Elizabeth and Moses Mahlangu (circa 1992), left, and Frans Lekgwati (circa 1950), right, were part of a group of black South Africans who became acquainted with the Book of Mormon in the 1960s and waited many years before being allowed to be baptized. Photo of the Mahlangus courtesy Neo Madela; photo of Frans Lekgwati courtesy the LDS Church History Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.

A Faithful Band

Moses Mahlangu and the First Soweto Saints

Richard E. Turley Jr. and Jeffrey G. Cannon

The faith of the African Saints is legendary, and the story of one man is often repeated to illustrate that faith. Moses Mahlangu waited many years from his introduction to the Book of Mormon sometime in the 1960s until his baptism in 1980. Two significant factors led to his long wait: (1) the laws and attitudes in South Africa affecting race relations and (2) a priesthood restriction of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regarding people of black[1] African lineage. Through it all, Mahlangu and several others who had been converted through their reading of the Book of Mormon remained faithful to their testimonies of this volume of scripture.

Like most legendary events, there are varying accounts of Moses Mahlangu's story.[2] No single version is universally retold by the narrators of

1. "African" identity is problematic in southern Africa. Many families with predominantly European ancestry have lived in Africa for generations and consider themselves African. This is especially relevant in the case of the Afrikaners (a designation which means "African" in the Afrikaans language), who are largely descended from Dutch, French, and German settlers beginning in the seventeenth century. For that reason, those with darker skin and typically Negroid appearance are identified herein as "black Africans" or "black South Africans." Those with lighter skin and typically European appearance are identified as "white Africans" or "white South Africans." There is also significant diversity in language and culture among the numerous black and white groups, as well as the "coloured" population, who are of mixed race.

2. Several unpublished oral histories from participants and their descendants are located at the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as CHL). Published retellings

Mormon history in South Africa, nor should that be expected. Even contemporaneously recorded accounts can include variations and discrepancies. Stories reduced to writing decades after the events they describe frequently contain inaccuracies, and if those stories have been repeated in the interim, significant variations sometimes develop—usually unintentionally. Despite the differences in the accounts of Moses Mahlangu, however, the central theme of enduring faith is still recognizable.

Sociologists have pointed out "that the past is not preserved [in memories] but is reconstructed on the basis of the present." Memory is largely formed by social mores, and "the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories."[3] Such is the case with the story of Moses Mahlangu. His story is remembered and retold by three distinct groups with at least as many purposes and variations. It is foundational to black South African Latter-day Saints because Mahlangu's experience helped smooth the way for them and in some ways illustrates their own experiences in the Church in South Africa. For white Latter-day Saints in South Africa, the story illustrates their Christian acceptance of Mahlangu and his associates despite prevalent social norms against it. Outside of South Africa, Mahlangu's story appeals to Latter-day Saints because it reflects the widely held belief that the divinity and veracity of the faith make it worth every trial or obstacle to be a part of it. In Mahlangu's African story, listeners all over the world hear the echo of the early American Saints who suffered at the hands of mobs and pulled handcarts through blizzards. Aspects of the story in support of the narrator's view are often recalled and emphasized in the retelling.

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include Moses Mahlangu, "I Waited Fourteen Years," in *All Are Alike unto God,* ed. E. Dale LeBaron (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 153–61; "Moses Mahlangu—the Conversion Power of the Book of Mormon," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints website, accessed October 12, 2015, https://www.lds.org/pages/moses-mahlangu-the-conversion-power-of-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng&country=afe. There are also several public addresses, such as E. Dale LeBaron, "African Converts without Baptism: A Unique and Inspiring Chapter in Church History," devotional address, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, November 3, 1998, available online at https://speeches.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Lebaron_EDale_1998_11.pdf; and Ulisses Soares, "Be Meek and Lowly of Heart," *Ensign* 43 (November 2013): 10–11. In addition, the story is told in innumerable other public and private forums. Each version contains at least minor differences from the others.

3. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40.

The outlines remain largely unchanged, but the perspective of the teller colors the details.

This article attempts to create a more complete narrative of the Moses Mahlangu story using several documents that have not been consulted previously. These sources, consisting of contemporary records and later reminiscences, help reconcile some of the differences in the various versions. These sources tell a more complex story than has previously been told. Consistent throughout these records and reminiscences are the faith and perseverance of Moses Mahlangu and his friends.

Awaiting the Long Promised Day

The first Latter-day Saint missionaries sent to South Africa stepped ashore at Cape Town on April 19, 1853.[4] Although their proselytizing was limited mostly to those of European ancestry, mission president Jesse Haven noted in his journal that at least two women of African ancestry joined the Church in 1853.[5] No Latter-day Saint missionaries were sent to strengthen South Africa's fledgling branches between 1865 and 1903, but by 1908 missionaries were reporting that a sizable population of South Africans with black African ancestry had "embrace[d] the Gospel."[6]

Moses Mahlangu was born January 4, 1925, in Boshoek, South Africa. Mahlangu began to show both an interest in religion and a searching mind at a young age. He recalled attending one church, only to be expelled when he questioned its teachings. He joined another and was again expelled for the same reason. He even started a church of his own on two occasions. His first church disbanded, and the second was still functioning when he was introduced to the Book of Mormon.[7]

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4. Joseph Richards, a missionary assigned to Hindustan, landed at the Cape en route to his assignment sometime in mid-1852. He remained about one month and did some proselytizing but did not record any baptisms. "The Work in Hindostan: Extracts of Letters from Elders William Willes, and Joseph Richards," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 14 (October 16, 1852): 541–42.

5. Jesse Haven, Journal, August 2, 1853, CHL.

6. Minutes, August 26, 1908, in Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Excerpts from the Weekly Council Meetings Dealing with the Rights of African Americans in the Church, 1849–1940, p. 5, George Albert Smith Papers, George A. Smith Family Papers, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

7. Moses Mahlangu, oral history, interviewed by E. Dale LeBaron, July 8, 1988, transcript, pp. 1–8, Badger Family Mission Papers, 1905–99, CHL.

Moses Mahlangu's conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began with that first Book of Mormon encounter sometime in the 1960s. The exact circumstances are unclear, but Mahlangu's cousin Johannes Lekgwati may have received a copy from members of the white family he worked for, who had themselves received it from missionaries.[8] Moses and Johannes took the book to another cousin, Frans Lekgwati, who was more fluent than they were in English and could explain the book to them. They enjoyed its teachings and believed the book to be true. A small group of believers, including Mahlangu, Frans and Johannes Lekgwati, Piet Mafora, and some of their families, began to form around the book.[9]

They met in their homes in Soweto, outside of Johannesburg, to study the Book of Mormon because they did not know where to find a Latter-day Saint chapel. In time, one of the group, Piet Mafora, found a chapel in Johannesburg while making deliveries in the area.[10] Moses went to see the building himself, but no one was there when he arrived. When he went a second time, the custodian introduced Moses to Church member Maureen van Zyl, who was able to give him the address of the mission home.[11]

Mahlangu arrived at the mission home on a Saturday sometime in 1968. Following South African practice at the time, as a black man, he knocked on the back door rather than approaching the front entrance. Lawrence Mackey, one of the missionaries at the mission home, remembered the housekeeper telling him someone wanted to speak with them.

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8. For varying accounts, see Jonas N. Lekgwati, oral history, interviewed by Randall J. Knudsen and Barbara Ann Knudsen, April 28, 2013, CHL; Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 9–10; Piet Mafora, oral history, interviewed by Randall J. Knudsen and Barbara Ann Knudsen, August 12, 2012, transcript, p. 3, James Moyle Oral History Program, CHL; Neo Madela, oral history, interviewed by Randall J. Knudsen and Barbara Ann Knudsen, August 19, 2012, CHL; Francinah and Jonas Lekgwati, oral history, interviewed by B. Thomas and Kathleen V. Barnes, February 2, 2014, CHL.

9. Francinah and Jonas Lekgwati, oral history, February 2, 2014; Jonas Lekgwati, oral history, April 28, 2013; Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 12. Mahlangu and Jonas Lekgwati include Isakar Manasha in the group but others do not.

10. Francinah and Jonas Lekgwati, oral history, February 2, 2014; Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 10. Mahlangu includes Isakar Manasha as one who found the building along with Mafora. Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 10.

11. Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 10–11; Maureen van Zyl to Jeffrey Cannon, email, June 5, 2015.

The mission home in Johannesburg about the time Moses Mahlangu came to the back entrance in 1968, hoping to learn about the Church. Courtesy Preston Crofts.

Mackey and his companion went to greet their guest. They were impressed by their "golden investigator." Mackey remembered meeting with Mahlangu for several weeks, each time telling the mission president, Howard C. Badger, of the wonderful man with whom they were meeting. Following mission policy, which prohibited proselytizing black South Africans, the missionaries met with Mahlangu but did not teach him. Finally, after three weeks, the mission president consented to let the missionaries teach Mahlangu about the apostasy and restoration.[12]

Eventually, the young elders introduced Mahlangu to their mission president. Mahlangu's retelling of the ensuing conversation bears striking parallels to Paul's experience in Ephesus recorded in Acts 19:1–7. Mahlangu recalled telling Badger,

> "I am with the Church of Christ, like you, you are the Church of Jesus Christ. I want to unite these two churches to be one."
>
> "Have you been baptized?" Badger asked.

12. Lawrence J. Mackey, oral history, interviewed by Randall J. Knudsen, November 20, 2014, CHL.

"Yes. I have been baptized."

"How did they baptize you?"

"I went in and baptized Mr. [Lukwati[13]] and then after that [Lukwati] baptized me in this church."

"When they baptized you, did you receive the Holy Spirit?"[14]

Mahlangu confessed he did not understand. Badger asked where Mahlangu and those who baptized him received the authority to baptize. Mahlangu replied that his authority came from the Bible, and the mission president told him the Joseph Smith story and explained the Latter-day Saint doctrine of authority. When Badger had finished, Mahlangu accepted what he had been told and said he was ready for baptism.[15]

Unlike Paul's Ephesian converts, however, Mahlangu and his friends were not immediately baptized. If they had lived in any other mission at that time, Badger likely would have granted their request. Although the Church's restriction on ordination for black Africans was in effect, there was no proscription against baptizing men and women of black African descent. In fact, Badger's first dinner in the country when he arrived as a young missionary in 1934 was provided by a mixed-race family of Latter-day Saints. Badger wrote in his journal for that date, "We went up to Bro. Daniels' (a colored man)[16] place for a choise dinner, after which a meeting was held—all of us bore our testimonies. The spirit was fine—I've discovered nationality and race are not so all-important."[17]

Notwithstanding his earlier experiences as a young missionary—perhaps even because of them, knowing how uncomfortable members of the Daniels family felt in a largely white church—Badger hesitated when faced with Mahlangu's request. What should he do? William Daniels had been baptized in 1915, but the situation in 1968 was quite different. Beginning in 1948, South Africa's government began implementing its apartheid policy, which further codified and enforced the strict

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13. Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 11, brackets in original, gives the spelling *Lukwati* for Mahlangu's cousin Johannes's surname. Though African orthography is sometimes fluid, Church records use *Lekgwati,* which is the spelling used elsewhere in this article.

14. Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 11.

15. Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 11.

16. In the South African lexicon, "coloured" refers to men and women of mixed race, as opposed to "black," which denotes persons of all or nearly all black African ancestry.

17. Howard C. Badger, Journal, November 5, 1934, 82–83, Badger Family Mission Papers, 1905–99.

separation of South Africa's racial groups. Scarcely any aspect of South African life was unaffected. Educational and employment opportunities, where one lived, and even whom one could marry were all dictated by apartheid legislation. Even so, South African law, which is often cited as the reason for denying the Soweto group baptism and admittance to church meetings, prohibited black people's attendance at white churches only if church authorities believed they would be a disturbance.[18]

As a former Utah state legislator, experienced with the differences between the letter of the law and actual practice, Badger understood that the technicalities of the law and the realities of South African life were quite different. What sort of reaction would the baptism of several black families from Soweto bring from the government and the nearly all-white membership of the Church in that country?

History of Church Policy toward Black South Africans

Howard Badger was not the first mission president in South Africa faced with this question. Badger's father, Ralph, had recently returned from presiding over the mission when he wrote Church leaders about the situation with potential black African converts. His August 17, 1908, letter reported "that an old native missionary had become a member of the Church at Queenstown, and is anxious to start an active missionary work among the

18. A proposal by the government in 1957 would have forced segregation on the churches throughout the country. Widespread opposition from the English-speaking churches, however, forced the government to temper its proposal. In its final form, the law allowed the government to prevent black South Africans from worshipping in white areas only if they created a nuisance or were attending in excessive numbers. Charles Villa-Vicencio, *Trapped in Apartheid: A Socio-Theological History of the English-Speaking Churches* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988), 18; Muriel Horrell, comp., *Laws Affecting Race Relations in South Africa (to the End of 1976)* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1978), 119; John W. de Gruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage: The English-Speaking Churches under Imperialism and Apartheid," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History,* ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 162. For examples of references to South African law prohibiting baptism or attendance at meetings for Moses Mahlangu, see Soares, "Be Meek and Lowly of Heart," 10–11; "Moses Mahlangu—the Conversion Power of the Book of Mormon"; Madela, oral history, August 19, 2012; Maria Dikeledi Moumakoa, oral history, interview by Randall J. Knudsen and Barbara Ann Knudsen, June 24, 2012, CHL.

natives" and "that the son of a Zulu chief had also been baptized who had requested that missionary work be done among the Zulus."[19]

Church leaders indicated their willingness to accept black converts in Africa even with the restriction on priesthood and temple blessings. In response to Ralph Badger's letter, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve decided on August 26, 1908, that missionaries "should not take the initiative," but if black Africans "apply for baptism themselves they might be admitted to Church membership in the understanding that nothing further can be done for them."[20]

The situation continued to evolve over the ensuing sixty years. In 1940 the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles decided to appoint a subcommittee to determine "whether or not one drop of negro blood deprives a man of the right to receive the priesthood."[21] The decision seems to have been made in the affirmative. When Evan P. Wright was called as mission president of the South African Mission in 1948, he was instructed that male converts must trace their genealogies outside Africa before they could be ordained and that failure to do so in the past had caused problems.[22] A few of the missionaries were diverted from proselytizing to focus on genealogical research. Where non-African bloodlines could not be proved, men of otherwise apparently European ancestry were denied ordination, creating a shortage of priesthood leadership. In 1952, Wright called the situation "a very serious problem."[23]

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19. Minutes, August 26, 1908, in Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Excerpts from the Weekly Council Meetings, 5.

20. Minutes, August 26, 1908, in Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Excerpts from the Weekly Council Meetings, 5–6.

21. Minutes, January 25, 1940, in Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Excerpts from the Weekly Council Meetings, 1. Paul Reeve traces the "one drop" language to Wilford Woodruff's summary of Brigham Young's January 23, 1852, address to the Utah territorial legislature. Woodruff's language became the basis of the majority of subsequent discussions on the topic. The "one drop" language is not present in the verbatim transcript made by George D. Watt. W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); "Brigham Young, 5 February 1852," George D. Watt Papers, ca. 1846–65, CHL.

22. Evan P. Wright, *A History of the South African Mission, Period III, 1944–1970* (n.p., ca. 1987), 419–20, copy at CHL.

23. Evan P. Wright to First Presidency, November 23, 1949, and Evan P. Wright to First Presidency, April 14, 1952, both in Wright, *History of the South African Mission*, 87, 225 respectively.

President David O. McKay visited South Africa in 1954 "to observe conditions as they are." While South Africa was hardening its racial attitudes and implementing its apartheid policy beginning in 1948, McKay lifted the requirement that men who bore no physical appearance of black ancestry must prove their non-African lineage before being ordained. "I should rather, much rather, make a mistake in one case and if it be found out afterwards, suspend his activity in the Priesthood than to deprive 10 worthy men of the Priesthood," he said.[24] Nevertheless, the Church's restrictions on priesthood ordination and temple participation remained for everyone with obvious or proven black African ancestry.

Howard Badger's Discussion with Church Leaders

Fourteen years later, Howard Badger brought the case of the Soweto group to the attention of Church leaders. Elder Marion G. Romney of the Church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles visited the mission from August 25 to September 7, 1968, and met Mahlangu at the Johannesburg chapel during his visit. Mackey remembered the General Authority inviting him into the interview with Mahlangu and hearing Mahlangu tell his story. Romney promised to discuss the matter with other senior Church leaders.[25] Concerned about the Church's overall work in South Africa, Romney asked Badger to make sure before proceeding that baptizing members of the Soweto group would not jeopardize the mission or the legal status of the missionaries.[26] Romney's holistic approach to the question became the guiding principle in Badger's subsequent actions.

The mission president contacted government officials for clarification on the law. On December 18, Badger wrote to Mahlangu to inform him that he had "received favorable word from the Bantu Administration, so that if you meet the requirements for baptism into our Church and are willing to dedicate your life to keeping the commandments of the Master, we will welcome you as a member of the Church." He invited Mahlangu to visit with him at the mission home to "discuss this matter

24. "Remarks of President David O. McKay at 12.30 PM Sunday 17th January, 1954 at Cumorah, Main Road, Mowbray, Cape Town," pp. 1–2, South Africa Johannesburg Mission Office Files, CHL.

25. Mackey, oral history, November 20, 2014; Howard C. Badger to Marion G. Romney, December 27, 1968, First Presidency Miscellaneous Correspondence, CHL.

26. Badger to Romney, December 27, 1968.

further with you at your earliest convenience."[27] Apparently, Mahlangu came quickly. Lawrence Mackey remembered Mahlangu could come only on Saturdays. If so, he likely came on December 21, 1968.

Six days later, on December 27, Badger wrote to Romney, telling the Apostle he had met with Mahlangu and giving more details about the government officials' instructions. The government had "no objection to our baptizing natives into the Church," Badger wrote, "providing we do not have the natives meeting with European congregations. They want to have the races kept separate in their religious meetings as otherwise."[28] The government's requirement for separate congregations, however, went beyond what the law required and presented a problem for the Latter-day Saint practice of calling priesthood holders from the local congregation as leaders. Black men could not hold the priesthood, and congregations could not be comprised of both black and white members.

Mahlangu knew of the priesthood restriction. "We have explained this situation to the native you interviewed," Badger told Romney. "Also, we have had him read the book 'Mormonism and the Negro', and he says he understands that he cannot hold the Priesthood or receive some other blessings but that it is enough for him to be able to become a member of the true Church of Christ."[29] Despite the challenges, Badger wrote to Romney that he planned to have Mahlangu receive the missionary lessons "the same as would be required of any white person, and then if he qualifies, we do not see how he can be denied baptism."[30] Over the ensuing months, however, Badger seems to have become less certain about what to do. As 1969 dawned and the South African summer turned to autumn, Mahlangu and his associates had yet to be baptized.

Meanwhile, in April 1969, Marvin J. Ashton, then an assistant to the general superintendent of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association, visited South Africa and delivered to Badger a message from N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency. Badger was authorized, Tanner had told Ashton, to make a decision himself as mission president.[31]

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27. Howard C. Badger to Moses Mahlangu, December 18, 1968, Lowell D. and Lorna C. Wood Papers, 1947–2005, CHL.

28. Badger to Romney, December 27, 1968; Mackey, oral history, November 20, 2014.

29. Badger to Romney, December 27, 1968. See John J. Stewart, *Mormonism and the Negro* (Logan, Utah: Bookmark, 1960).

30. Badger to Romney, December 27, 1968.

31. William H. Bennett, notes on telephone conversation with Howard C. Badger, December 17, 1970, Mission Supervisor Records, CHL.

The onus was now on Badger to decide the fate of the men and women awaiting baptism. At some point, the missionaries taught them, just as Badger had indicated would happen in his letter to Romney.[32] "The missionaries gave me lessons till they were finished," Mahlangu said.[33] However, Badger seems to have changed his mind about baptism, and the members of the Soweto group were never baptized during his tenure as mission president.

Badger's about-face may have been the result of instruction from Salt Lake. Lawrence Mackey described being invited into a meeting between Badger and Mahlangu in which Badger read a letter instructing them not to proceed toward baptism.[34] Mahlangu described what may have been this meeting when he was interviewed in 1988 by historian Dale LeBaron, who served as mission president in South Africa from 1976 to 1979:

> In America when they searched they found a book that said when they send the first missionaries to South Africa they mustn't preach to the black people. They must preach to the whites first. After they preached to the whites, the word [Lord?] will say again, and they will preach to the black people. I said to President Badger, "Now what are we going to do?" President Badger said, "I don't know what to do, because I tried to baptize you and now I can't escape that word. You can just be like [Cornelius], a man of Italy, who was a very good man, and waiting to receive the word of God or to be a member in the Church of the Jews until the angels came and told him what to do.[35]

Mahlangu humbly accepted the decision. Badger's teenage daughter, Carla, however, did not take the news so easily. She recalled her father receiving a letter from the First Presidency and telling her it was "not good news for Moses." The Soweto group could not be baptized because of an agreement with the government that the Church would not proselytize black South Africans and that the Church had a responsibility to preach to the house of Israel first, he said. Recounting her response, Carla said, "I really went off about that. I was really upset about that. . . . It was really a hard thing."[36]

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32. See Harlan C. Clark to William H. Bennett, January 11, 1970, Mission Supervisor Records.

33. Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 12–13.

34. Mackey, oral history, November 20, 2014.

35. Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 13. See Acts 10:1–8.

36. Carla B. Larson, oral history, interviewed by Randall J. Knudsen and Barbara Ann Knudsen, October 21, 2014, CHL.

The three independent reminiscences of Mackey, Mahlangu, and Carla Badger seem to carry considerable historical weight in attributing the prohibition of baptism to a decision by Church leaders in Salt Lake. However, a search of the Church's historical records failed to turn up any evidence of such a decision from this time and instead revealed a slightly later decision and a somewhat more complex sequence of events.

Badger's Successor Wrestles with the Situation

After Badger had been released as mission president in July 1970, Mahlangu petitioned Badger's successor, Harlan W. Clark, for baptism. Clark was a Salt Lake City attorney who had served in South Africa as a young man and whose earlier missionary service coincided with the young Howard Badger's for more than a year. In a letter dated December 4, 1970, Clark sought guidance from William H. Bennett, the assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve assigned to Africa, asking Bennett to contact Badger for information about Mahlangu and his fellow believers, as well as any previous decisions made in their case.[37]

On December 17, 1970—some two years after Badger had written to Mahlangu and Romney telling them that the government had no objection to the baptism—Bennett telephoned Badger at his Utah home to ask about the situation. Badger told Bennett that although the government said there was no impediment, he was concerned that unspecified officials would take actions against the Church, such as denying visas to missionaries, if those already in the country began actively proselytizing black South Africans. Badger was concerned the government would see the change as the Church's going back on what he believed was at least a tacit agreement that the missionaries would not proselytize black South Africans.[38]

Bennett's notes indicate that Badger was also concerned about local Church members' reactions, though Badger named no one in particular. Home teaching and other Church programs would be an added burden or even impossible because the new black members would not be able to hold the priesthood and thus could not assist. White home teachers would need government permits to enter the areas where the black members lived, and if Badger was correct about the government's recalcitrance, the permits might not be granted. Predicting a significant

37. Harlan W. Clark to William H. Bennett, December 4, 1970, Mission Supervisor Records; Clark to Bennett, January 11, 1970.

38. Bennett, notes on telephone conversation with Badger, December 17, 1970.

number of new black members, Badger anticipated the additional burden would be substantial. In fact, he believed that interest would be so great among the black population that the missionaries would have no time to work with the white South Africans who would be necessary, under policies then existing, to staff the growing wards and branches.[39]

No mention was made of instructions from Salt Lake denying permission. Rather, Badger told Bennett of his authorization from Tanner to go ahead with the baptisms if he chose to do so.[40] If Badger had been instructed not to baptize the Soweto group, he most likely would have told Bennett on this occasion. Instead, Badger took responsibility for the decision himself, offering a rationale similar to what Mahlangu and Badger's daughter Carla later attributed to instructions coming from Church headquarters.

On December 29, 1970, Bennett wrote to Clark to inform him of what he had learned. He advised Clark of Badger's reasoning for denying baptism for the Soweto group and told him he had discussed the situation with Marion G. Romney, who apparently concurred with Badger. Concerning that conversation, Bennett wrote, "It appears that we have received direction from the Brethren that this is not the time for us to move ahead with a program for baptizing the Bantus in South Africa. I am sorry about this situation but when the total picture is kept in mind it would appear that there are very good reasons for going easy at the present time."[41]

Despite his disappointment, Bennett felt that the decision communicated by Romney reflected the direction of the then-president of the Church Joseph Fielding Smith. In a January 22, 1971, letter to Clark, Bennett wrote, "I am sure that his counsel and direction is inspired from on high and I am sure that the Lord knows the reasons why we have been instructed as we have been."[42] This seems to have been the final word until 1978, when the First Presidency declared that the Lord "has heard our prayers, and by revelation has confirmed that the long-promised day has come when every faithful, worthy man in the Church may receive the holy priesthood."[43]

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39. Bennett, notes on telephone conversation with Badger, December 17, 1970.

40. Bennett, notes on telephone conversation with Badger, December 17, 1970.

41. William H. Bennett to Harlan W. Clark, December 29, 1970, Mission Supervisor Records.

42. William H. Bennett to Harlan W. Clark, January 22, 1971, Mission Supervisor Records.

43. Doctrine and Covenants Official Declaration 2. For a discussion of the events immediately leading up to the revelation, see Edward L. Kimball,

Church Leaders Seek a Solution for Black Africa

Church leaders' reluctance at the time to baptize black South Africans may in part have stemmed from events in West Africa only a few years earlier. Mahlangu and his friends were not the only black Africans to request baptism. As early as 1946, the Church began receiving letters from West Africans requesting that missionaries be sent there.[44]

David O. McKay and his counselors in the First Presidency were concerned for the would-be Latter-day Saints in Africa but were uncertain how they should proceed. Their deliberations lasted years as they considered the universality of the gospel message and the constraints placed upon them by the restrictions regarding priesthood and temple ordinances for people of black African descent.

McKay, who had struggled with the priesthood restriction for decades, told his counselors in June 1961, "We cannot escape the obligation of permitting these people to be baptized and confirmed members

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"Spencer W. Kimball and the Revelation on Priesthood," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 4–78. For personal reflections recorded by black Latter-day Saints, see Joseph Freeman, *In the Lord's Due Time* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979) (the first black man to be ordained an elder after the revelation); Marcus H. Martins, "Thirty Years after the 'Long-Promised Day': Reflections and Expectations," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 79–85 (the first black man to serve an LDS mission after the revelation). Latter-day Saint American journalist Andrew Clark visited a Johannesburg ward as well as a branch in Soweto in April and May of 1991 and published an essay including his observations: Andrew Clark, "The Fading Curse of Cain: Mormonism in South Africa," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27 (Winter 1994): 50. Russell W. Stevenson offers both a narrative and a documentary overview of how Kimball's revelation has affected the Church in the years since 1978. Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830–2013* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 159–201, 343–57.

44. For a more extensive treatment of the West African story, see James B. Allen, "Would-Be Saints: West Africa before the 1978 Priesthood Revelation," *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (1991): 207–47; Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 81–94. Similar requests were made of South African Mission presidents before and after the 1978 revelation. Many black South Africans had found Church literature and become believers. See, for example, Evan P. Wright to First Presidency, June 17, 1952, in Wright, *History of the South African Mission*, 440; Judy Bester Brummer, Reminiscence, in "Witnesses to the Moment: Accounts of the Missionaries in Africa around the Time of the 1978 Revelation Extending Priesthood Blessings to All," ed. Wesley Stephenson, typescript, [5–6], CHL.

of the Church if they are converted and worthy."[45] His visit to South Africa in 1954 had strengthened his desire to lift the priesthood ban which so hampered the Church's efforts in Africa, but he believed a revelation from God was needed to do so.

In an address given in Cape Town, he spoke of his experience meeting a faithful Latter-day Saint in Hawaii who was denied the priesthood because of his race:

> I first met this problem in Hawaii in 1921. A worthy man had married a Polynesian woman. She was faithful in the Church. They had a large family everyone of whom was active and worthy. My sympathies were so aroused that I wrote home to President Grant asking if he could make an exception so we could ordain that man to the Priesthood. He wrote back saying "David, I am as sympathetic as you are, but until the Lord gives us a revelation regarding that matter, we shall have to maintain the policy of the Church." I sat down and talked to the brother explained frankly the reasons for such seeming discrimination and gave him the assurance that some day he will receive every blessing to which he is entitled; for the Lord is just and no respector of persons.[46]

Upon his return from South Africa in 1954, McKay appointed a committee to study the issue. According to Leonard J. Arrington, who heard committee member Adam S. Bennion speak of its work, the Church President "pled with the Lord without result and finally concluded the time was not yet ripe" to lift the restriction.[47]

A decade after McKay's trip to South Africa, Church leaders decided to send senior missionaries to West Africa who would serve as priesthood leaders and administer the Church. Though black men could not at the time hold the priesthood, they would be allowed to perform some functions normally assigned to priesthood holders for which there was no scriptural requirement of priesthood ordination. Specifically, they would be authorized to pass (but not bless) the sacrament, and they would be appointed group leaders.[48]

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45. David O. McKay, Diary, June 22, 1961, quoted in Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 82.

46. "Remarks of President David O. McKay," 2.

47. Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 183.

48. LaMar S. Williams, Journal, January 11, 1963, CHL.

On January 11, 1963, the Church announced that missionary work would begin in Nigeria as soon as visas could be obtained.[49] Shortly before the new mission was to be opened, however, Ambrose Chukwu, a Nigerian studying in California, visited a Church building and was appalled to learn of the priesthood restriction. He wrote a letter to the *Nigerian Outlook* newspaper inciting public opposition to the Church in his home country. Other Nigerian students wrote letters to prominent figures in Nigeria, successfully working to keep Latter-day Saint missionaries out of their country.[50]

As a result, the missionaries' visas were held up, and LaMar Williams of the Church's Missionary Department, who had long corresponded with various groups in Nigeria and Ghana, was able to make only short trips to visit potential members and push the work forward. While on his third visit to Nigeria in November 1965, however, Williams was abruptly recalled to Salt Lake without explanation.[51] Soon, a bloody civil war erupted in the country.[52]

A solution like the one proposed for Nigeria might have worked in South Africa were it not for South African laws prohibiting mixed-race congregations. The sizable white membership of the Church in South Africa could have foreseeably administered the Church and its ordinances without missionary assistance, thus creating self-sustaining units insofar as they were staffed by local members and not missionaries.

However, although South African law did not explicitly prohibit such an approach and many churches maintained integrated congregations, successive Latter-day Saint mission presidents and General Authorities were cautious about their church's situation in South Africa. A memorandum from Bennett to the First Presidency in 1971 noted that South African authorities were surveilling the Church's missionaries and that several foreign Protestant ministers had recently been deported for their

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49. "Church to Open Missionary Work in Nigeria," *Deseret News,* January 11, 1963, B1; Williams, Journal, January 11, 1963.

50. Allen, "Would-Be Saints," 230. Chukwu acquired a copy of John J. Stewart's *Mormonism and the Negro,* the same book Howard Badger gave to Moses Mahlangu. Chukwu quoted from it liberally in his plea to his fellow Nigerians to keep Latter-day Saints out of the country. Ambrose Chukwu, "They're Importing Ungodliness," *Nigerian Outlook,* March 5, 1963, 3.

51. Williams, Journal, November 6, 1965.

52. LaMar S. Williams and Nyal B. Williams, oral history, interviewed by Gordon Irving, May 1981, typescript, 20–21, James Moyle Oral History Program.

opposition to government policies.[53] Church leaders were so concerned about losing their only foothold on the continent that the proposed Nigerian mission was set to be administered from London rather than Johannesburg to avoid antagonizing South African authorities.[54]

Under the circumstances then in South Africa, Mahlangu and his friends in Soweto would have to wait.

The 1978 Revelation

The waiting seemed to be over in June 1978, when the Church announced that President Spencer W. Kimball had received a revelation opening the priesthood to all worthy male members. It is unclear exactly when Mahlangu and other investigators associated with him learned of the revelation.

In the 1988 oral history, Mahlangu said that mission president E. Dale LeBaron came to him at some point and announced, "Now the time is arrived for you to be baptized and to come into the Church. Everything is open for you to come now. Come with your families."[55] LeBaron gave a similar account in a 1998 address at Brigham Young University.[56] LeBaron's journal, however, made no mention of Mahlangu until Mahlangu came to visit him in December.[57] Mahlangu had waited more than ten years. Now, he hoped, his waiting was over. It was not.

LeBaron and other Church leaders in South Africa had been proceeding with caution. The priesthood restriction was not the only obstacle to full integration of nonwhites in the Church's South African congregations. They also faced government policies and a culture of deep racial divisions.

For years the Church's missionary efforts had been hampered by a government-imposed cap on the number of foreign missionaries allowed to proselytize in the country. On August 7, 1978, only two

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53. William H. Bennett to Spencer W. Kimball, memorandum, April 12, 1971, Mission Supervisor Records. Bennett noted that "occasionally, an immigration official will inquire about certain missionaries, but no other surveillance is apparent." Bennett warned the mission president "that he and the missionaries" should be careful "in their public utterances and behavior." Bennett to Kimball, memo, April 12, 1971.

54. Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay,* 84.

55. Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988, 13.

56. LeBaron, "African Converts without Baptism."

57. Elwin Dale LeBaron, Journal, January 2, 1979, 358, Journals, 1955–58 and 1972–79, CHL.

months after the lifting of the priesthood restriction, LeBaron met with a government official in the Department of the Interior in an effort to remove the cap on foreign missionaries. He was accompanied by Johannesburg Stake president Louis Hefer and Hefer's first counselor, Isaac Swartzberg, an attorney.[58]

LeBaron recorded in his journal that the official questioned "why we made the change in regard to the blacks and how this was going to be implemented in South Africa." Swartzberg acted as the primary spokesman, and LeBaron did not record how they responded. But their answer must have satisfied the official, who said he intended to recommend granting their request. Word reached LeBaron two weeks later that the quota had been lifted.[59]

Government approval was always a major factor in Mahlangu's baptism. Badger's inquiry to the government in 1968 and his correspondence with Marion G. Romney showed a concern on the part of Church leaders for how proselytizing black South Africans would affect the Church's work in the country.

Government attitudes, however, were not the only local obstacles to Mahlangu's full integration into the Church. Some members of the Church in South Africa welcomed the Soweto group; others apparently did not. Benjamin de Wet, who was bishop of the Johannesburg First Ward when the Soweto group was baptized, wrote that "permission to proselyte the black people and the revelation that all worthy males may receive the Priesthood was better accepted here than was expected."[60] Frans Lekgwati's son Jonas remembers being welcomed and included in youth activities.[61] Mahlangu's granddaughter Neo Madela, on the other hand, recalled that her grandmother, Elizabeth Mahlangu, was offended by the way she was treated when she first visited the Church in Johannesburg, having been called names. She vowed to never return.[62] In time, however, she did return.

Dale LeBaron knew the situation in South Africa very well. He too had served a mission there as a young man and had worked as a Church employee administering the Church Educational System there

58. LeBaron, Journal, August 7, 1978, 336.

59. LeBaron, Journal, August 7, 23, 1978, 336–37, 339.

60. Benjamin de Wet, "South Africa: A Different View," typescript, 9, in Maurice B. Bateman and Arlen Bateman, Temple Mission Papers, 1991–95, CHL.

61. Jonas Lekgwati, oral history, April 28, 2013.

62. Madela, oral history, August 19, 2012.

for several years before his appointment as mission president. When Spencer W. Kimball and other Church authorities visited South Africa in October 1978, LeBaron took the opportunity to discuss with Neal A. Maxwell and presumably some of the other visitors how proselytizing black Africans within the mission should proceed in the wake of the recent revelation.[63]

President Kimball addressed the matter himself in a meeting of missionaries following an area general conference in October 1978. His remarks reflect a joy for the opportunities opened up to those with black African ancestry but also a caution about proceeding too quickly without considering the consequences of the new direction:

> I anticipate the day when the Gospel that has come to you and your families and has transformed you[r] life will begin to transform their lives and make new people out of them. . . . We are going forward in this program, shall soon have some special missionaries working in this field. And of course there is no reason in the world why you couldn't go forward immediately as has been suggested by Brother [Neal A.] Maxwell and others, to mention this matter to the worthy people who seem to be living the Gospel. Who seem to be advantageous, who could work into the program and bring joy and peace to many people and who could live the commandments of the Lord. That is basic and important, and then we will move forward with slowness. We want to be sure that we know what we are doing, moving with care and we will go forward with this great program.[64]

Although the priesthood restriction had never been explicitly cited as the reason for circumscribing efforts in South Africa, lifting it seems to have opened the way to more universal proselytizing. However, the missionaries and Church members still had to work within the legal and cultural confines of South Africa.

Kimball's comments reinforced a policy already being communicated to missionaries the previous month and perhaps earlier. By September, LeBaron had been telling his missionaries they should not seek out black South Africans generally but should seek out potential leaders through referrals and other selective approaches. There was a fear that attempting to incorporate too many new black converts too quickly would complicate issues for the Church. However, black leadership

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63. LeBaron, Journal, October 29, 1978, 356.

64. Spencer W. Kimball, address to missionaries, October 23, 1978, in LeBaron, Journal, October 29, 1978, 356.

needed to be found and trained for the branches that they anticipated would be established when missionaries were called to proselytize in black South African languages.[65]

LeBaron obediently moved ahead with caution. His journal records meeting with regional representative Louis Hefer, Johannesburg Stake president Olev Taim, and Sandton Stake president Johannes Brummer to discuss the matter on November 21.[66] Two months later, LeBaron wrote that they were meeting regularly.[67]

Taim recalled turning to the Book of Mormon for guidance in their deliberations:

> We looked at the principles in the Book of Mormon—the relationship between the Nephites and the Lamanites. And when they had harmony between the Nephites and the Lamanites, they loved each other because they were brothers and sisters in the gospel. When the Lamanites joined the Church they were, at certain times, more faithful than the Nephites, and I said, "Why was that? Because they were converted. They were truly converted, and they were committed." And so we said, "Well let's look at the principle of conversion, let's look at the principle of love, let's look at the principle of respect for one another."
>
> The true Nephites respected the Lamanites. They didn't say, "We must change the color or change the language or change the culture. We must just follow the culture that Jesus Christ laid down in his gospel."[68]

This approach was antithetical to the situation then in South Africa, where white police officers patrolled the streets in armored vehicles, political dissidents were arrested and killed by the police, and black resistance fighters planted bombs in restaurants and other areas where white South Africans congregated.

Church members had to move forward after the revelation in a South Africa characterized by fear, mistrust, and violence. The National Party government feared not only for its political survival but also for the survival of white South Africans and the Afrikaner community in particular. African decolonization, the subsequent political and economic instability, and the concomitant exit of Europeans from the

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65. Daniel J. Cuny, Mission Journal, September 14, 1978, CHL.

66. LeBaron, Journal, December 5, 1978.

67. LeBaron, Journal, January 2, 1979, 368.

68. Olev and Patricia Taim, oral history, interviewed by Dan and Edith Baker, June 4, 2012, James Moyle Oral History Program.

continent terrified them. South African officials were able to convince some Western leaders (particularly Ronald Reagan of the United States and Great Britain's Margaret Thatcher) that the white government in South Africa was a bulwark against what they saw as communist incursions into Africa.[69]

Arguably, although the government's fears may have been exaggerated, they were not unreasonable given the events they saw unfolding around them. It was the self-described Marxist Kwami Nkrumah who led Gold Coast to independence as the renamed Ghana in 1957 and who was ousted by a coup in 1966, beginning a string of short-lived governments in that country.[70] Closer to home, the Marxist Mozambique Liberation Front led the struggle for independence in South Africa's neighbor, resulting in the establishment of the communist People's Republic of Mozambique in 1975. In 1977, Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda declared the Soviets "colleagues and comrades."[71] Thousands of Soviet-backed Cuban soldiers began arriving in Angola in 1975, and the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan heightened Western concerns over the expansion of communism. The African National Congress, which embodied the resistance movement in South Africa, was closely aligned at the time with both Cuba and the Soviet Union.[72]

Thousands of young, white South African conscripts, including some Latter-day Saints, were sent to the front lines of the border war in Angola and were also charged with keeping the peace in South Africa itself. In 1976, a demonstration by Soweto high school students protesting Afrikaans as a medium of instruction captured international attention when police opened fire and killed scores of young protestors. The incident prompted more protests and riots throughout the country.[73]

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69. See Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 495, 588–89; Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 3d ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Nota Bene, 2001), 215–16.

70. Documents released in 2001 show that the American, British, and French governments were complicit in the coup which ousted Nkrumah. Ama Biney, "The Development of Kwame Nkrumah's Political Thought in Exile, 1966–1972," *Journal of African History* 50, no. 1 (2009): 84.

71. Giliomee, *Afrikaners,* 589.

72. Thompson, *History of South Africa,* 216.

73. See Giliomee, *Afrikaners,* 578–80; Andre and Judy Brummer, oral history, interviewed by Dan and Edith Baker, April 26, 2012, transcript, p. 3, James Moyle Oral History Program.

Anticommunist sentiment was strong in the Latter-day Saint community as well. Then-Apostle Ezra Taft Benson frequently denounced communism in his writings, as well as his addresses in general conference and elsewhere. Both Benson's and David O. McKay's September 29, 1967, general conference talks had warned against communism.[74] In his address, Benson encouraged Church members to read a new book by the anticommunist writer Gary Allen with a foreword by Latter-day Saint W. Cleon Skousen in order to educate themselves on communist strategies for disruption and revolution.[75] The next year, 1968, the elders quorum presidency in Cape Town wrote the mission presidency in Johannesburg, suggesting that Skousen be invited to South Africa to lecture on communism. Suggesting their belief that the government would be interested in Skousen's message, the quorum presidency also proposed requesting government consent and assistance for the event. The suggestion does not appear to have gained much traction, and the idea seems to have been dropped.[76]

Eleven years later, the anticommunist feeling continued. After a trip to postcolonial Zambia (previously Northern Rhodesia), LeBaron recorded in his journal his disappointment over what had become of that country, where a Marxist regime had come to power following independence.[77] A majority of Church members left the country, once prospering branches were abandoned, and the chapel in Kitwe was eventually sold to the government.

Fear of communism was also prevalent among white men and women in what was then Rhodesia (Zimbabwe after April 18, 1980), which was also part of the mission based in Johannesburg. The minority white government there was embroiled in a bloody and protracted

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74. David O. McKay, in *Official Report of the One Hundred Thirty-Seventh Semi-annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1967), 9–10; Ezra Taft Benson, in *Official Report,* 35–39. Benson took it a step further, connecting the spread of communism with the civil rights movement, saying, "There is nothing wrong with civil rights; it is what's being done in the name of civil rights that is alarming." He added, "The so-called civil rights movement as it exists today is used as a Communist program for revolution in America" and elsewhere. Benson, in *Official Report,* 35.

75. Benson, in *Official Report,* 39.

76. Mission Presidency Meeting Minutes, May 20, 1968, South Africa Johannesburg Mission Office Files, CHL.

77. LeBaron, Journal, April 7, 1979, 382.

struggle to hold onto power in the face of internal violence and mounting international pressure. Nevertheless, Bulawayo Branch president Robert Eppel remembered, "In Zimbabwe in those days we were far more integrated racially than they were in South Africa."[78] Indeed the government there had made certain steps toward integration. It was in Zimbabwe that the first baptism of a black African convert after the 1978 revelation is believed to have occurred.

Ernest Sibanda had been a Seventh-day Adventist minister, school teacher, and headmaster, but by the time he met missionaries Bruce Black and Dean Kaelin in Bulawayo in December 1978, the war had left him destitute. The missionaries gave Sibanda a copy of the Book of Mormon, and when they returned the next day, they found he had stayed up late into the night, reading by moonlight. Black and Kaelin asked permission to teach Sibanda and were told to proceed but that they must keep LeBaron's assistants apprised of Sibanda's progress.[79]

Sibanda was baptized on January 13, 1979, and he was ordained a priest on January 21 by Robert Eppel. On February 17, Sibanda's wife followed him in baptism.[80] Despite Eppel's assurances of greater racial tolerance in Rhodesia, Dean Kaelin remembered only a third of the members in the branch raising their hands in a welcoming vote for their newest member.[81]

The Long Road to Baptism

Across the border in South Africa, Mahlangu met with LeBaron sometime in mid-December 1978. He had first visited with LeBaron two years before and told LeBaron then "that when the Lord allowed the blacks to join the church, he wanted to be the first one to join." Now, six months after the revelation, Moses sought out the mission president and "desired to know if this would make a difference and whether he could join. When [LeBaron] told him that it did make a difference, he was

78. Robert Eppel, oral history, interviewed by Matthew K. Heiss, September 21, 1998, typescript, p. 3, CHL.

79. Ernest Sibanda, "I Am a Free Man," in LeBaron, *All Are Alike unto God*, 125–26; Dean Kaelin, "Memories of South Africa, Nov. 1978–Sep. 1980," typescript, pp. [1–2], Wood Papers.

80. Historical Report for 1979, Baptisms and Confirmations, Bulawayo Branch, South African Mission, p. 1, Record of Members Collection, CHL; Historical Report for 1979, Ordinations, Bulawayo Branch, South African Mission, Record of Members Collection.

81. Kaelin, "Memories of South Africa," [2–3].

overjoyed." Mahlangu began bringing his family and friends to Sunday School and stayed after to be taught by the missionaries before the evening sacrament meeting.[82]

It is unclear if Mahlangu and the others had been attending Church meetings previously. Frans Lekgwati's son Jonas recalled that Moses attended the ward in Johannesburg and was fellowshipped and even fed by the members for some time before informing the rest of the Soweto group about what he had been doing.[83] This may have been a mistaken reference to Mahlangu's meeting with missionaries at the mission home in 1968. Another member of the group, Piet Mafora, recalled they did not attend the ward until after the 1978 revelation. However, Gerald de Wet, the ward seventies group leader, who was responsible for coordinating the ward's efforts with those the missionaries were teaching, recalled preparing the group for baptism as early as 1975 but remembered that the baptisms were delayed due to the political situation surrounding the Soweto riots in 1976.[84] Jonas Lekgwati also recalls preparations for baptism at the time of the riots.[85]

Whenever the Soweto group began attending, a key element in some accounts that emphasizes the group's commitment is that they were forced to sit outside and listen through open windows.[86] Although this version has become the *textus receptus,* Mahlangu's oral history makes no mention of sitting outside, and others take issue with the claim, saying it never happened.[87] In fact, of those most intimately connected with the events, only Dikeledi Moumakoa reports any of the Soweto group listening outside, though she does not report having done it

82. LeBaron, Journal, January 2, 1979, 368. The consolidated meeting schedule did not go into effect in South Africa until May 4, 1980.

83. Francinah and Jonas Lekgwati, oral history, February 2, 2014.

84. Mafora, oral history, August 12, 2012, 10; Gerald Derek de Wet, oral history, interviewed by Matthew K. Heiss, March 5, 2014, CHL.

85. Jonas Lekgwati, oral history, April 28, 2013.

86. See Soares, "Be Meek and Lowly of Heart," 10–11; "Moses Mahlangu—the Conversion Power of the Book of Mormon"; Madela, oral history, August 19, 2012; Mackey, oral history, November 20, 2014; Larson, oral history, October 21, 2014. Andrew Clark also related the story of the Soweto group waiting outside. He does not, however, offer any direct quotes from Mahlangu, and his reporting of the events, like others, is secondhand. Clark, "Fading Curse of Cain," 50.

87. Mahlangu, oral history, July 8, 1988; Mafora, oral history, August 12, 2012, 12–13; de Wet, oral history, March 5, 2014.

herself.[88] Both seventies leader Gerald de Wet and Soweto group member Piet Mafora, who first found the chapel in Johannesburg, make a point of refuting this aspect of the story.[89] Jonas Lekgwati indicated they were not forced to listen from outside, saying, "We would go to church as normal as anything."[90]

What is certain is that the Soweto group waited another two years after the 1978 revelation for baptism. Why? Although LeBaron had been meeting with local priesthood leaders to plan the expansion of proselytizing to black Africans, some missionaries remembered apathy, if not animosity, among some members toward baptizing black converts.[91] Rather than "animosity," Gerald de Wet characterized the attitude as "caution." Actively proselytizing black South Africans was unprecedented.[92] De Wet also recalled that his father, who was then the bishop of the Johannesburg First Ward, disagreed with LeBaron over the mission president's desire to move forward with the baptism of the Soweto group after the 1978 revelation.[93] There do not appear to have been any baptisms of black converts in South Africa during 1978 and only one in 1979.[94] Necessary support from local leaders finally came around March 1980.[95]

The year 1980 proved to be momentous. South African Mission records show that in May of that year, "African" converts outnumbered "European" converts for the first time.[96] Demonstrating that more than the former priesthood restriction for black Africans had been an issue, mission records also show that the first Indian converts were baptized in June 1980 in the Natal Province (now KwaZulu-Natal). Indians make up a sizable group in South Africa, especially in Natal, which is situated

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88. Moumakoa, oral history, June 24, 2012. The Moumakoas' daughter, Mathagele, also relates this detail in her recollection of the events as told to her. Moumakoa, oral history, June 24, 2012.

89. Mafora, oral history, August 12, 2012, 12–13; de Wet, oral history, March 5, 2014.

90. Jonas Lekgwati, oral history, April 28, 2013.

91. Kaelin, "Memories of South Africa," [2–3]; Boyd Peterson, Reminiscence, in Stephenson, "Witnesses to the Moment," [3].

92. Gerald de Wet to Jeffrey G. Cannon, email, May 29, 2015.

93. de Wet, oral history, March 5, 2014.

94. Ordinance and action record, Johannesburg and Sandton Stakes and South Africa Johannesburg Mission, CHL.

95. Kaelin, "Memories of South Africa," [3].

96. It is impossible to determine exactly what is meant by "African" and "European" since "African" could mean black as well as "coloured."

on the Indian Ocean. On October 26, 1980, the Chatsworth Branch was formed, comprised primarily of ethnically Indian members.[97]

As instructed, LeBaron had moved forward cautiously, but on July 2, 1979, a new mission president, Lowell D. Wood, arrived in South Africa. Like LeBaron, Wood was Canadian and had served a mission to South Africa as a young man. He was aware of the difficulties involved in actively proselytizing black South Africans but was not privy to the discussions concerning the Soweto group that had been going on for more than a decade. Wood's wife, Lorna, who remembered the group in Soweto as "a faithful band of Africans that had trekked to the Johannesburg Chapel weekly," recalled:

> Lowell found himself at a period in time when the gospel needed to be preached to the [black] Africans but he also knew he had to be very careful in implementing it. He felt that the [white] South Africans needed to feel the responsibility to reach out themselves and that they would not take kindly to it if "President Wood" had brought all these Africans into the Church and then dropped the responsibility for their care in the South Africans' laps.[98]

The path to the baptismal font was not short. Before members of the Soweto group were baptized or even taught the standard missionary lessons, they were first taught lessons in welfare principles at the request of local priesthood leaders.[99] Only then were they taught the lessons intended to prepare candidates for baptism. Finally, in another departure from standard practice elsewhere, as part of the plan to gain support from existing members, local leaders were allowed to interview black proselytes for baptism. It was felt by some that local leaders, rather than foreign missionaries, were better able to navigate sensitive cultural issues, such as the widespread practices of polygamy and common-law marriage, as well as traditional African religious practices that had proved difficult to eradicate for other churches with large black African congregations.[100]

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97. Historical Record, Section B—Historical Events, South Africa Johannesburg Mission Annual Historical Reports, 1978–81, 1989, 1993–95, 2001–14, CHL; Chatsworth Branch Historical Record, October 26, 1980, CHL. It is difficult to verify this claim in the mission history regarding the racial demographics of baptisms. See note 102 for more.

98. Lorna Wood, Reminiscence, in Stephenson, "Witnesses to the Moment," [14–15].

99. Wood, Reminiscence, in Stephenson, "Witnesses to the Moment," [15].

100. de Wet to Cannon, email, May 29, 2015.

The Johannesburg chapel where the Soweto group was baptized in 1980. This building figures prominently in the story of the Soweto group. This photo shows the building as it appeared in the 1960s when Piet Mafora spotted it. Moses Mahlangu met Church member Maureen van Zyl here and was told how to contact the mission president. Subsequently, the mission president, Howard C. Badger, introduced Mahlangu to Apostle Marion G. Romney in this building. It was also here that the Soweto group reportedly sat outside listening to services. Courtesy the H. Tracy Hall Foundation.

Reports that some candidates for baptism were living in polygamous marriages had to be investigated and resolved.[101]

The interview process involved several meetings with both ward and stake leaders. Once the local leaders were satisfied, the baptisms could proceed, but satisfying local leaders proved difficult in some areas. A more stringent caution appears to have been exercised by local leaders in the more autonomous stakes compared to leaders in mission branches, who reported to the foreign mission president. Black African names appear on baptismal rolls in significantly greater proportion in the mission branches than the units administered by the stakes.[102] Caution

101. de Wet, oral history, March 5, 2014.

102. Records are incomplete and do not generally denote race, but it is possible to determine a rough estimate of the proportion of black Africans baptized based on the names listed in the records sent to Church headquarters. In 1980, available records indicate that about 10.4 percent of convert baptisms

seemed to have been at least partially warranted when one mission branch, created in a flurry of black convert baptisms, was eventually dissolved because of the types of issues raised by local leaders in the stakes. Similar issues in other branches were also reported.[103]

Finally, on September 6, 1980, Moses Mahlangu and other members of the Soweto group were baptized in Johannesburg. They were not the first black African converts, nor is theirs the only story of perseverance in the face of exceptional obstacles. However, theirs is a story of patience and humility as they waited and kept the faith for many years before being baptized into the church they loved.

But the story is not just theirs. As Benjamin de Wet noted, the priesthood revelation and the baptism of new black members was accepted more willingly by white members in South Africa than was generally expected. Social and cultural prejudices and expectations had to be overcome by everyone involved in a country gripped by racial tension and mutual distrust. Maureen van Zyl, who had given Moses Mahlangu the mission president's address in 1968, recalled that "once the barrier was broken down, a very strong lasting bond was formed between the members. . . . It was difficult at times to remember that there was such a thing as apartheid, but unfortunately, there was."[104]

Instrumental in breaking those barriers was the branch established in Soweto on August 9, 1981. Maureen van Zyl's husband, James, became the first branch president, and Frans Lekgwati served as his second counselor. Moses Mahlangu and white member Craig Russel served as counselors to the black elders quorum president, Robert Mathebe. Nearly every presidency in the branch consisted of both black and white members working closely together as a hopeful portent of the coming end of apartheid in South Africa, which would allow for increased cooperation and progress.[105]

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in the stakes had obviously black African names. In the mission branches that number was about 48.5 percent. If the branches in Zimbabwe are excluded, the percentage of obviously black African names baptized in mission branches in South Africa drops to 36. Ordinance and action record.

103. Steynsburg Branch Annual Historical Reports, 1982–83, CHL; East London South Africa District Annual Historical Reports, 1982–83, 1996, CHL.

104. Maureen van Zyl to Jeffrey Cannon, email, June 10, 2015.

105. Johannesburg 2nd Branch Annual Historical Report, Organization Historical Events, CHL; Johannesburg 2nd Branch Annual Historical Report, Section A—Officers Sustained, October 11, 1981; van Zyl to Cannon, email, June 10, 2015.

As the Church in Soweto grew, largely unmolested by government interference, the world was changing and the apartheid state was being dismantled. The Communist Bloc began to unravel in the late 1980s, and the Berlin Wall, concrete symbol of the Cold War, opened its gates on November 9, 1989. In a signal that the world was losing its tolerance for apartheid, the United States Congress passed sanctions against South Africa over the veto of Ronald Reagan in 1986. Other countries also enacted sanctions and boycotts, convincing many in South Africa's governing party that apartheid was no longer sustainable. In February 1990, a new South African president, F. W. de Klerk, ordered the release of political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, whose decades-long incarceration was seen worldwide as the image of oppression in South Africa. Mandela became president of South Africa himself four years later.

Meanwhile, the new Church members in Soweto gained experience, and black counselors were called as presidents. Frans Lekgwati was called as branch president on December 1, 1985. The branch eventually became a ward. On March 14, 1999, the Soweto South Africa Stake was created with Robert Eppel, the former branch president in Bulawayo, as president. Six years later, Eppel was released and his former first counselor, Jackson Mkhabela, who was then serving as bishop of the Soweto Ward, was sustained by a multiracial congregation as the first black stake president in the new South Africa.

Conclusion

This article began with a brief discussion of the legendary faith of African Latter-day Saints and the complexities of memory. The story of Moses Mahlangu is constructed of the memories of its participants and the documents left behind. As previously noted, memories are constructed of present perceptions. Memories of past events and attitudes are largely shaped according to the milieu at the time of recall. The Soweto group's story is recalled by its participants now thirty to fifty years after the events themselves and in circumstances much different from those under which they occurred.

More than two decades have elapsed since the end of apartheid. Its mostly peaceful dissolution and the ensuing changes in South African society have been called miraculous, despite the remaining challenges. Even more time has passed since the 1978 revelation extending priesthood and temple blessings to people of all races. Memories of that event and the circumstances surrounding it are also influenced by current mores concerning race and the inclusiveness that many Latter-day

Saints want to ascribe to the Church. The recollections of the participants in this story and those who repeat them are necessarily affected. What all agree on is the persistent faith of Moses Mahlangu and the men and women—both black and white—who waited with him.

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