

New Joseph Smith Movie: History or Propaganda?

As we crossed the street it was a dreary overcast day in Salt Lake City but once inside the Joseph Smith Memorial Building there were gracious, smiling LDS missionaries everywhere.

As we entered the waiting area for the elaborate new LDS movie, *Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration*, the first clue that the film aimed to elicit an emotional outpouring for the portrayal of Smith as a saintly martyr, was the number of missionaries standing around offering tissues to everyone entering the theater. After attending the movie one Mormon commented:

Being that I'm LDS and regard Joseph as a prophet, I was touched in several places and was brought to tears quite a few times . . . which I presume is expected since they handed out tissues BEFORE the movie started! (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0431170/>).

The film was released in December of 2005 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Joseph Smith's birth. The project was discussed in 2004 in the LDS church-owned *Deseret News*:

The script has been vetted by historians, the church's correlation committee and by the highest authorities of the church whose 12 million members consider Smith a prophet chosen to restore Christ's church.

"We've had long meetings about the script," said Elder Donald L. Hallstrom of the church's First Quorum of the Seventy and executive director of the Church Audiovisual Department. "Members of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve have taken a very personal role to be comfortable with the way the life of Joseph is portrayed."

Munns called the script "a labor of love but a real labor. It stood up to a lot of scrutiny." The scrutiny was time-consuming but necessary.

"A film never really gets better than its script," he said. "It is doctrinally sound, **historically accurate** and very appealing, very engaging. Hopefully people will learn some things and feel some things and like it . . .

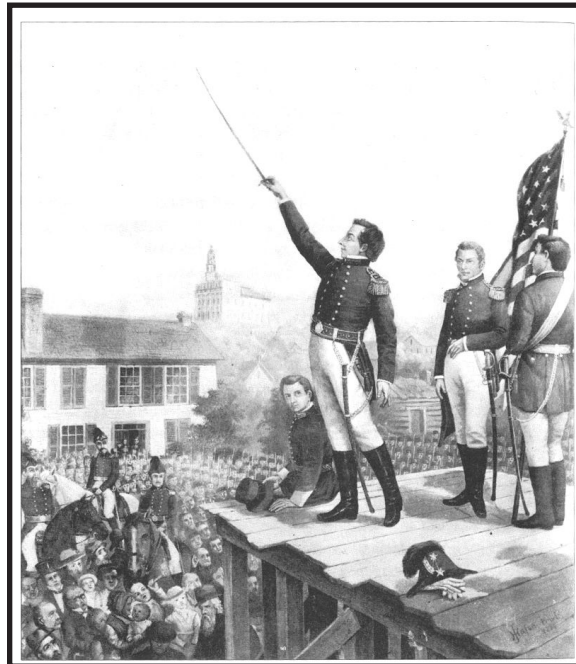
"We think this film will appeal to those not of our faith," Munns said. "We hope this will help them to appreciate this great man, the challenges he overcame and the church he organized, to see him as a man and not just a prophet." ("Joseph Smith' filming proceeds at a fast clip," *Deseret Morning News*, October 26, 2004).

While the film took thousands of man-hours and several years to complete, the cost of the film has not been released. The film is approximately 70 minutes long and is being shown at various

LDS historic sites and visitors' centers. For theater locations, see www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,6516-1-3350-1,00.html.

Joseph the Man

With the goal of telling Smith's life in a way that would be "comfortable" to the LDS Church leaders, historical accuracy seems to have been of little concern. The movie



Last Public Address of Lieut. General Joseph Smith

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was designed to be a “faith promoting” experience, not a balanced view of Smith “as a man.” The official LDS web site gives the following description of the film:

The film depicts events in the life of Joseph Smith from his early youth in Vermont to his martyrdom in Illinois at age 38. It recounts Joseph’s search for truth as a young boy, a search that resulted in divine revelation that set his life on a path of service and sacrifice in restoring the Church of Jesus Christ. Through scenes of his interactions with family and with early Church members and others, viewers will see both the personal and public sides of Joseph’s caring nature and prophetic leadership (<http://www.lds.org/newsroom/showrelease/0,15503,4028-1-22488,00.html>).

It is exactly in the film’s depiction of Smith’s “personal” side that it becomes obvious this is strictly a propaganda piece. Smith’s magic involvement, temper, lying, and manipulation of his followers are conveniently overlooked.

The movie, like most LDS projects, was beautifully filmed and well acted. However, this was not a realistic portrayal of either the beginnings of Mormonism or Smith’s relatively short life. One Mormon blogger wrote:

Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration is literally an hour long string of images and depicted events. The entire film is a montage. We see many of the major events in his life, along with various bits of playfulness, preaching, and prophesying. We see him imprisoned in Richmond, imprisoned in Liberty and imprisoned in Carthage, **though we never once have any idea why**. He heals the sick, he rebukes the wicked, he buries his children, he is loved by all. Scottish bagpipes play a tune that will later praise his name.

The blur of images and sound tells us nothing more than a bullet point list of facts about Joseph’s life, but its aim is to convince us of a fact not empirically verifiable – that he was indeed a prophet. It’s a work of art calculated to make us feel the spirit.

Is this a good thing? I think it is. Mostly. My only concern is the audience that will respond to the film. The western world is an increasingly cynical and skeptical one. And I sense that many potential investigators will be impressed by the man but unmoved by the message (<http://motleyvision.blogspot.com/2006/01/review-joseph-smith-prophet-of.html>).

Another Mormon observed:

Not much time was spent on dissention within the Church, the financial troubles of Kirtland, or Zion’s Camp. Polygamy was mentioned not at all. And that’s okay. It seemed to me that the primary audience is the general population of the Church, and interested outsiders. I don’t think that it was really made for people who don’t know anything about the life of the Prophet, and I think that it was made to build and strengthen the testimonies of those who saw it (<http://www.lavalane.org/ponderit/2006/01/joseph-smith-prophet-of-restoration.html>).

This Mormon has summed it up quite well. The film is meant to reinforce believers, to give members a positive emotional experience that will hopefully carry them through

any periods of doubt. In such a portrayal Smith’s rougher side was conspicuously absent.

Joseph’s Early Years

A significant period of time was given to reenacting Joseph’s terrible leg surgery when he was about seven (see *Salt Lake City Messenger*, no. 99). While this event was no doubt important in forming his mental outlook, it appears that the main reason for including it in the film is to help establish a sympathetic view of Joseph Smith.

The film then moves to the period just prior to Joseph’s first vision, when he was fourteen, showing the religious revivals in the neighborhood and the ministers preaching on predestination and election to salvation, two doctrines Smith later rejected. Joseph’s 1820 vision is recounted in the current way with no mention of the various accounts that differ as to date, who appeared or the message delivered (see *Inventing Mormonism*, by Marquardt and Walters, *Salt Lake City Messenger*, no. 87 and <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/firstvision.htm>).

In the movie version of the 1820 vision Smith is told by God and Christ that he is not to join any Christian church. However, there is no mention of his later attempt to join the Methodist Church in 1828.

Joseph Lewis, Emma Smith’s cousin, later explained why Joseph was not allowed to become a member of the Methodist Church:

I, with Joshua McKune, a local preacher at that time, I think in June, 1828, heard on Saturday, that **Joe Smith** had joined the church on Wednesday afternoon, (as it was customary in those days to have circuit preaching at my father’s house on week-day). **We thought it was a disgrace to the church to have a practicing necromancer, a dealer in enchantments and bleeding ghosts, in it.** So on Sunday we went to father’s, the place of meeting that day, and got there in season to see Smith and talked with him some time in father’s shop before the meeting. **Told him that his occupation, habits, and moral character were at variance with the discipline, that his name would be a disgrace to the church, that there should have been recantation, confession and at least promised reformation-**. That he could that day publicly ask that his name be stricken from the class book, or stand an investigation. He chose the former, and did that very day make the request that his name be taken off the class book (*The Amboy Journal*, June 11, 1879, p. 1).

For more information, see the article, *The Mormon Prophet Attempts to Join the Methodists*, by Wesley P. Walters at <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/josephsmithmethodist.htm>.

Hugo Olaiz, *Sunstone* news editor, gave these reflections on the film’s treatment of Smith’s first vision:

The bicentennial celebrations of the first Mormon’s birth have been marked by a further irony. Not only has the Church changed since Joseph’s day, **Joseph himself has**

been revised. The Man Who Communed with Jehovah [ed.—taken from a famous LDS hymn] has been refitted with clothing that better fits the Saints' contemporary tastes. **Once a polygamist, Joseph Smith is now presented as a devoted monogamist,** and his home life has become the object of idyllic celebration. **Once the bellicose general of an army, he is now presented as a pacific city-builder.** The man who denounced all creeds as abominations has become a national treasure—the “American Prophet.” . . .

Another aspect of Joseph Smith's history has experienced a remarkable revision in the new film. Many of us remember (and the Church continues to sell) the 1976 film *The First Vision*, with its dramatic depiction of revival preachers and convicted sinners crying “I believe!”—a depiction so dramatic it approaches parody. The new film's telling of the First Vision steers well away from anything that might be interpreted as ridicule or, for that matter, that would strike most viewers as controversial. . . . In this film, the warring parties we read about in Joseph Smith's History [ed.—at the back of the *Pearl of Great Price*] are reduced to polite disagreement. The minister who confronts the young prophet about his claims is firm in his disbelief but comparatively civil. Instead of warning that the First Vision is “of the devil” (Joseph Smith—History 1:21), he merely advises Joseph to abandon his “foolish notions” (“Joseph Smith, Revised and Enlarged: The Prophet Has New Clothes, But Do The Seams Show?,” by Hugo Olaiz, *Sunstone*, Dec. 2005, p. 70).

Joseph as Soothsayer

In portraying Smith's teen years the film is silent regarding the Smith family's involvement in magical practices during the 1820's. Today LDS historians generally agree that Joseph Smith was involved in magical practices as a young man but tend to minimize the importance of such activity. However, Richard Bushman, a well-respected LDS scholar, has devoted several pages to the Smith's experience with magic and money-digging in his new book, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*:

The Smiths were as susceptible as their neighbors to treasure-seeking folklore. In addition to rod and stone divining, the Smiths probably believed in the rudimentary astrology found in the ubiquitous almanacs. Magical parchments handed down in the Hyrum Smith family may have originally belonged to Joseph Sr. The visit of the angel and the discovery of the gold plates would have confirmed the belief in supernatural power. For people in a magical frame of mind, Moroni sounded like one of the spirits who stood guard over treasure in the tales of treasure-seeking. The similarities may even have made the extraordinary story more credible in the Smith family. Lucy [ed.—Joseph Smith's mother] recognized the crossover in prefacing her narrative of the plates with a caution against thinking

that we stopt our labor and went at trying to win the faculty of Abrac drawing Magic circles or sooth saying to the neglect of all kinds of business we never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation but whilst we worked with our hands we endeavored to remember the service of & the welfare of our souls.

Lucy's point was that the Smiths were not lazy—they had not stopped their labor to practice magic—but she showed her knowledge of formulas and rituals and associated them with “the welfare of our souls.” Magic and religion melded in Smith family culture. . . .

Joseph Jr. never repudiated the stones or denied their power to find treasure. Remnants of the magical culture stayed with him to the end (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, by Richard L. Bushman, 2005, Knopf, pp. 50-51).

The film never mentions these activities of the Smiths nor how magical practices affected their lives.

Joseph Meets Emma

One emphasis in the movie is the apparent loving relationship between Joseph and his wife Emma. The film introduces Emma Hale in a scene where she and her mother are outside hanging up the laundry. While discussing the topic of marriage, they see Joseph Smith walking down the lane. Joseph and Emma's eyes meet and the audience realizes that romance is in the air.

But the film fails to explain Smith's presence in the Pennsylvania neighborhood in 1825. He did not just happen to pass by the Isaac Hale household but was actually boarding there. Joseph's mother recounted that the reason he and his father had traveled from Palmyra, New York, to the Pennsylvania border was to provide magical direction to a Mr. Stowell in his efforts to locate an underground silver mine:

A short time before the house was completed [1825], a man by the name of Josiah Stool [Stowell] came from Chenango county, New York, with the view of getting Joseph to assist him in digging for a silver mine [in Pennsylvania]. **He came for Joseph on account of having heard that he possessed certain means by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye.**

. . . After labouring for the old gentleman about a month, without success, Joseph prevailed upon him to cease his operations; and it was from this circumstance of having worked by the month, at digging for a silver mine, that the very prevalent story arose of Joseph's having been a money digger.

While Joseph was in the employ of Mr. Stool, he boarded a short time with one Isaac Hale, and it was during this interval, that Joseph became acquainted with the daughter, Miss Emma Hale, to whom he immediately commenced paying his addresses, and was subsequently married (*Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Many Generations*, by Lucy Smith, 1853, p. 91; also reproduced in *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir*, edited by Lavina F. Anderson, Signature Books, 2001, pp. 359-360).

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Joseph the “Glass Looker”

In 1826, while working for Mr. Stowell, Joseph Smith was charged with a misdemeanor due to his magic practices. Mr. Stowell’s nephew brought the charges against Smith, believing that Smith was an imposter. Richard Bushman writes:

Notes of a March 1826 court appearance in South Bainbridge shed light on the Smith family’s attitudes toward treasure-seeking on the eve of receiving the plates. Peter Bridgeman, nephew of Josiah Stowell, entered a complaint against Joseph Smith Jr. as a disorderly person in South Bainbridge, Chenango County, New York. New York law specified that **anyone pretending to have skill in discovering lost goods should be judged a disorderly person**. . . . Presumably, Bridgeman believed that Joseph was trying to cheat the old man by claiming magical powers. In the court record, Stowell said that he “had the most implicit faith in the Prisoners skill,” implying that was the reason for hiring Joseph (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 51-52).

Joseph Smith’s involvement in magic practices had always been denied by the LDS Church until 1971, when Wesley P. Walters discovered two original documents which proved that Joseph Smith was a “glass looker” and was arrested and examined before a justice of the peace in Bainbridge, N.Y. in 1826. One of the documents is Justice Albert Neeley’s bill to the county showing the costs involved in several hearings held in 1826. The fifth item from the top of Neeley’s bill mentions the examination of “Joseph Smith The Glass Looker.” (For a photo of this document, see *Messenger* no. 68 at <http://www.utlm.org/newsletters/no68.htm>)

The documents relating to Smith’s March 1826 arrest were at first thought to be from the actual trial but further research seems to indicate that this was a preliminary hearing. But the fact remains that Smith was engaged in magical practices during the very time period that he was supposedly being groomed by God for his calling as prophet and seer (1820-1827).

For more details on this 1826 court proceeding and the Smith’s involvement in magic, see *Inventing Mormonism*, by Walters and Marquardt, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, by Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, edited by Dan Vogel, vol. 2-4, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, by D. Michael Quinn, and our *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?*, *Joseph Smith and Money Digging and Mormonism, Magic and Masonry*.

Emma’s Father Objects to Marriage

While the film mentions that Emma’s parents objected to her marriage to Joseph, it does not explain the reasons. Mr. Hale wrote a statement outlining his disapproval of Smith, printed in 1834, but it was not utilized in the movie:

Harmony, Pa. March 20th, 1834

I first became acquainted with Joseph Smith, Jr. in November, 1825. He was at that time in the employ of a set of men who were called “money diggers;” and **his occupation was that of seeing, or pretending to see by means of a stone placed in his hat, and his hat closed over his face. In this way he pretended to discover minerals and hidden treasure.** His appearance at this time, was that of a careless young man—not very well educated, and very saucy and insolent to his father. Smith, and his father, with several other “money-diggers” boarded at my house while they were employed in digging for a mine that they supposed had been opened and worked by the Spaniards, many years since. Young Smith gave the “money-diggers” great encouragement, at first, but when they had arrived in digging, to near the place where he had stated an immense treasure would be found—he said the enchantment was so powerful that he could not see. They then became discouraged, and soon after dispersed. This took place about the 17th of November, 1825; . . .

After these occurrences, young Smith made several visits at my house, and at length asked my consent to his marrying my daughter Emma. **This I refused, and gave my reasons for so doing; some of which were, that he was a stranger, and followed a business that I could not approve;** he then left the place. Not long after this, he returned, and while I was absent from home, carried off my daughter, into the state of New York, where they were married without my approbation or consent (*Mormonism Unveiled*, by E. D. Howe, 1834, pp. 262-266).

Joseph Smith’s arrest in 1826 for “glass looking” no doubt added to Mr. Hale’s apprehensions about the marriage. Mr. Hale went on to state:

Smith [later] stated to me, that he had given up what he called “glass-looking,” and that he expected to work hard for a living, and was willing to do so. . . . Soon after this, I was informed they had brought a wonderful book of Plates down with them [from New York to Pennsylvania]. . . .

Joseph Smith Jr. resided near me for some time after this and I had a good opportunity of becoming acquainted with him, and somewhat acquainted with his associates, and I conscientiously believe from the facts I have detailed, and from many other circumstances, which I do not deem it necessary to relate, that the whole “Book of Mormon” (so called) is a silly fabrication of falsehood and wickedness, got up for speculation, and with a design to dupe the ridiculous and unwary—and in order that its fabricators may live upon the spoils of those who swallow the deception. ISAAC HALE (*Mormonism Unveiled*, p. 266).

Evidently Smith’s change in vocation from magician to prophet did nothing to improve Mr. Hale’s opinion of him.

LDS Abuse of Dissenters in Missouri

The movie portrays the Mormons as totally peace-loving, non-violent people, contrary to the historical record. While the movie shows various attacks on the Mormons it never

mentions why their non-Mormon neighbors feared them. LDS historian Stephen LeSueur wrote:

Joseph Smith had designated Jackson County, Missouri, as the site for the Saints' Zion in 1831, and many of his followers began gathering there soon afterward. A small group of Mormons attempted to establish a communitarian society in Jackson County, but they came into conflict with their Missouri neighbors, who viewed suspiciously their strange beliefs and practices. . . .

The Mormons were partly responsible for causing, or at least reinforcing, the suspicions and prejudice against them. Their claims about establishing the Kingdom of God in Jackson County, that they would "literally tread upon the ashes of the wicked after they are destroyed from off the face of the earth," excited fears that the Mormons intended to obtain their "inheritance" by force. According to Joseph Thorp, a Clay County resident, the Mormons told local settlers that "this country was theirs [the Mormons'] by the gift of the Lord, and it was folly for them [the Missourians] to improve their lands, they would not enjoy the fruits of their labor; that it would finally fall into the hands of the saints." In July 1832, a Mormon journal in Independence published a Joseph Smith revelation in which the Lord declared that "I will consecrate the riches of the Gentiles [non-Mormons], unto my people which are of the house of Israel." Similar claims regarding the role of the Indians in building the Kingdom and punishing God's enemies stimulated rumors that the Mormons were exhorting the Indians to drive the non-Mormon settlers from their land. . . . Whatever the faults of the Mormons, however, it was the Missourians who initiated the conflicts between the two groups (*The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, by Stephen C. LeSueur, 1987, pp. 16-18).

After the Mormons were driven from their settlement in Jackson County, Missouri, they relocated in and around Caldwell County to the north. But as more and more Mormons moved into the area, the non-Mormons grew hostile.

Besides the problems with non-Mormons, during 1837 and 1838 there was growing dissent within the church regarding church finances, the failure of the Mormon's Kirtland Bank in Ohio, and whether members could sell their property in Jackson County, Missouri. LDS historian Richard Bushman explains:

Joseph soon learned that the disaffection in the Kirtland Church had spread to Caldwell County, beginning with the Missouri Presidency. Not long after Caldwell was settled, the Missouri Saints began to doubt the faithfulness of David Whitmer, William Phelps, John Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery. . . .

In January 1838, a group of apostles and high councilors appointed a committee to make inquiries. . . . The four were accused of various infractions of the Word of Wisdom and of selling their lands in Jackson County, signaling a lack of faith in the Saints' return to their promised land. . . .

The individual complaints against the Missouri Presidency blended with the larger issue of loyalty to Joseph Smith (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 346-347).

Reed Peck, who left Mormonism after the Missouri problems, gave one of the earliest accounts of Sidney Rigdon's infamous "salt sermon," threatening the dissenters:

At this period measures were concerted no doubt by instigation of the presidency to free the community of the Cowderies, Whitmers, Lyman Johnson and some others, . . . the matter was taken up publicly by the presidency the Sunday following (June 17th) in the presence of a large congregation—S. Rigdon took his text from the fifth chapter of Mathew "Ye are the salt of the Earth but if the salt have lost his savour wherewith shall it be salted, it is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and **be trodden under foot of men**" . . . He informed the people that they had a set of men among them that had dissented from the church and were doing all in their power to destroy the presidency laying plans to take their lives &c., accused them of counterfeiting lying cheating and numerous other crimes and called on the people to rise en masse and rid the county of such a nuisance **He said it was the duty of this people to trample them into the earth** and if the county cannot be freed from them any other way I will assist to trample them down or to erect a gallows on the square of Far West and hang them up as they did the gamblers at Vicksburgh and it would be an act at which the angels would smile with approbation Joseph Smith in a short speech sanctioned what had been said by Rigdon, though said he I don't want the brethren to act unlawfully but will tell them one thing Judas was a traitor and in stead of hanging himself was hung by Peter. . . . (*Reed Peck Manuscript*, typescript, pp. 6-7, photocopy of original document at the University of Utah, Marriott Library).

The Danites

With growing opposition in the community and dissention among some of the top LDS leadership, a secret band was formed to deal with troublemakers. This group became known as the Danites. In June, 1838, a very threatening letter was sent to the dissenters which accused them of serious crimes and ordered them to leave Far West, Missouri, at once. D. Michael Quinn shows that this letter was authorized by some of the highest leaders in the LDS Church:

On 17 June 1838, first counselor Sidney Rigdon preached his "Salt Sermon" as a warning that Mormon dissenters would "be cast out and trodden under foot of men." . . . Rigdon was restating what a revelation of February 1834 had authorized the First Presidency to do to Mormons who "hearken not to observe all my words" (D&C 103:8-10). The next day second counselor Hyrum Smith and his Uncle John Smith (assistant counselor in First Presidency) joined with Danite leader Sampson Avard (as first signer) and eighty other Danites in a threatening letter to Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, Lyman E. Johnson, and William W. Phelps. . . .

Regarding this Danite expulsion of prominent Mormon dissenters, Counselor Rigdon told Apostle Orson Hyde at Far West that "it was the imperative duty of the Church to obey the word of Joseph Smith, or the presidency, without

question or inquiry, and that if there were any that would not, they should have their throats cut from ear [to] ear.” (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, by D. Michael Quinn, p. 94)

The threatening letter the Danites sent to the dissenters contained the following:

To Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, William W. Phelps, and Lyman E. Johnson, greeting:

Whereas the citizens of Caldwell county have borne with the abuse received from you at different times, and on different occasions, until it is no longer to be endured . . . **out of the county you shall go, and no power shall save you.** . . . if you do not depart, we will use the means in our power to cause you to depart; for go you shall. . . . vengeance sleepeth not, neither does it slumber; . . . there is but one decree for you, which is depart, depart, or a more fatal calamity shall befall you. . . . For the insult, if nothing else, and your threatening to shoot us if we offered to molest you, we will put you from the county of Caldwell: so help us God (Letter quoted in *Senate Document 189*, Feb. 15, 1841, pp. 6-9).

Book of Mormon witness John Whitmer, who was threatened by the Danites in the letter cited above, wrote the following in his history of the church:

Joseph Smith, Jr., S. Rigdon, and Hyrum Smith moved their families to this place, Far West, in the spring of 1838. As soon as they came here, they began to enforce their new organized plan, which caused dissensions and difficulties, threatenings and even murders. Smith called a council of the leaders together, in which council he stated that **any person who said a word against the heads of the Church, should be driven over these prairies as a chased deer by a pack of hounds**, having an illusion to the Gideonites, as they were termed, to justify themselves in their wicked designs. . . . On the 19th of June, 1838, they preached a sermon called the **salt sermon**, in which these Gideonites understood that they should drive the dissenters, as they termed those who believed not in their secret bands, in fornication, adultery or midnight machinations. . . . They had threatened us, to kill us, if we did not make restitutions to them, by upholding them in their wicked purposes and designs. . . . to our great astonishment, when we were on the way home from Liberty, Clay County, we met the families of Oliver Cowdery and L. E. Johnson, whom they had driven from their homes, and robbed them of all their goods, save clothing, bedding, etc.

While we were gone Jo. and Rigdon and their band of Gadiatons kept up a guard, and watched our houses, and abused our families, and threatened them, if they were not gone by morning, they would be drove out, and threatened our lives, if they ever saw us in Far West (*John Whitmer's History*, p. 22).

The fact that the Mormon leaders violated the civil rights of their own people by driving out dissenters from their midst caused many non-Mormons to conclude that they were dealing with a very dangerous group. As they heard reports by those who were driven out, they became increasingly fearful of the Mormons. Richard Bushman commented:

Mormons believed they were building Zion according to God's commands; to apostates and outsiders they looked like mindless zealots obeying a tyrant.

In 1838, the practical form of this question involved submission to law. The Missourians believed that Mormons thought Joseph's revelations put them beyond the law. Since the word of God outranked the law of the land, Mormons were suspected of breaking the law whenever the Prophet required it (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 353-354).

Extermination Order

The film has a scene showing the Missouri militia about to carry out an “extermination order” given by Governor Lilburn W. Boggs on October 27, 1838. Governor Boggs had declared:

The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State if necessary, for the public peace—their outrages are beyond all description (*The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, p. 152).

After Governor Boggs' order an army of the state militia marched to the borders of Far West, Missouri, and demanded the surrender of Joseph Smith and several others. A hasty court-martial was convened on the spot and Smith and the other prisoners were sentenced to be executed the next morning. The film shows the captain's refusal to carry out the order but doesn't give any details surrounding the event.

While many Mormons have heard of Governor Boggs' “extermination order,” they usually are not aware that the term originated with the Mormons. Sidney Rigdon, first counselor in the First Presidency, had preached his infamous “salt sermon” threatening the dissenters in June. Then on July 4, 1838, he warned that there could be “a war of extermination” against anyone abusing the Mormons. This was three months prior to the time Boggs issued his order. LDS historian B. H. Roberts commented on Rigdon's July 4th speech:

This oration by Sidney Rigdon has always been severely criticized as containing passages that were ill-advised and vehemently bitter. Especially those passages which threatened a war of extermination upon mobs should they again arise to plague the saints (*History of the Church*, vol. 3, p. 42, footnote).

In his speech, after speaking of the persecution that church members had suffered, Rigdon threatened:

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We take God and all the holy angels to witness, this day, that we warn all men, in the name of Jesus Christ to come on us no more for ever, from this hour we will bear it no more; our rights shall no more be trampled on with impunity; the man, or the set of men who attempt it, do it at the expense of their lives. And that mob that comes on us to disturb us, it shall be between us and them a **war of extermination**; for we will follow them until the last drop of their blood is spilled; **or else they will have to exterminate us**, for we will carry the seat of war to their own houses and their own families, and one party or the other shall be **utterly destroyed**. . . . We this day, then, proclaim ourselves free with a purpose and determination that never can be broken, No, never! No, never! No, never! (*Comprehensive History of the Church*, by B. H. Roberts, vol. 1, p. 441).

B. H. Roberts acknowledged that Joseph Smith himself approved of Rigdon's speech:

The unwisdom of the utterance has been quite generally recognized by our writers, and by them responsibility for it has been placed upon the rather fervid imagination of Sidney Rigdon, who delivered the speech, and who quite generally is supposed to have been mainly or wholly responsible for it. This is not true. The speech was carefully prepared . . . and read by other presiding elders of the church before its delivery. It immediately appeared in *The Far West*, a weekly newspaper . . . and was also published . . . on the press of the *Elders' Journal*. **Joseph Smith in his journal speaks of it approvingly**; and in the *Elders' Journal*, of which he was the editor, and in the editorial columns under his name, the speech is approvingly recommended to the saints. In view of these facts, if the 'declaration' was of doubtful propriety, and unwise and impolitic, responsibility for it rests not alone on Sidney Rigdon, but upon the authorities of the church who approved it, and the people who accepted it by their acclamation (*Comprehensive History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 443).

This speech undoubtedly helped trigger the violence that erupted in Missouri. During the conflict that ensued, the Mormon Danites were engaged in plundering and burning the homes of the non-Mormons. For example, Benjamin F. Johnson, a Danite, who later served on Joseph Smith's highly secret Council of Fifty, commented:

. . . I started . . . and fell into rank with a company of near twenty mounted men . . . I soon learned our destination was to Taylor's on Grand River, about nine miles above, where it was said arms and ammunition were held for the use of the mob. . . . There were two men with a number of women and children, and all affirmed that there was nothing of the kind there. . . . our captain ordered a search in the cornfields . . . which soon resulted in the discovery of arms and ammunition and of their falsehoods. The females hastily took from the houses what they could carry, and here I might say there was almost a trial of my faith in my pity for our enemies . . . Among the women was one, young married and apparently near her confinement, and another with small children and not a wagon, and many miles away from any of their friends, and snow had begun already . . . to fall. My sympathies were drawn toward the women and children, but I would in no degree let them deter me from duty. So while others were pillaging for something to carry away, I was doing my

best to protect . . . the lives and comfort of the families who were dependent on getting away upon horseback. . . . While others were doing the burning and plunder, my mission was of mercy . . . Before noon we had set all on fire and left upon a circuitous route towards home (*My Life's Review*, by Benjamin F. Johnson, 1947, pp. 38-39, at the University of Utah Marriott Library).

The Mormon justification for stealing is discussed by Steven LeSueur:

Oliver B. Huntington, a teenage boy living at Diahman, and Benjamin F. Johnson, a member of the Mormon militia, both claimed that the decision to plunder the Missourians' food and possessions was prompted by the necessities of war. "It should not be supposed . . . that we were common robbers because we took by reprisal that with which to keep from starvation our women and children," Johnson wrote. . . . And the rumor spread among them, particularly among Danites under Sampson Avard's tutelage, that "the time had come when the 'riches of the Gentiles' should be consecrated to the Saints," thus fulfilling an 1831 revelation to Joseph Smith. The Mormon soldiers believed their pillaging was divinely sanctioned. . . .

The desperate crimes committed by the Mormon soldiers can be attributed to several factors. Their militant activities and the belligerent speeches of their leaders during the summer and fall of 1838 had been leading them on a course of increasing lawlessness and violence (*The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, pp. 120-121).

Steven LeSueur calculated that "the Mormons burned about fifty cabins and stores, and drove one hundred non-Mormon families from their homes" (*The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*, p. 124).

Speaking of the Danites, D. Michael Quinn noted that, "As of 4 September 1838, Danite John N. Sapp estimated their number at 800-1,000" (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, p. 479). Through his research Quinn has identified about 230 of these Danites by name (*Ibid.*, pp. 479-485).

With mounting hostilities and plundering on both sides, together with the Mormon's growing army, the non-Mormons had good reason to be alarmed.

Haun's Mill

The film shows various attacks on Mormon settlements by non-Mormons. The most famous of these was the slaughter at Haun's Mill on October 30, 1838. However, Mormons are not usually aware of the fighting that had already been escalating in Missouri. Ten days before the attack on Haun's mill

Mormon soldiers met secretly and organized into companies of ten, fifty, and one hundred in preparation for war. . . . On the morning of 20 October, Joseph Smith gathered about three hundred of his men on a ridge near Diahman and covenanted with them never to accept peace at the sacrifice of truth and justice. . . . The Prophet then

stepped forward, drew his sword, and lifting high above his head, proclaimed, "I have drawn my sword from its sheath and I swear by the living God that it never shall return again till I can go and come and be treated by others as they wish to be treated by me" (*The 1838 Mormon War*, pp. 125-126).

The Mormons living in the small community of Haun's Mill had experienced a number of attacks from non-Mormons but had signed a peace treaty with the locals. Thus they were caught off-guard when, on Tuesday, October 30, 1838, about 200 Missouri troops attacked the settlement, killing eighteen men (see *The 1838 Mormon War*, p. 164).

There is, of course, no way that a person can justify this bloody deed. Dr. Quinn was very disturbed by the "brutality of the anti-Mormon" militia that "attacked the LDS settlement at Haun's Mill," but he put the matter into perspective by showing that the action of the Danites earlier at the Battle of Crooked River led to the slaughter at Haun's Mill:

In the skirmishes that both sides called "battles," Mormons used deadly force without reluctance. Benjamin F. Johnson wrote that Danite leader (and future apostle) Lyman Wight told his men to pray concerning their Missouri enemies: "That God would Damn them & give us pow[e]r to Kill them." Likewise, at the beginning of the Battle of Crooked River . . . Apostle David W. Patten (a Danite captain with the code-name "Fear Not") told his men: "Go ahead, boys; rake them down." The highest ranking Mormon charged with murder for obeying this order was Apostle Parley P. Pratt who allegedly took the careful aim of a sniper in killing one Missourian and then severely wounding militiaman Samuel Tarwater. This was after Apostle Patten received a fatal stomach wound. In their fury at the sight of their fallen leader, some of the Danites mutilated the unconscious Tarwater "with their swords" striking him lengthwise in the mouth, cutting off his under teeth, and breaking his lower jaw; cutting off his cheeks . . . and leaving him [for] dead." He survived to press charges against Pratt for attempted murder. . . .

A generally unacknowledged dimension of both the extermination order and the Haun's Mill massacre, however, is that they resulted from Mormon actions in the Battle of Crooked River. Knowingly or not, Mormons had attacked state troops, and this had a cascade effect. Local residents feared annihilation: "We know not the hour or minute we will be laid in ashes," a local minister and county clerk wrote the day after the battle. "For God's sake give us assistance as quick as possible." Correspondingly, the attack on state troops weakened the position of Mormon friends in Missouri's militia and government. Finally, upon receiving news of the injuries and death of state troops at Crooked River, Governor Boggs immediately drafted his extermination order on 27 October 1838 because the Mormons "have made war upon the people of this state." Worse, the killing of one Missourian and mutilation of another while he was defenseless at Crooked River led to the mad-dog revenge by Missourians in the slaughter at Haun's Mill (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, pp. 99-100).

Richard Bushman commented:

The skirmish at Crooked River led to the charge of treason against Joseph Smith and the Mormon leaders. Resisting a band of vigilantes was justifiable, but attacking a militia company was resistance to the state (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 364).

In Sidney Rigdon's July 4th speech he threatened that if the Mormons were attacked, there would be "a war of extermination; for we will follow them until the last drop of their blood is spilled; or else they will have to exterminate us. . ." Although Boggs' order echoed Rigdon's threat to exterminate the opposition, the Mormons were able to negotiate a settlement. Joseph Smith and four others surrendered to the militia. Richard Bushman writes:

The Mormons were to give up their arms and leave the state. Those accused of crimes were to be surrendered and tried. Mormon property in Missouri was to be confiscated to reimburse the Daviess citizens whose houses had been burned. The Mormons were to give up everything except their lives (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 367).

The Mormon prisoners were eventually brought before a court. Richard Bushman gave the following overview of the event:

The inquiry before Judge Austin King of the Fifth Circuit Court in Richmond ran from November 12 to 28 [1838]. The nearly fifty prisoners were accused of participating in the raids on Daviess County or the attack on Samuel Bogart and the Richmond County militia at Crooked River. For two weeks, the court heard testimony from over forty witnesses blaming Joseph for instigating the Mormon raids and setting up the Danites as a secret government. . . . At the end, the court found probable cause to charge Joseph and five others with "overt acts of treason." Another five, including Parley Pratt, were charged with murder because a Missourian was killed at Crooked River. The rest of the accused Mormons were dismissed. . . .

Because the Richmond jail was crowded, on December 1 the group charged with treason were sent chained and handcuffed to Liberty, the Clay county seat (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 369).

Mr. Bushman gives the following summary of the Mormon problems in the 1830's:

While in prison, Joseph mulled over the problems of the past year. The Missourians were to blame, of course, but he now saw that the Church had erred, and he had made mistakes himself. . . .

Repairing their mistakes, however, did not deal with the underlying question: why God had allowed the Missourians to abuse the Saints. If this was His work where was He? The succession of failures, beginning with Jackson County and continuing through the Far West surrender, was too much for John Corrill, the steady, clear-headed Missouri leader. At the end of his 1839 account of early Mormonism, Corrill explained why he abandoned the movement:

When I retrace our track, and view the doings of the church for six years past, I can see nothing that convinces me that God has been our leader; calculation after calculation has failed, and plan after plan has been overthrown, and our prophet seemed not to know the event till too late. If he said go up and prosper, still we did not prosper; but have labored and toiled, and waded through trials, difficulties, and temptations, of various kinds, in hope of deliverance. But no deliverance came.

Everything Corrill said was true. The great work had met defeat after defeat. None of the Mormon settlements had lasted in Ohio or Missouri. Joseph's seven-year stay in Kirtland was the longest in any gathering place. At Far West, the Saints survived barely two years. The gathering led to one disaster after another, as local citizens turned against the expanding Mormon population (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 379).

After spending months in jail the five men were able to make an escape while being transferred to another jail in April of 1839, and made their way to Illinois.

Both the Missourians and the Mormons were guilty of crimes but the movie places all the blame on the non-Mormons and shows the Mormons as peaceful and non-aggressive. There were reasons the Mormons kept running into opposition and were driven out of various areas, but that is never explained in the film.

Joseph's Temper

While the movie shows Joseph Smith good-naturedly entering into wrestling contests, it fails to show how he sometimes lost his temper and became violent. D. Michael Quinn observed that Smith was a "church president who physically assaulted both Mormons and non-Mormons for insulting him" (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, pp. 261-262).

On August 1, 1843, Smith's history records:

Mr. Bagby, the collector, came up in the midst of our conversation, . . . I told him that I had always been ready to pay all my taxes when I was called upon; and I did not think it gentlemanly treatment to sell any of my lots for taxes; and I told him that he was continually abusing the citizens here. Bagby called me a liar, and picked up a stone to throw at me, **which so enraged me that I followed him a few steps, and struck him two or three times.** Esquire Daniel H. Wells stepped between us and succeeded in separating us. . . . I rode down to Alderman Whitney . . . he imposed a fine which I paid, and then returned to the political meeting (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, p. 524).

On August 13, 1843, Smith made public reference to the altercation with Mr. Bagby:

I met him, and he gave me some abusive language, taking up a stone to throw at me: **I seized him by the throat to choke him off** (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, p. 531).

In that same year Smith assaulted Joseph Butterfield, president of the Seventy:

Josiah Butterfield came to my house and insulted me so outrageously that **I kicked him out of the house, across the yard, and into the street** (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, p. 316).

Jedediah M. Grant, a member of the First Presidency under Brigham Young, told of Smith's rough handling of a visiting minister:

. . . the Baptist priest who came to see Joseph Smith . . . stood before him, and folding his arms said, "Is it possible that I now flash my optics upon a man who has conversed with my Savior?" "Yes," says the Prophet, "I don't know but you do; **would not you like to wrestle with me?**" That, you see, brought the priest right on to the thrashing floor, and he turned a summerset right straight. After he had whirled round a few times, like a duck shot in the head, he concluded that his piety had been awfully shocked . . . (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 3, pp. 66-67).

While this may have seemed amusing to Apostle Grant, Joseph Smith was hardly displaying a Christian attitude. His close friend Benjamin F. Johnson made this observation after Smith's death:

And yet, although so social and even convivial at times, he [Joseph Smith] would allow no arrogance or undue liberties, and criticism, even by his associates, was rarely acceptable, and **contradiction would rouse in him the lion at once**, for by no one of his fellows would he be superseded or disputed and in the early days at Kirtland, and elsewhere one or more of his associates were more than once, for their impudence, **helped from the congregation by his foot**, and at one time at a meeting at Kirtland, **for insolence to him, he soundly thrashed his brother William** who boasted himself as invincible. And while with him in such fraternal, social and sometimes convivial moods, we could not then so fully realize the greatness and majesty of his calling, which, since his martyrdom, has continued to magnify in our lives, as the glories of this last dispensation more fully unfold to our comprehension (Letter by Benjamin F. Johnson to Elder George S. Gibbs, 1903, as printed in *The Testimony of Joseph Smith's Best Friend*, pp. 4-5, at University of Utah, Marriott Library).

Mormon writer Max H. Parkin refers to a court case against Joseph Smith in which Calvin Stoddard, Joseph Smith's brother-in-law, testified that

Smith then came up and knocked him in the forehead with his flat hand — **the blow knocked him down, when Smith repeated the blow four or five times, very hard** — made him blind — that Smith afterwards came to him and asked his forgiveness (*Conflict at Kirtland*, 1966, p. 132, citing from the *Painesville Telegraph*, June 26, 1835).

This side of Joseph Smith's character is very carefully left out of the film.

Joseph's Boasting

In 1843 Charlotte Haven, a non-Mormon, wrote letters from Nauvoo which contain some candid observations about Joseph Smith:

Joseph Smith . . . is evidently a great egotist and boaster, for he frequently remarked that at every place he stopped going to and from Springfield people crowded around him, and expressed surprise that he was so “handsome and good looking” (“A Girl’s Letters from Nauvoo,” *Overland Monthly*, California, December 1890, p. 621).

He talked incessantly about himself, what he had done and could do more than other mortals, and remarked that he was “a giant, physically and mentally.” In fact, he seemed to forget that he was a man. . . . They say he is very kindhearted, and always ready to give shelter and help to the needy (*Ibid.*, p. 623).

A reporter who visited Joseph Smith wrote in 1843:

We spent about an hour conversing on various subjects, the prophet himself, with amazing volubility, occupying the most of the time, and his whole theme was himself. Let us give what turn we would to the conversation, he would adroitly bring it back to himself. . . . he said: ‘The world persecutes me, it has always persecuted me. . . . When I have proved that I am right, and get all the world subdued under me. I think I shall deserve something (*The New York Spectator*, September 23, 1843).

For those who might doubt these assessments of Smith’s character, we give the following quotes from Joseph himself:

I am a lawyer; I am a big lawyer and comprehend heaven, earth and hell, to bring forth knowledge that shall cover up all lawyers, doctors and other big bodies (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, p. 289).

Don’t employ lawyers, or pay them for their knowledge, for I have learned that they don’t know anything. I know more than they all (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, p. 467).

I combat the errors of ages; I meet the violence of mobs; I cope with illegal proceedings from executive authority; I cut the gordian knot of powers, and I solve mathematical problems of universities, with truth-diamond truth; and God is my “right hand man” (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 78).

If they want a beardless boy to whip all the world, I will get on the top of a mountain and crow like a rooster: I shall always beat them. . . . I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. A large majority of the whole have stood by me. **Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I. The followers of Jesus ran away from Him, but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet** (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 408-9).

Smith Introduces Polygamy

Polygamy was unlawful in Illinois, thus the need for extreme secrecy. But another obstacle to its practice was convincing women that it was right before God. After all, the Book of Mormon condemned polygamy (Jacob 2:23-28) and section 101 in the 1835 edition of the *Doctrine*

and Covenants denied the Mormons practiced it. Evidently Smith appealed to new revelation and the practice of polygamy in the Old Testament as justification for “restoring” the principle in his day and linked it to eternal exaltation. The revelation starts out:

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as **you have inquired** of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, **justified** my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having **many wives and concubines**—Behold, and lo, I am the Lord thy God, and will answer thee as touching this matter. . . . all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same. . . . and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned . . . (*Doctrine and Covenants* 132:1-4).

Richard Bushman commented:

The possibility of an imaginary revelation, erupting from his own heart and subconscious mind, seems not to have occurred to Joseph. To him, the words came from heaven. They required obedience even though the demand seemed contradictory or wrong. . . . Joseph told a prospective wife that submitting to plural marriage would “ensure your eternal salvation & exaltation and that of your father’s household. & all your kindred” (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, pp. 438-439).

One of the first women listed as a plural wife of Joseph Smith is Fanny Alger, a teenager who lived in the Smith home in the mid-1830’s. Todd Compton, an LDS historian, commented that

her marriage to him in Kirtland, Ohio, established a pattern that was repeated in Nauvoo, Illinois: Smith secretly marries a teenage servant or family friend living in his home, and his first wife Emma forces the young woman from the premises when she discovers the relationship (*In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, by Todd Compton, p. 25).

Oliver Cowdery, one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, became aware of the relationship between Joseph and Fanny but considered it a case of adultery. In 1838 he wrote to his brother, Warren, about the episode:

When he [Joseph Smith] was there we had some conversation in which in every instance I did not fail to affirm that what I had said was strictly true. **A dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger’s was talked over** in which I strictly declared that I had never deviated from the truth in the matter, and as I supposed was admitted by himself (Letter written by Oliver Cowdery and recorded by his brother Warren Cowdery; see photograph in *The Mormon Kingdom*, vol. 1, p. 27).

While Smith may have taken at least two plural wives in the 1830’s, his first plural wife in Nauvoo, Illinois, was Louisa Beaman in 1841. Soon after this, the doctrine was introduced to selected leaders. Richard Bushman comments:

Joseph told the Twelve about plural marriage soon after their return in 1841, and they began marrying other women

soon after. Before Joseph died, as many as twenty-nine other men had married at least one additional wife under his authorization. The practice had to be generalized because the revelation tied marriage to the highest form of exaltation. . . . The plural marriage revelation [D.&C. 132] still describes the modern Mormon view of marriage and family, although Latter-day Saints abandoned plural marriage more than a century ago. . . .

To those sealed by the priesthood, the promises were startling. When out of the world, the revelation said, sealed couples would pass by the angels and go on to godhood (*Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, p. 443).

Smith's secret teachings were exposed in 1842 after Martha Brotherton, a young convert, published her story of being approached by Brigham Young to be his plural wife. LDS historian Richard Van Wagoner related:

In a retrospective newspaper account months later, Martha Brotherton, a young Nauvoo woman, reported that during [January of 1842] she was privately approached by Brigham Young and asked "were it lawful and right . . . could [you] accept of me for your husband and companion?" Brigham stated that "Brother Joseph has had a revelation from God that it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives; for as it was in the days of Abraham, so it shall be in these last days . . . if you will accept of me, I will take you straight to the celestial kingdom." Brotherton reported that when she hesitated, Young left the room and returned ten minutes later with Joseph Smith. "Well, Martha," she reported the prophet as having said, "just go ahead, and do as Brigham wants you to. . . . I know that this is lawful and right before God. . . . I have the keys of the kingdom, and whatever I bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever I loose on earth is loosed in heaven." Martha begged for time to consider the offer, then left for Saint Louis, where she published her story in the 15 July 1842 *St. Louis Bulletin*.

Even before Martha left Nauvoo, rumors of the incident began to circulate. Hyrum Smith, believing Joseph's public posture that polygamy was not being practiced, publicly addressed the Saints on 7 April 1842 "in contradiction of a report in circulation about elders Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young, himself, and others of the Twelve, alleging that a sister had been shut in a room for several days, and that they had endeavored to induce her to believe in having two wives." Joseph, who addressed the group after Hyrum, added, "There is no person that is acquainted with our principles who would believe such lies" (*Mormon Polygamy: A History*, by Richard S. Van Wagoner, second ed. 1989, p. 20).

Even though Joseph Smith was publicly denying any doctrine or practice of plural marriage, he was secretly taking more wives. Only a week after Martha Brotherton's accusations were printed in the *St. Louis Bulletin* Smith convinced seventeen-year-old Sarah Ann Whitney to be his plural wife. Richard Van Wagoner relates:

She [Sarah Ann Whitney] was sealed to Smith with her parents' permission on 27 July 1842. In an 18 August 1842 letter to the Whitneys, Smith, hiding from Missouri law enforcement officials, detailed his problems in getting to see

Sarah Ann without Emma's knowledge. "My feelings are so strong for you since what has passed lately between us . . . if you three would come and see me in this my lonely retreat, it would afford me great relief, of mind, if those with whom I am allied, do love me, now is the time to Afford me succor . . . the only thing to be careful is to find out when Emma comes then you cannot be safe, but when she is not here, there is the most perfect safety" (*Mormon Polygamy*, pp. 48-49).

Sarah Ann probably did not realize that she had become Joseph's fifteenth plural wife. Any youthful dreams of courtship and a public marriage were sacrificed to gain Smith's promise of eternal exaltation for herself and her parents.

Number of Wives

Todd Compton compiled biographical information on 33 women who were married to Smith, ranging in age from 14 to 58. Compton provided the following overview of Smith's wives:

In the group of Smith's well-documented wives, eleven (33 percent) were 14 to 20 years old when they married him. Nine wives (27 percent) were twenty-one to thirty years old. Eight wives (24 percent) were in Smith's own peer group, ages thirty-one to forty. . . .

The teenage representation is the largest, though the twenty-year and thirty-year groups are comparable, which contradicts the Mormon folk-wisdom that sees the beginnings of polygamy as an attempt to care for older, unattached women. These data suggest that sexual attraction was an important part of the motivation for Smith's polygamy (*In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 11).

Compton further observed:

Eighteen of Joseph's wives (55 percent) were single when he married them and had never been married previously. Another four (12 percent) were widows. . . . However, the remaining eleven women (33 percent) were married to other husbands and cohabiting with them when Smith married them. . . . I use the term polyandry—which means one woman being married to two men simultaneously—to describe this marital triangulation.

Polyandry is one of the major problems found in Smith's polygamy and many questions surround it. . . .

A common misconception concerning Joseph Smith's polyandry is that he participated in only one or two such unusual unions. In fact, fully one-third of his plural wives, eleven of them, were married civilly to other men when he married them. If one superimposes a chronological perspective, one sees that of Smith's first twelve wives, nine were polyandrous. So in this early period polyandry was the norm, not the anomaly. . . . none of these women divorced their "first husbands" while Smith was alive and all of them continued to live with their civil spouses while married to Smith (*In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 15-16).

The fact that Joseph Smith asked for other men's wives was made very plain in a sermon delivered in the Salt Lake

Tabernacle by Jedediah M. Grant, second counselor to Brigham Young. In this sermon, delivered February 19, 1854, Apostle Grant stated:

When the family organization was revealed from heaven—the patriarchal order of God, and Joseph began, on the right and on the left, to add to his family, what a quaking there was in Israel. Says one brother to another, “Joseph says all covenants are done away, and none are binding but the new covenants; now suppose Joseph should come and say he wanted your wife, what would you say to that?” “I would tell him to go to hell.” This was the spirit of many in the early days of this Church. . . .

What would a man of God say, who felt aright, when Joseph asked him for his money? He would say, “Yes, and I wish I had more to help to build up the kingdom of God.” Or if he came and said, “I want your wife?” “O Yes,” he would say, “here she is, there are plenty more.” . . . Did the Prophet Joseph want every man’s wife he asked for? He did not . . . If such a man of God should come to me and say, “I want your gold and silver, or your wives,” I should say, “Here they are, I wish I had more to give you, take all I have got” (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, pp. 13-14).

For further evidence that Joseph Smith had multiple wives, visit the LDS web site www.familysearch.org. One can find a list of 24 of Joseph Smith’s wives by simply typing in the names of Joseph and Emma (Hale) Smith, add his parents, Joseph and Lucy, add United States as the country, and you should be able to find the list. While the list is incomplete, it does contain the names of four of the women who had living husbands when they married Smith. These are Mary Elizabeth Rollins (Lightner), Sylvia Sessions (Lyon), Presendia Huntington (Buell) and Zina Huntington (Jacobs). Also listed are Helen Mar Kimball, Smith’s youngest wife at 14 years of age, and seventeen-year-old Sarah Ann Whitney.

Smith’s revelation on polygamy stated that according to “the law of the priesthood” a man could have “ten virgins given unto him by this law” and it would not be adultery (*D&C* 132:61-62). In light of the wording of the revelation, one wonders how he could justify his marriages to women with living husbands. Evidently he believed all marriages not performed by the priesthood were null and void, leaving the woman available for a “celestial” marriage. Richard Van Wagoner explained:

Smith viewed as invalid those marriages not sealed by his blessing. As God’s earthly agent, he believed he had been given powers that transcended civil law. . . . Whenever he deemed it appropriate he could release a woman from her earthly marriage and seal her to himself or to another with no stigma of adultery (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 47).

Most of the plural marriages were done without Emma’s knowledge. Smith also “proposed to at least five more women who turned him down” (*In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 2). Two of these proposals are mentioned by Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister:

Not all of the women Joseph solicited submitted to his entreaties. The most publicly embarrassing refusal was Joseph’s attempt, in 1842, to marry Nancy Rigdon, daughter of counselor Sidney Rigdon, himself a vocal opponent of polygamy. At the time she was being courted by twenty-three-year-old Francis M. Higbee. By early 1844, Higbee had become an influential dissident. Jane Law, wife of former counselor William Law, was unsuccessfully propositioned by Joseph in the spring of 1844 (*Junius & Joseph: Presidential Politics and the Assassination of the First Mormon Prophet*, by Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister, 2005, p. 134).

Were the Marriages Consummated?

When the issue of Joseph Smith’s plural marriages is discussed with Mormons they will often assert that Smith did not cohabit with his wives but were sealed for eternity only. However, several of his wives and friends made statements that clearly show at least some of the marriages included sexual relations. Todd Compton explained:

For instance, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner stated that she knew of children born to Smith’s plural wives: “I know he had six wives and I have known some of them from childhood up. I know he had three children. They told me. I think two are living today but they are not known as his children as they go by other names.” Melissa Lott Willes testified that she had been Smith’s wife “in very deed.” Emily Partridge Young said she “roomed” with Joseph the night following her marriage to him, and said that she had “carnal intercourse” with him.

Other early witnesses also affirmed this. Benjamin Johnson wrote: “On the 15th of May . . . the Prophet again Came and at my hosue [house] occupied the Same Room & Bed with my Sister that the month previous he had occupied with the Daughter of the Later Bishop Partridge as his wife.” According to Joseph Bates Noble, Smith told him he had spent a night with Louisa Beaman (*In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 12-13).

Emma’s Problems with Polygamy

The film depicts Emma and Joseph’s relationship as one of mutual respect and equality. An LDS member gave the following assessment of the film’s treatment of Joseph and Emma:

“I saw the film last weekend when we were in Utah. Fabulous! I loved the way they depicted Emma & Joseph’s relationship” (www.nauvoo.com).

The movie, however, conveniently omits Joseph and Emma’s numerous arguments over polygamy.

Both in speeches and church publications, Smith continually denied the doctrine and practice of plural marriage, while secretly adding more wives. Thus the rumors persisted. Richard Van Wagoner wrote:

Smith’s denials of polygamy were accepted at face value by most Saints. But Emma so strongly suspected her

husband of practicing it that she enlisted support from other anti-polygamy women to keep track of him. Joseph Lee Robinson wrote of one such alliance. Angeline, wife of his brother Ebenezer, "watched Brother Joseph the Prophet [...] it was at a time when she was very suspicious and jealous of him for fear he would get another wife." Robinson alleged that Emma was so angry she "said she would leave and was making preparations to go to her People in The State of New York it came close to breaking up his family" (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 51).

Sometime during February of 1843 Emma evidently became aware that Joseph had taken her best friend, Eliza R. Snow, as a plural wife. Eliza was currently living in the Smith home, which housed a number of boarders. LDS historians Linda Newell and Valeen Avery wrote:

When the full realization of the relationship between her friend Eliza and her husband Joseph came to her, Emma was stunned. . . . Although no contemporary account of the incident between Emma and Eliza remains extant, evidence leads to the conclusion that some sort of physical confrontation occurred between the two women. In 1886 Wilhelm Wyl published the first known version of the incident in his anti-Mormon book, *Joseph Smith the Prophet: His Family and His Friends*:

They say . . . there is scarcely a Mormon unacquainted with the fact that Sister Emma . . . soon found out the little compromise arranged between Joseph and Eliza. Feeling outraged as a wife and betrayed as a friend, Emma is currently reported as having had recourse to a vulgar broomstick as an instrument of revenge; and the harsh treatment received at Emma's hands is said to have destroyed Eliza's hopes of becoming the mother of a prophet's son. . . .

A fourth story, attributed to LeRoi C. Snow, Eliza's nephew, is an oral family tradition that tells of Emma knocking Eliza down the stairs with a broom, the fall resulting in a miscarriage for Eliza. . . .

Whether Eliza fell down the stairs or whether Emma pushed her or pulled her down by the hair, or whether Emma only turned her out of the house, the result seems to be documented in Eliza's terse journal entry for February 11, 1843: "Took board and had my lodging removed to the residence of br. [Jonathan] Holmes." . . . Eliza did not make another entry in her journal for five weeks and wrote no explanation for either the gap in her diary or her abrupt departure from Emma's home. . . .

The incident between Emma and Eliza forced the issue of plural marriage into the open. Emma could no longer believe that Joseph was not involved, and he could no longer deny it. Emma had not acted with violence before; now her determined opposition might show up again with unexpected force. Joseph resolutely tried to bring Emma around (*Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, by Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, 1994, pp. 134-137).

Emma seems to have occasionally agreed to Joseph taking other wives only to turn on him later. Linda Newell and Valeen Avery provide this information on Emma's capitulation:

For two months, from March to May, Joseph appears to have talked with Emma about plural marriage. He apparently used their rides together to teach her the necessity of the endowment and sealing. There is no evidence that she ever opposed him on any doctrine but plural marriage. Convinced that it was necessary for her salvation and essential to their continued relationship, she may have decided to compromise with Joseph. In May 1843 she finally agreed to give Joseph other wives if she could choose them . . . Emma chose the two sets of sisters then living in her house, Emily and Eliza Partridge and Sarah and Maria Lawrence.

Joseph had finally converted Emma to plural marriage, but not so fully that he dared tell her he had married the Partridge sisters two months earlier (*Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, pp. 142-143).

Emily Dow Partridge told how she and her sister were married without Emma's knowledge and then were remarried to Smith later with Emma's consent:

. . . the Prophet Joseph and his wife Emma offered us a home in their family, and they treated us with great kindness. We had been there about a year when the principle of plural marriage was made known to us, and I was married to Joseph Smith on the 4th of March 1843, Elder Heber C. Kimball performing the ceremony. My sister Eliza was also married to Joseph a few days later. **This was done without the knowledge of Emma Smith.** Two months afterward she consented to give her husband two wives, providing he would give her the privilege of choosing them. She accordingly chose my sister Eliza and myself, and **to save family trouble Brother Joseph thought it best to have another ceremony performed.** Accordingly on the 11th of May, 1843, we were sealed to Joseph Smith a second time, in Emma's presence. . . . **From that very hour, however, Emma was our bitter enemy.** We remained in the family several months after this, but things went from bad to worse until we were obligated to leave the house and find another home (*Historical Record*, edited by Andrew Jenson, vol. 6, 1887, p. 240).

According to Todd Compton, Joseph Smith married at least twenty-seven plural wives between 1833 and July 12, 1843 (see *In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 4-6). These were all before Joseph committed his revelation to paper. For example, the Partridge sisters were married to Smith in March of 1843. In July of 1843 Joseph's brother, Hyrum, believed he could convince Emma of the truthfulness of polygamy and suggested Smith commit the revelation to paper. Joseph's secretary, William Clayton recorded:

On the morning of the 12th of July, 1843; Joseph and Hyrum Smith came into the office . . . Hyrum said to Joseph, "If you will write the revelation on celestial marriage, I will take it and read it to Emma, and I believe I can convince her of its truth, and you will hereafter have peace." Joseph smiled and remarked, "You do not know Emma as well as I do." . . . Hyrum then took the revelation to read to Emma. . . . When he came back, Joseph asked how he had succeeded. Hyrum replied that he had never received a more severe talking to in his life. . . .

Joseph quietly remarked, "I told you you did not know Emma as well as I did." . . . Two or three days after the revelation was written Joseph related to me [William Clayton] and several others that Emma had so teased, and urgently entreated him for the privilege of destroying it, that he became so weary of her teasing, and to get rid of her annoyance, he told her she might destroy it and she had done so . . . realizing that he . . . could rewrite it at any time if necessary (*History of the Church*, Introduction to vol. 5).

A month later, Joseph and Emma were again arguing over polygamy. On August 16, 1843, William Clayton recorded the following in his journal:

This A.M. Joseph told me that since E[mma] came back from St. Louis she had resisted the P[riesthood] in toto, and he had to tell her he would relinquish all for her sake. She said she would [have] given him E[liza] and E[mily] P[artridge] but he knew if he took them she would pitch on him and obtain a divorce & leave him. He however told me he should not relinquish anything (*An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton*, edited by George D. Smith, p. 117).

Emma's struggles with polygamy continued. Linda Newell detailed the events of the coming days:

A few days after hearing that Joseph would "relinquish all," Emma found two letters in his pocket from Eliza R. Snow, then living at the Morley Settlement. Emma, seeming "vexed and angry," asked William if he had delivered the letters to Joseph. Clayton denied it. His report of the incident may have been colored by his own apprehensions

Two days later, William Clayton again reported Emma in another situation, . . . The 23 August entry reads:

Prest J[oseph]. told me that he had difficulty with E[mma]. yesterday. She rode up to Woodworths with him & called while he came to the Temple. When he returned she was demanding the gold watch of F[loria]. he reproved her for her evil treatment. On their return home she abused him much & also when he got home. **he had to use harsh measures to put a stop to her abuse but finally succeeded.**

William Clayton did not include the full details. Still smarting from her discovery of Eliza's letters, Emma went for a short carriage ride with Joseph. He attended to some business at the temple while she called on the Lucian Woodworth family. Emma was unaware that the Woodworth's sixteen-year-old daughter, Flora, had been Joseph's plural wife since spring. What probably began as a casual social visit exploded when Emma discovered that Joseph had given Flora a gold watch. The implications of such a gift were obvious since he had also given one to Eliza. Joseph returned as Emma "was demanding the gold watch" from Flora and reprimanded her. Once in the carriage, however, Emma undoubtedly vented her own anger at discovering yet another unsettling situation, continuing what William Clayton called "her abuse" until Joseph must have lost his temper and employed "harsh measures" to stop Emma ("The Emma Smith Lore Reconsidered," by Linda King Newell, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 91).

What are we to make of William Clayton's statement that Joseph "had to use harsh measures" to stop Emma's quarrelling "but finally succeeded"? Did Smith physically assault her? Whether his harsh measures were verbal or physical, it hardly presents a picture of the loving atmosphere in the Smith home as presented in the film.

The Poisoning

Another curious incident in Smith's life is his accusation that Emma tried to poison him. Ms. Newell writes:

Joseph won a respite with Emma over plural marriage when she received the Church's highest ordinance, the second anointing, on or shortly before 28 September 1843. She had received her endowment and been sealed to Joseph for eternity the previous spring. But by November marauders on the outskirts of the city had begun looting, burning, and whipping. Emma and Joseph's relationship again showed signs of intense stress and they both suffered from ill health. In an 1866 conference address, Brigham Young told this story:

[Joseph] called his wife Emma into a secret council, and there he told her . . . of the time she undertook to poison him, and he told her that she was a child of hell, and literally the most wicked woman on this earth, that there was not one more wicked than she. He told her where she got the poison, and how she put it in a cup of coffee. . . . When it entered his stomach he went to the door and threw it off.

. . . The evidence strongly suggests that Joseph indeed made the accusation but that he was wrong in concluding that Emma tried to poison him. The episode needs a larger context. Joseph's diary entry of 5 November 1843, describes becoming suddenly ill while eating dinner and vomiting so violently that he dislocated his jaw and "raised fresh blood." He believed he had been poisoned, but recovered enough to attend a "prayer meeting in the hall over the store" that evening. This was a meeting of the "quorum of the anointed"—those who had received their endowments—and most likely the "secret council" in which, according to Brigham, Joseph accused Emma of trying to poison him. Joseph's diary records that he and Emma did not dress for the prayer circle that night. Significantly, members did not customarily participate in the prayer circle if they had hard feelings against anyone else in the group. . . .

If Emma had convinced Joseph of her innocence in the earlier incident, Joseph apparently did not tell the others at the meeting and Emma remained forever guilty in their minds (*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 91-93).

In the same Brigham Young speech quoted above, he went on to relate:

He [Joseph] spoke to her [Emma] in that council in a very severe manner, and she never said one word in reply. I have witnesses of this scene all around, who can testify that I am now telling the truth. Twice she undertook to kill him (*The Essential Brigham Young*, 1992, pp. 188-189).

Regardless of whether or not Emma actually tried to poison Joseph, obviously Smith and the other leaders believed it to be the case. These harsh accusations do not present a picture of marital bliss.

Plural Marriage Essential

Marriage to multiple women was not a side-line issue with Smith but a central part of his quest for exaltation and godhood. Todd Compton observed:

One may wonder why Smith married so many women when two or three wives would have complied with the reported divine command to enter polygamy. However, the church president apparently believed that complete salvation (in Mormon terminology, exaltation, including the concept of deification) depended on the extent of a man's family sealed to him in this life. . . . This puts the number of women Joseph married into an understandable context (*In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 10-11).

Perhaps understandable to a Mormon, but does it really answer the objections? Why all the lying to Emma and the public? Why married women? One could argue that it looks a lot like an excuse for adultery.

Generally speaking, Mormons today seem unaware that Smith practiced polygamy and believe it was instituted in Utah to provide homes for widows. But there never was such a need. LDS apostle John A. Widtsoe admitted that there was no surplus of women:

The implied assumption in this theory, that there have been more female than male members in the Church, is not supported by existing evidence. On the contrary, there seems always to have been more males than females in the Church . . .

The United States census records from 1850 to 1940, and all available Church records, uniformly show a preponderance of males in Utah, and in the Church (*Evidences and Reconciliations*, 1960, pp. 390-392).

Even if there had been an excess of widows they could have been cared for through some church program that would not necessitate marriage.

Plural marriage was presented to people as an essential doctrine, necessary for the highest rank in heaven. In 1878 apostle Joseph F. Smith told how God had to send an angel with a drawn sword to Joseph Smith to convince him to enter plural marriage "or he should be utterly destroyed" (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 20, p. 29).

Richard Van Wagoner observed:

This emphasis on procreation became the basis for the Mormon concept of humanity's progress to divinity. All of Smith's Nauvoo doctrinal innovations fell into place around this new teaching. Smith explained that God was an exalted man and that mortal existence was a testing ground for men to begin progress toward exalted godhood. Salvation became a family affair revolving around a husband whose plural wives and children were sealed to him for eternity under the "new and everlasting covenant" (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 56).

Preaching in 1866, President Brigham Young declared:

The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, p. 269).

In 1890 the LDS Church issued the Manifesto, printed at the back of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, putting an end to the official practice of plural marriage. However, many continued its practice, even risking excommunication if found out. This led to many splinter groups who still practice polygamy and believe the LDS Church is in a state of apostasy. Today the LDS Church tries to distance itself from the splinter groups. President Gordon B. Hinckley was interviewed by Larry King in 1998 and asked about those currently practicing plural marriage. One of his questions to Hinckley was: "First tell me about the church and polygamy. When it started it allowed it?" Hinckley responded "When our people came west they permitted it on a restricted scale."

Hinckley went on to state:

I condemn it, yes, as a practice, because I think it is not doctrinal. It is not legal. And this church takes the position that we will abide by the law (*Larry King Live*, Sept. 8, 1998)

Three things should be noticed in Hinckley's comments. First, when asked specifically when plural marriage started in Mormonism, Hinckley clearly lied. He knows that Joseph Smith was practicing polygamy as early as the 1830's, years before the Mormons came west.

Second, plural marriage is obviously still "doctrine." Section 132 of the *Doctrine and Covenants*, which advocates plural marriage, is still printed in their scriptures.

Evidence that the LDS Church still believes the doctrine is their practice of allowing an LDS widower to be sealed to another woman after his wife's death. For example, in the *Salt Lake Tribune* for April 7, 2006, was an article announcing the temple marriage of Apostle Russell M. Nelson, age 81, to a BYU professor. His first wife died in February of 2005 and this was the first marriage for his new wife. This would mean, according to LDS beliefs, that Nelson has two wives sealed to him for eternity. Obviously the LDS Church still believes plural marriage will be practiced in the celestial kingdom.

Third, if Hinckley's objection is that its practice is "not legal," how does one square that with Joseph Smith practicing plural marriage when it was against the laws of Illinois?

Joseph's Political Ambitions

The film never explains why the communities surrounding Nauvoo were so against the Mormons. The tension seems to be just an extension of the seemingly senseless persecution endured by the Mormons through the years.

However, thousands of Mormons were pouring into Nauvoo, which threatened to give them tremendous political power and the ability to affect local elections. Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister observed:

With ten to twelve thousand inhabitants in 1843, Nauvoo was the second largest city in Illinois, rivaled only by Chicago. The Holy City, as it was often called, dominated the economy of the region (*Junius & Joseph*, p. 22).

Also during the early 1840's Smith had secretly introduced a number of new doctrines and practices. Besides introducing plural marriage, he secretly instituted the Council of Fifty, a secret governing body, which was a forerunner of his plan to set up a theocracy, the literal Kingdom of God on Earth.

When Smith set up the Nauvoo Legion, with himself elevated to "Lieutenant General," the non-Mormon community became fearful of the militant stance of the Mormons. On July 21, 1841, the *Warsaw Signal* reported:

How military these people are becoming! Everything they say or do seems to breathe the spirit of military tactics. Their prophet appears, on all occasions, in his splendid regimental dress signs his name Lieut. General, and more titles are to be found in the Nauvoo Legion, than any one book on military tactics can produce; . . . Truly fighting must be a part of the creed of these Saints! (*Warsaw Signal*, July 21, 1841).

D. Michael Quinn observed that

the Nauvoo Legion was no ordinary militia. By 1842 the legion had 2,000 troops, by far the largest single militia in Illinois. Within two years, the Nauvoo Legion had nearly 3,000 soldiers. By comparison the U.S. army had less than 8,500 soldiers that year (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, p. 106).

Besides this, the Mormons tended to vote as a block. Thomas Ford, Governor of Illinois from 1842-1846, made these observations:

But the great cause of popular fury was, that the Mormons at several preceding elections had cast their vote as a unit, thereby making the fact apparent that no one could aspire to the honors or offices of the country, within the sphere of their influence, without their approbation and votes. . . .

This one principle and practice of theirs arrayed against them in deadly hostility all aspirants for office who were not sure of their support, all who have been unsuccessful in elections, and all who were too proud to court their influence, with all their friends and connections (*History of Illinois*, by Thomas Ford, 1854, pp. 329-330).

Furthermore, Smith had decided to run for President of the United States. Governor Ford commented:

To crown the whole folly of the Mormons, in the spring of 1844, Joe Smith announced himself as a candidate for president of the United States. His followers were confident that he would be elected. Two or three thousand missionaries were immediately sent out to preach their religion, and to electioneer in favor of their prophet for the presidency. This folly at once covered that people with ridicule in the minds of all sensible men, and brought them into conflict with the zealots and bigots of all political parties; as the arrogance and extravagance of their religious pretensions had already aroused the opposition of all other denominations in religion (*History of Illinois*, p. 321).

Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister give the following assessment of Smith's bid for the presidency:

For the thirty-eight-year-old prophet Joseph, the American presidency was only the beginning. His publicly stated motivation for seeking the presidential chair was to facilitate compensating the Saints for their losses—of life, land, and property—during years of persecution in Missouri and their subsequent expulsion from the state. His private vision (initially made known only to a select inner circle of confidants) was even more ambitious. He prophesied the demise of the United States government within his own lifetime and proclaimed that his political Kingdom of God would ultimately overthrow all earthly regimes in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Smith's dual political agendas were managed by a secret Council of Fifty, organized as the nucleus of a new world government. . . . To Joseph's opponents, the prospect of merging church and state in America meant a frightening, and unacceptable, repudiation of a cornerstone of the constitution (*Junius & Joseph*, p. 1).

Since the community was already upset because the Mormons had a militia and voted as a block, when Smith entered the political arena it just added to people's apprehension.

Nauvoo Expositor

Not all of Smith's top leaders approved of his secret doctrine of plural marriage and plans for a kingdom. LDS historians James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard commented:

In April 1844 several of those who disagreed with the Prophet over the plurality of wives and other new doctrines withdrew and organized a reform church based on teachings as they had stood in 1838. The dissenters included William Law of the First Presidency, his brother Wilson Law, Austin Cowles of the Nauvoo high council, James Blakeslee, Charles G. Foster, Francis M. Higbee, and business men Robert D. Foster, Chauncey Higbee, and Charles Ivins. The grievances of these men and about two hundred others who joined with them extended beyond polygamy. . . . Denouncing Joseph Smith as a fallen prophet, a political demagogue, an immoral scoundrel, and a financial schemer, these men publicized their charges in a newspaper inaugurated June 7, 1844, as the *Nauvoo Expositor* (*The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 1992, pp. 205-206).

This step was not taken lightly or suddenly. William Law had repeatedly tried to convince Smith to renounce polygamy. Finally William Law

filed a suit against Smith in Hancock County Circuit Court, charging the prophet with living with Maria Lawrence "in an open state of adultery" from 12 October 1843 to 23 May 1844 (*Mormon Polygamy*, p. 66).

Joseph Smith's response was to denounce Law and deny the charge of adultery in his speech of May 26, 1844:

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. . . .

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 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** (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 410-411).

The *Nauvoo Expositor* was only able to print one edition, June 7, 1844. Joseph Smith, as mayor of Nauvoo, brought the issue before the city council on June 10th, which

decided the paper was a public nuisance that had slandered individuals in the city. Public indignation threatened mob action against the paper, they reasoned, and if the council failed to respond, the libelous newspaper would arouse anti-Mormon mobs. . . . The mayor, Joseph Smith, then ordered the city marshal to destroy the press, scatter the type, and burn available papers. Within hours the order had been executed. The publishers, ostensibly fearing for their personal safety, fled to Carthage, where they obtained an arrest warrant against the Nauvoo city council on a charge of riot (*Story of the Latter-day Saints*, p. 206).

While Mormons try to justify the destruction of the press on the basis that the paper was full of lies, history has shown that the charges were legitimate. Smith had at least 33 plural wives by 1844. A number of other top leaders were practicing polygamy as well, and there was a secret agenda to set up the political Kingdom of God.

The destruction of the press outraged the defectors and non-Mormons, who then called for the extermination of the Mormons (see *Mormon Enigma*, p. 181).

Historians Linda Newell and Valeen Avery tell how Smith then called out the Nauvoo Legion:

On June 12 Joseph and seventeen others were arrested on charges stemming from the destruction of the press. Judge Daniel H. Wells, a friendly non-Mormon, acquitted them all. . . .

Joseph responded to lynching threats by declaring martial law and calling out the Legion. Dressed in his uniform, he reviewed his militia as they marched past the Mansion on June 18 and stopped smartly in front of Porter Rockwell's partially completed bar and barbershop. Joseph climbed up the framework, then spoke for an hour and a half, warning the crowd of approaching danger. "Will you all stand by me to the death, and sustain at the peril of your lives, the laws of our country, and the liberties and privileges which our fathers have transmitted unto us, sealed with their sacred blood?"

The people shouted, "Aye!"

With a swift motion he drew his sword and thrust it up. "I have unsheathed my sword with a firm and unalterable determination that this people shall have their legal rights, and be protected from mob violence, or my blood shall be spilt upon the ground like water, and my body consigned to a silent tomb."

Emma saw little of Joseph in the following four days. He spent most of his time sequestered in his office, planning a defensive strategy, aware that in a short time he could be arrested again. . . .

Meanwhile Governor Ford . . . wrote Joseph on June 22, "Your conduct in the destruction of the press was a very gross outrage upon the laws and the liberties of the people. It may have been full of libels, but this did not authorize you to destroy" (*Mormon Enigma*, pp. 184-185).

Rather than take a chance on non-Mormon justice, Joseph then fled the state. After pleas from his wife and leaders to return and give himself up, Smith and his brother, accompanied by several friends, traveled to Carthage. Robert S. Wicks and Fred R. Foister tell of their arrival:

The Nauvoo company arrived at Hamilton's Hotel just before midnight. A "great crowd" of nearly five hundred soldiers greeted them, eager to catch a glimpse of the infamous Joe Smith. . . .

After rising early, Joseph and Hyrum surrendered themselves to the constable. . . .

Shortly after Joseph and Hyrum had completed their recognizance bonds and were waiting to conduct an interview with the governor, they were approached by the constable, who served the men with new writs, this time charging them with treason for calling out the Nauvoo Legion earlier in the month. . . .

Justice Smith remanded Joseph and Hyrum to jail to await examination on the new charge, scheduled to take place the next day. The accused were taken to the Carthage jail (*Junius & Joseph*, pp. 157-158).

Since the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor* was the act that set in motion Smith's arrest and murder, it is amazing that no mention is made of it in the film.

Smith's Death

LDS leaders John Taylor and Willard Richards stayed at the jail with Joseph and Hyrum Smith, although others were allowed to visit. Fearing the growing number of enemies in Carthage, friends had smuggled in two guns to the Smiths (see <http://www.utlm.org/onlineresources/josephsmithsdeath.htm>).

Robert Wicks and Fred Foister give this account of the storming of the jail:

Hearing shots from outside, Dr. Richards parted the curtain. More than two hundred men, some in militia uniforms, others wearing fringed blue flannel hunting shirts, most of them armed, were crowding around the jail. . . .

The men in the hallway began their assault, firing up the stairs towards the sitting room. They regrouped on the landing.

Hyrum checked his weapon, aimed, and fired. A shot from the hallway struck him in the face. "I am a dead man!" he cried. Hyrum's pistol fell from his hand. Joseph leaned over his dying brother, called out his name, and returned to the task of securing the door. The assailants pressed against the door until the latch gave way. As the intruders poked their gun barrels into the room, Richards and Taylor

beat them down with broad swipes of their canes. Joseph's shoulder pressed against the weakening door. He jammed his Allen Pepperbox through the opening and shot blindly into the landing. Three times the ball struck a man. Three times the gun misfired. . . .

The prophet retreated to the open window opposite the door. Gunfire from the hallway filled the room with smoke. Hit in the thigh from the latest volley, Joseph sat awkwardly on the broad window ledge. . . .

Joseph held out his arms in the hailing sign of a Freemason in distress, "O Lord my God . . ." he cried, uttering the first four words of the Masonic plea for help. He fell from the window and landed, nearly fifteen feet below, on his side, badly hurt and unable to move. . . . One grabbed the dying man, and cursed as he propped him up against the well curb. . . .

Four men, led by John C. Elliott, took up their arms, and moved to the front rank of troops. They took position, aimed, and fired on command. Each ball found its mark. . . . Several of the men struck Joseph's lifeless body with their bayonets to make certain the job was done (*Junius and Joseph*, pp. 177-178).

John Taylor, who was present in the room, told how the guns were smuggled into the jail:

Elder Cyrus H. Wheelock came in to see us, and when he was about leaving drew a small pistol, a six-shooter, from his pocket, remarking at the same time, "Would any of you like to have this?" Brother Joseph immediately replied, "Yes, give it to me," whereupon he took the pistol, and put it in his pantaloons pocket. . . .

I was sitting at one of the front windows of the jail, when I saw a number of men, with painted faces, coming around the corner of the jail, and aiming towards the stairs. . . .

I shall never forget the deep feeling of sympathy and regard manifested in the countenance of Brother Joseph as he drew nigh to Hyrum, and, leaning over him, exclaimed, "Oh! my poor, dear brother Hyrum!" He, however, instantly arose, and with a firm, quick step, and a determined expression of countenance, approached the door, and pulling the six-shooter left by Brother Wheelock from his pocket, opened the door slightly, and snapped the pistol six successive times; only three of the barrels, however, were discharged. I afterwards understood that two or three were wounded by these discharges, two of whom, I am informed died (*History of the Church*, vol. 7, pp. 100, 102 & 103).

Mormons will often respond that there is no proof that anyone died as a result of Joseph firing his gun. However, the fact that he was firing back at the mob certainly shows that he intended to kill their attackers.

The film ends with a scene of the mob storming the jail but with no sign of the Smiths shooting back. The camera focuses on Joseph holding his dying brother Hyrum, as he looks toward the open window.

The musical score wells up in a dramatic rendition of the popular LDS hymn honoring Joseph Smith, *Praise to the Man*. The non-Mormon won't catch the significance of the music but it seems to be calculated to bring the Mormon to tears. The lyrics go:

Praise to the man who communed with Jehovah!
Jesus anointed that Prophet and Seer.
Blessed to open the last dispensation,
Kings shall extol him, and nations revere.

Praise to his memory, **he died as a martyr**;
Honored and blest be his ever great name!
Long shall his blood, which was shed by assassins,
Stain Illinois* while the earth lauds his fame.

Great is his glory and endless his priesthood.
Ever and ever the keys he will hold.
Faithful and true, he will enter his kingdom,
Crowned in the midst of the prophets of old.

Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven;
Earth must atone for the blood of that man.
Wake up the world for the conflict of justice.
Millions shall know "brother Joseph" again.

Chorus:

Hail to the Prophet, ascended to heaven!
Traitors and tyrants now fight him in vain.
Mingling with Gods, he can plan for his brethren;
Death cannot conquer the hero again.

*In recent editions of the LDS hymnbook, "Plead unto heaven" has replaced the words "Stain Illinois."
(<http://mlmb.byu.edu/phelps4.htm>)

Did Joseph Smith suffer a martyr's death? Or did he reap what he had sown? While the attack on the jail was clearly illegal, the Mormons' growing presence in Illinois, voting as a block, the destruction of a newspaper, the Nauvoo Legion, and Smith's secret doctrines and practices certainly created fear and anger in the non-Mormon communities. There is no excuse for a mob storming the jail, but Joseph Smith must bear a large part of the responsibility for what led to the event.

Joseph Like Jesus?

The film's glorified story has struck several viewers as an attempt to portray Smith's life as parallel to Christ's. Hugo Olaiz observed:

The movie makes a point of informing readers that Mormons do not worship Joseph Smith. Yet the Joseph Smith portrayed in this film is a strikingly Christ-like figure. Like Jesus, Joseph charismatically communes with the common folk—children, the poor, the sick, and the outcast, including a company of black converts that includes recently rediscovered African pioneer Jane Manning James. The instant healing of a young boy in the Nauvoo swamps recalls similar miracles performed by the Savior. "Tell us, Joe, which Mormon house is going to burn tonight," one of the guards taunts him at Liberty jail, evoking the tormentors who taunted Jesus to prophesy (Matthew 26:67-68, Luke

22:64). When a grief-stricken Emma asks why Joseph could work no miracle to save one of their own sick children, Joseph replies, "I can only do God's will," an echo of words spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of John (John 5:30, 6:38).

The film comes to an abrupt end with the martyrdom at Carthage. After his brother Hyrum dies in his arms, Joseph springs to the jailhouse window. The camera follows his point of view: we see what Joseph sees as he crashes through the glass—and then, instead of plummeting to the ground, he ascends (yet again like Jesus) into the clouds. Is Mormon triumphalism no longer able to stomach its founder's death? A viewer not familiar with Mormonism might conclude that we believe there was no martyrdom but only apotheosis—that Joseph Smith literally leaped from the window into heaven (*Sunstone*, Dec. 2005, p. 71-72).

This effort to sanitize Joseph Smith is nothing new. It was commented on as early as 1859:

People sometimes wonder that the Mormon can revere Joseph Smith. That they can by any means make a Saint of him. But they must remember, that the Joseph Smith preached in England, and the one shot at Carthage, Ill., are not the same. The ideal prophet differs widely from the real person. . . . Art may make him, indeed, an object of religious veneration. But remember, the Joseph Smith thus venerated, is not the real, actual Joseph Smith . . . but one that art has created (*Tiffany's Monthly*, 1859, p. 170).

This film comes across as Disney-type fantasy, not a balanced account of Smith's life. While possessing natural abilities and talents, Joseph Smith's personal character was far from the saintly image his followers have molded him into. His strong egotism and drive for power, together with his deceptive practices led ultimately to his destruction.



Acceptance of Joseph Smith Necessary for Eternal Life?

The importance of Joseph Smith in Mormon theology cannot be overemphasized. Joseph Fielding Smith, tenth president of the LDS Church, proclaimed:

If Joseph was verily a prophet . . . then his knowledge is of the most vital importance to the entire world. No man can reject that testimony without incurring the most dreadful consequences, for he cannot enter the kingdom of God (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., p. 189).

Heber C. Kimball, a member of the first Presidency under Brigham Young, said that the time would come when people would

prize brother Joseph Smith as the Prophet of the Living God, and look upon him as a God, and also upon Brigham Young, our Governor in the Territory of Deseret (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 5, p. 88).

Brigham Young, the church's second president, gave the following challenge:

Well, now, examine the character of the Savior, and examine the characters of those who have written the Old and New Testament; and then compare them with the character of Joseph Smith, the founder of this work . . . and you will find that his character stands as fair as that of any man's mentioned in the Bible. We can find no person who presents a better character to the world when the facts are known than Joseph Smith, Jun., the prophet, and his brother, Hyrum Smith, who was murdered with him (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 14, p. 203).

D. Michael Quinn, excommunicated LDS historian who still believes in Joseph Smith's call, outlined the different aspects of Smith's character:

Few Mormons today can grasp the polarizing charisma of their founding prophet. Some may feel uncomfortable when confronted with the full scope of Joseph Smith's activities as youthful mystic, treasure-seeker, visionary, a loving husband who deceived his wife regarding about forty of his polygamous marriages, a man for whom friendship and loyalty meant everything but who provoked disaffection by "testing" the loyalty of his devoted associates, an anti-Mason who became a Master Mason, church president who physically assaulted both Mormons and non-Mormons for insulting him, a devoted father who loved to care for his own children and those of others, temperance leader and social drinker, Bible revisionist and esoteric philosopher, city planner, pacifist and commander-in-chief, student of Hebrew and Egyptology, bank president, jail escapee, healer, land speculator, mayor, judge and fugitive from justice, guarantor of religious freedom but limiter of freedom of speech and press, preacher and street-wrestler, polygamist and advocate of women's rights, husband of other men's wives, a declared bankrupt who was the trustee-in-trust of church finances, political horse-trader, U.S. presidential candidate, abolitionist, theocratic king, inciter to riot, and unwilling martyr (*Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, pp. 261-262).

Thousands of people have found it impossible to reconcile these various aspects of Smith's character with a prophet of God. However, Brigham Young emphasized that accepting Joseph Smith as God's prophet was necessary for one to have eternal life:

. . . I am an Apostle of Joseph Smith. . . . all who reject my testimony will go to hell, so sure as there is one, no matter whether it be hot or cold . . . (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 3, p. 212).

. . . no man or woman in this dispensation will ever enter into the celestial kingdom of God without the consent of Joseph Smith. . . . Every man and woman must have the certificate of Joseph Smith, junior, as a passport to their entrance into the mansion where God and Christ are . . . I cannot go there without his consent. . . . He reigns there as supreme a being in his sphere, capacity, and calling, as God does in heaven (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 7, p. 289).

I will now give my scripture—"Whosoever confesseth that Joseph Smith was sent of God . . . that spirit is of God; and every spirit that does not confess that God has sent Joseph Smith, and revealed the everlasting Gospel to and through him, is of Anti-christ . . . (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 8, p. 176).

To many Christians such claims border on blasphemy. We are to look to Christ, not a man or a church, for eternal life. In the New Testament we read:

He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:12-13).

While the Bible is silent about Joseph Smith, it points to "Christ in you" as our "hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

1826 New York Court Documents Relocated

In 1971 Presbyterian minister and scholar Wesley P. Walters scoured the areas surrounding Bainbridge, New York, looking for early documents relating to Joseph Smith. He was able to locate two documents connected to Smith's 1826 arrest for practicing magic while working for Josiah Stowell. We immediately published the documents and since then much has been written regarding his find (see the various articles on our web site at www.utlm.org).

These documents recently made the news when it became known that they were at the home of the past county historian, Mae Smith. After Walters had turned the documents over to the county, the historian secretly took the documents, plus thousands of other old county papers, home for safe-keeping. There they stayed until her death, when the records were returned to the Chenango County Historical Department in 2005. Several news stories erroneously reported that the documents were given to the LDS Church. However, Dale Storms, the current Chenango County historian, stated:

I sent a copy to their [LDS] archives. I did not send the originals. They called and thanked me. . . . I'm hoping they will be conserved because of the water damage. They need conservation. Our county is looking into having that done. (*The Post-Standard*, New York, December 11, 2005, p. A-14).

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LDS Church Growth

While there is a popular assumption among Mormons that their church is the fastest growing faith, it is simply a myth. The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported on the problems of church growth:

Today, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has more than 12 million members on its rolls, more than doubling its numbers in the past quarter-century. But since 1990, other faiths – Seventh-day Adventists, Assemblies of God and Pentecostal groups – have grown much faster and in more places around the globe.

And most telling, the number of Latter-day Saints who are considered active churchgoers is only about a third of the total, or 4 million in the pews every Sunday, researchers say. . . .

Take Brazil. In its 2000 Census, 199,645 residents identified themselves as LDS, while the church listed 743,182 on its rolls. . . .

"It is a matter of grave concern that the areas with the most rapid numerical membership increase, Latin America and the Philippines, are also the areas with extremely low convert retention," says [David G.] Stewart, a California physician ("Keeping Members a Challenge for LDS Church," by Peggy F. Stack, *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 26, 2005).

The percentage of Mormons in Utah is also falling. The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported:

Within the next three years, the Mormon share of Utah's population is expected to hit its lowest level since The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints started keeping membership numbers. . . .

The often cited claim that Utah is 70 percent Mormon is not true – and hasn't been true for more than a decade, according to the church numbers. While continuing to grow in actual members, the LDS share of the state population showed a slow but constant decline every year from 1989 to 2004.

According to the 2004 count, Utah is now 62.4 percent LDS with every county showing a decrease ("Mormon Portion of Utah Population Steadily Shrinking," by Matt Canham, *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 24, 2005).

At the April 2006 Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the church statistics for the year 2005 were announced:

Total Church Membership:	12,560,869
Increase in children of record in 2005:	93,150
Converts baptized in 2005:	243,108
Full-time Missionaries:	52,060

While baptisms for 2005 were up by about 2,000 over 2004, it was still not as high as other years. Interestingly, the number of converts peaked in 1990 with 330,877 baptisms. This was accomplished with 43,651 full-time missionaries.

The 12.5 million member count includes more than baptized members. It also includes children who have been blessed as babies (whether baptized or not) and inactive members. Even if a person never attends again after being

blessed as an infant he will be included in the count until he dies. According to the *Salt Lake Tribune*

Inactive Mormons who rarely, if ever, attend church are included in all membership numbers ("Church Won't Give up on 'Lost Members'," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 17, 2005).

Such people will not be taken off the rolls

until the member would have reached the age of 110. . . . That means some of the people included in the worldwide tally of 12 million members are really dead, with life expectancy in the United States at about 78 years old . . . (*Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 2005).

Thus we see that the 12.5 million number is quite exaggerated.

Finding Inactive Members

The church also asks members to volunteer as "member locaters." The *Salt Lake Tribune* reported:

To do so, the LDS Church has set up three "member locater" offices in Salt Lake City, American Fork and St. George that search for lost Mormons in the United States and Canada. Analysts search for the names and numbers of relatives through church records or online public access databases, [LDS Church general authority Merrill] Bateman said.

Those leads are then passed on to volunteer missionaries, mostly elderly couples, who serve as member locaters (*Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 17, 2005).

This explains why many inactive Mormons are surprised and upset when someone from the LDS Church seems to contact them out of the blue. Some inactive members don't want to be bothered. Others have already joined another church and had assumed their LDS membership had been terminated long ago.

The LDS Church never releases the number of people who have resigned or been excommunicated.

Close-up of Chile Membership

The problems of church growth were further illuminated in an article in the *Salt Lake Tribune* discussing the LDS Church presence in Chile. Reporter Peggy Stack explained the problems of divorce and remarriage in Chile. Many couples do not go through a formal marriage, thus making it easier to separate if the need arises. Those that have been married in the Catholic Church and decide to split up often do not go through the process of getting the marriage annulled. Ms. Stack reported:

In this environment, the LDS Church quietly baptized unmarried partners, especially those who had been together for a long while or who had children together. But it drew the line at having those marriages "sealed for time and all eternity" in a temple. . . .

The marriage dilemma is a headache for missionaries and sometimes causes would-be converts to lose interest.

But it is only one of several reasons members and/or potential members fall away. . . .

In addition, members who want to go to the temple abstain from coffee, tobacco and alcohol, which can be tough in Chile, a major exporter of wine.

By far the greatest challenge, though, is tithing. . . . That keeps them out of the temple and away from full participation.

The importance of paying tithing became a kind of mantra during LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley's visit repeated by everyone in leadership ("Building Faith," *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 31, 2005).

The article goes on to state that although there are 535,000 people on the LDS membership rolls in Chile, only 120,000 identified themselves as Mormons in the 2002 Chilean census. An even greater disparity is seen when comparing the 535,000 number with the average of 57,000 people said to attend sacrament meetings.

If this same type of problem is present in other Latin American countries, the claim that there are 4.5 million members in those countries becomes very suspect.

For further discussion of the problems in past Mormon statistics, see <http://www.mormoninformation.com/stats.htm>.

Update on Lawsuit

In the June 2005 *Salt Lake City Messenger* we announced our lawsuit against Allen Wyatt, Scott Gordon and FAIR (Foundation for Apologetic Information & Research) for trademark infringement. That lawsuit is still in process and the trial has been scheduled for February of 2007.

Excerpts From Emails and Letters

Aug. 2005 — I have been a member of the LDS CHURCH for 45 yrs, currently a High Priest, and served in the Bishopic, and as a Stake High Council. I have studied the mormon doctrine extensively. One thing that I have learned about us Mormons is "we don't know the true history of the church". Why? Because it is not faith promoting.

Sept. 2005 — you should probably be grateful that the lds church does not waste their earthly time debunking the beliefs of others. if they didn't have a tolerant, charitable attitude—as christ taught—they have the resources to squash you. how about spending your life on something positive?

Sept. 2005 —I am really really unhappy after being a member of the LDS church for nearly 8 years. I became a member when I married my dear husband, who is a devout LDS member . . . After experiencing the LDS church for nearly 8 years, I believe it is one of control, superstition, fear, and guilt-inducing.

Sept. 2005 — you guys obviously dont know too much about the LDS church . . . I took a look at your site and read part of your book, you guys should do some research or go try something before you talk bad about it.

Sept. 2005 — It was with your help I resigned from the Mormon church in 1989. It was one of the best things I ever did.

Oct. 2005 — you are Charlatan, you only want money

Oct. 2005 — I married a mormon 7 yrs. ago. I was then and still am a born-again Christian. I had no idea how far apart our belief systems are. It has been a struggle to know how to live with a pride-filled “high priest” and be a witness to the love of Christ — the real Christ.

Nov. 2005 — I know that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the true church of God. . . . Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God.

Nov. 2005 — I can't put into words the sense of freedom I have gained since leaving the LDS church. After reading many of your publications, I'm amazed at how I allowed myself to be deceived for so long. My brother is currently reading *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality*. I hope he comes to his senses also. Thank you both so much!

Nov. 2005 — As a convert to the LDS church, I want to thank you. . . . From a logical standpoint, you have bolstered my beliefs in the LDS church and especially that of Joseph Smith.

Dec. 2005 — I am a convert of 4 years, baptized at age 19, and I can't thank you enough for all the help and resources your site provided me in my decision to resign from the LDS church. . . . This Sunday I am going to tell my bishop that I am resigning as an act of faith in Jesus Christ.

Dec. 2005 — Earlier this week, I withdrew my membership from the Mormon church. Your insightful analysis and articulate commentary as to the theological inconsistencies of Mormon doctrine relative to the Christian perspective contributed significantly towards my eventual decision, and for this I thank you.

Dec. 2005 — You are basing a lot of your information on half truths then misleading people on false accusations. . . . I hope that you are proud of the garbage that you are spreading.

Dec. 2005 — I am an inactive LDS member . . . I have many questions about the real truths behind mormonism . . . I am on a journey of my own to find the truth.

Dec. 2005 — As an ex-Mormon who worships the real Jesus of the Bible, I am so grateful for God opening my eyes to the falsehood of Mormonism.

Jan. 2006 — I have been reading more and more on your website and am impressed with how accurate you stay to things . . . The comparison you give of mormons teachings and Christian teachings were really eye opening . . .

Jan. 2006 — I completley disagree with you on everything your a liar and you deceive the hearts of men. if your so sure that mormonism is a frod why do you have to put us down publicly.

Jan. 2006 — I am 34 years old and have been a member of the LDS church till this past month. I sent in my letter of resignation along with all of my family. I was introduced to the truth information you have that explains the churches actual foundation . . .

Feb. 2006 — I recently removed my name from the LDS records partly because of your's and the recovery from mormonism websites. . . . I belive in what you are doing, and there are more of us searching for the truth. Thanks.

Feb. 2006 — As missionary I felt that your tactics of only disparaging the beliefs of another are pretty useless. The fact of the matter is that the Questions that you raise are not winning you converts, but raising interest in the LDS faith.

Feb. 2006 — I have yet to find one single piece of evidence that contradicts my belief that Joseph smith was a true prophet.

Feb. 2006 — My wife and I decided to leave the church back in November and so we are still going through the transition, explaining things to our families, etc. I'm sure you understand how difficult that can be when your family has been strong in the LDS church for generations. Your website has been helpful in learning about some of the things the LDS church has tried to hide. Thank you.

Feb. 2006 — Why do you seek to destroy the church of god? . . . The church is growing faster that any other church in the world.

Mar. 2006 — It is difficult to even read (so I stopped) the presented diatribe . . . Happy in the knowledge that you are in the company of a lot of other perpetrators of false doctrine . . . you will convert no one of any substance.

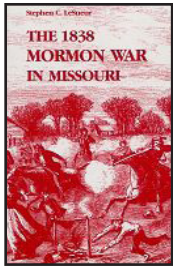
Mar. 2006 — I am an 18 year old girl who, just in the past three weeks has left my Mormon beliefs. I was a convert, a “golden investigator”, and I held so much promise for the Church. I was finally saved from the entwining deceit of the Mormon “gospel” . . .

Mar. 2006 — I have been a Bishop three times, in several stake Presidencies and in about every other position in the Church at the Ward and Stake levels. Until now I have never taken the time to actually research any of the origins of the Church. I have been amazed and more at what I am finding. I appreciate what you all must have gone thru over the years—especially in SLC.

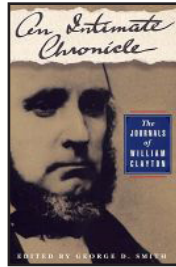
April 2006 — Over the past 28 years you have earned my respect and gratitude for your painstaking and accurate research which has continuously confronted Mormonism with its greatest falsehoods and embarrassing contradictions. The hardest part in combating this behemoth of certitude (that Mormonism has become) depends upon is getting the horse to the trough — and attempting to get the horse to take a sip or two from the water! As a former member of “the Church” I know how great the resistance is against reading printed material that is “critical” of “the truth.” The “Church” does a very efficient job of keeping its membership from reading alternative materials, and engaging in critical thought.

My wife is still a believer, even though 5 of our 6 children chose freedom over mental slavery during their growing-up years. Nonetheless, our marriage has been strong enough to survive my departure from the “truth” over 29 years ago.

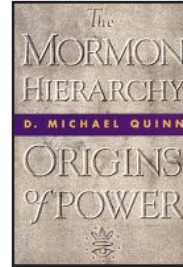
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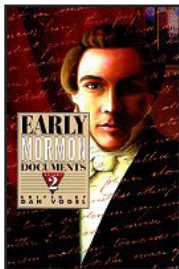
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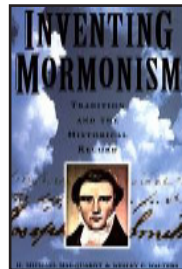
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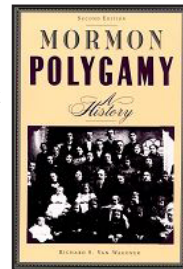
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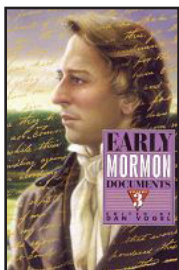
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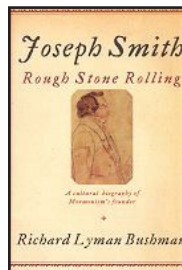
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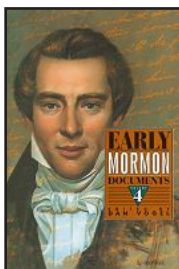
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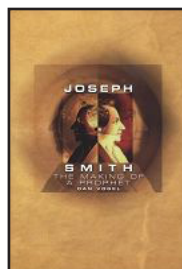
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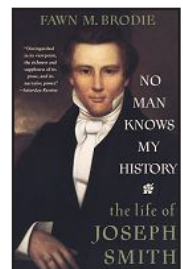
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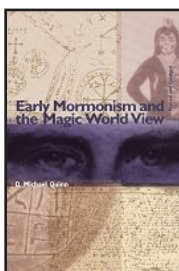
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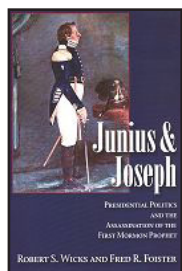
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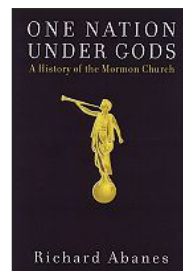
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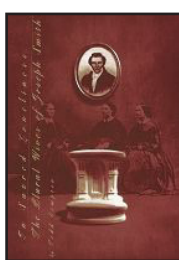
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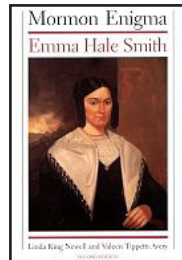
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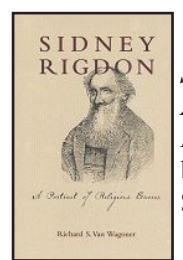
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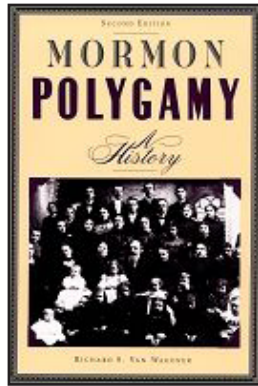
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