

Mormonism's Jesse Haven and the early focus on proselytising the Afrikaner at the Cape of Good Hope, 1853-1855

ABSTRACT

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as the Mormon church is officially known, has emphasised the Christian vocation to mission almost since its founding in the USA in April 1830. While Mormon historians have written a great deal about the denomination's success in West Africa very little has been written about Mormonism in South Africa. The present paper aims to fill part of the gap by relating the experience of one of Mormonism's first missionaries to the continent i.e. Jesse Haven. In a conclusion the question is addressed whether Mormonism's American origins or its drive to gather in an American Zion made it just too foreign or too un-Afrikaans to be compatible with the emerging identity of the Afrikaans nation.

Mormonism has been part of the South African religious landscape since 1852 when missionary Joseph Richards spent nearly a month at the Cape en route to his assigned mission field in Hindustan. With typical missionary enthusiasm, he distributed a few tracts and even preached a few sermons. The following year three missionaries officially assigned to the Cape of Good Hope landed at Table Bay on 19 April 1853. Contrary to the usual practice of mission work in Africa, these missionaries were not on the continent seeking to win black converts. The majority of the missionaries' early efforts focused on the white, English-speaking population in the colony, but in time, mission president Jesse Haven made a special effort to include the Dutch (or Afrikaans) speakers as well.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as the church is officially known, has emphasised the Christian vocation to mission almost since its founding in rural New York on 6 April 1830. Founder Joseph Smith sent his brother Samuel on a mission to neighbouring communities almost immediately after the church's organisation. Firmly entrenched in a common notion of the time that Christianity had fallen victim to a general apostasy, Mormonism declared itself to be a restoration of the primitive church. As such, both Christians and non-Christians were proselytised with equal zeal.

While Mormon historians have written a great deal about the denomination's success in West Africa since its *entrée* there in 1979, they have written very little about Mormonism in South

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1 J Richards, "The Work in Hindostan," *The Latter-day Saints Millennial Star* (Liverpool, England), 3 August 1852, 541-542 and E P Wright, *A History of the South African Mission: Period I, 1852-1903* (n.p., 1977), p. 61.

Africa.² The historiography of Mormon efforts among the Afrikaners is even less impressive.³ At the risk of being included in the long list of parochial denominational histories, the present paper aims to fill this gap in the published history of Christianity in South Africa by relating the experience of one of Mormonism's first missionaries to the continent: Jesse Haven. Beyond the immediate relevance to Mormon history, Haven's experience in the Cape Colony is illustrative of the adaptation of method and accommodation to local custom necessary for Christian missionaries throughout the world.

Jesse Haven and his companions in the first official Mormon delegation to Africa, Leonard Smith and William Walker, received their commission at a special conference of the church in Great Salt Lake City, Utah Territory, 28 August 1852. They were not professional missionaries, had no formal theological or mission training, and were without any high position in the church. In fact, records show that not one of them was even present at the conference where their names were read along with 103 others appointed to missions throughout the world.

Less than a month after receiving their assignments, the missionaries left on their seven-month journey to Africa on 15 September. In the company of many of the other missionaries called at the same time, they made the trek across the continent they had all crossed at various times only a few years before as part of the great westward exodus of the Mormons to the American West. For travelling to Europe and beyond, the journey then continued across the Atlantic Ocean to the British Isles, where Haven, Smith, and Walker would stay a few weeks before finally heading south to their destination at the southern tip of Africa. Writing of their feelings upon their arrival at the Cape, Haven wrote: "we faltered not—fainted not—feared not; we felt that the Lord had sent us to deliver the message, and by His help we were determined to accomplish what we had been sent to perform."⁴

Nowhere in the surviving records does Haven explicitly define his understanding of "what [they] had been sent to perform" but his letters to church headquarter leave little doubt that his intention—at least early on—was to focus on the English colonists. In a 20 August 1853 letter to Willard Richards, a counsellor to Brigham Young, Haven reported approximately half the inhabitants of Cape Town were, "colored people, being of all shades from a jet black to almost an European complexion." He further explained that the white population at Cape Town, both English and Dutch, generally spoke English and that he expected two of the missionaries would go to Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown where "a large portion of which are English[.] There are also many small towns in the vicinity of these towns which are inhabited by English."

Certainly aware of church restrictions affecting the proselytising of black Africans, Haven's reasons for referencing those of Negroid ancestry are obvious to those familiar with Mormonism's

2 Mormon authors have produced several works on the South African Mission but none is widely available nor specifically addresses the LDS Church's history with the Afrikaner. Of the histories available, E P Wright's *A History of the South African Mission* is the most comprehensive. See also, F R Monson, 'History of the South African Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1853-1970,' (MA thesis: Brigham Young University, 1972).

3 Neither Wright's nor Monson's study gives much attention to the Afrikaners. J W Hofmeyr's bibliography, *History of the Church in Southern Africa: A Select Bibliography of Published Material to 1980* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1986) lists only three works on Mormonism from South African authors: J Beijer, *De Mormon in Zuid Afrika: eene waarschuwing aan allen, die de waarheid in Christus Jezus lief-hebben* (Groningen: Beijer, 1863); A J van Staden, *Mormone* (Pretoria: HAUM, 1981) and W L Steenkamp, *Wat is die Mormonisme?* (Cape Town: NG Kerk-Uitgewers, 1983).

4 J Haven, "The Daily Journal of Jesse Haven Commenced on Sept. 15, 1852 ended Nov. 20th 1853, Journal 'A,'" Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA. Hereafter cited as Haven, Journal, [date].

ban on the ordination of men with African ancestry.⁵ In a church where polity rests on an almost exclusively lay priesthood, the injunction against ordination for black men severely limited the proselytising of Africans until the policy was discontinued in 1978.

Haven's letter to Richards was based on four months of experience at the Cape. In those four months the only converts the missionaries had won were English. Not one of the three American missionaries spoke either Dutch or its vernacular form that would come to be called Afrikaans. When they arrived in South Africa, they had just come from England where LDS missionaries had been having considerable success since the first mission to that country in 1837. The journal Haven kept during his time in England reveals a fondness for the people he met there and it is probably natural such an affinity should continue into his work at the Cape.⁶ Perhaps combined with a little wishful thinking, these factors may have led to his overestimation of the population of English colonists at the Cape and the proportion of Afrikaners able to speak the English language. Over a year later, observing a waning spirit of inquiry manifested in and around largely English-speaking Cape Town and the increasing interest among the Afrikaners, Haven's conception of the commission he had been given seems to have expanded as his focus broadened to include the Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking population as well.⁷

By far, the majority of Haven's early letters and journal entries discuss the missionaries' efforts among English-speaking colonists but, gradually, his correspondence with leaders in Utah and the British Isles began to mention the Afrikaners and the desirability of making the message of Mormonism available to them. He wrote to Samuel Richards, president of the British Mission, that the missionaries' inability to speak the "low Dutch" of the colonists was hampering the work. It was at this time that the records Haven created first mention any "Dutch"-speaking converts. He reported to Richards that a few of their new converts could speak what he consistently called Dutch, but they seem to have been mostly bilingual English colonists rather than Afrikaners. One of these new converts, probably Thomas Weatherhead, was particularly encouraging to Haven, inspiring him to write that if the new proselyte "were only in a situation to leave home [to preach], he would be a great help to us."⁸

As subjects of the British Crown, Afrikaners at the Cape were surrounded by the English language. Though it was a foreign tongue, it was at that time the language of commerce, government, and culture and many Afrikaners would have been capable of interacting with the missionaries from Utah without much difficulty. Most Afrikaners, however,—especially in the rural areas—could speak little or no English.⁹ Estimates of Afrikaners unable to speak English reach 70 percent or more.¹⁰ With Afrikaners making up approximately 75 percent of the colony's

5 J Haven, to W Richards, 19 August 1853, in Haven, Journal, 30 October 1855.

6 Tying the priesthood denial to a descent through Cain and the curse imposed as punishment for murdering his brother Able, Brigham Young made one of his most explicit statements on the policy in an address to the territorial legislature in 1852, the same year Haven and his companions were sent to the Cape (W Woodruff, Journal, 16 January 1852, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City). The policy was also discussed in an article appearing in the *Deseret News*, 3 April 1852.

7 Haven, Journal, 11 February 1853.

8 J Haven to B Young, 1 November 1854, in Haven, Journal, 31 October 1854

9 J Haven to S W Richards, 20 January 1854, in *Millennial Star*, 18 March 1854, 173-174.

Weatherhead was ordained a priest by Haven 13 September 1853 (South African Mission, Historical Report, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, 13 September 1853. Hereafter cited as Historical Report, [page].)

10 J Haven to S Richards, 26 April 1856, in *Millennial Star*, 17 May 1856, 318-319; H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 210-212.

white population, therefore, even conservative estimates of the European population unable to speak English exceed fifty percent.¹¹

EARLY EFFORTS AT DUTCH PROSELYTISING

By late 1853 Haven seems to have come to recognise the need to make his message available to the Afrikaners in their own language. At a meeting held 13 September, Haven's desires to reach Afrikaners was manifested as bilingual convert Thomas Weatherhead was ordained a priest¹² in Mormonism's lay priesthood and Haven commissioned him to undertake a missionary journey to the predominantly Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking Stellenbosch area.¹³ No report of this mission exists and the surviving records indicate Weatherhead probably never fulfilled his charge.¹⁴

Unable to find a suitably-qualified convert either willing or able to travel to Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking towns, missionary Leonard Smith journeyed to Stellenbosch 16 January 1854.¹⁵ Six days later he was meeting with church members in Cape Town reporting on his trip.¹⁶ No missionary journal from Leonard Smith is known to exist and mission records do not include any minutes of this meeting, leaving us to speculate on Smith's reception at Stellenbosch. Whatever he reported, it was apparently encouraging to Haven. Citing the "many in this colony that speak the Dutch language and cannot understand English" and a desire that they too "may know what the Lord has done," he sent a letter petitioning church members for donations to cover the costs of translating some of the pamphlets he had published in the year since arriving in the colony.¹⁷ Haven was now fully committed to the Dutch / Afrikaans effort, dedicating both money and time to working on the translation with Thomas Weatherhead.

Haven did not record the date the translation was completed, but did report taking the completed manuscript of their translated pamphlet 'A Warning to All' to Deep River for editing by a Mr. Waldeck 14 July 1854.¹⁸ He arrived to find Waldeck away from home and apparently feeling some urgency to have it printed, he took the manuscript to the printer and ordered one thousand copies without waiting to have it reviewed.¹⁹ A year later, while visiting with fellow missionary William Walker in Alice, Haven took this pamphlet and others Weatherhead had translated to church member Joseph Ralph for review.²⁰ Haven's trips to have the pamphlets reviewed by both Waldeck and Ralph reveal some concerns about the correctness of the translation. Weatherhead's skill as a translator, however, cannot be judged because none of the translations he made is known to be extant. Haven's correspondence with church leaders in Utah refers to his having sent copies of the translations to several associates there²¹ but their present whereabouts are unknown.

Because Haven consistently referred to those we today call Afrikaners as *Dutch*, it is possible the 'Dutch' pamphlets he had printed would be more appropriately considered Afrikaans owing to

11 Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 202.

12 Demographic estimates are based on G D Scholtz's figures in *Die ontwikkeling van die politieke denke van die Afrikaner*, vol. 3 (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1974), 22-23, cited in Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 201.

13 The office of priest, having authority to preach, baptise, and administer the sacrament of the Lord's supper, is a relatively low position in the Mormon hierarchy, being part of the lower or Aaronic order.

14 Historical Report, 4-5.

15 Haven, Journal, 16 September 1853.

16 Haven, Journal, 16 January 1854.

17 Haven, Journal, 22 January 1854.

18 Historical Report, 181-182.

19 Haven, Journal, 14 July 1854.

20 Haven, Journal, 24 July 1854.

21 Haven, Journal, 4 July 1855.

the fact they were translated by a man who had lived his entire life at the Cape where the vernacular was quite different from the Dutch of the Netherlands. Haven's 20 January 1854 letter to Samuel Richards referencing the 'low Dutch' of the Afrikaners²² shows his awareness of differences in the language spoken at the Cape and that spoken in the Netherlands but it is unknown which vernacular he chose for his translations. His journal shows some doubt in his mind as to Weatherhead's ability to translate adequately into proper Dutch: first, Haven purchased a Dutch dictionary for Weatherhead, suggesting unfamiliarity with some of the vocabulary. In this case a dictionary may have provided the correct words and their spelling, but grammar and verb conjugation would still have been lacking. Second, Haven took the translations to two different persons in an effort to edit and correct Weatherhead's work. Rather than Dutch or Afrikaans, the pamphlets may have been some combination of the two, not entirely one or the other. If the pamphlets were truly Afrikaans, they would be some of the first materials printed in that language. Without knowing whether Weatherhead's translations or any of Haven's other, unqualified references to the Dutch language could be more properly called Afrikaans, the present author makes no attempt to determine which of the two languages Haven was truly referencing in his letters and diaries.

On 3 August 1854, Jesse Haven retrieved from the printer the first of the three 'Dutch' pamphlets he was to have translated.²³ This two-page circular, which had been published in English 8 October 1853, boldly declared the missionaries' message of Mormonism as a restoration of the primitive Christian church, invited the people of the Colony to repent and be baptised, and warned against believing false reports made against the Church and the missionaries.²⁴ Ten days after the pamphlet's publication, nine men from this fledgling outpost of Mormonism set out on a Sabbath-day effort to distribute their new literature. Seven were sent to Cape Town and two to Wynberg.²⁵ The Wynberg effort yielded fifty people who attended a midweek service there on the fifteenth—so many that there was not enough room for all of them in the home where the meeting was being held.²⁶ Haven preached again at a service there a few days later to find a much diminished congregation.²⁷ Perhaps the large crowd from the previous meeting was disappointed when, after being attracted by literature in their own language, they arrived to find services were held only in English. In the meantime, Haven had been so encouraged by the response to his pamphlets at the earlier Wynberg meeting held on the fifteenth, he began taking Dutch lessons from a local member, Johanna Provis (née Longeveld), the very next day.²⁸ His journal entries for the following weeks make frequent references to his study of the Dutch language and by the twelfth of September he was assisting Thomas Weatherhead (probably on a very minor level) in translating a second pamphlet published at the Cape, 'On the First Principles of the Gospel.'²⁹

The second circular to be published in Dutch was an open letter written by Haven to his brother John, a Congregationalist minister in Massachusetts. Jesse Haven's choice to translate this document is interesting in that it could be recognition of the common Reformed confession of the

22 Haven to Young, 1 November 1854.

23 J Haven to S W Richards, 20 January 1854, in *Millennial Star*, 18 March 1854, 173-174.

24 Haven, Journal, 3 August 1854.

25 J Haven, W Walker, L I Smith, 'A Warning to All,' L. Tom Perry Special Collections Library, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, USA.

26 Haven, Journal, 13 August 1854.

27 Haven, Journal, 15 August 1854.

28 Haven, Journal, 20 August 1854.

29 Haven, Journal, 16 August 1854.

predominantly Dutch Reformed Afrikaners and the Congregationalism of his brother. In the letter, the Mormon brother outlined the Biblical doctrines of faith, baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and spiritual gifts attendant to the true church, challenging his brother with the question of whether or not his faith included all the principles taught by Jesus and the apostolic church of the first century.

By late 1854 Jesse Haven was writing to church leaders in London about the desirability of missionaries called to the Cape of Good Hope being fluent in both English and Dutch.³⁰ New missionaries with the qualifications he suggested would take months to arrive if they were to be sent at all. Unwilling to wait, Haven did what he could. On 12 January 1855 he wrote to William Walker who had established himself at Ft. Beaufort requesting he ordain a priest any man in the church who could speak Dutch and was willing to devote his time to preaching. Walker was then to send the man to Cape Town, preaching along the way.³¹ The request was to go unfulfilled.

HAVEN'S FIRST DUTCH MISSION

Two days after requesting William Walker send him a Dutch-speaking church member to assist him, Haven ordained Thomas Weatherhead an elder³² in preparation for the upcoming mission tour to Sellenbosch. Almost exactly a year after Leonard Smith's excursion to Stellenbosch, Jesse Haven set out 19 January with the newly ordained Weatherhead on an expedition to the town and its surrounding farms.

The morning after their arrival in Stellenbosch, Haven and Weatherhead posted notices announcing they would hold services later that day on the town square—Haven's advertisements being written in English and a few of Weatherhead's written in Dutch. As they preached, they were disturbed by the taunts of a few boys and by the missionaries of another denomination asking them to leave because they were on their property. The Mormons complied and moved their preaching only to find out later that the spot they had previously occupied did not belong to the other missionaries at all.³³

Although there was some appearance of official opposition manifested against the Latter-day Saints at Stellenbosch, it seems to have been unauthorised. After distributing tracts part of the day, Haven and Weatherhead again occupied a spot on the town square to preach their message on the twenty-second. In the audience was one Mr. Rolley, the town's jailor. Two days later, when Haven went to the home of a policeman, the officer's wife told him they were under orders from the magistrate not to associate with the Mormons and not to receive them. Upon being confronted by Haven on this point later that week, the magistrate explained he had given no such order and gave the missionaries freedom to speak with whomever they chose. The apparently unauthorised order had been given in the magistrate's name by the jailor, Mr. Rolley.³⁴

Three times during the Stellenbosch mission, Haven and Weatherhead went into the surrounding country to meet with the Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking farmers in the area. With only one

30 Haven, Journal, 18 and 21 August, 12, 13 and 14 September 1854.

31 J Haven to S W Richards, 12 February 1855, in *Millennial Star*, 2 June 1855, 347-349; and Haven to Richards, 26 April 1856, *Millennial Star*, p. 319.

32 Haven, Journal, 12 January 1855.

33 Haven, Journal, 14 January 1855.

Elder is the first office in Mormonism's higher, or Melchizedek, order of the priesthood. In addition to the duties of a priest, Elders may confirm Church members, bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost, and bless the sick by the imposition of hands.

34 Haven, Journal, 21 January 1855.

or two exceptions, they were treated kindly. Their first outing was on 23 January. Haven wrote in his journal that the pair went five or six miles into the country and met with a man Haven identifies only as ‘Mr. Louw’ who invited them for dinner. When they visited him again two days later, he expressed an anxiety to get a copy of the Book of Mormon in Dutch.³⁵

The first day in the country areas outside Stellenbosch, Haven and Weatherhead met with an Afrikaans minister, the Reverend Mr. Reitz,³⁶ whom Haven described as ‘liberal in his views’ and prayed would be convinced of the message he brought.³⁷ Mormon membership lists, though, make no indication that Reitz ever left his pulpit to join himself with them. It is unknown whether he attempted to discourage the efforts by the local ministers of religion later in the week to impose a boycott on the Latter-day Saints’ meetings.

By the end of Haven and Weatherhead’s stay in Stellenbosch, the local clergy had rallied their people against them. On their final day the two missionaries held one last, poorly-attended meeting on the town square and left for Haven’s headquarters at Mowbray, near Cape Town. The local pastors, Haven wrote in his journal, had convinced their congregants to boycott the Latter-day Saint meetings.³⁸ The boycott signalled an important recognition of Mormonism by the clergy at Stellenbosch—a town that would later become a centre of Reformed South African theology and Afrikaner nationalism.

Three weeks after returning from Stellenbosch, Haven wrote to Samuel Richards saying they had ‘found a few Dutch who were honest hearted and anxious to get the Book of Mormon in that language.’ He also lamented his inability to do more for the Afrikaners because of a lack of funds and requested “Cannot something be done towards furnishing this colony with Dutch books?”³⁹ Dutch speakers would have to wait another thirty-five years for an edition of the Book of Mormon in that language; an Afrikaans edition would not be published until 1972.

HAVEN’S SECOND DUTCH MISSION

On 16 February 1855, Haven undertook one more Dutch mission with similar results to the first. The Dutch translation of Haven’s ‘On the First Principles of the Gospel’ had been retrieved from the printer’s shortly after the previous month’s mission to Stellenbosch⁴⁰ and this second mission may have been part of a drive to distribute the new Dutch literature and a renewed hope for success. Haven’s choice of companion for his second Dutch mission was local member Richard Provis, whose wife, Johanna, had been serving as the American’s Dutch/Afrikaans tutor.⁴¹

Their journey was to last ten days, taking them through Paarl, Malmesbury, and D’Urban (now Durbanville). After travelling the more than 65 kilometres to Paarl the two arrived the evening of the sixteenth and stayed the night in a public house. Haven wrote in his journal the next day that few of the inhabitants could understand English.⁴² Seeing they could do very little in the area, and finding a Dutch farmer who would transport them part way to Malmesbury, they left that morning.

35 Haven, Journal, 24 and 26 January 1855.

36 Haven, Journal, 23 and 25 January 1855.

37 Haven’s journal says “Reitz,” 23 January 1855.

38 Haven, Journal, 23, 25, and 27 January 1855.

39 Haven, Journal, 28 and 29 January 1855.

40 Haven to Richards, 12 February 1855, p. 348.

41 D J Whittaker, “Early Mormon Pamphleteering” (PhD dissertation: Brigham Young University, 1983) 97.

42 Haven, Journal, 16 February 1855.

When the farmer could take them no farther, they walked some distance before securing lodging with another Dutch farmer where, Haven writes, “we were treated as though we had been black boys.”⁴³ Whether the poor treatment was the result of religious prejudice we do not know but Haven seems to imply such.

Their treatment was much better the next morning when they arrived in Malmesbury around eight and were met by Provis’ father-in-law, Wilhelmus Langeveld. Haven records they were “kindly received and well treated” and that in consequence of being ‘much tired’ they determined to ‘do nothing in regard to distributing tracts &c.’ If Haven’s intent was to proselytise Johanna Provis’ father on this trip, his journal bares no evidence of the effort.⁴⁴

Haven and Provis then spent the following day distributing tracts to the primarily Afrikaner residents of Malmesbury with little incident.⁴⁵ The coming days were not so quiet. February 20 found the two Latter-day Saint missionaries on their way to the home of ‘a Dutch farmer’ more than five and a half kilometres from the town. The visit seems more than random as Haven and Provis would have needed some impetus to visit so far out of their way. The farmer was not home but the two were received kindly by his wife and son.⁴⁶

Returning to Malmesbury, Haven writes, they called at the home of a policemen around 3:30 in the afternoon. The policeman’s wife consented to the missionaries holding a meeting in her home that evening at five and the men left with the promise of an appointment. When they returned at the appointed hour, however, they found the woman averse to their preaching, but agreed they could converse for a time until they were interrupted by two women who disrupted the interview. The Mormons left with a prayer.⁴⁷

The missionaries’ first encounter with official Afrikaner religion in the area came on Wednesday, 21 February. Haven recounts the story in his journal:

Feb 21st: spent the day in Malmesbury. Called on the Dutch Minister. He treated us roughly. When I told him “Joseph Smith had shed his blood for the Testimony of Jesus.”⁴⁸ He said, “It is a lie” I repeated it again; Bro Provis said that he said then “It is a damned lie. But I do not recollect of him putting in the word ‘damned’ tho’ I presume he did for he was very wrathful. He told us ‘to be off’. As we left, bro Provis told him, “You are the first minister I ever heard swear” I told him as I left, “You make me think of the Pharisees.” He was much agitated.⁴⁹

If such was always the character of Haven’s dealings with the Afrikaners, it is not surprising his efforts at conversion were not highly successful.

Finding themselves in D’Urban (now Durbanville) en route back to mission headquarters at Mowbray, Haven and Provis had two very different experiences with as many ministers. First was an interview with a ‘Dutch minister’ by the name of JJ Beck on 24 February. Beck treated them kindly and, being busy that day, agreed to meet with them again the following afternoon. In the meantime the missionaries met with a Mr. Parker who had left the Wesleyan ministry and was then holding his own independent meetings. Having left a few tracts with his wife at his home on the twenty-fourth, Haven and Provis found him unreceptive when they met him on the twenty-fifth. He refused to allow the missionaries entrance into the yard, blocking the gate.

43 Haven, Journal, 17 February 1855.

44 Haven, Journal, 17 February 1855.

45 Haven, Journal, 18 February 1855.

46 Haven, Journal, 19 February 1855.

47 Haven, Journal, 20 February 1855.

48 Haven, Journal, 20 February 1855.

49 Joseph Smith was murdered by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, USA, 27 June 1844.

The experience with Beck was quite different. Beck kept the appointment on the twenty-fifth where they engaged in what Haven described as ‘a very interesting conversation.’ The minister thanked the missionaries for their visit and for ‘laying the Doctrines of the Latter-day Saints before him.’ Haven was encouraged by Beck’s interest in their visit and prayed he would accept the message he had brought to the continent. That night they returned to Mowbray with members Nicholas Paul and Thomas Tregidga.⁵⁰

Although this was the last of the missions to the Afrikaners Haven would make personally, he later directed another mission to be undertaken. While away at a conference of the church in Port Elizabeth in August 1855 Haven happily received word that Thomas Weatherhead and Thomas Tregidga, were soon to set out on the fourth mission specifically to Dutch/Afrikaans speakers.⁵¹ Apparently, the lack of baptisms resulting from Leonard Smith’s trip to Stellenbosch in 1854 and Haven’s two missions earlier in 1855 did not dissuade him from his desires to teach and baptise the Afrikaners. He at least seems to have found some quality in the Afrikaners he thought would make them good Latter-day Saints and eager converts, if only the message could be sufficiently communicated to them.⁵²

There is little doubt Jesse Haven understood at least something of the nationalist spirit of the Afrikaners. It was clear to him that there was more than just language separating the ‘Dutch’ from the English or the black African natives. Having set sail for England en route to Utah 15 December 1855, Haven addressed a letter reporting his activities in the Cape Colony to Brigham Young and his counsellors in the church’s governing body, the First Presidency.⁵³

After several pages describing conditions in the mission and a general summary of the missionaries’ work in the colony, Haven began a discussion of his work with the Afrikaners. His special concern with their language is evident. “We distributed a large quantity of Dutch tracts,” he wrote, “and one brother preached a few times in that language, none were baptised, tho’ I believe we found some that would obey the Gospel, if one well versed in the language, could be with them for a while.”⁵⁴ Clearly, Haven understood at least a little of the importance of the Afrikaners’ language.

Beyond issues of language, a conversion to Mormonism required two very difficult changes. Firstly, it required abandoning one’s personal beliefs. For the Afrikaners, this meant the Dutch Reformed Church. Haven wrote of this fact: “Their religion is the Dutch Reformed, and only to suggest the idea that perhaps their Church is not the true Church, they look with astonishment, and seem to say, ‘Is it possible?’”⁵⁵ Secondly, Nineteenth-century Mormonism also encouraged immigration to the Mormon gathering place in Utah. “The Dutch here, as well as other classes of the natives” he reported, “are very much attached to the country, and the idea of emigrating, frightens them.”⁵⁶

In an effort to bring suitable (and hopefully most successful) missionaries to the Colony, Haven suggested to his superiors in Utah, “It is not for me to counsel in the matter; yet, my judgment would be, not to send an English Elder to labour among the Dutch in this land. A Scotchman, or an American, would be far preferable. They like the Scotch much better than the

50 Haven, Journal, 21 February 1855.

51 Haven, Journal, 25 February 1855.

52 Historical Report, 167.

53 Haven to Richards, 26 April 1856, p. 319.

54 Haven, Journal, 15 December 1855.

55 J Haven to B Young, H C Kimball, and J M Grant, January 1856, in Haven, Journal, January 1845.

56 J Haven to B Young, H C Kimball, and J M Grant, January 1856.

English. [. . .] An Elder born and brought up in Holland, would be a suitable person to labour among the Dutch here. Like many people, they think much of the mother country of their ancestors, and every thing that comes from it.”⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

In the two-and-a-half years Jesse Haven spent in South Africa his attitude toward the Afrikaners changed from a policy of avoidance to an active drive to proselytise them. Yet despite his efforts, the list of Jesse Haven’s Afrikaner converts seems to begin and end with Johanna Provis, his Dutch teacher and the wife of his Anglophone companion on the mission tour to Paarl, Malmesbury, and D’Urban. Leonard Smith and William Walker seem to have been similarly unsuccessful.⁵⁸ Was it simply a matter of language keeping the Afrikaners from accepting the message of the first Mormons sent to the Cape Colony? Jesse Haven left the Cape seeming to think otherwise.

The Afrikaner’s language has long been a source of nationalist pride and identity. The scope of such is outside the confines of the present article but an inability to speak the vernacular was not the only obstacle in proselytising the Afrikaners and Jesse Haven knew it. Could it be that beyond simply its predominant use of the English language, Mormonism’s American origins or its drive to gather in an American Zion made it just too foreign—too un-Afrikaans—to be compatible with the emerging identity of this proud nation?

Such questions of nationalism and identity continue to confront missionaries of all confessions and denominations, not just Mormons and not only in their attempts at proselytising the Afrikaners of South Africa. For the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, only twenty-two-years old when Jesse Haven was called to his missionary labours in 1852 and still relatively new today, internationalisation has forced missionaries and church leaders to adapt to local circumstances unforeseen before the missionaries’ arrival. Jesse Haven is but one example in the Christian church’s drive to fulfil Jesus’ commission to the apostles, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Mt 28:19).

KEY WORDS

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Nationalism and identity

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57 J Haven to B Young, H C Kimball, and J M Grant, January 1856.

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