

ON THE ADVISABILITY OF ATTEMPTING TO ADDRESS POLYGAMY THROUGH DIVORCE

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*...ye are **commanded in all things to ask of God**, who giveth liberally, and that which the Spirit testifies unto you, even so I would that you should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men, for some are of men, and others of devils. (D&C 46:3b,c)¹*

CONSIDERATIONS OUTLINED

How are we to address polygamy among nations and peoples where it has been accepted or taught based on prevailing traditions (customs) or religions? Should we attempt to eradicate it by mandating divorce among those who accept the gospel of Jesus Christ in these cultures? According to the instruction given in D&C 46:3 and similar verses,² I put my petition to the Lord to learn what would be wise and acceptable unto Him in answer to such questions. Several considerations will serve to illustrate the issues and concerns the Lord impressed upon me with regard to attempting to mandate or legislate divorce to solve the problem of polygamy.

- 1) ***First Consideration***: **Consider the house of Israel**. They are the covenant people of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.³ They have also come from a polygamous family.⁴
 - a) **Why consider the house of Israel (Jacob) and the covenants God made with this polygamous family?**
 - i) From the beginning God knew⁵ that Abraham's grandson, Jacob, would enter into po-

¹ Scripture references are from: *The Holy Scriptures, an Inspired Revision (IR) of the Authorized Edition* (Herald Publishing House, 1974 Edition, First Printing) – also known as the *Joseph Smith Translation (JST)*; *The Book of Mormon*, 1908 Authorized Edition (Herald Publishing House, 10th Printing, 1973) and *The Book of Mormon, Restored Covenant Edition* (First Printing, Zarahemla Research Foundation, 1999); *The Doctrine and Covenants* (Herald Publishing House, 1970 Edition, Second Printing, 1974). Emphasis via bolding, italics, and underlining has been added in various scriptures to highlight portions of quoted texts to emphasize points made within the text.

² cf. Matthew 7:9-21, James 1:5, I Nephi 4:9 & D&C 28:1a with D&C 46:3b-4b

³ Isaiah 49:25 with Mormon 4:70-74

⁴ Genesis 35:22-26

⁵ cf. I Nephi 2:100-102, Isaiah 40:1-31, 41:1-20, 42:8,9, 43:1-15, 44:1-8, 45:1-25, 46:9-13, 48:1-22, 49:5,6,13-16, 50:3, etc. with John 14:29

- lygamous relationships and that it would be from these relationships that twelve patriarchs would arise to fulfill God's covenants. Notwithstanding His foreknowledge, God chose to covenant with Abraham, promising to make him the father of a countless number of children by faith.⁶ And He chose Jacob to be the heir through whom the promise would be fulfilled.⁷ (Note: In this study Jacob's polygamy will be reviewed in light of the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob without necessarily emphasizing why God covenanted with Abraham and his posterity.⁸)
- ii) Though the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, scattered the house of Jacob (i.e. the house of Israel) for their transgressions, yet He promised to set His hand a second time to recover them and restore them unto the lands of their inheritance according to the covenants which He made with their fathers.⁹
 - iii) The Book of Mormon was brought forth to show the house of Israel (including Lehi's family) and the whole world that God has not forgotten them, but that He is merciful and is remembering the covenants He has made with the house of Israel.¹⁰
 - iv) In the account given in the Book of Mormon, Jacob, Lehi's son, plainly testifies that:
 - (1) Polygamy is an abomination, even a *grosser crime*, before God;¹¹
 - (2) God gave commandments that a man shall have but one wife and no concubines;¹²
 - (3) If God does not command (shepherd) His people, they will fall into sinful practices like polygamy;¹³
 - (4) God planted Lehi's family in this land to raise up a righteous branch (remnant) of His covenant people, Israel, one that would not follow on in the sinful practices of their fathers, including the sinful practice of polygamy and having concubines!¹⁴
 - (5) The Lamanites were more righteous than the Nephites, notwithstanding all their iniquities, because they did not forget the commandments of the Lord to have, *save it were one wife, and concubines they should have none*.¹⁵
 - v) Through the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and through the witness it bears God has provided us with a clear understanding of His priorities when it comes to covenants and abominable practices like polygamy. Simply stated, covenants, including marriage covenants, are a high priority with God and should be treated accord-

⁶ Genesis 15:1-22 with Romans 4:11-16 & Galatians 3:7-9; cf. James 2:20-23

⁷ Genesis 35:9-12 & 49:24,26

⁸ cf. Genesis 8:1-23 & 9:15-25 with Genesis 12:1-3, 13:12-15, 15:1-12, 17:1-29, 22:1-22, etc.; see also I Corinthians 1:26-29, 10:1-14 & Romans 11:1-12:1 with II Nephi 7:7 & Jacob 3:22-25

⁹ II Nephi 11:27-32, Isaiah 11:11-13, 12:1-6, 27:1-13, 40:1-31, 41:20, 43:1-44:28, 45:17-25, 46:3-13, 48:1-22, 50:1-7, 23, 52:1-56:8, 60:1-22, 65:1-25, Jeremiah 31:31-34, 32:36-42, Ezekiel 11:16-20, 36:26-38, etc. with Isaiah 5:1-7 & Romans 11:1-12:1

¹⁰ Book of Mormon Title Page, I Nephi 4:14-29, I Nephi 7:17-64, II Nephi 2:19-24, II Nephi 6:1-3, etc. with Mormon 4:26,103 & Moroni 10:28

¹¹ Jacob 2:44-56 with Mosiah 7:2-5; cf. Nehemiah 13:26-27

¹² Jacob 2:36,55

¹³ cf. Jacob 2:39 with Mosiah 5:84-86 & Helaman 4:48-73; see also D&C 59:1a-c & 5b with John 12:49,50

¹⁴ Jacob 2:32-38,44,55

¹⁵ Jacob 2:54,55

ingly. Consider the following:

- (1) Twelve sons were born to Israel as follows:¹⁶
 - (a) The sons of Jacob and Leah: Reuben,¹⁷ Simeon, Levi,¹⁸ Judah,¹⁹ Issachar, and Zebulun
 - (b) The sons of Jacob and Rachel: Joseph²⁰ and Benjamin
 - (c) The sons of Jacob and Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali
 - (d) The sons of Jacob and Zilpah: Gad and Asher
- (2) Even though more than one woman was involved in giving birth to Jacob's children while living together with him, the twelve patriarchs and their twelve tribes that make up the house of Israel are blessed unto this day as one family with no bill of divorcement²¹ required by God for Jacob's polygamous relationships.
- (3) Judah's descendants, the Jews, along with the other descendants of the house of Israel (including the house of Benjamin, born of Rachel) are being restored to the Promised Land given to Abraham in fulfillment of God's covenants.²²
- (4) The sons of Levi (the tribe into which Moses and Aaron were born) were not given a specific portion of land, but were chosen to serve the Lord in all of Israel. Through prophecy God has declared that He shall *purify* and *purge* them *that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness*.²³
- (5) We in America live in a land promised to Joseph, the first son of Rachel, the second polygamous wife of Jacob (Israel);²⁴ it is a covenanted land, one that God has given to the seed of Joseph.²⁵
- (6) We, who are of the restored Gentile church, those unto whom the Book of Mormon and the fullness of the gospel has been restored, are called to take the gospel unto a remnant of the house of Israel in fulfillment of the covenants God has made with their fathers – again, because God makes and keeps covenants.²⁶
 - (a) We are to be fishers of the children of the house of Israel, to seek them out that they may be brought back to the knowledge of their Redeemer, their forefathers, and God's covenants with them.²⁷
 - (b) We are to be nursing fathers and mothers to the children of the household of Israel, showing them what great things God has done for their fathers and that He has not forgotten nor forsaken them.²⁸
 - (c) We are to minister unto them according to the fullness of the gospel preserved

¹⁶ Genesis 35:22-26; see Exodus 1:1-5

¹⁷ Jacob's firstborn (Genesis 35:22-26 & I Chronicles 5:1)

¹⁸ From which the Levitical priesthood sprang (see Hebrews 7:11 with Numbers 3:39-51), the house into which Moses was born (Exodus 2:1).

¹⁹ Judah "prevailed" above his brethren by faith in that kings were born of his line, including *the Lion of the Tribe of Judah* (I Chronicles 5:2 with II Chronicles 13:18; see Revelation 5:5)

²⁰ Joseph received the birthright, which Reuben lost (I Chronicles 5:1,2)

²¹ cf. Isaiah 50:1-3

²² II Nephi 12:73,74 with Ezekiel 11:16-21; cf. Deuteronomy 33

²³ Malachi 3:3

²⁴ Genesis 49:22-26

²⁵ Ether 6:7,8; cf. I Nephi 1:150 with I Nephi 1:164,165

²⁶ cf. III Nephi 12:2 & Ether 5:22 with I Nephi 3:96-216; see also Isaiah 49:5,6,13-25

²⁷ cf. Jeremiah 16:14-21 with I Nephi 3:236,237 & II Nephi 12:50,51

²⁸ cf. I Nephi 6:52-54 & 7:13-16 with Isaiah 49:22,23

and brought forth in the Book of Mormon.²⁹

(7) Finally, if we repent and hearken to the Lord's words, we too may come in unto the covenant by faith and be numbered among the faithful remnant of Jacob which will build the New Jerusalem.³⁰ We, too, will become children of Abraham by faith, members of the household of Israel, i.e. members with the children born of Jacob's polygamy.³¹ This is not meant to excuse or accommodate their polygamy. Rather, it is to be accomplished to the honor and glory of God's mercy and His faithfulness to covenants.³²

vi) What then is the respective or relative importance of polygamy and covenants? Consider the fact that polygamy is only one of many things³³ that are abominable before the Lord.³⁴ Here is a list of other abominations identified in the Book of Mormon:

- *The formation of a church that slays, tortures, binds the saints of God* (I Nephi 3:139-144)
- *Building up churches not unto the Lord* (II Nephi 12:1-21)
- *Pride, i.e. that which leads to affliction and persecution of others* (Jacob 2:5-28)
- *Whoredoms* (Jacob 2:37)
- *Secret works of darkness, of secret murders and abominations* (Alma 17:52-64 & III Nephi 2:89)
- *Harlotry, shedding innocent blood, and denying the Holy Ghost* (Alma 19:5-14)
- *Pride, oppression of the poor, persecuting the humble, mocking that which was sacred, denying prophecy and revelation, murdering, plundering, lying, stealing, committing adultery, contentions, dissenting, boasting, etc.* (Helaman 2:44-46,161-167)
- *Secret bands (combinations or societies) and uniting with them* (Helaman 3:28-30, Mormon 4:55 & Ether 3:92 with Alma 17:53-59, III Nephi 1:41-85, III Nephi 2:11, etc.)
- *Sinning against/rejecting the gospel...pride, lying, deceit, mischief, hypocrisy, murders, priestcraft, whoredom, secret abominations, etc.* (III Nephi 7:34,14:2)
- *Denying the pure mercies of God* (Moroni 8:20)
- *Being without civilization* (Moroni 9:8-12)
- *Willfulness of heart in seeking for blood and revenge, etc.* (Moroni 9:20-25)

Simply stated, all manner of wickedness and iniquity is abominable before God.³⁵ Breaking covenants is especially abominable and is punishable by severe judg-

²⁹ cf. I Nephi 3:17-19,181-203, 4:16-33, II Nephi 12:71-99, III Nephi 13:54-14:3, Mormon 2:34-(37)-54, etc., with Romans 11 & D&C 2:6, 12:5, 39:2-3, 42:5a, etc.; Moroni 1-10

³⁰ III Nephi 10:1-4

³¹ Galatians 3:7 with Ephesians 2:11-22

³² cf. Romans 6:1-23 with Romans 2:28,29

³³ cf. Mosiah 2:48

³⁴ cf. Proverbs 11:1, 12:22, 15:8,9,26, 16:5, 28:9, etc. with Galatians 5:19-21; see also Deuteronomy 7:25,26, 12:29-32, 18:9-14, 20:17,18, 27:15, etc. (*worshipping other gods/graven images/idols*)

³⁵ cf. Leviticus 26:12-39 with Isaiah 24:5,6, Jeremiah 11:1-14, etc.; cf. D&C 1:3d, Romans 1:26-32 & II Timothy 3:1-9 with I Nephi 3:167-170 & II Nephi 7:22

ments.³⁶

vii) The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is not calling His people and all mankind to repent and forsake just the abominable practice of polygamy. He is calling them to repent of all their sins and to abide in His covenants according to His commandment (which Jesus testified are life everlasting³⁷). Notwithstanding the sin of polygamy, from whence the house (family) of Israel sprang, the Lord promises to fulfill the covenants He made with them when they *humble themselves, and pray, and seek His face, and turn from their wicked ways*.³⁸

b) **Is there a lesson that we may learn from God's dealings with the house of Israel that can help us deal righteously, according to His covenants and commandments, among the peoples of the earth regarding polygamy?** By faith I am assured³⁹ of the Lord that it is both appropriate and advisable to draw a parallel between His dealings with Israel (including Lehi) and how to deal with polygamy in the missionary field today.⁴⁰ The following summary is based on some of the points made earlier and is presented as both a review and a justification for drawing such a lesson as well as for establishing a basis for making application of this lesson to our present situation.⁴¹

- i) The Heirs of the Covenant: The covenant God made with Abraham was established with Abraham's son Isaac, not with Abraham's older son Ishmael.⁴²
- (1) Ishmael was eventually sent away from Isaac but with a blessing because he was the son of Abraham, with whom God had covenanted.⁴³
- (2) The Apostle Paul explains that the separation of these two sons of Abraham, one born of the flesh and the other born of faith, is an *allegory* about *two covenants*.⁴⁴ While much could be written about this *allegory*,⁴⁵ for the present discussion it is simply noted here that these two half brothers were not separated because of polygamy, but because of the respective *covenants* discussed by Paul. (This point is significant to the present discussion and will be referenced below with regard to Jacob's sons, some of whom were born under circumstances similar to those associated with Ishmael's birth.)
- ii) The Blessings of the Covenant: The blessings associated with God's covenant with Abraham were passed on to Jacob through Isaac's blessing.⁴⁶ Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel (according to the covenant), would be the promised fruitful

³⁶ cf. II Nephi 12:16, Mosiah 13:21-33, Helaman 2:13, Mormon 4:34-56 with Mormon 1:45 & D&C 1:5f, 50:2, 94:5, etc.

³⁷ John 12:49,50; cf. I John 5:1-4 with James 2:21

³⁸ Leviticus 26:40-45 with II Chronicles 7:14 & 15:1-19; cf. Romans 11

³⁹ cf. Hebrews 11:1

⁴⁰ cf. II Nephi 8:16

⁴¹ cf. I Nephi 6:5,6

⁴² Genesis 17:24-29 & 26:1-5,24

⁴³ Genesis 21:6-19 <11> with Genesis 17:26-29

⁴⁴ Galatians 4:22-31

⁴⁵ e.g. I Corinthians 10:1-11

⁴⁶ Genesis 28:1-5 & 29:10-22

heir.⁴⁷ Specifically:

- (1) Jacob was blessed with twelve sons, referred to as patriarchs, who were born to him of multiple women, all of whom were living with him and bearing him children concurrently.⁴⁸
- (2) Some of the arrangements behind these births were like the arrangements made for Ishmael's birth, i.e. a wife giving her maiden to her husband to bear children.⁴⁹
- (3) However, none of these sons were sent away as was Ishmael. All were of the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, though multiple mothers bore them while living together with their common husband. Thus, the children of Israel were given an inheritance together in the Promised Land according to the covenants of the Lord.⁵⁰
- (4) In other words, the *allegory* Paul spoke of regarding the separation of Ishmael and Isaac did not apply (was not applied) to the sons of the household of Israel (Jacob) because of, and according to, the covenants of the Lord.⁵¹
- (5) God did eventually scatter the house of Israel, but not because of Jacob's polygamy.⁵² God scattered them because of their infidelity to the Lord and their transgression of the covenant He made with them at Horeb.⁵³ Notwithstanding their rebellion, in due time the Lord promised that He shall be merciful unto them and remember their sins no more.⁵⁴ (Note: the "old" covenant given at Horeb through Moses did not expressly prohibit polygamy. In fact, it appears to have included provisions that managed certain aspects of polygamous marriages.)⁵⁵
- (6) God promised to gather a remnant of Israel and bring them to the knowledge of Jesus Christ in His own due time according to the covenant He made with them.⁵⁶
- (7) This gathering is foreshadowed by the *type*⁵⁷ spoken of by Moroni concerning Joseph: as God preserved the house of Jacob through Joseph – who brought his family, the house of Israel, to Egypt – so shall God be merciful to Joseph's seed by preserving a remnant in Joseph's land.⁵⁸

iii) The Remnant of the Covenant, a Righteous Branch: God brought a remnant of the house of Israel to this land to raise up unto Himself a righteous people, and thus preserve Joseph's seed.⁵⁹

- (1) In particular, He brought Lehi's family, along with Ishmael's family (not Abra-

⁴⁷ Genesis 35:9-12 & 49:24,26

⁴⁸ Genesis 35:22-26

⁴⁹ Genesis 30:1-13

⁵⁰ Deuteronomy 5:1-33 with III Nephi 7:4-12

⁵¹ cf. Jeremiah 29:4-14

⁵² Deuteronomy 4:23-27, 28:58-68, I Kings 14:15, Nehemiah 1:7-11, Ezekiel 11:16,17 with Ezekiel 18:1-32; Jeremiah 2:11-13,19-35, III Nephi 10:9,10, etc.; see also Daniel 9

⁵³ cf. Leviticus 26:1-46, II Kings 18:11,12 & Hebrews 8:9 with Judges 3:4-9, Isaiah 43:24-28, Jeremiah 32:30-44, Daniel 9, etc.; see further I Kings 11:30-39 & I Kings 15:3-5 with II Kings 17:6-41

⁵⁴ Hebrews 8:10-13 & Romans 11 with Isaiah 11, 43, 53, 60, etc.

⁵⁵ e.g. Deuteronomy 17:15-17, 21:10-17, 25:5-10, etc.

⁵⁶ Ezekiel 11:16-21 & III Nephi 2:102-109 with Isaiah 11 & Deuteronomy 5

⁵⁷ Similar to Paul's reference to an *allegory*, Moroni explains how Joseph's life foreshadowed or served as a prophecy of things to come in the life of his posterity.

⁵⁸ Ether 6:6,7

⁵⁹ cf. II Nephi 2:1-50 with Jacob 2:34,35,44, etc. with Genesis 50:23-37

ham's son, Ishmael), to Joseph's land to preserve them and cause them to bear righteous fruit unto the Lord.⁶⁰

- (2) For this purpose God gave this remnant of His covenant people commandments, *including a commandment to not do as their forefathers in taking unto themselves multiple wives*.⁶¹ Specifically, they were commanded to have but one wife and no concubines.⁶²
- (3) God sternly reproved the Nephites when they transgressed this commandment and called them to repentance through Lehi's son Jacob.⁶³
 - (a) Please note how soon they transgressed this command to not have plural marriages or illicit relationships after arriving on this land. It was within the lifetime of the first generation!
 - (b) Note further how within the first generation of the restored church, which was organized on April 6, 1830, the members of the church soon polluted their inheritance and the church became *reproached* with the crime of fornication and polygamy.⁶⁴ The significance of this correlation will be discussed further in a later section.
- (4) Jacob explained further that because the Lamanites kept this command, to not do as their forefathers in taking unto themselves multiple wives, God would not destroy them and they would become a blessed people in some future day.⁶⁵
 - (a) It was foretold that until that day, they would dwindle in darkness⁶⁶ and unbelief for many generations because of the *traditions*⁶⁷ of their fathers (which did not include polygamy).
 - (b) Conversely, the Nephites, who had been greatly blessed of the Lord, would eventually be destroyed for sinning against the commandments of God, i.e. against the greater light with which they had been so abundantly blessed.⁶⁸
 - (c) The difference, as Jacob explained, was to be found in each group's response to the Lord's commandments, especially His commandment to have but one wife and no concubines.⁶⁹
 - (d) As God told Lehi, inasmuch as his posterity kept His commandments, they would prosper in the land; otherwise they would be cut off from the Lord's presence.⁷⁰ (Note: God did not say the wicked would not prosper in this land. Rather, He said that they would be cut off from His presence, which is to be in the gall of bitterness, being without God in this world.⁷¹)

⁶⁰ Jacob 3 with Romans 11:1-12:1 & Ephesians 5:9

⁶¹ See Appendix II for example Biblical references to polygamy

⁶² Jacob 2:44

⁶³ Jacob 2:1-70

⁶⁴ D&C 111:4b (approved August 17, 1835); cf. D&C 83:8c, 98:3

⁶⁵ Jacob 2:56 & I Nephi 4:15-25; cf. Alma 12:111,123-125 with Mosiah 7:1-5

⁶⁶ cf. I Nephi 3:125,130-134 with Matthew 6:21-24

⁶⁷ If we are not careful to follow only those traditions of our fathers that are righteous traditions, those born of the Word of God, we, too, can fall into condemnation (cf. Helaman 5:102-107 with Matthew 15:3-8).

⁶⁸ cf. Helaman 5:108 with Jacob 2:29-65

⁶⁹ cf. Jacob 2:29-65 with I Nephi 5:119-132

⁷⁰ cf. II Nephi 1:34 & 3:6-16, Alma 17:1,2,43,44 with D&C 63:5 & Jeremiah 4:1

⁷¹ Alma 19:75

c) **What specific lesson or lessons, then, may we draw from God’s dealings with the children of Israel that has application in our present situation?** The key points of the lesson are summarized below. The advisability of this lesson and its various points will be discussed in two subsequent sections, “*Second Consideration*” and “*Third Consideration*.”

- i) Polygamous families, newly introduced to the gospel, should be taught the need for and importance of obeying honorable laws⁷² as well as the commandments of God, and they should be admonished to keep their legal covenants (e.g. legal contracts of marriage) by faith⁷³ before God and the church.⁷⁴
 - (1) If plural marriage is lawful in the country in which they live and they did not know the Lord’s will regarding polygamy when entering into this sinful practice, they should be taught to keep their marriage covenants in accordance with the civil laws governing their land.⁷⁵
 - (2) This is consistent with established church law, which states that all legal contracts of marriage made before a person is baptized into the church should be held sacred and fulfilled.⁷⁶
 - (3) While some religions and cultures permit husbands to put away their wives as they wish, converts from these religions and cultures must be taught that the religion Jesus Christ established and maintains is not like their old ways.⁷⁷ Women are not to be treated as something that can be discarded at the option of the man. A wife is to be honored and cherished, even as Christ loved and gave Himself for the church.⁷⁸
 - (4) If, however, plural marriages are unlawful in the land in which they live, then their marriages are unlawful and they, at least in terms of civil laws, have not sinned ignorantly or faultlessly. They should then be admonished to take action to conform to the dictates of the laws of their land, openly and honestly, which may include annulling or dissolving marriages.⁷⁹
 - (5) If a polygamous family were to consider immigrating to another land, they should be taught and admonished to respect and obey the laws of that land. For example, United States law prohibits the practice of polygamy. Further, the Lord has ordained this land to be a land free from polygamy.⁸⁰ Therefore, it would be a criminal act,⁸¹ both legally and spiritually, to attempt to practice polygamy on this land.
- ii) The children of polygamous families new to the faith should be taught to obey the command to *not* do as their parents have done.

⁷² cf. I Peter 2:13-17, Galatians 3:15, etc. with D&C 95:2,

⁷³ cf. Habakkuk 2:4b with Romans 1:16,17

⁷⁴ D&C 111:4a with D&C 28:9 & 37:2b

⁷⁵ cf. D&C 111:4a & D&C 17:18 with Mosiah 11:120-141

⁷⁶ D&C 111:4a; Remember D&C 52:4b-5b

⁷⁷ cf. Matthew 5:35,36 with Galatians 3:28

⁷⁸ cf. Ephesians 5:25-33

⁷⁹ cf. I Peter 2:13-17 with D&C 95:2,

⁸⁰ cf. Jacob 2:30-58 with Ether 1:30-35

⁸¹ cf. D&C 111:4b

- (1) That is, they should be taught not to enter into polygamous marriage arrangements just as the children of Lehi were commanded to not do as their forefathers had done.⁸²
 - (2) Otherwise, according to the word of the Lord, they will be cut off from the Lord's presence for transgressing the new covenant they have entered into through baptism.⁸³
- iii) Regarding baptism, each person and their situation must be reviewed with much prayer and fasting.⁸⁴
- (1) Unless the Spirit of the Lord directs otherwise (according to His wisdom and knowledge), according to the scriptures it is wisdom to keep established lawful covenants, including lawful marriage covenants.⁸⁵
 - (2) Those involved in polygamy (i.e. prior to having the gospel preached to them) should be taught the words of Christ about taking up their cross and denying themselves all unrighteousness.⁸⁶ If they are able to keep the words of Christ regarding restraining themselves, it is better for them to separate themselves from one another, but only if this does not give Satan an advantage over them and among the members of the church or the community in which they live.⁸⁷
- iv) What about priesthood and men involved in polygamy? The instruction and witness preserved in the New Testament⁸⁸ stands sure and should be taught,⁸⁹ which states that priesthood of the church are to be husbands of but one wife (with no concubines, e.g. no mistresses, imagined or otherwise!⁹⁰).⁹¹
- 2) **Second Consideration: Consider the members of a polygamous family who live in some country and/or culture where polygamy is legal and customary, e.g. in an Islamic state, and are new to the gospel.**
- a) If the gospel of Jesus Christ has never been declared unto them, that is, they do not know God's will for them and have sinned *ignorantly*, then the shed blood of Jesus Christ has atoned for their sins.⁹² This includes polygamy.

For behold, and also His blood atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who hath died not knowing the will of God concerning them and who have ignorantly sinned. (Mosiah 1:107)

⁸² Jacob 2:33-35

⁸³ cf. Alma 17:29,30,44 with Mosiah 9:41 & Alma 5:27; see also D&C 63:5 with D&C 83:7,8(8b)

⁸⁴ cf. D&C 52:4b-5b with D&C 42:18d & 59:5d

⁸⁵ cf. D&C 46:3b-4b with III Nephi 5:76-80

⁸⁶ cf. Matthew 16:25-31

⁸⁷ cf. Matthew 19:9-12 with I Corinthians 7:1-5

⁸⁸ e.g. I Timothy 3:1-13 & Titus 1:5-11

⁸⁹ Matthew 28:17-19

⁹⁰ cf. D&C 42:7d,e & 63:5 with Matthew 5:29-31

⁹¹ cf. II Timothy 3:16 & Deuteronomy 17:17

⁹² cf. Mosiah 8:55-67 with Alma 7:17-36

- b) However, once they are taught Jesus Christ's doctrine,⁹³ including His instruction on divorce,⁹⁴ they are no longer ignorant of His will and, therefore, are held accountable for what they know.⁹⁵ Simply stated, once someone is taught the truth they are no longer blameless before the Lord.
- c) Therefore, any resolution which would require (in this scenario) individuals to choose between 1) breaking a *legal* marriage covenant by divorce, and 2) turning away from the Lord's commandment to be baptized,⁹⁶ places them in jeopardy of God's judgments. Why? The Lord did not give us provision in scripture, explicitly or otherwise, to divorce for these reasons.⁹⁷ And rejecting His gospel is obviously not covered by the atonement.⁹⁸
- d) Therefore, under such circumstances, it would be better for the members of such a polygamous family, who had sinned ignorantly, to never hear the gospel preached in this life. Why? Their polygamous relations would, in such a case, remain covered by the atonement of Christ if they die without hearing the gospel.⁹⁹ However, not sharing the gospel with them would violate the Lord's commandment to preach the gospel to all people throughout the whole world.¹⁰⁰
- e) How then will the Lord judge a people who place others *who know not God* in such a compromised position? We could not plead ignorance in this matter if we were to take action that would end in this result. We have the fullness of the gospel contained within the scriptures. This is why it is wisdom, not simply obedience, to call upon the Lord in all such cases in compliance with His scriptures.

3) ***Third Consideration: Consider the temptation that divorced members of a polygamous family will face in a divorce situation:***

- a) To illustrate this concern, consider the case of a man with multiple wives, all of whom live with him concurrently and each of whom have born him children. Consider further that they live in a small rural setting where strict forms of non-Christian religious views are maintained (e.g. Islamic) or where witchcraft is practiced. They then hear the gospel for the first time. To comply with a requirement to divorce, the husband divorces all but one wife and is baptized. To further fulfill the requirements of the resolution, the divorced wives are required to live as single parents with children. Here are a few temptations they will more than likely face, all of which are significant concerns to the individuals and to the church, and have far-reaching consequences if yielded to.

- i) Situation: Having known each other intimately in the past, the divorced husband and

⁹³ D&C 17:18

⁹⁴ e.g. III Nephi 5:76-80

⁹⁵ cf. Alma 16:141 & Helaman 3:26; see also D&C 17:18

⁹⁶ cf. III Nephi 12:33-35 & Moroni 8:29

⁹⁷ cf. Matthew 5:35,36, 19:3-8 & Mark 10:2-10 with I Corinthians 6:15,16; see also D&C 111:4a & Malachi 2:16

⁹⁸ cf. III Nephi 3:20 & 13:47 with Mormon 4:86

⁹⁹ Mosiah 1:107

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 28:17-19, Mormon 4:86, D&C 16:5, etc.

each of his former wives will be tempted with having martial relations when they interact in their daily routines, e.g. in caring for their children.¹⁰¹ If they succumb to the temptation and come together, they will commit adultery, which will result in them not having the Spirit of the Lord¹⁰² and not coming forth in the first resurrection or inheriting the kingdom of heaven.¹⁰³

- (1) Therefore, unless a person is absolutely sure it is God's will that individuals new in the faith and in hostile environments towards Christianity should be placed in such difficult circumstances (e.g. by mandating divorce on polygamous families through such a resolution), he or she should refrain from mandating divorce else they commit sin; as it is written, whatsoever is not of faith is sin.¹⁰⁴ Specifically, if it is not the Lord's will, individuals can bring themselves under condemnation for having placed this requirement upon others.¹⁰⁵
- (2) Yes, it would be ideal if the divorced wife and her former husband, with whom she was once one flesh,¹⁰⁶ could act simply as a sister and brother in the church after being divorced. But can we honestly ignore the reality of their humanity?¹⁰⁷ Consider the fact that many church members among us have been overtaken by the wiles of our enemy, the devil, and have committed adultery, if not temporally, then spiritually.¹⁰⁸ Placing members where they can be more easily tempted is nothing less than *ill advised* according to witness I continue to receive of the Spirit of truth. Rather than place generalized requirements upon them, we are commanded to minister to them through the Spirit of meekness, i.e. as the Spirit of the Lord directs.¹⁰⁹
- (3) Mandating divorce among polygamous people will not resolve the overall problem of abominable relationships between individuals or family members. It may actually increase such relationships through the divided families it creates as described above.

- ii) Situation: The divorced wives now live without a spiritual head, one with whom they are one flesh.¹¹⁰ If any one of the divorced wives converts and is baptized, she will now face even greater temptations because of the hostile spiritual and physical environment in which she lives.¹¹¹ Yes, I believe in the power of Jesus Christ to protect His own, and that He is able to keep her from temptation.¹¹² Yet, is it wise to ignore such counsel and admonition as the following?

But the younger widows refuse; for when they have begun to wax wanton against

¹⁰¹ e.g. I Corinthians 10:12,13 with D&C 17:6

¹⁰² D&C 63:5 & Proverbs 6:32

¹⁰³ e.g. I Corinthians 6:9, Galatians 5:19-21, Hebrews 13:4

¹⁰⁴ Romans 14:23

¹⁰⁵ e.g. Acts 15:1-32

¹⁰⁶ e.g. I Corinthians 6:16

¹⁰⁷ cf. D&C 17:6d,e

¹⁰⁸ cf. D&C 63:5 with Matthew 5:29-31 & I Corinthians 10:12,13

¹⁰⁹ Galatians 6:1

¹¹⁰ cf. Ephesians 5:22-33 with I Corinthians 6:19

¹¹¹ cf. Isaiah 59:15 with Hebrews 10:32, I Peter 5:8,9, etc.

¹¹² cf. II Peter 2:9 with D&C 17:6d,e & D&C 92:1a

Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan. (I Timothy 5:11-15)

Mandating divorce effectively produces *young widows* and is dangerous to the individuals and to the church, as well as to the community at large. Choosing to ignore such potential outcomes or attempting to minimize the potential for such scenarios is more than unwise, it is dangerous. In the words of the Spirit of the Lord, which I continue to receive, it is *ill advised!*

iii) Situation: A practical, real-life concern includes the setting up of social classes (e.g. a caste system) and the potential for quarrels between these different classes, namely between the “chosen” family and the “divorced” or the separated (outcast) families, etc. This again is no small concern, especially to the children involved. It will have a great impact on them as they grow up. Idealism is not reality. Notwithstanding reports that arranging baptisms around divorcement of polygamous families has been received favorably, the fruit of such arrangements will take time to come forth, but that fruit will reveal its true nature. By then the lives of many will have been long since impacted and shaped by the various actions taken.

b) These last two considerations, in particular these last several situations, were given to illustrate the advisability of not blindly mandating divorce among polygamous peoples who are new to the restored gospel. Other situations can and do exist. Lest we sin against God in such matters, He has commanded us to call upon Him for guidance and direction in all circumstances. Please remember the words of Jesus Christ, “Wisdom is justified of all her children,”¹¹³ even the children of God, the children of the One who counsels from on high.¹¹⁴

THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD

Adopting resolutions prohibiting polygamy and other sins within the church cannot serve as substitutes for the call to repentance and devoted obedience to the Lord. I fear that our resolutions are leading us to become as the ancient covenant peoples, of whom it was written in the prophets that they honored God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him.¹¹⁵ Just passing legislation for or against various things does not ensure that we are discerning as well as living out the will of God in such matters. My appeal to the church is to rely on the commands of God, especially the one given in D&C 46:3.

The commandment given in D&C 46:3b, which was quoted in the opening must prevail *in all things* if we are to expect the Lord to bless and prosper the endeavors of the conference.¹¹⁶ This

¹¹³ Luke 7:35 with Matthew 11:21

¹¹⁴ James 3:17,18 with Isaiah 9:6 & Genesis 7:42

¹¹⁵ Isaiah 29:26 & Matthew 15:7

¹¹⁶ cf. D&C 59:1,c & 5b with III Nephi 12:22

commandment forms the basis for common consent, i.e. for the members of the church to commonly consent to do the revealed will of the Lord.¹¹⁷ It is the provision God has given to the church for the members of the church to come to a common understanding of His will as well as a common determination to do His will.¹¹⁸

Those individuals called to govern in the affairs of the church must be diligent in calling upon the Lord for wisdom and counsel in all matters, i.e. in each and every matter;¹¹⁹ otherwise they will stray from His ordinances and statutes.¹²⁰ The Lord has said that we are not to live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds forth out of His mouth, meaning Jesus Christ.¹²¹

- 1) Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God, the bread of heaven by whom we are to live and move and have our being.¹²²
- 2) Jesus Christ's words (i.e. His eternal body and blood¹²³) are spirit and they are life; His words are given to us to show us what we should do in all things.¹²⁴
- 3) Equally stated, the Holy Ghost, which is granted to us through the baptism of Jesus,¹²⁵ carries the words of Christ unto our hearts.¹²⁶ This is the Spirit of truth that is to guide us into all truth.¹²⁷
- 4) We receive His Spirit of truth, and thus His words, through prayerful feasting upon His words.¹²⁸
- 5) As thus it is written, whosoever has the Son, i.e. the Word of Life, has life and whosoever does not have the Son does not have life.¹²⁹

Any resolution, decision or vote that compromises this commandment, to call upon the Lord in all things, is in violation of God's word and His will. As such, rather than take a generalized legislated course of action, we must turn from our own devices¹³⁰ and call upon the Lord together in mighty prayer to know how we should proceed in any and all such instances.¹³¹

God intends to be our counselor in all matters.¹³² We cannot circumvent His counsel or command and expect Him to do nothing.¹³³ Resolutions that act in any way to supersede or circumvent (either intentionally or unintentionally) God's commands, will not go unnoticed or unaddressed by Him.¹³⁴ As such, passing resolutions in general is no small matter. Those who enact legislation that is not in accordance with God's will, wisdom, counsel, or command will be judged for violating His law.¹³⁵ Alma understood and respected this principle, and so he called

¹¹⁷ cf. D&C 25:1b, 27:4c with D&C 41:1b & Moroni 7:17-20; cf. Mosiah 3:1-7 & II Chronicles 15:12-15

¹¹⁸ cf. D&C 1:b,c & 41:3c; cf. John 10:3,4 & Revelation 2:7,11,17,29 & 3:6,13,22 with Genesis 3:5

¹¹⁹ cf. Acts 2:1 & D&C 28:2c & 41:1b-2b with D&C 87:8d; consider further III Nephi 7:16,17 with I Nephi 4:8-13

¹²⁰ cf. Isaiah 1:10-20, Romans 1:16-22, II Nephi 6:74-85, D&C 1:3d-e, etc. with James 1:5 & Micah 6:8,9, etc.

¹²¹ Deuteronomy 8:3 & Matthew 4:4

¹²² John 1:14-16 & 6:32-63 with I John 4:9 & Colossians 2:6-10; cf. Acts 17:28 with Colossians 1:12-20

¹²³ cf. Ether 1:72,80,81

¹²⁴ John 6:63 with II Nephi 14:4,6

¹²⁵ cf. III Nephi 4:49,50 with D&C 39:2

¹²⁶ cf. II Nephi 15:1 with II Nephi 14:3 & D&C 97:2

¹²⁷ Mark 1:6 with John 14:15-18, 16:13 & II Nephi 14:6; D&C 10:6 & 90:1a-6c

¹²⁸ II Nephi 13:30 & 14:4,6 & D&C 63:16 with John 6:32-63 & Colossians 3:12-17

¹²⁹ I John 1:1 & 5:12 with John 6:53-63

¹³⁰ cf. Jeremiah 18:11,12

¹³¹ cf. D&C 28:1 & 58:5; see also II Chronicles 15:12-15

¹³² cf. D&C 58:5a with Genesis 7:42 & Isaiah 33:22; see also Proverbs 3:5-12

¹³³ cf. D&C 58:6i with Isaiah 63:9,10 & Jeremiah 16:12,13

¹³⁴ cf. Matthew 15:4-8 & 23:10-35

¹³⁵ cf. Matthew 5:19-22 & 7:30-37 with Alma 3:33-35 & Mormon 4:62

upon God to know how to deal with the transgressors in the church for which he was given responsibility.¹³⁶ God blessed Alma for doing so. Unless we do the same (and I personally do not have the testimony or assurance of the Comforter that we have done so to His satisfaction), we cannot expect the blessings Alma received in regulating the affairs of the church.

POLYGAMY IN THE BIBLE

The Bible includes the greatest number of accounts of polygamy and concubines found in scripture. References are listed below under several general headings.

Overall blessed by God (prior to the kings of Israel):

- **Abraham**, who had at least one wife and multiple concubines (Genesis 16:3,4, 25:6, etc.; cf. Genesis 25:1-7 with I Chronicles 1:32,33)
- **Nahor**, Abraham's brother, Rebekah's grandfather (Genesis 22:25-28, 24:15)
- **Jacob** (Israel), father of "the house of Israel" (Genesis 30:1-26, 37:2, etc.)
- **Elkanah**, father of Samuel, the prophet who anointed Saul and David to be the first kings of Israel (I Samuel 1:1-3,19,20)

Kings from Israel (some blessed, some not blessed)

- **Saul**, king of Israel (I Samuel 14:50 & II Samuel 3:7, 21:11 with II Samuel 12:8)
- **David**, king of Israel (II Samuel 5:13, 12:1-11, 27:3, I Chronicles 14:3, etc.)
- **Solomon**, king of Israel, David's son (I Kings 11:1-11 & Nehemiah 13:26,27)
- **Ahab** (I Kings 20:3,7)
- **Jehoiachin** (II Kings 24:15)
- **Rehoboam**, Solomon's son (II Chronicles 11:21-23 & 12:14)
- **Abijah**, Rehoboam's son (II Chronicles 13:21)
- **Jehoram** (II Chronicles 21:14-17)

Chief Priests & Judges¹³⁷

- **Jehoiada** (II Chronicles 24:1-3,6)
- **Gideon (Jerubbaal)**, a prominent judge in Israel (Judges 7:1, 8:30, 9:2)

Others listed in the Chronicles of Israel (no definite statement on being blessed or not)

- **Ashur**, of the house of Judah (I Chronicles 4:5-7)
- **Izrahiah** and his sons, Michael, Obadiah, Joel, Ishiah and those "with them," which were of the house of Issachar (I Chronicles 7:3-4)
- **Shaharaim**, of the house of Benjamin (I Chronicles 8:8-11)
- **Jerahmeel & Caleb**, of the house of Judah (I Chronicles 2:18,19,25,26,46-49)

Those specifically not blessed by God:

- **Lamech**, first on record as a polygamist (Genesis 4:19 KJV; Genesis 5:30-43 IV)
- **Esau**, Jacob's older brother (Genesis 28:6-9 & 36:1-6 with Malachi 1:2,3 & Hebrews

¹³⁶ Mosiah 11:120,126

¹³⁷ Note: Ibzan (Judges 12:8-10) & Abdon (Judges 12:13-15) were judges with numerous sons, suggestive of multiple wives.

12:16,17)

- **Belshazzar**, king of Babylon (Daniel 5:2,3)

Regulations (pertaining to possible multiple wives):

- Exodus 21:7-11 – on maidservants and wives
- Deuteronomy 17:14-20 – on kings and their multiply unto themselves horses, wives, and gold
- Deuteronomy 21:10-17 – on captive woman taken as wives
- Deuteronomy 25:5-10 & Matthew 22:23-32 – on a brother's wife and raising seed up unto him

Polygamy prophesied (associated with judgment):

- Isaiah 3:27 (cf. II Nephi 8:65)

In addition to these direct references in the Old Testament, the apostle Paul taught on the subject of polygamy in the New Testament church by telling Timothy and Titus that priesthood should be the husband of one wife.¹³⁸ As noted above, there were prominent polygamous men in Old Testament Israel who were patriarchs, judges, priests, kings, etc., but Paul assures Timothy and Titus this was not to be the case among the New Testament church leadership (priesthood).

But why, in the first place, would Paul write on this subject of the number of wives a priesthood member should have, and why did he not go on to say that all men in the church should have but one wife? Had polygamy reared its evil head among some in the early churches or in the missionary field (as it had among the Nephites or later in the restored church of 1830), making it requisite for him to address the subject? Was it not clear to everyone in the church that polygamy was wrong and that polygamous men should not hold priesthood? Was polygamy one of the heresies Paul warned about, which he said evil men would attempt to bring into the church?

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. (Acts 20:28-31)

While Paul's instruction on marriage for priesthood is limited and, as such, may not clear up all such questions, his instruction is sufficient to confirm that priesthood, at least, should have but one wife. This is not all. As the church is to look to the priesthood for their example, it is wisdom for members to understand that they likewise should have but one spouse (at a time).¹³⁹ It should also be remembered and taught that the books of the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, contain many scriptures that indicate, if not prescribe, monogamy.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ I Timothy 3:1-16 & Titus 1:5-9

¹³⁹ e.g. II Thessalonians 3:7-9, I Timothy 4:12, I Peter 5:1-3, etc.

¹⁴⁰ e.g. Genesis 2:30, Genesis 3:26,27, Genesis 8:37 (I Peter 3:20), Exodus 20:17, Leviticus 18, 20 & 21, Deuteronomy 28:54, Jeremiah 6:11, Malachi 2:1-17, Matthew 5:35,36, Mark 10:1-10, Luke 18:29-30, I Corinthians 7, Ephesians 5:31-33, etc.

POLYGAMY IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

There are only a few instances of polygamy reported on in the Book of Mormon, all of which are associated with wickedness.

Those generally blessed by God, but rebuked specifically for polygamy:

- **Nephites** (Jacob 1:15 & 2:30-37)

Those not blessed by God (polygamy was symptomatic of their sinful lifestyles):

- **King Noah** and his priests (Mosiah 7:1-10,20)
- **Riplakish** (Ether 4:48)
- An apparent untold number in the last generation of the Jaredites (Ether 6:36)

Contrast with those who did not practice polygamy, the Lamanites:

- **King Lamoni**, for example (Alma 12:111-179 & III Nephi 4:49,50 with Jacob 2:54-58)

Notwithstanding the relatively few references to polygamy that it contains, the Book of Mormon presents the strongest case against polygamy that is found anywhere in the available volumes of scripture.¹⁴¹ Jacob clearly identifies it as a *grosser crime* and an *abomination* before God.¹⁴²

Jacob's declaration, which is *plain and precious*, was brought forth in the Book of Mormon in these latter days, I believe, to take away one of the stumbling blocks that have caused the Gentile churches to stumble.¹⁴³ The many instances of polygamy listed in the Bible and the lack of an outright condemnation of the practice has encouraged some people to assert that it is a lawful and appropriate practice even in the present day. The Book of Mormon takes away this ambiguity concerning polygamy, and with it the latitude for some to argue that the Bible justifies the practice of polygamy based on, for example, David and Solomon having many wives.

POLYGAMY IN THE DOCTRINE & COVENANTS

In 1835 the church took a determined stand against fornication and polygamy because the church had, by that time (in just five years from its inception), become *reproached* by the *crime of fornication and polygamy*.

Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy; we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife; and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again. (D&C 111:4b)

Preceding this statement by the church, the Lord had given definite instruction on marriage, stating that men are to cleave to one wife and none else.

Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shall cleave unto her and none else; and he

¹⁴¹ The brass plates may contain further instruction and commandments. See Jacob 2:29-33

¹⁴² Jacob 2:29-33

¹⁴³ cf. I Nephi 3:183-203

that looketh upon a woman to lust after her, shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not, he shall be cast out. Thou shalt not commit adultery; and he that committeth adultery and repenteth not, shall be cast out; but he that hath committed adultery and repents with all his heart, and forsaketh it, and doeth it no more, thou shalt forgive; but if he doeth it again, he shall not be forgiven, but shall be cast out. (D&C 42:7d,e; see also D&C 63:5)

*And again, I say unto you, that whoso forbiddeth to marry, is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man; **wherefore it is lawful that he should have one wife**, and they twain shall be one flesh, and all this that the earth might answer the end of its creation; and that it might be filled with the measure of man, according to his creation before the world was made. (D&C 49:3a-c)*

The message is unequivocal. Monogamy, with a pure heart, is clearly the Lord's avowed will for marriage in His church in these latter days just as it was in the beginning. Note further that this instruction is not just for priesthood.

THE GIFT OF REPENTANCE

Repentance is a gift granted by God, not something that can be mandated or legislated, e.g. by requiring certain acts or actions.¹⁴⁴ Repentance involves a change of heart brought about by the workings of the Holy Spirit in a person's life (or in a group of peoples' lives).¹⁴⁵ It involves a change in direction towards Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁶ Any action that leads to further sin against God cannot be construed as repentance or as constituting an act of repentance. Any such action is an act of further rebellion against the Lord.

Therefore, divorcement in a polygamous family does not necessarily constitute repentance, especially because of the possible covenants involved. I say necessarily because there may be cases in which a lawful union may or may not have been established under the governing laws of the respective land or culture before the gospel was declared unto those so involved. Therefore, dissolving a relationship may very well constitute a part of someone's repentance towards the Lord. Hence, we have been given the command to call upon the Lord to obtain wisdom and guidance in all such matters.

In many cases, our actions or the consequence of our actions simply cannot be undone; hence God's call to us to repent and seek forgiveness. If we could set things aright by simply undoing what we have done wrong, where would be the need for repentance and forgiveness? Repentance involves much more than attempting to fix things by undoing them. It often involves following through with obligations and meeting our responsibilities, as opposed to attempting to abort them – similar to turning to abortion to resolve pregnancy, which does not constitute repentance but murder.

Summed up, repentance comes of obedience to God in accordance with His will and wisdom. It comes by keeping God's commandments through love, which the Apostle John assures us are not grievous.¹⁴⁷ Stated another way, repentance comes through being reconciled to God's will

¹⁴⁴ cf. Alma 10: 30 with Acts 11:18 & II Timothy 2:25

¹⁴⁵ e.g. Mosiah 2:1-6 & 3:1-3

¹⁴⁶ cf. Alma 17:39

¹⁴⁷ I John 5:1-3 with John 14:15-18

(not our will or the will of the flesh and the devil).¹⁴⁸ If our repentance is not based on such principles as found throughout the scriptures, then it is a dead work and profits us nothing.

SEARCH THE PROPHETS

To maintain a right perspective on any and all issues facing the church we must search and understand the words of the Lord's prophets.¹⁴⁹ We are commanded especially to search the words of the prophet Isaiah contained in the Bible and Book of Mormon.¹⁵⁰

*Behold what the scriptures saith: Man shall not smite, neither shall he judge; for judgment is mine, saith the Lord; and vengeance is mine also, and I will repay. And he that shall breathe out wrath and strifes against the work of the Lord and against the covenant people of the Lord, which are the house of Israel, and shall say, we will destroy the work of the Lord and the Lord will not remember His covenant which he hath made unto the house of Israel, the same is in danger to be hewn down and cast into the fire; for the eternal purposes of the Lord shall roll on until all His promises shall be fulfilled. **Search the prophecies of Isaiah**...and as the Lord liveth, He will remember the covenant which He hath made with them. (Mormon 4:25-28)*

If our decisions and actions, including our resolutions, are not consistent with the eternal purposes and plan of God, i.e. as manifest by His works and His covenants, we will be in danger of the fire that awaits those who *abuse* the laws of God.¹⁵¹

While preparing this study (on a righteous response to polygamy in the mission field) I have been admonished to search the words of Isaiah as well as to call attention to the Lord's command to search the words of Isaiah. Isaiah's words convey a proper context, a proper perspective, and a proper relationship between: 1) God's covenants with the house of Israel, 2) His judgments upon them, and, 3) His mercies towards them for the Holy One of Israel's sake. Further, Isaiah's prophecies pertain to the work that we have been called to in these the latter days for fulfilling the covenants of the Lord. We would be wise, then, to search out what the words of Isaiah have to say about polygamy and its relation to the work of the Lord.

According to Isaiah's prophecies, where does polygamy and its resolution fit in with the Lord's covenants and commandments, and the fulfillment of the same? It does not prominently appear in the book. (Remember, wresting the scriptures brings destruction.¹⁵²)

ON DIVORCEMENT FROM "STRANGE" WIVES AND DEALING POLYGAMY

In Ezra and Nehemiah we read of how the Lord's servants had the children of Israel put away their "strange" wives.¹⁵³ This was done to keep them from turning away from God unto serving false gods.¹⁵⁴ This purging was *not* done because of polygamy.¹⁵⁵ These "strange" wives had

¹⁴⁸ cf. Acts 5:32, II Corinthians 10:3-6, Hebrews 5:9, etc. with II Nephi 13:7-15 & Moroni 8:29; see also II Corinthians 5:20 & II Nephi 7:41-44

¹⁴⁹ III Nephi 10:32 with II Timothy 2:15 & 3:16,17; cf. Alma 12:4-5

¹⁵⁰ III Nephi 9:47, 10:26-32 with Mormon 4:25-27; cf. D&C 42:5

¹⁵¹ cf. Mormon 4:62

¹⁵² II Peter 3:16 & Alma 10:17

¹⁵³ Ezra 9:1-10:44 & Nehemiah 13:23-31; cf. I Peter 3:1,2

¹⁵⁴ I Kings 11:1-11,29-40 with Nehemiah 13:26,27

come from different nations which the house of Israel had been commanded to drive out of the land God promised unto them. The prior inhabitants were evil in God's sight because of their wicked ways and worship of idols, so He had them evicted.¹⁵⁶

As the covenant people of the Lord, the children of Israel were to separate themselves from these people and their idolatrous practices.¹⁵⁷ But they did not keep the commandments of God. In so doing they broke the covenant the Lord had made with them in Horeb under the leadership and ministry of Moses.¹⁵⁸

Should polygamy among peoples who have not as yet heard the gospel of Jesus Christ be handled in the same fashion God had the children of Israel deal with their "strange" wives, those which had come from the forbidden nations and cultures?¹⁵⁹ Should the record of Ezra and Nehemiah apply to people who are not as yet joined to the covenant people of the Lord? Should they be held to the same measure of accountability as the house of Israel, who knew the will of God but had not kept it?¹⁶⁰ Is it a just application of God's word to justify requiring divorce among those *who know not God* based on the proscription God gave unto the Israelites to not marry into wicked cultures?¹⁶¹

Remember, Ishmael¹⁶² in contrast to the sons of Jacob who were born of his wives' handmaids.¹⁶³ They were born of similar circumstances. Yet God handled each differently according to His covenants and His wisdom. God caused Ishmael to be sent away while keeping Jacob's polygamous family together.¹⁶⁴ And He has promised to gather the house of Israel again in these latter days according to His covenants.¹⁶⁵ In like manner, individuals considering joining the church through repentance and baptism should be taught the importance of faithfully keeping their lawful covenants and to seek the Lord's wisdom and will in all things so they might not sin against Him.

Consider again the fact that while God had the Israelites give up their "strange" wives, He did not have David send his wife Bathsheba and her son Solomon away.¹⁶⁶ Instead, the kingdom was conferred upon Solomon, his second born of this polygamous wife, whose marriage to David he had arranged through adultery and murder,¹⁶⁷ which are most assuredly abominable before God. God remembered David and blessed him and his household because David had kept God's commandments and statutes, repenting in all things *except* for his actions against Uriah,

¹⁵⁵ Remember the law had provisions for regulating plural marriage and for taking wives from conquered peoples; see Deuteronomy 20:16-18 & 21:10-14

¹⁵⁶ Exodus 34:12-17 with Deuteronomy 4:23-31, 5:3, 7:1-5, ...

¹⁵⁷ Deuteronomy 7:1-6

¹⁵⁸ Deuteronomy 5:2 (1-33)

¹⁵⁹ Remember also that Jesus Christ would later send His Jewish disciples into the whole world to teach, to baptize, and to gather everyone that believes His gospel into one sheepfold; cf. Matthew 28:17-19, John 10:7-18, Romans 2:28,29 & Acts 10:1-48 with Matthew 5:45,46

¹⁶⁰ Luke 12:56-57

¹⁶¹ On this point, I suppose that perhaps one could argue church members should not mingle with polygamous people. Would it be just to not affiliate with those who sinned ignorantly prior to coming under the covenant? Is such a view consistent with the great commission (Matthew 28:17-19)? Is it consistent with the vision Peter was given in Joppa about Gentiles coming to faith in the gospel (Acts 10:9-16)? Is it consistent with admonitions such as I Peter 3:1,2?

¹⁶² Genesis 16:1-20 & 21:7-19

¹⁶³ Genesis 30:1-13

¹⁶⁴ Numbers 10:11-36

¹⁶⁵ cf. Isaiah 11

¹⁶⁶ Samuel 11,12

¹⁶⁷ I Kings 1:28-40

Bathsheba's husband, for which God cursed David and his kingdom.¹⁶⁸

POLYGAMY AND BAPTISM

Nowhere in scripture, as far as I have been shown or have been able to determine, are people required to divorce from polygamous relations in order to be baptized, including those who are already married under civil laws and/or cultural or religious provisions (e.g. in Islamic states). As such, stipulating divorce as a condition of baptism involves setting a new precedent not covered by the scriptures. It opens the door for a host of temptations and complications within the church, some of which were explored previously in the *Second Consideration* and the *Third Consideration*.

On the other hand, allowing members of polygamous families to be baptized into the church raises many questions and concerns as well. Would others attempt to justify joining them in this abominable practice because they were allowed to become members without divorcing? How about their children; what if they too want to establish polygamous relationships? Should they be allowed to increase their polygamous family by adding more wives, etc.?

In response to my inquiries of the Lord as to how I should respond in this matter I received the following word of wisdom: the Lord may allow polygamous individuals to enter into the new covenant restored in these latter days and become members of the restored church, but it must be according to the direction of His Spirit of truth.¹⁶⁹ Notwithstanding, polygamous individuals must understand that they are not at liberty to perpetuate their old sinful ways.¹⁷⁰ While they are obliged to meet their former marriage commitments,¹⁷¹ e.g. to their children and spouses, they would not be at liberty to enter into additional marriage commitments or encourage others to enter into the practice of plural marriages.¹⁷² Otherwise, the Lord has testified that they will be cut off from His presence.¹⁷³

Reiterating a point made previously, repentance does not specifically involve attempting to undo or reverse that which has already been done, such as by divorcing (breaking a covenant) to end polygamy or by aborting a child to end a pregnancy, lawful or otherwise. Repentance does involve not repeating the offense, however.¹⁷⁴ Taking further wives would be repeating the offense; it would not constitute repenting of polygamy. Conversely, attempting to undo polygamy through divorce may further compound the sin (as discussed previously in the *Considerations Outlined* section).

Ultimately, in answer to all such questions on this subject, I am again constrained to encourage all those dealing with or contemplating dealing with this matter to call upon the Lord to gain wisdom and understanding in *all* things, i.e. in each and every case according to the commandment in D&C 46:3. Otherwise they open themselves to offending God and of coming under His condemnation.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁸ I Kings 11:34 & 15:4,5

¹⁶⁹ cf. D&C 52:4b-5b & 83:7 with Matthew 9:14 & Revelation 22:17

¹⁷⁰ cf. D&C 42:7d-e with Jacob 2:30-44; see Colossians 3:5-15

¹⁷¹ cf. D&C 111:4a with I Timothy 5:8; cf. Alma 19:5-20

¹⁷² cf. D&C 111:4 with Ephesians 4:28

¹⁷³ cf. D&C 42:7d & 49:3a-c

¹⁷⁴ I John 3:6-9

¹⁷⁵ D&C 63:15,16 with D&C 116:2, etc.

DO NOT KEEP COMPANY WITH FORNICATORS

Why must we call upon the Lord for wisdom with regard to polygamy (why isn't it an open and shut case)? Polygamy can be lawful in certain cultures, religion, and states, e.g. Islamic states (which make up a significant portion of the world's population, i.e. the missionary field). However, it may also be an excuse or a ploy to cover someone's fornication or adultery. In such cases we are not to *keep company* with those who are involved in *unlawful* practices. The Apostle Paul states:

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators; yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, no, not to eat. (I Corinthians 5:9-11)

As Paul explains, he is speaking specifically about fornicators in the church, not those in the world. Otherwise, because fornication and adultery are so prevalent in the world, as fruits of the flesh,¹⁷⁶ we would have to be taken out of this world in order to not keep company with fornicators. Yet we are not to keep company with those who are fornicators within the church. Specifically Paul states that we are not to sit down and eat with them; this most assuredly includes the sacrament table.¹⁷⁷ Jesus Christ plainly gave a commandment to this effect to His disciples in America.

And now behold, this is the commandment which I give unto you, that ye shall not suffer anyone knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily when ye shall minister it, for whosoever eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul. (III Nephi 8:60 [cf. Alma 16:138-141])

Notwithstanding this proscription, we must not err by forbidding them to meet with us in our meetings, including in our sacrament meetings.

Therefore, if ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of My flesh and blood, ye shall forbid him; but ye shall minister unto him and shall pray for him unto the Father in My name; and if it so be that he repenteth and is baptized in My name, then shall ye receive him and shall minister unto him of My flesh and blood; But if he repenteth not, he shall not be numbered among My people, that he may not destroy My people, For behold, I know My sheep and they are numbered; Nevertheless, ye shall not cast him out of your synagogues or your places of worship, for unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and repent and come unto Me with full purpose of heart and I shall heal them, and ye shall be the mans of bringing salvation unto them. Therefore, keep these sayings which I have commanded you, that ye come not under condemnation, for wo unto him whom the Father condemneth! (III Nephi 8:61-67)

And that we might not err, we must call upon the Lord for wisdom as to how to conduct all the

¹⁷⁶ Galatians 5:19-21

¹⁷⁷ I Corinthians 10:1-11:34

meetings of the church.¹⁷⁸ Jesus Christ's command to not forbid anyone from attending the meetings of the church is to keep us from coming under condemnation just as much as it is to let our Light, who is Jesus Christ, shine so others may repent and come unto Him (if they are willing). The companion command to pray for them is equally important to our salvation and the health of the church. If we fail to keep this command we can be overcome by their darkness.¹⁷⁹

And behold, ye shall meet together oft, and ye shall not forbid any man from coming unto you when ye shall meet together, but suffer them that they may come unto you and forbid them not; but ye shall pray for them and shall not cast them out; and if it so be that they come unto you oft, ye shall pray for them unto the Father in my name. Therefore, hold up your light that it may shine unto the world. (III Nephi 8:53,54)

Alma provides us with righteous counsel that is consistent with the instructions of the Lord. In dealing with those within and those outside the fellowship of the Lord's church, he admonishes the following.

And now I, Alma, do command you in the language of Him who hath commanded me, that ye observe to do the words which I have spoken unto you; I speak by way of command unto you that belong to the church. And unto those which do not belong to the church, I speak by way of invitation, saying, Come and be baptized unto repentance that ye also may be partakers of the fruit of the tree of life. (Alma 3:107,108)

Obedience and diligence in keeping the word of the Lord is to be preached to all peoples – those who are brothers and sisters in the church, and those who do not belong to the church. And to those outside the fellowship, an invitation is to be extended to repent and come unto Jesus Christ that they may partake of His goodness. To those who are part of the body of Christ, a command to be vigilant in keeping the covenants and commandments of the Lord.

POLYGAMY AND THE RESTORATION

Polygamy has been and continues to be one of the most divisive topics in the Restoration. Recently James Daugherty reported in the *Tidings of Zion*¹⁸⁰ that doctrine, particularly polygamy, was the dominant issue in the struggle between the LDS and RLDS churches for the devotions of the membership of the church following the death of Joseph Smith, Jr.

Much has been written on this topic from both sides, including many disputed facts and accounts, with little resolve in terms of a general consensus. This includes its origin and its importance to the many churches that sprang from the Restoration of the gospel.

Within the Reorganization, which he led for many years, Joseph Smith III had perhaps the strongest influence on shaping the stance of the Reorganization against the practice of polygamy. As outlined in his memoirs, the martyr's son strongly opposed this abominable practice and took action against it, including being prepared to bear testimony in the congressional halls of these

¹⁷⁸ D&C 46:1-4

¹⁷⁹ cf. Galatians 6:1,2

¹⁸⁰ Issue 84, p. 8

United States of America for the express purpose of bringing it to an end.¹⁸¹

According to his own account, the younger Joseph actively reviewed any and all evidence available to him concerning claims of his father's involvement in polygamy. He also willingly entertained all who attempted to convince him of the supposed virtues of its practice. None of the proponents of the practice, however, moved him to adopt it or to even accept the notion that it had a rightful place in the Restoration.

The struggles Joseph Smith III and the church faced in the early years of the Reorganization were monumental. They dealt with many issues on a seemingly continual basis by those who advocated and practiced polygamy. Today we, too, face struggles of monumental proportion. Attempting to address such issues as polygamy on our own will prove fruitless. We must rely upon the Lord to resolve all such matters equitably and righteously. As it is written, "*A false balance is an abomination to the Lord; but a just weight is his delight.*"¹⁸² Without God's wisdom actively guiding us, the fragmenting and scattering of the church is bound to continue.

We read in the Book of Mormon that the only thing that shall overthrow the church is the transgression of God's people.¹⁸³ Transgression involves misapplying or attempting to supplant the law and prophets with traditions [resolutions?] just as much as it does overt disobedience and rebellion.¹⁸⁴ As it was with the Nephites of old, so it will be with us: it is wickedness that has been and will continue to cause the church to fail in her progress.¹⁸⁵ In other words, we need not look any further than the church's own transgression and her members' wickedness to understand our present halted situation and condition.¹⁸⁶

The fact that polygamy has been¹⁸⁷ and remains a prevalent topic of controversy in the Restoration movement should indicate to us, I believe, that it is a crucial issue, even a pivotal or strategic issue yet facing the church. It is one that has and will continue to have great influence on the progress of the Lord's church and His work among us, among the Lamanites and all Israel, and in the world at large. It seems evident that because polygamy has had such an impact on the restored church, it must relate to matters of great importance to God (e.g. with regard to our obedience to His will and His purposes concerning marriage and the kingdom). Correspondingly, we should expect polygamy to be one of Satan's choicest tools for attempting to destroy the Lord's church.¹⁸⁸

We would be wise, therefore, to take great care in how we address polygamy. We must ensure that it is handled correctly and lawfully before the Lord. Otherwise we cannot expect to be found guiltless before Him when we are brought into judgment for all our actions and the results of those actions.¹⁸⁹

Again, wickedness can range from being overtly rebellious toward God and His laws to being overly zealous in defending Him and His ways.¹⁹⁰ Like Saul (Paul), it is easy to think that

¹⁸¹ Joseph Smith III and the Restoration, Herald Publishing House, Independence, Missouri, ©1952, pp. 222-236, 258-260, 344-351, 419-463, etc.

¹⁸² Proverbs 11:1

¹⁸³ Mosiah 11:166

¹⁸⁴ cf. Matthew 15:3,6, 23:10-35, etc.

¹⁸⁵ cf. Alma 2:17

¹⁸⁶ cf. D&C 102:1-3; see also I Nephi 3:219-237 with II Nephi 12:1-51

¹⁸⁷ e.g. D&C 111:4b

¹⁸⁸ cf. Mosiah 11:166 with D&C 90:6c,8d & Revelation 12:10

¹⁸⁹ I Nephi 3:33

¹⁹⁰ cf. Romans 1:18-32 with Romans 10:1-3

we are zealously defending God when in fact we are persecuting His Christ and His church.¹⁹¹ Misapplying God's word is as dangerous as ignoring it or defying it. Care must be taken, then, to not overemphasize one scripture at the expense of others. If the Lord would not excuse His disciples from saving their own lives by breaking His laws, should we expect Him to excuse us for things less than laying down our lives for Him, e.g. for breaking His laws to resolve issues of concern like polygamy?¹⁹²

Repentance and faith in Jesus Christ: these are the provisions God has given us for the health and healing of His church.¹⁹³ All else will fail to have a lasting positive result. We must make more than a superficial attempt to regulate the affairs of the church, e.g. by masking the polygamy problem through arranging for people to divorce so that they can be baptized. Like Alma's people of old, we must walk *circumspectly* before the Lord.¹⁹⁴ Preaching repentance and teaching the word of God, not our carefully framed resolutions, is required. This is what will establish the Lord's righteousness among us, just as it did among the Nephites and Lamanites of old.¹⁹⁵

IN SUMMARY, WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE?

Polygamy is most assuredly objectionable to those who hold to the plain and precious truths found in *the New Covenant, even the Book of Mormon and the former commandments*.¹⁹⁶ Notwithstanding the strong feelings and emotions that run very deeply regarding this abomination, however, we cannot take just any course of action we want in defending against it. Staunchly opposing polygamy without the Lord's supervision does not necessarily accomplish the righteous work of God in all cases.¹⁹⁷ Our convictions, as to what is right or wrong, do not give us the right to go outside the law of God in addressing matters such as polygamy.¹⁹⁸ Simply stated, we are not above the law. We must conform to the will of the Lawgiver by asking, seeking, and knocking and then obeying Him in all things.¹⁹⁹

As the prophet Micah testified, God *requires* us to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him in all matters.²⁰⁰ He judges us based on how we respond to His word and the way in which we judge others.²⁰¹ We can easily bring ourselves under His condemnation by failing to heed the Lord's instruction.²⁰²

It is critical, therefore, that we handle all lawful covenants appropriately and responsibly before the Lord. Remember, God said that He would prove us to know whether we will abide in the new and everlasting covenant.²⁰³ I believe He is proving us now as to whether or not we will be faithful in fulfilling His covenants with the house of Israel, a people who sprang from a polygamous family.

My hope and prayer in preparing this review has been to encourage our being led by the

¹⁹¹ Acts 22:1-10; cf. Matthew 25:32-47

¹⁹² cf. Matthew 16:27

¹⁹³ D&C 3:16,17

¹⁹⁴ Mosiah 11:146,147

¹⁹⁵ Words of Mormon 1:26,27, Alma 12:2-7, Alma 16:82, Helaman 2:164, etc.

¹⁹⁶ cf. D&C 83:8 with Jacob 2

¹⁹⁷ cf. Romans 10:1-3, James 1:19,20, D&C 52:4b-5b, etc.

¹⁹⁸ cf. Matthew 16:27

¹⁹⁹ cf. III Nephi 7:10-12 with D&C 46:3b

²⁰⁰ Micah 6:8,9 with D&C 46:3c

²⁰¹ James 2:13, John 12:48, Alma 19:78-80, III Nephi 13:1-6, Moroni 7:13-18, etc.

²⁰² cf. D&C 63:15,

²⁰³ D&C 95:3c; cf. I Peter 1:6-9 & 4:12,13

Lord's Spirit. As it is written, "for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."²⁰⁴ Mormon explains further that all those who are true followers of Jesus Christ are filled with the pure love of Christ, charity.²⁰⁵ Without His love, we cannot participate in the Lord's work, i.e. without it we are disqualified from the work.

*Behold, I speak unto you, and also to all those who have desires to bring forth and establish this work; **and no one can assist in this work, except he shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things whatsoever shall be intrusted to his care.** (D&C 11:4)*

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of His Son Jesus Christ, that ye may become the sons of God, that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him – for we shall see Him as He is – that we may have this hope, that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen. (Moroni 7:53)

To this end, then, may we be guided by this purifying and perfecting love of Jesus Christ. For without His love and direction, we can do nothing; but with His love we will receive sufficient strength to bring honor to His name, even unto bearing our heavenly Father much fruit through His Spirit.²⁰⁶

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit [see Galatians 5:22-23]; for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. (John 15:4-10)

²⁰⁴ Romans 8:14

²⁰⁵ Moroni 7:53

²⁰⁶ Galatians 5:22-25 & Ephesians 5:9 with John 15:1-8