

### My Sources for this Lesson

Gospel Topics Essays (<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/plural-marriage-in-the-church-of-jesus-christ-of-latter-day-saints?lang=eng>); Brian Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy, 4 vols* (Greg Kofford Books, 2013-18); [https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism\\_and\\_polygamy](https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_polygamy); B. Carmon Hardy, "Lords of Creation: Polygamy, the Abrahamic Household, and Mormon Patriarchy," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 119-152; Richard Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*; Jill Mulvay Derr and Matthew J. Grow, "Letters on Mormon Polygamy and Progeny: Eliza R. Snow and . . ."; Steven Harper, *Making Sense of the D&C: A Guide through Modern Revelation* (Deseret Bk, 2008), 480-489; etc.

### Introduction

The Lord asked the Prophet Joseph Smith to see the world differently on many subjects—including revelation, repentance, the gift of the Holy Ghost, gifts of the Spirit, temples, and pre-and post-mortal life. God asked him to change the culture of Christianity on even more—the trinity, baptism, scripture, priesthood ordinations, women, covenants and ordinances, just to name a few. Joseph characteristically obeyed immediately: "Go tell your Dad," and he did. "Move to Kirtland," and he did. "Build a temple," and he did. "Don't redeem Zion now," and he did not fight the Missourians. This was not the case when he received the revelation to enter into plural marriage. He was horrified. In this lesson we will take a brief overview at Joseph's reluctance and eventual practice of plural marriage.

While translating the Bible, we know of Joseph asked several questions that brought beautiful revelations (i.e. Moses 1-7; D&C 76; Matthew 24, etc.). However, plural marriage was the hardest thing the Lord asked him to do. plural marriage was a trial of faith. It violated moral, legal, and cultural norms. Even though it was part of our biblical history, it led to persecution within and without the church. It was like an Abrahamic sacrifice for him. I hope after our study together, you will have more empathy and compassion for Joseph trying to understand the commandment and offer this sacrifice.

### Scriptural Background of Polygamy:

~4000 BC—Gen 1:28; Moses 2:28; Abr 4:28; and D&C 132:62; "God said unto them [Adam and Eve], 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.'" Abr 5:18 "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." Moses 5:2-3, "And Adam knew his wife, and she bare unto him sons and daughters, and they began to multiply and to replenish the earth. And from that time forth, the sons and daughters of Adam began to divide two and two in the land."

~600 BC—Jacob 2:24, 27, 30 "David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord. . . .27. For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none; . . . 30. 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."

~AD 30-33—Matt 22:30, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels."

1830—Dec 30—Joseph Smith Translation up to Gen 24, paused for a few months. Then translated the New Testament.

1831—D&C 42:22—"Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart and cleave unto her and none else"

1831—D&C 49:15-16—"Marriage is ordained of God unto man . . . it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation"

1832—D&C 76:56—"who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, . . . are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory." This is the first time Joseph learned of this sealing Seven times our revelations include: "Holy Spirit of promise" as a sealing of ordinance. The NT includes this phrase once (Eph 1:17), and the D&C includes it seven times (D&C 76:53; 88:3; 124:124; 132:7, 18, 19, 26). Six of the seven refer to the permanent sealing, not the conditional

1832 July 20-July 7, 1833—Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, from John 7 through Malachi finished. Fredrick G. Williams acted as scribe for most of the Old Testament .

1836—D&C 110: received sealing keys from Elijah that opened the way for the restoration of the ordinance of sealing

1843—D&C 131:1, 3 "In order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into . . . the new and everlasting covenant of marriage."

1843—D&C 132—First half discusses eternal marriage, and second half plural marriage (revealed earlier, recorded in 1843)

### Joseph's Reticence to Live the Law of Plural Marriage

Joseph did not want to obey the law of plural marriage—it was repulsive to him initially. We see this from written records and the fact that it took him years to implement and record it. He had a tender relationship with Emma according to their love letters and other people's reports. He did not want to offend her. It broke his moral code. He had lived through much persecution and knew this would offend even his friends, let alone his enemies. After much anguish, the Lord softened his heart, and Joseph accepted God's order. We know of he married one wife in the mid-1830s that "did not last," and over thirty more between "early 1841 and the fall of 1843" (Harper, 481). I list them at the end of the handout.

Joseph is attacked for being oversexed, disloyal to his wife, and taking advantage of young women. In my decade of making a careful study of this topic, I have not seen evidence for those accusations in the records from people involved at that time. Joseph did not accept this law until an angel came to him three times—the last of which with a drawn sword threatening to remove him from his place—and then he moved forward, even when Emma refused. It appears that the names of which women who were to join his family came from the angel. He asked each one to receive their own spiritual witness before agreeing.

### **The Lord Prepared Women And Men**

In 1882, Joseph F. Smith (Hyrum's son) printed in the *Deseret News*:

The Lord showed him [Joseph] those women who were to engage with him in the establishment of that principle in the Church, and at that time some of these women were named and given to him, to become his wives when the time should come that this principle should be established" (Hales, *Polygamy*, 1.224).

Although Joseph F. Smith's record of his memories is later, this story is consistent with accounts from wives and family journals.

### **Angel Came 3 Times—July 1834, 1840, and Returned in 1842 with a Sword**

We know of 21 accounts that speak of an angel revealing the doctrine of plural marriages to the Prophet Joseph. It appears these angels explained the commandment, answered Joseph's questions, encouraged him, and finally threatened to replace him. The first angelic visitations probably happened in Kirtland, between 1834 or 1835. The prophet waited for the right time to present the doctrine when the angel returned to him in Nauvoo with a "drawn sword." It appears that this was the only time that Joseph did not immediately respond to the Lord's command. Twenty of the recorded re-tellings occurred after Joseph's death. Here are a few examples from those who heard the story from the Prophet Joseph:

- 1) *Emily D. Partridge*: "Joseph Smith told me that the angel had appeared to him and had given him that revelation" (ibid, 1.196).
- 2) *Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner*: "Joseph told me that he was afraid when the angel appeared to him and told him to take other wives. He hesitated, and the angel appeared to him the third time with a drawn sword in his hand and threatened his life if he did not fulfill the commandment." Later she said gave the date of the "drawn sword" as February 1842" (1.192, 196).
- 3) *Joseph B. Noble* (recorded 3 memories): "In the fall of the year A.D. 1840 Joseph Smith taught him the principle of Celestial marriage or a 'plurality of wives,' and that the said Joseph Smith declaired [*sic*] that he had received a Revelation from God on the subject, and that the Angel of the Lord had commanded him (Joseph Smith) to move forward in the said order of marriage." Later in 1880, he again, "spoke of Joseph unfolding to him the eternity of the marriage covenant to convince him of the truth of which was no small matter—Joseph bore testimony that he had received a revelation on this principle in Kirtland but the Lord then told him 'not yet.' The angel of the Lord came to him in Nauvoo and told him the time had come." And he repeated a similar statement in 1883 (ibid., 1.196-197).
- 4) *Eliza R. Snow* told her brother Lorenzo Snow in 1843, "Prophet Joseph unbosomed his heart and described the trying mental ordeal he experienced in overcoming the repugnance of his feelings, the natural result of the force of education and social custom, relative to the introduction of plural marriage. He knew the voice of God—he knew the commandment of the Almighty to him was to go forward, to set the example, and establish celestial plural marriage. He knew that he had not only his own prejudices and prepossessions to combat and to overcome, but those of the whole Christian world; but God, who is above all, had given the commandment, and He must be obeyed. Yet the Prophet hesitated and deferred from time to time, until an angel of God stood by him with a drawn sword, and told him that, unless he moved forward and established plural marriage, his priesthood would be taken from him and he should be destroyed!" (ibid., 1.215; Eliza R. Snow, *Biography & Family Record of Lorenzo Snow*, 69).

### **Polygamy was Joseph's Abrahamic Sacrifice (D&C 132:36)**

I define an "Abrahamic Sacrifice" as God asking for a short-term detour of God's previous law to obey personal revelation. It is also the hardest commandment to obey because it requires the giving up of an individualized tailor-made sacrifice. When a disciple has proved oneself worthy of following God's law, the Lord takes one of His most treasured truths and asks an individual to give it up. Because of the individual nature of the sacrifice it requires knowledge of both God's commandments and personal revelation. It requires one to follow a living, present, revealed revelation even in the face of breaking the tried and tested revelation of scripture. It is learning to say, "Thy will not mine," over the hardest thing to give up for each person. Then after the sacrifice, the Lord asks the ones sacrificing to return to living His law again. One of Joseph's plural wives, Zina Huntington, referred to the call to polygamy as "a greater sacrifice than to give my life . . . [but] I obtained a testimony for myself that God had required that order" (Harper, *D&C*, 482).

Interestingly, in the first half of D&C 132 (at least after verse 4), the Lord first introduces the law of eternal marriage. He then retells the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac; after which he asks Joseph to live the law of plural marriage. One of Joseph's plural wives recorded that he said, "the practice of this principle would be the hardest trial the Saints would ever have to test their faith" (Harper, *D&C*, 481).

### **Polygamy Theologically**

Even though examples of polygamy are mentioned often in the Bible, it is often attacked. Some say that it is unfair to women, a lifestyle for cultures with oversexed, it breeds controlling men. However, none of these fit into Joseph's historical practice as I read the accounts. It is helpful to read D&C 132 realizing that much of it is talking about sealing, not plural marriage.

The restored theology suggests just the opposite. From an eternal view, polygamy says women have an easier chance of gaining eternal salvation than men do. That is also not the message of the restoration. As there are more male babies conceived and a few more born than female babies, but by childhood, the numbers are just about even—men and women—just right for the Edenic law, to pair off to by two. This sound like God's plan eternally, Yet, the Book of Jacob explains, the law of more than one wife is only given at certain times for those who are to raise up seed to the Lord. We also learn in D&C 132 that some will live polygamy in heaven. However, that is not a requirement according to our scriptures.

## History of Marriages and Sealings

Joseph taught celestial marriage openly, but did not speak publicly on plural marriage (except perhaps a rare, obscure, tangential reference only caught by a few). Here are a few examples of hints that suggest he knew of the doctrine:

### May 1835

W.W. Phelps wrote his wife, “A new idea, Sally, if you and I continue faithful to the end, we are certain of being one in the Lord throughout eternity; This is one of the most glorious consolations we can have in the flesh.”

### May 5, 1835, and November 4, 1838

Emma signed her letter to Joseph, “Yours forever.” In Nov Joseph signed, “I am yours forever, your husband”

### November 24, 1835

The Prophet Joseph married his first couple, Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey and Newel Knight. It is doubtful whether he “sealed” them beyond this life as we read Newel’s and Joseph’s accounts of the ceremony in their journals with no mention of anything beyond life Newel wrote (*Hales, 1.198-200*):

“We received much Instruction from the Prophet concerning matrimony, & what the ancient order of God was, & by the authority of the priesthood which he held, he joined us in the bond of matrimony on Tuesday.” —Joseph: “You covenant to be each others companions *through life*, and discharge the duties of husband & wife in every respect to which they assented, I then pronounced them husband & Wife in the name of God.”

**January 20, 1836**—Joseph married Apostle John Boynton and Susan Lowell, then recorded: “I pronounced upon them the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and such other blessings as the Lord put into my heart . . . I doubt whether the pages of history can boast of a more splendid and innocent wedding and feast than this, for it was conducted after the order of heaven” (*Hales, 1.201*).

**April 3, 1836**—Elijah came with keys of the sealing power (D&C 110:14-16)

**1840 or 1841**—Joseph taught a few leaders the revelation on plural marriage in Nauvoo.

**July 12, 1842**—Joseph dictated and his scribe recorded command on Eternal and Plural Marriages, known today as D&C 132

**May 1843**—Joseph and Emma are sealed for time and all eternity

**Sept 1843**—Joseph and Emma received the crowing ordinances of exaltation (D&C 42:49)

**April 8, 1844**—Two months before Joseph’s death, his brother Hyrum openly taught *eternal marriage* in Nauvoo:

“I married me a wife, and I am the only one who had any right to her. We had five children, the covenant was made for our lives. She fell into the grave before God showed us his order. God has shown me that his covenant is dead, and had no force, neither could I have her in the resurrection, but we should be as the angels—it troubled me. President Joseph said you can have her sealed to you upon the same principles as you can be baptized for the dead. I enquired what can I do for any second wife? You can also make a covenant with her for eternity and have her sealed to you by the authority of the priesthood. I named the subject to my present wife, and she said, ‘I will act as proxy for your wife that is dead, and I will be sealed to you for eternity myself for I never had any other husband. I love you and I do not want to be separate from you nor be forever alone in the world to come.’ . . . What honest man or woman can find fault with such a doctrine as this? None. It is a doctrine not to be preached to the world; but to the Saints who have obeyed the gospel and gathered to Zion. It Is glad tidings of great joy” (*Hales, Polygamy, 1.213*).

## Misunderstandings

Like many new restored laws, it was misunderstood often by those in and out of the church (i.e. remember the first baptisms for the dead, with men for women and women for men without recorders and a horse acting as a witness?). The early saints felt that being sealed to Joseph insured exaltation for their whole families. They wanted to all be sealed together with the prophet’s family. Even if not in this world, they hoped for a family connection into celestial glory. Men also came up to Joseph and asked if their families could be joined to his.

Another misunderstanding comes when we think men sought this. It was a church calling, and most often assigned to those who had the financial, emotional, and spiritual sensitivity to take on more. During Joseph’s life time no more than one hundred people were involved in polygamist relationships. Over the next few decades, one estimate claims 4% of the men were called to live this (*Institute Manual, Church History, 424*). The higher number of offspring though end up with much higher percentage involved by the third and fourth decade that it was practiced.

What we know of Joseph’s and Emma’s example was not a perfect implementation of the law, but I do not see this as an excuse to throw rocks at the Prophet, or speak evil of the Lord’s anointed. I am surprised that our culture, which blatantly breaks the law of chastity both before and after marriage, which thinks it is okay to find pleasure in looking at naked men and women and even make access available to youth, have the audacity of denouncing the Prophet Joseph, who like Abraham, was commanded by God to live another form of marriage for a short period of time.

### Why no Offspring?

Twelve children have been attributed by various informants to be Joseph’s offspring (outside of Emma’s nine). With DNA and historical testing, only one of the twelve, Josephine Lyon, had the potential of being a living offspring of Joseph—but even in this case, it is hard to tell with DNA as the next generation married into Smith blood lines (*Ugo A. Perego, JS Jr., the Question of Polygamous Offspring, and DNA Analysis*). This does not answer how Jacob 2 fits in. Perhaps it was needed for others.

### Why Marry Married Women?

D&C 132:41-45 explains this—no infidelity was practiced. I find two additional possible reasons for this. First, we can assume it was easier on Emma if she knew Joseph would be having no intimate relations with his eternal wives. Some saw this law as for the next life only. Second, the angel gave Joseph the names of the women when they were single, and when he finally acted on it, it was easier to just stick with the same woman and say—“An angel gave me your name, just pray about it . . . no need to worry about anything in this life, stay with your husband, but in the future, your family can be sealed eternally in heaven to mine . . . if you get an answer.” Some of the women were married to non-believing men so the eternal hope had additional impact on them.

### Why without Emma’s Permission?

Emma’s acceptance of the Law of Sarah was on and off. D&C 132:64-65 explains the “Law of Sarah” and encourages her to facilitate the living of this law. Joseph is promised that he and Emma are sealed eternally regardless of her acceptance (D&C 132:49 and 109:68-69). The Lord also told Joseph, “I have seen your sacrifices in obedience to that which I have told you. Go, therefore, and I make a way for you escape, as I accepted the offering of Abraham of his son” (D&C 132:50).

### Joseph Smith Plural Sealings and Proposals in Nauvoo

(Chart adapted from *Hales, Polygamy*, 1.428; \*sealed for eternity only).

<u>Name of wife</u>	<u>Sealing Date</u>	<u>Legal Husband</u>	<u>Sexuality</u>
1. Louisa Beaman	April 5, 1841	none	yes
2. Sarah Bates Pratt Proposal*	July, 1841	Orson Pratt	} no
3. Zina Huntington *	Oct. 1841	Henry B. Jacobs	
4. Presendia Huntington*	Dec. 11, 1841	Norman Buell	
5. Agnes Moulton Coolbirth	Jan. 6, 1842	[widow]	
<i>Sarah Granger Kimball Proposal</i>	early, 1842	Hiram Kimball	

### Angel Visit Early February 1842

6. Mary Elizabeth Rollins*	Late Feb. 1842	Adam Lightner
7. Patty Bartlett *	March 9, 1842	David Sessions
8. Marinda Nancy Johnson*	April, 1842	Orson Hyde

### April 1842 - Shift in Joseph’s Plural Proposals

<i>Nancy Rigdon Proposal</i>			
9. Delcena Johnson	<July, 1842>		
10. Eliza R. Snow	June 29, 1842		Possible
11. Sarah Ann Whitney	July 27, 1842	[Joseph Kingsbury]	Possible
12. Martha McBride	August, 1842		
13. Sylvia Sessions	Early 1843	Edwards Sayers	yes
14. Ruth Vose	February 1843		
15. Flora Woodworth	Spring 1843		
16. Emily Dow Partridge	March 4, 1843		yes
17. Eliza Maria Partridge	March 8, 1843		yes
18. Almera Woodard Johnson	April, 1843		yes
19. Lucy Walker	May 1, 1843		yes
20. Sarah Lawrence	May, 1843		yes
21. Maria Lawrence	May, 1843		yes
22. Helen Mar Kimball	May, 1843		
23. Hannah Ells	mid-year 1843		possible
24. Elivira Annie Cowles	June 1, 1843	Jonathan Holmes	
25. Rhoda Richards	June 12, 1843		
26. Desdemona Fullmer	July, 1843		
27. Olive G. Frost	Summer		yes
28. Malissa Lott	Sept 20, 1843		yes
29. Fanny Young	Nov 2, 1843		
30. Nancy M. Winchester			
31. Elizabeth Davis	} Unknown	Jabez Durfee	
32. Sarah Kingsley*		John Cleveland	
33. Esther Dutcher		Albert Smith	
34. Mary Hero		[John Sneider]	yes

