
Leman Copley

(1781–1862)

D&C 49; 54: Introduction

Leman, a member of the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing (Shakers), left the Shaker movement and was baptized a member of the Church in March 1831. Although his commitment to his newfound faith appeared genuine, the Prophet Joseph Smith thought his conversion tenuous. He said, “[Leman] was apparently honest hearted, but still retain[ed] the idea that the Shakers were right in some particulars of their faith.”¹

Whether it was to bolster his religious convictions or share news of the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with his Shaker acquaintances, Leman “was anxious that some of the elders should go to his former brethren [the Shakers] and preach the gospel” in North Union, Ohio.² The Prophet Joseph was consulted about the matter. He wrote, “In order to have a more perfect understanding on the subject, I inquired of the Lord.” In response to his pleadings, in May 1831 he received a revelation that “refuted some of the basic concepts of the Shaker group” (D&C 49: Introduction).

Leman Copley, Sidney Rigdon, and Parley P. Pratt took a copy of Joseph’s revelation to North Union to share with the Shakers. Leman and Sidney arrived in the Shaker settlement first. They met with Ashbel Kitchell, a man of importance to the Shaker community. Kitchell wrote in his journal that Leman “had taken up with Mormonism as the easier plan.”³ After Parley P. Pratt arrived at North Union, the three attended a Shaker worship service. At the end of the service, Sidney Rigdon received permission to read the revelation that refuted some of the basic Shaker concepts to the assembled. The revelation was not well received. Parley P. Pratt wrote, “We fulfilled this mission, as we were

¹ Revelation, 7 May 1831 [D&C 49], 80. Joseph Smith Papers.

² John Whitmer. *An Early Latter Day Saint History: The Book of John Whitmer*, ed. F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launius (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1980), 60.

³ Ashbel Kitchell, “A Mormon Interview,” as cited in Lawrence R. Flake, “A Shaker View of a Mormon Mission,” *BYU Studies* 20 (Fall 1979): 97.

commanded, in a settlement of this strange people, near Cleveland, Ohio; but they utterly refused to hear or obey the gospel.”⁴

After their visit to North Union, Leman showed signs of being conflicted in his faith. Where he had allowed newly arriving Saints from Colesville, New York, to settle on his acreage in Thompson, Ohio, he now demanded they leave. In summer 1831 fellowship was withdrawn from Leman. Over a year later, his fellowship was reinstated in October 1832. Yet Leman continued to vacillate in his faith.

In 1834 he falsely testified in a court case against Joseph Smith. On April 1, 1836, the Prophet Joseph wrote,

[Leman Copley] confessed that he bore a false testimony against me in that suit, but verily thought, at the time, that he was right, but on calling to mind all the circumstances connected with the things that happened at that time, he was convinced that he was wrong, and humbly confessed it, and asked my forgiveness, which was readily granted. He also wished to be received into the Church again, by baptism, and was received according to his desire. He gave me his confession in writing.⁵

In 1837 as faithful Latter-day Saints were packing up their belongings in preparation to move to Missouri, Leman watched them but did not make plans to move from Ohio. It became apparent to Church leaders that his property and other holdings were more valuable to him than his faith.

Leman did not return to his former Shaker affiliation. In 1849 he joined James C. Brewster and Hazen Aldrich in their Church of Christ (Brewsterites). Before long, he left their faith to join a religious society led by Austin Cowles. He never committed total allegiance to Cowles. His interest remained in his land, which by 1850 was valued at \$3,500.⁶ Leman died a wealthy farmer in December 1862 at age 81.

⁴ Parley P. Pratt Jr., ed. *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 47.

⁵ History, 1838–1856, Volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844]. Joseph Smith Papers.

⁶ US Federal Census, 1850.