

# Defending Polygamy: Historical and Doctrinal Defense

## I. Biblical Foundation

If polygamy disqualifies Joseph Smith, then Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David are also disqualified.

- **Abraham:** Sarah & Hagar. God blessed him AFTER (Gen 17:1)
- **Jacob:** Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah. Fathered 12 tribes. God renamed him Israel
- **Moses:** Zipporah & Ethiopian woman. God defended him (Num 12:1-15)
- **David:** Multiple wives. **God GAVE David his wives** (2 Sam 12:8)
- **Solomon:** 700 wives, 300 concubines. God blessed him with wisdom/wealth

**Deuteronomy 25:5-6 (Levirate Marriage):** "If brethren dwell together, and one die... her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife." **God commanded polygamy by law.**

## II. Joseph Smith RESISTED for YEARS

Critics claim Joseph invented polygamy. But he resisted for years until an angel threatened to SLAY him.

### The Angel with the Drawn Sword

**Benjamin F. Johnson (1903):** "And this command was given many years previous... until an Angel with a **drawn Sword** Stood before him and commanded that he should give it to the Twelve and the Church or he **Should be Slain.**"

**Helen Mar Kimball Whitney (1884):** "He would have **continued silent, as he did for years, until an angel of the Lord threatened to slay him.**"

### Timeline:

- 1st appearance (circa 1834): Angel commanded plural marriage
- 2nd appearance: Joseph delayed
- 3rd appearance (circa 1842): Angel came with **drawn sword**, threatened destruction

**22 accounts from 9 witnesses (Brian C. Hales, Mormon Historical Studies 2011):** Mary Lightner, Lorenzo Snow, Helen Mar Kimball, Benjamin Johnson, Erastus Snow, Orson Pratt, others

Joseph waited 5 years after first attempt (Fanny Alger, 1835) before trying again. If he invented it for selfish reasons, why wait years? Why tell people he was threatened by an angel?

## III. Fanny Alger: "Scrape" Not "Affair"

**Critics claim:** Oliver Cowdery called it a "dirty, nasty, filthy affair"—proving adultery.

**Truth:** Oliver wrote "scrape"—the word "affair" was added later by Warren Cowdery (Oliver's nephew) when copying the letter.

**Oliver Cowdery to Warren Cowdery (Jan 21, 1838, Huntington Library):** "A dirty, nasty, filthy **scrape** of his and Fanny Alger's was talked over."

"**Scrape**" in 1830s-1840s meant **scandalous incident**, NOT romantic affair. Sidney Rigdon used "scrape" for "a real drunken scrape." The word "affair" meaning romantic/sexual relationship didn't come into use until end of 19th century.

**Why "scrape"?** Oliver was upset because Joseph practiced plural marriage without Oliver's knowledge. It appeared scandalous because Joseph hadn't publicly revealed the doctrine yet. Oliver didn't understand it was commanded by God.

## IV. Emma's Human Struggle

Emma struggled—and that's completely understandable. But she stayed with Joseph until his death.

**D&C 132:51-54:** "A commandment I give unto... Emma Smith... for I did it... **to prove you all, as I did Abraham...** if she will not abide this commandment **she shall be destroyed.**"

**Emma's actions:** Gave consent for Emily/Eliza Partridge (March 1843), then regretted it. Emily: "Emma gave her consent... but she **afterwards turned round and denied ever doing it.**"

Emma stayed with Joseph through persecution, mob violence, imprisonment, and plural marriage. Shows her love and testimony, even when she didn't understand.

**After Joseph's death:** Emma denied polygamy (trauma, protecting Joseph's reputation, protecting her sons). This doesn't mean she was lying—it means she was human and traumatized.

## V. Women's Testimonies

**Lucy Walker (1902):** "I was **doing the will of God...** that has been a support through all my trials."

**Mary Lightner (1902):** "I **count it one of the greatest blessings** of my life that I was sealed to the Prophet Joseph."

**Helen Mar Kimball (1884):** "It **proved to be a blessing...** I have a **testimony that polygamy is of God.**"

**Emily Partridge (1877):** "I feel **thankful... for the privilege...** sealed to the Prophet Joseph."

**Zina Huntington (1886):** "I made a greater sacrifice than to give my life... But I was **living for eternity.**"

**Pattern:** All testified it was from God. All defended it publicly. None accused Joseph of coercion. Many remained faithful decades after his death.

## VI. Sealings vs. Marriages

Not all "marriages" were sexual. Critics lump them all together dishonestly.

### Three Types:

1. **Time and Eternity** — Full marriages (this life and next), included conjugal relations
2. **Eternity Only** — Sealings for next life only, **NO sexual relationship during mortality.** Example: Helen Mar Kimball
3. **Proxy Sealings** — After Joseph died, Brigham Young sealed deceased women to Joseph

**D&C 128:18:** "You cannot seal one to another but by **continuous links of generation** in the sealing power."

Some sealings were to **form eternal family links**, not for sexual relationships.

## VII. Helen Mar Kimball (Age 14)

**Critics claim:** "Joseph married a 14-year-old!"

**Truth: (1) ONLY ONE case; (2) Eternity only—NOT sexual; (3) It was her father's idea; (4) Her journal proves she didn't think it was a regular marriage**

### It Was Her Father's Idea

**Helen (1884):** "My father [Heber C. Kimball]... **having a great desire to be connected with the Prophet, Joseph, he offered me to him...** My father had but one Ewe Lamb, but **willingly laid her upon the altar.**"

### Helen's Journal: She Didn't Think It Was a Marriage

**Helen (1881):** "During winter of 1843, **some young gentlemen got up a series of dancing parties... but I had to stay home,** as my father had been warned by the Prophet to keep his daughter away... She felt quite sore over it... to allow her brother to go and enjoy the dance... **and fetter her down, for no girl loved dancing better than I did,** and I really felt it was **too much to bear.**"

### What does this prove?

- **Helen wanted to socialize with boys her age**—if she thought she was "married" to Joseph, why care about dances with other young men?
- **She resented being kept from social events**—thinking like a 14-year-old girl, not a "wife"
- **Her father kept her from dances**—because sealing was eternity-only, not a time marriage
- **She later married Horace Whitney (1846, 11 children)**—proving Joseph sealing was NOT a time marriage

### Helen Defended It Her Entire Life

"I am **thankful** that He has brought me through the furnace of affliction... and has given me a **testimony that polygamy is of God.**" (1884)

## VIII. Why Commanded & Why Stopped

### Why Commanded

**Reasons:** (1) Raise up seed (Jacob 2:30); (2) Test obedience like Abraham (D&C 132:51); (3) Restore biblical practices; (4) Seal families for eternity

### Why Stopped (1890 Manifesto)

**Wilford Woodruff (1891):** "The Lord showed me by vision... exactly what would take place if we did not stop... **All ordinances would be stopped...** I went before the Lord, and **I wrote what the Lord told me to write.**"

**D&C 124:49-51:** "When I give a commandment... and **their enemies come upon them and hinder them...** it behooveth me to require that work no more... but **to accept of their offerings.**"

**U.S. government threatened to:** Confiscate Church property, imprison leaders, shut down temples, disincorporate the Church. God stopped it to preserve the Church.

## IX. Key Points Summary

1. **Polygamy is biblical** — Abraham, Moses, David practiced it; God GAVE David his wives (2 Sam 12:8)
2. **Joseph resisted for YEARS** — Angel appeared 3 times with drawn sword, threatened to slay him (22 accounts, 9 witnesses)
3. **Fanny Alger was a "scrape," not "affair"** — word altered by Warren Cowdery; "scrape" = messy situation, not adultery
4. **Emma struggled but stayed** — Shows her humanity; God tested her like Abraham; she stayed until Joseph's death
5. **Women testified it was from God** — Consistent testimonies, defended publicly, no coercion accusations
6. **Not all sealings were sexual** — Eternity-only (Helen Mar), dynastic (family links), time-and-eternity (full marriages)
7. **Helen Mar proves eternity-only sealings** — Age 14, her father's idea, journal shows wanted to see boys/go to dances (not thinking like a "wife"), married Horace Whitney 1846 (11 children)
8. **Stopped by revelation** — God commanded it; God stopped it to preserve Church

## X. The Question Critics Must Answer

**If polygamy disqualifies Joseph Smith, why doesn't it disqualify Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David?**

*If Joseph invented it for selfish reasons, why did he resist for years, tell people an angel threatened to slay him, and have eternity-only sealings (Helen Mar) that weren't sexual?*

**Bottom Line: Women testified it was from God. Joseph resisted for years. Helen Mar's journal proves eternity-only sealings. Fanny Alger "affair" was a "scrape." Emma struggled but stayed. You can't accept the Bible and reject polygamy. Either God commands prophets to do hard things, or He doesn't. The evidence shows: He does.**

## Biblical/Historical Comparison

Prophet	Wives	God's Response
Abraham	Sarah, Hagar, Keturah	God blessed him (Gen 17:4-5)
Jacob	Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, Zilpah	God renamed him Israel (Gen 35:9-12)
Moses	Zipporah, Ethiopian woman	God defended him (Num 12:1-15)
David	Michal, Abigail, Ahinoam, Bathsheba, others	<b>God GAVE him wives (2 Sam 12:8)</b>
Joseph Smith	~35 sealings (many eternity-only)	Received by revelation (D&C 132)