
A Stake in Zion

D&C 96:1

In a religious context, the word *stake* originated with the poetic imagery of Isaiah: “Enlarge the place ... of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes” (Isaiah 54:2).

Each stake of Zion supports and holds up the Church in the same way as a tent or tabernacle is held up by stakes. Each stake is a gathering place for remnants of the House of Israel (D&C 82:13–14; 101:17–21). Today a stake is composed of wards and branches. In June 1833, when this revelation was received by the Prophet Joseph Smith, the stake in Kirtland was not composed of wards and branches.

In this revelation, the Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith that the Kirtland Stake was to “be made strong” (D&C 96:1). For that to happen, the Lord told Joseph that land surrounding the temple site should “be divided into lots ... for the benefit of those who seek inheritances” (v. 2). Although the division of lots and inheritances as planned did not work out, the Kirtland Stake was organized in the summer of 1833. On February 17, 1834, twelve high priests were called to serve on the Kirtland High Council. The next day, the First Presidency—Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams—were called to serve as the stake presidency of the “standing” high council. Note that the high council was constituted before there were wards and before stake presidents were called to preside over bishops and quorums of high priests.

The calling of a stake president did not happen until the Nauvoo era (D&C 124:133–134). The calling of a stake president is the prerogative of general authorities of the Church. Elder M. Russell Ballard told of a time when he was called to Chile to divide a stake and set apart a stake president for a new stake—

I was sent by the Brethren to South America to divide a stake and choose new leadership for the new stake. ...

My job was to seek to know the mind and will of the Lord in order to extend on His behalf the call to serve as stake president. It is an overwhelming responsibility.

When I arrived at the stake to begin interviewing potential leaders, the current stake president told me that there were only three men who could possibly serve as the president. Through an interpreter I explained to the stake president that the procedure of the Church was that I would interview all of the priesthood leaders living within the new stake.¹

There were thirty priesthood leaders to interview, and because they needed an interpreter, the interviews took longer than usual. "Late Saturday night, I had not yet found the person the Lord wanted to preside over this new stake," Elder Ballard said. As he reviewed the list of priesthood leaders, he discovered one brother had not been interviewed. He learned that the brother was "home caring for his wife and three children, who were ill."²

At seven o'clock on Sunday morning, that brother met with Elder Ballard and was extended the call to be the stake president. Elder Ballard asked him to prayerfully and quickly determine who his counselors were before conference began. The stake president replied, "Brother Ballard, I am prepared. I was told by the Spirit last night that I would be called to be the stake president. Here are my counselors, here are my high councilors, here are the others to serve as leaders of the stake."³ The stake was organized and leaders were sustained during the ten o'clock session of conference.

¹ M. Russell Ballard, *When Thou Art Converted: Continuing Our Search for Happiness* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2015), 144.

² Ballard, *When Thou Art Converted*, 144.

³ Ballard, *When Thou Art Converted*, 145–146.