

A Response to Concerns Regarding Joseph Smith and the Practice of Plural Marriage in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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Concern:

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Response:

One popular anti-Mormon narrative reports that Joseph Smith met a woman and gave her 24 hours to comply with a marriage proposal or she would be cut off forever.¹ The story is folklore, but it is based upon the introduction of the previously unmarried Lucy Walker to the principle of plural marriage.

Joseph first discussed plural marriage with Lucy in 1842. She did not initially accept this proposal but rather agonized for many months over the prospect. She 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 night of my soul. The Prophet discerned my sorrow. He saw how unhappy I was.² Finally, on April 30, 1843, Joseph saw her anguish and spoke to her, pushing her to resolve. I have no flattering words to offer. It is a command of God to you. I will give you until tomorrow to decide this matter. If you reject this message the gate will be closed forever against you. How did Lucy respond to this challenge? She responded as skeptics would today:

This aroused every drop of Scotch in my veins. For a few minutes I stood fearless before him, and looked him in the eye. I had been speechless, but at last found utterance and said: "Although you are a prophet of God you could not induce me to take a step of so great importance, unless I knew that God approved my course. I would rather die. I have tried to pray but received no comfort, no light," and emphatically forbid him speaking again to me on this subject. Every feeling of my soul revolted against it.

¹ See for example George D. Smith, "The Forgotten Story of Nauvoo Celestial Marriage," *Journal of Mormon History*, 36 (Fall 2010) 4:157. By selectively quoting Lucy Walker's account, George D. Smith makes it appear as if Joseph introduced plural marriage and then immediately gave her a forty-hour ultimatum to participate, when in reality many months passed between the two events.

² 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; see also testimony in Andrew Jenson, "Plural Marriage," *Historical Record* 6 (July 1887): 229-30.

