

# Remembering the Impact of British Missionary Isaac Russell

Scott C. Esplin

Church history is replete with accounts of the first Latter-day Saint missionaries to England. Prophesying of the importance of their success, the Prophet Joseph Smith said that their work would be the means of bringing salvation to the Lord's latter-day Church.<sup>1</sup> The names of these first elders read like a who's who of early Church membership. They included Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; Willard Richards, later called to the same quorum; and Joseph Fielding, brother-in-law to Hyrum Smith. In addition to these four prominent individuals in Latter-day Saint history, three lesser-known members also joined the original company. These three Canadian converts—John Goodson, John Snider (or Snyder), and Isaac Russell—completed the group of seven missionaries that left America in 1837 to open the door of salvation to the nation of England.<sup>2</sup> Concerning the roles these men played, Joseph Fielding's brother James declared, "Kimball bored the holes, Goodson drove the nails, and Hyde clinched them."<sup>3</sup>

Though the names of Elders Kimball, Hyde, Richards, and Fielding continue to be revered in Church history, what became of the other three? Goodson and Snider never completed their missions, leaving England in early October 1837 after less than three months in the field and doing so against the wishes of their fellow companions. Joseph Fielding wrote, "I think they should not have gone and Elders Kimball and Hyde believe so too. . . . Bro. [Goodson] has some old Enemies in London, but he wanted to go home. Bro. Snyder has some business at home but not pressing. He had never spoken much in public, had not much liberty, and was discouraged. May the Lord yet bless them and make them useful in his Church."<sup>4</sup> Snider did indeed prove useful, helping finance both the Nauvoo House and the Nauvoo Temple by gathering funds for the

Church.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, in Goodson's case, Elder Fielding's wish was not fulfilled. Heber C. Kimball recorded: "Brother Goodson pretended to have business of importance which called him home. He had over 200 Books of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants which he refused to let me have, although I proffered to pay him the money for them on my return to America. He carried them back, and on arriving in Iowa Territory he burned them, at which time he apostatized and left the Church."<sup>6</sup>

But what about Isaac Russell? How should history remember this other laborer in the vineyard? Unlike Goodson and Snider, Russell faithfully completed his mission to England, bringing dozens into the Church and establishing a branch of faithful British Saints. Unfortunately, events that engulfed the Church immediately after his return, including the Kirtland apostasy and the fall of Far West, cloud an assessment of Russell's contributions and faithfulness. Some of these misunderstandings and misconceptions persist today.

### **Preparing the Way for Truth: The Conversion of Isaac Russell**

Like several of the original British missionaries, Isaac Russell was a native of England. Born at Windy Haugh, near Alston, on April 13, 1807, he was the youngest of the thirteen children of William and Isabella Peart Russell. When he was ten years old, Isaac and his family moved to Upper Canada, settling near Toronto. After becoming an apprentice cabinetmaker, Russell married Mary Walton, also from Alston, England, in June 1829. Eventually, Isaac and Mary settled with their young family on a hundred-acre farm in the Charleston settlement nine miles northwest of Toronto. Religiously oriented, Russell became active in the local Methodist congregation, helping construct the local meetinghouse and leading the community's choir.

Life for the Russell family changed dramatically in 1836 when Isaac learned of a preacher in nearby Toronto named Parley P. Pratt. Having accepted the restored gospel, Isaac's sister Isabella Walton wrote to Isaac and encouraged him to listen to Elder Pratt's teachings. Upon hearing Pratt speak, Russell declared, "This is the Gos-

pel I have been looking for and am ready to live and die by.”<sup>77</sup> Isaac and his wife, Mary, were baptized by Elder Pratt in nearby Black Creek. Among many others baptized by Elder Pratt were Isaac’s sister Frances Dawson and her family; John Goodson; Joseph, Mary, and Mercy Fielding; John and Leonora Taylor; John Snider; James and Margaret Wardlaw; and Lucy Bridgeland.<sup>8</sup> Ordained an elder at water’s edge, Russell began sharing the everlasting gospel with family and friends, including William and Wilson Law, James Standing, Jacob Scott, and Theodore Turley, before preparing to move his family to join the body of the Church in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1837.

### **Spreading the Message Abroad**

Concerning Elder Pratt’s success among these Canadian converts, Heber C. Kimball prophesied, “From the things growing out of this mission, shall the fullness of the gospel spread into England, and cause a great work to be done in that land.”<sup>79</sup> True to his prediction, the conversion of the friends and family of Isaac Russell extended the work to the British Isles. As mentioned earlier, Russell was called to join fellow Canadian converts Joseph Fielding, John Snider, and John Goodson on a mission to their native England with Elders Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, and Willard Richards. Meeting in New York City, the party set sail for England on July 1, 1837, and arrived in Liverpool nearly three weeks later. Shortly thereafter, the group began laboring as missionaries in nearby Preston.

Upon beginning missionary work in England, Russell encountered opposition which haunted him the remainder of his life. His youngest daughter later remarked, “I have often wondered, and studied over the fact that when Satan gathered his legions, and sought to destroy the Elders, to prevent the establishment of God’s kingdom upon the earth, that their first attack was upon father; that the manifestation of their rage and hatred should be hurled at him instead of Brother Kimball, who stood at the head of that mission. . . . [Father] seemed to wage a constant warfare against some unseen power.”<sup>10</sup> On the eve of the first baptisms in Britain, demonic forces fiercely attacked Russell. Shortly before daybreak, he entreated Elder Kimball for help, declaring, “I want you should get up and pray

for me that I may be delivered from the evil spirits that are tormenting me to such a degree that I feel I cannot live long, unless I obtain relief.”<sup>11</sup>

Elder Kimball and Elder Hyde laid their hands on Russell, rebuking the evil spirit which opposed their work. Contending with the demonic hosts for about an hour and a half, the group experienced what Heber C. Kimball called the hosts’ “vindictive malignity,” and learned “the power of the adversary, his enmity against the servants of God, and got some understanding of the invisible world.”<sup>12</sup> Elder Hyde described standing between Elder Kimball and the devils, fighting and contending with them face to face until they finally retreated from the room.<sup>13</sup>

This encounter greatly changed the party’s attitude toward Isaac Russell. Prior to the experience, Heber C. Kimball disbelieved that Russell was being troubled by devils. Joseph Fielding summarized the lesson: “If we never before knew that there were evil Spirits, we did now. We also knew how [to] feel for dear Bro. Russel.”<sup>14</sup> The fight against evil forces also impacted the early missionaries’ understanding of their work. After Elder Kimball narrated the event to Joseph Smith years later, the Prophet said, “At that time you were nigh unto the Lord; there was only a veil between you and Him, but you could not see Him. When I heard of it, it gave me great joy, for I then knew that the work of God had taken root in that land. It was this that caused the devil to make a struggle to kill you.”<sup>15</sup>

Having overcome this initial opposition, Russell and his fellow laborers faithfully moved forward with the work, baptizing the first nine English converts in the River Ribble the following morning. That afternoon, Russell preached to an assembly of about five thousand at the obelisk in Preston, many of whom “were pricked to the heart.”<sup>16</sup> The gospel message had indeed taken root in the country.

To spread the gospel message more effectively, the missionaries decided to divide their labors. On August 1, 1837, Russell and Snider were assigned to head north to Russell’s native Alston, near the border with Scotland, where they established a small branch.<sup>17</sup> The work was not easy, however, even in Russell’s hometown. By September, John Snider returned to Preston, reporting to Elder Kimball that “they met with considerable opposition while preach-

ing the Gospel.”<sup>18</sup> Though thirty people had been baptized and others were investigating, Snider was ready to return to America, leaving Russell to labor alone in Alston. By Orson Hyde’s account, Russell could have prevented Snider’s early return by improving his missionary methods. Rebuking him for allowing Snider to spiritually “have lain down in the furrow and died,” Elder Hyde reminded Russell to preach “the simple gospel to the people and to baptize them; and then teach them all other things necessary.”<sup>19</sup>

Elders Hyde and Kimball corresponded regularly with Russell while he was in Alston, counseling him on his labors. Apparently, opposition from ministers of other faiths was strong.<sup>20</sup> In December 1837, Elders Hyde and Kimball wrote Russell, “We are not surprised at all that your way has been hedged up by the priests. We have told you repeatedly that if you would leave the priests alone, you would prosper. The plain fact is, the priests hold the people under their control and it is our business to gather out the honest in heart from under this bondage. . . . It is not our business to gratify a disposition to face down upon the priests. But it is our business to save souls, and we do say in the name of the Lord, let the priests alone and preach the simple Gospel of Christ.” Using their own success as a pattern, Hyde and Kimball concluded, “We can go almost anywhere and preach and baptize, and our way is not closed up, because we let the priests alone, and if you would do the same, your way would not be closed up.”<sup>21</sup>

Accepting the counsel, Russell labored diligently, and the Church in and around Alston grew to about sixty members.<sup>22</sup> Eventually the branches of Alston, Preston, and Bedford became the three principal congregations in the country. Of these three branches, Heber C. Kimball observed, “Thus the great work was commenced in three places, Preston, Bedford and Alston, which forcibly reminds me of the parable of the leaven which the woman hid in the three measures of meal.”<sup>23</sup> Summarizing Russell’s success in Alston, Elder Kimball continued: “[Russell] met with considerable opposition from his own kindred, as well as from ministers of the different denominations, who sought every opportunity to destroy his influence. Notwithstanding the great opposition, he was instrumental in bringing upwards of sixty souls into the kingdom of God, and left them

rejoicing in the truth.”<sup>24</sup> Russell’s accomplishments were similar to those experienced in other areas of the mission, as congregations spread outward reaching a total of over two thousand converts.<sup>25</sup>

By April 1838, Elders Kimball, Hyde, and Russell were ready to return home. Russell left the Cumberland Branch in Alston under the watchful care of his cousin, Jacob Peart. After faithfully completing their missions, the three elders embarked for home on April 20, 1838, leaving the mission in the capable hands of Joseph Fielding, with Willard Richards and William Clayton acting as counselors.<sup>26</sup> On the journey home, Russell continued his missionary zeal, preaching both on the ship and in New York City, baptizing along his journey back to Kirtland.<sup>27</sup>

### **“A Time to Try Men’s Souls”**

The Kirtland that Russell found upon his return in May 1838 was dramatically different than the one he had left nearly a year earlier. Noticeably absent were the leaders of the Church, who had moved to Far West, Missouri, following widespread apostasy and persecution in Kirtland. Elder Kimball summarized the change: “Brother Joseph and the greater part of the authorities of the Church, and almost all the members who had any faith in Mormonism, had already removed.”<sup>28</sup> Russell and his family did the same, moving to Far West, Missouri, in the fall of 1838.

Upon arriving in Far West, Russell encountered the apostasy and persecution he had left behind in Kirtland. In October 1838, dark clouds gathered over Missouri. Communities surrounding Far West increasingly came under attack from mobs aimed at driving Church members from the state. As an influential Church leader, especially among his fellow Canadian converts, Russell was called upon for leadership. At this point, his actions, as well as his activity in the Church, become clouded. Accounts by Russell’s family indicate that Church leaders called upon him to lead an emigrant group, composed largely of Canadian converts, in their journey from DeWitt to Far West.<sup>29</sup> His nephew, William Dawson, described Russell’s role:

In the month of October 1838 Isaac Russell was sent by Joseph Smith in person from Far West back to the Mississippi River to meet

and hurry up a company of emigrants before the mobs closed in upon them. He went, met with the company, and came on with it, until it was supposed that a mob was in ambush just ahead of them awaiting their arrival. The camp then refused to go any further. Russell pled with them and urged them to drive on that night being confident that if they would they would get past all danger. But they would not move further. He then took two men and rode ahead to the place where the mob were reported to be in ambush but found no signs of the mob. Returning he found the camp had turned aside some distance from the main road and encamped. The mob now gathered from all quarters and this delay put them between the camp and Far West. Russell remained with them two or three weeks hoping an opportunity would yet offer to get through the mob. The news soon came of the surrender at Far West. It was now useless for the camp to journey further in that direction. Russell then left them and alone returned to Far West.<sup>30</sup>

The official history of the Church during this era, however, records a different scenario. Instead of describing Russell as leading an emigrant group to Far West, Church records report him leading a group away from the Church and into apostasy. *History of the Church* for December 1838 states:

Isaac Russell, who had become connected with a small camp of the Saints, of about thirty families, going west, turned from his course at Louisiana, and led them north ten miles on the Spanish claims,<sup>31</sup> where they built huts or lived in tents through the winter in great suffering. Russell turned prophet (apostate). He said Joseph had fallen and he was appointed to lead the people.

Chandler Rogers, who was moving west, was met by a mob at Huntsville, and compelled to turn back, and fell in with Russell's camp. Russell said he was "the chosen of the Lord;" and when they left the place, they would have to go on foot, and take nothing with them, and they must sell their teams. Some would not sell and he cursed them.<sup>32</sup>

An accurate picture of Russell's activity during the winter of 1838–39 is complicated by apparent attempts he made to mislead his former converts in Britain. On January 30, 1839, Russell reportedly wrote his cousin Jacob Peart and the branch he left under his direction in Alston, England, about the apostasy in Far West.<sup>33</sup> In his letter, Russell declared, "The Lord has directed me, with a few others, whose hearts the Lord has touched, to go into the wilderness where we shall be fed and directed by the hand of the Lord

until we are purified and prepared to minister to the Lamanites.”<sup>34</sup> Establishing himself as an instrument of salvation, Russell continued, “God is sending us before to prepare a place for you and for the remnant who will survive the judgments which are now coming on the Church of Latter-day Saints, to purify them, for we are sent to prepare a Zion.”<sup>35</sup>

Worried how the letter might be received, he charged the branch with secrecy, warning them not to share it with any except those among whom he had labored, concluding, “If you should hear that I have apostatized, believe it not, for I am doing the work of the Lord.”<sup>36</sup>

Sensing that something was wrong, Heber C. Kimball wrote Church leaders in England about Russell’s apostasy. He counseled, “Brethren, I want you to go to the north where Brother Russell labored, and see what situation the Saints are in, for I have some fears about them. Go and strengthen them in the name of the Lord, for I think that Russell is leading them astray.”<sup>37</sup> In May 1839, Elder Willard Richards visited Russell’s British branches and secretly investigated the suspicion. Claming to be a Methodist minister, he inquired about the “Mormonites” and specifically asked if anyone in town had recently seen or heard from Orson Hyde, Joseph Fielding, or Isaac Russell. Discovering that Jacob Peart, head of the Alston Branch and Russell’s cousin, had indeed received a letter from Russell, Elder Richards confronted him. Obtaining a copy of the letter, he quickly called members together and refuted Russell’s plan.<sup>38</sup> He unfolded “the sophistry and falsehood of this letter to the convincing of the Saints at Alston and Brampton, so as to entirely destroy their confidence in the apostate Russell, although they had loved him as a father.”<sup>39</sup> After reluctantly rejecting Russell’s appeal for leadership, members in Alston reaffirmed their faith and recognized the inspiration of Church leaders who had come to their aid. According to Willard Richards’s account, this was “the greatest assurance [the Alston Saints] have ever had, that this is the work of God, for they see in this that their Heavenly Father is mindful of them and when they stray ignorantly or undesignedly, he will take measures to bring them back again.”<sup>40</sup>

Back in America, Church leaders likewise acted on Russell's false claims. As directed by revelation, members of the Quorum of the Twelve secretly assembled prior to the second British Mission at the Far West temple site on April 26, 1839.<sup>41</sup> In addition to ordaining Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith to the apostleship, the leadership of the Church excommunicated thirty-one individuals, including Isaac and Mary Russell and their family and friends. On the way out of town, Theodore Turley, one of Isaac's Canadian converts, prevailed upon the members of the Twelve to bid farewell to Russell, inform him of their actions, and verify their presence in the area.<sup>42</sup> Five months later, after settling in Nauvoo, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote Russell, by way of his scribe James Mulholland, informing him of the Church's knowledge of his actions regarding the Alston Branch. Appending a personal note to the letter, Mullholland, a fellow Canadian convert, offered his own well wishes for Isaac Russell by paraphrasing Isaiah 50:10–11: "In my own behalf I wish to state that I sincerely wish that it may soon come to pass that you, sir, and all our friends at Far West may perceive that you are walking in the light of a fire, and sparks that you have yourselves kindled; and that you may turn around and fear the Lord, obey the voice of His servant, and thereby escape the sentence, 'Ye shall lie down in sorrow.'"<sup>43</sup>

Three years later, in 1842, the Prophet wrote about Russell's state of apostasy: "We have also had brethren and sisters who have written revelations, and who have started forward to lead this Church. Such was . . . Isaac Russell. . . Mr. Russell stayed in Far West, from whence he was to go to the Rocky Mountains, led by three Nephites; but the Nephites never came, and his friends forsook him, all but some of the blood relations, who have since been nearly destroyed by the mob."<sup>44</sup>

### **Reaching Out to Isaac Russell**

"Nearly destroyed by the mob" properly describes the remainder of Russell's years in Missouri. Cut off from the Church, Isaac and Mary, together with a few of their family members and friends, remained in Far West, where they suffered greatly. His daughter

summarized the family's afflictions: "The hatred and venom of the mob was especially directed against father. They were incensed because of his refusal to leave at their bidding."<sup>45</sup> For a period of nearly two years, Russell endured constant abuse, including the destruction of his property, incarceration in the Richmond Jail, and threats to his life. He and his loved ones were once ordered from their home early one morning by a drunken mob that threatened to murder the entire family, beginning with the children. According to his daughter, "Without a word of remonstrance father entered the house, and bringing out a blanket brought the children one by one, and seated them upon it, taking the babe, little Sarah from my mother's arm last; then facing the mob he raised his right hand to heaven, and said in a voice quiet and calm, 'There they are—shoot if God will let you.'"<sup>46</sup> Ashamed by their actions, mob members slowly drew away.

As a final act of persecution, the Missouri mob took Russell to the Far West temple lot, where he had previously been excommunicated from the Church, and sold him as a slave. Witnessing the scene, a Mr. Raglan paid the demanded price and offered Russell his freedom.<sup>47</sup> Instead, Russell agreed to work for Raglan for six months to pay off the debt. Upon his release, Russell and his family finally left Far West, settling in Ray County on a little farm near Richmond.

While Russell and his family suffered at the hands of the mob for remaining in Missouri, their family members who congregated in Nauvoo reached out to them. Jacob Peart, the cousin whom Russell had left in charge of the Church in Alston, England, pled with him to join them in Nauvoo. Sharing his witness of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Peart wrote, "I have had many opportunities of seeing Brother Joseph and hearing him preach and also of conversing with him and I have found him all that you used to tell me. . . . I am perfectly satisfied that he is a man of God called and anointed to carry on the great work of the last days."<sup>48</sup> Noting that Russell's apostasy had "wounded [him] in the tenderest part,"<sup>49</sup> Peart entreated Russell to visit him in Nauvoo. Not knowing how to get the letter to Russell in Missouri, Peart addressed it to their fellow cousin John Dawson, adding his hope that he could prevail upon Russell to

return: “O how I long to see cousin Isaac Russell. Try to send him here that I may have the opportunity of conversing with him once more on the great and important subject of salvation even by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>50</sup>

Friends likewise sought for Isaac’s return. In February 1841, fellow Canadian convert Phebe McNall wrote from Illinois, pleading with Isaac and his family to join her: “I want to see you more than I can express on paper. I often think of your good teachings in Canada and as often wish to see you and yours. I have my own troubles but there is nothing that mars my peace like having so good a brother and friend live so far from the place of gathering and what has the look of deviating from duty. . . . Many join in sending their respects. . . . For my part I feel as if I could fetch you on my back if it was necessary.”<sup>51</sup> Appending a note of further encouragement, Enos McNall added, “I want to see you very much for I can’t brother you there for I think we are rite [*sic*] here. . . . Come down . . . and be one in our midst, this from your friend.”<sup>52</sup>

A prominent individual who reached out to Isaac Russell was William Law, a fellow Canadian convert and friend. Arriving in Nauvoo from Canada late in 1839, Law appealed to Russell, beckoning him to return:

It is needless for me to express my regret that you remain so long from the Body of the Church. . . . Read the Book of Mormon and you will find that Joseph has not fallen. . . . I have carefully watched his movements since I have been here, and I assure you I have found him honest and honourable in all our transactions which have been very considerable. . . . Pardon me when I say that I fear some evil spirit had prejudiced your mind and then takes the advantage of you. You now stand opposed to the only organised Church on the Earth. . . . Why do you keep away from the work of the Lord[?] You can do nothing where you are, you cannot advance the work of the Lord there, come forth then and submit to the order that God has established, and let your voice be heard amongst the nations.<sup>53</sup>

For his part, Joseph Smith also made an effort to bring Russell back. William Law concluded his feelings by expressing the wishes of the Prophet: “You were once a mighty man, why then be rebellious because of offences, or from any other cause, as to you being cut off from the Church, Joseph disapproved of it with much warmth

and wishes you and the rest to appeal at the general assembly of the Church, you would be received here with open arms were you to come back.”<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, reconciliation did not occur in either Isaac’s or Joseph’s lifetimes. Russell followed the Prophet in death, contracting swamp fever in the river bottoms of Crooked River in Missouri just three months after Joseph’s martyrdom in 1844.

### **Repairing the Memory of Isaac Russell**

Though Isaac Russell died outside the Church, the family he left behind, including his wife and six children, continued to be attracted to it. Finally in 1861, after over twenty years of disaffection, they succeeded in moving to Utah. Sadly, the memory of their father’s apostasy greeted them in the territory. They were welcomed with Church sermons, week after week, on the apostasy of Isaac Russell. The youngest child, Isabella, recalled: “I can yet see the tearful group gathered in our home after such a days experience. Our father, whose name was sacred, whose very memory was worshipped by his children. But after the scene had been repeated several times our mother seemed to understand, and she said to us, ‘It is done as a test and a trial to our faith. They may doubt our sincerity.’”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, one friend from Canada charged the widow and her family with being frightened out of Missouri only by the prospect of the Civil War. To these attacks, Mary Russell quietly responded, teaching her children, “We can only listen and endure patiently, and not allow it to affect us too deeply, and the time may come when we can tell the truth, and correct some of the mistakes about your father; but it would be useless to attempt it now.”<sup>56</sup>

Correcting the memory of Isaac Russell became a mission for his posterity. The youngest daughter, Isabella, wrote, “There has always been something unaccountable and unsatisfactory in the thought that Satan had power to curtail his life’s work, and to cover his name with a shadow and a reproach that rests upon it to this day, undeserved and unwarranted.”<sup>57</sup> Family members hung their belief in their father’s innocence on William Law’s 1840 letter declaring the Prophet’s love for Russell and disapproval of his excommunication. Law observed, “Why then be rebellious because of offenses or from

any other cause? As to you being ‘cut off’ from the Church, Joseph disapproved of it with much warmth.”<sup>58</sup> The children believed that this meant the Prophet had disapproved because their father was cut off without a proper hearing. Isaac Russell, however, honored the removal of his priesthood authority by consistently refusing to lead religious services the remainder of his life.<sup>59</sup>

An experience with Heber C. Kimball further strengthened the family’s conviction of Russell’s innocence. During a dinner at the Social Hall in the winter of 1862, Isabella Russell learned of President Heber C. Kimball’s feelings:

My sister . . . and I were seated together on the stage, when President Kimball left his seat and came over to where we were and took a seat upon the sofa between us; saying as he shook hands, “So you are Isaac Russell’s daughters?” My sister replied, “Yes, we are Isaac Russell’s daughters,” in a tone that plainly implied, “And we are not ashamed of it.” His next remark was, “Isaac Russell was a good man, a man that I loved, and if there is no one else to see that he is righted, when the time comes, I will see that he is righted myself.”

“Of course there is only one way, he will have to come back by baptism, for the man who cut him off was still in authority, and it will be necessary for some one to attend to that ordinance for him, but I say again that I will see Isaac Russell righted, if there is no one else to do it.”

He further said, “If it had happened in this day, it would never have been noticed, but it was a time to try men’s souls, and no one knew who to trust.” “Why,” he said, “Orson Hyde went further on the road to apostasy than ever your father did, but he had time to regain his balance, and he is now one of the solid pillars of the church.” And he repeated again, “Of course, there is only one way your father will have to come back to the church by baptism, for the man who cut him off was still in authority, and it will be necessary for someone to attend to that ordinance for him, and if no one else stands for him I will myself.”<sup>60</sup>

Isabella summarized the impact of the encounter, “Words can never tell how precious this interview was to us, and I think I am safe in saying that our father’s name was never mentioned from the pulpit again. I think the test had been satisfactory, and that mother and her children had been accepted as worthy the fellowship of the faithful.” Mary Russell was, in fact, brought back into full fellowship, with each of her children receiving baptism between 1856 and 1864.<sup>61</sup>

Restoring Isaac Russell's priesthood blessings took a little longer. Mary Russell died, firm in the faith, in 1864. As Heber C. Kimball had explained, it took proper authority to restore Isaac to his place. Proxy baptism was performed for him on August 27, 1889, in the Logan Temple. Further temple work was later done when he was posthumously sealed to his wife, Mary, and their six children in the Los Angeles Temple on March 12, 1965.<sup>62</sup>

Though priesthood ordinances were restored to Isaac Russell, re-establishing his memory in the eyes of the Church members is more difficult. Histories, both general and specific, of the early Church and the missionary labors in Great Britain focus on Russell's disaffection and apostasy. Rarely are his missionary successes in England or the return of his family and the subsequent reauthorization of gospel ordinances mentioned.<sup>63</sup> Correcting possible mistakes in the historical records are further complicated by conflicting accounts. Though the family firmly held to their father's innocence, supported by encounters with Heber C. Kimball, Joseph F. Smith, and others who reportedly shared their viewpoint, other prominent individuals with firsthand knowledge of the events consistently affirmed his apostasy. Elder George A. Smith, for example, who was present for the events of Far West, including the meeting at which Russell and his family were cut off, repeatedly referred to the apostasy of Isaac Russell in talks given as late as the 1850s.<sup>64</sup>

Deciphering historical accuracy and assigning judgment on faithfulness is problematic. Too often history is written in permanent ink, making it difficult to erase misperceptions and misjudgment. When writing Church history, many are prone to implement historical hindsight, arbitrarily assigning declarations of worthiness based on limited insight or information. Anxious to moralize, some mistakenly take a single snapshot from a lifetime of deeds and draw eternal assumptions about another's destiny. The essayist William George Jordan summarized this tendency: "One judges a painting by the full view of the whole canvas; separate isolated square inches of colour are meaningless. Yet we dare to judge our fellow man by single acts and words, misleading glimpses, and deceptive moments of special strain. From these we magnify a mood into a character and an episode into a life."<sup>65</sup> Personally, however, most hope to be

judged differently, trusting (and in some cases counting) that the Lord will weigh all our motives, actions, and intentions in the balance and account for time, circumstance, and growth. Maybe we should be a little more willing to do the same with historical characters like Isaac Russell.

In the end, the Prophet Joseph summarized how all will be judged, in and out of the Church, across the spectrum of time. Reassuringly, both for our individual cases and possibly in the case of Isaac Russell, Joseph declared:

While one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring, and without any of those contracted feelings that influence the children of men. . . . He holds the reins of judgment in His hands; He is a wise Lawgiver, and will judge all men, not according to the narrow, contracted notions of men, but, “according to the deeds done in the body whether they be good or evil,” or whether these deeds were done in England, America, Spain, Turkey, or India. He will judge them, “not according to what they have not, but according to what they have,” those who have lived without law, will be judged without law, and those who have a law, will be judged by that law. We need not doubt the wisdom and intelligence of the Great Jehovah; He will award judgment or mercy to all nations according to their several deserts, their means of obtaining intelligence, the laws by which they are governed, the facilities afforded them of obtaining correct information, and His inscrutable designs in relation to the human family; and when the designs of God shall be made manifest, and the curtain of futurity be withdrawn, we shall all of us eventually have to confess that the Judge of all the earth has done right.<sup>66</sup>

Wisely, God will be our judge.

Isaac Russell played a significant role in opening the door of salvation to the nation of England. Concerning his fellow preaching companion, Orson Hyde later told Russell’s daughter, “Your father, he was one of the most powerful speakers we ever had in the Church, he could move heaven and earth.”<sup>67</sup> However, discrepancy and misunderstanding mar his memory today. Lacking crucial details of the story, students of Church history should judge him and all others with care. Elder Dallin H. Oaks proclaimed, “The Lord’s way of final judgment will be to apply his perfect knowledge of the

law a person has received and to judge on the basis of that person's circumstances, motives, and actions throughout his or her entire life."<sup>68</sup> Lacking such perfect knowledge, we should exercise caution in assuming and assigning final judgment on the state of souls. As the Prophet Joseph declared, when "the curtain of futurity" is withdrawn, we will confess in Isaac Russell's and all other cases, including our own, that "the Judge of all the earth has done right."<sup>69</sup>

## Notes

1. See Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 2:489.
2. Heber C. Kimball described his call to England: "On Sunday, the 4th day of June, 1837, . . . the Prophet Joseph came to me, while I was seated in front of the stand, above the sacrament table, on the Melchizedek side of the Temple, in Kirtland, and whispering to me, said, 'Brother Heber, the Spirit of the Lord has whispered to me: "Let my servant Heber go to England and proclaim my Gospel, and open the door of salvation to that nation"' (quoted in Orson F. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996], 103–4).
3. Journal of Heber C. Kimball, quoted in James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, *Men with a Mission: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles, 1837–1841* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 40.
4. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 42n62.
5. See Susan Easton Black, *Who's Who in the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 305.
6. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 155. Some disagreement exists regarding the number of books involved. For alternative accounts, see Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 249n52.
7. Roy H. Russell, "The Story of Isaac Russell," in *Isaac Russell Family and Descendants*, 29, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
8. See Russell, "Isaac Russell and Mary Walton Russell and Some of Their Descendants."
9. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, ed. Parley P. Pratt Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 110.
10. Isabella Russell Johnson, "History of Isaac Russell," Isaac Russell Family Papers, MSS 1511, Box 1, fd. 1, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
11. Spencer W. Kimball, as quoted in Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 129.
12. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 130–31.
13. See Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 131.

14. Joseph Fielding Diary, quoted in Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 34.
15. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 130–32.
16. Richard L. Evans, *A Century of "Mormonism" in Great Britain* (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1984), 34; see also Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 135.
17. See *History of the Church*, 4:315–16; see also *History of the Church*, 2:508.
18. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 155.
19. Orson Hyde to Isaac Russell, September 7, 1837, Isaac Russell Family Collection, 1831–1893, MSS 497, Box 1, fd. 3, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
20. Opposition in Alston continued throughout the early years of the British mission. One anti-Mormon pamphlet from the era contains an address delivered by H. Stevenson in the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel at Alston on December 7, 1838. The discourse attacks both Isaac Russell and Joseph Fielding, acknowledging Russell's success in the area, especially among "several Wesleyans and Ranters, and a few who belonged to no religious sects of people" ("A Lecture on Mormonism," Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, M209 S848L 1839).
21. Roy H. Russell, "Letter from Orson Hyde to Isaac in Preston," *Isaac Russell Family and Descendants*, 189, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
22. See Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, and Willard Richards, "Mission to England, or the First Foreign Mission of the Latter-day Saints," *Millennial Star*, April 1841, 294–95.
23. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 192.
24. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 192.
25. See Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 191. For details about the total number of converts, see Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 53n102.
26. See Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 53.
27. See Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 200–202.
28. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 202.
29. See Johnson, "The Life of My Father."
30. Affidavit by William Dawson, December 22, 1888, Isaac Russell Family Collection, 1831–1893, MSS 497, Box 1, fd. 3, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
31. The city described in this account is Louisiana, Missouri, located along the Mississippi River in Pike County. The "Spanish claims" apparently has reference to this region, which was Spanish territory from 1763 (following the French defeat during the French and Indian War) until 1800 (when France reassumed control of the area). Whether this is the same location described in the previous statement by William Dawson is unclear. Chronologically, the two events seem to happen simultaneously and in the same geographic area, though with very different details regarding motives and results.
32. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:226. Russell's children deny the accuracy of this reported act. In a letter addressed to B. H. Roberts regarding his history,

Russell's youngest daughter, Isabella, states:

The most atrocious falsehood of all is that in which Father is represented as leading a company off, onto a Spanish claim, and building log huts, where they spent one winter in abject poverty and suffering. There is not a shadow of foundation for this. I can account for Father's movements from the abandonment of Kirtland until the day of his death in 1844. The main body of the Saints left Kirtland July 6th, 1838. Father was either with that company or left immediately after. Brother George speaks of his being obliged to stop on the road to work at his trade in order to obtain means to continue the journey, but he was in Far West in the fall of that same year, 1838. On the 26th of April, 1839, he was cut off from the Church on the Temple block. On the 12th of August, 1840, my sister Sarah was born in Far West, in the midst of bitter mobbing; in 1841 he worked out his six months obligation to Mr. Raglan, and served his term in the Richmond jail. In 1842 he leased the Woodward farm three miles East of Richmond, Missouri, and built rooms for the family, in one of which I was born in 1843. In the fall of 1844, he contracted swamp fever while working in the Crooked River bottoms at his trade (cabinet maker and builder), and came home to die, passing away on the 27th of September. Where was the winter of abject poverty and misery on the Spanish claims? (Isabella Russell Johnson to B. H. Roberts, January 23, 1920, Isaac and Mary Walton Russell Family History, MS 16461, Church Archives)

Though Isabella writes an impassioned defense of her father, the possibility still exists, however, that this event occurred during the winter of 1837–38. Isabella's knowledge of these details is limited by the fact that she was born in 1843, five years after the supposed incident.

33. Russell's children questioned the authenticity of this letter to Jacob Peart. In the same letter to B. H. Roberts where she challenged the credibility of the winter of apostasy (see note 32), Isabella Russell continued, "Some parts of that letter measure up to Father's standard, and some are so foreign to the real character of the man whose last thought was of self or self-aggrandizement, that to me they are unbelievable, and in view of the fact as stated in the history, that the letter was obtained by strategy, to me it opens up a wide field of conjecture, and I would have to see the original letter to believe that some parts of it were written by my father. That he had enemies on that mission who wished his downfall, I am satisfied" (Isabella Russell Johnson to B. H. Roberts, January 23, 1920).

34. Isabella Russell Johnson to B. H. Roberts, January 23, 1920).

35. Isabella Russell Johnson to B. H. Roberts, January 23, 1920).

36. Isabella Russell Johnson to B. H. Roberts, January 23, 1920).

37. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 246.

38. See Willard Richards to Joseph Fielding and William Clayton, May 7, 1839, MS 5946, Church Archives.

39. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:344.
40. Willard Richards to Joseph Fielding and William Clayton, May 7, 1839.
41. A revelation, now published as Doctrine and Covenants 118, directed the Twelve Apostles to leave on the second mission to England from the Far West temple site on April 26, 1839. Though driven from the state, Brigham Young led his quorum back to Missouri to fulfill the directive.
42. See Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:339.
43. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:6.
44. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:681.
45. Johnson, Family Papers, MSS 1511, Box 1, fd. 1, 18, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
46. Johnson, Family Papers, 23.
47. Russell's daughter reports that Mr. Raglan "paid the price demanded by the mob, simply to get father out of their hand" and that he offered him his freedom, which Russell refused, preferring instead "to pay him faithfully in work for the money expended" (Johnson, Family Papers).
48. Jacob Peart to Isaac Russell, January 26, 1843, Isaac Russell Family Collection, 1831–1893, MSS 497, Box 1, fd. 1, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
49. Jacob Peart to Isaac Russell, January 26, 1843.
50. Jacob Peart to John Dawson, January 26, 1843.
51. Phebe McNall to Isaac Russell, February 21, 1841, Isaac Russell Family Collection, 1831–1893, MSS 497, Box 1, fd. 1, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
52. Enos McNall to Isaac Russell, February 21, 1841, Isaac Russell Family Collection, 1831–1893, MSS 497, Box 1, fd. 1, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
53. William Law to Isaac Russell, November 29, 1840, quoted in Lyndon W. Cook, "'Brother Joseph Is Truly a Wonderful Man, He Is All We Could Wish a Prophet to Be': Pre-1844 Letters of William Law," *BYU Studies* 20 (Winter 1980): 218.
54. William Law to Isaac Russell, November 29, 1840, quoted in Cook, "'Brother Joseph,'" 218.
55. Johnson, "The Life of My Father," 28.
56. Johnson, "The Life of My Father," 28.
57. Johnson, "The Life of My Father," 25.
58. Roy H. Russell, "Letter to Isaac from William Law," in *Isaac Russell Family and Descendants*, 157.
59. See Isabella Russell Johnson to B. H. Roberts, January 23, 1920.
60. Johnson, Family Papers. Family records state that the man responsible for cutting Isaac Russell off was Sidney Rigdon.
61. The oldest son, George Walton Russell, was baptized on April 6, 1856, before the family's coming to Utah. Their four daughters, Mary Elizabeth, Ann Jane, Sarah Eliza, and Isabella Millican Russell, were all baptized on January 2, 1862. By family records, Samuel, the second son, struggled the most with misperceptions about his father. He refused baptism until a "man in authority" (whom his sister claimed was Joseph F. Smith) counseled him, "Go and do your duty; do not let

these things hold you back any longer; be patient, and faithful to your convictions, and the time may come when you can vindicate your father fully, but do not attempt it now” (MSS 1511, L. Tom Perry Special Collections). Accepting the counsel, Samuel was finally baptized on February 29, 1864. Interestingly, no record is given of Mary Russell’s rebaptism. Endowment House records detail the family’s receipt of the endowment and list Mary’s Canadian baptism in 1836, while the children have the later baptismal date.

62. Temple Index Bureau records indicate a sealing to spouse for Isaac and Mary Russell in the Endowment House on March 13, 1870, nineteen years before his recorded rebaptism date. Endowment House records for March 13, 1870, make no mention of this sealing. The International Genealogical Index gives the later ordinance data.

63. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker’s excellent study even incorrectly reports that Russell “returned early from the 1837 mission to England” (*Men with a Mission*, 57).

64. See George Albert Smith, January 10, 1858, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 7:115–16.

65. William George Jordan, *The Crown of Individuality* (New York: F. H. Revell Co., 1909), 101.

66. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:595.

67. Johnson, “The Life of My Father.”

68. Dallin H. Oaks, “Judge Not and Judging,” address to the Church Educational System (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 1.

69. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:595.