

LDS Leaders Still Believe There Will Be Polygamy in Heaven

By Sandra Tanner

Plural marriage was first introduced into Mormonism by Joseph Smith in the 1830's (see UTLM Topical Index: Joseph Smith: Polygamy). It is a common misconception to think of the practice of polygamy as starting with Brigham Young and the Mormon's trip west. Even though Joseph Smith had already married several women, he did not dictate his famous revelation on eternal marriage and polygamy until 1843 (*Doctrine and Covenants*, section 132). By the time he died he had been sealed to at least 33 women.¹

For the next fifty years the practice of plural marriage was considered essential to attain godhood. Brigham Young, second president of the LDS Church, declared "The only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy" (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, August 19, 1866, p. 269).

In a sermon reported in the LDS Church's *Deseret News*, August 6, 1862, Brigham Young stated:

Monogamy, or restrictions by law to one wife, is no part of the economy of heaven among men. Such a system was commenced by the founders of the Roman empire. . . . Rome became the mistress of the world, and introduced this order of monogamy wherever her sway was

¹ In a review of Todd Compton's new book on Smith's polygamy [In Sacred Loneliness] we read:

In identifying 33 well-documented wives of [Joseph] Smith—other researchers have placed the figure as high as 48—Compton found that in the case of 11 women, Smith's polygamy was polyandrous. That is, the women were married and cohabiting with their husbands, who mostly were faithful Mormons, when Smith married them.

Yet not one divorced her "first husband" when Smith was alive. Indeed, they continued to live with their civil spouses while married to Smith.

"If one superimposes a chronological perspective, one sees that of Smith's first 12 wives, nine were polyandrous. . . ."

Compton, a practicing Mormon . . . spent much of the 1990's combing pioneer records, diaries and reminiscences. . . .

Eleven of Smith's wives were between ages 14 and 20, nine were in their 20s, eight were in Smith's own peer group of 31 to 40, two were in their 40s and three in their 50s. . . .

Toward the end of Smith's life, knowledge of his secret marriages began to leak out. William Law, Smith's second counselor . . . filed suit against the church leader for living 'in an open state of adultery' with 19-year-old Maria Lawrence.

In a speech a month before his death, Smith responded by flatly denying polygamy, which was illegal under federal law. "What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one," he said. (*Salt Lake Tribune*, December 13, 1997, p. C2. See Smith's entire speech in *History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 408-412.)

acknowledged. Thus this monogamic order of marriage, so esteemed by modern Christians as a holy sacrament and divine institution, is nothing but a system established by a set of robbers. . . .

Why do we believe in and practice polygamy? Because the Lord introduced it to his servants in a revelation given to Joseph Smith, and the Lord's servants have always practiced it. "And is that religion popular in heaven?" It is the only popular religion there . . . (*Deseret News*, August 6, 1862)

With mounting pressure from the government for the Mormons to obey the laws of the land, the LDS Church abandoned the practice in 1890, although several leaders secretly took additional wives after that date (see *Salt Lake City Messenger*, no. 101, "1890 Manifesto").

Although the current Mormon leaders are very quiet about the matter of polygamy, it is still very much a part of their theology. Joseph Smith's revelation on plural marriage, *Doctrine & Covenants*, section 132, is still printed in the LDS scriptures. This leads to a certain amount of confusion as to when something is supposed to be considered doctrine. When Larry King interviewed President Hinckley in 1998 about current polygamy among the various splinter groups he responded:

I condemn it, yes, as a practice, because I think it is **not doctrinal**. It is not legal. And this church takes the position that we will abide by the law. We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, magistrates in honoring, obeying and sustaining the law. (*Larry King Live*, September 8, 1998, [http://www.lds-mormon.com/lk1_00.shtml]. For other examples of Hinckley's prevarication see [http://www.i4m.com/think/leaders/Hinckley_dontknow.htm]).

There are two problems with Hinckley's answer. First, he failed to explain why section 132 is still contained in their scriptures if it does not represent doctrine. And second, his statement that they don't practice polygamy today because it is illegal contradicts the fact that it was illegal to practice plural marriage when Joseph Smith introduced the teaching, and was the reason why Utah was denied statehood until 1896 (*Salt Lake City Messenger*, no. 97, "Plural Marriage Illegal").

While church leaders no longer allow the practice of polygamy here on Earth, they do allow a living man to be sealed to another woman after the death of his wife, or after divorce. This leads to the obvious situation of establishing multiple sealings on Earth that, according to Mormonism, will necessitate polygamy in heaven.

Writing in 1897 LDS Apostle Charles W. Penrose stated:

In the case of a man marrying a wife in the everlasting covenant who dies while he continues in the flesh and marries another by the same divine law, each wife will come forth in her order and enter with him into his glory. (Charles W. Penrose, *“Mormon” Doctrine Plain and Simple, or Leaves from the Tree of Life*, (Salt Lake City: 1897) p. 66)

This doctrine was reaffirmed in October of 2007 at the funeral for the second wife of President Howard W. Hunter, the fourteenth President of the LDS Church. The *Deseret News* reported:

President Hinckley affirmed the eternal nature of the marriage between Sister [Inis] Hunter and the former church president, whose first wife, Claire Jeffs, died after a long battle with Alzheimer’s disease and is now buried beside him in the Salt Lake Cemetery.

Inis Hunter “will now be laid to rest on the other side,” he said. **“They were sealed under the authority of the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood for time and for all eternity,”** he said, recalling the marriage ceremony he performed for them in the Salt Lake Temple in April 1990. (“Sister Hunter’s humor and cheerfulness remembered as she is laid to rest,” *Deseret News*, Oct. 22, 2007)

Another example of plural sealings is Apostle Russell M. Nelson’s marriage in 2006 to a BYU professor. The *BYU NewsNet* for April 7, 2006, announced the temple marriage of Apostle Nelson, age 81, to Wendy Watson (see [<http://newsnet.byu.edu/story.cfm/59218>]). His first wife died in February of 2005 and this was the first marriage for his new wife. This would mean, according to LDS beliefs, that Nelson has two wives sealed to him for eternity.

Joseph Fielding Smith, tenth president of the LDS Church, remarried twice after the death of his first wife, and in his book, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 2, p. 67, he remarked: “. . . **my wives will be mine in eternity.**”

Harold B. Lee, the eleventh president of the church, also remarried after his wife’s death and was sealed to another woman and was looking forward to a polygamous relationship in heaven. He, in fact, wrote a poem in which he reflected that his second wife, Joan, would join his first wife, Fern, as his eternal wives:

*My lovely Joan was sent to me: So Joan joins Fern
That three might be, more fitted for eternity.
“O Heavenly Father, my thanks to thee”
(Deseret News 1974 Church Almanac, p. 17)*

After being widowed, Apostle Dallin Oaks remarried in the temple and believes he will be married eternally to both women. In 2002 he commented on his second sealing:

When I was 66, my wife June died of cancer. Two years later—a year and a half ago—I married [in the LDS

temple] Kristen McMain, the **eternal companion** who now stands at my side. (Dallin Oaks, “Timing,” speech delivered at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, January 29, 2002, [<http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=684>])

I know that when my grandfather remarried after the death of my grandmother, the family certainly believed that the new wife, sealed to him in the temple, would be an equal wife with my grandmother in heaven. The official *LDS Church Handbook of Instruction* says:

Living Women — A living woman may be sealed to only one husband. . . .

Living Men — If a husband and wife have been sealed and the wife dies, the man may have another woman sealed to him if she is not already sealed. (*Church Handbook of Instruction*, p.72)

The church leaders realize the quagmire their doctrine of “eternal families” becomes with blended families, but don’t have any good answers. In an *Ensign* article entitled “Uniting Blended Families,” LDS leader Robert E. Wells gave this advice:

Choosing a Spouse. After a person decides to **remarry**, it may take some time to find a spouse. In my case I wrote to several friends and relatives who understood my circumstances and told them of my desires to remarry. I asked them if they knew of anyone who would be willing to consider becoming a mother to three children and a wife to a Church district president and banker in South America with many demands on his time. After receiving six recommendations, I took a vacation to the United States and ultimately felt prompted to date and eventually propose marriage to my beloved Helen.

Helen brought a two-year-old daughter into our union, and I brought my sons, ages three and six, and my nine-year-old daughter. In time, we had three daughters together, which gave us a blended family of seven children. . . . Following are some areas, along with related suggestions, that blended families may need to openly address: . . .

Sealings. Former Utah senator Jake Garn was reluctant to remarry following the death of his first wife, Hazel, in 1976, but he soon realized that he could not be both a father and a mother to his children. When he began dating Kathleen Brewerton, who would become his second wife, questions soon arose about how his first wife would feel **should he become sealed to a second wife.** The couple took their questions to President Spencer W. Kimball.

He said he did not know exactly how these relationships will be worked out, but he did know that through faithfulness all will be well and we will have much joy. Brother Garn later recalled. Kathleen told him that she was **afraid of offending Hazel.** President Kimball’s demeanor seemed to change. From being somewhat hesitant in his earlier answers, he now became sure and spoke with firmness. He looked right at Kathleen and with a tear forming in his

eye, he said, "I do know this: you have nothing to worry about. Not only **will she accept you**, she will put her arms around you and thank you for raising her children" (*Jake Garn, Why I Believe* [1992], 13).

Family members need not worry about the **sealing situation** of blended families as it might be in the next life. Our concern is to live the gospel now and to love others, especially those in our family. If we live the gospel to the best of our ability, the Lord in His love and mercy will bless us in the next life and all things will be right.

I have seen some new blended families become torn apart by worrying about who will belong to whom and who will be with whom in the next life. My mother, who is sealed to my deceased father, is married to a widower who is sealed to his first wife, who died childless. My mother and her second husband have a son, who is my brother. We are not concerned about who will be sealed to whom. We simply trust in the Lord's wisdom and love and try to live righteously. . . . (Robert E. Wells, "Uniting Blended Families," *Ensign*, Aug. 1997, p. 24)

Temple sealings are all-important to the LDS people and designate who will be joined to whom in the hereafter. These blended families raise a number of problems for the LDS concept of the eternal union of the family unit. In the case of children born to a mother in a second marriage, but where the mother was sealed to the first husband, would the children be considered part of the first temple marriage? Wouldn't this leave the second husband, the actual father, out of the picture? Assuming the second husband has gone through the temple, but not sealed to this wife, would the children stay with the second husband? Would they then be deprived of their mother, who is sealed to the first husband? The LDS Church has no answer.

It should be noted that the first seven presidents of the LDS Church practiced plural marriage. For example, my great-great grandfather Brigham Young was married to over 50 women and fathered at least 56 children. His successor was Apostle John Taylor, who had 14 wives and 36 children.²

² First Seven Presidents of the LDS Church were Polygamists:

1. Joseph Smith, President from 1830-1844, at least 33 wives, 7 children by Emma, unknown if any by plural wives.
2. Brigham Young, President from 1847-1877, over 50 wives, 56 children.
3. John Taylor, President from 1880-1887, at least 14 wives, approx. 36 children.
4. Wilford Woodruff, President from 1889-1898, at least 10 wives, approx. 34 children.
5. Lorenzo Snow, President from 1898-1901, at least 9 wives, 33 children.
6. Joseph F. Smith, President from 1901-1918, 6 wives, 43 children.
7. Heber J. Grant, President from 1918-1945, 3 wives, 12 children. According to LDS doctrine, these men will have all of their faithful wives and children with them in the resurrection, which would mean they will be living polygamy in the Celestial Kingdom.

Thus we see that the doctrine and practice of plural marriage has not been abandoned, but only delayed until the afterlife. It seems the LDS Church simply wants to keep it out of the public eye for better public relations and fear of being identified with polygamist splinter groups.

Is Polygamy Part of God's Plan for Marriage?

When God created humans He instituted His plan for marriage: one man should have one wife. In Genesis 2:18 we read: "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." Verse 22 relates the creation of Eve, again showing that there was to be just one woman for each man. Verse 24 states: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh."

The first mention of polygamy in the Bible is Genesis 4:19: "And Lamech [a descendant of Cain] took unto him two wives . . ."

If there was ever a justification for polygamy it would seem to have been needed when Adam and Eve were to populate the earth. Yet we see the pattern of just one woman and one man.

The same pattern is carried out by Noah at the time of the Ark (Genesis 7:7). Noah took his one wife into the ark. Again, if polygamy were ordained of God, why didn't He tell Noah to take additional wives to repopulate the earth faster?

God instructed Moses that the kings of Israel were to have only one wife: "Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, **that his heart turn not away.**" (Deut. 17:17)

This is exactly what happened with Solomon. We read in I Kings 11:4:

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that **his wives turned away his heart after other gods**: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.

David's heart was right with God because he did not turn to other gods, not because he practiced polygamy.

LDS will sometimes point to 2 Samuel 12:8 to prove that David's wives were approved by God. But that verse indicates that he inherited Saul's wives, not that David actually married them by God's appointment. It was the custom of the time for the succeeding ruler to receive all of the prior ruler's property and women. This is not a proof that God intends people to practice polygamy. It is contrary to the pattern of marriage established with Adam and Eve and His instructions in Deuteronomy.

Just as divorce was permitted, so too was polygamy. But it does not represent God's will. In Matt. 19:3-9 the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce and Jesus answered:

Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they **twain** [two] shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more **twain** [two], but **one** flesh.

The Pharisees then asked him why Moses allowed for divorce. Jesus answered:

Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so (Matt. 19:7).

In the New Testament the practice of polygamy would have kept a man from leadership in the church. Paul instructed Timothy: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife..." (I Tim. 3:2)

Paul also wrote to Titus: "... ordain elders in every city . . . if any be blameless, the **husband of one wife** . . ." (Titus 1:6)

Even the Book of Mormon condemns polygamy. In Jacob 2:24 we read: "Behold, David and Solomon truly had **many wives and concubines**, which thing was **abominable** before me, saith the Lord."

Mormons will sometimes appeal to Jacob 2:30, saying God could make exceptions to verse 24 and command polygamy. It says: "For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things [instruction in Jacob 2:24]."

This verse seems to indicate that the reason God would order the practice of plural wives would be to speed

up reproduction ("raise up seed"). Since Joseph Smith's polygamy did not achieve this (as there are only a couple of children suspected to be from Smith's plural wives) it would appear that Jacob 2:30 would not apply.

Also, Smith seems to have begun practicing polygamy even before his revelation, *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 132. Verse 52 instructs Smith's wife, Emma, to "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."

Mormons will sometimes argue that the date on the revelation (July 12, 1843) is only the date when the revelation was committed to paper, not when it was actually given. But verse 52 demonstrates that Smith had already taken plural wives before the revelation was given, no matter what the date. The second half of verse 52 seems to suggest that Smith had also taken some women as wives who were not virtuous.

As Christians we turn to Jesus for our view of heaven. He never taught anything about the necessity of marriage either in this life or the life to come. Also, the idea of marrying in a temple was foreign to both Jews and Christians during New Testament times. In Luke 20:34-36 we read:

And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.



Utah Lighthouse Ministry
1358 S. West Temple
Salt Lake City, UT 84115
(801) 485-8894
www.utlm.org