

## Section 49

---

Ann Lee and her family were early Shakers, or members of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, as they called themselves. At age 22, Ann believed she had a revelation that she was to be God's messenger. She became the leader of the group in 1772 and led her few followers from England to America two years later, settling near Albany, New York.

The Believers struggled during the American Revolution but gradually gained momentum from the same series of spiritual awakenings that gave rise to the Restoration. Having lost all four of her children to death as infants before being abandoned by her adulterous husband, Lee died in 1784. The Believers continued to thrive in America, however, leading to the establishment of several communities including North Union, Ohio, just a few miles from Joseph Smith in Kirtland.<sup>1</sup> The Saints and the Believers were neighborly and traded with each other.<sup>2</sup>

The Believers believed that Christ instituted God's first church, which subsequently apostatized. They believed, therefore, that God would restore his church. Believers acknowledged the goodness of "real reformers" but, asserting that both Catholic and Protestant Christianity were apostate from Christ's church, they held that "a true Church could have originated only by a new revelation from God to some one person."

---

<sup>1</sup> F.W. Evans, *Believers Compendium* (1859), chapter XI.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence R. Flake, "A Shaker View of a Mormon Mission," *BYU Studies* 20:1 (1979): 94–99.

They believed that George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, prepared the world for God to establish his church again. Then “arose Ann Lee and her little company, to whom Christ appeared the second time.” They held that Ann Lee, “by strictly obeying the light revealed within her, became righteous even as Jesus was righteous. She acknowledged Jesus Christ as her Head and Lord, and formed the same character as a spiritual woman that he formed as a spiritual man.” She was, in a sense, “the second appearing of Christ.”

Believers held that marriage was a worldly, not divine, institution (citing Matthew 22:30) and that sexual relations were ungodly. The choice to leave the world and live celibately was, in Shaker terms, to “take up the cross.” They rejected resurrection and looked forward to shedding their flesh at death to live a wholly spiritual afterlife. They believed in individual moral agency, noting that only those who chose to obey the Lord would be saved, and that coercion was wrong. They believed in confessing sin but not in the need for redeeming ordinances such as baptism.

Believers advocated temperance, including eating meat sparingly, if at all. Shaker explanations for worshipping God by singing and dancing sound like D&C 136:28, where the Lord acknowledges that repentant, forgiven souls long to sing and dance as forms of prayer and thanksgiving. Believers taught consecration and stewardship of property. They rejected all forms of exploitation—especially men of women, capital owners of laborers, and mankind of the environment. They envisioned God as both Father and Mother. They spoke of “our Eternal Heavenly Mother,” citing Genesis 1:27—“Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness. So God created man in his own image, *male* and *female*.”<sup>3</sup>

Oliver Cowdery spent a few days among the North Union Believers and left several copies of the Book of Mormon with them in 1830, promising to return. Ashbel Kitchell, their large, impressive leader, kept thinking about Oliver's teachings. He decided that “if God had any hand in that work, he would inform me by some means, that I might know what to do, either by letting me have an interview with an angel, or by some other means give me knowledge of my duty.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> F.W. Evans, *Believers Compendium* (1859), chapters III–X.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence R. Flake, “A Shaker View of a Mormon Mission,” *BYU Studies* 20:1 (1979): 94–99.

A Believer named Leman Copley embraced the restored gospel. In May 1831 he came to Joseph “apparently honest hearted, but still retaining ideas that the Believers were right in some particulars of their faith; and, in order to have a more perfect understanding on the subject,” Joseph’s history says, “I inquired of the Lord and received the following revelation.”<sup>5</sup> The Lord revealed Section 49 because Joseph did not know exactly where Shaker beliefs and the restored gospel overlapped or diverged. Copley “was anxious that some of the elders should go to his former brethren and preach the gospel”<sup>6</sup> Section 49 assigned Sidney Rigdon and Parley Pratt to go with Copley to deliver section 49 to the Believers.

Section 49 clarifies the truth and error in Shaker doctrine. Perhaps that is why we hear Heavenly Father’s first-person voice in this revelation, a rare treat. Is he speaking to clarify the nature of the Godhead? Often in the Doctrine and Covenants we hear Christ speaking of himself as the Son of God. Section 49 ends that way, but most of the revelation is in Heavenly Father’s voice. This is one of only two places in the Doctrine and Covenants where we hear the Father speak of Christ as his Only Begotten Son.<sup>7</sup>

The revelation clarifies that Ann Lee was not Christ, nor is any man that comes along saying he is. Christ will come with power from heaven, having sent his angels in advance to sanctify the earth with fire. Section 49 clarifies that the Believers erred in thinking marriage is a temporary, human institution. Because the Believers did not understand premortal life and God’s plan to embody his children on earth and make them immortal by resurrection and fully divine by exaltation, their opposition to marriage and procreation was counter to his plan. They were thwarting it and section 49 told them so. Similarly, Believers erred in rejecting the ordinance of baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

---

<sup>5</sup> “[History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 \[23 December 1805–30 August 1834\]](#),” p. 112, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 30, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> “[John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847](#),” p. 26, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 30, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> “[Revelation, 7 May 1831 \[D&C 49\]](#),” p. 80, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 30, 2020.

Section 49 affirms Believers' beliefs that are aligned with restored truths. They and the Lord see eye to eye on the evils of inequality and on needlessly exploiting the environment (D&C 49:20–21).

Sidney and Leman left the day the revelation was given, a Saturday, and were in North Union in time to witness the Believers' evening meeting. They visited with Ashabel Kitchell that evening, discussing whether sex, even in marriage, was Christian. The elders spent the night among the Believers. Parley arrived in North Union early on the Sabbath and asked his companions how things were going. Sidney told him of the previous evening's discussion and that Ashabel had invited them not to debate doctrines but join the Believers for worship. Parley refused to sit by silently. "They had come with the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ," he contended, "and the people must hear it." The missionaries sat through the service respectfully. Afterwards Sidney rose and told them he had a message from the Lord Jesus Christ specifically for them. "Could he have the privilege of delivering it? He was told he might." Sidney read Section 49 and asked the Believers to receive it.

Here was the answer to Ashabel Kitchell's prayer that God would tell him whether the gospel Oliver Cowdery taught was true. Ashabel rejected it, saying,

The Christ that dictated that I was well acquainted with, and had been from a boy, that I had been much troubled to get rid of his influence, and I wished to have nothing more to do with him; 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.

"You cannot," Sidney Rigdon protested. "I wish to hear the people speak." Ashabel advised the Believers to make their feelings known. They echoed their leader and Sidney relented to their will. Parley Pratt rose, took off his coat, and shook it in front of them "as a testimony against us," Ashabel said, "that we had rejected the word of the Lord Jesus." "You filthy beast," he responded to Parley. "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.”<sup>8</sup>

What a scene that must have been. By Ashabel’s account he cowed the missionaries with his forceful rebuke, but Parley Pratt was not easily intimidated. He got back on his horse and went straight home to Kirtland. Sidney stayed for supper with the Believers. Leman stayed overnight and decided to reunite with the Believers. Years later, Parley summed up the drama with a single line. “We fulfilled this mission, as we were commanded, in a settlement of strange people, near Cleveland, Ohio; but they utterly refused to hear or obey the gospel.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence R. Flake, “A Shaker View of a Mormon Mission,” *BYU Studies* 20:1 (1979): 94–99.

<sup>9</sup> *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, revised and enhanced edition, edited by Scot Facer Proctor and Maurine Jensen Proctor (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 2000), 69–70.