

Textual Studies of the Doctrine and Covenants

The Plural Marriage Revelation

William Victor Smith

GREG KOFFORD BOOKS
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Chapter One

Introduction

Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants is perhaps Joseph Smith's most historically influential revelation after the Book of Mormon. Its significance flows from its language of deification—tied closely to the notion of “sealing”—and its explicit promotion of polygamy. Though disclosure of the revelation was limited at first, the resulting rumors about it had a powerful effect on cognizant Church leaders and members in Nauvoo, Illinois. It would fracture Church leadership at the highest levels and set the stage for acts that both led to the assassination of Joseph Smith and elevated the Twelve Apostles to the summit of Church leadership. Beyond this, the plural marriage revelation, delivered on July 12, 1843, has had a profoundly important interpretive and textual history that reflects a complex internal structure with several interwoven themes. Fundamental to the revelation is polygamy: its justification, purpose, regulation, and salvific force.¹ Embedded within the revelation's narrative of plural marriage² and sealing is the fusion of two sacerdotal arcs launched early in Joseph Smith's career:

1. I speak mostly of its immediate (1843) and nineteenth-century context. The revelation's role in Church discourse has varied considerably. One public strategy in use from the beginning, used by Joseph Smith himself, was to claim the revelation was only tangentially concerned with polygamy as ancient artifact. Minutes of Nauvoo City Council for June 10, 1844, reported in “To the Public,” *Nauvoo Neighbor Extra* (June 17, 1844): 1. Even contemporary critics gave a bipolar picture, though they were careful to note the revelation's emphasis on the perseverance of sealing. On the revelation's interaction with history and culture, see Stephen C. Taysom, “A Uniform and Common Recollection: Joseph Smith's Legacy, Polygamy, and the Creation of Mormon Public Memory,” 121–52; and Newel G. Bringhurst, “Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants: Its Complex Contents and Controversial Legacy,” 59–86.

2. While “plural marriage” was a common term for polygamy in Mormon discourse after Joseph Smith, Joseph does not seem to have ever referred to the relation between himself and wives other than Emma with the term “marriage.”

the 1831 high priesthood to “seal up to eternal life” (D&C 68:12) and the angel Elijah’s part in the delivery of “the keys of this dispensation” (D&C 110:16). The high priesthood was a realization of Melchizedek’s position in biblical and Book of Mormon theology. First introduced in June 1831 among the Latter-day Saints (those so ordained were then and are yet called “high priests”), it was a feature of some forms of Freemasonry.³ The high priesthood and visitation of Elijah together offered men and women a durable marriage union persisting beyond death in a felicity of domestic exaltation. Though polygamy did not endure in normative Mormonism, its sealing subtext still occupies the apex of Mormon liturgical emphasis today—an emphasis manifested in the bumper sticker phrase “families are forever.”

While frequently separated in modern LDS discourse, the revelation fuses polygamy and sealing into a single tributary to the stream of the 1843 Mormon narrative of salvation. Because of the seeming inseparability of polygamy and eternal sealing, the promise of the latter (and its associated blessings) was frequently a gateway for devoted couples to enter into polygamy. Those who accepted the invitation to engage plurality were eligible to have their present unions sealed, while refusing the invitation to polygamy generally barred the opportunity (at least for a time).

As the new order of marriage became more broadly known, and the plural marriage revelation became a part of Mormon identity in Utah, polygamy and sealing became symbols out of which much of the cultural pattern (and perception) of Mormonism was built. At the same time, the forces of frontier reality and the dynamics of a post-Joseph Smith era of Mormon leadership formed an interpretative superstructure that saw the revelation as a framework of future heavenly life and the general cosmic order. That superstructure built on Joseph Smith’s other work as well, but it also diverged from much of his later theological expansions in important ways. This divergence led to fascinating interactions as the contrasting theological concepts of Utah and Nauvoo history collided in the decades following the 1890 Manifesto as the LDS Church began to distance itself from plural marriage.⁴

If the plural marriage revelation was a formal confirmation of a “domestic heaven,” it went much further, seeing such unions as parts of a larger

They were “sealed”—and it is clear that practically this was true. Domesticity was never a part of Smith’s relationships to wives other than Emma.

3. See the discussion of verses 6–15 in Chapter 4; and William V. Smith, “Early Mormon Priesthood Revelations: Text, Impact, and Evolution,” 1–84.

4. On cosmological and ontological issues, see the discussions of verses 28–45 and 58–66 in Chapters 6, 9, and 10.

framework of communal salvation, even God-like in nature. It wrote those unions into a story that made them part of human and biblical history from its beginnings, a trend that characterized much of Joseph Smith's religion making.⁵ Moreover, through a series of polygamous unions, the revelation created an expanding network of interconnected familial sealings with dynastic overtones. This new temple theology, centered in binding husband and wife for time and eternity, contributed to a refurbished vision of Zion.

In addition, sermons by Smith in Nauvoo made clear the expanse of the new Zion and subtly reckoned with relieving the increasing pressures brought by clandestine polygamy and the growing Mormon population of Hancock County, Illinois.⁶ Realizing that their goals could not be achieved in the United States as it was, Smith established the "Kingdom of God" (or Council of Fifty) in March 1844 to both campaign for Joseph Smith's run for the United States presidency and, if necessary, to explore ways to relocate the Latter-day Saints beyond the reach of the Union.⁷ Reaching out to Sam Houston, the Council sought a land grant in the disputed buffer territory of western Texas. They also looked toward Oregon and California as possibilities. The Mormon move was not unusual in America, where private citizens and groups were not shy about seeking new territory to expand the United States or even to establish their own nations. The movement's principals were called Filibusters, and the Council was following a well-trodden path.⁸

5. The Book of Mormon and Smith's Bible revision work saw Christianity as a lost part of an archetypal text of the Hebrew Bible. Terry L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion*, 47; and John G. Turner, "More than a Curiosity: Mormonism and Contemporary Scholarship," 239.

6. For the text of these July 19, 1840, April 16, 1843, and April 8, 1844 sermons, see Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 415–20, 362–65. Sources for Joseph Smith's sermons may be found on those dates at the online resource, William V. Smith et al., eds., "The Parallel Joseph."

7. On Joseph Smith's presidential aspirations, see Newel G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster, *The Mormon Quest for the Presidency*, ch. 1. See also Brent M. Rogers, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Mormons and the Federal Management of Early Utah Territory*, ch. 1.

8. Michael Scott Van Wagenen, *The Texas Republic and the Kingdom of God*, ch. 1. The Fifty as government played over and against Smith's position that the national government had failed in its duty to the citizenry, largely due to its political nature. They were subject to vigorous *internal* debates, but unlike the constitutional republic, there were no crippling shackles to a fractured constituency and inflexible laws that could prevent the protection of the socially

The plural marriage revelation had set in motion a reconceived notion of Zion, with polygamy at its center. Among its practitioners it could be neither a temporary nor a local feature of Mormonism.

The plural marriage revelation impacted Mormon theology in multiple other ways as well. The reconceptualized Zion was theologically, if not topologically, more temple-centric than Missouri had been. It was paradoxically less focused on gathering believers to a central location, a vision that took many decades to bear circumstantial fruit.⁹ The revelation further entailed a refined vision of eternal life, shifting from being merely a kind of shorthand for living in the eternal, post-mortal presence of God to being an all-encompassing term for God's salvation work. It also provided brief textual support for the lesser-known doctrine of adoption and for further implicit refinement of the high priesthood.

With so much of Mormon theology being centrally tied to plurality, the discontinuation of polygamy made it vital but difficult to separate the new theological vision from the practice.¹⁰ In the textual analysis of the revelation I will briefly treat such impact issues.

To explore the structure of the revelation's text in a historical and documentary fashion, I consider successive portions of the text in their

or religiously downtrodden. In that sense, the Fifty shared an already occupied stage with other antebellum American groups like abolitionists, feminists, and Catholics. On the role of the Fifty in Utah especially see Jedediah S. Rogers, *The Council of Fifty: A Documentary History*; and Matthew J. Grow et al., eds., *Administrative Records: Council of Fifty, Minutes, March 1844–January 1846*.

9. William Victor Smith, *Every Word Seasoned with Grace: A Textual Study of the Funeral Sermons of Joseph Smith*, ch. 8. The Zion theology of Nauvoo was perpetuated for a time after Smith's death, but it gradually changed to suit the conditions of migration to Utah. In October 1844, Brigham Young repeated Smith's theology: "Nauvoo will be the head stake for the Saints to come and receive their endowment. . . . [T]here will also be many more stakes or places for the gathering for the Saints of God." Brigham Young, sermon, October 4, 1844, Journal, 1844 September 28–1846 February 3.

10. As historian Kathleen Flake has noted, one of the possibly unintentional but fortuitous engines deployed in this effort at separation was the printing of the six volume History of Joseph Smith during 1902–1912, edited by B. H. Roberts as *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. The history manuscript and its planned sources were largely written (ca. 1840s–50s) at or about a time when polygamy was unknown, secret, or dangerous. Hence its printing referenced the July 12 revelation but little else regarding polygamy. Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle*, 44.

evolving contexts. This method creates some topical disjuncture and repetition but has the advantage of approaching the text from a reader's perspective. The epilogue draws together and expands on some matters to give a somewhat smoother historical overview.

In addition to a general analysis of the text of the revelation, several theses will be explored that serve to organize the historical and typological substrata of the revelation. These include the following:

1. The nature of the revelation (that is, its text and context) suggests that its present form results from a fusion of several revelations and ideas that developed during Joseph Smith's lifetime. But the prehistory of the revelation is only tangential: its topics had immediate connection to Joseph Smith in 1843 and are mostly driven by the immediate purpose of the text.¹¹
2. The revelation was not intended for public circulation and reflects aspects of the relationship between Joseph Smith and Emma Smith that were meant to remain between them, or at least in a narrow circle of insiders. Indeed, the revelation may be considered part of the epistolary genre: in effect it is a letter to Emma. It was because of Hyrum Smith's persuasion and enthusiasm that the text of the revelation was produced and subsequently distributed.¹²
3. The revelation represents the textual completion of what I call the high priesthood cycle, a cycle that began in 1831 and ended in the final ritualization of sealing and anointing. The end of that cycle saw a combined re-centering of the high priesthood in both its ecclesial and temple forms within the President of the High Priesthood. Joseph Smith's office of President of the High Priesthood began and ended, in a sense, as an office without assistants or counselors. I see the nature of the high priesthood and its cycle as an interpretive subtext for various portions of the revelation. While Brigham Young and the apostles who succeeded Smith retold the story in terms of apostleship, even attempting to redefine the high priest-

11. Danel W. Bachman considered the text as historically generated, answering questions that Smith had at different points in his career. See Danel W. Bachman, "New Light on an Old Hypothesis: The Ohio Origins of the Revelation on Eternal Marriage," 19–32. See also B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*, 10; and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 293.

12. There is intentional evidence in parallel literature, environmental considerations, and the personalities connected to the text.

hood as apostleship at one point, the endpoint remained the same: Young held tightly to two sets of reins—ecclesial leadership and temple liturgical regulation (see Chapter 4). The apostles are part of what I call the apostolic cycle.¹³

4. Evolving interpretations of the revelation text began to see it as reflexive. Effectively a map to ultimate reward, subsequent experience and cultural forces helped it to be seen as a reflection of God's own life. Within the revelation there is the outline of an eschatological framework, a space for "ultimate" things that allowed for different salvific narratives whose foundations depended on two rather distinct cosmologies. Early Mormon accounting for the beginnings of things (protology) by different cosmologies meant the revelation might fund different accounts of end things (eschatology), each within the parameters of the revelation. Attempts at fusing the different cosmologies in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries still linger in Latter-day Saint thought and provide distinct readings of the revelation.

Delivery and Original Manuscript

At the time the revelation was delivered, scribal culture in Mormonism stood at the edge of revolution. In only a few years, stenography significantly changed the problem of reporting the words and pronouncements of Church leaders. But until the 1850s, longhand reports of events were the essential reality. It was in longhand that William Clayton, confidant and scribe of Joseph Smith, observed the following in his second Nauvoo diary on July 12, 1843:

Wednesday 12th This A.M, I wrote a Revelation consisting of 10 pages on the order of the priesthood, showing the designs in Moses, Abraham, David and Solomon having many wives & concubines &c. After it was wrote Prests. Joseph & Hyrum presented it and read it to E[mma]. who said she did not believe a word of it and appeared very rebellious. J[oseph] told me

13. Both of these terms (high priesthood cycle, apostolic cycle) participate in a serviceable myth: that Joseph Smith or other principal characters in Mormonism held chronologically self-consistent views of these concepts and the acts and words associated with them. The archival traces of those words and acts show that such organizational memes may have some value to distant observers, but it is unlikely that Smith and his associates would have found them useful if they had been consulted in their past states.

to Deed all the unincumbered lots to E[mma] and the children He appears much troubled about E[mma].¹⁴

Clayton's reference to "ten pages" probably refers to ten half-foolscap pages or possibly pages cut from a blank ledger book (not an unknown practice).¹⁵

Three decades later, Clayton wrote a much longer affidavit detailing his July 12, 1843, experience, wherein he sought to defend the Mormon practice of polygamy against RLDS (Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) critics who denied that Joseph Smith engaged in and instituted polygamy.¹⁶ Because of the affidavit's importance in understanding the revelation, I include it here in its entirety:¹⁷

Inasmuch as it may be interesting to future | generations of the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of | Latter Day Saints, to learn something of the first teachings of | the principle of plural marriage by President Joseph Smith, | the Prophet, Seer, Revelator and Translator, of said church, | I will give a

14. Clayton combined events from the day of the revelation and the day following here. This and most of the other quotations from Clayton's diaries that appear here may be found online at Robert Fillerup, "William Clayton's Nauvoo Diaries and Personal Writings." Clayton's diaries also appear in part in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* and *The Nauvoo Diaries of William Clayton, 1842–1846, Abridged*. The latter two are organized by date and may be easily consulted under the dates supplied in the text and notes herein. For more information on Clayton's records see James B. Allen, "William Clayton and the Records of Church History," 83–114; and James B. Allen and George D. Smith, "Editing William Clayton and the Politics of Mormon History," 129–56.

15. The Kingsbury manuscript is discussed in the addendum to this volume. It may suggest the physical format of Clayton's original.

16. Aside from annoyance over RLDS missionarying in Utah, the so-called "Temple Lot" court case required testimony on polygamy, the July 12 revelation, and Joseph Smith's participation in plural marriage. Affidavits were generated from Nauvoo participants in polygamy to verify that Smith initiated the practice, delivered the plural marriage revelation, and engaged in plurality himself. Joseph F. Smith was the engine behind collecting much of this testimony. See Ron Romig, "The Temple Lot Suit After 100 Years," 3–15; S. Patrick Baggette II, "The Temple Lot Case: Fraud in God's Vineyard," 121–36; Joseph F. Smith, Letter to George A. Smith, July 11, 1872; Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:app. C; Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet*, 124, 207, ch. 10; Newel G. Bringhurst, "RLDS Church Reaction to the LDS Doctrine and Covenants' Section 132: Conflicting Responses and Changing Perceptions."

17. William Clayton, Affidavit, February 16, 1874. The affidavit was published in Andrew Jenson, *Historical Record*, 6:225. I use a diplomatic transcription of the original document here. The "|" mark indicates a line end in the original manuscript.

short relation of facts which occurred within my | personal knowledge, and also matters related to me by | President Joseph Smith.

I was employed as a clerk in President Joseph | Smith's office under Elder Willard Richards, and | commenced to labor in the office on the 10th day of | February 1842.¹⁸ I continued to labor with Elder Richards | until he went East to fetch his wife to Nauvoo.

After Elder Richards started East I was necessarily | thrown constantly into the company of President Smith, | having to attend to his public and private business,- | receiving and recording tithings and donations, attending | to land, and other matters of business.¹⁹ During this period, | I necessarily became well acquainted with Emma Smith, | the wife of the Prophet Joseph, and also with the | children—Julia M. (an adopted daughter,) Joseph, | Frederick and Alexander, very much of the business being transacted at the residence of the Prophet.

On the 7th of October 1842, in presence of Bishop | Newel K. Whitney and his wife Elizabeth Ann, President | Joseph Smith appointed me Temple Recorder, and also his | private clerk, placing all records, books, papers &c. in | my care, and requiring me to take charge < of >²⁰ and preserve | them, his closing words being, “when I have any | Revelations to write you are the one to write them.”²¹

During this period the Prophet Joseph frequently | visited my house in my company, and became well²² acquainted with my wife Ruth, to whom I had been | married five years.

One day in the month of February 1843, date not | remembered,²³ the Prophet invited me to walk with him. | During our walk, he said he had learned that there was | a sister back in England to whom I was very much attached. | I replied there was, but nothing farther than an attachment | such as a brother and sister in the church might rightfully | entertain for each other. He then said, “why don't you send for | her?” I replied, “in the first place I have no authority to send for | her, and if I had, I have not the means to pay expenses.” To this | he answered, “I give you authority to send for here, and

18. Clayton recorded in his diary for the day, “Brother Kimball came in the morning to say that I must go to Joseph Smith's office and assist Brother Richards. I accordingly got ready and went to the office and commenced entering tithing for the Temple. I was still shaking with the Ague [malaria] every day but it did not much disable me for work.” Fillerup, “William Clayton's Nauvoo Diaries.”

19. Clayton kept the “Book of the Law of the Lord,” during this period. See, Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843*, 2–9.

20. The pointed brackets indicate an insertion in the text. This is Clayton's insertion.

21. Clayton did not close the quote.

22. Page 1 (recto of leaf one, the document is not paginated) ends here.

23. The event took place on March 9, 1843, according to Clayton's diary.

Introduction

9

I will furnish | you the means,” which he did.²⁴ This was the first time the | Prophet Joseph talked with me on the subject of plural | marriage. He informed that the doctrine and principle | was right in the sight of our Heavenly Father, and that it | was a doctrine which pertained to Celestial order and glory. | After giving me lengthy instructions and information | concerning the doctrine of celestial or plural marriage, | he concluded his remarks by the words, “It is your | privilege to have all the wives you want.”

After this introduction, our conversations on the subject | of plural marriage were very frequent, and he | appeared to take particular pains to inform and | instruct me in respect to the principle. He also | informed me that he had other wives living, besides | his first wife Emma, and in particular gave me to | understand that Eliza R. Snow, Louisa Beman, | S. P. Sessions²⁵ and Desdemona C. Fullmer, and others | were his lawful wives in the sight of Heaven.

On the 27th of April 1843 the Prophet Joseph Smith | married to me Margaret Moon, for time and eternity²⁶ at the residence of Elder Heber C. Kimball; and on the 22nd of | July 1843, he married to me, according to the order of the | church, my first wife Ruth.

On the first day of May 1843, I officiated in the | office of an Elder by marrying Lucy Walker to the Prophet | Joseph Smith, at his own residence.²⁷

During this period the Prophet Joseph took several | other wives. Amongst the number I well remember Eliza | Partridge, Emily Partridge, Sarah Ann Whitney, Helen | Kimball and Flora Woodworth. These all, he acknowledged | to me, were his lawful, wedded wives, according to the | celestial order. His wife Emma was cognizant of the | fact of some, if not all, of these being his wives, and she | generally treated them very kindly.

On the morning of the 12th of July, 1843, Joseph and | Hyrum Smith, came into the office, in the upper story of | the brick store, on the bank of the Mississippi River. They | were talking on the subject of plural marriage. Hyrum | said to Joseph, “if you will write the revelation on Celestial marriage, | I will take, and read it to Emma, and I believe I can convince | her of its truth, and you will hereafter have peace.” Joseph | smiled and remarked, “you do not know Emma as well | as I do.” Hyrum repeated his opinion and further remarked, | “the doctrine is so plain I can convince any reasonable man | or woman of its truth, purity and heavenly origin,” or | words to their effect. Joseph then said,

24. Clayton's diary for March 9, 1843, has the following: “Thursday 9. At prest. Josephs office. Walked out in the P. M. he told me it was lawful for me to send for Sarah & said he would furnish me money.”

25. Sylvia Porter Sessions Lyon. Lyon was civilly married to Windsor P. Lyon at the time. Lyon was left out of published versions of Clayton's affidavit.

26. Page 2 of Clayton's affidavit ends here.

27. Clayton's diary: “May 1st A.M. At the Temple. At 10 married Joseph to Lucy Walker. P. M. at Prest. Joseph's; he has gone out with Woodworth.”

“well, I will write | the revelation, and we will see.” He then requested me | to get paper and prepare to write. Hyrum very urgently | requested Joseph to write the revelation by means of the | Urim and Thummim, but Joseph, in reply, said he did | not need to, for he knew the revelation perfectly from | beginning to end.²⁸

Joseph and Hyrum then sat down, and Joseph commenced | to dictate the Revelation on Celestial marriage, and I wrote it, | sentence by sentence, as he dictated. After the whole was written, | Joseph asked me to read it through, slowly and carefully, | which I did, and he pronounced it correct. He then remarked | that there was much more that he could write, on the same | subject, but what was written was sufficient for the present.

Hyrum then took the Revelation, to read to Emma. Joseph | remained with me in the office until Hyrum returned. | When he came back, Joseph asked him how he had succeeded. | Hyrum replied that he had never received a more severe | talking to in his life, that Emma was very bitter and full | of resentment and anger.

Joseph quietly remarked, “I told | you, you did not know Emma as well as I did.” Joseph | then put the Revelation in his pocket and they both | left the office.

The revelation was read to several of the authorities | during the day. Towards evening Bishop Newel K. | Whitney asked Joseph if he had any objections to his | taking a copy of the revelation; Joseph replied that | he had not, and handed it to him. It was carefully | copied the following day by Joseph C. Kingsbury.

Two or three days after the Revelation was written, | Joseph related to me and several others that Emma had | teased, and urgently entreated him for the privilege | of destroying it; that he became so weary of her | teasing, and to get rid of her annoyance, he told her | she might destroy it, and she had done so, but he | had consented to her wish in this matter to pacify | her, realizing that he knew the Revelation perfectly, | and could re-write it at any time, if necessary.

The copy made by Joseph C. Kingsbury is a true²⁹ and correct copy of the original in every respect. The copy was | carefully preserved by Bishop

28. Page 3 of the affidavit ends here. Clayton’s reference to “the Urim and Thummim” here is important for a number of reasons. First, it illustrates that Smith’s use of revelatory instrumentality had never really ceased, as is sometimes suggested. This was a catchall term in early Mormonism for various stones that assisted revelation, not just the spectacles associated with the Book of Mormon. W. W. Phelps was perhaps the first to suggest the title for these objects, Urim and Thummim. (When early revelations were published, the term was back-written into them.) On Smith’s early use of such objects see Mark Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet.”

29. Page 4 of the affidavit ends here. Page 5 is the final page of the affidavit. By nature of the writing medium, pages 6, 7, and 8 are blank.

Whitney, and but few knew of | its existence until the temporary location of the Camp of Israel | at Winter Quarters, on the Missouri River, in 1846.

After the Revelation on celestial marriage was written | Joseph continued his instructions, privately, on the doctrine, | to myself and others, and during the last year of his life we were | scarcely ever together, alone, but he was talking on the | subject, and explaining that doctrine and principles | connected with it. He appeared to enjoy great liberty³⁰ and | freedom in his teachings, and also to find great relief in | having a few to whom he could unbosom his feelings | on that great and glorious subject. From him I learned | that the doctrine of plural and celestial marriage is | the most holy and important doctrine ever revealed to | man on the earth, and that without obedience to that | principle no man can ever attain to the fulness | of exaltation in celestial glory.³¹

Salt Lake City,

W^m Clayton.³²

js

February 16th 1874

Territory of Utah

County of Salt Lake.

On this sixteenth day of February, A.D. 1874, before the | undersigned a Notary Public in and for said County and | Territory, personally came W^m Clayton, who, being sworn in due form of law, says, | that the foregoing

30. "Liberty" was a common term among preachers of the era, meaning that the speaker enjoyed uninterrupted flow of thought and ease of expression. This state was generally ascribed to inspiration, in the spirit of the New Testament's promise that "the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say." For example, 1870s Seventh Day Adventist preacher Joseph Waggoner reported, "Most of the time I enjoyed great liberty in speaking." J. H. Waggoner, "Report of Meetings," 175.

31. Clayton's claims at this point are supported by his diary. Joseph Smith focused a lot of his time with Clayton discussing polygamy and the angst they both felt over the domestic strains it fostered. (The male-centeredness of these reports is, of course, evident.) Additionally, there is no doubt that both Clayton, Smith, and the others involved in the practice engaged in sexual activity with their multiple marriage partners. Of course, Smith had more wives than any of the other participants in Nauvoo, and it appears that the linkage aspect was globally more important than sex, though, as the revelation suggests, the latter had a vital religious meaning too. It is naïve to divorce Joseph Smith from physical desire. There are clear dynastic elements (see the discussion of verses 49–50 in Chapter 7). But some unions seem designed as loyalty hurdles (Smith's marriages to the wives of leader associates) trying to drive commitment to levels that would avoid the devastating betrayals of Missouri and Ohio. Others may have been largely motivated by desire.

32. Clayton underscored both his name and the date with a flourish.

statement is true in every particular, and where the facts are | related as coming under his own personal observation, and where the language of others | is quoted the exact sentiments, and as near as possible the exact words, are given in every | instance.

[Notary seal applied] In testimony whereof I have hereunto subscribed my name | and affixed my notarial seal, at my office in Salt Lake City, | Utah Territory, the day and year aforesaid.

John T. Caine
Notary Public

Clayton admits that his affidavit is correct in outline (“words to their effect”), but that it should not be taken as a transcript of the event. Clayton’s diary entry and his affidavit hint at the strained relationship between Joseph and Emma Smith at the time, as well as Emma’s confused and angry feelings over her husband’s marriages.³³ Emma felt vulnerable to disgrace and insecurity. She had ambivalent feelings over the legitimacy of polygamy, but avoided direct public action.

Clayton was living his own drama over polygamy, with one wife fending off (or ambivalent about) an ignorant suitor, confused or upset “in-laws,” and so forth. Smith made promises of support but had to be careful over his own situation. Meanwhile, Joseph Smith’s sermons at this point are in part a reflection of this stormy background, meant partly to support those in the know and perhaps to prepare others.³⁴

The July 12 revelation, however, was not the final revelation on this topic from Smith.³⁵ For instance, two months later, on September 15, 1843, Clayton recorded the following:

33. The day after the revelation was given, Clayton was called to a meeting of Joseph and Emma who had come to some agreement over their differences. Joseph perhaps hoped to either keep her from leaving him by offering stability tied to city property or fulfill already discussed alternatives. See Clayton’s diary entry for July 13, 1843. A month later Clayton recorded that Emma had found two letters from one of Joseph’s wives, Eliza Roxcy Snow, in his coat pocket. In anger, she asked Clayton if he was the delivery service. See his entries for August 21, 23, 1843. For Kingsbury’s memory of copying the revelation, see Chapter 9 and the Epilogue, below.

34. See Smith’s July and August 1843 sermons in William V. Smith et al., “The Parallel Joseph.” In particular, see Clayton’s interpretive account of Smith’s August 27, 1843 sermon.

35. Clayton’s affidavit above reports that Smith claimed more information was available at the time. There is no record of a specific continuation of the July 12 plural marriage revelation text.

Prest. J. told me he had lately had a new item of law³⁶ revealed to him in relation to myself. He said the Lord had revealed to him that a man could only take 2 of a family except by express revelation and as I had said I intended to take Lydia he made this known for my benefit. to have more than two in a family was apt to cause wrangles and trouble. He finally asked if I would not give L[ydia] to him I said I would so far as I had any thing to do in it. He requested me to talk to her.

The patriarchal language of give and take reflects the plural marriage revelation but was probably more optimistic than warranted. Lydia Ann Moon was reluctant to marry Smith, though she was apparently comfortable about marrying Clayton. However, at the time, William Clayton was already married to two of the Moon sisters, Margaret and Ruth. Thus, this new revelation prevented Clayton from marrying a third sister. In the end, Lydia would marry neither and instead monogamously married Clayton's younger brother James, who died soon after at Winter Quarters (Florence, Nebraska).³⁷ This regulation reported by William Clayton was either unknown or ignored in later instances of marriages, where several daughters and even a widowed mother might be married to the same man.³⁸

36. "Law," "Priesthood," and "order of the priesthood" were often, as they are in the plural marriage revelation, code words for plural marriage; as Clayton saw it, that law had to be lived if it was "revealed" to a man or woman (meaning, apparently, that the person was introduced to the practice and invited to participate). The text of the revelation suggests this and lies at the foundation of nineteenth-century Mormon claims that the highest heaven was closed to those who rejected the practice. See Smith et al., "Parallel Joseph," August 27, 1843."

37. Lydia and James had one child, Hiram James Clayton. Lydia remarried after Clayton's death in 1847 but never entered polygamy in life. She died at Rock Creek, California in 1897. She was sealed to James by proxy in 1915 and to other husbands in 1994 and 2010. William Clayton made a rather dreary assessment of Lydia in his diary entry for January 23, 1846: "She went to Burlington last year but previous to her going she agreed to be sealed to me for time and eternity. She refused to be sealed to Joseph. While at Burlington she wrote pledging herself to her contract. When she came home she faltered and went out to fathers where she got entangled with my brother James and has resolved to marry him. She has lost her faith in the Church and is on the road to ruin, but so determined that no argument is of any use. The family feel sorry but cannot change her feelings. Her mother frets much about it."

38. Theodore Turley married three sisters in March and April 1844, hence the regulation was either Clayton's alone, or Smith rethought it. Nancy R. Turley and Lawrence R. Turley, *The Theodore Turley Family Book*, 56. On such practice, see also Gary James Bergera, "Identifying the Earliest Mormon Polygamists

Dating the Revelation

While the July 12, 1843, dating of the plural marriage revelation is not in dispute, an issue that has always surrounded the revelation is the chronology of when Joseph Smith first understood, taught, and practiced plural marriage. A common view is that this revelation is connected to Smith's revisions of the Bible between 1830 and 1833. In tension with this view is the internal and external context of the revelation itself. The text of the revelation is largely contemporary to 1843 in the sense that it is a product of that year. On the other hand, at least some of its ideas were shared with members of Smith's inner circle much earlier.

One reason to support the revelation's connection to Smith's efforts to revise the Bible is the revelation's points of contact with the Bible. First, as Clayton summarized in his diary: "I wrote a Revelation . . . on the order of the priesthood, showing the designs in Moses, Abraham, David and Solomon having many wives & concubines." Thus, much of the text of the revelation references polygamous figures from the Hebrew Bible. The other two obvious points of contact are from the teachings of Jesus: one being Jesus's parable of the talents (Matt. 25), and the other being his response to the Sadducean puzzle of the Levirate husbands (Matt. 22:23–33, Mark 12:18–27, Luke 20:27–39).

This last point of contact is prominent in Smith's explanation of the revelation as the Nauvoo City Council (most of whom were previously unaware of the practice) debated how to respond to the *Nauvoo Expositor's* leaking of Smith's secretive polygamous marriages in June 1844. Not wanting to confirm the *Expositor's* allegations, Hyrum and Joseph Smith claimed that the revelation's intersection with polygamy was merely historical and that the driving force behind the revelation was his own concern with the levirate puzzle.³⁹ It is unclear from the council minutes whether this referred to his work with Sidney Rigdon in the Bible revision

1841–1844," 39; Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910*, 69–70; and John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled or the Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop John D. Lee*, ch. 14.

39. "To the Public," 1. The change of story was not unnoticed by those who were taught that the revelation marked a restoration of polygamy, not just an historical commentary. Danel W. Bachman, "The Authorship of the Manuscript of Doctrine and Covenants Section 132," 35–36.

effort more than a decade before the revelation or some other encounter with the text.⁴⁰

Manuscript Copies of the Revelation

The original Clayton manuscript of the revelation did not survive the disgust of Emma Smith, who apparently burned it.⁴¹ However, other copies were made and shared among those in Smith's inner circle.

Of the several copies of the revelation made, the two most prominent and influential for later imprints are those of Joseph C. Kingsbury and Willard Richards. According to Clayton, Newel K. Whitney, one of Smith's closest confidantes on the subject,⁴² asked for a copy of the revelation and recruited Kingsbury to produce it.⁴³ Willard Richards, acting in his position as Church historian, produced the other important handwritten copy of the revelation. Both the Kingsbury and Richards manuscripts show markup, with those on the Kingsbury manuscript suggesting that it was employed in setting type for the first imprint, and those on the Richards manuscript indicating that it may have been used for the Manuscript History of the Church.⁴⁴ See the addendum at the end of this

40. Samuel Brown argues that Smith's early 1830s revisions to the story of the Sadducees indicate a beginning for Smith's thought on both eternal marriage and polygamy. See Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death*, 230.

41. One story circulated that she used fire tongs to put it to the flames so that she could say she never touched it. Robert J. Woodford, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants," 1735.

42. Newel Whitney was not only one of those to whom the revelation was read after its delivery, he was already well-acquainted with the practice of polygamy. His daughter, Sarah Ann, was married to Smith.

43. Kingsbury, by Clayton's affidavit, copied the revelation the day after it was delivered. However, an examination of the manuscript suggests it may have been copied in two episodes. The Kingsbury copy is cataloged in Revelations Collection, circa 1829–1876, MS 4583, Box 1, fd. 75, LDS Church History Library. See Chapter 9 and the addendum to this volume.

44. The Manuscript History of the Church was a project begun by Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and clerks in 1838. In Nauvoo, after several more attempts, the project was turned over to Willard Richards. When Richards died in 1854, having brought the history to 1838, George A. Smith then helmed the project to its completion, winding up at Joseph Smith's death. As noted elsewhere, the

volume for a transcription of the Kingsbury manuscript with comparisons to the Richards manuscript.

Additional copies of the revelation were also made and distributed. Both Brigham Young and Hyrum Smith seemed to have copies of the revelation, though whether those copies still exist is unknown.⁴⁵ Aside from these, two other copies are known to exist, both in the handwriting of Newell K. Whitney's oldest son, Horace Kimball Whitney.⁴⁶

Despite its secrecy, some street knowledge of the revelation certainly existed in Nauvoo.⁴⁷ Hyrum showed the revelation to various people, including some members of the Nauvoo high council. William Law related his introduction:

I hereby certify that Hyrum Smith did, (in his office,) read to me a certain written document, which he said was a revelation from God, he said that he was with Joseph when it was received. He afterwards gave me the document to read, and I took it to my house, and read it, and showed it to my wife, and returned it next day. The revelation (so called) authorized certain men to have more wives than one at a time, in this world and in the world to come. It said this was the law, and commanded Joseph to enter into the law. —And also that he should administer to others. Several other items were in the revelation, supporting the above doctrines.⁴⁸

Similarly, James Allred reminisced to a clerk:

history project generally made no reference to polygamy, except its citation of the plural marriage revelation.

45. "A Special Conference of the Elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," *Deseret News—Extra* (September 14, 1852): 25. On Hyrum having a copy, see David Fullmer's June 15, 1869, affidavit in *40 Affidavits on Celestial Marriage, Book number 1, 1869*, 27; Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:142.

46. See the addendum. The Horace Whitney copies are catalogued as MS 7876, LDS Church History Library, and MS 3497, LDS Church History Library. Horace (1823–1884) was the oldest child of Newel and Elizabeth Ann Whitney.

47. M. Guy Bishop, "Eternal Marriage in Early Mormon Marital Beliefs," 85; Orson Pratt, October 7, 1869, *Journal of Discourses*, 13:193.

48. Law's affidavit was published in the single issue of the *Nauvoo Expositor*. Austin Cowles, former counselor in the Nauvoo stake presidency, gave similar testimony. The *Expositor* offered heated criticism of Smith and the other practitioners of polygamy in Nauvoo, styling them "heaven daring, hell deserving, God forsaken villains" and offering the reports of women who had been shocked by proposals of plural marriage. See also Nauvoo vs. O. R. Bostwick, February 26, 1844. Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 490–95.

At a meeting of the High council in Nauvoo, Sept 23 1843 Br Hiram Smith read the revelation relating to the plurality of wives, he said he did not believe it at first, it was so contrary to his feelings, but he said he knew Joseph was a profit of God, so he made covenant that he would not eat, drink, or sleep untill he knew for himself, that he had got a testimony that it was true, that he had even had the voice of God concerning it.”⁴⁹

Since Hyrum Smith learned of polygamy prior to the writing of the revelation, “it” in Allred’s statement has “plurality of wives,” as antecedent, not the July 12 revelation. Leonard Soby recalled that Hyrum read the revelation to the council around August 12.⁵⁰

Such reports of reading the revelation suggest the idea that several contemporary copies were made, though precisely how many other manuscript copies existed in Nauvoo is unknown.

Printing the Plural Marriage Revelation

In 1866, Brigham Young (already a polygamist by July 12, 1843) discussed his being introduced to the revelation:

If it is wrong for a man to have more than one wife at a time, the Lord will reveal it by and by, and he will put it away that it will not be known in the Church. I did not ask Him for the revelation upon this subject. When that revelation was first read to me by Joseph Smith, I plainly saw the great trials and the abuse of it that would be made by many of the Elders, and the trouble and the persecution that it would bring upon this whole people. But the Lord revealed it, and it was my business to accept it.⁵¹

Assuming the accuracy of this report, the soonest this might have happened was October 23, 1843, when the apostles returned to Nauvoo from a mission through parts of the east coast of the United States.

49. James Allred, “Statement,” October 15, 1854. Allred’s report is substantively different from Brigham Young’s, who claimed that he convinced Hyrum of the divinity of polygamy a year earlier in 1842, during Hyrum’s attempts to entrap those he thought were engaged in illicit polygamy. Hales, *Joseph Smith’s Polygamy*, 2:44–45. Hyrum, himself, gave different accounts. See Thomas Bullock’s minutes in *Historian’s Office General Church Minutes: 1839–1845*, April 8, 1844 (quoted in the Epilogue, below). On the circulation of the revelation see Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 63–64; and Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 10–11.

50. Leonard Soby, Statement, November 14, 1883.

51. Brigham Young, August 19, 1866, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:267.

Young collected and kept the Kingsbury copy himself three years after Joseph Smith's death.⁵² This would be used for the first imprint of the revelation, which appeared in a special edition of the Church's Salt Lake City weekly newspaper, the *Deseret News Extra*, on September 14, 1852. This was a part of the Church's public announcement of plural marriage as a practice in the faith, an announcement made in the wake of federally appointed territorial officials who were also making public claims about the practice in Utah.⁵³ The *Extra* was not the first public defense of polygamy. Six weeks prior to the August conference that brought the public announcement of polygamy at Church headquarters, Parley P. Pratt responded in print to accusations of polygamy by a San Francisco editor, John Nugent. In Pratt's pamphlet, "*Mormonism!*" "*Plurality of Wives!*" *An especial chapter, for the especial edification of certain inquisitive news editors, etc.*, he admitted to and defended polygamy with a series of arguments that set the standard for Mormon preaching on its justification: 1) polygamy was a biblical practice, 2) it was practiced by a majority of mankind at the present time, 3) it

52. See Young's remarks in "A Special Conference of the Elders," 25. The provenance of the Kingsbury copy is mostly complete and its textual influence is traceable without much difficulty. With the death of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, Church historian Willard Richards assumed control of those materials in Joseph Smith's office and the historian's collections, while Emma Smith held ownership of materials in the Smith residence (known as the Mansion House), such as the Egyptian mummies and papyri connected to the Book of Abraham, and the Bible revision manuscripts. Whitney may not have had custody of the Kingsbury copy in October 1843 when Joseph Smith apparently read the revelation to Brigham Young. Smith may have returned the Kingsbury copy after that. At any rate, Whitney held the Kingsbury copy in 1847 when Brigham Young requested it in March of that year. Young kept it in his possession (except for its use in publishing the *Extra*). Richards may have copied the revelation sometime after August 1852. Joseph C. Kingsbury's own affidavit (dated May 22, 1886) on copying the Clayton original appears as Joseph C. Kingsbury, affidavit, 1886 May 22. Probably before the manuscript passed to Young, Whitney's son, Horace K. Whitney, made a copy (and perhaps two copies—one of the two may be a copy of the other). See the bibliographic notes on these copies at the end of the addendum.

53. Jonathon H. Moyer, "Dancing with the Devil: The Making of the Republican/Mormon Pact," 18–22; Peter L. Crawley, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Mormon Church*, 2:357–58. This was the fourth *Extra* published by the *Deseret News* since its inaugural in 1850. A January 1852 *Extra* detailed a defense of the Territory against claims made by federal appointees who had fled Salt Lake City the previous year. Rogers, *Unpopular Sovereignty*, 45–54.

protected the virtue of women by eliminating the need and opportunity for prostitution, fornication, and adultery. Pratt did not mention the plural marriage revelation directly but told of the “law of God . . . from Zion.”

Beginning with the public announcement, the major imprints of the revelation are as follows:

1. *Deseret News Extra* (Sept. 14, 1852): 25–27. Salt Lake City, Utah.⁵⁴
2. *Deseret News Extra. Great Salt Lake City, U. T., September 14, 1852.* Horace S. Eldredge, presiding elder in St. Louis, Missouri had item 1 reprinted at the “Valley Farmer” print shop in St. Louis in December 1852.⁵⁵
3. *The Seer* 1, no. 1 (January 1853): 7–11, Washington, D.C. Based on item 1. Orson Pratt introduced verse numbers here for the first time. Pratt renumbered the verses to their present form in his 1876 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.⁵⁶
4. *Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star* (January 1, 1853), 5–8. Liverpool, UK. Based on item 1.⁵⁷
5. *Millennial Star Supplement* (January 22, 1853).⁵⁸ A reprint of item 1 with an editorial postscript by Samuel W. Richards, calling for a fair hearing of the pamphlet.⁵⁹

54. The *Deseret News Extra* gave minutes of the August 28–29, 1852, special conference when polygamy was publicly announced, and the resulting pamphlet was edited by Thomas Bullock, Brigham Young, and Willard Richards. Young redacted the pamphlet on several occasions prior to publication. See Church Historian’s Office Journal, August 29–September 16, 1852, 15:272–92. See also Crawley, *Descriptive Bibliography*, 2:354–57.

55. Eldredge made some changes in the *Extra*, but the revelation itself is duplicated without additional comment. Crawley, *Descriptive Bibliography*, 2:357–58.

56. For Joseph Smith’s revelation corpus in general, see Robin Scott Jensen, “‘Rely Upon the Things Which are Written’: Text Context and the Creation of Mormon Revelatory Records.”

57. Hereafter abbreviated *Millennial Star*.

58. Crawley, *Descriptive Bibliography*, 3:41.

59. Rumors of polygamy had long circulated in Britain, but missionaries were instructed to deny the practice or were simply ignorant of it. (For example, see Crawley, *Descriptive Bibliography*, 2:114–15.) Now that the rumors had in essence been acknowledged, a number of staunch members became disaffected. An active program ensued to explain the revelation and offer arguments for previous Church policy. The 8,000 copies of the supplement sold out during the year. This was remarkable in the sense that the first edition of the Pearl of Great Price published in 1851 in 12,000 copies still had several thousand copies on the shelf in 1876.

6. *Deseret News* (January 21, 1857): 361–62. Based on the Manuscript History of the Church version of the revelation.
7. *Millennial Star* (November 5, 12, 1859): 715–16, 729–31. Reprint of item 6.
8. *Millennial Star* (April 28, 1866): 257–61. Based on item 4.
9. George A. Smith's pamphlet, "Answers to Questions," published initially in 1869 and reprinted twice (in 1872 and 1873).
10. *Millennial Star*, "An Answer" (February 13, 1869): 107–11. Reprint of the material in item 9, but subtitled, "*Deseret News*" in reference to item 1.
11. *Millennial Star*, "The Resurrection" (November 22, 1875): 746–50. Has the verse numbering matching that of the *Seer* (item 3), but this is probably accidental since both simply placed digits at the beginning of the paragraphs of item 1.
12. The next five imprints of the revelation appeared in the 1878, 1879, 1882, 1888, and 1891 editions of the Pearl of Great Price (canonized in 1880).⁶⁰
13. Doctrine and Covenants 1876, 1879, etc. The revelation first appeared as a part of the Doctrine and Covenants in Pratt's 1876 edition, where it received the same number (132) as in the current (2013) edition. The 1921 edition followed the format of item 14 below.⁶¹
14. B. H. Roberts ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 5:501–7. Roberts submitted occasional redactions of the texts of the revelations to the Church presidency and his work then formed a standard for later editions until 1981.⁶²

60. On editions to 1930 see Chad J. Flake and Larry W. Draper, *A Mormon Bibliography, 1830–1930: Books, Pamphlets, Periodicals, and Broad-sides Relating to the First Century of Mormonism*. On canonization, see, "Fiftieth Semi-Annual Conference, Fifth Day," 4.

61. An episode of the "History of Joseph Smith" series that appeared five years after the *Extra*, once again in the *Deseret News*, contained the plural marriage revelation. The *Deseret News* History was edited for inclusion in the *Millennial Star* in Liverpool, which formed the basis for B. H. Roberts's *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* published between 1902 and 1912.

62. Roberts often consulted Church Historian Anthon H. Lund in person on the history. For examples, see John P. Hatch, ed., *Danish Apostle: The Diaries of Anthon H. Lund, 1890–1921*, 157, 169, 194, 197.

While viewed as authoritative by believers since its initial delivery, the plural marriage revelation was officially canonized in the October 1880 General Church Conference when Pratt's 1880 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants and his 1878 Pearl of Great Price were accepted by the Church.⁶³

Organization of the Revelation

This study will examine the text of the revelation through the lens of topics suggested by the following outline of its structure:

1. The Revelation Heading. Most imprints of the revelation text add a summary heading. Over the years, the length and emphasis of the heading has changed as its social and religious meaning has evolved.
2. The Ancient Roots of Polygamy (vv. 1–5). The revelation begins with an explanation for its existence. It shows modern polygamy as an extension of ancient practice, one that has salvific overtones.
3. The Permission to Seal (vv. 6–15). Priesthood sacrament may bestow permanence on mortal relationships, and hence it forms a fundamental theme in polygamy. Here the revelation demonstrates itself as the endpoint in a developing chain of ritual instruction in Mormonism.
4. Unconditional Sealing and Eternal Damnation (vv. 16–27). Sealing bonds as conceived by the revelation and in Nauvoo practice were nearly unconditional. Parties to a sealing might crack that seal only with the most dread transgressions.
5. Polygamy and the Afterlife (vv. 28–45). Kingdoms of God and polygamy in the accumulation of afterlife glory.
6. The “Sealing” Keys of the Kingdom (vv. 46–48). The Patriarchal Priesthood and the complex historical narrative over the distribution of authority for sealing and polygamy.
7. Joseph Smith's Exaltation (vv. 49–50). “All that he gives me I shall take with me.” Smith's guarantee of salvation gave him standing in his role as temple priest and the discussion of the validity of the plural marriage revelation.
8. The Secret of Emma (vv. 51–57). A mystery surrounding the revelation and its relation to Emma.
9. The Mechanics of Plurality (vv. 58–63). Parable of the Ten Virgins, polyandry, and the basis for priesthood status in the “transfer” of

63. “Fiftieth Semi-Annual Conference, Fifth Day,” 724.

plural wives. The Kingsbury's manuscript suggests that these and the last few verses may have been added later.

10. The Law of Sarah (vv. 64–66). An ultimatum to Emma Smith that would not be an empty threat in later practice.

The genesis of the July 12, 1843, revelation on plural marriage may have been Emma Smith's resistance to polygamy, but below its disturbing surface it captured, reformulated, and originated many of Joseph Smith's ideas about the ancient world and modern doctrine. Publicly announced nine years later in response to claims by appointed territorially officers, it played a major and continuing role in the politics and culture of the Intermountain West. Additionally, it had consequences for important Mormon ideas about earthly and heavenly salvation. It was and is in many ways the textual foundation for much of nineteenth and twentieth-century Mormonism.

Chapter Three: Verses 1–5

The Ancient Roots of Polygamy

Like most of Joseph Smith's revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants, section 132 is dialogic in nature—Joseph Smith poses (or relays) questions to God, and the revelation text communicates answers to those questions in the voice of Deity. In this manner, the revelation opens with a prologue explaining its origin:

1 Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines—

2 Behold, and lo, I am the Lord thy God, and will answer thee as touching this matter.¹

3 Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same.

4 For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory.

5 For all who will have a blessing at my hands shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as were instituted from before the foundation of the world.

This preamble does at least three things. First, it frames the revelation as a response to Joseph's inquiries concerning the plural marriages of early Israelite patriarchs, prophets, and kings. Second, it links the "doctrine of

1. In the early parlance of Mormonism, this text qualifies as both *commandment* and *revelation*. Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books, Facsimile Edition*, xxv note 3. The words "Lord thy God" and "Lord your God" echo the declaration at Mount Sinai; taken together, they occur more frequently in this revelation than any other.

their having many wives and concubines” (v. 1) with “a new and an everlasting covenant” (v. 4). Third, verses 3 through 5 establish the revelation as a threshold of knowledge beyond which one cannot reverse course: “for all those who have this law revealed unto them must obey the same” (v. 3). Once this threshold is crossed, failure to accept and obey the covenant opens the door to damnation (a theme repeated in other parts of the revelation).² While the notion that increased knowledge implies increased jeopardy was nothing new (see Mosiah 3:11–12), this threat of possible damnation was especially directed toward Emma Smith.³

Evidence that the revelation was used as a convincing tactic on other occasions in Nauvoo is sparse, though other expressions about jeopardy may have been deployed. Smith is reported to have told prospective wives that their salvation and that of their family would be assured by accepting his proposal. Martha Brotherton, a young convert who came to Nauvoo with her family in 1842, found herself the object of a marriage proposal by Brigham Young. Smith’s explanation of the legality of the proposal echoes portions of the plural marriage revelation, in particular verses 46 through 48 and verses 61 through 62. Brotherton was shocked by the situation and her faith was devastated. She wrote an account of the proposal for the St. Louis *American Bulletin*, where she suggests that romantic attraction was a part of the conversation—at least whether or not she felt attracted to Young.⁴ Unfortunately, when a woman publicly disclosed such adventures, she could be labeled as a prostitute or otherwise slandered. The tactic worked to some degree among Church members who were ignorant of polygamy, but failed to draw attention away from Joseph Smith in the press.⁵

2. William Clayton interpreted verse 3 to mean that polygamy was necessary for exaltation and that “there can be no blessings for the human family only through a polygamist.” William Clayton, letter to Madison M. Scott, November 11, 1871.

3. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 39; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, 463; Merina Smith, *Revelation, Resistance and Mormon Polygamy*, 84.

4. Martha H. Brotherton, “St. Louis, July 13th, A. D. 1842,” 1.

5. Lyman Wight voiced support for such treatment as a legitimate response to a woman who complained about insulting behavior. Melvin C. Johnson, *Polygamy on the Pedernales: Lyman Wight’s Mormon Villages in Antebellum Texas, 1845–1858*, 47–48. Women who rejected polygamy in Nauvoo and kept silent seemed to endure no penalty other than the shock to their understanding.

“Inasmuch as You have Inquired of My Hand”

Verse 1 has been the basis for parts of the heading descriptions in various (especially later) imprints of the revelation that tie it to Smith’s early career, when his actions are often perceived as founded on closely-packed miraculous events. (For example, the 1981 heading states that “the doctrines and principles involved in this revelation had been known by the Prophet since 1831.”) In Utah, stories were propagated that both Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith knew of the “principle”⁶ as early as 1830 or 1831, with some believing that Cowdery had early on taken a plural wife without Smith’s permission.⁷

It is natural to assume that the revelation may have been prompted by Smith’s inquisitiveness during his revision of the Hebrew Bible, as other revelations and events during that time were prompted by questions had during this revision and other translation efforts. For example, according to Cowdery, the restoration of authority to baptize was prompted by Smith’s translating of the Book of Mormon, and the sweeping vision of heaven in Doctrine and Covenants 76 occurred “while translating St.

6. This was a common, insider term for polygamy. For example, William Clayton learned from Smith that polygamy is the “most holy . . . principle.” See Clayton’s affidavit in the introduction to this volume. Fundamentalist Mormon polygamists are fond of the word. Three years before the affidavit, Clayton wrote that “Polygamy is a Celestial order, the most sacred and holy that was ever revealed from Heaven to man.” Clayton, letter to Madison M. Scott, November 11, 1871.

7. These stories may have been founded on rumors surrounding Oliver Cowdery’s behavior when the 1830 “Lamanite” missionaries left New York for Missouri. Before leaving New York, Cowdery was engaged to Elizabeth Whitmer, who played a founding role in the early Church. While in Ohio, Cowdery became enamored with another young woman, to whom he apparently proposed marriage. The breach of faith resulted in some discussion and discipline in May 1832. See The Conference Minutes and Record Book of Christ’s Church of Latter Day Saints, 1838–1839, 1844, May 26, 1832. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 13; Orson Pratt, June 23, 1878, *Journal of Discourses*, 20:29; Joseph F. Smith, “Celestial Marriage,” *Ogden Herald*, May 21, 1886, 2. “They had a revelation that . . . Patriarchal Marriage . . . was right. . . . Joseph said, ‘Oliver if you go into this thing it is not with my faith or consent.’ . . . Oliver Cowdery took to wife Annie Lyman, cousin to Geo. A. Smith. From that time he went into darkness and lost the spirit.” Comments by Brigham Young, July 26, 1872, in Charles Lowell Walker journals, 1854–1899, 8:118. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, 17. Scott G. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 5:84.

John's Gospel."⁸ Reminiscent reports, however, suggest that it was Hyrum who asked for clarification on the Old Testament Patriarchs and that verse 1 acknowledges this more recent conversation—not an early question of Joseph Smith during his revision of the Bible a decade earlier.

While the text of the revelation may not have been prompted by Joseph Smith's earlier efforts to revise the Bible, he had made claims to Hyrum and others that revelation dictated his course in polygamy. Sarah Kimball reported that when Smith proposed marriage to her early in 1842 (a proposal she rejected) he claimed that God had given two revelations on polygamy. The first one he characterized as given "many years before as a privilege with blessings" but the new revelation in Nauvoo was a commandment.⁹ Given the volatility of public knowledge of the practice, Smith may have had safety concerns that prevented earlier revelations on it from being written down. This was not an unusual restriction. For example, the endowment ceremonies, according to Heber C. Kimball, were "not to be written" (though they would later be transcribed in Utah).¹⁰ Similarly, Joseph Smith's revelation on war (now section 87) was concealed during his lifetime and his shared vision of April 3, 1836 (now Doctrine and Covenants 110), remained unmentioned until August 1852 and unpublished until November 1852. Perhaps Smith's much earlier relationship with Fanny Alger depended on this "first" revelation rather than on an early version of July 12, 1843, revelation. William Clayton's 1874 affidavit claims that Smith had known the content of the revelation, if not the precise and full text, for some time. There is little doubt that Smith had been thinking about the parameters of such a text, and the language of the revelation appears in several contexts prior to July 12, 1843. While any previous and unrecorded revelation on the topic may have had general connections to the 1843 revelation, a close examination of the text reveals it to be a compilation of various thematic elements that were modified and brought together in a July dictation that was mainly relevant to 1843.¹¹

8. The quotation appears in the heading of the current edition of Doctrine and Covenants 76. On Cowdery, see Oliver Cowdery, "Dear Brother," 14–16.

9. Sarah Kimball, "Auto-Biography," 51.

10. Heber C. Kimball, Letter to Parley P. Pratt, June 17, 1842.

11. On Alger's puzzling place in the polygamy panorama, see B. Carmon Hardy, *Doing the Works of Abraham, Mormon Polygamy: Its Origin, Practice, and Demise*, 42–44; Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 323–27; Don Bradley, "Mormon Polygamy Before Nauvoo? The Relationship of Joseph Smith and Fanny Alger," 14–58; Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:85–152.

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As mentioned earlier, the question often assigned to Joseph Smith in verse 1 seems to have originated with Hyrum Smith. Unaware of his brother's own involvement, Hyrum was previously a leader in the effort to detect and expose polygamy in Nauvoo up to May 1843. It was during this time that he may have been converted to the idea of plural marriage by Brigham Young, who had (according to Young) disclosed the news to Hyrum of Joseph's own polygamous marriages. In a reminiscent account, Mercy Fielding Thompson tells of a revelation Joseph reported to his brother on proxy sealing of marriages. Joseph apparently informed Hyrum that polygamy meant he could be sealed to both his deceased wife, Jershua Barden, and his living wife, Mary Fielding.¹² The prospect of preserving both unions in the hereafter was a side of polygamy Hyrum had not considered, and it reflects the developing nature of sealing concepts as they connected to baptism for the dead, which was the initial foray into a theology of proxy sacraments.¹³ In a marriage for mortal life only, Mercy Fielding (Mary Fielding's sister and a widow of Joseph Smith's clerk and early polygamist Robert Thompson) became, with her sister Mary, Hyrum's

12. Unfortunately, the only report of Young informing Hyrum Smith comes twenty-three years after the fact, in which Young added comments that placed Hyrum in a somewhat unflattering light, perhaps still reflecting Young's anxiety over the perceived legitimacy of his own position. Elden J. Watson, ed., *Brigham Young Addresses: A Chronological Compilation of Known Addresses of the Prophet Brigham Young*, 5:52–54. Hyrum's own report suggests that his brother introduced him to the idea. Hyrum, Jershua, and Mary were sealed in May 1843 after Joseph informed Hyrum of a new revelation that made such proxy sealings possible. Carol Cornwall Madsen, ed., *In Their Own Words: Women and the Story of Nauvoo*, 194–95. It seems unlikely that this April or May revelation claimed by Mercy was the text of the plural marriage revelation, and it is unclear whether the revelation Mercy mentions was written. In her undated account, Mercy mentions the Presiding Bishop of the Church. In 1843 no presiding bishop was in place. She may have meant future presiding bishop Newel K. Whitney, suggesting a collation of various memories. On Hyrum's story, see James Allred's statement in Chapter 1, and Hyrum's unpublished remarks at the April 8, 1844, Church conference. Joseph Smith began actively preaching about the virtues of sealing in May 1843, and this continued through the fall.

13. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 495–96; Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 141–42. John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet*, 97–98.

wife.¹⁴ Mercy was taken into the Smith home, where for the remaining year of Hyrum's life she lived in relative security and was treated with kindness.

Despite its 1843 purpose and construction, the plural marriage revelation contained ideas that were circulating years before its dictation. For example, William W. Phelps wrote to his wife Sally in 1835:

A new idea, Sally, if you and I continue faithful to the end, we are certain to be one in the Lord throughout eternity; this is one of the most glorious consolations we can have in the flesh.¹⁵

Phelps's letter hints at an early conceptual leakage of high priesthood sealing to familial bonds, though there was no corresponding liturgy in evidence.¹⁶

Other reports of earlier knowledge of eternal marital sealing were rarely contemporary and at times seem to conflate various later events or teachings. For example, in his posthumously published autobiography, Parley P. Pratt wrote that Smith taught him about sealing while the two were in the Washington, DC area in 1839:

During these interviews he taught me many great and glorious principles concerning God and the heavenly order of eternity. It was at this time that I received from him the first idea of eternal family organization, and the eternal union of the sexes in those inexpressibly endearing relationships which none but the highly intellectual, the refined and pure in heart, know how

14. Mercy was unaware of husband Robert's participation in polygamy. She was apparently sealed to him by proxy in May 1843. Mercy stated that Robert's spirit appeared to Joseph Smith several times in the summer of 1843 requesting she be married "for time" to Hyrum. When Mercy was introduced to polygamy in July or August 1843, she rejected it until she was able to take and contemplate a copy of the July revelation. Mercy Fielding Thompson, *Autobiography*, 195.

15. W. W. Phelps, Letter to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835. See also Samuel Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death*, 145–48, 214–17, 228–36.

16. The plural marriage revelation follows this idea in a strictly textual sense: it makes no mention of Elijah, and Phelps's remarks preceded the April 3, 1836 vision (Doctrine and Covenants 110) by a year. Regulation of sealing in the mid-twentieth century required that men assigned to perform sealing be high priests, and current practice assures that the same condition exists by default. Heber J. Grant, Letter to Lewis R. Anderson, March 5, 1935, and Devery S. Anderson, *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846–2000: A Documentary History*, 255. Phelps claimed some special knowledge of the 1836 vision in 1851, reporting: "I was present when the keys were delivered to Joseph." Thomas Bullock, booklet (#10), February 2, 1851.

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to prize, and which are at the very foundation of everything worthy to be called happiness.

Till then I had learned to esteem kindred affections and sympathies as appertaining solely to this transitory state, as something from which the heart must be entirely weaned, in order to be fitted for its heavenly state.

It was Joseph Smith who taught me how to prize the endearing relationships of father and mother, husband and wife; of brother and sister, son and daughter.

It was from him that I learned that the wife of my bosom might be secured to me for time and all eternity; and that the refined sympathies and affections which endeared us to each other emanated from the fountain of divine eternal love. It was from him that I learned that we might cultivate these affections, and grow and increase in the same to all eternity; while the result of our endless union would be an offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, or the sands of the sea shore.

It was from him that I learned the true dignity and destiny of a son of God, clothed with an eternal priesthood, as the patriarch and sovereign of his countless offspring. It was from him that I learned that the highest dignity of womanhood was, to stand as a queen and priestess to her husband, and to reign for ever and ever as the queen mother of her numerous and still increasing offspring.¹⁷

With some irony, Pratt's wife at the time of the Washington interviews, Mary Ann Frost Stearns Pratt, initially accepted sealing in 1843 but later rejected it and became estranged from her husband upon discovering in 1846 that he had married other wives without her knowledge. (A month later, Brigham Young would convince her to be sealed to Parley for time and to the deceased Joseph Smith for eternity by proxy.) It is possible that Smith introduced sealing to Pratt without the context of polygamy, perhaps knowing that Pratt might be repulsed by the latter—Pratt was apparently working against Smith regarding polygamy early in 1843¹⁸—however Pratt's inclusion of likely post-Nauvoo thought (such as the detailed nature of the heavenly family) points to his recital almost surely compressing a number of experiences and feelings over a considerable period.

17. Parley Parker Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, 329–30.

18. Willard Richards, Letter to Brigham Young, July 18, 1843. Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism*, 202–10. Pratt's admission of a classically Puritan attitude is instructive regarding the way early Latter-day Saints who persevered from the New York period may have seen plurality and sealing.

Claiming that knowledge of polygamy came even earlier, Parley Pratt's brother, Orson Pratt, taught that Smith was quietly discussing polygamy as early as 1832:

In the forepart of the year 1832, Joseph told individuals, then in the Church, that he had inquired of the Lord concerning the principle of plurality of wives, and he received for answer that the principle of taking more wives than one is a true principle, but the time had not yet come for it to be practiced. . . . The Lord has His own time to do all things pertaining to His purposes in the last dispensation; His own time for restoring all things that have been predicted by the ancient prophets.¹⁹

Whether or not Orson Pratt's claim is correct, Smith's vision of the enterprise of restoration was prominent in his preaching and his coreligionists were ready to believe that almost any biblical precedent was fair game to Mormonism.

“A New and an Everlasting Covenant”

Though he was oriented by a Protestant world, Joseph Smith did not feel bound by the scriptural interpretations of that tradition. Protestants frequently viewed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as men whose moral weakness or cultural tradition made them examples of the foibles of human nature. For example, in his 1830 edition of *A Theological Dictionary*, Charles Buck wrote that the Patriarchs' polygamy was a reflection of the

19. Orson Pratt, October 7, 1869, *Journal of Discourses*, 13:193. Pratt relates a story that may have circulated for thirty years. Given the way Cowdery's misstep followed him, it seems unlikely that such a conversation in 1832 broached anything like a specific suggestion. Even the broad suggestion that an Abram-Hagar union was God-approved let alone God-commanded may have bordered on scandalous. Phelps wrote to Brigham Young in 1861 that Joseph gave an 1831 revelation to the effect that the “Lamanites” would become “white” by virtue of the Mormon men taking Indian women as wives (a not unheard of idea at the time, outside of Mormonism). Phelps may have been exaggerating or misremembering for several reasons, and the structure of his remembered text may reflect this. See Hardy, *Works of Abraham*, 34–37 for Phelps's reconstruction of this revelation. Phelps's claim is supported in part by Ezra Booth, “Mormonism—Nos. VIII–IX,” 1. On Booth's letters, see Dennis Rowley, “The Ezra Booth Letters,” 135–41. Polygamy did not go beyond implication in this Missouri revelation. David J. Whittaker, “Mormons and Native Americans: A Historical and Bibliographical Introduction,” 35. On Phelps, see Samuel M. Brown, “The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and William Phelps,” 26–62.

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“hardness of their heart.”²⁰ Instead, Smith’s revelation rehabilitated the ancient Patriarchs, making them exemplars of not only righteous living but of meeting the necessary ritual requirements to achieve the fullest exaltation.²¹ Thus, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in particular are depicted as having become “gods” (v. 37). Protestants often preached that Abraham’s lie about Sarah was a fault, whereas Smith dictated a revelation absolving Abraham’s character (Abr. 2:22–25). The Book of Abraham assigns the lie to God’s commandment—not an unusual position in Nauvoo where community morals and church law might be ignored under special conditions. The plural marriage revelation marks Abraham’s taking Hagar as divine command, not Sarah’s response to a childless marriage. John Cook Bennett’s claims that Joseph Smith argued for a divine command ethic isn’t at odds with the text of the revelation, or for that matter, the Book of Mormon itself.²²

Based on this understanding of the Patriarchs being exemplars of righteous obedience to law, verse 5 (compare vv. 11, 28) is interesting for its allusion to Smith’s April 2, 1843, declaration found in Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21: “There is a law irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.” Bringing this all together, the implication could be easily drawn that in order to be exalted in God’s presence one must fulfill all of the sacraments including, in this case, participation in polygamy. Smith’s sermon of June 11, 1843, was one of the more important instances where he considered the necessity of performance completeness, and it formed a vital link in the logic of proxy ordinances like baptism for the dead. Orson Pratt canonized the idea by adding one of Smith’s 1842 open letters to the Saints to the Doctrine and Covenants (section 128).²³

The revelation’s connecting the “new and an everlasting covenant” of marital sealing with the practice of plural marriage, and Joseph Smith’s tendency to present them together, suggest a related question: Were there

20. B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage*, 40. Wilson H. Kimnach, ed., *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758*, 25:444, 453.

21. Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary Containing Definitions of All Religious Terms*, s.v. polygamy.

22. See the discussion of verses 28 through 45 below. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 29–32.

23. For reports of the sermon, see William V. Smith et al., “The Parallel Joseph,” June 11, 1843.

any non-polygamous Nauvoo couples simultaneously civilly and eternally married while Smith was still alive? Some Church members who were already civilly united and heard of sealing through the Nauvoo grapevine apparently requested (and were granted) sealing without being introduced to polygamy.²⁴ However, during that time there does not seem to be any officially-recorded, simultaneous sealing and marriage that did not involve polygamy. This should be expected though, as Smith, either himself or through an intermediary, seems to have rarely broached sealing with a person outside the context of polygamy.²⁵

After Smith's death and before the trek west, there were a small number of simultaneous sealings and marriages not involving plurality. Brigham Young married and sealed Truman Leonard to Orlensia White, as well as his own son, William Goodall Young, to Adelia Clark on January 1, 1846. Heber C. Kimball recorded the latter couple's ceremony, which bears similarity to verse 19 of the plural marriage revelation. A more typical example of non-plural sealing was Charles Lambert and Mary Alice Cannon, who were civilly married by John Taylor in November 1844 but not sealed until 1846 in the Nauvoo temple (again by Taylor).²⁶ A much less typical example is that of Joseph C. Kingsbury, who was married and sealed to Caroline Dorcas by Heber C. Kimball on March 4, 1845. Kingsbury was a widower but was previously engaged in a faux public marriage with Sarah Ann Whitney, a plural wife of Joseph Smith.²⁷

24. Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*, 2:173.

25. Sealing may have been a (silent) subtext for Smith's sermon on hearing of the death of perennial missionary Lorenzo Dow Barnes. Barnes fell in love with Philadelphia convert Susan Conrad; when Barnes died in late 1842, Smith seemed to suggest the possibility of sealing. See William V. Smith, "A Documentary Note on a Letter to Joseph Smith. Romance, Death, and Polygamy: The Life and Times of Susan Hough Conrad and Lorenzo Dow Barnes." Smith, *Every Word Seasoned with Grace*, ch. 3; Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843*, 361.

26. On the Young and Clark sealing, see Heber C. Kimball journal entries in George D. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton*, 246; and Lisle G. Brown, ed., *Nauvoo Sealings Adoptions and Anointings*, 355. On the Lambert and Cannon marriage and sealing, see Charles Lambert, *Autobiography*. On sealing among those already legally married in Nauvoo, see Gary James Bergera, "The Earliest Sealings for Civilly Married Couples Living and Dead," 49–74.

27. Kingsbury's sham marriage was meant to protect Joseph Smith from suspicion—perhaps in case of pregnancy—by participating in a public marriage

“If Ye Abide not that Covenant, then Are Ye Damned”

The meaning of the word “law” in this particular revelation was historically interpreted as referring to authorized polygamy. This is important in understanding other portions of the revelation. The law is connected with sealing, but its main thrust centered on a threshold of knowledge. While polygamy, sealing, and exaltation were implicitly linked in the revelation, it was only “those who have this law revealed unto them” (v.3) who had passed that threshold of knowledge. Those who had such knowledge revealed to them, but failed to “abide . . . that covenant” would be “damned” (v. 4).

This threat of damnation for failure to live the law that one had knowledge of was inconsistent in practice. While William Clayton anguished over the ambivalence of his second wife, Margaret, his first wife, Ruth, did not seem to complain (at least by Clayton’s record), even though the difficult emotions that so often surrounded polygamy were no doubt present in Ruth. Conversations between Clayton and Joseph Smith revealed no salvific threat over revoking the marriage (covenant) with Margaret. A single rule is difficult to apply perhaps. On the other hand, if things were not properly done, either against Smith’s rulings about who took whom in marriage, how many, how often (see v. 44), or other deeper matters, Smith said that there could be extreme penalties, including death. In his June 23, 1843 journal, a few weeks before the revelation, Clayton wrote:

[Joseph] said [Robert B.] Thompson professed great friendship for him but he gave way to temptation & he had to die. Also bro [Vinson] Knight he gave him one [wife] but he went to loose conduct and he could not save him. Also [Brigham Young] had transgressed his covenant & he pled with the Lord to spare him this end & he did so, other wise he would have died.²⁸

The statements about death may play into the seriousness of the “destroyed” clauses later in the revelation (vv. 26, 41, 52, 54, 63–64). However, *destruction* is more explicitly presented there as the denial of the highest joy in heaven or being “delivered unto the buffetings of Satan” (v.26), a phrase that appears in several of Smith’s revelations and borrows from 2 Corinthians 12:7.²⁹

to one of Joseph Smith’s wives, Sarah Ann Whitney, on April 29, 1843. Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*, 351.

28. Robert Fillerup, ed., “William Clayton’s Nauvoo Diaries and Personal Writings,” June 23, 1843.

29. It also appears in a number of early Mormon ecclesiastical court minutes, and it echoes the events as the Jewish and Roman trials of Jesus, as measured by

The idea of a death penalty, however, certainly fits the Old Testament context of polygamy, which associated sexual misconduct (adultery with a married woman, rape, consensual loss of virginity by a betrothed woman, etc.) with death. Smith apparently entrusted Robert B. Thompson with the secrets of polygamy some time before Thompson died in August 1841. According to Clayton, Smith believed that Thompson's death was a result of his giving "way to temptation."

The context suggests that Thompson went out on his own in taking a wife or perhaps was expressing a sexual freedom not authorized or sanctioned by Smith.³⁰ Clayton reported Smith saying that, "the way he knew in whom to confide, God told him in whom he might place confidence."³¹

Clayton's interview with Smith was in fact a personal caution about proper boundaries:

J[oseph] took me and conversed considerable concerning some delicate matters. said [Emma] wanted to lay a snare for me. He told me last night of this and said he had felt troubled. He said [Emma] had treated him coldly & badly since I came and he knew she was disposed to be revenged on him for some things she thought that if he would indulge himself she would too.³²

The underground Nauvoo process of marrying and giving in marriage contained generous sprinklings of revelation reports confirming, denying, or introducing the practice to men and women, but the complete boundaries of engagement were nowhere to be found. Instead, participants seemed to feel their way through a forest of oral or aural perception and cultural interpretation. Consistency was difficult to achieve when personalities interfaced with secrecy and a crucial lack of common knowledge.

an 1829 revelation to Smith (Doctrine and Covenants 19).

30. This was not an unknown problem even after polygamy became public knowledge. The rules were not always clear. See the case of Gustavus Hills discussed in Chapter 9, note 10. The cause of Thompson's death was linked to malaria. Knight was singled out in Smith's January 1841 revelation as the first "presiding" bishop of the Church (Doctrine and Covenants 124:141). His death meant that the office was not filled until after the exodus of the Mormons from Nauvoo. After Smith, the mystique of a death penalty is not in evidence when participants overstepped Brigham Young's boundaries. Young might have required a penitent heart for such things among his closest associates, but none of them seemed to be in danger of death over it. See the discussion of verse 37 in Chapter 6.

31. Fillerup, "William Clayton's Nauvoo Diaries," May 16, 1843.

32. Ibid., June 23, 1843.

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