



Orson Hyde

(1805–1878)

Testimony of the Twelve Apostles

D&C 68: Introduction, 1–3; 75:13; 100:14; 102: Introduction, 3; 103:40; 124:129

Orson wrote of being an orphan and growing to “manhood, a stranger to a father’s protection and to a mother’s care.”¹ At age 14 he journeyed from New England to Ohio, seeking adventure and employment. He worked in an iron foundry and a woolen mill before being hired to work in the N. K. Whitney and Company store in Kirtland, Ohio.

At age 23 Orson joined the Methodist Church in the Kirtland vicinity and became a “class leader.” He abandoned the Methodists in favor of the Campbellite movement. Orson became a pastor of the Campbellite congregations in Elyria and Florence, Ohio. While preaching against the Book of Mormon in 1831 he wrote, “For the first time, I thought that the Mormon Bible might be the truth of heaven . . . [and I became] pretty strongly

¹ *Frontier Guardian*, December 26, 1851, 2, as cited in Howard H. Barron, *Orson Hyde: Missionary, Apostle, Colonizer* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1977), 16.

convicted in my own mind that I was doing wrong.”² In October 1831 Orson was baptized in the Chagrin River by Sidney Rigdon.

Within a month, the Lord commanded him and all faithful elders to “go ye into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature” (D&C 68:8). Orson left Kirtland with Samuel Smith, the brother of the Prophet Joseph, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in the eastern states. “Wherever we were received and entertained, we left our blessing,” Orson wrote, “and wherever we were rejected, we washed our feet in private against those who rejected us.”³

When Orson Hyde and Samuel Smith returned to Kirtland, Orson, being well-versed in the scriptures, was appointed a teacher in the School of the Prophets. Orson said of his gospel scholarship, “I have once memorized the Bible, and when anyone quoted one verse, I could quote the next. Have memorized it in English, German, and Hebrew.”⁴

On June 6, 1833, he was appointed a clerk to the First Presidency of the Church. Functioning in that office, he recorded the Kirtland revelations from 1831 to 1834, the Kirtland council minutes, Joseph Smith’s letter book, and patriarchal blessings. In addition, in 1834 Orson served on the Kirtland high council. In 1835 he was ordained an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. As an apostle, Orson was blessed to “go forth according to the commandment, both to Jew and Gentile, and to all nations, kingdoms and tongues.”⁵

In partial fulfillment of that blessing, he was one of the first to serve a mission to the British Isles. “When we [Orson and Heber C. Kimball] came in sight of Liverpool, the Spirit of God rested down upon us to a very great degree,” wrote Orson. “Let me assure you . . . that the Lord God Omnipotent is with us.”⁶ Of opportunities to share the Restoration message Elder Kimball penned, “Brother Hyde and myself have labored all the time, night and day, so that we have not had much time to sleep. There are calls on the right and left. . . . There are ten calls where we can only fill one.”⁷

² Orson Hyde, “History of Orson Hyde,” *Millennial Star* 26 (November 19, 1864), 760–761.

³ Hyde, “History of Orson Hyde,” 774–775.

⁴ Orson Hyde, “The Marriage Relations,” *Journal of Discourses* 26 vols. (Liverpool: Latter-Day Saint Depot, 1855), 2:81.

⁵ Blessing to Orson Hyde, 15 February 1835, 151. Joseph Smith Papers.

⁶ “Letter of Orson Hyde to Marinda Hyde,” *Messenger and Advocate* 3, no. 11 (August 1837), 550.

⁷ Letter of Heber C. Kimball to Willard Richards, October 12, 1837, Preston, England, in Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball: Apostle, the Father and Founder of the British Mission* (Salt Lake City: Kimball Family, 1888), 171.

When Orson returned to the States, his faith in the Restoration waivered. On October 24, 1838, he signed an affidavit vilifying the character of Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Of his actions he later lamented, "Few men pass through life without leaving some traces which they would gladly obliterate. Happy is he whose life is free from stain and blemish. I sinned against God and my brethren. I acted foolishly. . . . I seek pardon of all whom I have offended, and also of my God."⁸

After Orson returned to full fellowship and membership in the Quorum of the Twelve, he was told by the Prophet Joseph, "In due time thou shalt go to Jerusalem, the land of thy fathers, and be a watchman unto the house of Israel, and by thy hand shall the Most High do a great work, which shall prepare the way and greatly facilitate the gathering together of that people."⁹

In 1841 Orson journeyed to England and from there through Europe to reach Palestine. On October 24, 1841, on the Mount of Olives, he dedicated Jerusalem for the return of the Jews. In the dedicatory prayer, Orson petitioned the Lord to "remove the barrenness and sterility of this land, and let springs of living water break forth to water its thirsty soil. Let the vine and olive produce in their strength, and the fig-tree bloom and flourish. Let the land become abundantly fruitful when possessed by its rightful heirs."¹⁰

After returning to the States, Orson was called to serve a mission to St. Petersburg, Russia. That mission was never fulfilled, as he was sent to Washington, D.C. to present a memorial to government leaders detailing persecution against Latter-day Saints in Missouri. It was while in the East that Orson learned of the deaths of Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum. He declared,

I will prophesy that instead of the work dying, it will be like the mustard stock that was ripe, that a man undertook to throw out of his garden, and scattered seed all over it, and the next year it was nothing but mustard. It will be so by shedding the blood of the Prophets—it will make ten saints where there is one now.¹¹

Orson lived to see his prophecy fulfilled. He was part of that fulfillment. When he returned to the main body of the Saints in Nauvoo, he was asked to supervise the completion of the Nauvoo Temple before joining the Latter-day Saint exodus to Iowa. In

⁸ "Autobiography of Orson Hyde, 1805–1878," *Millennial Star* 26 (1864).

⁹ History, 1838–1856, volume C-1, [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]. Joseph Smith Papers.

¹⁰ "Letter of Orson Hyde," *Times and Seasons* (April 1, 1842).

¹¹ Smith, History of the Church, 7:198.

1852 he migrated to the Salt Lake Valley. In the valley he served as an associate judge of the Supreme Court, in the territorial legislature, and as a regent of the University of Deseret.

In June 1875 Brigham Young removed Orson as President of the Twelve and put John Taylor in his place. The reason for the change was because Elder Taylor had served longer in continuing faithfulness in the Twelve. If Orson felt resentment by the change, it was not recorded. He died in November 1878 at age 73.