

## Chapter 10

### Utah LDS Church Published a False Version of How Polygamy Entered the Church

Any study on the subject of how the doctrine of plural marriage entered the Utah LDS Church should include a careful examination of the two opposing sides on the subject. On one side there are Joseph's testimonies published while he was living. In direct opposition to Joseph's testimonies are the affidavits and historical records of polygamists made years after his death. Their affidavits are in direct opposition to Joseph's testimonies.

The Utah LDS Church has published that the doctrine of plural marriage was introduced into the Church after a visitation of an angel to Joseph Smith. Fawn M. Brodie, a well-known Utah LDS author, wrote that she had found the story of the angel with the sword to be widespread among early Utah LDS members. She published:

**The story of the [angel with a] drawn sword appears frequently in the testimonies of the early polygamists.**

(Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 303)

Conversely, while Joseph strongly testified that an angel had appeared to him to reveal the Book of Mormon and to restore the priesthood and thus the Church, he *never* related that anything similar transpired regarding polygamy. Claims that an angel appeared to Joseph to authorize polygamy were made and written by others, not him.

In May 1887, nearly forty-three years after Joseph Smith's death, Andrew Jenson of the Utah LDS Church published sixteen pages of affidavits and testimonies in *The Historical Record*. In some of the affidavits an attempt was made to promote the belief

that polygamy was introduced into the Church by an angel. It was claimed that Joseph had declared that the Lord had given him a plural marriage revelation in the early 1830s. However, he had refused to obey God's command until after the Lord sent a sword-carrying angel who threatened to "destroy" (to kill) him if he did not marry plural wives. This assertion (by the few members practicing polygamy) that their polygamy was justified because—two generations prior—the Lord sent an angel to deliver a plural marriage message to Joseph. This should be examined in light of the counsel given by Joseph and the scriptures about true angelic ministry from God.

**Joseph Warned That  
Revelations from Satanic Angels  
Contradict Former True Revelations**

Before reading the affidavits by his accusers, let us first examine what Joseph said about angels visiting and delivering messages to individuals. As editor of the *Times and Seasons* (the Church's official publication), Joseph published an article entitled "Try the Spirits." In it he warned the Saints against mistaking angels of Satan for angels of God. He was concerned that the Saints would be deceived into believing false revelations delivered by satanic angels.

"Try the Spirits" filled over five-and-one-half pages, but only one short quote from Joseph's article will be considered here—his statement on how to know that an angel is from Satan. According to Joseph, if there is any statement within the message delivered that contradicts a former revelation from God, both the message and the angel are from Satan. Joseph Smith wrote:

**There have also been ministering angels in the church which were of satan appearing as an angel of light:—A sister in the State of New York had a vision who said it was told her that if she would go to a certain place in the woods an angel would appear to her,—she went at the appointed time and saw a glorious personage descending arrayed in white . . . he commenced and told her to fear God and said that her husband was called to do great things, but that**

**he must not go more than one hundred miles from home or he would not return; whereas God had called him to go to the ends of the earth; and he has since been more than one thousand miles from home, and is yet alive. Many true things were spoken by this personage and many things that were false.—How it may be asked was this known to be a bad angel? . . . by his contradicting a former revelation.**

*(Times and Seasons 3 [April 1, 1842]: 747)*

The woman of whom Joseph spoke was evidently the wife of a Church missionary because Joseph explained, “God had called him to go to the ends of the earth.” However, the angel who spoke with the woman gave her a disjunctive and contradictory revelation, saying that her husband must not go over one hundred miles from home or he would not return. This contradiction revealed that Satan was the source of the second message.

Joseph’s above counsel was in line with that of Apostle Paul when he warned:

**But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8–9)**

The counsel given by both Joseph and Paul shows how important it is to discern the truthfulness of angelic messages, particularly when they have moral and doctrinal implications. Since angels are messengers from God to do His will, then this counsel would also apply to revelations allegedly received from Him. Accordingly, if a revelation is received that contradicts the Scriptures (including a former revelation from God), it is false.

### **Section 132 Fails Another Divinity Test**

The Utah LDS Church’s much-repeated superstition of an angel with a sword threatening to kill people if they refused to commit adultery is not only offensive on its face, but it is not scripturally sound. Such a commandment would support a new

doctrine and a new covenant that takes precedence over and above the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the Doctrine and Covenants. There is nothing in any authentic Church publication during Joseph's lifetime to suggest that Joseph ever entertained such an "angel." If he had encountered such, he would have discerned immediately that any entity commanding him to practice and introduce into the Church a new doctrine that was condemned and forbidden in the Scriptures was a satanic messenger.

In testing the source of Section 132, one should ask the question: Does Section 132 agree with the laws of marriage as taught in the Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants, or does it contain new commandments which contradict former commandments and revelations? The answer, of course, is that it contains new and disjunctive commandments as the following direct quotes from Section 132 show:

**REVELATION given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Nauvoo, Illinois, recorded July 12, 1843, relating to the new and everlasting covenant . . . [Section 132 introduction]**

**. . . I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant . . .**

**(verse 4)**

**And as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant . . .**

**(verse 6)**

**. . . by the new and everlasting covenant . . . (verse 19)**

**. . . of the new and everlasting covenant . . . (verse 26)**

**. . . my new and everlasting covenant . . . (verse 27)**

**. . . a wife in the new and everlasting covenant . . .**

**(verse 41)**

**. . . not in the new and everlasting covenant . . . (verse**

**42)**

As previously discussed in chapter 3 of this book, Section 132 changed the definition of "the new and everlasting covenant" from baptism to polygamy. It made polygamy—not baptism—the gateway to Celestial Glory. This is, of course, false doctrine, which both Joseph Smith and the Apostle Paul taught how to discern.

### **Affidavits That Seek to Implicate Joseph Are Filled with Problems**

Section 132 was officially presented at Salt Lake City in August 1852, eight years after Joseph's death. However, the affidavits regarding the "angel with a sword" were not sworn to until between twenty-five to fifty-seven years after Joseph's death. Among those who swore under oath that Joseph had testified to them of a visitation from an angel with a sword were Apostle Lorenzo Snow, Elder Benjamin Johnson, Mrs. Adam Lightner (Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner), and Elder Joseph Bates Noble.

Joseph Bates Noble is also remembered for the false claim that he had performed the first plural marriage ceremony in this dispensation by uniting in marriage Joseph Smith and Louisa Beaman (also spelled Beman or Beeman). Louisa was Noble's wife's sister, who became one of Brigham Young's plural wives. Joseph Noble also asserted that he was the first man in the Church, "in this dispensation," to father a child by a plural wife. (Andrew Jenson, *The Historical Record* 6 [Salt Lake City, Utah, May 1887]: 239; see also Hazel Noble Boyack, *A Nobleman in Israel: A Biographical Sketch of Joseph Bates Noble, Pioneer To Utah In 1847*, 31, 69).

For nearly 200 years the Utah LDS Church has upheld Noble's claims. Affidavits by Noble and others have helped convince many undiscerning individuals that plural marriage was a divinely given revelation to Joseph Smith and enforced by an angel who threatened to kill him with a sword if he refused to practice polygamy. This myth is one of the foundation stones upon which the Utah LDS Church polygamy doctrine rests.

The allegation that Joseph was plurally married to Louisa Beaman was very familiar to Joseph and to Church members at Nauvoo in 1842. Also aware of this accusation (and Joseph's denials) were Brigham Young and other members of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, the Church's clerks, its historian, and members of every priesthood quorum at the Church's headquarters in Nauvoo. It is probable that every adult living at Nauvoo in 1842 also knew that Dr. John C. Bennett had accused Joseph of marrying Louisa and that Joseph had denied Bennett's charges.

Church members at Nauvoo had ample opportunity at that time to choose whether to believe Joseph or Bennett. Joseph then asserted in the strongest possible language that he had only one wife, Emma Hale Smith, and no spiritual or plural wives. The false charge published by Bennett in 1842 that Joseph was married to Louisa Beaman was common knowledge to many. It was resumed years later by LDS Church leaders in Utah and combined with the myth of a sword-yielding angel.

**Three Affidavits Published in 1887  
Conflict with Joseph’s Authentic Record**

Testimonies by Elder Joseph Bates Noble, Apostle Lorenzo Snow, and Elder Benjamin F. Johnson are quoted below from Andrew Jenson’s *The Historical Record*. Their testimonies are in direct conflict with Joseph’s words of counsel and warning on the subject of discerning the identity of angels. They have no support from anything written and published by Joseph during his lifetime.

**JOSEPH BATES NOBLE’S TESTIMONY.**

“Territory of Utah,  
County of Salt Lake. } ss.

“Be it remembered, that on this twenty-sixth day of June, A. D. 1869, personally appeared before me, James Jack, a notary public in and for said county, Joseph Bates Noble, who was by me sworn in due form of law, and upon his oath saith, that in the fall of 1840, Joseph Smith taught him the principle of celestial or plural marriage, or a plurality of wives; and that the said Joseph Smith declared that he had received a revelation from God on the subject, and that the angel of the Lord had commanded him (Joseph Smith) to move forward in the said order of marriage; and further, that the said Joseph Smith requested him (Joseph B. Noble) to step forward and assist him in carrying out the said principle, saying, ‘In revealing this to you, I have placed my life in your hands, therefore do not in an evil hour betray me to my enemies.’

“Subscribed and sworn to by the said Joseph B. Noble,

the day and year first above written.

**JOSEPH B. NOBLE,**  
**JAMES JACK,**  
 Notary Public.” . . .

“Elder Joseph B. Noble swears (the affidavit I have on hand) before a notary public, on June 6, 1869, that he did on April 5, 1841, seal to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, Miss Louisa Beaman, according to the revelation on plural marriage.” (Jenson, *The Historical Record* 6 [May 1887]: 221)

**“APOSTLE LORENZO SNOW’S TESTIMONY.**

“The following affidavit was made before J. C. Wright, clerk of Box Elder County, Utah, Aug. 28, 1869:

“In the month of April, 1843, I returned from my European mission. . . . When at President Joseph Smith’s house . . . we walked a little distance . . . he there and then explained to me the doctrine of plurality of wives.

“He said that the Lord had revealed it unto him and commanded him to have women sealed to him as wives, that he foresaw the trouble that would follow and sought to turn away from the commandment, that an angel from heaven appeared before him with a drawn sword, threatening him with destruction unless he went forward and obeyed the commandment.

(Signed)                      **LORENZO SNOW.”** (ibid., 222)

Lorenzo Snow and his family were polygamously related to the Youngs, the Nobles, and the Beamans. Lorenzo’s sister Eliza Snow was one of Brigham Young’s plural wives. Young was also married plurally to Louisa Beaman (Joseph Bates Noble’s sister-in-law). Lorenzo’s brother Erastus Snow was married to Artemesia Beaman, who was Louisa Beaman’s sister, and Joseph Bates Noble had married Mary Adeline Beaman, who was also a sister to Louisa and Artemesia (see Boyack, *A Nobleman in Israel*, 21).

**“BENJAMIN F. JOHNSON’S TESTIMONY.**

**“The following affidavit was sworn to before James Jack, a notary public, in Salt Lake City, March 4, 1870. . . .**

**“Again, on the 19th of October, the same year [1843], President [Joseph] Smith made us another visit at Macedonia [Illinois]. . . .**

**“He also visited my mother at her residence in Macedonia and taught her in my hearing the doctrine of celestial marriage, declaring that an angel appeared unto him with a drawn sword, threatening to slay him if he did not proceed to fulfill the law that had been given to him. . . .**

**(Signed) B. F. Johnson.”**

(Andrew Jenson, *The Historical Record* 6:221, 222)

It is evident that all of these polygamists were so deeply involved in the principle that they sought to justify their actions by making these false affidavits.

**Additional Affidavit of Mary Elizabeth  
Rollins Lightner Is Built on Falsehoods**

Utah LDS historian Andrew Jenson published the names of twenty-seven women whom he alleged were Joseph’s plural wives. Mary Elizabeth Rollins is listed as one of them (*ibid.*, 234).

Genealogical records of the Utah LDS Church show that Mary Elizabeth Rollins was the wife of Adam Lightner, the mother of two little children, and was eight months pregnant with her third child in February 1842, the month in which Utah LDS historians claim that she and Joseph were wed. Interestingly, Mary did not mention ever being married to Joseph in her original autobiography. She did so only in an affidavit she signed *sixty years* after the supposed wedding, when she was eighty-four years old. Few can imagine any scenario in which a married woman eight months pregnant by her real husband would accept another marriage proposal by another married man. Most importantly, she would not have forgotten to write about that momentous occasion in her autobiography!

Yet Mary Lightner claimed in her 1902 affidavit that she believed a sword-carrying angel not only appeared to Joseph, but

threatened to kill Joseph if he did not marry her. Her account was readily accepted in Utah because she claimed that Brigham Young had married her to Joseph in 1842, which gave her great standing in the eyes of polygamists. In fact, although she was living with and cohabiting with her husband, Adam Lightner, she had been sealed as a plural wife to Brigham Young for time in January 1846 (see John J. Stewart, *Brigham Young and His Wives: And The True Story of Plural marriage*, 89).

Mary Lightner's affidavit was published by Fawn Brodie, who wrote:

**Curiously, she [Mary Lightner] makes no mention of her marriage to Joseph in her autobiography . . . but on February 8, 1902, when eighty-four years old, she swore to an affidavit that said in part: "I was sealed to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, by commandment. In the spring of 1831, the Savior appeared and commanded him to seal me up to everlasting life, gave me to Joseph to be with him in his Kingdom. . . . In 1834 he was commanded to take me for a wife. I was a thousand miles from him. He got afraid. The angel came to him three times, the last time with a drawn sword and threatened his life. I did not believe. If God told him so, why did he not come and tell me? The angel told him I should have a witness. An angel came to me—it went through me like lightning—I was afraid. Joseph said he came with more revelation and knowledge than Joseph ever dare reveal. Joseph said I was his before I came here and he said all the Devils in Hell should never get me from him. I was sealed to him in the Masonic Hall, over the old brick store by Brigham Young in February 1842." (Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 443–444)**

While the whole scenario presented by Mary in her above affidavit seems preposterous, there is still one more point to be made. According to Mary, it took Joseph eleven years (1831–1842) to finally obey the Savior and a life-threatening angel to make Mary his plural wife. Such a delay in obeying the Lord's command—particularly since his life was allegedly threatened—

seems very improbable for the Lord's Prophet. He would have certainly learned his lesson about obeying the Lord after lending 116 pages of the Book of Mormon transcript to Martin Harris, which were then stolen and never recovered (see LDS DC 3, 10 and RLDS DC 2, 3). Church history bears out that Joseph never delayed long (especially not eleven years) to do anything the Lord commanded him to do.

### Summary

When Joseph Noble swore under oath that he had performed a plural marriage ceremony uniting Joseph Smith and Louisa Beaman in marriage, he was repeating the same false allegation made in 1842 by Dr. John C. Bennett. Bennett, who was deeply involved in practicing and teaching plural marriage at Nauvoo, was expelled from the Church by Joseph Smith for his felony crimes and immoral conduct. Bennett then published a book in which he wrote:

**In concluding this subject, however, I will semi-state two or more cases, among the vast number, where Joe Smith was privately married to his spiritual wives—in the case of Mrs. A\*\*\*\* S\*\*\*\* [Agnes Smith], by Apostle Brigham Young; and in that of Miss L\*\*\*\*\* B\*\*\*\*\* [Louisa Beaman], by Elder Joseph Bates Noble.** (John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints; or, An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism*, 256)

Joseph Noble, by making affidavit that he had performed a plural marriage ceremony for Joseph and Louisa, strengthened the foundation for polygamy in the Utah LDS Church. No doubt Noble's affidavit caused some to say, "Bennett said it was so in 1842, and now Noble is agreeing with Bennett. Therefore, it must be true!" However, Noble agreeing with Bennett does not make it true. In fact, it could be asserted that anyone who agrees with Bennett is probably *not* telling the truth.

It is the opinion of the authors that neither Bennett nor Noble told the truth. It should be remembered that through his seductions, personality, and power, Bennett made many converts to polygamy

at Nauvoo. Only a few names of his converts are named in Church history. He had many other converts whose names were never published. Fortunately, Joseph left an astounding amount of testimony against Bennett's false allegations.

Joseph did all in his power to stop the doctrine of plural marriage that was being secretly taught at Nauvoo and in the surrounding communities. However, his efforts were not enough to overcome the strong opposition he faced from those within the Church who wanted to promulgate and enjoy that doctrine and who were determined to undermine his efforts to stop it.

On Sunday, May 26, 1844, one month before Joseph's death, he preached to thousands who had gathered at the Stand (an outdoor preaching area) to hear him speak against those who were accusing him of plural marriage and other crimes. Joseph began his sermon by reading the entire eleventh chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which includes these words:

**The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed forevermore, knoweth that I lie not.** (2 Corinthians 11:31; see also *LDS History of the Church* 6:408)

He wanted his audience to know that he was not lying to them. He told them:

**A man asked me whether the commandment was given that a man may have seven wives. . . . What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one.** (*LDS History of the Church* 6:411)

This statement by Joseph was definite and purposeful because he wanted Church members to be assured that he was virtuous and was telling them the truth. Joseph's words still resonate to our day. Then as now, every seeker of truth must decide whether to believe Joseph's testimony that polygamy is a sin (of which he is innocent), or to believe his accusers who wish us to make him guilty of such depredations.

There are two sides in this controversy. Both sides cannot be telling the truth about how polygamy came into the Church. The authors are convinced that Joseph Smith told the truth when he said that he had only one wife. If Joseph told the truth, then polygamy did not enter the Church by way of him introducing it. And those who swore affidavits in 1869 and 1870, that were published in 1887 in *The Historical Record*, did so to deceive Church members and the general public. This is especially true for Mary Lightner's 1902 sworn affidavit, which was published in Fawn M. Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*.

Those who swore these affidavits had much to lose if they could not convince the Saints and the world that their actions were based on the prophetic direction of their founder. If their polygamous activities could not be so justified and excused, they knew they all faced fines or imprisonment for the multitude of felonies in which they had participated and the wave of damage their actions had brought upon others. But if they could convince authorities that their actions grew out of best intentions based on the freedom of religion, they hoped to mitigate such consequences. Thus, it was necessary for them to get their stories aligned, including the old made-up tale of an angel with a sword threatening to slay their leader if he did not agree to violate his marriage vows to Emma.