

SECTION 60

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 1835 Edition | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

This short revelation, known in modern editions as Doctrine and Covenants Section 40, serves as a divine post-mortem on the brief conversion and subsequent departure of James Covell (spelled Covill in the 1835 text). Historically, Covell was a Methodist minister who had covenanted to obey a previous revelation (modern Section 39) which commanded him to be baptized and preach the restored gospel in Ohio. However, Covell left the movement almost immediately (within 48 hours). This text serves to explain that departure to the early church. It utilizes the imagery of the Parable of the Sower to diagnose Covell's spiritual state: although his heart was initially 'right' and he received the word with 'gladness,' the text asserts that Satan tempted him immediately. The specific causes for his fall are identified as the 'fear of persecution' and the 'cares of the world.' Theologically, this section establishes that a covenant made with God through the prophet can be broken 'straightway,' resulting in a loss of standing and leaving the individual's fate in God's hands.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Speaker), James Covill (Covell), Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Satan

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. FRAGILITY OF SPIRITUAL STANDING

Assertion: An individual can be 'right before' God and covenant to obey, yet lose that standing almost immediately due to external pressure and internal fear.

"the heart of my servant James Covill was right before me... but straightway satan tempted him... wherefore he broke my covenant"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, particularly Reformed traditions, a genuine work of regeneration cannot be lost 'straightway' (Philippians 1:6). While Evangelicals acknowledge that superficial professors of faith fall away (1 John 2:19), this text asserts that Covell's heart was actually 'right before me' prior to his immediate fall. This implies a soteriology where one's standing with God is highly fluid, contingent on moment-by-moment obedience to prophetic commands, rather than a fixed status based on the finished work of Christ.

2. PROPHETIC INSIGHT INTO INTENT

Assertion: The prophet has the authority to declare the specific internal spiritual reasons (fear, cares of the world) for an individual's departure.

"the fear of persecution, and the cares of the world, caused him to reject the word"

Evangelical Comparison: This text functions as a divine validation of Joseph Smith's authority over a defector. By claiming revelation regarding Covell's internal motives, Smith insulates the movement from the criticism of a minister leaving. In Evangelicalism, while fruit is inspected, the specific internal workings of a man's conscience are generally left to God's judgment, not pronounced by a leader as binding revelation.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the language borrows heavily from the New Testament (Parable of the Sower), the application is fundamentally different. In the Bible, the 'Word' is the message of the Kingdom/Gospel. Here, 'the word' refers to a specific administrative directive given to Covell in the previous revelation. The theological gap lies in the nature of the Covenant. In this text, the covenant is a transaction of obedience: Covell promised to obey, he failed, so the covenant is broken. In Evangelical theology, the New Covenant is ratified by Christ's blood and received by faith, securing the believer despite their failures. This text presents a relationship with God that is fragile and dependent on human performance under pressure.

Shared Values:

The reality of Satan and temptation.; The danger of the 'cares of the world' choking spiritual life.; The necessity of courage in the face of persecution.

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Adds new, binding revelation that judges the heart of a specific individual, going beyond the scope of biblical authority.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide / Assurance – Suggests that being 'right before God' is a temporary state that can be lost 'straightway' through fear or hesitation to obey a command.

Semantic Warnings:

"Covenant"

In Text: A promise made by a human to obey a specific command from God/Prophet.

Evangelical: A sovereign administration of grace and promise initiated by God (e.g., Abrahamic, New Covenant).

Example: *In this text, Covell 'broke my covenant' by changing his mind about a mission. In Hebrews, Christ is the mediator of a 'better covenant' that is not based on human performance (Hebrews 8:6).*

"The Word"

In Text: The specific revelation/command given through Joseph Smith.

Evangelical: The Scriptures, the Gospel message, or Christ Himself (Logos).

Example: Covell rejected 'the word' by not going to Ohio; Evangelicals view rejecting the Word as rejecting Christ's offer of salvation.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined here as enduring to the end in obedience to the prophet's revelations.

How Attained: By keeping covenants to obey God's word (as delivered by Smith).

Basis of Assurance: Low assurance; standing can be lost 'straightway' due to temptation.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by making the 'covenant' dependent on the human agent's performance ('he covenanted... he broke').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Implicit Obligations:

1. Do not fear persecution.
2. Prioritize the prophet's commands over the 'cares of the world'.
3. Maintain covenants despite social pressure.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In this section, God says Covell's heart was 'right' but then he immediately broke the covenant. How does a person maintain their standing with God if it can be lost so quickly?
2. What was the specific 'word' that Covell rejected here? Was it the gospel of Jesus, or a specific command to go to Ohio?
3. How does this passage compare to Jesus's promise that 'no one will snatch them out of my hand' (John 10:28)?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The struggle with 'Cares of the World' – We all struggle with prioritizing the world over God. This is why we need a Savior who overcame the world for us, rather than a system that condemns us for our struggle. [John 16:33 - 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.']}

Spiritual Weight:

1. Fear of Failure [Severe] – The text creates a high-pressure environment where hesitation or fear is equated with breaking a covenant with God. Believers may feel they are constantly one mistake away from being

'rejected'.

2. Instability of Identity [Moderate] – If a man can be 'right before God' and then 'satan tempts him' resulting in immediate fall, the believer has no solid ground for assurance. Their identity as a child of God is volatile.

PISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Acceptance of Joseph Smith's testimony regarding the invisible spiritual war occurring in Covell's heart.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of Scripture and the fruit of one's life (Matthew 7:20), rather than a leader's subjective revelation about another person's private thoughts.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: January 6, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The name is spelled 'Covill' in 1835 but 'Covel' in historical records. The text is a reactionary document, written immediately after Covell's departure.