

# Argument 9: Joseph Smith's Polygamy — Cheat Sheet

## Their Claim in One Sentence

Joseph Smith's polygamy (including teen brides and polyandry) proves he was a false prophet and cult leader motivated by lust.

## Ground Rules for This Discussion

- **Do not be defensive.** Acknowledge the difficulty honestly. The Church's own Gospel Topics Essay confirms the basic facts.
- **Do not minimize.** "It was a different time" is context, not a complete answer.
- **Redirect to the real question:** Does plural marriage *alone* disprove prophetic calling? Apply the same standard to biblical prophets.

## Biblical Polygamists Called Righteous

Person	Wives	God's Verdict
Abraham	Sarah, Hagar, Keturah	"Friend of God" (James 2:23)
Jacob/Israel	Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah	Father of covenant people
Moses	Zipporah + Cushite woman	God struck <i>Miriam</i> for criticizing him (Num 12:1-10)
David	Multiple	"A man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22)
Gideon	"Many wives" (Judg 8:30)	Hall of Faith (Heb 11:32)

**Key verse:** 2 Samuel 12:8 — God told David through Nathan: "I gave thee thy master's wives into thy bosom." God takes credit for giving David plural wives.

**Mosaic Law regulated (not prohibited) polygamy:** Deut 21:15-17; Exodus 21:10.

## One-Line Objection Responses

Objection	Response
"He married a 14-year-old!"	Legal marriage age in 1840s America was 12-14 with parental consent. Her father arranged it. No evidence of consummation. Disturbing by modern standards, but not the predatory outlier critics imply.
"He married other men's wives!"	Many appear to be "eternity only" sealings — not conjugal earthly marriages. Complex, yes. Proof of fraud, no.
"The secrecy proves guilt!"	Polygamy was illegal in Illinois. Biblical prophets also kept commands secret under threat (Abraham in Egypt, Rahab, Nephi and Laban). Practice was publicly declared in 1852.
"This is what cult leaders do!"	This assumes the conclusion. If he was a true prophet obeying a hard command, it looks like Abraham offering Isaac. The question of prophetic authenticity must be settled on broader evidence.
"A true prophet wouldn't do this!"	Moses murdered a man. David committed adultery and murder. Hosea married a prostitute <i>at God's command</i> (Hosea 1:2). God's commands sometimes offend human sensibilities.
"The Book of Mormon condemns polygamy!"	Jacob 2:27 sets monogamy as default; v. 30 provides the exception: "If I will... raise up seed unto me, I will command my people." Not a categorical ban.
"By their fruits ye shall know them!"	Examine the <i>whole</i> ministry: Book of Mormon, temple ordinances, 17M+ member church, global welfare system. One difficult practice does not define the entire harvest.

## Key Contextual Points

- **19th-century marriage norms** differed dramatically from modern ones. Legal marriage age was 12-14 in many states.
- **Evidence for consummation** varies by marriage. Many may have been dynastic/theological sealings (Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*; Brian Hales, *Joseph Smith's Polygamy*).
- **Joseph claimed reluctance.** Told associates an angel with a drawn sword commanded him. Consistent with Abraham-and-Isaac pattern of difficult divine commands.
- **D&C 132:3-4** — the commandment. **Jacob 2:27-30** — the governing principle (monogamy default, polygamy by divine exception only).

## The Biblical "False Prophet" Test

Critics apply: "His behavior was immoral, therefore false prophet."

The actual biblical tests:

- **Deut 18:20-22** — Do prophecies come true?
- **Deut 13:1-3** — Does teaching lead people to God or away from Him?
- **Matt 7:15-20** — Examine the whole fruit, not one branch.

None of these tests use "personal marital practices conform to future cultural norms" as the standard.

## What the Church Has Done

- **Published Gospel Topics Essays** openly addressing plural marriage in Kirtland, Nauvoo, and Utah
- **Discontinued the practice in 1890** (Official Declaration 1)
- **Excommunicates members who practice polygamy today**
- **Over 130 years of consistent monogamy** as Church practice

## The Redirect

*"I understand this is difficult — it's difficult for Latter-day Saints too, and the Church has openly published the historical details. But let me ask: if polygamy disqualifies a prophet, what do you do with Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and Gideon? God Himself said He gave David his plural wives (2 Sam 12:8). The question isn't whether polygamy is comfortable — it's whether Joseph Smith's total ministry bears the marks of divine calling."*

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## Resources

- [Church: Plural Marriage in Kirtland and Nauvoo](#)
- [FAIR: Joseph Smith's Plural Marriages](#)
- [FAIR: Polyandry](#)
- [FAIR: Age of Plural Wives](#)