

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 49

While this section is primarily aimed at correcting or contradicting certain specific Shaker doctrines, it does reveal some interesting details and background on related points of doctrine.

The text can be arranged as a list addressing various points of Shaker doctrine:

- Introduction (v. 1-4)
- Shaker doctrines addressed (v. 5-22)
 - The 2nd Advent (v. 5-7)
 - Repent and be baptized (v. 8-14)
 - Marriage is ordained of God (v. 15-17)
 - Meat eating (v. 18-21)
 - Ann Lee (v. 22)
 - Signs of the Day of the Lord (v. 23-25)
- Conclusion (v. 26-28)

1 HEARKEN unto my word, my servants Sidney, and Parley, and Leman; for behold, verily I say unto you, that I give unto you a commandment that you shall go and preach my gospel which ye have received, even as ye have received it, unto the Shakers. 2 Behold, I say unto you, that they desire to know the truth in part, but not all, for they are not right before me and must needs repent. 3 Wherefore, I send you, my servants Sidney and Parley, to preach the gospel unto them. 4 And my servant Leman shall be ordained unto this work, that he may reason with them, not according to that which he has received of them, but according to that which shall be taught him by you my servants; and by so doing I will bless him, otherwise he shall not prosper.

v1-4 Introduction. Copely is called to go back and preach the gospel to his former Shaker compatriots.

v2 A surprisingly mild judgement on a set of doctrines that diverges considerably from what is detailed in the subsequent verses. One would assume this is because the Shakers were not indulging in the priestcrafts, materialism and worldliness that so often are the source of the Lord's wrath against other who have a "form of godliness, but deny the power thereof", cf. JS-H 1:19. This suggests what really gets the Lord mad is a corrupt walk, and not flawed doctrine.

5 Thus saith the Lord; for I am God, and have sent mine Only Begotten Son into the world for the redemption of the world, and have decreed that he that receiveth him shall be saved, and he that receiveth him not shall be damned-- 6 And they have done unto the Son of Man even as they listed; and he has taken his power on the right hand of his glory, and now reigneth in the

heavens, and will reign till he descends on the earth to put all enemies under his feet, which time is nigh at hand-- 7 I, the Lord God, have spoken it; but the hour and the day no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor shall they know until he comes.

v5-22 A number of particular Shaker doctrines are addressed and either contradicted outright, or compared to well known Biblical statements and shown to be flawed.

v5-7 The Second Advent. These verses indicate the Lord condescended to come to earth, was killed and then returned into heaven to assume His Throne. It also states, he is still currently sitting on that Throne and has not as yet left that Throne to return to the earth for His Second Advent. This being the case, He was not currently on the earth, as the Shakers believed, and the day of His arrival was unknown to man.

These verses contain some unusual and obscure third-person references where the Lord is referring possessively to His mortal tabernacle, the "Only Begotten Son". It is obscure because He refers to His mortal flesh as "mine Only Begotten Son", which is confusing because it sounds like the Father speaking of the Son. But this is definitely the Son speaking, cf. v. 28. Note in v. 6 the title "Son of Man" is used as well. This title is one Jesus frequently applied to himself in the third-person in the Gospels. Compare Isa. 53:10, 3 Ne. 1:14, D&C 29:1, D&C 93:4 for the Lord speaking in a possessive manner about His mortal flesh. See also 2 Ne. 30:2, Alma 37:9, D&C 19:16-18.

8 wherefore, I will that all men shall repent, for all are under sin, except those which I have reserved unto myself, holy men that ye know not of. 9 wherefore, I say unto you that I have sent unto you mine everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning. 10 And that which I have promised I have so fulfilled, and the nations of the earth shall bow to it; and, if not of themselves, they shall come down, for that which is now exalted of itself shall be laid low of power. 11 wherefore, I give unto you a commandment that ye go among this people, and say unto them, like unto mine apostle of old, whose name was Peter: 12 Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus, who was on the earth, and is to come, the beginning and the end; 13 Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, according to the holy commandment, for the remission of sins; 14 And whoso doeth this shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, by the laying on of the hands of the elders of the church.

v8-14 Repent and be baptized. These verses recount what the LDS Church terms the First Principles and Ordinances of the Gospel,

and cite well known Biblical references to their institution (v. 11) and eternal nature (v. 9, 11). The Shakers did not consider water baptism essential.

v8 "except those which I have reserved unto myself, holy men that ye know not of", this is an obscure reference. It could be referring to something along the lines of 1 Ki. 18:4, 1 Ki. 19:18, or to the City of Enoch (cf. D&C 45:12).

Hyrum M. Smith and Janne Sjodhal, in their Doctrine and Covenants Commentary suggest the Lord is referring to the translated John the Beloved and the Three Nephites. Joseph Fielding Smith in volume 2 of Answers to Gospel Questions, and a number of other works, forwards the same. Given the similarity of the language to that of 1 Ki. 18:4, it seems more likely the Lord is making reference to something along those lines.

15 And again, verily I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man. 16 wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation; 17 And that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made.

v15-17 Marriage is ordained of God. The doctrine of celibacy is rejected. Note the implication of monogamy in v. 16 employing a paraphrase of Gen. 2:24. Also note the implication of the premortal existence of man in v. 17.

18 And whoso forbiddeth to abstain from meats, that man should not eat the same, is not ordained of God; 19 For, behold, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have in abundance. 20 But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin. 21 And wo be unto man that sheddeth blood or that wasteth flesh and hath no need.

v18-21 The eating of the flesh of animals is endorsed, cp. D&C 89:12-13. The Lord indicates animals may be used for food and clothing, so that people can live comfortably.

But, the Lord's endorsement of abundance does not justify materialism or an unequal distribution of wealth, which leads to the sinful worship of mammon (v. 20). It also does not justify the killing of animals where there is no need for food or clothing, in fact doing so results in woes upon the person who does (v. 21).

There are two underlying issues being addressed here. First

is the Shaker doctrine of abstaining from Pork products, following along the lines of the Law of Moses. The Lord is stating flatly that whoever presents such a thing as doctrine "is not ordained of God". As the Lord lifted the Law of Moses ban on pork and all things unclean under the Law of Moses (cf. Acts 10:9-15), then why would He reimpose such a thing again?

The second is the Lord commenting on the austere and spare Shaker lifestyle. The "simple life" had become a part of their religion, where abstemiousness was taken as a sign of devotion. This is reflected in their crafts, for which they are most well known. In v. 19 the Lord makes it clear that such a spare life is not His intent, but that they might have abundance. And this abundance is to be used to help those in need and establish Zion, cf. D&C 101:75, D&C 104:18.

22 And again, verily I say unto you, that the Son of Man cometh not in the form of a woman, neither of a man traveling on the earth.

v22 This simple verse contradicts Ann Lee's claims to be or have the spirit of Jesus Christ in her and therefore be the Second Advent.

23 wherefore, be not deceived, but continue in steadfastness, looking forth for the heavens to be shaken, and the earth to tremble and to reel to and fro as a drunken man, and for the valleys to be exalted, and for the mountains to be made low, and for the rough places to become smooth--and all this when the angel shall sound his trumpet. 24 But before the great day of the Lord shall come, Jacob shall flourish in the wilderness, and the Lamanites shall blossom as the rose. 25 Zion shall flourish upon the hills and rejoice upon the mountains, and shall be assembled together unto the place which I have appointed.

v23-25 Three signs of the Day of the Lord that have yet to be fulfilled: the destruction associated with the Day of the Lord (v. 23, cp. Isa. 34), the redemption of Israel (v. 24, cp. Isa. 30), the establishment of Zion (v. 25, Isa. 52). If these three signs are predicted in the Bible as occurring with the Second Advent, and have not occurred, then the Second Advent cannot have occurred either. All three of these events are well attested to in the Bible, cf. Matt. 24.

v23 "shaken", from Haggai 2:6-7 the shaking is presented as the sifting out of the nations, but here a more literal reading is presented with the heavens and the earth being physically jolted and disturbed, cp. 3 Ne. 8. See comments on the D&C 21:6 figurative usage of "shake".

26 Behold, I say unto you, go forth as I have commanded you; repent of all your sins; ask and ye shall receive; knock and it shall be opened unto you. 27 Behold, I will go before you and be your rearward; and I will be in your midst, and you shall not be confounded. 28 Behold, I am Jesus Christ, and I come quickly. Even so. Amen.

v26-28 The section concludes with a superlative triple-repeat "behold", that appears to be aimed at the same subjects as v. 1-4. They are told to do what they have been commanded (v. 26), they are informed the Lord will support them in their endeavors (v. 27), and that this Lord God who has been speaking to them is Jesus Christ, not Ann Lee, and He will be coming soon.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 49

Excerpt from History of the Church

At about this time came Lemman Copley, one of the sect called Shaking Quakers, and embraced the fulness of the everlasting Gospel, apparently honest-hearted, but still retaining the idea that the Shakers were right in some particulars of their faith. In order to have more perfect understanding on the subject, I inquired of the Lord, and received the following:

[text of D&C 49 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, page 167)

Excerpt from the Book of John Whitmer

Lemman Copley one of the disciples, who was formerly a Shaker Quaker, he was anxious that some of the elders should go to his former brethren and preach the gospel. He also feared to be ordained to preach himself, and desired that the Lord should direct in this and all matters, and thus saith the Lord:

[text of D&C 49 quoted]

The above-named brethren went and proclaimed according to revelation given to them, but the Shakers hearkened not to their words, and received not the gospel that time; for they were bound up in tradition and priestcraft, and thus they are led away with foolish and vain imaginations. (John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 6, paragraphs 5-6)

Excerpt from the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt

I found the churches in Ohio had increased to more than a thousand members, and those in New York to several hundred. I also heard from my wife, from whom I had been absent about six months. The news was that the whole Church in the State of New York, including herself (for she had joined during my absence), was about to remove to Ohio in the opening spring. I, therefore, was advised to proceed no farther eastward, but to await their arrival. After visiting the saints a few days, I commenced to labor with my hands; but the Lord would not suffer me to continue long in this occupation. Some time in March, I was commanded of the Lord, in connection with S. Rigdon and L. Copley, to visit a people called the Shakers; and preach the gospel unto them. We fulfilled this mission, as we were commanded, in a settlement of this strange people, near Cleveland, Ohio; but they utterly refused to hear or obey the gospel. After this I paid a visit to the churches round about Kirtland. (Parley P. Pratt, Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, pages 47-48)

Journal entry by Ashbel Kitchell, Shaker's leader, excerpted from Joseph Smith and the Doctrine and Covenants

We were visited on Saturday evening by Sidney Rigdon and Lemam Copley, the latter of whom had been among us; but...had taken up with Mormonism as the easier plan and had been appointed by them as one of the missionaries to convert us.... We retired to rest, not knowing that they had then in possession what they called a revelation or message from Jesus Christ to us....

[On Sunday morning] they came into meeting and sat quietly until meeting was through, and the people dismissed; when Sidney Rigdon arose and stated that he had a message from the Lord Jesus Christ to this people; could he have the privilege of delivering it? He was answered, he could. He then said it was in writing; could he read it? He was told he might. He then read the following Message

[D&C 49 is quoted with only a few minor wording changes]

At the close of the reading, he asked if they could be permitted to go forth in the exercise of their gift and office - I told him...I wished to have nothing more to do with him [the God the missionaries represented] and as for any gift he had authorized them to exercise among us, I would release them & their Christ from any further burden about us, and take all the responsibility on myself.

Sidney made answer - This you cannot...do; I wish to hear the people speak. I told him if he desired it, they could speak for themselves, and stepped (sic) back and told them to let the man know how they felt; which they did in something like these words; that they were fully satisfied with what they had, and wished to have nothing do with either them or their Christ. On hearing this Rigdon professed to be satisfied, and put his paper by; but Parley Pratt arose and commenced shakeing (sic) his coattail; he said he shook the dust from his garments as a testimony against us, that we had rejected the word of the Lord Jesus.

Before the words were out of his mouth, I was to him, and said; - You filthy Beast, dare you presume to come in here, and try to imitate a man of God by shaking your filthy tail; confess your sins and purge your soul from your lusts, and your other abominations before you ever presume to do the like again. (Milton V. Backman and Richard O. Cowan, Joseph Smith and the Doctrine and Covenants, pages 55-56)

Copyright © 2013 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.