

George A. Smith's Mission with the Twelve in England, 1839–41

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On July 8, 1838, Joseph Smith received a remarkable revelation at Far West, Missouri, that dramatically influenced the course of Church history and the lives of nine members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, including George A. Smith. The revelation stated that the Twelve should depart on April 26, 1839, from the “building-spot” of the Far West Temple on a mission “over the great waters” to the British Isles (D&C 118:4–5). When Joseph Smith received this revelation, George A. Smith was not yet an Apostle, but by the time the Apostles departed on their mission, he had become a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. The purpose of this chapter is to tell of George A. Smith’s courageous participation in this extraordinary mission.

Near the end of January 1839, George A. Smith received a message that would change his life forever. The Prophet Joseph Smith, who at that time was imprisoned in Liberty Jail, sent Don Carlos Smith to tell George that he had been called as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Don Carlos said that Hyrum Smith had asked him how he thought George “would like the appointment.” Don Carlos replied, “It was such a laborious task for [George] to travel on foot” that he would probably dread it—to which Hyrum reportedly replied, “He must take a horse then.” Nevertheless, George accepted the call but asked Don Carlos to keep it a secret for a while.¹ George received a second notification of his calling on February 1, 1839, while he was traveling with Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball on their way to see the Prophet in Liberty Jail. On that occasion, Elder Kimball informed George that he would become an Apostle. The next day, February 2, while the brethren were visiting the Prophet Joseph Smith in prison, the Prophet formally called George to be one of the Twelve. When Joseph asked

for George's feelings concerning the call, the new Apostle replied, "I was pleased with the appointment, and would do my best to honor it."²

At the time of his call, George was only twenty-one, the youngest man to serve in the Quorum of the Twelve. In spite of his youthfulness, he was already a man of many accomplishments. He had marched in Zion's Camp when he was only sixteen, he had been the youngest member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, he had served as a stake high councilor in Missouri, and he had fulfilled at least four short-term missions for the Church.³ He was also the Prophet's cousin and the only member of the Quorum of the Twelve who was not married at the time.

Prophecy of the Mission

George's call to the Twelve brought with it the expectation that he would go on a mission to the British Isles with the other Apostles in accordance with the revelation Joseph Smith received in July 1838. However, since that revelation had been given, Missouri's governor, Lilburn W. Boggs, had issued the "extermination order," which had effectively expelled most faithful Mormons from that state. This unfortunate turn of events severely complicated the circumstances surrounding the departure of the Twelve. Joseph Smith's revelation stated that the Apostles should depart on their mission from the building spot of the temple in Far West on April 26, 1839. There were some who felt that because of the extermination order the Lord would no longer expect the Apostles to venture back into Missouri before departing on their mission. Joseph Smith Sr., the Prophet's father, was one who felt that way.⁴

Brigham Young called a meeting in Quincy, Illinois, on March 18 to discuss the matter. While many believed that "the Lord would not require the Twelve to fulfill his words to the letter" because it was so dangerous, Brigham believed differently. In addition, all the members of the Twelve who were at the meeting "expressed their desires to fulfill the revelation." Brigham Young declared, "I told them the Lord God had spoken, and it was our duty to obey and leave the event in his hands and he would protect us."⁵

A month later, the time arrived for the Twelve to fulfill Joseph Smith's prophecy. On April 18, Brigham Young, Orson Pratt, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and George A. Smith departed from the friendly confines of Quincy and headed back to the most perilous place for Latter-day Saints—Far West.⁶ At this time, Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith had been called to the Twelve but had not yet been ordained. In addition, Alpheus Cutler traveled with the Apostles. Others would join them along the way.

“Early on the morning of the 26th of April, we . . . proceeded to the building spot of the Lord's House [in Far West],” Brigham Young wrote.⁷ By this time, two other Apostles had joined them—Heber C. Kimball and John E. Page.⁸ On this singular occasion Brigham Young ordained Wilford Woodruff as an Apostle, and Heber C. Kimball ordained George A. Smith.⁹ The Twelve then prayed in order of seniority and sang the hymn “Adam-ondi-Ahman.” This historic meeting did not last long because of the perilous conditions. Nevertheless, the Twelve took great satisfaction in what they had accomplished. Brigham Young put the episode into perspective: “Thus was this revelation fulfilled, concerning which our enemies said, if all other revelations of Joseph Smith were fulfilled that one should not, as it had day and date to it.”¹⁰ At the conclusion of this notable meeting, the Apostles and those who were with them hurriedly left Far West and made their way back to Quincy, Illinois.

When the Apostles returned to Illinois on May 2, they were pleased to hear that Joseph Smith had escaped from prison and was temporarily staying with Judge John Cleveland on the outskirts of Quincy. While the Apostles had been away, the Prophet had been working feverishly to buy land in Commerce (later Nauvoo), Illinois, where the Church would establish yet another gathering place for the Saints. Thus, even though the Apostles had made their official departure for their mission from Far West, Missouri, they would still remain in Illinois for a few more months to relocate their families to Commerce.

During this time, when the Saints were gathering to Commerce, Joseph Smith and the First Presidency met with the Twelve on numerous occasions to train the Apostles for their mission. A meeting held on July 2 must have been especially impressive to young

George A. Smith. During that gathering, the First Presidency gave special blessings to the two newest Apostles: Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith. Then Hyrum Smith spoke to the Apostles, counseling them to teach nothing but the first principles of the gospel because that was all “this generation could endure.” Then the Prophet spoke to them about the importance of forgiving their brother “on the first intimations of repentance & asking forgiveness.” Soon thereafter, Joseph Smith gave the Twelve an important “key.” He warned, “In all your trials, troubles, & temptations, afflictions bonds imprisonment & death see to it that you do not betray heaven, that you do not betray Jesus Christ, that you do not betray your Brethren, & that you do not betray the revelations of God whether in the bible, Book of Mormon, or Doctrine & Covenants or any of the word of God . . . lest innocent blood be found in your skirts & you go down to *hell*.”¹¹

While the Apostles were preparing for their mission, George helped move his father’s family from Green Plains to Commerce. Unfortunately, the house he had arranged for was “filled with several who were sick.” At that time a large portion of Saints were seriously ill with malaria, which was commonly referred to as the ague. Soon George, and his father and brother, also became “very sick with the fever.” Despite their illness, they mustered up enough energy to take “down the log body of a small stable” and then reassemble it on a clean plot of ground away from the manure. There they lived in the stable on a dirt floor and without a door until September 21, when George started for England.¹²

Pathway to the British Isles

Nine Apostles served missions to Great Britain between 1839 and 1841: Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, and Willard Richards. (William Smith and John E. Page were also called to the British Isles, but they did not go and eventually apostatized from the Church. The Quorum had only eleven Apostles at that time.) Willard Richards was already living in England, having remained there after completing a mission with Heber C. Kimball in

1837. Elder Richards was also ordained an Apostle when the other members of the Twelve arrived in England in April 1840. Orson Hyde stayed in Commerce temporarily but eventually joined the Apostles in England during his historic journey to the Holy Land. Two elders who were not members of the Quorum of the Twelve traveled with the Apostles. Their names were Theodore Turley and Reuben Hedlock.

The seven Apostles who departed from Commerce in the summer of 1839 did not leave together; they actually left in four different groups. John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff started on August 8, 1839. Parley P. and Orson Pratt departed on August 29. Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball said good-bye to their loved ones on September 18. Finally, George A. Smith and his two traveling companions, Theodore Turley and Reuben Hedlock, departed on September 21.¹³

Like so many Saints in Commerce at that time, most of the Apostles were seriously ill with malaria when they left on their missions. George A. Smith was no exception. Despite extremely poor health and high fever, he began his journey on horseback. After traveling about a mile and a half, he became so sick that he decided to stop and rest awhile at the home of his cousin Joseph Smith. When George entered the room where his uncle Joseph Smith Sr. lay sick in bed, the old patriarch “burst out laughing.” “Who has been robbing the burying yard?” Joseph Sr. asked. George replied that even though he was sick, he was determined to go to England. Joseph Sr. then gave George an encouraging blessing, promising the young Apostle that he would be restored to health, “accomplish a great deal of good, and return safely home again.” That was the last time George ever saw Joseph Smith Sr. because his uncle died while George was in England. While George was at Joseph Smith’s home, the Prophet gave his cousin a letter of introduction stating that he could recommend George because he had known him a long time “and always found him faithful in all things.”¹⁴

When George and his companions were about to say good-bye to Joseph Smith, the Prophet looked at Theodore Turley and George and made an unusual statement: “Keep up good courage, boys, some of you will look through the grates [prison bars] before

you come back.”¹⁵ The statement did not make much of an impression at the moment, but it turned out to be a prophetic declaration that was fulfilled in England seven months later.

George and his traveling partners then headed for Quincy. They arrived there on September 23, where they met Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball who were also sick. While they were in that town a doctor prescribed some medicine for George. His eyesight was so bad that he was “near blind” and “could not distinguish the color of anything.”¹⁶

From Quincy, all five missionaries traveled and preached along the way for the next five weeks until they reached Cleveland, Ohio, on November 3. There they took a stagecoach to Kirtland, where they stayed for over two weeks. “The Saints there were dead with a universal spirit of apostacy, which had dominion over them,” wrote George. Nevertheless, the missionaries bore testimony to the backsliding members in the temple. While in Kirtland, George “broke out all over like a person with the itch.” In a desperate attempt to cure the ailment, George rubbed himself “all over with gunpowder and grease, which [in turn] . . . produced diarrhea.”¹⁷

Elder Smith and his party departed from Kirtland on November 22, 1839. They traveled by boat, train, and foot for more than two months until they finally arrived at New York City on January 31, 1840. There they found the Pratt brothers and Heber C. Kimball. By this time John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff had already set sail for Great Britain.¹⁸ George remained on the East Coast for thirty-seven more days before departing for England with his brethren. During his stay in the East, he made a trip to Philadelphia and other parts of Pennsylvania. He returned to New York City on February 24, and on March 4 he spoke at a Church conference held there.¹⁹

On March 9, Elder Smith boarded the packet ship *Patrick Henry* along with Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, and Reuben Hedlock. Of the group, only Elder Kimball had ever been to sea before, and the members of the crew called them landlubbers. They were at sea for twenty-eight days, and Brigham Young was so sick that he was confined to his berth nearly the entire

voyage. George also suffered from seasickness most of the trip and was unable to eat “during a considerable portion” of the voyage.²⁰

At long last the missionaries landed in Liverpool, England, on April 6, 1840. The ailing Brigham Young was so thankful to set foot on land that he “gave a loud shout of hosannah.”²¹ The elders “took lodging at No. 8 Union Street; had prayer meeting, blessed each other and partook of the sacrament.”²² They thanked the Lord for His “protection and care” and asked Him to open the way before them to have a successful mission.²³

George A. Smith’s six-month journey from Commerce, Illinois, to Liverpool, England, was both heart-wrenching and faith-promoting. It was heart-wrenching because George, like most of the Apostles, was incredibly ill during most of his travels. At the same time, it was faith-promoting because he was tenacious about fulfilling his calling in spite of his bad health. He and the other Apostles had few, if any, baptisms during their journey. However, their fortunes would soon change once they were in the British Isles.

Preston Conference

Two days after George A. Smith and the other four Apostles arrived in Liverpool, they took a train to Church headquarters in Preston. There they “found a multitude of saints who rejoiced at [their] arrival and made [them] welcome.” The members were particularly happy to see Heber C. Kimball, who had labored among them two years earlier. However, Brigham Young was so “emaciated” from his long sea voyage that when Willard Richards saw him for the first time in three years, he did not recognize him.²⁴

On April 12, several of the Apostles preached at a meeting in Temperance Hall, often referred to as the Cockpit. George A. Smith was one of those who “bore testimony of the truth of the Latter-day work.” It was the first time Elder Smith gave his testimony in England. About seven hundred people were in attendance.²⁵

On Tuesday, April 14, a historic meeting was held in Preston, England. It was the first time “a majority of the Quorum of the Twelve” had met together outside the borders of the United States. Those present were Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Parley P.

Pratt, Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor, and George A. Smith. Elders Taylor and Woodruff had arrived in England three months earlier than the other five Apostles and were pleased to be reunited with the other members of the Twelve. The meeting was held in the house of Willard Richards, who was ordained an Apostle on that occasion. Elder Richards's ordination was the fulfillment of a revelation received by Joseph Smith in Far West, on July 8, 1838 (see D&C 118:6).²⁶

Then, on April 15, the Apostles held a general conference at Temperance Hall in Preston. At that meeting leaders announced there were already 1,671 members, 34 elders, 52 priests, 38 teachers, and 8 deacons in England and Scotland.²⁷ Those at the conference voted to publish a hymnbook and a monthly periodical. They also decided to call a patriarch to give blessings to the faithful members of Great Britain.²⁸

The following day the Quorum of the Twelve met again to conduct additional business. They decided to name their new periodical the *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* and appointed Parley P. Pratt as the first editor.²⁹ They called Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Parley P. Pratt to secure a copyright for the Doctrine and Covenants and Book of Mormon. They then approved a motion to ordain Peter Melling as the first patriarch of the Church in England.³⁰

On April 18, the Apostles decided to separate and preach the gospel in various parts of the British Isles. They sent Heber C. Kimball back to the branches he helped build up during his previous mission in England; Orson Pratt to Scotland; John Taylor to Liverpool; Parley P. Pratt to Manchester; Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and Willard Richards to Herefordshire; and George A. Smith to the Potteries.³¹

Preaching in the Potteries

The region referred to as the Potteries was located in Staffordshire, about thirty miles south of Manchester. It comprised "about a dozen towns," including Burslem, Fenton, Hanley, Longton (sometimes called Lane End), Stoke-Upon-Trent, and Tunstal. "The principal business" in the area was "the manufacture of china

and earthenware.”³² Therefore, the towns and villages were dominated by huge, eighty-foot bottle ovens that baked beautiful, world-famous ceramics. However, by the 1840s these towns had become overpopulated and burdened with a great deal of unemployment. In addition, the smoke from the ovens filled the air in the region. The combined population of these communities was about eighty thousand. The Latter-day Saints claimed to have 101 members in the region.³³ This was the area in which George A. Smith labored diligently for the next two and a half months.

On the way to the Potteries, Elder Smith stopped in Manchester, where he stayed for a few days. There he had an embarrassing situation. Some members met him at the train station and escorted him to the home of Alice Hardman. Before this visit, George was unaware that the Saints in Manchester had taken seriously the Apostle Paul’s admonition to “greet one another with an holy kiss” (2 Corinthians 13:12). While Elder Smith was relaxed, sitting on a sofa, the room suddenly filled with “about twenty sisters, many of them young and handsome.” The ladies were, no doubt, curious to see the unmarried, twenty-two-year-old Apostle. “One of them, decidedly a little beauty, prompted by the rest, approached [George], and modestly said, ‘Brother Smith, we want to kiss you,’ while the score of eyes which surrounded her flashed like fixed stars on a clear night.” Elder Smith said he “never felt so foolish” in his entire life. He responded by saying that “kissing was no part of [his] mission to England.” The Apostle then wrote, “Their countenances all fell, and although a bachelor, I was regarded as no lady’s man by the sisters in Manchester.”³⁴

After a short stay in Manchester, Elder Smith finally arrived in Burslem, one of the principal towns of the Potteries. There he met Elder Alfred Cordon, president of the Church in that region. Elder Smith wasted little time before getting involved in the work of the Lord. That night, April 23, he spoke in the Latter-day Saint meeting hall in the nearby community of Hanley. The building was previously a chicken house that the Saints had rented and converted into a place where they could hold meetings. However, in spite of the Saints’ efforts to clean the building, it was still “infested with fleas.” After the meeting, George took up lodging at the home of Samuel

Johnson on upper Pitt Street in Burslem, where Elder Smith stayed most of the ten weeks that he labored in the Potteries.³⁵

On April 25, Willard Richards came to stay with Elder Smith for a few days on his way to Herefordshire. On Wednesday, April 29, the two Apostles visited with their fellow missionary, Theodore Turley, who was in prison at Stafford. Elder Turley had been preaching in his hometown of Birmingham. Before Turley had immigrated to America, he had been a prominent member of the Methodist Church in that city. However, when he returned to his hometown, his Mormon preaching offended some of his former Methodist friends. One of them had him put in jail, claiming Turley had owed him money before he left for America seventeen years earlier. The guards would not even furnish Turley with food. Elder Turley was able to survive only because members of the Church, living in surrounding communities, provided him with money and food.³⁶

When Elder Smith shook hands with Elder Turley through the prison bars, it reminded him of the statement Joseph Smith had made to the two men when they parted with the Prophet on September 21, 1839. The Prophet had declared, “Keep up good courage, boys, some of you will look through the grates [prison bars] before you come back.” George A. Smith believed that Theodore Turley’s confinement in that prison was “a fulfillment of Joseph’s prophecy.” Altogether, Elder Turley remained about eight weeks in prison without trial. He was finally released from jail when “his friends were about to expose the illegality and wickedness of the proceedings against him.”³⁷

After the two Apostles visited Elder Turley in prison, Elder Richards headed for Herefordshire, and Elder Smith continued his missionary labors in Longton. That evening Elder Smith baptized Elizabeth Allbasters. She had the distinction of being the first person of many whom George A. Smith would baptize in England.³⁸

During the next few months, Elder Smith walked from town to town, preaching in homes, rented buildings, temperance halls, marketplaces, and open fields. He met and counseled with the Latter-day Saints and visited with ministers of other faiths. He baptized scores of people and established several new branches.

On May 4, George baptized William Knight, James Brough, William Plant, and John Wardle. Then he ordained William Jackson a priest and called him to preside over the local branch (probably in a town called Leek). The next day Elder Smith walked ten miles to Longton, where he preached that evening. After the meeting two people asked if they could be baptized. Elder Smith ordained Isaac Whittacker a priest, and Whittacker, in turn, baptized the two enthusiastic investigators.³⁹

George was in Newcastle on May 6. While there, he preached in the marketplace at the base of a large cross to “several thousand people.” He organized a branch of fourteen people in that community and then walked to Burslem. On May 10, Elder Smith was in Hanley with Theodore Turley, who had just been released from jail. While they were preaching, a Methodist minister named John Jones began to disrupt the meeting. “A large and strong man” named Daniel Bowers “carried [Jones] out of the house,” saying “these people pay the rent here, and you must not disturb them.” Soon thereafter Bowers became a member of the Church.⁴⁰

George A. Smith was back in Longton on May 18. While there a local Methodist minister named William W. Player visited the Latter-day Saint Apostle. The preacher asked Elder Smith several technical questions about “the beasts” that John saw in the book of Revelation and the “Leviathan” spoken of in the book of Job. Elder Smith told Reverend Player that he “was not prepared to explain anything about it.” However, the Apostle then explained to the minister that if he would “obey the first principles of the Gospel, and get as much of the Spirit of the Lord as John had when he saw the visions” that he would soon come to understand them. Player, who was president of the Longton Temperance Society, was so impressed with Elder Smith’s sincerity that he invited George to give a lecture in their hall on “total abstinence from intoxicating drinks.” Soon the Church started renting the Temperance Hall as a meeting place for the Latter-day Saints until the branch had one hundred members. In addition, Reverend Player converted to the Church and eventually became the presiding elder in the branch.⁴¹

On May 31, Elder Smith baptized two people in Leek, but unfortunately he did not have a change of clothing. Nevertheless, after

the baptism, the diligent Apostle preached a sermon while wearing his wet clothes. When the meeting concluded, George walked ten miles back to Burslem while his clothing dried on his back.⁴²

Before long, Elder Smith became so engaged in the work that he failed to write in his diary for nearly three weeks. “For the last twenty days I have been so busy with preaching, counselling, baptizing, confirming, and teaching the people that I had not time to journalize any,” wrote George on his twenty-third birthday, June 26, “and have seldom gone to bed before 2 o’clock in the morning, as people were constantly in my room inquiring about the work of the Lord.”⁴³

The Church held a general conference on July 6 in Manchester for all the Saints in the British Isles. The meeting was held at Carpenters’ Hall, and seven of the eight Apostles laboring in Britain were in attendance.⁴⁴ (Orson Pratt remained in Scotland.) The conference reported there were forty-one branches in England and Scotland with a membership of 2,513, including 256 brethren who held the priesthood. This was an increase of 842 members since the last general conference held in Preston three months earlier.⁴⁵ Two days later the Quorum of the Twelve met and called Heber C. Kimball, Wilford Woodruff, and George A. Smith to go to London and become the first Latter-day Saint missionaries to proselytize in that great city.⁴⁶

However, before Elder Smith moved to London, he went back to the Potteries for about three weeks. On August 5, 1840, he wrote in his journal about the success that he, and Wilford Woodruff before him, had experienced in the area during the past half year: “The work of the Lord is rolling on in this region, about 50 persons had been baptized since last Friday. The spirit of inquiry is great; about 800 have been baptized since Elder Woodruff opened the door about 5 months ago.” Then the Apostle happily concluded, “I never saw the work roll on with such power. Truth will prevail.”⁴⁷

Unlike Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith did not record exact statistics in his journal concerning how many people he personally baptized or how many people were baptized under his direction. However, in a letter that Elder Smith wrote to the *Millennial Star*, he reported that during the first three months that he labored in the

Potteries “80 were added to the church.”⁴⁸ That is certainly an impressive number of baptisms for such a short time.

Heber C. Kimball, Wilford Woodruff, and George A. Smith in London

On August 18, 1840, Elders Kimball, Woodruff, and Smith arrived in the great metropolis of London.⁴⁹ Being the first Latter-day Saint missionaries to serve in that city, they arrived not knowing a soul. According to Wilford Woodruff, the three Apostles were awestricken by the multitude of people and crowded conditions. “I am now in the great city of London,” wrote Elder Woodruff, “the largest most noted & populous commercial City in the world containing a Population of about (1,500,000) one million five hundred thousand people.” The Apostle then mused: “O London as I walk thy streets and behold the mass of human beings passing through thee & view thy mighty pallaces, thy splendid mansions, the costly merchandize wharewith thou art adorned even as the capital of great Babylon, I am ready to ask myself, what am I & my Brethren here for?” Elder Woodruff then responded to his own query: “To warn thee [the people of London] of thine abominations & to exhort the[e] to repent of thy wickedness.”⁵⁰

Three days later, after the Apostles walked through the part of London that contained St. Paul’s Cathedral and other majestic buildings, George A. Smith made an astonishing prophecy: “Empires rise, grow powerful, decline and fall to ruins and are buried in forgetfulness;—cities may be great and wealthy, filled with gold, pearls and precious stones, but ruin awaits them, for the Lord cometh to judge the nations: *one hundred years and London may be a heap of ruins.*”⁵¹ Remarkably, one hundred years after this prophecy, Europe was engulfed in World War II and London was being destroyed by Nazi bombs.

London turned out to be an extremely difficult place to do missionary work. Elders Kimball, Woodruff, and Smith were three of the most successful missionaries in the history of the Church, under whose direction hundreds had already joined the Church in other parts of England. These dynamic preachers, however, struggled to

establish the Church in London. The three Apostles spent their first ten days in London “visiting the clergymen and preachers and others of the several denominations, asking the privilege of preaching in their chapels, and [were] continually refused by them in a contemptuous manner.”⁵² The only opportunity they had been given to preach during that time was on August 25. On that day the Catholic Teetotal Society asked George A. Smith to speak at the South London Temperance Hall on the subject of temperance.⁵³ This was probably the first discourse by a Latter-day Saint elder in the city.

The first baptism came about, in part, because of a speech that George A. Smith gave on August 30, 1840, at a place called Tabernacle Square. Because none of the ministers would give permission for the elders to preach in their churches, the Apostles decided “to preach in the open air” at Smithfield Market. As fate would have it, the Lord Mayor “issued orders prohibiting street preaching in the city.” Fortunately, a man named Henry Conner stepped forward and showed the missionaries a place to preach outside the city limits where the Lord Mayor had no jurisdiction. The place was Tabernacle Square.

There they found a preacher standing on a chair and giving a sermon to about four hundred people. When the minister completed his discourse, Elder Heber C. Kimball announced to the clergyman there was “a man present from America who would like to preach.” The minister granted permission, and Elder George A. Smith delivered a twenty-minute discourse on the first principles of the gospel. Later that day, at three o’clock, Elder Kimball and Elder Woodruff also preached at the same place. At the conclusion of the meeting, Henry Connor invited the three missionaries to his house, where they continued talking about the gospel. Before the night was over, Connor asked to be baptized. The next day, August 31, Elder Kimball baptized Henry Connor, making him the first convert to the Church in London.⁵⁴ This was certainly a rewarding experience for the Apostles, who had worked so hard in London with nothing to show for it. In fact, Wilford Woodruff, who was perhaps the most successful missionary of this dispensation, once stated that London was “the hardest place [he] ever visited for establishing the gospel.”⁵⁵

George A. Smith and his fellow missionaries not only had to contend with antagonists on the streets of London but also the powers of the adversary. On September 9, Elder Smith recorded in his journal: “My rest was not pleasant, being constantly annoyed by visitations from the spirit of darkness, which required all my faith and energy of mind to resist.” However, Elder Smith chose to say “little about it.”⁵⁶ As time went on, these visitations from the spirit world became even more horrific. Wilford Woodruff told of an occasion when several evil spirits actually attacked him and Elder Smith. “It seemed as if there were legions of spirits [in the room],” wrote Elder Woodruff. “They sought our destruction, and on one occasion . . . these powers of darkness fell upon us to destroy our lives and both Brother Smith and myself would have been killed, apparently, had not three holy messengers come into our room and filled the room with light.” Elder Woodruff noted, “They were dressed in temple clothing. They laid their hands upon our heads and we were delivered, and that power was broken so far as we were concerned.”⁵⁷

Despite opposition on both sides of the veil, the Apostles diligently pressed forward and eventually had modest success. On November 9, George A. Smith received a letter from Willard Richards asking him to return to the Potteries for the last five months of his mission.⁵⁸ The Brethren reassigned Elder Smith for reasons of health: “He had injured his lungs by preaching in the streets, so that he discharged considerable blood from them.”⁵⁹ A few months later, Elder Smith summarized the work of Elders Kimball, Woodruff, and himself in London: “We met with much difficulty in introducing the fulness of the gospel; the hearts of the people seemed barred against the truth, but the Lord blessed our labours, and we succeeded in establishing a branch of the church there.”⁶⁰ From August 18 to November 9, these three great Apostles baptized only eleven people, a relatively small number compared to their success in other parts of England.⁶¹

Return to the Potteries

Elder Smith arrived back in his beloved Potteries on November 17 and immediately began to preach in spite of his poor health.

During the final five months of his mission, he continually suffered with illness, including coughing spells, painful lungs, a sore throat, and extremely poor eyesight. Yet he diligently pressed on, hardly ever taking time off to rest or recuperate.

When he returned to the Potteries, he was disheartened because he discovered that the unemployment rate among the Saints was even higher than before. According to one account, “He estimated that only a third of the 450 Saints . . . were fully employed, others worked only two or three days per week, and some worked not at all.”⁶² “Some of the Saints are suffering for want of food; others are turned out of employment for being Latter-day Saints,” wrote Elder Smith. “I pray daily for the Lord to gather them up and send them to Zion.”⁶³

From this point on, the doctrine of gathering would become one of the major themes of Elder Smith’s preaching. He worked tirelessly to get people to join the Church and then consistently encouraged them to migrate to Nauvoo. This also became a major thrust for all of the Apostles. On February 17, George A. Smith “received letters from President Brigham Young and Willard Richards, one on the subject of ‘Gathering.’” That evening Elder Smith “called the Saints together and laid the subject before them.” He then wrote back to President Young that “all were willing but none able to gather at the present.”⁶⁴ They were simply too poor.

By the latter part of March 1841, George A. Smith’s mission was quickly coming to an end. His final days were filled with emotional good-byes as Elder Smith visited various communities for the last time. On March 22, he “took leave of the Saints at Leek, leaving most of them in tears.”⁶⁵ On March 27, the poor but grateful Saints in Hanley “raised a subscription of four pounds” to help pay Elder Smith’s way back to America.⁶⁶ On April 6, Elder Smith and the other Apostles attended a nationwide Church conference in Manchester.⁶⁷ Finally, on April 20, they boarded the ship *Rochester* and set sail for America.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Brigham Young summarized the accomplishments of all of the Apostles during their one-year sojourn in the British Isles: “We . . .

baptized between seven and eight thousand, printed 5,000 Books of Mormon, 3,000 Hymn Books, 2,500 volumes of the *Millennial Star*, and 50,000 tracts.”⁶⁹ For those interested in George A. Smith’s part in this extraordinary mission, he filed a summary of his activities in the April 1841 *Millennial Star*. After talking about the eleven baptisms that Elders Kimball, Woodruff, and he had in London he recorded: “Since that time, my labours have been chiefly confined to the limits of the Staffordshire conference [which included the Potteries], . . . containing 18 branches of the church, 580 members having been added since the time I commenced labouring there.”⁷⁰

George A. Smith, then, served a remarkable mission in England. Even though he was the youngest of all the Apostles by far and was perhaps in the poorest of health, he was exceedingly successful. Literally hundreds were baptized under his direction. His proselyting methods were essentially the same as the other Apostles serving in Great Britain at that time.⁷¹ He sought out ministers of other faiths and asked to speak before their congregations. He also sought out other groups to speak to, especially temperance societies. He would speak on temperance and then invite the members of the audience to come and hear a sermon on a gospel message. Sometimes he rented halls. On one occasion, he even hired town criers to advertise his meeting. In addition, he regularly preached in private homes. Perhaps the most important missionary tools were referrals from members. Nearly everywhere he went in the Potteries, Elder Smith would first make contact with members of the Church. This often led to convert baptisms. In London, on the other hand, he and his companions experienced comparatively little success because they simply did not know anyone.

Through it all, George A. Smith was able to maintain a spirit of humility in the face of adversity. “Although I have suffered much bodily affliction during the past year,” Elder Smith recorded, “the Lord has blessed my labours abundantly, and I can say I never enjoyed myself better in the discharge of my duty, than I have on this mission.”⁷²

Notes

1. George A. Smith, "My Journal," *The Instructor*, March 1947, 119.
2. Smith, "My Journal," 142.
3. Andrew Jenson, *Latter-Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901), 1:39; Craig Manscill, "Smith, George A.," *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 1114.
4. *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 13:159.
5. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801–1844*, ed. Elden Jay Watson (Salt Lake City: Smith Secretarial Service), 35.
6. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 35–36.
7. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 37.
8. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 3:337.
9. *2006 Church Almanac* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Morning News, 2005), 53, 57; *History of the Church*, 3:337.
10. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 39.
11. Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898*, typescript, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 1:342–44.
12. Smith, "My Journal," 168.
13. V. Ben Bloxham, James R. Moss, and Larry C. Porter, eds., *Truth Will Prevail* (Solihull, England: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 114.
14. Smith, "My Journal," 168.
15. Smith, "My Journal," 323.
16. Smith, "My Journal," 215.
17. Smith, "My Journal," 216–17.
18. Bloxham, *Truth Will Prevail*, 114.
19. Smith, "My Journal," 320.
20. Smith, "My Journal," 320; *History of the Church*, 4:102–4; *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 69.
21. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 69.
22. Smith, "My Journal," 320–21.
23. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 69.
24. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 69–70.
25. Smith, "My Journal," 321.
26. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 70.
27. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:438.
28. *History of the Church*, 4:118.
29. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 303. Pratt says that this meeting took place on April 15, 1840, but the *History of the Church* states it was on April 16 (see *History of the Church*,

4:118–19). Wilford Woodruff also says this meeting was held on April 16 (see *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:438–39).

30. *History of the Church*, 4:119.
31. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:441.
32. Smith, "My Journal," 322.
33. James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, *Men with a Mission, 1837–1841: The Quorum of the Twelve in the British Isles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 118.
34. Smith, "My Journal," 321–22.
35. Smith, "My Journal," 322.
36. Smith, "My Journal," 323.
37. Smith, "My Journal," 323.
38. Smith, "My Journal," 365.
39. Smith, "My Journal," 367.
40. Smith, "My Journal," 367.
41. Smith, "My Journal," 368.
42. Smith, "My Journal," 415.
43. Smith, "My Journal," 416.
44. "Minutes of the General Conference," *Millennial Star*, July 1840, 67.
45. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:480.
46. Smith, "My Journal," 417.
47. Smith, "My Journal," 476.
48. *Millennial Star*, April 1841, 306.
49. *History of the Church*, 4:180.
50. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:494.
51. Smith, "My Journal," 526; emphasis added.
52. *History of the Church*, 4:182.
53. Smith, "My Journal," 527.
54. *History of the Church*, 4:182–84; Smith, "My Journal," 527–28.
55. *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 1:506.
56. Smith, "My Journal," 571.
57. Wilford Woodruff, *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 287.
58. Smith, "My Journal," 71.
59. *History of the Church*, 4:236.
60. *Millennial Star*, April 1841, 306.
61. *Millennial Star*, April 1841, 306.
62. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 227.
63. Smith, "My Journal," 106.
64. Smith, "My Journal," 108.
65. Smith, "My Journal," 176.
66. Smith, "My Journal," 176.
67. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 95.
68. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 96.

69. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young*, 97.

70. *Millennial Star*, April 1841, 306.

71. For information on the proselyting methods used by the Apostles in Great Britain at that time, see Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, *Men with a Mission*, 89–91.

72. *Millennial Star*, April 1841, 306.