

Removing the Stain of Polygamy from the Restoration

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On June 27, 1844 Joseph Smith Jr., an authentic religious genius, was murdered in cold blood before the work of the Restoration was completed.¹ Joseph's ministry began during his fifteenth year when in faith he rose up out of the darkness and chaos of this world and into the Light of Christ.² He willingly chose to serve his God, laboring and sacrificing much to restore the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a hard-hearted and stiff-necked generation.³

In fulfillment of prophecy, the world has long spoken both good and evil of Joseph Smith.⁴ Many people and many churches claim that they know Joseph. Historians, theologians, authors, and scholars have produced an exhaustive number of volumes on the subject of Joseph. The majority of these works are based upon the historical narrative put forth by the largest and most well-known branch of Joseph's Restoration: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They assert that Joseph was commanded by God to enter into plural marriage using a priesthood ordinance called sealing, secretly teaching the doctrine to a select group of men and women in Nauvoo.⁵ The LDS Church bases their claims upon the lies of John C. Bennett, the polygamy of Brigham Young and his followers, and the "revelation on marriage" known as LDS Doctrine and Covenants section 132.⁶

¹ "[Joseph] Smith was an authentic religious genius, unique in our national history....I do not find it possible to doubt that [he] was an authentic prophet. Where in all of American history can we find his match?....In proportion to his importance and his complexity, [Smith] remains the least-studied personage, of an undiminished vitality, in our entire national saga." Harold Bloom, literary critic, religious scholar, and Professor of Humanities at Yale University. Bloom, H. (1992). *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post Christian Nation*, p. 95. Simon and Schuster: New York.

² See Teachings and Commandments (T&C) 1—Joseph Smith History (JSH), Part 2. All of the scriptural references are taken from the Restoration Edition of the scriptures. They can be found online for free at <https://scriptures.info/> or to purchase at <https://scriptures.shop/>.

³ T&C A Glossary of Gospel Terms, "Hardness of Heart:" Hardness of heart is usually accompanied by a hardness of head; that is, people tend to not be willing to live in accordance with principles, even though they want to know about them. They are often more curious than they are obedient, becoming voyeurs rather than visionaries. Oddly enough, one's curiosity gets satisfied as he obeys — but man is usually unwilling to make that exchange (New Covenants [NC] Book of Mormon [BofM]—Alma 9:3,10; 1 Nephi 3:26). Man determines whether he has a hard heart or an open heart. Anciently, the "heart" was considered the seat of understanding rather than emotion; therefore, an "open heart" belonged to the seeker, the asker, the knocker on the door (New Covenants [NC] New Testament [NT]—Matthew 3:42,44). And "Stiffneckedness:" When a person is 1 — in error and 2 — decidedly committed to remaining so. He won't budge, won't humble himself, and won't ask the Lord to remove his scales of darkness. He remains a devoted disciple of unbelief, leading to wickedness that is borne upon the shoulders of his ignorance.

⁴ See T&C 1—JSH, 3:3 and T&C 139:7.

⁵ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also calls the marriage covenant "Celestial marriage," or the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.

⁶ See *Saints*, Vol. 1, Ch. 40, "United in an Everlasting Covenant." Retrieved from <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/40-united-in-an-everlasting-covenant?lang=eng>.

On April 6, 1860, Joseph Smith III, the oldest living son of Joseph and Emma Smith, established the second largest branch founded upon the Restoration: The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Joseph III spent his life exonerating his father from the accusation of plural marriage and was instrumental in persuading the United States Congress to pass laws making the practice of polygamy illegal.⁷ For over 100 years the RLDS Church believed and taught that Joseph Smith was a faithful and honorable monogamist.

In 1918, RLDS Patriarch Elbert A. Smith, grandson of Joseph and Emma, made the observation that the LDS Church in Utah included two remarkable statements made by Joseph Smith in their official History.⁸ The first on May of 1844, stated, “What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can find only one.” The second was ten days before he died, “I have taught all the strong doctrines publicly, and always taught stronger doctrines in public than in private.” Patriarch Smith concluded that these two statements “effectually disposes of the Utah claim that [Joseph] taught the strong (and rank) doctrine of polygamy in private, not daring to teach it in public. Salt Lake can hardly repudiate its own version of these sermons. . . . There is no halfway ground. Either Joseph Smith was true and clean, open and above board . . . or else he was a hypocrite and a fraud through and through. . . The Utah Mormons cannot long continue seriously to contend that he was a real prophet of God, and a good man, yet blowing hot in private and cold in public, a monogamist in the pulpit and press and a polygamist in his home, a pure milk of the word man by daylight and a strong meat man after dark.”⁹

In 2001, the RLDS Church officially changed their name to the Community of Christ. Because the historical preponderance of the LDS Church regarding Joseph and polygamy is widely accepted as fact today, the Community of Christ Church has now begun to sway toward believing the LDS Church’s portrayal of Joseph Smith.¹⁰

⁷ See Launius, Roger D. (1987) *Methods and Motives: Joseph Smith III’s Opposition to Polygamy, 1860-90. Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Winter 1987), pp. 105-120. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/45228113?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁸ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints contends that *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* in six volumes was written by Joseph Smith and compiled by B. H. Roberts. This is not a true statement. Joseph Smith had only written his and the Restoration’s history up to June 1830 before he was killed. After his death, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and other men undertook to “correct” the history of the Church. Many alterations, additions, deletions and corrections were made before the LDS Church published the six-volume series. One of the largest alterations regarded plural marriage. Joseph was decidedly against it and was laboring to eradicate it from the Church when he was killed. The LDS Church’s history was edited to show that Joseph and Hyrum approved of, taught, and practiced plural marriage. Many examples of these changes can be seen at <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>. One example is the changes Brigham had made to Joseph journal entry for October 5, 1843. The original journal entry denouncing polygamy can be seen here (as of February 21, 2022): <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-3-15-july-1843-29-february-1844/123#xbbbe971c-8c89-4ea1-b1af-c88a5eb316fb>. The doctored version of Joseph’s journal entry promoting polygamy can be seen here (as of February 21, 2022): <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-draft-1-march-31-december-1843/143#source-note>.

⁹ See *Saints’ Herald* 65 [February 27, 1918]: 204. See also Price, P. and R. (2000). *Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy, Vol. 1*, Ch. 10. Independence, MO: Price Publishing Co.

¹⁰ Per private conversation with Community of Christ apostle, Lachlan E. Mackay, summer of 2019 at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Several years ago, as an active, faithful, seventh generation Latter-day Saint, I concluded that my church's position on Joseph and polygamy showed him to be the worst kind of hypocrite, yet, I could not deny that his words filled me with light and a hunger to know the Lord. I became determined to reconcile this paradox and find the truth. I researched, studied, pondered, and prayed for many years. One day a quiet thought entered my mind, "what if Joseph meant what he said?"

As I opened my mind to this new and startling idea, I began to come to know the real Joseph. He was a brilliant theologian. He was never one to back down or hesitate to proclaim all of the doctrines of the gospel, regardless of the persecution and opposition he encountered. He was a religious revolutionary who shared deep and often poignant thoughts and feelings on a number of difficult to understand topics without apology. On the subject of plural marriage, whenever he spoke about it, he emphatically denounced it and condemned it.

In the eastern United States, there were other new religious groups that arose around the same time that Joseph began the Restoration. Some of these new religions espoused divergent sexual and marital practices such that polygamy began to be associated with religious reform.¹¹ Whenever God begins a work to renew and restore truth there is always opposition in order to preserve mankind's right to choose.¹² Opposition presents itself in a myriad of ways. One of those is through the false spirit of adultery. Because adulterous hearts require signs to believe, the introduction of sexual promiscuity into a Restoration is one of the easiest ways for Satan to derail it.¹³

The adversary seemed aware that Joseph was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom, and thus oppression and persecution arose against Joseph almost from his infancy.¹⁴ He was often accused of adultery and polygamy and it quickly became commonplace for Mormon missionaries to be asked if they believed in having more wives than one.¹⁵

¹¹ The plurality of wives became associated with religious reform in the 1500's. Radical reformers in Munster, Germany in the 1530's practiced polygamy. Plural marriage became the subject of theological and social debates, and was a significant aspect of Enlightenment thinking throughout Europe in the 1700's. Martin Madan published a pro-polygamy treatise in England in 1780. See Pearsall, Sarah. (2013). "Polygamy and Bigamy." Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-01119.xml>. Some of the groups who practiced divergent marriages in the United States were the Cochranites, John Humphrey Noyes' communities, and others. Their sexual practices reignited the idea that polygamy is part of religious reform.

¹² See NC BofM—2 Nephi 1:8.

¹³ See NC NT—Matthew 6:15.

¹⁴ See T&C 1—JSH 2:7-8.

¹⁵ Joseph Smith, as editor of the *Elders' Journal*, listed frequently asked questions in the November 1837:28 edition. He listed the questions again along with the answers in the July 1838:43 edition, "In obedience to our promise, we give the following answers to questions, which were asked in the last number of the Journal." Question number seven was, "***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.*** But we do disapprove of the custom which has gained in the world, and has been practised among us, to our great mortification, of marrying in five or six weeks, or even in two or three months after the death of their companion. We believe that due respect ought to be had, to the memory of the dead, and the feelings of both friends and children." Emphasis added.

In 1834, Joseph was a member of a committee organized to publish a work “arranged from the items of the doctrine of Christ” and titled the *Doctrine and Covenants*.¹⁶ Published in 1835 and unanimously accepted by the saints, it contained a section which became known as the Statement or Law of the Church on Marriage. It stated in part, “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.”¹⁷

By 1842, Doctor John C. Bennett’s sexual escapades in Nauvoo added fuel to the ongoing adultery rumors adding a new twist that Joseph was secretly preaching and practicing polygamy and giving Bennett and other select men permission to do likewise. When Joseph discovered Bennett’s sexual indiscretions and duplicity he confronted him, “Doctor! why are you using my name to carry on your hellish wickedness? Have I ever taught you that fornication and adultery was right, or polygamy or any such practices? . . . Did I ever teach you any thing that was not virtuous—that was iniquitous, either in public or private?” Bennett responded, “You never did.” He swore out an affidavit affirming that Joseph had only taught the strictest principles of the gospel and of virtue both in public and in private.¹⁸

Bennett was excommunicated for his misconduct, yet this did not stop the cancer of secret abominations from spreading throughout Nauvoo and the Church. As Joseph and Emma began to understand just how deeply the putridity of Bennett’s behavior and teachings had seeped into the minds of the saints, they determined that since adultery takes two willing participants that the women of the Church would benefit from their own instruction. A society for the females, where they could meet regularly to learn truth straight from Joseph and Emma’s mouths, was organized on March 17, 1842.¹⁹ The primary purpose of the Female Relief Society was to strengthen and promote virtue and chastity among the women.²⁰

¹⁶ The Kirtland high council appointed the following men to the committee: Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams. The book was titled *Doctrine and Covenants* because the first part was comprised of the seven *Lectures on Faith* and the second part contained the revelations of the Lord revealed through Joseph. Oliver Cowdery was tasked with writing the section on marriage. Joseph had the Law of the Church on Marriage reprinted several times in the *Times and Seasons* between 1841-1844 and chose to include it in his 1844 edition of the *Doctrine and Covenants*. *Times and Seasons* can be found online at centerplace.org.

¹⁷ 1835 edition *Doctrine and Covenants* section 101; see also “*Doctrine and Covenants, 1835*,” p. 251, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835/259>.

¹⁸ *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, No. 19, (August 1, 1842), p. 871. Bennett stated in his affidavit that he “never was taught any thing in the least contrary to the strictest principles of the Gospel, or of virtue, or of the laws of God, or man, under any occasion either directly or indirectly, in word or deed, by Joseph Smith; and that he never knew the said Smith to countenance any improper conduct whatever, either in public or private; and that he never did teach . . . in private that an illegal illicit intercourse with females was, under any circumstances, justifiable, and that I never knew him so to teach others.”

¹⁹ The official name voted on by the women present when the Society was first organized on March 17, 1842 was the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo. Joseph and Emma desired the people to be virtuous, morally good, chaste, to abstain from vice, and to conform to the moral, divine law of chastity. See *Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book* found online at the Joseph Smith Papers Project website.

²⁰ Joseph often instructed the women to be pure of heart, exhorting them to live up to their privileges so that the angels could not be restrained from being their associates. He instructed them, “for what is more pleasing to God than innocence; you [women of the Relief Society] must be innocent, or you cannot come up before God; if we

Joseph and Emma soon realized that the women of the Church had become so dependent upon the prophet and other leading men that they were susceptible to evil persuasion by any who claimed, “Joseph said it is right.” Joseph encouraged the women to learn the scriptures and to think for themselves, stating that “If the people departed from the Lord, they must fall—that they were depending on the prophet hence they were darkened in their minds from neglect of themselves.”²¹ Joseph did not want the women to “trust in the arm of flesh,” specifically men’s adulterous advances. He and Emma hoped that a closer connection to Emma would empower women to “just say no” when approached by men making false claims. Joseph asked Emma to “tell the sisters of the society that if any man, no matter who he was, undertook to talk such stuff [as the doctrine of polygamy] to them in their houses, to just order him out at once, and if he did not go immediately, to take the tongs or the broom and drive him out, for the whole idea was absolutely false and the doctrine an evil and unlawful thing.”²²

Despite their crusade to eradicate polygamy and excommunicate those who were practicing and promoting it, the crime and sin of polygamy was taking a strong hold upon the saints and rapidly infiltrating the Restoration. Rumors that Joseph was secretly involved continued to increase. Joseph, Emma, and Hyrum intensified their efforts to eradicate the plural wife doctrine from the Church. On October 5, 1843, Joseph “gave instruction to try those who were preaching, teaching” or practicing this law, stating, “[I] forbid it and the practice thereof. No man shall have but one wife.”²³ He and Hyrum excommunicated men and women, published names of guilty persons in the paper, and answered countless letters from saints who asked if “men having a certain priesthood, may have as many wives as he pleases.”²⁴ Joseph and Hyrum’s answer was firm: “that man teaches false doctrine, for there is no such doctrine taught here.”²⁵

When polygamy rumors spread to include Hyrum, Joseph and Emma directed the publication of the pamphlet *A Voice of Innocence*. Their aim was to defend and exonerate Hyrum while publicly denouncing the plural wife practice.²⁶ The document was presented to several

would come before God, we must keep ourselves pure, as He is pure.” See Smith, Joseph F. (1976). *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p.226. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company (hereafter denoted as TPJS).

²¹ See the entry for the May 26, 1842 meeting in the *Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book* found online at the Joseph Smith Papers Project website.

²² Vienna Jaques’ reminiscence as found in *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, p. 170; and *The Saint’s Herald*, October 15, 1935, p. 1329.

²³ “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 3, 15 July 1843–29 February 1844,” p. [117], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 7, 2022, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-3-15-july-1843-29-february-1844/123>.

²⁴ See *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (February 1, 1844), pp. 416-431 for the notice of the excommunication of Hiram Brown. The notice stated: “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 of April next, to make answer to these charges. JOSEPH SMITH. HYRUM SMITH”

²⁵ See T&C 152 and *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5, No. 6, (March 15, 1844), pp. 464-479. This letter was written by president Hyrum Smith on March 15, 1844 to the saints living on China Creek, in Hancock County, Illinois.

²⁶ Orsamus F. Bostwick leveled accusations of polygamy, adultery, and prostitution at Hyrum Smith. See *Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, p. 940, [October 1, 1842]. See also the document *A Voice of Innocence from Nauvoo*.

thousand saints who voted unanimously to “raise our voices and hands against John C. Bennett’s ‘spiritual wife system,’ as a grand scheme of profligates to seduce women . . . let polygamy, bigamy, fornication, adultery, and prostitution, be frowned out of the hearts of honest men to drop into the gulf of fallen nature. . . . And let all the saints say, Amen!”²⁷

LDS Church History and D&C section 132 teach that there are times when God may command a man to enter into polygamy, yet, Joseph Smith consistently denied that he practiced plural marriage and spoke out against it, both publicly and privately. On April 8, 1844, co-president, co-prophet, and Patriarch of the Church Hyrum Smith spoke at length against the “spiritual wife system” during a special meeting for the Elders. He was decidedly against the idea in every form, calling it the “damned foolish doctrine of polygamy.” Hyrum declared that God had never commanded any man to enter into plural marriage and promised that any elder discovered teaching, preaching, or living it would be called home, their preaching license removed, and their name published in the paper.²⁸

A few weeks before his death, Joseph asked William Marks, president of the Nauvoo Stake and high council, to help bring leading men and women “in high places” to stand trial and be expelled for secretly practicing polygamy. Joseph stated that polygamy would ruin the church and lamented that he had been deceived by these men.²⁹ Joseph was killed before he could follow through on bringing the guilty parties to trial.³⁰ It is worth the effort to reconcile these contradictions. We live in a great day and age where truth long since hidden is coming forth into the light of day.³¹ “The things of God are of deep import,” taught Joseph, “and time, and

²⁷ On March 7, 1844, the pamphlet was presented to a “vast assembly of saints” who unanimously accepted it. The document was then presented to the Female Relief Society. The meetings were so well attended that it was necessary to hold four sessions to accommodate all who wished to participate. Two meetings were held on March 9, 1844 and two were held on March 16, 1844. The document was unanimously accepted by all of those in attendance and published in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* on March 20, 1844.

²⁸ The Joseph Smith Papers (2015). *Journals, Vol. 3, May 1843-June 1844*, p. 224. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church Historian’s Press and Hyrum Smith, April 8, 1844 Conference address, “Minutes and Discourses, 6–9 April 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock,” p. 30-32, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 12, 2002; <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-and-discourses-6-9-april-1844-as-reported-by-thomas-bullock/33>. Up to Joseph’s death some of the men whose names were published in the paper include: John C. Bennett and Hiram Brown.

²⁹ Emma told Joseph that some of the sisters in the Relief Society claimed that Brigham Young and some of his fellow apostles were involved in the secret polygamy ring in Nauvoo. Brigham, who was on his way back East, was called on by Joseph to delay his departure and come speak with him (see letter from William Smith to his nephew, Joseph Smith III, printed in *The Saints’ Herald* 26 [April 15, 1879]: 117. The letter revealed that John Taylor, Willard Richards, and Brigham Young were the ones responsible for privately teaching and practicing polygamy and that Joseph had been deceived by them). See *RLDS History of the Church* 2:733 and William Marks, “Epistle,” *Zions Harbinger and Baneemy’s Organ* 3 (July 1853), pp. 52-54. Published in St. Louis by C. B. Thompson.

³⁰ At the time of Joseph’s death eight members of the quorum of the Twelve were secretly involved in polygamy, and according to William Marks, without Joseph’s prior knowledge or approval. Those men were: Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Parley P. Pratt, Willard Richards, John Taylor, George A. Smith, Orson Hyde, and Orson Pratt. Shortly after Joseph’s murder two more entered into the practice with the other eight taking on even more wives. Those two were Lorenzo Snow and Wilford Woodruff.

³¹ The evidence which proves that Joseph fought polygamy has always existed in newspapers, documents, journals, etc. We are indebted to those who have made this information available through digitization, the internet, books, articles, blogs, etc.

experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! If thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity--thou must commune with God.”³²

There is a growing movement within mainstream LDS Mormonism to believe that Joseph meant it when he said a few weeks before he died, “I had not been married scarcely five minutes, and made one proclamation of the Gospel, before it was reported that I had seven wives. . . I can only find one. I am the same man, and as innocent as I was fourteen years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers.”³³

Critics cry out that in the effort to exonerate Joseph and prove that he was a faithful monogamist two main pieces of evidence are overlooked: LDS Doctrine and Covenants 132, known as the “polygamy revelation,” and the many testimonies of women who claimed to have been “married or sealed” to Joseph.³⁴

In June 1844 the first and only edition of the *Nauvoo Expositor* was published as an expose on Joseph and polygamy. It contained language similar in nature to LDS D&C 132. Seriously concerned that the *Expositor* would stir up angry mobs, the Nauvoo City Council consulted together for two days to determine what action they should take, if any, against the paper. Testimony was given by both Joseph and Hyrum concerning the purported polygamy revelation which had been written down one year earlier on July 12, 1843 most likely in preparation for a sermon Joseph gave on July 16th during which he publicly taught the concepts of the revelation.³⁵ Joseph testified before the City Council on June 8 and 10, 1844 that the *Expositor* transformed the truth of God into a lie, that he never preached the revelation in private as he had in public, and had not taught [polygamy] to the anointed in the Church, either in public or in private. Many men confirmed this statement. Joseph explained that he had been pondering on the passage in the Bible “[I]n the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in Heaven” and received for an answer that a man and his wife must

³² TPJS, p. 137.

³³ Ehat, Andrew F. & Cook, Lyndon W. (1980). *The Words of Joseph Smith*, pp. 375-77. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center Brigham Young University (hereafter denoted as WJS).

³⁴ Critics who state that the women should be believed are generally referring to affidavits from dozens of women who claimed that they were “married or sealed” to Joseph Smith. The wording in these affidavits is such that if the woman had been sealed as a daughter to Joseph and Emma rather than as a wife to Joseph, her affidavit was still technically accurate. Also, consider that Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball “married or sealed” dozens of women to Joseph and a few women to Hyrum as wives in January 1846, one and a half years *after* their deaths. Many of the affidavits collected by Joseph F. Smith in 1869 do not include a date of woman’s marriage or sealing to Joseph Smith, thus the women were not technically lying when they stated that they had been “married or sealed” to Joseph as they could have been referring to the post-martyrdom sealings performed by Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. The few affidavits referring to Hyrum Smith are very suspect, not being affirmed until after all of the purported witnesses to the event were deceased. Additionally, Hyrum’s sister-in-law Mercy Fielding Thompson stated that she was the only plural wife of Hyrum and that he had no others. Mercy was never sealed to Hyrum while he was living, rather, he stood as proxy for her deceased husband, Robert Blashel Thompson, so that she could be sealed to Robert.

³⁵ The revelation Joseph received in answer to his question regarding the scripture “neither are they married nor given in marriage in the resurrection” was written down July 12, 1843 most likely in preparation for a talk he gave on the subject on July 16, 1843 (see WJS, pp. 232-233).

be married in view of eternity in this life or he will have no claim on her in the next, and that was the full amount of the content of the revelation.³⁶ Hyrum testified that he read the marriage revelation to the high council in August 1843, and “that it was in answer to a question concerning things which transpired in former days and had no reference to the present time.”³⁷

The original revelation is no longer in existence. Brigham Young and his followers claimed that Joseph Kingsbury, a store clerk, made a copy of the original revelation before Emma burned it. That copy was kept locked in Brigham’s desk drawer until it was read for the first time in public during a special conference in the Salt Lake Tabernacle in 1852, eight years after Joseph’s death. Many people who had seen or listened to the original revelation testified that the one Brigham brought forth was nothing like the one Joseph had received.³⁸ In 1876 Brigham had The Law of the Church on Marriage which stated that “one man should have but one wife” removed from the Doctrine and Covenants and replaced it with what is now known as section 132.³⁹ D&C 132 is an altered copy of a copy with a dubious history.

The second criticism regards believing the testimony of women.⁴⁰ Misled by church leaders’ and husbands’ incorrect interpretations of scripture, false beliefs, and a wrong understanding of what Joseph was really doing, many early Mormon women who agreed to plural marriage suffered terribly.

Helen Mar Kimball, daughter of Heber and Vilate, had lived thirty years in polygamy when she lamented: “Nothing would induce me to lose . . . that crown which awaits all that have laid their willing, but bleeding hearts upon the altar!”⁴¹

Sarah Pratt, first wife of Orson Pratt, left Mormonism when Orson, at age fifty-seven, took his tenth wife, a young girl of sixteen. Sarah called his venture into polygamy “sheer fanaticism.”

³⁶ See NC NT—Matthew 10:22 and Mark 5:43; Dinger, John S., editor. (2011). *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, p. 255-256. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books and WJS, pp. 232-233. Joseph taught the concepts of the eternal marriage revelation publicly to the saints in a sermon on July 16, 1843, “[A] man must enter into an everlasting covenant with his wife in this world or he will have no claim on her in the next.” He told the saints that he “could not reveal the fullness of these things until the [Nauvoo] Temple is completed.” According to Joseph’s journal, on May 28, 1843 the very first Eternal marriage covenant of the Restoration took place between Joseph and Emma. The next day, Hyrum entered into an Eternal marriage covenant with his deceased wife, Jerusha who had died several years earlier. Hyrum’s second wife, Mary Fielding Smith declined the opportunity to be eternally married to Hyrum and had chosen instead to stand as proxy for Jerusha.

³⁷ Dinger, John S., editor. (2011). *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, p. 241. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books.

³⁸ See *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.*; The Temple Lot Case [trial and appeal transcripts] (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1893); <https://archive.org/details/TempleLotCase>; and various statements of Emma Smith.

³⁹ In 1876 under Brigham Young’s direction, 26 sections were added; one of those was section 132, the “polygamy” revelation, while the former Law of the Church on Marriage was removed. In 1921 *Lectures on Faith* was removed.

⁴⁰ The strongest anti-polygamy sermon ever given by a prophet of the Lord recorded in scripture revealed that the Lord heard the mourning of the daughters of His people in Jerusalem and in all the lands of His people because of the wickedness and abominations of their husbands who had broken the hearts of their tender wives and lost the confidence of their children and whose sobbings ascended up to God against their husbands and fathers. See NC BofM—Jacob 2:8-9.

⁴¹ *The Saints’ Advocate* 6 (June 1884): pp. 449-451.

A daughter of Jedediah M. Grant said, “Polygamy is alright when it is properly carried out—on a shovel!”⁴²

Phebe Woodruff, first wife of Wilford Woodruff shared with a close friend why she publicly supported polygamy, “I loathe the unclean thing with all the strength of my nature, but Sister, I have suffered all that a woman can endure. I am old and helpless, and would rather stand up anywhere, and say anything commanded of me, than to be turned out of my home in my old age which I should be most assuredly if I refused to obey counsel.”⁴³

Emmeline B. Wells, Daniel H. Wells’ seventh wife, prominent writer and editor defended plural marriage in public, but inwardly was full of sorrow. She recorded in her journal: “O, if only my husband could only love me even a little and not seem to be perfectly indifferent to any sensation of that kind. He cannot know the cravings of my nature; he is surrounded with love on every side, and I am cast out. . . . How much sorrow I have known in place of the joy I looked forward to.”⁴⁴

Brigham Young said the following about the struggles women had in polygamous unions: “A few years ago one of my wives, when talking about wives leaving their husbands said, 'I wish my husband's wives would leave him, every soul of them except myself.' That is the way they all feel, more or less, at times, both old and young.”⁴⁵

Of all the testimonies women have given regarding Joseph and polygamy, there is one whose holds the greatest value. She was the only woman whose life intertwined intimately with his. She is the only woman of the Restoration given the title Elect Lady by the Lord.⁴⁶ Despite the suspicion, turmoil, and poverty that accompanied Joseph from the beginning of the Restoration, Emma chose to unite her life to his. She was his greatest support and truest friend. Driven from state to state by persecution, the struggles to provide the necessities of life, the deaths of six children, caring for their family while Joseph was imprisoned or forced into hiding, what Emma experienced in her young married life would have emotionally and spiritually crippled most ordinary women.⁴⁷ Joseph’s mother, Lucy, said of Emma, “I have never seen a woman in my life, who would endure every species of fatigue and hardship, from month to month, and from year to year, with that unflinching courage, zeal, and patience, which she has ever done; for I know that which she has had to endure . . . would have borne down almost any other woman.”⁴⁸ Emma suffered great sorrows and afflictions yet she remained faithful and true to Joseph, to the Lord, and to the work of the Restoration.

⁴² Van Wagoner, R. S. (1986). *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, p. 94. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books.

⁴³ Pearson, C. L. (2016) *The Ghost of Eternal Polygamy*, p. 113. Pivot Point Books. See also, Van Wagoner, R. S. (1986). *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, p. 101. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books.

⁴⁴ Van Wagoner, R. S. (1986). *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, p. 94. Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books.

⁴⁵ *Journal of Discourse*, vol. 9, p. 195.

⁴⁶ Emma is the only woman of the Restoration to be given the title elect lady by the Lord. In all of scripture there are only two women referred to as “elect lady:” Mary, the wife of Christ (NC NT—2 John 1:1, T&C 171—The Testimony of St. John 8:1, 13; 11:16; and 12:1, 4) and Emma Smith (T&C 5:1).

⁴⁷ During their marriage, Emma gave birth to nine children, five of whom were stillborn or died as infants, and adopted twins, one of whom died as an infant, for a total of six out of eleven who died.

⁴⁸ Smith, Lucy Mack (1853). *History of Joseph Smith*, pp. 190-191. Liverpool, England.

Those who advocated plural marriage in Nauvoo and later altered the LDS Church's history described Emma as a thorn in Joseph's side, opposing his plural marriage policies, burning the polygamy revelation, and leading him an ill life. According to Joseph, Emma, their children, and others who knew her, these accusations were absolutely not true.⁴⁹ Joseph and Emma had a respectful, loving, and affectionate marriage.⁵⁰ Asked if she and Joseph had ever quarreled or if she had opposed him where polygamy was concerned, Emma replied, "I never had any reason to oppose him, for we were always on the best of terms ourselves. . . . 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 . . . It was quite a grievous thing to many that I had any influence with him."⁵¹

Regarding D&C 132, Emma declared, "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."⁵²

Emma was considered "of the purest and noblest intentions herself, she never submitted to be made a party to anything low, wrong, or evil, was absolutely fearless where the right was concerned."⁵³ She was a woman of great compassion, honor, integrity, and truthfulness. If anyone knew what Joseph was about, it was Emma, who stood by his side as his partner, companion, and helpmeet.⁵⁴ Emma stood shoulder to shoulder with Joseph to fight iniquity, both in public and in private, and consistently championed him as a man of honor and virtue.⁵⁵ Toward the end of her life, she said of Joseph, "He did not have improper relations with any woman that ever came to

⁴⁹ Anderson, M. S. (1832-1914) *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, p.35.

⁵⁰ Joseph adored Emma, publicly remarking on several occasions that she was a wonderful wife. He said of her, "Oh, what a commingling of thought filled my mind for the moment, again she is here, even in the seventh trouble—undaunted, firm, and unwavering—unchangeable, affectionate Emma." See Newell and Avery. (1994) *Mormon Enigma Emma Hale Smith*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

⁵¹ Briggs, E. C., *Early History of the Reorganization*, pp. 88, 93-95 and *The Saints' Herald*, Vol. 26, pp. 289, 290.

⁵² Briggs, E. C., *Early History of the Reorganization*, pp. 88, 93-95.

⁵³ Newell and Avery. (1994) *Mormon Enigma Emma Hale Smith*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

⁵⁴ Emma's support of Joseph began early in their courtship. She accompanied Joseph the night he retrieved the Gold Plates at the Hill Cumorah. She rode to warn Joseph about a group of men that were searching the woods to find the plates which he had hidden. Emma served as Joseph's scribe for a time while he translated the plates into the Book of Mormon. Once Oliver Cowdery became the scribe, Emma would relieve Oliver when he grew tired. Emma never broke the Lord's confidence: she lived with the Gold Plates in her home for almost two years under a command from God that she was not to look at them, even while the plates were kept in a little trunk on her dresser or covered by a linen tablecloth, she kept her word.

⁵⁵ A few of the ways Emma joined with Joseph in the fight against polygamy: she and Joseph filed a slander lawsuit against Chauncey Higbee, he supported her in forming the Relief Society to help teach the woman the commandments of God so they would have the knowledge to turn away men seeking to engage them in polygamy, and she edited the pamphlet, *A Voice of Innocence*, and during the succession crisis which took place after Joseph's death, Emma supported William Marks, and not Brigham Young. When Brigham's followers headed West, Emma remained in Nauvoo where she continued to denounce polygamy and defend Joseph's innocence. Emma stated, "I was threatened by Brigham Young because I opposed and denounced his measures and would not go west with them. At that time, they did not know where they were going themselves, but he told me that he would yet bring me prostrate to his feet" (Briggs, E. C., *Early History of the Reorganization*, pp. 88, 93-95).

my knowledge.”⁵⁶ Emma “spoke so endearingly of Joseph, in confidence, tears filling her eyes that [you] could see she revered his very memory, and had full faith in Joseph’s inspiration as a prophet of God, and she always denied. . . in the most emphatic language that he taught or practiced polygamy.”⁵⁷

Joseph assured Emma that if she heard rumors about spiritual marriages, or anything of the kind, that “they were without foundation; that there was no such doctrine, and never should be with his knowledge, or consent.”⁵⁸ She recalled that Joseph told her polygamy was “contrary to the will of Heaven” and always led to violence.⁵⁹ Emma, who knew Joseph best, was firm: “he had no other wife or wives other than myself, in any sense, either spiritual or otherwise.”⁶⁰

After Joseph’s death the Restoration shattered into dozens of off-shoots and began to fall into ruin and decay.⁶¹ Polygamy entered Brigham Young’s branch unchecked and proceeded to destroy lives and shatter faith. Since God’s definition of adultery includes sexual relations outside the bounds of a monogamous marriage, if we are going to rescue, preserve, and live the Restoration begun by Joseph, we ought to know what that entails, including the truth behind polygamy.⁶²

⁵⁶ Newell and Avery. (1994) *Mormon Enigma Emma Hale Smith*, p. 301. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

⁵⁷ Briggs, E. C., *Early History of the Reorganization*, pp. 88, 93-95.

⁵⁸ *The Saints’ Herald*, Vol. 26, pp. 289, 290.

⁵⁹ See interview with Emma Smith as reported in *The Saints’ Herald*, vol. 26, pp. 289-290. Too often, violence is a product of adultery/polygamy as wicked and ambitious men wrestle for control over wives, children, and followers. “Linking murder and adultery together in the list that Alma provides [NC BofM—Alma 11:8] is not just happenstance. Preaching against adultery and guarding yourself against that may keep you also distant from the kind of anger and violence that results in the shedding of blood and the misery of many souls, just like the Answer to the Prayer for Covenant mentions” (Snuffer, Denver [2021] *Equality*, p. 8).

⁶⁰ *The Saints’ Herald*, Vol. 26, pp. 289, 290.

⁶¹ See dream given to Joseph Smith, Jr. June 26, 1844 as contained in T&C 153.

⁶² See T&C—A Glossary of Gospel Terms, “Adultery:” To look on a woman to lust after her...or...commit adultery in their hearts (T&C 50:4; see also NC NT—Matt 3:21; NC BofM— 3 Nephi 5:27; T&C 26:8) means the actual scheming or mental planning to engage or seduce. It is not just a passing biological attraction that is subdued by one’s will to obey God, nor is it a whispered temptation from a mischievous spirit. Subduing and rejecting that temptation is part of living righteously. Divorce also leads to adultery. When forced away by the man she loves, a woman is then adulterated by the act of the man. He is accountable for the treachery involved in dissolving the marriage that the woman wanted and forcing her into the relation with either no one or with another man. In either case, it is adulterating the marriage which she had with him. He is accountable for that uncharitable, unkind, and unjustified treatment of the woman. On the other hand, when she has lost affection for him and the union has become hollow and without love, then the marriage is dead, and continuation of the relation is a farce. It is not a marriage. In fact, it is a pretense and an abomination unworthy of preservation. It will not endure. “We reject adultery by any name or description. It is morally wrong, even if you call it plural wives, polygamy, ‘celestial marriage,’ or any other misnomer. Adultery is prohibited in the Ten Commandments and remains an important prohibition for any moral society.” There is a reason why such a serious sin as adultery ought to be altogether avoided; even if it is only as a foolish temptation contemplating the possibility of a plural wife. All need greater light and knowledge. The only way it can be acquired is by heed and diligence to the commandments of God. Any other path is a diversion, intended to waylay a person and prevent him or her from developing as God intends. Those who think they can follow God and yet commit adultery are deceived and giving heed to a false spirit. It is impossible to be both on the path to greater light and also engaged in such a serious sin. In addition to referring to a physical act involving sexual union with another, the term adultery is often used with the connotation of unfaithfulness, as in Israel becoming unfaithful and playing the part of an adulteress, worshiping other gods (see OC—Jeremiah 2:1).

Joseph was one of this world's greatest Christian thinkers. He laid a foundation that would revolutionize the whole world.⁶³ His audacious and unorthodox religion was a gift from God intended for all mankind.⁶⁴ Yet, God's voice through Joseph has largely been silenced by the stain of polygamy. Honest seekers for truth disregard and discount Joseph's marvelous message in part because they believe he was a liar, hypocrite, sexual deviant, and pedophile.

Opposing information preserves our right to choose. On one side are the testimonies of known liars, traitors, and enemies of Joseph, the men and women who embraced the "damned foolish doctrine of polygamy" placing the blame of their own sins upon the shoulders of Joseph, and the LDS Church's long-standing historical traditions. On the other side are the testimonies of Joseph, a prophet of God, who declared a few weeks before his death, "It is our purpose to build up and establish the principles of righteousness, and not to break down and destroy. The Great Jehovah has ever been with me, and the wisdom{ XE "Wisdom" } of God will direct me in the seventh hour. I feel in closer communion and better standing with God than ever I felt before in my life," and Emma, the Elect Lady, who lamented that "the Utah Mormons had by their acts, since the death of her husband, made true all the slanders and vile things charged against the Church."⁶⁵ Either Joseph and Emma were telling the truth or they were not.⁶⁶

John C. Bennett's lies and Brigham Young's doctrine of polygamy have stained the Restoration long enough. The Lord promised Joseph, "*your people shall never be turned against you by the testimony of traitors . . . you shall be had in honor. And but for a small moment, and your voice shall be more terrible in the midst of your enemies than the fierce lion, because of your righteousness, and your God shall stand by you for ever and ever.*"⁶⁷ I invite you to come to know the Lord through the revelations, teachings, and writings of Joseph Smith.⁶⁸ Together, we can rescue the Restoration and help move it toward its glorious, prophesied conclusion.⁶⁹

⁶³ See WJS, p. 367. The Lord promised Joseph that his people would never be turned against him by the testimony of traitors (T&C 139:7).

⁶⁴ One of Joseph Smith's greatest teachings was the audacious idea that God desired to have a personal relationship with each and every person. Joseph taught that "every soul" who forsakes their sins, and comes unto the Lord, and calls on His name, and obeys His voice, and keeps all His commandments, could ascend up to the throne of God, to see His face and know that He is! See T&C 93:1.

⁶⁵ WJS, pp. 375-77 and *The Saints' Herald*, Vol. 26, pp. 289, 290.

⁶⁶ There is enough information published and recorded in Joseph's day that is readily available to us today that can inform us concerning Joseph's repeated denials and condemnation of polygamy. The public and private words of Joseph reveal that he taught nothing but what was right and reveal that he was decidedly opposed to the plural wife system.

⁶⁷ T&C 139:7, emphasis added.

⁶⁸ See Old Covenants (OC) "Foreword," retrieved from <https://scriptures.info/scriptures/oc/ocforeword>, and T&C A Glossary of Gospel Terms, "Know the Lord."

⁶⁹ On January 19, 1841 the Lord promised the saints that if they built a temple wherein He could dwell, that he would "come and restore again that which was lost unto you, or which he has taken away, even the fullness of the Priesthood." The Nauvoo Temple was never completed and the promised fullness was not restored. All Restoration attempts are meant to culminate with the establishment of Zion. This has not yet happened. See T&C A Glossary of Gospel Terms, "Zion."