

Doctrine and Covenants Section 23 addendum



Inside the Joseph Knight home in Colesville, New York, where many meetings of the Colesville Branch were held. Photo by D. Mangum, 2023

Newel Knight and the first miracle of the Church

Shortly after Section 23 was revealed, in which Joseph Knight, Sr. was told to pray vocally, Joseph Smith came to Colesville to preach. In that visit the young prophet asked Newel Knight to pray vocally which proved an overwhelming request. Newel wrote in his autobiography about the experience that led to Joseph Smith casting the devil out of him. Interestingly, what Newel recorded in his journal is copied from the Joseph Smith History.

From Newel Knight's autobiography/journal, Allen version¹ typescript, p. 2

On Sunday, April 11, 1830, the first public discourse preached by Latter Day Saints was delivered by Oliver Cowdery at the home of Peter Whitmer, Sr. During the same month the prophet honored me with a visit during which time I received a great manifestation, one long to be remembered, and in order that my children may know how the Lord has dealt with me, **I will make this extract from Joseph Smith History.**²

¹ This is called the Allen version, because it eventually was preserved by Newel's granddaughter Inez Knight Allen. After Newel Knight's death, his wife Lydia kept the original manuscript copy, and apparently she copied it over on hundreds of small pages. Those pages were handed down to Lydia's son Jesse, and then to Jesse's daughter, Inez Knight Allen, who probably was the typist.

² Several times in Newel's autobiography, Newel chose to include sections of Joseph Smith's history to describe experiences in which the two men had both participated. Joseph Smith's history up to 1834 was published serially in the Nauvoo *Times and Seasons* and accessible to Newel as he wrote his own history.

During this month of April, I [Joseph Smith] went on a visit to the residence of Mr. Joseph Knight of Colesville, Broome Co, N.Y. with whom and his family I had been previously acquainted, and of whose name I have above made mention as having been so kind and thoughtful towards us while translating the Book of Mormon. Mr. Knight and his family were Universalists,³ but were willing to reason with me upon my religious views and were as usually friendly and hospitable, We held several meetings in the neighborhood, and had many friends and some enemies. Our meetings were well attended and many began to pray vocally to Almighty God that he would give them wisdom to understand the truth.

Amongst those who attended our meetings regularly was Newel Knight, son of Joseph Knight. He and I had many serious conversations on the important subject of man's eternal salvation; we had got into the habit of praying much at our meetings and Newel had said he would try and take up his cross and pray vocally during the meeting, but when we again met together he rather excused himself; I tried to prevail upon him making use of the figure, supposed that he should get into a mudhole, he replied that provided he had got into a mudhole through carelessness, he would rather wait and get out himself than have others help him; and so he would wait until he should get into the woods by himself and there he would pray.

Accordingly, he deferred praying until the next morning, when he retired into the woods, where (according to his own account afterwards) he made several attempts to pray, but could scarcely do so, feeling that he had not done his duty, but that he should have prayed in the presence of others. He began to feel uneasy and continued to feel worse both in mind and body until upon reaching his own house his appearance was such as to alarm his wife very much.

He requested her to go and bring me to him. I went and found him suffering very much in his mind and his body acted upon in a very strange manner. His visage and limbs were distorted, and twisted in every shape and appearance possible to imagine, and finally he was caught up off the floor of the apartment and tossed about most fearfully. His situation was soon made known to his neighbors and relatives, and in a short time as many as eight or nine grown persons had got together to witness the scene.

After he thus suffered for a time, I succeeded in getting hold of him by the hand, when almost immediately he spoke to me and with great earnestness requested of me, that I should cast the devil out of him, saying that he knew he was in him, and that he also knew that I could cast him out. I replied, if you know that I can, it shall be done, and then almost inconsciously[sic] I rebuked the devil and commanded him in the name of Jesus Christ to depart from him, when immediately Newel spoke out and said that he saw the devil leave him and vanish from his sight. This was the first miracle which has

³ Universalists believe that God loves all people and eventually all will be reconciled to God and receive salvation; that there is no eternal hell, and punishment is temporary to purify oneself to live with God.

been done in this church or by any member of it, and it was done not by man, but it was done by God, and by the power of godliness; therefore let the honor and the praise, the dominion and the glory be ascribed to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for ever and ever, Amen.

The scene was now entirely changed, for as soon as the devil had departed from our friend, his countenance became natural, his distortions of body ceased and almost immediately the Spirit of the Lord descended upon him, and the visions of eternity were opened to his view. **He [Newel] afterwards related his experience as follows:**

I [Newel] now began to feel a most pleasing sensation resting upon me, and immediately the visions of heaven were opened to my view. I felt myself attracted upwards, and remained for sometimes enwapt [enwrapped] in contemplation, insomuch that I knew not what was going on in the room. By and by I felt some weight pressing upon my shoulder and the side of my head, which served to recall me to a sense of my situation, and found that the spirit of the Lord actually caught me up off the floor, and that my shoulder and head were pressing against the beams. All this was witnessed by many to their great astonishment and satisfaction, when they saw the devil thus cast out and the power of God and his Holy Spirit thus made manifest.

[Joseph Smith again writing about Newel]

As soon as consciousness returned, his [Newel's] bodily weakness was such that we were obliged to lay him upon his bed and wait upon him for some time. As may be expected, such a scene as this contributed much to make believers of those who witnessed it, and finally, the greater part of them became members of the Church."

[Newel continues writing]

During the last week in May I went on a visit to Fayette and was baptized by David Whitmer.

Additional background information from William Hartley's book, *They Are My Friends, A History of the Joseph Knight Family 1825-1850*, Grandin Press, 1986, pp 47-48:

Newel was the first of the Knight clan and the first Colesviller to join the new church. Newel attended the first conference of the Church, on June 9, 1830, at the Whittmer's. About thirty members and several investigators attended. When the conference ended, the Church had seven elders, three priests, and two teachers, none of whom were Knights. The conference, Newel said, included the sacrament, confirmations, ordinations, much good instruction, "and the Holy Ghost was poured upon us in a marvelous manner. Many prophesied, while others had the heavens opened to their view."

That conference resembled the early Christian's Day of Pentecost. Spiritual outpourings filled the meeting. Many were so overcome, Joseph Smith said, that "we had to lay them on beds or other convenient places." Their state was not unlike the Apostle Paul's during his vision on the road to Damascus. Among those overcome was Newel Knight "who had to be placed on a bed, unable to help himself." He could not understand why they put him on the bed for he felt no sense of the weakness.

Newel declared that he saw the heavens opened and beheld a vision, much like Stephen the Martyr's:

It was a scene long to be remembered. I felt my heart filled with love, with glory, and pleasure unspeakable. I could discern all that was going on in the room and a vision of futurity also suddenly burst upon me, and I saw, represented, the great work, which through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, was to be accomplished. I saw the heavens opened, I beheld the Lord Jesus Christ seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, and it was made plain to my understanding that the time would come when I would be admitted into his presence, to enjoy His society for ever and ever.

Diane Mangum, November 2024