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Prologues to Plurality:  
A Study of Revelations Informing Doctrine and Covenants 132  
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As Emma Smith's fury over her husband's polygamy grew, Hyrum Smith proposed to his brother Joseph that he produce a revelation for Emma that might help her convert to the principle. Joseph agreed but was doubtful it would have any effect on his wife's attitude. Hyrum, a recent convert to plural marriage, encouraged Joseph to use the Urim and Thummim to receive the revelation, but Joseph said "he knew the revelation perfectly from beginning to end" and did not need the aid of the seerstone.<sup>2</sup> On July 12, 1843, Joseph dictated the "revelation on marriage," now published in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) as Section 132, which Emma promptly rejected.

It is apparent from Joseph's response to his brother that he had received elements of Section 132 earlier. Some of his associates believed he had received part of this revelation a dozen years earlier in 1831.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will review Smith's revelations on marriage over a fifteen year period, from 1829 to 1844, moving chronologically from the Book of Mormon and Smith's inspired translation of the Bible to the Kirtland era, and finally review known plural marriage revelations received during the Nauvoo period. I conclude by discussing the themes and development of these revelations. Some of them are documented during his lifetime, while others were recalled long after his martyrdom. I discuss those documented before his death in June 1844 and supplement details of the pre-martyrdom revelations with later sources when available, noting the later dating. I also provide a list of post-martyrdom mentions of revelations.

Smith's first produced work of scripture is the Book of Mormon, not translated by analyzing characters on plates of gold as is commonly assumed, but deciphered through a seerstone, the medium he used most to receive revelations. Therefore, the Book of Mormon is more accurately understood as a revelation, or perhaps a "revelatory

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<sup>1</sup> I appreciate constructive feedback from Michael Marquardt, Joe Geisner, Cheryl Bruno, and Don Bradley.

<sup>2</sup> For the transitory meaning of "Urim and Thummim," see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 171–75.

<sup>3</sup> "Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo," Gospel Topics Essays, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, [churchofjesuschrist.org](http://churchofjesuschrist.org).

translation” as opposed to a conventional translation. And it is here that we find our first “revelation” on polygamy, or as it was more commonly referred to by its early practitioners—plural marriage.

Book of Mormon Monogamy Exception:

“if I will . . . raise up seed unto me, I will command my people” —1829

The earliest doctrinal statement related to the controversial practice of plural marriage may have occurred in the Book of Mormon. A common interpretation of a passage translated in 1829 indicates that plural marriage was a valid option when sanctioned by God. Polygyny and concubines<sup>4</sup> are forbidden by default, but an exception is specified: “For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people” (Jacob 2:27–35).<sup>5</sup> Although not present during the production of the Book of Mormon, Brigham Young reflected twenty-nine years later that the earliest revelation on plural marriage occurred during production of the Book of Mormon, stating “that while Joseph and Oliver [Cowdery] were translating the Book of Mormon, they had a revelation that the order of Patriarchal marriage and the Sealing was right.” Young believed the revelation led to a later unauthorized plural marriage by Cowdery to Mary Ann Lyman.<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Smith Bible Translation:

February 9–September 12, 1831

The 1843 plural marriage revelation opens stating that Joseph Smith “inquired of my hand to know . . . [about] . . . Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and

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<sup>4</sup> “Polygyny”—one husband and multiple wives. In polygynous relationships, a “concubine” has a lower status than a wife.

<sup>5</sup> The text in Jacob 2:23–35 is not clear, and it is possible the text does not provide a caveat for polygamy.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Karl and Katharine Miles Larson, eds., *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 2 vols. (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1980), 1:349 (July 26, 1872); Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal: 1833–1898*, 9 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 5:55 (Aug. 26, 1857). For doubts about Cowdery’s plural marriage, see Brian C. Hales, “Guilty of Such Folly?: Accusations of Adultery or Polygamy against Oliver Cowdery,” in *Days Never to Be Forgotten: Oliver Cowdery*, ed. Alexander L. Baugh (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 279–93.

Solomon ... [regarding] ... their having many wives and concubines” (D&C 132:1)—an exercise he could have taken while translating verses from Genesis mentioning polygamous marriages. Official LDS church sources suggest that part of D&C 132 “emerged from Joseph Smith’s study of the Old Testament in 1831” and that “people who knew Joseph well later stated he received the revelation about that time.”<sup>7</sup> His 1831 studies were in conjunction with his “translation” of the Bible, later published as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST). These were modifications or additions to the King James version to correct points that “had been taken from the Bible, or lost.”<sup>8</sup> Smith’s plural wives Helen Mar Kimball and Lucy Walker, as well as apostle Lyman Johnson (brother of Smith’s plural wife Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde) recalled that the principle of plural marriage was revealed in 1831.<sup>9</sup> Joseph B. Noble (who performed the early Nauvoo plural marriage of Louisa Beaman to Smith) remembered that plural marriage was revealed during Smith’s translation of the Bible.<sup>10</sup> These recollections are less reliable because they occurred four or more decades later.

Smith’s July 1843 revelation said God commanded Old Testament figures to take additional wives (D&C 132:1, 34, 37, 65). While Genesis incidentally mentions polygamous relationships, it does not suggest God commanded plural marriage. Between February 9 and April 4, 1831, Smith worked on text from Genesis about Abraham having more than one wife; and through September 12, covered text that would have mentioned

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<sup>7</sup> “Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo.”

<sup>8</sup> This translation is commonly called the “Joseph Smith Translation” or “Inspired Version.”

<sup>9</sup> Helen Mar Kimball Smith Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884), 53; Lucy Walker Smith Kimball, Temple Lot Transcript, respondent’s testimony, part 3, 450–51, questions 27, 53, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, hereafter CHL; “Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, Dec. 16, 1878, 788.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph B. Noble, Centerville, Davis Co., Utah, Stake conference, June 11, 1883, qtd. in Andrew Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 232–33. B. H. Roberts said the translation of the Old Testament prompted an inquiry of the Lord in 1831. B. H. Roberts, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1902–12, 1932), 5:29–30.

other polygamous marriages.<sup>11</sup> However, Smith did not take the opportunity to expand or clarify text from Genesis about the practice of plural marriage.

On June 10, 1844, Joseph Smith explained to the Nauvoo city council that a portion of D&C 132 came when he inquired “concerning the passage in the resurrection [sic] concerning ‘they neither marry nor are given in marriage, &c.’”<sup>12</sup> In Matthew 22, Jesus was asked about the implications of resurrection and the Old Testament levirate practice of a brother marrying the wife of his deceased brother to “raise up seed unto his brother.”<sup>13</sup> If a woman married and outlived her husband, then subsequently married and outlived each of his multiple brothers one at a time, who would be her husband in the resurrection? Jesus responded that “in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels.”

Joseph Smith’s re-translation of Matthew 22 was done between April 7 and June 19, 1831, with a second revision of the same text between 1832 and about January 1833.<sup>14</sup> While Smith made minor modifications to the text, nothing substantive was changed to suggest plural or eternal marriage. The text would be reinterpreted in 1843 in D&C 132:16–17, which states that non-eternal marriages result in separation at death, forfeiting godhood:

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

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<sup>11</sup> H. Michael Marquardt, “Chronology: Joseph Smith’s Bible Revision, 1830–1835,” *The Four Gospels According to Joseph Smith* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2007), 21–22; Robert J. Matthews, “*A Plainer Translation*”: *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 64–67.

Joseph B. Noble stated on June 11, 1883, “that the Prophet Joseph told him that the doctrine of celestial marriage was revealed to him while he was engaged on the work of translation of the scriptures, but when the communication was first made the Lord stated that the time for the practice of that principle had not arrived.” See Jenson, “Plural Marriage,” 232–33.

<sup>12</sup> “Revised Minutes, 17 June 1844,” *Nauvoo Neighbor*, June 19, 1844, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Agnes Coolbrith Smith would enter a levirate marriage with Joseph Smith on January 6, 1842, after her husband, Don Carlos Smith (brother of Joseph), passed away.

<sup>14</sup> Marquardt, “Chronology.”

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.

Smith's 1832 inspired translation of Romans 7:19–23 (20–24 in the JST) adds concepts that he may have used in later justifications for plural marriage in Nauvoo (discussed below). I have included his additions to Romans 7:19 (JST Romans 7:20–21) in square brackets: 'For the good that I would [have done when under the law, I find not to be good; therefore] I do [it] not: but the evil which I would not [do under the law, I find to be good]; that, I do.'<sup>15</sup>

#### Kirtland Revelations on Marriage

In addition to translated materials, Smith dictated revelations and issued a statement on marriage that would be canonized by its inclusion in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. Looked at in a series, these three documents show evidence of an evolution of thought over time regarding marriage.

#### Shaker Revelation: "it is lawful that he should have one wife"—May 7, 1831

On May 7, 1831,<sup>16</sup> Smith dictated a revelation to be read to a nearby Shaker community that emphasized monogamy rather than Shaker-promoted celibacy: "whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God ... Wherefore, it is lawful that [man] should have one wife" (D&C 49:15–16).<sup>17</sup> The revelation provided justification from 1 Timothy warning against those "forbidding to marry" (1 Tim 4:3) and possibly from text stating

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<sup>15</sup> Ronald V. Huggins, "Joseph Smith's Inspired Translation of Romans 7," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 179–80.

<sup>16</sup> Earlier dating of this revelation was mid-March, but the recently available *Book of Commandments and Revelations* specifies May 7. "Revelation Book 1," 80, The Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org, hereafter JSP.

<sup>17</sup> His New Testament revision was completed July 31, 1832. For another 1831 revelation suggesting traditional marital relationships, see D&C 42:22–23 (Feb. 1831). For a treatment of Mormon and Shaker sexuality, see Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

that a bishop must be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2). Smith did not revise these texts in his inspired translation of the Bible.

#### Matrimonial Alliance Revelation:

##### “Should They Form a Matrimonial Alliance with the Natives”—July 17, 1831

Upon Joseph Smith’s arrival in Jackson County, Missouri in mid-July 1831, efforts were made to work around the difficulties of obtaining a license to enter Indian territory immediately to the west, in order to execute the revelatory mandate to convert the “Lamanites.”<sup>18</sup>

A group of Elders crossed over into Indian Territory on July 17 and Joseph Smith received the revelation some consider the original plural marriage revelation. Because they had no pen and paper, the revelation was not recorded. That December, Mormon-turned-critic Ezra Booth<sup>19</sup> recalled the revelation: “It has been made known by revelation, that it will be pleasing to the Lord, should they form a matrimonial alliance with the Natives; and by this means the Elders, who comply with the thing so pleasing to the Lord, and for which the Lord has promised to bless those who do it abundantly, gain a residence in the Indian territory.”<sup>20</sup>

Three days later, Joseph Smith received a revelation on another approach to obtain licensed access. It told Sidney Gilbert to “obtain a license (behold, here is wisdom & whoso readeth let him understand) that he may send goods also unto the lamanites even by whom he will as clerks employed in his service & thus the gospel may be preached unto them.”<sup>21</sup>

Ezra Booth mentioned this additional approach: “Another method has been invented” regarding “goods suited to the Indian trade, and persons are to obtain license from the government to dispose of them to the Indians in their own territory; at the same time, they are to disseminate the principles of Mormonism among them.”<sup>22</sup>

Booth, who was closely involved in the efforts to convert Indigenous peoples, illuminated the purpose of both revelations. As a prolific writer trying to destroy the

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<sup>18</sup> H. Michael Marquardt, *Joseph Smith’s 1828–1843 Revelations*, (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2013), 126n53. See D&C 28:8 for a mandate to convert Lamanites.

<sup>19</sup> Booth was one of fourteen pairs of missionaries called to Missouri. See D&C 52.

<sup>20</sup> “Booth to Rev. Ira Eddy, Dec. 6, 1831,” *Ohio Star* 2, no. 49 (Dec. 8, 1831): 1.

<sup>21</sup> “Revelations Book 1,” 93–94; JSP. The revelation was altered in 1835 to remove reference to Lamanites (D&C 55:9–10).

<sup>22</sup> “Booth to Rev. Ira Eddy,” 3.

credibility of Smith,<sup>23</sup> Booth would have taken the opportunity to expose a revelation about a more expansive doctrine of plural marriage if that indeed, had been verbalized by Smith. With two methods proposed in a row to gain access to the territory, plus an absence of theological explanation of the proposed marriage alliance, we can assume that at a minimum, Smith's public discussion about the revelation had to do only with trying to obtain legal access to the Indian territory.

Another revelatory point mentioned by Booth about the marriage alliance revelation was that "[i]t has been made known" that Harris "is entirely free from his wife" and can proceed with a Lamanite marriage. According to Booth, this confirmed Harris' own revelation that he was free from his estranged wife. But concern was expressed about potential legal entanglements and that it would be best for Harris to finalize a divorce before proceeding with a marriage, which may explain why the matrimonial alliance idea was abandoned.

Nearly fourteen years later, W. W. Phelps referred to the matrimonial alliance revelation: "Phelps s[ai]d. 6 or 8. went over the boundaries of the U.S. to preach— Jos[eph]. went to prayer—he then commenced a revelation that Martin [Harris] was to [marry] among the Lamanites—& that I was to preach that day—&c &c it was a long revelation."<sup>24</sup> There is no indication from the meeting minutes of a theological purpose for Harris to try to take a wife. A late source "claimed he [Harris] had a revelation when he first came to Kirtland for him to go to Missouri, and obtain an Lamanite Indian squaw for a wife to aid them in propagating Mormonism."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Booth wrote nine exposé-style letters to the *Ohio Star*, later published in Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or, A Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Printed and Published by the Author, 1834). My thanks to Craig Foster for helping me contextualize Booth.

<sup>24</sup> "Meeting of the Twelve & others in the Recorder's office," Feb. 27, 1845, qtd. in H. Michael Marquardt, "Ezra Booth on Early Mormonism: A Look at His 1831 Letters," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 28 (2008): 51n74. See also *Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1910–1951* (Salt Lake City: Privately published, 2010); and Jedediah Rogers, ed., *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2014), 82–83.

<sup>25</sup> "Statement of Rev. S. F. Whitney on Mormonism," in Arthur B. Deming, ed., *Naked Truths About Mormonism* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1888): 3. The statement goes on to say that at a later point (about 1836) Joseph Smith "named two" women who "would

Within days of arriving in Utah in July 1847, Brigham Young began casting plural marriage as a method to remove a dark-skinned curse of the Lamanites described in the Book of Mormon: “The objections of some men to the plurality of Wives and that the Elders would marry Wives of every tribe of Indians, and showed how the Lamanites would become a White and delightsome people.”<sup>26</sup> This initiated a series of statements by Young stating that plural marriage was a method of changing Indigenous peoples’ skin color.<sup>27</sup> In 1855, Young promoted “the necessity of our forming the strong ties of matrimony with the Lamanites” as a method of converting American Indians.<sup>28</sup>

In 1861, Phelps wrote to Young about the matrimonial alliance revelation of July 1831, noting that a party of elders had crossed “over the boundary, west of Jackson Co. Missouri” into “Indian Country.” The revelation came while they were praying to know which of the seven elders should first preach to the “remnants of the Lamanites and Nephites.” The fourth paragraph (of seven) of Phelps’s recollection of the revelation had to do with marriage:

Verily I say unto you that the wisdom of man in his fallen state, knoweth not the purposes and the privileges of my holy priesthood. but ye shall know when ye receive

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accommodate” Harris’s single status. Martin and Lucy separated in June 1830 and Lucy died in the summer of 1836. He remarried in the fall. It was not uncommon for separated couples to remarry without divorce. Daniel W. Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage before the Death of Joseph Smith” (master’s thesis, Purdue University, 1975), 129–33.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Bullock Journal, 243–44, July 28, 1847, qtd. in Richard S. Van Wagoner, ed., *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Smith–Pettit Foundation, 2009), 1:287; 2 Nephi 5:21; Jacob 3:8–9; Mormon 9:6; 1 Nephi 11:13, 13:15.

<sup>27</sup> According to Young, white Mormon men marrying Indigenous women would have the opposite effect of a white Mormon man marrying a Black woman. The couple and progeny of a white and Black couple would be cursed, while the marriage of a white man/Lamanite woman would bless the Lamanites. Fred C. Collier, *The Teachings of President Brigham Young, Vol. 3, 1852–1854* (Salt Lake City: Colliers Publishing Co., 1987), 44; Brigham Young, “The Persecutions of the Saints,” Mar. 8, 1863, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86): 10:110.

<sup>28</sup> For Young on matrimonial alliances with Native Americans, see Van Wagoner, *Complete Discourses of Brigham Young*, Apr. 14, 1855, 931; May 10, 1857, 1265.

a fulness by reason of the anointing: For it is my will, that in time, ye should take unto you wives of the Lamanites and Nephites, that their posterity may become white, delightsome and Just, for even now their females are more virtuous than the gentiles.

In his letter titled “substance of a revelation,” Phelps remembered Smith saying “the Lord could preserve his words as he had ever done, till the time appointed” even though they had no pen and paper. But Phelps failed to list Martin Harris as one of the elders as he had done sixteen years earlier in his 1845 recollection. And only “part” of the revelation was recalled. Anachronisms in the text of the revelation also suggest events were not correctly recalled thirty years after the fact.<sup>29</sup> The letter continued, saying that in about 1834, Phelps asked Joseph Smith, “How ‘we,’ that were mentioned in the revelation could take wives from the ‘natives’—as we were all married men? He replied instantly ‘In th[e] same manner that Abraham took Hagar and Katurah [Keturah]; and Jacob took Rachel Bilhah and Zilpah: by revelation—the saints of the Lord are always directed by revelation.’”<sup>30</sup>

Evidence of plural marriage is extant later in the Kirtland period. The 1831 idea of a matrimonial alliance, and Joseph Smith’s study of the stories of the biblical polygamists could have aided in expanding the theological connotations of plural marriage in Smith’s mind.

In Mormon thought in 1861, plural marriage was central to the major events of the past decade, such as the public announcement of plural marriage, the Reformation, Utah War, Young’s encouragement to form matrimonial alliances with American Indians, and the saints’ apocalyptic perceptions of the unfolding Civil War. Phelps’s recollection of the words of the 1831 revelation thirty years earlier was affected by his current world view, possibly his 1834 questions to Joseph Smith about the revelation, and Brigham Young’s Utah teaching that plural marriage could change the racial characteristics of Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>29</sup> For example, it mentions that Zion will be redeemed, but the concept of redeeming Zion wouldn’t occur until after fall 1833 when the saints were forcibly removed from Jackson County.

<sup>30</sup> W. W. Phelps to Brigham Young, Aug. 12, 1861, Brigham Young Collection, CR 1234, CHL. For background on this revelation coming to light to the historical community, see Jerald and Sandra Tanner *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), 230.

The 1831 matrimonial revelation provided a potential solution to fulfill Smith's revelatory mandate to "go unto the Lamanites and preach my gospel unto them" (D&C 28:8). The most likely scenario explaining the revelation with available information is that Martin Harris, who was estranged from his wife, was to take an Indigenous wife in order to obtain legal access to Indian territory. Other accompanying Elders may have also been invited to participate in the alliance.

Statement on Marriage: "Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy"—August 1835

Polygamy evolved as a concept over time, and by 1835 rumors of plural marriage had propagated. The 1835 Doctrine and Covenants "Statement on Marriage" indicates that rumors of polygamy were circulating. These may have been from Smith teaching an early form of plural marriage, allegations of non-monogamous relationships by Smith, Cowdery, and others, or rumors that Mormons were practicing a form of communal wives.<sup>31</sup>

The statement stated: "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."<sup>32</sup> An 1837 resolution also addresses concerns of polygamy, "we will have no fellowship whatever with any Elder belonging to the quorums of the Seventies who is guilty of polygamy."<sup>33</sup> In 1838, Smith answered "not at the same time" to the question: "Do the Mormons believe in having more wives than one?"<sup>34</sup> A year later, Smith addressed rumors that "Some have reported that we not only dedicated our property, but likewise our families to the Lord ... a community of wives,"<sup>35</sup> and in 1840, he wrote "when a man consecrates or dedicates his wife and children to the Lord, he does not give them to his brother or to his neighbor."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Brian Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), 1:42-53,87-99,127-151,153-177.

<sup>32</sup> "Doctrine and Covenants 1835," Section 101, Aug. 1835, p. 251, JSP.

<sup>33</sup> Quorum of the Seventies "Resolution #1," *Messenger & Advocate*, May 1837, 511.

<sup>34</sup> "Joseph Smith, Questions and Answers, Far West, Caldwell Co., MO, 8 May 1838," JSP.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Smith, "To the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Caldwell county," (Dec. 16, 1839), *Times and Seasons*, Apr. 1840, 83-84.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Smith, "Communications," *Times and Seasons*, April 1840, 85.

Not long after the 1835 statement was published, without a license, Joseph Smith performed the marriage of abandoned and un-divorced Lydia Goldthwaite Bailey to Newel Knight on November 24, 1835. “I have done it by the authority of the holy priesthood and the Gentile law has no power to call me to account for it,” Smith stated. He would perform at least ten additional illegal marriages over the next two months, evidence that his views on marriage continued to evolve, and that he believed his authority superseded civil law.<sup>37</sup>

### Nauvoo Plural Marriage Revelations

The first documented non-monogamous relationship engaged in by Joseph Smith was with Fanny Alger, likely in 1836, and potentially associated with a revelatory experience.<sup>38</sup> In Nauvoo, religious innovation continued with the practice of “sealings,” which were a way to expand traditional relationships through a spiritual/priesthood dimension. Sealings often took on a marital dimension and could be for time (this life only), or for eternity (the next life) or both.<sup>39</sup> Sealings to Joseph included single and married women. There is evidence of plans for Emma, Joseph Smith’s first wife, to be sealed to a man other than Joseph. And there is evidence for other polyandrous relationships (i.e., more than one husband). Documented revelations are associated with some of these sealing-marriages or proposed marriages during the Nauvoo period and seem to have informed the July 1843 “Marriage Revelation” (D&C 132) that Smith said he knew “perfectly from beginning to end.”

John C. Bennett, mayor of Nauvoo and confidante of Joseph Smith’s, is an important, albeit controversial source of information about the Nauvoo-era revelations. It is therefore important to understand Bennett’s background before examining the revelations in detail. In 1840, Bennett came to Nauvoo and moved in with the Smiths in September, living there until the next June. He quickly became a prominent citizen by

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<sup>37</sup> “Journal, 1835–1836,” (Nov. 24, 1835) p. 49n130, JSP. From 1842 to 1844, it was common for the Nauvoo High Council to allow un-divorced individuals to pursue another marriage if there were no legal obstacles. Bachman, *A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage*, 129–33. Recall too that Joseph Smith received a revelation freeing Harris from his marriage (mentioned above). My thanks to Craig Foster for his perspective on divorce at that time.

<sup>38</sup> See Don Bradley, “Dating Fanny Alger” in this volume.

<sup>39</sup> See Todd Compton, “Were There ‘Eternity-Only’ Plural Marriages in Nauvoo?” in this volume for an exploration of “time” vs. “eternity” marriages by Smith.

helping create the Nauvoo Charter, becoming mayor of Nauvoo, establishing a university, and serving as an officer in the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge.

Smith appointed Bennett as “acting counselor” or “assistant President” in the First Presidency on April 8, 1841. By May, Bennett was having a sexual relationship with Catherine Fuller.<sup>40</sup> Smith began proposing and entering plural marriages while Bennett boarded with the Smiths.<sup>41</sup>

Bennett and those who followed his form of “spiritual wifery”<sup>42</sup> justified sexual relations with women (single or married) by telling them that sexual encounters were allowed if the parties kept them secret, that this was approved by Joseph Smith, and that any sin would fall upon the man rather than the woman.<sup>43</sup>

Chauncey Higbee, who was involved in Bennett’s spiritual wife system, told women “there could be no Sin when there was no accuser.”<sup>44</sup> In the midst of his own plural marriage activity, on November 7, 1841, Smith referred to the New Testament story of a woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8:3–11). Pointing out that no one accused her, Joseph preached: “If you have no accuser you will enter heaven, and if you will follow the revelations and instructions which God gives you through me, I will take you into heaven as my back load. If you will not accuse me, I will not accuse you....

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<sup>40</sup> During a high council inquiry into Bennett and others’ sexual relationships, Catherine Fuller testified on May 25, 1842, that “nearly a year ago I became acquainted with John C. Bennett, after visiting twice and on the third time he proposed unlawful intercourse being about one week after first acquaintance.” Catherine Fuller testimony before the Nauvoo High Council, May 25, 1842, Testimonies in Nauvoo High Council Cases, May 1842, MS 24557, fd. 1, CHL.

<sup>41</sup> Dating the first Nauvoo marriages is difficult. They seem to have originated between April 1840 and May 1841. See Gary James Bergera, “Memory as Evidence: Dating Joseph Smith’s Plural Marriages to Louisa Beaman, Zina Jacobs, and Presendia Buell,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 4 (Oct. 2015): 95–131.

<sup>42</sup> Spiritual wifery was a broad practice during that era, not confined to Mormonism. John L. Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 56.

<sup>43</sup> Fuller, High Council testimony.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret J. Nyman, High Council testimony, May 21, 1842; Matilda J. Nyman, High Council testimony, May 24, 1842. Higbee’s name is spelled in various ways in the minutes.

What many people call sin is not sin; I do many things to break down superstition, and I will break it down.”<sup>45</sup>

The commonalities and differences between Smith and Bennett’s 1840/1841 relationship activities are difficult to determine. Bennett promoted and engaged in ceremony-free relationships with the requirement of secrecy. Smith also required secrecy in addition to his personal authorization. It is unclear if he always required a ceremony.<sup>46</sup>

Rumors of Bennett’s relationships became a liability to Smith. In April 1842, charges of sexual impropriety were leveled against Bennett, and an investigation ensued. Bennett was amiable in May when he resigned his mayorship and left the church, stating that Smith did not authorize his illicit relationships. But in June, Smith published several pieces illustrating Bennett’s crimes. The exposure angered Bennett, who recanted his earlier position on Smith, claiming Joseph’s involvement in and authorizations of his relationships.

From late June to August 19, 1842, Bennett published a series of exposé articles about behind-the-scenes activities in Nauvoo in the *Sangamo Journal*. He reworked those articles into a book that fall. Some of his accounts have verifiable exaggerations. Other details can be corroborated and fill in previously unknown details. He also helped several women publish affidavits about Joseph Smith’s proposals, some included below (with notation of Bennett's involvement). In the end, it can be difficult to sort truth from

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<sup>45</sup> Willard Richards, Nauvoo, Illinois, to Levi Richards, Manchester, England, Nov. 11, 1841, typescript, Richards Family Papers, MS 12790, CHL; “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 Addenda,” 20, JSP. See also Smith’s conceptually similar discourse, “History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844],” (July 23, 1843) 1681, JSP.

<sup>46</sup> Decades later, Sarah Pratt, to whom Smith apparently proposed, remembered that Joseph’s earliest relationships did not require a ceremony. Other evidence suggests relationships without a ceremony.

falsehood and exaggeration from all sides.<sup>47</sup> When weighing evidence, Bennett’s background should be a factor.<sup>48</sup>

Sarah Pratt: “the Lord had given her to him”—late 1840/ early 1841

Regarding Sarah Marinda Pratt, Bennett spoke of a revelation where “the Lord had given her to him [Joseph Smith],” which had occurred “at an early day in the history of that city [Nauvoo].”<sup>49</sup> Bennett said he refused to help Smith propose to Pratt and again referred to the revelation, “if the Lord had given her to him he must attend to [the proposal] himself,” saying that Joseph “intended to make [Pratt] one of his *spiritual wives*, for the Lord had given her to him.” Bennett said he was with Smith at the time, and quoted Joseph as saying: “Sister Pratt, the Lord has given you to me as one of my spiritual wives. I have the blessings of Jacob granted me, as he granted holy men of old, and I have long looked upon you with favor, and hope you will not deny me.”

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<sup>47</sup> For a discussion on dishonesty about polygamy, see B. Carmon Hardy, Appendix I., B, “Lying for the Lord: An Essay,” in *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 363–88; “Nauvoo Journals, December 1841–April 1843,” Introduction to Journals, JSP. For Smith’s modification to the Abraham story allowing God-sanctioned dishonesty, see Susan Staker, “‘The Lord Said, Thy Wife Is a Very Fair Woman to Look Upon’: The Book of Abraham, Secrets, and Lying for the Lord,” in *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith*, Bryan Waterman, ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 289–318.

<sup>48</sup> I point out material passing through Bennett’s hands below and draw observations from them as I do other sources. For discussions on Bennett and polygamy, see Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon: A Portrait of Religious Excess* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 26–43; Andrew F. Smith, “John Cook Bennett’s Nauvoo,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* (2002 Nauvoo Conference Special Edition), 111–18; Gary James Bergera, “John C. Bennett, Joseph Smith, and the Beginnings of Mormon Plural Marriage in Nauvoo,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 25 (2005): 52–92; George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy: “... But We Called It Celestial Marriage”* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008), 65–73; Brian C. Hales, “John C. Bennett and Joseph Smith’s Polygamy: Addressing the Question of Reliability,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 2 (Apr. 2015): 131–81.

<sup>49</sup> The saints flowed into Commerce, Illinois, in late 1839, renamed “Nauvoo” in April 1840.

According to Bennett, Sarah replied: “I care not for the blessings of Jacob, and I believe in no such revelations, neither will I consent under any circumstances.”<sup>50</sup> Her husband, Orson Pratt, was on a mission in the British Isles at the time. Bennett said Smith justified the relationship by saying, “there is no harm in it if her husband should never find it out,” a concept repeated elsewhere by Bennett. In an interview in Utah decades later, Sarah Pratt confirmed that idea, recalling Joseph saying, “God does not care if we have a good time, if only other people do not know it.” She said that it wasn’t until later that Smith began including a marriage ceremony in his relationships.<sup>51</sup>

After his return from a mission, Orson Pratt became bewildered, and then suicidal when learning of the overtures to Sarah. She claimed Smith had proposed to her, while Joseph and others claimed she had a relationship with Bennett. Sarah and Orson were later excommunicated for not supporting Joseph—the alleged proposal was too much for them. Later the excommunication was overturned, and Orson became a fierce defender of polygamy. Sarah separated from her apostle-husband in Utah, upset with his “obsession with marrying younger women.” Sarah always maintained that Joseph Smith had proposed to her.<sup>52</sup>

#### Melissa Schindle: “first having the will of the Lord,”—fall 1841

Melissa Schindle, a young woman boarding with Catherine Fuller testified that Joseph Smith proposed a sexual encounter with her, sanctioned by revelation. “He ... told her it was the will of the Lord that he should have illicit intercourse with her,<sup>53</sup> and that

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<sup>50</sup> “Bennett’s Second and Third Letters,” *Sangamo Journal*, July 15, 1842, 2; emphasis in original. Bennett expanded details of the proposal in his later book, for example, “I have long looked upon you with favor, and an earnest desire of connubial bliss, I hope you will not repulse or deny me.” John C. Bennett, *History of the Saints* (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842), 229.

<sup>51</sup> W. Wyl [Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal], *Joseph Smith, the Prophet, His Family and His Friends* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Publishing Co., 1886), 60–63.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Van Wagoner, “Sarah Pratt: The Shaping of an Apostate,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19 (Summer 1986): 69–99; Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 1:575–93; Gary Bergera, *Conflict in the Quorum: Orson Pratt, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 7–51.

<sup>53</sup> Even though Smith dictated D&C 132:1, 37–39 which mentions Old Testament figures having concubines in addition to wives, he is elsewhere silent on the topic.

he never proceeded to do anything of that kind with any woman without first having the will of the Lord on the subject. This presumes a revelation prior to the proposal. Joseph told Melissa that “she must never tell of his propositions to her.”<sup>54</sup> Bennett, who published Schindle’s sworn testimony before a justice of the peace, was also accused of having a relationship with her.<sup>55</sup>

Marinda Nancy Hyde: “Hearken to Joseph in all things he shall teach”—December 2, 1841

While Marinda Nancy Hyde’s husband, Orson, was on an overseas mission from April 1840 to December 7, 1842, Wilford Woodruff delivered a copy of a revelation from Joseph Smith to Marinda on December 2, 1841, addressing her need for assistance. “Inasmuch as you have called upon me to know my Will concerning my handmaid Nancy Marinda Hyde,<sup>56</sup> Behold it is my Will that she should have a better place prepared for her, than that in which she now lives.”

In accordance with the revelation, she moved in with another family, improving her circumstances. The revelation ended referring to Smith’s earlier marriage proposal: “Let my handmaid Nancy Marinda Hyde hearken to the council [sic] of my Servant Joseph in all things whatsoever he shall teach unto her, and it shall be a blessing upon her and upon her children after her, unto her justification, saith the Lord.”<sup>57</sup> Hyde said this revelation

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Classifying Schindle as a concubine is one possible way to classify this relationship. See D. Michael Quinn, “Evidence for the Sexual Side of Joseph Smith’s Polygamy,” comments on Session #2A, “Reconsidering Joseph Smith’s Marital Practices,” Mormon History Association’s Annual Conference, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, June 29, 2012, (unabbreviated version, revised during July) 121–22n285.

<sup>54</sup> Abraham Fulkerson, Justice of the Peace (McDonough County, Ill.) account of Melissa Schindle’s sworn testimony, Bennett, “Bennett’s Second and Third Letters,” 2. The affidavit dates the encounter “in the fall of 1841.” Schindle signed the sworn affidavit with an “X” suggesting she didn’t know how to write and had help preparing the affidavit. She was married to George Schindle, listed as a member of the Nauvoo Legion. Mentioned in the same affidavit is a possible sexual encounter between Smith and Catherine F. Warren, which Bennett affirms.

<sup>55</sup> Fuller, May 25, 1842, Testimonies in Nauvoo High Council Cases.

<sup>56</sup> Hyde’s name is rendered “Nancy Marinda,” and at other times “Marinda Nancy.”

<sup>57</sup> “Revelation, Nauvoo, IL, 2 Dec. 1841” in *Book of the Law of the Lord, 1840–46*, 66, MS 22507, CHL. See also “Revelation, 2 December 1841,” JSP.

was given to her not long after Joseph Smith taught her about the “doctrine of celestial marriage” and she “followed the council [sic] of the prophet Joseph” hoping for “the fulfillment of the promises and blessing” of the revelation.<sup>58</sup> Two marriage dates are recorded for the polyandrous relationship (April 1842 and May 1843).<sup>59</sup> It might be that the second date was a repeat sealing for the benefit of her husband, who had returned from his mission on December 2, 1842.<sup>60</sup> Although challenged by the ordeal,<sup>61</sup> Orson Hyde soon became converted to polygamy, marrying his second wife in February or March 1843 with Smith officiating and Marinda as a witness. He married again on July 20, placing her second sealing date to Joseph between Orson’s first two plural marriages.<sup>62</sup>

Years later, she indicated there was an 1831 revelation to Joseph Smith about her: “The Lord gave me to Joseph Smith before I married Orson Hyde. This I did not know until ten years after, when Joseph taught me the doctrine of celestial marriage. This was in the fall of 1841.”<sup>63</sup> She said her husband Orson told “me that Joseph Smith before our

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<sup>58</sup> Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde Statement [ca. 1880], MS 23157, CHL.

<sup>59</sup> The first date is from a list of marriages recorded in Joseph Smith journal in the handwriting of Thomas Bullock, July 14, 1843, “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 2, 10 March 1843–14 July 1843,” [310], JSP. The other is from a May 1, 1869, affidavit signed by Marinda recorded in Joseph F. Smith, Affidavit about Celestial Marriage, 1:15, 4:15, CHL.

<sup>60</sup> Quinn, “Evidence for the Sexual Side of Joseph Smith’s Polygamy,” 43n236.

<sup>61</sup> Wilford Woodruff remembered “certain trials or tests ... as the plurality & Eternity of the M. [Marriage] covenant was being revealed ... [including] O. Hyde’s trial.” Franklin D. Richards journal, June 25, 1896, CHL, and in *Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1910–1951*, Privately Published, Salt Lake City, Utah 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 241.

<sup>63</sup> Mary Elizabeth Rollings Lightner, who also entered a polyandrous relationship with Smith, reported that he said he “made known to me that God had Commanded him in July 1834 to take me for a Wife” (Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, “Mary Elizabeth Rollins,” copy of holograph in Susa Young Gates Papers, Mss B 95, box 14, fd. 4, 18, Utah State Historical Society). She was about the same age as Marinda Nancy Johnson at the time (16).

marriage, requested him not to marry me, but gave no reason for the request.”<sup>64</sup> Joseph and Emma had moved into the Johnson home in mid-September 1831, nearly two months after the matrimonial marriage revelation, and stayed until the next September.<sup>65</sup> Marinda’s late recollection of the date of the 1831 revelation about her matches the timeframe that the Smiths lived with the Johnsons.

Martha Brotherton / Brigham Young: “it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives”— circa March 1842

Martha Brotherton reported a discussion with Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young, and Joseph Smith about plural marriage and an associated revelation. Between November 1841 and April 1, 1842,<sup>66</sup> Heber C. Kimball told her: “There are many things revealed in these last days that the world would laugh and scoff at; but unto us is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom.”

A little later, Brigham Young proposed to her saying:

Brother Joseph has had a revelation from God that it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives; for as it was in the days of Abraham, so it shall be in these last days ... if you will accept of me, I will take you straight to the celestial kingdom; and if you will have me in this world, I will have you in that which is to come, and brother

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<sup>64</sup> Hyde, Statement [ca. 1880].

<sup>65</sup> Marinda’s brother Luke Johnson wrote in 1858 that Joseph Smith was threatened with emasculation by a mob when Smith lived at the Johnson home on March 24, 1832, a common reprisal for sex crimes. A late source claims this was due to Smith’s familiarities with 16-year-old Nancy. If the mob attack was related to Nancy, it may suggest the date of Smith’s revelation to marry her occurred before March 24. For the emasculation attempt, see Luke Johnson, “History of Luke Johnson,” *Deseret News*, May 19, 1858, 53–54; Clark Braden and E. L. [Edmund Levi] Kelley, *Public Discussion of the Issues between the Reorganized Church ...* (St Louis: C. Braden, 1884), 202. For a discussion of issues with Braden/Kelly, see Brian Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 1:42–48.

<sup>66</sup> Rumors of the proposal were put down in the April 7, 1842, conference by Hyrum Smith who said, “a sister had been shut in a room for several days” to “induce her to believe in [a man] having two wives.” The Brothertons emigrated from England in November 1841. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy*, 151. Marquardt suggests March 1842. H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism, 1816–1844* (Salt Lake City: Xulon Press, 2005), 385.

Joseph will marry us here to-day, and you can go home this evening, and your parents will not know any thing about it.

Thus, by late 1841, Young was talking about a plural marriage revelation received by Smith and connecting it to Old Testament patriarchs. Ten minutes after he proposed to Brotherton, Joseph came into the room and told her:

I know that this is lawful and right before God, and if there is any sin in it I will answer for it before God,<sup>67</sup> and I have the keys of the kingdom, and whatever I bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever I loose on earth is loosed in heaven; and if you will accept of Brigham, you shall be blessed ... it would be the greatest blessing that was ever bestowed upon you... and if you do not like it in a month or two, come to me, and I will make you free again; and if he turns you off, I will take you on.

Joseph's offer to marry Martha if she didn't care for Brigham portrays a fluidity and non-permanence in early plural marriages. Young added: "and you will never have reason to repent it—that is, if I do not turn from righteousness, and that I trust I never shall." As she concluded her account, she noted: "The next day being Sunday, I sat down, instead of going to meeting, and wrote the conversation, and gave it to my sister."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The concept of the man answering for any sin was taught by Bennett's spiritual wife adherents.

<sup>68</sup> Sworn affidavit of Martha H. Brotherton, first published in "Martha H. Brotherton, Affidavit dated July 13, 1842," *Native American Bulletin* 1, no. 145 (July 16, 1842), and later in Bennett, "Bennett's Second and Third Letters," 2. Bennett biographer Andrew F. Smith believes Bennett helped Brotherton write the letter. Andrew F. Smith, *The Sainly Scoundrel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 105–6. Brian Hales agrees (Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 1:534–536). Gary Bergera believes the letter is free from Bennett's influence and is "persuaded that most, if not all, of Brotherton's account is accurate." Bergera, "John C. Bennett, Joseph Smith, and the Beginnings of Mormon Plural Marriage in Nauvoo," 155–56n78. The revelation is also mentioned in an article in the *Millennial Star* by Parley P. Pratt as a rebuttal to rumors that had reached England. It states Brotherton set up Joseph Smith and Brigham Young to appear as if they had "been trying to seduce her, by making her believe that God had given a revelation that men might have two wives." Readers were assured that "no such principle [of having

The conversation mentions a revelation about plural marriage in general, but not specifically about Brotherton. Brotherton would have been Young's first plural marriage. After her death, he had her sealed to him with her sister acting as proxy.<sup>69</sup>

Additionally, Young recalled in 1847 that Smith received a revelation for Young's November 2, 1843 plural marriage to Augusta Cobb. According to Young, "Sister Cobb was given me by Revelation from Joseph but I never did anything till long after she was given until I got the ceremonies performed and all made right."<sup>70</sup>

#### Nancy Rigdon: "Happiness Letter" Revelation—about April 10, 1842

On April 9, 1842, or shortly thereafter,<sup>71</sup> Joseph Smith's plural wife Marinda Nancy Hyde<sup>72</sup> arranged a private meeting between Smith and Nancy Rigdon, daughter of First Presidency member Sidney Rigdon. Nancy's brother-in-law George Robinson wrote that summer that Smith "stated to her that he had had an affection for her for several years, and wished that she should be his; that the Lord was well pleased with this matter, for he had got a revelation on the subject, and God had given him all the blessings of Jacob, etc., etc., and that there was no sin whatever."<sup>73</sup>

John C. Bennett mentioned this revelation, quoting Smith as saying, "the Lord has given her [Rigdon] to me to wife. I have the blessings of Jacob, and there is no

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two wives] ever existed among the Latter-day Saints, and never will." "Apostacy," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, Aug. 1842, 73–74.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 26n7; Gary James Bergera, "Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841–44," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 42n102.

<sup>70</sup> Entry for November 30, 1847, *Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1910–1951*, Privately Published, Salt Lake City, Utah 2010.

<sup>71</sup> It could have been on a later date. It was described as after the funeral of Ephraim Marks, which was held on April 9.

<sup>72</sup> Orson Hyde, "Speech of Elder Orson Hyde, delivered before the High Priests Quorum in Nauvoo, Apr 27, 1845 upon the course and conduct of Mr. Sidney Rigdon" (City of Joseph [Nauvoo], IL: John Taylor, 1845), 27; Bennett, "Bennett's Second and Third Letters," 2. Bennett says Smith asked Hyde to talk to Rigdon after the failed proposal.

<sup>73</sup> "Extract of a letter from General George W. Robinson to General James Arlington Bennett" (July 27, 1842) qtd. In Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 246.

wickedness in it. It would be wicked to approach her unless I had permission of the Lord, but as it is, it is as correct as to have a legal wife in a moral point of view.” Bennett said Smith “had asked the Lord for her, and that it was his holy will that he should have her—he told her that it would not prevent her from marrying any other person—that he had the blessings of Jacob granted to him—and that all was right.”<sup>74</sup>

Rigdon refused Joseph’s proposal and he dictated a letter to her a day or two later hoping to convince her to marry him. The letter contains the text of a revelation, one different from the revelation(s) described by Robinson and Bennett. This important letter also contains a rare discussion about revelation and plural marriage by Smith, including a discussion of revelation, examples of the role of revelation in accepting the principle of plural marriage, and a discussion of Smith’s views of religious ethics. Perhaps for plausible deniability in case the letter was discovered, plural marriage is never specifically mentioned, however the text and circumstances surrounding the letter make its object clear.

The letter begins by talking about obtaining happiness, keeping commandments, and revelatory ethics—each recurring themes in the letter. Its introductory phrase, “Happiness is the object and design of our existence,” has led this letter to be referred to as the “Happiness Letter.” The letter continues, introducing the concept of revelatory moral values: “That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another.” Other phrases in the letter describe a paradigm where revelation supersedes traditional assumptions of what is right and wrong: “We cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them,” “Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is,” and “things which might be considered abominable to all who understand the order of Heaven only in part, but which, in reality, were right.” Five months earlier, in November 1841, Smith preached a similar concept: “if you will follow the Revelations and instructions which God gives you through me, I will take you into heaven.... What many people call sin is not sin.”<sup>75</sup>

Smith then alludes to the New Testament parable of the ten talents. Regarding servants who profitably invested their talents, the parable states: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things”; and regarding the slothful servant: “Take therefore the talent from him, and

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<sup>74</sup> John C. Bennett “Letter from Gen. Bennett,” *Sangamo Journal*, July 8, 1842, 2; John C. Bennett, “Bennett’s Second and Third Letters,” 2. According to Bennett, Smith had asked for his help with the proposal.

<sup>75</sup> “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 Addenda,” 20, JSP.

give it unto him which hath ten talents” (Matt 25:21, 28). Joseph wrote to Rigdon that those who will not accept the offered revealed blessing (a plural marriage proposal) will lose that which they have, like talents hidden in the earth: “Blessings offered, but rejected, are no longer blessings, but become like the talent hid in the earth . . . the blessing is bestowed on those who will receive and occupy; for unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly, but unto him that hath not or will not receive, shall be taken away that which he hath, or might have had.”

Smith would invoke the hidden talents parable a year later. On April 2, 1843, he approached Benjamin F. Johnson about marrying his sister Almira Johnson. Benjamin recalled years later that Joseph told him that Smith would preach a sermon later that day about plural marriage “that no one but you will understand.”<sup>76</sup> Smith’s journal entry for that day mentions his sermon and hints at an obscure intension of the parable: “What is the meaning of the scriptures. he that is faithful over a few thi[n]gs shall be made ruler over many? & he that is faithful over many shall be made ruler over many more? What is the mea[n]ing of the Parable of the 10 talents?”<sup>77</sup> Johnson wondered at Smith’s abstruse sermon. Joseph “showed plainly that to him that hath shall be given more, and from him that had but one should be taken that he seemed to have, and given to him who had ten. This, so far as I could understand, might relate to families.”

The publication of Buckeye’s Lament, a satirical poem about Nauvoo polygamy, shows that the tie between the parable of the ten talents, and the consequence of rejecting plural marriage—was well known by early 1844:

The one or two [wives] that he may have,  
He’d be deprived of then;  
And they’ll be given as talents were  
To him who has got ten.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review* (Independence, MO: Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co., 1947) 91.

<sup>77</sup> “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 2, 10 March 1843–14 July 1843,” [43], JSP.

<sup>78</sup> “Buckeye’s Lamentation for Want of More Wives,” *Warsaw Message*, Feb. 7, 1844, 1. For background, see Gary James Bergera, “Buckeye’s Laments: Two Early Insider Exposés of Mormon Polygamy,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 95, no. 4 (Winter 2002–2003): 351.

This concept is also echoed in D&C 132:39, where David’s wives were given to another because of unauthorized polygamy, “he shall not inherit them out of the world, for I gave them unto another, saith the Lord.” And speaking of plural wives, Smith told William Clayton “you have a right to get all you can.”<sup>79</sup> These examples share the parable’s point of taking talents (wives) and giving them to someone who is more faithful. Section 132 merges the parable of the ten talents with the parable of the ten virgins, which are told back-to-back in Matthew. The ten talents become ten virgins, or wives which can be taken from a slothful servant and given to another who will “rule over many.” (Matt 1–30, Luke 11–27, D&C 132:52–53,62–63).<sup>80</sup>

The letter continues, equating God’s “blessing” and “gifts” with “enjoyments” that require revelatory approval: “It is proper that we should enjoy His gifts and blessings whenever and wherever He is disposed to bestow; but if we should seize upon those same blessings and enjoyments without law, without revelation, without commandment, those blessings and enjoyments would prove cursings.”

The letter also discusses the centrality of revelation, that it must be followed even if it appears unreasonable: “This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation.... Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire.” Smith then gives an example of Solomon asking for wisdom and receiving a “special revelation” which granted “every desire of his heart.” He continues, “So with Solomon; first he asked wisdom, and God gave it him, and with it every desire of his heart; even things which might be considered abominable to all who understand the order of heaven only in part, but which, in reality, were right, because God gave and sanctioned by special revelation.”<sup>81</sup>

This paragraph nearly names polygamy as the subject. Solomon’s plural wives and concubines that were “considered abominable” (Jacob 2:24) but here are “sanctioned by special revelation” as is similarly done in D&C 132:38 where God is quoted as saying

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<sup>79</sup> George D. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 115 (Aug. 11, 1843).

<sup>80</sup> See also Brigham Young, “The Gospel Incorporates All Truth, Etc.,” Aug. 31, 1873, *Journal of Discourses*, 16:160–71.

<sup>81</sup> Compare Jacob 2:23–24 speaking of the “grosser crime” of Solomon having “many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord. ... [because] God, delight[s] in the chastity of women.”

“many” of “my servants” “received many wives and concubines, and also Solomon ... and in nothing did they sin save in those things which they received not of me.”

The last part of the letter transitions into an unannounced revelation. It begins by directing Nancy Rigdon to seek for her own confirmation and warns that she should refrain from any man she has not been given by revelation, possibly a reference to her romantic interest in Francis Higbee.<sup>82</sup> “He [God] says, ‘Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find; but, if ye will take that which is not your own, or which I have not given you, you shall be rewarded according to your deeds.’”

The rest of the revelation is directed to a broader audience, although intended for Nancy’s ears. Presumably to those who accept Joseph’s proposal, the Lord will not withhold any “good thing” to those “who will listen to ... the voice of my servant,” for God delights in those who to “abide by the law of my kingdom.” Perhaps referring to turmoil they may feel in learning about plural marriage, the revelation assures them that joy will be the final result: “But no good thing will I withhold from them who walk uprightly before me, and do my will in all things; who will listen to my voice, and to the voice of my servant whom I have sent; for I delight in those who seek diligently to know my precepts, and abide by the laws of my Kingdom; for all things shall be made known unto them in mine own due time, and in the end they shall have joy.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 307n46.

<sup>83</sup> John C. Bennett, “6<sup>th</sup> Letter from Gen Bennett. Joe Smith’s Letter to Miss Rigdon,” *Sangamo Journal*, Aug. 19, 1842, 2; “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843] [addenda],” (Aug. 27, 1843) 3, JSP. Nancy Rigdon’s brother confirmed Smith’s proposal later. John Wickliffe Rigdon, “Affidavit, June 18, 1882,” in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1905), 83–84; also John W. Rigdon, “Life Story of Sidney Rigdon,” MS 3451, CHL, 164–69. Willard Richards is credited with penning and delivering the letter to Nancy and also wrote a letter to his wife about plural marriage that shared similar phraseology with the Happiness Letter. Devery S. Anderson, “‘I Could Love Them All’: Nauvoo Polygamy in the Marriage of Willard and Jennetta Richards,” *Sunstone Magazine*, June 2013, 171. In a carefully written response to Bennett’s letter, Nancy’s father Sidney Rigdon said that the letter “purporting to have been written by Mr. Joseph Smith to her, was unauthorized by her, and that she never said to Gen. Bennett or any other person, that said letter was written by said Mr. Smith, nor in his hand writing, but by another person.” “Affidavits and Certificates Disproving the Statements and

Margaret Nyman: “you have been guilty of illicit intercourse”—May 24, 1842?<sup>84</sup>

John C. Bennett shared excerpts of an undated case unconfirmed by contemporary materials in the LDS church archives.<sup>85</sup> The inquiry of Margaret Nyman refers to a revelation to Joseph Smith about her guilt of illicit intercourse. The revelation is mentioned twice (bolded) in the exchange.

*Inquisitor.* — Margaret, the **Lord has revealed that you have been guilty of illicit intercourse with men**; confess, and your fault shall be forgiven; if not, God’s curse will fall upon you.

*Margaret* — I will confess, I am young and once was innocent, but...

*Inq.* — Who was the first man deprived you of your virtue?

*Mar.* — Mr. W \_\_\_\_\_

*Inq.* — How came you to yield?

*Mar.* — He said Joseph approved of it, and I yielded \* \* \*

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Affidavits Contained in John C, Bennett’s Letters,” Aug. 31, 1842, *The Wasp*, Sep. 3, 1842, 3. For doubts about the authenticity of the letter, see Gerrit Dirkmaat, “‘Search for ‘Happiness’: Joseph Smith’s Alleged Authorship of the 1842 Letter to Nancy Rigdon,” *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 3 (July 2016): 94–119. For overviews of the proposal and aftermath, see Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 25–30; Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 239–40; Van Wagoner, *Sidney Rigdon*, 296–99.

<sup>84</sup> If this inquiry is not fabricated, it may have been on May 24, 1842. May 21–24, the High Council heard testimony from women about Bennett and others’ spiritual wifery. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, Margaret Nyman testified to the high council, a copy of which is extant. Later that day in a separate case, she, Sarah Miller, and Matilda Nyman testified in Joseph Smith’s suit against Chauncy Higbee for sexual slander. There is no available record of the content of their testimony, only that they testified. Docket book of Ebenezer Robinson, Chicago Historical Society (Ill.) collection of Mormon materials, 1836–1886, MS 8136, CHL. The following testimony may be from Smith’s lawsuit or other testimony to the High Council. For background, see John S. Dinger, “Sexual Slander and Polygamy in Nauvoo,” *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 3 (July 2018): 1–10. My thanks to John Dinger for bringing this to my attention.

<sup>85</sup> Gary James Bergera, “‘Illicit Intercourse’: Plural Marriage, and the Nauvoo Stake High Council, 1840–1844,” *John Whitmer Association Historical Journal* 23 (2003): 70n55. Bennett did not include this in his *History of the Saints*.

*Inq.* — Any others?

*Mar.* — Yes

*Inq.* — Give the next name.

*Mar.* — You must excuse me.

*Inq.* — If you do not, you will be cut off from the Church.

*Mar.* — Mr. B \_\_\_\_\_.

*Inq.* — Did he urge the same doctrine?

*Mar.* — No.

*Inq.* — How did he accomplish his purpose?

*Mar.* — We just went at it and asked no questions, for Joseph had approved it.

*Inq.* — Is there any other?

*Mar.* — Yes.

*Inq.* — Name him.

*Mar.* — It is not necessary, I am under a covenant.

*Inq.* — You must answer. Joseph directed us to absolve all covenants.

*Mar.* — I would rather defer it until I can consult the person.

*Inq.* — **Joseph knows all about it, it has been revealed to him by God**, and if you do not reveal it, the curse will fall on you; you must tell.

*Mar.* — It was Joseph.

*Inq.* — Stand aside, you need not tell that...<sup>86</sup>

On May 24 Nyman testified to the High Council that “Chancey Higby” used the name of Joseph Smith to convince her to have sex. She clarified in her testimony that she had no personal acquaintance with Joseph Smith.<sup>87</sup>

#### Sarah Ann Whitney: Marriage Ceremony Revelation—July 27, 1842

On July 27, 1842, nearly a year before D&C 132 was dictated, Joseph Smith received a revelation giving the words of a plural marriage ceremony. Newel K. Whitney<sup>88</sup> repeated

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<sup>86</sup> John C. Bennett, “ANTI-MORMON LECTURE. —The Secret Wife System at Nauvoo, as described by Gen. J. C. Bennett,” *New York Herald*, Sep. 4, 1842, 3096; emphasis added and lines formatted for readability.

<sup>87</sup> Testimony of Margaret J. Nyman before the High Council, May 21, 1842, published in “Chauncy L. Higbee,” *Nauvoo Neighbor*, May 29, 1844, 3.

<sup>88</sup> Newel K. Whitney became the second bishop of the church when Edward Partridge, the first bishop, took up residence in Missouri.

the revealed words to seal his daughter Sarah Ann to Smith. The revealed ceremony appears to be an expansion of the 1835 D&C Article on Marriage. Later Mormon marriage ceremonies such as the 1852 “solemnization of the marriage ceremony” published by Apostle Orson Pratt are based on the Whitney ceremony.<sup>89</sup>

Verily thus saith the Lord unto my se[r]vant N. K. Whitney the thing that my se[r]vant Joseph Smith has made known unto you and your Famely [family] and which you have agreed upon is right in mine eyes and shall be crowned upon your heads with honor and immortality and eternal life to all your house both old & young because of the lineage of my Preast [Priest] Hood saith the Lord it shall be upon you and upon your children after you from generation to generation By virtue of the Holy promise which I now make unto you saith the Lord.<sup>90</sup>

Newel is told that by his agreeing to marry his daughter to Smith, the marriage will bring eternal life to his household, including his posterity, reiterating Smith’s 1835 blessing to him seven years earlier: “He shall be blessed with all the fulness of the good things of this earth, and his seed after him from generation to generation.”<sup>91</sup> The marriage ceremony revelation continues: “These are the words which you shall pronounce upon my se[r]vant Joseph [Smith] and your Daughter S. A. [Sarah Ann] Whitney. They shall take each other by the hand and you shall say: ‘you both mutu[al]ly agree calling them by name to be each others companion so long as you both shall live presser[v]ing yourselv[es] for each other and from all others and also through [o]ut all eternity.’”

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<sup>89</sup> See ceremony text in Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” *The Seer* 1, no. 2 (Feb. 1853): 31–32. For commentary on the three ceremonies, see Kathleen Flake, “The Development of Early Mormon Marriage Rites,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 1 (Jan. 2015): 77–102. For references to Smith’s 1835 marriage ceremony, see Dan Vogel, *History of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: a Source-and Text-critical Edition* (Salt Lake City: Smith–Pettit Foundation), 2:318; See also Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 223–24.

<sup>89</sup> Bergera, ““Illicit Intercourse,”” 70n55.

<sup>90</sup> “Revelation, 27 July 1842, in Unidentified Handwriting–B,” JSP.

<sup>91</sup> Patriarchal Blessing Book, 1:33–34, Blessing of Newel K. Whitney by Joseph Smith Jr., Oct. 7, 1835 “through the Urim and Thummim,” H. Michael Marquardt, comp. and ed., *Early Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Smith–Pettit Foundation, 2007): 54.

Smith and Sarah Whitney agree to preserve themselves for each other and from all others forever—a puzzling agreement considering Smith’s complex marital situation. But a caveat is given to this arrangement to accommodate Joseph Smith’s other relationships. The revelation continues, “reserving only those rights which have been given to my servant Joseph by revelation and commandment and by legal Authority in times passed.” It appears that Smith’s reserved rights have to do with his plural wives that were designated by command/revelation, while the “legal Authority” reference refers to his legal marriage to Emma Smith. Joseph is to preserve himself from all others, except for his legal and revelation-designated plural marriages, past or future.

Rights are again mentioned regarding Whitney and Smith’s relationship: “If you both agree to covenant and do this, then I give you S. A. [Sarah Ann] Whitney my Daughter to Joseph Smith to be his wife to observe all the rights betwe[e]n you both that belong to that condition.” Note that Sarah is given to Joseph, but Joseph is not given to Sarah. The same practice continued later in sealings. The revelation invokes ancient priesthood lines, which will “concentrate” through their posterity. The mention of posterity indicates the marriage was to produce children. Newel is instructed to invoke the name of his wife, himself, and his ancestors:

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 of Priest Hood vested in me by revelation and commandment and promise of the living God obtained by the Holy Melchizedek Gethrow [Jethro<sup>92</sup>] and other of the Holy Fathers commanding in the name of the Lord all those powers to concentrate in you and through to your po[s]terity for ever.<sup>93</sup>

Revelations and translations through him often have Smith cast in a Moses-like role. The Old Testament says Moses stayed with Jethro, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses to marry (Ex. 2:21), just as Joseph stayed with Newel, who is now giving his daughter to Smith. The invocation of Jethro may refer to Newel, acting in a Jethro-like capacity as Newel’s ancestor (one of his “Holy Progenitors”). Smith considered Moses to be a polygamist like himself, and his marriage to Sarah may be in essence, a recreation of the Jethro / Moses / Zipporah story: “All these things I do in the name of the Lord Jesus

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<sup>92</sup> In Hebrew (which Joseph Smith had studied), “Jethro” can be translated as “his posterity.”

<sup>93</sup> “Revelation, 27 July 1842.”

Christ that through this order he may be gloryfied [glorified] and [that] through the power of anointing Davied [David] may reign King over Iseral [Israel] which shall hereafter be revealed[.]let immortality and eternal life henc[e]forth be sealed upon your heads forever and ever.”<sup>94</sup>

The text states that through the marriage of Sarah and Joseph, David would reign as king over Israel, and that future revelation would provide further illumination. In July 1843, a revelation indicated that David “hath fallen from his exaltation” and that “he shall not inherit them [his wives and concubines] out of the world, for I gave them unto another” due to “the case of Uriah and his wife” (D&C 132:39). David had arranged for Uriah’s death to obtain his wife Bathsheba.

The next spring, Smith would preach: “Although David was a king he never did obtain the spirit & power of Elijah & the fulness of the Priesthood, and the priesthood that he received & the throne & kingdom of David is to be taken from him & given to another by the name of David in the last days raised up out of his lineage.”<sup>95</sup> After Smith’s death, Sarah named three sons in a row “David” in an apparent attempt to fulfill the Davidic birthright promised to Sarah in her revealed wedding ceremony. She hoped that one of her Davids would reign over Joseph’s restored kingdom of Israel.

Her first son was named David Kimball Smith, his middle name reflecting either Sarah’s father’s middle name (Newel Kimball Whitney) or her “proxy” husband Heber C. Kimball’s surname. Sarah was married “for time” to Heber C. Kimball after Smith’s death. The surname “Smith” was for her eternal marriage to Joseph Smith, and to whom the son belonged in the afterlife. They named the birth spot “The Valley of David,” likely honoring the Davidic role the infant was expected to fill. Later, during an attempt to invoke an angel by several women, three young children came under attack by demons according to those present, and David Kimball Smith did not survive, despite Vilate Kimball’s prayer to take one of her children instead of David.<sup>96</sup> Later Sarah bore a second son who was also named David, who did not live to adulthood. A third son David lived to adulthood, passing away in 1927.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> “Revelation, 27 July 1842.”

<sup>95</sup> Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 2:226 (Mar 10, 1844).

<sup>96</sup> Vilate was Heber C. Kimball’s first wife, and now sister-wife to Sarah.

<sup>97</sup> H. Michael Marquardt, *The Strange Marriages of Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, and Joseph C. Kingsbury and Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co; Revised Edition, 1982), 17–79; Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 342–58. Thanks to Jacob Vidrine for bringing this to my attention.

Shortly before his death, with Emma pregnant, Joseph Smith also named his unborn son David, indicating his future Davidic role.<sup>98</sup>

The text of the marriage ceremony concluded by sealing eternal life on Joseph and Sarah. She was sealed to Joseph Smith later that day by her father and the ceremony was witnessed by her mother Elizabeth Ann Whitney.<sup>99</sup>

Newel, Elizabeth and Sarah Ann Whitney: “I <know> it is the will of God that you should comfort <me>” —August 18, 1842

On August 18, 1842, just over three weeks after Smith and Sarah Ann Whitney were married, he penned a letter to “Brother and Sister, Whitney, and &c. [Sarah Ann Whitney],” requesting the three visit him to comfort him while in hiding, have his blessings sealed on them, and attend to other unwritten matters.

Smith describes his loneliness from being in hiding and then reminds them of an earlier prophecy, “... now is the time to afford me succour, in the days of exile, for you know I foretold you of these things.”

After describing the logistics of how to meet him in his new hiding place, Smith notes the revelatory nature of his request. “I <know> it is the will of God that you should comfort <me> now in this time of affliction ... for I know the goodness of your hearts, and that you will do the will of the Lord, when it is made known to you;”

Smith adds another purpose for their visit, “one thing I want to see you for is <to> get the fulness of my blessings sealed upon our heads, &c.” This makes it clear that Smith’s letter is tied to the blessings associated with his plural marriage to Sarah Ann.

Throughout the letter he reiterated the importance of secrecy, that they are not safe if Emma comes, that matters “can be attended to with most perfect saf[e]ty” in his private room, but he “cannot write them [his plans] on paper, burn this letter as soon as you read it ...”<sup>100</sup> Some believe the letter suggests an invitation for a sexual rendezvous.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Valeen Tippetts Avery, *From Mission to Madness: Last Son of the Mormon Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 44–45.

<sup>99</sup> At this time Elizabeth Ann Whitney was a counselor to Emma Smith in the Nauvoo Relief Society.

<sup>100</sup> Letter to Newel K., Elizabeth Ann Smith, and Sarah Ann Whitney, August 18, 1842, JSP.

<sup>101</sup> See for example William Lawrence Foster, “Between Two Worlds: The Origins of Shaker Celibacy, Onedia Community Complex Marriage, and Mormon Polygamy” (University of Chicago, 1976), 247-8.

It is unknown if the Whitneys visited Smith that evening. What blessing Smith had in mind are unknown, but Sarah Ann would receive additional blessings under Smith's hand the next spring.

Sarah Ann Whitney: "if she remain in the Everlasting covenant" —March 23, 1843

Eight months after Sarah Ann Whitney's marriage to Joseph Smith, he wrote the text of a blessing for her, which included an appeal to the Lord. The blessing, written in Joseph's hand, has the first-person voice of God (italics) responding to Smith's request about his plural wife who had turned eighteen years old the day before:

Oh Lord my God thou that dwellest on the high bless I beseech of thee the one into whose hands this may fall and crown her with a diadem of glory in the Eternal worlds[.] Oh let <sup>it</sup> be sealed this day on high that she shall come forth in the first resurrection to receive the same *and verily it shall be so saith the Lord if she remain in the Everlasting covenant to the end as also all her Fathers house shall be saved in the same Eternal glory[.] and if any of them shall wander from the fo<sup>a</sup>ld of the Lord they shall not perish but shall return saith the Lord and be saived ~~it~~ and by repentance be crowned with all the fullness of the glory of the Everlasting Gospel[.]* These promises I seal upon all of their heads in the name of Jesus Christ by the Law of the Holy Priesthood even so Amen."<sup>102</sup>

Smith's petition that Sarah be crowned and have her blessings assured "this day" is postponed. The revelation quotes God as saying it "shall be so" if she stays in the "Everlasting covenant till the end."

The earlier marriage ceremony revelation helps clarify what the "everlasting covenant" entailed in this context. There, the same blessings are repeated, with the requirement of doing "the thing that my se[r]vant Joseph Smith has made known unto you ... and which you have agreed upon," i.e., her marriage to Joseph. We can therefore infer that in the written blessing, Sarah was to remain in her marriage (everlasting covenant) to Joseph, and all that it entailed, so that she and her family could receive the associated blessings.

On the same day in the presence of Sarah and her parents, her recently widowed uncle-in-law, Joseph C. Kingsbury, received a "Patriarchal and sealing blessing" from

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<sup>102</sup> "Blessing Given to Sarah Ann Whitney by Joseph Smith. Nauvoo City, March 23, 1843," typescript copy of holograph, CHL; emphasis added.

Joseph Smith: “I seal thee up to come forth in the first resurrection, unto eternal life, and thy companion Caroline, who is now dead.” Kingsbury and his deceased wife<sup>103</sup> (Sarah’s aunt) are sealed, and he is told “no one shall have power to take her from thee, and you both shall be crowned.”<sup>104</sup> Kingsbury is unconditionally blessed with the first resurrection and crowned, while the same blessings are conditional for Sarah and her family. Referring to events just over a month later, Kingsbury wrote:

And on the 29th of April 1843 I according to President Joseph Smith counsel & others agreed to stand by Sarah Ann Whitney as supposed to be her husband & had a pretended marriage for the purpose of bringing about the purposes of God in these last days ... and also Joseph Smith, & Sarah Ann Should Rec’d a Great Glory Honor & Eternal Lives and I also should Rec’d a Great Glory Honor & Eternal lives to the full desire of my heart in having my Companion Caroline in the first resurrection to claim her & no one to have power to take her from me<sup>105</sup>

The civil marriage of Kingsbury and Whitney was legal, but from Smith’s perspective it was a pretend marriage designed to cover for his own marriage to Sarah, possibly in case of pregnancy.<sup>106</sup> Kingsbury reported that this marriage would bring him eternal life, that he would have Caroline in the first resurrection, and that no one could take her from him—the same blessings promised in his earlier patriarchal-sealing blessing. That the same blessings are reported in the March 23 blessing, and the April 29 marriage tells us that the earlier blessings of both Kingsbury and Whitney likely had to do with the proposed pretend marriage. The contingency placed on Sarah’s blessings for her and her family by staying in the everlasting covenant might be explained by an initial reluctance by her to marry Kingsbury.

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<sup>103</sup> Caroline Whitney Kingsbury passed away in October 1842, sister of Newel K. Whitney.

<sup>104</sup> Patriarchal Blessing Book, 1:145, CHL, in Marquardt comp., *Early Patriarchal Blessings*, 216.

<sup>105</sup> Joseph C. Kingsbury, “History of Joseph C. Kingsbury,” (photocopy of manuscript), in Ronald and Ilene Kingsbury Collection, MS 522 box 3 fd. 2, pgs. 12–16, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

<sup>106</sup> For a possible proposed sexual encounter, see discussion above in ‘Newel, Elizabeth and Sarah Ann Whitney: “I <know> it is the will of God that you should comfort <me>” —August 18, 1842.’

While there are no other known revelations about Sarah Ann Whitney and plural marriage, a brief overview of her evolving family relationships after her marriage to Joseph C. Kingsbury is instructive and provides a fascinating example of Mormon family complexity. After Smith's death, Sarah was sealed to apostle Heber C. Kimball, and became pregnant by him, although she continued to use the surname Kingsbury. In 1846, she was resealed to Smith "for eternity" in the Nauvoo Temple with Kimball standing as Smith's proxy during the ceremony. She was then sealed "for time" to Kimball. Later, Kingsbury would become Newel K. Whitney's spiritually adopted son through the law of adoption,<sup>107</sup> making Kingsbury essentially a spiritual brother to his pretend wife Sarah. Kingsbury added two additional wives to his family, who were also spiritually adopted as daughters to Sarah's father. As has been discussed, Sarah and Heber would produce three sons they named David, who was to be Joseph and Sarah's promised Davidic heir.<sup>108</sup>

#### Revelations Regarding Jane and William Law, Emma and Joseph Smith

The relationships between Emma Smith, William Law, Joseph Smith, and Jane Law are complex, and more than one related revelation is mentioned in the historical record.

Some evidence suggests Smith considered acceptance of the principle of plural marriage to be a prerequisite test of faith to a couple's eternal marriage.<sup>109</sup> First Presidency members William Law and Hyrum Smith opposed plural marriage when it was first introduced to them. On May 26, 1843, Brigham Young convinced Hyrum that

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<sup>107</sup> The Law of Adoption provided a method for men and women to be spiritually adopted to a man, typically of a higher priesthood authority. Samuel M. Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation," *Journal of Mormon History* 37 no. 2 (Summer 2011): 3–52; Jonathan A. Stapley, "Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism," *Journal of Mormon History*, 37 no. 2 (Summer 2011): 53–117.

<sup>108</sup> Marquardt, *Strange Marriages of Sarah Ann Whitney*, 1–23; Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 342–53.

<sup>109</sup> Although Andrew Ehat wrote that "the practice of plural marriage was never a prerequisite to receiving these, the highest ordinances of salvation; however, Joseph Smith believed that God told him to employ this principle as a means of testing the faith of those selected to receive these temple blessings." Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982), 75.

plural marriage was a correct principle.<sup>110</sup> Joseph then reanointed members of the anointed quorum, the locus of the unfolding Nauvoo-era temple rites where washings, anointings, endowment rituals, and sealing ceremonies were practiced. Law's name was excised from some records of the meeting of the 26th even though he attended. The first eternal marriages occurred on May 28, and Law is not listed as attending from the 28th until late August. Law continued to work with Smith, fulfilling his first presidency duties.

Hyrum encouraged Joseph to dictate a revelation that he hoped would convince Emma to soften her stance on plural marriage, resulting in the July 12 revelation known as D&C 132, a partial copy of which was lent to Law.

A few weeks later, on August 3, Joseph "Conversed about W[illiam] Law, Emma &c" and on the 27th, Law began attending Quorum of Anointed meetings again. On October 1, Law was reanointed, perhaps suggesting he had finally accepted the doctrine of plural marriage, presumably a prerequisite to William and Jane Law being sealed for eternity. It may though, have been in preparation to place Law and Amasa Lyman in the First Presidency after Smith's planned removal of Sidney Rigdon.<sup>111</sup> At some point, Law seems to have temporarily accepted plural marriage. He reflected that "through our religious zeal we harkened to the teachings of man, more than to the written word of God; yea, (for a short moment) ... but his spirit prevailed and before the fearful step was taken."<sup>112</sup> Law would later claim that Smith began living in an open state of adultery with Maria Lawrence on October 12<sup>113</sup> and Law would attend his last anointed quorum meeting on November 1. His friendship with the Lawrence family went back to their days in Canada, and Smith's relationship with Maria may have been particularly troubling. Tensions had increased enough between the two men that by December 28, Law was

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<sup>110</sup> Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 106 ( May 26, 1843); Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:42-47.

<sup>111</sup> At the conference, Smith campaigned against Rigdon, but when put to a vote, Smith's desires were overturned, and Rigdon remained in the First Presidency.

<sup>112</sup> William Law journal, Jan. 1, 1844, in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *William Law: Biographical Essay; Nauvoo Diary; Correspondence; Interview* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book Company, 1994), 37. For questions about the reliability of Law's diary, see Benjamin E. Park, "William Law's Diary and the Perils of Suspect Sources," *Journal of Mormon History* 48, no. 2 (April 2021): 123–127.

<sup>113</sup> On October 26, 1843, Smith performed a marriage ceremony between his plural wife Maria Lawrence and John M. Bernhisel, possibly as an attempt to cover up Smith's marriage to Lawrence.

certain that Smith had him in mind when remarks about a right-hand “Brutus” were delivered by Smith.

The next year on May 13, 1844, Law recorded that Smith “had lately endeavored to seduce my wife, and had found her a virtuous woman,”<sup>114</sup> and on May 17, Law and other dissidents were excommunicated. On May 23, Law filed a suit against Smith for lying and adultery, and the next day Smith accused him and others of conspiring to take his life. The situation further deteriorated, and Law and others started a paper called the *Nauvoo Expositor*, which Smith ordered destroyed after the city council declared it a public nuisance. Before month’s end, Joseph and Hyrum Smith would be arrested for destroying the press, and then murdered by a mob.

The primary factors feeding into revelations regarding the Smiths and Laws were Joseph’s desire for the Laws to accept plural marriage, their inability to accept it as divinely sanctioned, and William and Jane Law’s desire to be eternally married. Factors from Emma include her anger over Joseph’s plural wives and her desire to be married to another husband, possibly William Law (see below). Another driver was a possible love interest between Jane Law and Joseph Smith. It is in this context that at least three revelations occurred, one of which was D&C 132.

Emma Smith and William Law(?): “Partake not of that which I commanded”—between May and July 12, 1843

On June 23, 1843, Joseph confided some “delicate matters” to William Clayton about a “snare” Emma wanted to set for Joseph as a matter of revenge. Emma said, “She thought that if he [Joseph] would indulge himself[,] she would too.”<sup>115</sup> Two and a half weeks later Joseph dictated the D&C 132 revelation at Hyrum’s request to help convince Emma to soften her attitude towards plural marriage.

The text beginning in verse 41 begins a new section of the revelation, responding to Joseph’s question “concerning adultery.” The section shifts from a generic discussion of eternal and plural marriage and addresses contemporary concerns about the practice. Emma’s planned snare and threat to indulge herself would still have been fresh on Joseph’s mind. Also at play was Emma’s fury over her husband’s relationships with other

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<sup>114</sup> The entry was later crossed out.

<sup>115</sup> Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 108 (June 23, 1843).

women, leading her to threaten divorce.<sup>116</sup> The initial verses of this section (41–42) explore the scenario of a sealed woman sleeping with another man, while 43–44 explore a sealed husband sleeping with another woman. Smith’s concern about Emma and other men was evident from at least late May when he asked William Clayton if he “had used any familiarity with E[mma]. I told him by no means & explained to his satisfaction.”<sup>117</sup> The verses suggests that Smith could have a revelation to determine a woman’s fidelity, as he had done (or would do so) with Law (discussed below): “(41) ... if a man receiveth a wife in the new and everlasting covenant, and if she be with another man, and I have not appointed unto her by the holy anointing, she hath committed adultery ... (42) If she be not in the new and everlasting covenant, and she be with another man, she has committed adultery.”

A form of polyandry is inferred in verse 41 where a virtuous woman who is sealed to a man can “be with” another man if she has been appointed by the holy anointing.<sup>118</sup> Verse 42 reinforces this idea by inferring that if she is in “the new and everlasting covenant,” and “be with another man,” it is not adultery. Both verses indicate that it is adultery only if she is not in the covenant, and not anointed.<sup>119</sup> Emma and Joseph had

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<sup>116</sup> After D&C 132 was dictated and read to Emma, William Clayton wrote in his diary that “she did not believe a word of it and appeared very rebellious. J[oseph] told me to Deed all the unincumbered lots [65 parcels of church property] to E[mma]. and the children He appears much troubled about E[mma].” Smith would also deed half of his steamboat to her. On August 18, 1843, Clayton recorded that Joseph feared that Emma would divorce him unless he relinquished all his wives. See Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 110, 117 (July 12, 1843, and Aug. 18, 1843).

<sup>117</sup> Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 106 ( May 29, 1843).

<sup>118</sup> It is unclear from the text if the women must be appointed to a specific man via the anointing, or if she must receive her anointing before she can be with a man.

<sup>119</sup> Quinn interprets v. 41: “The revelation did not discuss the circumstance this verse only implied—when God appoints another man unto a woman who is already married. Consistent with the above verse, there would be no adultery on the part of the woman or on the part of this other man whom God has ‘appointed’ to be with her sexually.” Quinn, “Evidence for the Sexual Side,” 54.

already received their first anointings. They would both receive their second anointings the next month.<sup>120</sup>

The revelation points out Joseph's revelatory power to discern adulterers, and his authority to reassign the victimized spouse to another partner: "And if she hath not committed adultery, but is innocent ... and I reveal it unto you, my servant Joseph, then shall you have power, by the power of my Holy Priesthood, to take her and give her unto him that hath not committed adultery" (D&C 132:44).

Verse 51 refers to an earlier revelation to Emma Smith and rescinds it. She is told by the Lord to "partake not of that which I commanded you [Joseph] to offer her" and "to abide and cleave unto my servant Joseph, and to none else" (verse 54). Emma may have been offered a companion around the time of the "snare" (June 23), or perhaps when learning of other marriages by her husband. But the offer is now rescinded, with the ensuing frustration classified as an Abrahamic sacrifice. Erastus Snow provided his interpretation of D&C 132:51 years later in 1883: "Emma used her womanly nature to teas[e] and annoy Joseph and went so far as to threaten Joseph that she would leave Him and cohabit with another man and the Lord forbade her in the Revelation."<sup>121</sup> Wilford Woodruff also recalled this in 1896 at a meeting with apostles as one of a series of difficult challenges, "certain trials or tests to which Prests. B. Young and Jno. Taylor were put by Prest. Joseph the Prophet in Nauvoo, as the plurality & Eternity of the M. [Marriage] covenant was being revealed. Also what Emma was commanded to abstain from, and O. Hyde's trial also."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> "Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 3, July 15, 1843–February 29, 1844," Sep. 28, 1843, 110, JSP; David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 62–68.

<sup>121</sup> "A Sinopsas [sic] of Remarks made by Apostle E[rastus] Snow July 22 [1883] at Nephi [Utah] Sunday evening," reported by Thomas Crawley, clerk of the Juab Utah Stake Conference, LR 4242 32, CHL. Snow was taught about plural marriage on April 17, 1843, "the Lord was now 'requiring his chosen and proved servants to take unto themselves wives.'" Smith "introduced several of those who had been sealed to himself and others of the first elders of the Church." "Autobiography of Erastus Snow, Dictated to his son Franklin R. Snow in the year 1875," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 14, no. 3 (July 1923): 107–10. Snow would plurally marry Minerva White in April 1844, the first of thirteen plural wives.

<sup>122</sup> Franklin D. Richards journal, 1844–1899, vol. 46, MS 1215, CHL.

An 1844 account by Joseph Jackson names William Law as the person offered to be sealed to Emma.<sup>123</sup> According to Jackson, William Law had been “trying to seduce Emma.” Jackson further reports:

Emma wanted Law for a spiritual husband, and that she urged as a reason, that as he had so many spiritual wives, she thought it but fair that she should at least have one man spiritually sealed up to her, and that she wanted Law, because he was such a “sweet little man.” ... [Joseph] remarked, that if all parties were agreed, that he and Law had better swop [swap] wives; to which he replied that that was all Emma wanted.

For the purpose of effecting his object, he got up a revelation that Law was to be sealed up to Emma, and that Law’s wife was to be his: in other words, there was to be a spiritual swop... It may be proper here to observe, that Law, although one of the principal men of the church, yet he was not one of those to whom It was given to know “the fullness of the kingdom” [i.e. full acceptance into the quorum of anointed / eternal marriage. Due to his rejection of plural marriage] Law [was] cut off from the holy order...

I went down to Joe’s house, and on entering, I found Joe in conversation with Emma, who was weeping bitterly. . . . He said she was mad because she could not get Law for a spiritual husband, and that he would be obliged to turn off [sic - out?] his spiritual wives, that he kept about the house.<sup>124</sup>

Years later, William Law said there was no proposed wife swap, recalling that: “Joseph offered to furnish his wife, Emma, with a *substitute* for him, by way of compensation for his neglect of her, on condition that she would forever stop her opposition to polygamy and permit him to enjoy his *young wives* in *peace* and keep some of them in her house and to be well treated, etc.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> William Law as Emma’s potential plural husband is not conclusive. William Clayton and possibly others are potential candidates.

<sup>124</sup> Joseph H. Jackson, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Experience of Joseph H. Jackson* (Warsaw, IL: Signal Office, 1844), 20–26. Some question the reliability of Jackson.

<sup>125</sup> “Three Letters from William Law on Mormonism: Letter I,” Shullsburg, Wis., Jan. 7, 1887, reprinted in the *Daily Tribune*, Salt Lake City, Tuesday, July 3, 1887, emphasis in original.

William and Jane Law: “‘no’ because Law was a Adulterous person” —before May 13, 1844<sup>126</sup>

On May 23, 1844, William Law accused Joseph Smith of lying and adultery. The next day Smith charged Law with conspiring to take the life of Joseph and his family. That same day, Alexander Neibaur “called at J Smith” where Joseph described a revelation regarding Jane, William, and himself. After Joseph recounted his first vision to Neibaur, he continued: “Told about Wm. Law— [who] wisht to be Married to his Wife for Eternity’[.] Mr Smith said would Inquire of the Lord, [who] Answered [‘]no because Law was a[n] Adulterous person[’]. Mrs Law wandt [wanted] to know why she could not be Married to Mr Law[.] Mr. S[mith] said [he] would not wound her feeling by telling her.”<sup>127</sup>

Later, when William was not at home, Joseph reported that Jane invited him in as he passed by: “She drawing her Arms around him [‘]if you want [won’t] seal me to my husband Seal myself unto you,[’] he Said [‘]stand away[’] & pusshing her Gently aside giving her a denial & going out, when Mr. Law came home he Inquiret who had been in his Absence, she said [‘]no one but Br Joseph,[’] he then demandet what had pass[ed.] Mrs L[aw] then told [‘]Joseph wandet [wanted] her to be Married to him.[’]”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Dating this revelation is difficult as references to it are reflections on past events. Quinn speculates that it was around October 1, 1843. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 496. Law’s journal entry that Smith had “lately” tried to seduce Jane Law is dated May 13, 1844. His previous entry is May 1, suggesting the proposal occurred between these dates. Cook, *William Law*, 52.

<sup>127</sup> Quinn believes the reason Law was reanointed into the anointed quorum on October 1 was because he had confessed to adultery. Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 496; Cook, *William Law*, 25–27.

<sup>128</sup> Alexander Neibaur journal, May 24, 1844, MS 1674, 26–27, CHL. See also Grant H. Palmer, “Why William and Jane Law Left the LDS Church in 1844,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 32, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2012): 43–51; Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 2nd edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 176–79; Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 97–100.

Smith's attempt to marry Jane may be an application of D&C 132:43–44 that states that Smith has the power to reappoint marriages if the husband committed adultery.

Factors feeding into this revelation include the Laws' desire to be eternally sealed, their refusal to accept plural marriage, William's accusation that Smith was an adulterer, Smith's suspicion that William was an adulterer, as well as Joseph's suspicions of Emma's infidelity (her threat to "indulge" herself). Joseph reported that the Lord revealed that William and Jane could not be eternally married because William was guilty of adultery.<sup>129</sup> Neibaur's recounting of Smith's report describes the proposal twice, once with Jane proposing to Joseph, and then Joseph proposing to Jane.

Likely describing the same event, on May 13, 1844, Law recorded in his diary that Joseph Smith "had lately endeavored to seduce my wife, and had found her a virtuous woman."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Hyrum Smith also reported that William Law confessed adultery to him, although it appears that Hyrum had just been dishonest in the same article when he stated that the revelation (D&C 132) had only to do with former times. *Nauvoo Neighbor* June 19, 1844, 2. Accusations of adultery between Smith and Law occur multiple times: October 1, 1843—Law reappointed into the anointed quorum because he may have confessed to adultery (per Quinn); October 12, 1843—Joseph Smith begins living in open state of adultery according to Law; May 17, 1844—William Law excommunicated without charge of adultery; May 23, 1844—Law files suit against Smith for lying and adultery; May 24, 1844—Smith tells Alexander Neibaur of a revelation that Law had committed adultery; May 26, 1844—In response to Law's accusations, Smith preaches: "What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one"; June 19, 1844—Hyrum Smith statement about Law's adultery in *Nauvoo Neighbor*. D&C 132:60 suggests Smith may have been guilty of adultery, and v.52 suggests some of the women he was married to were guilty of adultery.

<sup>130</sup> This portion of a longer entry is crossed out. After Smith's death, the Council of Fifty minutes reported that "Wm. Law and his brother Wilson were especially active in fanning the flame of prejudice and excitement, because Prest. Joseph would not seal Wm. Law to his wife for eternity in consequence of his being an adulterer." "Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846; Volume 1, 10 March 1844–1 March 1845," [290], JSP.

On April 18, 1844, several dissidents were cut off from the church including William Law. Obscure trial notes provide additional information that mirror much of Neibaur's account.<sup>131</sup> According to a Mr. Scott's<sup>132</sup> testimony, Joseph said that:

[William] Law [spoke] yesterday [about] Gods—more wives—full Mormons<sup>133</sup>— [Law] spoke against Joseph=[and spoke about] William Law's, rights [to be sealed].— [Joseph] Went to Wm['s] wife to attempt to seduce her.— Joseph wanted her to come into the order.<sup>134</sup>

[The Laws were] not privilege[d] to [be] se[a]led unless he [William] obe[ye]d, & marry more [women. It is a] privilege [to be] seal[e]d to him — watch[ed for] his opportunity[.] Wm [was] out [of the house, Joseph was] in bed room attempt to take her abed.—

repent & kill him— spare his life

she told her husband, get time[?] told William. —Joseph swore & c[onfessed?] —Wm told Joseph Wm wife lied some when, Joseph said you did[.] Joseph acknowledged—& sealed William & wife.— was not a more gallant scoundrel ever hung between the heavens, and the earth.<sup>135</sup>

Scott's testimony appears to suggest that some lying had occurred between Joseph and Jane, and when that was cleared up, Joseph went ahead and sealed Jane and William

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<sup>131</sup> See also Lyndon W. Cook, "William Law, Nauvoo Dissenter," *Brigham Young University Studies* 22 no. 1 (Fall 1982): 65n82.

<sup>132</sup> Here, Scott's first name is variously transcribed as "Jno" ("John") or "Jak" (IE "Jacob"). Jacob was the father of John, both living in Nauvoo.

<sup>133</sup> D&C 132:18–20 describes eternal marriage as an avenue to becoming gods.

<sup>134</sup> Possibly Holy Order (also called the Anointed Quorum). Or possibly the order of celestial marriage.

<sup>135</sup> Quorum of Twelve Apostles Minutes, Meeting of Apr. 18, 1844 with the High Council, Presidents of Seventies: (Trial of Laws), Box "High Council Meetings, etc., conference and public meetings," CA, folder, "Minutes of Council of Twelve," CHL. My bracketed supplementary text depends on a reconstruction of Scott's testimony in Robert M. Call, "Anatomy of a Rupture: Identity Maintenance in the 1844 Latter-Day Saint Reform Sect," (master's thesis, Utah State University, 2017), 44.

Law.<sup>136</sup> Providing additional context, Joseph Jackson reported in 1844 that Smith told him:

He had been endeavoring for some two months [mid-November 1843 to mid-January 1844], to get Mrs. William Law for a spiritual wife. He said that he had used every argument in his power, to convince her of the correctness of his doctrine, but could not succeed.... [Joseph said] that Law was trying to seduce Emma, and he was determined to beat him.... He and Emma had both tried to persuade her [Jane Law] of the correctness of the doctrine, but that she would not believe it to be of God.<sup>137</sup>

Lydia Moon, William Clayton, and Joseph Smith: “a New Item of Law”—on or before September 15, 1843

Two months after D&C 132 was dictated, Smith received a revelation regarding marital harmony in polygamous relationships. In addition to his first wife, William Clayton had married two sisters, and wanted to marry a third—Lydia Moon. When he asked Joseph Smith about it: “Joseph told me he had lately had a new item of law revealed to him in relation to myself. He said the Lord had revealed to him that a man could only take 2 of a family except by express revelation and as I had said I intended to

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<sup>136</sup> For a sense of how the story would come to be perceived, see Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19: The Story of a Life in Bondage, Being a Complete Expose of Mormonism, and Revealing the Sorrows, Sacrifices and Sufferings of Women in Polygamy* (Hartford, CT: Dustin, Gilman & Co., 1876), 61; and Jackson, *Narrative of the Adventures*, 21. Years later, anointed quorum member Bathsheba Wilson Bigler Smith testified under oath that she thought Joseph Smith and Jane Law were sealed for eternity: “Q:- And she was sealed to him [Joseph Smith] for eternity? A:- I believe she [Jane Law] was.” Bathsheba Smith Deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, respondent’s testimony, part 3, page 318, questions 564–77, CHL. An 1867 third-hand account reports that when looking at church history records, Brigham Young “found by examination that ... [William] Laws wife” and several others “had all been Sealed to Joseph, as their Husbands could not Save them.” (John Hawley, *Autobiography*, 97, Jan. 1885, Community of Christ Library and Archives). Also compare Smith’s dream of contention followed by reconciliation with Law on June 13, 1844. “History, 1838–1856, volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844],” 94, JSP.

<sup>137</sup> Jackson, *Narrative of the Adventures*, 19–20. Jackson reports contradictions in Smith’s account.

take Lydia he made this known for my benefit. To have more than two in a family was apt to cause wrangles and trouble.”

After sharing the “new item of law” Smith made an inquiry to Clayton about Moon: “He finally asked if I would not give L[ydia] to him. I said I would so far as I had anything to do in it. He requested me to talk to her.” Two days later, Clayton reported her polite refusal of the proposal to Smith.<sup>138</sup>

### Revelatory Themes

The conceptual origin of plural marriage may have been planted before the organization of the church when Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon text that God would command polygamy “to raise up seed unto me” (a common interpretation of Jacob 2:27–35).

Separated from his wife, Martin Harris was told to enter into a marriage alliance with Indigenous peoples to help Mormon missionaries gain access to Indian Territory. Other Mormon elders (some of whom were married) may have received the same command.

However, there is no contemporary evidence that suggests any theological connotations to the proposed marriage alliance. It was an attempt to gain access to land where white people were banned. The only other documented revelation on marriage in 1831 says that man “should have one wife.”<sup>139</sup> There is no evidence in Smith’s 1830s Bible translation, including text covering biblical polygamists, that suggest plural marriage concepts were being restored to scripture.

W. W. Phelps’s 1861 recollection of the “substance” of the 1831 revelation was that American Indian posterity could become “white and delightful” through plural marriage with white Mormon men. Phelps was influenced by Young’s teachings beginning in 1847 that interracial marriage with “Lamanites” would remove the dark skin curse taught in the Book of Mormon.

While Smith may have been open to the possibility of polygamy as early as 1829, the marriage alliance revelation was a steppingstone towards full-blown plural marriage in Nauvoo. Contemporary evidence for the practice of polygamy before 1836 is sparse,<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 120 (Sep. 17, 1843).

<sup>139</sup> D&C 49:15–16

<sup>140</sup> Early contemporary evidence of plural marriage includes newspaper accounts that Mormons were practicing a form of communal wives, the 1835 Doctrine and

but Smith may have begun developing a theological foundation and even receiving revelations about specific women before then. For example, in 1880, Marinda Nancy Hyde reported that Smith had a revelation about her in 1831—the timeframe Smith lived in her home, and not long after the marriage alliance revelation.

Smith’s involved discussion on plural marriage and revelation in his “Happiness” letter to Nancy Rigdon states that relationships are appropriate when sanctioned by revelation. Revelations that specify an individual being appointed to another, include Sarah Pratt, Marinda Nancy Hyde, Nancy Rigdon, Melissa Schindle, Emma Smith, and possibly William Law. D&C 132:35, 37, 51 & 65 talk of receiving a revelation before proceeding with a relationship.

Post-1844 recollections of revelations on plural marriage hint that there may have been many more. Later examples of Smith’s followers remembering him telling them about such revelations include Mary Elizabeth Rollins: “he was commanded to take me for a Wife;” Marinda Nancy Hyde: “The Lord gave me to Joseph Smith”; Emily Dow Partridge: “the Lord had given me to him”; Lucy Walker: “I have been commanded of God to take another wife, and you are the woman”; Presendia Lathrop Huntington: “he explained to her clearly the knowledge which he had obtained from the Lord”; Zina Huntington Jacobs: “The Lord told him to take me”; Heber C. Kimball: “I want you to give Vilate [Heber’s wife] to me to be my wife saying that the Lord desired this at my hands”; Erastus Snow: “the Lord was now ‘requiring his chosen and proved servants to take unto themselves wives’”; Brigham Young: “Sister [Augusta] Cobb was given me by Revelation from Joseph”; plus multiple recollections of an angel commanding Smith to practice plural marriage.<sup>141</sup>

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Covenants denial of rumored polygamy (Section 101) and allegations of non-monogamous relationships by Smith, Cowdery, and others--in particular the Fanny Alger relationship with Joseph Smith, starting sometime between late 1832 and 1836 (inclusive). For dating Alger-Smith relationship by various historians, see Bradley, “‘Dating’ Fanny Alger” in this volume, and Brian C. Hales, “The Joseph Smith-Fanny Alger Relationship: Plural Marriage or Adultery?” josephsmithpolygamy.org.

<sup>141</sup> Rollins Lightner, “Remarks,” 255; Hyde, Statement; Emily D. P. Young, Deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent’s Testimony, part 3, 350–52, questions 22–24, CHL; Lucy Walker Kimball, “A Brief Biographical Sketch of the Life and Labors of Lucy Walker Kimball Smith,” 9–11, MS 4942, CHL.; “A Venerable Woman, Presendia Lathrop Kimball,” *Woman’s Exponent* 11, no. 21 (Apr. 1, 1883): 163; John Wight,

Fulfilled desire as a result of prayer is conveyed in Smith's letter to Nancy Rigdon, which states that Solomon "first he asked wisdom, and God gave it him, and with it every desire of his heart; even things which might be considered abominable."<sup>142</sup> In Section 132, after reviewing polygamous and concubinal practices of Old Testament figures, Joseph is told to "restore all things. Ask what ye will, and it shall be given unto you," suggesting Smith could ask for a wife and receive revelatory permission for her (D&C 132:40).

With such a high occurrence of revelation preceding proposals in the historical record, we can assume that he had one for each woman he approached for a relationship. The *Nauvoo Expositor* outlined this pattern, that "God Almighty has revealed it to him, that she should be his (Joseph's) Spiritual wife."<sup>143</sup> D&C 132 even points out that the polygamist patriarchs sinned by not taking all the wives God told them to: "in nothing did they sin save in those things which they received not of me" (D&C 132:38). Insight into Smith's views are further illustrated when he told William Clayton "you have a right to get all you can."<sup>144</sup>

Some of the accounts indicate the ease Smith received revelations, manifested in both the Sarah Ann Whitney blessing, and the Nancy Rigdon happiness letter, where Smith's prose transitions, unannounced, into revelation.

In addition to Smith getting revelations about the women he married, some of the twenty-nine other men who polygamously married women in Nauvoo during Smith's

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"Evidence from Zina D. Huntington-Young," Interview with Zina, Oct. 1898, *Saints Herald* 52, no. 2 (Jan. 11, 1905): 28; Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball, An Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), 439–40; "Autobiography of Erastus Snow," 107–10; Entry for November 30, 1847, *Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1910–1951*, Privately Published, Salt Lake City, Utah 2010.; Brian C. Hales, "Encouraging Joseph Smith to Practice Plural Marriage: The Accounts of the Angel with a Drawn Sword," *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 55–64.

<sup>142</sup> "History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843] [addenda]," (Aug. 27, 1843) 3, JSP.

<sup>143</sup> "Preamble," *Nauvoo Expositor* 1 (June 7, 1844) 2.

<sup>144</sup> Bennett, "6th Letter," 2; Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 115 (Aug. 11, 1843).

lifetime<sup>145</sup> may have been directed by Joseph Smith's revelations to marry. John C. Bennett suggested a pattern by which men could request Smith to inquire for a revelation about a potential plural wife: "When an Apostle, High Priest, Elder, or Scribe, conceives an affection for a female, and he has satisfactorily ascertained that she experiences a mutual flame, he communicates confidentially to the Prophet his *affaire du Coeur* and requests him to inquire of the Lord."<sup>146</sup>

If Smith received revelations for each of his proposals, which is likely, there would have been over forty revelations on plural marriage. If he also obtained revelations for other men, that number would be substantially higher.

Often, an appeal to Old Testament patriarchs and their practice of plural marriage was included in a revelation. "Jacob's blessings" were promised to Sarah Pratt, Nancy Rigdon, and Sarah Ann Whitney, and that term is repeated in D&C 132:1, 37. Reference to the revelation associated with Martha Brotherton mentions the restoration of plural marriage as practiced by Abraham. And Old Testament ideology even comes into play when Joseph and Emma's difficulties related to plural marriage are compared to Abraham's sacrifice.

David's and Solomon's many wives and concubines are condemned in the Book of Mormon as "abominable" (Jacob 2:24), yet Joseph's letter to Nancy Rigdon stated that "special revelation" in response to prayer granted "every desire of [Solomon's] heart; even things which might be considered abominable."<sup>147</sup>

The revealed ceremony for Sarah Ann Whitney states that in the future David would reign as king over Israel, a promise tied to her marriage to Joseph Smith. After Smith's death, she would go on to raise up seed to him through her marriage to Heber C. Kimball, naming her first three sons "David" to fulfill the prophetic prediction uttered in her marriage ceremony.

Blessings associated with plural marriage are emphasized in several of the revelations. Nancy Rigdon was told that "no good thing will I withhold from them ...

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<sup>145</sup> George D. Smith, "Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841–46: A Preliminary Demographic Report," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 137.

<sup>146</sup> Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 220–25; emphasis in original.

<sup>147</sup> Compare Jacob 2:23–24 speaking of the "grosser crime" of Solomon having "many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord... [because] God, delight[s] in the chastity of women."

who will listen to my voice, and to the voice of my servant.”<sup>148</sup> Marinda Nancy Hyde was told “it shall be a blessing upon her.”<sup>149</sup> Martha Brotherton was told it would be the “greatest blessing that was ever bestowed upon you.”<sup>150</sup> Sarah Ann Whitney was promised she would be crowned with eternal life.<sup>151</sup> Joseph dictated a revelation that he was to “prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you” which will lead him to “inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions” (D&C 132:3,19), and “to whomsoever you give any one on earth, by my word and according to my law, it shall be visited with blessings” (D&C 132:48).<sup>152</sup>

While D&C 132:19 promised “a continuation of the seeds forever and ever,” other revelations go further, promising blessings to progeny. Smith’s instructions to Marinda Nancy Hyde stated, “it shall be a blessing upon her and upon her children after her.”<sup>153</sup> Lucy Walker was told her marriage to Smith “would prove an everlasting blessing to my father’s house. And form a chain that could never be broken, worlds without End.”<sup>154</sup> Sarah Ann Whitney was promised “eternal life to all your house both old & young,” and to future progeny, “it shall be upon you and upon your children after you from generation to generation.”<sup>155</sup> Helen Mar Kimball was told: “If you will take this step, it will ensure your eternal salvation & exaltation and that of your father’s household & all of your kindred,”<sup>156</sup> and Smith’s wife Eliza R. Snow saw the concept of blessed progeny from a mortal standpoint, stating that plural marriage was “instrumental in producing a more

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<sup>148</sup> Bennett, “6th Letter,” 2.

<sup>149</sup> “Revelation, Nauvoo, IL, 2 Dec. 1841.”

<sup>150</sup> Brotherton Affidavit, July 13, 1842, *Native American Bulletin*.

<sup>151</sup> “Revelation, 27 July 1842.

<sup>152</sup> See also D&C 132:1, 3, 19, 48, 64.

<sup>153</sup> “Revelation, Nauvoo, IL, 2 Dec. 1841.”

<sup>154</sup> Walker, “Brief Biographical Sketch,” 5–6; “Revelation, Nauvoo, IL, 2 Dec. 1841.”

<sup>155</sup> “Revelation, 27 July 1842.

<sup>156</sup> Helen Mar Kimball Smith Whitney, “Autobiography, 30 March 1881,” MS 744, CHL. Catherine Lewis, who lived with the Kimball family in Nauvoo, wrote that Helen Mar Kimball was told “the salvation of our whole family depended on” Helen’s sealing to Joseph Smith. Catherine Lewis, *Narrative of Some of the Proceedings of the Mormons* (Lynn, MA: N.p., 1848), 19.

perfect type of manhood mentally and physically, as well as in restoring human life to its former longevity.”<sup>157</sup>

The revelation included in the letter to Nancy Rigdon notes that those who “abide by the laws of my Kingdom; ... all things shall be made known unto them in mine own due time.” This is not only conceptually similar but shares nearly identical phraseology to text in D&C 132. Because of Joseph’s restored keys and power, God will “make known unto you all things in due time” (D&C 132:45). The revelation to Marinda Nancy Hyde to “hearken to the council of my Servant Joseph in all things whatsoever he shall teach unto her” and D&C 132:64: “and he teaches unto [Emma] the law of my priesthood, as pertaining to these things, then shall she believe and administer unto him” convey Joseph as the authoritative source of truth.

Elements of desire and sexual pleasure are alluded to in some of the revelations. In his attempt to convince Nancy Rigdon to marry him, his dictated letter uses the example of “special revelation” that granted “every desire of [Solomon’s] heart,” which was typically viewed as “abominable,” and that “we should enjoy His gifts ... wherever He is disposed to bestow” as long as those “enjoyments” are sanctioned with revelation.<sup>158</sup>

Both Mary Elizabeth Rollings and Marinda Nancy Hyde said decades later that Smith had an interest in them long before he approached them about marriage.<sup>159</sup> According to John C. Bennett, Smith told Melissa Schindle that “it was the will of the Lord that he should have illicit intercourse with her.” And Bennett reported Smith had “long looked upon [Sarah Pratt] with favor,” hoping for “an earnest desire of connubial bliss.”<sup>160</sup>

The concept of God appointing a wife to a husband can be found in a number of examples, such as with Sarah Pratt, “for the Lord had given her to him.” It is not clear if he had “long looked upon [her] with favor”<sup>161</sup> before or after God appointed her to him, or if it was in conjunction with his desire for her (“Ask what ye will, and it shall be given unto you according to my word,” D&C 132:40). Mary Elizabeth Rollings reported that

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<sup>157</sup> “Eliza Snow Affidavit,” *Smith Affidavit Books*, Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., 4 vols, transcript, 1:25, MS 3423, CHL.

<sup>158</sup> Bennett, “6th Letter,” 2.

<sup>159</sup> Rollins Lightner, “Remarks,” 255.

<sup>160</sup> Fuller, May 25, 1842, Testimonies in Nauvoo High Council Cases; Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 228–31.

<sup>161</sup> Bennett, *History of the Saints*, 229.

Smith had an interest in her by 1834, and that God had appointed their marriage by revelation.

And Marinda Nancy Johnson reported “The Lord gave me to Joseph Smith \before I married Orson Hyde/.”<sup>162</sup>

Nancy Rigdon was warned against taking an unappointed partner, not to “take that ... which I have not given you.”<sup>163</sup> Smith was told that it is adultery when being with someone not appointed (D&C 132:41) and that a wife of an adulterous husband could be reappointed to another man: “then shall you have power ... to take her and give her unto him that hath not committed adultery” (D&C 132:43–44). Emma Smith may have had a man temporarily appointed to her by revelation in addition to Joseph Smith.

Other circumstances allowed a wife to be reappointed to another man. Smith told Martha Brotherton that he would marry her if her marriage to Brigham Young was distasteful. A revelation to Smith discouraged William Clayton from taking Lydia Moon as a plural wife, opening an opportunity for Smith to marry her. The concept of reappointment matches Smith’s allusion to wives as talents (from the parable of the ten talents)—that a woman can be taken from one man and given to another. For example, in the letter to Nancy Rigdon, “for unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly, but unto him that hath not or will not receive, shall be taken away that which he hath, or might have had.”<sup>164</sup> Joseph Kingsbury wrote that by entering into a pretend marriage with Smith’s wife Sarah Ann Whitney, no one would have power to take Kingsbury’s deceased wife from him. When discussing Emma’s requirement to “receive all those that have been given unto my servant Joseph” he is told, using language from the parable, “he shall be made ruler over many things; for he hath been faithful over a few” (D&C 132:52–53). And speaking of wives, Joseph told William Clayton “you have a right to get all you can.”<sup>165</sup>

In the case of adultery, Smith was told he can discern adulterers, “if she hath not committed adultery ... and I reveal it unto you” then he would “have power ... to take her and give her unto him that hath not committed adultery” (D&C 132:44). This played out when Joseph had a revelation that William Law committed adultery and could not be eternally sealed to his wife, Jane. Smith’s subsequent proposal to Jane may be him trying to reappoint Jane Law to himself as defined in verse 44. The power to discern adultery is

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<sup>162</sup> Hyde, Statement.

<sup>163</sup> Bennett, “6th Letter,” 2.

<sup>164</sup> Bennett, “6th Letter,” 2.

<sup>165</sup> Bennett, “6th Letter,” 2; Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 115 (Aug 11, 1843).

also exercised when Smith received a revelation that Margaret Nyman was guilty of adultery.

The letter to Nancy Rigdon warns of committing fornication or receiving someone not appointed. This is reiterated later, “And as ye have asked concerning adultery ... if she be with another man, and I have not appointed unto her by the holy anointing, she hath committed adultery and shall be destroyed” (D&C 132:40–41).

In the section addressing Smith’s question, “as ye have asked concerning adultery” in D&C 132, adultery and unspecified sins of Joseph are discussed. Some of his wives had “said they were pure” but were not and were to be destroyed. Nevertheless, Emma was to “receive all those that have been given to my servant Joseph” (D&C 132:52). She was to “forgive my servant Joseph his trespasses” if she wanted her own forgiveness (D&C 132:56). Joseph had suspected Emma of infidelity as evidenced by his question to Clayton, wondering “if [Clayton] had used any familiarity with E[mma].”<sup>166</sup> No one was to condemn Smith for his unspecified transgressions, “for I will justify him; for he shall do the sacrifice which I require at his hands for his transgressions” (D&C 132:60).

The Happiness Letter’s implication of revelation sanctioned “seizing ... enjoyments,” ties into Melissa Schindle’s depiction that “it was the will of the Lord that he should have illicit intercourse with her.” According to Schindle Joseph Smith engaged in sexual relations sanctioned by revelation without marriage. Sarah Pratt recalled that Smith’s earliest relationships did not include marriage ceremonies, but later ones did. Smith’s assistant in the First Presidency, John C. Bennett, and others adopted an approach like those described by Pratt and Schindle. Bennett and others had relationships with women without a ceremony, stating that it was all right according to church leaders if the relationship was kept secret. It is unclear if Smith practiced these types of relationships, or if testimonies about these relationships represent spurious influence from Bennett.

Polyandry accounts for about one third of Smith’s relationships.<sup>167</sup> Individuals discussed in this chapter that were invited into, or involved in a polyandrous relationship include Sarah Pratt, Marinda Nancy Hyde, Emma Smith, William Law, Jane Law, Melissa Schindle, Margaret Nyman, and Joseph Smith. According to John C. Bennett, a marriage between Joseph Smith and Nancy Rigdon “would not prevent her from marrying any other person,” opening the door to a polyandrous relationship.

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<sup>166</sup> Smith, *Intimate Chronicle*, 106 (May 29, 1843).

<sup>167</sup> Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 15.

Charges of secrecy surrounding plural marriage were made in the *Nauvoo Expositor*, “they are told ... to never divulge what is revealed to them ... that she should be his (Joseph’s) Spiritual wife.” It also reported that practitioners swore “to never divulge what is revealed to them, with a penalty of death attached.”<sup>168</sup> The practice of swearing spiritual wife candidates “into the secrets of a lodge, which secrets were not to be revealed under the penalty of their lives” also occurred in branches on the east coast in 1844.<sup>169</sup> This is not unlike other Masonic-like oaths of secrecy that had become part of Mormon practice beginning with Danites in the late 1830s, and later in the Nauvoo Masonic lodge in 1842, Quorum of Anointed in 1842, and Council of Fifty in 1844.<sup>170</sup>

Margaret Nyman was reluctant to answer probing questions at an inquiry, stating that she was under covenant, presumably to maintain secrecy. Sarah Pratt summarized her understanding of the approach to plural marriage: “God does not care if we have a good time, if only other people do not know it,” matching John C. Bennett’s spiritual wifery approach. Keeping Brotherton’s proposed marriage secret from her parents as suggested by Brigham Young fits in with the overall secrecy of the practice.

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<sup>168</sup> *Nauvoo Expositor* 1 (June 7, 1844) 2.

<sup>169</sup> *History of the Trials of Elder John Hardy, Before the Church of Latter Day Saints in Boston, For Slander, in Saying That G. J. Adams, S. Brannan and Wm. Smith Were Licentious Characters*, Boston: Conway & Company, 1844.

<sup>170</sup> Danites: Sampson Avar, “it was necessary this band [Danites] should be bound together by a covenant, that those who revealed the secrets of the society should be put to death.” Sampson Avar testimony, United States Senate, Document showing *The Testimony Given Before the Judge of the Fifth Judicial District of the State of Missouri, on the Trial of Joseph Smith, Jr., and others, for High Treason and Other Crimes Against that State*, Feb. 15, 1841. (Washington, DC: Blair & Rives, 1841); Freemasonry: Joseph Smith, “The secrets of masonry. is to keep a secret,” “Discourse, 15 October 1843, as Reported by Willard Richards,” p. [134], JSP; Quorum of Anointed: Bradley H. Kramer, “Keeping the Sacred: Structured Silence in the Enactment of Priesthood Authority, Gendered Worship, and Sacramental Kinship in Mormonism,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan 2014) 105–11; Relief Society: Cheryl L. Bruno, “Keeping a Secret: Freemasonry, Polygamy, and the Nauvoo Relief Society, 1842–44,” *Journal of Mormon History*, 39, no. 4 (Fall 2013) 158–81; Council of Fifty: “Every member of it to be bound to eternal secrecy,” “Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846; Volume 1, 10 March 1844–1 March 1845,” p. [26], JSP.

Smith's 1832 retranslation of Romans 7:19–20 suggests an openness to reconsidering traditional interpretations of sin: "For the good that I would [have done when under the law, I find not to be good; therefore] I do [it] not: but the evil which I would not [do under the law, I find to be good]; that, I do" (JST 20–22).<sup>171</sup> His prioritization of priesthood authorized marriage over civil/legal marriage beginning in 1835 marks his first documented practical steps of a reconstruction of marital ethics, dubbed "theocratic ethics" by historian Michael Quinn.<sup>172</sup> This would come into stark relief later when the civil/legal marriage of Joseph Kingsbury to Sarah Ann Whitney was classified a "pretended marriage" to cover her plural marriage to Smith. A November 1841 sermon further illustrated Smith's conceptual shift. Discussing the New Testament story of a woman accused of adultery, Smith surmised that "no man will be condemned before God who has no accuser" and "if you will follow the revelations and instructions which God gives you through me, I will take you into heaven.... What many people call sin is not sin." Statements in Smith's 1842 letter to Nancy Rigdon justifying his proposal to her further illustrate his ethical views of marital relationships. For example: "That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another." The Rigdon letter goes on to say that in answer to prayer, Solomon received "special revelation" that granted his "every desire" that would otherwise be considered "abominable to all who understand the order of heaven only in part, but which, in reality, were right."<sup>173</sup>

Revelation gave Smith authority that granted him whatever (and possibly whomever) he requested, as well as authority over sin. After eleven verses discussing Old Testament polygamy, Smith was reminded of his appointment to restore all things and told: "Ask what ye will, and it shall be given you." Regarding sin he is told "whosoever sins you remit on earth shall be remitted eternally in the heavens," and that God "will forgive all your sins." (D&C 132:40, 46, 50).

Section 132 further justifies polygamy via revelation: (35: "Was Abraham, therefore, under condemnation? Verily I say unto you, Nay; for I, the Lord, commanded it;"); and also for Smith: (59: "if he do anything in my name, and according to my law and by my word, he will not commit sin and I will justify him;") and per Smith's prerogative (48: "whatever you give on earth, and to whomsoever you give any one on

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<sup>171</sup> Huggins, "Joseph Smith's Inspired Translation," 179–80. Brackets indicate text added by Smith.

<sup>172</sup> Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 88–89.

<sup>173</sup> Bennett, "6th Letter," 2.

earth, by my word and according to my law, it shall be visited with blessings and not cursings.”)

### Conclusion

The vehicle through which the Mormon prophet radically reconstructed marriage and sexuality was not static, nor a single event, but a series of continuing revelations, prompted by circumstance and opportunity. The initial seeds of plural marriage, planted in the early days of the church, gradually expanded and unfolded in Smith’s mind.

Whether it be accessing American Indian lands, affection, restoration, adultery, producing a Davidic heir, pleasure, testing loyalty, expanding kinship, opportunity, or appeasement—the revelations addressed factors and motivations leading to Smith’s expansion and control of polygamy.

However, some of those closest to him created the greatest barriers to him realizing his dream. Emma Smith’s discovery of unknown wives and her subsequent opposition to the practice shaped the story, leading to Joseph’s dictation of D&C 132 where his past revelatory ideas (which is said he knew “perfectly”) were put to paper. Emma’s anger only increased after reading it. It warned that her husband could discern adultery, possibly alluding to Smith’s suspicions of her or her intended plural husband; took away her promised plural husband; provided forgiveness of Joseph’s trespasses; and warned her of her destruction unless she submitted to Joseph’s dictates and accept all his wives. It is no wonder there are reports of her destroying the revelation.

As an early polygamy insider, Smith’s close friend and fellow First Presidency member John C. Bennett ran with Smith’s altered sexual morality in directions that would bring scandal and scrutiny to the practice. The excommunicated and publicly embarrassed Bennett would commence a campaign of exposition, some true, some not, bringing unwanted attention to Nauvoo spiritual wifery, and in some cases, more information about revelations on polygamy.

Another member of the First Presidency, William Law, and his wife, Jane, were unable to accept plural marriage despite their desire to be eternally sealed. Although reports of revelations suggest a proposed relationship between Emma and William, as well as a proposed relationship between Joseph and Jane, the Laws developed a firm resolve to do all they could to fight against polygamy and expose the practice, setting off a chain of events leading to Joseph Smith’s murder.

Nonetheless, neither family, friends, tradition, law, nor biology, stood in the way of Smith’s vision of a family kingdom of saints, interconnected through a complex web of relationships constructed by sealings that transcend death. Through continuing revelation

culminating in D&C 132, he constructed, revised, and reinforced this innovative system of family relationships that would continue beyond his death. Today, all branches of Mormonism continue to be affected, some more so than others, by the legacy of polygamy.

2024, "Prologues to Plurality: A Study of Joseph Smith's Revelations on Marriage," in *Secret Covenants: New Insights on Early Mormon Polygamy*.

<https://www.academia.edu/143263914/>

*Prologues\_to\_Plurality\_A\_Study\_of\_Joseph\_Smiths\_Revelations\_on\_Marriage\_in\_Secret\_Covenants\_New\_Insights\_on\_Early\_Mormon\_Polygamy\_pp\_1\_44*