

## Sacred Marriage or Secret Affair? Joseph Smith and the Beginning of Mormon Polygamy

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was born to a poor farm family on December 23, 1805, in Vermont. Given his humble beginning no one would have suspected that one day he would issue revelations, found a religion, and marry thirty-eight women in a new order of plural marriage.

In studying Joseph Smith's life one is left to wonder when he first puzzled over the issue of polygamy in the Bible. In the earliest account of Smith's childhood he mentions that he studied the Bible from an early age:

At about the age of twelve years my mind become seriously imprest with regard to the all important concerns for the welfare of my immortal Soul which led me to searching the scriptures believing, as I was taught, that they contained the word of God.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt he had read in Genesis of Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon's extra wives. It certainly was on Smith's mind in 1828 and 1829 when he dictated the Book of Mormon passage denouncing polygamy unless directed by God.<sup>2</sup>

While there are examples of polygamy in the Old Testament there is no evidence that the practice was commanded by God or was a doctrine to be obeyed. Plural marriage in Mormonism, on the other hand, was always connected to their doctrine of eternal marriage and

exaltation, not just a social practice. Following the lives of Biblical polygamists one is struck by the troubles it brought into their relationships. And so it was with Joseph Smith.

### A Double Standard

Throughout Joseph Smith's life the LDS Church continually insisted that its standard for marriage was one

man and one wife. However, behind the scene Smith had a very different agenda. Richard Van Wagoner observed:

Smith never publicly advocated polygamy. New Testament monogamy, the official church position throughout his lifetime, was clearly outlined to the prophet in 1831 revelations: "Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shall cleave unto her and none else" (D&C 42:22); "It is lawful that [a man] should have one wife, and they

twain shall be one flesh" (D&C 49:16).

But from the early days of the church rumors hinted that Smith maintained a private position different from his public posture.<sup>3</sup>

Smith's double standard was evident early in his marriage to Emma.<sup>4</sup> Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery in their biography of Emma Smith felt that charges of impropriety against Joseph may have caused him to leave Harmony, Pennsylvania, in 1830 for Ohio:



Joseph Smith's Nauvoo Mansion  
where he took in boarders.

1 Editor Scott Faulring, *American Prophet's Record*, Signature Books, 1987, p. 4.

2 Book of Mormon, Jacob 2:23-25.

3 Richard Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, Signature Books, 1989, second edition, p. 4.

4 Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, Signature Books, 2004, pp. 178, 514.

The pleasant aspects of Emma's life, however, were being overshadowed by rumors that Joseph had an unconventional view of marriage. His and Emma's abrupt departure from Harmony in 1830 may have been because her cousin, Hiel Lewis, accused Joseph of improper conduct with women. Fifty years later he repeated thirdhand stories that Joseph attempted "to seduce E.W. (Eliza Winters)," and that Joseph and Martin Harris had said "adultery was no crime."<sup>5</sup>

When Smith began his revision of the Bible in 1830 he again encountered the issue of polygamy. LDS historian Glen Leonard commented:

Joseph Smith's puzzlement over biblical references prompted him to seek understanding from the Lord. While working on what has become known as the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (JST), he pondered the meaning of the Old Testament marriage practices described in Genesis.<sup>6</sup>

Further, we know that in 1831 he had given a revelation to a few trusted men to take plural wives of the "Lamanites" while doing missionary work among them. This was supposed to aid in making the American Indians a "white and delightful" people, as promised in the Book of Mormon,<sup>7</sup> through intermarriage. Todd Compton writes:

W.W. Phelps, in 1861, recorded that Smith received a revelation in Missouri on July 17, 1831, that directed Mormon men to intermarry with "Lamanite" (Native American) women. When Phelps later asked how the group in question, mostly married men, could take other wives, Smith immediately answered, "In the same manner that Abraham took Hagar and Keturah; that Jacob took Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah; by revelation—the saints of the Lord are always directed by revelations." A December 1831 letter by anti-Mormon Ezra Booth supports Phelps: "It had been made known by revelation" that God wanted "a matrimonial alliance with the natives" and that God would bless them "abundantly" if they obeyed. They would also "gain a residence" in Indian lands, despite the Indian agent's opposition. "It has been made known to one who has left his wife in the State of New York that he is entirely free from his wife, and is at pleasure to take him a wife from among the Lamanites."<sup>8</sup>

In spite of Smith's revelation, none of the missionaries seem to have obeyed this command. It also appears that none of the Indians were converted.

Mormon leaders and historians generally assert that the earliest teaching on plural marriage was given as early as 1831.<sup>9</sup> However, they usually fail to mention the revelation to marry the "Lamanites." Smith's associates would later claim that he had taught them about plural marriage in addition to the revelation about intermarriage.<sup>10</sup>

Later there would be charges that Smith was involved with young Nancy Marinda Johnson while in Ohio in 1831-1832. Most Mormons have heard about the time that Smith and Sidney Rigdon, while staying with the Johnson family, were dragged from their beds in the middle of the night and tarred and feathered. A Dr. Dennison was brought along to "perform a surgical operation, but he declined when the time came to operate."<sup>11</sup> The mob included former Mormons who were reportedly concerned about Smith's financial plans. But later it was charged that one of the men was angry at Joseph for being "too familiar" with Nancy Johnson. Mormon historians discount the connection of the beatings with outrage at any misconduct by Smith, pointing out that the beatings included both Rigdon and Smith. However, it is suspicious that Dr. Dennison was brought along to castrate only Joseph, although he ended up refusing to do the surgery.<sup>12</sup> Why was Joseph singled out for this punishment and not Rigdon? The presence of the doctor to castrate Joseph adds credibility to the charge that Smith had behaved improperly. While the claim of an affair with Nancy in the early 1830's isn't definitive, it is known that she was later sealed to Smith in Nauvoo even though she was a married woman. Todd Compton relates that in 1834 Nancy Marinda married future apostle Orson Hyde. However, in Nauvoo she

was a polyandrous plural wife of Joseph Smith, a relationship that still has many puzzling aspects. She married Smith when Hyde was on a mission, and it is uncertain how much the apostle knew of the marriage.<sup>13</sup>

George D. Smith (no relation to Joseph Smith) in his new book *Nauvoo Polygamy*: "...but we called it celestial marriage," relates:

5 Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, University of Illinois Press, 1994, second edition, p. 64.

6 Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise*, Deseret Book, 2002, p. 343.

7 Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 30:6. "...their scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a **white** and a delightful people." In 1981 the word "white" was changed to "pure." In spite of this change the book still promotes a racist view of American Indians. See 2 Nephi 5:21 and 3 Nephi 2:12-15.

8 Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, Signature Books, 1997, p. 27.

9 *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*—Religion 324-325, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001, p. 327.

10 Leonard, *Nauvoo*, p. 344; Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, p. 64.

11 *Journal of Discourses*, Latter-day Book Depot, vol. 11, p. 5; Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, Random House, 1971, p. 119.

12 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 230-231, 238; Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, pp. 4-5, 13.

13 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 228-229, 232.

The sealing of Marinda [Nancy Johnson] Hyde in April 1842 [to Joseph] consummated a relationship that had begun ten years earlier but had stalled the previous December. Between Smith's polyandrous marriages to the Huntington sisters in late autumn 1841, he courted Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde, wife of the absent missionary Apostle Orson Hyde.<sup>14</sup>

During the mid-1830's Joseph Smith had an affair with a teenager named Fanny Alger, who was living in the Smith home in Ohio.<sup>15</sup> Todd Compton lists her as Smith's first plural wife but the evidence of an actual ceremony is weak. There is an 1896 account by Mosiah Hancock that his father performed the Smith-Alger marriage, most likely in 1833.<sup>16</sup> Book of Mormon witness Oliver Cowdery, however, referred to Joseph's involvement with Fanny as a "dirty, nasty, filthy affair."<sup>17</sup> Former LDS apostle William E. McLellin asserted that Emma caught Joseph in the barn with Fanny:

William McLellin told his account of Joseph and Fanny Alger to a newspaper reporter in 1875. "[McLellin] ... informed me of the spot where the first well authenticated case of polygamy took place, in which Joseph Smith was 'sealed' to the hired girl. The 'sealing' took place in a barn on the hay mow, and was witnessed by Mrs. Smith through a crack in the door!... Long afterwards when he visited Mrs. Emma Smith... she then and there declared on her honor that it was a fact—'saw it with her own eyes.'"<sup>18</sup>

The early rumors of Smith's infidelity might have been dismissed if it weren't for his later polygamist activities, especially his marriages to women with living husbands. Taken as a whole they show a pattern of affairs throughout his life.

As these rumors spread the LDS leaders realized that they needed to do something to clear the church's name of scandal. Richard Van Wagoner explains:

Rumors of the prophet's relationship with Alger, whispered about Kirtland during the summer of 1835, may have been the catalyst for the church's announcement of its official position on marriage as well as motivation for the prophet's frequent addresses on marital relationships that fall. While Smith was in Michigan his secretary, W.W. Phelps, presented to the church's 17 August 1835 General Conference a "Chapter of Rules for Marriage among the

Saints." This declaration stipulated in part: "Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of **fornication, and polygamy**; we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in the case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again." The assembled Saints voted to accept the statement as part of "the faith and principle of this society as a body" by canonizing it in the official *Doctrine and Covenants* of the church.<sup>19</sup>

This section on marriage was printed in every edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants* until 1876, making it possible for early LDS leaders to publicly denounce plural marriage while practicing it in private.

George Smith discusses Joseph's early acquaintance with the women who would later become his plural wives:

Joseph made other acquaintances in his early life that presaged the plural marriages he would consummate in the 1840's. His relationships in Ohio with various families and their daughters—some quite youthful at the time—allowed him to invite the young women into his further confidence when they were older. In most cases, the women were adolescents or in their twenties when he met them. About ten were pre-teens, others already thirty or above. Most were

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14 George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy: "...but we called it celestial marriage,"* Signature Books, 2008, p. 116.

15 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, pp. 38-44.

16 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 32-33.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 26-28, 34-35, 38-39.

18 Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, p. 66.

19 Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, p. 6;

1835 *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 101.

with the families in Ohio, where Smith had sent missionaries from western New York in 1830. Then Smith issued a revelation in January 1831 ordering his followers to sell their property and trek 300 miles west to Kirtland, which he designated as a city of refuge for the church's converts. He became acquainted there with some twenty-seven of the women who would later become his mates...<sup>20</sup>

The next possible case of polygamy was Lucinda Morgan Harris, the widow of William Morgan, who had since remarried. Todd Compton lists her as Smith's second plural wife. Evidently the Smiths lived with the Harris's for two months in 1838. Compton states, "There is no firm date for Smith's marriage to Lucinda, but these two months are a good possibility. He often married women while he was living in the same house with them..." If the marriage didn't happen at that time, there is reason to believe Smith was married to her in the 1840's.<sup>21</sup> George Smith lists Lucinda as Joseph's fifth plural wife, using the later date.<sup>22</sup>

## Nauvoo, Illinois

However one views the events in the 1830's, historians generally agree that by at least 1841 Joseph Smith was being sealed to women in some sort of marriage ceremony. George Smith observes:

The story of Joseph Smith's documented marriages after wedding Emma in 1827 opens in April 1841 [in Nauvoo, Illinois] and ends some thirty-seven wives later with his marriage to Fanny Young in November 1843. His life during those two and a half years was dizzying as he juggled land purchases, religious appointments, speeches, meetings; armed and trained a town militia; welcomed settlers and immigrants to the new town; oversaw building projects; and assumed a prominent role in the ascent municipal government. All of this in addition to pronouncing revelations, avoiding arrest and extradition orders, and entering into matrimony with over three dozen women, which meant about one new wife a month. . . .

Woven throughout this fabric of daily public life is a concealed record of courtship and marriage that can be found in diaries, autobiographies, letters, affidavits, and sealing records which confirm these events.<sup>23</sup>

George Smith starts his list of Joseph's plural wives

with Louisa Beaman in April of 1841. They were married by Joseph Bates Noble, who was married to Louisa's sister, Mary. Years later Noble would tell of marrying them "during the evening under an Elm tree in Nauvoo. The Bride disguised in a [man's] coat and hat."<sup>24</sup> When asked about the nature of the marriage, Noble stated that the marriage was consummated "for I saw him [Joseph] in bed with her [Louisa]."<sup>25</sup>

George Smith comments, "Neither Smith nor Beaman left a personal account of their marriage (that has been found), but eleven other sources confirm that the ceremony did take place."<sup>26</sup> There was always a great need for secrecy as Illinois had a law against bigamy.<sup>27</sup>

*Nauvoo Polygamy* documents Joseph Smith's thirty-seven plural wives and categorizes them as follows:

Seventeen of them were single. Three of the teenaged wives and three of those in their twenties were orphaned or separated from their parents. Unlike Louisa, fourteen of the wives were already married and typically had children.<sup>28</sup>

Todd Compton starts his list of Smith's wives with Fanny Alger, followed by Lucinda Harris, thus making Louisa Beaman Joseph's third plural wife, with a total of thirty-three. Whether the final count is thirty-three, thirty-seven or more, scholars generally agree that the list includes about a dozen women with living husbands.

In the fall of 1841 Joseph Smith took his next two wives, sisters Zina Huntington Jacobs and Presendia Huntington Buell, who were already married. By marrying Zina and Presendia, Smith disobeyed the directive given to Moses that a man was not to marry sisters. Later he would also disobey the command that a man was not to marry both a mother and daughter.<sup>29</sup>

Smith had proposed to Zina in 1840, prior to her marriage to Jacobs, and was refused. Even though Zina was now married, Smith persisted in his pursuit of her. Compton tells the story:

Again according to family tradition, she and Henry saw Smith soon after the marriage and "asked why he had not come. . . he told them the Lord had made it known to him she was to be his celestial wife." Once again Zina was plunged into a quandary. Smith told them that God had commanded him to marry her. However, he apparently also told them

20 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 30.

21 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 49.

22 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 621.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

29 Leviticus 18:17-18; 20:14.

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## Joseph Smith's Wives

The chart below contains information from *Nauvoo Polygamy* by George D. Smith.<sup>a</sup> Although Fanny Alger is not included in the list by George Smith, Todd Compton lists her as Joseph Smith's first plural wife in his book, *In Sacred Loneliness*.<sup>b</sup> In 1887, Andrew Jenson, assistant church historian, listed Fanny Alger as one of Smith's first plural wives in the *Historical Record*.<sup>c</sup> The numbers in parentheses ( ) represent Compton's list of Joseph's plural wives. The asterik★ notes the twenty-seven plural wives on Jenson's list.

Number	Name of Plural Wife	Marriage Date	Joseph's age	Wife's age
	Emma Hale	Jan 18 1827	21	22
★ (1)	Fanny Alger	early 1833	27	16
★ (3)	1. Louisa Be[a]man	April 5 1841	35	26
★ (4)	2. Mrs. Zina Diantha Huntington (Jacobs)	Oct 27 1841	35	20
★ (5)	3. Mrs. Presendia Lathrop Huntington (Buell)	Dec 11 1841	35	31
(6)	4. Agnes Moulton Coolbrith (Smith)	Jan 6 1842	36	30
★ (2)	5. Mrs. Lucinda Pendleton (Morgan Harris)	after Jan 17 1842	36	40
★ (8)	6. Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Rollins (Lightner)	Feb 1842	36	23
★ (7)	7. Mrs. Sylvia Porter Sessions (Lyon)	Feb 8 1842	36	23
(9)	8. Mrs. Patty Bartlett (Sessions)	Mar 9 1842	36	47
★ (12)	9. Mrs. Sarah M. Kingsley (Howe Cleveland)	after Mar 1842	36	53
(11)	10. Mrs. Elizabeth Davis (G. Brackenbury Durfee)	after Mar 1842	36	50
(10)	11. Mrs. Marinda Nancy Johnson (Hyde)	April 1842	36	26
(13)	12. Delcena Diadamia Johnson (Sherman)	approx. June 1842	36	35
★ (14)	13. Eliza Roxcy Snow	June 29 1842	36	38
	14. Mrs. Sarah Rapson (Poulterer)	after July 1842	36	49
★ (15)	15. Sarah Ann Whitney	July 27 1842	36	17
(16)	16. Martha McBride (Knight)	after Aug 5 1842	36	37
★ (17)	17. Mrs. Ruth Daggett Vose (Sayers)	Feb 1843	37	35
★ (18)	18. Flora Ann Woodworth	Mar 4 1843	37	16
★ (19)	19. Emily Dow Partridge	Mar 4 1843	37	19
★ (20)	20. Eliza Maria Partridge	Mar 8 1843	37	22
★ (21)	21. Almera Wood[w]ard Johnson	after Apr 25 1843	37	29
★ (22)	22. Lucy Walker	May 1 1843	37	17
★ (23)	23. Sarah Lawrence	May 11 1843	37	16
★ (24)	24. Maria Lawrence	approx. May 1843	37	19
★ (25)	25. Helen Mar Kimball	approx. May 1843	37	14
★ (27)	26. Mrs. Elvira Anna Cowles (Holmes)	June 1 1843	37	29
★ (28)	27. Rhoda Richards	June 12 1843	37	58
★ (26)	28. Hannah S. Ells	mid -1843	37	30
	29. Mary Ann Frost (Stearns Pratt)	July 24 1843	37	34
★ (30)	30. Olive Grey Frost	mid-1843	37	27
★ (32)	31. Nancy Maria Winchester	after mid-1843	37	14
★ (29)	32. Desdemona Catlin Wadsworth Fullmer	after July 1843	37	33
★ (31)	33. Melissa Lott	Sept 20 1843	37	19
	34. Sarah Scott (Mulholland)	after Oct 25 1843	37	26
	35. Mrs. Phebe Watrous (Woodworth)	after Oct 29 1843	37	38
	36. Mary Huston	approx. Oct 1843	37	25
★ (33)	37. Fanny Young (Carr Murray)	Nov 2 1843	37	55

a George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, pp. 621-623.

b Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 4-6.

c Andrew Jenson, *Historical Record*, 1887, vol. 6, pp. 233-234.

they could continue to live together as husband and wife. According to family tradition, Henry accepted this, but Zina continued to struggle. . . .

Zina remained conflicted until a day in October, apparently, when Joseph sent [her brother] Dimick to her with a message: an angel with a drawn sword had stood over Smith and told him that if he did not establish polygamy, he would lose “his position and his life.” Zina, faced with the responsibility for his position as prophet, and even perhaps his life, finally acquiesced.<sup>30</sup>

She finally consented and entered into a polyandrous marriage with Smith while six months pregnant with Jacob’s child.<sup>31</sup> During the next six months Joseph would enter into six more polyandrous marriages.<sup>32</sup>

Later in Utah, Jedediah M. Grant, second counselor to President Brigham Young, gave a sermon in the Tabernacle in which he confirmed that Joseph Smith asked for other men’s wives:

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.”<sup>33</sup>

When Brigham Young returned from his missionary trip to England in 1841 he was soon introduced to the secret practice.<sup>34</sup> Brigham later stated:

Some of my brethren know what my feelings were at the time Joseph revealed the doctrine; . . . it was the first time in my life that I had desired the grave, and I could hardly

get over it for a long time and when I saw a funeral, I felt to envy the corpse its situation, . . .<sup>35</sup>

However, once converted he was diligent in expanding his kingdom, eventually marrying fifty-five women.<sup>36</sup> Years later Brigham Young would proclaim “The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy.”<sup>37</sup>

## Publicly Exposed

In April of 1842 Joseph Smith secretly approached Nancy Rigdon, the nineteen-year-old daughter of Sidney Rigdon, to be his wife but was refused. Shortly after that Smith sent her a letter, laying out his rationale for undertaking an action that on the surface might appear wrong. Even though she was instructed to destroy the letter after reading it she saved the letter, which was later published in the August 19, 1842, *Sangamo Journal* and then in John C. Bennett’s *History of the Saints*. It read in part:

Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and *keeping all the commandments of God*; but we cannot keep ALL the commandments without first *knowing* them . . . That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another. . . . *Whatever God requires is right*, NO MATTER WHAT IT IS, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire.<sup>38</sup>

Emma Smith’s biographers describe the confrontation that followed:

Nancy Rigdon showed the letter to her father. Rigdon immediately sent for Joseph, who reportedly denied everything until Sidney thrust the letter in his face. George W. Robinson, Nancy’s brother-in-law, claimed he witnessed the encounter and said Joseph admitted that he had spoken with Nancy but that he had only been testing her virtue.<sup>39</sup>

Even though Sidney Rigdon was a member of the first presidency and stayed in the church, the event put a strain on Smith and Rigdon’s friendship.

30 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 80-81.

31 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 75.

32 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 4-5.

33 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2, pp. 13-14.

34 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 47.

35 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 3, p. 266.

36 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 635.

37 *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, p. 269.

38 John C. Bennett, *History of the Saints*, Leland & Whiting, 1842, pp. 243-244. Emphasis in original.

39 Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, pp. 111-112.

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A couple of months later Brigham Young would face a similar situation. He was first married at age twenty-three in 1824, then widowed a few years later. After converting to Mormonism he married Mary Ann Angell in 1834. Years later he secretly entered plural marriage, taking Lucy Ann Decker Seely, possibly separated from her husband, as his plural wife in June of 1842.<sup>40</sup> But his next attempt at courting turned into a public scandal.

Brigham Young approached a young English convert, Martha Brotherton, but was rejected. Her story was then published in the *St. Louis Bulletin* on July 15, 1842. She made a sworn affidavit that Heber C. Kimball escorted her to a private meeting with Brigham Young where she was locked in the room and pressured to marry Brigham Young in polygamy. Martha gave this report of the meeting:

B[ Brigham ] Y[oung]: Well, what are your feelings toward me?

M[artha] B[rotherton]: My feelings are just the same towards you that they ever were, sir.

BY: But to come to the point more closely, have not you an affection for me, that, were it lawful and right, you could accept of me for your husband and companion?

MB: If it was lawful and right perhaps I might; but you know, sir, it is not.

BY: Well, brother Joseph has had a revelation from God that it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives; . . . and if you will accept of me I will take you straight to the celestial kingdom; and if you will have me in this world, I will have you in that which is to come, and brother Joseph will marry us here today, and you can go home this evening, and your parents will not know any thing about it.

MB: Sir, I should not like to do anything of the kind without the permission of my parents.

BY: Well, you are of age, are you not?

MB: No, sir, I shall not be until the 24th of May.

BY: Well, that does not make any difference. You will be of age before they know, and you need not fear. . . .

MB: I want time to think about it.

BY: Well, I will have a kiss any how.<sup>41</sup>

When it was obvious that she was hesitant to accept his proposal Joseph Smith was brought into the room to try and convince her:

J[oseph] S[mith]: Well, Martha, it is lawful and right before God. I know it is. Look here, don't you believe in me? Well Martha, just go ahead and do as Brigham wants you to, he

is the best man in the world except me. . . . Yes, and I know that this is lawful and right before God, and if there is any sin in it I will answer for it before God, and 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; and if you will accept of Brigham, you shall be blessed. God shall bless you, and my blessing shall rest upon you, and if you will be led by him, you will do well; for I know Brigham will take care of you, and if he don't do his duty to you, come to me and I will make him; and if you do not like it in a month or two, come to me and I will make you free again; and if he turns you off I will take you on.

M[artha] B[rotherton]: Sir, it will be too late to think in a month or two after. I want time to think first.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, after Martha was able to convince them that she needed time to pray about it and that she would tell no one of the conversation, she was allowed to leave the room. The next day she wrote down the conversation and soon left for St. Louis. Her statement was given wide distribution in various newspapers and was included in ex-Mormon John C. Bennett's 1842 expose, *History of the Saints*.<sup>43</sup> However, Joseph and his brother Hyrum continued to make public denials of any such doctrine or practice. Richard Van Wagoner comments:

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."<sup>44</sup>

Martha's statement would cost her dearly. The LDS newspaper, *The Wasp*, edited by Joseph Smith's brother, printed a stinging denunciation of her and John C. Bennett on August 27, 1842. It charged that Martha Brotherton and all such females were "mean harlots." Brigham Young's denial, issued the same day as the *Wasp* article, stated, "I do hereby testify that the affidavit of Miss Martha Brotherton . . . is a base falsehood, with regard to any private intercourse or unlawful conduct or conversation with me."<sup>45</sup>

40 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 262.

41 H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816-1844*, Xulon Press, 2005, p. 564.

42 Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism*, p. 565.

43 Bennett, *History of the Saints*, pp. 236-240.

44 Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, p. 20.

45 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 270.

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George Smith explains that “Brotherton eventually returned to England, where she died in 1864. But on August 1, 1870, in Salt Lake City, Brigham Young achieved his romantic pursuit when he had Brotherton sealed to him for eternity. Her sister, Elizabeth Brotherton Pratt, plural wife of Apostle Parley Pratt, acted as proxy for the deceased.”<sup>46</sup>

While 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. However, the transaction was carefully kept from Emma Smith. Richard Van Wagoner relates:

He [Joseph Smith] was walking a tightrope, secretly courting both thirty-eight-year-old Eliza R. Snow and seventeen-year-old Sarah Ann Whitney, while fighting extradition to Missouri as “an accessory to an assault with intent to kill” former governor Lilburn W. Boggs. Smith was also at odds with his long-time friend and counselor Sidney Rigdon over a reputed polygamous proposal on 9 April 1842 to Rigdon’s unmarried daughter Nancy.<sup>47</sup>

In a footnote Van Wagoner tells more of the Whitney story:

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 [*sic*] 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”<sup>48</sup>

Any youthful dreams of courtship and a public marriage were sacrificed to gain Smith’s promise of eternal exaltation for herself and her parents. Both Todd Compton and George Smith list Sarah Ann as Joseph’s fifteenth plural wife.<sup>49</sup>

Six weeks after marrying Sarah Ann Whitney Joseph made another public denial of plural marriage. Due to Bennett’s expose and the ongoing rumors of polygamy Joseph Smith printed the following in the September 1, 1842, *Times and Seasons*:

Inasmuch as the public mind has been unjustly abused through the fallacy of Dr. Bennett’s letters, we make an extract on the subject of *marriage*, showing the rule of the church . . . from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and is **the only rule allowed by the church**. . . . “Inasmuch as this church of Christ had been reproached with **the crime of fornication, and polygamy**: we declare that we believe, that **one man** should have **one wife**; and **one woman**, but **one husband**, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.”<sup>50</sup>

In spite of such denials Joseph continued to take more wives and he expanded the number of men involved in the practice. George Smith lists five men who were living in plural marriage in 1842: Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Heber Kimball, Vinson Knight and Reynolds Cahoon. Joseph had sixteen plural wives, the others had one plural wife each.<sup>51</sup>

Joseph Smith introduced the new teaching to his secretary, William Clayton, in February of 1843. Upon hearing that Clayton had formed a special friendship with a woman while doing missionary work in England, Smith used this as an opening to teach him the new doctrine. He instructed Clayton to send to England for the woman and marry her in polygamy. Joseph explained “It is your privilege to have all the wives you want.” However, when Sarah Crooks arrived in Nauvoo she rejected Clayton’s offer.<sup>52</sup>

In the meantime Clayton had taken his wife’s sister, Margaret, as his second wife. Upon learning of her pregnancy and fearing public exposure, Clayton took the matter to Joseph. George Smith explains:

With such access to the church president, Clayton not only captured the tone of the invitation to marry when Smith said “you have a right to get all you can.” He bequeathed to us Smith’s plan for keeping such obvious marriages secret. After Margaret became pregnant in May or June 1843, Clayton wrote on October 19 about needing to *protect “the truth” by telling untruths*, in this case the strategic charade of publicly rebuking someone while privately embracing them. Clayton wrote about Smith’s advice: “Says he[,] just keep her [Margaret] at home and brook it and if they raise trouble about it and bring you before me I will give you an awful scourging and probably cut you off from the church and then I will baptize you and set you ahead as good as ever.”<sup>53</sup>

46 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, pp. 271-272.

47 Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, pp. 31-32.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49, footnote 3.

49 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 6; Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 622.

50 *Time and Seasons*, vol. 3, September 1, 1842, p. 909.

51 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 311.

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 247, italics in original.

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The secrecy surrounding polygamy even led to problems for young men trying to court the girls in Nauvoo:

When nineteen-year-old Orange Wight noticed the attractive sixteen-year-old Flora Woodworth one spring day in 1843, how could he have known she was already married, and was even a secret wife of the Mormon prophet? He had returned home from a year-long mission to the eastern United States and was not yet familiar with the changed social landscape in Nauvoo. He was surprised to discover that many of the young women he wanted to befriend were someone else's secret wives.<sup>54</sup>

## When Did Emma Know?

While Emma did not see Joseph's revelation on polygamy until Hyrum Smith read it to her in July of 1843, she had to know of the rumors in the 1830's of Smith's connection to other women. At least by 1842 she had to be aware of Martha Brotherton, Nancy Rigdon and John C. Bennett's accusations. She may have initially hoped that it was only a matter of a few indiscretions, not a doctrine promoted by her husband.

The Smith's home in Nauvoo was large enough to allow boarders. Emma may not have been aware of the convenience this arrangement offered Smith in his courting and marrying single women. Many of Joseph's wives first came to the home as boarders or helpers.

Several times Emma seemed to accept plural marriage only to change her mind later. Evidently Joseph had tried on a number of occasions to convince her it was of God and necessary for her salvation. Finally, after assuring her that with acceptance she would also be sealed eternally to Joseph, she agreed to his marrying two sets of sisters, ranging in age from sixteen to twenty-two, who were living in the home.<sup>55</sup>

One of his wives, Emily Partridge, gave a statement in 1887 regarding her two marriages to Smith in the spring of 1843:

... 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 afterwards she consented to give her husband two wives, provided 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, she giving her free and full consent thereto. 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 obliged to leave the house and find another home.<sup>56</sup>

Before the Partridge sisters left the home, Emma had several confrontations with them and Joseph, demanding that there be an end to their marriages. Emily recounted that "Emma said some very hard things—Joseph should give us up or blood should flow." She went on to relate, "Joseph came to us and shook hands with us, and the understanding was that all had ended between us." Summing it all up, Emily stated "I am ashamed to say, I felt indignant towards Joseph for submitting to Emma, but I see now he could do no different."<sup>57</sup> Such accounts destroy the well-polished image of Joseph and Emma's happy marriage that is promulgated today.

Joseph now approached young Lucy Walker, who would become his twenty-second plural wife. Todd Compton relates:

Lucy was another young wife of Smith—he proposed to her when she was fifteen or sixteen. In her story we find the familiar pattern of the teenage girl living in the Mormon leader's house, whom Joseph then approaches and marries.<sup>58</sup>

The Walker family had converted to Mormonism several years before moving to Nauvoo. In the summer of 1841 the mother, Lydia, contracted malaria due to the swampy conditions in Nauvoo and finally died on January 18, 1842. Lucy recalled, "When at length we were forced to believe she would not speak to us again we were in the depths of despair. Ten motherless children!"<sup>59</sup> Joseph soon came up with a solution. The father was sent on a mission to the east, the younger children were sent to other families and at least two of the older siblings, Lorin and Lucy, were taken in by the Smith's. Shortly after this division of the family one of the younger children died.

54 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 414.

55 Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, pp. 142-143

56 Andrew Jenson, *Historical Record*, May 1887, p. 240.

57 Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 180.

58 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 458.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 461.

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In the midst of all this sorrow and loneliness, Joseph approached sixteen-year-old Lucy Walker in late 1842 about plural marriage. Todd Compton outlines Lucy's resistance:

When Smith sensed resistance, as has been seen, he generally continued teaching—asking the prospective wife to pray about the principle, . . . So it happened here. “He said, ‘If you will pray sincerely for light and understanding in relation thereto, you shall receive a testimony of the correctness of this principle.’” Lucy was horrified by polygamy and by his proposal and did not quickly gain the promised testimony. She prayed, she wrote, but not with faith. She was nearly suicidal: “tempted and tortured beyond endurance until life was not desirable. Oh that the grave would kindly receive me that I might find rest on the bosom of my dear mother.” Lucy now felt intensely the absence of her parents: “Why—Why Should I be chosen from among thy daughters, Father, I am only a child in years and experience. No mother to council; no father near to tell me what to do, in this trying hour. Oh let this bitter cup pass. And thus I prayed in the agony of my soul.”<sup>60</sup>

Then in the spring of 1843, while Lucy's brother and Emma were in St. Louis, Joseph pressed the issue again.<sup>61</sup> Lucy took the matter to God in prayer and finally felt she had received divine approval. Todd Compton relates:

On May 1 [1843] Lucy, who had turned seventeen the day before, married Smith at his home, with William Clayton officiating and Eliza Partridge standing witness.<sup>62</sup>

Later that month Joseph married two other girls who were staying with the Smiths, Sarah and Maria Lawrence, evidently with Emma's consent. Linda Newell and Valeen Avery provide this background:

The Lawrence sisters had come to Nauvoo from Canada without their parents in 1840 when Maria was about eighteen and Sarah fifteen. Emma and Joseph offered them a home. According to William Law's account, the girls had inherited about eight thousand dollars in “English gold.” Law said, “Joseph got to be appointed their guardian,” and indicated that he [Law] and Sidney Rigdon were bondsmen to Joseph. After Emma approved of the Lawrence marriages, William Law accused her of doing so with an eye to helping Joseph secure the inheritance. Joseph's history dated May 30, 1843, reads, “I superintended the preparation of papers to settle the Lawrence estate,” and four days later the “accounts of

the Lawrence estate were presented to the probate judge, to which he made objection.”<sup>63</sup>

Five days after watching Joseph be sealed to the Lawrence sisters Emma was rewarded with her own sealing to Joseph for time and all eternity. But evidently struggling with jealousy, Emma fell back into her old pattern of resisting the practice of plural marriage.

Even though Emma forced the Partridge sisters to leave the home she evidently allowed the Lawrence girls to stay. Lucy Walker stayed as well, but Emma may not have known of her marriage to Smith. But Joseph's marriage to Maria Lawrence would become the last straw for Smith's counselor William Law who would bring charges of adultery against Smith in May of 1844.

Finally Joseph's brother Hyrum convinced Joseph to dictate the revelation and he would take it to Emma and convince her once and for all of its truth. William Clayton, who wrote the revelation as Smith dictated it, provided this account:

On the morning of the 12th of July, 1843; Joseph and Hyrum Smith came into the office. . . . They were talking on the subject of plural marriage. 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. Joseph remained with me [William Clayton] in the office until Hyrum returned. 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.” Joseph then put the revelation in his pocket. . . . Two or three days after the revelation was written Joseph related to me 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, but he had consented to her wish in this matter to pacify her, realizing that he . . . could rewrite it at any time if necessary.<sup>64</sup>

According to Todd Compton, Joseph Smith married approximately two dozen women by July of 1843, most of them without Emma's knowledge or consent.<sup>65</sup> While

60 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 464.

61 Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, p. 132; Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 193.

62 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 465.

63 Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, p. 144.

64 *History of the Church*, Introduction to vol. 5, Deseret Book, 1976, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

65 Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, pp. 4-6.

Smith's revelation is dated July 12, 1843, it was not included in the LDS canon until 1876. Prior to that date the 1835 section denouncing polygamy was included in every printing of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Thus Smith and various church leaders could publicly appeal to that section to demonstrate that they did not promote polygamy. This raises the problem of Joseph publicly lying about the very thing he was practicing in private. The revelation on polygamy is still printed in the current *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 132.

## The Revelation

1 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**— . . .

3 Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed unto them **must obey the same**.

4 . . . and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye **damned**; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory. . . .

19 And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, . . . shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, . . . and they shall pass by the angels, and the **gods**, . . . to their exaltation and glory . . . which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.

. . . Then shall they be **gods**, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them. . . .

22 For strait is the gate, and narrow the way that leadeth unto the exaltation and continuation of the **lives**, and few there be that find it, . . .

24 This is **eternal lives**—to know the only wise and true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. . . .

25 Broad is the gate, and wide the way that leadeth to the **deaths**; and many there are that go in thereat, because they receive me not, neither do they abide in my law . . .

27 The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which shall not be forgiven in the world nor out of the world, is in that ye commit murder wherein ye shed innocent blood, and assent unto my death, after ye have received my new and everlasting covenant, saith the Lord God; . . .

29 Abraham received all things, whatsoever he received, by revelation and commandment, by my word, saith the Lord, and hath entered into his exaltation and sitteth upon his throne. . . .

32 Go ye, therefore, and **do the works of Abraham**; enter ye into my law and ye shall be saved. . . .

34 God commanded Abraham, and Sarah gave Hagar to

Abraham to wife. And why did she do it? Because this was the law; and from Hagar sprang many people. . . .

37 Abraham received **concubines**, and they bore him children; and it was accounted unto him for righteousness, because they were given unto him, and he abode in my law; as Isaac also and Jacob . . . they have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are **gods**.

38 David also received **many wives and concubines**, and also Solomon and Moses my servants, as also many others of my servants, from the beginning of creation until this time; and in nothing did they sin save in those things which they received not of me.

39 David's **wives and concubines** were given unto him of me, . . .

40 I am the Lord thy God, and I gave unto thee, my servant Joseph, an appointment, and restore all things. . . .

52 And let mine handmaid, **Emma Smith**, receive all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph, and who are virtuous and pure before me; and those who are not pure, and have said they were pure, shall be **destroyed**, saith the Lord God. . . .

54 And I command mine handmaid, Emma Smith, to abide and cleave unto my servant Joseph, and to none else. But if she will not abide this commandment she shall be **destroyed**, saith the Lord; for I am the Lord thy God, and will **destroy** her if she abide not in my law.

55 But if she will not abide this commandment, then shall my servant Joseph do all things for her, even as he hath said; and I will bless him and multiply him and give unto him an hundredfold in this world, of . . . wives and children, and crowns of eternal lives in the eternal worlds. . . .

61 And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood—if any man espouse **a virgin**, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and **they are virgins**, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him; . . .

62 And if he have **ten virgins** given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, . . .

63 But if one or either of the ten virgins, after she is espoused, shall be with another man, she has committed adultery, and shall be **destroyed**; for they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, . . . and for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men; . . .

64 . . . if any man have a wife, who holds the keys of this power, and he teaches unto her the law of my priesthood, as pertaining to these things, then shall she believe and administer unto him, or she shall be **destroyed**, saith the Lord your God; for I will destroy her; . . .

65 Therefore, it shall be lawful in me, if she receive not this law, for him to receive all things whatsoever I, the Lord his God, will give unto him, . . . and he is exempt from the law of Sarah, who administered unto Abraham according to the law when I commanded Abraham to take Hagar to wife. . . .<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 132, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981. Emphasis added.

It is obvious that the revelation was specifically worded to justify polygamy and to use spiritual coercion to get Emma to accept it or be damned. In relation to verse one, the LDS Church gave the following explanation to the use of the word “concubines”:

#### **D&C 132:1. What Are Concubines?**

*Concubine*, a word commonly used in the Old Testament, was defined by Elder Bruce R. McConkie as follows: “Anciently they were considered to be *secondary wives*, that is, wives who did not have the same standing in the caste system then prevailing as did those wives who were not called concubines. There were no concubines connected with the practice of plural marriage in this dispensation, because the caste system which caused some wives to be so designated did not exist.”<sup>67</sup>

By this definition it would seem that all of Joseph Smith’s wives would fall into the category of “concubine.” They certainly did not have the “same standing” as Emma, were not publicly acknowledged and had no rights of inheritance.

Mormons today try to separate eternal marriage from polygamy but the revelation makes these one and the same. In section 132 the Biblical term “eternal life” is redefined as “eternal lives,” thus changing man’s goal of being with God eternally to that of becoming a God with the ability to procreate eternally.<sup>68</sup> The *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual* explains:

#### **D&C 132:22–25. What is “the Continuation of the Lives” and the “Deaths”?**

Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “Those who gain eternal life (exaltation) also gain eternal lives, meaning that in the resurrection they have **eternal ‘increase,’ ‘a continuation of the seeds,’ a ‘continuation of the lives.’** Their spirit progeny will ‘continue as innumerable as the stars; or, if ye were to count the sand upon the seashore ye could not number them.’” . . . President Joseph Fielding Smith further explained that “the term ‘deaths’ mentioned here has reference to the cutting off of all those who reject this eternal covenant of marriage and therefore they are denied the power of exaltation and the continuation of posterity. To be denied posterity and the family organization, leads to the ‘deaths,’ or end of increase in the life to come.”<sup>69</sup>

Doing the “works of Abraham,” as mentioned in section 132:32-37, thus becomes eternal procreation, or

“eternal lives.” Those who enter into this covenant “are not angels but are gods.” In opposition to the clear teaching of the Bible that there is only one God,<sup>70</sup> Smith taught there is an endless stream of men progressing to godhood.<sup>71</sup>

Mormons today seem to view D&C section 132 as mainly relating to a man being sealed to his wife in an eternal marriage, with plural marriage only an outdated appendage. The early Mormons viewed it just the opposite, declaring that plural marriage was necessary for exaltation. In Joseph Smith’s day eternal marriage was synonymous with plural marriage. Curiously Smith wasn’t even sealed to his legal wife, Emma, until May 28, 1843, after he had already been sealed to two dozen women. If Smith’s concern was to be married eternally to his wife why did he put so many women ahead of her? It seems obvious that the issue was getting her to accept plural marriage. Once she agreed to the new doctrine Smith had her sealed to him.

### **Virgins or Married Women?**

In contradiction to the revelation restricting marriage to “virgins” Smith married over a dozen women with living husbands.<sup>72</sup> Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, married and a faithful Mormon, told how Joseph Smith had approached her to be his secret plural wife with the claim that God had sent an angel to him “three times between the year of ’34 and ’42 and said I [Smith] was to obey that principle [plural marriage] or he would lay (destroy) me.” Todd Compton observed that “Smith linked plural marriage with salvation, as he did in later marriages. If Mary accepted him as her husband, her place in heaven would be assured.”<sup>73</sup>

Richard Van Wagoner tells more of Mary’s sealing to Smith:

Mary Elizabeth Rollins, married to non-Mormon Adam Lightner since 11 August 1835, was one of the first women to accept the “celestial marriage” teachings of the prophet. “He was commanded to take me for a wife,” she declared . . . “I was his, before I came here,” she added . . . Brigham Young secretly sealed the two in February 1842 when Mary was eight months pregnant with her son, George Algernon Lightner. She lived with Adam Lightner until his death in Utah many years later. In her 1880 letter to Emmeline B. Wells, Mary explained: “I could tell you why I stayed with Mr. Lightner. . . . I did just as Joseph told me to do, as he knew what troubles I would have to contend with.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual*, p. 327.

<sup>68</sup> Compare D&C 132:22,24 with Matthew 7:13 and John 17:4.

<sup>69</sup> *D&C Student Manual*, p. 327.

<sup>70</sup> Isaiah 43:10-11; 44:6, 8, 24; 45:5:5-7, 22.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Deseret Book, pp. 312, 345-347.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, pp. 223-224.

<sup>73</sup> Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, p. 212.

<sup>74</sup> Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, p. 43.

No explanation is given as to how married women met the criteria for “virgins” in Smith’s plural marriage revelation.

## Presenting the Revelation to the Nauvoo Stake High Council

With rumors of polygamy growing in number, Joseph evidently decided it was time to present the revelation to a larger audience. George Smith explains:

On August 12, 1843, as Hyrum Smith read his brother’s month-old dictated revelation to a dozen or more individuals at a Nauvoo Stake High Council meeting, reactions were mixed. Reports of the event contain references to dissent in the leadership for the first time since Oliver Cowdery’s private objection in 1838 to the prophet’s conduct with Fanny Alger or the year-ago protest of President John Bennett when he defected over what he called “gross sexual improprieties, ethical degradation, financial misbehavior, theft, and murder.” Four supporters of plural marriage, James Allred, David Fullmer, Thomas Grover, and Aaron Johnson, as well as a critic, Leonard Soby, reported on the meeting in letters and affidavits. . . .

Not long afterward, two members of the High Council, Cowles (father of Smith’s plural wife, Elvira Cowles) and Soby, withdrew from the church and revealed the content of the revelation to the public. It created a wave of confusion and discontent as these formerly esteemed leaders accused Smith and others of marital infidelity. Citizens in the surrounding area needed little prompting to join their own voices to the chorus of protesters. It was during this period, before and after the Smith brothers’ martyrdom, that many first realized that plural marriage was, in fact, a reality among the LDS hierarchy.<sup>75</sup>

Even though Emma knew of Joseph’s marriages to the Partridge sisters and the Lawrence sisters, and possibly a few others, she must not have known the extent of Smith’s marriages. On August 16, 1843, Smith’s secretary, William Clayton, recorded in his diary:

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 and leave him. He however told me he should not relinquish anything.<sup>76</sup>

Then on August 18 Clayton records a conversation with Joseph about a visit he and Emma made at the Woodworths.

Evidently this was the first that Emma realized Joseph had already wed young Flora Woodworth, his eighteenth plural wife:

President Joseph told me that he had difficulty with E[mma] yesterday. She rode up to Woodworths with him and called while he came to the Temple. When he returned she was demanding the gold watch of F[lora]. He reproved her for her evil treatment. On their return home she abused him much and also when he got home. He had to use harsh measures to put a stop to her abuse but finally succeeded . . .<sup>77</sup>

One of the last leaders to be introduced to polygamy by Joseph Smith was apostle Amasa Lyman in 1844. George Smith details Lyman’s conversion to plural marriage:

Amasa Lyman . . . was preparing to go to Boston in the spring of 1844 when Joseph Smith spoke with him about plural marriage. As Lyman reported it, “a few days after the [April] conference, I had an interview with the Prophet, in which he taught me some principles on celestial marriage. On the day of my parting with him, he said as he warmly grasped my hand for the last time, ‘Brother Amasa, go and practice on the principles I have taught you, and God bless you.’”

. . . Lyman understood that the “plurality of wives” was a matter that “as yet was to be kept carefully from the ears of the world.” In Lyman’s last conversation with the prophet, Smith used “impressive words” to emphasize “the import and obligation of this ancient law,” saying that “to obey that law” was “one of the essentials to salvation.”

### *Joseph’s ultimatums*

At first, Lyman found polygamy to be “strange, startling, astonishing” and “rather too much to grasp in a moment.” He also perceived a “tone” of “power and authority” in Smith’s voice. More and more often, Joseph would threaten colleagues with eternal damnation if they did not accept the promised rewards of plural marriage. If Lyman rejected this principle, Joseph told him, “he would be damned.” . . . When he returned from the East, he dutifully married eight women and by old age would father thirty-seven children.<sup>78</sup>

While *Nauvoo Polygamy* discusses Smith’s various wives, it also details the extent of early polygamy among the leaders in Nauvoo. George Smith offers the following tally:

From 1843 through the first half of 1844, Joseph Smith expanded the number of his confidants. John Bennett had broken the story to the newspapers, but publicity had not

<sup>75</sup> Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 369.

<sup>76</sup> George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton*, Signature Books, 1995, p. 117.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, p. 118.

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, pp. 363-364.

prevented the inner circle from swelling to thirty-three brethren, excluding Bennett, by the time Joseph and Hyrum Smith were assassinated on June 27, 1844. As we have seen, new plural marriages ceased for a few months after Bennett's intimate accounts in 1842, but the next year and a half saw seventy-one more celestial weddings, twenty-one for Smith and fifty for other men. In fact, celestial marriages more than tripled in 1843. Young married his second and third plural companions on November 2, 1843, the same day Smith married his last plural wife. Kimball would not marry in 1843, but chose to postpone his second plural sealing until the fall of 1844. Cahoon would not marry again, after joining Lucinda Johnson in 1842 matrimony, until January 1846. Knight, of course, had died. However, twenty-eight other men complied with the principle: twenty in 1843 and eight in the first half of 1844 (see chapter 5).

Before the Saints left Nauvoo in 1846, this total would swell to 196 men and 719 women.<sup>79</sup>

## Events Leading to Joseph's Death

The last few months of Joseph's life were full of strife and confusion, much of it in relation to polygamy. Emma seems to have enlisted the help of various friends to keep an eye on Joseph's movements. On April 17, 1844, the *Warsaw Signal* reported the following:

We learn direct from Nauvoo, that Jo Smith, on Friday last, turned his wife out of doors. "Sister Emma's" offence was, that she was in conversation with Mr. E[benezer]. Robinson, and refused, or hesitated to tell the Prophet on what subject they were engaged. The man of God, thereupon, flew into a holy passion, and turned the partner of his bosom, and the said Robinson, into the street—all of which was done in broad day-light, and no doubt in the most approved style.<sup>80</sup>

In his journal and autobiography, Joseph Lee Robinson, Ebenezer's brother, frankly admitted that Joseph and Emma had a fight over plural marriage:

. . . Angeline Ebenezer's wife had some time before this had watched Brother Joseph the Prophet had seen him go into some house that she had reported to sister Emma the wife of the Prophet it was at a time when she was very suspicious and jealous of him for fear he would get another wife . . . she was determined he should not get another if he did she was determined to leave and when she heard this she Emma became very angry and said she would leave . . . It came close to breaking up his family . . . the Prophet felt

dreadful bad over it, he went to my Brothers and talked with Angelene on the matter, and she would not give him any satisfaction, and her husband did not reprove his wife, and it came to pass the prophet cursed her severely, . . . I thought that I would not have a wife of mine do a thing of that kind for a world, but if she had done it she should get upon her knees at his feet and beg his pardon. . . .<sup>81</sup>

Smith was not only facing opposition at home, some of his top leaders came out against him and his new doctrines. Besides teaching polygamy and multiple gods, Smith also had himself secretly ordained king and was planning the political kingdom of God. Several leaders filed lawsuits against Smith, one was by William Law.<sup>82</sup> After repeatedly pleading with Joseph to renounce plural marriage, Law decided to bring a lawsuit against Smith for "living in an open state of adultery" with Maria Lawrence. Richard Van Wagoner explains:

Smith commented on the charges the next day in Sunday services, noting that such accusations were not new to him. "Another indictment has been got up against me," he said. "I had not been married scarcely five minutes, and made one proclamation of the gospel, before it was reported that I had seven wives, . . . What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one" ([HC 6]:408-11). Smith, who had been sealed to Maria and Sarah Lawrence in the summer or early fall of 1843, had himself appointed legal guardian of the two orphan girls on 4 June 1844, two weeks after Law's charges were filed. . . .

Law's charge of adultery against the prophet was apparently his final attempt to get Smith to abandon polygamy. . . . On 18 April 1844 Law and his wife Jane and brother Wilson were excommunicated for "unchristianlike conduct." Ten days later they and other dissidents founded a separatist church, declaring Smith a fallen prophet. The group issued a prospectus for an opposition newspaper, *The Nauvoo Expositor*, 10 May 1844.<sup>83</sup>

## Nauvoo Expositor Destroyed

On June 7, 1844, the first and only edition of the *Nauvoo Expositor* was printed. In it were charges of secret polygamy, the doctrine of plural gods and the Mormons' political agenda:

We are earnestly seeking to explode the vicious principles of Joseph Smith, and those who practice the same

<sup>79</sup> Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 310.

<sup>80</sup> Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987, p. 210.

<sup>81</sup> Journal of Joseph Lee Robinson, as quoted in Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* p. 210.

<sup>82</sup> *Salt Lake City Messenger*, no. 106, pp. 16-17.

<sup>83</sup> Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, p. 66.

**abominations and whoredoms**; which we verily know are not accordant and consonant with the principles of Jesus Christ . . .

Many of us have sought a reformation in the church, without a public exposition of the enormities of crimes practiced by its leaders . . . but our petitions were treated with contempt; and in many cases the petitioner spurned from their presence, and particularly by Joseph . . .

It is a notorious fact, that many females . . . are requested to meet brother Joseph, or some of the Twelve, at some insulated point, or at some particularly described place on the bank of the Mississippi, or at some room, which wears upon its front—*Positively NO admittance*. . . . they are told, after having been sworn in one of the most solemn manners, to never divulge what is revealed to them, with a penalty of death attached, that God Almighty has revealed it to him that she should be his (Joseph's) **Spiritual wife**; . . . The Prophet damns her if she rejects. . . .

Our hearts have mourned and bled at the wretched and miserable condition of females in this place; many orphans have been the victims of misery and wretchedness, through the influence that has been exerted over them, under the cloak of religion and afterwards, in consequence of that *jealous disposition* which predominates over the minds of *some*, have been turned upon a wide world, fatherless and motherless, destitute of friends and fortune; and *robbed of that which nothing but death can restore*. . . .

The next important item which presents itself for our consideration, is the attempt at **Political power** and influence, which we verily believe to be preposterous and absurd. . . .

Among the many items of false doctrine that are taught the Church, is the **doctrine of many Gods**, one of the most direful in its effects that has characterized the world for many centuries. We know not what to call it other than blasphemy, for it is most unquestionably, speaking of God in an impious and irreverent manner.—It is contended that there are innumerable Gods as much above the God that presides over this universe, as he is above us; . . .<sup>84</sup>

Also in the paper was a statement by William Law's wife, Jane:

I certify that I read the revelation referred to in the above affidavit of my husband, it sustained in strong terms the **doctrine of more wives than one at a time**, in this world, and in the next, it authorized some to have to the number of ten, and set forth that those women who would not allow their husbands to have more wives than one should be under condemnation before God.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>84</sup> *Nauvoo Expositor*, June 7, 1844, pp.1-2.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup> *History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 432.

<sup>87</sup> *Warsaw Signal*, June 12, 1844.

<sup>88</sup> *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, "Nauvoo Expositor," vol. 3, 1992, p. 996.

<sup>89</sup> Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, pp. 392-394.

<sup>90</sup> Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, p. 282.

Three days later the Nauvoo City Council, with Joseph Smith officiating as mayor, ordered the Marshal to destroy the press:

The Council passed an ordinance declaring the Nauvoo Expositor a nuisance, and also issued an order to me [Joseph Smith] to abate the said nuisance. I immediately ordered the Marshal to destroy it without delay. . . . About 8 p.m., the Marshal returned and reported that he had removed the press, type, printed paper, and fixtures into the street, and destroyed them.<sup>86</sup>

The Mormon account sounds quite tame in comparison to the June 12, 1844, version given by Charles A. Foster, one of the publishers of the *Expositor*:

. . . a company consisting of some 200 men, armed and equipped, with muskets, swords, pistols, bowie knives, sledge-hammers, &c, assisted by a crowd of several hundred minions, who volunteered their services on the occasion, marched to the building, and breaking open the doors with a sledge-hammer, commenced the work of destruction. . . . They tumbled the press and materials into the street, and set fire to them, and demolished the machinery with a sledge hammer, and injured the building very materially.<sup>87</sup>

While Mormons try to justify the destruction of the press on the basis that the paper was full of lies,<sup>88</sup> history has shown that the charges were legitimate. The destruction of the press caused a public uproar, and fearing a riot Smith called out the Nauvoo Legion. This led to the arrest of both Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum. While the Smiths were awaiting a hearing the jail was stormed by an angry mob and the brothers were shot to death.<sup>89</sup>

## Joseph's Widows

Between 1844 and 1846 LDS Church leaders would marry twenty-four of Joseph Smith's thirty-seven plural wives before their trek west. George Smith explains:

Susa Young Gates recalled that her father, Brigham, approached the widows to tell them that "he and his brethren stood ready to offer themselves to them as husbands" in order to contribute to their comrade's offspring, and that the widows were free to "choose for themselves." Within just a half a year, six of the women married Young, four married Kimball, and one married Amasa M. Lyman. Over the next year and a half, Young, Kimball, and six others . . . would marry thirteen more of the widows for a total of twenty-four of Smith's thirty-eight wives.<sup>90</sup>

Emma Smith, rejecting Brigham Young's leadership and polygamy, stayed in Illinois and married Lewis Bidamon, a non-Mormon, in December of 1847.<sup>91</sup>

### Smith's Legacy

LDS scholars Danel Bachman and Ronald K. Esplin defend Joseph Smith's practice of polygamy with this claim:

Far from involving license, however, plural marriage was a carefully regulated and ordered system. Order, mutual agreements, regulation, and covenants were central to the practice.<sup>92</sup>

This might cover many of the later plural marriages in Utah but it hardly is a picture of the way Smith took wives. Pressuring a woman into accepting him as a husband by using claims of an angel with a drawn sword, threatening Smith with destruction if she refuses him, hardly seems to fit the description given above. Smith's relationship with numerous teenagers and married women looks like "license." These "mutual agreements" usually did not include Emma's consent and Smith did not establish a home with any of these women or publicly acknowledge them. The Partridge sisters entered into plural marriage in good faith but after repeated run-ins with Emma, Joseph seems to have divorced them and sent them on their way. How does this fit with the claim of eternal "covenants"?

It is estimated that there are currently 60,000 people who claim Joseph Smith as their prophet (even though not members of the LDS Church) who are involved in polygamy, spread among a number of off-shoot groups and independent polygamists.<sup>93</sup> The recent raid on the polygamist group in Texas and the arrests in Canada have brought the issue to public attention and created a public relations nightmare for the Mormons. While the LDS Church tries repeatedly to distance itself from the current practice there is no denying that the only reason there are splinter groups today practicing polygamy is because of Joseph Smith and his revelation, which is still printed in the *Doctrine and Covenants*.

After looking at the heartbreaks and confusion of polygamy one is drawn to Christ's simple teaching:

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and **the two** will become **one flesh**." (Matthew 19:5)



<sup>91</sup> Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, p. 246

<sup>92</sup> *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, "Plural Marriage," vol. 3, p. 1094

<sup>93</sup> *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 7, 1998

## HEART of the Matter

Since March of 2006, "Heart of the Matter" has been broadcast live from the capital of Mormonism, Salt Lake City, Utah. Each week, its host, Shawn McCraney [former Mormon], contrasts biblical truth with Mormon doctrine. The show is seen all over the world by virtue of dish, cable, streaming-video, internet archives and Youtube video segments. This program can be seen at:

[www.hotm.tv](http://www.hotm.tv)

Watch the program live on Channel 20 in Utah or on the Internet with streaming-video every Tuesday evening at 8:00 p.m. Mountain time.

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*Recent letter from a woman in Malasia who was saved from Mormonism by UTLM and Heart of the Matter!*

Hi Shawn, . . . I live in ASIA, Malaysia exactly. I just want to thank you very much for the program you are doing. It really open up my mind altogether about Mormonism. I met with missionaries several times and really so carried away emotionally with what they presented to me. Personally i have doubt at first about The BOM, but since i never touched the Bible for most part of my life, i began enjoy reading it at last. Frankly i was impressed very much with their personalities. I seldom met such young nice guys in my life. They are so kind, caring, polite and always remember God in their daily life. . . . They also talk about The Words of Wisdom. This the very words that leads me to find the true answers to my curiosities. I go to GOOGLE and searched for it. One thing lead to another, at last i found UTLM.ORG. And now your shows too. One again Shawn, Thank you very much to you and Sandra Tanner for this wonderful job. You have save the world. GOD bless you.

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# UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF MORMON

By Ross J. Anderson  
(Christian Pastor, Former Mormon)

Zondervan Publishing Corporation  
An Excerpt from Chapter Seven

## Search for a Missing Civilization: Is the Book of Mormon Really an Ancient Book?

As a teenager, I remember the excitement I felt the evening my father and I were invited to visit the ruins of Central America. I envisioned a fascinating adventure to discover the lost cities of the Book of Mormon lands. We never made the trip, although thousands of Latter-day Saints have. Many more have imagined the journey through the various picture books available that compare Book of Mormon stories to ancient American sites.

To Latter-day Saints, the Book of Mormon is an ancient record of great cities, peoples at war, and the rise and fall of nations. They look for its mark on the landscape of America. But archaeology has failed to unearth any concrete evidence for the Book of Mormon. In response, LDS scholars seek to validate the book's antiquity by seeking similarities to the ancient Near East. Others see stronger connections between the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's own times.

### The Silent Testimony of Archaeology

From the beginning, Latter-day Saints have made various attempts to reconstruct Book of Mormon geography on the American map. The most common approach today locates the story largely in Central America and Mexico, the region known as Mesoamerica. LDS authors have published elaborate suggestions, complete with full color photographs, about how ancient Mesoamerican cultures might parallel the Book of Mormon peoples.<sup>1</sup> But LDS writers admit that all of this is pure conjecture. One Brigham Young University professor puts it like this:

"No one has found any inscriptional evidence for, or material remains that can be tied directly to any of the persons, places or things mentioned in the book."<sup>2</sup>



Latter-day Saints interpret the ancient ruins of Mexico as Book of Mormon artifacts.  
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Consider some examples. The Book of Mormon peoples are described using gold, silver, iron, brass, and copper. The mining, smelting, and casting of metal ores require special tools and complex processes that leave traces in the archaeological record. But scholars generally agree that metallurgy was not introduced into Mesoamerica until several centuries after the Book of Mormon story ends. What's more, the Book of Mormon mentions the use of steel swords. But metal swords were not known in Mesoamerica before the Spanish conquest.<sup>3</sup>

The Book of Mormon also speaks of many different kinds of animals, mostly those familiar in the Old World, like cattle, sheep, goats and horses. But none of these have been found in any archaeological setting that dates to Book of Mormon times. Unlike the deer, jaguar, peccary, tapir and other native species, the horse has never been found

<sup>1</sup> The most widely accepted attempt to correlate the Book of Mormon with Mesoamerican geography and culture is John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> David J. Johnson, "Archaeology," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 62-63.

<sup>3</sup> On the use of metals in Mesoamerica, see Deanne G. Matheny, "Does the Shoe Fit? A Critique of the Limited Tehauntepec Geography," *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 283-97.

[Correction: The Deanne Matheny article is printed in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe, Signature Books, 1993. It can be read online at: <http://www.signaturebookslibrary.org/book/chapter8.htm#imitedj>

depicted in any of thousands of samples of Mesoamerican art — in spite of its impressive appearance.<sup>4</sup>

The Book of Mormon contains anachronisms, that is, events or objects that appear out of the proper time period in which one would expect them to be present. To give just one example, Alma 16:13 describes how Nephite evangelists “went forth preaching repentance to the people...in their synagogues, which were built after the manner of the Jews.” The Book of Mormon mentions synagogues twenty-five times. But synagogues were not developed by the Jews until four hundred years after Lehi left Jerusalem. How could the writer have known how the Jews built their synagogues?

To Latter-day Saints, raising issues like this will probably seem like an “anti-Mormon” attack. A sincere inquirer should not be expected to ignore honest questions that bear on the Book of Mormon’s credibility. Yet we should raise these questions with sensitivity and humility.

New World archaeology is still a young science. Perhaps some day, an artifact or inscription will be unearthed to validate the Book of Mormon. By contrast, archaeology has repeatedly demonstrated the Bible’s historical and geographical reliability. The use of metals, as described in the Bible, has been verified at a number of sites in the Near East. A traveler today can visit the site of ancient Capernaum, where Jesus lived, or Ephesus, where the apostle Paul traveled.<sup>5</sup>

A few years ago I visited the British Museum in London. There I saw a series of massive stone panels from ancient Nineveh, carved during the reign of Assyria’s King Sennacherib to commemorate the defeat of the Israelite city Lachish. Lachish is mentioned in the Bible, as is Sennacherib’s military campaign in Israel. But even after decades of archaeological work in the New World, it seems to me that the best Mormon apologists can do is create an aura of plausibility by suggesting vague similarities between the Book of Mormon and ancient Mesoamerica.

## Denied by DNA

Recent advances in DNA research have challenged the traditional LDS understanding of where the American Indians came from, leading some to question the credibility of the Book of Mormon’s basic story. The predominant hypothesis of mainstream science is that all Native

Americans are of Asian origin. This view is supported by extensive DNA sampling of American Indian populations.

The traditional LDS view, still held by most Mormons, is that, as children of Lehi, Native Americans are of Semitic origin. Latter-day Saints have believed this because it was taught by Joseph Smith and is the most straightforward way to read of the Book of Mormon text. But widespread testing of Native American DNA affords no evidence of any relationship with Semitic peoples.

While some LDS scholars claim that DNA results are inconclusive and thus do not undermine the traditional view, others have adopted the hypothesis that most Native Americans are of Asian origin, while a small subset is Semitic. If so, Nephites and Lamanites made up only a small portion of the total New World population during the Book of Mormon’s time frame.<sup>6</sup>



Are the people of Central America descended from the Lamanites?  
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The LDS Church has seemingly acknowledged that the DNA evidence carries some weight. For example, the introduction to the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon identifies the Lamanites as “the principle ancestors of the American Indians.”<sup>7</sup> The 2006 edition states that the

<sup>4</sup> On crops and animals, see *Ibid.*, 302-10.

<sup>5</sup> On the archaeological confirmation of the Bible, see Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, revised and expanded by Howard F. Vos (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> On the DNA issue, see D. Jeffrey Meldrum and Trent D. Stephens, “Who Are the Children of Lehi?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 1 (2003): 38-51.

<sup>7</sup> Carrie A. Moore, “Debate Renewed with Change of Book of Mormon Introduction,” *The Deseret Morning News* (November 8, 2007).

Lamanites “are among the ancestors of the American Indians.” This change accommodates the current scientific consensus at the expense of the traditional LDS view. But if the Nephite and Lamanite clans were not alone in the Americas, it seems odd that the Book of Mormon never mentions the numerous people who must have lived in surrounding lands and who surely would have interacted with them.

## Internal versus External Evidence

Lacking external, physical evidence, LDS scholars have turned from spade to book, hoping to establish an ancient provenance for the Book of Mormon by linking it to ancient Near Eastern texts and practices. The idea is that if the Book of Mormon accurately reflects Near Eastern elements that Joseph Smith could not have known and that cannot be traced to the Bible, then it must be taken seriously as an ancient text, even without archaeological proofs.<sup>8</sup> Yet this approach can be highly speculative. The pioneer of this method, Hugh Nibley, explains it like this:

While Book of Mormon students readily admit that no direct, concrete evidence currently exists substantiating the links with the ancient Near East that are noted in the book, evidence can be adduced—largely external and circumstantial—that commands respect for the claims of the Book of Mormon concerning its ancient Near Eastern background.<sup>9</sup>

For the typical Latter-day Saint, circumstantial evidence is enough. Even though many of the parallels break down upon close inspection, those who are already committed to the Book of Mormon will find them convincing. Their testimony of the Book of Mormon is based on a spiritual experience, not on external verification. Thus LDS scholars merely need to provide enough of an argument to reassure believers and to hold the critics at bay.

## Literary Evidence

One type of internal evidence for the Book of Mormon has to do with its language and style. If the Book of Mormon peoples came from Jerusalem, the root language behind the book would be Hebrew. Thus LDS scholars believe that the presence of Hebrew literary and grammatical patterns, called Hebraisms, give evidence of its ancient origin. The most fundamental problem with this approach is that

the Book of Mormon is only available to us in translated form. Without an original document to compare, we simply cannot know whether the Hebraisms we observe are rooted in some Hebrew original or result from factors in the English text.

One example of a Hebraism in the Book of Mormon is chiasm.<sup>10</sup> Chiasm occurs when a series of terms are stated and then repeated in reverse order, forming a mirror-like reflection. The elements of a chiasm follow the pattern A<sup>1</sup>-B<sup>1</sup>-B<sup>2</sup>-A<sup>2</sup>, as in Isaiah 6:10 (KJV):

A<sup>1</sup>: Make the *heart* of this people fat,  
 B<sup>1</sup>: and make their *ears* heavy,  
 C<sup>1</sup>: and shut their *eyes*;  
 C<sup>2</sup>: lest they see with their *eyes*,  
 B<sup>2</sup>: and hear with their *ears*,  
 A<sup>2</sup>: and understand with their *heart*, and convert, and be healed.

No one disputes that chiasm appears in the Book of Mormon (see Alma 41:13-14). But does this reflect a Hebrew basis of the text? After all, chiasm is not unique to the Hebrew language. Any time a reciprocal relationship or action is described, or a series of items is repeated in reverse order, chiasm will result. The common phrase, “A place for everything, and everything in its place,” is a chiasm. Thus chiasm can arise by coincidence.

Moreover, Joseph Smith’s familiarity with biblical language could account for chiasm occurring in his writings, whether intentionally or not. This explains why chiasm crops up in Smith’s writings outside the Book of Mormon. Let me give just one example, from *Doctrine and Covenants* 3:2.

A<sup>1</sup>: For God doth not walk in crooked paths,  
 B<sup>1</sup>: neither doth he turn to the right hand nor to the left,  
 B<sup>2</sup>: neither doth he vary from that which he hath said,  
 A<sup>2</sup>: therefore his paths are straight...

A cursory reading of the Doctrine and Covenants reveals other passages that have elements of chiasm, such as Section 6:33-34 and Section 43:2-6. Since these passages are neither ancient nor Hebrew in origin, they diminish the relevance of chiasm in the Book of Mormon.

LDS apologists also claim to find names in the Book of Mormon that are found in ancient Near Eastern sources but not in the Bible.<sup>11</sup> For example, the name Alma has been found in Jewish documents from about 132 A.D. But

8 D. Brent Anderson and Diane E. Wirth introduce the claim of Near Eastern parallels in “Book of Mormon Authorship,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 166-67.

9 Hugh W. Nibley, “Book of Mormon Near Eastern Background,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 187.

10 The case for chiasm is made by John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds. (Provo, UT: Religious Study Center, Brigham Young University, 1982). 33-52.

11 Terry L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 140-41.

without knowing what the original Hebrew spelling of these names might have been, no one can know whether any Book of Mormon name is truly parallel to a Near Eastern name or not. Moreover, many of the names listed by LDS scholars could easily be derived from biblical names with only slight modification: Sam from Samuel, Josh from Joshua, Sariah from Sarah, Chemish from Chemosh, and so forth.<sup>12</sup>

One challenge in trying to establish Hebraic literary parallels is that the Book of Mormon is riddled with the language of the Bible. As illustrated with chiasm, most of the Hebraisms identified in the Book of Mormon can also be found in modern writings of Joseph Smith.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that these language forms do not come from an ancient Hebrew source, but from Smith consciously or unconsciously imitating the language of the Bible.

## A Nineteenth-Century Text?

Since its publication, observers have noted that the Book of Mormon contains numerous parallels to nineteenth-century American life. In chapter one I mentioned Alexander Campbell, a leading American theologian from Joseph Smith's time. In his review of the Book of Mormon, Campbell noted that Smith had written into the book "every error and almost every truth discussed in N. York for the last ten years."

He decides all the great controversies - infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of freemasonry, republican government, and the rights of man. All these topics are repeatedly alluded to.<sup>14</sup>

As Campbell observed, the Book of Mormon reflects nineteenth century American theological and political themes. It offers guidance on democracy, the practice of capitalism, and various Protestant controversies. Some scholars see parallels between the Book of Mormon's secret

societies—the Gadianton robbers—and contemporary concerns about Freemasonry. Many see the warning in 1 Nephi 13 about a "great and abominable church" as a close parallel to anti-Catholic propaganda in the 1830s.

Sermons by Nephite prophets echo the form and language of nineteenth century evangelists. The conversion experiences described in the Book of Mormon are similar to spiritual awakenings commonly reported in the American revival movement of the early 1800s.<sup>15</sup> Why are the contents of an ancient work so closely tied to the concerns of one American generation?

## Battle of the Parallels

LDS scholars counter that, as a translation, the Book of Mormon can be expected to reflect the time and place in which it was translated. They recognize many of the parallels cited, but argue that instead of being unique to nineteenth-century America, these reflect universal questions of human life. Where the Book of Mormon does speak directly to particulars of Joseph Smith's environment, they assert, this is evidence of the book's prophetic power. If God intended the Book of Mormon to speak to Smith's generation, Mormons are not surprised that it addresses concrete issues from American life. From this perspective, the parallels actually confirm the prophetic accuracy of the Book of Mormon.<sup>16</sup>

In the end, the question is: Which parallels are more convincing? Those that link the Book of Mormon to the ancient Near East, or those that connect it to Joseph Smith's American context? Taking the evidence of archaeology, literary parallels, and nineteenth-century anachronisms all into account, people who are not already convinced of the Book of Mormon's claims have reason to doubt that it is an ancient book.



[This entire book is now available through  
Utah Lighthouse Ministry.]

<sup>12</sup> Thomas J. Finley evaluates the claim of ancient Near Eastern names in the Book of Mormon in "Does the Book of Mormon Reflect an Ancient Near Eastern Background?" *The New Mormon Challenge*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 353-59. Finley also responds to other LDS claims of Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon.

<sup>13</sup> Edward H. Ashment, "'A Record in the Language of My Father': Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon," *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 375-80.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Campbell, "Delusions," *The Restoration Movement Pages*: <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/people/acampbell.html> (January 4, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> On various parallels between the Book of Mormon and nineteenth-century American life, see Mark D. Thomas, "Scholarship and the Book of Mormon" and Susan Curtis, "Early Nineteenth-Century America and the Book of Mormon" in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990). On parallels to revivalist conversion and preaching, see Grant Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 95-133. On the background of Freemasonry, see Dan Vogel, "Echoes of Anti-Masonry: A Rejoinder to Critics of the Anti-Masonic Thesis," *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> A thoughtful LDS perspective on the nineteenth-century parallels is found in Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon*, 165-67.

## Excerpts from Letters and Emails

**Oct. 2008.** . . . i can tell that none of you have talked to a mormon about any of this, or read the book of mormon, pearl of great price, or doctrine and covenants. you are completely wrong and misguided about almost all of your accusations. you seem to put short quotes and twist them around to prove your point. you dont include the background information, audience, or anything. you are creating false judgements about the mormons.

**Nov. 2008.** As a 43 y.o. faithful LDS member I recently began questioning my faith and found very objective and factual data that sent me into a spiral downward concerning the Church I believed I knew. . . .

I went to FAIR after the LDS.org website missionary stated this was the only approved source for material on controversial topics. I was sick after reading some of what I found on FAIR, which included attacks on others and lots of fluffy and faith oriented replies to fact based questions. . . . Its the final straw for me. I lose all to admit to myself and my family what is clearly truth yet I am not afforded any consideration.

**Nov. 2008.** I am finally thanking you for all the good and hard work you and Jerald did for me and many thousands of others. I was once a Mormon, married in the Idaho Falls Temple, but quit church in my twenties. I became a scientist who remained curious about how Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon, etc. and it was the writings of you two who explained it clearly and convincingly.

**Dec. 2008.** I love your website! It really encourages me to seek out the truth about Mormonism. I've been surrounded by Mormons for many years now. As a Christian, it makes me so sad to see how little they know of the Truth and life Jesus offers.

**Dec. 2008.** Exactly, you are only in it for the money!!!!!!!!!

**Dec. 2008.** It's really sad that you all go this far to try to pull people from the truth. this website is a bunch of LIES. I will pray for all of you. . . . Remember, there is only one true church . . . The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

**Dec. 2008.** This ministry has been such a blessing to me. Your books helped me so many years ago when I was leaving the Mormon church. I always look forward to receiving your newsletter. Isn't it comforting to know that the only peace in this world and in our lives comes from our Lord Jesus found in the Bible.

**Dec. 2008.** I am planning on leaving the LDS church, I've been a member now for about a year. The local church hasn't been all that bad. . . . The Temple is beginning to really bother me. The things I am learning about the temple seem to contradict the Bible.

**Dec. 2008.** Have you read the Book of Mormon? Have you prayed about it with an open heart and mind and asked our Heavenly Father if it is true? The LDS Church is Christ's restored Church on earth.

**Jan. 2009.** First of all I need to say that my purpose is not to contend with you or to demean you. . . . I hesitate to judge your true motives but in listening to your broadcasts and call-in-shows as well as reading your many anti-Mormon publications I get the heavy and dark feeling of contention and anger woven throughout your discourse. Christ never mocked or demeaned others, instead he taught with the spirit of love and humility. I have never sensed that spirit of love nor humility from either of you – quite the opposite.

**March 2009.** I am LDS and have been doing a lot of research on Mormonism. I was born in the church . . . I've always felt the church was true, but have been really struggling with a lot of things over the last few years. It has always bothered me how Christ doesn't seem to be in people's heart in the LDS church. They mention him in a talk or when closing a prayer or something, but I can tell there is no real love for him like I see when I talk to Christians. . . . One thing I can say is that I have been born again. I've been asking god to help me know Jesus because I knew he was missing in the LDS church and in my life.

[A week later the same man wrote about his efforts to talk to his LDS wife]

I think my wife is slowly coming around. This all just happened over the past month or so, so I just need to be patient and let it work itself out. If Shawn [McCraney] could hang in there for another four years after being born again, I'm sure I can make it for a while. . . . She's slowly starting to think "outside the box." I think she is starting to see things in a different way. My main thing is trying to help her see that Mormons don't worship Christ the same way as biblical Christianity. . . . I'm praying that she will want to know Christ more than she does and that it's all about him and not the church. . . . But I've learned that I do have to take it slow and not push too much on her at one time. After all, it took several months to find out everything I discovered myself. Thanks again for being there for me.

**March. 2009.** I just watched your interview with Shawn [McCraney] on YouTube. I am 22 and was raised in Mormonism. Thankfully, my parents became skeptical a few years ago and left the church. My mom told me to "google" you — and I'm happy I did. Your research has answered many of my questions. Thank you. I'm happy to have found answers and have left the church while I am still young & unmarried.

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## ***Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon***

Robert Hullinger's book, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism*, examines the major thought patterns of the Book of Mormon in relation to Joseph Smith's personal development. Why did Smith view the American Indians as Israelites? Was he familiar with *View of the Hebrews*? What influence did Masonry have on the Book of Mormon? Was he disturbed by the religious controversies in the New England area?

Hullinger argues that Joseph Smith was responding to the critics of the Bible in his day, such as Thomas Paine. Paine, often referred to as the father of the American Revolution, became notorious for writing *The Age of Reason*, published in 1793–94, advocating deism and arguing against Christian doctrines.

Lucy Smith, Joseph's mother, wrote about the family's encounter with the writings of Thomas Paine. Shortly before Joseph Smith was born, while the Smiths were living in Tunbridge, Vermont, Lucy became interested in religion and started attending the Methodist meetings. Asael Smith, Lucy's father-in-law, disapproved and tried to convince Joseph Smith, Sr., to quit attending. Lucy wrote that Asael "came to the door one day and threw Tom Paine's age of reason into the house and angrily bade him read that until he believed it."<sup>1</sup>

Hullinger observes:

Prophecy in the Book of Mormon is a massive response to deistic objections. Smith traced prediction back to the time of Jared, including the note that prophecies from the time of Adam were on the brass plates of Laban (1 Ne 3:20) and, soon after the publication of the Book of Mormon, produced prophecies of Adam himself. . . .

No room was allowed for Paine's charge that the prophets were "liars and impostors," for Smith made the gift of prophecy depend upon merit. Prophets were identified by their genealogies, their properly recorded calls from God, their exemplary lives, and their fulfilled predictions.

Smith generally acknowledged the objections that skeptics had toward prophecy. He detailed the case against it as he saw it through the person of Korihor, the arch-villain and antichrist of the Book of Mormon. Korihor "began to preach unto the people against the prophecies which had been spoken by the prophets, concerning the coming of Christ" (Alma 30:6).<sup>2</sup>

Further on, Hullinger states:

Fulfilled prophecy was meant to inspire faith in future fulfillment. By including signs of the coming birth and death of Christ and notice of their accomplishment in the Book of Mormon, Smith pointed that reader who had been looking for such signs to those of the coming millennium. By what the Bible and Book of

Mormon describe as signs of the last days, including the discovery of the latter book, the reader was encouraged and challenged to expect the imminent wind-up of this world's affairs and the beginning of the millennium.<sup>3</sup>

In discussing Smith's view of revelation, Hullinger concludes:

In defense of God, Joseph Smith assailed the natural revelation of deism and the static revelation of traditional Christianity. To enable revealed religion to overcome natural religion, however, he supported the deistic attack upon the view that the present Bible is God's complete and errorless revelation to mankind. Destruction of the traditional view left him free to preserve special revelation by his own means.<sup>4</sup>

A free copy of this book will be sent with every order totaling \$40 or more, while supplies last. See the back page for details.

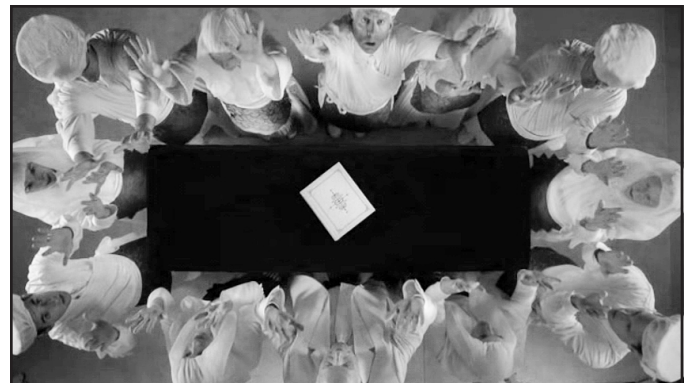


## **HBO's BIG LOVE MORMON TEMPLE SCENE**

In March of 2009, the HBO series, "Big Love," showed a re-enactment of part of the Mormon Temple ceremony. Here are two photos from the show.

To read a discussion about this episode, go to:  
<http://blog.mrm.org/category/mormon-temple/>

For more information on the Mormon temple ceremony, we recommend *Evolution of the Mormon Temple Ceremony 1842-1990* by Jerald and Sandra Tanner.



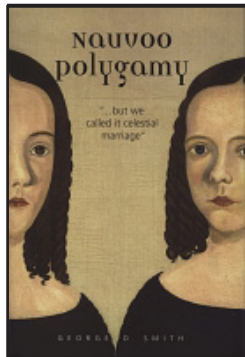
1 Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir*, Signature Books, 2001, p. 291.

2 Robert N. Hullinger, *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon*, Clayton Publishing House, 1980, p. 141.

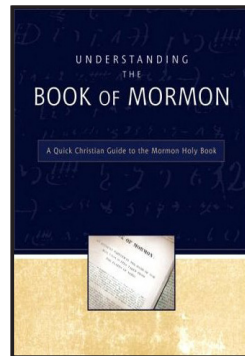
3 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

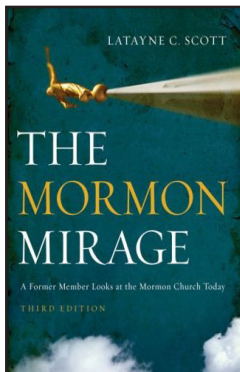
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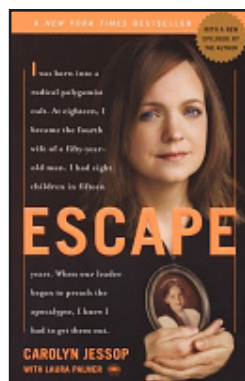
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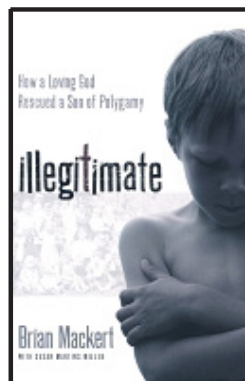
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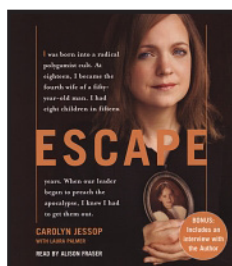
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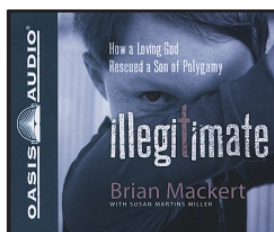
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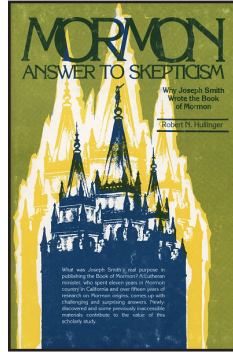
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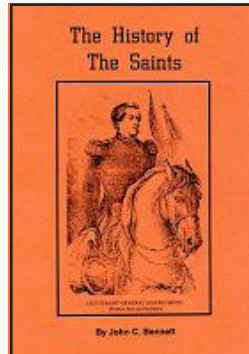


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