

SECTION 115

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Received on April 26, 1838, at Far West, Missouri, Doctrine and Covenants Section 115 is a pivotal administrative and theological text in Mormon history. It is best known for verse 4, where the Lord purportedly establishes the official name of the institution: 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.' Beyond nomenclature, the text establishes a theology of geography, designating Far West as 'holy ground' and commanding the construction of a temple there. The text introduces the concept of 'stakes' of Zion as places of physical defense and refuge from coming divine wrath. It places a heavy emphasis on strict obedience to revealed patterns, warning that God will not accept the temple if it deviates from the divinely shown blueprint. Finally, it reaffirms Joseph Smith's exclusive possession of the 'keys of the kingdom,' centralizing authority in his person despite the growing internal dissent occurring historically at this time.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Jr., Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, Edward Partridge

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ECCLESIASTICAL NOMENCLATURE

Assertion: The specific name 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' is divinely mandated and required.

"For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (D&C 115:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Church (Ekklesia) is the universal body of Christ, comprised of all true believers across time and denominations (Ephesians 1:22-23). There is no biblical mandate for a specific corporate name (e.g., Baptist, Presbyterian). D&C 115:4, however, posits that the validity of the church is tied to this specific revealed name, implying that other Christian groups are not 'His' church in the fullness of the sense intended here. This shifts the definition of the Church from a spiritual organism to a specific legal and institutional organization.

2. GEOGRAPHIC SOTERIOLOGY (ZION AS REFUGE)

Assertion: Physical gathering to Zion and its stakes provides protection from God's wrath.

"And that the gathering together... may be for a defense, and for a refuge from the storm, and from wrath when it shall be poured out without mixture upon the whole earth. (D&C 115:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text asserts that safety from the 'wrath... poured out without mixture' is found in the physical act of gathering to specific locations (Zion and her stakes). This creates a geographic soteriology where physical proximity to the center of the sect offers protection. In contrast, the New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ delivers believers from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10) and that true worship is no longer tied to a specific mountain or city (John 4:21), but is in spirit and truth.

3. CONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE OF WORSHIP

Assertion: God's acceptance of the temple is conditional upon strict adherence to the revealed architectural pattern.

"And if my people build it not according to the pattern... I will not accept it at their hands. (D&C 115:15)"

Evangelical Comparison: This doctrine reintroduces a Levitical style of strict adherence to ritual forms. The text explicitly states that God's acceptance of the offering (the temple) is contingent on the builders following the 'pattern' exactly. If they fail in the details, the work is rejected. This contrasts sharply with the New Covenant, where believers are 'accepted in the Beloved' (Ephesians 1:6) through faith, and God dwells not in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24) but in the hearts of his people.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the locus of safety and authority. In this text, safety from divine wrath is achieved by gathering to a specific GPS location (Far West) and submitting to a specific hierarchy (Joseph Smith). In Evangelicalism, safety from wrath is achieved solely through the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer by faith. Furthermore, the text re-establishes a temple cultus (sacred space, specific architecture) that the New Testament declares fulfilled and obsolete in the person of Christ.

Shared Values:

Desire to worship God.; Belief in the holiness of God.; Concept of the church as a light to the nations.

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a rigid hierarchy where the 'pattern' is shown only to the presidency, and the people must follow to be accepted.
2. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – Suggests that physical gathering to a city is necessary for 'refuge from the storm' of God's wrath, supplementing Christ's work.
3. [Major] Theology Proper (Omniscience) – God commands a temple to be built in a specific timeframe at a place where He presumably knows his people are about to be violently expelled.
4. [Critical] Sola Gratia – Acceptance by God is conditional on the precise execution of a building project ('if my people build it not... I will not accept it').

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: A literal city to be built in Missouri (and its satellite 'stakes').

Evangelical: Historically Jerusalem; Typologically the Kingdom of God or the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: *In D&C 115, Zion is a place of physical defense in Missouri. In Hebrews 12:22, believers have already come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God (spiritual reality).*

"Keys"

In Text: Exclusive administrative authority held by Joseph Smith to govern the kingdom.

Evangelical: Authority given to the apostles to preach the gospel and exercise church discipline (Matt 16:19), ultimately held by Christ (Rev 1:18).

Example: *Verse 19 claims Joseph Smith holds the keys; Evangelicals believe Christ holds the keys of death and Hades.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to gathering to Zion to escape 'wrath poured out without mixture.'

How Attained: Through obedience to the prophet, gathering, and temple building.

Basis of Assurance: Compliance with the 'pattern' shown to the presidency.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by making safety from wrath contingent on geographic movement and construction labor rather than faith in Christ.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Arise and shine forth (v5)
2. Build a house (temple) to the Lord at Far West (v8)
3. Begin work on July 4th (v10)
4. Re-commence foundation work one year later (v11)
5. Do not get into debt for the building (v13)
6. Build exactly according to the revealed pattern (v14)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Gather physically to Far West or appointed stakes
2. Accept Joseph Smith's exclusive keys and authority
3. Submit to the First Presidency's direction regarding the building pattern

Ritual Requirements:

1. Consecration of land
2. Temple construction for the purpose of worship

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 6, it says Zion is a refuge from the storm. How do you reconcile this promise with the fact that the Saints were driven out of Far West just months after this revelation?
2. Verse 15 says God won't accept the temple if it isn't built exactly to the pattern. How does this pressure to be perfect in rituals affect your relationship with God compared to relying on Jesus' perfection?
3. Why do you think the name of the church is emphasized so strongly here (v4) when the New Testament refers to believers simply as 'the church' or 'saints' in various locations?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Refuge from the Storm – The text expresses a valid human longing for safety from divine judgment and worldly chaos. The Gospel answers this not with a city in Missouri, but with Christ Himself. [Isaiah 25:4 - 'For You have been a strength to the poor... A refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat.]
2. The Holy Name – The desire to be identified by Christ's name is good. However, true identification comes from the indwelling Spirit, not an institutional label. [2 Timothy 2:19 - 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism/Fear of Rejection [Severe] – The explicit threat that God will not accept the work if it deviates from the pattern (v15) creates a high-stakes environment where human error invalidates worship. This fosters anxiety rather than assurance.
2. Displacement/Uprooting [Moderate] – The command to gather to Far West (v17) required families to uproot their lives, sell property, and move to a frontier zone, placing immense financial and physical strain on them.
3. Cognitive Dissonance [Severe] – Believers must reconcile the promise of 'refuge' (v6) with the historical reality of the violent expulsion from Missouri that occurred shortly after.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Vertical Authority).

Verification Method: Obedience to the prophet serves as the validation of the truth; the text does not offer an external verification method but demands compliance.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology encourages testing spirits (1 John 4:1) and searching the Scriptures to verify claims (Acts 17:11). This text demands obedience to a new pattern revealed only to the leadership.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 26, 1838

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The text is historically situated in the 'Mormon War' period. The command to build the temple (v8) became impossible to fulfill due to the Extermination Order issued in October 1838.