

Section 115

In December 1836, the Missouri state legislature created Caldwell County for Latter-day Saints to settle and named Far West as its seat. Some two thousand Saints gathered to Far West, with a few thousand more in the surrounding area. On April 6, 1837, the Church's seventh anniversary, they made plans to build a temple like the one in Kirtland, Ohio. They chose a site in the center of town and came together to break ground. Then the work stopped. When Joseph visited Far West in November, a council decided to postpone temple building until the Lord revealed otherwise.¹ A few weeks after Joseph moved to Far West in March 1838, the Lord revealed his will concerning the temple, the name of His Church, and the gathering of the Saints.

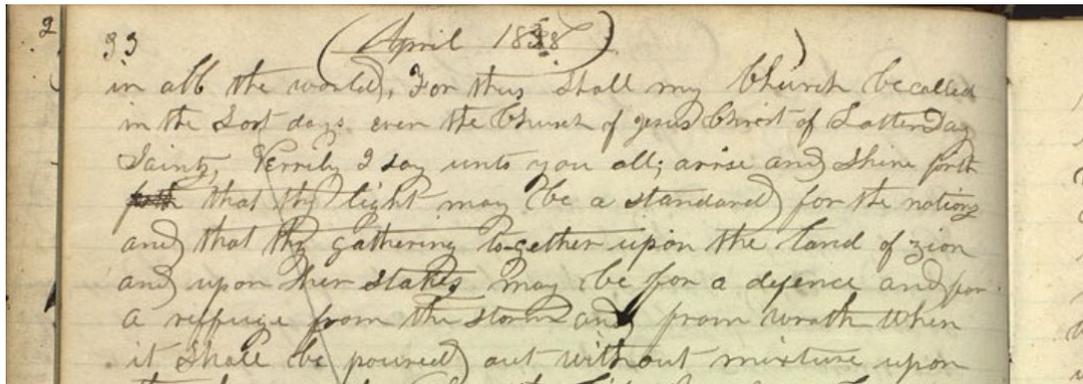
At its organization on April 6, 1830, the Church was called the “Church of Christ” (see D&C 20:1). Then, beginning on May 3, 1834, Church leaders officially adopted the title, “The Church of the Latter Day Saints.” Section 115 commands that it be called “the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” a designation Joseph had already begun using.²

Shortly after the Lord revealed section 115, Thomas Marsh, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, wrote of its content to Wilford Woodruff:

¹ “Minutes, 6 November 1837,” 81, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 2, 2020.

² K. Shane Goodwin, “The History of the Name of the Savior’s Church: A Collaborative and Revelatory Process,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58:3 (2019): 5–41.

Since Br. Joseph came to this place, we have been favored with a lengthy revelation in which many important items are shown forth. First, that the Church, shall hereafter be called. 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.' Second, it saith 'Let the City Farwest be a holy and a consecrated land unto me, and it shall be called most holy, for the ground upon which thou standest is holy: Therefore, I command you to build a house unto me, for the gathering together of my Saints, that they may worship me.' 3d. It also teaches, that the foundation stone must be laid on the 4th of July next, and that a commencement must be made in this following season; and in one year from that time, to continue the work until it is finished. Thus we see that the Lord is more wise than men, for [some] thought to commence it long before this, but it was not the Lords time, therefore, he overthrew it, and has appointed his own time. The plan is yet to be shown to the first presidency, and all the Saints, in all the world, are commanded to assist in building the house [of the Lord].³



Early manuscript of D&C 115:4. Image via Joseph Smith Papers.

Section 115 is an optimistic declaration. In the face of overwhelming opposition, including indebtedness, persecution, and poverty, the Lord is building Zion. The temple is all-important. Having recently received the priesthood keys to authorize temple ordinances (see section 110), Joseph is the Lord's choice to carry Zion forward, establish its stakes, oversee its temples, and gather the faithful of all nations to be endowed with power.

³ Thomas B. Marsh to Wilford Woodruff, April 30, 1838, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Saints gathered on July 4, 1838, to obey section 115's command to begin work on the temple. George Robinson, Joseph's secretary, reported, "We therefore met on this day in Far West Mo. To make our declaration of independence, and to Lay the cornerstones of the house of the Lord agreeably to the commandment of the Lord unto us given April 26th 1838."⁴ The Saints then gathered building materials so that construction could proceed on April 26, 1839, as the revelation specified. Meanwhile, according to one Missouri historian, the walls inched upwards to nearly three feet before the Saints were driven from the state by the governor's executive order in the fall.⁵

In obedience to verse 18, Joseph led three expeditions in the spring of 1838 to search out locations for "stakes in the regions round about" (D&C 115:18). Additional explorations were conducted throughout the summer and land surveys conducted in anticipation of more Saints arriving in the fall. On June 28, 1838, at a small grove near the home of Lyman Wight, near Spring Hill in Daviess County, Joseph Smith organized the Adam-ondi-Ahman stake, the third stake organized in the Church.

Recently the Lord impressed on President Russell M. Nelson's mind "the importance of the name He decreed for His Church." President Nelson taught that because of section 115 "the name of the Church is not negotiable. When the Savior clearly states what the name of His Church should be even precedes His declaration with, 'Thus shall my church be called,' He is serious." Using any substitute for the revealed name minimizes or removes the Savior, and "when we *discard* the Savior's name, we are subtly *disregarding* all that Jesus Christ did for us—even His Atonement." That would not be wise.⁶

⁴ "Journal, March–September 1838," 46, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed December 2, 2020.

⁵ William A. Wood, "An Old Mormon City in Missouri," *American Magazine of History* 16 (1886): 98–99; as cited in Gentry, "A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri," 64, note 77.

⁶ Russell M. Nelson, "The Correct Name of the Church," General Conference October 2018, emphasis in original.