



Woe Unto You, Scribes

The Hidden History of Polygamy

compiled by

Karen Hyatt

*“If we have the truth, [it] cannot be harmed
by investigation. If we have not truth,
it ought to be harmed.”*

–J. Reuben Clark

*“Good inspiration is based upon
good information.”*

–President Russell M. Nelson

Introduction

The purpose of this presentation is to increase faith and understanding among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and those of other faiths by sharing information about Joseph Smith and his alleged practice of polygamy.

Erroneous ideas about this topic have caused confusion among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and created stumblingblocks for friends of other faiths for decades. Some have understood that polygamy only began in the church after the trek west, and they're surprised to learn that Joseph is said to have practiced it in Nauvoo long before that. Early church leaders taught that polygamy was necessary for exaltation, which can be very disturbing for faithful church members. For many women, especially, the unspoken dread of future polygamy – in this life or the next – is set aside on a spiritual “shelf” of troubling questions.

While most of us, including busy church leaders, have typically gotten our history filtered through professional researchers, we can now examine thousands of original and *contemporaneous* documents – meaning documents created during Joseph's lifetime – for ourselves, thanks in large part to the Joseph Smith Papers Project. These documents demonstrate that Joseph Smith consistently opposed polygamy as an abomination; that he denied ever having taught or practiced it; and that, contrary to the narrative perpetuated by well-meaning historians, Joseph was, in fact, telling the truth.

The work of Brian Hales will be cited frequently, since his writings have heavily influenced our current teachings about Joseph Smith. Hales' efforts to gather documentation and make it available online are enormously appreciated, but, as we'll see, his conclusions are not always supported by the historical record.

We'll be examining the following subjects:

- Joseph's and Hyrum's teachings on polygamy
- Evidence for the claim that Joseph practiced it
- The scriptural basis for plural marriage, including Doctrine and Covenants 132
- The testimonies – and absence of testimonies – from the alleged plural wives

A convenient video version of this presentation, along with a searchable transcript and links to all of the documents cited, can be found at JosephToldTheTruth.org.

Joseph's and Hyrum's Teachings on Polygamy

On [Sunday, May 26, 1844](#), Joseph Smith preached to the saints in Nauvoo, Illinois, addressing rumors of his alleged practice of polygamy:



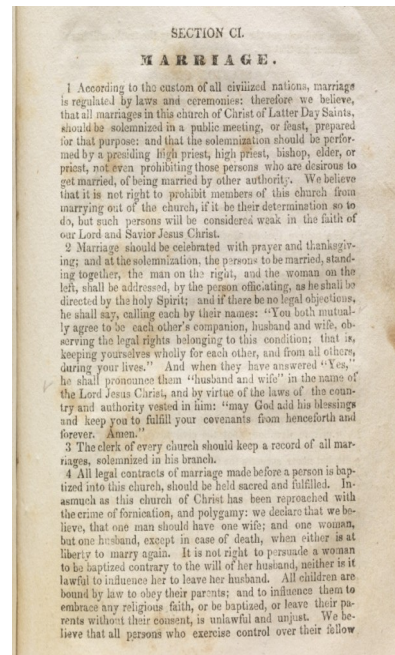
“I had not been married scarcely five minutes, and made one proclamation of the gospel before it was reported that I had seven wives... What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery and having seven wives when I can only find one. I am the same man and as innocent as I was 14 years ago, and I can prove them all perjurers.”¹

In July 1838, as editor of the [Elders' Journal](#), Joseph published a list of questions and answers, including this one: “Question 7th: Do the Mormons believe in having more wives than one? Answer: No, not at the same time. But they believe that if their companion dies, they have a right to marry again.”

In fact, the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, published in 1835 under Joseph's direction, contained an [article on marriage](#) as part of Section 101:

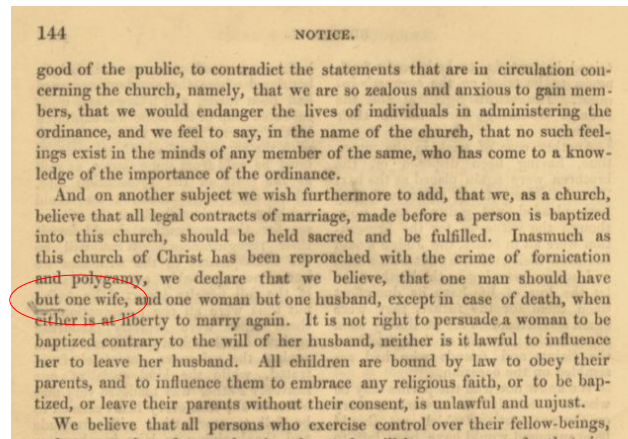
“Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.”

This article was reprinted in [numerous church publications](#) and was included in the second edition of the [Doctrine and Covenants](#), published in 1844.

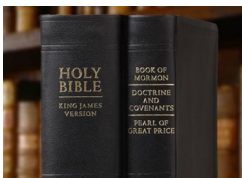


Some historians believe the article contained a special loophole that actually allowed for polygamy, because it said that “one man should have one wife; and one woman **BUT** one husband.” [They argue](#) that “one wife” is a tricky way to say “at least one wife,” which would seem to defeat the purpose of the declaration, which was to clarify the church's position on polygamy – not to create ambiguity or deceive.

Fortunately, the church republished this article on marriage in the January 1844 edition of the [Millennial Star](#) and made it crystal clear, declaring, “[W]e believe that one man should have **but** one wife, and one woman **but** one husband,” which should surely put to rest any idea that the article was carefully worded to secretly allow for what it clearly condemns.



In fact, this article on marriage remained in the Doctrine and Covenants until **1876**, when [it was finally removed](#), and [Section 132](#) – which presents polygamy as a doctrine from God – was added.²



Section 132 has been a great source of confusion, since it contradicts teachings found in all four books of scripture, including the Doctrine and Covenants itself.

[Genesis 2:24/Moses 3:24](#): “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.”

[Mark 10:7-8](#): “For this cause shall a man cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh.”

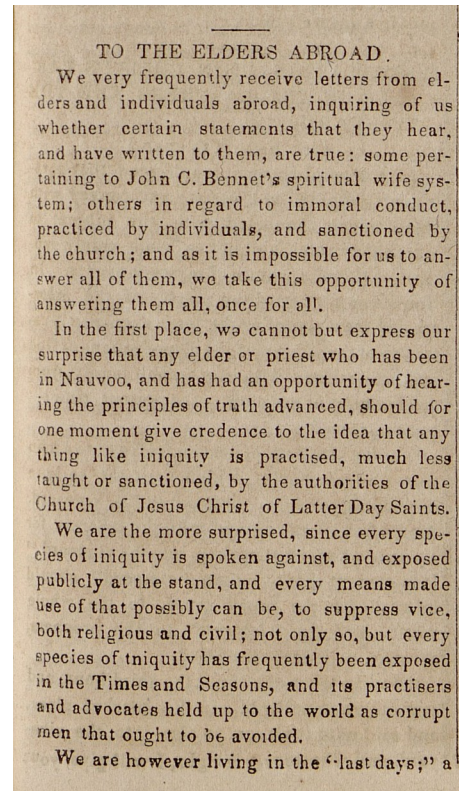
[Jacob 2:27](#): “[T]here shall not any man among you have save it be one wife, and concubines he shall have none.”

[D&C 42:22](#): “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.”

Importantly, Section 132 was not introduced to the saints [until 1852](#) – *eight years* after Joseph’s death. We’ll examine this section in detail, but for now, let’s look at Joseph’s and Hyrum’s recorded teachings, which consistently condemned polygamy and any such thing.

For instance, under Joseph’s editorial direction, the [Times and Seasons](#) published this in April of 1844:

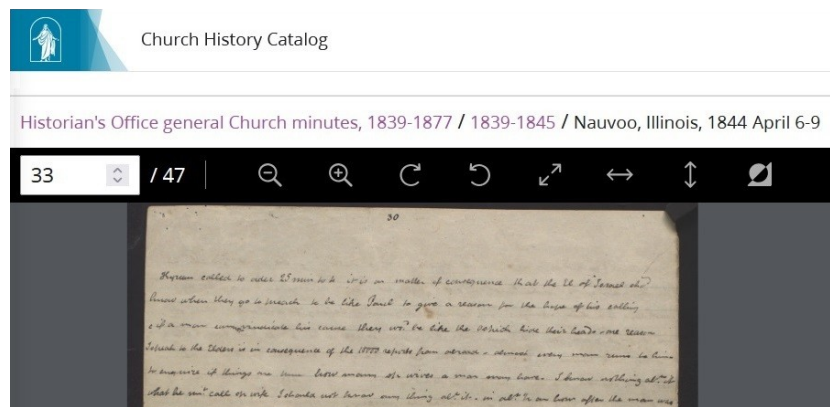
“To the Elders Abroad – In the first place, we cannot but express our surprise that any elder or priest...should for one moment give credence to the idea that anything like iniquity is practised, much less taught or sanctioned, by the authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. We are the more surprised since every species of iniquity is spoken against and exposed publicly at the stand... If any man writes to you or preaches to you doctrines contrary to the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or the book of Doctrine and Covenants, set him down as an imposter... Try them by the principles contained in the acknowledged word of God; if they preach or teach or practice contrary to that, disfellowship them; cut them off from among you as useless and dangerous branches...”



At about the same time, a very exasperated Hyrum Smith gave this strongly worded rebuke in April of 1844:

“One reason I speak to the Elders is in consequence of the ten thousand reports which come to me from abroad – almost every foolish man runs to me to enquire...how many spiritual wives a man may have... I am authorized to tell you from henceforth that any man who comes in and tells any such damn fool doctrine, to tell him to give up his license. None but a fool teaches such stuff. The devil himself is not such a fool. Every Elder who teaches such stuff ought to have his nose wrung... I wish the Elders of Israel to understand it is lawful for a man to marry a wife, but it is unlawful to have more...”³

While this speech is preserved in the [Church History Catalog](#), the Joseph Smith Papers database only includes [an edited version](#), which requires some explanation.



After the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum, Brigham Young commenced work on a compilation of church history in which he and his scribes made [numerous revisions](#) to original journals and notes, as noted in Brigham's journal⁴:

- Apr 1, 1845 "I commenced **revising the History of Joseph Smith** at Brother Richards' office: Elder Heber C. Kimball and George A. Smith were with me"
- Apr 2, 1845 "Engaged at Elder Richards' office with Elders Kimball and Smith **revising Church History**"
- May 12, 1845 Evening, with Brothers Heber C. Kimball, W. Richards and George A. Smith at Brother Edward Hunter's **revising history**"
- May 13, 1845 "With Elders Heber C. Kimball, W. Richards and George A. Smith reading and **revising Church History**"
- May 14, 1845 "...we read and **revised history all day**"
- May 16, 1845 "I spent the day at Brother Hunter's in company with Brothers Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards, George A. Smith and N. K. Whitney **revising history**"
- May 17, 1845 "**Revising history** as yesterday"
- May 20, 1845 "We read and **revised fifty-seven pages of History of Joseph Smith**"
- June 18, 1845 "I met with Elders Heber C. Kimball, John Taylor and George A. Smith at Brother Taylor's; we **revised a portion of the History of Joseph Smith**"
- June 19, 1845 "I spent the day with Brothers H. C. Kimball and George A. Smith **revising history**"
- June 20, 1845 "Elders H. C. Kimball, Orson Pratt, George A. Smith, and myself engaged **revising Church History**"
- Nov 8, 1845 "**Revising history** in company with Brothers Heber C. Kimball, Willard Richards and George A. Smith"
- Nov 11, 1845 "Forenoon, Elders Willard Richards and George A. Smith **revising history**. Afternoon, Elder Kimball and I joined them, and assisted in **revising history**"
- Nov 26, 1845 "At the Historian's Office with Elder George A. Smith and **revised fifty pages**"
- Nov 28, 1845 "Elders Willard Richards and George A. Smith read and **revised history to the end of 1843**"

Some of the so-called "revisions" included deleting entire speeches and sections of speeches. [Here's an example](#) of text that was to be omitted at the direction of Brigham Young. The text is crossed out, and we can see a notation in the left hand margin: "Not to go in by BY's orders."⁵

July 25 1843 1845

It is a time-honored adage that love begets love; let us pour forth love - show forth our kindness unto all mankind, and the Lord will reward us with overflowing increase - cast our bread upon the waters, and we shall receive it after many days increased to a hundred fold. Friend ship is like brother Surlay in his blacksmith shop welding iron to iron; it unites the human family with the happy influence.

I do not dwell upon your faults, and you shall not upon mine, Charity, which is love, covereth a multitude of sins, and I have often covered up all the faults among you; but the proudest thing is to have no faults at all. We should cultivate a meek, quiet and peaceable spirit.

Have the Presbyterians any truth? yes. Have the Baptists, Methodists &c any truth? yes, they all have a little truth mixed with error. We should gather all the good and true principles in the world, and treasure them up, or we shall not come out pure Reformation.

Last Monday morning certain ~~men~~ came to me and said: "Brother Joseph ~~is no prophet~~ he can't lead the church, you must lead the church, if you ~~recognize all things will go wrong~~ you must lead ~~the church will be scattered~~." I felt ~~amused~~ and said, "have we not learned the truthhood after the order of Melchisedec which includes both Prophets, Priests and Kings; see Rev. 1 ch. 6 v. and I will advance your Prophet to a priest, and then to a king, not to the kingdoms of this earth, but of the most high God, see Rev. 5 ch. 10 v. Then hath made us unto our God, King and Priest, and we shall reign on the earth."

If I should be scolded would there not be a great many of my enemies disappointed in Missouri, when they wake up and find themselves in hell, see what they might have obtained and realize what they have lost, by not listening to my voice, and obeying my instructions?

Math. 5 ch. 17 and 18 v. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you. Till heaven and earth pass one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

and again, Math. 11 ch. 12 v. 13 v. "And from the days of John the Baptist, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."

saye christ he was the rock &c

gave the power

see Matheus 30 ch. 30 v. 31 v. "And then shall anoint Aaron, and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priestly office. And then shall speak unto the children of Israel, saying, This shall be an holy anointing oil unto me throughout your generations." Also Matheus 40 ch. 45 v. "And then shall anoint them, as thou didst anoint thine father, (Aaron), that they may minister unto me in the priestly office, for their anointing shall come,

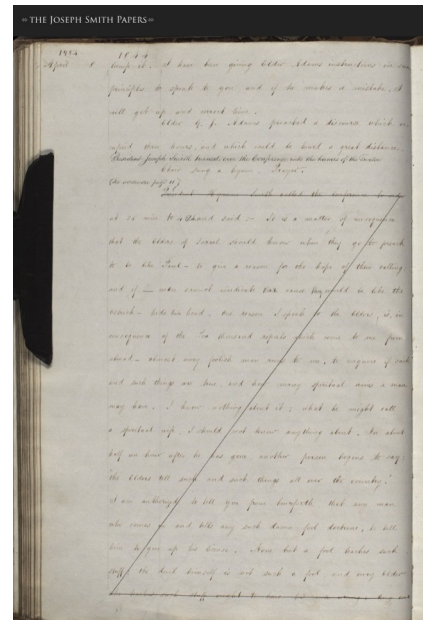
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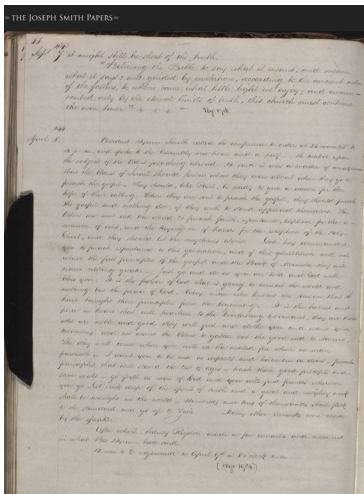
[Here's an example](#) of a draft copy of the minutes from a meeting on April 8, 1844. We can see that a few additions have been made in the upper section of the manuscript in a different hand-writing.

This particular draft is noteworthy, as this is the speech by Hyrum Smith referenced earlier, in which he says that none but a fool teaches that a man may have multiple wives.

All eight pages of this speech have been crossed out to indicate that they should be omitted from the final version of the history that was being compiled.⁶



And here's an excerpt from the [revised version](#), in which Hyrum's fiery speech has been omitted and replaced with a mildly worded summary that does not resemble the original at all:



“He treated upon the subject of the Elders preaching abroad. He said...that the Elders of Israel should know what they were about when they go to preach the gospel – They should...be ready to give a reason for the hope of their calling. When they are sent to preach the gospel, they should preach the gospel and nothing else... Many other remarks were made by the speaker.”⁷

The Joseph Smith Papers editors acknowledge that this revised version of Hyrum's speech was [“created”](#) in Utah over a decade later.

History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844]

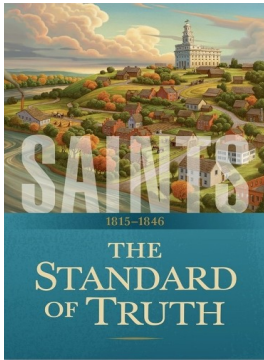
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Source Note



JS, *History, 1838–1856, vol. E-1*, [created 20 Aug. 1855–5 Apr. 1856](#); handwriting of Robert L. Campbell, Leo Hawkins, and Jonathan Grimshaw; 392 pages, plus 11 pages of addenda; CHL. This is the fifth volume of a six-volume manuscript history of the church. This fifth volume covers the period from 1 July 1843 to 30 Apr. 1844; the remaining five volumes, labeled A-1, B-1, C-1, D-1, and F-1, continue through 8 Aug. 1844.



After the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum, Brigham Young recounted numerous stories of private conversations he claimed to have had with both men. One such story is repeated in [Saints: The Standard of Truth](#), in which Brigham says that Hyrum approached him one day in 1843 seeking information that Brigham and the twelve seemed to have but of which Hyrum – beloved brother of the prophet and co-president of the church – was somehow ignorant.

According to [Brigham's story](#), which he told in 1866, Hyrum was brought to tears over the realization that, in his ignorance, he had been preaching against polygamy, unaware that this holy doctrine had secretly been revealed to Joseph.⁸

“

One day soon after the sermon, Hyrum saw Brigham near his home and asked if they could talk. “I know there is something or other which I do not understand that is revealed to the Twelve,” he said. “Is this so?”

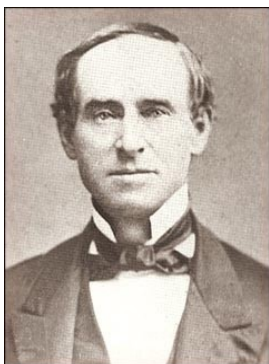
...

As Brigham taught him about the Lord's revelation to Joseph on plural marriage, Hyrum wept, convinced that Joseph acted under commandment.

”

Yet Hyrum's strongly worded speech, given just two and a half months before his death, does not comport with Brigham's story of his tearful conversion to polygamy more than a year earlier.

It's very instructive to note that the contemporary record of Hyrum's anti-polygamy speech was omitted from Brigham's history of the church, while his own pro-polygamy recollection from over two decades later was included.



Charles Wesley Wandell, an assistant church historian under Brigham Young, [recorded the following](#) in his diary:

“[H]aving been employed in the historian's office at Nauvoo, I know that after Joseph's death, his memoir was 'doctored' to suit the new order of things, and this, too, by the direct order of Brigham Young...”⁹

On October 5th, 1843, [the following important entry](#) was recorded in Joseph's journal by his scribe, with whom he had been discussing holding disciplinary church courts for those practicing polygamy:

Thursday October 5th
 morning rode out with Esau
 Butterfield, to farm 80. ---
 P.M. rode on prairie to show some
 brethren some land. - - -
 worked up and down it with scribe. -
 and gave instruction to try them who were
 preaching teaching or ~~preaching~~ the doctrine of
 plurality of wives. on this law. Joseph forbids
 it, and the practice thereof. - No man
 shall have but one wife

“...walked up and down street with scribe and gave instructions to try those who were preaching or teaching the doctrine of plurality of wives. On this law. Joseph forbids it and the practice thereof - No man shall have but one wife”¹⁰

And we do have records of church members being excommunicated for these practices shortly after this. For example, Joseph Smith brought [charges against Harrison Sagers](#) for attempting to seduce his own wife’s younger sister and claiming that Joseph condoned it.¹¹

Another man named Hiram Brown was “[cut off from the church](#)” for “preaching Polygamy and other false and corrupt doctrines.”

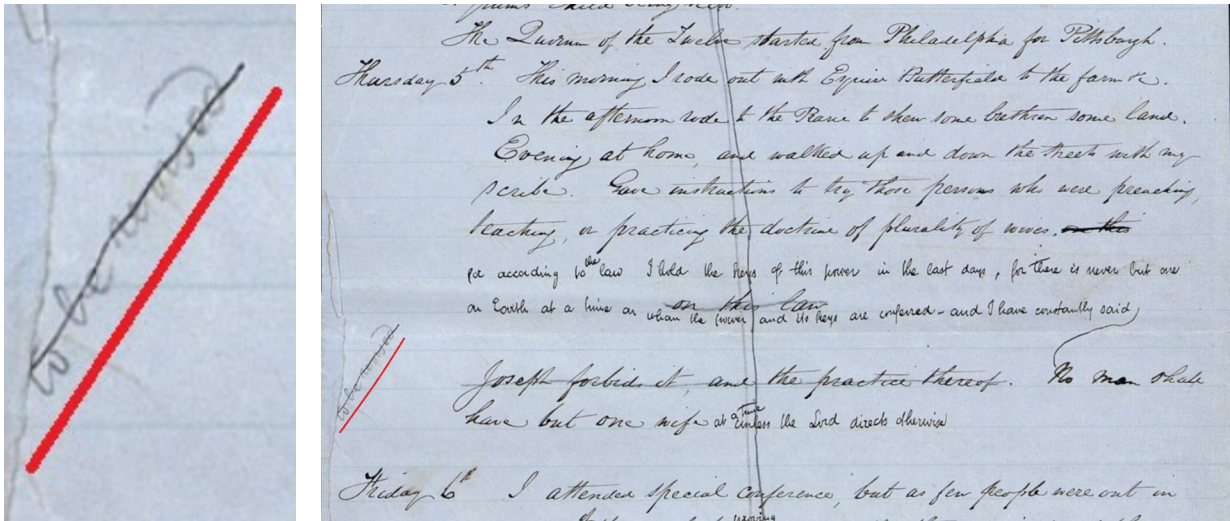
Unfortunately, the October 5th entry from Joseph’s journal, which so clearly illustrates his position on polygamy, was also altered before it was placed into the historical record. Thanks to the Joseph Smith Papers, we can see for ourselves the alterations that were made.

TIMES AND SEASONS.
 CITY OF NAUVOO,
 THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 1844.
 NOTICE.
 As we have lately been credibly informed, that an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-day Saints, by the name of Hiram Brown, has been preaching Polygamy, and other false and corrupt doctrines, in the county of Lapeer, state of Michigan.
 This is to notify him and the Church in general, that he has been cut off from the church, for his iniquity; and he is further notified to appear at the Special Conference, on the 6th

Here is the [original entry](#), clearly stating, “No man shall have but one wife”:

plurality of wives. on this law. Joseph forbids
 it, and the practice thereof. - No man
 shall have but one wife

And [here is the draft copy](#) of that entry, in which multiple major revisions were made to the original.¹² Notice the notation, “to be revised,” in the left margin near the bottom of the page.



We can see the original words, “Gave instructions to try those persons who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives.”

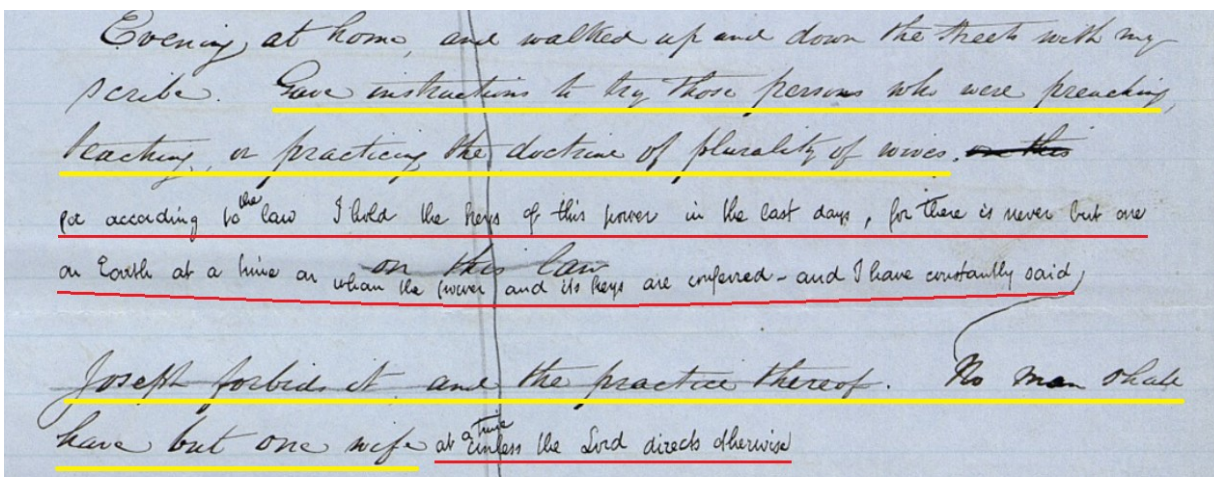
The following words were then inserted in someone else’s handwriting:

“for according to the law, I hold the keys of this power in the last days, for there is never but one on earth at a time on whom the power and its keys are conferred. And I have constantly said...”

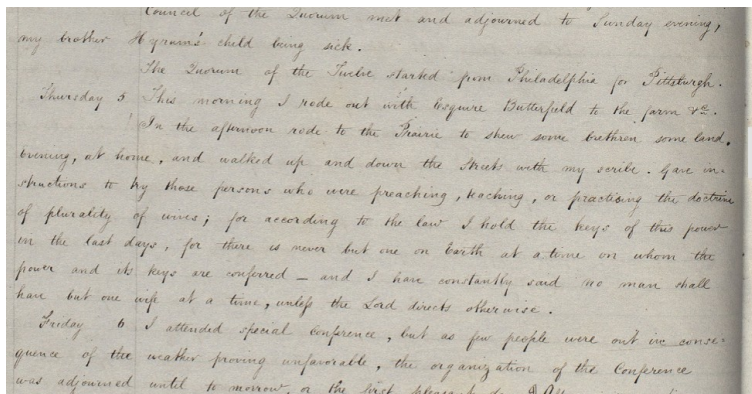
And then there’s an arrow pointing to the original sentence, “No man shall have but one wife,”

followed by another addition: “unless the Lord directs otherwise.”

The sentence “Joseph forbids it, and the practice thereof” is completely crossed out.



And [here is the final draft](#) or *fair copy*, including the omissions and extensive additions that were made after Joseph's death¹³:



5 October 1843 • Thursday ³²⁵

³²⁶ 5 Thursday 5 This morning I rode out with Esquire Butterfield to the farm &c..

In the afternoon rode to the Prairie to shew some brethren some land. Evening, at home, and walked up and down the Streets with my scribe. Gave instructions to try those persons who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives; for according to the law I hold the keys of this power in the last days, for there is never but one on Earth at a time on whom the power and its keys are conferred— and I have constantly said no man shall have but one wife at a time, unless the Lord directs otherwise.

6 October 1843 • Friday ³²⁷

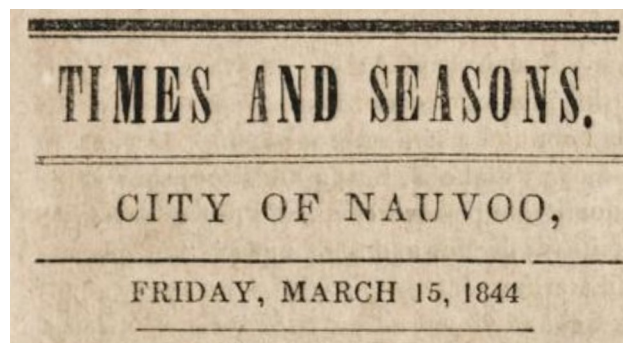
This revised version is now part of the church history compiled by the Utah scribes.

Amateur historian [Brian Hales addressed this dramatic change](#) to Joseph's journal. He notes that the words added *after Joseph's death* precisely match phrases from Section 132 of our current Doctrine and Covenants – which, as noted earlier, was also added *after Joseph's death* – and concludes that “the scribe was...simply using Joseph's words to help the audience understand what Joseph was trying to teach.”¹⁴

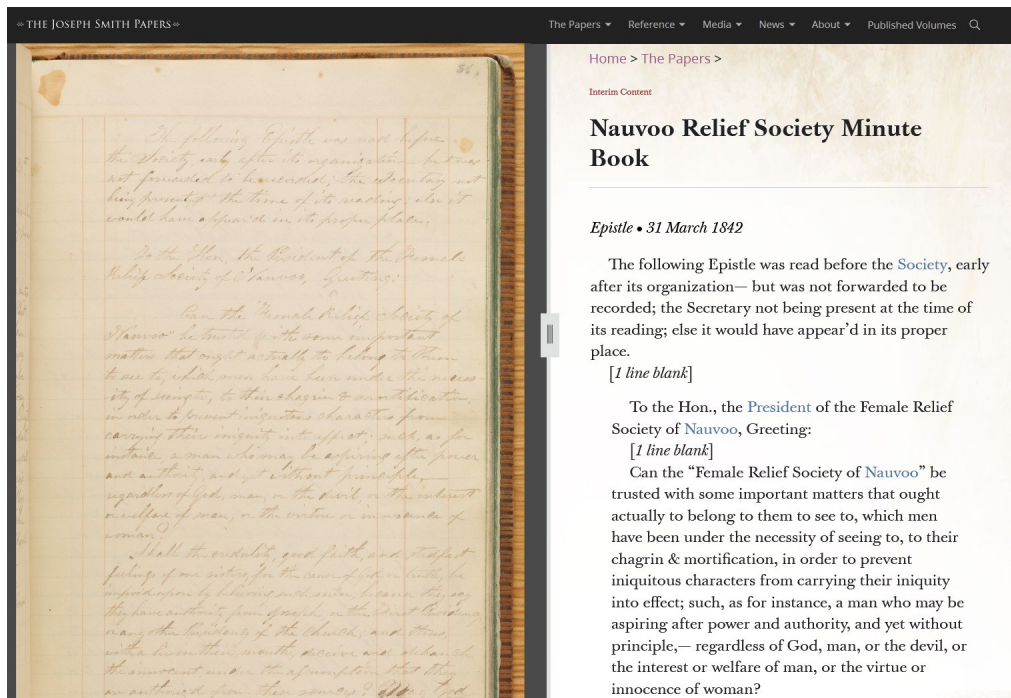
The idea that Joseph was “trying to teach” that God sometimes approves of polygamy by saying “No man shall have but one wife” seems implausible. And, in fact, Joseph's *original* journal entry actually aligns perfectly with *all* of his teachings on polygamy.

As editor of the *Times and Seasons*, he published [a letter penned by Hyrum Smith](#) in March of 1844, which included this portion:

“To the brethren of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints living...in Hancock County...
Whereas...some of your elders say that a man having a certain priesthood may have as many wives as he pleases, and that doctrine is taught here: I say unto you that that man teaches false doctrine, for there is no such doctrine taught here; neither is there any such thing practised here. And any man that is found teaching privately or publicly, any such doctrine, is culpable, and will stand a chance to be brought before the high council and lose his license and membership also...”



One of the strongest speeches ever given on the topic was written by Joseph Smith to the Relief Society sisters in [March of 1842](#), asking for their help in preventing “iniquitous characters from carrying their iniquity into effect.” He warned the sisters not to be duped by any man claiming to have authority from Joseph or the first presidency, or any other presidency of the church, and told them that “no such authority ever has, ever can, or ever will be given to any man, and if any man has been guilty of any such thing, let him be treated with utter contempt, and let the curse of God fall on his head, and let him be turned out of society as unworthy of a place among men, and denounced as the blackest and the most unprincipled wretch; and finally let him be damned!”¹⁵



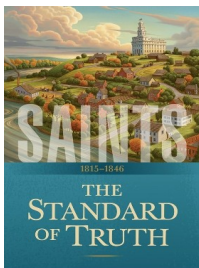
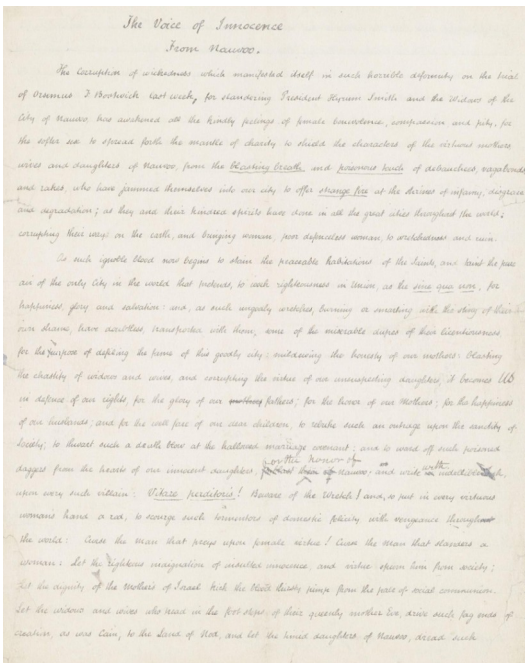
He further made it clear that this was to be universally applied to all men, no matter their office or calling, saying, “all persons pretending to be authorized by us, or having any permit, or sanction from us, are and will be liars and base impostors, and you are authorized...to denounce them as such, and shun them as the flying fiery serpent, whether they are prophets, Seers, or revelators; Patriarchs, twelve Apostles, Elders, Priests, Mayors, Generals, City Councillors, Aldermen, Marshalls, Police, Lord Mayors or the Devil, all are alike culpable and shall be damned for such evil practices...”

may have in any such character; for we do not want any one to believe any thing as coming from us, contrary to the old established morals & virtues & scriptural laws, regulating the habits, customs & conduct of society; and all persons pretending to be authoriz'd by us, or having any permit, or sanction from us, are & will be liars & base impostors, & you are authoriz'd on the very first intimation of the kind, to denounce them as such, & shun them as the flying fiery serpent, whether they are prophets, Seers, or revelators; Patriarchs, twelve Apostles, Elders, Priests, Mayers, Generals, City Councillors, Aldermen, Marshalls, Police, Lord Mayors or the Devil, are alike culpable & shall be damned for such evil practices; and if you yourselves adhere to anything [p. [87]]

Emma Smith also stood united with her husband in condemning all forms of iniquity, including polygamy. To several overflowing crowds of sisters she read a scathing speech entitled “[The Voice of Innocence from Nauvoo](#),” denouncing the

“ungodly wretches” that were “blasting the chastity of widows and wives, and corrupting the virtue of our unsuspecting daughters...” She implored the sisters to rebuke such an outrage upon the chastity of society and to thwart such a death blow at the hallowed marriage covenant.

“Wherefore,” she concluded, “while the marriage bed undefiled is honorable, let polygamy, bigamy, fornication, adultery, [and] prostitution be frowned out of the hearts of honest men to drop in the gulf of fallen nature, ‘where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched!’ and let all the saints say, Amen!”¹⁶



Incredibly, [Saints: The Standard of Truth](#) has this to say:

“Because neither Joseph nor Emma wrote down how they felt about plural marriage, many questions are left unanswered.”¹⁷

It’s astonishing that historians so often ignore the words of Joseph, Hyrum, and Emma. Scholars routinely claim that these three pillars of the restoration never meant what they said about polygamy. They insist that Joseph was prevaricating; that Hyrum, his faithful brother and co-president of the church, was ignorant of Joseph’s secret doctrine; and that Emma – who consistently denied both before *and* after Joseph’s death that her husband ever practiced polygamy – was simply lying.

Brian Hales dismisses Joseph’s declaration of his innocence, cited earlier, in which he exclaims, “What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery and having seven wives when I can only find one,” by explaining that Joseph was not telling the whole truth.



[Hales says](#), “[O]utwardly, Joseph only had one wife, having never publicly acknowledged his plural wives in any way... So as he was openly addressing the congregation that day, Emma was the only wife Joseph had legally or publicly acknowledged... These observations...demonstrate an attempt to share only partial truths in the hopes that the audience would not read between the lines.”¹⁸

[He adds](#), “Historians have generally recognized that most statements include elements designed to avoid frank lying.”

Regarding Hyrum, [Hales explains](#), “As associate church president and church patriarch, Hyrum Smith was close to Joseph, his brother. However, as late as May 1843, he was not in Joseph’s polygamy inner circle.”¹⁹

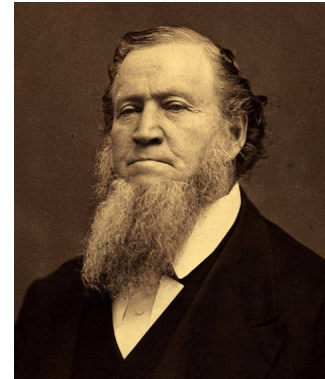
Incidentally, the historical evidence actually does support the idea of a secret circle of Nauvoo polygamists, but it also shows that Joseph was not part of it and was, in fact, fighting against it.

[Emma also denied](#), consistently and till the end of her life, that her husband ever taught or practiced polygamy and repudiated the idea that she and Joseph were ever at odds over any supposed plural wives. In fact, contrary to the stories told by historians, they didn’t argue about much at all. [In Emma’s words](#), “There was no necessity for any quarreling. He knew that I wished for nothing but what was right, and as he wished for nothing else, we did not disagree.”²⁰



[Joseph Smith III](#), son of Joseph and Emma, also testified that, though his room was adjacent to theirs, he never heard them argue. “It has been reported...that Mother was quarrelsome and was antagonistic to my father and frequently made trouble for him. I never heard any quarrelling or harsh language between them under any circumstances, and...even disagreements between them were not conducted in a noisy or angry manner, that mother’s language was quiet and temperate, and so was father’s.”²¹

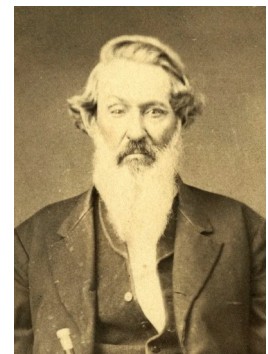
This exemplary picture of marital harmony between the Lord's prophet and his faithful wife is completely at odds with the wild assertions by Brigham Young and other early polygamists, including [this statement](#) made by Brigham in 1866: "Not six months before the death of Joseph, he called his wife Emma into a secret council, and there he told her...of the time she undertook to poison him, and he told her that she was a child of hell and literally the most wicked woman on this earth, that there was not one more wicked than she... I have witnesses of this scene all around who can testify that I am now telling the truth. Twice she undertook to kill him."²²



[Brian Hales counters Emma's repeated denials](#) that her husband ever practiced or taught polygamy by citing testimony from a man named William McLellin:

"[I]n 1847, William McLellin had an interview with Emma, and Emma didn't want to talk about polygamy, but she did say, 'Look, if you tell me things you heard, I'll tell you whether they're true or false.' And in that conversation, she said Joseph was both an adulterer and a polygamist."²³

Hales also cites McLellin as a source in his books and articles and includes, among others, [the following story](#) that McLellin told to Joseph Smith III: "At your birth, your father committed an act with a Miss Hill – a hired girl. Emma saw him and spoke to him. He found he was caught. He confessed humbly and begged forgiveness. Emma and all forgave him. She told me this story was true!!"²⁴



A few facts that might put William McLellin's testimony in perspective are that in 1833, the Lord had already revealed that he was "[not well pleased](#)" with him; that McLellin was [excommunicated from the church twice](#); that in 1839, [he robbed Joseph and Emma's home](#); and that, according to the [History of the Church](#), he "went to the sheriff and asked for the privilege of flogging the Prophet" while Joseph was in jail.²⁵

In light of all this, it's mystifying that Brian Hales would prioritize McLellin's testimony over Emma's, but for some reason, he dismisses both her testimony and that of her son, Joseph III. [He explains](#):

“[J]ust months before [Emma] died, Joseph Smith III asked her a series of questions... Well, one of the questions was, ‘Was Joseph a polygamist?’ And she denies that he had any other wives than her...and, to be quite honest with you, there are at least two other denials that clearly were not senility, were clearly not specially phrased questions, where Emma just comes right out – and they’re fairly well documented – and said, ‘Joseph did not practice polygamy.’ And how do I deal with that? **I don’t know. I do not have a good explanation...** I think Emma was an amazing woman... She had the worst row to hoe of all polygamous wives in my view. She did remarkably well. She stumbled, but I believe there’s plenty of forgiveness on these things for her...”²⁶

The suggestion that Emma “stumbled” in rejecting polygamy and that she would need to be forgiven for affirming that Joseph was a faithful husband is extraordinary.



As Hales mentions, Joseph III, Joseph’s and Emma’s oldest living son, conducted [an interview with his mother](#) near the end of her life in which she affirmed multiple times that her husband never practiced polygamy or anything like it and stated unequivocally, “I know that he had no other wife or wives than myself in any sense, either spiritual or otherwise.”²⁷



However, [Hales dismisses this statement](#) and instead suggests that Joseph III may have falsified his mother’s testimony:

“We don’t have a lot of material from [Emma]. We have a couple of denials that are recorded. One of them comes through Joseph Smith III, who waited until she was dead to publish it, and, interestingly, if you go to the notes that he wrote during his interview on that occasion, **it doesn’t have anything in there on polygamy.** It talks about the Book of Mormon and her statement on the Book of Mormon being beyond Joseph’s ability in 1829. But when you get to all the polygamy stuff, there’s no notes there. He’s reconstructing this from notes that we don’t have or from his own memory, and I’m just not sure he’s representing her words very accurately there.”²⁸

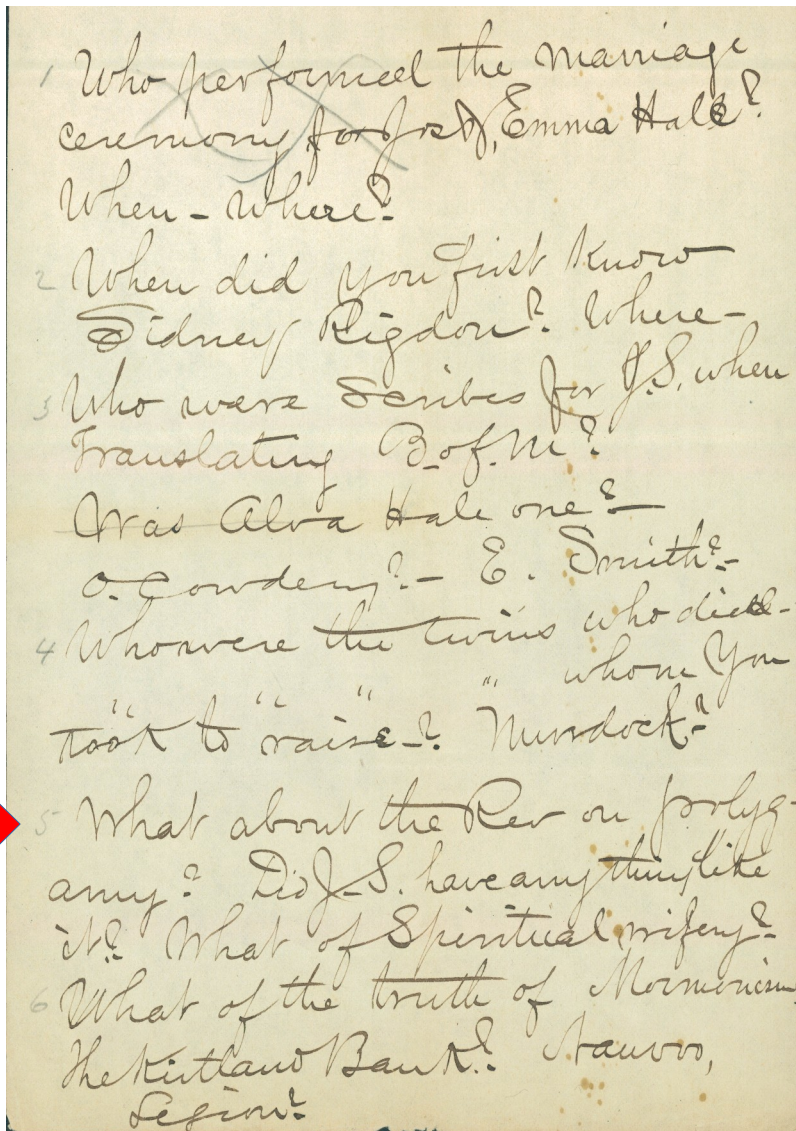
He's even more frank in [another interview](#):

“[R]egarding [Emma’s] so-called denials, I don’t believe Joseph Smith III. That whole interview was written down – published – well after Emma had died. Emma wasn’t there to respond to it. And I’ve seen Joseph Smith III’s notes for those interviews... There’s a number of things written down about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon... There’s no notes about – at least that we have currently – and there may have been and they’ve been lost – but **nothing about what she actually said regarding polygamy.**”²⁹

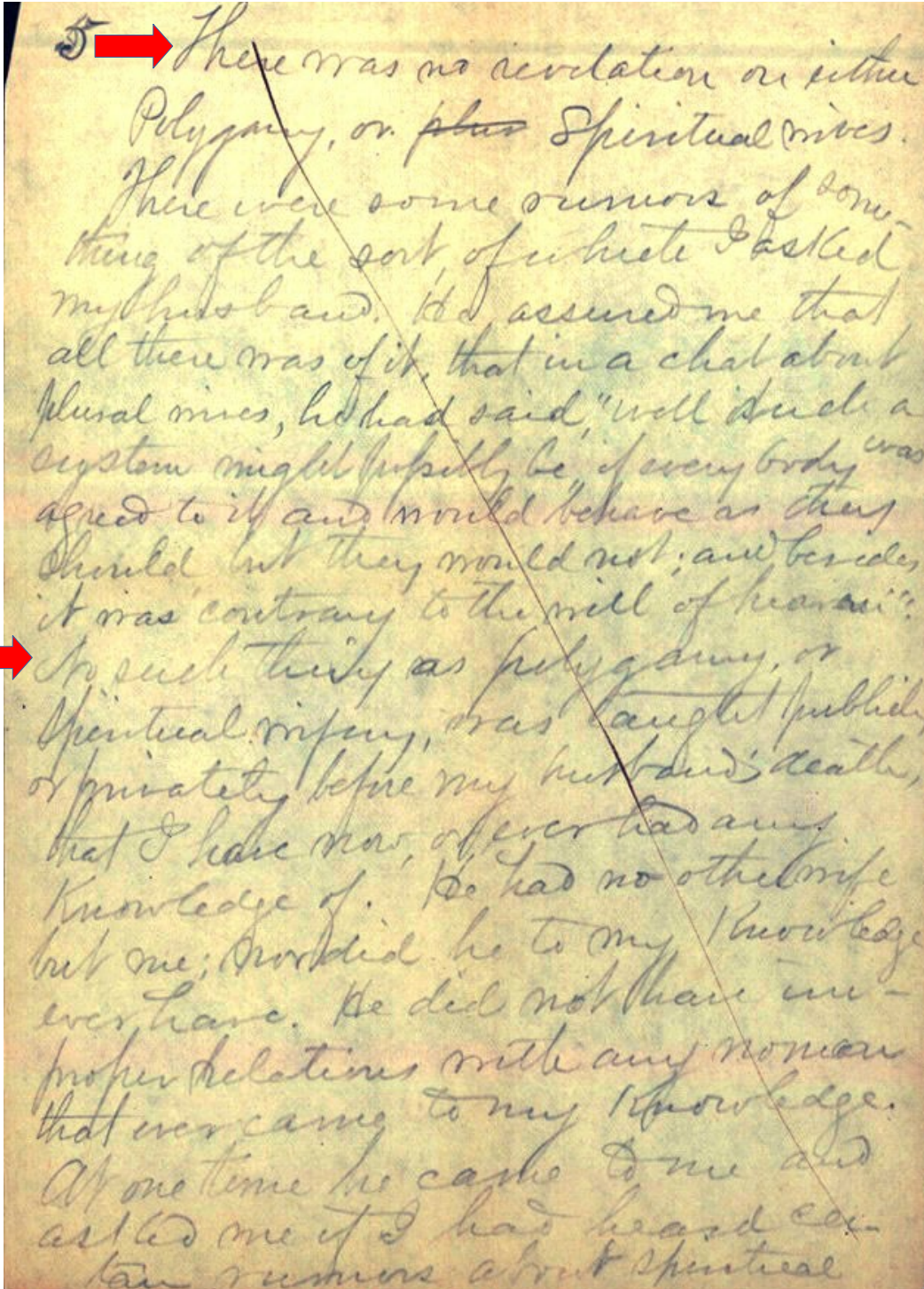
This is manifestly false. The handwritten notes made by Joseph III in preparation for and during his interview with Emma [exactly match his report](#) of that interview in the [Saints’ Herald](#), published October 1, 1879.

We can see Joseph III’s questions, written in pen, on the first page of his notes.³⁰

The fifth question is, “What about the revelation on polygamy? Did Joseph Smith have anything like it? What of spiritual wifery?”



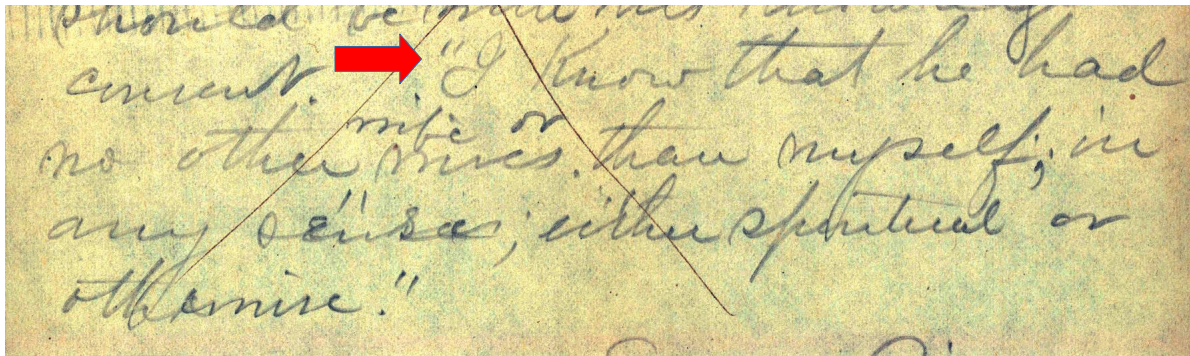
We can also see Emma's corresponding answers, written in pencil, including this unequivocal response: "There was no revelation on either polygamy or spiritual wives... No such thing as polygamy or spiritual wifery was taught publicly or privately before my husband's death that I have now or ever had any knowledge of. He had no other wife but me."



5 → There was no revelation on either Polygamy, or ~~plus~~ Spiritual wives. There were some rumors of something of the sort, of which I asked my husband. He assured me that all there was of it, that in a chat about plural wives, he had said, "well such a system might possibly be, if every body was agreed to it and would behave as they should but they would not; and besides it was contrary to the will of heaven?"

→ No such thing as polygamy, or spiritual wifery, was taught publicly or privately before my husband's death, that I have now, or ever had any knowledge of. He had no other wife but me; nor did he to my knowledge ever have. He did not have any improper relations with any woman that ever came to my knowledge. At one time he came to me and asked me if I had heard certain rumors about spiritual

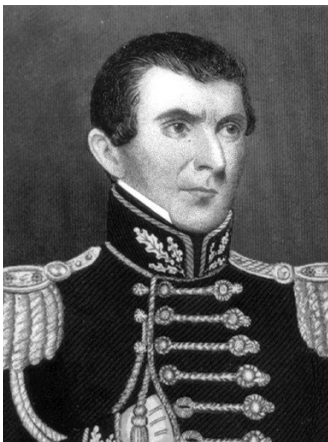
And again, according to the interview notes, Emma stated clearly, “I know that he had no other wife or wives than myself in any sense, either spiritual or otherwise.”



All of this precisely matches what Joseph III published in the *Saints' Herald*. If Brian Hales really did examine these notes, it's hard to imagine how he could claim that they contained “nothing about what she actually said regarding polygamy.”

Q. What about the revelation on Polygamy? Did Joseph Smith have anything like it? What of spiritual wifery?
A. There was no revelation on either polygamy, or spiritual wives. There were some
No such thing as polygamy, or spiritual wifery, was taught, publicly or privately, before my husband's death, that I have now, or ever had any knowledge of.
Q. Did he not have other wives than yourself?
A. He had no other wife but me; nor did he to my knowledge ever have.
knowledge, or consent. I know that he had no other wife or wives than myself, in any sense, either spiritual or otherwise.

Other testimonies are likewise rejected or ignored when they don't support the traditional narrative of Joseph's polygamy, such as statements from Nancy Rigdon and her father regarding a document known as the “Happiness Letter.”

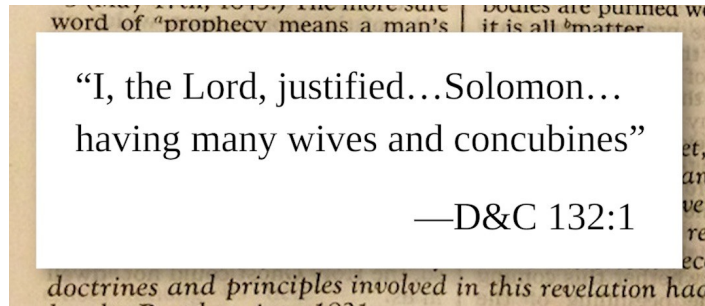


On June 27, [John C. Bennett](#) wrote one of [many letters](#) to the *Sangamo Journal* declaring, “Joseph Smith, the notorious Mormon prophet and swindler...is the most consummate blackguard and dastardly coward...” and that he had “seduced not only hundreds of single and married females, but...attempted to seduce Miss Nancy Rigdon, the eldest...daughter of Sidney Rigdon.”³¹

According to Bennett, Joseph wrote Nancy what is popularly known as the “[Happiness Letter](#),” in which the author uses half-truths to persuade Nancy that a plurality of wives is sometimes approved of, or even required, by God.

“Happiness is the object and design of our existence... That which is wrong under one circumstance may be, and often is right under another... God gave [King Solomon] every desire of his heart, even things which might be considered abominable...but which, in reality, were right, because God gave and sanctioned [them] by special revelation.”³²

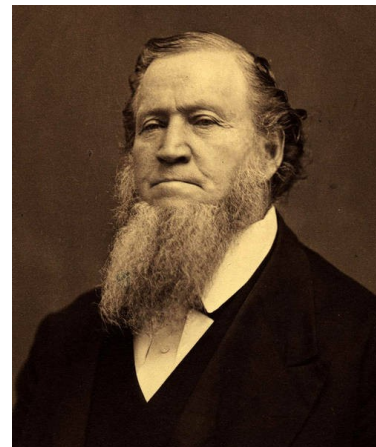
Importantly, the author’s teachings about Solomon’s polygamy match those found in [Section 132](#) of our current Doctrine and Covenants, which we’ll examine shortly.



The letter continues: “Blessings offered, but rejected, are no longer blessings, but become like the talent hid in the earth by the wicked and slothful servant...for unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly; but unto him that hath not, or will not receive, shall be taken away that which he hath...”

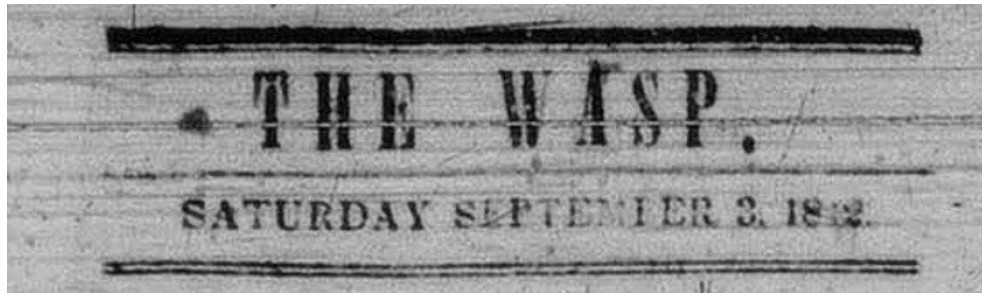
It’s striking that the principle implied here – that rejecting a plurality of wives is akin to burying one’s talent – was later [taught explicitly by Brigham Young](#) to the Utah saints:

“Now, where a man in this church says, ‘I don’t want but one wife, I will live my religion with one,’ he will perhaps be saved in the celestial kingdom; but when he gets there, he will not find himself in possession of any wife at all. He has had a talent that he has hid up. He will come forward and say, ‘Here is that which thou gavest me, I have not wasted it, and here is the one talent,’ and he will not enjoy it, but it will be taken and given to those who have improved the talents they received, and he will find himself without any wife, and he will remain single forever and ever.”³³



Of the letter to Nancy Rigdon, [Bennett writes](#), “I have seen it, so has her father... Now call upon Miss Rigdon for the truth of the foregoing.”

As it happens, we do have a response from the Rigdons, written by Nancy's father a few weeks later and published in [the Wasp newspaper](#):



“Editor of the Wasp. Dear Sir: I am fully authorized by my daughter, Nancy, to say...that the letter which has appeared in the Sangamo Journal... purporting to have been written by Mr. Joseph Smith to her, was unauthorized by her, and that she never said...that said letter was written by said Mr. Smith, nor in his handwriting, **but by another person and in another person's handwriting**... I would further state that Mr. Smith denied to me the authorship of that letter. [Signed,] Sydney Rigdon.”³⁴

Yet despite this public refutation *and* the fact that the letter was not written in Joseph's handwriting [Brian Hales](#) continues to attribute the letter to Joseph Smith:

“Apparently, in an attempt to propose plural marriage to her, the prophet dictated a letter to her containing doctrinal teachings that was published by excommunicated member John C. Bennett.”³⁵

Hales adds, “While some researchers may question whether Joseph Smith was the true author, no other plausible candidate has been proposed.”

Attributing this letter to Joseph because its true author has not been positively identified is a prime example of the carelessness underlying the traditional narrative of Joseph's polygamy.

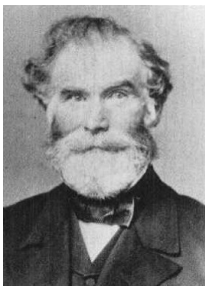
What is the motivation for continually rejecting the well documented, contemporary, and consistent statements of Joseph, Emma, and Hyrum, in favor of later recollections and “the testimony of traitors” ([D&C 122:3](#))? What evidence do we have that the testimonies and teachings from our founding prophet, his faithful wife, and his beloved brother should not be believed?

Evidence for Joseph's Alleged Polygamy

The most well-known testament to Joseph's alleged polygamy is [Doctrine and Covenants Section 132](#), "relating to the new and everlasting covenant, including the eternity of the marriage covenant and the principle of plural marriage." The heading to Section 132 describes it as a "revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Nauvoo, Illinois, recorded July 12, 1843."

It would be much more accurate to say that in 1852 – ***eight years after Joseph was killed*** – Brigham Young introduced this purported revelation, claiming that Joseph had received it years before, but that it had been kept secret in Brigham's desk.

At a special conference on [August 29, 1852](#), at the request of Brigham Young, Orson Pratt introduced the subject to the Utah saints:



"It is quite unexpected to me, brethren and sisters, to be called upon to address you...upon the principle which has been named, namely, a plurality of wives... I have not been in the habit of publicly speaking upon this subject... consequently, we shall have to break up new ground..."³⁶

In the afternoon, during the same conference, [Brigham Young](#) also addressed the congregation:

"You heard Brother Pratt state this morning that a revelation would be read this afternoon. The original copy of this revelation was burnt up. Sister Emma burnt the original. This revelation has been in my possession many years. And who has known it? None but those who should know it. I keep a patent lock on my desk, and there does not anything leak out that should not."³⁷



After Brigham's remarks, what we now know as D&C Section 132 was then read to the congregation for the first time.



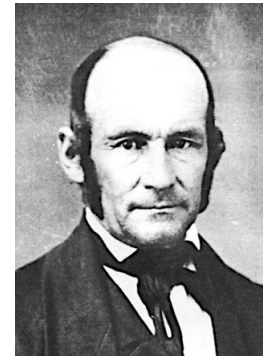
In an [1867 interview with Jason Briggs](#), Emma was asked about Brigham’s claim, to which she responded:

“The statement that I burned the original of the copy Brigham Young claimed to have is false and made out of whole cloth and not true in any particular. I never saw anything purporting to be a revelation authorizing polygamy until I saw it in [The Seer](#), published by Orson Pratt [in 1853].”³⁸

Since Emma and Brigham can’t both be telling the truth, let’s examine some of the claims surrounding the receipt of the alleged revelation on polygamy.

In 1874, [Brigham recalled](#), “While we were in England, I think, the Lord manifested to me by vision and his Spirit things that I did not then understand... And when I returned home and Joseph revealed those things to me, then I understood the reflections that were upon my mind while in England... This was in 1841...right in front of my house in the street...”³⁹

Heber C. Kimball confirmed that Joseph taught him about polygamy as soon as he returned from the same mission to England. But [in his version](#), Joseph called Heber, Brigham, and Willard Richards together and taught it to them all for the first time. [Heber recalls](#), “I received a revelation from God through Joseph Smith myself once in the presence of Brigham Young and Willard Richards. It was, ‘Thus saith the Lord, for my servant Willard and Brigham and Heber to take more wives.’ When we came home in [July] 1841, we had not been home over six days before Joseph called us together and laid these things before us the first time we knew of them.”⁴⁰



Heber’s account cannot be true, however, as [Willard Richards](#) did not arrive in Nauvoo until several weeks after the others.⁴¹

In a surprising [statement given in 1869](#), Brigham told U.S. Senator Lyman Trumbull that polygamy had actually originated in Utah: “As to our institutions, we know we are right, and polygamy, which you object to, was not originally a part of our system, but was adopted by us as a necessity after we came here.”⁴²



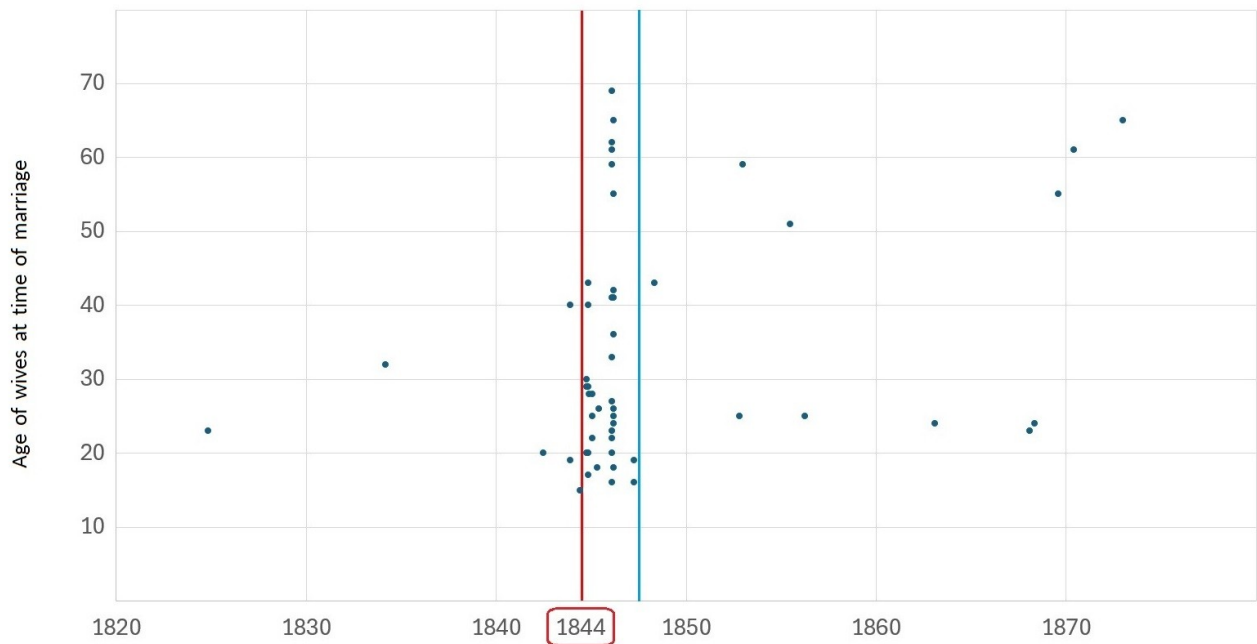
While it's true that polygamy was not part of the original doctrine taught by Joseph, the notion that it was instituted due to a surplus of women after the trek west was [debunked over 80 years ago](#) by [Apostle John A. Widtsoe](#):



“The United States census records from 1850 to 1940 and all available church records uniformly show a preponderance of males in Utah and in the church. The theory that plural marriage was a consequence of a surplus of female church members fails from lack of evidence.”⁴³

Even though, as Brigham noted, polygamy was not originally part of the church, Brigham himself had secretly taken numerous wives before leaving Nauvoo, and, strikingly, the vast majority of his marriages took place immediately after Joseph and Hyrum were killed.

Wives of Brigham Young



The red line marks the date of the martyrdom. The blue line is Brigham's departure from Nauvoo and arrival in the Salt Lake valley.

Heber C. Kimball's situation was similar. Prior to the martyrdom, Heber had taken one additional wife. Less than **six months** after Joseph's death, Heber had over a dozen wives and would eventually have over forty.⁴⁴

This excerpt of a letter from Heber to his first wife, Vilate, gives us a glimpse into the justifications he used to persuade her to accept what he was doing behind her back:

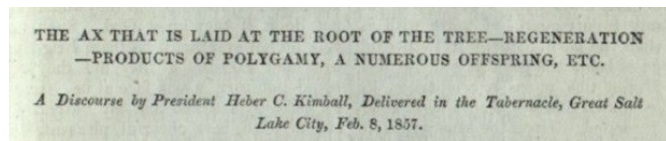


“What I have done is according to the mind and will of God... Every son and daughter that is brought forth by the wives that are given to me will add to your glory as much as it will to them... What I have done has been by stolen moments for the purpose to save your feelings and that alone on the account of the love I have for you. I beg of you to consider my case... God has put power into my hands for the purpose to get women to myself and those that he has given to me.”⁴⁵



It's impossible not to digress for a moment and include the following remarks by Heber C. Kimball, given in the Salt Lake tabernacle in 1857:

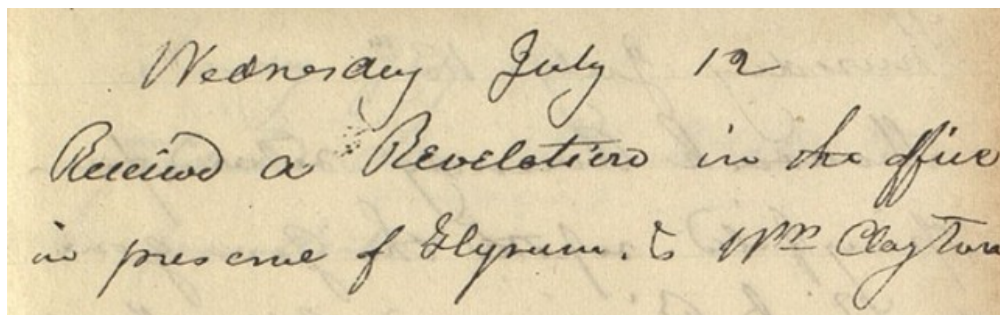
“If I am faithful all the time and continue right along with brother Brigham, we will go to brother Joseph [in the spirit world] and say, ‘Here we are, Brother Joseph’... He will say to us, ‘Come along, my boys... Where are your wives?’ ‘They are back yonder. They would not follow us.’ **‘Never mind,’ says Joseph, ‘here are thousands. Have all you want.’** Perhaps some do not believe that, but I am just simple enough to believe it...”⁴⁶



In the spirit world there is an increase of males and females, there are millions of them, and if I am faithful all the time, and continue right along with brother Brigham, we will go to brother Joseph and say, “Here we are brother Joseph; we are here ourselves are we not, with none of the property we possessed in our probationary state, not even the rings on our fingers?” He will say to us, “Come along, my boys, we will give you a good suit of clothes. Where are your wives?” “They are back yonder; they would not follow us.” “Never mind,” says Joseph, “here are thousands, have all you want.” Perhaps some do not believe that, but I am just simple enough to believe it.

We'll now return to the provenance of Section 132.

As entries in Joseph Smith's journal were recorded on his behalf, some of his scribes would write in the first person, as if in Joseph's own voice. His scribe Willard Richards recorded [the following entry](#) in Joseph's journal for July 12, 1843: "Received a revelation in the office in presence of Hyrum and William Clayton."⁴⁷

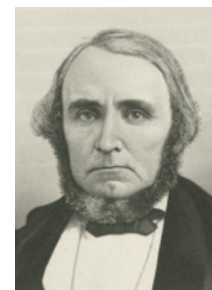


Wednesday July 12
Received a Revelation in the office
in presence of Hyrum & Wm Clayton

Richards included no details about what the revelation entailed, but editors of the Joseph Smith Papers note that just four days later, Joseph gave his [first public sermon on eternal marriage](#),⁴⁸ so it's plausible that this may have been the subject of the revelation.

At any rate, a [revised version of this journal entry](#) was, again, *created* over a decade later. The original wording, "Received a revelation...", was changed to, "I received the following revelation...", and the full text of what we know as D&C 132 was added to the entry.⁴⁹

This alteration was based on the testimony of William Clayton, one of Joseph's clerks, who is said to have kept a journal of his own during this time.



Here's an [entry from Clayton's personal journal](#), purportedly written on the same day, July 12, 1843 (see footnote 631):

"This A.M. I wrote a revelation consisting of ten pages on the order of the priesthood, showing the designs in Moses, Abraham, David, and Solomon having many wives and concubines, etc. After it was wrote, presidents Joseph and Hyrum presented it and read it to Emma, who said she did not believe a word of it and appeared very rebellious."⁵⁰

It seems strange that Clayton's personal journal should include so many more details than the journal kept by Willard Richards on behalf of the prophet himself. Yet this entry by Clayton is *heavily* relied on as proof that Joseph received a revelation on polygamy – what would later become D&C Section 132.

Importantly, however, Clayton would later give a [sworn affidavit](#), written in his own hand, that differs *considerably* from his allegedly contemporaneous journal entry. And, far from being minor embellishments, the contradictory details he gives in 1874 actually make up *the core of his narrative*, which is that on July 12, Joseph and Hyrum came into the church office discussing Emma's obstinate opposition to polygamy. He recalls:

“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 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 commenced to dictate the revelation on celestial marriage, and I wrote it. **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.”⁵¹

This is no minor discrepancy.

Clayton's early account – his alleged journal entry – specifically says that Joseph and Hyrum went to see Emma *together*.

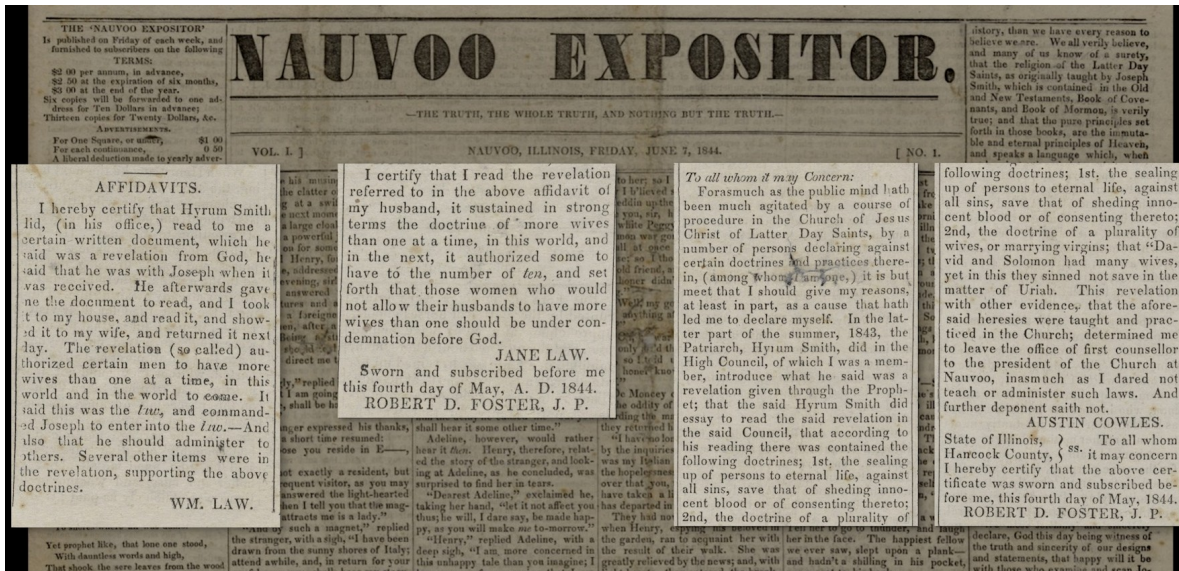
Yet his later testimony completely revolves around Hyrum's going *by himself*. It's Hyrum who begged Joseph to write the revelation; Hyrum who took it to Emma *while Joseph waited with Clayton*; and Hyrum who came back with the tale of being berated by Emma.

In fact, the two accounts are irreconcilable on this fundamental point. The journal entry, supposedly written mere hours after the event, should have been an extremely accurate and reliable record. Yet, if that's the case, then his later account – *his sworn affidavit* – was a **complete fabrication**. Again, the two are totally irreconcilable.

Why is this so important? Because, according to William Clayton, the only three who were present when the polygamy revelation was received were himself, Joseph, and Hyrum – making Clayton the only living witness. In fact, his testimony is the only purportedly contemporaneous account of Joseph’s receiving any such revelation – **a revelation that contradicts everything Joseph ever taught about polygamy.**

Recognizing that Clayton fabricated *at least* one of his statements completely destroys his credibility as a witness, making it absolutely irresponsible to prioritize his testimony over Joseph’s. Yet, this is exactly what historians have done for over a century and a half.

Importantly, Clayton’s falsification of these events also undermines all other claims that hinge on his dubious accounts. For example, in June 1844, three weeks before Joseph and Hyrum were killed, excommunicated member William Law and others created a newspaper called the [Nauvoo Expositor](#). Intended to expose Joseph Smith as a “pernicious and diabolical...criminal,”⁵² this newspaper [published affidavits](#) from apostates William Law, his wife, Jane, and a man named Austin Cowles, who had previously been a member of the high council and who swore that Hyrum Smith had read the polygamy revelation to the entire high council ten months earlier, in August of 1843.⁵³



Joseph and Hyrum denied these claims, and Joseph, who was mayor of Nauvoo at the time, [further explained](#) that “...on enquiring concerning the passage in the resurrection concerning ‘they neither marry nor are given in marriage, etc.’ he received for answer, men in this life must marry in view of eternity, otherwise they

must remain as angels, or be single in heaven, which was the amount of the revelation referred to...”⁵⁴

Joseph also referred to William Law’s affidavit, [saying](#) that “the truth of God was transformed into a lie.”⁵⁵

The affidavits themselves raise several questions:

- If Hyrum had read such an offensive and heretical revelation, as claimed, why did Cowles wait almost ten months to publish his complaints?
- Why did Cowles and the Laws voice their concerns only after they had all been [excommunicated](#) for [apostasy](#) and become open enemies of Joseph Smith?⁵⁶
- And why, during all that time, did not one of the other council members say a word to anyone about this shocking new doctrine, especially with Hyrum supposedly sharing it so freely with the whole council?

The only intriguing part of these implausible affidavits is that each contains language specific to the purported revelation written by William Clayton.

Cowles, in particular, in [his affidavit](#), writes that the revelation “contained the following doctrines: 1st. the sealing up of persons to eternal life against all sins, save that of shedding innocent blood or of consenting thereto.” And we can see the nearly identical language in [D&C 132](#) (see v. 36). “2nd, the doctrine of a plurality of wives, or marrying virgins,” which of course is also in Section 132. “[And] that David and Solomon had many wives, yet in this they sinned not save in the matter of Uriah.” These elements are all found in the alleged revelation written by William Clayton.

Austin Cowles affidavit

“the sealing up of persons to eternal life, against all sins, save that of shedding innocent blood or of consenting thereto”

“the doctrine of a plurality of wives, or marrying virgins”

“that ‘David and Solomon had many wives, yet in this they sinned not save in the matter of Uriah’”

Doctrine and Covenants 132

“[I]f a man marry a wife...and they are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise...and he or she shall commit any sin or transgression... and if they commit no murder wherein they shed innocent blood, yet they shall...enter into their exaltation;

“[I]f any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and... if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him...”

“David also received many wives and concubines, and also Solomon... and in none of these things did [David] sin against me save in the case of Uriah and his wife...”



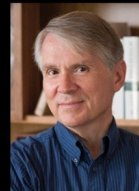
Yet, the only contemporaneous connection between that “revelation” and Joseph and Hyrum are Clayton’s fraudulent story and the claims of these three avowed enemies of Joseph Smith.

Why in the world would the testimonies of such witnesses be prioritized over Joseph’s and Hyrum’s?

Of course, if Joseph did not receive a revelation on polygamy and Hyrum therefore had no such thing to read to the high council, the obvious question is how Austin Cowles and the Laws could have seen Clayton’s spurious revelation, which they certainly seem to be quoting from.

Interestingly, if Brian Hales is correct that there was a ***polygamy inner circle*** in Nauvoo, it’s very plausible that Clayton’s document may have been shown to potential candidates as tangible evidence of Joseph’s secret “revelation.”

In fact, this is the very scenario proposed by [many historians](#): that a [secret revelation](#) on polygamy was shared with [select men and women](#) who were quietly engaged in the practice. The difference is that, in their version, Joseph is actually part of the secret circle instead of trying to root it out.

 Hales	“Upon entering a plural marriage, Nauvoo polygamists became part of a secret group . Collectively, historians often refer to these members as ‘polygamy insiders.’ ”
 Compton	“It was new doctrine, preached only in great secrecy... Smith taught polygamy to his inner circle... ”
 Bergera	“...[T]wenty-eight men and their wives comprise the most likely candidates for membership in Joseph Smith's inner circle of plural marriage participants.”

In any case, the parallel language between the affidavits and Section 132 of our current Doctrine and Covenants is not proof that Hyrum read Clayton’s dubious polygamy revelation to the high council or to anyone else.

Scriptural Basis for Polygamy?

Not only is the provenance of [Section 132](#) extremely problematic, but the internal inconsistencies in this section also raise serious doubts, beginning with **verse 1**, where the Lord is purportedly answering Joseph’s question about why he “justified” Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others in their having “many wives and concubines.” Yet Isaac did *not* have many wives; he had **one**. In the entire biblical narrative, there is no mention of Isaac’s having any wife but Rebekah.

Joseph had already translated the Book of Mormon, which consistently condemns polygamy, and he had also made many [inspired changes to the Bible](#) that actually *emphasized the Lord’s displeasure* with David and Solomon, so it’s seems unlikely that he would be under the impression that the Lord justified them in any way.

Jacob 2:27: “[H]earken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife and concubines he shall have none.”

Mosiah 11: “[King Noah] did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart. And he had many wives and concubines.”

Ether 10: “Riplakish did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord, for he did have many wives and concubines...”

King James Version	Joseph Smith Translation
2 Samuel 12:13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.	2 Samuel 12:13 And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath not put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.
1 Kings 3:14 And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.	1 Kings 3:14 And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, then I will lengthen thy days, and thou shalt not walk in unrighteousness as did thy father David.
1 Kings 11:4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.	1 Kings 11:4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not perfect with the Lord, his God, and it became as the heart of David, his father.
1 Kings 11:6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father.	1 Kings 11:6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, as David his father, and went not fully after the Lord.

Importantly, in **verses 2 and 3** of [Section 132](#), the Lord purportedly says that he “will answer” Joseph and warns, “Therefore prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am *about to give unto you.*” Yet **verse 52** of the same section refers to multiple women that have supposedly *already been given* to Joseph: “And let mine handmaid, Emma Smith, receive all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph, and who are virtuous and pure before me...”

That the Lord should have already given Joseph multiple additional wives by this time – over a dozen, according to the historians – prior to counseling him to prepare his heart for what he is *about* to be taught is nonsensical and requires historical gymnastics to explain.

Verse 54 includes a commandment from the Lord to Emma to “cleave unto my servant Joseph and to none else,” while commanding her husband to “cleave” to any number of women. This is an abominable perversion of the commandment that God specifically directs to his sons: “Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her **and none else**” ([D&C 42:22](#)).

Verse 26 teaches an extraordinary doctrine that is not reflected anywhere else in holy writ – namely, that if a couple is sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise, they may then commit any sin or transgression and all manner of blasphemies, with the exception of murder, and still enter into their exaltation. This shocking declaration is not supported by any other scripture and is completely incompatible with [3 Nephi 12](#), [D&C 1](#), and, really, our entire canon of scripture.

In verse 39, not only does the Lord supposedly express approval of King David’s polygamy, with the exception of Bathsheba, but he explains that he himself facilitated it: “David’s wives and concubines were given unto him of me by the hand of Nathan...and **in none of these things did he sin** against me, save in the case of Uriah and his wife.” This is diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Book of Mormon, which Joseph Smith called “the most correct of any book on earth” and wherein the Lord states, “Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, **which thing was abominable before me**, saith the Lord.”

Verse 61 is extremely problematic, beginning with, “If any man espouse a virgin **and desire to espouse another...**” The idea of a married man desiring to “espouse another” is, of course, condemned by the Savior in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon: “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery in his heart” ([Matt. 5:28](#); [3 Ne. 12:28](#)).

Verse 61 continues, “if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified.” This supposedly divine stipulation that the women be virgins was wholly ignored by Brigham Young and other Utah polygamists.

As just one example, we have [newspaper articles](#) and court records confirming that in **1847**, Augusta Cobb’s husband, Henry Cobb, sued for – and was granted – a divorce from his wife on the grounds of adultery with Brigham Young, whom [she had married](#) in **1843**.⁵⁷



Supreme J. Court--Boston.
Divorced from a Woman who had become the "Spiritual Wife" of a Mormon Leader.—
Henry Cobb vs. Augusta Cobb. This was a libel alleging crim con on the part of the respondent with Brigham Young, in Nauvoo, in August, 1844, and December, 1845. After living 21 years in good repute with her lawful husband, the respondent became led away with Mormonism, leaving her husband, went to Nauvoo, and joined the church there.

**the legal term “crim con” denoted adultery*

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
 Church History Biographical Database

Augusta Adams — Born 1802 December 7
 — Married **Brigham Young** 1843 November 2 (Age 40)

Alternate Names: Augusta Cobb (Married Name)
 Birth Date: On 1802 December 7 (Born)
 Death Date: On 1886 February 3 (Died)

Verse 61 also makes a man’s marrying additional wives contingent on the first wife’s consent. Yet **verse 64** clarifies that if his wife does not receive this law, she will be *destroyed*.

64 And again, verily, verily, I say unto you, if any man have a wife, who holds the keys of this power, and he teaches unto her the law of my priesthood, as pertaining to these things, then shall she believe and administer unto him, or she shall be destroyed, saith the Lord your God; for I will destroy her; for I will magnify my name upon all those who receive and abide in my law.

The idea that our Heavenly Father would threaten to destroy one of his daughters for objecting to her husband’s taking more wives after he has vowed to “cleave unto her and none else” seems incomprehensibly blasphemous and should be sufficient evidence that Section 132 did not come from God – or from Joseph.

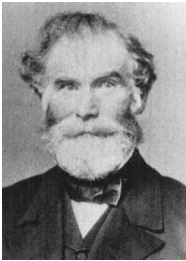
Some insist that if we don't accept the so-called "doctrine of...many wives and concubines" found in the first verse of Section 132, then we must also discard the doctrine of eternal marriage mentioned in the same section.

This does not follow. As we've seen, the pattern of the later scribes was to corrupt existing revelations and manuscripts. As noted earlier, Willard Richards' record of Joseph's having received a [revelation in July of 1843](#) is bolstered by the fact that just four days later, Joseph gave a [sermon](#) in which he preached publicly for the first time on the doctrine of eternal marriage.⁵⁸

∞ THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPERS ∞

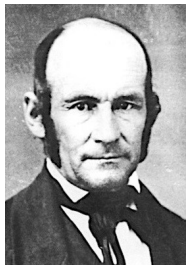
JS's 16 July 1843 discourse was the first occasion on which he publicly taught the concept of eternal marriage, promising that he would teach the Latter-day Saints more about eternal unions when the Nauvoo temple was completed.³¹ JS also announced in the discourse that the Saints should recognize Hyrum Smith as a prophet. JS's scribe Willard Richards, who

This doctrine is entirely distinct from teachings about polygamy from Brigham Young and other Utah leaders, who repeatedly taught not only that polygamy was of God, but that it was essential to exaltation:



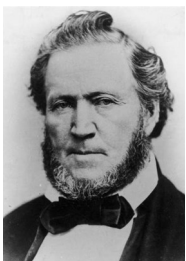
[Orson Pratt](#):

"[T]his doctrine...is incorporated as a part of our religion and necessary for our exaltation to the fullness of the Lord's glory in the eternal world. We consider it an essential doctrine to glory and exaltation."⁵⁹



[Heber C. Kimball](#):

"You might as well deny Mormonism and turn away from it as to oppose the plurality of wives. It is a principle that God has revealed for the salvation of the human family."⁶⁰



[Brigham Young](#):

"Without the doctrine that this revelation reveals, no man on earth ever could be exalted to be a God."

"The only men who become gods, even the sons of God, are those [who enter into polygamy](#)."⁶¹

Joseph Smith taught that eternal marriage was of God. He taught that polygamy was an abomination.

But what about biblical polygamy? Doesn't the story of Abraham, for example, show that God condoned polygamy at least some of the time?

A closer examination of the story of Abraham – who was still known as Abram at this point – is eye-opening. On finding herself barren, Abram's wife, Sarai, is the one to suggest that he use her slave, Hagar, as a surrogate: "I pray thee, go in unto my maid. It may be that I may obtain children by her. And **Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai**" ([Genesis 16:2](#)).

This was never a command from God; Hagar was never treated as a wife; and the resulting misery for all involved attests to the Lord's displeasure at their having turned to a worldly solution to their problem instead of to him. Perhaps it's no coincidence that God later gave Abram and Sarai new names and that *Abraham* and *Sarah* never again resorted to using concubines or handmaids, but patiently waited on the Lord until he blessed them with Isaac in their old age.

Abraham's grandson Jacob did have two wives, but, again, a careful reading reveals that, far from being commanded by God, Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah by his scheming father-in-law. He was deceived into this marriage, yet he kept his promise to marry Rachel, the love of his heart. Again, custom and culture allowed this, just as modern society regards many things that God has warned against, such as debt and divorce, as acceptable solutions to common problems.

And again, misery and sorrow plagued Jacob's entire family, just as it had Abram's. During times of infertility, Leah and Rachel both turned to the same solution of using their handmaids as surrogates. How these "handmaids" felt in being used in this way we can only imagine. And Leah's despair at being an unloved wife is truly heart wrenching, as after bearing her first son, she expresses hopefully, "Now therefore, my husband will love me" ([Genesis 29:32](#)). This unhappy arrangement was neither commanded nor sanctioned by God.



Some claim that the Lord would never have made Jacob a great patriarch of the twelve tribes if he hadn't approved of Jacob's polygamy. But God also made powerful instruments of Paul, Zeezrom, Alma the younger and the sons of Mosiah, yet we would never conclude that he must have approved of *their* early behavior. Again, it seems significant that God would later change Jacob's name to Israel.

Perhaps the core message of the stories of Abraham, Jacob, and others is one the Lord has repeatedly emphasized: that as we turn our hearts to him, our sins, though they be as scarlet, may be white as snow (see Isaiah 1:18). Whether or not this is the intended message of these biblical stories, seeking to justify polygamy because of what was done by them of old, is squarely condemned in the Book of Mormon (see [Jacob 2:23, 26](#)).

As previously noted, Jacob condemns the polygamy of David and Solomon, calling it “abominable.” Here are Jacob’s powerful words on the subject:

“Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph.

“Wherefore, I the Lord God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old.

“Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord, for there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none;

“For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women, and whoredoms are an abomination before me, thus saith the Lord of hosts.

“Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes” ([Jacob 2:25-29](#)).

Incredibly, despite this strong and unequivocal language, the traditional polygamy narrative holds that Jacob, in the very next verse, qualifies this condemnation of a plurality of wives by cautioning that the Lord might actually *command* it once in a while: “For if I will, saith the Lord of hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things” ([Jacob 2:30](#)).

That Jacob would speak so powerfully and in such condemnatory language, only to undermine his entire sermon by adding that the Lord might capriciously command what he has called an “abomination” would be baffling, to say the least. And the idea that Jacob would alert his people to a loophole that the Lord would only make brief use of over 2,000 years later also seems very unlikely.

It's interesting that verse 30 begins with "For..." which implies a *continuation* of the point being made and not an exception. In fact, the word "for" was so incompatible with the idea of this being a loophole that the authors of the [Gospel Doctrine manual](#) actually **changed** the wording from "For if I will..." to "[But] if I will..." in order to support the idea that this verse was meant as an exception to God's rule of monogamy.⁶²

The Lord's purpose for commanding His people to practice plural marriage

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Jacob taught: "For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife. ... [But] if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things" (Jacob 2:27, 30). At various times throughout biblical history, the Lord commanded people to practice plural marriage. For example, He gave this command to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon (D&C 132:1).

Regrettably, here is how many of us have probably been reading Jacob 2:30:

"For if I will, [sometime in the future] saith the Lord of hosts, raise up seed unto me, [children] I will command my people; [to practice polygamy] otherwise [if I don't want to raise up children at this time] they shall hearken unto these things."
[these commandments to have only one wife]

As we can see, this interpretation superimposes onto the verse many things that are not explicitly said. Let's examine this more carefully and see if there's a more plausible interpretation.

First, regarding the Lord's desire to "raise up seed," it's remarkable that even at times when it would seem desirable to raise up many children quickly, God never commanded anyone to do so in polygamy. Adam had one wife, as he and Eve replenished the entire earth. When Lehi left Jerusalem to start anew in the promised land, each of his sons took one wife. There's no indication that the Jaredites took multiple wives when they came to the promised land, and [Ether 10](#) specifically condemns the practice. And notably, there were a total of eight souls on the ark: Noah, his wife, and their three sons, with one wife each.

In fact, right here in [Jacob 2](#), the Lord explains that he has led *the very people he's speaking to* out of Jerusalem in order to "raise up...a righteous branch" unto him (v. 25) – and commands them to do so **monogamously**.

The apparent implication in verse 30 that God might *someday* want to raise up seed to himself, instead of at that very time, is instantly refuted in [1 Nephi 7:1](#), where the Lord explicitly tells Lehi that his sons should take wives with them to the land of promise “that they might raise up seed unto the Lord.” It’s the *very reason* God led Lehi’s family out of Jerusalem, and he commanded them to do this with the help of Ishmael’s perfectly suited family – providing one wife for each son and one wife for Zoram.

So why did Jacob use the phrase “If I will...” if he wasn’t referring to some future possibility? Perhaps he was using it in the same way that a father might warn his son, “If I’m working overtime to pay for your college, you’d better get good grades.” The father is already working the overtime, so “**If** I’m working overtime” is, in this case, equivalent to “**Since** I’m working overtime,” as he reminds his son to be diligent.

If we read the next phrase, “I will command my people,” just as it stands, without attaching anything extra onto it, we get a straightforward message: “I will give commandments to my people.” This is exactly how the Lord directs his people toward righteousness – by commanding them.

The verse concludes with “otherwise they shall hearken unto these things.” It’s interesting that the phrases *these things* and *such things* are used elsewhere in this [same chapter](#), always in a negative context.

v. 14: “...if ye persist in *these things*, his judgments must speedily come unto you.”

v. 21: “...*such things* are abominable unto him who created all flesh.”

v. 34: “ye have done *these things* which ye ought not to have done.”

The same phrase as found in verse 30 would make sense if used in this way: “I will command my people; otherwise, they shall hearken unto *these things*.”

With these thoughts in mind, let’s look at a possible alternate interpretation of Jacob 2:30:

“For if [[or since](#)] I will, saith the Lord of hosts,
raise up seed unto me, [[righteous children](#)]
I will command my people; [[I’ll give them commandments](#)]
otherwise [[if I don’t give them commandments](#)]
they shall hearken unto these things [[whoredoms and polygamy](#)].”

This would also make much more sense with the following verse, in which the Lord gives his reasons for forbidding polygamy – namely, that it hurts his daughters deeply. Significantly, this verse also begins with “**For...**” and is clearly a continuation of the command for men to have only one wife: “For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands” (v. 31).

How absurd and even cruel it would be for the Lord to say, “I will occasionally command my people to practice polygamy, **for** I have seen that it causes my daughters to mourn.”

Incidentally, historians often claim that Jacob, like Joseph Smith, is only condemning *unauthorized* polygamy and that polygamy is actually a godly principle, as long as the man is properly authorized to practice it.

This is why it’s crucial to understand the reasons the Lord gives for forbidding polygamy – that he loves his daughters and does not want their husbands to grieve them by sharing their most intimate relationship with other women.

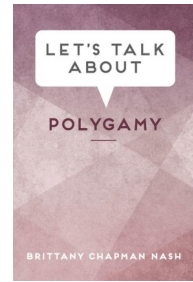
As researcher [Steve Reed](#) so eloquently puts it, “Does it seem reasonable that the Nephite women and children were so profoundly heartbroken by the men’s practice of taking multiple wives and concubines simply because they lacked ‘authorization’?”⁶³

And, sadly, God’s warning that polygamy causes grief and heartache is borne out by the accounts of many women in early Utah, including this heart-wrenching story from [Emma Lynette Richardson Conover](#), describing her experience sometime after 1858:

“Some old fanatics were preaching that a young man could not save a girl if he married her. That to be saved she must marry some old codger tried and true. My parents got the disease with the rest, and when one of the tried and true came our way [they said] I must marry him. I cried and begged, begged and cried, but to no avail. I was forced to marry him... I will say that up to the time I speak of my father had always been good to me. I can now see that it was the pressure of the times that caused him to act as he did.”⁶⁴

Emma Lynette had two children by this man.

Historian Brittany Nash wrote a booklet for the church called *Let's Talk About Polygamy* and [gave a presentation](#) where she recounted the 1879 story of Annie Berry Chestnut Day, calling it “horrifying”:



When Annie was 14 years old, her nearly 50-year-old stepfather “essentially tricked her into marrying him under the pretext that she was receiving her temple endowment. Annie’s mother was complicit in the idea, and Annie did not realize she was married to the man she still called ‘pa’ until after they left the temple.”⁶⁵ Annie bore three children by her stepfather before divorcing him. She later married monogamously.

Polygamy also caused great sorrow among willing participants. While some were outspoken supporters of the practice, Nash notes that the public statements of these women often contradicted their privately recorded sentiments, such as this [1881 journal entry](#) from Emily Partridge, plural wife of Brigham Young:



“My mind goes back to days gone by, and what do I find? Can I find anything so pleasant that I could wish to live it over again, or even to dwell upon it in thought with any degree of satisfaction? No, I cannot. My life has been like a panorama of disagreeable pictures. As I scan them over one by one, they bring no joy, and I invariably wind up with tears. I have been heart hungry all my life... Some will understand what it is to be a woman, mother, or an unloved spiritual wife.”⁶⁶

Emmeline B. Wells, plural wife of Brigham’s counselor Daniel H. Wells, wrote an article for the *Woman’s Exponent* in [September of 1874](#), in which she declared, “All honor and reverence to good men, but they and their attentions are not the only sources of happiness on the earth and need not fill up every thought of woman.”⁶⁷

Sadly, this stoic facade is belied by Emmeline’s [heart-wrenching lamentation](#), recorded in her personal diary on the very day that the *Exponent* article was published:



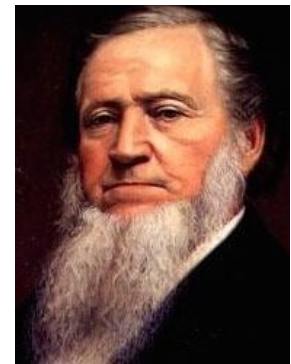
“O if my husband could only love me even a little and not seem so perfectly indifferent to any sensation of that kind, he cannot know the craving of my nature, he is surrounded with love on every side, and I am cast out. O my poor aching heart, where shall it rest its burden, only on the Lord, only to him can I look... I have no one to go to for comfort or shelter no strong arm to lean upon no bosom bared for me, no protection or comfort in my husband.”⁶⁸

Why polygamous women sometimes spoke favorably of polygamy while privately sorrowing is largely a matter of speculation. Nash raises one compelling possibility, proposed by [an outside observer](#): “Matilda Griffing Bancroft, a prominent visitor to Utah in 1880, observed that Latter-day Saint women viewed polygamy as a religious duty and that it was a matter of pride to make everybody believe they lived happily and to persuade themselves and others that it was not a trial.”

Nash adds, “Perhaps some Latter-day Saint women imagined that to be seen as truly strong and faithful, they had to steel themselves against difficulties living polygamously.”

This is a very plausible explanation, especially in light of [Brigham Young’s teachings](#), such as this one:

“I wish here to say to all the members of this Church and kingdom that it is in the hearts of many of them to wish that the doctrine of polygamy was not taught and practiced by us... I wish to say to you and all the world that if you desire with all your hearts to obtain the blessings which Abraham obtained, you will be polygamists, at least in your faith, or you will come short of enjoying the salvation and the glory which Abraham has obtained. This is as true as that God lives.”⁶⁹



If Nash and Bancroft are correct, this may shed light on the motivations behind the very late and often contradictory testimonies of several polygamous Utah women who, *decades after the prophet’s death*, claimed to have been “married or sealed” to Joseph Smith.

Supposed Wives of Joseph Smith

Most people are very surprised to learn that *not one* of Joseph's supposed wives left a **single contemporaneous record** of any marriage to him. There are no journal entries, no marriage certificates, and no firsthand accounts from any of these women during his lifetime.

It's also very significant that Joseph had no children with anyone but Emma – yet he fathered nine with her.

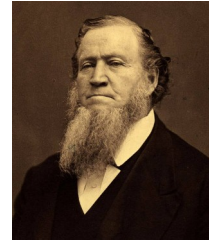
[Brittany Nash](#) confirms that “Joseph Smith’s practice of polygamy and the doctrine he taught regarding it are two areas in which...**definitive answers are most lacking.**”⁷⁰ The authors of the [Gospel Topics Essays on polygamy](#) acknowledge, “The exact number of women to whom he was sealed in his lifetime is unknown because **the evidence is fragmentary.**”⁷¹ The footnote references Brian Hales’ claim that Joseph had 30 to 40 wives, calling that “a careful estimate.”

[On his website](#), Hales lists 35 likely wives, noting that “...supporting evidence for each of these sealings varies, with some being highly reliable and others based upon a single attestation or sources of lesser credibility.”⁷² As we’ll see, the assertion that any of the evidence is highly reliable is questionable at best.

In fact, of these 35 women, **17** of them – *almost half* – never claimed **at any time** to have been married to the prophet. *All* claims about these marriages came from other people – and usually long after Joseph’s death. And even the women who did claim to have been married or sealed to Joseph Smith never said anything about their supposed marriages until decades after his death. It’s extremely telling that even after Brigham Young introduced the polygamy revelation in 1852, *not one* of Joseph’s supposed wives spoke up at that time to defend the practice and affirm that she had been a plural wife of Joseph. Any statement like that would have gone a long way toward lending credibility to Brigham’s now public doctrine, yet not one wife said a word at the time.

Importantly, the bulk of the women’s claims came in **1869**. The main reason for this is that in 1866, two of Joseph’s sons came as missionaries to preach to the Utah saints, and part of their message was that their father had never taught or practiced polygamy. Some believed their message and began to distance themselves from the Utah church, prompting [Brigham Young](#) to warn the saints against following them:

“There are a few here that knew Joseph Smith the prophet, and some of them are apostatizing from the work...to run after young Joseph Smith... If there are any Latter-day Saints who wish to be destroyed, run after that family, and I will promise you in the name of the God of Israel, that you will be damned.”⁷³



To combat the claims of Joseph’s sons, apostle Joseph F. Smith set out to gather up all the evidence for Joseph’s polygamy and put the matter to rest. [He later wrote](#) about his efforts to do this:



“When the subject first came before my mind, I must say I was astonished at the scarcity of evidence, I might say almost total absence of direct evidence upon the subject as connected with the prophet Joseph himself. There was nothing written...”⁷⁴

Joseph F. Smith then turned to [collecting affidavits](#) from women he believed had been married to the prophet.⁷⁵ Some of these affidavits gave no specific marriage date. One was undated, unnotarized, and unsigned, yet the woman for whom it was prepared is counted by historians as a wife of Joseph Smith, even though she herself never made any such claim.

Following are brief highlights of the evidence for some of the women on [Brian Hales’ list](#) of 35 likely wives,⁷⁶ in order to illustrate the caliber of the evidence that has been relied on by historians. Highlights for all 35 women are included in the video version of this presentation, which can be seen at [JosephToldTheTruth.org](#).

[Agnes Coolbrith](#)

We have no record of Agnes ever claiming to have been a wife of Joseph Smith. We do have a claim from Lucy Walker Kimball that Agnes was married to Joseph. Lucy was one of Heber C. Kimball’s 43 wives, and she made this claim about Agnes in 1884 – **eight years after Agnes’ death** and *40 years* after Joseph’s death.

[Almera Johnson](#)

We have an 1870 affidavit and other accounts from Almera’s polygamous brother, **Benjamin F. Johnson**, whose name comes up over and over in the various claims. Almera herself said nothing about being married to Joseph until **1883**, almost 40 years after his death. She claims to have lived with the prophet Joseph as his wife, but there is no evidence of Joseph’s having lived as husband and wife with anyone but Emma.

Delcena Johnson

We have nothing from Delcena. According to Brian Hales, “Delcena left no record of her relationship with Joseph.” **Benjamin F. Johnson**, her brother, provided the “sole evidence” for her sealing.” This was in **1903** – almost 60 years after the death of the prophet – and by Benjamin’s own admission, his sister never told him that she had been married to Joseph, but only “tacitly admitted” it.

Desdemona Fullmer

Desdemona signed an 1869 affidavit claiming she had married Joseph in 1843. There is no record of this marriage, but we do have a record of her having polygamously married Ezra T. Benson, great-grandfather of President Benson, in 1846. Hales cites the following account from Desdemona’s 1868 autobiography: “In the rise of polygamy, I was warned in a dream Amy Smith [presumably she meant to say Emma] was going to poison me... I told my dream to brother Joseph... He told me it was true. She would do it if she could.”

****Please keep in mind that the crucial question is not whether these improbable accounts should be believed. It’s whether they should be **prioritized** over the consistent, public, and repeated testimonies of **Joseph, Emma, and Hyrum.***

Eliza Partridge

We have several affidavits from Eliza in 1869, one attesting to her first marriage to Joseph on March 8, 1843, and another attesting to a second marriage to him on May 11, in the presence of Emma Smith. Brian Hales notes that Eliza M. Partridge “wrote little regarding her plural marriage to the prophet” and that she made a brief mention of her own sealing in her 1877 autobiography. Interestingly, in that autobiography, Eliza makes no mention of any alleged second marriage to Joseph Smith.

Emily Partridge Young

We have similar affidavits from Eliza’s sister, Emily, also given in 1869, attesting to two marriages to the prophet – a secret marriage in March 1843, and a second one on May 11, in the presence of Emma Smith. In her 1892 court testimony, Emily swore that Joseph, Eliza, and Emily decided to *pretend* to be marrying for the first time on May 11 to avoid upsetting Emma, who, she explained, had only recently embraced polygamy. The questioner then showed her a copy of Joseph Smith’s journal entry for May 11, which showed that Emma was not even in town on that day and could not have been present at the sisters’ supposed marriage to Joseph.⁷⁷

Eliza R. Snow

On October 1, 1842, in response to accusations of polygamy by enemies of Joseph Smith, including John C. Bennett, Eliza joined several women in signing a [declaration](#) that they knew of no other system of marriage being practiced in the church except monogamy:

“We, the undersigned, members of the ladies’ relief society, and married females do certify and declare that we know of no system of marriage being practised in the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints save the one contained in the [1835] book of Doctrine and Covenants, and we give this certificate to the public to show that John C. Bennett’s ‘secret wife system’ is a disclosure of his own make.”⁷⁸

Twenty-seven years later, however, Eliza signed an [affidavit](#) swearing that she had been sealed to Joseph Smith in June of 1842 – over three months *before* she signed the declaration that polygamy was not practiced in the church. So either the 1842 declaration was a deception or the 1869 affidavit was falsely sworn. In either case, Eliza cannot be considered a credible witness.

Elizabeth Davis

We have nothing from Elizabeth. Sarah Pratt, polygamous wife of Orson Pratt, claimed that Elizabeth had been one of Joseph’s wives. Hales’ source for this claim is an anti-Mormon book, [Mormon Portraits or the Truth About the Mormon Leaders](#). Another of his sources for the claim that Elizabeth – who was **already married** to an active latter-day saint – was also married to Joseph Smith, is a book called [The Adventures and Experience of Joseph H. Jackson: Disclosing the Depths of Mormon Villainy](#). There is **zero** reference to Elizabeth or any other Davis in the entire book, and in it, Joseph Jackson makes the claim that “Joe Smith boasted to me that he had seduced 400 women.”

Esther Dutcher

We have nothing from Esther. Hales notes, “Only one evidence refers to this sealing. However, since the single reference is from a reliable source, albeit late, she’s included here.”

The “reliable source” is a letter written in **1888** – *44 years after Joseph’s death and 32 years after Esther’s death* – by Utah polygamist and former counselor to Brigham Young, Daniel H. Wells.

Fanny Alger

We have nothing from Fanny. Another late and vague recollection from Benjamin F. Johnson, given in 1903, tells of a “whispered” rumor. Brian Hales also quotes [Mosiah Hancock](#), who, in 1890 – 14 years after his father Levi died – made this “addition” to Levi’s autobiography: “Brother Joseph said, ‘Brother Levi, I want to make a bargain with you. If you will get Fanny Alger for me, for a wife you may have Clarissa Reed.’”

The only contemporaneous evidence we have of any interaction between Joseph and Fanny Alger comes from an [1838 letter from Oliver Cowdery](#), which certainly deserves our attention, in which he refers to “a dirty, nasty, filthy affair of [Joseph’s] and Fanny Alger’s.”

Fanny had married a man named Solomon Custer and moved to Indiana two years before Oliver wrote this letter, and in it Oliver does not give any specifics or say whether his complaints stemmed from firsthand knowledge or from secondhand rumors. But in late 1838, Oliver was excommunicated on a variety of charges, one of which was “seeking to destroy the character of President Joseph Smith Jr by falsely insinuating that he was guilty of adultery etc.”

Responding to Oliver’s accusations, Joseph Smith gave the high council a history respecting “[the girl business](#),” after which the [high council](#) exonerated Joseph of any improper behavior and upheld the charge against Oliver of falsely accusing Joseph.⁷⁹

The lack of specificity in all areas of this account is frustrating, but it’s noteworthy not only that the high council was satisfied with Joseph’s account of the situation, but also that Joseph’s enemies, even at the height of their accusations against him in Nauvoo, never brought up the alleged improprieties of which Oliver had accused him.

There is no other contemporaneous evidence of any relationship between Joseph and Fanny.

Strangely, Brian Hales again quotes [William McLellin](#), the twice-excommunicated enemy of Joseph Smith mentioned earlier, who adds to his story about Joseph and the mysterious “Miss Hill” to claim that Emma once saw Joseph and Fanny in the barn together alone: “She looked through a crack and saw the transaction!!! She told me this story too was verily true.”

That Emma would confide such a thing to William McLellin while denying it to everyone else seems unfathomable.

Louisa Beaman

We have nothing from Louisa. Hales acknowledges, “Louisa Beaman apparently left no accounts of the sealing ceremony or of her relationship with the Prophet.”

In 1869, polygamist Joseph Bates Noble signed an [affidavit](#) claiming that he had “married or sealed” Louisa to Joseph on April 5, 1841. This claim is problematic, since Joseph Bates Noble did not move to Nauvoo until the fall of 1841, and Louisa was not baptized until 1843. According to researcher [Don Bradley](#), “Noble actually gives a variety of dates: two different days of the month, two different months, and three different years.”⁸⁰

Lucinda Pendleton

We have nothing from Lucinda. According to Hales, “Lucinda Pendleton left no records... Evidence for a sealing in Nauvoo during Joseph’s lifetime is **non-existent**.”

Mary Heron

We have nothing from Mary. Brian Hales states that, “According to **one isolated source**, Mary Heron, the legal wife of John Snider, was sexually involved with Joseph Smith in 1843.”

That single source is Joseph Ellis Johnson, Mary’s son-in-law, who was facing church discipline for impregnating the wife of Lorenzo Snow. Hales cites the rather crass claim that Johnson was “familiar with *the first frigging* that was done in his house with his mother in law by Joseph” and notes that this statement “constitutes the primary evidence of a relationship between Joseph Smith and Mary Heron Snider.”

Sarah Cleveland

We have nothing from Sarah suggesting that she was ever married to Joseph Smith. Sarah did, however, join Emma and others in signing the 1842 declaration, certifying that she knew of no system of marriage being practiced in the church except monogamy. Significantly, she never denied that declaration.

The **only** claim that Sarah was a plural wife of the prophet comes from a letter written by her son-in-law in **1895** – nearly 40 years after her death. Yet, based on a claim by Eliza R. Snow that Sarah had supposedly witnessed Eliza’s marriage to Joseph, Brian Hales actually suggests that Sarah Cleveland was a “polygamy insider.”

[Sylvia Sessions Lyon](#)

We have nothing from Sylvia. Joseph F. Smith's affidavit book includes an [undated, unnotarized, and unsigned affidavit](#) that was prepared on Sylvia's behalf but never completed. She's nevertheless counted as one of Joseph's plural wives.

In 1915, Sylvia's daughter Josephine claimed that her mother had made a deathbed disclosure over 30 years earlier that Josephine was the daughter of the prophet Joseph Smith. Taking her at her word, historians pointed to Josephine as proof of Joseph's polygamy for over a century, until [DNA evidence](#) was presented which finally disproved her claim and confirmed her as the daughter of Windsor Lyon, Sylvia's only husband.

Again, please visit [JosephToldTheTruth.org](#) for highlights for all 35 of the supposed wives, a searchable transcript, and links to all of the documents cited.

For now, we will discuss just two more of the supposed wives: Sarah Ann Whitney, who merits particular attention, as her supposed relationship with the prophet is generally considered indisputable, and Zina Huntington Young.

[Sarah Ann Whitney](#)

Sarah and her mother both signed affidavits in 1869, affirming that Sarah was married polygamously to Joseph Smith on July 27, 1842, by her father, Newel K. Whitney. These claims are problematic for several reasons. Like Eliza R. Snow, Sarah's mother, Elizabeth Whitney, signed the [October 1842 statement](#) declaring that she knew of no system of marriage besides monogamy being practiced in the church, making either that declaration or her [1869 affidavit](#) false and completely undermining her credibility.

Although there is no marriage record for Joseph and Sarah, we do have a [record](#) of Sarah's marriage to Joseph Kingsbury in April of 1843, with Joseph Smith performing the ceremony, which certainly should require an explanation if Sarah had already married Joseph Smith the previous year.

In his [autobiography](#), Joseph Kingsbury later commented on his 1843 marriage to Sarah: "I agreed to stand by Sarah Ann Whitney as supposed to be her husband and had a pretended marriage for the purpose of bringing about the purposes of God in the last days." How a pretend marriage to Sarah would bring about the purposes of God is a mystery, and Kingsbury's motive for this late claim that Sarah had secretly been Joseph's wife and not his own is likewise a matter of speculation.

[Brian Hales](#) does point out that in 1880, Kingsbury sought \$8,000 worth of compensation from the church – equivalent to over \$200,000 in today’s dollars – for costs he had incurred by “keeping one of [Joseph’s] wives...”

Claimed as evidence for Sarah’s supposed marriage to the prophet, we have a purported revelation from Joseph in which the Lord gives Newel K. Whitney instructions for performing the ceremony between “my servant Joseph and your daughter S. A. Whitney.” If authentic, this would be the only contemporaneous document explicitly linking Joseph Smith with a polygamous marriage. However, the documents supporting this claim were, again, created decades after Joseph’s death – two copies [dating](#) to the [1870s](#), and a [typewritten copy](#) submitted to the church by polygamist Orson F. Whitney in 1912. There is no original.

There’s an important piece of history involving the Whitney family that we will address here in detail, and some background is essential.

In August of 1842, an illegal warrant had been issued for Joseph’s arrest. According to the [Joseph Smith Papers](#), “In early August, [the] Adams county sheriff...arrived in Nauvoo with a warrant to arrest [Joseph Smith] and extradite him to Missouri.” By August 10, Joseph had gone into hiding for two weeks to avoid the possibility of arrest and extradition. The next day, [August 11](#), Joseph sent instructions for Emma, Hyrum, Newel K. Whitney, and a few others to meet him that night on a nearby island. After dark, the parties went by skiff and met up on the island, where they exchanged information and made plans for Joseph to hide at Edward Sayers’ home.

[Two days later](#), Joseph had sent word asking for Emma to visit him so they could discuss whether to take their family and leave the area for a time. As the carriage was being prepared, Emma realized that this had drawn the attention of the sheriff, who kept a vigilant watch in the hopes of following her to Joseph’s hiding place. So William Clayton and Lorin Walker instead got into the carriage, which they left uncovered to ensure that the sheriff could see that Emma was not with them. They then drove off, unfollowed, to the home of some friends, the Durphys.

Meanwhile, Emma secretly set off for the Durphys’ on foot and met up with the carriage there. They drove together for several miles and turned into the woods, at which point Emma left the carriage and traveled on foot the rest of the way to Edward Sayers’ home, where Joseph was waiting.

The prophet was extremely appreciative of the efforts of his wife, his brother, and his friends, and was very cognizant of the trouble it cost them to make these covert visits. On [August 16](#), overcome by gratitude for their kindness and deeply touched by his experience during their clandestine island meeting just days earlier, Joseph recorded his feelings, speaking most warmly of Emma, Hyrum, and Newel K. Whitney:

“How glorious were my feelings when I met that faithful and friendly band...on the Island... With what unspeakable delight...I took by the hand on that night my beloved Emma, she that was my wife... 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. There was brother Hyrum... thought I to myself, brother Hyrum, what a faithful heart you have got. Oh, may the eternal Jehovah crown eternal blessings upon your head as a reward for the care you have had for my soul... Said I to myself, here is brother Newel K. Whitney also, how many scenes of sorrow have strewed our paths together; and yet we meet once more to share again. Thou art a faithful friend... Brother Whitney, thou knowest not how strong those ties are, that bind my soul and heart to thee.”

[The following night](#), having heard rumors that Joseph’s location had been discovered, Emma went to see him at Edward Sayers’ home to warn him that it was no longer safe there. He left immediately and was kindly received at Carlos Granger’s.

This brings us to [a letter that Joseph wrote](#) the next day, which he addressed, “Dear and Beloved Brother and Sister Whitney and &c.”:

“I take this opportunity to communicate some of my feelings privately at this time, which I want you three eternally to keep in your own bosoms; for my feelings are so strong for you since what has passed lately between us, that the time of my absence from you seems so long and dreary that it seems as if I could not live long in this way. And if you three would come and see me in this my lonely retreat, it would afford me great relief of mind... I am now at Carlos Granger’s, just back of Brother Hyrum’s farm...all three of you can come and see me in the fore part of the night, let Brother Whitney come a little ahead and knock at

the southeast corner of the house at the window; it is next to the cornfield; I have a room entirely by myself, the whole matter can be attended to with most perfect safety...the only thing to be careful of is to find out when Emma comes. Then you cannot be safe, but when she is not here, there is the most perfect safety: only be careful to escape observation as much as possible...when I see you, I will tell you all my plans, I cannot write them on paper, burn this letter as soon as you read it; keep all locked up in your breasts, my life depends upon it. One thing I want to see you for is to get the fullness of my blessings sealed upon our heads, &c. You will pardon me for my earnestness on this subject when you consider how lonesome I must be, your good feelings know how to make every allowance for me; I close my letter. I think Emma won't come to night. If she don't, don't fail to come tonight. I subscribe myself your most obedient and affectionate companion, and friend.

Joseph Smith.”

Historians typically present this letter with little or none of the pertinent background:

- that Joseph was in hiding for his life, and that the letter disclosed his location;
- the subterfuge that Emma had to employ in order to safely visit him;
- the sheriff's attempts to follow her to Joseph's secret location;
- Joseph's recent experience on the island with his friends;
- and the heartfelt gratitude he had expressed for Newel K. Whitney, in particular, just two days earlier.

Incredibly, without this essential context, Joseph's letter is almost always [interpreted by historians](#) as a request for the Whitneys to bring their *daughter* with them to his one-room hiding place during this dangerous time for what might politely be called a *tryst*. It's further presumed that when Joseph used the phrase "you three" in his letter, he was referring to the Whitneys' 17-year-old daughter, Sarah, and not their adult son, Horace. This assumption is, again, based on the claim that Sarah and her less-than-credible mother would make 26 years later that Sarah had married Joseph the previous month.

Presenting the Whitney letter as evidence of a relationship between Joseph and Sarah without disclosing the essential background is careless at best, and perhaps even willfully deceptive.

Zina Huntington Young

In 1869, Zina, plural wife of Brigham Young, signed an affidavit affirming that she was “married or sealed” to Joseph Smith on October 27, 1841. Yet not only is Zina on record as having married Henry Jacobs seven months earlier, but at the time of her supposed marriage to the prophet, she was actually pregnant with Henry’s child *and* continued to live with him as his wife afterwards.

Again, we have no record of Zina’s ever being married or sealed to Joseph during his lifetime. However, we *do* have a [record](#) of her marriage to Brigham Young on February 2, 1846, and she really *was* pregnant with Henry’s child when she married Brigham, which Brian Hales calls “a strange thing.”

Henry was sent on a mission to England three months after Zina’s marriage to Brigham and never lived with her again.

An 1869 edition of [The World newspaper](#) published an interview with several of Brigham’s wives, including Zina Huntington Young, who shared this shocking but valuable observation: “It is the duty of a first wife to learn to regard her husband... with indifference and with no other feeling than that of reverence, for **love we regard as a false sentiment**; a feeling which should have no existence in polygamy.”⁸¹

This perspective on polygamous relationships was echoed by [Pamelia Benson](#), first wife of Ezra T. Benson, great-grandfather of the prophet. Having suffered greatly as she watched her husband take other wives, *including her own sister*, Pamelia said:

“My anguish was at times almost too great to be borne, and I could only regard his taking other wives calmly and without suffering when I had learned to look upon him without love and affection, and as I would regard a total stranger... **A first wife must learn to cast out all love and affection from her heart if her husband takes other wives.**”⁸²

Such are the fruits of polygamy.

Conclusion

In 1973, an army physician named Lester Bush wrote a [scholarly article](#) demonstrating that the race-based priesthood ban was not instituted by Joseph Smith – as had been presumed for over a hundred years – but by Brigham Young.⁸³

Bush was not an accredited historian, yet his article was widely read, and scholars today believe the article played an important role in the lifting of the ban five years later, since, as [President Russell M. Nelson](#) has wisely noted, “good inspiration is based upon good information.”⁸⁴

Might we be on the verge of another such pivotal moment in our history?

Indeed, modern church leaders have already disavowed many of Brigham Young’s teachings, including, of course, the [priesthood ban](#); the [Adam-god theory](#); the horrific doctrine of [blood atonement](#); and, notably, even some of his teachings on [polygamy](#) – specifically, that it’s essential for exaltation.

Could it be time to reject polygamy in its entirety as a false tradition and to reassure millions, especially faithful daughters of God, that their Heavenly Father is unchanging; that he loves all of his children deeply; and that he has never commanded – and never will command – his sons to break the hearts of their tender wives?

Isn’t it time to consider that our founding prophet may have been telling the truth all along?

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