

# Sunday School Supplement

## POLYGAMY: THE PERPLEXITIES, THE PERSECUTIONS, AND THE PROPHETS

With the possible exception of Joseph Smith, more has been written in the field of Mormonism upon the subject of polygamy than any other issue. An examination of written works dealing with polygamy reveals that much of it is either too polemical or too antagonistic to be of much scholarly value. Many needed facts still remain obscure or hidden from recorded history. Diaries are missing, or possibly they were never kept. Polygamy was not just the marital system for the Church hierarchy but for many lay members as well. It was the heartthrob as well as the heartache for many years of early Mormon history. Recent scholarship is making important steps towards the description and interpretation of Mormonism's involvement with polygamy (actually polygyny) and the doctrine of plural marriage.

In the preparation of this supplemental section, the research material surveyed has been divided into the following areas:

1830-1861	The Origins and Growth of Polygamy
1862-1890	The Persecution of Polygamy's Patriots and Their Defense of the Doctrine
Fall—1890	Issuing the Manifesto
1891-1933	Post-Manifesto Problems and The Withdrawal of Polygamy
1934-1980	Fundamentalists and The Modern Era
plus	The Sociological Aspects of Pioneer Polygamy

Due to the wide variety of topics addressed, it was decided to present this information in the form of questions and answers. Some questions might be answered by a set of conflicting opinions. This is to be expected with a subject where many facts await discovery and the possibility for different viewpoints still exists. A bibliographical note follows in conclusion.

### The Origins and Growth of Polygamy

*Did the Prophet Joseph Smith ever teach polygamy?*

"In the month of April, 1843, I (Lorenzo Snow) returned from my European mission. A few days after my arrival at Nauvoo, when at President Joseph Smith's house, he said he wished to have some private talk with me, and requested me to walk out with him. It was toward evening. We walked a little distance and sat down on a large log that lay near the bank of the river. He there and then explained to me the doctrine of plurality of wives; he said that the Lord had revealed it unto him, and commanded him to have women sealed to him as wives; that he foresaw the trouble that would follow, and sought to turn away from the commandment; that an angel from heaven then appeared before him with a drawn sword, threatening him with destruction unless he went forward and obeyed the commandment.

"He further said that my sister Eliza R. Snow had been sealed to him as his wife for time and eternity. He told me that the Lord would open the way, and I should have women sealed to me as wives. This conversation was prolonged, I think one hour or more, in which he told me many important things.

"I solemnly declare before God and holy angels, and as I hope to come forth in the morning of the resurrection, that the above statement is true."

Affidavit of Lorenzo Snow as found in Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Independence, Missouri: Zion's Printing and Publishing Company, n.d.), pp. 67-68.

*How early did Joseph receive the doctrine of plural marriage?*

"Lyman Johnson told his missionary companion, Orson Pratt, that 'Joseph had made known to him as early as 1831 that plural marriage was a correct principle,' but he said it was not yet time to teach and practice it. George Q. Cannon said that Smith learned 'in an early day' that 'it was to obey God's will' that the ancients had plural wives 'and he probably learned, also, that his servants in those (Kirtland) days would be commanded to carry out this principle.'

"President Joseph F. Smith, nephew of the Prophet, made an interesting claim

relative to his uncle's understanding at that time. In 1882 he spoke at the funeral services of Elizabeth Ann Whitney, the daughter of Newel Whitney and plural wife of Joseph Smith. His remarks were misquoted by a local reporter. So the next day in a letter addressed to the editor of the *Deseret News* he made the following clarification:

'What I did say was to the effect that when the Prophet Joseph Smith received the revelation in relation to the eternity of the marriage covenant, which includes plural marriage, in 1831; the Lord showed him those women who were to engage with him in the establishment of that principle in the Church, and at that time some of these women were named and given to him, to become his wives when the time should come that this principle would be established.' "

Danel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith," (M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975), pp. 56-57.

*How extensive was the practice of polygamy in the Church?*

"The great majority of Mormons have had no direct experience with polygamy. Considering that the Church is approximately 150 years old, that polygamy was in effect for about one-third of that time, and that at the maximum less than one-fifth of the Church population lived in polygamous families while the principle was in effect, then less than one-fifteenth of all Mormons have been so involved. But even that figure fails to consider the geometric growth of the church. Just as most of the scientists who have ever lived are alive at the present moment, more than half of those who have been Mormons were baptized since 1950. Thus the percentage of all Mormons from the beginning to the present who were parents or children in plural households is something less than one percent."

Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 185.

### The Persecution of Polygamy's Patriots and Their Defense of the Doctrine

*What were the legal punishments upon conviction of polygamy?*

"Passage of the Edmunds Act in 1882 launched an all-out crusade against Mormon polygamy. The law provided a \$500 fine for those found guilty of polygamy and a prison sentence of up to five years. Nominal polygamists, those convicted of unlawful cohabitation, could be jailed for six months and fined

\$300. Prosecutions in the courts eventually jailed more than thirteen hundred men and a few women in prisons in Arizona, Michigan, South Dakota, Idaho, and Utah."

Melvin L. Bashore, "Life Behind Bars: Mormon Cohabs of the 1880's," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 47:1 (1979): 23-24.

*What kind of conditions were the Utah cohabs submitted to in the penitentiary?*

"The most bothersome hindrance to a good night's rest was the pesky bed bugs. One man suggested renaming his bunkhouse the 'Bug house.' (Hiram) Clawson said 'a man could write his name with the blood of bugs by pressing his finger against them as they crawled along the wall. . . . Newly whitewashed walls soon told an awful tale of blood and carnage.' . . .

"The nightly raid of bugs was met with stubborn resistance by the men. The bugs attacked James Kirkham in one final rampage on the eve of his release. He records that 'such a night I shall never forget we spent the whole of the time fighting bedbugs. We killed by actual count 249.' . . .

"The men were discouraged by the prison fare and found the dining room filthy, with lice sometimes crawling on the tables. Before mealtime conversation was prohibited, the noise and confusion attending the meals was 'simply bewildering.' . . .

"The water, brought by bucket from Parley's Creek, was often muddy and unfit to drink. Complaints and protests against stale meat and maggoty soup brought sporadic improvements. The bread was the single item on the menu that was universally acclaimed. Despite their complaints, most of the men left the leisurely life of the prison heavier than when they entered."

Melvin L. Bashore, "Life Behind Bars: Mormon Cohabs of the 1880's," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 47:1 (1979): 30-34.

*Did anyone ever die upholding the principle of plural marriage?*

On a tombstone in Parowan, Utah are the following inscriptions:

"Inscribed on the east panel is the scriptural passage:

'And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How Long, Oh Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'

Revelations 6:10

"The north side carries this poetic cry: Here lies a victim of a Nation's blunder, Which many to untimely graves hath

brought,  
It nature's holy ties hath torn asunder,  
And, untold suffering, woe, and  
anguish wrought,  
By ruthless hand this man crossed  
death's dark river,  
His was the sacred blood of innocence,  
The taker of the life will meet the giver,  
Before the Tribune of Omnipotence.

"On the west side of the monument you read:

In memoriam  
EDWARD MEEKS  
DALTON  
Son of Edward & Elizabeth  
DALTON

Born, Parowan, Utah,  
August 25th, 1852

DIED

December 16th, 1886,  
34 Yrs, 3 Mos, & 21 Das.

"And on the south side are the words they always quote in Parowan:

He was shot and Killed December 16th, 1886, in cold blood by a deputy United States Marshall, while under indictment for a misdemeanor under the Edmunds Anti-polygamy law."

Fae Decker Dix, "Unwilling Martyr: The Death of Young Ed Dalton," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 41:2 (1973): 165-166.

#### Issuing the Manifesto

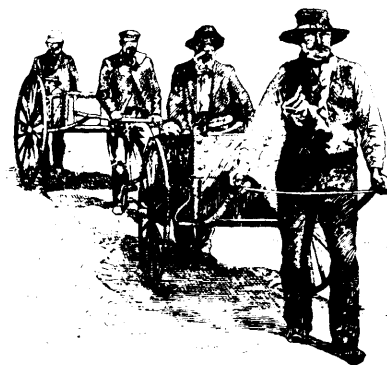
*What attitudes preceded the way for the issuing of the manifesto?*

" . . . the first of the steps which indicated that the church was yielding its position in the late 1880's (was) the adoption of an anti-polygamy constitution for Utah during the early summer of 1887. By agreeing to adopt a constitution which prohibited and punished polygamy, the leaders of the church offered a concession to the federal government on the polygamy issue. Such a concession involved a major shift in the church's policy of coping with the federal anti-polygamy campaign. While the adoption of the constitution did not indicate that the church had surrendered to the government or that it was ready to abandon the practice of plural marriage, it did suggest that the attitude of church leaders had undergone a significant change. Recognizing the need for settling the polygamy issue with the government, they were now willing to make concessions to reach such a settlement. Such an attitude made the complete surrender of polygamy much more likely."

Henry J. Wolfinger, "A Reexamination of the Woodruff Manifesto in the Light of Utah Constitutional History," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 39:4 (1971): 330.

"Little effort is required to appreciate the

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helplessness felt by the Mormon Church in the summer of 1890. Hundreds of its leading elders were in prison. Hundreds were in exile. Its real and personal property was in the possession of the United States Government. The constitutionality of the escheat laws had been upheld by the courts, and with this judicial action, the last avenue to relief had been blocked. The Cullom-Struble Bill, which would have disfranchised all members of the Mormon Church, was pending in Congress. Every attempt to secure statehood had failed. The Saints were weary of harrassment; the running and hiding and the searches and seizures had worn them down, and many were questioning the practicability and value of maintaining patriarchal marriage in the face of such seemingly insurmountable odds. Their non-Mormon friends counseled abandonment. On September 25, 1890, 'after praying to the Lord and feeling inspired,' President Wilford Woodruff issued the (Manifesto). . . ."

Orma Linford, "The Mormons and the Law: The Polygamy Cases," *Utah Law Review* 9:3 (1965): 582.

#### Post-Manifest Problems and the Withdrawal of Polygamy

*What problems were associated with the*

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#### *withdrawal of polygamy?*

"Mormons believed polygamy to be a divine commandment, and they taught and practiced it for a half-century. Following Wilford Woodruff's Manifesto of 1890, church members experienced a difficult transition period as they were forced to abandon the principle of polygamy in practice, if not technically in doctrine. The Manifesto, originally intended to demonstrate church adherence only to certain aspects of the anti-polygamy laws, was later interpreted to include full compliance with all such laws. Later, church leaders petitioned for amnesty that resulted in the granting of pardon to all who would follow the laws. Despite these measures, many church members, including several of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, failed to comply readily and fully with the anti-polygamy laws."

Kenneth L. Cannon II, "Beyond the Manifesto: Polygamous Cohabitation among LDS General Authorities after 1890," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46:1 (1978): 24-25.

"The transition was painful, resulting in many members' excommunication from the church and others' leaving the United States in order to continue

practicing polygamy. Some of the ramifications of polygamy, such as the continued practice of the principle by certain apostate groups, remain to the present day. The church's position on polygamy changed slowly and gradually. After 1890 its official position was forced to coincide with the anti-polygamy laws, but the actual practice of the church leaders failed to coincide with the established laws. Many General Authorities continued living with, and fathering children by, their plural wives, thereby breaking the laws against polygamous cohabitation. Through a process of federal investigation, increased social pressure, and stricter church disciplinary sanction, the church leaders and members finally complied not only officially but also factually with the country's anti-polygamy laws."

*Ibid*, p. 36.

#### **Fundamentalists and the Modern Era**

*By what claims do modern*

*"fundamentalists" continue their practice of polygamy?*

"Although the struggle was intense, for some of the Saints a relinquishment of the practice was unthinkable. Consequently, when Wilford Woodruff announced the suspension of the practice in 1890, his action was received with disappointment by some of the Saints. And although the Church in general was convinced that the suspension of plural marriage was accomplished by the same power that introduced it, a few were determined to continue the practice irrespective of the consequences.

"Despite ecclesiastical and civil sanctions against it, the practice of polygamy is advocated to this day by small coteries of zealots dedicated to a belief that the action of the Church in 1890 was not universally applicable. More specifically, their contention rests upon the following premises:

(A) A special dispensation of priesthood authority operating independent of the Latter-day Saint Church has been perpetuated from Joseph Smith to the present day, by which sanction of the practice of plural marriage has continued.

(B) Since the practice of plural marriage is an irrevocable law of the Gospel and essential to the highest exaltation in the world to come, authorization for its continued practice was guaranteed in 1886 when a select group of individuals were chosen to continue the principle independent of the Church.

(C) Resulting from a policy of

compromise, and dictated at the behest of a few non-Mormon territorial officials, the Manifesto was advocated as a revelation from God only after a spirit of rebellion arose among the members of the Church following its issuance.

(D) At the time of the issuance of the Manifesto, it was tacitly understood by the Church leaders that legislation favorable to a resumption of the practice of plural marriage would be introduced following statehood. However, after the turn of the century, this policy was abandoned and the Church undertook a campaign to eradicate from its society those who continued to foster the fundamental tenets of Mormonism."

Dean C. Jessee, "A Comparative Study & Evaluation Pertaining to the Practice of Plural Marriage," (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young Univ., 1959), pp. 1-2.

*What sources are available to those who wish to understand these points from the LDS point-of-view?*

Note: An authoritative, non-partisan study is yet to be written on this phase of polygamy; however the following pro-LDS sources might be helpful to the questioning Latter-day Saint:

Anderson, J. Max. *The Polygamy Story: Fiction and Fact*. Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1979.

Reimann, Paul E. *Plural Marriage Limited*. Salt Lake City: Paul E. Reimann, 1974.

Richards, Henry W. *A Reply To "The Church of the Firstborn of the Fulness of Times."* Salt Lake City: Henry W. Richards, 1965.

Wyatt, Clair L. "... some that trouble you..." Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1974.

#### **The Sociological Aspects of Pioneer Polygamy**

*Is it true that Mormon polygynous men had large harems as indicated by the large number of wives married to such well-known early church leaders as Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball?*

"Information on seventy-five husbands and their polygynous wives has been collected. The most frequent number of wives that existed in a plural family was two, although the average number was 4.9. The range was from two to forty-five wives. Almost 70% of the men had less than five wives, while only 10% had ten or more. It seems that the large family was the exception rather than the rule."

Vicki Burgess-Olson, "Family Structure and Dynamics in Early Utah Mormon Families, 1847-1885" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1975), pp. 128-129.



# Mormon Sport

## Magazine

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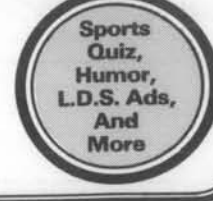
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Hello!! Mormon Sport would like to introduce you to a magazine that we feel is long overdue; one that deals with only our L.D.S. athletes, coaches, fitness experts and nutritionalists worldwide who believe in excellence in both physical and spiritual matters, and are strong church members as well.

Some of our Mormon Athletes are well known, but the majority go unnoticed, and many of their stories can be of benefit to you. Things like parental support of endeavors, hard work, the benefits of the Word of Wisdom, setting and achieving goals, endurance and much more.

Below is just a sample of the articles to appear in the January 1980 issue. We invite you to travel with us as we follow our athletes worldwide. Of course, your travels won't be by plane or even car, but through the pages of Mormon Sport Magazine. We hope you'll come along!!! We promise to make this an exciting year!!

- "Spencer W. Kimball, The Athlete," by Andrew and Edward Kimball. A delightful article about our beloved Prophet and leader and his love for sports, by his son and grandson.
- "From Grandpa's Pond to Moscow," by Henry Marsh. Read how Henry's life was saved because his grandfather (Henry D. Moyle) lived a righteous life. Learn of Henry's rise to world class athlete and Pan Am Gold medal winner.
- "When You're Down, Get Up and Try Again," by Curt Brinkman. This is an inspiring story of courage and faith by one of the world's great wheelchair athletes.
- "Decision Confirmed in Red China," by Devin Durrant. BYU's basketball player makes an all-important decision and tells how it was confirmed while touring Red China.
- "Cindee Secrist, M.V.P.," by Hugh Hilton. Read of Cindee's honors as M.V.P. in softball in Southern California.
- "Training," by Paul Cummings. How to begin a serious training program by America's 1500 meter record holder and Olympic hopeful.
- "Fitness for Life," by Dr. Phil Allsen. Why we should stay fit by a nationally known fitness expert.
- "The Pride of Utah Valley," (Orem's Track Team) by Rollie Bestor (BYU Assist. Swim coach). Orem High dominated the Utah track scene last year, and most are back again.
- "The Best Event of My Life," by Bruno Gerzeli. Read how this world famous soccer player found something more important than just playing soccer.
- "Dad Sold His Business," by Mark McGregor (BYU swimmer and Returned Missionary.) Mark tells of his father's total support of his children's endeavors and their resulting success.
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*How did women fare in the pioneer period of polygamy?*

"Brigham Young insisted that women should be self-supporting, starting with his own wives. He even urged girls to take the lead in showing impractical young men how they could support themselves, and thus overcome their reluctance to take a wife. He said that women 'make just as good mathematicians and accountants as any man,' and could 'do the business of any counting-house.' Many of the women plied their own trade. A work on the Mormons dated 1874 wrote that, in some respects, 'you would think these people the most forward of the age. They close no career on a woman in Utah.' "

John Cairncross, *After Polygamy Was Made A Sin: The Social History of Christian Polygamy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 191-192.

*How might a young girl look upon polygamy?*

### The Marriage Proposal

O Susan, wilt thou come with me  
In sweet community to live?  
Of heart and hand and home I'll give  
Of all the love that swells my breast,  
Of all the honor of my name,  
Of worldly wealth by me possessed,  
A sixteenth portion thou shalt claim.

Nay, tell me not to share the blessings  
That I now offer thee  
Thou'lt find but fifteen others there.  
A household happy, gay and free,  
A mod'rate household, I may say,  
My neighbor has as many more,  
And Brother Brigham, o'er the way,  
Luxuriates in forty-four.

I'll give thee whatso'er thou wilt,  
So be it but a sixteenth part.  
'Twould be the deepest part of guilt  
To slight the rest who share my heart.  
Then wilt thou not thy fraction yield  
To make complete my perfect bliss?  
Say "Yes" and let our joys be sealed  
With just the sixteenth part of a kiss.

Lester A. Hubbard, *Ballads and Songs From Utah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1961), p. 415.

### A Bibliographical Note

Much valuable information is contained in the full texts of the sources already cited. In addition, an excellent review of sources on polygamy is found in Davis Bitton's "Mormon Polygamy: A Review Article," *Journal of Mormon History*, 4 (1977): 101-118. (*The Journal of Mormon History* is published annually by the Mormon History Association, P.O. Box 7010, University Station, Provo, Utah 84602. The *Journal* is distributed to members upon payment of the \$5.00 annual dues.)

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