
Sidney Rigdon

1793-1876

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Sidney Rigdon was originally a Baptist minister, later a follower of Alexander Campbell and a “Campbellite” preacher. He was a dynamic leader whose forceful oratory persuaded those audiences who heard him preach.

In the fall of 1830 Rigdon met the first four missionaries sent out by the newly created “Mormonite” movement (as it was then called). He read the Book of Mormon the missionaries were distributing and was baptized. Because of his conversion, and the respect he held among Campbellites, he led hundreds to convert to the new Mormonite movement. Shortly afterward he traveled to New York to meet Joseph Smith in December of 1830.

Because of Rigdon’s background, education and oratory, Joseph Smith enlisted his help with his movement. Rigdon became a scribe, counselor, and fellow president with Smith over the church when a “First Presidency” was organized.

Rigdon shared in persecutions with Joseph Smith, and was tarred and feathered by a mob in 1832, and was imprisoned in Missouri in 1838. When Smith ran to be President of the United States in 1844, Rigdon ran as his Vice-President.

Rigdon attempted to lead the Mormon church following the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, but was defeated in an election in August 1844 by Brigham Young and the twelve. Subsequent to his defeat, Young viewed Rigdon as a potential competitor, and had him excommunicated from the church the following month, September 1844.

Rigdon was accused of having co-written the Book of Mormon, but he denied the claim and explained it was in print before he first saw the text.

Rigdon agreed with Campbell's contention that a New Testament form of Christianity was not practiced by existing denominations. In Rigdon's view, however, the original church could not be spontaneously reestablished, but required God to confer authority to proceed. Rigdon saw in Joseph Smith an ingredient missing from Campbell's movement: Priesthood authority from God. Rigdon's conversion to Mormonism alienated him from Alexander Campbell, who criticized both Mormonism and Rigdon and resented the many Campbellites led into Mormonism by Rigdon.

Rigdon participated in a heavenly vision with Joseph Smith, in which the condition of mankind in the afterlife was revealed. The vision is known as Doctrine & Covenants, Section 76. The lengthy vision describes three levels of afterlife for man, following the resurrection. These are identified as the Telestial (lowest), Terrestrial (middle) and Celestial (highest). The lengthy vision relates in part the following,

“We, Joseph Smith, Jun., and Sidney Rigdon, being in the Spirit on the sixteenth day of February, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty-two—By the power of the Spirit our eyes were opened and our understandings were enlightened, so as to see and understand the things of God— Even those things which were from the beginning before the world was, which were ordained of the Father, through his Only Begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, even from the beginning; Of whom we bear record; and the record which we bear is the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is the Son, whom we saw and with whom we conversed in the heavenly vision. For while we were doing the work of translation, which the Lord had appointed unto us, we came to the twenty-ninth verse of the fifth chapter of John, which was given unto us as follows— Speaking of the resurrection of the dead, concerning those who shall hear the voice of the Son of Man: And shall come forth; they who have done good, in the resurrection of the just; and they who have done evil, in the resurrection of the unjust. Now this caused us to marvel, for it was given unto us of the Spirit. And while we meditated upon these things, the Lord touched the eyes of our understandings and they were opened, and the glory of the Lord shone round about. And we beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and received of his fulness; And saw the holy angels, and them who are sanctified before his throne, worshiping God, and the Lamb, who worship him forever and ever. And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all, which we give of him: That he lives! For we saw him, even on the right

hand of God; and we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God. And this we saw also, and bear record, that an angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God, who rebelled against the Only Begotten Son whom the Father loved and who was in the bosom of the Father, was thrust down from the presence of God and the Son, And was called Perdition, for the heavens wept over him—he was Lucifer, a son of the morning. And we beheld, and lo, he is fallen! is fallen, even a son of the morning!”

Following his excommunication Rigdon never returned to the faction led by Brigham Young, but instead made two attempts to organize a Church of Christ, both of which failed, one before his death and the other shortly after.