

Chapter 12

Mary Page Eaton Testified that Joseph Was Not a Polygamist

Throughout her long life, Mary Judd Page Eaton declared that Brigham Young, and not Joseph Smith, had introduced polygamy into the Church. As recorded in the previous chapter, Mary and her husband, Apostle John E. Page, lived in Nauvoo after Joseph's death. During that time Apostle Page was expelled for opposing Brigham Young's measures, which included the introduction of false temple endowments and plural and celestial marriage.

Mary later asserted:

I can prove, by some of the covenants we were required to make, that Joseph never originated them. Mr. Page was with me, and went through the same ceremonies. The words of our covenants were spoken to us by Brigham. After we had received the endowment in the temple, as soon as we were alone in our house, Mr. Page said to me, 'Mary, I tell you that endowment is all of the devil.' (*The Saints' Advocate* 5 [March 1883]: 295)

Apostle Page envisioned the Saints returning to Independence and acquiring the Temple Lot property. He affiliated with the Church of Christ (Temple Lot), led by Granville Hedrick, who was promoting the gathering and the acquiring of Temple property. By 1867 Apostle Page was afflicted with asthma. Believing that his illness was terminal, he told Mary he was disappointed with the Church of Christ. He also told her that he was going to die, and requested that Seventy John Landers of the RLDS Church preach his funeral sermon. Apostle Page died October 14, 1867. He and Mary were the

parents of eight children.

In 1876 Mary married William Eaton, an elder of the Church of Christ (Temple Lot). Mary, a staunch member of the RLDS Church, and Mr. Eaton moved to Independence. There they shared a deep interest in the Temple Tract, and Eaton purchased lots, including the area which contains the “spot” for the Temple of the Lord. They then sold those lots to the Church of Christ, which owns them to this day.

Mary Page Eaton deserves to be listed with the great women of the Restoration because:

1. She, as an apostle’s wife, lived in Nauvoo and knew Joseph and Emma personally, and heard Joseph say that “polygamy was wrong when it was practiced by the ancients, and it’s wrong now.”

2. She was the only wife of an apostle who served during the Nauvoo era, who openly opposed polygamy. In contrast, some of the wives of Brigham Young and the apostles who followed him, made affidavits that they had been Joseph’s wives.

3. Mary asserted that a direct connection existed between Udney Jacob’s *Peace Maker* and Section 132 of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants.

4. Mary helped purchase parcels of the Temple Lot in an effort to reserve the land for the erection of the true Temple, which is yet to be constructed. In contrast, Brigham Young and his fellow apostles sold their rights to that lot (which they had never really owned) to James Pool of Independence (see *The Temple of the Lord* by Richard and Pamela Price, 41–55). Mary was a witness for the RLDS Church in the famous Temple Lot Suit.

5. Mary was an educated woman who used her talents to write articles and letters over a period of many years, in an effort to clear Joseph’s name of polygamy.

Her parents, relatives, and friends went west with Brigham Young, and she wrote long letters to convince them of the truth. One letter stated:

Dear Friend:—Yours of July 25th [1880] is received. I am anxious to tell you the same news I wrote to sister Lois,

in Kamas, Utah. I heard E. W. Tullidge preach in our church lately; He gave an interesting account of the rise of the church through Joseph the Martyr, announcing his belief in his son as being the president of the church at the present time. He finished by uttering a prophecy concerning the church in Utah. It ran thus: "There shall thousands of that people throw away their evil doctrines and join the true church, and preach the gospel in purity to the nations of the earth."

The same prophecy was declared by John E. Page, my husband, I think in 1854, in Dekalb, Illinois, to a large school-house full of attentive hearers. He spoke with sadness of the evils that people had been led into by blind shepherds, but said with great earnestness: "Thus saith the Spirit of the Lord: He will turn and overturn that church until He shakes out the evil doctrines from them, and very many shall come out from them and teach the gospel in purity to the nations."

Now mark these two witnesses on the tablet of your memory. I have told you beforehand, for with a sane mind and much rejoicing I heard them both, being present when these things were uttered. I doubt not the Lord or his goodness, ability, and power to fulfill them. You say you have replied to my arguments on polygamy. True; but you can not refute them and believe the Book of Mormon. You say it is plain that the Nephites were not allowed to practice that principle; but wherein that was a standing law to all ages, you fail to see. "Herein is a marvelous thing," that you do not see that the law given by an angel of the Lord to Jacob to teach his people was not correct in that age of revelation. Jacob says it was given before in the age of Lehi. The Lord says the disobedience of it in the age of David and Solomon, was abominable before Him. Again in the same chapter the Lord says he will visit all the lands of his people who disobey it, with a sore curse, even unto destruction. Jacob says that the Lamanites have not forgotten the command given to our fathers, (plural). In that age the same pure law was in force, and for keeping this command the Lamanites shall become a blessed people. This is an age yet to come. If they shall be blessed for keeping this law, the church in Utah, will be

cursed for disobeying it, as in lands where the same sin prevailed, for God is no respecter of persons. Read Mosiah, chapter seven, and you will find that in another age the same crime brought destruction upon those who practiced it in the age in which King Noah lived. Read Ether, fourth chapter, concerning those not of the Nephites, but of a people led to this land by the Lord, who always gives pure laws to His people. The Prophet Ether says that King Riplakish did not do right in the sight of the Lord, for he had many wives. Is it possible for the Lord to call a thing good that He has by so many witnesses called evil? Can he declare any practice abominable that is (defined by Webster) “hateful, detestable, loathsome,” and afterwards when importuned, call it the celestial law, and righteousness? The prophet Mormon says, “He changeth not, if so He would cease to be God.”—Book of Mormon 4:7.

Now I think you are convinced by so many witnesses. When the angel told Jacob the Lord’s law for his people, it was a standing law to all ages. What would you think of a people who dared to say, “The gospel brought to us by an angel was not a law to all ages?” In conclusion we refer to chapter ten of the second book of Nephi, 4th and 5th. The nations that possess the Lord’s words in the Book of Mormon shall be judged by them at the last day.

Yours for truth,

Mary Page Eaton.

(*The Saints’ Herald* 35 [September 1, 1888]: 557–558)

Mary Writes of Polygamy’s Foundation

Mary wrote an article in which she proclaimed boldly against Brigham Young and Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, daughter of Apostle Heber C. Kimball. Mary was well acquainted with both families. On December 19, 1838, at Far West, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball had ordained John Page to the office of apostle, and on December 26, 1838, Apostle Kimball performed the wedding ceremony for Mary Judd and John Page. Mary wrote:

THE FOUNDATION OF POLYGAMY.

IN Brigham Young's public address to his church, September 17th, 1878, he says: "Our father Adam had but one wife here; her name was Eve; but there is no doubt but that he left many companions." Why did he utter these false and deceptive teachings without a shadow of foundation but his own insidious assertion? With many others equally foolish, and untenable, he artfully enslaved the minds of his people, placing them in a terrible net, and made their bands so strong that nothing but the power of God can release them! But God's loving favor, and ever prevailing power, will reclaim the honest.

When I read Bro. Joseph's [Joseph Smith III] reply to Littlefield, I rejoiced and said, It is enough; we have no need to say more on the subject; Joseph has so clearly, from the word of God, shown the errors that people have been deceived by, all but hypocrites and deceivers among them will begin to "enquire for the old paths" of righteousness and walk therein. But today, while reading Helen Mar [Kimball] Whitney's defense of polygamy, I thought, How dark the minds of that people, when the word of God is so plain! [Helen, a wife of a polygamist, claimed to have been married to Joseph the Prophet.] . . . Helen Mar says polygamy is right, because it was practiced by some of the Bible prophets and kings, and Joseph Smith the Martyr taught it! What a weak and soul-sickening excuse to do evil! Before Joseph Smith taught any doctrine, God made an instrument of him to translate the Book of Mormon, and in 2d book of Nephi, chapter 2, Lehi the prophet says of the book, that which is written by the children of Joseph, and the children of Judah, (referring to the Bible), "shall grow together unto the confounding of false doctrines." And the eleventh chapter says the nations that have these words shall be judged by the things written by the Nephites. In the twelfth chapter the Lord says the words from his mouth to the Nephites shall be "a standard" to his people. These are words of the prophets which the Lord inspired them to write, also inspired Joseph to translate. They prove that we shall be judged by them, and not

by any man's word that teaches contrary to them; for they shall "confound false doctrines." Helen Mar quotes some of the revelation she says Joseph the Martyr had on plural marriage [LDS DC Section 132], where he is made to ask the Lord how he justified Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, and others, in having many wives and concubines! This alone condemns the pretended revelation, and proves it an atrocious falsehood; for Joseph knew the word of the Lord in the Book of Mormon forbade the practice of such vileness, and called it "abominable" in David and Solomon, and said no man shall "do like them of old," referring to all who had practiced polygamy. All who are not "lost in the mists of darkness" that Lehi saw will clearly see that if they accept that trash as revelation from God, *they must reject* the Book of Mormon. . . .

To believe God is the author of such fallacious and foul laws and statements is more unreasonable than to believe He instituted all the religions extant in the land instead of the pure gospel of Christ and his apostles.

Helen Mar says she has lived thirty years in polygamy, and then utters a lamentable and soul stirring wail which is the undercurrent and true telltale of the miseries of that people. She says "Nothing would induce me to lose . . . that crown which awaits all that have laid their willing, but bleeding hearts upon the altar!" What a vile mockery of godliness for men to thus deceive and enslave the female mind. . . . How can men believe in God, or expect his mercy, who cause such misery to such lovely wives! This yoke of bondage is obviously Satan's device; for Christ says, "Take my yoke upon you; for *my yoke is easy*, and my burden is light." The Prophet Jacob says the Lord has seen the sorrow and heard the mourning of the daughters of his people. He is the same merciful God forever, to all that trust him.

Mary Eaton.

(*The Saints' Advocate* 6 [June 1884]: 449–451)

An Article Defending the Bible

Another article by Mary reads:

Polygamous Mormons Not Biblical

A defense of the Bible and answer to the *Kansas City Star* for August 16th, 1888.

The Bible does not teach polygamy as a correct principle, but as a custom of the heathen. Their influence caused a few of the Israelites to practice it. When the Author of all good, the great architect of our world, placed the happy pair in the garden of Eden, he planned the true pattern for the happiness of all the world. This was observed by his people before the flood, until Lamech, a descendant of Cain, and a murderer, "took unto him two wives." Righteous Noah, to whom the Lord talked and gave particular instruction, went into the ark with his wife; his sons also followed the Edenic pattern and were saved, when the posterity of Cain and the rest of the wicked were drowned and exterminated from the earth. We follow the Bible history to Abraham. His wife Sarah gave him her maid to be his wife. This she did in her unbelief in the promise of the Lord, that "Sarah should be the mother of nations." Sarah soon found she had done wrong; and Abraham also, for the Lord commanded him to put away the bond woman. He obeyed the Lord, a good example for Bible believers. . . . Next we notice the righteous youth Jacob, deceived by the heathen Laban and persuaded to follow their customs. Moses commanded the kings of Israel not to multiply wives, but they brought terrible calamities upon themselves by disobeying this law. The New Testament and Book of Mormon adhere strictly to the Lord's plan. Those who led the Mormons to Utah deceived them, and taught them the customs of Laban the heathen. There are many thousands of Latter Day Saints in the world, under the ministerial charge of Joseph Smith [III], the son of the founder of their church. They are loyal to the government and are of pure morals and obey the law of Eden. They send their elders to teach the people in the west that polygamy has not come to stay. It must go to the heathen, its natural originators, its final home.

M. Eaton

August 19th, 1888. (*The Saints' Herald* 35 [October 13, 1888]: 655)

Concerning Righteous Seed

Mary penned these words:

I ask, Is it possible that . . . any other sane man or woman, can believe that God can contradict or countermand any law that he has given to his Church? After telling the Nephites that polygamy is abominable, to make his word so plain that none should be deceived, he says, “For if I will raise up seed unto me; I will command my people, otherwise,” from those who practiced polygamy in the land of Jerusalem. This is apparent, for he had before said he had brought them here to raise up a righteous branch of the children of Joseph [son of Jacob]. Now can a people be righteous and break this plain law? All reflecting minds will say, No. And will not be deceived by a pretended revelation to the contrary. As Sister Emma [Smith Bidamon] wisely said, it [Section 132 in the LDS DC] must come from the devil. God has especially shown to us that he is unchangeable, by bringing forth his church in this land where the political law prohibits such vices [as plural marriage]. Those that practice them have to go into secret combinations, and build temples in which to perform their oaths and perverse sealings. In the Book of Ether, third chapter, last paragraph, the prophet says, “The Lord worketh not in secret combinations.” This is a positive declaration, which must deter a true Saint from sustaining that in which the Lord does not work.

We left the popular churches of the day to join the humble church of God, because his word says he is unchangeable. The blessings, ordinances, and precepts of the gospel are alike in all ages of the world. Let us continue to serve the unchangeable God and praise him for his word so beautiful and plain. (*The Saints' Herald* 27 [December 1880]: 385)

At age eighty-seven, Mary was still defending Joseph. Abbie Horton, a sister in the Church, wrote of Mary:

truthful men and women have for years been speaking and writing in defense of the pure character and unsullied principles of the founder of the true Church. Some of these are in our midst. Only yesterday Sister Mary Eaton, widow of

Elder John E. Page, said to us, “I knew Joseph the Martyr at a time when he was suffering from persecution on every hand. All manner of falsehoods were told concerning him and the direst indignities perpetrated upon him, but like a man of God he bore it all with forbearance and fortitude. When assailed because of false reports which were whispered about, he said, ‘My sister, polygamy was wrong when practiced by the ancients, and it’s wrong now.’ ”

The footsteps of this frail little sister are tottering, the feeble and delicate frame can hardly support itself; but though waning, the memory of that honest, pure-hearted man whom she had ever revered as a prophet of God, still answers to the humble prayer and to the soulful desire to continue to the end, abiding in the faith of the message delivered to this generation through Joseph Smith. (*The Saints’ Herald* 51 [March 30, 1904]: 305)

Mary Page Eaton knew much about the invasion of polygamy into the Church at Nauvoo, and its flourishing in Utah. Her beloved sister, Rachel Judd Henderson, a widow, became Jacob Hamblin’s wife at Council Bluffs in 1849. This brought Mary much sorrow because Hamblin took plural wives (see Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, *A Book of Mormons*, 109).

Mary Judd Page Eaton died March 6, 1907. Her home was a little cottage that stood on land where the present RLDS Auditorium stands, immediately south of the Temple Lot she loved so much. She testified to the end that Joseph Smith fought polygamy.

