

# Polygamy in the Early Church

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**Description:** This class covers the practice of plural marriage in the early Church, from the 1830s to the early 1900s. Critics have called out certain practices that sound sensational on the surface and have caused anxiety and concern among some members, but there is important doctrinal, historical, and cultural information that greatly helps put the practice into proper and more understandable context. This class will cover some of that information and respond to the critics' challenges.

## Introduction

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When we think of Joseph Smith, the first images that typically come to mind are the First Vision, the translation of the Book of Mormon, the establishment of the Church, the restoration of priesthood and keys, revelations from heaven, a devoted husband and father, or perhaps Carthage Jail. But Joseph Smith was also this dispensation's first polygamist. He was involved in secret marriages unknown to his wife, Emma, was in relationships with other men's wives, teenagers, and more—details that are shocking to many and disturbing to others. Helen Mar Kimball, one of Joseph Smith's plural wives, stated, "The Prophet said that the practice of this principle [plural marriage] would be the hardest trial the Saints would ever have to test their faith."<sup>1</sup>

Those who have been disturbed by information learned about Joseph's plural marriages have many questions. To be frank, some we may never be able to answer in this life. There are almost no firsthand accounts of polygamy in Joseph Smith's lifetime—and the few we have are highly abbreviated, even written in code. The details available today come principally through late reminiscences and a series of court cases later in the 1800s that required women testify about their relationships with Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. It is through a deeper understanding of the available data that we best come to terms with polygamy in the early Church and with Joseph Smith's role in its institution.

Though I learned about the Prophet being involved in plural marriage in college, my first challenge in this regard came when some women in my stake began reading Todd Compton's 1997 book *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Compton's thorough biographies of each of the women he identified as potential plural wives of Joseph Smith was shocking to these sisters, who until reading this book, were unaware that Joseph had even practiced polygamy at all. Compton's fundamental assumption was that Joseph Smith was sexually involved with most, if not all, of these wives—perhaps a natural assumption, given how things worked later in Utah, but ultimately incorrect. Based on his book, several sisters were quite scandalized by stories of Joseph marrying women already married to others or taking young teenagers for wives—many of them behind Emma's back and without her knowledge. When asked about it, I did not have ready answers, having not dug deeply into this aspect of the Prophet's life. While I offered personal observations that Compton's assumptions might be incorrect, it would be several years before I felt confident in that assertion, thanks to the even more thorough work of Brian Hales and Don Bradley, which culminated in four volumes called *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, capturing every known source document on the topic and drawing well-supported conclusions that put the entire practice in a different light. Since then, other resources have come out, including Church history essays on the topic, other books, and other supportive works that respond to the issues raised by critics and concerned members alike.

This class clearly cannot cover all the issues to the depth that Hales' four volumes can, much less all the research of so many others. But I will summarize what I have learned from the best thinking available today and respond to common questions to the best of my ability. I am also quite comfortable saying, 'We don't have enough information to answer this to our satisfaction' where needed, because on the topic of polygamy in Nauvoo especially, there are a few of those. But as with the

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<sup>1</sup> Hales and Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Toward a Better Understanding*, x.

other topics covered this year, I'm confident that the more we dig in, the more we can still testify that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.

## Pre-Nauvoo

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Many in Utah spoke of Joseph Smith first receiving the revelation on plural marriage as early as 1831, typically in conjunction with his translation of the Bible, especially the early chapters of Genesis that speak of Abraham marrying several women. This is possible but undocumented in any contemporary documents. Even in the Bible translation, there are no changes to the texts that speak of such marriages, indicating that they may have caught the Prophet's attention at that early date.

Whenever he first learned of the principle, there is only one real potential marriage between Joseph Smith and another woman before Nauvoo, and the details are sparse, third-hand, and late. Here is what we know.

In 1833, a young woman (16-17 years old) named Fanny Alger came to live in the Smith home to work for Emma as a maid or housekeeper (something very common for young women in that day). She lived with the Smiths about three years. We have no record from Fanny, Joseph, Emma, or anyone else there at the time that provides useful details, but in 1896, Mosiah Hancock wrote that his father, Levi Hancock, was asked by Joseph Smith to approach Fanny and her family and see if they were willing. He approached her father, Samuel, first, who approved, then her mother (who was Levi's sister) who approved, then Fanny, who expressed willingness. With that, they went to Joseph and Levi performed the marriage ceremony, with Joseph telling him what to say.<sup>2</sup> The date is unknown but probably 1835-1836, when Fanny was between 18-20 years old.

Other late witnesses, including Eliza Snow, said that they knew Joseph had married Fanny in Kirtland. One source was William McLellin, an early apostle but later apostate to the Church, who claimed to have talked with Emma Smith in 1847, though he didn't write anything about it until 1872. He wrote that Emma went looking for Joseph and Fanny and saw them in the barn together. According to McLellin, "She looked through a crack and saw the transaction!!!" It is unknown what "transaction" he was referring to: the marriage ceremony, a display of affection, or something else. Whatever it was angered Emma, according to McLellin, who drove Fanny from their home. Joseph enlisted the help of Frederick Williams, Oliver Cowdery, and Sidney Rigdon, but these men condemned Joseph and sided with Emma, so Joseph repented and Emma forgave, said McLellin.<sup>3</sup>

The nearest to contemporary evidence comes from a letter from Oliver Cowdery to his brother, Warren, dated 21 Jan 1838. In a surviving copy of that letter, Oliver is recorded to have said, "A dirty, nasty, filthy scrape<sup>4</sup> of his and Fanny Alger's was talked over in which I strictly declared that I had never deviated from the truth on the matters, and as I supposed was admitted by himself."<sup>5</sup> Here Oliver is more interested in defending himself than condemning Joseph, and uses the event to illustrate that he was found innocent at that point in time. A few weeks later, when charges were brought against Oliver, he raised the issue of Fanny Alger and accused Joseph of adultery.<sup>6</sup> Though there is no record of exactly what he said, Joseph "gave a history respecting the girl business," according to the minutes, that completely satisfied all member of the high council and stake presidency in attendance.<sup>7</sup> Given that the concept of plural marriage was not yet known, it's unlikely that Joseph Smith explained his relationship to Fanny in that way—the men there would have still seen that as adultery. What we do know is that no action was taken against Joseph Smith, and Oliver Cowdery was excommunicated.

Shortly after Fanny left the Smith's home, she and her parents departed for Missouri (September 1836). Along the way, they stopped for a time in Indiana, and Fanny met a man named Solomon Custer. She stayed there and in November 1836, they

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<sup>2</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:108.

<sup>3</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:96.

<sup>4</sup> The copy has the word "scrape" as the original, which is overwritten by an unknown hand with the word "affair." Some have quoted the letter, using the overwritten word and implying an illicit sexual union, using the modern definition of "affair." But the definition in Joseph's day was simply an event with no sexual connotations; see Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:138-140.

<sup>5</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:138.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver was not present but listed it in his written response to the high council.

<sup>7</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:142.

were married. Her parents and brother continued to Missouri, Nauvoo, and Utah, strongly supporting Joseph Smith all along the way. They spoke proudly of Joseph's marriage to their daughter and never considered it anything but proper.<sup>8</sup>

## Nauvoo Plural Marriage

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There is no record of any additional activity with plural marriage from Fanny Alger to 1841. This is likely because Joseph Smith was dealing with Emma's feelings, the financial challenges in Kirtland, the move to Missouri, persecution, and prison time there, and finally getting Nauvoo established.

Many testified later that Joseph hesitated to go back down the plural marriage path after the attempt with Fanny Alger. They discussed how he postponed trying the practice again and even had his own doubts about it. He told others he feared for his life once he started practicing it. So, what would motivate him to do it? Twenty-one separate accounts talk about an angel with a drawn sword who appeared and threatened him if he did not do it. For example, Lorenzo Snow testified in 1869, "... he foresaw the trouble that would follow and sought to turn away from the commandment, [but] an angel from heaven appeared before him with a drawn sword, threatening him with destruction unless he went forward and obeyed the commandment."<sup>9</sup> One witness, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, stated that the drawn sword was on the third visit of the angel, meaning that Joseph had hesitated for many years until this final threat.

Plural marriage was shared with very few people in Nauvoo, perhaps 200-300 total. Documentation exists for 115 people being involved directly in the practice—thirty men and 85 women. It was challenge for Joseph Smith to know how to share it, because he needed to keep it quiet—he tried to restrict it to just those he felt he could deeply trust. However, in the end, he shared it with certain people who so strongly opposed him that it led to his murder at Carthage Jail in 1844. Because we have no primary records from the Prophet himself, it is from these people, the so-called 'polygamy insiders,' that we have any knowledge of what he said and did.

### Louisa Beaman, April 1841

The first known plural sealing in Nauvoo was between Joseph Smith and Louisa Beaman. Louisa died in 1850 and left no personal account, so the only known source of the story is her brother-in-law, Joseph Noble, an early convert and bodyguard of Joseph Smith. He was a bishop in Nauvoo in 1841 but living in Montrose, Iowa, in 1840 when he learned of it. In 1869, he recorded that Joseph came to him asking for help in arranging the marriage. He, his wife Mary, Louisa, and Cyrus Wheelock (a man that Joseph trusted from past experience) were present, when Joseph revealed the doctrine to them. The date is unknown but late 1840 is likely. He stated that eventually Louisa accepted the Prophet's proposal, and on 5 April 1841, he performed the sealing ceremony, per Joseph's instructions. Louisa was single so Joseph was her first (and only) husband. He later added that it happened under an elm tree in Nauvoo and that Louisa was "disguised in a coat and hat," perhaps to make it appear to be a small group of men talking, rather than a marriage ceremony.<sup>10</sup>

### Teaching the Twelve and Others

Shortly after this, Joseph Smith began teaching members of the Twelve the doctrine, as they returned from missions to England. Soon, several of them would start to take plural wives, acting under Joseph's direction. A few other men outside of the Twelve were also informed and took wives, but many Church leaders were left out at first, including both counselors in the First Presidency, Hyrum Smith, certain members of the Twelve, and many of the Seventy.

In 1854, John Taylor said in a public address:

I remember being with President Young and Kimball and I think one or two others with Brother Joseph soon after we had returned from England. He talked with us on these principles and laid them before us. It tried our minds and feelings. We saw it was something going to be heavy upon us. [I]t was not that very nice pleasing thing some people thought about it[.] It is something that harried up our feelings. Did we believe it? Yes we did. I did. The whole rest of

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<sup>8</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:118-119.

<sup>9</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:188.

<sup>10</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:230-231.

the brethren did but still we should have been glad to push it off a little further. We [would have] been glad if it did not come in our day but that somebody else had something to do with it instead of us.<sup>11</sup>

## October 1841 to June 1842

After his sealing to Louisa Beaman, Joseph was sealed to ten additional women in a little over a year. Nine of these women were currently married to other men<sup>12</sup> and one was an older widow. We'll speak of these specifically below (Polyandry) but for now just note that this was the pattern until June 1842, to be sealed to women already married. The women during this time to which Joseph was sealed are the following, listed with name, sealing date, and husband:

- Zina Huntington Jacobs (27 Oct 1841), married to Henry Jacobs
- Presendia Huntington Buell (11 Dec 1841), married to Norman Buell
- Agnes Coolbrith Smith (6 Jan 1842), widow of Joseph's brother, Don Carlos (died in 1841)
- Sylvia Sessions Lyon (late 1842 or early 1843?), married to Windsor Lyon (divorced in Nov 1842)
- Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner (Feb 1842), married to Adam Lightner
- Patty Bartlett Sessions (9 Mar 1842), married to David Sessions
- Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde (Apr 1842 or May 1843), married to Orson Hyde
- Elizabeth Davis Durfee (Jun 1842?), married to Jabez Durfee
- Sarah Kingsley Cleveland (Jun 1842?), married to John Cleveland
- Lucinda Pendleton Harris (1842?), married to George Harris

## Criticisms: Polyandry and Teenagers

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### Polyandry

One of the common concerns are Joseph Smith's marriages to women who were already married to other men. This type of polygamy is called "polyandry," meaning one woman married to two or more men. Starting with Fawn Brodie's well-known biography, *No Man Knows My History*, many authors have worked under the assumption that all of Joseph Smith's relationships including sexuality. Careful scholarship, however, shows that there is no evidence to support the notion that Joseph Smith was sexually involved with polyandrous wives or the youngest teenagers. In fact, there is strong evidence in many cases that those relationships were *not* sexual, and patterns of language and behavior to extend that same conclusion to all others of a similar nature.

One of the critical notions is that in the early Church, the notion of "sealing" was not understood in the same way as it is today. From statements of early participants, it's clear that they understood the term to encompass at least three types of relationships—this life only, this life and eternity, and eternity only.<sup>13</sup> In addition, Nauvoo sealings were considered what is sometimes called 'dynastic' in nature. This means that unlike today, where we seal families vertically, up and down the generations, they sealed people horizontally, in an attempt to build relationships across families and tie people together here on earth as well as in the next life. Their idea was that you built the kingdom of heaven here on earth by joining or sealing yourself to as many others as you could. It wasn't until later when sealings for the dead began to be performed that Church leaders stopped the practice and sealed only within families—eventually everyone is all sealed together anyway through the many relationships we have through our ancestors to each other.

The other critical concept is that many women believed in Nauvoo that the only way to be exalted was to be sealed in this life to a righteous husband. For women who were married to non-members, husbands who were less interested in the Church or unworthy, or were in a marriage that brought them unhappiness—and who had no framework that marriage relationships

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<sup>11</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Sylvia Sessions Lyon is potentially one exception, discussed below.

<sup>13</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:413-414. Hales notes that eternity-only sealings were only performed in the Nauvoo and early Utah periods of Church history.

could be resolved after this life—that meant they either had to spend eternity with a man they didn’t like or had to miss out on exaltation.

This helps us see why people engaged in something Brian Hales calls “ceremonial polyandry” which is very different from “sexual polyandry.”<sup>14</sup> Ceremonial polyandry means that women could be sealed for *eternity only* to Joseph Smith (or others) but have no sexual or other relationship with them in mortality and continue to live with and have children with their husbands, to whom they were married for this life only.

For example, for many years, most considered that Sylvia Sessions Lyon’s daughter, Josephine, born 8 Feb 1844, to be a likely child of Joseph Smith. Not only does the timing make it possible, but Josephine stated that her mother Sylvia, on her death bed, told Josephine that she was Joseph Smith’s daughter. However, recent DNA testing has demonstrated conclusively that Josephine was the daughter of Windsor Lyon, Sylvia’s husband at the time. This supports the notion that Joseph was not sexually engaged with Sylvia but was sealed to her for eternity only. It was also discovered that Sylvia made this same statement to her younger daughter who was born many years after Joseph Smith’s death and was the daughter of Ezekiel Clark. What Sylvia seemed to be saying is that because she was sealed to Joseph Smith, she believed that made her daughter’s belong to Joseph Smith as well.<sup>15</sup>

### Teenage Wives

Historical records show that Joseph Smith was sealed to ten women of less than twenty years of age:

- Helen Mar Kimball – 14
- Nancy M. Winchester – 14?
- Flora Ann Woodworth – 16
- Sarah Ann Whitney – 17
- Sarah Lawrence – 17
- Lucy Walker – 17
- Fanny Alger – 19?
- Emily Dow Partridge – 19
- Maria Lawrence – 19
- Malissa Lot – 19

Several factors need to be taken into account to better understand these sealings to younger women. First, it was very common for women to marry in their teenage years at that time, and for there to be a substantial age difference between the man and the woman. Most states had laws specifying the age of consent for young women was age ten.<sup>16</sup> Three examples in Joseph Smith’s own life include Emma’s brother, Jesse Hale, who was twenty-three when he married Mary McKune, she being fifteen. Martin Harris, at age twenty-four, married his first cousin, Lucy Harris, when she was fifteen. And Thomas Ford, governor of Illinois when the Prophet was killed, was twenty-eight when he married his fifteen-year-old wife, Frances Hambaugh.<sup>17</sup> So especially for the sixteen to nineteen-year-olds, this would not be considered particularly unusual. But even in that day, someone Joseph’s age (mid-30s) marrying a fourteen-year-old might have raised eyebrows. A closer look at these sealings helps us better understand the situations of these two—and others in the list.

Remember the concept of “ceremonial polyandry” or “dynastic sealing” discussed above. This also helps explain why Joseph Smith would be sealed to young teenage girls and not be sexually active with them. Many of these marriages were performed

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<sup>14</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 1:308-309.

<sup>15</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 69; Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 349-376 discusses this case extensively, working from the assumption that Josephine was indeed Joseph Smith’s physical daughter, examining timelines and relationships to try and demonstrate that sexual relations at this time would not have constituted polyandry because Sylvia was likely divorced in the later Nauvoo years. But more recent research is captured on the website, <http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/common-questions/plural-marriages-sexual/#NoChildrenfromPluralWives> and <http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/plural-wives-overview/sylvia-sessions/>, from which the information above is taken.

<sup>16</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 2:290.

<sup>17</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 70.

to establish a dynastic sealing relationship between Joseph and other members in Nauvoo. Both of the fourteen-year-old sealings are good examples of this, but especially the youngest one.

The sealing of Joseph to Nancy Wincester is poorly documented—little more than that fact that they were sealed. From what little we have, it appears to be dynastic and non-sexual in nature.

Helen Mar Kimball is a different story in terms of details available. That sealing was initiated not by Joseph Smith but by her father, Heber C. Kimball, with Helen's consent. She told the story of how her father first broached the subject to which she strenuously objected. But he carefully explained it to her and gave her time to think and ponder. Then Joseph Smith came to their house and also taught it to her with her parents present. She said that she embraced the notion based on their testimonies but later (1848) gained a personal witness from a "vision of my mind" that helped her see it was the will of God. She stated, "The beauty & the glory which I saw in it was enough to make up for the trials in this life."<sup>18</sup>

Later in life, she remembered Joseph Smith teaching that if she would do this, "it will ensure your eternal salvation and exaltation and that of your father's household and all of your kindred." Based on that promise, she "willingly gave myself to purchase so glorious a reward."<sup>19</sup> Many critics have used this statement to say that Joseph Smith promised exaltation to coerce young girls to marry him. But this teaching not only feels out of place with general gospel principles today, in fact, Helen indicated that she likely remembered it wrong or misunderstood it. Contemporary letters and other writings from her own parents show that was not how they understood it, and Helen's many statements about it throughout her life demonstrate that she did not accept that concept as true. All her words except this one statement expressed the continued need for righteousness as required for exaltation.<sup>20</sup>

The question remains, was the sealing with Helen Mar Kimball and Joseph Smith sexual in nature? There is strong evidence that the answer is no. Helen herself referred to the sealing as for "eternity alone," meaning that she and Joseph did not live as husband and wife in this life.<sup>21</sup> Most significantly, in the 1892 Temple Lot trial, where the Church of Christ (Temple Lot) or the Hendrickites, and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints were contending for the temple lot in Missouri, the Church of Christ used polygamy as a test to prove that the Reorganized Church (now called the Community of Christ) did not fully embrace Joseph Smith's teachings, thereby discrediting their claim to the lot.<sup>22</sup> To achieve this, they deposed the wives of Joseph Smith they could find *and* who had been his wife sexually, to substantiate that it was more than a spiritual concept. Despite living in Salt Lake City (the location of the depositions) and being readily available, and despite being an outspoken advocate for and a published author on the subject of plural marriage, Helen was not called to testify. This strongly suggests that she had not been sexual with Joseph Smith from her sealing in May 1843 to the time of his death and that their sealing was dynastic only, to bind the Smith and Kimball families together.<sup>23</sup>

Though the evidence is not conclusive, the next youngest woman, Flora Ann Woodruff's sealing appears also to be a dynastic, eternity only sealing.<sup>24</sup> Sarah Ann Whitney may have been dynastic as well, though the scant evidence is not conclusive. With the remaining 17-19 year-olds, there is evidence of at least marriage consummation, though not continued activity: none of them were pregnant during this time and encounters with Joseph appear to be rare.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:25-26.

<sup>19</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:27.

<sup>20</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 3:198-201.

<sup>21</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 3:202.

<sup>22</sup> Ironically, the Church of Christ did not believe in plural marriage either but such as the actions of attorneys seeking to prove their case.

<sup>23</sup> Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:28-29.

<sup>24</sup> Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 390.

<sup>25</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 103-104; FairMormon, "Joseph Smith's marriages to young women," [https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Joseph\\_Smith/Polygamy/Marriages\\_to\\_young\\_women#Question:\\_Why\\_was\\_Joseph\\_Smith\\_sealed\\_to\\_young\\_women.3F](https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Joseph_Smith/Polygamy/Marriages_to_young_women#Question:_Why_was_Joseph_Smith_sealed_to_young_women.3F).

## Emma Smith

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Emma's role in polygamy is complicated and completely lacking in first-person accounts—she just didn't talk about it. In fact, later in life, Emma denied that Joseph Smith even practiced polygamy. Her sons realized that she was not being truthful on this issue when they went to Utah and California and visited their relatives and other Church members there, met with Joseph Smith's wives or read affidavits from them, and found out for themselves what had been going on.

### Not telling Emma

After the incident with Fanny Alger, which Emma treated with contempt, Joseph Smith appears not to have discussed plural marriage with Emma until he had already been sealed to a number of women. This seeming deception has troubled some, who wonder why Joseph would hide his activities from his wife. We wish we had Joseph's journal or something to help explain his actions and decisions, but second-hand accounts give us something to work with.

It's unknown exactly what date Joseph told Emma about his plural marriage activities. Perhaps he revealed it to her in stages, such as telling her first about the doctrine of eternal marriage for couples, then about his eternity-only sealings to other women. One sister remembered Emma telling her that at that time, Joseph's wives "were only sealed for eternity they were not to live with them and have children."<sup>26</sup> This mostly reflects Joseph's activities through the end of 1842. What we know for sure is that she knew the full doctrine by May 1843. It was in this month that Emma gave four women to Joseph Smith to be his wives: Eliza and Emily Partridge and Mariah and Sarah Lawrence. According to Emily Partridge, she and her sister Eliza were sealed to Joseph in March 1843. Two months later (May 1843), Emma agreed to give her husband two additional wives if she could choose them. She selected the Partridge sisters, who were living in the Smith's home at the time. She said that "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." Emily added that shortly after this, Emma gave Sarah and Maria Lawrence to Joseph, and they also lived in the same house. Other witnesses corroborated this account.<sup>27</sup> All recognize these marriages as for time and eternity.

It was only a few days later, on 23 May 1843, that Emma and Joseph were sealed together for time and all eternity. That same day, she was admitted into the prayer circle which had only been men before, and in a few weeks would be the first woman endowed, so that she could give that same endowment to other women.<sup>28</sup>

Why did Joseph not tell Emma sooner? We can't know for sure but there are some likely reasons. First, Emma had reacted so strongly to Fanny Alger that Joseph had to be reluctant to tell her about more. Second, Joseph may have waited until he thought Emma would accept plural marriage, leading her to that point in stages, as suggested above. In 1892, Lorenzo Snow commented that if a revelation was presented to people, "it would be a law to them, and be binding upon them . . . but I do not think it would be binding upon any other part of the church other than that which had knowledge of its existence." In other words, as long as Emma was not taught the doctrine, she could not be held accountable for disobeying it.<sup>29</sup> The language of D&C 132 indicates that Emma's accountability was high once she knew of it, so out of concern for her welfare, Joseph may have delayed telling her.

From our vantage point, Joseph's delay in telling Emma seems like a huge blunder. Later Church policy required explicit permission from the first wife for any other marriages. But we have to acknowledge that Emma's position was unique. Other couples could put their faith in the doctrine because it came from a man they believed to be a prophet. While Emma clearly supported Joseph's prophetic calling, it was also her husband that was delivering the message, and she knew his weaknesses and challenges like no other.

Joseph's behavior of hiding his activities from Emma can trouble members of the Church today as well, which is understandable. Just as accepting Joseph Smith as God's prophet requires faith, so accepting that he was doing his best to

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<sup>26</sup> Lucy Meserve Smith note, quoted in Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 75.

<sup>27</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 76.

<sup>28</sup> Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 142-143.

<sup>29</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 76-77.



implement this command of the Lord requires faith. For those lacking faith, “seeing his conduct as justified and righteous . . . may not be possible.”<sup>30</sup>

## Reversal, Rejection, and Compromise

Emma’s agreement to support plural marriage apparently did not last long. Emily Partridge testified later that she and her sister each got one night with Joseph, then Emma was too bitter and “she never allowed us to live with him.”<sup>31</sup> Emma’s opposition continued to grow until 12 July 1843, when Hyrum Smith told Joseph to write a revelation for him to give to Emma, which he was sure would convince her. William Clayton recorded the event. He wrote that he wrote the revelation as Joseph Smith dictated it (which later became D&C 132), then Hyrum took it to Emma, but Emma was angry and said “she did not believe a word of it.” Clayton commented that she “appeared very rebellious.” Later, he told more details, including a comment from Joseph that he didn’t think a revelation would help because Hyrum didn’t know Emma like he did. But Hyrum went anyway and when he returned, stated that “he had never received a more severe talking to in his life.” Joseph replied, “I told you, you did not know Emma as well as I did.”<sup>32</sup>

The result of Hyrum’s efforts included Emma making two demands: any additional plural marriages had to be with her permission, and Joseph needed to provide means for Emma to support herself independent of him. After this time, only two more women were sealed to Joseph—one for eternity only and one for time and eternity with Emma’s permission. With the second demand, Joseph deeded property over to Emma immediately, including several city lots in Nauvoo and even his share of the steamboat *Maid of Iowa*.

The compromise seems to have done the trick. After his final two sealings, Joseph took on no more plural wives and seems to have even turned his attention away from the existing ones—everyone but Emma left the home—to live monogamously with Emma during the last eight months of his life. By all accounts, they were close and happy in their relationship during this time, with Emma becoming pregnant in early 1844.

The truce they reached, however, did not put a stop to Emma’s opposition. The last meeting of the Relief Society in 1842 was on 2 April, then there were no meetings until 16 June 1843. Many factors may have been involved but Emma’s struggles with plural marriage was surely one of them, since she was the president of the Society. The first meeting in 1843 was conducted in her absence as she and Joseph were traveling with their family. In July, with Emma still not participating, the Society split into four wards to match the political boundaries of the city and to allow more women to participate, as there was no room in the city large enough to hold all the sisters at once. Emma was not present for any other meetings in 1843. The first meeting in 1844, held on 9 March, was the first she had attended in nearly two years. The substance of this meeting was repeated with the other wards over the next week. In the meetings, Emma presented a document that Joseph had asked W. W. Phelps to write, entitled “A Voice of Innocence from Nauvoo.” The document was designed to counter slanderous statements about the Church in general and Hyrum Smith specifically, in regards to rumors of ‘spiritual wifery,’ a reference to John C. Bennett’s perversions. But Emma modified it and used it with the Relief Society to emphasize support for Joseph’s public teachings condemning spiritual wifery (and anything like it), and thus imply that the sisters should not heed his private teachings about plural marriage.<sup>33</sup> In other words, leveraging her own authority, given her by Joseph Smith, she used Joseph’s own public teachings, denials of polygamy in Nauvoo, and his own “Voice of Innocence” to “give every woman present a valid reason for avoiding plural marriage,” the very thing her husband was teaching privately.<sup>34</sup> That was the last meeting of the Relief Society in Nauvoo, though Emma’s opposition to polygamy continued until and even after Joseph Smith’s death in June 1844, as she combatted it both publicly and privately.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 77.

<sup>31</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 78.

<sup>32</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 78-79.

<sup>33</sup> Jill Derr, et al, *The First Fifty Years*, 126-131, 151-156; JSP: J3, xix-xx.

<sup>34</sup> Newel and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 174-175.

<sup>35</sup> Hales and Hales, *Better Understanding*, 87-88.



## Emma's Later Denials

Later in her life, Emma Smith was asked many times about Joseph's involvement with polygamy. She consistently denied that it had ever happened. This was likely the best way for her to cope with her sadness and anger over it. Her efforts included teaching her sons that their father had not practiced polygamy. When these sons, as leaders of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, went to Utah to visit their 'cousins,' they were presented with affidavits and personal testimony establishing that Joseph Smith had not only practiced polygamy but had treated many of the women like full wives, meaning their marriages included sexual relations. The sons appear to have been convinced, though publicly it remained the position of the Reorganized Church that Joseph had not engaged in the practice.

## After Joseph's death

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Plural marriage was a significant issue in the opposition that began against Joseph and the Church in 1844 in Nauvoo. Led by William and Wilson Law, Charles and Robert Foster, and Chauncy and Francis Higbee, who saw Joseph as an immoral dictator, they started a newspaper called the *Nauvoo Expositor*. The paper only printed one edition. In it, the dissenters declared that "the religion of the Latter Day Saints, as originally taught by Joseph Smith . . . is verily true." It declared that its precepts are "invigorating" and "dignify and ennoble man's conceptions of God." However, they also declared that many doctrines, "taught secretly, and denied openly" were "heretical and damnable in their influence, though they find many devotees." They declared it their role to "explode the vicious principles of Joseph Smith, and those who practice the same abominations and whoredoms." They claimed to have sought a private reformation, but "our petitions were treated with contempt," especially by Joseph, who said that if he had sinned, "he would not make acknowledgement, but would rather be damned." And what is his great crime? To teach that "God Almighty has revealed it to him, that she [a convert sister] should be his (Joseph's) Spiritual wife; for it was right anciently, and God will tolerate it again." They claimed such women were forced into this "wretched and miserable condition," creating a "wretchedness of females in this place [Nauvoo]." They also challenged the Prophet's political power over the city, that he taught the false "doctrine of *many Gods*" and "established an inquisition" to root out heretics. They were specific, saying that "Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and many other official characters" taught "the plurality of wives, for time and eternity" and other doctrines and practices they deemed unworthy of the gospel of Christ. They called on all those preaching "the doctrine of other Gods above the God of this creation; [and] the plurality of wives" to cease preaching such things.

To solidify the testimony, William Law, former counselor in the First Presidency, included an affidavit saying that "Hyrum Smith did, (in his office,) read to me a certain written document, which he said was a revelation from God, he said that he was with Joseph when it was received. He afterwards gave me the document to read, and I took it to my house, and read it, and showed it to my wife, and returned it the next day. The revelation (so called) authorized certain men to have more wives than one at a time, in this world and in the world to come. It said this was the *law*, and commanded Joseph to enter into the *law*.— And also that he should administer to others." Others supported that affidavit, including Robert Foster, Jane Law, and Austin Cowles (a member of the stake presidency, who also testified that Hyrum had read the document, saying that it taught "the doctrine of a plurality of wives, or marrying virgins").

It was this printing that caused the city council to call the *Expositor* a nuisance and order the press and type destroyed, and it was that act for which Joseph was brought to Carthage for trial, which never happened because the defendant was murdered.

After Joseph Smith's death on 27 June 1844, Brigham and the Twelve took charge of the Church and stated that Joseph had instructed them to care for his plural wives. Those who didn't have husbands already were offered plural marriage to someone in the Twelve or another Church leader (see table below). Some of these sealings were for time only, some for eternity only, and some for both. Three died before leaving Nauvoo. Some married outside the Church after Joseph's death.

One, Sarah Lawrence, though initially married to Heber C. Kimball, left him for California gold miner and later denied ever having been married to Joseph Smith.<sup>36</sup>

Many were also sealed to Joseph Smith again in proxy sealings, once the Nauvoo temple was completed. In many cases, their current husbands acted as proxy for Joseph in the ceremony. Several of Joseph's wives stayed close friends as they migrated to Utah, often getting together in later years. They supported each other and remembered the day of their shared widowhood, when Joseph was killed.

## Manifesto<sup>37</sup>

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Once the Saints arrived in Utah, and thus out of the United States and in a more secluded environment, the practice of plural marriage began to be more openly discussed. On 29 August 1852, Brigham Young had Orson Pratt publicly announce the practice to the world. One attendee wrote, "the revelation on plurality of wives was read to the Conference the house was filled to overflowing."<sup>38</sup> The 1843 revelation on eternal marriage and plural marriage was read to the conference, the first time it had been publicly read, and was subsequently published.

Opposition to the announcement was swift and loud from all parts of the United States. But other national issues, predominantly the Civil War, kept the country from taking much action, other than an 1862 measure, the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Bill, to make polygamy illegal in all states. The bill was not enforced for many years. Many Americans conflated Mormonism with Islam and especially Turks, known for their harems and abuse of young women. The image in many minds was that of the legendary Bluebeard who married many women, murdering them and hiding them in a locked room in his castle, until one wife discovered his great secret and was able to escape, her brothers killing the evil man. The phrase "Mormon Bluebeard" was common in public discourse, with many imagining great crimes committed against women in this secret theocracy in the west.<sup>39</sup>

Church members viewed their right to practice plural marriage as tied to their rights to freedom of religion. The Church sent George Reynolds as a test case in 1879 to see if their constitutional argument would hold sway. In the US Supreme Court case, *Reynolds v. United States*, Reynolds and the Church lost, meaning the Saints' position had proved to be unacceptable in the United States—polygamy was against the law, regardless of the reason for practicing it. Church members determined to ignore the ruling and follow their consciences. As a result, increasingly punishing legislation began to be passed and enforced, starting with the Edmunds Act in 1882 that made cohabitation punishable by imprisonment and fine. As a result, many men began to be arrested and put in prison, considering themselves to be martyrs for the faith. In 1887, Congress went after not just the men but the Church itself with the Edmunds-Tucker Act. It dissolved the corporation of the Church and allowed the government to confiscate all Church property valued at greater than \$50,000. This included the temples, Church offices, and other structures.<sup>40</sup> Men went into hiding in remote locations and others escaped to Canada and Mexico. Those who were arrested readily pled guilty and were imprisoned. Women and children were dramatically impacted as well, with families going into hiding or splitting up so they couldn't be identified with their husbands and fathers. With Church leadership either imprisoned or in hiding and the government beginning to seize Church property, the continued acts of civil disobedience looked like it would only end with the destruction of the Church.

Plural marriage was greatly scaled back during this time. Men were requested to only live with one wife and the doctrine was not taught in any public setting. In 1889, leaders prohibited any new plural marriages in Utah. When a challenge to the legality of the Edmunds-Tucker Act failed in May 1890, Church leaders knew there was nothing else to be done. Wilford Woodruff, the president of the Church, prayed to know what was to be done. He had held the course to this point, determined to support the rights of the Church to exercise religious liberty. As he prayed, he said, "The Lord showed me by vision and revelation

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<sup>36</sup> Hales, "Joseph Smith's Plural Wives after the Martyrdom."

<sup>37</sup> Most of the information in this section comes from the Church essay, "The Manifesto and the End of Plural Marriage."

<sup>38</sup> Ulrich, *House Full of Females*, 240.

<sup>39</sup> Reeve, *Religious of a Different Color*, "Oriental, White, and Mormon."

<sup>40</sup> Though amazingly, two temples were dedicated during this challenging time: Logan in 1884 and Manti in 1888.

exactly what would take place if we did not stop this practice.” He saw that the Church would lose its temples and that the Church as an institution would be destroyed. On 25 September 1890, he wrote a proclamation that today we call the Manifesto. The document declared the Church’s intent to comply with the law. The Manifesto was presented to the Church in the October 1890 General Conference by Orson F. Whitney, a bishop in Salt Lake City at the time, and Lorenzo Snow, president of the Quorum of the Twelve, called for a vote. All hands were in favor, though observers noted that some abstained.

Many reacted with great relief, seeing the Manifesto as the way to save the Church and even rid them of a practice they had grown to dislike. Others saw it as a capitulation to illegal government actions, including some members of the Quorum of the Twelve. After living plural marriage opening for nearly forty years, many could not remember living without it. Others assumed this was a short-term change and that polygamy would return at some future time. Church leaders, including Wilford Woodruff, actively toured cities, speaking in favor of the Manifesto and working to show the hand of the Lord in it. In 1893, U.S. President Benjamin Harrison granted a general amnesty to polygamists, allowing them to come out of hiding and families to be reunited. In 1896, Utah became a state with a constitution that outlawed polygamy.

## Post-Manifesto plural marriage

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The Manifesto’s declarations didn’t dissolve all the plural marriages already in existence. Some did end their marriages and go on to other relationships, but many determined to stay true to their covenants, support their spouses and children as they felt obligated to do, and remain married polygamously until they died. Thus it took many years before there were no more polygamous families in the Church—into the 1930s and beyond.

Between 1890 and 1904, there were a few additional plural marriages contracted. Since local Church leaders felt the Manifesto only applied to the government of the United States, most post-Manifesto plural marriages were performed in Mexico but there were a handful in the United States as well.<sup>41</sup> It’s not clear if these were authorized by the president of the Church. However, when these were brought out by the press, it caused a challenge and embarrassment for Church leaders. In April 1904, at General Conference, Joseph F. Smith, president of the Church, issued what has come to be known as the Second Manifesto, stating that all attempts to practice polygamy were without prophetic authorization and were to be considered sinful, with participants subject to excommunication.<sup>42</sup> This statement was sustained unanimously by the Conference.

One apostle, John W. Taylor, continued to perform plural marriages after 1904. He was excommunicated but his efforts led to a movement of continued polygamy among certain members, which became the fundamentalist movement from which current practitioners of polygamy stem.

## Conclusion

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The Church’s essay, “Plural Marriage and Families in Early Utah,” best summarizes this topic:

Latter-day Saints do not understand all of God’s purposes for instituting, through His prophets, the practice of plural marriage during the 19th century. The Book of Mormon identifies one reason for God to command it: to increase the number of children born in the gospel covenant in order to “raise up seed unto [the Lord]” (Jacob 2:30). Plural marriage did result in the birth of large numbers of children within faithful Latter-day Saint homes.<sup>43</sup> It also shaped 19th-century Mormon society in other ways: marriage became available to virtually all who desired it; per-capita inequality of wealth was diminished as economically disadvantaged women married into more financially stable

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<sup>41</sup> One calculation determined there were 18 in Mexico, 3 in Arizona, 2 in Utah, 1 in Colorado, and 1 in a boat on the Pacific Ocean.

<sup>42</sup> Brian C. and Laura Harris Hales, “The Practice of Polygamy,” in Hales, *A Reason for Faith*.

<sup>43</sup> Studies have shown that monogamous women bore more children per wife than did polygamous wives except the first. Fertility at the societal level, however, was enhanced because of the near universality of marriage among women and the abundant opportunities for remarriage among previously married women of childbearing age. L. L. Bean and G. P. Mineau, “The Polygyny–Fertility Hypothesis: A Re-evaluation,” *Population Studies* 40 (1986): 67–81; Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, *Polygamy: A Cross Cultural Analysis* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2008), 62–63.

households;<sup>44</sup> and ethnic intermarriages were increased, which helped to unite a diverse immigrant population.<sup>45</sup> Plural marriage also helped create and strengthen a sense of cohesion and group identification among Latter-day Saints. Church members came to see themselves as a “peculiar people,” (1 Peter 2:9) covenant-bound to carry out the commands of God despite outside opposition, willing to endure ostracism for their principles.<sup>46</sup>

For these early Latter-day Saints, plural marriage was a religious principle that required personal sacrifice. Accounts left by men and women who practiced plural marriage attest to the challenges and difficulties they experienced, such as financial difficulty, interpersonal strife, and some wives’ longing for the sustained companionship of their husbands.<sup>47</sup> But accounts also record the love and joy many found within their families. They believed it was a commandment of God at that time and that obedience would bring great blessings to them and their posterity, both on earth and in the life to come. While there was much love, tenderness, and affection within many plural marriages, the practice was generally based more on religious belief than on romantic love.<sup>48</sup> Church leaders taught that participants in plural marriages should seek to develop a generous spirit of unselfishness and the pure love of Christ for everyone involved.

During the years that plural marriage was publicly taught, all Latter-day Saints were expected to accept the principle as a revelation from God.<sup>49</sup> Not all, however, were expected to live it. Indeed, this system of marriage could not have been universal due to the ratio of men to women.<sup>50</sup> Church leaders viewed plural marriage as a command to the Church generally, while recognizing that individuals who did not enter the practice could still stand approved of God.<sup>51</sup> Women were free to choose their spouses, whether to enter into a polygamous or monogamous union, or whether to marry at all.<sup>52</sup> Some men entered plural marriage because they were asked to do so by Church leaders, while others initiated the process themselves; all were required to obtain the approval of Church leaders before entering a plural marriage.<sup>53</sup>

The passage of time shaped the experience of life within plural marriage. Virtually all of those practicing it in the earliest years had to overcome their own prejudice against plural marriage and adjust to life in polygamous families. The task of pioneering a semiarid land during the middle decades of the 19th century added to the challenges of

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<sup>44</sup> Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 130–133.

<sup>45</sup> Kathryn M. Daynes, “Forging Mormon Society: Polygamy and Assimilation,” (Presentation at the Western Historical Association, Fort Worth, TX, Oct. 10, 2003).

<sup>46</sup> See Jacob 1:8; and Acts 5:41. Studies of the 19th-century Mormon image in the United States have found the Mormons were most closely associated with plural marriage. Jan Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 51–97.

<sup>47</sup> For an exploration of some of these difficulties, see Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> For one example of the feelings that existed between husband and wives, see Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 305, 329–30.

<sup>49</sup> Plural marriage was first introduced privately to a small group of Church members, which expanded over time. Church leaders publicly announced the practice in 1852.

<sup>50</sup> Recent calculations using a 3 percent growth rate and an average five-year age interval between husbands and wives at first marriage (reasonable estimates for the 19th-century Mormon population) indicate that the upper limit of sustainable polygamy in a stable society is 16 percent of husbands and 28 percent of wives. Davis Bitton and Val Lambson, “Demographic Limits of Nineteenth-Century Mormon Polygyny” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 11–15.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, the comments of George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses*, 22:124–25, 23:278.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Emmeline B. Wells, Ellen B. Ferguson, Emily S. Richards, and Joseph M. West, letter to the Honorable Committee of the Senate on Education and Labor, May 12, 1886, quoted in Daynes, *Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System*, 61. They testified, “No Mormon woman, old or young, is compelled to marry at all, still less to enter into polygamy.” In addition, Brigham Young stated: “When your daughters have grown up, and wish to marry let them have their choice in a husband. ... Take this or that man if you want them my girls, ... you shall have your own agency in the matter even as I want mine.” Brigham Young Sermon, Apr. 16, 1854, Brigham Young Office Files, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Lowell C. Bennion, “Mapping the Extent of Plural Marriage in St. George, 1861–1880,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 34–49; and Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 75–81.

families who were learning to practice the principle of plural marriage. Where the family lived—whether in Salt Lake City, with its multiple social and cultural opportunities, or the rural hinterlands, where such opportunities were fewer in number—made a difference in how plural marriage was experienced. It is therefore difficult to accurately generalize about the experience of all plural marriages.

Still, some patterns are discernible, and they correct some myths. Although some leaders had large polygamous families, two-thirds of polygamist men had only two wives at a time.<sup>54</sup> Church leaders recognized that plural marriages could be particularly difficult for women. Divorce was therefore available to women who were unhappy in their marriages; remarriage was also readily available.<sup>55</sup> Women did marry at fairly young ages in the first decade of Utah settlement (age 16 or 17 or, infrequently, younger), which was typical of women living in frontier areas at the time.<sup>56</sup> As in other places, women married at older ages as the society matured. Almost all women married, and so did a large percentage of men. In fact, it appears that a larger percentage of men in Utah married than elsewhere in the United States at the time. Probably half of those living in Utah Territory in 1857 experienced life in a polygamous family as a husband, wife, or child at some time during their lives.<sup>57</sup> By 1870, 25 to 30 percent of the population lived in polygamous households, and it appears that the percentage continued to decrease over the next 20 years.<sup>58</sup> . . .

For many who practiced it, plural marriage was a significant sacrifice. Despite the hardships some experienced, the faithfulness of those who practiced plural marriage continues to benefit the Church in innumerable ways. Through the lineage of these 19th-century Saints have come many Latter-day Saints who have been faithful to their gospel covenants as righteous mothers and fathers, loyal disciples of Jesus Christ, and devoted Church members, leaders, and missionaries. Although members of the contemporary Church are forbidden to practice plural marriage, modern Latter-day Saints honor and respect these pioneers who gave so much for their faith, families, and community.

Table 1: Joseph Smith's Plural Wives<sup>59</sup>

| Name          | Date Sealed to JS | Age at Sealing | Husband before/at time | Later Husbands | Death Year/Location |
|---------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Fanny Alger   | 1835 or 1836      | 19?            | --                     | Solomon Custer | 1889/Indiana        |
| Louisa Beaman | 5 Apr 1841        | 26             | --                     | Brigham Young  | 1850/Utah           |

<sup>54</sup> These figures are based on two different studies using different sources. Stanley S. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," *Western Humanities Review* 10, no. 3 (Summer 1956): 233; and Daynes, *Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System*, 130. Brigham Young's large family was definitely atypical. See Dean C. Jessee, "'A Man of God and a Good Kind Father': Brigham Young at Home," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 2 (2001): 23–53.

<sup>55</sup> Brigham Young to William H. Dame, Aug. 8, 1867, Brigham Young Letterbook, vol. 10, p. 340, Brigham Young Office Files, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; Daynes, *Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System*, 141–70. In general, women in Utah Territory could obtain a divorce more easily than in most other places in the United States at the time. One of Brigham Young's clerks explained: "As a rule, the Prest. [Brigham Young] never refuses a bill [of divorcement] on the application of a wife, and NEVER when she INSISTS on it." Quoted in Embury, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, 253.

<sup>56</sup> Daynes, *Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System*, 107; Cynthia Culver Prescott, "'Why Didn't She Marry Him': Love, Power and Marital Choice on the Far Western Frontier," *Western Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 25–45; Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats, *Washington County, [Oregon,] Politics and Community in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 121.

<sup>57</sup> Lowell C. Bennion and others, *Polygamy in Lorenzo Snow's Brigham City: An Architectural Tour* (Salt Lake City: Western Regional Architecture Program, University of Utah, 2005), 26; Marie Cornwall, Camela Courtright, and Laga Van Beek, "How Common the Principle? Women as Plural Wives in 1860," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26 (Summer 1993): 149; Daynes, *More Wives Than One*, 101.

<sup>58</sup> Lowell C. Bennion, "Plural Marriage, 1841–1904," in Brandon S. Plewe, ed., *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2013), 122–25; Lowell C. Bennion, "The Incidence of Mormon Polygamy in 1880: 'Dixie' versus Davis Stake," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 17, 31.

<sup>59</sup> Compiled from Hales, "Biographies of Joseph's Plural Wives" (<http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/plural-wives-overview/>); Hales, "Joseph Smith's Plural Wives after the Martyrdom" (<http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Joseph-Smith's-Plural-Wives-after-the-Martyrdom.pdf>); Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 5–9.

| Name                    | Date Sealed to JS                   | Age at Sealing | Husband before/at time                | Later Husbands                     | Death Year/Location |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Zina Diantha Huntington | 27 Oct 1841                         | 20             | Henry Jacobs                          | Brigham Young                      | 1901/Utah           |
| Presendia Huntington    | 11 Dec 1841                         | 31             | Norman Buell                          | Heber C. Kimball                   | 1892/Utah           |
| Ages Moulton Coolbrith  | 6 Jan 1842                          | 33             | Don Carlos Smith (died 7 Aug 1841)    | George A. Smith<br>William Pickett | 1876/California     |
| Sylvia Sessions         | Between 19 Nov 1842 and 18 May 1843 | 24             | Windsor Lyon                          | Heber C. Kimball<br>Ezekiel Clark  | 1882/Utah           |
| Mary Elizabeth Rollins  | Feb 1842                            | 23             | Adam Lightner                         | --                                 | 1913/Utah           |
| Patty Barelett          | 9 Mar 1842                          | 47             | David Sessions                        | John Parry                         | 1892/Utah           |
| Marinda Nancy Johnson   | Either Apr 1842 or May 1843         | 26 or 27       | Orson Hyde                            | --                                 | 1886/Utah           |
| Elizabeth Davis         | ?                                   | Born 1791      | Jabez Durfee                          | --                                 | 1876/Kansas         |
| Sarah Kingsley          | ?                                   | Born 1788      | John Cleveland                        | --                                 | 1856/Illinois       |
| Lucinda Pendleton       | ?                                   | Born 1801      | George Harris                         | --                                 | 1856/Tennessee      |
| Delcena Johnson         | Before July 1842                    | 35?            | Lyman Royal Sherman (died early 1839) | --                                 | 1854/Utah           |
| Eliza R. Snow           | 29 Jun 1842                         | 38             | --                                    | Brigham Young                      | 1887/Utah           |
| Sarah Ann Whitney       | 27 Jun 1842                         | 17             | Joseph Kingsbury                      | Heber C. Kimball                   | 1873/Utah           |
| Martha McBride          | Summer 1842                         | 37             | Vinson Knight (died 31 Jul 1842)      | Heber C. Kimball                   | 1901/Utah           |
| Ruth Vose               | Feb 1843                            | 35             | Edward Sayers                         | --                                 | 1884/Utah           |
| Flora Ann Woodworth     | Spring 1843                         | 16             | --                                    | Carlos Gove                        | 1850/Iowa           |
| Emily Dow Partridge     | 4 Mar and 11 May 1843               | 19             | --                                    | Brigham Young                      | 1899/Utah           |
| Eliza Maria Partridge   | 4 Mar and 11 May 1843               | 21             | --                                    | Amasa Lyman                        | 1886/Utah           |
| Almera Johnson          | Apr 1843                            | 30             | --                                    | Reuben Barton                      | 1896/Utah           |
| Lucy Walker             | 1 May 1843                          | 17             | --                                    | Heber C. Kimball                   | 1910/Utah           |
| Sarah Lawrence          | May 1843                            | 16             | --                                    | Heber C. Kimball<br>Joseph Mount   | 1872/California     |
| Maria Lawrence          | May 1843                            | 19             | --                                    | Brigham Young<br>Almon Babbitt     | 1847/Illinois       |
| Helen Mar Kimball       | May 1843                            | 14             | --                                    | Horace Whitney                     | 1896/Utah           |
| Hannah Ells             | Summer 1843                         | 30             | --                                    | --                                 | 1845/Illinois       |
| Elivira Cowles          | 1 Jun 1843                          | 29             | Jonathan Holmes                       | --                                 | 1871/Utah           |
| Rhoda Richards          | 12 Jun 1843                         | 58             | --                                    | Brigham Young                      | 1879/Utah           |
| Desdemona Fullmer       | July 1843                           | 33             | --                                    | Ezra T. Benson<br>Harrison McLane  | 1886/Utah           |
| Olive G. Frost          | Summer 1843                         | 27             | Parley P. Pratt                       | Brigham Young                      | 1845/Illinois       |
| Malissa Lott            | 20 Sep 1843                         | 19             | --                                    | John Bernhisel<br>Ira Willes       | 1898/Utah           |
| Nancy M. Winchester     | ?                                   | Born 1828      | --                                    | Heber C. Kimball<br>Amos Arnold    | 1876/Utah           |
| Fanny Young             | 2 Nov 1843                          | 56             | Roswell Murray (died 1839)            | --                                 | 1859/Utah           |
| Esther Dutcher          | ?                                   | Born 1811      | Albert Smith                          | --                                 | 1856/Utah           |



| Name       | Date Sealed to JS | Age at Sealing | Husband before/at time | Later Husbands | Death Year/Location |
|------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Mary Heron | ?                 | Born 1800      | John Snider            | --             | 1852/Utah           |

## Commentary on D&C 132

### Date and Location

Wednesday, 12 July 1843, Nauvoo, IL

### Setting

For Wednesday, 12 July 1843, Joseph Smith's journal has a short entry: "Wednesday July 12 Receivd a Revelation in the office in presence of Hyrum [Smith]. & W<sup>m</sup> Clayton."<sup>60</sup> William Clayton's journal is a bit more informative:

This A.M. I wrote a Revelation consisting of 10 pages on the order of the Priesthood, showing the designs in Moses, Abraham, David and Solomon having many wives & concubines &c. After it was wrote Pres<sup>ts</sup>. Joseph and Hyrum presented it and read it to E[mma Smith] who said she did not believe a word of it and appeared very rebellious."<sup>61</sup>

Hyrum had been strongly opposed to the doctrine of plural marriage when he first heard rumors about it being practiced in Nauvoo. But on 26 May 1843, he spoke directly with his brother, Joseph, about it and became converted to it. He stood with Joseph thereafter.

Emma Smith was a different story. Though accepting of plural marriage in May 1843, when she gave four women to Joseph as wives, Emma's opposition to the practice was growing in the summer of 1843. On 12 July, William Clayton reported in 1874:

On the morning of the 12th of July, 1843, Joseph and Hyrum Smith came into the office, in the upper story of the brick store, on the bank of the Mississippi River. 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 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 repeated his opinion and further remarked, "the doctrine is so plain, I can convince any reasonable man or woman of its truth, purity and heavenly origin," or words to their effect. Joseph then said, "well, I will write the revelation, and we will see." He then requested me to get paper and prepare to write. Hyrum very urgently requested Joseph to write the revelation by means of the Urim and Thummim, but Joseph, in reply, said he did not need to, for he knew the revelation perfectly from beginning to end.

Joseph and Hyrum then sat down, and Joseph commenced to dictate the Revelation on Celestial marriage, and I wrote it, sentence by sentence as he dictated. After the whole was written, Joseph asked me to read it through, slowly and carefully, which I did, and he pronounced it correct. He then remarked that there was much more that he could write, on the same subject, but what was written was sufficient for the present.

Hyrum then took the revelation to read to Emma. Joseph remained with me in the office until Hyrum returned. When he came back, Joseph asked him how he had succeeded. Hyrum replied that he had never received a more severe talking to in his life, that Emma was very bitter and full of resentment and anger. Joseph quietly remarked, "I told you, you did not know Emma as well as I did." Joseph then put the Revelation in his pocket and they both left the office."<sup>62</sup>

The next day, 13 July 1843, Joseph Kingsbury made a copy of the revelation in behalf of his boss, Newel K. Whitney, and Joseph gave the original to Emma, who burned it. Kingsbury's copy was the only one made and was given to Brigham Young in

<sup>60</sup> JSP, J3:57.

<sup>61</sup> JSP, J3:57n259.

<sup>62</sup> Hales and Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Toward a Better Understanding*, Ch. 12, Emma Smith, "Emma Experiences Plural Marriage."



1847. The Kingsbury copy was published by Young in 1852 just before plural marriage was publicly announced by Orson Pratt at General Conference as a Latter-day Saint doctrine, and then was used as the basis for its addition to the Doctrine and Covenants in 1876.<sup>63</sup>

Sometimes it is said that there is only one revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants addressed to a woman, and that is D&C 25 to Emma.<sup>64</sup> But D&C 132 is also addressed to Emma, at least in part, so we need to amend that statement that there are two revelations addressed to the same woman in the Doctrine and Covenants.

## Documents and Publication

The oldest copy is a copy of the original made by Joseph C. Kingsbury (13 July 1843), Church archives. It was first published as a *Deseret News Extra* (14 September 1852) then as Section 132 in 1876.

## Outline

- New and everlasting covenant (1-6)
- Covenant conditions (7-14)
- Examples of the doctrine (15-25)
- Blasphemy (26-27)
- Eternal increase and exaltation (28-39)
- Sealed on earth and heaven (40-47)
- Promise of exaltation (48-50)
- Counsel to Emma (51-57)
- Plural marriage (58-66)

## Commentary

New and everlasting covenant (1-6)

1 ***inasmuch as you have inquired***. Like so many of Joseph’s revelations, this one began with a question, which was apparently triggered by the study of figures in the Old Testament—Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon—who were polygamists, and how that was justified of the Lord.

1 ***Isaac***. See v. 37.

1 ***many wives and concubines***. Using Old Testament terminology, a “wife” and a “concubine” were only different by status. Both were married to the man but a wife was higher sociality and economically. A concubine was simply a socially lower wife.

2 ***will answer thee as touching this matter***. The answer is long and does not come directly until v. 37. The ‘pre-answer’ prepared Emma by putting plural marriage in the context of temple covenants of the highest order.

3 ***prepare thy heart to receive and obey***. The Lord told Emma to be humble, soften her heart, and be prepared to be taught “instructions” from the Lord.

3 ***all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey***. While this is true of heavenly Father’s laws in general, the doctrines in D&C 132 are particularly binding unto those who learn of them. Once educated and confirmed by the Spirit, we are obligated to be obedient to this new light and truth.

4 ***a new and an everlasting covenant***. This term had been used several times in Joseph’s revelations, representing various aspects of covenants restored in this dispensation. It is not that the covenant of marriage is, by itself, the new and everlasting covenant, but rather that it is part of the whole package of new and everlasting covenants revealed in these last days.

4 ***no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory***. Echoing and reinforcing v. 3, Emma and all of us are reminded that once we are taught these covenants, not living them makes it so we cannot enter into the glory of God.

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<sup>63</sup> Cook, *The Revelations*, 293-294.

<sup>64</sup> McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 193.

**5 *have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law.*** There are consequences to every law given by God; obedience to those laws bring good consequences (blessings) and disobedience brings bad consequences (punishments). If we desire a blessing, we need to live the law associated with it. See D&C 88:34-38; 130:20-21.

**6 *instituted for the fulness of my glory.*** As D&C 131 taught, “in order to obtain the highest [glory], a man must enter into this order of the priesthood” (D&C 131:2). The new and everlasting covenant of marriage was instituted to bring men and women up to that highest glory.

**6 *abide the law, or he shall be damned.*** The third time this is mentioned. Emma would have heard the “he” as referring to Joseph Smith. In other words, he had to obey this commandment or be damned, according to the Lord.

Covenant conditions (7-14)

**7 *covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations.*** A very thorough list, which includes promises, relationships, and even “expectations.” In short, anything important in this life or the next.

**7 *sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise.*** The Holy Spirit of promise was mentioned three times before in the Doctrine and Covenants (76:53; 88:3; 124:124) and in Paul’s writings (Ephesians 1:13). This is the Holy Ghost ratifying a covenant, ordinance, relationship, or expectation of something now and in the eternities. Without that sealing or verification, these things “are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection.”

**8 *mine house is a house of order.*** D&C 88:118 and 109:8 both refer to the House of the Lord with several characteristics, including “house of order.” This revelation extends the term “house” beyond the temple to the whole system of covenants and blessings the Lord has for his children. It must all be done in the Lord’s own way to be recognized by him.

**11 *by law . . . before the world was.*** Not only is the Lord’s house orderly but eternal. The path toward exaltation has been laid out and taught us from the very beginning.

**12 *no man shall come unto the Father but by me.*** The path to eternal life, ordained before the world was, is the Savior Jesus Christ. It is only through him, his word and his law, that any person can come to our heavenly Father. See John 14:6; 2 Nephi 31:17-18; Alma 38:9.

**13 *thrown down, and shall not remain.*** In the Lord’s orderly house, anything done outside of the path of Christ, no matter how important or exalted in this world, dies with our mortality, “shaken and destroyed” (v. 14). All that remains is what God has ordained and sealed up.

Examples of the doctrine (15-25)

**15 *Therefore.*** So far the Lord hasn’t answered the question about Abraham, Jacob, Moses, etc. He has laid the groundwork for understanding it in the larger picture of his eternal plan for mankind and in the perfect yet exacting system set up for our exaltation. In these verses, there are presented three examples of how these principles apply to marriage.

**15 *if a man marry him a wife in the world.*** The first example is a civil marriage, where a man and woman are married “not by me nor by my word.” In this case, the marriage is good “in the world” but ends “when they are dead.” They have no covenantal relationship in the next life, because their contract was for this life only.

**16 *they neither marry nor are given in marriage.*** Using and explaining Jesus language in Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, and Luke 20:35, this revelation explains that Jesus was referring to people in mortal covenants only, who cannot bring their marriage into heaven, nor make such covenants in the next life. Instead, they become “angels in heaven” or “ministering servants” to support those “who are worthy of . . . an eternal weight of glory.”

**17 *did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged.*** As D&C 76 teaches that resurrection ‘locks in’ our eternal status or kingdom, so here we understand that not making covenants relating to the fulness of the priesthood puts us in a position where we cannot increase or “be enlarged.” If that is our status, we remain single, “without exaltation” though saved. We cannot be “gods, but are angels of god forever.”

**18 if a man marry a wife, and make a covenant.** The second example is when a man and woman are married with a covenant that is purported to be “for time and for all eternity” but is “not by me or by my word” and is “not sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise,” their eternal fate is like those who marry civilly only: “they cannot, therefore, inherit my glory.”

**19 if a man marry a wife by my word.** The third example is a couple who is married by proper authority and have their covenant sealed “by the Holy Spirit of promise.” Their promises are the highest: they are promised to “come forth in the first resurrection” and to receive “thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths.” They are “written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” and shall “pass by the angels, and the gods . . . to their exaltation and glory in all things,” including a “continuation of the seeds forever.”

**19 commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood.** See vv. 26-27 where this is explained best.

**20 Then shall they be gods, because they have no end.** That is a fascinating definition of “god”—someone that has no end. But it is more than that—they are “above all” with all things subject to them, and they have “all power” so that even the angels are subject to them (the angels mentioned in vv. 15-18).

**21 except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory.** Once again, the order the Lord’s plan is confirmed. There is only one way to achieve the situation described in v. 20, which is to fully live the laws of the Lord.

**22 strait is the gate, and narrow the way.** From Matthew 7:13-14. “Strait” means ‘narrow,’ and, ironically, “narrow” means ‘compressed’ in the Matthew verses. The point is that the way is tight and any variation removes you from the path and away from the gate.

**22 the exaltation and continuation of the lives.** See vv. 30-31.

**22 neither do ye know me.** Matthew 7:23 says, “I never knew you,” in addressing the wicked. But in the JST, Joseph Smith changed it to “Ye never knew me,” which is the message here to those who are married outside of the narrow gate and constricted path to exaltation the Lord has laid out.

**23 then shall ye know me.** The key to knowing the Lord is to receive him in this world, meaning to take on these ordinances in the correct way. When we know him in this way, then we can be exalted and be where he is.

**24 eternal lives—to know the only wise and true God.** A variation of John 17:3 but with the plural “lives” to emphasize the continuation (v. 22) into the eternities.

**25 Broad is the gate, and wide the way.** The opposite of v. 22, the way to “deaths” (plural to match “lives”) is easy to find and easy to stay on, so “many there are that go in thereat,” who are not willing to receive God’s law.

Blasphemy (26-27)

**26 any sin or transgression of the new and everlasting covenant.** Verses 26-27 can be confusing if read superficially. It might sound like someone married by proper authority and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise will be exalted almost no matter what, but that is incorrect. “The promises here given apply exclusively to those who, having been married for time and eternity, advance to that station wherein they have had their calling and election made sure.”<sup>65</sup> We still have to repent and be blessed by the atonement of Jesus Christ to be justified and sanctified before God, in order to qualify to “come forth in the first resurrection” and enter into exaltation. Without repentance, we will be “delivered unto the buffetings of Satan.”

**27 blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.** Matthew 12:31 (plus Mark 3:29 and Luke 12:10) speak of this sin but do not explain it. The definition here is that someone who has perfect knowledge denies Christ, fights the truth, and joins forces with Satan, which assents unto Christ’s death anew, akin to committing murder to shed “innocent blood” (Christ).<sup>66</sup> Those who commit this sin “shall be damned” without glory.

Eternal increase and exaltation (28-39)

**28 the law of my Holy Priesthood.** Or, the fulness of the Melchizedek priesthood (D&C 124:28).

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<sup>65</sup> McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 1064.

<sup>66</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 4:253; McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 1066.

29 **Abraham received all things . . . by revelation.** Abraham was perfectly obedient to the revelations and commandments he received from the Lord, therefore he “hath entered into his exaltation.” Abraham is our model and exemplar, perhaps especially in relation to the question that triggered this revelation.

30 **from whose loins ye are, namely, my servant Joseph.** Joseph Smith was not only the inheritor of the covenant of Abraham, but a descendent of Abraham, through his great-grandson, Joseph (2 Nephi 3:7-15).

30 **they continue as innumerable as the stars.** Abraham received this promise multiple times (Genesis 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; plus 23:12 for seed like sand on the seashore) and the saying was passed down among the Israelites (Exodus 32:13; Isaiah 48:19). Here the Lord clarifies that that promise is not just an earthly one, with many descendants, but one tied to eternal life and exaltation, with posterity “out of the world” that will continue.

31 **This promise is yours also.** As the inheritor of the blessings of Abraham through the marriage covenant, the same promise is available to all, as a “continuation of the works of my Father.”

32 **do the works of Abraham.** The blessings only come through the same level of obedience as Abraham showed, receiving all things the Lord revealed (v. 29).

34 **God commanded Abraham, and Sarah gave Hagar.** Now we finally get to the answer to the question Joseph, Emma, and other Latter-day Saints in their day and ours have wondered about—how was polygamy not a sin?

35 **I, the Lord, commanded it.** As v. 34 also said, the first key to understanding Abraham’s taking Hagar to wife is that it was a command of the Lord, not just something Abraham or Sarah thought was a good idea.

36 **Abraham was commanded to offer his son Isaac.** As a second example, Abraham was clearly commanded to offer Isaac as a human sacrifice in Genesis 22, even though it contradicted the command not to kill. Because Abraham was perfectly obedient, “it was accounted unto him for righteousness” (also Genesis 15:6).

37 **Abraham received concubines.** The two known concubines (wives of lesser status) of Abraham were Hagar and Keturah (Genesis 25:1, 6).

37 **Isaac also and Jacob.** Jacob’s four wives are known (Genesis 29-30) but the Bible only records Isaac having one wife, Rebekah (Genesis 24). It is entirely possible that Isaac had other wives that are simply not mentioned in the scripture, because Rebekah was the one that mattered.<sup>67</sup> Critics of Joseph Smith have raised this issue with D&C 132 but it is an argument out of silence—just because the OT doesn’t mention wives doesn’t mean he didn’t have them.<sup>68</sup>

38 **David also received many wives and concubines.** David had eight wives named in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 25:39; 18:27; 2 Samuel 3:2-5; 11:27) and “more concubines and wives” (2 Samuel 5:13) that are unnamed and unnumbered.

38 **Solomon.** According to 1 Kings 11:3, Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. While the numbers are surely exaggerated (a common OT practice), the point is that he had a very large number of women in his harem.

38 **Moses.** Though the text is somewhat obscure and disputed, Moses is recorded in the OT as having two wives, Zipporah (Exodus 2:21) and a second unnamed wife who was a Cushite (Ethiopian, Numbers 12:1). Josephus, a Jewish historian from the time of Christ, recorded from an unknown source that this other wife married Moses when he was still a prince in Egypt during a campaign against the Ethiopians. Her name was Tharbis and she was portrayed as a minor role in Cecil B. DeMille’s epic *The Ten Commandments*.

39 **save in the case of Uriah and his wife.** While all the men mentioned in vv. 37-38 are given a blanket statement that they did not sin with their multiple wives except where they took wives not given them by God, David’s case gets a specific call-out. 2 Samuel 11 describes in detail David’s viewing of the naked Bath-sheba and his lust for her, ending in her getting pregnant

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<sup>67</sup> Isaac didn’t marry Rebekah until he was forty, which was very unusual. Perhaps he married another woman first and something happened—she died?—without leaving an heir, so Abraham commanded his servant to get a wife from his kinsmen. That is speculation but not out of the question, given what we know about marriage practices of the day, life expectancy, etc.

<sup>68</sup> Many kings in Israel had multiple wives but we only know that because of genealogies and certain prominent descendants from other wives; otherwise, we’d be inclined to think incorrectly that they all were monogamists.

and David having her husband killed to cover his sin and take her as his wife. In 2 Samuel 12, the prophet Nathan rebuked David, but in the end, Bath-sheba became the preferred wife (and very politically astute) who got her son Solomon placed on David's throne (1 Kings 1).

**39 *fallen from his exaltation*.** David's punishment for the sins of murder and adultery and violating the marriage covenant given him by the Lord was exactly what was described in the verses above—he lost his exaltation and lost all his wives, “for I gave them unto another, saith the Lord.”

Sealed on earth and heaven (40-47)

**40 *an appointment, and restore all things*.** Though we don't have the original, I would suggest a textual emendation for this awkward phrase: ‘I gave unto thee, my servant Joseph, an appointment [a calling] to restore all things.’ Regardless, this phrase does highlight the only reason Joseph Smith seems to have given to polygamy insiders for its practice—it was a required part of the restoration of all things in our dispensation.<sup>69</sup>

**41 *if she be with another man, and I have not appointed unto her by the holy anointing, she hath committed adultery*.** This verse has some challenging language as well but fundamentally is interpreted that a woman being with another man than her husband in the new and everlasting covenant, is an adulterous relationship. V. 42 draws the same conclusion for a marriage that is not part of the covenant.<sup>70</sup>

**43 *and he was under a vow*.** The same condemnation applies to men who are with a woman outside of the marriage covenant or “vow,” whether it be an eternal marriage or a civil one.

**44 *take her and give her unto him that hath not committed adultery*.** Using OT language, the Lord confirms that the Prophet has the authority to officially break the shattered marriage covenant of the adulterous man and free the wife to marry another who is faithful. Because the faithful man can have more than one wife in eternity, this is likened to the story of the servant who was faithful over a few things and was made ruler over many (Matthew 25:21-23).

**45 *the keys and power of the priesthood*.** Joseph Smith had received all the keys and priesthood power needed for this dispensation, in order to “restore all things, and make known . . . all things.”

**46 *whatsoever you seal on earth shall be sealed in heaven*.** This echoes the promise given to Nephi in Helaman 10:7 and Peter in Matthew 16:19 and the power Elijah demonstrated in sealing the heavens from raining (1 Kings 17:1-7). We sometimes see this as only applying to marriage today, but the sealing power promises that “whatsoever” the prophet with these keys seals or binds or remits or retains here will be honored in heaven.

**47 *bless . . . curse*.** That sealing power extends to anyone the Prophet with keys blesses or curses.

Promise of exaltation (48-50)

**48 *to whomsoever you give any one on earth*.** This refers to the Prophet using his unique authority to “give” someone in marriage to another, according to the Lord's law.

**49 *I seal upon you your exaltation*.** Less than a year before his murder, the Lord makes Joseph's calling and election sure. It wasn't that he was perfected or without error in his life, but he had proved himself obedient enough to the Lord that the Lord could extend this promise now.

**50 *I have seen your sacrifices, and will forgive all your sins*.** Joseph's quest, from the First Vision, Moroni's appearances, during the Book of Mormon translation, and all throughout his life, was forgiveness of sins. How marvelous to hear that “all” his sins would be forgiven.

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<sup>69</sup> Hales and Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Toward a Better Understanding*, Ch. 1, Reasons for Practicing Plural Marriage, “1. As Part of the Restitution of All Things.”

<sup>70</sup> Robinson and Garrett, *A Commentary*, 4:257; McConkie and Ostler, *Revelations*, 1073.

50 ***I make a way for your escape.*** As Abraham escaped the sacrifice of his son Isaac with an angel halting his raised arm and a ram being found as the substitute sacrifice, so the Lord promised a way out of the current commandment that was such a sacrifice for Joseph and put him at so much risk. As it turned out, the “way for your escape” was through Carthage Jail.

#### Counsel to Emma (51-57)

51 ***A commandment I give unto mine handmaid, Emma.*** Though the whole revelation was given with Emma’s concerns in mind, these verses are specifically addressed to her.

51 ***stay herself and partake not of that which I commanded you to offer unto her.*** The Lord commanded Emma to stop being critical of plural marriage. The reference to something the Lord offered unto her is unclear and perhaps something only Joseph and Emma knew about (see v. 55).

51 ***to prove you all, as I did Abraham.*** Returning to Abraham’s example, Emma was told another purpose for plural marriage—to test and try the faith of the Saints.

52 ***receive all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph.*** Emma was also commanded to receive or accept all the wives to which Joseph had been sealed. This was likely an especially difficult one for her because Joseph had married and been sealed to many women without her knowledge in 1841-1842, and perhaps even some in 1843.

53 ***ruler over many things.*** Returning to the imagery from Matthew 25:21-23, Emma was reminded that Joseph would be made a ruler in the next life because he had been faithful “over a few things” in this life. One interpretation of “things” here is wives, opening the potential that Joseph would have even more wives in the next life than he had been sealed to in this one.

54 ***abide and cleave unto my servant Joseph.*** Emma was commanded to not only obey Joseph in this matter but to “cleave” to him and none else, meaning to be completely faithful to him as his wife.

54 ***she shall be destroyed.*** If she was not faithful to this commandment of eternal marriage after having received it from the Lord, she would be “destroyed”—not an immediate, physical destruction, but the more significant destruction of someone who is not obedient to God.

55 ***then shall my servant Joseph do all things for her, even as he hath said.*** This likely ties back to v. 51 and the thing the Lord had commanded Joseph to offer Emma. Whatever Joseph had offered her, she was to reject it if she embraced the revelation, or Joseph would do it if she “will not abide this commandment.” Based on subsequent events, this offer may have been related to financial support or, as some have speculated, even divorce.

56 ***let mine handmaid forgive my servant Joseph.*** We don’t know all the things Emma needed to forgive Joseph for, but it at least included not telling her from the beginning about the other wives, which surely hurt her deeply. Joseph’s reasons for delaying are unclear but perhaps were tied to his understanding that once the doctrine was revealed to someone, they were accountable and damned if they rejected it, and he loved Emma too much to put her in that position until he felt he was ready.<sup>71</sup> If she forgave Joseph, she was promised a forgiveness of her own sins, blessings, and a that “her would [would] rejoice.”

57 ***let not my servant Joseph put his property out of his hands.*** This reference is also uncertain; perhaps in their discussions at this time Emma was requesting control over certain properties. Whatever the discussion, the Lord said not to do it as it would lead to Joseph’s destruction.

#### Plural marriage (58-66)

58 ***the law of the priesthood.*** Meaning, the temple ordinances, including the law of eternal marriage.

59 ***he will not commit sin, and I will justify him.*** The reference is to Joseph Smith, who was called of God, given keys of priesthood power, and acting in the Lord’s name. When he is following this pattern, there is no sin, though it may appear that way to some.

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<sup>71</sup> Hales and Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: Toward a Better Understanding*, Ch. 12 Emma Smith, “Why did Joseph Wait to Tell Emma?”

60 **he shall do the sacrifice which I require at his hands for his transgressions.** Emma was assured that Joseph's mistakes and sins had consequences.

61 **desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent.** This is called "the law of Sarah" (v. 65), which is that the first wife must consent to any subsequent marriages of "a virgin," meaning a previously unmarried woman. Joseph was sealed to several women for eternity only, either for the woman's eternal benefit (e.g., she was married to a non-member and could not therefore be sealed to anyone) or due to the woman's preference for an eternal companion, but because these were not "virgins," Emma's permission was not required.

62 **if he have ten virgins.** The number is inconsequential; the principle is that following this law of Sarah where a virgin is sealed to a man with the approval of his first wife, there is no sin or adultery involved.

63 **after she is espoused, shall be with another man.** However, if one of the other wives were to have sexual relations with another man, that is adultery, for that relationship is not given or condoned by the Lord.

63 **to multiply and replenish the earth.** A third reason for polygamy was given here—to bring children into the world. This was a glorious and critical part of the Father's plan "for their exaltation in the eternal worlds."

64 **then shall she believe and administer unto him, or she shall be destroyed.** This law is binding on any wife who is taught it, with destruction (eternal judgment) promised to one who rejects it after learning of it (see v. 56).

65 **if she receive not this law, for him to receive all things.** If the wife was taught this law and rejected it, then the law of Sarah did not apply to the man—he could "receive" other wives according to the law of the Lord, and the sin was on her, not him.

66 **I will reveal more unto you, hereafter.** Emma did receive more when she was endowed in September 1843 and perhaps in other private teachings, but there are no other written revelations on this subject in Joseph Smith's lifetime.

## Results

D&C 132's primary message is that exaltation requires the covenant of eternal marriage. Though it was given in the context of implementing polygamy as a manifestation of eternal marriage, it's clear that polygamy is *not* required for exaltation, just marriage according to the Lord's law and sealed by his power.

The day after D&C 132 was recorded, Joseph and Emma Smith counseled together about moving forward. She negotiated two things from her husband. First, Joseph was required to receive Emma's permission before taking any other wives. As it turned out, he was only sealed to two other women, one for eternity only and one for time and eternity. For the last eight months of his life, Joseph appears to have become strictly monogamous.

Second, Joseph had to assure that Emma would be financially self-sufficient. Accordingly, he deeded to her all unencumbered property in his possession, including sixty city lots and one-half ownership of the steamboat *Maid of Iowa*. This compromise allowed Joseph and Emma to stay together as a couple and even enjoy some happiness together in his remaining months.<sup>72</sup>

Emma seems to have been humbled and offered her support for plural marriage again in the fall of 1843. This had the great benefit of allowing her to be the first woman to receive her full temple ordinances and then begin to share those with other women. Joseph seems to have held off giving those to others until Emma could first receive them, and 28 September 1843 was the first he could see to do that with her.<sup>73</sup> In November 1843, Joseph thought he had been poisoned and blamed Emma, but that seems unlikely, given everything known about Emma and the event. However, by the end of 1843, Emma was quietly speaking out against polygamy to other women. She vacillated between making an effort to support her husband and being reviled by the whole thing. However, during the last nine months of his life, Joseph appears to have been completely devoted to Emma, setting aside relationships with his other wives, and it was to Emma that he turned for advice and counsel when things began to fall apart in the summer of 1844. His final letters to her from Carthage Jail reflect a closeness in their

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<sup>72</sup> Hales and Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Toward a Better Understanding*, Ch. 12, Emma Smith, "Crisis and Agreement."

<sup>73</sup> A group of men had already received their temple ordinances from the Prophet, starting in May 1842.



relationship that had probably been increasing throughout 1844. When Joseph was killed, she remarked in the middle of her weeping, "My husband was my crown."<sup>74</sup>

Brigham Young, who butted heads with Emma over multiple issues as the Saints were preparing to leave Nauvoo, is recorded to have said, "Joseph used to say that he would have her [Emma] hereafter, if he had to go to hell for her," then added, probably with some humor mixed with frustration at Emma, "and he will have to go to hell for her as sure as he ever gets her."<sup>75</sup>

However, Joseph staunchly supported Emma through all their trials. He is said to have remarked to one of his other wives who started to say something critical of Emma, "If you desired my love, you must never speak evil of Emma."<sup>76</sup>

While Joseph Smith was in hiding in August 1842, avoiding arrest from Missouri officials, in remarks made and recorded first-hand in his journal, he said this about Emma, which reflected well his life-long feelings toward her:

With what unspeakable delight, and what transports of joy swelled my bosom, when I took by the hand on that night, my believe Emma, she that was my wife, even the wife of my youth; and the choice of my heart. Many were the re-vibrations of my mind when I contemplated for a moment the many ~~past~~ scenes we had been called to pass through. The fatigues, and the toils, the sorrows, and sufferings, and the joys and consolations from time to time had strewed our paths and crowned our board. Oh! what a co-mingling of thought filled my mind for the moment, Again she <is> here, even in the seventh trouble, undaunted, firm and unwavering, unchangeable, affectionate Emma.<sup>77</sup>

Just as he was leaving for Carthage, Emma asked Joseph for a blessing. With no time available, he told her to write it down and would seal it to her. The blessing she wrote is insightful to her state of mind on 24 June 1844:

First of all that I would crave as the richest of heaven's blessings would be wisdom from my Heavenly Father bestowed daily, so that whatever I might do or say, I could not look back at the close of the day with regret, nor neglect the performance of any act that would bring a blessing. I desire the Spirit of God to know and understand myself, that I desire a fruitful, active mind, that I may be able to comprehend the designs of God, when revealed through his servants without doubting. I desire a spirit of discernment, which is one of the promised blessings of the Holy Ghost.

I particularly desire wisdom to bring up all the children that are, or may be committed to my charge, in such a manner that they will be useful ornaments in the Kingdom of God, and in a coming day arise up and call me blessed.

I desire prudence that I may not through ambition abuse my body and cause it to become prematurely old and care-worn, but that I may wear a cheerful countenance, live to perform all the work that I covenanted to perform in the spirit-world and be a blessing to all who may in any wise need aught at my hands.

I desire with all my heart to honor and respect my husband as my head, ever to live in his confidence and by acting in unison with him retain the place which God has given me by his side, and I ask my Heavenly Father that through humility, I may be enable to overcome that curse which was pronounced upon the daughter s of Eve. I desired to see that I may rejoice with them in the blessings which God has in store for all who are willing to be obedient to his requirements. Finally, I desire that whatever may be my lot through life I may be enabled to acknowledge the hand of God in all things.<sup>78</sup>

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*A note on sources: In many cases, the same information is available from multiple sources, all quoting the same journals, letters, and accounts. While much of the information could be found on the Church's web pages on these topics, the Hales'*

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<sup>74</sup> Hales and Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Toward a Better Understanding*, Ch. 13, Emma Struggles as Joseph's First Wife.

<sup>75</sup> Journal of Discourses, 17:159, 9 August 1874.

<sup>76</sup> Hales and Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Toward a Better Understanding*, Ch. 8, Nauvoo Plural Marriage Begins, "Why Did Joseph Smith Seek Sealings to Legally Married Women?"; Harper, *Making Sense*, 485.

<sup>77</sup> JSP, J2:93-94.

<sup>78</sup> Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 190-191.

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