



Africa

Continent of Bright Hope



By Richard M. Romney
Church Magazines

The faith and obedience of Latter-day Saints in Africa and Madagascar set an example for Church members everywhere.

It is easy to love the people of Africa,"¹ said Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in Freetown, Sierra Leone, during an assignment that also included visits to Liberia and Ghana.

He said that the faith and obedience of African Latter-day Saints, born of their love for the gospel, set an example for all members of the Church.



The covenant of baptism opens the door to many blessings, and so does faithful study of the gospel.



It is impressive, Elder Holland said, “to see how much the gospel means to them, to see what they have done with it, how they cherish it, to see their faithfulness in tithing and in service, in going to the temple—I think of the temple as the crowning image—and then to see them raising their children in the Church and sending their sons and daughters on missions. It is wonderful evidence of their faithfulness.”²

Before Your Eyes

Elder Holland noted that, with the exception of South Africa (where a stake was organized in 1970), the Church has been in Africa for less than 30 years. Because of that, the Church here has been “born before your eyes, born in a day,” and “Africa is one of those special places where you get to see the glory of the Lord, the wonder and the miracle of the Restoration, quite literally unfold before your eyes.”³

He said he will always remember being in Accra, Ghana, with President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), when he announced that a temple would be built there. “[The people] stood and cheered, wept and danced, held each other,

and cried. And in a way, that spirit still continues. That is my love for the Africans—it is their uncompromised joy in the gospel. Most have had so little in their lives of material goods, but when they got the gospel, they just embraced it. . . . And they still do. They are doing it to this day.”⁴

Prophecies Fulfilled

Other prophets and apostles who have fulfilled assignments in Africa speak of the continent as a place where the prophecies of the Lord are literally being fulfilled.

“The African people are a kind and patient people,” said Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles following a visit with members of the Church in Mozambique and Nigeria. “They don’t have a lot of income or resources that allow them financially to do things, so they just do them out of sheer effort. They will walk miles and miles and miles to accomplish something that they are prompted to do by the Holy Ghost to further the work.”⁵

Elder Scott noted that in 1999, when he dedicated Mozambique for the preaching of the gospel, there were only 40 members there, and the country was part of the South Africa Johannesburg Mission. At the time of his second visit, in January 2011, the Church in Mozambique had grown to more than 5,000 members spread throughout two districts and 19 branches meeting across the

country. Mozambique is also headquarters of the Mozambique Maputo Mission, which includes the country of Angola.⁶

Young but Growing

“We are young here,”⁷ Elder Russell M. Nelson, also of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said while visiting Madagascar, Malawi, and Kenya. “We are watching the Lord move upon this great continent of Africa to bless the people . . . with the truth, the light of the gospel, [including] the ordinances of salvation and exaltation.”⁸ He said he was particularly impressed with the strength of local Church leadership in Africa: “I can’t tell you how grateful we are for these [local] leaders, who give of their time and talent in the service of the Lord to bless the lives of these people.”⁹

Elder Nelson is “very optimistic” about the future of the Church and the people in Africa and Madagascar because their faith is stronger than their challenges. “You truly are children of God, children of the covenant Israel, prepared to meet the Lord Jesus Christ and God, our Eternal Father, and dwell in Their presence with [your] families,”¹⁰ he said at a meeting in Madagascar. Elder Nelson also stated, “These are people of great potential. They have faith. They have a love of the Lord, and they have all that is required to make people really strong.”¹¹





Striving to always remember the Savior, members are strengthened and renewed by partaking of the sacrament.



During an interview in Nairobi, Kenya, Elder Nelson commented, “We’ve got Latter-day Saint chapels. We have a stake here [in] Nairobi. We had a stake conference today. It was a thrill to meet with the people. More than a thousand people gathered, [and they were] so reverent [and had a] beautiful choir, [an] excellent stake presidency, [and a] patriarch on the stand. How can I express my joy when I see such progress?”¹²

Despite Adversity

Elder Holland said the Church in Africa is thriving even in the face of challenges. As an example, he said, “While there was a raging civil war in Côte d’Ivoire [Ivory Coast], the Latter-day Saints . . . just kept coming to the temple. It’s a great tribute to them. I stand in awe.”¹³

Speaking of both Sierra Leone and Liberia, Elder Holland said, “Because they’ve had such a bloody, war-torn, brutal recent past, that’s one of the reasons the gospel is taking hold so dramatically. They’ve seen what life ought *not* to be, and now with the missionaries and the members testifying, they’ve seen what it *can* be. Heaven has been able to turn [their trials] into a blessing, and they’re lifting themselves out

of political disarray and civil strife.”¹⁴

In addition, Elder Holland pointed out that the growth of the Church in Zimbabwe has continued despite difficult times in recent years: “The Church has blossomed. We have growth, we have stakes, we have missions. That’s what’s happening all over Africa.”¹⁵

Preaching the Gospel

One key to the Church’s success in Africa, Elder Holland said, is that “we don’t get involved in conspicuous, sociopolitical issues. We preach the gospel. We are concerned about justice, and we are concerned about social opportunity and equity. But we think [the answers are found in the gospel], so we just preach the gospel. And it has been true elsewhere and it is true in Africa, that people get that insight, blessing, and light in their lives, and suddenly things start to change and their lives are blessed.”¹⁶

The Lord’s Promise

Elder Holland quoted the Savior, who said, “The last shall be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16).

“In some ways,” he said, “the gospel is late in coming to Africa, at least as we could do it on the Lord’s timetable—and it was the Lord’s timetable, I’m quick to affirm. It is only comparatively recently that the Africans have begun to get missions and missionaries, the blessings of the priesthood, and so forth. It’s a big continent, and we still have a long way to go. But I

believe the growth we are now seeing in Africa is part of the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise. African Latter-day Saints are emerging with faith. They are on the move. They are meeting the challenge of receiving the gospel and making it obvious in their lives.”¹⁷ ■

NOTES

1. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa,” www.lds.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/emerging-with-faith-in-africa.
2. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa.”
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa.”
4. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa.”
5. Richard G. Scott, in “Mormons in Africa: A Bright Land of Hope,” mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormons-africa-bright-land-hope.
6. See “Jesus Christ Lives’ Elder Scott Testifies in Mozambique,” lds.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/jesus-christ-lives-elder-scott-testifies-in-mozambique.
7. Russell M. Nelson, in video in “Learn of the Savior, Saints in Madagascar and Malawi Are Told,” lds.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/learn-of-the-savior-saints-in-madagascar-and-malawi-are-told.
8. Russell M. Nelson, in “Elder Nelson Completes Trip to Africa in Kenya,” lds.org/church/news/elder-nelson-completes-trip-to-africa-in-kenya.
9. Russell M. Nelson, in video in Heather Whittle Wrigley, “Elder Nelson Visits Madagascar, Dedicates Malawi,” Oct. 28, 2011, lds.org/church/news/elder-nelson-visits-madagascar-dedicates-malawi.
10. Russell M. Nelson, in video in “Learn of the Savior, Saints in Madagascar and Malawi Are Told.”
11. Russell M. Nelson, in video in “Elder Nelson Visits Madagascar, Dedicates Malawi.”
12. Russell M. Nelson, in video in “Family Success Comes from Following the Savior,” lds.org/prophets-and-apostles/unto-all-the-world/family-success-comes-from-following-the-savior.
13. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa.”
14. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa.”
15. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa.”
16. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa.”
17. Jeffrey R. Holland, in “Emerging with Faith in Africa.”



AFRICA SOUTHEAST AND WEST AREAS*

Members: 381,417

Stakes: 70

Wards: 508

Missions: 22

Districts: 60

Branches: 646

Headquarters: Johannesburg, South Africa, and Accra, Ghana

*As of April 2013.

TEMPLES

Operating

Aba Nigeria, dedicated August 7, 2005

Accra Ghana, dedicated January 11, 2004

Johannesburg South Africa, dedicated August 24–25, 1985

Announced

Durban South Africa

Kinshasa Democratic Republic of Congo