

A Response to Lindsay Van Allen’s “Response to Fairmormon”: Round Four

By Brian C. Hales

This essay represents round four of a discussion that started with Kirk Van Allen’s “D&C 132: A Revelation of Men, Not God.” It is plain that Kirk Van Allen and his wife Lindsay disagree with Laura and me. These types of exchanges can be helpful if they provide accurate information on contrasting views. Truth seekers will study and pray to discern correct information. One of Joseph Smith’s revelations encouraged: “Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good” (D&C 90:24).

Straw Men Arguments

Lindsay’s essay manifests multiple problems, both in balance and accuracy, theologically and historically. It also includes a multitude of Straw Man arguments. A Straw Man argument occurs when a writer portrays the opposition inaccurately and then proceeds to counter the inaccurate argument. Such polemics always destroy the Straw Man, but do little to advance understanding because they are not based upon true depictions. Since these primarily constitute a misrepresentation of our viewpoint, I will deal with them in an appendix. Readers are, however, highly encouraged to review them after reading this essay. Also, readers and the Van Allens may want to watch this short YouTube video on Straw Man arguments put together by Kevin deLaplante: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5vzCmURh7o>.

While the Van Allens are entitled to their opinions, their creativity in criticizing is sometimes a little extreme: “We have to ask the Hales if they pulled a groin muscle, because they were doing some crazy contortions trying to explain. . .” Accompanying this statement is a photo of a pediatric contortionist. This statement may seem clever, but it appears to be a diversion away from scholarly inquiry. While ad hominem critiques are something helpful in contextualizing a claim, their concerns that we might have “pulled a groin muscle” seem insincere. I’m generally thick-skinned and being criticized is not unexpected—it comes with belief (see Matt. 5:11), yet I usually find such tactics to be a poor substitute for good argumentation. I wondered why the photos were included at all since they seem to have little relationship to the points being discussed.

Is the “Law” and “Covenant” in D&C 132 Polygamy?

I don’t wish to misrepresent the Van Allen’s position, but it appears they believe that the “law” and “covenant” in D&C 132 (especially vv. 4–6) command polygamy or that all exalted beings are polygamists. To support this view, Lindsey first quotes Apostle Orson Pratt’s writings from *The Seer*. Her willingness to do this suggests that she is unaware that Brigham Young was highly critical of material in *The Seer*. While the Church’s *Millennial Star* had reprinted several articles from *The Seer*, President Young inserted the following instructions in 1855:

A monthly periodical called the “Seer,” published by Elder Orson Pratt at Washington City, D.C., contains beautifully written articles; but notwithstanding the general beauty of the style, and the apparent candour and minuteness of the reasoning, the “Seer” has many items of erroneous doctrine. As it would be a lengthy and laborious operation to enter minutely into their disapproval, I prefer, for the present, to let the Saints have opportunity to exercise their faith and discernment in discriminating between the true and erroneous; and simply request them, while reading the “Seer,” to ask themselves what spirit they are of, and whether the Holy Ghost bears testimony to the truth of all the doctrines therein advocated.¹

In my writings I will sometimes quote Orson Pratt, but I don’t quote *The Seer* for anything authoritative. Instead I find a better source or provide no quote at all.

Next Lindsay quotes Brigham Young saying: “Monogamy, or restrictions by law to one wife, is no part of the economy of heaven among men.” Apparently, she believes this strongly supports her position because it is repeated a second time toward the end of the essay. Regardless, it doesn’t say that the law is strictly plural marriage. It states that the law in heaven has no restrictions to “one wife.” In other words, the celestial kingdom allows polygamy. No monogamy restrictions exist there. It is unclear why Lindsay included this because Laura and I agree with it.

The next quote states:

Why do we believe in and practice polygamy? Because the Lord introduced it to his servants in a revelation given to Joseph Smith, and the Lord’s servants have always practiced it. ‘And is that religion popular in heaven?’ It is the only popular religion there...” –Prophet Brigham Young, *Deseret News*, August 6, 1862 [JD 9:322]

So we learn that polygamy is “popular in heaven.” Great, but does that mean that all men in the celestial kingdom are polygamists? I guess we can’t tell from this statement.

Later Lindsay writes:

Brian and Laura claim that though both eternal marriage and plural marriage are mentioned in section 132 (but again, if you see plural marriage in section 132 you are a “fundamentalist”), they are separate doctrines. They illustrate their point with this quote from Joseph F. Smith in 1879:

¹ Brigham Young in “Publications,” *Millennial Star*, 17 (May 12, 1855), 19: 298. In 1860 Orson admitted that “Some of the doctrines I had advanced in the ‘Seer,’ at Washington were incorrect.” (“Instructions to the Saints,” *Deseret News*, July 25, 1860, page 2 [162], col. 2.) The First Presidency responded to Elder Pratt’s confession saying: “One of the Elders of Israel had written a long revelation which he deeded to be very important, and requested br. Joseph to hear him read it. The Prophet commended its style in glowing terms, remarked that the ideas were ingeniously advanced, c., c., and that he had but one objection to it. ‘What is that?’ inquired the writer, greatly elated that his production was considered so near perfect. The Prophet Joseph replied, ‘It is not true.’” (Ibid., page 3 [163], col. 1; see also *Deseret News*, August 23, 1865, pages 2–5.)

“This doctrine of eternal union of husband and wife, and of plural marriage, is one of the most important doctrines ever revealed to man in any age of the world.”

Did you catch that? Smith said “doctrine...is”. The word “is” is used with a singular subject. . . If the subject was plural, the proper predicate would be the word “are.”

To support the idea that plural marriage is commanded and is the new and everlasting covenant, Lindsay advances an argument that hinges on whether the shorthand scribe wrote “is” or “are.” Since most of the discourses were reviewed by the speaker before they were published, this might be supportive. However, since we are dealing with such an important concept, it would seem that clearer declarations might have been available.

In addition, while lining up a series of proof texts might seem convincing, truth will be found by learning all the teachings that have been given. Writers seeking quotations that imply polygamy is commanded might want to consult Anne Wilde’s, *An Essential for Exaltation: Celestial Plural Marriage Essential for the Highest Degree of the Celestial Kingdom*. None of the quotations are plain declarations, but it is a nice compilation that Lindsay might enjoy reviewing.

On the other hand, if balance is sought, correlating a wider sample of the statements of early leaders regarding plural marriage is useful. For example, speaking in 1883 to the Saints at Bear Lake, Idaho, John Taylor acknowledged, “He [God] has told us about our wives and our children being sealed to us, that we might have a claim on them in eternity. He has revealed unto us the Law of Celestial Marriage, associated with which is the principle of plural marriage.”² Here President Taylor clearly differentiates between the “Law of Celestial Marriage” and the “principle of plural marriage.” There are many other similar references. (See MormonPolygamyDocuments.org.)

The Works of Abraham

Returning to Lindsay’s line of thought, she makes an additional attempt to portray D&C 132 as including a commandment to practice polygamy.

D&C 132:32 states

“Go ye, therefore, and do the works of Abraham; enter ye into my law and ye shall be saved.”

There is nothing in this verse that suggests it is a temporary command or personal. In fact, it says we must do it to be saved.

This argument is popular among Mormon fundamentalists. However, it is problematic as they interpret this scripture. Abraham did many good “works.” He sought for the priesthood (Abr. 1:2–3), he presided righteously over his family, he paid his tithing (Alma 13:15), he kept covenants, he received revelation (Abr 3:11), he sacrificed burnt offerings (Gen. 22:13), he was a

² John Taylor, (no date) 1883, in *Journal of Discourses*, 24:229; emphasis added.

missionary (Abr 1:19), he complied with the commandment of circumcision (Gen. 17:23–26, Acts 7:8), and he married plural wives by proper authority (Gen. 16; D&C 132:37).

If section 132’s directive to “do the works of Abraham” constitutes a commandment to practice plural marriage, it would also be a commandment to offer up burnt offering and covenant with circumcision because Abraham did those “works” as well. We must do the works of Abraham that we can, but priesthood ordinances like marriage sealings or burnt offerings require authority. Otherwise, neither sacrificing (see 1 Sam. 15:22) or plural marrying (see D&C 132:18) will be recognized by God.

Does D&C 132 Command Polygamy?

Lindsey’s apparent claims that D&C 132 commands polygamy at all times or that any leader taught that all exalted beings are polygamists are not uncommon, but they are also not true. Contradictory and ambiguous statements are often recruited as support by fundamentalists.

In this case, evidently the best quotations Lindsay could muster are from *The Seer*, and then citations from Brigham Young stating polygamy is part of the economy of heaven or is popular in heaven. These are not strong corroborative evidences because they do not plainly state the simple concept the Lindsay seems to promote. If plural marriage is required for exaltation, we might ask why leaders did not plainly state it? It could be said in three words: “Exaltation requires polygamy.”

The answer is that polygamy is not required of all people at all times and places any more than burnt offerings are required of all people at all times. The scriptures tell us that God gives specific commandments to “prove us herewith” (Abr. 3:25). His ways are higher than our ways (Isa. 55:9) and unsearchable (Rom. 11:33). Adam was commanded to offer burnt offerings, Abraham to circumcise, Nephi to build a ship, Noah to build an ark, and the Latter-day Saints to practice polygamy between the early 1840s and 1890. We don’t have to build a ship or ark or offer burnt offerings, but we will not be penalized for not doing so. The language of D&C 132:19 is plain that a worthy monogamous couple sealed by proper authority will be exalted—no polygamy needed.

It’s All about the Math

Lindsay is critical of our analysis of demographics: “Throughout their FAIR rebuttal, the Hales often dismissed our concerns or conclusions because of ‘speculation.’ We found this section of Hales piece to be full of speculative holes. Pot meet kettle.” It is unfortunate that plain observations about sex ratios or female Christian devotion or the teachings in D&C 132 regarding sealing and exaltation are sometimes attributed to Brian Hales (or to me and my wife Laura together) as apologetics. Let me try to summarize these observations in a way that we all can agree. Starting with the demographics:

1. The past 200–300 years of census data show that births are about 1:05 male to 1.00 female.
2. According to scientific method, we cannot assume the gender birth ratio existed in the centuries prior to our data collection because we do not know the physiological etiology. That is, we don't know why the birth rates are different, so we cannot assume they were consistent in the millennia before. Demographers Brian and Jaisson acknowledged the “oscillatory nature around a near-equilibrium of the two sexes” that could ebb and flow over thousands of years, rather than just centuries.³
3. Multiple studies show that women are more receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ than are men. It is very constant. Likewise, it can be viewed in almost any Christian or LDS congregation today. Brigham Young taught this: “The fact is, let the pure principles of the kingdom of God be taught to men and women, and far more of the latter than the former will receive and obey them.”⁴
4. Because the observational data regarding female religious preferences has been gathered from the past 200–300, it cannot be generalized to other times and places either. That is, it cannot be assumed to have occurred prior.

Summarizing 1–4: Neither the birth gender ratio nor female Christian devotion can be projected back in time. In other words, demographics cannot predict the gender ratios at the final judgment.

If we add these observations to the teachings of section 132, we can perhaps understand why Joseph Smith's question about polygamy found in D&C 132:1 elicited an answer from God explaining *eternal* marriage (vv. 2–20).

1. Section 132 teaches that exaltation requires eternal marriage (v. 17). It allows a plurality of wives (vv. 61–63) and condemns a plurality of husbands (vv. 41–42, 61, 63). Multiple Church leaders have corroborated these observations.
2. Section 132 does not predict more women than men at the final judgment, but it does provide an option that would allow all worthy individuals to be exalted. That option is *eternal* plural marriage.
3. According to section 132, marriages performed by the sealing authority held by the “one” man (v. 7), “shall be of full force when they are out of the world,” (v. 19) whether it is a man's first wife or additional wife. Stated another way, a woman sealed to a man as his second (or other polygamous) wife would be expected to be his wife in eternity. President Monson, the “one” man today, does not allow plural unions of living couples.

³ Eric Brian and Marie Jaisson, *The Descent of Human Sex Ratio at Birth: A Dialogue between Mathematics, Biology and Sociology* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2007), 181.

⁴ Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 18:249 (June 23, 1874).

“Presentism”

Lindsay makes the following claim:

A huge problem with the Hales’ statement is that it is full of presentism. If the church has decided to re-interpret the intent D&C 132, they can do that. But to project that reinterpretation back on the original purpose and intent of the revelation is inaccurate.

“Presentism” may be defined as an “uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes, especially the tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts.” If I understand Lindsay’s position correctly, she assumes D&C 132 commands polygamy and then assumes that the monogamy Church standard today is “presentism.” That is, Latter-day Saints today practice monogamy, so we have reinvented D&C 132 to allow for that interpretation.

Lindsay’s interpretation is more easily defended if she ignores the scriptures and Joseph Smith’s teachings. God told Lehi that He could command or not command polygamy (Jacob 2:30). So if God commands polygamy, the presentism will be polygamy. If God does not allow it, then the presentism would not.

God told Joseph Smith: “Wherefore I, the Lord, command and revoke, as it seemeth me good; and all this to be answered upon the heads of the rebellious, saith the Lord” (D&C 56:4). Fundamentalists identify the “rebellious” as the Latter-day Saints in 1890. But that is so unfair. The vast majority of those Saints were willing to continue to sacrifice for plural marriage. The “rebellious” was the United States government who persecuted the Saints.

Regardless, the Book of Mormon and New Testament Saints were monogamous (Jacob 2:27, 1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6). Their interpretation of marriage would have been monogamy. Similarly, in the early 1830s, the marital standard for Church members was monogamy. Then between the early 1840s and 1890 polygamy was a commandment to the Latter-day Saints. Their view of marriage during that period was polygamous. The command was revoked through the 1890 Manifesto so that post-1890 matrimonial practice is once again monogamy. Each period had a different standard. The views of the Saints at any particular time was not presentism.

It is possible that between the 1840s and 1890 some Latter-day Saints may have overemphasized the importance of the practice of plural marriage in God’s plan of salvation. It was a difficult principle to obey and some may have felt that believers living in other ages needed their same trials to gain exaltation. Yet the presiding leaders never indicated that to be true. Joseph Smith explained that each generation received their own blessings for living the specific commandments then given: “If others’ blessings are not your blessings, others’ curses are not your curses; you stand then in these last days, as all have stood before you, agents unto

yourselves, to be judged according to your works.”⁵

“All Old Covenants Have I Caused to be Done Away”

Another important concept that deserves revisiting is D&C 22:1, which reads: “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, even that which was from the beginning.” Laura and I read this to mean that the new and everlasting covenant of marriage causes all old covenants of marriage to be done away, but Lindsay apparently disagrees:

That does cause one to stop and ponder, until you read the verse in context. You see, Brian and Laura did something here called proof-texting. That is where you take a totally unrelated verse of scripture and you use it, out of context, to justify your argument. When we look at this verse in context, we see that the Lord is discussing baptism. And how he only accepts baptism done by His authority. It is in no way related to section 132, nor did early members of the church view D&C 22:1 in this manner.

The new and everlasting covenant is composed of many covenants with baptism being the first. Eternal marriage covenants are part of the new and everlasting covenant. The Lord states plainly that he is revealing a new and everlasting covenant as he introduces eternal marriage (D&C 132:4). Without any explanation, Lindsay tells us that “it is in no way related” to the Lord’s earlier declaration. How would she know this? It seems that “all” means “all” in D&C 22:1.

Admittedly, the verses might be interpreted differently. But when we consult the historical record, we discover that the Nauvoo Saints believed that the new and everlasting covenants of marriage caused legal marriage covenants to be done away. For example, Todd Compton concluded: “Thus all couples in Nauvoo who accepted Mormonism were suddenly unmarried, granted Joseph’s absolutist, exclusivist claims to divine authority.”⁶ John D. Lee provided this recollection:

About the same time the doctrine of “sealing” for an eternal state was introduced [1842–43], and the Saints were given to understand that their marriage relations with each other were not valid. That those who had solemnized the rites of matrimony had no authority of God to do so. That the true priesthood was taken from the earth with the death of the Apostles and inspired men of God. That they were married to each other only by their own covenants, and that if their marriage relations had not been productive of blessings and peace, and they felt it oppressive to remain together, they were at liberty to make their own choice, as much as if they had not been married.⁷

⁵ Joseph Smith, “To the Honorable Men of the World,” *Evening and Morning Star* (Aug 1832): 22.

⁶ Todd Compton, “A Trajectory of Plurality: An Overview of Joseph Smith’s Thirty-Three Plural Wives,” *Dialogue* 29, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 23.

⁷ John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled* (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand & Company, 1877), 146. John D. Lee’s recollections may not always be reliable, but this description is consistent with other observations regarding eternal marriage sealings.

Furthermore, there is no supportive evidence that a woman ever had two husbands sealed by priesthood authority. Dan Vogel admitted “There is no solid evidence of polyandrous sexuality in any of Joseph Smith’s plural marriages.”⁸ Similarly, Mike Quinn acknowledged that there is no unambiguous evidence supporting it.⁹ Quinn, unarguably one of the most accomplished of all Mormon historians, accumulates every possible defense of sexual polyandry (including dreams and phrenology reports), but towards the end of an essay discussing polyandry acknowledges that there is no plain evidence.¹⁰ So we can haggle about whether “all” means “all” in D&C 22:1, but without supportive evidence that a woman could have two lawful husbands (according to God’s laws), the interpretation advanced by Lindsay and Kirk Van Allen is not persuasive.

Proponents of the position that Joseph Smith practiced sexual polyandry need to answer the question whether the alleged behavior was in accordance with his teachings or in contradiction to them. If it was in accordance, then where are those teachings? Surely some of the women or their families would have shared them in defense of the woman’s participation. If it is in contradiction, then where are the complaints of hypocrisy and adultery? Even anti-Mormons did not level the claim until 1851. Neither did William Law, who apostatized in 1844, make the allegation. Charges of sexual polyandry depict unreality.

Rhetorical exchanges like this will not likely change the opinions currently held by Kirk or Lindsay Van Allen regarding plural marriage. Unbelievers consistently attribute Joseph Smith’s libido as the primary driving force in establishing polygamy among the Latter-day Saints in the early 1840s. In contrast, most believers accept that it was revelation.

What I hope to do through this discussion is to recreate the historical and theological world of the Nauvoo polygamists for readers. They probably haven’t thought about it, but the Van Allen’s interpretation of D&C 132 portrays the early pluralists as bumbling dupes who were so gullible that they could not see the glaring problems the Van Allen’s have identified. In fact, the Van Allen’s version is rife with half-truths and misrepresentations. The truth is that men like Brigham Young and John Taylor, women like Eliza R. Snow and Zina Huntington, were just as cautious and skeptical as we are today. Superficial evaluations like the Van Allen’s may assuage their feelings as they leave the Church, but they do not accurately depict what happened in Nauvoo a 170 years ago.

APPENDIX

Straw Men Arguments advanced by Lindsay Van Allen with Responses

Below are Lindsay’s quotations that represent Straw Men and my response in italics:

⁸ <http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/hales-vogel-1-facebook-exchanges>

⁹ See <http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Quinns-FINAL-RESPONSE.pdf>.

¹⁰ See <http://josephsmithspolygamy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Quinns-FINAL-RESPONSE.pdf> and then go to endnote 267 on page 118.

“The Hales seek to purport that a ‘polygamous heaven’ is a hypothetical speculation.” *Having written thousands of published pages on plural marriage, I can’t imagine why anyone would think that I believe polygamy in heaven is “hypothetical.” Neither did we represent that view in our response to Kirk.*

“The Hales suggest that current data cannot be extrapolated back through previous millennia and then seek to do just that as they use a 2009 Pew Forum and a 1958 book to suggest that women are more religious than their male counterparts by a ratio of at least 1.09 to 1. We would like to remind that Hales that this data can not accurately extrapolate the religious practices of the previous millennia. To use data that only goes back 57 years, to pedestalize women and claim that men are religiously inferior throughout 6,000 years of history is absurd, and should in no way be used as a justification for the polygamous practices of Mormons in the 19th century.” *Apparently Lindsay simply missed this statement found in the our original response: “Just as the birth ratios appear to have favored males 105 to 100 over the past few centuries, the opposite trend for participation in Christianity has favored women to a greater degree. Neither observation allows for sweeping conclusions regarding the preceding millennia.”*

“The Hales explain that we don’t know what the unmarried ‘ministering servants’ duties will be, as if this is some kind of consolation to those that will leave this life unwed.” *We said nothing about consoling individuals who do not receive exaltation. Joseph Smith taught: “The disappointment of hopes and expectations at the resurrection, would be indescribably dreadful.”¹¹ Individuals who reject the new and everlasting covenant will be disappointed. This is part of the reason why I am trying to help people understand the teachings of D&C 132. Now is our opportunity to accept it (I believe).*

“There seems to be no great way to say that if no one happens to marry you in this life or you are unable to marry for reasons outside of your control, you have just drawn a short stick for eternity.” *In fact, we said everyone will receive the opportunity to be married. God is just. We quoted Elder Boyd K. Packer who said in the April 2014 General Conference: “Those who do not marry or those who cannot have children are not excluded from the eternal blessings they seek but which, for now, remain beyond their reach. We do not always know how or when blessings will present themselves, but the promise of eternal increase [exaltation] will not be denied any faithful individual who makes and keeps sacred covenants.”¹²*

“...you are a crazy fundamentalist. . .” *We did not call Kirk “crazy” or a fundamentalist. However, we did say that some of the reasoning included in his arguments has been advanced by Mormon fundamentalists for decades.*

“The Hales explained that the New and Everlasting Covenant was not marriage and certainly not plural marriage.” *We didn’t say this, and we don’t believe it. The New and Everlasting*

¹¹ Ehat & Cook, *Words*, T–S 4 (15 September 1843): 331–32; 9 October 1843 (2) (Monday Afternoon), 253.

¹² Boyd K. Packer, “The Witness,” 2014 April General Conference, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/print/2014/05/sun>.

Covenant is all the covenants and includes eternal marriage, some of which will be plural marriages.

“The Hales’ assumption is that the marriage to Joseph did away with Zina’s marriage to Henry.” We did not mention Zina Huntington in our response but it seems obvious that Lindsay has not read much of our writings. Zina herself said she was sealed to Joseph “for eternity.” Zina’s brothers made the same statement. An eternity-only sealing is for eternity. It is not a marriage on earth and does not cause a legal marriage to be done away.

The Hales are quick to assert that we just really don’t know what we will want in eternity, because we are telestial beings that can’t understand the eternities. ***Actually it was Joseph Smith who told Fanny Young that she was foolish and did not know what she would want in heaven.***

“To claim that section 132 does not justify the practice of polygamy, is to claim that the prophets from Joseph Smith to Heber J. Grant did not understand or properly administer D&C 132. D&C 132 was presented as the commandment justifying polygamy. To claim that there is no polygamy within its pages is to claim superior knowledge of the section and its intent than 7 modern-day prophets.” In reality, we believe that section 132 DOES justify the practice and we have always said so. I’m not sure where this idea comes from, but it is not in our writings.

“Verses 61–62 say that the law of the priesthood is that a man can take multiple wives. To claim that section 132 does not authorize plural marriage is to deny that these verses don’t really mean what they say.” We agree. I’m not sure who she is opposing in these sentences.