

Chapter 15

Joseph's Struggles to Eradicate Polygamy in 1842

Many important events occurred in the year 1842 in regard to the polygamy issue, as has been chronicled in previous chapters of this treatise. Through them all Joseph Smith struggled valiantly to keep the plural wife menace out of the Church at Nauvoo, but during that year it became more and more evident that he was losing ground. Some of the Church leaders were secretly favoring the doctrine, and in June 1842 Brigham Young had taken Lucy Decker Seeley as a plural wife. Therefore, it became evident that the Church would have to be cleansed by other means—that Joseph's efforts were not enough to stem the tide.

Emma Testified that Joseph Had a Premonition of Death

According to Emma Smith, about September 1842 Joseph was told by the Spirit that if he would leave Nauvoo and remain away until the Church was cleansed and sifted, "he should live until he had accomplished his work in the redemption of Zion." Joseph hid in Nauvoo through the summer and fall of 1842, but did not actually flee from there until June of 1844.

Emma made that statement in December 1856 to Elders Edmund C. Briggs and Samuel Gurley of the Reorganized Church, who were guests at the Mansion House where she and her second husband, Major Lewis C. Bidamon, operated a hotel. Edmund Briggs published this revealing account of his conversation with Emma:

I then said to her [Emma], "Did Joseph have any

knowledge or premonition of his death before it took place?”

She replied, “Yes, he was expecting it for some time before he was murdered. About the time he wrote those letters that are in the Book of Covenants [September 1 and 6, 1842], he was promised [by the Lord] if he would go and hide *from the Church until it was cleansed*, he should live until he had accomplished his work in the redemption of Zion; and he once left home [in June 1844], intending not to return until the Church was sifted and thoroughly cleansed, but his persecutors were stirring up trouble at the time and his absence provoked some of the brethren to say he had run away, and they called him a coward, and Joseph heard of it and he then returned, and said, ‘I will die before I will be called a coward.’

“He was going to find a place and then send for the family, but when he came back I felt the worst I ever did in my life, and from that time I looked for him to be killed, and had felt so bad about it that when he was murdered I was not taken by surprise, and did not feel so bad as I had for months before.”

While she talked to us, the tears flowed from her large, bright eyes like rain and I could see in every act, affection for Joseph. (Apostle Edmund C. Briggs, *Early History of the Reorganization*, 83; italics added)

In this same interview, she asserted:

“I never had confidence in Brigham Young, and Joseph did not for some time before his death.” (ibid.)

Emma also told Briggs:

“For the last eighteen months or two years before his [Joseph’s] death, it seemed the best elders were kept away from him as much as possible on missions, and the worst characters in the Church hovered around him all the time.” (ibid., 94)

Joseph’s Letter Confirmed that He Intended to Leave Nauvoo

Joseph’s two letters which Emma referred to were written by the Prophet in early September 1842, while he was hiding to

evade capture and false arrest by the Missourians because of the Boggs incident. According to Emma, there was an element of sin and wickedness within the Church, which made it needful for the Church to be sifted and cleansed. That sin was, of course, polygamy.

The Prophet's first letter was read to the Saints at Nauvoo during a Sunday worship service. Here is an extract from it:

September 1st, 1842.

To all the Saints in Nauvoo:—

Forasmuch as the Lord has revealed unto me that my enemies, both of Missouri and this State [Illinois], were again on the pursuit of me; and inasmuch as they pursue me without cause, and have not the least shadow, or coloring of justice or right on their side, in the getting up of their prosecutions against me; and inasmuch as their pretensions are all founded in falsehood, of the blackest die, I have thought it expedient, and wisdom in me to leave the place [Nauvoo] for a short season, for my own safety and the safety of this people. . . . When I learn that the storm is fully blown over, then I will return to you again.

And as for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life; and for what cause it seems mysterious, unless I was ordained from before the foundation of the world, for some good end, or bad as you may choose to call it. Judge ye for yourselves.—God knoweth all these things, whether it be good or bad. But nevertheless, deep water is what I am wont to swim in; it all has become a second nature to me. And I feel like Paul, to glory in tribulation, for to this day has the God of my Fathers delivered me out of them all, and will deliver me from henceforth; for behold, and lo, I shall triumph over all my enemies, for the Lord God hath spoken it. (*Times and Seasons* 3 [September 15, 1842]: 919; RLDS DC 109:1–2; LDS DC 127:1–2)

Joseph's statement that he intended "to leave the place for a short season" agrees with Emma's assertion that Joseph had

planned to leave Nauvoo. Perhaps only Emma would have known that he was not planning to return until after the Church was sifted and cleansed. Emma was closer to the Prophet than any other individual. Her statements regarding this period in Church history have too long been ignored.

To whom was Emma referring when she said that there were those who kept the best elders away from him? Who allowed the worst characters to hover “around him [the Prophet] all the time” during his last two years? Who had that much power? The answer is, Only the Twelve Apostles had that much authority! It was part of their effort to take control and introduce a polygamous lifestyle into the Church.

Emma asserted that Joseph intended to leave and send for her and the children and remain away until the Church was cleansed and sifted. Cleansed and sifted of what? When grain is sifted, the chaff is separated from the kernels. The Church would be sifted and cleansed by the transgressors being separated from the faithful Saints. One of the grosser sins which the Church needed to be cleansed of was polygamy. Emma speaks of Joseph leaving Nauvoo and some of his brothers in the Church calling him a coward. There is evidence that this occurred in June 1844, when the Prophet fled into Iowa. Word reached him that some of the brethren had called him a coward. Joseph returned to Nauvoo to fight the apostasy in the Church, with the knowledge that it would cost him his life.

Joseph Spoke Publicly of His Impending Death

Joseph’s private secretary, High Priest James Whitehead, stated that the Prophet made inference to his forthcoming death at Nauvoo months before his martyrdom. Whitehead declared:

... Joseph the Martyr brought his son Joseph on the stand with him in Nauvoo at the east end of the Temple, and after he had preached one of the grandest discourses I ever heard him preach, he called Joseph [III] to his right hand—I was as close to him as I am to that brother—he called him to his right hand, and put one of his hands upon his head and said,

“Brothers and sisters, I am no longer your prophet; this is your prophet. I am going to rest.” But we did not think he was going to be killed. But he knew. (Supplement to *Lamoni Gazette*, Lamoni, Iowa, January 1888)

Testimonies that Joseph Prophesied of His Death

Brigham Young’s Testimony. Brigham preached a sermon August 1, 1852, in Great Salt Lake City in which he told of hearing Joseph prophesy that he would die before he reached the age of forty. Young declared:

Though he [Joseph] had prophesied that he would not live to be forty years of age, yet we all cherished hopes that *that* would be a false prophecy, and we should keep him for ever with us; we thought our faith would outreach it, but we were mistaken—he at last fell a martyr to his religion. (*Journal of Discourses* 1 [Salt Lake City, Utah, 1854]: 364)

In a sermon at Salt Lake City, May 6, 1877, Young referred to the same subject, saying:

I heard Joseph say many a time, “I shall not live until I am forty years of age.” (ibid., 18:361)

Apostle John Taylor Spoke of Joseph’s Tomb. In 1870 Apostle John Taylor spoke of Joseph having “built a tomb for himself” in Nauvoo (see *Journal of Discourses* 13:231).

In 1876 Apostle Taylor delivered a funeral sermon in Salt Lake City in which he again referred to Joseph’s “tomb” at Nauvoo:

I heard Joseph Smith say, at the time he was making a tomb at Nauvoo, that he expected, when the time came when the grave would be rent asunder, that he would arise . . . (ibid., 18:333)

Elder John Brush’s Testimony. Elder John Brush, who lived in Nauvoo during the days of Joseph Smith, told of an experience which confirmed to him that the Prophet had prior knowledge of his early death. His biographers wrote:

The gift of tongues still seemed to be poured out upon Bro. Brush, and many were strengthened by prophecy or exhortation in this manner. . . . One time when Bro. Brush had gone to the prayer meeting of another ward he was moved upon to speak in tongues, and the interpretation of the tongue was as follows: "Thus saith the Lord, except the people of my church do better and more faithfully keep my law, they shall be driven even from here, and Joseph their prophet shall be taken."

This was a startling revelation to the Saints, as they could not know the hidden workings of the minds of all. They could not believe that Joseph their prophet could be taken, and they doubted the source of the tongue. Grieved to the heart over the interpretation of the tongue, and unable to rest until he ascertained the truth concerning it, Bro. Brush at last sent a man to Bro. Joseph, who, after repeating it, asked him if the tongue was of the Lord. Bro. Joseph replied, "Tell the brother to set his mind at rest. The tongue is too true; it is of the Lord." (*Autumn Leaves* 4 [Lamoni, Iowa, 1891]: 175)

Joseph Had His Sepulcher Built

Joseph was so convinced that his life would soon be taken, that he set men to work constructing a sepulcher to receive his body. He had the sepulcher built into the side of the hill close to the Temple, which was at the time under construction. The sepulcher was completed before Joseph and Hyrum were murdered.

Joseph III Remembered the Sepulcher

Only Emma, her eleven-year-old son, Joseph III, and a few trusted individuals knew that Joseph and Hyrum had been buried beneath the little springhouse on the Homestead property. At the time of Joseph's death there was a financial reward for his capture, dead or alive. The bodies had lain in state at the Mansion House. That night Emma, fearing the desecration of Joseph and Hyrum's bodies if they were placed in the sepulcher, had trusted friends lift their caskets from their burial vaults. Bags filled with sand were placed in the vaults. After appropri-

ate funeral ceremonies the next day, the vaults, with their bags of sand, were placed in the sepulcher (see James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 211; see also Richard N. Holzapfel and T. Jeffery Cottle, *Old Mormon Nauvoo 1839–1846*, 159–160). Meanwhile, the bodies in their caskets were secretly buried under cover of night—first in the basement of the Nauvoo House, which was under construction, and later beneath the springhouse on the Homestead property. It was soon discovered that the vaults did not contain the bodies of the fallen leaders, and speculation began immediately as to where they were buried.

Many years later, when Joseph III was president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and was dictating his memoirs, he stated:

“I do not know much about the cavalcade [the funeral procession] which formed, nor was I a witness to the depositing of the bodies (or the boxes supposed to contain the bodies) of Father and Uncle Hyrum in the temporary tomb, built in the hillside near the Temple. I remember some of the rumors passed around as to the place where the bodies were really deposited, but I knew where they were subsequently buried, for I was present upon the occasion when, in the presence of two others, there was an opening of the place of deposit, and I saw the features of my father as they were exposed, and a lock of hair was cut from his head, a portion of which I have in my possession today, in a brooch which my mother used to wear. (Mary Audentia Smith Anderson, *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III (1832–1914)*, 37)

Caroline Smith Placed in the Sepulcher. Caroline Grant Smith, wife of Apostle William Smith, died in May 1845, and was laid to rest in the sepulcher. Shortly thereafter her body was moved to a Nauvoo cemetery. However, William wrote Caroline’s brother on August 12, 1845, “I am now preparing a place in Emma’s garden to bury her” (*Nauvoo Neighbor*, August 20, 1845). So, the Smith family burial ground on the Homestead property became the final resting place for thirty-year-old Caroline. She had never recovered from the trials she suffered in

1838 at the hands of the mobs in Caldwell County, Missouri.

Her entombment in the sepulcher is the last one to be recorded in an official Church publication at Nauvoo prior to the exodus.

Brigham Young's Testimony. In October 1845 Brigham Young addressed the Saints assembled at a Church conference at Nauvoo. He was planning the exodus to the West, and said that he wanted to place Joseph's body in the sepulcher before leaving, but Emma would not reveal the location of the two Martyrs' graves. Young publicly pled with Emma to allow Joseph's remains to be moved from their location to the sepulcher. The record states:

President Brigham Young then arose and said . . . Joseph once said, with outstretched arms, "If I fall in battle in Missouri, I want you to bring my bones back, and deposit them in that sepulchre—I command you to do it in the name of the Lord." . . .

President B. Young continued; we are determined also to use every means in our power to do all that Joseph told us. And we will petition Sister Emma, in the name of Israel's God, to let us deposit the remains of Joseph according as he commanded us. And if she will not consent to it, our garments are clear.—Then when he awakes in the morning of the resurrection, he shall talk with them, not with me; the sin shall be upon her head, not ours. (*Times and Seasons* 6 [November 1, 1845]: 1014–1015)

Emma was not swayed by Young's public pleadings. She never revealed the location of the graves to Apostle Young, nor did she allow the bodies to be moved to the sepulcher as he had suggested. She, and the faithful few who knew where the Martyrs were buried, kept their secret. Perhaps Emma's reason for not revealing where Joseph and Hyrum were buried was couched in a statement which she made to Elders Samuel Gurley and Edmund C. Briggs in 1856, when she told them:

"I never had confidence in Brigham Young, and Joseph did not for some time before his death." (Briggs, *Early History of the Reorganization*, 83)

Perhaps she feared that the remains of the Martyrs, if placed in the sepulcher, would be taken by Brigham Young to the West at the time of the exodus.

As for the sepulcher, no statement of its exact location has been found as of this writing.

A Review of Some of the Important Documents Published against Polygamy in 1842

January 1—The year 1842 began with a notice of “Caution!” and the explanation that

. . . one Dr. William Campbell, *alias* Samuel Rogers, . . . Sometime in September last he joined a branch of this church, in Mercer county in this State, where he obtained a recommend from the elders of that branch, as a member in good standing. He soon after got married to a young lady of that neighborhood. . . . It has since been ascertained that he has two others [*sic*] wives, one in Ohio, and the other in this State. He undoubtedly joined the church for a cloak to his iniquity. (*Times and Seasons* 3 [December 15, 1841]: 638)

Since it took from three to four weeks for the paper to reach many subscribers, due to distance, they did not receive that issue until after January 1, 1842 (see *Times and Seasons* 3 [September 1, 1842]: 910).

May 11—A “Notice” was signed by three members of the Presidency, nine of the Apostolic Quorum, and three members of the Bishopric pertaining to action taken to withdraw the hand of fellowship from Dr. John C. Bennett (see *Times and Seasons* 3 [June 15, 1842]: 830).

June 15—The “Notice” concerning Dr. Bennett was published. It stated,

The . . . members of the First Presidency of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, withdraw the hand of fellowship from General John C. Bennett, as a christian, he having been labored with from time to time, to persuade him to amend his conduct, apparently to no good effect. (*ibid.*)

July 1—Joseph published an article to explain why Bennett

had been expelled from the Church. The following summary of the Prophet's findings against Bennett appears in the book *Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy*, volume 1, page 140. Joseph found that Bennett and other "wicked men" had used seven steps to seduce young women. The seven steps were:

1. To convince women that Joseph Smith had received a revelation which allowed men to have plural wives;

2. They brought witnesses (some of their own clique) to testify that this was true;

3. They taught their victims that which Joseph called Bennett's "plausible tale"—which was the false claim that Joseph was preaching and teaching so vigorously against polygamy in order to fool Emma and the prejudiced public;

4. They "vehemently" requested intercourse with the women;

5. They pledged that if pregnancies occurred Dr. Bennett would perform abortions;

6. They offered to furnish the women with the necessities of life (to care for them as their wives);

7. They promised to marry the women (see also *Times and Seasons* 3 [July 1, 1842]: 839; 3 [August 1, 1842]: 870; *Nauvoo Neighbor*, May 29, 1844). Joseph said that Bennett "wilfully and knowingly lied, in the above insinuations" (*Times and Seasons* 3:840).

July 22—Approximately one thousand men of Nauvoo met. The object being "to obtain an expression of the public mind in reference to the reports . . . calumniating the character of Pres. Joseph Smith." A resolution was adopted (with the exception of two or three voting negatively) upholding Joseph as a "good, moral" man (see *Times and Seasons* 3:869).

August 1—The Prophet published an article under the title of "John C. Bennett" in which he told of Bennett's activities against the Church and Joseph since his expulsion. Bennett had charged that "Joseph Smith and many others were adulterers . . . that we believed in and practiced polygamy" (*ibid.*, 869).

A number of certificates and affidavits were published which exonerated Joseph. They included an "Affidavit of the City Council" (pages 869–870); and an "Affidavit of Wm. Law" (pages 872–873). Certificates signed by others were published.

They included Elias and F. M. Higbee (page 874), Miss Pamela M. Michael (page 874), Sidney Rigdon (page 875), and William and Henry Marks (page 875).

The Ladies' Relief Society, numbering about one thousand ladies and led by President Emma Smith, signed a petition which spoke "in the highest terms of the virtue . . . of Joseph Smith" (page 869).

August 15—A letter from Emma's nephew, L. D. Wasson, was printed. He wrote of having

heard you [Joseph] give J. C. Bennett a tremendous flagellation for practicing iniquity under the base pretence of authority from the heads of the church. . . . There are many things I can inform you of, if necessary, in relation to Bennett and his prostitutes. (page 892)

September 1—An extract from the Church's law on marriage was published, which stated:

Inasmuch as the public mind has been unjustly abused through the fallacy of Dr. Bennett's letters, we make an extract on the subject of marriage, showing the rule of the church on this important matter. The extract is from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and is the only rule allowed by the church.

"... Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy: we declare that we believe, that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again." (page 909)

October 1—The Church's law on marriage was published in its entirety under the title of "On Marriage," with the introduction that it was "From the Book of Doctrine & Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints."

It was followed by this statement:

We have given the above rule of marriage as the only one practiced in this church, to show that Dr. J. C. Bennett's "secret wife system" is a matter of his own manufacture. . . . (page 939)

This was followed by a statement signed by twelve leading men of the Church, wherein they stated:

... we know of no other rule or system of marriage than the one published from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants . . . (page 939)

Next was a statement signed by nineteen women. Their signatures attested to the fact that

... we know of no system of marriage being practised in the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints save the one contained in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and we give this certificate to the public to show that J. C. Bennett's "secret wife system" is a disclosure of his own make. (page 940)

This was signed by Emma Smith, president of the society, and Eliza R. Snow, secretary. The other seventeen women were well-known Church women.

December 1—Joseph condemned Udney Jacob's polygamous tract *The Peacemaker* by printing:

NOTICE. There was a book printed at my office, a short time since [*The Peacemaker*], written by Udney H. Jacobs, on marriage, without my knowledge; and had I been apprised of it, I should not have printed it; not that I am opposed to any man enjoying his privileges; but I do not wish to have my name associated with the authors, in such an unmeaning rigmorole of nonsense, folly, and trash. Joseph Smith. (*Times and Seasons* 4 [December 1, 1842]: 32)

Summary

Joseph did all that he could to eradicate polygamy in its different forms throughout 1842. After more than one hundred and sixty years have passed, the records published at Nauvoo during the Prophet's lifetime still stand as a testimony of his innocence.