

## **General Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 39-40**

These two sections address a person named James who had a rather short connection with Smith and the Church, approximately one or two days.

Up until the 2013 edition of the D&C, the person was identified as James Covill, a Baptist minister. With the 2013 edition, the name was changed to James Covel, a Protestant Methodist lay minister. See the historical comments for an explanation as to why the change was made.

## **Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 39**

This revelation is intended for one James Covel who was an older, apparently 60 years of age, Methodist lay minister at the time the revelation was received. There is no record of Covel being baptized, per the command in v. 10. It is known that Covel's interest waned quickly as is indicated by D&C 40, but the details as of why are unknown.

1 HEARKEN and listen to the voice of him who is from all eternity to all eternity, the Great I AM, even Jesus Christ-- 2 The light and the life of the world; a light which shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not; 3 The same which came in the meridian of time unto mine own, and mine own received me not; 4 But to as many as received me, gave I power to become my sons; and even so will I give unto as many as will receive me, power to become my sons.

5 And verily, verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth my gospel receiveth me; and he that receiveth not my gospel receiveth not me. 6 And this is my gospel--repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom.

v1-6 These verses form a standard introductory authority statement (v. 1-4), and combines it with a gospel summary (v. 5-6). Compare v. 1-4 with D&C 34:1-4, D&C 35:1-2. For the gospel summary verses (v. 5-6), compare D&C 25:1, 3 Ne. 11:31-41 and note the proselytizing theme common to gospel themed passages.

7 And now, behold, I say unto you, my servant James, I have looked upon thy works and I know thee. 8 And verily I say unto thee, thine heart is now right before me at this time; and, behold, I have bestowed great blessings upon thy head; 9 Nevertheless, thou hast seen great sorrow, for thou hast rejected me many times because of pride and the cares of the world.

10 But, behold, the days of thy deliverance are come, if thou wilt hearken to my voice, which saith unto thee: Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on my name, and you shall receive my Spirit, and a blessing so great as you never have known.

11 And if thou do this, I have prepared thee for a greater work. Thou shalt preach the fulness of my gospel, which I have sent forth in these last days, the covenant which I have sent forth to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel. 12 And it shall come to pass that power shall rest upon thee; thou shalt have great faith, and I will be with thee and go before thy face. 13 Thou art called to labor in my vineyard, and to build up my church, and to bring forth Zion, that it may rejoice upon the hills and flourish. 14 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto thee, thou art not called to go into the eastern countries, but thou art called to go to the Ohio.

v7-14 These verses address Covell personally, specifically addressing his past (v. 7-9), present (v. 10), and future (v. 11-14).

v7-9 Covell's past foreshadows his future. In the past he has forsaken the Lord because of worldly things, and we learn from D&C 40 he does it again.

v9 This verse suggests, in general, pain and sorrow are a result of following after the cares of the world.

v10 "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on my name", a close paraphrase of Acts 22:16. A paraphrase like this from Paul's conversion story may have been offensive to Covell, given his 40 years of involvement in the Methodist and Episcopal Churches.

v11 The gospel went to all nations so that the Lord may gather all of Israel. As they were scattered, the gospel had to go to everyone in order to get Israel, cp. D&C 14:10, D&C 38:33.

v14 Being sixty years old, Covell had a long history of living in "the eastern countries", presumably what we would refer to today as the Northeastern United States. Covell is being called by the Lord to leave New York and move to Ohio with the rest of the Church, and build up Zion.

15 And inasmuch as my people shall assemble themselves at the Ohio, I have kept in store a blessing such as is not known among the children of men, and it shall be poured forth upon their heads. And from thence men shall go forth into all nations.

16 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, that the people in Ohio call upon me in much faith, thinking I will stay my hand in judgment upon the nations, but I cannot deny my word. 17 Wherefore lay to with your might and call faithful laborers into my vineyard, that it may be pruned for the last time. 18 And inasmuch as they do repent and receive the fulness of my gospel, and become sanctified, I will stay mine hand in judgment.

19 Wherefore, go forth, crying with a loud voice, saying: The kingdom of heaven is at hand; crying: Hosanna! blessed be the name of the Most High God. 20 Go forth baptizing with

water, preparing the way before my face for the time of my coming; 21 For the time is at hand; the day or the hour no man knoweth; but it surely shall come. 22 And he that receiveth these things receiveth me; and they shall be gathered unto me in time and in eternity. 23 And again, it shall come to pass that on as many as ye shall baptize with water, ye shall lay your hands, and they shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, and shall be looking forth for the signs of my coming, and shall know me.

24 Behold, I come quickly. Even so. Amen.

v15-24 The target audience shifts from Covell in specific to the ecclesia in general. Covell is called to gather to Ohio (v. 14), those who are will be blessed greatly (v. 15). Those who are in Ohio are asking the Lord to delay His judgements upon mankind (v. 16), but the only thing that can do that is the people repenting (v. 18). So, the Lord tells the ecclesia to call the nations of the earth to repent, be baptized, and be sanctified by the Holy Spirit (v. 17, 19-23).

v16-18 The only way to avoid Judgement is to individually repent. The advocacy of the righteous only goes so far, as was exhibited in Abraham's advocacy on behalf of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"stay mine hand", appearing in both v. 16 and 18 in different contexts. In v. 16, nobody has the power to stop the Lord's work (cf. Dan. 4:35, Alma 10:23, Morm. 8:26, Moro. 9:14, D&C 38:22, D&C 76:3), but in v. 18, the Lord says he will stop if the people repent (cf. 2 Sam. 24:16). This is the only passage in the Scriptures that makes this unequivocal statement. It is elsewhere implied (e.g., Lev. 26, Deut. 28), but this is the only place where it is made explicit.

Verse 18 also suggests the Day of the Lord, or Second Coming, is not a fixed time, but is event-driven and dependent upon the wickedness or righteousness of the people. The more wicked the people are, the more quickly it will come. The more righteous the people are, the less quickly it will come.

v20 This verse makes reference to the spirit of Elijah, cp. D&C 2.

v24 A terse ending indicating the Lord's coming is soon. Obviously, for anyone who dies prior to Second Advent, their coming before the Lord is a bit sooner.

## Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 39

Very little was known of the James Covill person, the Baptist minister, aside from Joseph's brief comment. Subsequent research indicated the person in question was in fact [James Covell, a Methodist minister](#) ([PDF link](#)).

The text was first published in Book of Commandments, pages 85-87, in 1833. It was published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants, pages 187-188, in 1835. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 4, number 23, pages 353-354, October 15, 1843. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 3, page 35, dated August, 1844.

### Excerpt from History of the Church

Not long after this conference of the 2nd of January closed, there was a man came to me by the name of James Covill, who had been a Baptist minister for about forty years, and covenanted with the Lord that he would obey any command that the Lord would give to him through me, as His servant, and I received the following:

[text of D&C 39 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, page 143)

Copyright © 2025 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.