

# BREAKING ISRAEL NEWS

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## MORMONS: OUR WORK WAS KEY IN GOD'S RESTORATION OF JERUSALEM

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*" And Hashem appeared unto Avram, and said: 'Unto thy seed will I give this Land'; and he built there an altar unto Hashem, who appeared unto him." Genesis 12:7 (The Israel Bible™)*



Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. (Shutterstock)

*By Judy Lash Balint/JNS.org*

Exactly 175 years ago, an American non-Jew, under the direction of the founder of his church, climbed the [Mount of Olives](#) and offered an impassioned declaration and prayer proclaiming the Holy Land as the gathering place for the Jewish people.

This week, that act by Orson Hyde, an Elder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was commemorated in Jerusalem by a joint delegation of prominent American Jewish and Mormon leaders. They gathered to mark a new phase in strengthening ties and cooperation between the Jewish and LDS communities.

The idea for the commemoration, and the visit to Israel by leaders from both faiths, grew out of a friendship between two lawyers who met in New York City in 2003: former New York Attorney General Bob Abrams, a veteran Jewish community activist, and Elder James J. Hamula, of the Seventy, a leader of the Church.

In 2008, he invited Abrams and several other Jewish leaders to visit Church headquarters in Salt Lake City.

In the months preceding that visit, Abrams had lengthy, sensitive negotiations with Church officials, which led to a commitment to cease the proxy baptisms of Jewish Holocaust victims that had outraged many in the Jewish community.

Neither that contentious issue, nor the decades-old agreement that the Church would not carry out its missionary outreach program in Israel, were mentioned during Thursday's ceremony. Instead, the focus was on the commonalities between the two faiths and highlighting Elder Hyde's landmark act that predated the advent of political Zionism.

Members of both groups praised Elder Hyde's initiative as a forerunner of Zionist activity that brought about the founding of the state of Israel. His 1841 visit predated Theodor Herzl's First Zionist Congress by more than 50 years.

"Orson Hyde's 1841 mission to Jerusalem to dedicate this land for the return of the Jews, and for Jerusalem to be its capital city, was an important moment in the latter-day Jewish return to their homeland," said Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, a member of the Church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, speaking at the event. It was held at [Brigham Young University's Jerusalem Center](#) for Near Eastern Studies on the northern ridge of the Mount of Olives.



Rabbi Meir Soloveichik (left) with Elder James J. Hamula at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. (Judy Lash Balint)

“We believe the work of Elder Orson Hyde has played a key role in [God choosing Jerusalem again](#),” he said. “We pray for the preservation of the Jewish people and for their peaceful association with all who dwell in what is truly the Holy Land.”

The Church leaders who welcomed the group to the campus’s elegant auditorium, overlooking the Temple Mount, included Elder Holland; Elder Quentin L. Cook, also of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Elder Hamula; Dr. James R. Kearl, assistant to the university president of the Jerusalem Center and John R. Taylor, director of interfaith relations for the Church.

Members of the Jewish delegation included former U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman, and his wife, Hadassah; Rabbi Michael Miller, executive vice president and CEO of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York; Marlene Post, former U.S. national president of Hadassah; Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, executive vice president of the New York Board of Rabbis, and Rabbi Meir Soloveichik of New York City’s Congregation Shearith Israel and director of Yeshiva University’s Zahava and Moshael Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought.

In his remarks, Elder Holland explained the theological connection of the Church to Jews and the land of Israel. Alluding to LDS founder Joseph Smith, Holland noted, “One of the foundational pieces of LDS theology is that we, of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, represent a remnant of the tribe of Joseph with our patriarchal lines going back principally to Ephraim and Manasseh, and that in such a covenantal relationship, modern prophets have played a role in the gathering of the Jews to their home land.”

He cited the similarities between the biblical prophecies of Ezekiel and Moses regarding the [ingathering of Jews to the land](#), and writings in the Book of Mormon that describe the covenant between God and the Jewish people and the prophecy of their return to “the land of Jerusalem, which is the promised land unto them forever.”



Rabbi Soloveichik told participants that the pile of stones Elder Hyde placed on the Mount of Olives in 1841 symbolized the idea of unity and represented the achievement of the present Jerusalem gathering of Mormons and Jews. “It’s people who are different and who do not deny their differences, but nevertheless are unified in seeking to

(L-R) Dr. James R. Kearl, assistant to the university president of the Jerusalem Center, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, Elder Quentin L. Cook, Sen. Joseph Lieberman and former New York Attorney General Bob Abrams.  
(Judy Lash Balint)

maintain an America and a world in which religious difference is cherished," he said. "It is the biblical vision itself that unites us."

Following the ceremony, the delegation was warmly welcomed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who told them he had written about Orson Hyde in his book, "A Durable Peace."

As an organizer of the gathering, Abrams said it was "one of the greatest days of my life and exceeded my wildest expectations."

He pointed out many of the similarities Judaism shares with the Mormon church that most people may not realize.

"Each has a fundamental focus on family," Abrams said. "Each places a very high value on education. Each has a strong commitment to charitable giving. Each demonstrates humanitarian concern and response when there are international catastrophes around the globe. Each has a history of disproportionate success due to ability, hard work and determination. And each has been subjected to fierce persecution and prejudice."

Also during their visit, the group met with senior officials of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Future plans call for Mormon-Jewish cooperation on a variety of humanitarian projects and increased contact between Jewish and Mormon communal professionals, Abrams noted.

While there was no public discussion of politics during the visit, Lieberman acknowledged that while the Church remains non-partisan, it could be helpful for the pro-Israel community to note that "Mormon support for Israel is based on religious doctrine that declares the Jewish people must return to the land, and is not a matter of politics of the moment."