

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 54

Revelation aimed at Newel Knight concerning those in the Church who will not consecrate their properties. It is interesting to note the ancient Church had problems establishing the ideal of selfless consecration as well (cf. Acts 5).

1 Behold, thus saith the Lord, even Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, even he who was crucified for the sins of the world-- 2 Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, my servant Newel Knight, you shall stand fast in the office whereunto I have appointed you.

v1-2 Introduction. Verse 1 an authority statement and v. 2 an endorsement of Knight's servitude in his calling.

Note v. 1 is the identical statement as D&C 53:2 with respect to His being crucified for the sins of the world, but here it is an authority statement rather than a lead in for a command.

3 And if your brethren desire to escape their enemies, let them repent of all their sins, and become truly humble before me and contrite. 4 And as the covenant which they made unto me has been broken, even so it has become void and of none effect. 5 And woe to him by whom this offense cometh, for it had been better for him that he had been drowned in the depth of the sea. 6 But blessed are they who have kept the covenant and observed the commandment, for they shall obtain mercy. 7 Wherefore, go to now and flee the land, lest your enemies come upon you; and take your journey, and appoint whom you will to be your leader, and to pay moneys for you.

v3-7 The text is directed at Knight's "brethren", or the ecclesia. The text can be arranged as an inverted parallel, as follows:

- A - (v. 3) If your brethren desire to escape their enemies...
- B - (v. 4-5) The covenant has been broken, woe unto them
- B - (v. 6) Blessed are they who have kept the covenant
- A - (v. 7) Flee lest your enemies come upon you

v3 Protection from enemies is a typical covenant benediction, cp. Lev. 26:6-8, Ps. 109.

v4 "void and of none effect", cp. D&C 56:1-4.

v7 The statement in this verse is the result of them not being "truly humble before me and contrite." Had they been, then the Lord would have protected them from their enemies, now they will instead be put to flight by their enemies, cp. Deut. 28:25.

8 And thus you shall take your journey into the regions westward, unto the land of Missouri, unto the borders of the Lamanites. 9 And after you have done journeying, behold, I say unto you, seek ye a living like unto men, until I prepare a place for you.

v8-9 The Lord addresses Knight again. In v. 2 he is told to stand fast in his office, but here he is told to move his feet to Missouri.

10 And again, be patient in tribulation until I come; and, behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, and they who have sought me early shall find rest to their souls. Even so. Amen.

v10 Conclusion with the typical admonitions.

"they who have sought me early", this is a paraphrase of the KJV Proverbs 8:17. The NAS renders it "those who diligently seek me will find me", the JPS renders it "those who seek me will find me."

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 54

This section was first published in the Book of Commandments, 1833, pages 128-129. It was published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine & Covenants in 1835, pages 195-196. It was published in the Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 4, page 432, dated February 15, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 8, page 113, dated January, 1845.

Excerpt from History of the Church

The branch of the Church in Thompson, on account of breaking the covenant, and not knowing what to do, they sent in Newel Knight and other Elders, to ask me to inquire of the Lord for them; which I did, and received the following:

[text of D&C 54 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, page 180)

Excerpt from the Book of John Whitmer

At this time the Church at Thompson, Ohio, was involved in difficulty, because of the rebellion of Leman Copley. Who would not do as he had previously agreed. Which thing confused the whole Church and finally the Lord spoke to Joseph Smith, Jr., the Prophet saying:

[text of D&C 54 quoted]

(John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 8, paragraph 3)

Excerpt from Regional Studies in LDS History

Carrying out his assigned duties (see D&C 51), Bishop Edward Partridge settled as many as 100 Saints on the Copley farm. The majority of this number were from the Colesville Branch, but apparently not all. Ezra Thayre, a convert from Ontario County, New York, had previously come to Ohio, seemingly in company with the Prophet Joseph Smith, and was then settled on land consecrated by Copley in Thompson. Expectations for an amicable relationship were shattered by the emergence of serious internal problems. Deep divisions arose over the nature of the consecration of property among Leman Copley, Ezra Thayre, Newel Knight, and others at the site. Unable to bear certain criticisms leveled against him relative to the failure of the earlier mission to the Shakers and to irregularities in his

observance of the law of consecration, Copley let his faith in the enterprise quickly wane. John Whitmer said that Leman's rebellion "confused the whole church."

In the latter part of May or in early June 1831, Leman enlisted the aid of his former mentor, Elder Ashbel Kitchell, in an effort to repossess his land. He likewise begged to be reunited with the Shakers. Kitchell remarked, "After some consultation we concluded to give him [Leman] union, and help him through; and to accomplish this, I went home with him, and held a meeting in the dooryard, among the Mormons." A lively exchange ensued between Elder Kitchell on one side and Newel Knight and his father, Joseph Knight, Sr., on the other. Newel Knight simply specified, "We had not labored long before the above named Copley broke the engagement which he made with us. At this time I went to Kirtland to see Brother Joseph and to attend a conference which had been appointed to commence on the sixth of June 1831 [June 3-5, 1831]."

When faced with the dilemma of the Colesville Saints, the Prophet sought divine assistance and was directed to instruct the branch to leave the Thompson area and move immediately to Missouri (D&C 54). Parties on both sides of the tumultuous situation at the Copley farm received a sound rebuke for their participation (D&C 54, 56). Ezra Thayre was given a particularly direct chastisement and called upon to "repent of his pride, and his selfishness, and obey the former commandment which [the Lord had] given him concerning the place upon which he lives" (D&C 56:8). A synopsis of the action taken against Leman Copley was expressed by Joseph Knight, Jr., who recorded, "The man was turned out of the church for bad conduct;...he then began to persecute us and we had to leave his farm and pay sixty dollars damage for putting up his houses and planting his ground.

(Excerpt from an essay entitled "The Colesville Branch in Kaw Township, Jackson County, Missouri, 1831 to 1833" by Larry C. Porter, published in Regional Studies in LDS History Series: Missouri, edited by Arnold K. Garr and Clark V. Johnson, pages 281-283)

Excerpt from Journal of Jared Carter

...from here we went to Kirkland where we found Joseph the sear here we found that preperperatoins was made for the Church from which we were to settle in Tomson we went from here to thomspon and there continued until the boddy of the church arrived to fairport and then we mooved out things & families to Thomson

here we had some severe trials a number of the members of the Church and I myself must acknowledge that here was one of the most trying seasons that I ever experienced for the grand adversary of all souls gained great power over some of my Brethren and among the rest of my Brethren I was most shockingly tempted but yet notwithstanding the many temptations I had I did not at all doubt but that the work of God that I had engaged in was the work of God but I greatly feared because of such manner of communication and became greatly confused because of what took place but more especially in consequence of Newell's addresses to me for his Statement threatens and commands to me was like putting new wine in to old bottles for notwithstanding I then possessed the principle as follows that not for the whole world would I have disobeyed God in one of the least of his commands yet he came to me in the following language the Spirit you have is not the true spirit and the winds never obeyed [he claimed to have calmed the winds so the boat could bring them to Ohio] There never was any healing under your prayers you never wrought any miracles unless it was by the power of the devil and now says he I command you to repent in the name of Christ or you will be cast off as he spoke these sentences the words dropped in to my mind which words are found in the book of Mormon no man can do a miracle in the name of Christ except he be every whit cleansed from sin he spoke some time after the above mentioned form affirming that he was filled with the Spirit of the Lord after hearing him sometime I said unto him what shall I do have you seen any thing in my daily walk and conversation that is contrary to the commandments of God he answered no I have not seen but that you and your wife were as exemplary as any of the whole church after having this interview I had some of the most severe trials but I did not believe all brother Newell said was exactly so for if I had I should as soon believed that there was no God as anything else (Jared Carter Journal, pages 11-14, in the collections of the History Department of the Church, also quoted in Robert J. Woodford's Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants, volume 2, page 701).

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