

The Polygamy Puzzle



Unraveling the Pieces to Find the Truth

by Lesley Taylor

“And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?” (John 8:46)

Thank you to Dustin Grady for helping bring this booklet into being. Your time, your knowledge, and your amazing editing skills have been invaluable.

Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction 1

Part I: What Did Joseph Say?..... 3

Part II: What Has the Lord Said?.....11

Part III: Doctrine and Covenants Section 132..... 18

Conclusion.....24

Suggestions for Further Study..... 25

Preface

There is a tale from ancient days about a knot – a knot so tight and so complicated that no one had been able to unravel it for hundreds of years. Although an oracle had prophesied that whoever could unravel the elaborate knot was destined to rule all of Asia, the fulfillment of that prophecy seemed hopelessly impossible. No one could ever succeed at untangling the mass of knots and rope – or so it seemed. But one day a man came upon the town. He heard the story of the famous knot; he desperately wanted to untie it. As he approached the knot, the impossibly crossed ropes seemed unconquerable. He was about to give up – but then he had an idea. A ridiculously simple idea. But one that no one had ever before considered in relation to the knot. He pulled his sword from its sheath and with one flourish, he cut the knot in two with the sharp blade. The knot was untied. The problem had been solved. And the man, Alexander the Great, would go on to rule all of Asia as prophesied.

The story of the Gordian knot is a well-known legend, but why use it to introduce the topic of polygamy? The tale actually provides a suitable comparison to the subject at hand.

For many who are members (or former members) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, polygamy is the Gordian knot of their testimonies. It is a puzzle that seems impossible to solve. They may have a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon – and of Joseph Smith as the prophet of the restoration, but polygamy seems to undermine that faith and introduce questions that have no apparent answers –

- *Why would God command his people to practice something that is described as a gross crime and an abomination in the Book of Mormon?*
- *How can God be a just, loving god if he requires his daughters to be one of many wives to a single husband in order to receive exaltation?*
- *Could Joseph Smith really have been a true prophet if he deceptively practiced polygamy in private while denying it in public?*

Questions such as these seem impossible to answer with any real satisfaction. That's why, for so many, polygamy gets put on a shelf and ignored, or leads to an abandonment of faith in Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and possibly even Jesus Christ.

But what if, like in the story of the Gordian knot, such questions are not impossible to answer? What if there *is* a solution to the polygamy puzzle?

The good news for all of us is that there **is** an answer to this seemingly unanswerable problem – and it is every bit as simple as cutting through the Gordian knot.

The truth is, ***Joseph Smith never practiced nor taught polygamy and God has never commanded nor sanctioned it.***

The solution only requires one to read the words of Joseph Smith and the Lord himself on the subject – and then BELIEVE them. That's it.

While this solution may appear simplistic and naive to many (especially historians and history-loving members), a close and scrutinizing examination of the supporting evidence – now easily accessible through the Joseph Smith Papers project and other online resources – brings further clarity to the answer.

And that is the purpose of this little book. It is a humble attempt to help people look at the puzzle of polygamy with new eyes – to consider a solution they might never before have considered. While this booklet will be far from comprehensive, that is the point. There are many comprehensive works in existence already – wonderful books produced from countless hours of research that go into depth on the ideas introduced here. This booklet is for those who may be turned away or intimidated by a three or four hundred-page book. It is hoped that this pamphlet will serve as an introduction to the truth about polygamy – and that it will lead the reader to further investigate the subject for themselves. It is also hoped that it will be a source of peace and joy and a renewed sense of faith and trust in the Lord for those who will read it with an open heart and mind.

Introduction

As already noted, this little book is in no way meant to address every issue associated with the polygamy puzzle. Rather, it is intended to be an introduction to a new way of looking at it. As such, there will be many questions that are not answered *here*. For those, sources will be listed at the end where the author recommends the reader go to find and learn more.

The present purpose is to set forth a **brief** (non-comprehensive) look at three main topics related to Mormon polygamy:

1. What verified statements Joseph Smith gave about polygamy and his alleged participation in it (rather than what others alleged he said or did)
2. What the Lord has said in the scriptures about polygamy
3. The history behind Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants

For many, the perspective being presented here will be new. It may go against deeply- and long-held beliefs. One of the difficulties when probing the problem of plural marriage is the natural discomfort that comes with it. Cognitive dissonance is real. Maybe you have grown up hearing the faith-promoting stories of ancestors who sacrificed and struggled to be obedient to this law. Maybe you have made your peace with it and believe that once we are celestial, we won't have any issue with it. Or maybe you have always struggled with polygamy, but you aren't ready to accept the unknowns that come with rejecting it.

The temptation may be to patently dismiss everything introduced here. It may feel like the safest approach. An honest and open approach to this material will inevitably bring with it uncomfortable questions: *What now? What are the implications of this? How does this affect everything I have believed and been taught about church history? How does this impact my testimony?*

But remember that just because something is uncomfortable does not mean it is not true. The scriptures are replete with examples of hard, uncomfortable truths being taught by God's true messengers. So amidst the multitude of questions that will inevitably come flooding into your mind as you consider this material, please consider these two: *Do I want to know the **truth**?* and *Who do I choose to believe?*

God has taught:

“Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; and whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning. The Spirit of truth is of God.” (D&C 93:24-26)

and

“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:32)

Hopefully the truth *is* our ultimate desire. In order to reach the truth, however, we must accurately discern which sources will lead us there. First, we should look to God, who is “a God of truth, and canst not lie” (Ether 3:12). Also important is looking to true messengers of God who speak “by the power of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 33:1). Scripture teaches that we may know true messengers by their fruits. Joseph Smith bore good fruit: he prophesied, he translated scripture, he communed with heavenly messengers, he restored lost knowledge. As we search for the truth, surely his words, along with the words of the Lord, should take precedence and priority as we sift through the mountains of evidence on both sides of this issue.

Understandably, it may be uncomfortable – even alarming – to honestly and openly approach the idea that polygamy might *not* be a true principle. It might be difficult not to dismiss what is presented in this book, with all its many ramifications. But we must remember that the “wicked one” tries to keep us from light and truth through incorrect “tradition[s] of [our] fathers” (D&C 93:39), while God desires to lead us to truth. He has promised that as we ask, He will answer; as we seek, we shall find; as we knock, it will be opened to us (Matthew 7:7). So *“be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” (Joshua 1:9)*. He will not abandon you as you push forward on your own personal journey toward the truth.

Part I: What Did Joseph Say?

For most people, the history surrounding polygamy in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is fuzzy at best. The general narrative suggests that Joseph received a revelation commanding the saints to practice plural marriage. He was reluctant to comply but eventually moved forward to fulfill the command. Worried that many would not be ready to accept such a difficult doctrine, he slowly introduced the practice – teaching only a few individuals at a time. All of this was done against the wishes of Emma, his wife, and with the understanding that complete secrecy must be maintained in order to protect the church and the sacred new doctrine. After the saints were cast out of Nauvoo, the practice was finally made public in the Salt Lake Valley when the church was free to worship “according to the dictates of [its] own conscience,” without fear of persecution. Though obedience to this “Abrahamic test” was difficult – even heart wrenching – for those asked to live it, generations were blessed as faithful saints sacrificed and obeyed and raised up seed to the Lord.

So the story goes. But, there is one glaring problem with this narrative. In order to believe it, one must also believe that Joseph Smith was a liar. It is unavoidable - for history shows that Joseph’s public condemnation of the practice was powerful and consistent. Yet we are asked to believe that this prophet of God – who proved himself to be so by his fruits – was saying one thing publicly, while practicing the opposite in private. Some may say he was “lying for the Lord” or upholding a greater good. But lying and hypocrisy have never been looked upon with favor by the Lord.

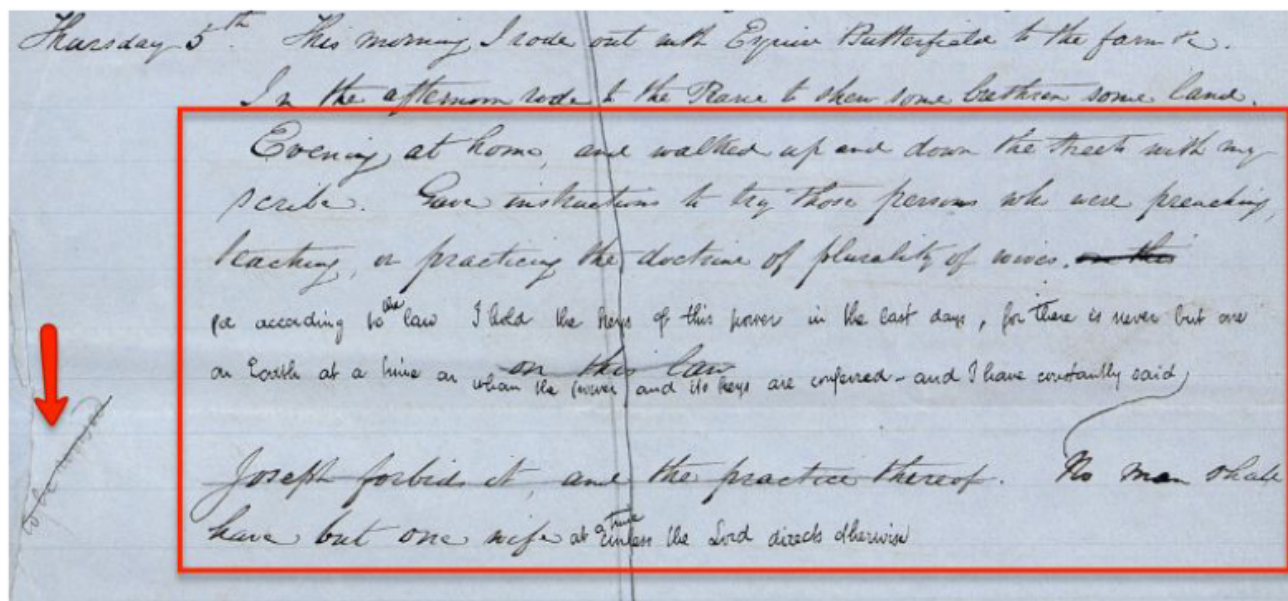
So, how can one reconcile this glaring disparity? This is one of the many tangled pieces of rope in the Gordian knot of polygamy. The answer, for those willing to consider it, is quite simple. Maybe Joseph was not a liar at all. Maybe he told the truth. Maybe when he spoke against polygamy he really meant it. Maybe he never practiced plural marriage.

Surprisingly, much of what Joseph said about polygamy is often left out of the narrative given by the Church. Few people really know that he was teaching and preaching against it – trying to root it out of the church, even in the years leading up to his death. Bringing his words to light is an important piece in the puzzle of polygamy. Trying to tackle this topic with brevity, however, is virtually impossible. There is no way to succinctly address issues of sworn affidavits, of declarations from Joseph’s alleged wives, of accounts of angels with drawn swords, etc., etc.¹ That is why no

attempt will be made in this work to do so. For a more in-depth look at those issues, however, the reader should look to the end of this booklet under “Suggestions for Further Study.”

The focus here will be placed upon Joseph’s own words – those confirmed through reliable sources. This is a difficult task as second and third hand accounts of private conversations (often recorded twenty, thirty, or more years after the fact) where Joseph supposedly said or did certain things are abundant. Church history has been modified (see History of the Church 7:29, p. 389; April 1, 1845). Even Joseph’s own journals have been altered.

Here is just one evidence of tampering in the historical documents related to plural marriage. In an entry from Joseph’s journal dated October 5, 1843, we see some interesting things. The left hand margin includes a scrawled note reading “to be revised” (see arrow). The handwriting of this notation is different from the handwriting of the main entry. Several words in the entry itself are crossed out, while others are added in – again in different handwriting from the primary writing. It is important to note that these revisions were made after Joseph’s death, so he would not have been able to approve of them.



The original entry reads:

Evening at home and walked up and down the street with my scribe. Gave inst[r]uction to try those persons who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives. on this law Joseph forbids it, and the practice ther[e]of— No man shall have but one wife at ^{the} unless the Lord directs otherwise

With the revisions, the meaning of the final entry is markedly different:

Evening at home and walked up and down the street with my scribe. Gave inst[r]uction to try those persons who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives. ~~on this law~~ for according to the law I hold the keys of this power in the last days, for there is never but one on earth at a time on whom the power and the keys are conferred - and I have continually said ~~Joseph forbids it. and the practice ther[e]of~~ No man shall have but one wife at a time unless the Lord directs otherwise.

(See also: <http://www.anonymousbishop.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/JosephSmithsMonogamy1.pdf> p. 15)

Clearly, what Joseph's original entry said and what the revised version says are completely opposite. Because such tampering has made it difficult to determine the accuracy of many of Joseph's supposed teachings on polygamy, quotes shown here will be taken from public writings and discourses where solid historical sources for the statements exist. Little commentary will be given so that the words can stand for themselves. It is hoped that the reader will suspend any preconceived notions while reading these statements and approach them with the possibility of their being true.

July 1838: In the July 1838 edition of The Elder's Journal, a series of frequently asked questions was printed along with Joseph's answers. 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."

*July 1840: "We... caution our brethren, against the impropriety of the organization of bands or companies, by covenants, oaths, penalties, or secresies [secrecies], but let... our covenants, be that of the everlasting covenant, as it is contained in the holy writ, and the things which God has revealed unto us. Pure friendship always becomes weakened, the very moment you undertake to make it stronger by penal oaths and secrecy. Your humble servants intend from henceforth to **disapprove every thing that is not in accordance with the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and which is not of a bold, frank, and upright nature.**" (Times and Seasons, July 1840)*

Note that Joseph was adamant that nothing should be done in secret and that all should be forthright in the gospel. If he were living opposite of the very character and principles that he publicly preached (as the traditional narrative suggests), then he could not be considered a man of God but rather a fallen prophet.

*July 1842: "It becomes my duty to lay before the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the public generally, some important facts relative to the conduct and character of DR. JOHN C. BENNETT, who has lately been expelled from the aforesaid church; that the honorable part of [the] community may be aware of his proceedings, and be ready to treat him and regard him as he ought to be regarded, viz: as an imposter and base adulterer...When he saw that I would not submit to any such conduct, he went to some of the females in the city, who knew nothing of him but as an honorable man, & began to teach them that promiscuous intercourse between the sexes was a doctrine believed in by the Latter-Day Saints, and that there was no harm in it; but this failing, he had recourse to a more influential and desperately wicked course; and that was, to persuade them that myself and others of the authorities of the church not only sanctioned, but practiced the same wicked acts; and when asked why **I publicly preached so much against it**, said that it was because of the prejudice of the public, and that it would cause trouble in my own house [with Emma, Joseph's wife]. **He was well aware of the consequence of such wilful and base falsehoods, if they should come to my knowledge; and consequently endeavored to persuade his dupes to keep it a matter of secrecy**, persuading them there would be no harm if they should not make it known." (Times and Seasons 3 [July 1, 1842]: 839–840)*

*September 1842: "Inasmuch as the public mind has been unjustly abused through the fallacy of Dr. Bennett's letters, we make an extract on the subject of marriage, showing the rule of the church on this important matter. The extract is from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and **is the only rule allowed by the church**. 'All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this church, should be held sacred and fulfilled. Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: **we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband**, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.'" (Joseph Smith, Jr.,*

Editor, Times and Seasons, 3 [September 1, 1842], p.909; quoting Doctrine & Covenants 101:1-4 [1835-1876 Editions])

*February 1844: “Notice: As we have lately been credibly informed that an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, by the name of Hiram Brown, **has been preaching polygamy, and other false and corrupt doctrines**, in the county of Lapeer, State of Michigan : This is to notify him and the Church in general, that he is cut off from the Church, **for his iniquity** ; and he is farther notified to appear at the Special Conference, on the 6th of April next, to make answer to these charges. [signed] Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Presidents of said Church.” (Joseph Smith Jr. & Hyrum Smith, “Times and Seasons,” Feb 1, 1844, vol. 5, p. 423)*

*May 1844: “God knows, then, that the charges against me are false. 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 mean to live and proclaim the truth as long as I can. This new holy prophet [William Law] has gone to Carthage and swore that I had told him that **I was guilty of adultery. This spiritual wifeism!** Why, a man dares not speak or wink, for fear of being accused of this...I am quite tired of the fools asking me. **A man asked me whether the commandment was given that a man may have seven wives**; and now the new prophet has charged me with adultery... **I am innocent of all these charges**, and you can bear witness of my innocence, for you know me yourselves...**What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one.** I am the same man, and as innocent as I was fourteen years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers.” (Joseph Smith, History of the Church, May 26, 1844, 6:409-411)*

*June 1844: “I am bold to declare that I have taught **all the strong doctrines publicly**, and always teach stronger doctrines in public than in private.” (History of the Church 6:474)*

Certainly plural marriage would be considered a strong doctrine. If Joseph was secretly practicing and teaching it, in opposition to this statement, we must then concede that he was not a true and honest servant of God.

One additional quotation is included from Hyrum Smith, Joseph's trusted companion and brother. Sustained as co-president of the church and serving as patriarch (an office considered by Joseph to be the highest in the church), his words also carry significant weight:

*March 1844: "We very frequently receive letters from elders and individuals abroad, inquiring of us whether certain statements that they hear, and have written to them, are true: **some pertaining to John C. Bennet's spiritual wife system; others in regard to immoral conduct, practiced by individuals, and sanctioned by the church;** and as it is impossible for us to answer all of them, we take this opportunity of answering them all, once for all. In the first place, we cannot but express our surprise that any elder or priest who has been in Nauvoo, and has had an opportunity of hearing the principles of truth advanced, should for one moment give credence to the idea that anything like iniquity **is practiced, much less taught or sanctioned, by the authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.** We are the more surprised, since **every species of iniquity is spoken against, and exposed publicly at the stand,** and every means made use of that possibly can be, to suppress vice, both religious and civil; not only so, but every species of iniquity has frequently been exposed in the Times and Seasons, and its practicers and advocates held up to the world as corrupt men that ought to be avoided. We are however living in the 'last days;' a time when the scriptures say 'men shall wax worse, and worse; deceiving, and being deceived;' in a time when it is declared, 'if it is possible the very elect should be deceived.' We have in our midst corrupt men, (and let no man be astonished at this for 'the net shall gather in of every kind, good and bad;') these corrupt men circulate corrupt principles, for a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit; these spread their pernicious influence abroad, 'they hatch cockatrices eggs, and weave the spider's web; he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper; their words eat as doth a canker; the poison of asps is under their tongue, and the way of peace they have not known.' Such men not unfrequently go abroad and prey upon the creduly of the people, probably have clandestinely obtained an ordination, and go forth as elders, the more effectually to impose upon the public. Some have got horses, and others money, under specious pretences, from the unwary and unsuspecting, among the newly formed branches who have not had all the sagacity to detect them. There are other men who are corrupt and sensual, and who teach*

*corrupt principles for the sake of gratifying their sensual appetites, at the expense and ruin of virtue and innocence. Such men ought to be avoided as pests to society, and be frowned down upon with contempt by every virtuous man and woman. All of the above, of whatever name or nature, are ‘reprobate concerning the faith;’ if the [they] write, they write corruptly; if they speak, they speak corruptly. They are such as the apostle speaks of, they speak ‘great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration.’- They are high and lifted up, and would trample upon the humble, and the meek, and the unassuming, and are not afraid to teach for the commandment of God, their own corrupt, and devilish doctrines, and principles; let no man therefore, be deceived by them, let no man harbor them, nor bid them God speed; dont be partakers of their evil deeds. **If any man writes to you, or preaches to you, doctrines contrary to the Bible, the Book of Mormon, or the Book of Doctrine and Covenants set him down as an impostor.** You need not write to us to know what you are to do with such men; you have the authority with you. Try them by the principles contained in the acknowledged word of God; if they preach, or teach, or practice contrary to that, disfellowship them; cut them off from among you as useless and dangerous branches, and if they are belonging to any of the quorums in the church, report them to the president of the quorum to which they belong; and if you cannot find that out, if they are members of an official standing, belonging to Nauvoo, report them to us. Follow after purity, virtue, holiness, integrity, godliness, and everything that has a tendency to exalt and ennoble the human mind; and shun every man who teaches any other principles.” (Hyrum Smith, Times and Seasons, March 15, 1844, vol. 6, pp. 490-491)*

While these are just a few of many quotations, it is hoped that they clearly reveal that Joseph was strong in his public condemnation of polygamy. The traditional narrative requires one to reconcile Joseph’s speaking thus in public, while practicing the opposite in private. Would a true prophet really act this way? Surely not. That is why it is hoped that these statements will be read from a perspective that Joseph was, perhaps, actually telling the truth. It is further hoped that they will serve as an impetus for the reader to investigate more deeply the true story behind Mormon polygamy.

Note: Several of the statements included here come after July 1843 – which, according to the section heading of D&C 132, is the date when Joseph’s revelation on plural marriage was written down. The section heading further suggests that some principles in

this revelation were known by Joseph as early as 1831 – in which case all of the preceding statements would have been given by him at a time when he was fully aware of the principle of polygamy. If what we are taught in the traditional narrative is true, then one is forced to concede that Joseph had to have been a liar or at least a deceiver.

*Furthermore, while Emma is not quoted herein, it should be noted that she emphatically and consistently denied that Joseph ever practiced polygamy. In 1879 she recalled, “I know that he had no other wife or wives than myself, **in any sense, either spiritual or otherwise.**” (The Saint’s Herald, Vol. 26, p. 289-90) She unwaveringly maintained Joseph’s innocence until her death.*

¹ While the subject of affidavits and Joseph’s supposed wives cannot be adequately attended to in this brief work, a few things are here addressed. Much of the evidence from those who portray Joseph as a polygamist comes from the testimony of his “wives” given in the Temple Lot Case of 1891. Most evidence was given in the form of written affidavits, but three women actually traveled to Missouri to testify in the case. It must be pointed out that the affidavits were written nearly 50 years after the purported events took place. Many of the accounts are very similar to each other, and contemporary journals (from the 1840s) of the women do not corroborate their claims. It must also be pointed out that most who look to this trial for proof, fail to read the judge’s final decision in the case. In a lengthy opinion, John F. Philips systematically outlined how evidence in the case demonstrated that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints under Brigham Young had strayed from the foundational doctrines and tenets of the faith as established by Joseph Smith and could not, therefore, be viewed as the legal successor to Joseph’s church. Judge Philips referred to – among other things – the testimony given by the three “wives” in the trial. He stated that while “it perhaps would be uncharitable to say of these women that they have borne false testimony as to their connection with Joseph Smith,” he nevertheless concluded their accounts were questionable at best. Anyone truly desiring to know the truth about polygamy – and Joseph’s involvement in it – would do well to remember that it isn’t the quantity of “evidence” that matters. It is the quality. (For further investigation, a complete account of Judge Philips’ decision can be found here:

<https://bookofmormonismdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/decisionofjohnfphilrich.pdf> Of particular interest are pages 34-44).

Part II: What Has the Lord Said?

Perhaps the most compelling evidence we have when trying to solve the polygamy puzzle is what the Lord Himself has said upon the subject. Particularly in the Book of Mormon, which many believe to be “the most correct of any book on earth” (Joseph Smith), the Lord speaks in very strong terms regarding this practice. So if we believe that God is a God of truth who cannot lie, we are forced – yet again – to make sense of some pretty tangled reasoning if we accept polygamy as a practice promoted and even commanded by Him. But what if we take what the Lord has said at face value – not interpreting it or twisting it or trying to make it fit into a particular narrative? What would we find?

The clearest window we have into understanding how the Lord feels about plural marriage is found in the Book of Jacob in the Book of Mormon. Following the death of Nephi, the prophet Jacob speaks to his people, weighed down with sorrow, concern, and love for them. He recognizes his responsibility to teach them true principles and lead them in sure paths, and so he speaks boldly – calling their attention to the dangerous road they have begun to travel. He warns them against the sins of pride and seeking after riches and then states that “were it not that [he] must speak unto [them] *concerning a grosser crime*, [his] heart would rejoice exceedingly because of [them]” (Jacob 2:22). Then comes a sermon which unequivocally and undeniably condemns polygamy. He says:

*“the word of God burdens me because of your **grosser crimes**. For behold, thus saith the Lord: This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son.*

*Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, **which thing was abominable before me**, saith the Lord.*

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

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

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

For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts.

Wherefore, this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes.” (Jacob 2:23-29)

He continues on:

*“Behold, ye have done **greater iniquities than the Lamanites**, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you. And because of the strictness of the word of God, which cometh down against you, many hearts died, pierced with deep wounds.*

*Behold, the Lamanites your brethren, whom ye hate because of their filthiness and the cursing which hath come upon their skins, **are more righteous than you**; for they have not forgotten the commandment of the Lord, which was given unto our father—that they should **have save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none**, and there should not be whoredoms committed among them.*

*And now, this commandment they observe to keep; wherefore, **because of this observance**, in keeping this commandment, **the Lord God will not destroy them**, but will be merciful unto them; and one day they shall become a blessed people.” (Jacob 2: 35, 3:5-6)*

Could it be plainer? In language black and white, Jacob reminds his people of the law given to their fathers that “men should have but one wife and concubines they should have none.” The law was of such importance, he pointed out, that the Lamanites would not be destroyed and would one day become a blessed people because of their faithfulness and obedience to the law of **monogamy**. He even suggested that because they observed to keep this one commandment, they were more righteous than the Nephites themselves – in spite of their many other failings. This is certainly profound evidence of how the Lord views polygamy.

But wait – what about the exception clause? The reader may be raising eyebrows and exclaiming that the most important verse has been skipped. What about verse 30?

Things get tricky here because so many people both within and without the church have been conditioned to read this verse in a certain way – a way that justifies polygamy under certain circumstances (ie when the Lord commands his people to do it to raise up righteous children). Undoing the hard-wiring that comes with this verse can be very difficult. But it is hoped that the sincere seeker of truth will look at the sermon of Jacob in its entirety and read all its verses – especially verse 30 – as part of a complete whole, rather than an isolated verse that negates everything that comes before or after it.

For those familiar with parallel structures, Jacob 2 contains a beautiful example of this Hebraic parallelism that helps to highlight its true meaning. (For those not familiar with parallelism, it is a literary structure in which key words or concepts lead to a central theme or statement and are then repeated in reverse order.) Because the center of the structure serves as the central or most important theme of the parallelism, it is interesting to note where the center of this parallelism occurs. Here is a highlighted representation for reference:

23 But the word of God burdens me because of your grosser crimes. For behold, thus saith the Lord: This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures,

A) for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. 24 Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord.

B) 25 Wherefore, thus saith the Lord, I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch from the fruit of the loins of Joseph.

C) 26 Wherefore, I the Lord God will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old. 27 Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none; 28 For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women.

D) And whoredoms are an abomination before me; thus saith the Lord of Hosts.

E) 29 Wherefore, *this people shall keep my commandments, saith the Lord of Hosts, or cursed be the land for their sakes.*

E) 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.*

D) 31 For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people in the land of Jerusalem, yea, and in all the lands of my people, because of the *wickedness and abominations* of their husbands.

C) 32 And *I will not suffer, saith the Lord of Hosts, that the cries of the fair daughters of this people,*

B) which *I have led out of the land of Jerusalem,* shall come up unto me against the men of my people, saith the Lord of Hosts. 33 For they shall not lead away captive the daughters of my people because of their tenderness, save I shall visit them with a sore curse, even unto destruction;

A) for they shall not *commit whoredoms, like unto them of old,* saith the Lord of Hosts.

Note that verse 30 falls right in the center of the structure! Paired with verse 29, it forms the crux or the essence of Jacob's powerful sermon. Using verse 29 as a guide helps to clarify the meaning of verse 30 itself. Verse 29 teaches that these people [the Nephites] must keep the Lord's commandments, or the land will be cursed for their sakes. Similarly, verse 30 reiterates this sentiment: if these people [the Nephites or any of the Lord's chosen people] are to raise up a righteous branch to the Lord, they must look to Him as their commander – keeping His commandments and being subject to His will. Otherwise they will be cursed and will turn to the wickedness and abominations of old – ie committing whoredoms and having many wives and concubines.

While the intent of Jacob's preaching seems apparent, reading these verses (primarily verse 30) in this way might be extremely difficult for some. It is hard to undo in a matter of minutes learning that has been laid over a period of years. This little booklet is meant to be a brief introduction to just some of the issues relating to polygamy. Thus, a deeper analysis of this chapter will not be attempted. It is hoped, however, that the reader will feel compelled to prayerfully seek to understand this chapter and its important message. (For further investigation of Jacob 2, two wonderful sources for further study are

<https://oneclimbs.com/2017/01/05/a-proposed-reinterpretation-of-jacob-230/> and <https://doctrineofchrist.com/is-polygamy-a-true-law-of-god/>)

Some may say that Jacob 2 is just one chapter out of many others in scripture that prove polygamy is a law of God. But how accurate is this assumption? What do the scriptures really say? Let's take a look at just a few scriptures from each of the standard works:

Old Testament

“When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth turn no more that way. **Neither shall he multiply wives to himself**, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.” (Deuteronomy 17:14-17)

“Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And **Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai**. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.” (Genesis 16:1-3)

*(Note: The story of Abraham will not be addressed in this work – the reader is encouraged to ponder and study this on their own. The point made herein is simply that, according to the Biblical record, Abraham hearkened to the voice of Sarai. There is no indication here – or anywhere in the Old Testament – that Abraham was commanded **by the Lord** to practice polygamy.)*

New Testament

“And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and **they twain shall be one** flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

“A bishop then must be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2)

Book of Mormon

“And now it came to pass that Zeniff conferred the kingdom upon Noah, one of his sons; therefore Noah began to reign in his stead; and he did not walk in the ways of his father. For behold, he did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart. And **he had many wives and concubines**. And he did cause his people to commit sin, and do **that which was abominable in the sight of the Lord**. Yea, and they did commit whoredoms and all manner of wickedness.” (Mosiah 11:1-2)

“And it came to pass that Riplakish **did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord, for he did have many wives and concubines**, and did lay that upon men’s shoulders which was grievous to be borne; yea, he did tax them with heavy taxes; and with the taxes he did build many spacious buildings.” (Ether 10:5)

Doctrine and Covenants

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

“Wherefore, 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” (D&C 49:16)

Pearl of Great Price

“And Lamech took unto himself **two wives**; the name of one being Adah, and the name of the other, Zillah. For Lamech having entered into a covenant with Satan, after the manner of Cain, wherein he became Master Mahan, master of that great secret which was administered unto Cain by Satan; and Irad, the son of Enoch, having known their secret, began to reveal it unto the sons of Adam... Wherefore Lamech, being angry, slew him, not like unto Cain, his brother Abel, for the sake of getting gain, but he slew him for the oath’s sake. For, from the days of Cain, there was a secret combination, and their works were in the dark, and they knew every man his brother. Wherefore the Lord cursed Lamech, and his house, and all them that had covenanted with Satan; **for they kept not the commandments of God**, and it displeased God, and he ministered not unto them, and their works were abominations, and began to spread among all the sons of men. And it was among the sons of men.” (Moses 5:44, 49-52)

(Note: It is here, in the book of Moses, that the first chronological reference to polygamy in scripture is found. Please note that the introduction of polygamy is inseparably connected to the establishment of secret combinations.)

Some may be tempted to dismiss these scriptures or to suggest that they do not provide ample evidence that polygamy is not approved of or sanctioned by God. But we have been given a safeguard by the Lord that His word will be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses. Here we have the witness of five books of scripture to support the truth that polygamy is condemned by God. Certainly there are other instances in the scriptures where polygamy is discussed – and even practiced. But there is no reference in any of the books (with the exception of D&C 132 which will be discussed hereafter) that indicates the Lord has ever commanded or instituted the practice Himself. That fact, combined with the Lord’s own words in the above scriptures, should at least give pause to those seeking to justify the practice of plural marriage using the scriptures.

Part III: Doctrine and Covenants Section 132

As seen in Part II, the scriptures do not indicate that the Lord in any way condones, commands, or encourages the practice of plural marriage – quite the opposite. So what about D&C 132? It is clear that the Lord is commanding the saints to live the “new and everlasting covenant” of polygamy in this section. It could not be plainer. Right? So why is it that the Lord would command his followers to participate in something that has been consistently condemned throughout the standard works? Can scripture contradict itself? Here again is a frustrating tangle of rope in our Gordian knot. How does one reconcile such an inconsistency – especially if God is “neither a changeable being; but... is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity” (Moroni 8:18)? While it may seem like a difficult question, looking into the murky history of Doctrine and Covenants Section 132 sheds enough light to help clear it up.

The first time that anyone was publicly made aware of the existence of Section 132 was on August 29, **1852** – eight years after the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Orson Pratt, under the direction of Brigham Young, officially proclaimed polygamy to be a tenet of the church in an address to a congregation of about 2,500 saints in the Salt Lake Valley. This discourse was delivered in the morning. In the afternoon, Brigham Young read the revelation (Section 132), stating that it had been given to Joseph previous to his death on July 12, 1843. The revelation was subsequently printed in the *Deseret News*, and was included in the January 1853 edition of *The Seer* – a periodical printed by Orson Pratt which served as an apologetic magazine defending and promoting polygamy.

But why had no one ever heard of this revelation if it had been received nearly 10 years earlier? Where did it come from?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provides the following historical background in its 2001 Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual:

It is clear that the Prophet Joseph Smith received section 132 before it was recorded but delayed making it known. The Prophet knew the Lord's will on plural marriage within the new and everlasting covenant probably as early as 1831 (see History of the Church, 5:xxix). In March 1843 he spoke to William Clayton of eternal marriage. In July of that year, he was discussing the doctrine with his brother Hyrum in William Clayton's presence when Hyrum said, "If you will write the revelation on celestial marriage, I will take it and read it to Emma, and I believe I can

convince her of its truth, and you will hereafter have peace” (History of the Church, 5:xxxii).

The Prophet consented and told William Clayton to get some paper to write; but to his brother’s “urgent request” that the Prophet use the Urim and Thummim to recall the exact revelation, Joseph replied that he did not need it, “for he knew the revelation from beginning to end” (History of the Church, 5:xxxii). When he had finished dictating, William Clayton read it back slowly, and Joseph said that it was exact. Bishop Newel K. Whitney heard the revelation read and asked permission of the Prophet Joseph Smith to have it copied. With the Prophet’s approval, Bishop Whitney sent Joseph C. Kingsbury the next day to copy it. Brothers Kingsbury and Clayton compared the copy line by line to the original and found it correct.”

(https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/language-materials/32493_eng.pdf?lang=eng)

William Clayton asserted that after the copy was made by Joseph Kingsbury, the original copy was shown to Emma, whereupon she seized it from Hyrum and threw it into the fire where it was destroyed by the flames. It was the Kingsbury copy of the revelation that Brigham claimed to have had in his possession when it was publicly revealed in 1852.

This is the general framework that is put forward in the standard polygamy narrative. A comprehensive deconstruction of this history will not be attempted – it would be too long for our purposes here (the reader is encouraged to do further reading on the subject, sources at the end of this book). Nevertheless, a few items must be noted.

First, it should be recognized that the narrative of how Section 132 came to be written down comes wholly and completely from the testimony of one man: William Clayton. The story of his receiving the revelation from Joseph comes from his word alone. The only other people present when the revelation was said to be recorded were Joseph and Hyrum. By the time the revelation was made public, they had both been dead for 8 years. It should further be noted that up to this time, Clayton had never before acted as a scribe to Joseph. According to the testimony of James Whitehead, the personal secretary of Joseph at the time of his death, William Clayton was “there helping with the books...[and] attended the outside business.” In other words, he was a financial clerk. It was Whitehead himself who would have handled dictation and copying work for the prophet. Whitehead further asserted that while Clayton had been

serving in a larger role, some of his responsibilities had been taken away because “there was some money disappeared and [Clayton] was blamed for it.” (See <http://www.anonymouzbishop.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/JosephSmithsMonogamy1.pdf> p. 20) Interesting that this is the man that Joseph supposedly trusted to copy what would be the most sensitive revelation he ever received...

And what of Joseph Kingsbury? Who was he? At the time of the supposed revelation, he was, as far as church history goes, an obscure store clerk working for Newel K. Whitney. Besides having seemingly no connection to Joseph Smith, his actions during the Temple Lot Case in the 1890s are certainly curious. When asked to take the customary oath given to witnesses in which they swear to tell the truth, Kingsbury said he would rather “affirm” than swear. His exact words were: “I generally affirm, and I suppose it is because my understanding is that a man cannot be convicted of perjury on an affirmation, and he can if he is sworn.” When asked if Joseph practiced polygamy, he replied, “I presume that he did.” When pressed to swear that Joseph had taught plural marriage, he chose instead to “affirm” it. (See *Abstract of Evidence Temple Lot Case U.S.C.C.*, p. 333, 339). It is interesting, to say the least, that the two men upon whose testimonies the genesis of Section 132 rests, were a financial clerk suspected of theft or embezzlement and an obscure store clerk unwilling to swear to his statements in a court of law. Much more could be said here, but it will be left to the reader to dig deeper.

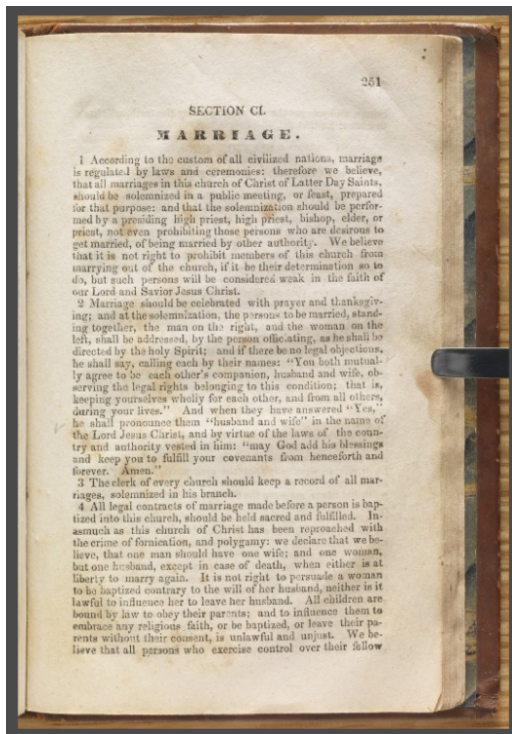
Before leaving the emergence of Section 132, however, one more curious reality must be addressed. Though widely unknown, the fact remains that when the revelation on plural marriage was added to the Doctrine and Covenants in 1876, another section was quietly removed. This “disappearing” section (which had been section 101 in the 1835 edition and section 109 in the 1844 edition) dealt with marriage. According to the Joseph Smith Papers website,

*On 17 August 1835, a general assembly of the church met “for the purpose of Examining a book of commandments and covenants” that had been “compiled and written by” the publication committee. “This Committee having finished said Book according to the instructions given them,” the minutes read, “it was deemed necessary to call the general assembly of the Church to see whether the book be approved or not by the authorities of the church, that it may, if approved, **become a law unto the church, and a rule of faith and practice** unto the same.” Sidney Rigdon... stood and “explained the manner by which*

they intended to obtain the voice of the assembly for or against said book." Voting on the book proceeded by quorums and groups, with the leader of each group bearing witness of the truth of the volume before his group voted to accept it. After the voting by quorums, the entire church membership present, both male and female, voted to accept the book as "the doctrine and covenants of their faith." After the general assembly accepted the new publication, William W. Phelps read an article on marriage that the assembly approved and added to the volume.

(<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835/259#historical-intro>)

Thus, what became section 101 was, in 1835, presented to the church, approved by the several quorums, voted on by the membership, and established as a law unto the church. It was reiterated by Joseph Smith in the Times & Seasons as already noted in Part I, and retained in the 1844 printing of the Doctrine and Covenants – an edition overseen by Joseph before his death. But when the 1876 printing of the Doctrine and Covenants was done under the direction of Brigham Young, this article on marriage was removed. It was also in this 1876 edition that section 132 was added to the book – without any kind of vote or ratification by the church or its quorums. As it will certainly be of interest to the reader to know what this article on marriage – this law unto the church – said, it is included here:



**Section 101 • Statement on Marriage,
circa August 1835**

SECTION CI.

MARRIAGE.

1 According to the custom of all civilized nations, marriage is regulated by laws and ceremonies: therefore we believe, that all marriages in this church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, should be solemnized in a public meeting, or feast, prepared for that purpose: and that the solemnization should be performed by a presiding high priest, high priest, bishop,

elder, or priest, not even prohibiting those persons who are desirous to get married, of being married by other authority. We believe that it is not right to prohibit members of this church from marrying out of the church, if it be their determination so to do, but such persons will be considered weak in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

*2 Marriage should be celebrated with prayer and thanksgiving; and at the solemnization, the persons to be married, standing together, the man on the right, and the woman on the left, shall be addressed, by the person officiating, as he shall be directed by the holy Spirit; and if there be no legal objections, he shall say, calling each by their names: "You both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, **keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others**, during your lives." And when they have answered "Yes," he shall pronounce them "husband and wife" in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of the laws of the country and authority vested in him: "may God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and forever. Amen."*

3 The clerk of every church should keep a record of all marriages, solemnized in his branch.

*4 All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this church, should be held sacred and fulfilled. **Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.** It is not right to persuade a woman to be baptized contrary to the will of her husband, neither is it lawful to influence her to leave her husband. All children are bound by law to obey their parents; and to influence them to embrace any religious faith, or be baptized, or leave their parents without their consent, is unlawful and unjust. We believe that all persons who exercise control over their fellow beings, and prevent them from embracing the truth, will have to answer for that sin.*

It is clear that at the time of Joseph's death, the law of the church was monogamy. The fact that this statement on marriage was removed from scripture at the very time that Section 132 was added is interesting, to say the least. Section 132 did not come to light until nearly a decade after it was

supposedly given, and it was recorded by two men whose actions call into question their integrity. Furthermore, Section 132 is not supported by the law of witnesses. Instead, it appears as a rogue instance of the Lord commanding a law that is clearly denounced throughout the rest of scripture. So while the items addressed here only scratch the surface of this story (doctrinal and historical contradictions found in Section 132, as well as literary analysis tying authorship of the section to Brigham Young, among other things, are not covered), it is hoped that the reader will carefully and prayerfully scrutinize the history behind this section and decide for themselves if it is a true revelation or not.

Conclusion

While certainly not comprehensive, it is hoped that this short work has successfully provided a new perspective when it comes to the puzzle of polygamy. With so many tangled threads and knotted ropes to unravel, it can be discouraging. It can feel like there are more questions than answers. But the Lord does not condemn us for having questions. He only asks that we come to Him with them and not place our trust in the arm of flesh. The words that spoke so powerfully to young Joseph continue to speak to us today: *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of **God**, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him”* (James 1:5).

As we open our hearts and minds to the real possibility that the Lord and His prophet Joseph Smith spoke the truth – that the Lord never commanded plural marriage and Joseph never lived it – a solution to the polygamy puzzle emerges. And as we go to the Lord in sincere prayer, with real intent, seeking to know the truth, He will answer us. He will help to restore testimony and trust in Him, in His everlasting love, in His goodness, and in His true servants. Through the power of the Holy Ghost, He will teach us the truth of all things (Moroni 10:5).

We need not fear; we need not “tremble or [be] angry because of the truth.” This places us upon a sandy foundation (see 2 Nephi 28:26, 28). Instead we must seek after truth - for it leads us to Christ who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). We must build our foundation on *Him* - not on men, on organizations, or on traditions. As we do so, we are given the assurance - not just that we will not - but that we cannot fall.

*“And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they **cannot** fall.”* (Hel. 5:12)

Suggestions for Further Study

While many wonderful resources exist that look deeper into many of the issues presented, here are just a few for further study:

Book: *Joseph Smith Revealed* by Whitney Horning

Book: *The Secret Chamber* by Val Brinkerhoff

Paper: *Joseph Smith's Monogamy*

<http://www.anonymousbishop.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/JosephSmithsMonogamy1.pdf>

YouTube Video: *First LDS Polygamist: Joseph or Brigham?*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5heXE5xS5w>

YouTube Channel: *132 Problems*

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCn4eQa8iEhaPPU3kph3GQsA>

Website/YouTube Channel: *Hemlock Knots* <https://hemlockknots.com/>

Website: *The Doctrine of Christ* <https://thedoctrineofchrist.com/>