

## Does Exaltation Require Polygamy?



Today, tens of thousands of modern polygamists live across the Wasatch Front extending down into central Mexico and up beyond the Canadian border. Most of these trace their practice of plural marriage back to Joseph Smith. They claim that once polygamy was established among the Latter-day Saints, the practice could never be suspended. Some church members may also agree, believing the exaltation requires plurality and that all beings in the celestial kingdom are polygamists.

### **Will It Be a Requirement?**

There is no record of Joseph Smith or any other priesthood leader stating that all exalted men are polygamists. However, statements made between 1852 and 1890, when plural marriage was treated as a commandment, can be easily quoted out of context to create the appearance that church leaders taught that all men in the celestial kingdom would be polygamists.

During the Temple Lot depositions taken in 1892, President Woodruff was asked “if Joseph Smith had ever taught you at Nauvoo or anywhere else during his lifetime, that in order for a man to be exalted in the hereafter, he must have more than one wife?” He answered, “I don’t know that I ever heard him make use of that expression or use that form of expression.”<sup>1</sup>

Similarly when queried, “Did Joseph Smith teach you that a man must have more than one wife to be exalted,” Nauvoo polygamist and apostle’s wife, Bathsheba Smith, responded: “I never heard of that.”<sup>2</sup>

A third witness is Joseph C. Kingsbury who was asked if Joseph Smith taught him “that a man could not be exalted in the hereafter unless he had more wives than one,” Kingsbury replied: “No sir. He did not teach me that. He did not say anything about that.”<sup>3</sup> Kingsbury also recalled: “I heard it preached from the stand that a man could be exalted in eternity with one wife.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite these clear statements the folklore persists.

### **Should Women Fear Eternal Polygamy?**

It is true that polygamy on earth is unfair. Generally, women suffer more than men due to plural inequalities. It is also true that LDS polygamists in the nineteenth century believed that plural marriage in some form would exist in the celestial kingdom. Joseph’s revelations declare that sealings performed by proper authority, whether monogamous or polygamous, would persist after death (D&C 132:19).

However, beliefs that eternal polygamy will forever victimize women are based upon faulty reasoning:

First, no presiding church leader has ever declared that plural marriage is required for exaltation for all people irrespective of when and where they lived on earth. The belief that every man will be

required to practice polygamy in the future or that every woman will have to share her husband in eternity is not — and never has been — a [doctrine](#) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Second, we do not know the dynamics of eternal marriage, and we know even less about the dynamics of eternal plural marriage. Fears of eternal polygamy are fears of the *unknown*, or xenophobia. Such fears could only be based upon assumptions that we cannot test for validity. To fear eternal polygamy is fearing future circumstances that we cannot accurately describe or even know to exist. Entertaining such worries is useless and could be faith-destroying. Brigham Young explained:

The whole subject of the marriage relation is not in my reach, nor in any other man's reach on this earth. It is without beginning of days or end of years; it is a hard matter to reach. We can tell some things with regard to it; it lays the foundation for worlds, for angels, and for the Gods; for intelligent beings to be crowned with glory, immortality, and eternal lives. In fact, it is the thread which runs from the beginning to the end of the holy Gospel of Salvation — of the Gospel of the Son of God; it is from eternity to eternity.<sup>5</sup>

Third, it is hard to comprehend how this would work out mathematically given the similar birthrates of men and women.

Fourth, God's plan is a "great plan of happiness"<sup>6</sup> and not a plan of eternal coercion or endless submission and suffering. Exalted beings "shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."<sup>7</sup>

Fifth, the agency of worthy beings regarding their eternal mates will be respected. Brigham Young emphasized: "If a woman is sealed to me and she wants to be divorced, she has a right to and I am under no obligation. Is not that agency all round? We have the privilege of being sealed or released."<sup>8</sup>

Sixth, exalted beings are raised to eternal glory: "which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them."<sup>9</sup> It will include "salvation, and honor, and immortality, and eternal life; kingdoms, principalities, and powers!"<sup>10</sup> Obtaining these blessings without allowing unknown details to concern us is a worthy goal.

To continue this brief narrative of the unfolding of the practice of polygamy in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, proceed to the section on [Plural Marriage Teachings](#).

### **Endnotes:**

1. Wilford Woodruff, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent's testimony, part 3, page 66, question 698.
2. Bathsheba Smith, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent's testimony, part 3, page 319, questions 590–91.
3. Joseph Kingsbury, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent's testimony, part 3, page 225, questions 1028–29.

4. Joseph Kingsbury, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent's testimony, part 3, page 205, question 600.
5. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 2:90.
6. See Alma 42:8, 16.
7. See Isa. 35:10.
8. Brigham Young, discourse given March 12, 1848, in Van Wagoner, ed., *Complete Discourses*, 1:276. President Joseph F. Smith agreed in 1915: "If a man and woman should be joined together who are incompatible to each other it would be a mercy to them to be separated that they might have a chance to find other spirits that will be congenial to them. We may bind on earth and it will be bound in Heaven, and loose on earth and it will be loosed in Heaven." (James R. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:330–31.
9. See D&C 132:19–20.
10. See D&C 128:23.