And next spring let them depart to go over the great waters, and there promulgate my gospel, the fulness thereof, and bear record of my name.

Let them take leave of my saints in the city of Far West, on the twenty-sixth day of April next, on the building-spot of my house, saith the Lord.” Doctrine and Covenants 118:4-5, Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet at Far West, Missouri, July 8, 1838.

Doctrine and Covenants was given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, at Far West Missouri, July 8, 1838, in response to the supplication, “Show us thy will, O Lord, concerning the Twelve.”

This was the only revelation received by the Prophet with a specific date of fulfillment. Following the Missouri-Mormon War during the fall of 1838, and the expulsion of the Saints from Missouri during the winter of 1839, members of the Missouri mob swore they would kill any Mormons attempting to return to Far West in fulfillment of this prophecy.

The Prophet Joseph Smith and other members of the Church were arrested at Far West, October 31, 1838. On November 12, 1838, civil officials convened a preliminary hearing before Judge Austin A. King. A total of 64 defendants were brought before Judge King during the following weeks. The Saints hired Alexander Doniphan and Amos Reese to defend them. At the conclusion of this hearing, November 29, 1838, Judge King issued 112 indictments. Most of the 60 Saints charged were allowed to post bail from $500 to $1,000. They were then told to get their families and leave the State of Missouri.

Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Caleb Baldwin, Alexander McRae and Lyman Wight were charged with treason in Caldwell and Daviess Counties - a charge for which there was no bail - and ordered to be held until they could be tried the following spring. They were transported to the Clay County Jail at Liberty, Missouri arriving December 1, 1838.

On January 25, 1839, the Prophet and his companions were brought before Judge Joel Turnham, at the Liberty Courthouse. During these proceedings, all of the prisoners except Sidney Rigdon were represented by Attorneys Alexander Doniphan and Peter Burnett. Rigdon chose to plead his own case before the court, which he did successfully. Sidney Rigdon was allowed to post bail; however, due to death threats upon his life, Rigdon did not leave the jail for ten more days. He made arrangements for a horse at night to make his escape, February 5, 1839.

On April 6, 1838, the remaining prisoners were removed from the Liberty Jail and transported to a home near Gallatin. Here they were brought before recently appointed Judge Thomas C. Burch of Missouri’s 11th Judicial District. Burch was the same man that prosecuted these men at Richmond before Judge Austin A. King. The defendant’s Attorneys Peter H. Burnett and Amos Rees, requested a change of venue to Marion County, arguing that Burch should not be allowed to rule in the case since he had been the prosecuting attorney against the defendants at the Richmond hearing.

Judge Burch heard testimony for 3 days. Perhaps it was good that Judge Burch had served as both prosecutor and judge of this case. After weeks of testimony and months of incarceration of the prisoners, Judge Burch order the Sheriff to take these men two days out of the county and turn them loose. They were freed April 16, 1839, and slowly worked their way across Missouri, arriving at Quincey, Illinois, April 22, 1839.

Upon their arrival in Illinois, the Prophet learned that the Quorum of the Twelve had left Illinois four days prior. They traveled mostly under the cloak of darkness, arriving at Far West just before midnight on April 25, 1839.
Elder Wilford Woodruff describes the background and circumstances of the revelation.

"The Twelve Apostles were called by revelation to go to Far West, Caldwell county, to lay the foundation of the corner stone of the Temple. When that revelation was given this Church was in peace in Missouri. It is the only revelation that has ever been given since the organization of the Church, that I know anything about, that had day and date given with it. The Lord called the Twelve Apostles, while in this state of prosperity, on the 26th day of April, 1839, to go to Far West to lay the corner stone of the Temple; and from there to take their departure to England to preach the Gospel. Previous to the arrival of that period the whole Church was driven out of the State of Missouri, and it was as much as a man’s life was worth to be found in the State if it was known that he was a Latter-day Saint; and especially was this the case with the Twelve. When the time came for the corner stone of the Temple to be laid, as directed in the revelation, the Church was in Illinois, having been expelled from Missouri by an edict from the Governor. Joseph and Hyrum Smith and Parley P. Pratt were in chains in Missouri for the testimony of Jesus."

Elder Woodruff recorded how the apostles who hadn't been imprisoned were fretting over what to do concerning this revelation and the actions taken by the apostles.

"As the time drew nigh for the accomplishment of this work, the question arose, “What is to be done?” Here is a revelation commanding the Twelve to be in Far West on the 26th day of April, to lay the corner stone of the Temple there; it had to be fulfilled. The Missourians had sworn by all the gods of eternity that if every other revelation given through Joseph Smith were fulfilled, that should not be, for the day and date being given they declared that it should fail. The general feeling in the Church, so far as I know, was that, under the circumstances, it was impossible to accomplish the work; and the Lord would accept the will for the deed. This was the feeling of Father Smith, the father of the Prophet. Joseph was not with us, he was in chains in Missouri, for his religion. When President Young asked the question of the Twelve, “Brethren, what will you do about this?” The reply was, “The Lord has spoken and it is for us to obey.” We felt that the Lord God had given the commandment and we had faith to go forward and accomplish it, feeling that it was His business whether we lived or died in its accomplishment.

On the 18th of April, 1839, I took into my wagon Brigham Young and Orson Pratt; Father Cutler took into his wagon John Taylor and George A. Smith, and we started for Far West. On the way we met John E. Page, who was going with his family to Quincy, Illinois. His wagon had turned over, and when we met him he was trying to gather up with his hands a barrel of soft soap. We helped him with his wagon. He then drove into the valley below, left his wagon, and accompanied us on our way. On the night of the 25th of April we arrived at Far West, and spent the night at the home of Morris Phelps. He had been taken a prisoner by the mob, and was still in prison.

On the morning of the 26th of April, 1839, notwithstanding the threats of our enemies that the revelation which was to be fulfilled this day should not be fulfilled; notwithstanding ten thousand of the Saints had been driven out of the state by the edict of the governor; and notwithstanding the Prophet Joseph and his brother Hyrum Smith, with other leading men, were in the hands of our enemies in chains and in prison, we moved on to the Temple grounds in the city of Far West, held a council, and fulfilled the revelation and commandment given to us.”

Elder George Q. Cannon recorded the events that took place at Far West.
“They laid it [the temple cornerstone] in the midst of their enemies; they sang their songs, ordained two of the Twelve [Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith], and if I recollect right, two of the Seventies, and then shook hands with the Saints there, bade them adieu, and took their departure for Europe, thus fulfilling the word of God given nearly a year previously through the Prophet Joseph, and which the enemies of the Kingdom of God said should never be fulfilled.”

Months earlier, Theodore Turley had defended Joseph Smith to a group of hostile men that vowed to keep this meeting from happening. During this same time Isaac Russell had apostatized from the Church and had advised Missouri officials concerning the prophecy - who vowed to kill any Mormons attempting to fulfill this prophecy - since this doctrine had a date attached to it.

Turley was fortunate enough to be present at the fulfillment of the revelation for which he stood up for. Brigham Young recorded the following interchange regarding Theodore.

“As the Saints were passing away from the meeting, Brother Turley said to Page and Woodruff, “Stop a bit, while I bid Isaac Russell good-bye”; and knocking at the door called Brother Russell.

His wife answered, “Come in, it is Brother Turley.”
Russell replied, “It is not; he left here two weeks ago,” and appeared quite alarmed; but on finding it was Turley, asked him to sit down; but he replied, “I cannot; I shall lose my company.”

“Who is your company?” Inquired Russell.
“The Twelve,” replied Turley.
“The Twelve!” exclaimed Russell

To which Turley responded: “Yes. Don’t you know that this is the twenty-sixth, and the day the Twelve were to take leave of their friends on the foundation of the Lord’s House, to go to the islands of the sea? The revelation is now fulfilled, and I am going with them.”
Russell was speechless, and Turley bid him farewell.

Theodore Turley then accompanied members of the Quorum of the Twelve on their missions to the British Isles. Thus was Doctrine and Covenants 118 fulfilled.

Sources:
5. The Mormon Wars, Covenant Communications, Inc. 2014.