

Chapter 4

Joseph Continued to Assert His Innocence of Polygamy in 1843

In the previous chapter a poem entitled “A Vision,” composed by Joseph Smith, was discussed. All seventy-eight stanzas were published in the Church’s official paper, the *Times and Seasons*, February 1, 1843, pages 82–85. Stanza number sixty-seven describes how Joseph had beheld a heavenly vision of individuals who inherit Celestial Glory. He tells that they will be “equal in power, dominion and might, With a fulness of glory and grace, round his [the Heavenly Father’s] throne.” (See LDS DC 76:92–96; RLDS DC 76:7:i–k.) This revelation is in direct contradiction to Section 132, which declares that only those who practice polygamy will inherit the highest conditions in Heaven.

Not only was Joseph’s divinely given knowledge as recorded in the poem made available to the Church members in America, but it was also published in Liverpool, England, in the Church’s paper, *The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star* for August 1843, pages 50–55. And, it was also printed in New York City in the *New York Herald*.

Apostle John Taylor Endorsed Joseph’s Poem

Apostle John Taylor, who succeeded Joseph as editor of the *Times and Seasons*, prefaced the printing of Joseph’s poem with statements which pointed to his prophetic insight. Taylor wrote:

Uncontrolled by the narrow limits of this earth, and raised above all sublunary objects, his mind soars aloft unto other kingdoms, unravels the secrets of eternity, and contemplates the organization of worlds, in other spheres: the destiny of the living, the dying, and the dead are developed;

together with the laws that govern other worlds, and the state of their inhabitants; the “heavens of heavens,” open before his gaze, and the celestial kingdom; the habitation of the great “I Am,” with all its resplendant, brilliant, and dazzling glory, bursts upon his sight. The Celestial, the Terrestrial and the Telestial worlds, with all their magnifice [sic] and beauty are open to his view; whilst the various states of their respective inhabitants, are presented before his vision. . . . Our poet seems to be perfectly at home among heavenly worlds, and converses about their proceedings with as much familiarity as one could do about his domestic economy. He unlocked great, and important principles which were indeed made known to the ancients; but which have been hid for ages: and when we contemplate the things that are unfolded we shall be led to say with Paul, “great is the mystery of godliness.” (*Times and Seasons* 4 [February 1, 1843]: 81)

This commentary by Apostle Taylor certainly gives the impression that he believed Joseph’s poem to be inspired. The poem “A Vision” published in 1843, as well as Section 76 given through Joseph in 1832, are very similar. This fact is very important in light of the contradictory doctrines of celestial inequality and exaltation to godhood through polygamy that are found in Section 132. The Utah LDS Church claims that Section 132 was first revealed five months after the poem was published. However, they did not make it public until nine years thereafter in 1852.

Joseph’s Poem in the *New York Herald*

After the February 1 issue of the *Times and Seasons* was sent to James Gordon Bennett (not related to Dr. John C. Bennett), editor of the *New York Herald*, Joseph’s poem and its message went to many who did not belong to the Church when James G. Bennett printed it in his newspaper. Joseph’s bold claim that he had beheld a vision on the subject of the heavenly glories received much publicity, and his testimony of celestial equality went to the world. Many who would never have had the opportunity to read the Doctrine and Covenants read Joseph’s poem in the newspaper,

which expressed an identical message that equality which exists in Celestial Glory did not require that an individual accept and practice the doctrine of a plurality of wives, as is set forth in Section 132. Instead, Joseph's poem is affirmation that he did not teach polygamy nor dictate Section 132.

So impressed was Editor James Gordon Bennett that he published this opinion of Joseph's poem:

In enthusiasm, fancy, originality, and power, this "Vision" is equal to any lecture that was ever given by Emerson, or Brownson, or any other newlight philosopher. . . . In its practical operation, it entirely outstrips and outgenerals not only the Fourierites, but also Father [William] Miller [of the Seventh Day Adventists] and his calculations [that Jesus would return in April 1843]. (*New York Herald* [March 6, 1843], 20)

Joseph's Poem Was Also Published Elsewhere

So important was the message of this poem that the Church saw fit in 1843 (before publishing Section 132 with contradictory counsel in 1852) to print it in their official newspapers in the United States and England, as well as to circulate it to nonmembers via the *New York Herald*. All seventy-eight stanzas of the poem were published in the *New York Herald*, but only excerpts pertaining to Celestial Glory are printed below:

**1. I will go, I will go, to the home of the Saints
[Celestial Glory],
Where the virtue's the value, and life the reward;
But before I return to my former estate
I must fulfil the mission I had from the Lord. . . .**

**11. I, Joseph, the prophet, in spirit beheld,
And the eyes of the inner man truly did see
Eternity sketch'd in a vision from God,
Of what was, and now is, and yet is to be. . . .**

14. For while in the act of translating his word
[producing the Inspired Version],
Which the Lord in his grace had appointed to me,
I came to the gospel recorded by John,
Chapter fifth and the twenty ninth verse,
which you'll see.

Which was given as follows:

“Speaking of the resurrection of the dead,—
“Concerning those who shall hear the voice of
“the son of man—
“And shall come forth:—
“They who have done good in the resurrection
“of the just.
“And they who have done evil in the resurrection
“of the unjust.”

15. I marvel'd at these resurrections, indeed!
For it came unto me by the spirit direct:—
And while I did meditate what it all meant,
The Lord touch'd the eyes of my own intel-
lect. . . .

66. I beheld the celestial, in glory sublime;
Which is the most excellent kingdom that
is,—
Where God, e'en the Father, in harmony reigns;
Almighty, supreme, and eternal, in bliss.

67. Where the Church of the first born in union
reside,
And they see as they're seen, and they know
as they're known;
Being equal in power, dominion and might,
With a fulness of glory and grace, round his
throne.

(Times and Seasons 4 [February 1, 1843]: 82, 85; *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star* 4 [August 1843]: 50, 51, 55; and the *New York Herald* [March 8, 1843], 2)

How similar the poem is to Section 76, which is still published as the law in both the LDS and RLDS Doctrine and Covenants:

And thus we saw the glory of the celestial, which excels in all things—where God, even the Father, reigns upon his throne forever and ever; before whose throne all things bow in humble reverence, and give him glory forever and ever.

They who dwell in his presence are the Church of the Firstborn; and they see as they are seen, and know as they are known, having received of his fulness and of his grace; and he makes them equal in power, and in might, and in dominion.

And the glory of the celestial is one, even as the glory of the sun is one. (LDS DC 76:92–96; RLDS DC 76:7i–k)

In contemplating Section 76 and Joseph’s poem (which was widely circulated), there can be no doubt of Joseph’s message to the Church and to the world from 1832 to 1843. Individuals who attain Celestial Glory are “equal in power, dominion and might, with a fulness of glory and grace, round his throne.” In addition, attaining the highest degree of Heaven does not require belief in, nor the practice of, polygamy. This was the mind and inspiration of Joseph Smith to members and nonmembers alike.

Yet, the Utah LDS Church teaches that all of that changed on July 12, 1843, when Joseph allegedly dictated Section 132. They also allege that he had been secretly obeying this revelation for nearly a decade. Moreover, they claim he first received Section 132 in the 1830s, but he did not commit it to writing until 1843. Thus, they must believe that he ignored Section 76 and his poem when he penned the disjunctive doctrines of Section 132.

Contrary to Section 76 and Joseph’s poem, Section 132 teaches that men who practice polygamy will be gods in Celestial Glory. On the other hand, those who have not married plural wives will only be angels who are “subject [servants] unto them.”

In short, the assertion that in Celestial Glory the angels will be subject to the polygamous gods (instead of all being equal) makes Section 132:19–21 contradictory to LDS Section 76:92–96, which says that *all* who obtain Celestial Glory will be “equal in power, and in might, and in dominion.”

Joseph Published a Parable as Yet Another Way to Declare His Innocence of Polygamy, and Show the Corruption of His Accusers

Joseph took every opportunity to declare his innocence of polygamy. He even chose to express his innocence by writing a parable for his valedictory article after he left the position of editor of the *Times and Seasons*. He could have written upon many other subjects, but he chose to tell of his innocence in the form of a parable. In it, Joseph depicted himself as an innocent fawn, a young deer, and referred to the powerful newspaper editors of his day as lions.

In the parable, Joseph told the story of his constant life-threatening struggles against the false charges hurled at him in the pages of the newspapers. Polygamy was one of those false criminal charges. It was the most sensational crime with which he was charged by the “lions.” Here are excerpts from Joseph’s parable of the fawn and the lions:

Mr. Editor,—Sir, ever since I gave up the editorial department of the “Times and Seasons,” I have thought of writing a piece for publication, by way of valedictory. . . . My principal remarks I intended to apply to the gentlemen of the quill, or, if you please, that numerous body of respectable gentlemen who profess to regulate the tone of the public mind, in regard to politics, morality, religion . . . the editors of the public Journals; or, if you please, I will designate [*sic*] them, the lions of the forest . . . because of the tremendous noise that they make when they utter their voice.

It came to pass that as I [Joseph] went forth like a young fawn, one day, to feed upon the green grass in my pasture, an ass [Dr. John C. Bennett] saw me, and brayed, and made a great noise; which a neighboring lion [editor] hearing roared, even as a lion roareth when he beholds his prey: at the sound of his voice the beasts of the field were alarmed, and the lions in the adjoining jungles pricked their ears and roared in their turn; and behold all the lions [editors] of the forest, alarmed by the noise, opened their mouths and uttered forth their voice which was as the roaring of a cataract, or as the voice

of thunder; so tremendous was their roaring that the trees of the forest shook, as if they were shaken by a mighty wind; and all the beasts of the forest trembled, as if a whirlwind were passing. I lifted up mine eyes with astonishment when I heard the voice of the lions, and saw the fury of their rage. I asked, is it possible that so many lords of the forest, such noble beasts, should condescend to notice one solitary fawn, that is feeding alone upon his pasture; without attempting to excite either their jealousy or anger? I have not strayed from the fold, nor injured the trees of the forest, nor hurt the beasts of the field, nor trampled upon their pasture, nor drunk of their streams; why then their rage against me? When lo! and behold! they again uttered their voices, as the voice of great thunderings, and there was given unto them the voice of men; but it was difficult for me to distinguish what was said, among so many voices; but ever and anon I heard a few broken, incoherent sentences, like the following:—Murder! Desolation!! Bloodshed!!! Arson!!! Treason!!! Joe Smith and the Mormons. . . . I then lifted up my voice and said, hear me, ye beasts of the forest! and all ye great lions [editors] pay attention! *I am innocent of the things whereof ye accuse me. I have not been guilty of violating your laws, nor of trespassing upon your rights. My hands are clean from the blood of all men, and I am at the defiance of the world to substantiate the crimes whereof I am accused; wherefore, then, should animals of your noble mein [sic] stoop to such little jealousies, such vulgar language, and lay such unfounded charges at the door of the innocent* [italics added]? It is true that I once suffered an ass [Dr. Bennett] to feed in my pasture; he ate at my crib and drank at my waters, but possessing the true nature of an ass, he began to foul the water with his feet, and to trample under foot the green grass, and destroy it. I therefore put him out of my pasture, and he began to bray. Many of the lions in the adjoining jungles mistaking his braying for the roaring of a lion, commenced roaring. When I proclaimed this abroad many of the lions began to enquire into the matter. . . . And they felt ashamed of themselves for being decoyed into such

base ribaldry, and foul-mouthed slander [Dr. Bennett's polygamous charges against Joseph]. But there were many that lost sight of their dignity, and continued to roar. . . . Among these was a great lion, whose den was on the borders of the eastern sea [Editor James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald*]. . . . His might, his influence were felt to the ends of the earth; when he lashed his tail the beasts of the forest trembled; and when he roared all the great lions and the young lions crouched down at his feet.¹

This great lion lifting up himself and beholding the fawn afar off [in Illinois], he opened his mouth, and joining in the common roar, uttered the following . . . :

JOE SMITH IN TROUBLE.—By a letter which we published on Sunday, from Springfield, Illinois, it appears that Joe Smith, the great Mormon Prophet, has at last given himself up to the authorities of Illinois. . . .

Why does not Joe try his power at working a miracle or two? Now's the time to prove his mission—besides being very convenient for himself.

When I heard it, I said poor fellow! How has thy dignity fallen! . . .

And now, friend B. [James Gordon Bennett] allow me to whisper a word in thine ear. Dost thou not know that there is a God in the heavens that judgeth? that setteth up one and putteth down another according to the counsel of his own will? That if thou possessest any influence, wisdom, dominion, or power, it comes from God, and to him thou art indebted for it? That he holds the destinies of men in his power, and can as easily put down as he has raised up? Tell me when hast thou treated a subject of religious and eternal truth with that seriousness and candor that the importance of the subject demands from a man in thy standing,

1. Joseph's parable was printed in *LDS History of the Church*, Volume 5, pages 274–277. On page 275, at this identical place in their printing of the parable, an asterisk references a note which explains: “This alludes to the *New York Herald*, published by James Gordon Bennett, who had been influenced by the misrepresentation of affairs at Nauvoo, by John C. Bennett.”

possessing thy calling and influence? As you seem to be quite a theologian, allow me to ask a few questions. Why did not God deliver Micaiah from the hands of his persecutors? Why did not Jeremiah “*work a miracle or two,*” to help him out of the dungeon? It would have been “*very convenient.*” Why did not Zacheriah, by a miracle prevent the people from slaying him? Why did not our Saviour come down from the cross? The people asked him to do it; and besides he had “*saved others,*” and could not save himself, so said the people. Why did he not prove his mission by working a miracle and coming down? Why did not Paul by a miracle prevent the people from stoning and whipping him? It would have been “*very convenient.*” Or why did the saints of God, in every age, have to wander about in sheep skins and goat skins? Being tempted, tried, and sawn asunder; of whom the world was not worthy. . . .

I listened, and lo! I heard a voice, and it was the voice of my shepherd [Jesus Christ], saying, listen all ye lions [editors] of the forest; and all the beasts of the field give ear; ye have sought to injure the innocent [with many false charges, including plural marriage]; and your hands have been lifted against the weak, the injured and the oppressed. Ye have pampered the libertine, the calumniator, and the base. Ye have winked at vice, and trodden under foot the virtuous and the pure. Therefore hear, all ye lions of the forest. The Lord God will take from you your teeth, so that you shall no longer devour. He will pluck out your claws, so that you can no longer seize upon you[r] prey. Your strength will fail you in the day of trouble, and your voice will fail, and not be heard afar off; but mine elect [the righteous Saints] will I uphold with mine arm, and my chosen shall be supported by my power. And when mine annointed [*sic*] shall be exalted [proven innocent], and all the lions of the forest shall have lost their strength [be proven to have reported falsehoods], then shall they remember that the Lord he is God.

JOSEPH SMITH.

(*Times and Seasons* 4 [February 15, 1843]: 97–98)

Many people from the 1840s to the present have chosen to ignore Joseph's repeated statements that he was innocent of all polygamy charges. Instead, they have based most of their evidence and references upon the bitter statements of those he prosecuted for polygamy; the collusions of those participating in it who feared exposure or adjudication and who desperately fabricated justifications for their deeds; those who changed the official records to match Brigham Young's revisions of history; and the sleazy fictions penned by gossip reporters.

Every debate has two sides, and in recent years only the side defaming and demeaning Joseph Smith has been heard. The authors of *Joseph Smith Fought Polygamy* have sought, and will continue to seek, to tell the other side of the story—to tell the story from Joseph's point of view—and by publishing his own words allow Joseph Smith to *finally* be heard!

Joseph struggled throughout 1843 to leave strong and sober testimonies against the doctrine of plural marriage with the assertion that he was not involved therein. His testimonies are recorded in the printed pages of history, both in and out of the Utah LDS Church. They stand as a bright witness that he neither taught nor practiced polygamy.