

**The First Year of Nauvoo Polygamy:
Events Leading to Joseph Smith's Plural Proposal to Nancy Rigdon**

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While the historical record does not include as much documentation as we would like concerning Joseph Smith's involvement with plural marriage, it is possible to recreate a timeline of events associated with the unfolding of Nauvoo polygamy. The first twelve months were filled with intense tensions and conflicts as he attempted to satisfy an angelic command by marrying plural wives. Other strong forces swayed him like maintaining secrecy and appeasing his wife Emma, who then seemed hardened against polygamy or spiritual wifery of any kind. This article will present one possible scenario of the proceedings leading up to Joseph's plural proposal to Nancy Rigdon in April, 1842.

Available evidence indicates that Joseph Smith's first polygamous marriage occurred in response to an 1834 angelic visit commanding him to restore and practice Old Testament polygamy.¹ In late 1835 or early 1836 he wed Fanny Alger² with Levi Hancock apparently performing the ceremony using priesthood authority.³ The plural union could not have turned out worse for the Prophet because both his legal wife Emma and Associate Church President Oliver Cowdery rejected the marriage and Fanny was sent packing from the Smith home. Rumors of adultery (not polygamy) rumbled among some Church members but evidently did not reach the ears of the editors of local newspapers who would have gladly published any titillating gossip concerning the Mormon Prophet, but did not mention the event.⁴

Several months prior to the discovery and aftermath of Joseph Smith's plural marriage to Fanny, he received a visitation in the Kirtland Temple from an angel, the Old Testament prophet Elijah. During that April 3, 1836 visit, Joseph was bestowed with authority to seal families eternally together (D&C 110:1-2, 13-15). Uncharacteristically, the Prophet left it dormant, not using it to seal any marriage, monogamous or polygamous, for five years. The first sealed marriage and first Nauvoo plural union was solemnized by Joseph B. Noble between Noble's sister-in-law, Louisa Beaman, and the Prophet on April 5, 1841.⁵

After breaking the ice and marrying Louisa as a plural wife for time and eternity,⁶ available evidence indicates that eight out of the next nine of Joseph Smith's plural marriage proposals, and possibly ten out of the next eleven, were to legally married women. Authors (like Fawn Brodie) who conclude that Joseph Smith practiced *sexual polyandry*, a condition where one wife experiences sexual relations with two husbands during the same time period, have written that the Prophet sought these

¹ Mary Elizabeth Rollings Lightner, "Remarks" at Brigham Young University, April 14, 1905, vault MSS 363, fd 6. 2-3; Letter to Emmeline B. Wells, summer 1905, MS 282, CHL. Copy of holograph in Linda King Newell Collection, Ms 447, bx 9, fd 2, Marriott Library. See also "Statement" signed February 8, 1902, Vesta Crawford Papers, copy, MS 125, bx 1 fd 11, Marriott Library. Original owned by Mrs. Nell Osborne.

² See Don Bradley, "Mormon Polygamy before Nauvoo? The Relationship of Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger," in Newell G. Brighurst and Craig L. Foster, eds., *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*, Independence, Missouri: John Whitmer Books, 2010, 14-58.

³ Levi Ward Hancock Autobiography with additions in 1896 by Mosiah Hancock, 63, CHL; cited portion written by Mosiah, (MS 570, CHL); Dean R. Zimmerman, *I Knew the Prophets: An Analysis of the Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs*. Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1976, 37-38;

⁴ Brian C. Hales, "Fanny Alger and Joseph Smith's Pre-Nauvoo Reputation," *Journal of Mormon History*, 35 (Fall 2009) 112-90.

⁵ Joseph B Noble, Affidavit, Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Book 1:38, 4:38; printed in Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 221.

⁶ See Joseph B. Noble, Temple Lot Case full manuscript, part 3, pages 396, 426-27 questions, 52-53, 681-704; Testimony of Benjamin Winchester with Joseph Smith III, Council Bluffs, Iowa, Nov. 27, 1900, Community of Christ Archives.

relationships to hide the paternity of any children that might be conceived.⁷ However, such writers present no reliable evidence to support their conclusions and they invariably ignore Joseph Smith's theological teachings that condemn sexual polyandry.

In contrast to *sexual* polyandry, *ceremonial* polyandry occurs when a woman has experienced two marriage ceremonies, one legal and one religious. Ostensibly, those ceremonies could create two husbands for the woman unless one of the ceremonies implicitly negates the other. No researchers to date have investigated the difference between these two forms of polyandry.⁸ Typically, authors supply documentation showing that ceremonial polyandry occurred and then leave the readers to assume or not assume the concomitant existence of sexual polyandry.

In fact, the evidence supporting polyandrous sexuality in the Prophet's plural marriages is problematic, while the contradictory evidence is compelling.⁹ For example, Joseph was sealed to his first polyandrous wife, Zina Huntington Jacobs on October 27, 1841 and according to sexual polyandry proponents, would have been experiencing connubial relations with her from that date forward. During the next twenty months, it appears he was sealed to all of his polyandrous wives, so by July of 1843 he had been married to possibly thirteen women who had legal husbands (Sylvia Sessions Lyon, Ruth Vose Sayers, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Sarah Kingsley Cleveland, Presendia Lathrop Huntington Buell, Sarah Ann Whitney Kingsley, Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs, Patty Bartlett Sessions, Marinda Nancy Johnson Hyde, Elvira Annie Cowles Holmes, Elizabeth Davis Durfee, Lucinda Pendleton Morgan Harris, and Esther Dutcher).¹⁰

Thus, according to the sexual polyandry interpretation, the Prophet engaged in polyandrous sexual relations with up to thirteen women starting as early as October 27, 1841. The timeline is important because on July 12, 1843, he dictated the revelation on celestial and plural marriage. At that point, if he had been practicing sexual polyandry for over a year and a half, he might have justified his polyandrous connections within the revelation. A written doctrinal declaration at that time authorizing sexual polyandry could have provided theological explanations to neutralized criticisms, should any have arisen.

However, the revelation on celestial marriage contains no such directives. Instead it condemns polyandrous relations as "adultery" saying the woman "shall be destroyed" (D&C 132:63). It seems that if on July 12, 1843, Joseph Smith had been practicing sexual polyandry with his legally married plural wives for any length of time, telling those women that their relationship with him was adultery and they would be destroyed because of it made little sense. That no backlash or complaints would have been registered by those aware -- and dozens were apprised of the Prophet's polyandrous sealings -- is equally implausible.

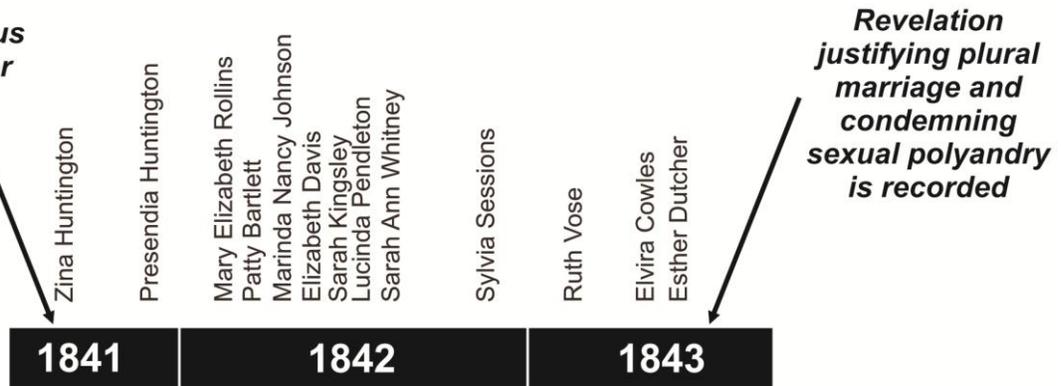
⁷ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd rev. ed. New York, 1971, 301-02; see also Harry M Beardsley, *Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1931, 390-91.

⁸ The one exception is my article "Joseph Smith and the Puzzlement of 'Polyandry,'" in Newell G. Bringham and Craig L. Foster, eds., *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*, Independence, Missouri: John Whitmer Books, 2010, 99-151. See also <http://josephsmithspolygamy.com/JSPolyandry/MASTERSexualPolyandry.html> (accessed October 9, 2011).

⁹ Evidence both supporting and contradicting the presence of sexual relations in Joseph Smith's polyandrous marriage is examined in Chapters 12-16 of my forthcoming volumes, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and Theology*, (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books 2012).

¹⁰ For discussion of twelve of these thirteen, see Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, 4-7.

First polyandrous sealing October 27, 1841



Revelation justifying plural marriage and condemning sexual polyandry is recorded

"Eternity Only" Sealings

Yet if sexuality did not exist in Joseph Smith’s polyandrous marriages, then why would he have entered into them in the first place? One answer is found in the Prophet’s teachings that all exalted beings must be sealed to a spouse. In other words, no man or woman is exalted singly (D&C 132:6-17). Women married to non-members, for example, require a husband in the eternities. While several authors have assumed no sealings occurred that were strictly for the next life, that is for "eternity only" and devoid of sexual relations on earth,¹¹ within the research papers of Andrew Jenson, author of the 1887 *Historical Record* article on Joseph Smith’s plural wives, is the following statement:

\Sister Ruth/ ~~Mrs. Sayers~~ was married in her youth to Mr. Edward Sayers,¹² a thoroughly practical horticulturist and florist,¹³ and though he was not a member of the Church, ~~yet~~ he willingly joined his fortune with her and they reached Nauvoo together some time in the year 1841;

While there the strongest affection sprang up between the Prophet Joseph and Mr. Sayers. The latter not attaching much importance to \the/ theory of a future life insisted that his wife \Ruth/ should be sealed to the Prophet for eternity, as he himself should only claim [page two] her in this life. She \was/ accordingly ~~the~~ sealed to the Prophet in Emma Smith's presence and thus ~~were~~ became numbered among the Prophets plural wives. ~~She however~~ \though she/ \continued to live with Mr. Sayers / ~~remained with her husband~~ \until his death.¹⁴

An additional document dated October-November of 1843 apparently from Phoebe Olney references Joseph’s plural sealing to Ruth Sayers: “Joseph did not pick that woman. She went to see whether she should marry her husband for eternity.”¹⁵ These documents demonstrate that at least one “eternity only” sealing was performed in Nauvoo under the Prophet’s direction. Doubtless many more of his marriages to legally married women were of this type, either because the woman could not be sealed to her legal husband or did not wish to be. In such plural marriages, the woman would continue conjugal relations with her civil husband, but would not be authorized to experience sexuality with Joseph Smith who was her husband only after death.

¹¹ See Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 14; see also 500; D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997, 183-84.

¹² Joseph Smith stayed with the Sayerses in August of 1842, while hiding from Missouri lawmen. See Dean C. Jessee, ed. *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Volume 2, Journal, 1832-1842*, alt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992, 403-18 (August 11-17, 1842).

¹³ See “Horticulture,” *Times and Seasons*, 3 (February 1, 1842) 678.

¹⁴ Andrew Jenson Papers [ca. 1871-1942], MS 17956; CHL, Box 49, Folder 16, fifth document. It appears that the documents in these folders were used to compile Jenson’s 1887 *Historical Record* article on plural marriage. See Joseph F. Smith affidavit books, CHL, 1:9 for date of this sealing “February A.D. 1843.” However the affidavit states that the sealing was performed by Hyrum Smith, which is unlikely because Hyrum did not accept plural marriage until May of that year.

¹⁵ Recorded by D. Michael Quinn Papers, Yale University, Addition—Uncat WA MS 244 (Accession:19990209-c) bx 1. I have been unable to identify the primary document to verify this quotation.

The New and Everlasting Covenant of Marriage and "Old Covenants"

While “eternity only” sealings undoubtedly explain most of Joseph Smith’s polyandrous marriages, at least one of the marriages was comprised of a “time and eternity” sealing to a woman who was later legally wed to another man. Joseph Smith was sealed to Sarah Ann Whitney on July 27, 1842. Then on April 23, 1843 the Prophet asked Joseph Kingsbury to marry her in a legal ceremony. Some observers may assume that since Sarah Ann had experienced two marriages covenants, one legal and the other a priesthood sealing, that afterwards she was authorized to experience sexual relations with both husbands during the same time period.

With respect to the law of chastity and sexual relations, Joseph Smith taught that conjugal relations can be experienced only within “lawful” marriage (D&C 49:16, see also 42:22). A “lawful” marriage requires both a *covenant* between a husband and a wife and official *authority* ratifying that covenant. Without these two elements, there is no marriage and sexual relations constitute adultery. Traditionally the authority to sanction a marriage covenant between a man and a wife, to make it “lawful,” can come from earthly governments or religious bodies. Such marriages may authorize sexual intimacy during mortality but the relationship ends at death. Making covenants alone is insufficient. That is, a man and a woman could not simply make a covenant with each other and thereafter consider themselves married and share sexual activity.¹⁶ Similarly, official authority alone cannot create a marriage. In other words, an officiator (e.g. a Justice of the Peace or a religious pastor) could not pick random males and females, pairing them up, pronouncing them “married” by his authority, and expect anyone to abide by his declarations. Both a mutual *covenant* and proper *authority* are always required.

Returning to Sarah Ann Whitney and her two husbands, some researchers might conclude that since she had twice complied with the requirements of marriage, afterwards the legal marriage allowed connubial relations with Joseph Kingsbury at the same time that the sealing for “time and eternity” allowed sexuality with the Prophet. That is, two overlapping marriage covenants permitted polyandrous conjugality. Such conclusions may seem logical, but are contradicted by Joseph Smith’s teachings. Acknowledging the theological underpinnings that the Prophet taught as he secretly established the practice of plural marriage is important for all writers because Nauvoo polygamists did not ignore them, but were governed by them from polygamy’s earliest inception.

The Prophet described a special *authority* and a new *covenant* that had been lost from the world (D&C 1:15). The *authority* was the binding authority of God that could “seal on earth... [and] it shall be eternally bound in the heavens” (D&C 132:46; cf. Mathew 16:19). This power, Joseph instructed, is strictly controlled and “there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred” (D&C 132:7).

The new *covenant* the Prophet championed is called “the new and everlasting covenant” and includes a covenant of eternal marriage (D&C 131:2). Marriages in the new and everlasting covenant differ from other “lawful” marriages in several respects. Most obvious is that they create married couples who, if they live worthily, are bound together for eternity (D&C 132:18-20). The second important difference is that when a person enters the new and everlasting covenant administered by proper priesthood authority, all previous covenants are “done away”: “Behold, I say unto you that all old covenants have I caused to be *done away* in this thing; and this is a new and an everlasting covenant” (D&C 22:1; italics added).

Therefore, a legally married woman who is sealed in the new and everlasting covenant does not thereafter have two husbands because the new and everlasting covenant of marriage supersedes, does away with, overrules, repudiates, sets aside, supplants, invalidates, and suspends the civil marriage.¹⁷ In

¹⁶ Just three years after Joseph’s death and doubtless reflecting the Prophet’s teachings on the subject, Apostle Heber C. Kimball taught on: “[T]here has been a doctrine tau[gh]t – if a man & woman makes a Cov[enan]t. they have a right to connect themselves – [but] this is wrong...” (*Minutes of the Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1835-1893*, Salt Lake City: Privately Published, 2010, 157; entry for December 21, 1847.)

¹⁷ The legal marriage between Joseph Kingsbury and Sarah Ann Whitney was strictly a façade to shield Joseph Smith from suspicion and did not and could not supersede the eternal sealing, even though it was performed afterwards.

the words of Joseph's revelation on the new and everlasting covenant, old covenants are "of no efficacy, virtue, or force" (D&C 132:7). Paul explained that the new covenant "hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8:13, see also 8-9; 13:20). In other words, the legal nuptial is no longer "lawful" in God's eyes and is not binding upon the participants.

For this reason Joseph Smith instructed that if a woman is sealed in the new and everlasting covenant for time and eternity, "after she is espoused, shall be with another man, she has committed adultery, and shall be destroyed" (D&C 132:63, see also 41-42). Afterwards, legal documents may remain filed at the courthouse and the neighborhood might be unaware of the priesthood sealing ordinance, but the old covenant no longer authorizes sexual relations in that union. Continued conjugality in the civil marriage would constitute a violation of the new and everlasting covenant, which does not recognize any "old covenants" and does not permit sexual polyandry. The legal marriage becomes a non-issue, ignored in the wake of an eternal nuptial.

Both Sarah Ann Whitney and Joseph C. Kingsbury apparently knew that Sarah's sealing to Joseph Smith preempted the legal marriage, which was performed to shield the Prophet from suspicion. Kingsbury later referred to it as a "pretend" marriage indicating that it was never consummated.¹⁸ Todd Compton wrote:

One wonders what the dynamics of a pretend marriage would have been – there would have been no sexual dimension, but Joseph Kingsbury and Sarah must have lived as close friends... We do know that Sarah Ann continued to live with her parents after the marriage to Smith; and Kingsbury, the day after the "pretend" marriage, apparently moved in the Whitney house also. Sarah became generally known as Mrs. Kingsbury, and she and Joseph C. attended public functions together. Outsiders would have suspected nothing unusual in the relationship.¹⁹

Years later in 1880, Kingsbury submitted a bill to the Church for his financial support of Sarah Ann. On November 23, 1880, Joseph C. Kingsbury asked President John Taylor that an \$8000 debt to the church "be remitted in consideration of services he had rendered in Nauvoo, and after leaving there, to the Prophet Joseph, in keeping one of his wives, Sarah Whitney, daughter of Bishop N. K. Whitney."²⁰ Whether Church president John Taylor was persuaded by Kingsbury's longshot argument is unknown.

Another example of this matrimonial dynamic is the case of Sylvia Sessions Lyon who wedded Windsor Lyon in a civil ceremony performed by Joseph Smith on April 21, 1838. Together they moved to Nauvoo and were comfortably established there by July 1840. At some point thereafter, Sylvia was sealed to the Prophet. Todd Compton wrote: "On February 8, 1842, when Sylvia was twenty-three, she was sealed to Joseph Smith."²¹ Other authors have agreed with this date.²² The source of this information is an unsigned document written in 1869 in an affidavit book compiled by Apostle Joseph F.

¹⁸ Marquardt, H. Michael. *The Strange Marriages of Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, Joseph C. Kingsbury, and Heber C. Kimball*. Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1973; rev. ed., Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1982, 18.

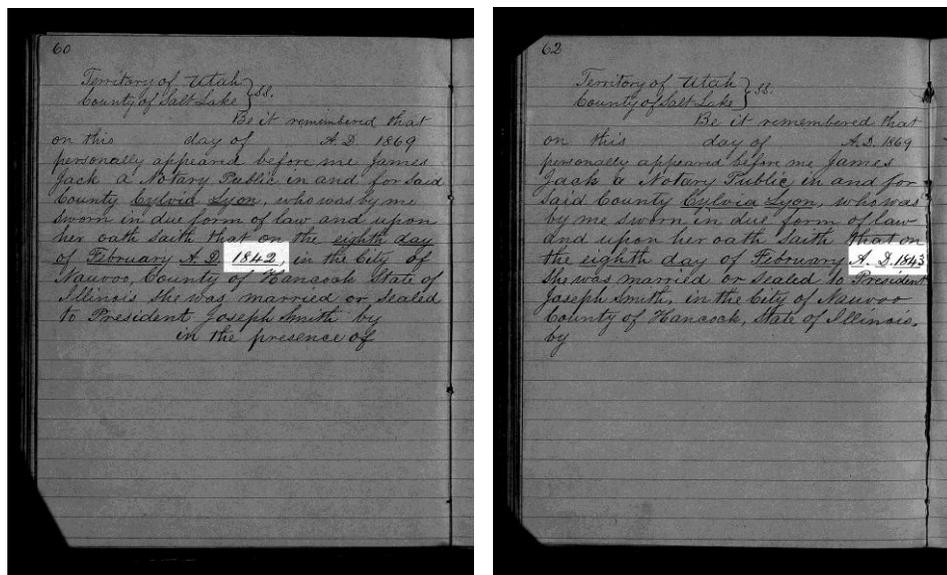
¹⁹ Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 352.

²⁰ L. John Nuttall Notes for J. Taylor Office Jrnl, HDC, d1346; quoted in D. Michael Quinn Papers—Addition—Uncat WA MS 244 (Accession:19990209-c) Box 1, Yale University Special Collections.

²¹ Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 681-82; see also, "A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith's Thirty-Three Plural Wives," *Dialogue*, Vol.29, (Summer 1996) No.2, p.34; "Remember Me in My Affliction": Louisa Beaman and Eliza R. Snow Letters, 1849," *Journal of Mormon History*, vol. 25, no. 2, (Fall 1999), 60.

²² Gary J. Bergera, "Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-1844," *Dialogue*, 38, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 66; Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816-1844*, Longwood, Florida: Xulon Press, 2005, 561; George D. Smith, "The Summer of 1842: Joseph Smith's relationships with the 12 Wives He Married After His First Wife, Emma," Sunstone Symposium presentation, Salt Lake Community College, July 31, 1998, 5; Danel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith." M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975, 350, #77; D. Michael Quinn lists on the year, 1842 in *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994, 587.

Smith.²³ Importantly, within that same collection of affidavit books is a second unsigned document that specifies an February 8, 1843 date, a full year later.²⁴ Research suggests that both documents were created at the same time and that neither should be treated as primary or preferred to the other. In addition, Josephine was born on February 8, 1844 thus implying that both mistakenly use Josephine's birthday as the wedding day. Taken together these documents present dates that are both dubious and contradictory.²⁵



Pages from Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 1:60, 4:62 showing conflicting dates.

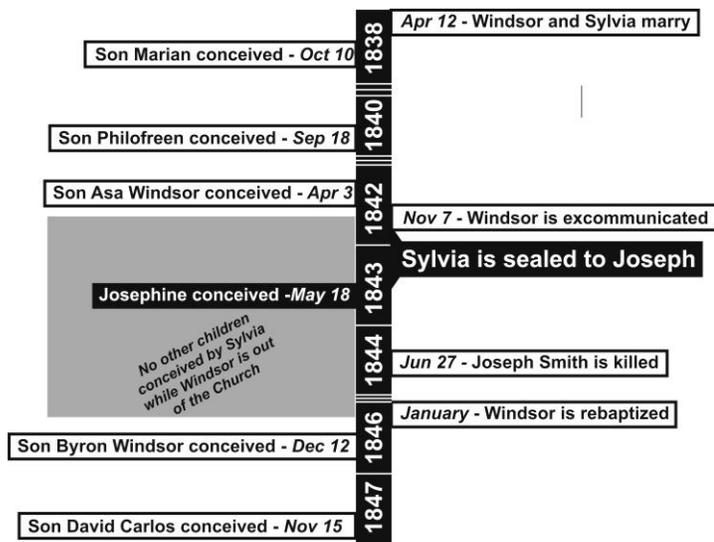
²³ Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books 1:60, CHL. See Don Bradley and Brian Hales, "LDS Joseph vs. RLDS Joseph: Records of Nauvoo Polygamy and the Conflict that Forged Them," in Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, eds., *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*, vol. 2, Independence, Missouri: John Whitmer Books, 2012.

²⁴ Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 4:62, CHL. See discussion in Brian C. Hales, "The Joseph Smith—Sylvia Sessions Plural Sealing: Polyandry or Polygyny?" *Mormon Historical Studies*, Spring 2008, Vol. 9, No. 1, 41-57.

²⁵ The fact that Sylvia Sessions Lyon was present for the plural sealing of her mother, Patty Bartlett Sessions, to Joseph Smith on March 9, 1842 (Patty Bartlett Sessions, copy of undated holograph in CHL, MS 3423) has been asserted as evidence that Sylvia already a polygamist herself. (See Gary James Bergera, Book review, "Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, eds. *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*. Independence, Missouri; John Whitmer Books, 2010, 314 pp. *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, vol. 31, no. 1 [Spring/Summer 2011] 111.) It is true that many of the individuals who witnessed these ultra-secret plural marriages were personally involved with polygamy, however, available evidence shows it was ever a requirement. For example, James Adams, Joseph B. Noble, Dimick B. Huntington, Brigham Young, Willard Richards, and Newel K. Whitney all performed plural marriage ceremonies prior to becoming polygamists themselves. (See Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 59, 81, 122, 179, 213, 298, 348 for marriage performance dates and sealer identities. For the dates the sealers themselves became polygamists, see George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy: "... but we called it celestial marriage"*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008, 574-656 and Gary James Bergera, "Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists, 1841-1844," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38 [Fall 2005] 3: 1-74.) In the latter half of 1841, Dimick Huntington's wife, Fanny, witnessed two separate polygamous ceremonies although she was not a plural wife. (Joseph Smith Affidavit Books, 1:5, 7, 19, CHL, MS 3423) and Dimick did not marry polygamously during the Prophet's lifetime. Two years later, Cornelius and Permella Lott were present at the celestial matrimony of their daughter to the Prophet, but Cornelius would not become a polygamist until 1846. (Cornelius P. Lott Family Bible, MS 3373; CHL.) Malissa's unmarried brother Joseph (b. 1834) and sister Amanda (b. 1836) also attended the ceremony. (Malissa Lott, deposition, Temple Lot transcript, respondent's testimony [part 3], page 100, question 150.) At least six other non-polygamists witnessed plural sealings in Nauvoo: Benjamin F. Johnson, Elizabeth Whitney, Sarah Godshall Phillips, Julia Stone, Hettie Stone, and Mary Ellen Harris Able. (See Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books 1-4, CHL, MS 3423.) In total, a minimum of seventeen non-polygamists, besides Sylvia Sessions, can be identified in the very limited available evidences as observing or participating in new plural marriages in Nauvoo during the Prophet's lifetime. Hence, Sylvia's viewing of her own mother's polygamous sealing is inconclusive evidence of her personal involvement in plural marriage at that time.

Without the assistance of the affidavit books, other sources must be consulted to determine an approximate sealing date for Joseph and Sylvia. In a document undoubtedly used to write his 1887 *Historical Record* article on plural marriage,²⁶ independent historian Andrew Jenson referred to Sylvia at the time of her sealing to the Prophet as “formerly the wife of Windsor Lyons.”²⁷ He also penned: “Sessions, Sylvia Porter, wife of Winsor [*sic*] Palmer Lyon, was born July 31, 1818... [She] Became a convert to ‘Mormonism’ and was married to Mr. Lyons - When he left the Church she was sealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith.”²⁸ A second corroboration is found in a 1915 statement from Sylvia’s daughter Josephine Lyon Fisher. She remembered her mother also “told me that I was the daughter of the Prophet Joseph Smith, she having been sealed to the Prophet at the time that her husband Mr. Lyon was out of fellowship with the Church.”²⁹

Collectively these documents place his sealing to Sylvia after Windsor’s excommunication from the Church. Windsor had a falling out with Stake President William Marks over a financial negotiation in the fall of 1842. In the end Windsor sued Marks in the civil courts – a violation of Church standards since such matters were to be resolved between members within the Church. In response, Marks brought Windsor up for a Church court. On November 19, 1842, Windsor was excommunicated.³⁰ Apparently Joseph Smith was sealed to Sylvia for “time and eternity” after Windsor’s loss of membership, which sealing would have “done away” or superseded the legal marriage covenants.³¹ However, Windsor may have returned later to serve as a “front husband” as Sylvia became pregnant and bore Josephine. After the martyrdom and after Windsor’s rebaptism, Sylvia returned to live with him, since her “time and eternity” sealing to the Prophet was no longer in force and her legal marriage was unaffected.



Time line showing approximate conception dates of Sylvia’s children and important activities of Joseph Smith and Windsor Lyon

²⁶ “Plural Marriage,” *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887) 219-40.

²⁷ Andrew Jenson Papers, MS 17956, CHL, box 49, folder 16.

²⁸ Biographical Information on Windsor and Sylvia Lyon, undated sheet in Andrew Jenson Collection, CHL.

²⁹ Josephine R. Fisher, certificate, February 24, 1915, Ms 3423, folder 1, images 48-49, CHL; see also Danel Bachman, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith.” M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975, 141, 350, #77.

³⁰ Fred C. Collier, *the Nauvoo High Council Minute Books of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, Hanna, Utah: Collier’s Publishing Co., 2005, 74.

³¹ See Brian C. Hales, “Joseph Smith and the Puzzlement of ‘Polyandry,’” in Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, eds., *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*, Independence, Missouri: John Whitmer Books, 2010, 112-18.

Hence, Joseph Smith's polyandrous marriages fell into two categories. The first were "eternity only" sealings without conjugality on earth between him and his eternal wife. The second constituted "time and eternity" marriages with the possibility of sexuality between him and his plural wife but not between her and the legal spouse, who served as a "front husband" to protect the Prophet. The historical record delineates one "eternity only" sealing (Ruth Vose Sayers) and two "time and eternity" marriages (Sarah Ann Whitney and Sylvia Sessions Lyon), but the precise dynamics of the other ten marriages are not documented. Most or all were probably "eternity only," sealings. However, it is not impossible that due to personal preference or other reasons, a woman might have chosen to become a "time and eternity" plural wife of Joseph Smith rather than be sealed to her civil husband. In such cases, the legal spouse would afterwards serve as a "front husband," and would be free to marry his own plural wives. Such possible marital shifting is understandably strange by today's standards. No clear evidence has been found showing that any of the other ten women secretly exchanged her civil husband for Joseph Smith in the middle of her legal marriage, but such is a theological possibility. Perhaps additional historical data will be discovered to help elucidate these matrimonial interactions.

Although several authors have posited sexuality as the Prophet's motive in his polyandrous proposals and marriages after marrying Louisa Beaman, it is doubtful that he ever practiced what his revelation on celestial marriage condemned in the strongest terms. Joseph Smith attempted to establish a new, eternally binding form of matrimony, which he called the new and everlasting covenant and included monogamy and polygamy. Breaking that covenant immediately after introducing it would have been a strange way to establish it. Had he done so, polygamy insiders would have criticized his behavior, measuring it against the very standard he gave them by "thus saith the Lord" revelation. Yet no one complained. The "polyandrous" wives did not murmur. Their husbands left no record whatsoever of grievances or accusations of hypocrisy against him. The officiators and witnesses made no protest. Even anti-Mormon William Law was silent on the subject, and John C. Bennett failed to exploit his polyandrous claims. The lack of a single complaint or protest (contemporaneous or after-the-fact) from Nauvoo polygamy insiders, those persons who were converted to his recently revealed new and everlasting covenant and would have judged him by it, indicates Joseph's behavior was in line with their expectations and the sexual standards he taught.

Joseph's Love for Emma

Returning to Joseph Smith's behavior after marrying Louisa Beaman, the question remains, why did he thereafter propose almost exclusively to legally married women and what caused him to change his proposal pattern about a year later? The answer appears to be his deep love for Emma. Historian Lawrence Foster summarized: "The introduction of polygamy was complicated by the deep affection that Emma and Joseph had for each other, a bond which is unmistakably revealed in their personal letters. Emma was jealously devoted to Joseph. He, in turn, showed great love for her. The deep attachment between them must have made the introduction of plural marriage particularly painful."³²

Even though he had secretly been sealed to over a dozen women by August 16, 1842, Joseph Smith then reflected in his journal upon his love for Emma:

With what unspeakable delight, and what transports of joy swelled my bosom, when I took by the hand on that night, my beloved Emma, she that was my wife, even the wife of my youth; and the choice of my heart. Many were the reviverations of my mind when I contemplated for a moment the many ~~pass~~ scenes we had been called to pass through. The fatigues, and the toils, the sorrows, and sufferings, and the joys and consolations from time to time [which] had strewed our paths and crowned our board. Oh! What a co-mingling of thought

³² Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, 149.

filled my mind for the moment, again she is here, even in the seventh trouble, undaunted, firm and unwavering, unchangeable, affectionate Emma.³³

Lucy Walker recalled: "He [Joseph Smith] often referred to the feelings that should exist between husband and wives, that they, his wives, should be his bosom companions, the nearest and dearest objects on earth in every sense of the word."³⁴ Joseph apparently succeeded in loving his plural wives; none of them ever complained he had abused them or treated them as objects or chattel. Nevertheless, it is plain that in his heart Emma held a unique place. Reportedly, "When one of his [plural] wives spoke to him [Joseph] in a complaining manner of Emma. The Prophet turned to her and said, 'If you desire my love, you must never speak evil of Emma.'"³⁵

How to Comply with the Angel without Hurting Emma?

Joseph Smith's first plural marriage, to Fanny Alger in Kirtland, Ohio in the mid-1830s taught him that Emma was understandably resistant to a restoration of Old Testament polygamy. In addition, he knew she would be hurt to learn he had (without her knowledge) wed plural wives with whom he experienced conjugal relations. However, the angel had appeared to him before the year 1841, probably twice, commanding him to marry polygamously. Accordingly, he was caught between two conflicting priorities, his sentiments for his wife and an angelic command. How could he appease the angel's directives without severely injuring Emma's feelings?

Mary Elizabeth Lightner, another of Joseph Smith's polyandrous wives, related that the angel came a total of three times commanding plural marriage. One possible reconstruction posits that the initial 1834 visit prompted the Fanny Alger plural marriage and that a second appearance (date undocumented but prior to April 5, 1841) provoked the sealing to Louisa Beaman. Mary Elizabeth also declared that the third visit was in "early February" of 1842.³⁶ The chronology is puzzling because at that time, Joseph Smith was sealed to perhaps a half-dozen plural wives. Why would the angel appear demanding the practice of plural marriage if the Prophet had been complying for the previous ten months? What was not happening in those marriages that the angel was demanding? In addition, why would the angel brandish a sword to compel obedience, generating genuine fear?³⁷ A menacing angel with a weapon seems out of place unless Joseph Smith's disobedience had been extreme.

One interpretation of the available evidence suggests that after the angel's second visit, the Prophet sought to appease his demands by marrying Louisa Beaman in a full-fledged plural marriage, but thereafter sought almost exclusively nonsexual "eternity only" sealings that would be less bothersome to Emma. By avoiding the complexities that accompany sexuality in his plural marriages after Louisa, he manifested sensitivity to Emma's feelings. However, his hopes that the single "time and eternity" sealing (to Louisa) and several "eternity only" sealings (to legally married women) would satisfy the angel who was commanding plural marriage were dashed. Returning in February 1842, the sword-bearing messenger was severely displeased, threatening him with "destruction unless he went forward and obeyed the commandment."³⁸ Evidently, Joseph was to marry "time and eternity" spouses

³³ Jesse, ed. *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Volume 2*, 415-16; *History of the Church*, 5:107.

³⁴ Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience*, Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co, 1888, 45-46.

³⁵ Lucy M. Wright, "Emma Hale Smith," *Woman's Exponent*, 30 (December 15, 1901) 8: 59. The source for this reported quotation is not provided.

³⁶ Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner to Emmeline B. Wells, summer 1905, MS 282, CHL. Copy of holograph in Linda King Newell Collection, Ms 447, bx 9, fd 2, Marriott Library; "Statement" signed February 8, 1902, Vesta Crawford Papers, copy, MS 125, bx 1 fd 11, Marriott Library. Original owned by Mrs. Nell Osborne. See also Juanita Brooks Papers, USHS, MSB103, bx16, fd 13.

³⁷ See Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life's Review*, Mesa, Arizona: 21st Century Printing, 1992, reprint, 95-96; and quote in Zimmerman, ed., *Letter of Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs*, 43.

³⁸ Lorenzo Snow, Affidavit signed August 18, 1869; Joseph F. Smith Affidavit Books, 2:19, CA MS 3423 fd 5.

and practice plural marriage like ancient patriarchs with the possibility of offspring. His foot-dragging would be no longer tolerated. If he did not obey, "he would lose his priesthood."³⁹

The question emerges why God would demand Joseph Smith to practice full plural marriage at that time? In fact, no rationale was ever given. However, the establishment of polygamy as a doctrinal possibility was justified by three reasons: First, it comprised part of the "restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21).⁴⁰ Second, it expanded the number of worthy couples who could "multiply and replenish the earth" creating families into which noble premortal spirits could be born (D&C 132:63).⁴¹ Third, (as discussed above) to allow all worthy women to be sealed to a husband and become eligible for exaltation (see D&C 132: 15-17, 19-20). The universal repugnance to the practice by women and most men indicates that if plural marriage had been permitted, but not commanded, it would have been minimally practiced. It probably would have existed primarily as a theological novelty with few practitioners. For reasons that were never revealed, God wanted the Saints in the 1840s to practice plural marriage and Joseph Smith was required to lead the way.

One weakness of this reconstruction is that of the nine individuals who left records of the angel-with-the-sword visit to the Prophet, only Mary Elizabeth Rollins spoke of three visits giving dates and she was in her eighties at the time.⁴² Her reticence to speak earlier in her life concerning her relationship with Joseph Smith is likely due to concerns that being an "eternity only" wife, she might have been seen as second-class to "time and eternity" wives.⁴³ So she waited until most Nauvoo polygamists had died and her legal husband Adam Lightner had been deceased for 15 years before openly discussing her plural marriage with the Prophet.

Three Changes after the Last Angelic Visit Including a Plural Proposal to Nancy Rigdon

Regardless of whether Mary Elizabeth Rollins' recollections are reliable, the historical record indicates that in March-April of 1842, three changes occurred in Joseph Smith's plural marriage strategies. Even though the Prophet had instructed several members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles regarding restored polygamy as they returned from England in the previous summer (of 1841), none had yet married plural wives. However, shortly after the third angelic appearance, Brigham Young proposed plural marriage to Martha Brotherton and Heber C. Kimball apparently married his first plural wife.⁴⁴ In addition, as opposed to plural sealings before the angel visit, Joseph Smith afterwards was sealed to women with no legal husbands with whom conjugality is well documented by attestations from the plural wives themselves (e. g. Malissa Lott and Emily Partridge), or from reliable second hand witnesses (e.g. in the cases of Louisa Beaman, Lucy Walker, Almera Woodard Johnson, Eliza Partridge).⁴⁵

³⁹ Zina Huntington, quoted in "The Prophet's Birthday," *Deseret News*, January 12, 1881, page 2.

⁴⁰ See Joseph A. Kelting, "Statement," Joseph Smith Affidavits, CHL, Ms 3423, Folder 2, images 11-16a; see also *Juvenile Instructor*, 29 (May 1, 1894), 289-90.

⁴¹ See Oliver Preston Robinson ed., *History of Joseph Lee Robinson*, History Comes Home, 2007, 30.

⁴² See Brian C. Hales, "Encouraging Joseph Smith to Practice Plural Marriage: The Accounts of the Angel with a Drawn Sword," *Mormon Historical Studies* vol. 11, no. 2, Fall 2010, 23-39.

⁴³ The historical record indicates that Mary Elizabeth Rollins experienced intermittent poverty throughout her life and later petitioned the Church for financial assistance because of her position as a widow of Joseph Smith. Another of Joseph Smith's plural wives, Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, penned a letter on October 9, 1887 to Church leaders encouraging their financial support of Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner: "I consider her worthy of your attention, and that she, as the Prophet's wife, should be relieved and provided for the remainder of her days." (Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Collection, MSS 363, BYU HBLL Special Collections, item 31.)

⁴⁴ See Martha H. Brotherton, Affidavit dated July 13, 1842, in John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints: Or an Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism*. Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842, 236-40; George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy: "... but we called it celestial marriage"*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008, 601.

⁴⁵ See <http://josephsmithspolygamy.com/JSPSexuality/MASTERJSPSexuality.html> (accessed September 26, 2011).

Three Changes in Nauvoo Plural Marriage in March-April 1842				
Plural Sealings and Proposals	Sealing date	Year	Legal husband?	Sexuality?
1. Louisa Beaman	April 5	1841		Yes
Sarah Bates Pratt Proposal	< July		Orson Pratt	
2. Lucinda Pendleton	< July		George Harris	
3. Zina Huntington	Oct.		Henry B. Jacobs	
4. Presendia Huntington	Dec. 11		Norman Buell	
5. Agnes Moulton Coolbrith	Jan. 6	1842	[widow]	
Sarah Granger Kimball proposal	early		Hiram Kimball	
Angel Visit February 1842				
6. Mary Elizabeth Rollins	Late Feb.	1842	Adam Lightner	
7. Patty Bartlett	March 9		David Sessions	
8. Marinda Nancy Johnson	April/Spring		Orson Hyde	
<i>Three Changes around March-April 1842:</i>				
1. Joseph Smith proposes to a previously unmarried woman – only the second time in Nauvoo.				
2. Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young marry plural wives.				
3. Joseph is sealed to women in marriages where sexual relations are later well documented.				
Nancy Rigdon proposal	April 9	1842		
9. Delcena Johnson	< July			
10. Eliza R. Snow	June 29			possible
11. Sarah Ann Whitney	July 27		[Joseph Kingsbury]	possible
12. Martha McBride	Aug			
13. Sylvia Sessions	Early	[Windsor Lyon]		Yes
14. Ruth Vose	Feb		Edward Sayers	
15. Flora Ann Woodworth	Spring			
16. Emily Dow Partridge	March 4			Yes
17. Eliza Maria Partridge	March 8			Yes
18. Almera Woodard Johnson	April			Yes
19. Lucy Walker	May 1			Yes
20. Sarah Lawrence	May	1843		probable
21. Maria Lawrence	May			Yes
22. Helen Mar Kimball	May			
23. Hannah Ells	mid year			possible
24. Elvira Annie Cowles	June 1		Jonathan Holmes	
25. Rhoda Richards	June 12			
26. Desdemona Fullmer	July			
27. Olive G. Frost	Summer			Yes
28. Malissa Lott	Sept. 20			Yes
29. Fanny Young	Nov. 2			
30. Nancy M. Winchester		Unknown		
31. Elizabeth Davis			Jabez Durfee	
32. Sarah Kingsley			John Cleveland	
33. Esther Dutcher			Albert Smith	

The third change, which occurred in April, came as Joseph Smith proposed to only his second previously unmarried woman in Nauvoo and the first since his marriage to Louisa Beaman.⁴⁶ The

⁴⁶ Historians Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward wrote in their book *Four Zinas: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000): “Joseph pressed Zina for an answer to his marriage proposal on at least three occasions in 1840, but she avoided answering him. Weighing against such a proposal was her affection for the prophet’s first wife, Emma, her respect for traditional Christian monogamy, the strangeness of this new matrimonial system, and the secrecy it would require.” (108.) This citation is based upon a family tradition as recalled by Mary Brown Firmage Woodward, long time record-keeper of the Zina Huntington family organization. Reportedly, Zina Diantha Huntington told her daughter Zina Presendia Young, who in turn informed her daughter Zina Card, who passed the information along to her own daughter Mary Brown. Besides the family tradition, Martha Bradley reports that she viewed a single-page typescript of an “autobiography,” then in Mary Brown Firmage Woodward’s possession. (Email correspondence to the author from Martha Bradley, March 27, 2008.) Bradley reported that it corroborated the tradition as cited in *Four Zinas*, however, details regarding when it was written, by whom, and other credibility issues, are unavailable. Apparently the document was misplaced prior to the files being donated to the Harold B. Lee Library at BYU. Its current whereabouts are unknown. Regardless, several of the details of the family tradition are problematic. In an 1898 interview, Zina insisted that Joseph never directly discussed plural marriage with her prior to her October 27, 1841 sealing. Zina explained: “My brother Dimick told me what Joseph had told him” regarding plural marriage, and asserted: “Joseph did not come until afterwards. . . . The Lord had revealed to Joseph Smith that he was to marry me. I received it from Joseph through my brother Dimick.” (Zina D. H. Young, Interviewed by John W. Wight, October 1, 1898, “Evidence from Zina D. Huntington-Young,” *Saints’ Herald* 52, no. 2, January 11, 1905): 28–30. Also in J. D. Stead, *Doctrines and Dogmas of*

woman he choose was Nancy Rigdon, the nineteen-year-old daughter of his First Counselor in the First Presidency, Sidney Rigdon. The proposal could not have turned out worse. Nancy's brother J. Wickliffe Rigdon, who late in life became a Latter-day Saint, recalled the incident:

It happened in this way: Nancy had gone to Church meeting being held in a grove near the temple lot on which the "Mormons" were then erecting a temple, an old lady friend [Marinda Johnson Hyde] who lived alone invited her, which Nancy did. When they got to the house and had taken their bonnets off, the old lady began to talk to her about the new doctrine of polygamy which was then being taught, telling Nancy, during the conversation, that it was a surprise to her when she first heard it, but that she had since come to believe it to be true.

While they were talking Joseph Smith the Prophet came into the house and joined them, and the old lady immediately left the room. It was then that Joseph made the proposal of marriage to my sister. Nancy flatly refused him, saying if she ever got married she would marry a single man or none at all, and thereupon took her bonnet and went home, leaving Joseph at the old lady's home.⁴⁷

In an attempt to win her over to plural marriage, the Prophet dictated a letter to her containing doctrinal teachings that was published by anti-Mormon John C. Bennett:

Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping ALL the commandments of God. But we cannot keep *all* the commandments without first *knowing* them, and we cannot expect to know *all*, or more than we *now* know unless we *comply* with or keep those we have *already received*. That which is *wrong* under one circumstance, may be, and often is, *right* under another.

God said, *thou shalt not kill*. --at another time He said, *thou shalt utterly destroy*. This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—*by revelation* adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. *Whatever God* requires is *right*, NO MATTER WHAT IT IS, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire. If we seek first the kingdom of God, *all good things* will be added. 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.

A parent may whip a child, and justly, too, because he stole an apple; whereas if the child had asked for the apple, and the parent had given it, the child would have eaten it with a better appetite; there would have been no stripes; all the pleasure of the apple would have been secured, all the misery of stealing lost.

This principle will justly apply to all of God's dealings with His children. Everything that God gives us is lawful and right; and 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 and vexations in the end, and we should have to lie down in sorrow and wailings of everlasting regret. But in obedience there is joy and peace unspotted, unalloyed; and as God has designed our happiness—and the happiness of all His creatures, he never has—He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of his law and ordinances. Blessings offered, but rejected, are no longer blessings, but become like the talent hid in the earth by the wicked and slothful servant; the proffered good returns to the giver; 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.

Brighamism Exposed, [Lamoni, Iowa: RLDS Church, 1911, 212-14.) In light of the contradictory evidence and the inability of historians to examine the described document, the credibility of this story is not established and should be quoted with caution.

⁴⁷ Affidavit of John Wickliffe Rigdon, dated July 28, 1905, MS 3423, CHL. Quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1905) 83-84.

Be wise TO-DAY; 'tis MADNESS to defer;
Next day the fatal precedent may plead.
Thus on till wisdom is pushed out of time

Into eternity. Our heavenly Father is more liberal in His views, and boundless in His mercies and blessings, than we are ready to believe or receive; and, at the same time, is more terrible to the workers of iniquity, more awful in the executions of His punishments, and more ready to detect every false way, than we are apt to suppose Him to be. He will be inquired of by his children – he says, ask and ye SHALL RECEIVE, *seek* and ye shall find;" but, if you will take that which is not your own, or which I *have not given* you, you shall be rewarded according to your deeds; 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 law 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.⁴⁸ (Emphasis – of unknown significance – is reproduced as in Bennett’s published version.)

J. Wickliffe Rigdon also related the aftermath:

Nancy told father and mother of it. The story got out and it became the talk of the town that Joseph had made a proposition to Nancy Rigdon to become his wife, and that she refused him. A few days after the occurrence Joseph Smith came to my father’s house and talked the matter over with the family [and] my sister... The feelings manifested by our family on this occasion were anything but brotherly or sisterly, more especially on the part of Nancy, as she felt that she had been insulted. A day or two later Joseph Smith returned to my father’s house, when matters were satisfactorily adjusted between them and there the matter ended.⁴⁹

Despite a sincere effort by the Prophet and even a doctrinal epistle that included justifications for plural marriage, he was unsuccessful.

Why Nancy Rigdon?

Joseph Smith's choice of Nancy Rigdon to receive this plural proposal, the first offered to a previously unmarried woman since he wed Louisa Beaman, is puzzling. Whatever the criteria he used to assess her possible willingness to embrace a new and extremely novel doctrine, the outcome suggests that he had misjudged her. With many youthful women in Nauvoo that Joseph could have approached instead of Nancy, the question emerges, why did the Prophet choose the daughter of his First Counselor in the First Presidency, Sidney Rigdon? Also why did he write such a detailed letter to teach her? The few existing letters from Joseph Smith to other women are very different in style and content.⁵⁰

The letter, ostensibly written *only* to Nancy Rigdon, contains a curious amount of expansive doctrinal discussion. Its primary focus is around the theme: "Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire."⁵¹ The text includes a story anyone could understand about a child who steals an apple that would have been given freely if the child had simply asked for it. However, the letter also contains a sophisticated discussion of ethics and an explanation of how divine laws might be altered across various generations and according

⁴⁸ "Sixth letter from John C. Bennett," *Sangamo Journal*, Springfield Illinois, August 19, 1842. Reprinted in Bennett, *The History of the Saints*, 243-45. Reprinted in *History of the Church*, 5:134 and Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. and ed. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976 printing, 256.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage*, 83-84.

⁵⁰ See for example, Joseph Smith’s September 1833 letter to Vienna Jacques in Dean C. Jesse, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 293-96; *History of the Church* 1:407-9.

⁵¹ "Sixth letter from John C. Bennett," *Sangamo Journal*, Springfield Illinois, August 19, 1842.

to individual circumstances. Specific language found in Old Testament scriptures is employed (Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 7:2, 12:2, 20:17) and a reference to King Solomon's interactions with the Lord (2 Chronicles 1:8-12, 1 Kings 4:29) is included. In addition, the text alludes to the issue that prompted the July 12, 1843 revelation on celestial marriage, specifically Solomon's "many wives and concubines" (D&C 132:1) and briefly mentions Christ's parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

It is possible that Nancy Rigdon, the nineteen-year-old daughter of a prominent Campbellite-preacher-turned-Mormon-leader would have been familiar with these scriptural passages. She might have also understood the letter's references to ethical, and theological issues. Regardless, Joseph's doctrinal exposition in this situation is surprising. Its tone and approach do not seem to convey a message that would successfully persuade a teenager to join him in a secret plural marriage. (And it was not successful.) Absent are appeals to loving feelings he may have possessed for her or an offer to marry him in order to enjoy conjugal bliss. Neither does he remind her of special status that she would receive being a plural wife of the prophet and Church president. Importantly, no coercive time-sensitive threats were declared that God had commanded her to comply or damnation would follow.⁵²

It is at least possible that his real target audience was not the child but the parent—i.e., that the Prophet was trying to instruct Sidney and garner his support for the doctrine. At that point in time, neither William Law, Joseph's second counselor in the First Presidency, nor Hyrum Smith, Associate President of the Church, were aware of the Prophet's teachings on the subject.⁵³ Evidence also shows that during his twenty-month stay in Nauvoo (November 1840 to July 1842), Assistant Counselor John C. Bennett never sat down with Joseph Smith to learn his teachings about eternal and plural marriage.⁵⁴ Accordingly, it is probable that Sidney was equally uninformed. Possibly Joseph hoped that Nancy would respond favorably and through her participation, her father would become converted to the principle. Available records indicate that Sidney Rigdon never supported plural marriage during Joseph's lifetime.⁵⁵

Summary

A review of Joseph Smith's teachings regarding polyandry demonstrates that *ceremonial* polyandry, wherein a woman had experienced two marriage ceremonies, were either two consecutive marriages, one for time and a second for eternity, or a sealing in the new and everlasting covenant that superseded and invalidate all other marriage covenants including legal nuptials. Importantly, sexual polyandry was not permitted and was deemed "adultery" causing the woman to be "destroyed" if she engaged in such relations (D&C 132:63).

⁵² The only known plural proposal that contained a time limit was issued to Lucy Walker who was introduced to the principle by Joseph Smith in 1842. She subsequently agonized for many months as the Prophet patiently waited. Lucy related: "I was tempted and tortured beyond endurance until life was not desirable. Oh that the grave would kindly receive me, that I might find rest... Oh, let this bitter cup pass. And thus I prayed in the agony of my soul. The Prophet discerned my sorrow. He saw how unhappy I was..." (Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience*, Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co, 1888, 46.) Only after witnessing her turmoil and having waited many months, in May of 1843 Joseph instructed Lucy: "I have no flattering words to offer. It is a command of God to you." Then he gave a singular directive, "I will give you until tomorrow to decide this matter." This twenty-four hour time limit is sometimes quoted to assert that Joseph gave ultimatums to his potential plural spouses to quickly press them into compliance. (See for example George D. Smith, "The Forgotten Story of Nauvoo Celestial Marriage," *Journal of Mormon History*, 36 [Fall 2010] 4:157.) In reality many months passed between the two events.

⁵³ William Law, Affidavit dated July 17, 1885, quoted in Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy*. Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Co., 1914, 126. On May 26, 1843 William Clayton recorded: "Hyrum received the doctrine of priesthood." George D. Smith, ed. *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995, 106.

⁵⁴ See Brian C. Hales, "John C. Bennett and Joseph Smith's Polygamy: Addressing the Question of Reliability," *Journal of Mormon History*, forthcoming.

⁵⁵ See discussion in Thomas J. Gregory, "Sidney Rigdon: Post Nauvoo," *BYU Studies* 21(winter 1981) 1: 61.

While details remain sketchy, interactions with a resolute angel and the Prophet's wife, Emma, no doubt generated immense tension for Joseph. Seeking to appease these stresses by avoiding "time and eternity" sealings to previously unmarried women with whom conjugal relations would be expected and contracting "eternity only" marriages to civilly wed females were apparently unacceptable. The angel rejected Joseph Smith's feeble polygamous strategy compelling him to teach the doctrines to others and mandate their compliance and for him to personally proceed by marrying new plural wives for "time and eternity."

Accordingly, the Prophet proposed to Nancy Rigdon and penned a sophisticated doctrinal argument to her that were fruitless. Understanding whether Joseph Smith also sought Sidney's participation and support is at present indiscernible. Even though the Prophet's correspondence has been filtered through the hands of John C. Bennett, the resulting letter contains sublime truths that, like a chameleon, blend into either a plural marriage setting or a completely non-polygamous context of scripture and everyday life.