

Chapter 17

Apostle John Taylor Lied about Polygamy Being Practiced by Church Leaders

Apostle John Taylor and other leading apostles secretly began practicing polygamy at Nauvoo even before Joseph's death. Brigham Young, President of the Quorum of Twelve, led the way by taking his first plural wife, Lucy Ann Decker Seely, in June 1842 (see John Stewart, *Brigham Young and His Wives: And the True Story of Plural Marriage*, 85). Apostle John Taylor, who succeeded Joseph in November 1842 as the editor of the *Times and Seasons*, was one of the leaders who practiced polygamy in secret, while denying it openly. For example, he denied it in November 1844 in a communication in the *Times and Seasons*, and again in 1850.

Taylor secretly married his first plural wife February 12, 1843 (see *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 21:105). He married two more plural wives before Joseph's death which occurred on June 27, 1844 (see Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, *A Book of Mormons*, 354). Six years later in 1850, which was two years before polygamy was publicly proclaimed a doctrine in Salt Lake City, John Taylor participated in a public debate in France. During the debate he denied that polygamy had been practiced by Church leaders at Nauvoo, although he at that time had fifteen wives (*ibid.*).

Rigdon Revealed the Twelve Were Practicing Polygamy

After the death of Joseph and Hyrum, Brigham Young and the majority of the Twelve moved quickly to take control of the Church. On September 8, 1844, they held a public conference in the Grove near the Temple in Nauvoo, where they tried

President Sidney Rigdon. After they expelled Elder Rigdon he moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he had been at the time of Joseph's martyrdom. One month later he published a paper entitled *The Messenger and Advocate*. In his first issue Sidney published that some of the Twelve were practicing polygamy. Sidney devoted much space in his paper to the subject of the Twelve "and their adherents" being engaged in polygamy. Rigdon wrote:

It is a fact, so well known, that the Twelve and their adherents have endeavored to carry on this spiritual wife business in secret, that I hardly need mention it here, and have gone to the most shameful and desperate lengths, to keep it from the public. First, insulting innocent females, and when they resented the insult, these monsters in human shape would assail their characters by lying, and perjuries, with a multitude of desperate men to help them to effect these corrupt practices from the view of the world. I could bring facts which can be established in any court of justice, in relation to these vile abominations practiced under the garb of religion that would make humanity blush. No falsehood too great, and no perjury too daring, in order to conceal these heaven-daring abuses of mankind. . . .

How often have these men and their accomplices stood up before the congregation, and called God and all the holy Angels to witness, that there was no such doctrine taught in the church; and it has now come to light, by testimony which cannot be gainsaid, that at the time they thus dared heaven and insulted the world, they were living in the practice of these enormities; and there were multitudes of their followers in the congregation at the time who knew it. . . . SIDNEY RIGDON. (*Messenger and Advocate* 1 [October 15, 1844]: 14)

Elder Rigdon also printed an article by one John A. Forgeus, who proclaimed against "that odious doctrine as taught in Nauvoo and other places, that a man can have more wives than one" (*ibid.*, 6).

Rigdon and his followers held a conference and afterwards

printed the “Minutes of a Conference held in Pittsburgh, Oct. 12th 1844.” The conference adopted the following resolution:

2. Resolved, that in consequence of the most flagrant violation of the original, or true principles and order of the church, by the Twelve and their abettors, by rejecting Elder Rigdon, and practicing the doctrine of polygamy, despoiling female virtue and chastity by seducing them, and tyrannizing over those who will not sanction their works of darkness, and many other like things, for which we regard them as apostates, and men fallen from the true order of the church, into a state of wickedness and corruption; therefore, we hold no fellowship with them. (ibid., 6)

Apostle Taylor Denied that Polygamy Was Being Practiced

In November of 1844 Apostle Taylor’s denial of Rigdon’s charges against the Twelve came swiftly. Although Taylor was the husband of three wives at that time, he published in the *Times and Seasons* that polygamy was not taught nor practiced by the Twelve. At that time he was married to his legal wife, Leonora Cannon Taylor, whom he married July 25, 1833 (see *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 21 [1930]: 105). He married wife number two, Elizabeth Kaighin, December 12, 1843, and wife number three, Jane Ballantyne, on February 25, 1844 (see Francis M. Gibbons, *John Taylor: Mormon Philosopher, Prophet of God*, 52, 53). Taylor as editor answered Sidney by publishing:

The saints of the last days have witnessed the outgoings and incomings of so many apostates that nothing but truth has any effect upon them. In the present instance, after the *sham* quotations of Sidney and his clique, from the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants, to skulk off, under the “dreadful splendor” of “spiritual wifery,” which is brought into the account as graciously as if the law of the land allowed a man a plurality of wives, is fiendish, and like the rest of Sidney’s revelation, just because he wanted “to go to Pittsburg and live.” Wo to the man or men who will thus wilfully lie to injure an innocent people! The law of the

land and the rules of the church do not allow one man to have more than one wife alive at once, but if any man's wife die, he has a right to marry another, and to be sealed to both for eternity; to the living and the dead! there is no law of God or man against it! This is all the spiritual wife system that was ever tolerated in the church, and they know it. . . . AN OLD MAN OF ISRAEL. (*Times and Seasons* 5 [November 15, 1844]: 715)

Apostle Taylor also reassured his readers that the communication of an "OLD MAN OF ISRAEL," which appeared in the *Times and Seasons*, was "genuine" (*ibid.*, 711).

Many Knew Taylor's Words Were False

In spite of Taylor's assurances that polygamy was not being practiced at Nauvoo, there were those who knew that he was lying—such as the Prophet's widow, Emma, and Joseph III, his son. Joseph III was well acquainted with Apostle Taylor and other members of the Twelve who went west.

Joseph III testified under oath of his knowledge of Taylor, other apostles, and their followers. He declared:

The ones that went west to Salt Lake Valley were preaching and openly proclaiming and practicing a doctrine contrary to the fundamental principles of the church, and all its teachings. . . . Now these people who went to Utah [from Nauvoo] were addicted, before they went, to the practice of polygamy, and continued the practice after they went there That is not simply my opinion, no sir; I know it. . . . When John Taylor or any other man presumes to preach or practice a doctrine contrary to the teachings of . . . the books that the church has authorized and recognized as authority, it is the right of everybody, either individually or collectively to say whether or not they shall follow his example or associate with him or anyone who preaches these doctrines that are forbidden and condemned by the church in its authorized books of doctrine and practice. (*The Temple Lot Case*, 81, 82)

**During the Debates in France,
Taylor Lied about Polygamy at Nauvoo**

Three years after leaving Nauvoo, four apostles left Salt Lake City for Europe. One of those was Apostle John Taylor whose destination was France. In New York City, Taylor was joined by Elder John Pack and Elder Curtis E. Bolton, who was quite fluent in the French language. By June 26, 1850, Taylor and his companions began holding meetings and proselyting in Boulogne-sur-Mer, France. They soon received a letter from the Reverend C. W. Cleeve, the Reverend James Robertson (an independent minister), and Philip Cates, challenging them to a three-night public debate. Those men wished to debate three subjects, including the topic of “Joseph Smith.” Taylor and his companions agreed to a three-night debate. It is fortunate that Elder Bolton took extensive notes during the debate, and Apostle John Taylor published the words of the debaters, including his own answers to charges that Joseph Smith was an impostor and a polygamist. Taylor’s answers show a willingness to bear false testimony to cover his own deeds.

Although he upheld Joseph’s innocence and declared polygamy had not been practiced by Joseph or other Church leaders, Taylor at the time was the husband of sixteen wives! They were: (1) his first and legal wife, Leonora Cannon Taylor; (2) Elizabeth Kaighin; (3) Jane Ballantyne; (4) Mary Ann Oakley; (5) Mary Amanda Utley; (6) Ann Hughlings Pitchforth; (7) Ann Ballan-tyne; (8) Mary Ramsbottom; (9) Lydia Dibble Smith; (10) Sarah Thorton Coleman; (11) Mercy Thompson Smith; (12) Sophia Whittaker; (13) Harriet Whittaker; (14) Caroline Hooper Saunders Gillian; (15) Margaret Young; and (16) Josephine Elizabeth Rouche (see Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, *A Book of Mormons*, 354). Taylor gave true testimony concerning Joseph, but lied where he himself was concerned.

Shortly after the debate, Apostle Taylor left France and went to Liverpool, England, and there published a tract on the debates. In compiling the tract he used “the record of the debates prepared from Elder Bolton’s extensive notes” (*John Taylor: Mormon Philosopher, Prophet of God*, 117).

Below are extracts from Taylor’s tract. He began by quoting

from the Reverend C. W. Cleeve:

The Rev. C. W. Cleeve then said, The first question of discussion is, Was Joseph Smith an imposter? The Rev. gentleman then proceeded to read general extracts from a work by the Rev. Henry Caswell, General [John C.] Bennett, and others, and an article from the *English Review*, charging Joseph Smith and the Mormonites with a number of crimes and immoralities. (John Taylor, *Three Nights' Public Discussion Between The Revds. C. W. Cleeve, James Robertson, and Philip Cates, and Elder John Taylor of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, At Boulogne-Sur-Mer, France*, 4)

The reader should remember that Dr. John C. Bennett's charges against Joseph included the charge that Joseph was practicing polygamy, which Bennett referred to also as spiritual wifery, a plurality of wives, and celestial marriage. He also charged that Joseph was claiming to have received a revelation on the subject.

Apostle John Taylor responded:

I was intimately acquainted with the late Joseph Smith, and know that the statements made by Mr. Cleeve are untrue. I have been with Mr. Smith for years; I have travelled with him; I have been with him in public and in private, at home and abroad; I was with him living, and when he died—when he was murdered in Carthage gaol, and I can testify that he was a virtuous, moral, high-minded man—a christian and a philanthropist. . . . In relation to the characters who made those statements, I happen to be acquainted with them, and know of the circumstances under which some of them were written, Concerning Mr. Caswell, I was at Nauvoo during the time of his visit. He came for the purpose of looking for evil. He was a wicked man, and associated with reprobates, mobocrats, and murderers. . . .

Respecting John C. Bennett; I was well acquainted with him. At one time he was a good man, but fell into adultery, and was cut off from the church for his iniquity; and so bad

was his conduct, that he was also expelled [from] the Municipal Court, of which he was a member. He then went lecturing through the country, and commenced writing pamphlets for the sake of making money, charging so much for admittance to his lectures, and selling his slanders. His remarks, however, were so bad, and his statements so obscene and disgraceful, that respectable people were disgusted. These infamous lies and obscene stories, however, have been found very palatable to a certain class of society, and in times of our persecutions multitudes were pleased with them. Hence, not only did it suit the inclination of these gentlemen above alluded to, but preying upon the cupidity of the uninformed, they made a very lucrative business of their disgusting traffic, and sold it to the world garnished with the names of Doctor Bennett, the Rev. Mr. Turner, the Rev. Mr. Caswell, and numbers of other reverends, associates of blacklegs and murderers. . . . I say now, as I said before, that reports have nothing to do with truth; and I will say, moreover, that public opinion has very little to do with it. (*ibid.*, 5, 6)

Taylor recorded that his opponent Mr. Robertson then said:

He and his friends had quoted against the testimony of General Bennett and Professor Caswell, and of works published in America, in 1848. These works had testified that Joseph Smith kept up a seraglio of “Sisters of the White Veil,” and “Sisters of the Green Veil;” and that Sidney Rigdon, who had at one time been almost as great a man among the Mormonites as Joe Smith, had quarrelled with Joe for the latter’s attempt to introduce his, Rigdon’s daughter, into the sisterhood. . . . Now he (Mr. Robertson) demanded distinctly of Mr. Taylor what was the nature of the sisterhood of the White and Green Veil—what was the nature of the dispute between Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith. (*ibid.*, 7)

Apostle Taylor countered with:

It would seem from the remarks of Mr. Robertson, that he also attaches very great importance to the statements of

Mr. Caswell and John C. Bennett, of course, for want of better testimony. I have already referred to their characters, I have already stated that I proved Mr. Caswell to have told one lie, *and a man that will tell one falsehood to injure an innocent people, will tell five hundred, if necessary, for the same object* We are accused here of polygamy, and actions the most indelicate, obscene, and disgusting, such that none but a corrupt and depraved heart could have contrived. These things are too outrageous to admit of belief; therefore leaving the sisters of the “White Veil,” the “Black Veil,” and all the other veils, with those gentlemen to dispose of, together with their authors, as they think best, I shall content myself by reading our views of chastity and marriage, from a work published by us, containing some of the articles of our Faith. “Doctrine and Covenants,” page 330. (ibid., 7, 8; italics added)

Taylor Quoted the Article on “Marriage” While Denying Polygamy

It is important for the reader to be aware that Taylor was telling a falsehood—he was lying by insisting that there had been no polygamy at Nauvoo. He too would have “told five hundred lies” for “the same object.” Taylor, in order to convince his opponents that he was telling the truth, read from the article on “Marriage” which Joseph had caused to be placed in the Doctrine and Covenants at the General Assembly of the Church in 1835. Taylor read the following from the law of the Church:

1. According to the custom of all civilised nations, marriage is regulated by laws and ceremonies; therefore we believe that all marriages in this Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-day Saints, should be solemnized in a public meeting, or feast, prepared for that purpose; and that the solemnization should be performed by a presiding High Priest, High Priest, Bishop, Elder, or Priest, not even prohibiting those persons who are desirous to get married, of being married by other authority. We believe that it is not right to prohibit members of this church from marrying out of the church, if it be their

determination so to do, but such persons will be considered weak in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2. Marriage should be celebrated with prayer and thanksgiving; and at the solemnization, the persons to be married, standing together, the man on the right, and the woman on the left, shall be addressed by the person officiating, as he shall be directed by the Holy Spirit; and if there be no legal objections, he shall say, calling each by their names, "You both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others during your lives." And when they shall have answered "Yes," he shall pronounce them husband and wife, and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, "May God add his blessing, and keep you to fulfil your covenants from henceforth, and for ever. Amen."

3. The clerk of every Church should keep a record of the marriages solemnized in his branch.

4. All legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into this Church should be held sacred and fulfilled. *Inasmuch as this Church of Jesus 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.* (italics added)

Then the polygamist Taylor continued to defend the Church against his accuser by replying:

Is it difficult for such men to write books, such as we have heard, to cover their infamy and deeds of darkness? Who but depraved men could write such books? These statements are too flimsy for intelligence to be blended with. We hear Joseph Smith's crimes, he was tried thirty-nine times before the tribunals of his country, and nothing proven against him. Why do not these gentlemen bring some legal authenticated testimony from those courts? Why did not the authors of these books do this? because they could not. When Joseph

Smith was among his enemies, on the ground where they have proven these things, why did they not do it? I ask these gentlemen for some legal proof. It will go further with me than the statements, opinions and reports of their Rev. authors, and might shew from whence springs that bitter, acrimonious spirit, which has been manifested by my opponents. (ibid., 8, 10)

Mr. Robertson continued to press Taylor for an answer to his important questions by asking:

Why did Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith differ? Was it not about Sidney Rigdon's daughter? (ibid., 17)

Taylor quickly replied:

I know nothing of Mr. Smith but what is good; he [Mr. Robertson] ought to prove his assertions, or not make them . . . I stated concerning Gen. Bennett, that at one time he was a good man; but that he fell into iniquity, and was cut off from the church for adultery, and then commenced his persecutions. If I had my books here [the *Times and Seasons*] I could have shown an affidavit made before the city council, about the time he was cut off, stating that he knew nothing evil or bad of Joseph Smith. An affidavit that I heard him make myself. . . . Concerning Joseph Smith, as there has been a good deal said about him, I am now going to introduce testimony about his character, that no one will be able to gainsay. It is not the report of this man, that, or the other, but positive living testimony; such as would be received by any court, and it is all I shall say on that subject. In the first place, I give my own, as I did before. I testify that I was acquainted with Joseph Smith for years. I have travelled with him; I have been with him in private and in public. I have associated with him in councils of all kinds; I have listened hundreds of times to his public teachings, and his advice to his friends and associates of a more private nature. I have been at his house and seen his deportment in his family. I have seen him arraigned before the tribunals of his country,

and seen him honourable acquitted, and delivered from the pernicious breath of slander, and the machinations and falsehoods of wicked and corrupt men. I was with him living, and with him when he died, when he was murdered in Carthage gaol by a ruthless mob, headed by a Methodist minister, named Williams, with their faces painted. I was there and was myself wounded. I at that time received four balls in my body. I have seen him, then, under these various circumstances, and I testify before God, angels, and men, that he was a good, honourable, virtuous man—that his doctrines were good, scriptural, and wholesome—that his precepts were such as became a man of God—that his private and public character was unimpeachable—and that he lived and died as a man of God and a gentleman. This is my testimony; if it is disputed, bring me a person authorized to receive an affidavit, and I will make one to this effect. I therefore testify of things which I know and of things which I have seen. (ibid., 22, 23, 24)

Such was the testimony of John Taylor, the polygamous apostle and missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with headquarters in Utah. His tract, *Three Nights' Public Discussion*, was published in 1850 and was sold throughout Great Britain and in France. It was republished in Liverpool in 1851 in a book compiled by Orson Pratt under the title of *O. Pratt's Works*. Thus, it was widely distributed.

Apostle Edmund C. Briggs Questioned John Taylor

In 1864 RLDS Apostle Edmund C. Briggs, while on a missionary assignment to Utah, questioned Apostle Taylor about the statements the latter made during the debate in France. Edmund's brother, Apostle Jason W. Briggs, published:

Mr. John Taylor, in 1850, in a public discussion in France, on being accused of polygamous proclivities, said:

“We are accused here of polygamy, and actions the most indelicate, obscene and disgusting, such than none but a corrupt and depraved heart could have conceived.”

And to refute this charge, he read from the Doctrine and Covenants the article on marriage, in which the husband and wife covenant to keep themselves *for* each other and *from* all others during their lives. And in 1864, when asked by E. C. Briggs how he reconciled his statement then with the alleged fact of the polygamy revelation of 1843, he took the same ground,—made a “prudential statement;” for if he had owned himself a polygamist, which he was at the time, he would have been driven out of France, and so cut off his usefulness in that country. “What! Mr. Taylor tell a lie,” said E. C. Briggs. “Yes,” said the former, “under the circumstances it was justifiable, the cir-cum-stan-ces [*sic*] were *peculiar*. (Jason W. Briggs, *The Messenger* 2 [Salt Lake City, Utah, April 1876]: 22)

Conclusion

While in Nauvoo, even before the death of the Prophet Joseph, Apostle John Taylor followed the example of Brigham Young and practiced polygamy secretly, while vehemently denying it openly.

Taylor’s statement that “a man that will tell one falsehood to injure an innocent people, will tell five hundred, if necessary, for the same object,” should be applied to himself—for during the years of 1843 to 1850, he denied polygamy while practicing it secretly. He and others injured an innocent people, the Saints and the Prophet Joseph—for as has been proven so often in previous chapters, Joseph had only one wife and no children by polygamous unions. He always spoke and wrote in opposition to polygamy. *Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy* will continue in a third volume which is currently being written. Volume three will give much more evidence that the document on polygamy, which is now Section 132 of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants, did not originate with Joseph Smith the Prophet.