

## Doctrine and Covenants Sections 52, 54, and 56



*Leman Copley had 1,000 acres of unbroken land in Thompson, Ohio that he consecrated and then withdrew, leaving the Colesville Saints without a place to live.*

### Newel Knight's Mission Call, Frustrations with Consecration, and the Revelations about Missouri

On June 3, 1831, Newel Knight traveled the 20 miles from his home in Thompson, Ohio, to Kirtland to attend the 4<sup>th</sup> conference of the Church.<sup>1</sup> Newel wrote in his journal that when Leman Copley broke his agreement to consecrate his farm land, Newel went to Kirtland to talk to Brother Joseph about it and to attend the conference.<sup>2</sup>

It was a large conference with about 2,000 in attendance.<sup>3</sup> A few men were ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood<sup>4</sup> and it was announced that Missouri was to “be the land of their inheritance, the land of promise,” Newel recorded in his journal. In fact, it was announced that

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<sup>1</sup> First conference of the church was June, 1830 in Fayette, New York. Second conference was the end of September, 1830, in Fayette New York when gathering was announced. Third conference was the end of December, 1830, in Fayette, New York, when the gathering place was announced as Kirtland, Ohio. Fourth Conference was in Kirtland, June 3-6, 1830. The revelation in D&C 52 came the next day.

<sup>2</sup> Newel Knight Journal, typescript. Page 13.

<sup>3</sup> Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, Deseret Book, 1973, p. 303.

<sup>4</sup> Newel Knight is listed in the minutes as already being an Elder as he attended the June conference. Sometime possibly shortly after that he was ordained to be High Priest, because by January 1832 he was noted as holding that office. An editor of Newel's journal reports he was made a High Priest at the June conference in Kirtland.

the next church conference would be held in Missouri on ground that would be consecrated for the City of Zion--where the New Jerusalem would be built.<sup>5</sup>

On June 7<sup>th</sup>, the day following the conference, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation that became Section 52. It mission calls for 28 men, most being sent to Missouri. Newel Knight is mentioned by name in D&C 52:32 and his companion was to be Selah Griffith.

Newel did not write a word about his mission call in his journal. Things were changing too quickly and the call was soon cancelled.

Soon after Section 52, a new revelation came: Section 54 directed Newel Knight that he remain the branch president of the Colesville Branch. In verse 2, Newel is told

“Behold, verily, verily, I say unto to you, my servant, Newel Knight, you shall stand fast in the office whereby I have appointed you.”

And in verse 8:

“And thus, you shall take your journey into the regions westward until the land of Missouri, unto the borders of the Lamanites.”

It was not just Newel going as a missionary to Missouri; the entire Colesville Branch was to go to the far western edge of the United States to the country’s border by the Lamanites.

Shortly after the Colesville group learned they were being sent to Missouri, another revelation came, D&C Section 56. In part, it instructed the church members in Thompson to repent of their “stiff-neckedness” and “rebellions.”

The new law of consecration never Implemented in Thompson in the brief time they were there. No doubt there was some grumbling and struggling among the Colesville group, but the problems were much bigger than a group of relatives and friends who did not get along at times. Newel as the Branch leader found himself embroiled in complicated issues.

It is suggested in the Doctrine and Covenants commentary that Ezra Thayre to some extent was responsible for the failure of the Colesville Saints to organize themselves under the law of consecration, and was possibly one of those being called on to repent in Section 56.<sup>6</sup> Leman Copley and Fredrick Williams also had property and money involved and they did not share the same vision with the church leaders on what consecration should be and pulled out.

Gerrit Dirkmaat, a presenter at the 2018 BYU Church History Symposium explained some of the problems in Thompson, Ohio with consecration.

“The consecration of properties was among the most radical of doctrines introduced into the newly formed Church of Christ. For a religion that was already discarding the standard creeds and traditions of Protestantism with the introduction of new canon and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Smith and Sjodahl, Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, p. 323.

the heralding of modern prophets, the consecration of properties went beyond theological professions of Christology or millennialism. This shared use of lands and resources struck at the heart of American capitalist culture, and not merely in a theoretical way.”<sup>7</sup>

“Deep division arose over the nature of consecrated property among Leman Copley, Ezra Thayer and Newel Knight, and others at the site,” wrote Dr. Larry Porter, BYU professor.<sup>8</sup> Part of the issue was that lands had been “consecrated” but not given with a deed.

One of Leman Copley’s friends, a Shaker elder who worshipped with Copley met with Newel Knight and Father Knight in an attempt to get Copley’s land back. Ashbell Kitchell wrote in his journal about a heated discussion with the two Knight men that went all through the night. Kitchell thought the Knights and people of their religion followed after their own lusts because he claimed they were married and therefore not celibate. Reportedly Newel responded with strong opinions. By morning the men had circled back around to talking about the property problems.

In the end, Copley simply evicted the Colesville Branch members and charged them \$60 each for “damages” to his property. Joseph Knight, Jr. sarcastically noted those damages were weeks of hard work “fitting up houses and planting his land.”<sup>9</sup>

Within a week the Colesville Branch was packed back in their wagons and headed to Missouri.

Diane Mangum, April 2025

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<sup>7</sup> Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Consecration and Controversy, Ezra Thayer, Leman Copley, and Early Conflicts over Consecrated Properties, present at the 2018 BYU Church History Symposium, printed in the book *Business and Religion, the Intersection of Faith and Finance*, Matthew Godfrey and Michael Hubbard MacKay, editors. Accessed online at <https://rsc.byu.edu/book/business-religion>, April 22, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> Larry D. Porter quoted in William G. Hartley, *Stand By My Servant Joseph*, Deseret Book, 2003, p.117

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 117-119.