

A Response to Concerns Regarding Joseph Smith and the Practice of Plural Marriage in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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Concern:

You have only until, let's say, tomorrow to decide and to marry me but it will have terrible consequences if you don't accept the marriage.

Response:

One popular anti-Mormon narrative reports that Joseph Smith met a woman and gave her 24 hours to comply with a marriage proposal or she would be cut off forever.¹ The story is folklore, but it is based upon the introduction of the previously unmarried Lucy Walker to the principle of plural marriage.

Joseph first discussed plural marriage with Lucy in 1842. She did not initially accept his proposal but rather agonized for many months over the prospect. She related: "I was tempted and tortured beyond endurance until life was not desirable. Oh that the grave would kindly receive me, that I might find rest . . . Oh, let this bitter cup pass. And thus I prayed in the agony of my soul. The Prophet discerned my sorrow. He saw how unhappy I was. . ."² Finally, on April 30, 1843, Joseph saw her anguish and spoke to her, pushing her to resolution: "I have no flattering words to offer. It is a command of God to you. I will give you until tomorrow to decide this matter. If you reject this message the gate will be closed forever against you." How did Lucy respond to this challenge? She responded as skeptics would today:

This aroused every drop of Scotch in my veins. For a few moments I stood fearless before him, and looked him in the eye. . . . I had been speechless, but at last found utterance and said: "Although you are a prophet of God you could not induce me to take a step of so great importance, unless I knew that God approved my course. I would rather die. I have tried to pray but received no comfort, no light," and emphatically forbid him speaking again to me on this subject. Every feeling of my soul revolted against it.

¹ See for example George D. Smith, "The Forgotten Story of Nauvoo Celestial Marriage," *Journal of Mormon History*, 36 (Fall 2010) 4:157. By selectively quoting Lucy Walker's account, George D. Smith makes it appear as if Joseph introduced plural marriage and then immediately gave her a twenty-four hour ultimatum to participate, when in reality many months passed between the two events.

² Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience*, Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co, 1888, 46; see also testimony in Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 229–30.

Lucy stood her ground. No doubt she had some of the same questions regarding plural marriage that observers voice today. She demanded a divine manifestation from the same source Joseph said he had received the commandment to practice plural marriage:

Said I, "The same God who has sent this message is the Being I have worshipped from my early childhood and He must manifest His will to me." He walked across the room, returned and stood before me with the most beautiful expression of countenance, and said: "God Almighty bless you. You shall have a manifestation of the will of God concerning you; a testimony that you can never deny. I will tell you what it shall be. It shall be that joy and peace that you never knew."³

She related how Joseph's promise was fulfilled shortly thereafter:

Oh, how earnestly I prayed for these words to be fulfilled. It was near dawn after another sleepless night when my room was lighted up by a heavenly influence. To me it was, in comparison, like the brilliant sun bursting through the darkest cloud. The words of the Prophet were indeed fulfilled. My soul was filled with a calm, sweet peace that "I never knew." Supreme happiness took possession of me, and I received a powerful and irresistible testimony of the truth of plural marriage, which has been like an anchor to the soul through all the trials of life.⁴

The next day she met the Prophet:

I felt that I must go out into the morning air and give vent to the joy and gratitude that filled my soul. As I descended the stairs, President Smith opened the door below, took me by the hand and said: "Thank God, you have the testimony. I too have prayed." He led me to a chair, placed his hands upon my head, and blessed me with every blessing my heart could possibly desire.⁵

This is the only known account where a time limit was imposed by the Prophet.

This narrative is routinely referenced by authors who depict Joseph as impatient and demanding with potential plural wives. Unfortunately they always fail to include a few important details. First, the initial introduction was in 1842 and the subsequent conversation at least four months

³ Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience*, Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co, 1888, 46–48; see also testimony in Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 229–30.

⁴ Ibid. Another account include an angelic visitation: "One night after supper I went out into the orchard and I kneeled down and prayed to God for information. After praying I arose and walked around the orchard and kneeled again and repeated this during the night. Finally as I was praying the last time, an angel of the Lord appeared to me and told me that the principle was of God and for me to accept it." Untitled typed sheet "The following was given by Judge D. H. Morris of St. George, Utah. . ." copy in Vesta P. Crawford Collection, Marriott Library, University of Utah, MS 125, bx 1, fd 5.

⁵ Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience*, Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co, 1888, 46–48.

later on April 30, 1843. Second, the time limitation came only after he “discerned [her] sorrow” and “saw how unhappy” she was. Third, Lucy reported a divine manifestation that set her heart at ease that very night. Fourth, Lucy was not offended by the experience, but remained true to the Prophet until her death. She later related: “In this I acted in accordance with the will of God, not for any worldly aggrandizement, not for the gratification of the flesh. How can it be said we accepted this principle for any lustful desires? Preposterous! This would be utterly impossible.”⁶

Concern:

According to information I have read the wives were forced into marriage. They were put under tremendous pressure to accept the marriage.

Response:

Some writers affirm that Joseph Smith put pressure on women to marry him. They portray him almost as a predator gallivanting about Nauvoo seeking new wives, even marrying other men’s spouses. While it makes for an entertaining storyline, it does not square with the historical record. One of Joseph’s plural wives, Lucy Walker, remembered the Prophet’s counsel: “A woman would have her choice, this was a privilege that could not be denied her.”⁷ The Prophet taught that eternal marriage was necessary for exaltation and encouraged all those he taught to comply, but he always respected their agency and choices in the matter.

Critics often repeat John C. Bennett’s claim that the Prophet would destroy the reputation of any woman who turned him down.⁸ We know of five women who refused Joseph’s plural proposals.⁹ However, the historical record shows that after each rebuff, he exerted no force and told no one. The only reason we know of those proposals is because each woman (or one of her relatives) related it later. Sarah Kimball, whose husband was a nonmember, was one of the five women. She later recalled her reaction:

I asked him to teach it to some one else. He looked at me reprovingly and said, “Will you tell me who to teach it to? God required me to teach it to you, and leave you with the

⁶ Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience*, Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co, 1888, 49.

⁷ Lucy Walker Kimball, “A Brief Biographical Sketch of the Life and Labors of Lucy Walker Kimball Smith,” CHL; quoted in Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience*, Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co, 1888, 46.

⁸ See John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints: Or an Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism*. Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842, 231 (Sarah Pratt) and 253 (Widow Fuller).

⁹ Besides Sarah Granger Kimball, included are Ester Johnson (Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review, Mesa*: 21st Century Printing, n.d. 96.), Lydia Moon (George D. Smith, ed. *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995, 120.), Cordelia C. Morley (Autobiography, holograph, HBLL, BYU, 4.) and Rachel R. Ivins Grant (“Rachel R. Grant: The Continuing Legacy of the Feminine Ideal,” 23–24; quoted in ⁹ Ronald W Walker,., “Rachel R. Grant: The Continuing Legacy of the Feminine Ideal,” in Cannon, Donald Q., and David J. Whittaker, eds. *Supporting Saints: Life Stories of Nineteenth-Century Mormons*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1985, 23–24.)

responsibility of believing or disbelieving.” He said, “I will not cease to pray for you, and if you will seek unto God in prayer, you will not be led into temptation.”¹⁰

It is true that Sarah Pratt and Nancy Rigdon accused Joseph Smith of impropriety and he aggressively defended himself against their allegations. However, his interactions with the five other women indicate that if Pratt and Rigdon had remained silent, he would have quietly left them as well “with the responsibility of believing or disbelieving.”

Concern:

One woman said the child that she bore she didn’t know if it was the child of Joseph or the child of, in this case, Orson Hyde . . . So that indicates that it was definitely not a spiritual marriage.

Response:

This unfortunate statement is based upon misinformation. Orson Hyde’s legal wife, Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde, left no references concerning her children or her relationship with Joseph Smith as a plural wife. Todd Compton assessed: “For such an important woman, Marinda is surprisingly under documented. I know of no holograph by her and have found only four letters to her.”¹¹

The actual allegation is attributed to another of Joseph Smith’s plural wives, Presendia Huntington Buell, by Mary Ettie V. Coray Smith, who wrote a memoir of her association with the Mormons with the assistance of an editor, Nelson Winch Green. Green is listed as the author, although the amount of editing and modifications he made to Mary Ettie’s story is unknown. The book, published in 1860, asserts: “I heard the latter woman [Presendia] say afterwards in Utah, that she did not know whether Mr. Buel [sic] or the Prophet was the father of her son.”¹² Mary Ettie’s claim that she personally heard Presendia Huntington voice the reported declaration is problematic in several ways.

In the nineteenth century, for a woman to mention her personal sexual involvement was rare.¹³ To admit to a polyandrous relationship would be rarer, but to openly refer to a polyandrous sexual involvement would be very extraordinary. The listeners to such admissions would have had no context to evaluate the declarations except to consider the behaviors plainly immoral.

¹⁰ Andrew Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 232.

¹¹ Todd Compton, “‘Remember Me in My Affliction’: Louisa Beaman and Eliza R. Snow Letters, 1849,” *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 48.

¹² Nelson Winch Green, *Fifteen Years among the Mormons: Being the Narrative of Mrs. Mary Ettie V. Smith*, 35. Green is listed as the author but, from the internal evidence, was actually Smith’s editor. Brodie quotes her in *No Man Knows My History*, 301.

¹³ See discussion in Todd Compton, “Fawn Brodie on Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives and Polygamy: A Critical View,” in Newell G. Bringhurst ed., *Reconsidering No Man Knows My History: Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect*, Logan, Utah: USU Press, 1996, 166.

Even in the secret teachings of plurality in Nauvoo, no doctrinal foundation for sexual polyandry was ever discussed. Hence, the women would be essentially declaring themselves to be unchaste. Todd Compton writes: “One wonders if Presendia would have said such a thing. Talk of sexuality was avoided by the Victorian, puritanical Mormons; in diaries, the word ‘pregnant’ or ‘expecting’ is never or rarely used.”¹⁴

An additional concern involves the likelihood that Mary Ettie would have been sufficiently close to Presendia in a social sense to have heard such a sensitive admission in the first place. Mary Ettie apostatized after leaving Nauvoo. That she, as an unbeliever later in Utah, would have been privy to such a private confession seems less likely. While such a discussion might occur in circumstances of great privacy with the closest of friends or to one’s female relatives, there is little evidence that Mary Ettie had such an intimate relationship with Presendia. She herself makes no claim to closeness to Presendia, nor does she imply that Presendia was making such statements more publicly.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty is found in Mary Ettie as a reliable witness. Stanley S. Ivins considered Mary Ettie V. Smith’s report as “inaccurate and of no value.”¹⁵ Even anti-Mormon Fanny Stenhouse recognized her confusion, describing Ettie Smith in 1875 as “a lady who wrote very many years ago and in her writings, so mixed up fiction with what was true, that it was difficult to determine where the one ended and the other began.”¹⁶ A descendant of Mary Ettie, John W. McCoy, concluded:

Mary Ettie does not seem to have kept a personal journal, and she is recounting events that occurred when she was very young. Moreover, the account was written down by Nelson Green, and then interpreted by the printer . . . It will not take the reader very long to discover that Mary Ettie’s account is skillfully written, if not deviously clever. Also, her literary license is stretched to the fullest possible extent for a variety of purposes . . . The line between truth and fiction does not seem to have been regarded as an absolute in every instance . . . Clearly, *Fifteen Years among the Mormons* is not a primary source. It is not even a reliable secondary source. The specific dates that it includes are most often wrong, and at least some of the names are reported incorrectly . . . The level of credibility even for statements supported by external facts is reduced by the unavoidable presence of her editor, Nelson Green.¹⁷

¹⁴ Todd Compton, “Fawn Brodie on Joseph Smith’s Plural Wives and Polygamy: A Critical View,” in Newell G. Bringhurst ed., *Reconsidering No Man Knows My History: Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect*, Logan, Utah: USU Press, 1996, 166.

¹⁵ Stanley S. Ivins Collection, USHS, notebook 4, page 63.

¹⁶ Fanny Stenhouse, *Tell It All! The Story of a Life's Experiences in Mormonism*, Hartford: A. D. Worthington & Co., 1875, 618.

¹⁷ John W. McCoy, “True Grit and Tall Tales: How Mary Ettie Coray (1827–1867) Got Her Man,” 2006, unpublished manuscript in possession of the author, 4–6, 13.

Although popular with antagonists, Mary Ettie V. Coray Smith's report that Presendia Huntington "did not know whether Mr. Buell or the Prophet was the father of her son" suffers from important weaknesses. It would benefit from additional supportive documentation from more credible witnesses, either to corroborate that exact statement or to provide evidence of similar comments by Presendia or other plural wives, none of which has been found.

Concern:

The time of Abraham, God reveals that . . . it's OK to have more than one wife Does the church believe that it was a teaching from God that he married women who had other men that were still alive, and even some apostles' wives when they were away on missions?

Response:

Joseph Smith was sealed to 14 women with legal husbands (Ruth Vose, Esther Dutcher, Mary Elizabeth Rollins, Presendia L. Huntington, Sarah Kingsley, Patty Bartlett, Elizabeth Davis, 8. Lucinda Pendleton, Elvira Annie Cowles, Marinda Nancy Johnson, Zina Diantha Huntington, Sylvia Sessions, Sarah Ann Whitney, and Mary Heron). Every one of women had experienced two marriage ceremonies: a sealing ordinance in the new and everlasting covenant with Joseph Smith and a civil ceremony with their legal spouses. However the question arises whether actually were living as the wife of two men thereafter, a state called "polyandry." Also, did these women experience sexual relations with both men, a dynamic called "sexual polyandry" or a "plurality of husbands."

Answers to these questions come as sexual polyandry is contextualized within Joseph Smith's teachings. In addition, evidence of such relations, or the lack thereof, helps to determine whether sexual polyandry ever occurred or could have been sanctioned by any Latter-day Saints at any time.

Sexual Polyandry was (and is) considered Adultery

A review of the historical record shows that all known references to sexual polyandry from Joseph Smith and subsequent Church leaders condemn it. The revelation on celestial and plural marriage, now section 132, contains three references to polyandrous sexual relations (vv. 41-42, 61-63). All three label them "adultery," in two cases stating that the woman involved "would be destroyed" (41, 63).

In addition, Latter-day Saints who were personally taught by Joseph Smith recalled only denunciations of the practice. For example, when asked in 1852, "What do you think of a woman having more husbands than one?" Brigham Young answered, "This is not known to the law."¹⁸ Five years later Heber C. Kimball taught, "There has been a doctrine taught that a man can act as

¹⁸ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:361, August 1, 1852.

Proxy for another when absent—it has been practiced and it is known—and its damnable.”¹⁹ The following year Orson Pratt instructed: “God has strictly forbidden, in this Bible, plurality of husbands, and proclaimed against it in his law.”²⁰ Pratt further explained:

Can a woman have more than one husband at the same time? No: Such a principle was never sanctioned by scripture. The object of marriage is to multiply the species, according to the command of God. A woman with one husband can fulfill this command, with greater facilities, than if she had a plurality; indeed, this would, in all probability, frustrate the great design of marriage, and prevent her from raising up a family. As a plurality of husbands, would not facilitate the increase of posterity, such a principle never was tolerated in scripture.²¹

Belinda Marden Pratt taught the same sentiment in 1854: “Why not a plurality of husbands as well as a plurality of wives?” To which I reply: 1st God has never commanded or sanctioned a plurality of husbands . . .”²² On October 8, 1869, Apostle George A. Smith taught that “a plurality of husbands is wrong.”²³ His wife, Bathsheba Smith, was asked in 1892 if it would “be a violation of the laws of the church for one woman to have two husbands living at the same time . . .” She replied: “I think it would.”²⁴ All of these individuals were involved with Nauvoo polygamy and several were undoubtedly aware of Joseph Smith’s sealings to legally married women.

Similar censures continued as First Presidency Counselor Joseph F. Smith wrote in 1889: “Polyandry is wrong, physiologically, morally, and from a scriptural point of order. It is nowhere sanctioned in the Bible, nor by the law of God or nature and has not affinity with ‘Mormon’ plural marriage.”²⁵ Elder Joseph Fielding Smith reiterated in 1905: “Polygamy, in the sense of plurality of husbands and of wives never was practiced in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Utah or elsewhere.”²⁶

In addition, the Apostle Paul denounced polyandry, calling it “adultery”:

For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.

¹⁹ *Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1835-1893*, Salt Lake City: Privately Published [Smith-Pettit Foundation], 2010, 160; see also 157.

²⁰ Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, 18:55–56, July 11, 1875.

²¹ Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” *The Seer*, 1:4 (April 1853) 60.

²² Belinda Marden Pratt, “Defense of Polygamy: By a Lady of Utah, in a Letter to Her Sister in New Hampshire,” *Millennial Star*, 16:471, (July 29, 1854).

²³ George Albert Smith, *Journal of Discourses*, Vol.13, p.41, George Albert Smith, October 8, 1869.

²⁴ Bathsheba Smith, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent’s testimony (part 3), page 347, question 1142.

²⁵ Joseph F. Smith to Zenos H. Gurley, June 19, 1889, CHL. Richard E. Turley, Jr. *Selected Collections from the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Provo, Utah: BYU Press, vol. 1, DVD #29.

²⁶ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1905), 48.

So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. (Rom. 7:2–3)

In light of the universal condemnation of sexual polyandry from every religious voice known to early Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith would likely have encountered some pushback implementing it in his plural marriages. That resistance would probably have been noted in some journal or by an anti-Mormon source. It would likely have generated some explanatory doctrinal responses defending the practice. Onlookers would have found sexual polyandry to be a tantalizing bit of gossip to exploit and practitioners (if there were any) would have immediately been on the defensive.

Yet, a review of available manuscripts reveals that no polyandrous wives personally reported it, defended it, or complained about it. In addition, no polyandrous husbands reported it, defended it, or complained about it. None of the officiators or witnesses reported it, defended it, or complained about it. Anti-Mormons did not accuse Joseph of practicing polyandry until 1850, nine years after it reportedly began. If the Prophet had engaged in such a controversial practice, it is unlikely that there would be no contemporaneous documentation.

At this point it is interesting to note that if Joseph Smith sought to practice polyandrous sexuality, the easiest path would have been to include theological justifications for it in the revelation on celestial marriage (section 132). Paradoxically, the revelation contains three condemnations and nothing to rationalize the behavior.

The New and Everlasting Covenant Causes All “Old Covenants” to be “Done Away”

Besides blatant condemnation of sexual polyandry from all Nauvoo religionists, other theological principles taught by the Prophet denounce the practice. An 1830 revelation, now D&C 22:1, states: “Behold, I say unto you that all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing; and this is a new and an everlasting covenant, even that which was from the beginning.” This revelation was given in response to a specific question about baptism, which is a new and everlasting covenant between a person and God. The revelation states generally that the new and everlasting covenant causes all old covenants to be done away. Thirteen years later Joseph asked about polygamy. The revelatory reply included an additional “new and everlasting covenant” between God and a man and a woman in an eternal marriage (D&C 132:4). The question is whether the earlier statement that “all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing; and this is a new and an everlasting covenant” applies to everlasting marriage covenants. If it did, then the new and everlasting covenant would supersede any legal marriage covenants.

Isaiah instructed: “But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little . . .” (Isaiah 28:13; see also 2 Nephi 28:30, D&C 98:12, 128:21). Joseph Smith’s God repeated this to him in a revelation now

D&C 98:12. Does that mean that another “new and everlasting covenant” might be revealed later in a “line upon line” fashion that would be subject to the 1830 description? The 1830 revelation plainly states “*all* old covenants” are “done away” by “a new and everlasting covenant.” If “all” in the 1830 revelation meant “all” including future covenants that would be revealed, then from a religious standpoint, a woman previously legally married and subsequently sealed would not have two husbands with whom she could experience sexual relations after the sealing ceremony. The new and everlasting covenant of marriage would supersede the legal covenant of marriage causing it to be “done away.” Therefore, if a woman went back to her legal husband, it would be adultery because in the eyes of the Church that marriage ended with the sealing and was “done away.”

Non-Sexual, Eternity-Only Sealings Fulfill the Primary Purpose for Plural Marriage

Joseph Smith gave three reasons for the restoration of plural marriage with one of them being much more important than the other two. The earliest justification he mentioned was the need to restore Old Testament polygamy as a part of the “restitution of all things” prophesied in Acts 3:21. The necessity to restore this ancient marital order was apparently the only explanation given in Kirtland, Ohio, in the mid-1830s. Benjamin F. Johnson recalled in 1903: “In 1835 at Kirtland I learned from my Sisters Husband, Lyman R. Shirman,²⁷ who was close to the Prophet, and Received it from him. That the ancient order of plural marriage was again to be practiced by the Church.”²⁸ A few years later in 1841, Joseph Smith even attempted to broach the topic publicly. Helen Mar Kimball remembered: “He [Joseph] astonished his hearers by preaching on the restoration of all things, and said that as it was anciently with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so it would be again, etc.”²⁹ This need for a restoration is mentioned in section 132: “I am the Lord thy God . . . I have conferred upon you the keys and power of the priesthood, wherein I restore all things” (v. 40; see also 45).

The second reason given by Joseph Smith was that as plural marriages led to more multiplying and replenishing of the earth. additional devout families would be created to receive noble pre-mortal spirits who would be born into them. Nauvoo Latter-day Saint Charles Lambert quoted

²⁷ Sherman was a close friend and devout follower of Joseph Smith. He was called as an apostle but died before learning of the appointment. See Lyndon W. Cook, “Lyman Sherman—Man of God, Would-Be Apostle,” 121–24.

²⁸ Dean R. Zimmerman, *I Knew the Prophets: An Analysis of the Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs*, 37–38; Joseph H. Jackson referred to three Nauvoo women who served as intermediaries as “Mothers in Israel.” Joseph H. Jackson, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Experiences of Joseph H. Jackson in Nauvoo, Exposing the Depths of Mormon Villainy*, 13.

²⁹ Helen Mar Whitney, *Plural Marriage as Taught by the Prophet Joseph: A Reply to Joseph Smith [III]*, Editor of the *Lamoni Iowa “Herald,”* 11; see also Jeni Broberg Holzapfel and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, eds., *A Woman’s View: Helen Mar Whitney’s Reminiscences of Early Church History*, 142–43. See also Joseph A. Kelting, “Affidavit,” March 1, 1894, images 11–16a; see also Kelting, “Statement,” *Juvenile Instructor* 29 (May 1, 1894): 289–90.

the Prophet discussing "thousands of spirits that have been waiting to come forth in this day and generation. Their proper channel is through the priesthood, a way has to be provided."³⁰ Helen Mar Kimball agreed that Joseph taught of "thousands of spirits, yet unborn, who were anxiously waiting for the privilege of coming down to take tabernacles of flesh."³¹ These recollections from the 1880s could have been influenced by later teachings. However, this rationale is also explicated in the revelation on celestial marriage: "they [plural wives] are given unto him [their husband] to multiply and replenish the earth" (D&C 132:63).

Joseph Smith clearly described the third reason in the July 12 revelation on eternal and plural marriage (now D&C 132):

Therefore, if a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, and he covenant with her so long as he is in the world and she with him, their covenant and marriage are not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world.

Therefore, when they are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory.

For these angels did not abide my law; therefore, they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity; and from henceforth are not gods, but are angels of God forever and ever. (D&C 132:15-17.)

These verses state that unsealed persons "remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity," which is eternal damnation within the context of the revelation (vv. 4, 6). The Prophet also explained: "Those who keep no eternal Law in this life or make no eternal contract are single & alone in the eternal world"³² (see also D&C 131:1–4). In Joseph Smith's cosmology, there are no unmarried (unsealed) men or unmarried (unsealed) women in the highest portion of the Celestial Kingdom.

It is true that the first two reasons for plural marriage given by Joseph Smith, the need for a "restitution of all things" and "to multiply and replenish the earth," are important. However, the third reason is vastly more significant because it deals with *eternity*. As described, worthy women without a sealed husband are eternally single and damned. There is no similar

³⁰ Charles Lambert, "Autobiography," 1883, quoted in Danel W. Bachman, "The Authorship of the Manuscript of Doctrine and Covenants Section 132," 43 note 44.

³¹ Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage*, 7.

³² Andrew F. Ehat, and Lyndon W. Cook, eds. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1980, 357; Franklin D. Richards reporting. 16 July 1843, 232. See also Lorenzo Snow, "Discourse," *Millennial Star*, 61 (May 8, 1899) 35: 547–48.

condemnation for people who fail to “multiply and replenish” the earth. Consequently, sexuality on earth is not needed to fulfill the primary reason for Joseph Smith’s polygamy.

“Eternity Only” Sealings

The historical record shows that Ruth Vose Sayers, whose husband was a non-Mormon, was sealed to Joseph Smith “for eternity” and was not his wife on earth. This sealing fulfilled the primary purpose of plural marriage.

In 1887, Andrew Jenson, an independent LDS historian, interviewed an unidentified Nauvoo polygamist, likely Eliza R. Snow or Malissa Lott, and noted:

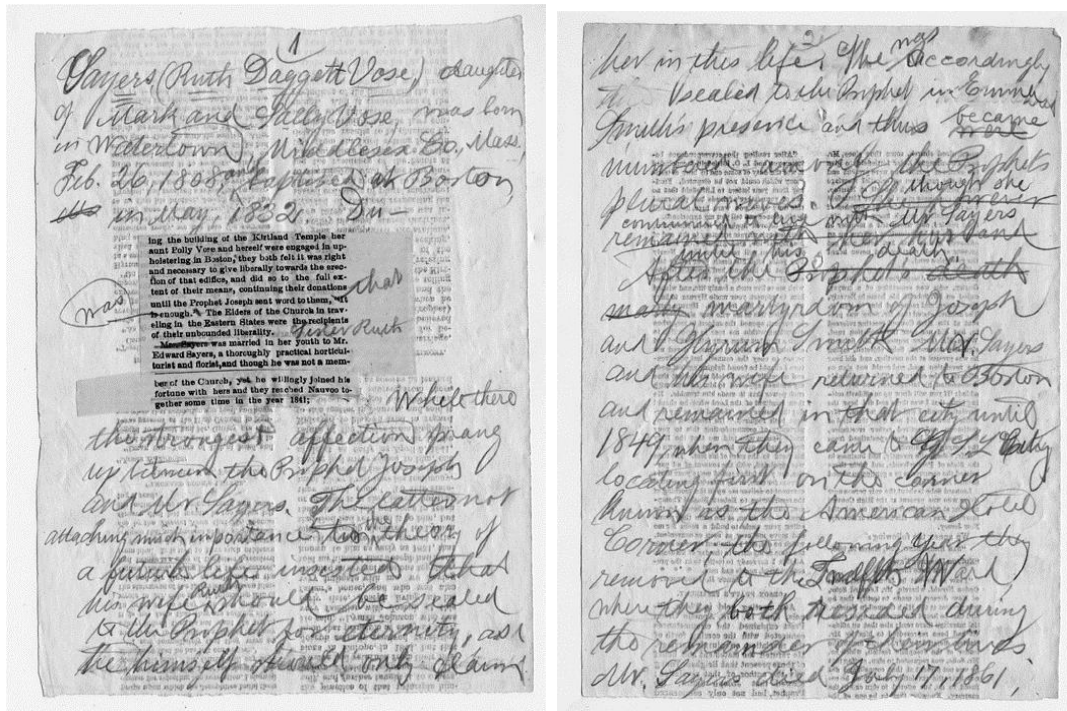
\Sister Ruth/ ~~Mrs. Sayers~~ was married in her youth to Mr. Edward Sayers, a thoroughly practical horticulturist and florist,³³ and though he was not a member of the Church, yet he willingly joined his fortune with her and they reached Nauvoo together some time in the year 1841;

While there the strongest affection sprang up between the Prophet Joseph and Mr. Sayers.³⁴ The latter not attaching much importance to \the/ theory of a future life insisted that his wife \Ruth/ should be sealed to the Prophet for eternity, as he himself should only claim her in this life. She \was/ accordingly ~~the~~ sealed to the Prophet in Emma Smith’s presence and thus ~~were~~ became numbered among the Prophets plural wives. ~~She however~~ \though she/ \continued to live with Mr. Sayers / ~~remained with her husband~~ \until his death.³⁵

³³“Horticulture,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (February 1, 1842): 678.

³⁴Joseph Smith stayed with the Sayerses during August 11–17, 1842, while hiding from Missouri lawmen. Dean C. Jessee, ed. *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Volume 2, Journal, 1832–1842*, 403–18.

³⁵Ruth Vose Sayers, Draft biographical sketch," Document 5, Andrew Jenson Papers (ca. 1871-1942), Box 49, fd. 16, pp. 1-2. Jenson apparently used the documents in these folders to compile his 1887 *Historical Record* article, “Plural Marriage.” This sealing is dated “February A.D. 1843” in Ruth Vose Sayers’s Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit Books, May 1, 1869, 1:9. However, the affidavit states that Hyrum Smith performed the sealing, which is unlikely because Hyrum did not accept plural marriage until May 1843.



Another somewhat garbled document referring to the same sealing apparently dating to 1843 appears to be in the hand of excommunicated Mormon Oliver Olney, whose wife, Phebe Wheeler, worked as a domestic in Hyrum Smith's home: “What motive has [S]ayers in it—it is the desire of his heart. . . . Joseph did not pick that woman [Ruth Vose Sayers]. She went to see whether she should marry her husband *for eternity*.”³⁶ Evidently, Olney was gathering information through his wife and learned of the episode involving the Sayers and the Prophet.

Therefore, the new and everlasting covenant of marriage contains two distinct sealing ordinances: one for “time and eternity” with sexual relations on earth and the other for “eternity only” without conjugality. To assume that all of Joseph Smith’s sealings were for “time and eternity” and included sexuality is not justified. It is possible that over half of all of his plural sealings were for “eternity only.”

No Solid Evidence of the Practice of Sexual Polyandry

The preceding discussion supports that from a doctrinal standpoint, sexual polyandry was condemned and unneeded. However, throughout religious history, leaders have sometimes behaved as hypocrites, either secretly or by granting themselves a customized exemption from a commandment adherents were required to follow. Some may question whether Joseph took these same liberties. An examination of the historical record, however, does not provide conclusive evidence that he did.

³⁶[Oliver Olney], typescript excerpt in Quinn Papers, WA MS 244 (Accession:19990209-c) Box 1; italics mine. I have been unable to identify the primary document to verify this quotation.

Joseph Smith was sealed to fourteen women with civil spouses. Of these, historical evidence demonstrates the probability of sexuality in three of the plural marriages (Sarah Ann Whitney, Sylvia Sessions, and Mary Heron).³⁷ For the remaining eleven, the evidence of sexual relations is missing, ambiguous, or contradictory. I classify those eleven sealings to the Prophet as “eternity only.”

In contrast, if sexual polyandry occurred, the mostly likely candidates would be Sarah Ann Whitney, Sylvia Sessions, and Mary Heron. However, documentation of sexual relations between these women and their legal husbands during the period of their marriage to the Prophet is absent. Sarah Ann Whitney and Sylvia Sessions were already physically separated from their civil spouses, so no change in their marital dynamics was required. Their conjugal relations suggest consecutive marriages, not simultaneous unions. No details regarding Mary Heron’s living situation are available, but we do know that her legal husband was a devout supporter of Joseph Smith.

Expanding the research to all known manuscripts dealing with Joseph Smith and plural marriage demonstrates that no solid evidence exists to support that he practiced or would have tolerated sexual polyandry. “Proving” or demonstrating its existence could be done rather easily by quoting a single credible supportive statement, if such existed. One well-documented testimony from a participant or other close observer (of which there were dozens) stating that any of the fourteen women had two genuine husbands at the same time would constitute such evidence. Also, a revelation or other theological justification traceable to Joseph Smith authorizing those relations would be very convincing. No evidence of this type has been found.

The absence of any solid evidence of polyandrous sexuality contrasts the abundance of documentation establishing the practice of *non*-polyandrous sexuality in Joseph Smith’s plural marriages. Sexual relations in traditional “polygamy” (technically “polygyny”)— a plurality of wives— is explained and defended in multiple documents from numerous Nauvoo polygamists and other insiders.

A review of the documented behaviors of the alleged sexual polyandry participants reveals that none of them corroborated that such relationships existed. We find no declarations from other

³⁷ There is no actual documentation for sexual relations in sealing between Joseph Smith and Sarah Ann Whitney. However, the marriage ceremony spoken to seal them together implies that mortal offspring could occur: “I give you S. A. Whitney my Daughter to Joseph Smith to be his wife to observe all the rights between you both that belong to that condition I do it in my own name and in the name of my wife your mother and in the name of my Holy Progenitors by the right of birth which is of Priest Hood vested in me by revelation and commandment and promise of the living God obtained by the Holy Melchizedek, [Jethro], and other of the Holy Fathers commanding in the name of the Lord all those powers to concentrate in you and through to your posterity forever.” (Sealing ceremony between Joseph Smith and Sarah Ann Whitney, quoted in H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary*, 315-16; see also Revelations in Addition to Those Found in the LDS Edition of the D&C, in *New Mormon Studies: A Comprehensive Resource Library*.) Additional evidence is lacking although Wilhelm Wyl, an anti-Mormon writer, asserted in 1886: “He [Joseph Smith] seduced her [Elizabeth Whitney’s] daughter [Sarah Ann Whitney].” (Wilhelm Wyl, *Mormon Portraits*, 90.)

polygamy insiders they were taught that sexual polyandry was acceptable for Joseph or anyone else. No credible accounts from any of the fourteen wives exist wherein they complained about it. This could be because it didn't exist or because the women were very devout. However, more remarkable is the lack of defenses of the practice. Dozens of people were aware of some of these fourteen sealings. That no explanatory texts or defensive references have surfaced is surprising. In addition, none of those Church members who apostatized criticized Joseph for such behavior. In short, the historical record reads as if sexual polyandry in any official form did not exist.

A comparison of the available documentation of Joseph Smith's practice of a "plurality of wives" and his alleged practice of a "plurality of husbands" demonstrates some noteworthy contrasts:

	Polygyny "plurality of wives"	Polyandry "plurality of husbands"
Plain supportive teachings from Joseph Smith regarding?	Yes	No
Written revelation justifying the practice (e.g. D&C 132)?	Yes	No
Women recalling the practice?	Yes	No
Complaints from participants that it was difficult?	Yes	No
Verbal and written defenses from participants?	Yes	No
Officiators recalling the practice?	Yes	No
Unambiguous statements discussing the dynamics of those relationships	Yes	No
Anti-Mormon complaints voiced prior to 1850	Yes	No
Revelation condemning the practice (e.g. D&C 132:41-42, 61-63)?	No	Yes
Statements from Nauvoo polygamists declaring the practice to be sinful?	No	Yes

Accusations that Joseph sent Men on Missions in Order to Marry their Wives

A common allegation in anti-Mormon literature is that the Prophet sent men on missions so he could marry their wives in polyandrous marriages. An 1843 publication by Anglican clergyman Henry Caswall claimed: "Many English and American women, whose husbands or fathers had been sent by the prophet on distant missions, were induced to become his 'spiritual wives,' believing it to be the will of God."³⁸ Eight years later the Reverend F. B. Ashley, the Vicar of Wooburn, Bucks, England, repeated the charge: "He [Joseph Smith] induced several American and English women whose husbands or fathers he had sent on distant missions to become his

³⁸ Henry Caswall, *The Prophet of the Nineteenth Century, or, the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Mormons*, 226.

spiritual wives, or ‘ladies of the white veil.’”³⁹ Echoing this sentiment, excommunicated Mormon Benjamin Winchester asserted in an 1889 interview: “It was a subject of common talk among many good people in Nauvoo that many of the elders were sent off on missions merely to get them out of the way, and that Joseph Smith, John C. Bennett and other prominent Church lights had illicit intercourse with the wives of a number of the missionaries, and that the revelation on spiritual marriage, i.e. polygamy, was gotten up to protect themselves from scandal.”⁴⁰ Similarly, in 1931, Harry M. Beardsley asserted: “Joe remained in hiding in Nauvoo for several months, dividing his time between a dozen hide-outs—among them homes of Mormons where there were attractive daughters, or where the husbands were away on missionary tours.”⁴¹

Of the fourteen polyandrous husbands identified, only one is documented as being on a mission at the time his legal wife was sealed to Joseph Smith. Apostle Orson Hyde departed on his mission to dedicate the land of Palestine on April 15, 1840. Two years later, his civil wife, Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde, was apparently sealed to Joseph in Nauvoo. If the Prophet was conspiring to get Hyde out of town in order to be sealed to Marinda, the two year delay is surprising. In fact, two sealing dates (April 1842 and May 1843) have been identified for Joseph and Marinda, one before and one after Orson’s December 7, 1842, return from Palestine.⁴² Regardless, Orson Hyde remained true to the Prophet and to the Church with the full knowledge that his legal wife was sealed to Joseph Smith.

Of the remaining thirteen husbands, the historical record shows that at least ten were not traveling as missionaries at the time of the sealings. While the spouses of the remaining three plural wives served missions while they were living in Nauvoo, the dates of the women’s sealings to the Prophet are unknown.⁴³ Accordingly, the accusations that Joseph Smith sent men

³⁹ F. B. Ashley, *Mormonism: An Exposure of the Impositions*, 8.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Winchester, “Primitive Mormonism--Personal Narrative of It,” 2.

⁴¹ Harry M Beardsley, *Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire*, 251.

⁴² Two sealing dates have been identified for Marinda Nancy Johnson’s sealings to Joseph Smith. The first is “Apr 42,” (could also be transcribed: “Spri 42”) which is recorded on an undated page after the final entry (dated July 14, 1843) in Joseph Smith’s journal, written by Thomas Bullock at the back of the second of four small books that Willard Richards used to record Joseph Smith’s journal between December 1842 and June 1844. In Richard E. Turley Jr., ed., *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, MS 155_1_6_320.jpg. For a transcript, see Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, 396. The second sealing date is May 1843, a year later, and is documented in an affidavit that Marinda signed in 1869. In Joseph F. Smith, *Affidavit Books*, 1:15. Neither entry provides a day—just the month and year.

⁴³ George Harris (legal husband of Lucinda Pendleton) left on his fourteen-month mission in July 1840. However, evidence of a sealing between his legal wife, Lucinda Pendleton, and the Prophet is contradictory and no date for the reported plural ceremony is known. Albert Smith (civil spouse of Esther Dutcher) served missions while living in Nauvoo. His son, Azariah, wrote: “Father taking [sic] an active part in building up the city [Nauvoo] and also being called upon, he went on a mission back East.” (Azariah Smith, *Journal and Autobiography*, 1.) The timing and duration of his mission is unavailable. Yet it is a moot point because nothing is known concerning the sealing date between his legal wife, Esther Dutcher, and Joseph Smith. The third woman, Mary Heron, married her legal

on missions in order to marry their wives are based upon only one documented account (Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde), three possible accounts, and a lot of unsupported speculation.

None of Joseph Smith's Plural Wives Accused him of Impropriety

According to the available documentary evidence, none of the thirty-five plural wives married to Joseph Smith ever criticized him or his treatment of them. Three of them passed away in Nauvoo before the Saints left for the Rocky Mountains and, by all accounts, retained their faith in Joseph and the Church. Twenty-five made the trek to the Salt Lake Valley and apparently maintained a belief in Joseph Smith's mission throughout the remainder of their lives.

Of the seven wives who died outside of Utah, reactions towards the church and Joseph varied: nothing is known concerning Lucinda Pendleton's religious convictions at her 1856 demise, Agnes Coolbrith did not identify herself with the Latter-day Saints but remained friendly to Church members who visited her, Flora Woodworth held to her beliefs, and Sarah Lawrence entirely lost her faith. In addition, three wives joined other churches: Fanny Alger united with the Universalists, Elizabeth Davis joined the Reorganization late in life, and Sarah Kingsley was baptized into a Protestant denomination just months before her death.

While available evidence is incomplete, only five of the thirty-five (about 15 percent) of the women sealed to Joseph Smith are known to have jettisoned their LDS beliefs. While the disaffection rates of other Nauvoo women from Mormonism or the disaffiliation rates of females from other religious movements of that era are unavailable, 15 percent is not overwhelming.

What is striking among all these observations is that we have no record that any of Joseph Smith's plural wives—including the seven who did not gather to Utah—ever accused him of abuse or deception. Decades after their feelings had matured and their youthful perspectives had expanded through additional experiences with marriage and sexual relations, none of them claimed they were victimized or beguiled by the Prophet. None stepped forward to write an exposé denouncing him as a seducing imposter. None wrote that Joseph Smith's polygamy was a sham or a cover-up for illicit sexual relations. Had any of Joseph's polygamous wives eventually decided that he had debauched them, their subsequent scorn might have easily motivated them to attack his reputation and use the anti-Mormon presses that would have eagerly printed such an account.

The preceding discussion and much more evidence that could be produced demonstrate that those who knew Joseph Smith the best and understood the details of his plural marriage teachings believed him to be sincere and not a hypocrite. He taught a strict law of chastity even before the Church was organized in 1830 (see Alma 39:3-5) and continued to reemphasize it

husband, John Snider, before joining the Church. Snider did serve missions for the Church while they lived in Nauvoo, but her relationship with Joseph Smith is poorly documented, and researchers have failed to locate a record of the sealing date.

throughout his life and up until his death by requiring all members who received the temple endowment (starting in 1842) to covenant to comply.

Regardless of a person's feelings towards Joseph Smith, *documentary transparency* of his plural marriage teachings and practices will prevent the spread of misinformation and half-truths. I believe the available evidences reveal Joseph to have been a reluctant polygamist who was commanded by God to establish a difficult practice.

Just weeks before his death he declared: "I never told you I was perfect—but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught."⁴⁴ One of those revelations is now Doctrine and Covenants section 132. Brigham Young taught in 1863: "If ever there was a truth revealed from heaven through him, it was revealed when that revelation [on Celestial and plural marriage] was given." He then quoted Joseph saying: "...if I have to die for any revelation God has given through me I would as readily die for this one as any other."⁴⁵ That revelation talks of the plurality of wives, but the zenith doctrine contained therein is *eternal marriage*, through which monogamous husbands and wives can remain together in the family unit throughout all eternity.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Thomas Bullock Report: 12 May 1844 (Sunday Morning), p.369

⁴⁵ Elden J. Watson, *Brigham Young Addresses: A Chronological Compilation of Known Addresses of the Prophet Brigham Young*, unpublished, 1984, 4:268, October 7, 1863, SLC Bowery; see also Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet*, Salt Lake: Bookcraft, 1989, 113.