

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 40

This section is a follow-up to D&C 39, wherein the promises made to Covell are withdrawn. While the section addresses one individual in specific, it serves to show the early church, only some 9 months old, how to deal with individual apostasy.

1 Behold, verily I say unto you, that the heart of my servant James Covell was right before me, for he covenanted with me that he would obey my word. 2 And he received the word with gladness, but straightway Satan tempted him; and the fear of persecution and the cares of the world caused him to reject the word. 3 wherefore he broke my covenant, and it remaineth with me to do with him as seemeth me good. Amen.

Whereas Covell had initially accepted the restored gospel (v. 1), he rejects it in the face of opposition (v. 2-3).

The section presents typical covenant rejection speech, cp. Matt. 13:1-23 (note that Matt. 13:14-15 quotes Isa. 6:9-10).

The text can be arranged as follows:

- A - (v. 1) He covenanted with Me
- B - (v. 2a) He received the word
- C - (v. 2b-c) Satan tempted him
 fears of persecution
 cares of world
- B - (v. 2c) He rejected the word
- A - (v. 3) He broke My covenant

v1 Response to 39:8.

v2 Echoes 39:9, this has been a persistent problem for Covell.

v3 This statement undoes the promises of 39:10-14.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 40

James Covell, a Protestant Methodist Minister, was interested in the restored gospel but rejected it the very same day (cf. D&C 39) and returned to associate with Methodists. We are left to speculate as to why. Doctrinal points that may have been problematic to Covell:

- 1) Baptism. Methodists were opposed to requiring baptism by immersion, allowing for sprinkling and pouring as well, did not require rebaptism for converts, and were not opposed to infant baptism. Covell was explicitly called to be rebaptised (cf. D&C 39:10).
- 2) Itinerant preaching. Covell had spent quite a bit of time traveling around the Northeast engaged in itinerant preaching when he was younger. Being called to do it again in Ohio (cf. 39:14), a place he had never been before, at the age of sixty may have been too much.
- 3) Centralized authority. Smith being the lone source of leadership authority in the Church was the opposite of the decentralized authority the Methodists were struggling with (e.g., the Methodist Protestant church had separated from the Methodist Episcopal church relatively recently over matters of centralized authority), and Covell sided with the Methodists who favored decentralized authority with short terms of leadership, to avoid pride and corruption.

Personal matters that might have been at issue:

- 1) James' two oldest sons, James Jr. and Samuel both entered into the Methodist ministry, following their father's example. Another son named Zenas, apparently after James' brother, their uncle, also joined the Methodist ministry.
- 2) James' older brother Zenas joined the Methodist ministry after James had, and two of Zenas' sons also entered into the Methodist ministry.
- 3) James had established a practice as a physician and pharmacist in New York City and in the local area.
- 4) James was sixty years old when asked to relocate to Ohio and engage in missionary work.

After declining the invitation to join the Church, Covell

returned to the Protestant Methodists and remained active with them until his death, after a brief period (approximately six months) of being "Removed" as a preacher from the rolls of Protestant Methodists ministers in the local conference which he was involved with.

The text of this revelation was first published in Book of Commandments, page 87, in 1833. It was published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants, page 188, in 1835. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 4, number 23, page 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

As James Covill rejected the word of the Lord, and returned to his former principles and people, the Lord gave unto me and Sidney Rigdon the following revelation, explaining why he obeyed not the word:

[text of D&C 40 quoted]

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

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