

## Far West and Adam-ondi-Ahman

D&C 115, 116, 117

by Jacob W. Olmstead



During the final months of 1837, apostasy began to affect the Church in Kirtland, Ohio. Many Latter-day Saints were disillusioned by heavy financial losses as a result of the collapse of the Kirtland Safety Society and began to reject the Prophet's temporal and spiritual leadership. Among the dissenters were several members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and Seventies, as well as the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates. In January 1838, as a result of this widespread apostasy and threats of violence, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon received divine instruction to abandon their labors in Kirtland and to flee to Far West, Missouri. Although the revelation pronounced Joseph's labors "finished in this place," leaving Kirtland meant parting not only from their homes, but from the Church's largest stake and its first and only temple. Nevertheless, Joseph and Sidney were admonished to "arise and get yourselves on to a land which I shall show unto you even a land flowing with milk and honey."<sup>1</sup>

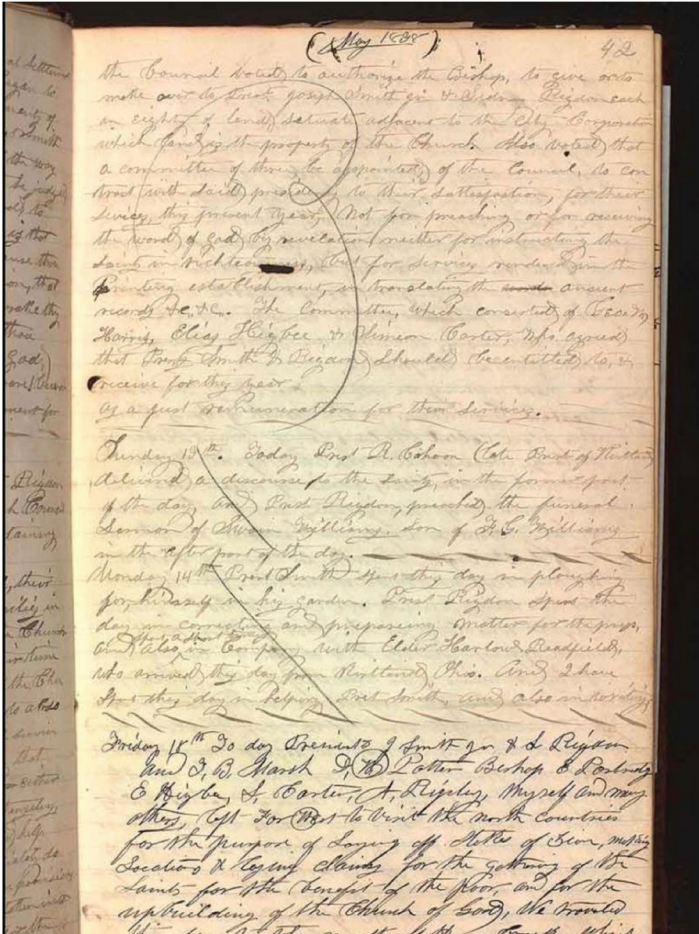
As they approached Far West after a "long & tedious journey," Joseph and Sidney were met by the Missouri Saints "with open arms and warm hearts welcomed us to the bosom of their society."<sup>2</sup> But news of internal divisions threatening the Church in Far West quickly put a damper on the joyful reunion. Four days prior to the Prophet's March 14 arrival, the Far West stake high council excommunicated an unrepentant William W.

Phelps and John Whitmer, both counselors in the Missouri stake presidency. The two were accused of profiting from the sale of land intended for the gathering of the Saints to Far West and also for their part in the presidency's selling of property in Jackson County contrary to previous revelation. The high council had not taken action against David Whitmer, president of the Missouri stake presidency, or assistant president Oliver Cowdery on additional charges. Instead, they waited until after Joseph's arrival to address this unpleasant item of business. Both Whitmer and Cowdery were excommunicated in early April 1838.

### Finding a Place for the Kirtland Saints

Far West grew to become the principal Mormon settlement in Missouri following the Saints' displacement from Clay and Ray Counties beginning in mid-1836. At the time of Joseph's arrival in 1838, Far West had a population of 4,900 with "150 homes, four dry goods stores, three family groceries, several blacksmith shops, two hotels, a printing shop, and a large schoolhouse that doubled as a church and a courthouse."<sup>3</sup> Finding affordable settlement lands for the anticipated arrival of a large influx of impoverished Kirtland Saints to Missouri became an immediate priority. On April 26, 1838, a revelation—now Doctrine and Covenants 115—provided some direction to the First Presidency, bishopric, and

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ated and unsurveyed Daviess County, situated immediately north of Caldwell County, appealed to Church leaders as a potential gathering place for impoverished Saints in northern Missouri.<sup>5</sup>

On May 18, 1838, Joseph Smith led a group of Church leaders including Sidney Rigdon, Thomas B. Marsh, and David W. Patten (all of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles), Bishop Edward Partridge, and others to the “north countries for the purpose of Laying off stakes of Zion, making Locations & laying claims for the gathering of the Saints for the benefit of the poor, and for the upbuilding of the Church of God.”<sup>6</sup> The company traveled northward into Daviess County for several days to the Grand River region, which Joseph Smith’s clerk George W. Robinson described as “large[,] beautifull[,] deep.” During their expedition, the party found a land with “plenty” of wild game including “Deer, Turkey, Hens, Elk, &c.” and prairies thickly covered with grass.<sup>7</sup> The land was indeed “flowing with milk and honey.”<sup>8</sup>

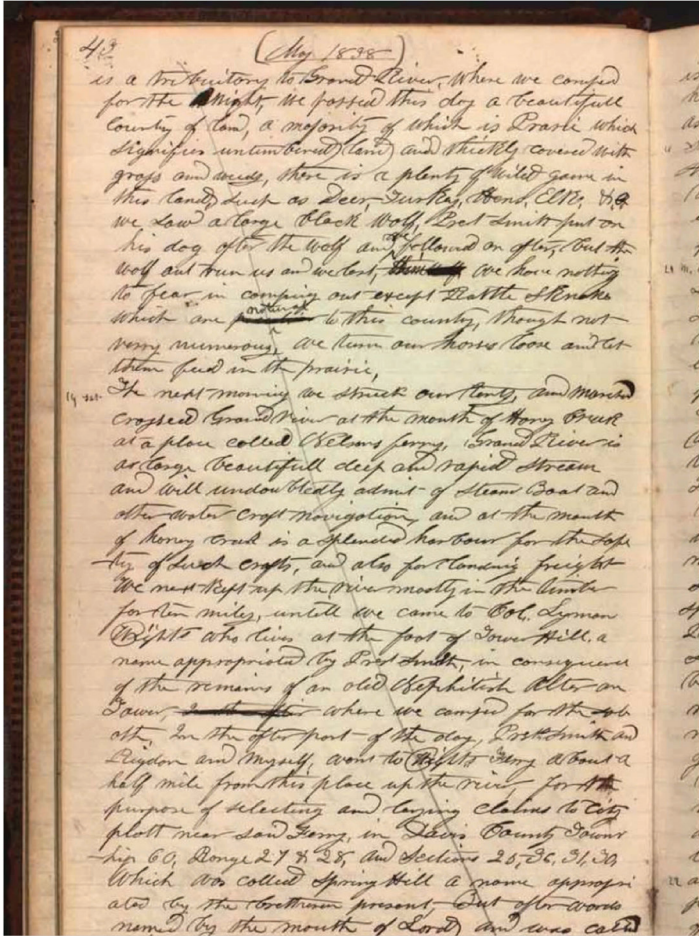
### The Place Where Adam Shall Come

While the natural abundance of the land in Daviess County provided for the temporal needs of the gathering Saints, revelation also directed the Saints to a place of great spiritual significance. As Joseph, Sidney, and George W. Robinson searched for a location to establish a settlement community near the Grand River, they came to a prominent knoll called Spring Hill. On this trip, Joseph received the revelation known today as

high council in Far West. In addition to urging the continued development of Far West and the construction of a temple there, the revelation directed “that other places should be appointed for stakes in the regions round about as they shall be manifested unto my Servant Joseph from time to time.”<sup>4</sup>

Availability of inexpensive land guided Church leaders as they looked for these “other places” to create new stakes in the region. Although considerable portions of Caldwell County remained unsettled, the land had been surveyed, making it no longer subject to preemption laws. These laws allowed settlers to secure and improve unsurveyed lands without initial payment. Under preemption, those without sufficient means could work secured lands for profit and then be given the first rights to purchase the land after it was surveyed and went on sale from the federal government. Newly cre-

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Doctrine and Covenants 116, which identified the region as Adam-ondi-Ahman, “because said he it is the place where Adam shall come to visit his people, or the Ancient of days shall sit, as spoken of by Daniel the Prophet.”<sup>9</sup>

The Saints knew of Adam-ondi-Ahman from previous revelations to Joseph Smith, which were published several years earlier in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. In what is now Doctrine and Covenants 107, the Lord explained that during Adam’s final years, he called his righteous posterity to “the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman,” where he “bestowed upon them his lasting blessing.” The revelation further explained that the Lord “appeared unto them” and “administered comfort unto Adam.” Being “full of the Holy Ghost,” Adam prophesied concerning his posterity “unto the latest generation.”<sup>10</sup> In addition to references in the Doctrine

and Covenants, the phrase had become a regular part of Mormon worship services through a hymn composed by William W. Phelps titled “Adam-ondi-Ahman.”<sup>11</sup> This hymn was included in the first Latter-day Saint hymnal, compiled by Emma Smith and published in the early months of 1836,<sup>12</sup> and the Saints sang this hymn during the Kirtland Temple dedication.<sup>13</sup>

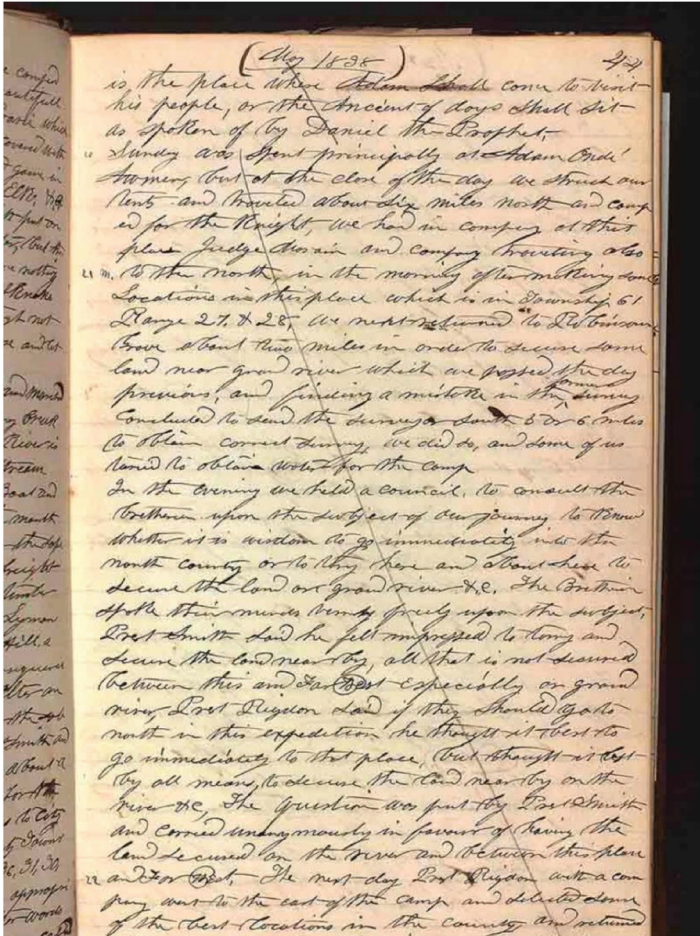
The new revelation concerning Adam-ondi-Ahman suggested a significant role for Adam in the events preceding the Lord’s Second Coming. Elaborating on Daniel’s vision of the Ancient of Days (see Daniel 7:9, 13–14), Joseph Smith later explained that “all that have had the Keys must Stand before him [Adam] in this grand Council. . . . The Son of Man [Christ] Stands before him & there is given him glory & dominion.—Adam delivers up his stewardship to Christ, that which was delivered to him as holding the Keys of the Universe, but retains his standing as head of the human family.”<sup>14</sup>

### Gathering to Adam-ondi-Ahman

By revealing the location of Adam-ondi-Ahman to Joseph Smith, the Lord imbued the land in Daviess County with a spiritual history as well as a spiritual future. At a time when the development of the kingdom of God upon the earth appeared on the brink of collapse as a result of apostasy and displacement, this revelation reminded Joseph and the Saints of their place in an unfolding sacred history. Church leaders were no longer solely working to establish a place for refugee Kirtland Saints and others desiring to gather, but they were also engaged in the gathering of the righteous to the location where Adam would one day turn over his stewardship to the Lord prior to the Second Coming.

Upon Joseph’s return to Far West on May 21, 1838, he immediately held a council “to consult the brethren upon the subject of our journey to know whether it is wisdom to go immediately into the north country . . . to secure the land on grand river.” After the brethren expressed their feelings on the subject, “the question was put by Prest Smith and carried unanimously in favour of having the land secured on the river and between this place and Far West.”<sup>15</sup> Five weeks later, on June 28, 1838, with Joseph Smith acting as chair, the Adam-ondi-Ahman stake of Zion was organized with John Smith called as president.<sup>16</sup> John Smith’s second counselor

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and one of the first Latter-day Saint settlers in Daviess County, Lyman Wight, wrote: "This beautiful country with its flattering prospects drew in floods of emigrants. I had not less than thirty comers and goers through the day during the three summer months." By October, Wight recorded that "upwards of two hundred houses" had been built in Adam-ondi-Ahman with "forty families living in their wagons."<sup>17</sup>

### "The More Weighty Matters"

Despite the establishment of this new stake of Zion and the call to settle in northern Missouri, some found it difficult to abandon their homes in Kirtland. Finally, during the summer months of 1838, most of the loyal Saints remaining in Kirtland began to make their way to Missouri. Notably absent from the parties of incoming Saints were William Marks and Newel K. Whitney,

a Kirtland bishop and wealthy businessman. The pair initially neglected to gather with the main body of the Church in Missouri in order to settle their business affairs in Kirtland. The two struggled with abandoning the temporal security their businesses and property provided.

### Newel K. Whitney

On July 8, 1838, Joseph Smith received a revelation (now Doctrine and Covenants 117) directed to Marks and Whitney commanding them to "come forth, and not tarry." The revelation called Marks to "preside in the midst of my people in the City Far West," presumably as the new president of the Missouri stake presidency. As for Whitney, the revelation directed him to "come up unto the land of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and be a bishop unto my people."<sup>18</sup> Using the imagery of Adam's ancient homeland and the infinite blessings promised to Adam's posterity, the revelation queried: "Is there not room enough upon the mountains of Adam-ondi-Ahman, and upon the plains of Olaha Shinehah, or in the land where Adam dwelt, that you should . . . covet that which is but the drop, and neglect the more weighty matters?"<sup>19</sup> Oliver Granger was designated to settle all the Church's accounts in Kirtland, and he delivered a letter to Marks and Whitney containing the revelation. In the letter, the First Presidency expressed confidence in the pair's willingness to obey the revelation and to "act accordingly."<sup>20</sup> Obedient to the instruction, both Marks and Whitney forsook their possessions in Kirtland. Eventually they joined with the main body of the Saints to attend to the "more weighty matters" of administering to the needs of the Saints.

### Epilogue

Throughout the summer of 1838, the Saints continued to gather to Far West, Adam-ondi-Ahman, and other Mormon settlements in northern Missouri. In accordance with the command to build up Far West, on July 4, 1838, cornerstones were laid for a temple in that community. Soon a site had also been selected for a temple in Adam-ondi-Ahman. However, the peace and abundance the Saints enjoyed in northern Missouri was short-lived. Simmering mistrust and suspicion between Missourians and Latter-day Saints erupted violently

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Newell K. Whitney

in August 1838. A series of armed conflicts known as the Missouri-Mormon War culminated with the imprisonment of Joseph Smith and the expulsion of the Latter-day Saints from Missouri. After the expulsion of the Saints from their state, Missourians immediately swooped in to lay claim to the Mormon lands and improvements. Although they would go on to establish another covenant community and build a beautiful temple in Nauvoo, the Saints maintained a hope that they would one day return to reclaim these sacred lands in Missouri prior to the Second Coming.

### Footnotes

- 1 “Revelation, 12 January 1838–C,” 1, josephsmithpapers.org.
- 2 “Letter to the Presidency in Kirtland, 29 March 1838,” in Joseph Smith, “Journal, March–September 1838,” 23–24, josephsmithpapers.org.
- 3 James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976, reprint 1992), 116–17.
- 4 “Revelation, 26 April 1838 [D&C 115],” in Joseph Smith, “Journal, March–September 1838,” 34, josephsmithpapers.org.
- 5 For an in-depth discussion of preemption laws and their impact on the Mormon settlement, see Jeffrey N. Walker, “Mormon Land Rights in Caldwell and Daviess Counties and the Mormon Conflict of 1838,” *BYU Studies*, vol. 47, no. 1 (2008), 5–55.
- 6 Joseph Smith, “Journal, March–September 1838,” 42, josephsmithpapers.org.
- 7 Joseph Smith, “Journal, March–September 1838,” 43.
- 8 “Revelation, 12 January 1838–C,” 1.
- 9 Joseph Smith, “Journal, March–September 1838,” 43–44.
- 10 “Doctrine and Covenants, 1835,” 86, josephsmithpapers.org; capitalization standardized; see also *Doctrine and Covenants* 107:53–56.
- 11 See “Minutes, 28 June 1838,” in *Elders’ Journal* (Aug. 1838), 61, josephsmithpapers.org. During the organization of the Adam-ondi-Ahman Stake, “Adam-ondi-Ahman” is referred to as “the well known hymn.”
- 12 Although the date of publication is listed as 1835, this first hymnal likely did not actually become available until February or March 1836; see Peter Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church, Volume One 1830–1847* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1997), 59.
- 13 “Kirtland, Ohio, March 27th, 1836,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, vol. 2, no. 6 (Mar. 1836), 276.
- 14 “Report of Instructions, between 26 June and 4 August 1839–A, as Reported by Willard Richards,” in *Willard Richards Pocket Companion*, 64, josephsmithpapers.org.
- 15 Joseph Smith, “Journal, March–September 1838,” 44.
- 16 “Minutes, 28 June 1838,” in *Elders’ Journal* (Aug. 1838), 60–61.
- 17 Rollin J. Britton, *Early Days on Grand River and the Mormon War* (Columbia: The State Historical Society of Missouri, 1920), 6–7.
- 18 Joseph Smith, “Journal, March–September 1838,” 57–58; spelling standardized.
- 19 Joseph Smith, “Journal, March–September 1838,” 58; spelling and punctuation standardized.
- 20 “Letter to William Marks and Newel K. Whitney, 8 July 1838,” 2, josephsmithpapers.org.