

Our Best Polygamy Story:
Weaving a New Garment for the History of Polygamy
in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Introduction

God’s vision and comprehension of the story of humanity is complete, omniscient. Occasionally, God gives individuals a vision of the real story: the past, present, and future of humanity as God sees it, which is reality. John the Revelator had such a vision, as did the Book of Mormon’s Nephi and Ether. Having a vision like this meant these men saw what actually happened during the Restoration, including how polygamy came into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, so if they were here they could tell us the real story in detail. But of course they’re not. We have the unsealed portion of the Book of Mormon which cries out to us from the dust, but it doesn’t give us names and dates, and since no one today claims to have seen a heavenly vision of how polygamy entered the Restoration, our narrative today relies upon the stories which have been handed down to us and the records which were available at the time the narrative was crafted.

Many feel that we should simply believe the story told by the people who were there to witness polygamy’s beginnings in the Church. Unfortunately, we can’t, because their stories conflict to such an incredible degree that it is literally impossible for everyone to have been telling the truth. There is a conspiracy in every conceivable version of this story, including the one we tell now, which is that Joseph Smith and other leaders secretly conspired to indoctrinate polygamy into the church.¹ This may be why for quite some time members were discouraged from digging into church history—it’s very messy. But if the parable of the vineyard applies here, in order to get healthy and good fruit, we have to get down in the dirt and dig around the roots; even be willing to toss some dung onto them.²

Our current polygamy narrative was presented in 2014 through the Gospel Topics essays and has been included in the new *Saints* books.³ No authors are listed, but it appears to be our church historians’ and general scribes’ best effort to make the different stories fit together in the most faith promoting way possible. But, for many people, hearing that God commanded a married father of seven (at the time) children to *marry* a 14-year-old girl, a

¹ From the Church’s essay, “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo”: “Plural marriage was introduced among the early Saints incrementally, and participants were asked to keep their actions confidential. They did not discuss their experiences publicly or in writing until after the Latter-day Saints had moved to Utah and Church leaders had publicly acknowledged the practice.”

² See the allegory of the olive vineyard in Jacob 5.

³ A historical summary of polygamy’s beginnings in the Church is found in “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo”, accessed online at: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng>.

peer of his oldest daughter, and then more teenagers and dozens of other women, some of them already married themselves, without the consent or even knowledge of his wife...perhaps the most charitable response to this narrative is to ask how such a story promotes faith in Jesus Christ.⁴

In Carol Lynn Pearson's book, *The Ghost of Eternal Polygamy*, she reconstructs our current polygamy narrative through a slightly altered lens: Sister Pearson tells our Latter-day Saint polygamy story as if Joseph Smith was wrong in his belief that God commanded polygamy. Joseph believed it, and instituted it, but we can see from the fruits that this was wrong and *we can let it go*. Interestingly, this is also *the overall message* of Brittany Chapman Nash's book *Let's Talk about Polygamy*, published by Deseret Book in 2021, which also makes the point that we are no longer expected to have a testimony of polygamy to be members in good standing.⁵

I am grateful for these sisters' efforts to make sense of our church history. I'm especially thankful for *The Ghost of Eternal Polygamy*, because the doctrine of many wives and concubines had been a psychological nightmare for me for decades. Nothing in Sister Pearson's book surprised me; I knew exactly what her book was the moment I saw the title, because this ghost lived with me. The reason I am so thankful for *The Ghost of Eternal Polygamy* is because it really served as a catalyst for me to personally seek out greater light and knowledge, specifically about polygamy in the eternities and the true nature of God.

Respectfully, though, this take on Joseph Smith just tastes terrible. It is a story in which a man sees God, has many angelic visitations and preaches Christ's gospel of peace and love, then—while still preaching these things—gets mixed up on marriage to such a degree that

⁴ Some cite polygamy as a type of Abrahamic sacrifice, but we must account for the most significant difference between Abraham's test and the Saints': Abraham's hand was stayed and Isaac was not sacrificed. Through that example all believers in the God of Abraham were invited to learn that his God did not demand child sacrifice as a form of worship, like the other gods of Abraham's day. The early Latter-day Saints, however, *did* sacrifice their marriages in order to be polygamous. Additionally, they were taught that polygamy was eternal, that the religion of the polygamists was "the only religion acknowledged" in heaven (quote from a discourse by Brigham Young on July 6, 1862, published in "The Deseret News" August 6, 1862, accessed online at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews2/id/45065/rec/32>).

⁵ "So, must modern Latter-day Saints share the same conviction as early Saints that polygamy was 'right'? As early as 1856, Saints who desired to receive ordinances in the temple, such as the endowment and sealing, were asked a series of questions to determine their commitment to the gospel and their worthiness to receive those sacred ordinances and blessings. Among those questions, they were asked if they had a belief in 'the plurality [plural marriage].' Although they were not required to practice polygamy, belief in it was a measure of faithfulness before ordinances were received. This affirmation has not been required since that time. The essential convictions of Latter-day Saints are defined in today's temple recommend questions—such as having faith in God the Father, a testimony of Jesus Christ as our Savior and Redeemer, and supporting and sustaining our leaders today. Plural marriage is not a commandment in our day, and a belief in it is not required to be a faithful, believing Church member." Nash, Brittany Chapman, *Let's Talk About Polygamy*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book: 110-111.

he publicly deceived the body of the church and broke his usually pregnant and nursing wife's heart by going behind her back to marry teenage girls and dozens of other women, all the while being an otherwise good person who testified to the true nature of God. While perhaps this is more believable than our conventional polygamy narrative, such a story still strains credulity.

To quote one of my extremely believing family members upon hearing the Gospel Topics story, in which Joseph was following God's command of polygamy, this person said: "That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard." A lot of members do not believe this story. This story has been the death of so many testimonies since its first telling that the damage is literally incalculable.

So I would like to tell what I consider to be the Latter-day Saints' best polygamy story if polygamy is a tare sown by satan, which I believe it is. The reason I am doing this is because President Nelson asked the women of the church to speak up with our impressions, our insights, and our inspiration.⁶ The writing and videos I have produced on this topic *are* my impressions, my insights, and my inspiration. I do not expect anyone to listen, nor do I expect any changes to be made because of what I say. But I'm going to say it because I've been asked, and because God has given me something to say: which is that I have seen who women are, and polygamy is not part of our divine nature nor destiny. It has never been the Divine intention, in any dispensation, for us to be given to men as concubines, or multiple wives. In fact, polygamy actually harms women's ability to fulfill our divinely ordained stewardship, in this life and the next.

Certainly humans have agency, and throughout history have justified ourselves in committing and commanding all sorts of works contrary to the Way shown by Christ. But God has never commanded polygamy because, for example, it allows more children to be born in a shorter amount of time, or for any of the other justifications we have told ourselves. We are blessed to be able to know that now because it's the time of the harvest, and this tare is discernible from the wheat: it has been scientifically measured and demonstrated that *none* of the supposed benefits of polygamy actually stand up to scrutiny. Regarding the example above, polygamy actually decreases the amount of total children born in a population.

This and many other evidentiary facts are laid out in the recent book, *The Evils of Polygyny: Evidence of Its Harm to Women, Men, and Society* by Rose McDermott.⁷ The analysis of data on polygyny, which is the specific term for a husband with multiple wives, found that every

⁶ Russell M. Nelson, "A Plea to My Sisters," October 2015 General Conference.

⁷ McDermott, Rose. *The Evils of Polygyny: Evidence of Its Harm to Women, Men, and Society*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018.

positive benefit associated with polygyny was anecdotal.⁸ The unique features that polygyny brings to families are all negative, statistically speaking. To assume polygamous Latter-day Saints following prophetic direction between roughly 1840 and 1890 were an exception is incorrect. The exact same detrimental effects of polygyny are measurable, statistically, across all polygynous groups, throughout time as far as there are records with data to measure. Whether they are the Mormon pioneers, devout Muslims, or atheists, the fruits are always the same.⁹ Might God be trying to teach us humans something important? Is there any other divine command or principle that results in no measurable benefit? Has God ever given a command or principle that produces universally bad fruit?

Because of this, I know the polygamy story we've been telling is not true: the doctrine of men having many wives and concubines did not come from God. It's uncomfortable to say that because it puts me at odds with our current narrative. However, our polygamy narrative has radically changed over the years; even historian and author of *Rough Stone Rolling* Richard Bushman said as much. In a group discussion which was then addressed by Dan Peterson, Brother Bushman answered a question about the challenge to faith when members are confronted with church history that doesn't match what they were taught by the missionaries and in Sunday School. As part of his answer he said:

"The dominant narrative is not true, it can't be sustained, so the church has to absorb all this new information or it will be on very shaky grounds—and that's what it's trying to do—and it'll be a strain for a lot of people, older people especially, but I think it has to change. Elder Packer had this sense of protecting the little people...but the price of protecting the grandmothers was the loss of the grandsons. They've got a story that doesn't work, so we just have to change."¹⁰

⁸ "While it is certainly theoretically possible that there are some positive features associated with polygyny, all of the cases we have heard remain anecdotal in nature. We were not able to find a single one that could be supported at an aggregate level statistically...The findings are clear, consistent, and statistically robust across the board. In fact, the results are the kind of thing most social scientists strive for but almost never find in the course of their careers. If these findings were about something not related to women, chances are that they would be treated as revolutionary in international relations theory; indeed, the effects are much stronger than those supporting the notion of the democratic peace that has spawned an entire cottage industry of inquiry. I leave it to the reader to ponder why powerful effects regarding the treatment of women on the health and security of states do not receive such extensive attention." McDermott: 23.

⁹ "As this entire volume demonstrates, polygyny is unequivocally one of those behaviors that has negative consequences regardless of who practices it or why." McDermott: 11.

¹⁰ YouTube video "Richard Bushman states the dominant church history narrative is false":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKuBw9mpV9w>.

Dan Peterson's article responding to perceived misunderstandings, "Yet, again: Has Richard Bushman declared the "dominant narrative" of Church history "false"?:
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/danpeterson/2020/03/yes-again-has-richard-bushman-declared-the-dominant-narrative-of-church-history-false.html>.

Richard Bushman asked Mormon Stories, who had drawn attention to his statement, to publish an explanation that included the following: "As it is, I still come down on the side of the believers in inspiration

Another word for change is *repent*.

Even President Hinckley oriented us toward changing our polygamy narrative. During his interview on the Larry King Live Show, Larry King asked President Hinckley what it meant that he was a prophet.¹¹ President Hinckley replied that it meant that he was responsible for declaring doctrine.¹² In this exact same interview, Larry King tried to get to the bottom of polygamy, unsurprisingly as that is our biggest stumbling block. In their exchange, President Hinckley said, speaking of polygamy, “it’s not doctrinal.”¹³

It was also during President Hinckley’s tenure that the church released “The Family: A Proclamation to the World.” As an English major in college I was trained to analyze text for meaning; I did editing for a literary journal¹⁴ and I understand how to correctly use grammar, syntax, and semantics: there is no space for polygamy in this document. It says, “We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between *a man and a woman* is ordained of God.” In the English language, you can’t say that one “a” (man’s) in the same phrase means 1, absolutely without exception, while the other “a” (woman’s) means at least but not limited to 1. To argue that the most recent teachings of the united First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve include or even make possible polygamy is to ignore the meaning of the English language and to pretend that words have no definition. If you accept the conventions of the English language, there is no space for polygamy in this document. It is unfortunate to have to drill down to this level of minutia, but I believe it’s because we have no doctrinal clarity on this issue.

and divine happenings—in angels, plates, translations, revelations—while others viewing the same facts are convinced they disqualify Joseph Smith entirely. A lot of pain, anger, and alienation come out of these disputes. I wish we could find ways to be more generous and understanding with one another” (source: <https://www.mormonstories.org/richard-bushman-reaffirms-his-testimony-of-angels-plates-translations-revelations/>). I argue likewise, and add that much of the Restoration can be “true,” while our dominant polygamy narrative is untrue.

¹¹ President Hinckley discussed his interview on the “Larry King Live” show in his talk, “What Are People Asking About Us?” at the October 1998 General Conference.

Interview on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/jAsNMWwRXvs?si=y7RGZht8DxapS72>.

Transcript accessible at: https://www.mormonismi.net/kirjoitukset/larry_king_1998.shtml.

¹² From the transcript of the show:

Larry King: What is your role? You’re the leader of a major religion?

Godron B. Hinckley: Yes sir.

LK: What’s your role?

GBH: My role is to declare doctrine. My role is to stand as an example before the people. My role is to be a voice in defense of the truth. My role is to stand as a conservator of those values which are important in our civilization and our society. My role it is to lead people.

¹³ LK: You condemn [polygamy].

GBH: I condemn it, yes, as a practice, because I think it is not doctrinal.

¹⁴ Brigham Young University’s *Inscape Journal*. Accessed online at: <https://inscape.byu.edu/>.

So a reckoning has been coming over polygamy and other related issues, and frankly the generations that are here now won't hold off that reckoning any more. I don't think we could if we tried. That said, I do believe there is a way to tell this story which does not utterly condemn our polygamous ancestors—my polygamous ancestors—but instead simply frees them of the accountability of this and other related sins on our heads. And I think it's a good idea to leave space in our hearts for a story in which everyone did their best, because *the most important thing is for us to know true doctrine*. It is true doctrine which will allow us to know the true and living God.

Truth about doctrine is actually easier to discern than truth about individuals, especially individuals who lived generations before and whom we have never met, and since some people will not even consider that polygamy is a tare sown by satan because of the *implications*, because of what it would mean about past church leaders, let's see what the best case scenario is for the leaders and ourselves if polygamy is not of God.

Of necessity this story is going to be a high-level summary, because addressing every piece of historical evidence would take thousands of either hours of video or pages of a book; that's not what this is. I'm going to roughly follow the format of the Gospel Topics essays to give a historical overview, and just use the evidence and scripture that support this narrative.

Because I am focusing on how the Church became ensnared by polygamy, I will be discussing historical events through that lens. But, you could tell this whole story using a different lens—a financial one for example—and paint a very good picture of how things went wrong: the Book of Mormon preached against seeking after riches and economic systems which result in wealth stratification, the law of the Lord gave the Saints specific instructions to avoid falling into such a trap, and the Prophet Joseph's revelations continually warned the Saints against their shortcomings in that regard, but here we are today with many poor among us while others are exceedingly rich, and we do not have Zion. So, polygamy is not the only story that can or should be told as we seek to establish Zion, but I would argue that accepting God's law of marriage is the *beginning of wisdom*. For that reason, it's the story I'm going to tell.

Our Best Story

“Contrary to popular opinion, American polygamy did not start with the Mormons.”¹⁵ In addition to many native Americans who followed a custom of marriage which allowed men to have many wives, during the Second Great Awakening, ideas of restoring Biblical

¹⁵ Pearsall, Sarah: 1.

polygamy began taking root in multiple religious denominations which grew in the spiritually saturated soil of America. It had begun in the 1780s, Revolutionary War time, before the Constitution and the First Amendment were ratified, when John Miner of Norfolk, Connecticut, had charges brought against him by his church for, according to Miner, “discoursing chiefly for talk sake, at sundry times and places, to give my opinion in favor of polygamy, in plain words, not once thinking of an offense.”¹⁶ The charges were brought before a council which then determined to appoint a special committee:

“Debates turned on two central points. The first was ‘whether it is consistent with ye Word of Go[d] for a Man to have a Plurality of Wives at ye same time.’ The second was ‘whether it be censurable for a B[rothe]r to hold and adhere to ye [Doctrine] of Poligamy, altho’ he does not put it in practice.”¹⁷

Despite a robust defense with help from advocates, Miner was excommunicated for his beliefs.

“It is really astonishing,” he said, “that...such a revolution as this should took place; that I should be cut off, as I am this day, from the privileges of communion...I shall content myself with publishing the whole of this strange process to the world, that better geniuses may undertake to right this matter.”¹⁸

As often happens in such cases of intellectual censorship and injustice, Miner’s excommunication did not end the discussion but rather inflamed supporters and solidified their brotherly desire to defend their inalienable right to speak their minds. Thus, defenses of polygamy began to seed the ground.

Of course polygamy had previously thrived all over the world, but since the time of Christ it was less common among Christian nations,¹⁹ possibly because monogamous marriage naturally orients a couple to Christ and enables them to comprehend His atonement. The *at-one-ment* that a couple, twain, as the Savior taught, can attain when they follow the golden rule with each other, mirrors and points to the oneness we are to strive for with God. It should not be surprising then that the seeds of Christian polygamy began to sprout often

¹⁶ Pearsall: 185.

¹⁷ Pearsall: 186.

¹⁸ Pearsall: 187.

¹⁹ “Monogamy had long distinguished Christians in Europe, demarcating them from Jews and Muslims, many of whom did allow plural marriages. As Christians moved out across the world, monogamy—and Europeans’ sense of its superiority—took on renewed importance. Commitment to monogamy informed the Christian mission around the world over many centuries” (Pearsall: 8).

enough in the years preceding Joseph Smith's first vision that it actually became associated with religious reform.²⁰

The polygamous group that seemed to have the most direct influence on the Latter-day Saints was the Society of Free Brethren and Sisters, a religious society begun in the early 1800s by a man named Jacob Cochran. Also known as the Cochranites, the Society of Free Brethren and Sisters gathered in Saco, Maine to establish a community of believers. Cochran is described as having been exceptionally charismatic, and after gaining over a thousand followers he began to “[preach] against the legal marriage bond,” saying that in God's standard, in the ideal state, people were neither married nor given in marriage, [and] that this should begin on earth.”²¹

Now this didn't mean celibacy, like the Shakers, but a community of wives, also referred to as spiritual wifery, where Jacob Cochran, as the leader, was said to have the authority to designate certain men, himself included, to be approved to have sexual relations with multiple women.²² Cochran taught his followers that they were living in the “last days,” when such marital innovations were a fulfillment of ancient prophecies.²³

America was a Christian nation, though, and so Jacob Cochran's teachings and behavior caused him to be indicted on five counts of “adultery and open and gross lewdness.”²⁴ In 1819 he was arrested—and then he escaped—but was captured and received a four-year prison sentence for his crimes. Following Cochran's imprisonment, he was not able to return to his community in Saco, Maine, so he attempted to resume his preaching elsewhere but didn't have much success due to the loss of his reputation, and he died without ever regaining a following. While the Cochranite numbers plummeted in the aftermath of Cochran's trial, they did not disappear from the American landscape. A second wave of Cochranite groups arose during the 1820s, this time spreading the principles of the Society of Free Brethren both within and outside of York County, Maine.²⁵

²⁰ Pearsall, Sarah M. S. *Polygamy and Bigamy*. Oxford University Press, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199730414-0119>.

²¹ Ridlon, G.T., Sr. *Saco Valley Settlements and Families: Historical, Biographical, Genealogical, Traditional, and Legendary*, Portland, ME: 1895: 272. Accessible online at: <https://archive.org/details/sacovalleysettle00ridl/page/272/mode/2up>.

²² Stinchfield, Ephraim. *Cochranism Delineated*, Boston: Hews & Goss, 1819. Accessed online at: <https://archive.org/details/cochranism-delineated1819/mode/2up>.

²³ Broadhurst, Dale R. “Jacob Cochran, Jr. (1782-1836), Cochran's Cult.” Accessed online at: <https://olivercowdery.com/gathering/JCochran.htm>.

²⁴ Broadhurst, Dale R. “Proceedings on the Trial of Jacob Cochran.” Accessed online at: <https://olivercowdery.com/gathering/JCochran.htm>.

²⁵ Newell, David. “For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace’: The Spiritual Travails of a Cochranite Woman,” *American Communal Societies Quarterly*, October 2016, Vol. 10 No. 4: 171. Accessed online at: <https://digitalcommons.hamilton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1326&context=acsq>.

Just a few years after these shenanigans in Maine, Joseph Smith who with his wife Emma lived in New York, started translating plates he said were given to him by an angel of God, which he then published as the Book of Mormon.²⁶ The reason the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has 17 million members today is because of this book. The theological clarity and the internal consistency of the Book of Mormon is a feat and mystery that has yet to be solved considering it came through an uneducated 24-year-old farm hand who lived in 19th century rural America; even his experience of treasure seeking doesn't explain the theological contents of the book.

The Book of Mormon prophesies that it will grow with the Bible, "unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions."²⁷ One of the false doctrines that had cropped up among Christians not just in America but, as we'll soon see, across the pond, was polygamy. While the New Testament pretty clearly communicates that monogamy is God's law for marriage, the Old Testament does not. But the Book of Mormon contained a plain and precious stance on polygamy, stating unequivocally through narrative and teachings that men having many wives and concubines was abominable before the Lord, that it was against the Law of Moses and the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and that the Lord led the Book of Mormon people out of the land of Jerusalem to raise up a righteous people that would not hearken to this abomination done by them of old!²⁸

1830

The Book of Mormon was first published in March of 1830, and the next month Joseph Smith organized the Church of Christ, as it was originally called. Just a few months later, in the summer of 1830, "Joseph Smith began a new translation of the Bible, intending to restore some of the plain and precious parts which had been lost."²⁹ He began with the Old Testament, expounding part of the book of Genesis to such an expansive degree that it was long enough to become its own book, and is now in our scriptures as the book of Moses. Joseph's inspired translation details polygamy's beginnings by Lamech, a descendant of Cain, well beyond the Old Testament record. This translation makes it clear that polygamy

²⁶ 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, in which punctuation was added by the publisher accessible at: <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1830/1>.

1840 edition of the Book of Mormon, in which Joseph Smith corrected any errors from the first edition accessible at: <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1840/1>.

²⁷ 2 Nephi 3:12.

²⁸ The Book of Mormon refers to men having more than one wife as "abominations" (Jacob 2: 10, 24, 28, 31; Mosiah 11: 2), "whoredoms" (Jacob 2: 23, 28, 33; 3:5; Mosiah 11: 2, 6), "wickedness" (Jacob 1: 15; 2: 6, 10, 31; Mosiah 11: 2), "filthiness" (Jacob 3: 9-10), and a "crime" (Jacob 2: 9; 2: 22-23). The Book of Mormon contains no narrative nor teaching which justifies a doctrine of many wives and concubines.

²⁹ Kent P. Jackson, "New Discoveries in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible," in *By Study and by Faith: Selections from the Religious Educator*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009).

was begun by a man who covenanted with satan and became Master Mahan.³⁰ The narrative of the Book of Moses also shows that polygamy was one of the principal abominations that contributed to the destruction of humanity at the Flood.

1831

While Joseph was in the midst of translating the book of Genesis, the Saints had a conference in which the Lord warned them: “Now I show unto you a mystery, a thing which is had in secret chambers, to bring to pass even your destruction in process of time, and ye knew it not,” and “the enemy in the secret chambers seeketh your lives.”³¹ As the Lord made clear: this wasn’t about a conspiracy of men; men can commit wickedness, but the power of the enemy is far greater than that of mortal men. The Lord was warning the Saints about the unseen realm, of beings which have power to destroy both soul and body,³² which power comes because of their knowledge. They know our weaknesses, our inclinations and our fears, and this knowledge allows them to manipulate us with astonishing ease.

To escape the power of this enemy, the Lord commanded the Saints to go to “the Ohio” where He would give unto them His law.³³ The next month, in February 1831 the newly formed church as a body arrived and the Lord commanded them to assemble themselves together

“to agree upon my word; And by the prayer of your faith ye shall receive my law, that ye may know how to govern my church and have all things right before me. And I will be your ruler when I come; and behold, I come quickly, and ye shall see that my law is kept.”³⁴

Although Christians worship Christ as our King, the government of heaven is actually the ultimate rule of Law. Earthly monarchies are but an unimpressive counterfeit. The heavenly King’s infinite power and authority comes from subjecting Himself to the Law to such a

³⁰ “And Lamech took unto himself two wives; the name of one being Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah... For Lamech having entered into a covenant with Satan, after the manner of Cain, wherein he became Master Mahan, master of that great secret which was administered unto Cain by Satan... Wherefore the Lord cursed Lamech, and his house, and all them that had covenanted with Satan; for they kept not the commandments of God, and it displeased God, and he ministered not unto them, and their works were abominations, and began to spread among all the sons of men” (Moses 5: 44, 49, 52).

³¹ Doctrine & Covenants 38: 13, 28.

³² “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

³³ “And that ye might escape the power of the enemy, and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless—Wherefore, for this cause I gave unto you the commandment that ye should go to the Ohio; and there I will give unto you my law; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high” (Doctrine & Covenants 38: 31-32).

³⁴ Doctrine & Covenants: 41: 2-5.

degree that He became indistinguishable from it. The Book of Mormon teaches that the existence of eternal law, and the just application of that law, is so essential that without it, “God would cease to be God.”³⁵ So whenever the Lord seeks to establish a people, the first thing they must have is His Law.

A few days after the Lord commanded the Saints to assemble themselves together to agree upon His word, twelve elders assembled themselves together in the name of Jesus Christ and received the law, renewed again as it was in days of old.³⁶ It was a strict law, but it was simple enough for a child to understand. It was in absolute harmony with the commandments given to Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and by the Savior Himself. And it was given to the Saints in their own language, so that they could understand God’s law without the ambiguity that comes from ancient records translated from dead languages and cultures.

The Elders were commanded to go forth preaching the gospel, two by two.³⁷ The Saints were commanded to not kill, steal, or lie.³⁸ And they were taught how to be married: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her *and none else*.”³⁹ This is the King’s law of marriage: it limits every man to one wife, who he should love with all his heart. It has no equivocation, no exception, no option to turn that which is singular into a plural. The Lord continuously commanded the Saints to be obedient to this law, to be especially watchful against sexual iniquity.⁴⁰

At this time when the Saints received this revelation and embraced the law of the church, false claims of revelation began to spring up, and so the Lord reminded the Saints that they had just received the law and that the pattern of commandments and revelation was set so that they could avoid future deception.⁴¹ The Lord constantly warned them to obey not only His law but even the laws of man so that the Saints’ enemies would not have power over them, so that “every bond could be broken wherewith the enemy seeketh to destroy my

³⁵ Alma 42: 22.

³⁶ “Revelation given in two parts through Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Kirtland, Ohio, February 9 and 23, 1831. The first part, consisting of verses 1 through 72, was received in the presence of twelve elders and in fulfillment of the Lord’s promise previously made that the “law” would be given in Ohio...The Prophet specifies this revelation as “embracing the law of the Church” (Introduction to Doctrine and Covenants 42).

³⁷ “And ye shall go forth in the power of my Spirit, preaching my gospel, two by two, in my name, lifting up your voices as with the sound of a trump, declaring my word like unto angels of God” (Doctrine & Covenants 42: 6).

³⁸ “And now, behold, I speak unto the church...Thou shalt not lie; he that lieth and will not repent shall be cast out” (Doctrine and Covenants 42: 18-21).

³⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 42: 22, italics added for emphasis.

⁴⁰ See Doctrine and Covenants 42: 74-78.

⁴¹ See Doctrine and Covenants 43: 2-8.

people.”⁴² The Lord told the Saints that He sent His everlasting covenant into the world, which was the Book of Mormon, “to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people, and for the Gentiles to seek to it, and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me.”⁴³ The law of the Lord was unequivocal about the strictly monogamous nature of marriage, as was the Book of Mormon.

(As a side note, I have an entire video detailing the monogamist intent of Jacob chapter 2 verse 30,⁴⁴ but just to mention here that when the Book of Mormon was printed, Jacob’s entire sermon against pride and polygamy was one chapter. In the 1870s it was divided up into chapters 2 through 3 and versified and given slightly different punctuation and 100 years later even had one of the words changed,⁴⁵ but the original publication contained an exceptionally straightforward sermon that no one understood as having an exception to the commandment of every man having one wife and no concubines. The first time an exception was read into this very clear sermon was after men began to commit the crime of polygamy, and simultaneously began to do as Jacob warned.⁴⁶)

It was in this revelation to the Saints about the everlasting covenant of the Book of Mormon that Joseph was also instructed to stop translating the Old Testament and begin translating the New, so that the Saints could be prepared for the things to come, “For verily I say unto you, that great things await you.”⁴⁷ Joseph began translating the New Testament and religious excitement among not just the Latter-day Saints but all sects and denominations continued.

Two months later,⁴⁸ the Lord responded through revelation to questions Joseph Smith and the Saints had about the teachings of the Shakers, telling them, among other things, that “marriage is ordained of God unto man. Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife,

⁴² Doctrine and Covenants 44: 5.

⁴³ Doctrine and Covenants 45: 9.

⁴⁴ Accessible at: <https://youtu.be/nC0-neDkhOQ?si=untl3-QCu9l6jSah>.

⁴⁵ Jacob 3: 5 in the 1837, 1840, 1879, and 1920 editions of the Book of Mormon all state that the Lamanites “have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our *fathers*—that they should have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them” (italics added). In the most recent, 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, the word “fathers” was changed to “father”: “they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our *father*...” (italics added). This change may have been based upon analysis of the original handwritten draft of the Book of Mormon.

⁴⁶ “This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son” (Jacob 2:23). Jacob explicitly warns against having a mindset which ponders to “know and understand wherein...the Lord, justified...Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon...as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines” (Doctrine & Covenants 132: 1).

⁴⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 45: 62.

⁴⁸ May 1831

and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation.”⁴⁹ Just two days after that, Joseph received a revelation to the elders of the church, warning them that “there are many spirits which are false spirits, which have gone forth in the earth, deceiving the world. And also Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you.”⁵⁰

The elders were told to be honest, preach the gospel of Jesus Christ by the spirit of light and truth, and to give heed and *do these things which they had received*, and which they would hereafter receive.⁵¹ Hereafter the Saints began to receive many commandments about establishing Zion, specifically about how they should organize finances and care for the poor.⁵²

Just a few months later, the Saints began to experience frustration in their efforts to establish a consecrated, Zion society. In August 1831 the Lord told them He was not pleased with them, because “I give commandments, and many have turned away from my commandments and have not kept them. There were among you adulterers and adulteresses...”⁵³ And the Lord again implored and commanded the Saints to strictly obey the commandment of marriage as they had received it: “And verily I say unto you, *as I have said before*, he that looketh on a woman to lust after her, or if any shall commit adultery in their hearts, they shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith and shall fear.”⁵⁴ The Lord said he would not force the Saints to know His will—He would not command them to understand the mysteries of God—but if they would simply *keep His commandments* He would give them the mysteries of His kingdom, “and the same shall be in him a well of living water, springing up unto everlasting life.”⁵⁵

Around this time, convert Ezra Booth began to be disenchanted with Joseph Smith and the church and began to publicly criticize both. One of his criticisms was that the church “depends principally upon the commandments, [most of which] are concealed from the world.” These commandments, Brother Booth said, “are considered ‘The mysteries of the Kingdom;’ and to divulge them to the world, is the same as casting pearls before swine.”⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 49:15-16.

⁵⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 50: 2-3.

⁵¹ See Doctrine and Covenants 50: 34-35.

⁵² See, for example, Doctrine and Covenants sections 51, 54, and 56.

⁵³ Doctrine and Covenants 63: 13-14.

⁵⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 63:16, italics added.

⁵⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 63:23.

⁵⁶ These letters were originally published between September and December 1831 in the Ohio Star (Ravenna) and were later reprinted in: Ezra Booth, in Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, Ohio: By the author, 1834). See also, Matthew McBride’s “Ezra Booth and Isaac Morley” article in *Church History Revelations in Context* (accessed at: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/revelations-in-context/ezra-booth-and-isaac-morley?lan>)

Within weeks of this accusation, the church had a special conference wherein it was proposed and decided that the church publish the revelations given thus far, including “the laws of the church of Christ.”⁵⁷ The conference voted that “the revelations were ‘worth to the Church the riches of the whole Earth.’”⁵⁸

When considering later accusations against Joseph, it should be kept in mind that in 1831 when Joseph Smith was accused of secret revelations, he immediately answered by publicly resolving to publish all the revelations that had not been published. Joseph Smith’s history refers to these initial revelations as:

“the foundation of the church in these last days; and a benefit to the world, showing that the keys of the mysteries of the Kingdom of our Savior, are again entrusted to man, and the riches of eternity within the compass of those who are willing to live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God: the conference priced the Revelations to be worth to the church, the riches of the whole earth, speaking temporally.”⁵⁹

These monogamic revelations were “the foundation of the Church”; that is essential to keep in mind when attempting to discern the parable later given by the Lord that we may know His will “concerning the redemption of Zion,” which remains a future event.⁶⁰

In December 1831, the Lord commanded Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to pause the translation of the Bible for a couple months so that they could go to the regions round about, and with the elders already proselytizing in obedience to the law of the Lord given in March, testify and quell some of the negative feelings and opinions that Ezra Booth had instigated.⁶¹

1832

g=eng), and David G.’s “Ezra Booth and Commandments in Early Mormonism” post on the Juvenile Instructor blog (accessed at: <https://juvenileinstructor.org/ezra-booth-and-commandments-in-early-mormonism/>).

⁵⁷ Revelation, 9 February 1831 [D&C 42:1–72], p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-9-february-1831-dc-421-72/1>.

⁵⁸ Introduction to Doctrine and Covenants 70.

⁵⁹ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], p. 173, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 7, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/179>.

⁶⁰ See Doctrine and Covenants 101: 43-60.

⁶¹ See Doctrine and Covenants 71.

This effort was successful and at the next conference, in January 1832, the Lord permitted them to resume the translation of the Bible and many elders were then called to go forth and proclaim the gospel and prune the vineyard.⁶² Orson Hyde and Samuel H. Smith were commanded to take their journey into the eastern countries,⁶³ where they ran right into some former Cochranites. While Jacob Cochran was no longer around, many former adherents were still ensnared in a polygamous lifestyle and mindset. Samuel Smith's (July 1, 1832) journal records that they were

“somewhat interrupted this day in the evening by a man and woman that taught the doctrine of the devil, such as... having spiritual wives... they came out to our meeting. The woman arose and began to preach and we requested her to stop and she would not, and we cried against her spirit, for we knew that it was an unclean spirit, and we cried against it that it was of the devil, and it made a considerable stir. The man that had the same spirit tempted us, saying: ‘Cast the Devil out,’ crying amen to the words of the woman. After considerable muttering and grumbling and shaking of her frame, she stopped and we proceeded with our meeting.”⁶⁴

After that more and more interactions with these polygamy believers took place. Samuel Smith recorded while in York, Main,

“A large congregation came together and Brother Orson preached to them... we’ve been were invited to go home with a younger man by the name of Ludgkins and stayed overnight with him. His stepmother we had seen before. We had seen her in Boston, the woman that came into our meeting and we had cried against her spirit.”⁶⁵

Days later, Orson Hyde noted:

“Attended a Cochranite meeting, and they said, ‘if any one had a message from God there was liberty to give it unto the people.’ And I commenced by prayer, but thought I would not tell them about the work then, but would get their confidence in the first place.”⁶⁶

Samuel Smith:

⁶² See Doctrine and Covenants 73.

⁶³ See Doctrine and Covenants 75:13.

⁶⁴ Samuel H. Smith Journal, July 1, 1832, Church History Library. May be accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/5f701d17-0604-462a-a4b1-696c24c6c93a/0?view=browse>.

⁶⁵ Samuel H. Smith Journal, September 25, 1832, Church History Library. Access same as footnote 62.

⁶⁶ Orson Hyde Journal, September 28, 1832, Church History Library. Access same as footnote 62.

“We went to a meeting in the evening and the people were called Cockrinites because the man that first preached their faith, his name was Cockrin. They gave liberty for anyone to speak... Brother Orson spoke to them and exhorted them to faithfulness to the Lord and to humility and to stand in the council of the Lord, that they might know the voice of the Good Shepherd, that they might when the voice came ‘behold the Bridegroom cometh’ go out to meet him. And they said ‘Amen.’ When meeting closed, we spake that we would like to preach to the people... They would not let us.”⁶⁷

The missionaries were anxious to gather all the repentant to Zion, and made every effort to convert the people of this area. In another journal entry, Orson Hyde, who would later become converted to a doctrine of many wives and concubines himself, said,

“Preached to a congregation of Cochranites who gave liberty; told them again to repent and go up to Zion, and we lifted our cry in the spirit, and I hope some of them will go; but they had a wonderful lustful spirit, because they believe in a ‘plurality of wives’ which they call spiritual wives, knowing them not after the flesh but after the spirit, but by the appearance they knew one another after the flesh.”⁶⁸

Elders Smith and Hyde began to have success, baptizing many former Cochranites and their neighbors. Among this group of converts in the New England area included a married mother of several young children, Augusta Cobb, who would later become the second polygamous wife of Brigham Young.⁶⁹

During this same time over in New York, Brigham Young and Heber Kimball had been considering the restoration due to a copy of the Book of Mormon which had been given to Brigham’s brother. The Youngs and the Kimballs were the closest of associates. Brigham and his wife Miriam had named their second daughter after Heber’s wife, Vilate. After investigating the Book of Mormon and seeing a vision which persuaded them that the gathering had commenced, and that the Lord’s Zion was imminent, Brigham and Heber were baptized.⁷⁰ Within a week of his baptism Brigham preached his first sermon. He later said, “I wanted to thunder, and roar out the gospel to the nations. It burned in my bones like

⁶⁷Samuel H. Smith Journal, September 28, 1832, Church History Library. Access same as footnote 62.

⁶⁸ Orson Hyde Journal, October 11, 1832, Church History Library. Access same as footnote 62.

⁶⁹ “Preached in the evening... two ladies confessed their faith in the work, and a Miss [Elizabeth] and Mrs. [Augusta Adams] Cobb” (Orson Hyde Journal, June 29, 1832, Church History Library. Access same as footnote 62). “Baptized three: Augusta Cobb, Elizabeth Haredeen and [Ann] Porter” (Samuel Smith Journal, June 29, 1832 Church History Library. Access same as footnote 62).

⁷⁰ Brigham Young was baptized on April 15, Heber Kimball on April 16, 1832.

fire pent up. ... Nothing would satisfy me but to cry abroad in the world what the Lord is doing in the latter days.”⁷¹

Brigham and Heber’s respective wives were soon baptized as well, but just a few months after their baptisms, Miriam Young died following a long illness.⁷² Brigham had already lost his mother, who died of tuberculosis when he was a young man, so losing the woman of his life again, this time the mother of his two young daughters, was a source of not only compounded grief but also extreme stress, and may have caused him to avoid emotional vulnerability and dependence upon women thereafter.

Meanwhile in Ohio, Joseph Smith had resumed translating the Bible, considering it to be his highest priority. While translating the New Testament with Sidney Rigdon, Joseph wrote, “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.”⁷³ Visions began to unfold the hidden mysteries of God’s kingdom from days of old; the Saints began to receive understanding about how they should organize so that they could be equal spiritually and temporally.⁷⁴

By July 1832 Joseph had finished the translation of the New Testament and had resumed translating the Old, picking up at Genesis 24, where Joseph made no changes to the widowed Abraham’s instructions for maintaining the covenant: Abraham required his servant to swear that he would find “a wife” for Isaac from Abraham’s own country and kindred.⁷⁵ As Joseph Smith progressed through subsequent chapters, he also made no changes to Isaac’s charge to *his* son Jacob: after grieving over Esau’s decision to marry polygamously, Isaac commanded Jacob to go take “a wife” so that Jacob could receive the blessings of Abraham.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Brigham Young, *Deseret News Weekly*, Aug. 24, 1854, 1.

⁷² Miriam Works Young died of tuberculosis on September 8, 1832, at the age of 26, leaving her husband Brigham a widower with two daughters, ages 7 and 2.

⁷³ Doctrine and Covenants 76:12

⁷⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 76: 7; 78:5.

⁷⁵ “Thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a *wife* unto my son Isaac...The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father’s house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a *wife* unto my son from thence” (Genesis 24:4,7, emphasis added).

⁷⁶ “And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him...Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother’s father; and take thee a *wife* from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother’s brother. And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham” (Genesis 28:1-4, emphasis added).

By September 1832, elders had begun to return from their missions in the eastern states and to make reports of their labors. Following the pattern set forth when the law of the Lord was revealed to the Saints the previous year,⁷⁷ Joseph Smith and six elders “united their hearts and lifted their voices on high” to receive “the word of the Lord concerning his church.”⁷⁸ The Prophet designated it a revelation on priesthood.

In this revelation, the Lord poured out greater light and knowledge upon the Saints but also soberly chastised them:

“Your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received— Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written.”⁷⁹

According to every available record of the church, both scriptural and historical, everything that the Saints had received up to this point related to marriage commanded monogamy, without exception. Missionary work continued, with great success continuing among not just former Cochranites but believers from all kinds of religious traditions, and the Lord continued to give the Saints direction on how to structure the church and a Zion society, including how to care for the widows, orphans, and the poor. Although the modern day revelations were in harmony with the Book of Mormon—for example, polygamy was not even an option to be considered when caring for the widows and those in need according to both Mosiah⁸⁰ and Doctrine and Covenants⁸¹—Latter-day Saints raised suspicions because of their teachings on consecration, as other groups of the day which instituted communal living taught that believers were not only supposed to be free with their property but *also* free with their marital relations.

⁷⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 42.

⁷⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 84:1-2.

⁷⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 84:54-57.

⁸⁰ “Now there were a great many widows in the land, and they did cry mightily from day to day, for a great fear of the Lamanites had come upon them... Now there was a great number of women, more than there was of men; therefore king Limhi commanded that every man should impart to the support of the widows and their children, that they might not perish with hunger; and this they did because of the greatness of their number that had been slain” (Mosiah 21: 10, 17).

⁸¹ “Verily, thus saith the Lord, in addition to the laws of the church concerning women and children, those who belong to the church, who have lost their husbands or fathers: Women have claim on their husbands for their maintenance, until their husbands are taken; and if they are not found transgressors they shall have fellowship in the church... And the storehouse shall be kept by the consecrations of the church; and widows and orphans shall be provided for, as also the poor. Amen” (Doctrine and Covenants 83: 1-2, 6).

At the end of 1832, following the pattern set forth when both the law of the Lord⁸² and the revelation on the priesthood were revealed to the Saints,⁸³ high priests at a conference prayed “separately and vocally to the Lord to reveal his will unto us concerning the upbuilding of Zion” and they received a revelation the Prophet Joseph designated as the “olive leaf’ ... plucked from the Tree of Paradise, the Lord’s message of peace to us.”⁸⁴ The Saints were commanded to organize themselves and establish a house of God.⁸⁵

1833

By the following March, 1833, Joseph’s translation work with the Bible had reached the Apocrypha, which the Lord revealed did not need to be translated.⁸⁶ Joseph then “went over sections already translated and made additional refinements and corrections until he felt that the translation was as the Lord wanted it to be.”⁸⁷ A few months later the translation documents note that Malachi is correct and reads, “Finished on the 2nd day of July 1833.”⁸⁸ This was a huge accomplishment. On

“that same day, the Prophet and his counselors, translation scribes Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams, wrote to Church members in Missouri and told them, ‘We this day finished the translating of the Scriptures for which we returned gratitude to our heavenly father.’”⁸⁹

From that moment on, “Joseph Smith no longer spoke of translating the Bible but of printing it, which he wanted and intended to do ‘as soon as possible.’”⁹⁰

Despite Joseph’s great desire to print and distribute the new translation of the Bible, the Saints were continually assailed from every side as they attempted to disseminate the word. The same month Joseph finished the new translation of the Bible, for example, a mob destroyed the printing press in Independence, Missouri which was printing the Book of

⁸² Doctrine and Covenants 42.

⁸³ Doctrine and Covenants 84:1-2.

⁸⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 88 Introduction.

⁸⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 88:119.

⁸⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 91.

⁸⁷ Kent P. Jackson, “New Discoveries in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible,” in *By Study and by Faith: Selections from the Religious Educator*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009).

⁸⁸ Old Testament Revision 2, p. 119, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 19, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-2/126#x25124ef1-1099-4112-917e-baa4fa8ad013>.

⁸⁹ Jackson, 2009.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Commandments, the book that contained what the Lord had called “the foundation of the Church in these last days.”⁹¹

“Throughout the rest of his life, the Prophet . . . repeatedly encouraged Church members to donate money for the publication of the new translation of the Bible, but other priorities and a lack of funds caused that it was not printed in his lifetime, which was a matter of considerable disappointment to him”⁹² and truly was a great loss for the church, for *the entire justification of Latter-day Saint polygamy rested upon a reading of the Old Testament that was wholly unsupported by the Joseph Smith translation of the Bible*. Every single doctrinal change the Prophet Joseph made related to polygamy in his translation of the Bible was to more strongly condemn it. Joseph made zero changes which explained or supported a divine doctrine of many wives and concubines. For much of the church’s history it has been asserted that Joseph began pondering polygamous concepts while translating the Old Testament; we now know that these assertions were made when Latter-day Saints had “no access to the manuscripts and virtually no institutional memory about the translation.”⁹³

Specifically, Joseph Smith did not change the Biblical chronology of Abraham and Israel, which records that these patriarchs had no polygamous interactions *after* they entered into covenant with the Lord and received their new names. But when the Prophet Joseph reached the record of the kings, he made *several* changes which clarified the polygamy of the Old Testament as unrighteous. These changes have since been found to be in harmony with the Damascus Document, which was discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls more than a 100 years after Joseph’s death.⁹⁴

Joseph even moved the scripture in Isaiah which prophesies of “seven women taking hold of one man” to be the bookend of the destruction verses of chapter 3, making it clear that

⁹¹ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], p. 173, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/179>.

⁹² Jackson, 2009.

⁹³ Jackson, 2009.

⁹⁴ “According to the Damascus Document, polygamy is a form of [Hebrew characters] (usually translated as ‘fornication’): The ‘builders of the wall’ . . . are caught twice in fornication: by taking two wives in their lives, even though the principle of creation is ‘male and female he created them’ and the ones who went into the ark ‘went in two by two.’ And concerning the prince it is written ‘he shall not multiply wives for himself. . .’ The prohibition of polygamy is made by reference to the stories of creation and the flood, as portrayals of God’s real intentions for humanity, and capped by the citation from the Law of the King. The Temple Scroll also prohibits polygamy for the king” (Crawford, Sidnie White, “Not According to Rule: Women, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran” (2003). Faculty Publications, Classics and Religious Studies Department. 65. Accessed at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/classicsfacpub/65>).

there is nothing beautiful nor glorious about desperation and scarcity.⁹⁵ Whether this verse is literal or symbolic, Joseph's translation clarified that this is not part of Zion.

With the translation of the Bible complete, Joseph turned his attention to building Zion, and especially fulfilling the Lord's command to build His house, which He had chastised the Saints for delaying.⁹⁶ Converts continued to gather to Kirtland, Ohio, among them the recently baptized Brigham Young and Heber Kimball and their families. At this time the Saints in Missouri were experiencing persecution and in a revelation the Lord told them their affiliations had come upon them "in consequence of their transgressions," but that His bowels were filled with compassion towards them and He would not utterly cast them off.⁹⁷

1834

The Lord gave instructions for the Saints to go to Missouri to redeem Zion.⁹⁸ The Prophet Joseph said that he would go to Zion "to assist in redeeming it," and many volunteered or were recruited to go with him.⁹⁹ While this group was making preparations to go to Missouri, missionary work continued, although in their efforts to share the gospel the Saints continued to transgress by not always following the Law of the Church. Their transgressions may have been due to ignorance, but nonetheless had lasting effects.

The first commandment the Lord gave to the Saints in the law given to govern the church was for the elders to "go forth in the power of my Spirit, preaching my gospel, two by two."¹⁰⁰ The Kirtland high council minutes from this time note that some elders, for various reasons, were approved to travel alone. In February 1834, for example, the high council "decided that Elder Brigham Young should travel alone, it being his own choice."¹⁰¹ Brigham, who at that time was a single widower, was one of several elders who traveled to the east and preached in the areas where former Cochranites and future Latter-day Saint polygamists lived—future polygamists such as the convert Augusta Cobb, who Brigham would later marry as a polygamous wife. At the time of this high council meeting there had

⁹⁵ The inspired version of Isaiah chapter 3 ends with: "Thy men shall fall by the sword, and thy mighty in the war. And her gates shall lament and mourn; and she shall be desolate and shall sit upon the ground. And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach" (Isaiah 3:25-27).

⁹⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 95:3.

⁹⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 101:2,9.

⁹⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 103.

⁹⁹ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 193251), 2:39.

¹⁰⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 42:6.

¹⁰¹ *History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]*, p. 436, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/442>.

been so many converts from this area that the high council decided to hold a general conference of the church in Saco, Maine that June (1834).¹⁰² It is no surprise that it was at this time, when so many individuals who had previously adhered to a doctrine of spiritual wife-ism were converting and gathering to Zion, that the Church began to be “reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy.”¹⁰³

Upon returning from his brief missionary labors in the east, Brigham Young remarried a woman named Mary Ann Angell who took on the care of his two daughters while he, Heber Kimball, and other volunteers took part in Zion’s camp, an experience which temporally and spiritually tried and taught the participants to a profound degree. The Lord had assured them that “by hearkening to observe all the words which I, the Lord their God, shall speak unto them, they shall never cease to prevail until the kingdoms of the world are subdued under my feet, and the earth is given unto the saints, to possess it forever and ever,”¹⁰⁴ but upon realizing that they would not be successful in redeeming Zion, they assembled themselves together to petition the Lord and learn His will. In seeking out God’s will for them, they followed the pattern set forth when the law of the Lord, the revelation on the priesthood, and the Lord’s will concerning the upbuilding of Zion were revealed, and “assembled [themselves] together” to learn the Lord’s will.¹⁰⁵

The Lord answered that their failure was because of the transgressions of His people, because “they have not learned to be obedient to the things which I required at their hands, but are full of all manner of evil.”¹⁰⁶ The Lord specified that He was *not* speaking of those “who are appointed to lead my people, who are the first elders of my church, for they are not all under this condemnation,” but it was the body of the church which was in transgression.¹⁰⁷ This revelation spoke against those were unwilling to give of their substance to build up the poor, but in broad terms it is important to note that in the summer of 1834, the Lord clearly stated that the *leaders* of the church were not violating the law given to govern the church, and this law did include the explicit command for men to be monogamous with their bodies and their minds.¹⁰⁸ The elders were told that they “should wait for a little season, for the redemption of Zion,” and had been instructed by the Lord through revelation that “inasmuch as they *keep not my commandments, and hearken not to observe all my words*, the kingdoms of the world shall prevail against them.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Doctrine and Covenants Section CI or 101, “Marriage,” 1835.

¹⁰⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 103:7.

¹⁰⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 105: 1. See also Doctrine and Covenants 42, 84, and 88.

¹⁰⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 105:3.

¹⁰⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 105:17.

¹⁰⁸ According to the Law given to govern the Church in Doctrine and Covenants 42.

¹⁰⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 105:13, 103:8.

A couple months later (August 1834), Joseph Smith wrote to the high council, giving them very specific instructions in order for the Saints to be

“in readiness to move into Jackson County, in two years from the eleventh of September Time for the redemption of Zion next, which is the appointed time for the redemption of Zion. If, verily I say unto you, If the Church with one united effort perform their duties, If they do this the work shall be complete.”¹¹⁰

But, Joseph cautioned them, “if we do not exert ourselves to the utmost in gathering up the strength of the Lord’s house, that this thing may be accomplished, behold there remaineth a scourge for the church, even that they shall be driven from City to City” and experience other sufferings.¹¹¹

That same month a general assembly of elders convened “to appoint a committee to arrange the items of the doctrine of Jesus Christ for the government of the church” so that said items could be published.¹¹² The Book of Commandments had been thwarted but they were going to try again, this time with an even more formal effort. Joseph Smith, Jr. Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams were appointed as the committee to arrange the contents of the publication.

1835

By February 1835,¹¹³ this committee had completed their work and began to show the proposed publication in its entirety to every governing body of the church in accordance with the Lord’s command in July 1830 that “all things shall be done by common consent in the church.”¹¹⁴ As the committee wrote in what was later included as the preface to the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, they knew that the church was evil spoken of in many places—its faith and belief misrepresented, and the way of truth thus subverted... therefore, [they] endeavored to present [their] belief, and when [they said] this, humbly trust[ed that this committee’s belief represented] the faith and principles of this society as a body.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], p. 535, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/541>.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Minutes, 24 September 1834, p. 76, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-24-september-1834/3>.

¹¹³ According to the Preface to the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, written by Joseph Smith Jr., Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and F. G. Williams, dated February 17, 1835.

¹¹⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 26:2.

¹¹⁵ Doctrine and Covenants, Preface, 1835: iii-iv.

It is important to note that in February 1835, the leaders of the church publicly acknowledged, accepted and even looked forward to being held accountable to the law that was contained in this book: “We do not present this little volume with any other expectation than that we are to be called to answer to every principle advanced, in that day when the secrets of all hearts will be revealed, and the reward of every man’s labor be given him.”¹¹⁶

In order for the various governing bodies of the church to have an opportunity to affirm the truthfulness of this proposed book, the bodies needed to be organized in the first place. The Church already had two standing high councils, but needed a group to be responsible for Church congregations which were outside the main Church centers in Ohio and Missouri and did not have enough members to have their own high council. Days before writing the preface to the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph Smith called a meeting with those who had been in Zion’s Camp. “After recounting the experiences of the Camp of Israel,” he stated that “it was the Will of God” that those who had gone on the expedition “should be ordained to the ministry and go forth to prune the vineyard for the last time.”¹¹⁷ The Prophet declared that the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon should “choose twelve men from the church as Apostles.”¹¹⁸ Accordingly, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris announced the selections, among them some future polygamists such as Brigham Young, Heber Kimball, Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt, and Parley P. Pratt.¹¹⁹

On February 27, 1835, Joseph Smith instructed the apostles on their duties, specifically warned them to keep a careful record of their whereabouts and of important questions and decisions, and asked them,

“What importance is there attached to the calling of these twelve apostles different from the other callings or offices of the Church? After some discussion by elders, Patten, Young, Wm. Smith & McLelin, President Smith gave the following decision. They are the Twelve Apostles, who are called to the office of traveling high council,

¹¹⁶ Doctrine and Covenants, Preface, 1835: iv.

¹¹⁷ Minutes, Discourse, and Blessings, 14–15 February 1835, p. 147, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-discourse-and-blessings-14-15-february-1835/1>.

¹¹⁸ Minutes, Discourse, and Blessings, 14–15 February 1835, p. 149, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-discourse-and-blessings-14-15-february-1835/3>.

¹¹⁹ Record of the Twelve, 14 February–28 August 1835, p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/record-of-the-twelve-14-february-28-august-1835/7>.

who are to preside over all the churches of the Saints among the Gentiles where there is no presidency established [meaning an organized stake with a high council], and they are to travel and preach among the Gentiles, until the Lord shall command them to go to the Jews. They are to hold the keys of *this* ministry, to unlock the door of the kingdom of heaven unto all nations, and to preach the Gospel to every creature. This is the power, authority and virtue of their Apostleship.”¹²⁰

Around this time they were also given the opportunity to examine the proposed Doctrine and Covenants and raise objections or record their approval. It is likely that this is when they wrote the following testimony, which was read a few months later at the conference to approve the book:

“The testimony of the witnesses to the book of the Lord’s commandments, which he gave to his church through Joseph Smith, jr. who was appointed by the voice of the church for this purpose: we therefore feel willing to bear testimony to all the world of mankind, to every creature upon the face of all the earth, and upon the islands of the sea, that the Lord has borne record to our souls, through the Holy Ghost shed forth upon us, that *these commandments were given by inspiration of God, and are profitable for all men, and are verily true.*”¹²¹

Soon after the newly called apostles departed on their first quorum mission, going as a body to spend 4 months in the eastern United States, where some renewed associations with former Cochranites, and others were introduced to their restoration doctrines for the first time. That summer, nine of the twelve apostles would attend the second of three church conferences held in Saco, Maine, the city that had previously been the gathering place for the Cochranites.¹²²

As previously mentioned, now that a couple of years had gone by gathering converts who previously or currently believed in polygamy as a restoration doctrine, the church was “reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy.”¹²³ In response to these rumors, the committee that had been charged with arranging the doctrine of Jesus Christ and revelations for the government of the church had prepared not just a compilation of

¹²⁰ Minutes and Discourses, 27 February 1835, as Reported by Oliver Cowdery, p. 88, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourses-27-february-1835-as-reported-by-oliver-cowdery/3>.

¹²¹ Doctrine and Covenants, General Assembly, 1835: 256.

¹²² General conference held on August 21, 1835. “The Minutes of the Conference in Maine” reported in Evening and Morning Star, Vol. 1-2, Kirtland, Ohio: 360. Accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/28092>. General conferences of the church were held in Saco, Maine on June 13, 1834, and August 12-14, 1836.

¹²³ Doctrine and Covenants Section CI or 101, “Marriage,” 1835.

doctrine and covenants, but also a separate article on marriage to be included within the publication.

In August 1835, while the Saints in Saco held their church conference, the church in Kirtland gathered to vote on this first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, “to see whether the book be approved or not by the Authorities of the church, that it may, if approved, become a law unto the church, and a rule of faith and practice unto the same.”¹²⁴ Every quorum, including the Quorum of the Twelve as previously quoted, had reviewed and written their testimonies of support for the entire proposed publication, which testimonies were read at the conference. The article on marriage was read to the assembly in its entirety, and described how marriages were to be performed: “All marriages in this church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, should be *solemnized in a public meeting*, or feast, prepared for that purpose.”¹²⁵ And it directly addressed the rumors spreading about the Saints: “We declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.”¹²⁶ Upon hearing the article on marriage, “the whole church voted to receive it, it is therefore to be attached to the book” and can be found in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants as Section 101, or CI.

Also of note during the summer of 1835 was the Church’s acquisition of four Egyptian mummies and multiple scrolls of papyrus, which Joseph, upon examining, believed contained the writings of Abraham, what we now have in our scriptures as the Book of Abraham. Whatever controversies surround this book, polygamy has never been one of them, for the Book of Abraham, which goes into lengthy detail about the Abrahamic covenant, does not say one word about a doctrine of many wives and concubines. It does not even mention the slave Hagar, or Keturah, who Abraham married after Sarah died. Sarai is the singular wife spoken of in the Book of Abraham.

Invigorated by the power of these prophetic interactions as well as the published revelations and laws, the Saints forged ahead building the house of the Lord in Kirtland and converts continued to gather to that city. The traveling high council continued their missionary labors but as mortals do regularly fell short of their call, with reports of their labors causing the First Presidency to reprove them multiple times, individually and as a body. In November 1835 Joseph Smith said, “Thus came the word of the Lord unto me concerning the Twelve saying, behold they are under condemnation, because they have not

¹²⁴ Minutes, 17 August 1835, p. 98, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-17-august-1835/1>.

¹²⁵ Doctrine and Covenants Section CI or 101, “Marriage,” 1835.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

been sufficiently humble in my sight.”¹²⁷ They were told to “repent speedily and prepare their hearts for the solemn assembly and for the great day which is to come.”¹²⁸

1836

By the next March, through great perseverance and sacrifice, the Kirtland Temple was complete. More than a thousand attendees were reported to have gathered for the dedication, which was actually a dedicatory week, one in which many Saints experienced pentecostal spiritual experiences and visions as they participated in various holy rites, such as an evening in which all the men, in any priesthood capacity, met at the temple to partake of the sacrament and be ritually cleansed through the washing of their feet. On this night they continued exhorting, prophesying and speaking in tongues until 5 o'clock the next morning.¹²⁹ As Patrick Morris writes about in his post “The Importance of the Kirtland Temple,” following this momentous occasion, the Saints had hoped to redeem Zion as the Lord had assured them they would if they performed their duties with one united effort.¹³⁰

The Saints did work to unify—for example, a third church conference was held in the Saco, Maine area where “spiritual wifery” was so prevalent, this time again with Brigham Young and several members of the traveling high council in attendance.¹³¹ But these and the other Saints’ and leaders’ labors collectively were apparently not what the Lord expected in fulfillment of their duties and by the end of 1836 the Saints had not redeemed Zion. Although the Missouri legislature created a county in Missouri as a sanctuary for Mormon settlement,¹³² and thousands of converts continued to come into the church, such as John Taylor, who with his family was baptized by Parley P. Pratt, and Willard Richards who was baptized by his cousin, Brigham Young.¹³³ Despite these and other blessings, “the kingdoms of the world [began to] prevail against [the Saints]” and they entered the prophesied time of scourging.¹³⁴

1837

¹²⁷ Revelation, 3 November 1835, p. 17-19, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-3-november-1835/1>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Journal, 1835–1836, p. 187-190, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 20, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/190>.

¹³⁰ Morris, Patrick. “The Importance of the Kirtland Temple,” Uncorrelated Mormonism, January 6, 2024. Accessed at: <https://uncorrelatedmormonism.com/the-importance-of-the-kirtland-temple/>.

¹³¹ Dates listed on Hemlock Knots website, accessed at: <https://hemlockknots.com/monogamy-polygamy-timeline/>.

¹³² Caldwell County, created December 29, 1836.

¹³³ John Taylor was baptized on May 9th, 1836. Willard Richards was baptized on December 31, 1836.

¹³⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 103:8.

In January 1837 the Kirtland Safety Society was organized to serve the financial needs of their growing community. Meanwhile, the seeds of that pernicious weed polygamy continued to sprout. In April, “the Presidents of the Seventies met in council in the House of the Lord...to take into consideration some difficulties, either real or imaginary, existing among the Seventies [and pronounced] some resolutions:

“1st. — That we will have no fellowship whatever with any Elder belonging to the quorums of the Seventies who is guilty of polygamy or any offense of the kind, and who does not in all things conform to the laws of the church contained in the Bible and in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants.”¹³⁵

The next month, a national bank crisis began, known as the Panic of 1837. By June, the church was not bearing the good fruit all the Saints had hoped for. Financial and ecclesiastical stress had Joseph Smith at his wits’ end and he came to understand that another branch needed to be grafted in, as the Manuscript History of the Church records:

“The enemy abroad and apostates in our midsts united in their schemes...and many became disaffected toward me as though I were the sole cause of those very evils I was most strenuously striving against; and which were actually brought upon us, by the brethren not giving heed to my council. No quorum in the church was entirely exempt from the influence of those false spirits...even some of the Twelve were so far lost to their high and responsible calling, as to begin to take sides, secretly with the enemy. In this state of things, and but a few weeks before the Twelve were expecting to meet in full quorum, (some of them having been absent for some time), God revealed to me that something new must be done for the salvation of his church, and on or about the first of June 1837, Heber C. Kimball, one of the Twelve, was set apart by the spirit of prophecy and revelation, prayer and the laying on of the hands of the First Presidency, to preside over a mission to England, to be the first foreign mission of the Church of Christ in the last days.”¹³⁶

In September 1837, Joseph Smith and other leaders embarked on a trip from Kirtland, Ohio to Far West, Missouri in order to locate new gathering places for the Saints and to organize church affairs. While on this journey, they held public meetings and were asked questions

¹³⁵ Messenger and Advocate 3, May 1837: 511. Accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/LDSMessengerAndAdvocate18341837/page/n511/mode/2up?view=theater>.

¹³⁶ History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838], p. 761, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 23, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/215>.

“daily and hourly . . . by all classes of people.”¹³⁷ Upon his return, Joseph prepared a list of twenty questions “to save myself the trouble of repeating the same a thousand times over and over again,” which was then published in the November 1837 issue of the Elders’ Journal, promising that the next issue would include answers to the queries.¹³⁸

1838

Over in England, Heber Kimball baptized young adult William Clayton who quickly rose to serve in the British mission as a counselor alongside Willard Richards who was called there as well.¹³⁹ The American Saints meanwhile relocated to Far West, Missouri, where the next Elders’ Journal came out in July 1838 with Joseph Smith’s responses to the most common questions he and other church leaders were asked:

“Question 7th. Do the Mormons believe in having more wives than one.
Answer. No, not at the same time. But they believe, that if their companion dies, they have a right to marry again.”¹⁴⁰

That same month (July 1838) the Lord had a warning for Newel K. Whitney through a revelation given to Joseph Smith: “Let my servant Newel K. Whitney be ashamed of the Nicolaitane band and of all their secret abominations.”¹⁴¹ The Lord speaks against the Nicolaitans in the book of Revelation, where he gives some chastisement but also some praise to the servant of the church of Ephesus, acknowledging that at least he doesn’t support the Nicolaitans: “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”¹⁴² But the Lord took issue with the congregations, for there were some there that “hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”¹⁴³

There is much that could be said about the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans but if we want to be brief, the LDS Bible Dictionary sums it up perfectly: The Nicolaitans were an

¹³⁷ Travel Account and Questions, November 1837, p. 28, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 23, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/travel-account-and-questions-november-1837/2>

¹³⁸ Documentary History of the Church 3:28-30 (May 8, 1838).

¹³⁹ William Clayton was baptized October 21, 1837, and was appointed as second counselor in the British Mission presidency in March 1838 by Joseph Fielding, head of the British Mission. Willard Richards was appointed as first counselor, no date available.

¹⁴⁰ Questions and Answers, 8 May 1838, p. 43, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 23, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/questions-and-answers-8-may-1838/2>.

¹⁴¹ Doctrine and Covenants 117:11.

¹⁴² Revelation 2:6.

¹⁴³ Revelation 2:14-15.

Antinomian sect in Asia Minor that *claimed license for sensual sin*. This was a group that believed they had the authority to engage in sexual iniquity, and they used the robes of religious observance to justify themselves. The Nicolaitans attempted to indoctrinate whoredoms as holy; they commanded men and women to engage in extra-marital, non-monogamous, sexual intercourse in order to receive some spiritual benefit.

So, by 1838, the mystery “had in secret chambers” by “the enemy”¹⁴⁴ had manifested into a “band” of men who engaged in “secret abominations.”¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately, Newel K. Whitney may have been unaware of and perhaps did not seek greater light and knowledge on just what deeds, exactly, the Nicolaitans did, for he later became a proponent of Latter-day Saint polygamy, wherein men claimed divine authority to have sexual relations with as many virgins as they desired, and assured women that engaging in such relations was *essential* for their exaltation.¹⁴⁶

In Missouri, contentious disputes with their neighbors erupted into what’s known as the “Mormon War,” despite the Lord having commanded the Saints to “renounce war and proclaim peace,” specifically in their interactions with the Missourians.¹⁴⁷ By November, the Saints surrendered after Missouri governor Lilburn Boggs ordered that they be driven from the state or be exterminated. That same month the Kirtland Safety Society failed. This was an especially traumatic blow to the body of the Saints, and led to widespread dissent and upheaval. The effect of this financial crisis was profound and absorbed the attention of the entire church.

As part of the fallout from the Mormon War, in December 1838 leaders of the church, including Joseph Smith, his brother Hyrum, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, Caleb Baldwin,

¹⁴⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 38:13, 28.

¹⁴⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 117:11.

¹⁴⁶ This teaching is found throughout the published materials of the Church between 1852 - 1890, but is most clearly conceded to in a letter to the President of the United States, from the First Presidency and Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, written December 1891 to plead amnesty for the members who had entered into polygamy prior to the Manifesto:

“We, the first presidency and apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, beg to respectfully represent to Your Excellency the following facts:

We formerly taught to our people that polygamy or celestial marriage as commanded by God through Joseph Smith was right; that it was a necessity to man's highest exaltation in the life to come.

That doctrine was publicly promulgated by our president, the late Brigham Young, forty years ago, and was steadily taught and impressed upon the Latter-Day Saints up to September, 1890.”

(“Proceedings before the Committee on Privileges and Elections of the United States Senate: in the matter of the protests against the right of Hon. Reed Smoot, a senator from the state of Utah, to hold his seat” [Jan. 16, 1904-April 13, 1906]. Accessed September 24, 2022, <https://archive.org/details/proceedingsbefor01unitrich/page/18/mode/2up>.)

¹⁴⁷ The Saints were given this command in a revelation now found in Doctrine and Covenants 98:16 on August 6, 1833. The Mormon War broke out in August 1838.

and Alexander McRae, were accused of treason and sent to Liberty Jail, where they stayed in custody until April. While Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and the other prisoners survived in miserable conditions, rumors flew about. When they reached the ears of those at Liberty Jail, Joseph Smith responded with fire:

“We say again unto you we are innocent of these things; they have represented us falsely; Was it for committing adultery, we are aware that false slander has gone abroad for it has been reiterated in our ears. These are falsehoods also. . . We have heard that it has been reported by some that some of us should have said that we not only dedicated our property but our families also to the Lord, and satan taking advantage of this has transfigured it into lasciviousness such as a community of wives which is an abomination in the sight of God. When we consecrate our property to the Lord it is to administer to the wants of the poor and needy for this is the law of God, it is not for the purpose of the rich, those who have no need, and when a man consecrates or dedicates his wife and children he does not give them to his brother or to his neighbor for there is no such law, for the law of God is thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife. He that looketh upon a woman to lust after her has committed adultery already in his heart. Now for a man to consecrate his property and his wife & children to the Lord, is nothing more nor less than to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the widow and the fatherless, the sick, and the afflicted, and do all he can to administer to their relief in their afflictions, and for him and his house to serve the Lord. In order to do this he and all his house must be virtuous and shun every appearance of evil. Now if any person has represented anything otherwise than what we now write he or she is a liar and have represented us falsely.”¹⁴⁸

While Joseph Smith was in Liberty Jail and Emma Smith was home pregnant and caring for their young children and doing what she could to act as mother of the church, the church was in commotion, and on multiple occasions the traveling high council took it upon themselves to “go ahead,” as Brigham Young and Willard Richards later asserted in a letter to the first Presidency: “Our motto is go ahead. Go ahead - & ahead we are determined to go – till we have conquered every foe. So come life or come death we’ll go ahead, but tell us if we are going wrong & we will right it.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Letter to the Church in Caldwell County, Missouri, 16 December 1838, p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 23, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-the-church-in-caldwell-county-missouri-16-december-1838/1>.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Brigham Young and Willard Richards, 5 September 1840, p. 12, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 23, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-from-brigham-young-and-willard-richards-5-september-1840/12>.

1839

They felt right about ordaining John Taylor as an Apostle, which Brigham Young and Heber Kimball did while Heber was briefly back in the States to make travel arrangements for immigrating British Saints.¹⁵⁰ And they felt right about convening a disciplinary council in March 1839 that excommunicated a number of prominent Latter-day Saints, including Thomas Marsh, who was the President of the Quorum of the Twelve and was subsequently replaced in that calling by Brigham Young.¹⁵¹ These actions extended beyond the responsibilities and keys of their calling that Joseph Smith had pronounced when they were ordained some 3 years earlier, but they were likely undertaken out of a perceived necessity during a chaotic time.

In April, Joseph Smith and his incarcerated companions escaped their long confinement and began their trek to rejoin the body of the Saints who by then had fled to Illinois. That same month, eight of the incomplete Quorum of the Twelve traveling high council left to resume or begin their missions to England.

The Apostles Go to England, 1839 - 1841

Scriptures and anthropology testify that the radical variation of marriage that is polygamy has popped up on the earth in every dispensation and among every people. But that alone does not tell us whether it is of God, or of Satan—polygamy’s pervasiveness only tells us that it is extremely important to one of them. Polygamy is either important to God because it is celestial marriage, or it is important to Satan because it destroys celestial marriage.

It should not be a surprise to believers of Christ, then, that when the apostles arrived in England, polygamy was very much a topic of discussion. It may have grown out of Martin Luther’s teachings during the Protestant Reformation, or the many books published on the subject of polygamy.¹⁵² Polygamy’s sudden traction in a Christian nation at the onset of the Restoration makes perfect sense when viewed through a spiritual lens. Viewed through a secular lens, it’s pretty surprising. From Sarah Pearsall’s *Polygamy: An Early American History*:

¹⁵⁰ John Taylor was ordained a member of the Quorum of the Twelve on December 19, 1838 in Far West, Missouri.

¹⁵¹ History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842], p. 899, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 24, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/80>.

¹⁵² Examples of such books include T. T. Payen’s *The Cases of Polygamy, Concubinage, Adultery, Divorce, etc., Seriously and Learnedly Discussed* (London: 1732) and Delany Patrick’s *Reflections on Polygamy* (London: 1739).

“Unexpected as it may seem, in 1780, polygamy became a preoccupation in England. It is difficult to comprehend fully the American controversy [over polygamy] without understanding this English one. In London in June 1780, the Reverend Martin Madan, a lawyer turned Methodist-leaning minister, published *Thelyphthora; or, a Treatise on Female Ruin*, a 2-volume (which was later expanded to 3) treatise calling for the reform of marriage law in England. It called in particular for the legalization of polygyny. This publication, [which appeared with a major publisher,] provoked a wave of reviews and counter-treatises, newspaper notices, poems, plays, and prints. By the end of the year, the topic formed a staple of London debating societies.

“Even beyond the metropolis, Madan’s doctrines were purported to be the subject of intense discussion. According to a Cheshire preacher, *Thelyphthora* was, despite its weightiness, ‘much read, and more talked of,’ indeed, ‘the general topic of conversation, in almost every company where I go.’¹⁵³

Here is an incomplete list of publications in and near England over the years following *Thelyphthora*’s release that addressed Madan’s pro-polygyny ideas:¹⁵⁴

- Anon., *An Heroic Epistle to the Rev. Martin M—d—n, author of a late treatise on polygamy* (London: R. Faulder, 1780)
- H.W., *The Unlawfulness of Polygamy Evince [or, Observations Occasioned by the Erroneous Interpretations of the Passages of the New Testament, respecting the Laws of Marriage, Lately published in a Treatise as Female Ruin]* (London: G. Kearsly, 1780)
- “A Layman,” *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Madan, concerning the chapter on polygamy, in his late publication, entitled Thelyphthora* (London: Fielding and Walker, 1780)
- John Smith, *Polygamy Indefensible* (London: Alexander Hogg, 1780)
- John Towers, *Polygamy Unscriptural* (London: Alexander Hogg, 1780)
- Anon., *A Letter to Dr. P—y, in answer to a discourse of his, lately published; in which are also some observations on Dr. M—n’s treatise on polygamy* (London: n.p., 1781)
- “A Nymph of King’s-Place,” *A Poetical Epistle to the Reverend Mr. Madan* (London: Fielding and Walker, 1781)
- Anon., *Martin’s Hobby Houghed and Pounded, or Letters on Thelyphthora* (London: J. Buckland, 1781)
- Edward Burnaby Greene, *Whispers for the Ear of the Author of Thelyphthora in favor of Reason and Religion* (London: H. Payne, 1781)

¹⁵³ Pearsall: 190-191.

¹⁵⁴ List from Pearsall: 358. Additionally, there were “at least a dozen magazine reviews in periodicals such as the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review*. There were several cartoons about it, as well as scores of newspaper stories[,and the topic was discussed in] at least ten separate debates in late 1780.”

- “Married Woman,” *Political Priest, A Satire Dedicated to a Reverend Polygamist* (London: J. Stockdale, 1781)
- The play *Thelyphthora, a farce* by Frederick Pilon (London, 1781)
- Anon., *Polygamy, or Mahomet the Prophet to Madan the Evangelist, an heroic poem* (n.p., 1782?)
- Edward Burnaby Greene, *Sweets for the tooth of the author of Thelyphthora: occasioned by that writer’s Five letters to Abraham Rees, D. D.* (London: H. Payne and C. Dilly, 1784)
- Thomas Haweis, *A Scriptural Refutation of the Arguments for Polygamy* (London: Charles Dilly, J. Mathews, and T. Wilkins, 1781)
- Richard Hill, *The Blessings of Polygamy Displayed* (London: J. Mathews, C. Dilly, and J. Eddowes, 1781)
- Richard Hill, *The Cobbler’s Letter to the Author of Thelyphthora* (London: J. Mathews, C. Dilly, and J. Eddowes, 1781)
- Henry Moore, *A Word to Dr. Madan* (Bristol: n.p., 1781)
- John Palmer, *An Examination of Thelyphthora, on the Subject of Marriage* (Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason for J. Johnson, 1781)
- James Penn, *Remarks on Thelyphthora* (London: Bladon, Deane, and Froud, 1781)
- Thomas Wills, *Remarks on Polygamy* (London: T. Hughes, F. Walsh, R. Baldwin, and W. Otridge, 1781)
- James Cookson, *Thoughts on Polygamy* (Winchester: J. Wilkes, T. Cadell, and J. Debrett, 1782)
- James Edward Hamilton, *A Short Treatise on Polygamy* (Dublin: n.p., 1786)
- The play *The Farce of Chit Chat, or the Penance of Polygamy* by B. Walwyn (Dublin, 1792)
- William Cowper, “Anti-Thelyphthora,” in *The Works of William Cowper, Esq., Comprising His Poems, Correspondence and Translations. With a Life of the Author by the Editor, Robert Southey* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1836-37)

Of necessity the entire doctrine hinged on the Old Testament, for Christ in the New clearly defined marriage as between “twain,” the male and the female, and His apostles required men serving in such offices as bishop to be the husband of 1 wife.¹⁵⁵ But those Old Testament polygamists seemed to make a case for it, specifically the patriarchs Abraham and Jacob, who received the covenant; Moses, whose law seemed to allow it and was possibly a polygamist himself; and of course powerful Kings David and Solomon, whose harems were legendary. These were the men upon whom the entire polygamy argument was built.

¹⁵⁵ See Matthew 19:4 and 1 Timothy 3:2.

Though *Thelyphthora* was hotly discussed and debated in its day, after 60 years its main argument had not effected a change in the laws surrounding polygamy. However, wrestling with the ideas *Thelyphthora* put forward was still very much in vogue, as books published during this time demonstrate.

It was into this environment that the traveling high council and other missionaries arrived in 1839. The core of the Latter-day Saints' future leadership during the period of polygamy indoctrination served missions to Great Britain between 1839 and 1841, including: Brigham Young, Heber Kimball, Willard Richards, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt, Parley Pratt, and George A. Smith. With the understanding of polygamy that had been cultivated by some of their interactions with former Cochranites, combined with their very recent exposure to the Book of Mormon and conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the traveling high council's minds were fertile ground for this doctrine, and it was here that their testimonies conflating the Abrahamic covenant with polygamy flourished.

Helen Mar Kimball later recalled that before her father, Heber C. Kimball, went on his mission to England, he

“said to some friends in my hearing that if ‘all things were to be restored again as they were in the beginning,’ as the scriptures declare them, the principle of a plurality of wives must also be restored; and he was heard to repeat the same when on his second mission to Europe, but he hardly expected it would come in his day.”¹⁵⁶

Lorenzo Snow testified toward the end of his life:

“As to plural marriage, I want to say a few words; for I may not have the opportunity of bearing my testimony to you again. There is no man that lives that had a more perfect knowledge of the principle of plural marriage, its holiness and divinity, than what I had. It was revealed to me before the Prophet Joseph Smith explained it to me. I had been on a mission to England between two and three years, and before I left England I was perfectly satisfied in regard to something connected with plural marriage.”¹⁵⁷

And Brigham Young, recalling when he came to gain a testimony of the doctrine of many wives and concubines, said,

¹⁵⁶ Woman's Exponent, vol. 10, no. 9, 1 October 1881: 66. Accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/WomansExp/id/30052>.

¹⁵⁷ “Discourse delivered at St. George, Utah on Thursday, May 8th, 1899 by President Lorenzo Snow,” Deseret Semi-Weekly News, June 6, 1899: 6.

“We were driven from Missouri after Joseph went up there and we came to Nauvoo, and the twelve went to England. While we were in England, I think, the Lord manifested to me by visions and his Spirit things that I did not then understand...there had never been a thought of it in the Church that I ever knew anything about at that time. But I had this for myself.”¹⁵⁸

Deceptive visions and manifestations, which the Lord had warned the Saints about in the founding months of the church,¹⁵⁹ likely came as these men pondered the doctrine of many wives and concubines without treasuring the words of Christ, nor considering the law of the Lord that was given to the Saints.¹⁶⁰ We can see this from their journals kept in England.

Brigham Young, for example, wrote a list of questions to ask Joseph Smith in the back of one of his journals in England. The second question listed is, “Was David a man after God’s own heart?”¹⁶¹ In 1 Samuel we see that King Saul’s transgressions had caused the Lord to look for “a man after his own heart,” which he found in the boy David.¹⁶² And in 1 Kings, the next king, Jeroboam, is told “thou has not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments, and who followed me with all his heart, to do that only which was right in mine eyes.”¹⁶³ This might cause one to wonder how the Lord justified David in having many wives and concubines, as we know many in England did. But if Brigham Young had an opportunity to read Joseph’s inspired translation of the Bible, or even ask Joseph himself, the scriptures would have been unfolded to him in absolute consistency with the law of the Lord, because as we have already discussed, Joseph changed every scripture which implied David was righteous in polygamy to demonstrate that his works were not righteous.

¹⁵⁸ Brigham Young, Deseret News, July 1, 1874. Accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews3/id/194495>.

¹⁵⁹ On May 9, 1831 the Lord warned the Saints that “there are many spirits which are false spirits, which have gone forth in the earth, deceiving the world. And also Satan hath sought to deceive you, that he might overthrow you...And by giving heed and doing these things which ye have received, and which ye shall hereafter receive—and the kingdom is given you of the Father, and power to overcome all things which are not ordained of him” (Doctrine and Covenants 50:2-3, 35). The Saints had already received the law of the Lord (Doctrine and Covenants 42) which commanded monogamy, and thereafter had received commandments to make themselves equal in all things, such as the following: “It must needs be that there be an organization of my people, in regulating and establishing the affairs of the storehouse for the poor of my people, both in this place and in the land of Zion...That you may be equal in the bonds of heavenly things, yea, and earthly things also, for the obtaining of heavenly things. For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things” (Doctrine and Covenants 78:3, 5-6).

¹⁶⁰ See Joseph Smith Translation Matthew 1: 37: “And whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived.” And Doctrine and Covenants 42:22: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.”

¹⁶¹ Brigham Young office files, 1832-1878 (bulk 1844-1877) / Journals, 1832-1877 / Brigham Young Journals, 1832- 1846 / Journal, 1840 October 19-1844: August 1. Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/2829aa49-03f1-41b4-b594-b9b8ba3df518/0/144>.

¹⁶² 1 Samuel 13:14.

¹⁶³ 1 Kings 14: 8.

The inspired translation of the Bible changes the verse in 1 Kings so that it instead reads that the Lord “rent the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to thee because he kept not my commandments. But thou hast not been as my servant David, when he followed me with all his heart, only to do right in mine eyes.”¹⁶⁴ David wanted to follow God and kept whatever traditions were remembered from the time of Moses, but according to the Damascus Document, in David’s day the law of Moses had been sealed up, which would mean David had not read the portion of the law that explicitly forbade kings from multiplying wives, and so a measure of David’s iniquity was done in ignorance.

In addition to this polygamy pondering, Brigham and the other men who attended the dedicatory week at the Kirtland Temple remembered the sacred experiences they had with their brethren there, washing their feet, and sought to replicate and build upon this ordinance with their new understanding of the ancient polygamous patriarchs and kings. It is unclear how much they incorporated a doctrine of many wives and concubines into their attempts, but evidence suggests experimentation. Heber Kimball’s England journal, for example, records multiple one-on-one encounters with women who washed his feet. In a journal entry recording one-such encounter, the married Elder Kimball’s writing has been erased but is still barely legible. This erased entry records that a Sister Ellen “combed my head. We washed our feet and went to bed.”¹⁶⁵

Though William Clayton was not at the Kirtland Temple nor even a member of the church when the Kirtland Temple was dedicated, he was instructed in this practice as well, as we can see from his mission journal, where the married Clayton records many instances of receiving similar foot washings from multiple women while serving his mission in England. Following are just three examples:

- “My feet were very sore to nig[ht.] Sarah washed them & gave me a pint of warm Porter. I lent her Book of Doc & Cov.”¹⁶⁶
- “Sarah had some egg milk ready & she washed my feet & I then went to bed.”¹⁶⁷
- “We got home about 1 ‘o clock took S[upper] with H Walker - sis Poole washed my feet S Crooks gave me an orange.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ RLDS 1 Kings 14:8. Accessed at: <https://www.centerplace.org/hs/iv/1kings.htm#c14>.

¹⁶⁵ Heber C. Kimball papers, 1837-1866 / Journal, 1840 December - 1841 March, 1843 June - October, 1845 May - November: January 21 (estimated). Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ea3055f9-c274-4988-8815-eba70af1007d/0/33>.

¹⁶⁶ Digital Collections, Mormon Missionary Diaries, Clayton, William vol. 1, 1840-1842: page 56 (March 30, 1840). Collection accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MMD/id/59385>.

¹⁶⁷ Digital Collections, Mormon Missionary Diaries, Clayton, William vol. 1, 1840-1842: page 59 (April 8, 1840). Collection accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MMD/id/59385>.

¹⁶⁸ Digital Collections, Mormon Missionary Diaries, Clayton, William vol. 1, 1840-1842: page 63 (April 22, 1840). Collection accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MMD/id/59385>.

Several segments of these journals are redacted, but the visible portions show a clear orientation toward what would later become known as “the doctrine of...having many wives and concubines.”¹⁶⁹

The Saints in America, 1839

Meanwhile, back in America, the Saints decided to send a group of delegates to Washington, DC, to importune the federal government for redress for their losses in Missouri. Joseph Smith Jr., Elias Higbee, Sidney Rigdon, and Porter Rockwell met with United States President Martin Van Buren, who they found to be a poor defender of the constitution. President Van Buren reportedly responded to them, “What can I do? I can do nothing for you,— if I do any thing, I shall come in contact with the whole State of Missouri.”¹⁷⁰

1840

After bringing their case to the House of Representatives and receiving a similar outcome, the delegation returned to Nauvoo, with Elias Higbee writing to Joseph,

“I feel now, as though that we have made our last appeal to all earthly tribunals; that we should now put our whole trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob— We have a right now which we could not heretofore so fully claim— That is of asking God for redress and redemption; as they have been refused us by man.”¹⁷¹

With large scale problems like this, the weeds of polygamy may not have seemed very threatening at this time. Or alternatively, most Saints and even leaders may have assumed that polygamy rumors were mere sparks, and that they were sufficiently dousing them with the law of the church and constant prophetic refutations. After the Saints’ printing press and type were recovered from Far West and brought to Nauvoo, the *Times and Seasons* began its run and in April 1840 printed Joseph Smith’s letter from Liberty Jail with its

¹⁶⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 132:1.

¹⁷⁰ Cited in Bryan B. Korth, “Images of Joseph Smith's 1839-40 Visit to Washington, DC,” in *Latter-day Saints in Washington, DC: History, People, and Places*, ed. Kenneth L. Alford, Lloyd D. Newell, and Alexander L. Baugh (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 1–28. Accessed at: <https://rsc.byu.edu/latter-day-saints-washington-dc/joseph-smiths-1839-40-visit-washington>. Summary of this meeting also published in: Discourse, 7 April 1840, p. 2, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 25, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1840/1>.

¹⁷¹ History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842], p. 1022, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 25, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/194#X6BE59C32-8BF2-488B-952F-153482FAFF26>.

lengthy and specific condemnation of lasciviousness and a community of wives, “which things are an abomination in the sight of God.”¹⁷²

From the outside, the sparks of polygamy attracted curiosity and attention, and plenty of people assumed, as they do now, that where there’s smoke, there’s fire. John Bennett certainly did, and though he was a married man, and father of young children, he moved into Nauvoo posing as a single bachelor, intent to feed his lustful desire with the plentiful fuel that certainly was available to such a leader as Joseph Smith.¹⁷³ Joseph was building a city, continuing to deal with the bureaucratic fallout from the Mormon War, and trying to get the inspired translation of the Bible published, in addition to his family duties and other ecclesiastical responsibilities. Bennett, who was well-acquainted with fraternity, quickly ingratiated himself with Joseph, who was in need of help but was not a particularly strong judge of character, as the Lord had told him years earlier when his actions resulted in the loss of the 116 manuscript pages from the translation of the book of Lehi.¹⁷⁴

1841

Bennett took advantage of this weakness and Joseph’s busy schedule by attempting to seduce women in Joseph’s name, but soon after the Saints were commanded to build a temple and while Joseph was attempting to get the inspired translation of the Bible published, John Bennett’s double-life was exposed and he was shown to have committed adultery and taught immorality in the name of the Lord. Because, as Joseph later said, Bennett acknowledged his iniquity, asked and prayed for forgiveness, begged that he might not be exposed, on account of his mother, and other reasons, and felt desperate at the thought of being so ruined and undone, Joseph and other leaders of the church initially chose to not publicly expose him.¹⁷⁵ Within weeks of the first intimations that Bennett was not who he claimed to be, the traveling high council returned from England.

Mists of darkness and doctrinal haze begin

From that moment on, polygamy accusations became a blaze, and the resulting mists of darkness have created a doctrinal haze that has prevented Latter-day Saints since that time from being able to ascertain eternal truth about polygamy. These mists of darkness have come about because, with the release of the Joseph Smith Papers, Richard Van Wagoner’s

¹⁷² Times and seasons (Nauvoo, Ill. : 1839-1846) / 1839-1840 (Volume 1) / 1840 April (No. 6): page 5. Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c6f59fe2-3612-4f15-b572-f1518ae533de/0/4>.

¹⁷³ John C. Bennett was baptized in September 1840 in Nauvoo, Illinois.

¹⁷⁴ “You cannot always judge the righteous, or as you cannot always tell the wicked from the righteous...” (Doctrine and Covenants 10:37).

¹⁷⁵ Times and Seasons, 1 August 1842, p. 868, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 25, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-august-1842/6>.

observation has become clear for all to see: after Joseph and Hyrum Smith were killed in 1844, members of the Quorum of the Twelve engaged in an organized, dedicated effort to revise the history, making *hundreds* of deletions, additions, and alterations to Joseph Smith's history.¹⁷⁶ Few outside Brigham Young's inner circle were aware of the behind-the-scenes alterations so seamlessly stitched into church history; an assistant church historian in 1845 observed that "after Joseph's death his memoir was 'doctored' to suit the new order of things."¹⁷⁷

This fact has become increasingly verified as the Joseph Smith Papers and other projects continue to reveal previously buried historical data. Every historical source which has been used to justify a doctrine of many wives and concubines falls into one of two categories. The first is a category of omission; it is made up of quotes which have no foundation or existence in Joseph Smith's lifetime and thus do not appear within the Joseph Smith Papers. The following is an example of such a quote, which was attributed to Joseph Smith and decades after his death published in multiple sources:

"They accuse me of polygamy, and of being a false prophet and many other things which I do not now remember; but, said he, I am no false prophet, I am no impostor; I have had no dark revelations, I have had no revelations from the devil. I have made no revelations; I have not got anything up myself. The same God that has thus far dictated and directed me, and inspired me and strengthened me in this work, gave me this revelation and Commandment on Celestial and Plural marriage; and the same God Commanded me to obey it. He said to me that unless I accept it and

¹⁷⁶ Richard S. Van Wagoner, Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess, Signature Books (Salt Lake City, 1994): 322.

This is recorded in many entries found in *History of the Church* volume 7, such as: "I commenced revising the History of Joseph Smith at Brother Richards' office: Elder Heber C. Kimball and George A. Smith were with me" (Apr 1, 1845: page 389); "Engaged at Elder Richards' office with Elders Kimball and Smith revising Church History" (Apr 2, 1845: 389-390); "With Elders Heber C. Kimball, W. Richards and George A. Smith reading and revising Church History" (Apr 13, 1845: 408); "we read and revised history all day" (Apr 14, 1845: 411); "I spent the day at Brother Hunter's in company with Brothers Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, George A. Smith and N. K. Whitney revising history" (Apr 16, 1845: 411); "Revising history as yesterday" (Apr 17, 1845: 411); "We read and revised fifty-seven pages of History of Joseph Smith from Book 'B'" (Apr 20, 1845: 411); "I met with Elders Heber C. Kimball, John Taylor and George A. Smith at Brother Taylor's; we revised a portion of the History of Joseph Smith" (May 18, 1845: 414); "I spent the day with Brothers H. C. Kimball and George A. Smith revising history" (May 19, 1845: 427); "Elders H. C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, George A. Smith, and myself engaged revising Church History" (May 20, 1845: 428); "Revising history in company with Brothers Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards and George A. Smith" (Nov 8, 1845: 514); "Forenoon, Elders Willard Richards and George A. Smith revising history. Afternoon, Elder Kimball and I joined them, and assisted in revising history." (Nov 11, 1845: 514); "Ten a.m., Brother Heber C. Kimball and I called at the Historian's Office and read history with Dr. Richards and George A. Smith" (Nov 24, 1845: 532); "At the Historian's Office with Elder George A. Smith and revised fifty pages history" (Nov 24, 1845: 532); "Elders Willard Richards and George A. Smith read and revised history to the end of 1843" (Nov 24, 1845: 533).

¹⁷⁷ Van Wagoner: 322.

introduce it and practise it, I together with my people should be damned and cut off from this time henceforth. And they say if I do so and so they will kill me. What shall I do! What shall I do! If I do not practise it I shall be damned with all my people; if I do teach it and practise it and urge it, they say they will kill me, and I know they will. But said he, we have got to observe it, that it was an eternal principle, and that it was given to him by way of Commandment and not by way of instruction.”¹⁷⁸

This quote has been shown to be a verbal statement first reported in 1881, 37 years after the alleged event, to President Joseph F. Smith when the Church was battling government laws against polygamy and seeking to provide evidence that it originated with Joseph Smith.¹⁷⁹ Nothing even remotely resembling this quote can be found in the Joseph Smith Papers.

The second category of historical sources used to justify a doctrine of many wives and concubines are those which were revised so that their original meaning is fundamentally changed from *forbidding* polygamy to *enabling* polygamy. An example of this type of source is the following quote, which started as a statement in Joseph’s journal forbidding polygamy without exception:

“Walked up and down the street with Scribe and gave instructions to try those who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives. on this Law. Joseph forbids it and the practice thereof. No man shall have but one wife.”¹⁸⁰

After Joseph Smith’s death, when the leaders prepared the draft for the History of the Church, this quote was “revised,” as the insertion in left margin notes, to become a pronouncement in the published History of the Church¹⁸¹ of the circumstances in which men *could* be polygamous:

¹⁷⁸ A version of this quote was published in the April 1884 issue of *The Contributor: A monthly magazine of home literature, represents the Young Men’s and Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Associations of the Latter-day Saints / 1879-1890 (Volumes 1-11) / 1883-1884 (Volume 5) / 1884 April (No. 7): 259.* Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/99e4dfbe-c3bd-4a98-9853-081f52ceb3df/0/0>.

¹⁷⁹ Dennison L. Harris statement, Ephraim, Utah, 1881 May 15: 7-8. Accessed at:

<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/750422ec-dbbc-42a4-a93d-2e3d671d711b/0/6>.

¹⁸⁰ Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 3, 15 July 1843–29 February 1844, p. 117, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 26, 2024,

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-3-15-july-1843-29-february-1844/123>.

¹⁸¹ History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], p. 1746, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 30, 2024,

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/118>.

“Walked up and down the Streets with my scribe. Gave instructions to try those persons who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives. for according to the law I hold the keys of this power in the last days, for there is never but one on Earth at a time on whom the power and its keys are conferred—and I have constantly said No man shall have but one wife at a time unless the Lord directs otherwise.”¹⁸²

Why would the Quorum of the Twelve do this? Well, when the traveling high council returned home from England, *they* were fully converted to the principle and doctrine of having many wives and concubines, but they knew the Prophet Joseph had not yet been converted to it. And that was fine, because most of them understood that polygamy was a doctrine that would come about in the process of time. They were well aware of how disruptive the persecutions had been to the Saints, and likely allowed that with the heavy burdens that had been laid upon his shoulders and the constant struggles of the Church, Joseph had not had time to consider what they believed to be the highest and holiest order of the priesthood. And so, they became very involved in Nauvoo, and watched Joseph carefully.

Brigham Young, speaking of polygamy and likely alluding to his revelation in England, later said, “I know how I received the knowledge that I have got” and then he explained his reasoning for why he felt justified in his testimony of polygamy despite Joseph’s contemporary teachings to the contrary:

“I had but one prayer, and I offered that all the time, and that was that I might be permitted to hear Joseph Smith speak on doctrine, and see his mind reach out untrammelled to grasp the deep things of God. But, in consequence of the wickedness of the children of men and the consequent inability they possess to receive heavenly things, he could not impart what was made known to him of the Lord. I was with him several years before I pretended to open my mouth to speak at all; but I would constantly watch him, and if possible learn doctrine and principle beyond that which he expressed.”¹⁸³

Heber Kimball recalled of the Prophet Joseph,

¹⁸² History Draft [1 March–31 December 1843], p. 72, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 30, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-draft-1-march-31-december-1843/143>.

¹⁸³ Brigham Young Papers, Discourse at General conference, “Concerns Hyrum Smith, Joseph Smith, and plural marriage,” 8 Oct 1866, Reported by George D. Watt. Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/23abc600-ff59-4c69-ad9f-85dd32e55db2/0/6>.

“We know that the greatest torment he had and the greatest mental suffering was because this people would not live up to their privileges. There were many things he desired to reveal that we have not learned yet, but he could not do it. He said sometimes that he felt pressed upon and as though he were pent up in an acorn shell, and all because the people did not and would not prepare themselves to receive the rich treasures of wisdom and knowledge that he had to impart. He could have revealed a great many things to us if we had been ready; but he said there were many things that we could not receive because we lacked that diligence and faithfulness that were necessary to entitle us to those choice things of the kingdom.”¹⁸⁴

Though Joseph clearly hadn't received this higher understanding as they saw it, the traveling high council chose to give him the benefit of the doubt, trusting that they would all be unified soon enough in their testimonies of polygamy. Joseph's Smith's great granddaughter recalled a story that she heard about this time in Nauvoo that stayed in her mind above all else. Her dearest friend's grandmother, Lydia Wright Mofett, had been a young woman in the early days of Nauvoo.

“She said she well remembered Brigham Young had come to her mother's home and explained the polygamist doctrine to her mother and herself and as he left telling them, ‘You must tell no one of this, we must keep it quiet for as yet Brother Joseph is not with us in this.’”¹⁸⁵

1841 resumed

At the beginning of 1841, the Lord had given the Saints specific instructions for what they needed to prioritize: they were commanded to build both a house for the entertainment of strangers, which became the Nauvoo mansion, and a temple in Nauvoo.¹⁸⁶ Joseph Smith and the Saints began work on these buildings in concert with all the other responsibilities associated with church and state. Hyrum Smith was appointed by the Lord “to the office of

¹⁸⁴ “Building the Temple—Endowments—Counsel to Missionaries, Etc.” Remarks by President Heber C. Kimball, made in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, April 6, 1863, *Journal of Discourses*, volume 10: 167. Accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/4209>.

¹⁸⁵ Lydia Wright Mofett is quoted in a letter from Earlita Smith Inslee included in Pamela and Richard Price's book, *Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy Volume 2* (Independence, Missouri, 2014: 196-697). Pdf may be accessed at: <https://mormonpolygamydocuments.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/JS1129.pdf> (page 22 of pdf).

This recollection is not in Family Search, but Lydia Wright Mofett's chronological timeline and associations align perfectly with her recollection (Ancestor ID 2743-WT4).

¹⁸⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 124, given January 19, 1841.

Priesthood and Patriarch... and from this time forth the Lord appointed unto him that he may be a prophet, and a seer, and a revelator unto the church, as well as Joseph.”¹⁸⁷

Back from England, members of the Twelve also sought to facilitate associations for the interests of the people of Nauvoo. Heber Kimball was one of the original petitioners to establish a Freemasonry lodge in Nauvoo, Illinois.¹⁸⁸ The Twelve also helped 1,000 European converts emigrate to America, and they continued to preside over all the churches of the Saints in England since there was not yet a presidency established there.¹⁸⁹

As these men began to carefully seed the ground for the doctrine of many wives and concubines, John Bennett’s reputation began to be publicly sullied as he attempted to protect and preserve a brothel from destruction after the Nauvoo City Council ordered the building removed as a nuisance.¹⁹⁰

1842

Soon after, the Relief Society was established,¹⁹¹ and in the minutes of their first meeting we see that one of the objects of the society was to correct the morals and strengthen the virtues of the female community.¹⁹² In one of the next Relief Society meetings, an epistle was read to the sisters, warning them against believing that any man had the authority to justify breaking the law of God:

“Shall the credulity, good faith, and stedfast feelings of our sisters, for the cause of God or truth, be impos’d upon by believing such men, because they say they have authority from Joseph, or the First Presidency, or any other Presidency of the Church; and thus, with a lie in their mouth, deceive and debauch the innocent, under the assumption that they are authoriz’d from these sources? May God Forbid!

“A knowledge of some such things having come to our ears, we improve this favorable opportunity, wherein so goodly a number of you may be inform’d that no

¹⁸⁷ Doctrine and Covenants 124: 91, 94.

¹⁸⁸ Source: Wikipedia: Heber C. Kimball. Accessed on October 4, 2024: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heber_C._Kimball.

¹⁸⁹ Church History: The Convert Immigrants. Accessed at: <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/content/trek/the-convert-immigrants?lang=eng>.

¹⁹⁰ Andrew F. Smith, *The Saintly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 86–91. Accessed at: https://bhroberts.org/records/q7W1rb-0mosp3/andrew_f_smith_recounts_the_details_of_john_c_bennetts_excommunication_in_1842.

¹⁹¹ March 17 1842.

¹⁹² Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, p. 7, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/30>.

such authority ever has, ever can, or ever will be given to any man, and if any man has been guilty of any such thing, let him be treated with utter contempt, and let the curse of God fall on his head, and let him be turned out of Society as unworthy of a place among men, & denounced as the blackest & the most unprincipled wretch; and finally let him be damned!

“We have been informed that some unprincipled men, whose names we will not mention at present, have been guilty of such crimes. We do not mention their names... suffice it to say, there are those, and we therefore warn you, & forewarn you, in the name of the Lord, to check & destroy any faith that any innocent person may have in any such character; for we do not want any one to believe any thing as coming from us, contrary to the old established morals & virtues & scriptural laws, regulating the habits, customs & conduct of society; and all persons pretending to be authoriz’d by us, or having any permit, or sanction from us, are & will be liars & base impostors, & you are authoriz’d on the very first intimation of the kind, to denounce them as such, & shun them as the flying fiery serpent, whether they are prophets, Seers, or revelators; Patriarchs, twelve Apostles, Elders, Priests, Mayers, Generals, City Councillors, Aldermen, Marshalls, Police, Lord Mayors or the Devil, are alike culpable & shall be damned for such evil practices; and if you yourselves adhere to anything of the kind, you also shall be damned.”¹⁹³

The epistle was signed by President Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, Heber Kimball, Willard Richards, and Vinson Knight (who died a few months later).

The introduction to the record of this epistle in the Relief Society Minute book states that it was not recorded at the time of its reading because the Secretary was not present,¹⁹⁴ so that is noteworthy when trying to parse through historical documents that have potentially been revised. But assuming this epistle was indeed read to the Relief Society, then it is impossible to misunderstand: *there is no secret permission for that which everyone understands to be sin. No one is above God’s law.*

Another copy of this epistle exists—a looseleaf, undated document—but on this document a phrase is added, which, like the revised journal entry, changes the message completely to make space for polygamy where none existed before. In this copy of the epistle to the Relief Society, the sisters are told:

¹⁹³ Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, p. 86, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/109>.

¹⁹⁴ “The following Epistle was read before the Society, early after its organization— but was not forwarded to be recorded; the Secretary not being present at the time of its reading; else it would have appear’d in its proper place.” Source in footnote 191.

“we don’t want any body to believe any thing as coming from us contrary to the old established morals & virtues & scriptural laws regulating the habits customs & conduct of Society *unless it be by message delivered to you by our own mouth, by actual revelation & commandment.*”¹⁹⁵

This phrase throws the entire epistle into confusion; how could a woman know whether the prophet, seer, revelator, patriarch, twelve apostle etc. telling them with his own mouth to disregard the old established morals and virtues and scriptural laws was, in fact, speaking by actual revelation and commandment? What is the measurement she could use to determine whether it was an actual revelation and commandment, if it was in direct contradiction to the commandments?

The main clue that this looseleaf epistle with the “unless” clause is the revised one, and that the copy in the Relief Society Minute Book is the original one, is that the men who were converted to polygamy—the ones whose journals demonstrate this conversion—these men later testified that they had received the doctrine of many wives and concubines by actual revelation.

And it wasn’t just the journals and testimonies that demonstrate their conversion to polygamy. During this time, a small number of the men who were converted to the doctrine of having many wives and concubines began secretly marrying and impregnating additional wives. They believed what they were doing was different than what John Bennett was doing, and so they did not think the condemnations applied to them. John Bennett’s justifications were solely an appeal to authority and were born of lust; but the apostles’ testimonies of polygamy were founded along the lines of Old Testament justifications.

Heber Kimball’s polygamous wife Sarah Peak Noon, who had emigrated with him and her husband and children from England, was pregnant at this time¹⁹⁶; Brigham Young was weeks away from his first recorded polygamous marriage¹⁹⁷; and Willard Richards would soon be marrying his first polygamous wife, Sarah Longstroth who had emigrated from England.¹⁹⁸ Theodore Turley, another missionary who had accompanied the Twelve

¹⁹⁵ Letter to Emma Smith and the Relief Society, 31 March 1842, p. 3, italics added. The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 4, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-emma-smith-and-the-relief-society-31-march-1842/1#source-note>.

¹⁹⁶ See Sarah Perry Peake (Unique ID L2MT-WWJ) on familysearch.org.

¹⁹⁷ Brigham Young is recorded to have married his first polygamous wife, Lucy Ann Decker, on June 14, 1842.

¹⁹⁸ See Sarah Longstroth (Unique ID LDM2-SPM) on familysearch.org. Correction: in the video I said Sarah was Willard’s second polygamous wife. According to the records on FamilySearch, she was his first.

Apostles on their mission to his native England, began polygamously marrying as early as January 1842, beginning with the first of what would eventually be 3 sisters who had emigrated from England with him and the group of 200 Saints that he had led back to Nauvoo in 1840 at the end of his mission.¹⁹⁹ Interestingly, Theodore Turley is an ancestor of Richard E. Turley Jr., the former Assistant Church Historian and Recorder who has been commissioned by the church to write the new biography of the Prophet Joseph Smith.²⁰⁰

Rumors of polygamy had always dogged the Prophet Joseph. In fact he later said, “I had not been married scarcely five minutes, and made one proclamation of the Gospel, before it was reported that I had seven wives.”²⁰¹ But in 1842 Joseph clearly attributed the firestorm in Nauvoo to John Bennett and his associates. When a report began circulating “about Elder [Heber] Kimball, B. [Brigham] Young, [Hyrum Smith], and others of the Twelve, alleging that [teenage Martha Brotherton], who had recently emigrated from England, had been shut in a room for several days, and that they had endeavored to induce her to believe in having two wives,” Joseph Smith and Hyrum Smith both denounced such reports as foolish lies.²⁰² From the Conference report in the Times and Seasons (April 1842):

“Pres’t. J. Smith spoke upon the subject of the stories respecting Elder [Heber] Kimball and others, showing the folly and inconsistency of spending any time in conversing about such stories or hearkening to them, for there is no person that is acquainted with our principles would believe such lies.”²⁰³

Though this young woman and her family had left Nauvoo, upon hearing such clear and unequivocal teachings in this setting and others, several women came forward, upset that they had been deceived into sexual relationships on just such terms. Gathering up all the

¹⁹⁹ See Theodore Turley (Unique ID KWJV-HKX) on familysearch.org.

²⁰⁰ Speaking of the Mountain Meadows Massacre on a June 10, 2023 episode of the Faith Matters podcast, Brother Turley said that “it is a natural human inclination to want to rehabilitate an ancestor who you’ve discovered has done something wrong, so people lapse into a mode of denial or an effort to try to justify what was done, and that is exactly the wrong approach. That will not bring about healing. That will not bring about reconciliation” (highlighted on a YouTube Short accessible here:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/YYtFAYTWI0s?app=desktop>).

We will see whether this outlook will be applied to the leaders who indoctrinated polygamy into the church.

²⁰¹ 26 May 1844, Sunday, Joseph Smith preached from the stand. The original document that recorded this speech does not seem to be currently available for public viewing but the Joseph Smith Papers allows access to portions of the document. Click the “View entire transcript” link for a transcript of this document which includes this quote.

Discourse, 26 May 1844, as Compiled by Leo Hawkins, p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 8, 2024,

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-26-may-1844-as-compiled-by-leo-hawkins/1>.

²⁰² Times and Seasons, 15 April 1842, p. 763, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 8, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-april-1842/13>.

²⁰³ Ibid.

testimonies resulted in charges being brought before the Nauvoo High Council, which voted to excommunicated John Bennett, who also resigned as mayor of Nauvoo,²⁰⁴ and a defamation lawsuit that Joseph brought against his friend Elias Higbee's son, Chauncey, a lawyer who Joseph accused of using his and Emma's names to "more readily...accomplish his purpose in seducing certain females."²⁰⁵

Receiving such a severe and public consequence for indulging his natural desires was certainly painful to John Bennett. But to be so dealt with when others in leadership seemed to be doing the same thing was absolutely infuriating. John Bennett had come to Nauvoo in the first place because he knew the polygamy rumors couldn't have come out of nowhere. He had almost believed Joseph was innocent of the rumors because after more than a year and a half of working closely with him, he hadn't seen any evidence of it—but John Bennett knew he had nothing to do with Martha Brotherton's accusations, and he was outraged to find out that other leaders were being allowed the sort of access to women that he was denied. From this point Bennett became fully antagonistic toward Joseph Smith. Soon after, he wrote of Joseph, "He has awakened the wrong passenger... and must suffer."²⁰⁶

The same month John Bennett was excommunicated, an assassination attempt was made on former Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs. Because Boggs had issued the Extermination Order against the Mormons, some suspected one of them may have attempted the killing. John Bennett began publishing letters in a neighboring city's newspaper accusing Joseph Smith of being behind the failed assassination attempt as well as other salacious sins,²⁰⁷ and Joseph responded by publicly denouncing Bennett and publishing an account of all his duplicitous dealings with the Saints.²⁰⁸ Days later Joseph was arrested as an accessory to the attempted murder, and then released by Nauvoo city

²⁰⁴ Bennett contested this view of his membership termination and furnished his defense in a Letter to the Editor of the Sangamo Journal, 27 June 1842, published July 8, 1842. Accessible at: <https://archive.org/details/039SJO18420729001/039-SJO-1842-07-08-001/page/n1/mode/2up?view=theater>.

²⁰⁵ From the 24 May 1842 JS, Complaint, before Ebenezer Robinson, Nauvoo, Hancock Co., IL typescript; typescript in possession of Richard and Pamela Price. Introduction to State of Illinois v. C. L. Higbee, p. , The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 8, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/introduction-to-state-of-illinois-v-c-l-higbee/1#transcript-1-1842>.

²⁰⁶ John C. Bennett to Sidney Rigdon and Orson Pratt, letter dated 10 Jan. 1842. Because of the timeline of John Bennett's church associations, it is believed this letter was actually written 10 Jan. 1843. Typescript in Journal History, CHL, under the date 10 Jan. 1842.

²⁰⁷ "Further Mormon Developments!! 2nd Letter from Gen. Bennett," Sangamo Journal / Illinois State Journal, 15 July 1842. Accessed at: <https://idnc.library.illinois.edu/?a=d&d=SJO18420715.2.103>.

²⁰⁸ Times and Seasons, 1 August 1842, p. 868, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-august-1842/6>.

marshall, but the current governor did not approve his release and so Joseph went into hiding for the rest of the year.²⁰⁹

While in hiding, Joseph wrote letters to the Saints on “the subject of the baptism of the dead, as that subject seems to occupy my mind,” he said, “and press itself upon my feelings the strongest, since I have been pursued by my enemies.”²¹⁰ Joseph instructed the Saints that

“the nature of this ordinance consists in the power of the priesthood, by the revelation of Jesus Christ, wherein it is granted that whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Or, in other words, taking a different view of the translation, whatsoever you record on earth shall be recorded in heaven, and whatsoever you do not record on earth shall not be recorded in heaven. . . . This, therefore, is the sealing and binding power, and, in one sense of the word, the keys of the kingdom, which consist in the key of knowledge.”²¹¹

Here it must be noted that no polygamous marriage record during Joseph’s life has ever been produced, despite this revelation which he taught the Saints, specifying that recording the ordinance *is* the thing that seals it in heaven. Every single “sealing” to a polygamous wife was done after Joseph died by men who believed the time had come to indoctrinate polygamy into the church.²¹²

But back to 1842—while in hiding Joseph’s wife Emma came to him, as did his friends. Upon seeing these loved ones, Joseph dictated the following expression of joy:

“With what unspeakable delight, and what transports of joy swelled my bosom, when I took by the hand on that night, my beloved Emma, she that was my wife, even the wife of my youth; and the choice of my heart. Many were the re-vibrations of my mind when I contemplated for a moment the many scenes we had been called to pass through. The fatigues, and the toils, the sorrows, and sufferings, and the joys and consolations from time to time had strewed our paths and crowned our board. Oh! what a co-mingling of thought filled my mind for the moment, Again she is here,

²⁰⁹ Journal, December 1841–December 1842, p. 213, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1841-december-1842/90>

²¹⁰ Doctrine and Covenants 127, 128:1.

²¹¹ Doctrine and Covenants 128: 8, 14.

²¹² Brown, Lisle G., compiler, Nauvoo Sealings, Adoptions, and Anointings: A Comprehensive Register of Persons Receiving LDS Temple Ordinances, 1841–1846, Salt Lake City, 2006: 280. Accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/nauvoo-sealings-adoptions-and-anointings/page/280/mode/2up?view=theater>.

even in the seventh trouble, undaunted, firm and unwavering, unchangeable, affectionate Emma.”²¹³

To ensure Bennett’s accusations were clearly put to bed, Joseph had the *Times and Seasons* publish relevant portions of the Church’s statement on Marriage.²¹⁴ Two months later, he had it published again, this time accompanied by nearly 2 dozen signatures of members of the church and residents of the city of Nauvoo, as well as members of the Relief Society, bearing testimony that:

“We the undersigned members of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and residents of the city of Nauvoo, persons of families do hereby certify and declare that we know of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and we give this certificate to show that Dr. J. C. Bennett’s ‘secret wife system’ is a creature of his own make as we know of no such society in this place nor never did.”²¹⁵

And:

“We, the undersigned members of the ladies’ relief society, and married females do certify and declare that we know of no system of marriage being practised in the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints save the one contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and we give this certificate to the public to show that J. C. Bennett’s ‘secret wife system’ is a disclosure of his own make.”²¹⁶

²¹³ Reflections and Blessings, 16 and 23 August 1842, p. 164, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/reflections-and-blessings-16-and-23-august-1842/2#7185974280245014020>.

²¹⁴ “Inasmuch as the public mind has been unjustly abused through the fallacy of Dr. John C. Bennett’s letters, we make an extract on the subject of marriage, showing the rule of the church on this important matter. The extract is from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and is the only rule allowed by the church.

‘All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this church, should be held sacred and fulfilled. Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again. It is not right to persuade a woman to be baptized contrary to the will of her husband, neither is it lawful to influence her to leave her husband.’”

Times and Seasons, 1 September 1842, p. 909, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-september-1842/15>.

²¹⁵ *Times and Seasons*, 1 October 1842, p. 939, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-october-1842/13>.

²¹⁶ *Times and Seasons*, 1 October 1842, p. 940, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-1-october-1842/14>.

October 1842 also saw the birth of Heber Kimball's first child with his polygamous wife Sarah Peak Noon, who Heber often mentioned in his journal while serving in England.²¹⁷ In November, a pamphlet was published at the Nauvoo Printing Office which defended polygamy as a doctrine of God. Upon hearing of it, Joseph Smith immediately responded:

“There was a book printed at my office, a short time since, written by Udney H. Jacobs, on marriage, without my knowledge; and had I been apprised of it, I should not have printed it; not that I am opposed to any man enjoying his privileges; but I do not wish to have my name associated with the authors, in such an unmeaning rigmarole of nonsense, folly, and trash.”²¹⁸

At the time the Peacemaker was printed, the Twelve apostles were responsible for the printing press in Nauvoo.²¹⁹

On December 26, after negotiations with government officials, Joseph Smith came out of hiding, surrendered to a fellow church member (Wilson Law) and they traveled to Springfield, Illinois, where the Prophet was held until January 2, 1843, when the Federal Circuit Court Judge quashed the warrant and ordered Smith released.

1843

Surveying Nauvoo upon his return, Joseph estimated that some twelve thousand Saints had gathered there.²²⁰ Joseph resumed serving as President of the Church, Mayor of Nauvoo, Lieutenant-General of the Nauvoo Legion, overseer of the construction of the Church's temple, owner of the Red Brick Store, manager of the Mansion House hotel, as well as a father of a young family and husband to an often pregnant wife. While working to fulfill his many responsibilities, and particularly because of the mischief John C. Bennett had so recently brought upon the church, Joseph Smith likely did not connect the dramatic increase in polygamy rumors with the return of the traveling high council and the Saints from England. And the apostles who were converted to polygamy seemed to be keenly

²¹⁷ See Sarah Perry Peake (Unique ID L2MT-WWJ) on familysearch.org, Memories section, “William and Sarah Peak Noon (1842).”

²¹⁸ Notice, circa 1 December 1842, p. 32, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 9, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/notice-circa-1-december-1842/1>.

²¹⁹ “On the 6th of Feb. I gave possession of the [printing] establishment, to Willard Richards the purchaser on the behalf of the Twelve; at which time my responsibility ceased as editor.” Ebenezer Robinson, quoted in Times and Seasons, 15 March 1842, p. 729, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 11, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/times-and-seasons-15-march-1842/12>.

²²⁰ Andrew H. Hedges and Alex D. Smith, “Joseph Smith, John C. Bennett, and the Extradition Attempt,” in Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 437–66. Accessed at:

<https://rsc.byu.edu/joseph-smith-prophet-seer/joseph-smith-john-c-bennett-extradition-attempt-1842>.

aware that they needed to keep their efforts as meticulously controlled as possible to avoid detection, as an interesting May 23, 1843 journal entry from William Clayton demonstrates. Possibly speaking of Heber C. Kimball and Hyrum Smith, Clayton wrote: “Conversed with H.C.K. concerning a plot that is being laid to entrap the brethren of the secret priesthood by bro H. and others.”²²¹

Joseph continued sending the traveling high council out on missions, this time to the Eastern states specifically to raise funds for the Nauvoo temple.²²² When they were in town and had the opportunity to engage in doctrinal inquiry with the Prophet, the Twelve who were converted to polygamy were careful to lead Joseph along without revealing all that they knew, and were doing. At some point the apostles began seeding the ground with questions, trying to open Joseph’s mind to revelatory possibilities: was marriage really over when one spouse died, as Hyrum’s and Brigham’s wives had? Wouldn’t the highest and holiest God have a highest and holiest form of marriage? Of course what John Bennett was doing was wrong, but what about the ancients, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all those who lived the law of Moses? Could Levirate marriage, for example, ever be of use in this dispensation? These were good questions, and they prompted serious reflection.

Joseph pondered the eternal nature of marriage, if there was one. He carefully studied the Savior’s words to the Sadducees, who had attempted to use an extreme hypothetical of Levirate marriage to trap Jesus, hoping to find cause against Him. Joseph had only received inspiration to make one small addition to these verses when he wrote his inspired version of the Bible,²²³ but of course that didn’t preclude a deeper meaning, and greater light and knowledge.

When Joseph sought to receive law, he followed the pattern the Lord had commanded, gathering with 12 or 6 Elders to petition the Lord.²²⁴ But when Joseph wondered about scriptures, and truth, he simply asked, as he had learned years before in his first vocal, private prayer.²²⁵ In July of 1843, Joseph asked God about marriage, and he received a simple, beautiful revelation about the eternal potential of the union between a husband and a wife. As Joseph himself later described,

²²¹ William Clayton’s Nauvoo Diaries and Personal Writings, compiled by Robert C. Fillerup. Accessed at archive.org/details/WilliamClaytonJournal/page/n93/mode/2up. Also accessible at: <https://doctrineandcovenantscentral.org/history/william-clayton/>.

²²² Recorded dates for some of the Twelve’s missions are as follows: Willard Richard July 1842 - no end date listed; Heber Kimball September 1842 - October 1843; Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and George A. Smith July 1843 - October 1843.

²²³ JST Luke 20:35: “But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, *through* resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage.”

²²⁴ See Doctrine and Covenants 42, 84, and 88.

²²⁵ See Joseph Smith, History, circa June 1839–circa 1841 [Draft 2], p. 3, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-1839-circa-1841-draft-2/3>.

“On enquiry the passage ‘in the resurrection they neither marry &c,’ I received for answer, Men in this life must be married in view of Eternity, was the amount of the revelation, otherwise they must remain as angels in heaven...”²²⁶

Joseph immediately began teaching the marriage revelation publicly, which teachings are first recorded on July 16, 1843. Many of the twelve were on missions and were not in Nauvoo for these initial teachings, and if there are more notes on these teachings they are not yet publicly available, or perhaps haven’t yet been noticed in the journals of those who lived in Nauvoo at this time. Of the notes available, one is by a man who was already a polygamist and another is from a young man who later became a polygamist, so they may have been written through a polygamy filter or been subject to the same revisions other documents went through. But with all that said, these notes do corroborate what Joseph himself said was in the revelation.

From Franklin D. Richards’ notes:

“No man can obtain an eternal Blessing unless the contract or covenant be made in view of Eternity. All contracts in view of this Life only terminate with this Life. Case of the woman & 7 husbands Luke 20–29 &c.

“Those who keep no eternal Law in this life or make no eternal contract are single & alone in the eternal world (Luke 20–35) and are only made Angels to minister to those who shall be heirs of Salvation never becoming Sons of God having never kept the Law of God ie eternal Law. The earthly is the image of the Heavenly shows that is by the multiplication of Lives that the eternal worlds are created and occupied that which is born of the flesh is flesh that which is born of the spirit is spirit.”²²⁷

And from William Clayton:

“went to the Grove and heard pres. J[oseph Smith] preach on the law of the priesthood. He stated that Hyrum [Smith] held the office of prophet to the church by birth-right & he was going to have a reformation and the saints must regard Hyrum

²²⁶ Nauvoo City Council Rough Minute Book, February 1844–January 1845, p. 25, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 12, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-city-council-rough-minute-book-february-1844-january-1845/27>.

²²⁷ Discourse, 16 July 1843, as Reported by Franklin D. Richards, p. 22, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 12, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-july-1843-as-reported-by-franklin-d-richards/2>.

for he has authority. He showed that a man must enter into an everlasting covenant with his wife in this world or he will have no claim on her in the next. He said that he could not reveal the fulness of these things until the Temple is completed &c.”²²⁸

The Nauvoo temple was not completed during Joseph’s lifetime, and the Grove was where the Saints held all large gatherings in Nauvoo, so a lot of Saints heard these teachings. Joseph in fact later asserted that “he had never preached the revelation in private, as he had in public—had not taught it to the anointed in the church in private, which statement many present confirmed.”²²⁹ There’s no indication that the many Saints who heard these public teachings on eternal marriage in any way understood them to be contradictory to the church’s law of marriage, which forbade polygamy in total.

Not long after, the high council may have discussed Joseph’s revelation; however, there is no record of it in the minutes of the following high council meetings. Reviewing the digital images of the most likely meeting where this could have taken place and the typed transcript reveals nothing out of the ordinary. After noting that the high council met and had no business, the minutes simply say, “Teaching by Prest Hiram Smith & William Marks.”²³⁰ Later, some men in that high council said that in August 1843 Hyrum read a revelation about polygamy. But why would there be no record of it if that were the case? Here is one possibility:

Perhaps after Joseph received his revelation on marriage and began publicly preaching it, there were questions as to whether it somehow meant polygamy, because accusations of polygamy had long dogged the Saints. Maybe the men in the high council asked about Levirate marriage, because that was what the Sadducees were using as the basis for their question to Jesus about eternal marriage and people assume Levirate marriage mandates or endorses polygamy, even though it wasn’t part the example of the Sadducees.

But speaking of Levirate marriage, it’s important to note that the example from which the tradition of Levirate marriage follows is actually between Judah’s daughter-in-law Tamar and her deceased husband’s younger, unmarried brothers who don’t want to be stuck

²²⁸ Discourse, 16 July 1843, as Reported by William Clayton, p. 65, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 12, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-july-1843-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1#1696855724057721984>.

²²⁹ Revised Minutes, 17 June 1844, p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 13, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revised-minutes-17-june-1844/1>.

²³⁰ Typed transcript available at:

<https://archive.org/details/NauvooHighCouncilMinutes/page/n83/mode/2up>.

Nauvoo Stake high council minutes, 1839 October-1845 October / Minutes, 1843 February 25-1844 May 11. Accessed at:

<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e7896b07-224e-4dd8-8790-b7f995838c46/0/13?lang=eng>.

marrying their older brother's widow.²³¹ They each wanted their own wife and children and marriage to Tamar would have precluded that, that's why they both resisted it so much. We can see from the story itself that these brothers understood the creation command to cleave to 1 wife and the restatement to Moses for men to not commit adultery because for the brothers, marrying their brother's widow would have prevented them from marrying any other woman; that's why they didn't want to do it. Polygamy is not part of the origin story of Levirate marriage.

Now at some point the children of Israel did interpret Levirate marriage as mandating or endorsing polygamy. But *their* interpretation does not mean *the Lord* ever mandated or endorsed polygamy. The children of Israel also at times interpreted the law of Moses as mandating child sacrifice.²³² That does not mean the Lord ever mandated child sacrifice. If we base our law on the interpretations of the children of Israel, we will be like them and also fail to build Zion. The Israelites were invited to come up to see the face of the Lord for themselves but they chose to stay at the bottom of the mountain.²³³ We must learn from them and recognize that if we hold them up as our examples in all things then we too will stay at the bottom of the mountain.

Maybe Hyrum didn't say it that way, or go into any explanation of the ancient traditions. Maybe there were questions in that August high council meeting about polygamy and Hyrum brushed them off because he wasn't particularly interested in exploring possible reasons for polygamy, ancient or modern. After all, Hyrum had no patience for polygamy if his recorded teachings are any indication.

He had recently said that "there were many that had a great deal to say about the ancient order of things as Solomon and David having many wives and concubines"—and no one is called out by name, but Hyrum used their language and then tried to clearly teach the correct principle:

"there were many that had a great deal to say about the ancient order of things as Solomon and David having many wives and concubines but it is an abomination in the sight of God. If an angel from heaven should come and preach such doctrine, [you] would be sure to see his cloven foot and cloud of blackness over his head, though his garments might shine as white as snow. A man might have one wife but

²³¹ See Genesis 38.

²³² See, for example, *Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel* by Heath D. Dewrell, 2017.

²³³ See Exodus 19:10-13, 20:18-21.

concubines he should have none. He observed that the idea was that this was given to Jacob for a perpetual principle”²³⁴

and that the Book of Mormon was “a key” to the Bible. So with those kinds of teachings under his belt, maybe in that high council meeting Hyrum just answered questions about Biblical polygamy by saying, “That was what the ancient people did but it has nothing to do with us today.”

Either while they were serving their missions to the eastern states or soon after returning, the Twelve would have been brought up to speed on the marriage revelation. Now this wasn’t the revelation they were expecting, but it was a start. Better than a start, actually; it gave them something to work with. And they got to work, trying out additional doctrinal explanations and phrases that better represented what they understood to be the higher and holier law of the priesthood, that doctrine of a man having many wives and concubines.

Joseph may have hoped that publicly teaching the marriage revelation would put an end to the polygamy questions and speculation, and instead turn the Saints’ eyes upward, toward God’s eternal law of marriage. On October 5, 1843, Joseph’s journal entry reads:

“Walked up and down the street with Scribe and gave instructions to try those who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives on this Law. Joseph forbids it. and the practice thereof. No man shall have but one wife.”²³⁵

As previously mentioned, the Joseph Smith Papers show that in transcribing this entry into the manuscript history of the church, a number of words were added to change the meaning entirely: Joseph forbidding polygamy becomes a pontification on Joseph’s authority to allow men to be polygamous, and the words “to be revised” are seen crossed out on the left, indicating that this was one of the planned revisions that occurred after Joseph and Hyrum’s deaths. The edited journal entry reads:

“Walked up and down the Streets with my scribe. Gave instructions to try those persons who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives. for according to the law I hold the keys of this power in the last days, for there is never but one on Earth at a time on whom the power and its keys are conferred—

²³⁴ Recorded on May 14, 1843. Levi Richards papers, 1837-1867 / Diaries / Volume 18, 1843 May 14-June 11. Accessed at:

<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/e8d44719-6577-4503-86b8-1641367be6b9/0/0>.

²³⁵ Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 3, 15 July 1843–29 February 1844, p. 117, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 14, 2024,

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-3-15-july-1843-29-february-1844/123>.

and I have constantly said No man shall have but one wife at a time unless the Lord directs otherwise”²³⁶

In the final draft of the History of the Church, the revised pro-polygamy quote is included.²³⁷

On August 31, 1843, the Smith family moved into the completed Mansion House. Initially, the Smiths gave visitors free room and board as an act Christian hospitality, but it quickly became clear that they were unable to cover the expenses that this free lodging entailed, so they soon began running the Mansion House as a hotel. It is notable that none of the visitors who stayed in the Mansion House with the Smith family ever recorded observing anything resembling polygamy.

The next month, the church’s Millennial Star office in Liverpool, England produced an interesting publication: “The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Sons of Jacob,” which was a reprint of a book sympathetic to the polygamy of the patriarchs as it was understood at the time.²³⁸ An Elder Samuel Downes commissioned the printing and said of this book,

“Having shewn it to many of my brethren, and it having met with their approbation, they are wishful to possess themselves of it also. I now at their solicitation for the church, and for mankind in general, send it forth unto the world.”²³⁹

A short review of it was published in The Millennial Star and some 100 copies of it were sold in the church’s Millennial Star office in Liverpool England.²⁴⁰ In England, there was no one to guard or speak out against the publishing of pro-polygamy material like there was in Nauvoo.

In November, Brigham Young married his 2nd polygamous wife, Augusta Adams Cobb, who was living in Cochranite territory when she converted to the church in 1832. At this time Augusta was still married to her first husband, Henry. According to a later newspaper report on the court’s decision regarding Augusta and Henry’s divorce, Augusta abandoned

²³⁶ History Draft [1 March–31 December 1843], p. 72, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 14, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-draft-1-march-31-december-1843/143>.

²³⁷ B.H. Roberts, ed, History of the Church, volume 6, 1912: 103. Accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/HistoryOfTheChurchOfJesusChristOfLatter-daySaints1902-Volume6/page/n103/mode/2up>.

²³⁸ This is discussed in Val Brinkerhoff’s book, The Secret Chamber: Spiritual Wifery & the Doctrine of Christ, Part V of Chapter 2: Historical Truth, pages 72-77. That portion is excerpted here: http://www.7witnesses.com/uploads/3/8/9/3/38938293/the_origin_of_polygamy_in_mormonism.pdf.

²³⁹ From the Preface to this 1843 edition of “The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs.” Accessed at: https://archive.org/details/per_utah-and-the-mormons_the-testament-of-the-twe_samuel-downes_1843.

²⁴⁰ “Notices,” The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star Vol. 04, No. 6 October 1843. Accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/216/rec/4>.

her husband and 5 children to go be a polygamous wife of Brigham Young: “Mrs Cobb said she loved Brigham Young better than she did Mr. Cobb...She said that the doctrine taught by Brigham Young was a glorious doctrine; for if she did not love her husband, it gave her a man she did love.”²⁴¹ Shortly after arriving in Nauvoo, Augusta was reported to have buried a 5-month old baby named Brigham, who had died on the journey.²⁴²

By December 1843 the tinkered marriage revelation was quietly and carefully making the rounds, and rumors of it had reached the ears of John Bennett, who still had close connections in Nauvoo. Bennett fired off a letter to his local newspaper with the salacious details as he understood them:

- “Joseph says that as ‘they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven,’ in eternity, it has been revealed to him that there will be no harmony in heaven unless the Saints select their companions and marry in time, for eternity!!!”
- “So Joe Smith has lately been married to his present wife Emma, for eternity as well as time.”
- “The doctrine is that a man may select as many wives for eternity as his devotion to the interests of the Mormon Church will entitle him—and this is to be determined by revelation through His Holiness, the Prophet!”
- “This marryin for eternity is not the spiritual wife doctrine noticed in my expose, but is an entirely new doctrine established by special revelation.”²⁴³

This earliest antagonistic letter about the marriage revelation is evidence that 1) Joseph’s revelation on eternal marriage was in answer to a question about Jesus’ teachings to the Sadducees who had inquired about Levirate marriage, and 2) a rumor or document was circulating Nauvoo that went beyond what Joseph himself said was in the revelation.

These continuous accusations must have been baffling to men like Joseph and Hyrum Smith that simply believed and kept the Lord’s law, and whose public teachings were consistent with their private actions. But for any man who didn’t keep the Lord’s law, the continuous accusations could be used as a salve for his own guilty conscience, and as fuel for retribution.

²⁴¹ The Buffalo Commercial newspaper, Buffalo, New York, Mon, Dec 6, 1847, Page 2. Accessed at: <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-buffalo-commercial-adaams-cobb-lead/34119243/>.

²⁴² Listed in Nauvoo Neighbor, November 8, 1843. Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/92f2d1ee-d159-42c0-ba06-2b01daf3bc8f/1/116>.

²⁴³ Hawk-eye. [Vol. V, No. 18] (Burlington, Iowa), 07 Dec. 1843. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. Accessed at: <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85049816/1843-12-07/ed-1/seq-1/>.

William Law was the second counselor in the first presidency when he was later reported to have confessed to the Prophet Joseph that he, William, was guilty of committing adultery.²⁴⁴ In consequence of this grave sin, Joseph did not believe William was eligible to be sealed to his wife Jane.²⁴⁵ Jane may not have known why she and her husband were denied this blessing, but she found it devastating and, according to Joseph, Jane came to him privately, threw her arms around his neck and requested to be sealed to Joseph if she could not be sealed to her husband, which Joseph declined.²⁴⁶

1844

In January 1844 William was removed from the First Presidency, for reasons that possibly went well beyond the adultery admission. However, apparently Joseph did not follow the procedures outlined in scripture for such removal, so William Law requested a rehearing in April.²⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the constant scourging of iniquitous accusations against the church meant that Joseph was obliged to continue publicly proclaiming his stance on the crime of fornication and polygamy. The January 1844 *Millennial Star*, which was the Church's periodical in England, repeated the 1835 statement on Marriage with the following directive:

“Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication and polygamy, we declare that we believe, that one man should have but one wife, and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again... We wish these doctrines to be taught by all that are in the ministry, that the people may know our faith respecting them, and also to correct the

²⁴⁴ Revised Minutes, 17 June 1844, as Published in Nauvoo Neighbor, p. 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 15, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revised-minutes-17-june-1844-as-published-in-nauvoo-neighbor/1>.

²⁴⁵ Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846; Volume 1, 10 March 1844–1 March 1845, p. 290, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 15, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/council-of-fifty-minutes-march-1844-january-1846-volume-1-10-march-1844-1-march-1845/292>.

²⁴⁶ Alexander Neibaur, Journal, 24 May 1844: 25-27. Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/aebb8eaf-ceb4-449a-84ff-2f5fb075c00b/0/25>.

²⁴⁷ Correction: in the video I stated William Law's rehearing was scheduled for April. According to this source, Law's request for a rehearing appears to have been denied: Cook, Lyndon W. (1994). *William Law: Biographical Essay*, Nauvoo Diary, Correspondence, Interview. Grandin Book Company. ISBN 978-0-910523-01-1. Book accessible at: https://books.google.at/books?id=KqvtAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y. “William Law requested his case be heard at the April 1844 general conference but was denied because of the explosive nature of things at Nauvoo resulting from the mounting opposition of the dissenters” (p. 18).

public mind in respect to the Church; and we hope, that the Saints will hearken to this counsel for their own good, and for the prosperity of the cause of God.”²⁴⁸

In February, Joseph and Hyrum printed the following notice in the *Times and Seasons*, demonstrating that they took action when they had credible information on individuals accused:

“NOTICE. As we have lately been credibly informed, that an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-day Saints, by the name of Hiram Brown, has been preaching Polygamy, and other false and corrupt doctrines, in the county of Lapeer, state of Michigan. This is to notify him and the Church in general, that he has been cut off from the church, for his iniquity; and he is further notified to appear at the Special Conference, on the 6th of April next, to make answer to these charges. JOSEPH SMITH. HYRUM SMITH. Presidents of said church.”²⁴⁹

That same month, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles nominated Joseph Smith to be a candidate for president of the United States. Because of their experience with persecution, Joseph had written to five men expected to be candidates for the presidency in the election of 1844, asking each man what he would do to protect the citizenship rights of the Latter-day Saints if he were elected. Three of the men responded, but none of them promised to help the Saints. As a result, the Apostles nominated Joseph. He accepted the nomination and proceeded to develop a political campaign.²⁵⁰

Also at this time, allegations of spiritual wifery, promiscuity, and prostitution against Hyrum Smith prompted the mayor’s court in Nauvoo to fine the accuser for slander.²⁵¹ By this time the polygamy rumors and accusations were past exhausting and baffling to the leaders and members who believed and obeyed the Lord’s law of marriage given to the church—they were maddening. The women determined to use their voices to put it all down.

²⁴⁸ The Latter-Day Saints’ *Millennial Star* 4:144, January 1844. Accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/241>.

²⁴⁹ *Times and Seasons*, Vol 5, 1 February 1844: 423. Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/2c58d957-e6a3-4682-b51d-d8b5f02bec23/0/7>.

²⁵⁰ Church History Topics, Joseph Smith’s 1844 Campaign for United States President. Accessed at: <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/joseph-smiths-1844-campaign-for-united-states-president?lang=eng>.

²⁵¹ *Journal*, December 1842–June 1844; Book 3, 15 July 1843–29 February 1844, p. 277, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-3-15-july-1843-29-february-1844/283>.

At the beginning of March, 1844, about 8,000 Saints gathered in a public meeting at the still under construction Nauvoo Temple. Joseph Smith denounced the accusations against Hyrum, and then W.W. Phelps read a statement on behalf of the Relief Society, called “The Voice of Innocence.” Here is a small portion of that statement. The slanders and accusations had

“awakened all the kindly feelings of female benevolence, compassion and pity, for the softer sex to spread forth the mantle of charity to shield the characters of the virtuous mothers, wives and daughters of Nauvoo, from the blasting breath and poisonous touch of debauchees, vagabonds, and rakes, who have jammed themselves into our city to offer strange fire at the shrines of infamy, disgrace and degradation...

“Resolved unanimously that while we render credence to the doctrines of Paul, that neither the man is without the woman; neither is woman without the man in the Lord, yet we raise our voices and hands against John C. Bennett’s “Spiritual Wife System,” as a scheme of profligates to seduce women; and they that harp upon it, wish to make it popular for the convenience of their own cupidity: wherefore, while the marriage bed, undefiled is honorable, let polygamy, bigamy, fornication, adultery, and prostitution, be frowned out of the hearts of honest men to drop in the gulf of fallen nature, “where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched!” and let all the Saints say Amen!”²⁵²

At the conclusion of this reading the 8,000 strong congregation called out, “Amen,” twice. In the following days it was then presented at four overflowing meetings of the Relief Society, where it was unanimously accepted. As the Relief Society was solidifying their purpose, Joseph Smith organized the Council of Fifty, in large part to secure settlement for the Saints “in Texas or Oregon or somewhere in California.”²⁵³ Soon after, Hyrum Smith published the following:

“To the Brethren of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, living on China Creek in Hancock County, Greeting: -Whereas Brother Richard Hewitt has called on me to-day, to know my views concerning some doctrines that are preached in your place, and states to me that some of your elders say, that a man having a certain priesthood, may have as many wives as he pleases, and that doctrine is taught here: I

²⁵² The voice of innocence from Nauvoo, 1844 March 9. Accessed at:

<https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/19559128-fd44-45f1-9142-3e6b22432d1f/0/0>.

²⁵³Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846; Volume 1, 10 March 1844–1 March 1845, p. 25, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 16, 2024,

<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/council-of-fifty-minutes-march-1844-january-1846-volume-1-10-march-1844-1-march-1845/27>.

say unto you that that man teaches false doctrine, for there is no such doctrine taught here; neither is there any such thing practiced here. And any man that is found teaching privately or publicly any such doctrine, is culpable, and will stand a chance to be brought before the High Council, and lose his license and membership also: therefore he had better beware what he is about.”²⁵⁴

Joseph published his own statement:

“We very frequently receive letters from elders and individuals abroad, inquiring of us whether certain statements that they hear, and have written to them, are true: some pertaining to John C. Bennet’s spiritual wife system; others in regard to immoral conduct, practiced by individuals, and sanctioned by the Church; and as it is impossible for us to answer all of them, we take this opportunity of answering them all, once for all.

“In the first place, we cannot but express our surprise that any elder or priest who has been in Nauvoo, and has had an opportunity of hearing the principles of truth advanced, should for one moment give credence to the idea that any thing like iniquity is practised, much less taught or sanctioned, by the authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. We are the more surprised, since every species of iniquity is spoken against, and exposed publicly at the stand, and every means made use of that possibly can be, to suppress vice, both religious and civil; not only so, but every species of iniquity has frequently been exposed in the Times and Seasons, and its practisers and advocates held up to the world as corrupt men that ought to be avoided. . . .

“There are other men who are corrupt and sensual, and who teach corrupt principles for the sake of gratifying their sensual appetites, at the expense and ruin of virtue and innocence. Such men ought to be avoided as pests to society, and be frowned down upon with contempt by every virtuous man and woman. . . .

“They are high and lifted up, and would trample upon the humble, and the meek, and the unassuming, and are not afraid to teach for the commandment of God, their own corrupt, and devilish doctrines, and principles; let no man therefore, be deceived by them, let no man harbor them, nor bid them God speed; don’t be partakers of their evil deeds.

²⁵⁴ Hyrum Smith, Times and Seasons, 1844 March 15 (No. 6) page 474. Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/f61faa83-6323-497c-9e63-3872baf2a88/0/10>.

“If any man writes to you, or preaches to you, doctrines contrary to the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or the book of Doctrine and Covenants, set him down as an imposter. You need not write to us to know what you are to do with such men; you have the authority with you.—Try them by the principles contained in the acknowledged word of God; if they preach, or teach, or practice contrary to that, disfellowship them; cut them off from among you as useless and dangerous branches, and if they are belonging to any of the quorums in the Church, report them to the president of the quorum to which they belong, and if you cannot find that out, if they are members of an official standing, belonging to Nauvoo, report them to us. Follow after purity, virtue, holiness, integrity, Godliness, and every thing that has a tendency to exalt and ennoble the human mind; and shun every man who teaches any other principles.”²⁵⁵

Then came the Special Conference, at which Hiram Brown had been ordered to appear after being cut off from the church for preaching polygamy. Hyrum Smith took the stand and left no room for misunderstanding:

“One reason I speak to the Elders is, in consequence of the Ten thousand reports which come to me from abroad—almost every foolish man runs to me, to enquire if such and such things are true, and how many spiritual wives a man may have. I know nothing about it; what he might call a spiritual wife, I should not know anything about. In about half an hour after he has gone, another person begins to say: ‘the Elders tell such and such things all over the country.’ I am authorized to tell you from henceforth, that any man who comes in and tells any such damn fool doctrine, to tell him to give up his license. None but a fool teaches such stuff; the devil himself is not such a fool, and every Elder who teaches such stuff ought to have his nose wrung; any one found guilty of such teaching will be published and his license will be taken from him. When Elders are sent to preach the Gospel, they are not to preach anything but the Gospel...

“I wish the Elders of Israel to understand it is lawful for a man to marry a wife, but it is unlawful to have more, and God has not commanded any of you to have more; and if any of you dare to presume to do any such things, it will spoil your fun, for you will never have the spirit to preach the Gospel. I despise a man who teaches a pack of stuff that will disgrace himself so; for a man to go into the world, and talk of this spiritual wife system he is as empty as an open sepulchre. If the coat suits any one, let him put it on.

²⁵⁵ Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons* 5: 490–491, 1 April 1844. Accessed at: <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/ef61a47c-4c6a-4615-8950-b2a306a38508/0/10>.

“I would call the Devil my brother before such a man. The idea of marrying for eternity is the seal of the Covenant, and is easily understood; and as to speaking of it I could make all the world believe it, for it is noble and grand; it is necessary in consequence of the broken Covenants in the world . . .”²⁵⁶

Hyrum spoke an hour and a half on these principles, preaching that “God has commanded you to preach repentance to this generation; if this generation will not receive this Book of Mormon they will have no greater.”²⁵⁷ 180 years later, we have still not received the greater portion of the Book of Mormon.²⁵⁸

As clear as these denunciations are, those who look back at history through a secular lens are incredulous that the fires of polygamy could burn so persistently without the instigation or even knowledge of the presidents of the church. But viewing the history of polygamy through a spiritual lens, this chain of events demonstrates that all hell combined against the restoration of the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because *nothing is more important to the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ than the oneness of the male and the female.*²⁵⁹ Some in the church were fallen men in a fallen world who tried to ascend spiritually by welcoming God’s light through their faith and trust in the name of the Lord, and their diligence in staying upon His word.²⁶⁰ But others succumbed to the exceptionally enticing alternative: finding that they had descended into darkness they compassed themselves about with sparks, and they walked in the light of their own fire and in the sparks that they kindled.²⁶¹

When men walking by the light of their own fire hear whispers of a secret revelation that gives them special authority to take as many “virgins” as they “desire,” it ignites their lust

²⁵⁶ Hyrum Smith, Conference Address, 8 April 1844, History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], pg. 1984-1985, 1988, The Joseph Smith Papers; <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/356>.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ “Behold, I have written upon these plates the very things which the brother of Jared saw; and there never were greater things made manifest than those which were made manifest unto the brother of Jared...the Lord said unto me: They shall not go forth unto the Gentiles until the day that they shall repent of their iniquity, and become clean before the Lord...And he that will contend against the word of the Lord, let him be accursed; and he that shall deny these things, let him be accursed; for unto them will I show no greater things, saith Jesus Christ; for I am he who speaketh” (Ether 4: 4, 6, 8).

²⁵⁹ “Marriage is ordained of God unto man. Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and *all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation*” (Doctrine and Covenants 49:15-16, emphasis added).

²⁶⁰ “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God” (Isaiah 50:10).

²⁶¹ “Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow” (Isaiah 50:11).

for power, gain, and unbounded sexuality.²⁶² And the fallout this abomination created for the Latter-day Saints was a confusing and chaotic conflagration whose ashes we are still sifting through today.

Soon after this conference in April, 1844, William Law was tried again by many of the Twelve and Nauvoo high council, and he and his wife Jane, along with other accusers, were unanimously excommunicated—the Laws for “unchristianlike conduct”; others for immorality stemming from iniquity they had engaged in years earlier as friends of John Bennett; some simply for apostasy, because they had heard or read the altered revelation and believed it came from Joseph, despite his public and private denials.²⁶³

On Saturday, May 25th Joseph was informed that some of his recently excommunicated accusers had instigated indictments against him for perjury, fornication and polygamy.²⁶⁴ First thing Monday morning his journal records that he started on horseback, “with a few friends and passing by the Temple pursued my course towards Carthage— thinking it best to meet my enemies before the court and have my Indictments [investigated].”²⁶⁵ Joseph Smith wanted a non-Mormon court to immediately investigate the charges of perjury, fornication and polygamy against him because he knew he was innocent of the charges.

Perhaps those who accused Joseph of these crimes felt unjustly treated, believing that they were being punished for behaviors that others got away with, and they pressed upon those feelings of injustice until they crystalized into a righteous indignation that took absolute precedence over whatever shame they may have felt at their own sins. They found a common enemy in Joseph, who they believed was no better than they were, and they focused their efforts against him and the church he led. They started their own church, with

²⁶² “And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood—if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another...therefore is he justified” (Doctrine and Covenants 132: 62. The conditions of justification are further explored in the following verses and clearly state that the women have two choices: believe that men are justified having many wives and concubines or be destroyed. If a woman does not consent, verse 65 states “she then becomes the transgressor; and he is exempt from the law of Sarah,” which is intimated to be participatory consent).

²⁶³ Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 4, 1 March–22 June 1844, p. 91, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-4-1-march-22-june-1844/93>.

²⁶⁴ Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 4, 1 March–22 June 1844, p. 132, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-4-1-march-22-june-1844/134>.

²⁶⁵ Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 4, 1 March–22 June 1844, p. 134, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-4-1-march-22-june-1844/136>.

William Law as prophet president and added their accusations to the blaze. Based upon his fiery response, Joseph was determined to quench it all:

“God is in the ‘still small voice’; in all these affidavits, indictments, it is all of the devil—all corruption. Come on! ye prosecutors! ye false swearers! All hell, boil over! Ye burning mountains, roll down your lava! for I will come out on the top at last. . . .

“For the last three years I have a record of all my acts and proceedings; for I have kept several good, faithful, and efficient clerks in constant employ; they have accompanied me everywhere, and carefully kept my history, and they have written down what I have done, where I have been, and what I have said; therefore my enemies cannot charge me with any day, time, or place, but what I have written testimony to prove my actions, and my enemies cannot prove anything against me. . . .

“God knows then the charges against me are false. I had not been married scarcely five minutes, and made one proclamation of the Gospel, before it was reported that I had seven wives. I mean to live and proclaim the truth as long as I can. This new holy prophet [William Law] has gone to Carthage and swore that I had told him that I was guilty of adultery. This spiritual wifeism! Why, a man dares not speak or wink, for fear of being accused of this. . . .

“I wish the grand jury would tell me who they are—whether it will be a curse or blessing to me. I am quite tired of the fools asking me. A man asked me whether the commandment was given that a man may have seven wives; and now the new prophet has charged me with adultery. I never had any fuss with these men until that Female Relief Society brought out the paper [The Voice of Innocence From Nauvoo] against adulterers and adulteresses. . . .

“I have been chained. I have rattled chains before in a dungeon for the truth's sake. I am innocent of all these charges, and you can bear witness of my innocence, for you know me yourselves. . . .

“What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one. I am the same man, and as innocent as I was fourteen years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers.”²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ Discourse, 26 May 1844, as Compiled by Leo Hawkins, p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-26-may-1844-as-compiled-by-leo-hawkins/1>.

The next month the affidavits the Prophet Joseph was responding to were published in the first and only edition of the Nauvoo Expositor. This paper contained a number of complaints against Joseph, particularly that he was the civil, ecclesiastical and military leader, united in one and the same person. The stated purpose of the Nauvoo Expositor was “to advocate...the UNCONDITIONAL REPEAL OF THE NAUVOO CITY CHARTER.”²⁶⁷ It warned readers against enabling Hyrum Smith’s candidacy for the Illinois state legislature and Joseph Smith’s candidacy for the Presidency of the United States because they would bring their theocratic ambition to a state and national level.

As evidence of how unsuited they believed Joseph Smith was for leadership, the Expositor assured readers that Joseph was indeed secretly engaging in the polygamous activities he publicly condemned, and explained how immigrant girls were seduced and ensnared by Joseph and the Twelve using their positions of authority.

If Joseph was telling the truth, and was indeed not secretly engaging in polygamy, here is one explanation for how the Nauvoo Expositor’s claims could have come about: The men who sought to dethrone Joseph, as they saw it, may have reasoned that since they had credible information that members of the Twelve were engaged in polygamy, and since they knew that the immigrant converts—not citizens of Nauvoo who for example were told “Joseph’s not with us yet” but newcomers from England—were consistently taught that this doctrine came from Joseph, the Nauvoo Expositors may have reasoned that it would have been all but impossible for Joseph not to be the source of this doctrine. Hyrum too, for he was co-president of the church and rumors of polygamy swirled around him as well.

Additionally, there *was* a secret polygamous marriage revelation circulating in Nauvoo, quite explicitly attributed to Joseph, and since the original *had* been read to the high council and referenced Levirate marriage, perhaps the Expositors assumed the high council had only heard a sanitized version. If any of them came across the corrupted revelation after hearing Joseph’s public teachings on the marriage revelation and the revelation itself at that high council meeting, they may have felt indignant that Joseph had shared the full, meaty polygamous revelation with a secret priesthood while hiding behind a milk revelation that had been revealed to the high council and the body of Saints.

One clue that something like this may have happened is that the high council meeting where the marriage revelation was read had been 10 months earlier, and no one had raised any complaint at the time. And, as we have seen, the minutes don’t indicate even obliquely that anything was taught in that meeting that was in direct opposition to the law of the church.

²⁶⁷ Nauvoo Expositor, 7 June 1844, p. 4, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-expositor-7-june-1844/4>.

But by the time the Nauvoo Expositor was published, Joseph's 1843 revelation on marriage had morphed into a new creature. No more were the Savior's teachings on Levirate marriage mentioned but instead readers found a fully fleshed out doctrine for polygamy. From the Expositor:

"The revelation (so called) authorized certain men to have more wives than one at a time, in this world and in the world to come. It said this was the law, and commanded Joseph to enter into the law.—And also that he should administer to others. Several other items were in the revelation, supporting the above doctrines."²⁶⁸

The revelation

"sustained in strong terms the doctrine of more wives than one at a time, in this world, and in the next, it authorized some to have to the number of ten, and set forth that those women who would not allow their husbands to have more wives than one should be under condemnation before God."²⁶⁹

And, the revelation

"contained the following doctrines; 1st. the sealing up of persons to eternal life, against all sins, save that of shedding innocent blood or of consenting thereto; 2nd, the doctrine of a plurality of wives, or marrying virgins; that "David and Solomon had many wives, yet in this they sinned not save in the matter of Uriah."²⁷⁰

Through the Joseph Smith Papers, we can access the notes from the Nauvoo City Council meetings where the Nauvoo Expositor was discussed, and so we can read for ourselves what Joseph and Hyrum said and published before they were killed in response to these specific accusations:

Hyrum Smith

"referred to the revelation, read to the High Council of the Church, which has caused so much talk about a multiplicity of wives; that said Revelation was in answer to a question concerning things which transpired in former days, and had no reference to the present time."²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Nauvoo Expositor, 7 June 1844, p. 2, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-expositor-7-june-1844/2>.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Revised Minutes, 17 June 1844, p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 16, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revised-minutes-17-june-1844/1>.

Joseph Smith, referred to as Mayor, said,

“Here is a paper (Nauvoo Expositor) that is exciting our enemies abroad...they make a criminality, for a man to have a wife on the earth, while he has one in heaven, according to the keys of the holy Priesthood—and he then read a statement of William Law’s from the Expositor, where the truth of God was transformed into a lie concerning this thing—”²⁷²

William Law’s statement in the Expositor had said that the revelation “authorized certain men to have more wives than one at a time, in this world and in the world to come,” and Joseph answered by saying that this transformed the truth of God into a lie. There is no eternal polygamy. It’s not an option. Each man may make an eternal covenant with one wife, and each woman may make an eternal covenant with one husband. That is the law.

“[Joseph] then read several statements of Austin Cowles in the Expositor concerning a private interview, and said he never had any private conversation with Austin Cowles on these subjects—that he preached on the stand from the bible, shewing the order in ancient days, having nothing to do with the present times.”

“[Hyrum] proceeded to shew the falsehood of Austin Cowles in the “Expositor,” in relation to the revelation referred to, that it was in reference to former days, and not the present time as related by Cowles.

“Mayor said he had never preached the revelation in private, as he had in public—had not taught it to the anointed in the church in private, which statement many present confirmed, that on enquiring concerning the passage in the resurrection concerning “they neither marry nor are given in marriage, &c., he received for answer, men in this life must marry in view of eternity, otherwise they much remain as angels, or be single in heaven, which was the amount of the revelation referred to, and the Mayor spoke at considerable length in explanation of this principle and was willing for one to subscribe his name, to declare the “Expositor” and whole establishment a nuisance.”²⁷³

This same edition of the Nauvoo Neighbor prefaced the report from the City Council meeting by stating that these statements were a brief synopsis of proceedings. In that meeting Joseph Smith spoke “at considerable length in explanation of the principle” of eternal marriage.²⁷⁴ I am hopeful that more extensive records of Joseph’s teachings on

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

eternal marriage are yet forthcoming, including the original revelation which may yet be in existence.

As they looked over the Nauvoo Expositor, perhaps the familiar description of how immigrant girls were propositioned prompted Joseph and Hyrum to reconsider their assumption that the Twelve were not engaged in polygamy.²⁷⁵ About this time, in fact, Joseph had a conversation with William Marks, who was the Stake President of Nauvoo, and the Presiding Officer of the High Council of Nauvoo. President Marks later relayed in two different accounts what he remembered of this conversation. Quoting from both of the accounts:

“I had a very good opportunity to know the affairs of the Church, and my convictions at that time were, that the Church in a measure had departed from the pure principles and doctrines of Jesus Christ. I felt much troubled in mind about the condition of the Church. I prayed earnestly to my Heavenly Father to show me something in regard to it, when I was wrapt in vision, and it was shown me by the Spirit, that the top or branches had overcome the root, in sin and wickedness...

“A few days after this occurrence I met with Brother Joseph. He said he wanted to converse with me on the affairs of the Church, and we retired by ourselves. I will give his words verbatim, for they are indelibly stamped upon my mind. He said he had desired for a time to have a talk with me on the subject of polygamy.”²⁷⁶

Marks quoted Joseph as saying,

““This doctrine of polygamy, or Spiritual wife system, that has been taught and practiced among us, will prove our destruction and overthrow. I have been deceived,’ said he, in reference to its practice. ‘Brother Marks, you have not received this doctrine, and how glad I am. I want you to go into the high council, and I will have changes preferred against all who practice this doctrine, and I want you to try them by the laws of the church, and cut them off, if they will not repent, and cease the practice of this doctrine; and,” said he, “I will go into the stand, and preach against it

²⁷⁵ See page 46 of this paper for Hyrum and Joseph’s 1842 response to the report that circulated which alleged Martha Brotherton was shut in a room for several days while church leaders endeavored to induce her to believe in having two wives.

²⁷⁶ October 23, 1859, letter from William Marks to Isaac Sheen, *The True Latter Day Saints’ Herald*, January 1860: 25-26 (pages 22-23 of linked pdf). Accessed at: <https://www.latterdaytruth.org/pdf/100137.pdf>.

with all my might, and in this way we may rid the church of this damnable heresy.”²⁷⁷

And—an interjection: we cannot rule out that the polygamists, if truly exposed, brought into the sunlight, and been given an opportunity to have their false notions brought to understanding, we cannot rule out that some or even all of the polygamists may have repented and have sought to make restitution for their sins.

Back to stake president Marks:

“There was much more said, but this was the substance. The mob commenced to gather about Carthage in a few days after, therefore there was nothing done concerning it. After the Prophet's death I made mention of this conversation to several, hoping and believing that it would have a good effect, but to my great disappointment, it was soon rumored about that Brother Marks was about to apostatize, and that all that he said about the conversation with the Prophet was a tissue of lies.”²⁷⁸

According to Nauvoo stake president and Presiding Officer of the High Council of Nauvoo William Marks, Joseph had been deceived by those who were secretly committing polygamy.

In one of his last formal acts as President of the Church, the Prophet Joseph authorized the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, “carefully select[ing]” the Rules for Marriage to continue to be part of the canon of doctrine.²⁷⁹ This edition was completed but not yet printed prior to Joseph’s martyrdom.

When Joseph was accused of secret revelations, he published them. When he was accused of polygamy, he continuously published the statement on Marriage. It is likely that the 1843 marriage revelation was not included in the 1844 Doctrine & Covenants because it was only a preview; Joseph said more would be revealed when the Nauvoo temple was complete,²⁸⁰ and that did not happen in his lifetime, nor was any marriage revelation revealed to the Saints when the Nauvoo temple was dedicated by subsequent leaders. However, the fact

²⁷⁷ June 15, 1853, letter of William Marks, Zion’s Harbinger and Baneemy’s Organ, July 7, 1853:155. Accessed at:

<https://archive.org/details/ZionsHarbingerAndBaneemysOrgan18491855/page/n155/mode/2up>.

²⁷⁸ October 23, 1859, letter from William Marks to Isaac Sheen.

²⁷⁹ Doctrine and Covenants, 1844, p. 0, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 17, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1844/5>.

²⁸⁰ Discourse, 16 July 1843, as Reported by William Clayton, p. 65, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed October 12, 2024, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-july-1843-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1#1696855724057721984>.

that Joseph “carefully selected” the statement on Marriage to continue to be part of the scriptural canon as the Saints had consented to, is evidence that the statement on Marriage was in absolute harmony with the marriage revelation, and that changes to the fundamental doctrine of monogamous marriage were not forthcoming.

After Joseph and Hyrum were killed, no other wives stepped forward to mourn with their families; to receive personal affects or anything related to their estates; they didn’t even step forward to declare their status as widows of Joseph when the polygamy revelation was shared with the Saints in Utah and they were “safe” to admit their participation in it. None of the women said anything about having been married to Joseph until such testimonies were needed to combat the missionary work of Joseph Smith’s sons, who came to Utah in the 1860s and said the church had gone astray because of polygamy,²⁸¹ and people believed them; and then as evidence in the Temple Lot trial, where the federal judge found the testimonies of the women who said they were married to Joseph Smith to not be credible and the church’s position lost.²⁸²

The few—and it may have been a very few number of men—who were converted to polygamy *and* knew for sure that Joseph wasn’t with them yet, may have reasoned that in God’s mercy Joseph and Hyrum were moved out of their place because they were beginning to lead the church astray in their determination to stop what the polygamists believed was an essential requirement for exaltation. In fact, this reasoning may be the genesis of the teaching that the prophet can never lead the church astray, because this saying did not enter the church until after Joseph’s death, and was asserted by the polygamist leaders.²⁸³

In that assertion, however, these polygamist leaders were in direction contradiction to scripture. The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and particularly Joseph Smith’s inspired translation of the Bible, where in Mark 9 we find an expounding of the Savior’s teachings on the hand, the foot, and the eye:

“And again, if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; for he that is thy standard, by whom thou walkest, if he become a transgressor, he shall be cut off. It is better for thee, to

²⁸¹ See Launius, Roger D. “Methods and Motives: Joseph Smith III’s Opposition to Polygamy, 1860-90.” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 20 No. 4: 105. Accessed at: <https://www.dialoguejournal.com/articles/methods-and-motives-joseph-smith-iiis-opposition-to-polygamy-1860-90/>.

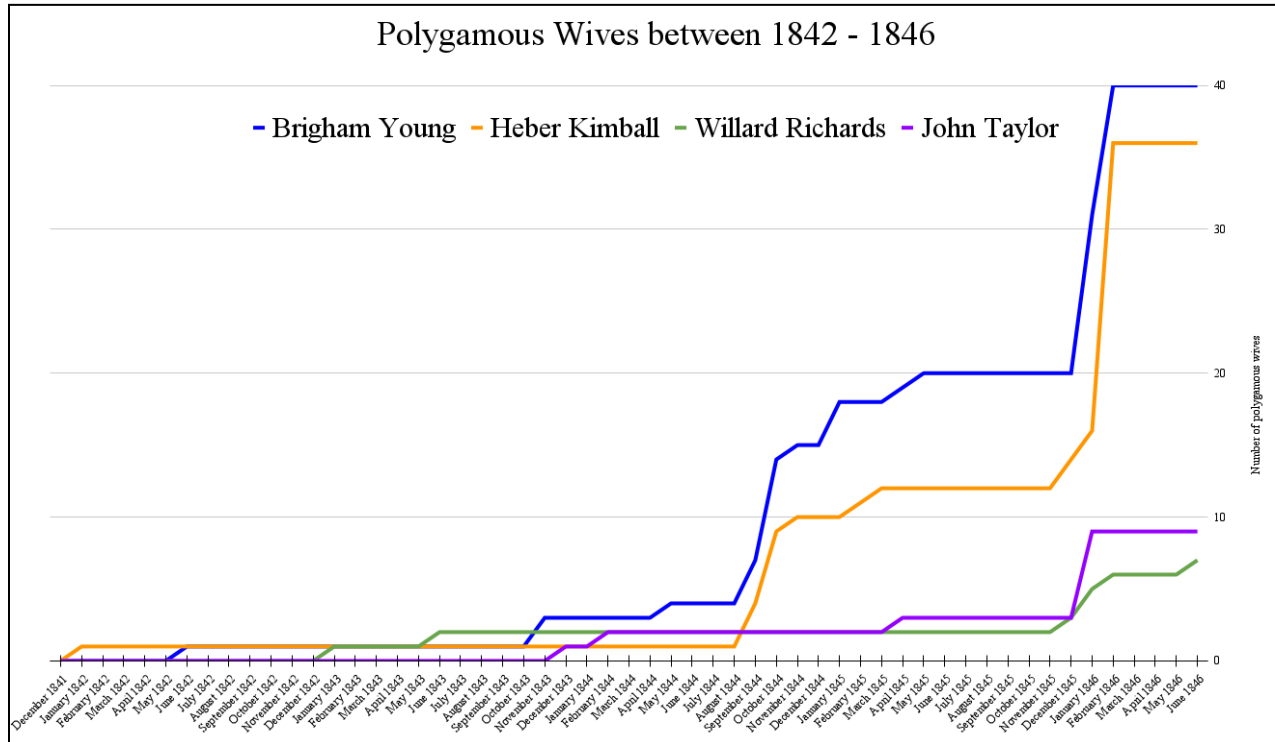
²⁸² Decision of John F. Philips, judge, in Temple Lot case: the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints versus the Church of Christ, et al: <https://archive.org/details/decisionofjohnfp00philrich>.

²⁸³ “You may go home and sleep as sweetly as a babe in its mother’s arms, as to any danger of your leaders leading you astray, for if they should try to do so the Lord would quickly sweep them from the earth.” Discourse by Brigham Young, “True Character of God—Erroneous Ideas Entertained Towards Him,” delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, February 23, 1862. *Journal of Discourses* Vol. 9: 289. Accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/10137>.

enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell; into the fire that never shall be quenched. Therefore, let every man stand or fall, by himself, and not for another; or not trusting another...

“And if thine eye which seeth for thee, him that is appointed to watch over thee to show thee light, become a transgressor and offend thee, pluck him out. It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God, with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.”²⁸⁴

Now, the polygamist leaders did not have access to Joseph’s inspired translation of the Bible at this time; it would be more than 20 years before the newly formed RLDS church would publish it. If the polygamists believed that the Lord had moved Joseph and Hyrum out of their place because they were leading the church astray, that would also explain why polygamy skyrocketed after Joseph’s and Hyrum’s deaths. Nauvoo certainly wasn’t a safer and more stable environment for the Latter-day Saints following the martyrdom. But, as you can see from this simple chart, while during Joseph and Hyrum’s lives, Brigham Young, Heber Kimball, Willard Richards, and John Taylor, as examples, had 1 or 2 polygamous wives, after Joseph and Hyrum were killed on June 27, 1844, these men immediately began to amass many wives. For Brigham and Heber, it was dozens.



²⁸⁴ JST Mark 9:42-47.

As a result, they needed to make some changes to the altered revelation on marriage before officially revealing it to the body of Saints. And these changes could have been made before they even left Nauvoo (between February and September 1846).

One example of such a refining change is that the polygamy document Jane Law read “authorized some [men] to have to the number of ten” wives, which before Joseph and Hyrum’s deaths must have seemed like a lot.²⁸⁵ But within 6 months of the Smiths’ deaths, before the Saints even left Nauvoo Brigham Young and Heber Kimball had well over a dozen wives each. So that authorization needed rephrasing, and instead became a justification using 10 as an example but not a limitation: “If he have ten virgins given unto him by this law he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him; therefore is he justified.”²⁸⁶

And after the polygamy document was revealed in 1852 Utah, the genesis of the polygamists’ marriage revelation compared to Joseph’s stated teachings on the marriage revelation was thrown into stark relief. Joseph said that he sought to understand what the Savior meant when he told the Saducees that “they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, through the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage.”²⁸⁷

But the polygamists had years before developed a conviction that God had a principle and doctrine of men having many wives and concubines, and they came to that conviction as they sought to understand how the Lord justified the polygamy of the Old Testament patriarchs, prophets, and kings. Because they were oriented to understand that polygamy was an essential component of the Abrahamic covenant, they added detail to their marriage revelation about Isaac having concubines, which was pretty stunning because there is nothing in the scriptural record that even intimates such a thing.²⁸⁸ To the contrary, when Rebekah was unable to conceive, Isaac did not use concubines. Genesis 25, “Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.”²⁸⁹

But because of their fervent testimony that having many wives and concubines was a principle and doctrine of God, that it was in fact *required* for exaltation, the polygamists

²⁸⁵ Nauvoo Expositor, 7 June 1844, p. 2.

²⁸⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 132: 62.

²⁸⁷ Luke 20: 35.

²⁸⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 132: 37: “Abraham received concubines, and they bore him children; and it was accounted unto him for righteousness, because they were given unto him, and he abode in my law; as Isaac also and Jacob did none other things than that which they were commanded; and because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods.”

²⁸⁹ Genesis 25: 21.

believed their revelation trumped not just the law of the church, but even scripture itself. They often spoke of the polygamy of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as in this 1857 Utah discourse by Heber Kimball. In this discourse President Kimball referenced the greater light and knowledge those that had passed away were now in possession of. Speaking generally of himself, Brigham, Willard, Joseph and Hyrum, etc., and specifically of Joseph Smith's father, who died in 1840, Heber said,

“Will not the old gentleman be jolly! Yes, for he always was; and he will be more so in proportion to the greater light and knowledge he has. Those are the men we are going to meet with; also with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, three of the old polygamists.

“Do you suppose that Joseph and Hyrum and all those good men would associate with those ancient worthies if they had not been engaged in the same practices? They had to do the works of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in order to be admitted where they are; —they had to be polygamists in order to be received into their society.”²⁹⁰

Orson Pratt, who was tasked with reading and defending the polygamy document to the Saints taught,

“So sacred did the Lord hold these polygamists that he said, many hundred years after their death— ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, and this shall be my memorial unto all generations.’ Now, Christians, do not find fault if God chose these polygamists and, at the same time, wished to make them a sample, a memorial to all generations, Christians as well as Jews.”²⁹¹

In these discourses, you can see from their teachings that the Saints struggled with polygamy, that it took an incredible amount of pressure to maintain it, and that is because it was continuously in opposition to the law of the church, the Book of Mormon, and Christ's teachings.

²⁹⁰ “The Ax That Is Laid At The Root of The Tree—Regeneration—Products of Polygamy, A Numerous Offspring, Etc.,” Discourse by President Heber C. Kimball, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, February 8, 1857. *Journal of Discourses* Vol. 4, page 221. Accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/538>.

²⁹¹ “God's Ancient People Polygamists--Marriage Relations are to Continue Forever--No Power Binding in Marriage but that of the Holy Priesthood Possessed by the Latter-day Saints.” Discourse by Elder Orson Pratt, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, October 7, 1874. *Journal of Discourses* Vol. 17: 215. Accessed at: <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/6544>.

It is reasonable to question whether the men who chose to indoctrinate and/or engage in polygamy were deceived prophets or something more nefarious. But that question may not be answered right now, for the Lord said that “*the inhabitants of Zion shall judge all things pertaining to Zion. And liars and hypocrites shall be proved by them, and they who are not apostles and prophets shall be known.*”²⁹² So while we are working to build Zion, I propose that we look at the history of polygamy in the church with openness and humility. We have all been deceived; it is what we individually choose to do once the deception is unveiled that determines our course hereafter, and that applies to the dead as well as the living.

It should not surprise us to realize that there was an underground root system of the pernicious weed of polygamy that sprouted up all around the restoration because *nothing is more important to the destroyer than corrupting mortals’ understanding of God, and our own divine nature and destiny, by perverting the equal balance of power and authority between the masculine and the feminine.* So let’s keep studying our history with awakened eyes, and our scriptures too.

In fact, there is a story in the Old Testament about the prophet Elisha that leaves space to give our polygamist Latter-day Saint leaders grace, which they need as much as we do. During a famine, Elisha journeyed to Gilgal and commanded his servant to boil a soup for the sons of the prophets who sat before him.²⁹³ The servant went out into the field to gather herbs and fortuitously found a wild vine growing. He gathered all the gourds of the vine and shred them into the pot of soup. Tragically, the servant did not know that the wild vine was poisonous, its fruit counterfeit. And the servant was not the only one who didn’t know—the great prophet Elisha was also ignorant of its poisonous nature.

Is it possible for a prophet to give us, even command us, to partake of that which God has forbidden, that which will cause us to die? Let us learn from the scriptures, and the reaction of the sons of the prophets:

“And it came to pass, as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out, and said, O thou man of God, there is death in the pot!”²⁹⁴

These men did not swallow the stew Elisha poured for them in an effort to lovingly sustain him, pretending it was nourishing when they knew it was deadly. They did not twist their testimonies to faithfully consume that which they knew would kill them. They spoke up! They loved Elisha—they knew he was a mortal man, not an omniscient God. And they loved themselves—they wanted to live.

²⁹² D&C 64: 38-39, italics added.

²⁹³ 2 Kings 4: 38-44.

²⁹⁴ 2 Kings 4: 40.

Upon learning the truth of the inedible soup which he had commanded to be prepared, Elisha sought to preserve the nourishment by commanding the men to add meal to the pot. They did so, and the poison was drawn out of the soup, allowing the sons of the prophets to eat it. When Elisha mitigated the deadly consequences, these men must have been grateful, for they were in a famine. They were able to receive nourishment despite the true nature of their meal.

But the silence of the scriptural record following this event implies something significant: this miraculous meal did not include a repeat. The sons of the prophets did not canonize the vine in recipe books as deadly* (*unless a prophet commands it), or as a holy sacrifice which some are called to eat, or as a very special meal only for those faithful enough to partake of it. No. They called it death. They miraculously survived its ingestion. And they never ate it again.

Now that we have fully completed the three to four generations of cursing that the Lord assured that those who hate his law will receive without repentance,²⁹⁵ let us with joyful gratitude awake, and embrace the truth: which is that, though satan has the power to deceive even the very elect, Christ's power is greater. He is mighty to save, the living and the dead. His arms are outstretched still, and He pleads with us to turn our hearts to our fathers, not in condemnation but in love. To humble ourselves, and stop the perpetuation of this sin upon their heads by repenting of our false traditions, starting with polygamy.

²⁹⁵ See, for example, Exodus 34: 6-7 and Doctrine and Covenants 124: 50.