

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 35

This section addresses Sidney Rigdon, a recent convert to the Church. Taken in light of the history of Rigdon's search for the ancient Christian church, it is plain the Lord is commenting very specifically on those things Rigdon has been looking for.

1 LISTEN to the voice of the Lord your God, even Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, whose course is one eternal round, the same today as yesterday, and forever. 2 I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was crucified for the sins of the world, even as many as will believe on my name, that they may become the sons of God, even one in me as I am one in the Father, as the Father is one in me, that we may be one.

v1-2 A general introduction composed of authority statements, cp. D&C 1:1-3, D&C 19:1-5.

v1 "one eternal round", a distinctly Book of Mormon phrase, cp. 1 Ne. 10:19, Alma 7:20, 37:12, D&C 3:2.

v2 Similar in content and theme as D&C 34:2-3.

3 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto my servant Sidney, I have looked upon thee and thy works. I have heard thy prayers, and prepared thee for a greater work. 4 Thou art blessed, for thou shalt do great things. Behold thou wast sent forth, even as John, to prepare the way before me, and before Elijah which should come, and thou knewest it not. 5 Thou didst baptize by water unto repentance, but they received not the Holy Ghost; 6 But now I give unto thee a commandment, that thou shalt baptize by water, and they shall receive the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, even as the apostles of old.

v3-6 These verses indicate Rigdon's previous work among the Campbellites was preparatory to the upcoming greater works he is now called to.

v3 This verse demonstrates the kind of interactive relationship the Lord has with people. The Lord has listened to his prayers and prepared him for a great work. What exactly this entails we do not know, but there are surely many incidents from the mundane to the extraordinary where the hand of Providence was manifested on Rigdon's part, even as it is manifested on our part.

v4 "and thou knewest it not", Rigdon was not aware of the forces at work about him. As we cannot perceive the things of the spiritual world with natural eyes, it is easy for us to overlook them.

v5-6 Rigdon realized the religions of the day lacked the authority and manifestations of the Holy Spirit and was actively seeking a Church that had just that (see Parley P. Pratt's comments below). The Lord responds to Rigdon's desires by informing him that he had found the restored ancient Church.

7 And it shall come to pass that there shall be a great work in the land, even among the Gentiles, for their folly and their abominations shall be made manifest in the eyes of all people. 8 For I am God, and mine arm is not shortened; and I will show miracles, signs, and wonders, unto all those who believe on my name. 9 And whoso shall ask it in my name in faith, they shall cast out devils; they shall heal the sick; they shall cause the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak, and the lame to walk. 10 And the time speedily cometh that great things are to be shown forth unto the children of men; 11 But without faith shall not anything be shown forth except desolations upon Babylon, the same which has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

12 And there are none that doeth good except those who are ready to receive the fulness of my gospel, which I have sent forth unto this generation. 13 Wherefore, I call upon the weak things of the world, those who are unlearned and despised, to thresh the nations by the power of my Spirit; 14 And their arm shall be my arm, and I will be their shield and their buckler; and I will gird up their loins, and they shall fight manfully for me; and their enemies shall be under their feet; and I will let fall the sword in their behalf, and by the fire of mine indignation will I preserve them.

15 And the poor and the meek shall have the gospel preached unto them, and they shall be looking forth for the time of my coming, for it is nigh at hand-- 16 And they shall learn the parable of the fig-tree, for even now already summer is nigh.

v7-15 The Lord continues the theme of the restoration of the ancient Church from v. 3-6 by listing several more specific tasks to be completed in this "great work" and the many miracles associated with this work. All of the tasks and miracles listed herein are drawn from well-known New Testament concepts of what the ancient Church was like and what is to be accomplish in the last days:

Gospel to Gentiles	Luke 21:24 Romans 11:25-32
Miracles, signs, wonders	Mark 16:17
Desolation on Babylon	Revelation 17:1-6
Weak given power of God	1 Corinthians 1:27-31 1 Corinthians 4:10-13 Acts 4:13
Gospel to poor and meek	Matthew 11:5
Parable of fig tree	Matthew 24:32-33

As is the case with v. 3-6, these are probably all things Rigdon was keenly interested in when searching for the same Christian Church as existed anciently.

v7 "their folly...made manifest", the general rejection of the Book of Mormon and the Church by the nations is predicted by Moroni in Mormon 8-9. The particular event here is probably the same one referenced in 2 Ne. 30:16-17, D&C 88:108-109.

v9 Compare D&C 24:113-14.

v11 Compare D&C 29:17-21.

"drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication", cp. D&C 86:3, D&C 88:94, D&C 88:105.

v13 "thresh the nations", i.e., to harvest the righteous out from among the nations, cp. Hab. 3:12, Micah 4:13, Isa. 28:23-29, Ether 10:25, D&C 133:59. In older editions, the word used is "thrash". They hold the same meaning, the beating of grain to separate the seed from the chaff.

v14 There is quite a bit of martial imagery in this section, the pinnacle of which is this verse. The phrase "fight manfully" is unique to the Scriptures, the use of "buckler" here is unique to the D&C.

The phrase "enemies shall be under their feet" is similar to 1 Cor. 15:25-27, D&C 49:6, D&C 58:22, D&C 76:61, 106, but in

all of those cases it is the Lord who has put His enemies under His feet, where the present case is the Lord's armies putting their enemies under their feet. This is the opposite case of Alma 46:22, where the Nephite armies say they will be trodden under the feet of the Lamanites if they fall into transgression. This particular usage is unique to the Scriptures.

We might speculate the martial imagery appealed to Rigdon owing to the fiery rhetorical style he developed as a Baptist minister.

17 And I have sent forth the fulness of my gospel by the hand of my servant Joseph; and in weakness have I blessed him; 18 And I have given unto him the keys of the mystery of those things which have been sealed, even things which were from the foundation of the world, and the things which shall come from this time until the time of my coming, if he abide in me, and if not, another will I plant in his stead. 19 Wherefore, watch over him that his faith fail not, and it shall be given by the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, that knoweth all things. 20 And a commandment I give unto thee--that thou shalt write for him; and the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect; 21 For they will hear my voice, and shall see me, and shall not be asleep, and shall abide the day of my coming; for they shall be purified, even as I am pure. 22 And now I say unto you, tarry with him, and he shall journey with you; forsake him not, and surely these things shall be fulfilled. 23 And inasmuch as ye do not write, behold, it shall be given unto him to prophesy; and thou shalt preach my gospel and call on the holy prophets to prove his words, as they shall be given him.

v17-23 Rigdon is called to be watch over and guide Joseph (v. 17-19, 22), as well as act as a scribe for him (20-21). Inasmuch as he is free from the labor of acting as scribe, he is to teach and testify of the gospel (v. 23).

Sidney was about 13 years older than Joseph, and was an experienced preacher with considerable ecclesiastical experience. Acting as a mentor to Joseph would have been a natural relationship in the early years of the Church.

v20 This writing Rigdon was called to was that of Joseph's "translation" of the Bible:

I shall now return to the month of September, 1831. Joseph, at this time, was engaged in translating the Bible, and Sidney Rigdon was writing for him. About

the first of this month, Joseph came to the conclusion to remove himself and clerk, as well as their families, to the before-mentioned town of Hiram, in order to expedite the work. They moved to the house of Father John Johnson, and lived with him in peace until the following March (Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, page 218)

24 Keep all the commandments and covenants by which ye are bound; and I will cause the heavens to shake for your good, and Satan shall tremble and Zion shall rejoice upon the hills and flourish; 25 And Israel shall be saved in mine own due time; and by the keys which I have given shall they be led, and no more be confounded at all. 26 Lift up your hearts and be glad, your redemption draweth nigh. 27 Fear not, little flock, the kingdom is yours until I come. Behold, I come quickly. Even so. Amen.

v24-27 A general conclusion where the Lord admonishes His followers to be faithful until the end.

v24 "heavens to shake for your good", cf. D&C 21:6.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 35

Below are Joseph Smith's brief comments on the revelation, then John Whitmer's comments on Rigdon's conversion, then Parley P. Pratt's comments on his affiliation and then preaching to Rigdon, and finally a lengthy biography of Rigdon.

This section was published in the Book of Commandments in 1835, and in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835. It was published in the Times and Seasons, volume 4, number 21, pages 320-321, dated September 15, 1843. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 2, pages 18-19, dated July, 1844.

Excerpt from History of the Church

In December Sidney Rigdon came to inquire of the Lord, and with him came Edward Partridge; the latter was a pattern of piety, and one of the Lord's great men. Shortly after the arrival of these two brethren, thus spake the Lord:

[text of D&C 35 & D&C 36 quoted]
(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, page 128)

Excerpt from Book of John Whitmer

And now it came to pass, that before they proceeded, on their journey from this place, there was a man whose name was Sidney Rigdon, he having been an instrument in the hand of the Lord of doing much good. He was in search of truth, consequently he received the fullness of the gospel with gladness of heart, even the Book of Mormon, it being what he was in search after, notwithstanding it was some days before he obtained a witness from the Lord, of the truth of his work. After several days the Lord heard his cries, and answered his prayers, and by vision showed to him that this emanated from Him and must remain, it being the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, first unto the Gentiles and then unto the Jews.

Now it came to pass, after Sidney Rigdon, was received into this Church, that he was ordained an elder, under the hands of Oliver Cowdery. He having much anxiety to see Joseph Smith, Jr., the Seer whom the Lord had raised up in these last days.

Therefore he took his journey to the state of New York, where Joseph resided.

There was another man whose name is Edward Partridge who was also desirous, to see the Seer, therefore, he accompanied Sidney, and journeyed with him, to behold this man of God, even Joseph Smith, Jr., he being desirous to know the truth of these things: But not having confidence enough to inquire at the hand of God. Therefore he sought testimony of man, and he obtained it, and received the truth and obeyed the divine requirements and was also ordained an elder unto the Church, to preach repentance and remission of sins, unto this idolatrous generation. Wherefore, after Sidney Rigdon had been at Palmyra a few days he proclaimed the gospel, in those regions round about, at which the people stood trembling and amazed, so powerful were his words, and some obeyed the gospel and came forth out of the water, rejoicing with joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. From thence he journeyed to Fayette, where Joseph lived, and there he also proclaimed the gospel in the regions round about and there were numbers added. Now in those days Sidney Rigdon was desirous to have the Seer enquire of the Lord, to know what the will of the Lord was concerning him. Accordingly Joseph enquired of the Lord, and these are the words that were spoken to him:

[text of D&C 35 quoted]

(John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 1, paragraphs 2-4)

Excerpts from Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt

Eighteen months had passed since our settlement in the wilderness. The forest had been displaced by the labors of the first settlers for some distance around our cottage. A small frame house was now our dwelling, a garden and a beautiful meadow were seen in front, flowers in rich profusion were clustering about our door and windows; while in the background were seen a thriving young orchard of apple and peach trees, and fields of grain extending in the distance, beyond which the forest still stood tip in its own primeval grandeur, as a wall to bound the vision and guard the lovely scene. Other houses and farms were also in view, and some twenty children were returning from the school actually kept by my wife, upon the very spot where two years before I had lived for months without seeing a human being. About this time one Mr. Sidney Rigdon came into the

neighborhood as a preacher, and it was rumored that he was a kind of Reformed Baptist, who, with Mr. Alexander Campbell, of Virginia, a Mr. Scott, and some other gifted men, had dissented from the regular Baptists, from whom they differed much in doctrine. At length I went to hear him, and what was my astonishment when I found he preached faith in Jesus Christ, repentance towards God, and baptism for remission of sins, with the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost to all who would come forward, with all their hearts, and obey this doctrine!

Here was the ancient gospel in due form. Here were the very principles which I had discovered years before; but could find no one to minister in. But still one great link was wanting to complete the chain of the ancient order of things; and that was, the authority to minister in holy things-the apostleship, the power which should accompany the form. This thought occurred to me as soon as I heard Mr. Rigdon make proclamation of the gospel. Peter proclaimed this gospel, and baptized for remission of sins, and promised the gift of the Holy Ghost, because he was commissioned so to do by a crucified and risen Saviour. But who is Mr. Rigdon? Who is Mr. Campbell? Who commissioned them? Who baptized them for remission of sins? Who ordained them to stand up as Peter? Of course they were baptized by the Baptists, and ordained by them, and yet they had now left them because they did not administer the true gospel. And it was plain that the Baptists could not claim the apostolic office by succession, in a regular, unbroken chain from the Apostles of old, preserving the gospel in its purity, and the ordinances unchanged, from the very fact that they were now living in the perversion of some, and the entire neglect of others of these ordinances; this being the very ground of difference between the old Baptists and these Reformers.

Again, these Reformers claimed no new commission by revelation, or vision from the Lord, while they had not the least shadow of claim by succession.

It might be said, then, with propriety: "Peter I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?"

However, we were thankful for even the forms of truth, as none could claim the power, and authority, and gifts of the Holy Ghost-at least so far as we knew.

After hearing Mr. Rigdon several times, I came out, with a number of others, and embraced the truths which he taught. We were organized into a society, and frequently met for public

worship. (Parley P. Pratt, Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, pages 13-14)

It was now October, 1830. A revelation [D&C 32:1-3] had been given through the mouth of this Prophet, Seer and Translator, in which Elders Oliver Cowdery, Peter Whitmer, Ziba Peterson and myself were appointed to go into the wilderness, through the western States, and to the Indian territory. Making arrangements for my wife in the family of the Whitmers, we took leave of our friends and the church late in October, and started on foot.

After traveling for some days we called on an Indian nation at or near Buffalo; and spent part of a day with them, instructing them in the knowledge of the record of their forefathers. We were kindly received, and much interest was manifested by them on hearing this news. We made a present of two copies of the Book of Mormon to certain of them who could read, and repaired to Buffalo. Thence we continued our journey, for about two hundred miles, and at length called on Mr. Rigdon, my former friend and instructor, in the Reformed Baptists Society. He received us cordially and entertained us with hospitality.

We soon presented him with a Book of Mormon, and related to him the history of the same. He was much interested, and promised a thorough perusal of the book.

We tarried in this region for some time, and devoted our time to the ministry, and visiting from house to house.

At length Mr. Rigdon and many others became convinced that they had no authority to minister in the ordinances of God; and that they had not been legally baptized and ordained. They, therefore, came forward and were baptized by us, and received the gift of the Holy Ghost by laying on of hands, and prayer in the name of Jesus Christ.

The news of our coming was soon noised abroad, and the news of the discovery of the Book of Mormon and the marvelous events connected with it. The interest and excitement now became general in Kirtland, and in all the region round about. The people thronged us night and day, insomuch that we had no time for rest and retirement. Meetings were convened in different neighborhoods, and multitudes came together soliciting our attendance; while thousands flocked about us daily; some to be

taught, some for curiosity, some to obey the gospel, and some to dispute or resist it.

In two or three weeks from arrival in the neighborhood with the news, we had baptized one hundred and twenty-seven souls, and this number soon increased to one thousand. The disciples were filled with joy and gladness; while rage and lying was abundantly manifested by gainsayers; faith was strong, joy was great, and persecution heavy.

We proceeded to ordain Sidney Rigdon, Isaac Morley, John Murdock, Lyman Wight, Edward Partridge and many others to the ministry; and, leaving them to take care of the churches and to minister the gospel, we took leave of the saints and continued our journey. (Parley P. Pratt, Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, pages 35-36)

Excerpt from Encyclopedia of Mormonism

Sidney Rigdon (1793-1876) was one of Joseph Smith's closest friends and advisers. He was also a renowned early convert to the Church, its most persuasive orator in the first decade, and First Counselor in the First Presidency from 1832 to 1844. Following the Prophet Joseph Smith's martyrdom, Rigdon became one of the Church's best-known apostates.

Rigdon was born February 19, 1793, on a farm in St. Clair Township, near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the fourth child and youngest son of William and Nancy Briant Rigdon. In 1817, while supporting his widowed mother on the family farm, Rigdon experienced Christian conversion and a year later qualified himself to become a licensed preacher with the Regular Baptists. He moved to eastern Ohio to preach under the tutelage of Adamson Bentley, a popular Baptist minister, and in June 1820 he married Phebe Brooks, Bentley's sister-in-law. After ordination as a Baptist minister, Rigdon became pastor of the First Baptist Church in Pittsburgh in 1821. Famed for his dynamic preaching, Rigdon attracted listeners until his congregation became one of the largest in the city. One of his critics, William Hayden, described him as being of "medium height, rotund in form; of countenance, while speaking, open and winning, with a little cast of melancholy. His action was graceful, his language copious, fluent in utterance, with articulation clear and musical" (quoted in Chase, p. 24).

Throughout his early ministry, Rigdon kept looking for the pure New Testament church that practiced laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost and healing the sick. Drawn to Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott, fellow ministers with similar views, Rigdon associated with leading members of the Mahoning Baptist Association, the forerunner of the restorationist Disciples of Christ movement. In 1826 he became the pastor of a Grand River Association congregation in Mentor, Ohio. In 1830, however, Rigdon broke with Campbell and Scott, who went on to form the Disciples of Christ, while Rigdon established a communal "family" near Kirtland.

In late October 1830 four Mormon missionaries visited Rigdon in Ohio. One was Parley P. Pratt, whom Rigdon had converted to the reformed Baptists a year earlier. Pratt told Rigdon about the Book of Mormon and the restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith. After two weeks of earnest investigation, Rigdon announced that he believed the new church to be the true apostolic church restored to the earth. In mid-November 1830 he was baptized and ordained an elder. More than a hundred members of his Kirtland congregation and common stock community followed him into the Church.

Rigdon, along with Edward Partridge, a young hatter who was interested in Mormonism, left almost immediately for Fayette, New York, to meet Joseph Smith. After their arrival, a revelation to Joseph commended Rigdon for his previous service, but called him to "a greater work," including that of scribe to the Prophet on his "new translation" of the Bible then under way (D&C 35). In December 1830, Smith, with Rigdon's help, worked on the manuscript that eventually became the seventh and eighth chapters of the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price. Rigdon's report of the harvest of souls in the Mentor-Kirtland area in Ohio may have encouraged Joseph to ask for guidance on moving the headquarters of the Church; in December 1830 a revelation commanded them to leave New York for Ohio (D&C 37; cf. 38). On February 1, 1831, Joseph and Sidney arrived in Kirtland, where they renewed their work on the inspired translation of the Bible.

In the summer of 1831, Joseph, Sidney, and other leaders journeyed to Independence, Missouri, which a revelation identified as the location of the latter-day Zion and the New Jerusalem. Sidney was instructed to dedicate the land of Zion for the gathering of the Saints and to write a description of

the country for publication (D&C 58:50). Upon their return to Ohio, Joseph and Sidney resumed the translation of the scriptures, and on February 16, 1832, they jointly received the vision of the degrees of glory that is now Doctrine and Covenants section 76. In March 1832 they were brutally attacked by a mob and tarred and feathered. Sidney received head injuries that occasionally affected his emotional stability for the rest of his life. His friend Newel K. Whitney said that thereafter he was "either in the bottom of the cellar or up in the garrett window" (Chase, p. 115).

In March 1833 Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams were formally set apart as counselors to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency. Sidney had already been called as a counselor to Joseph a year earlier, before there was a First Presidency. In 1833 Rigdon was also called to be a "spokesman" for the Church and for Joseph Smith. Rigdon was promised that he would be "mighty in expounding all scriptures" (D&C 100:11). At this same time, Joseph said of him, "Brother Sidney is a man whom I love, but he is not capable of that pure and steadfast love for those who are his benefactors that should characterize a President of the Church of Christ. This, with some other little things, such as selfishness and independence of mind...are his faults. But notwithstanding these things, he is a very great and good man; a man of great power of words, and can gain the friendship of his hearers very quickly. He is a man whom God will uphold, if he will continue faithful to his calling" (HC 1:443).

In 1834 Rigdon assisted in recruiting volunteers for Zion's Camp and, while Joseph was away on that undertaking, had charge of affairs in Kirtland, including the construction of the temple. He was a leading teacher at the Kirtland school and helped arrange the revelations for publication in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Under the Prophet's direction, Sidney helped compose and deliver many of the doctrinally rich Lectures on Faith. He often preached long, extravagant biblically based sermons, notably one at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. In the persecution that followed the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society, Rigdon, along with Joseph Smith and other Saints, fled for their lives to Far West, Missouri, in 1838. There Rigdon delivered two famous volatile speeches, the Salt Sermon and the Independence Day oration, both of which stirred up fears and controversy in Missouri and contributed to the Extermination Order and the

Battle of Far West. With Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Rigdon was taken prisoner and locked up in Liberty Jail, but was released early because of severe apoplectic seizures.

Rigdon took an active part in the founding of Nauvoo and in 1839 accompanied Joseph Smith to Washington, D.C., to present the grievances of the Saints to the federal government. He was elected to the Nauvoo City Council and served also as city attorney, postmaster, and professor of Church history in the embryonic university projected for the city. Despite his many appointments, however, he was nearly silent during this time and often sick. He was accused of being associated with John C. Bennett and other enemies of the Church in their seditious plans to displace Joseph Smith, but this he always denied. He did not endorse the principle of plural marriage, although he never came out in open opposition to it. Joseph Smith eventually lost confidence in Rigdon and in 1843 wished to reject him as a counselor, but because of the intercession of Hyrum Smith, retained him in office.

Early in 1844, when Joseph Smith became a candidate for president of the United States, Rigdon was nominated as his running mate and he established residence in Pittsburgh to carry on the campaign. He was there when news arrived of Joseph Smith's murder. He hastened to Nauvoo to offer himself as a "guardian of the Church," promising to act as such until Joseph Smith was resurrected from the dead. His claims were duly considered, but at a memorable meeting in Nauvoo on August 8, 1844, Church members rejected him as guardian. The Twelve Apostles were sustained as the head of the Church. When he undertook to establish a rival leadership, Rigdon was excommunicated in September 1844 and left with a few disciples for Pennsylvania, where they organized a Church of Christ. Acting erratically, he lost most of his followers in less than two years. In 1863, he made another effort, founding the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion, which continued into the 1880s. From 1847 to his death in 1876, Rigdon resided in Friendship, New York, usually in a state of emotional imbalance and unhappiness. (Encyclopedia of Mormonism, entry for Rigdon, Sidney, pages 1233-1235)

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