

If Studying History Always Makes You Feel Proud and Happy, You Probably Aren't Studying History.

The history of Mormon polygamy is complex, challenging, and often deeply uncomfortable. It is also fundamental to understanding the origins of the church, its doctrines, and its culture today. This presentation provides an evidence-based timeline of how polygamy was introduced, revealing contradictions between public teachings and private practices.

"I saw [the quote] once and I thought it was really good... I have no idea where it started." - Mike, LDS Discussions



The Investigation Begins with an Unambiguous Condemnation.

The Book of Mormon on Polygamy.

Scriptural Text

>"Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord." (Jacob 2:24)

>"For there shall not be any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none... For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me." (Jacob 2:27-28)

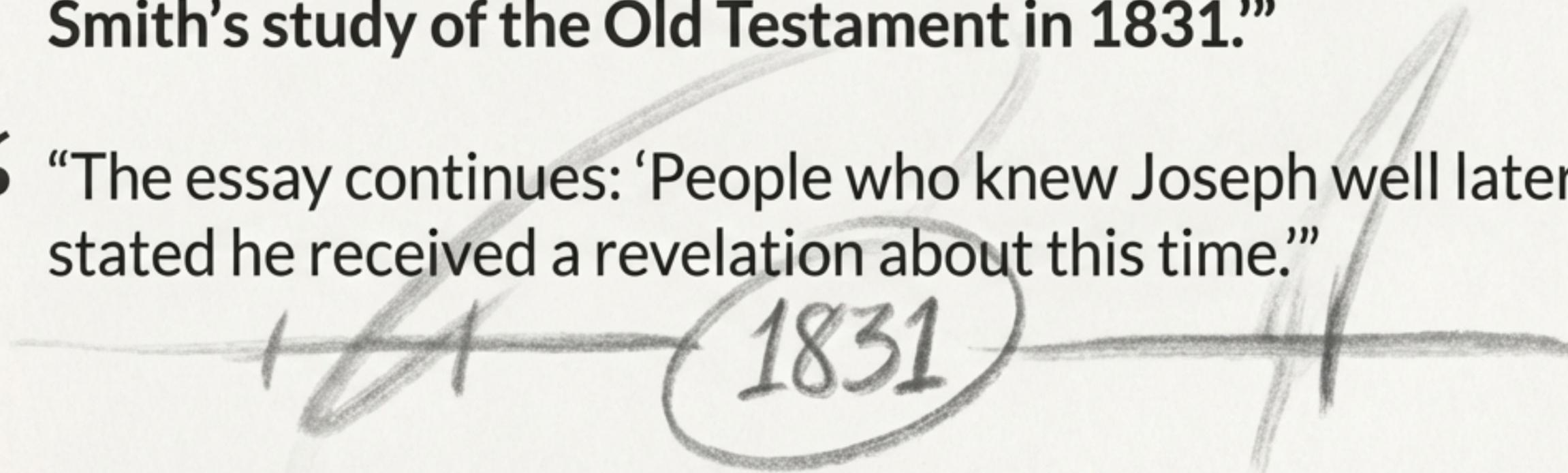
>"For if I will, saith the Lord of hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise they shall hearken unto these things." (Jacob 2:30)

Key Takeaways

- **Abominable:** The practice is unequivocally condemned as a "whoredom" and an "abomination."
- **One Wife Rule:** The law for the people is strictly one wife.
- **The 'Exception Clause':** The text provides a future potential loophole ("if I will... I will command my people"), which becomes critical later. This shows Joseph Smith's thinking at the time he wrote the Book of Mormon.

The Church's Timeline Points to an 1831 Revelation

- “The Church's essay on polygamy states: ‘The revelation on plural marriage was not written down until 1843, but its early verses suggest that part of it emerged from Joseph Smith's study of the Old Testament in 1831.’”
- “The essay continues: ‘People who knew Joseph well later stated he received a revelation about this time.’”

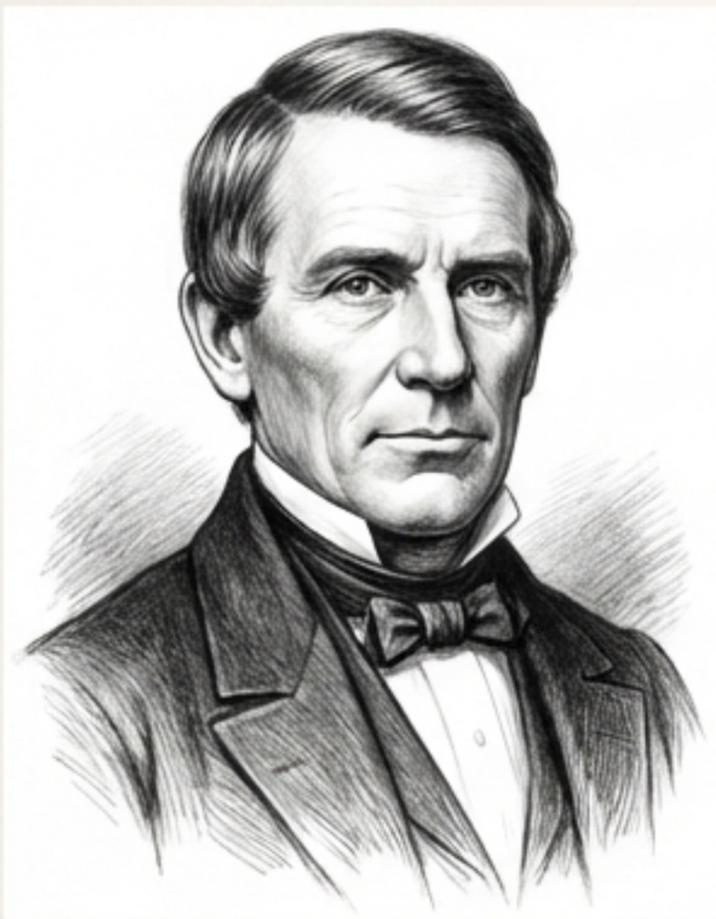


But what was this supposed 1831 revelation actually about?

The 1831 "Revelation" Was Not About Celestial Marriage

It was about marrying Native American women to make their children "white and delightsome."

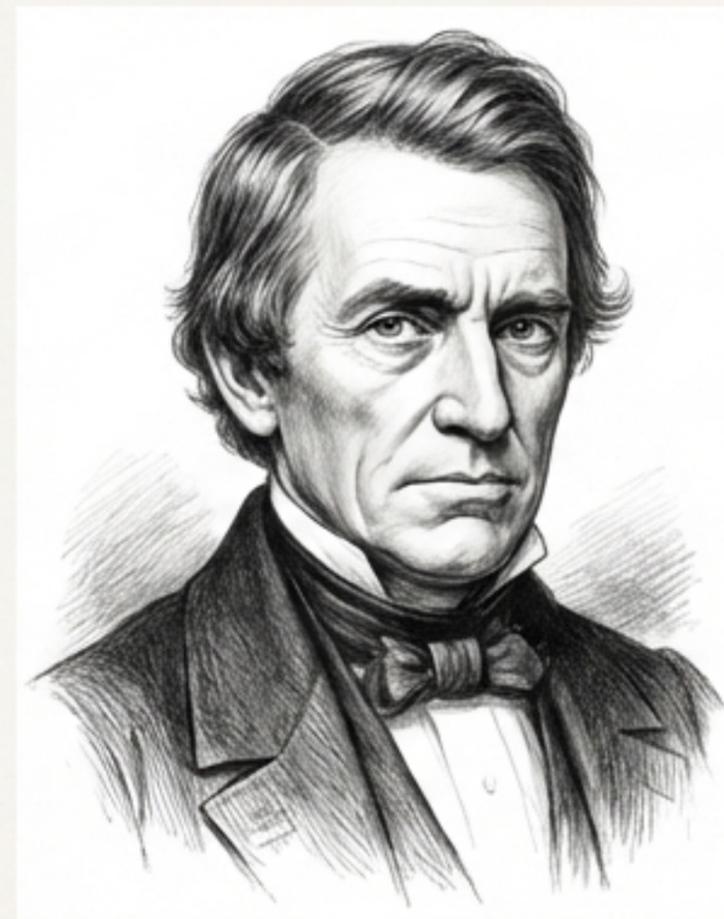
A Friendly Source (W.W. Phelps)



The one most valued will in this journal,
>"It is my will, that in
time ye should take unto
you wives of the
Lamanites and Nephites,
that their posterity may
become white, delightsome
and just..." *See also letter that in the journal
is set by concerning with the lovers of us the*

W.W. Phelps, a faithful member, recalled this instruction from Joseph Smith regarding a mission to the "Indians."

An Antagonistic Source (Ezra Booth)



A Public letter: profite, overreptor.
>"It has been made known
by Revelation that it will
be pleasing to the Lord,
should they form a
matrimonial alliance with
the natives..." *See also letter that in the journal
is set by concerning with the lovers of us the*

Ezra Booth, who had left the church, wrote about the same instruction in 1831, confirming the core directive.

This was not a revelation about eternal, sealed polygamous families. It was rooted in 19th-century racial ideas and missionary strategy.

In the Same Year, Official Scripture Commanded Monogamy.

While the Church now claims Joseph Smith was privately learning about polygamy in 1831, he was publicly recording revelations that taught the opposite.

Doctrine & Covenants 42:22 (Feb 1831)

“Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.”

&

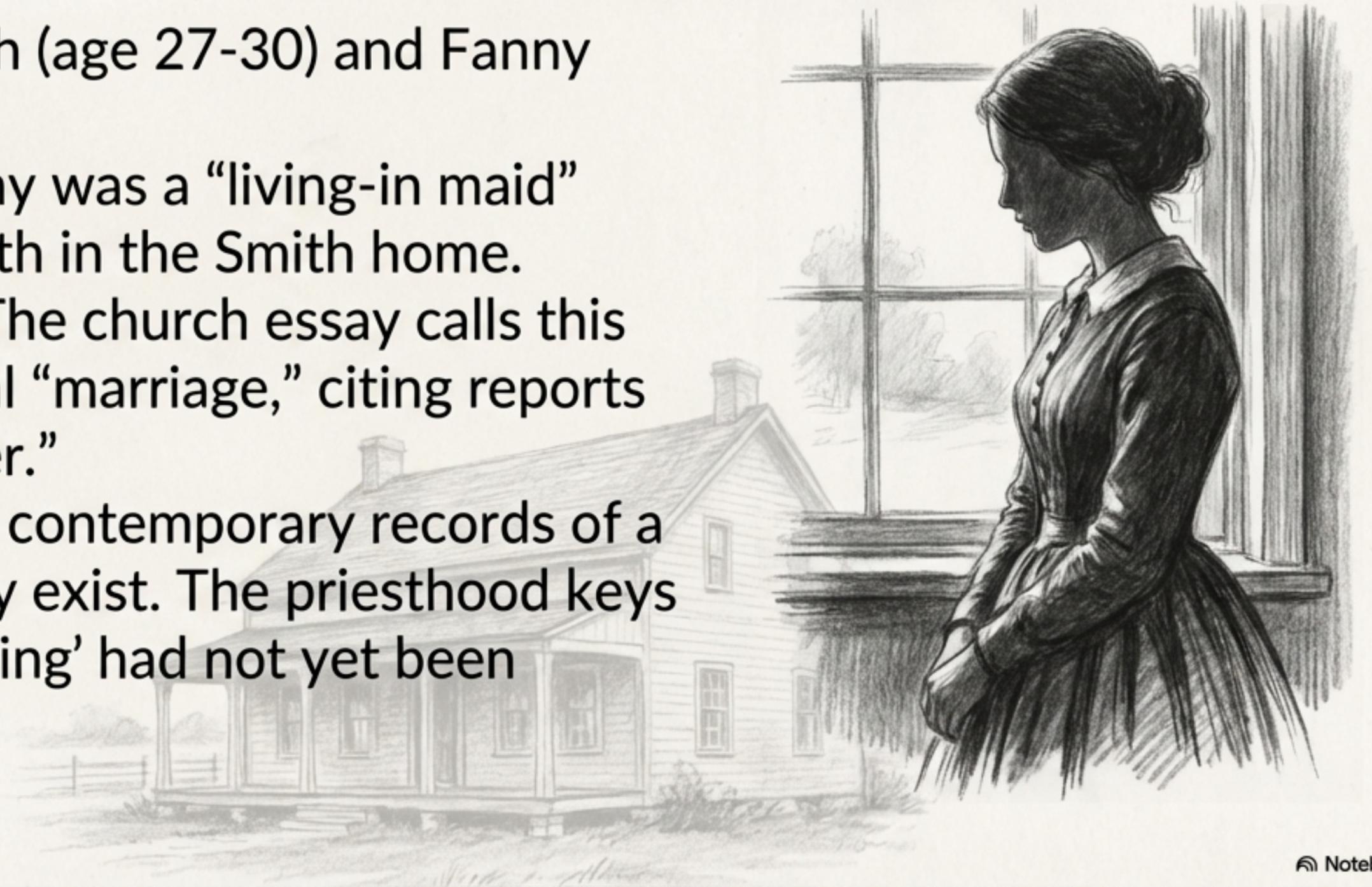
Doctrine & Covenants 49:16 (May 1831)

“Wherefore, it is lawful that he should have one wife, and they twain shall be one flesh...”

Joseph Smith edited these revelations in 1835. If he intended to allow for polygamy, he had a second chance to add an exception clause—as he did in the Book of Mormon. He did not.

Case File: The Fanny Alger Relationship (c. 1833–1836)

- **Who:** Joseph Smith (age 27-30) and Fanny Alger (age 16-19).
- **Relationship:** Fanny was a “living-in maid” helping Emma Smith in the Smith home.
- **Church Position:** The church essay calls this Joseph’s first plural “marriage,” citing reports from “decades later.”
- **Contradiction:** No contemporary records of a marriage ceremony exist. The priesthood keys later used for “sealing” had not yet been “restored.”





“A Dirty, Nasty, Filthy Affair.” Oliver Cowdery’s Reaction

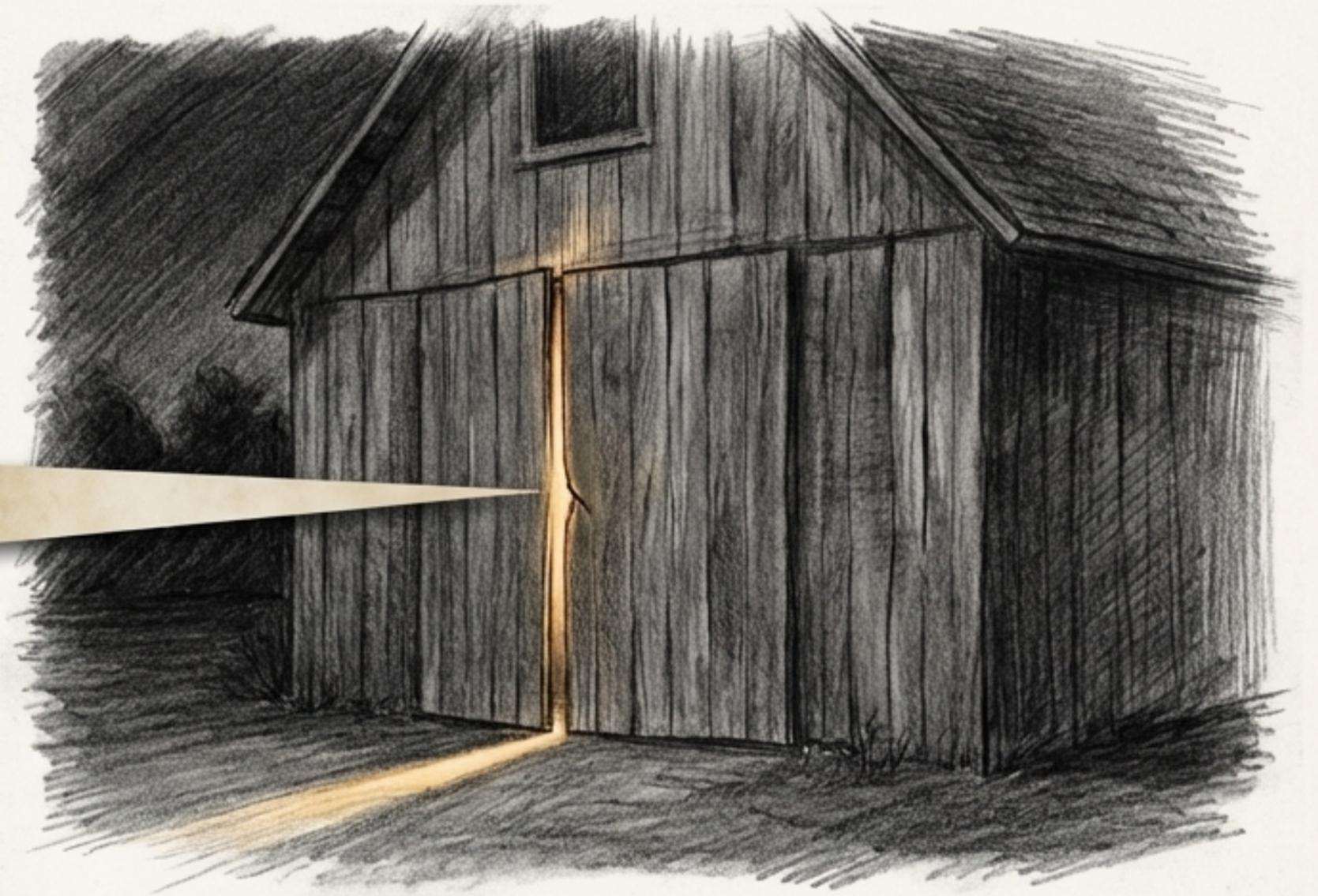
It was a dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Algers... I strictly declared that I had never deserted from the truth in the matter.

- Oliver Cowdery was the “second elder” of the Church and co-president. If a divine law of polygamy existed, he would have known.
- His description of the event as an “affair” demonstrates this was not viewed as a sanctioned marriage by Church leadership at the time.
- The conflict over this incident was a major factor in Cowdery’s eventual excommunication.

The Fallout: A Confrontation and an Expulsion

According to early Church member William McClellan, Emma Smith's suspicion grew.

"I heard that one night she missed **Joseph and Fanny Alger**. She went to the barn and saw him and Fanny in the barn together alone. She looked **through a crack** and **saw the transaction**. She told me this story too was verily true."



The Result

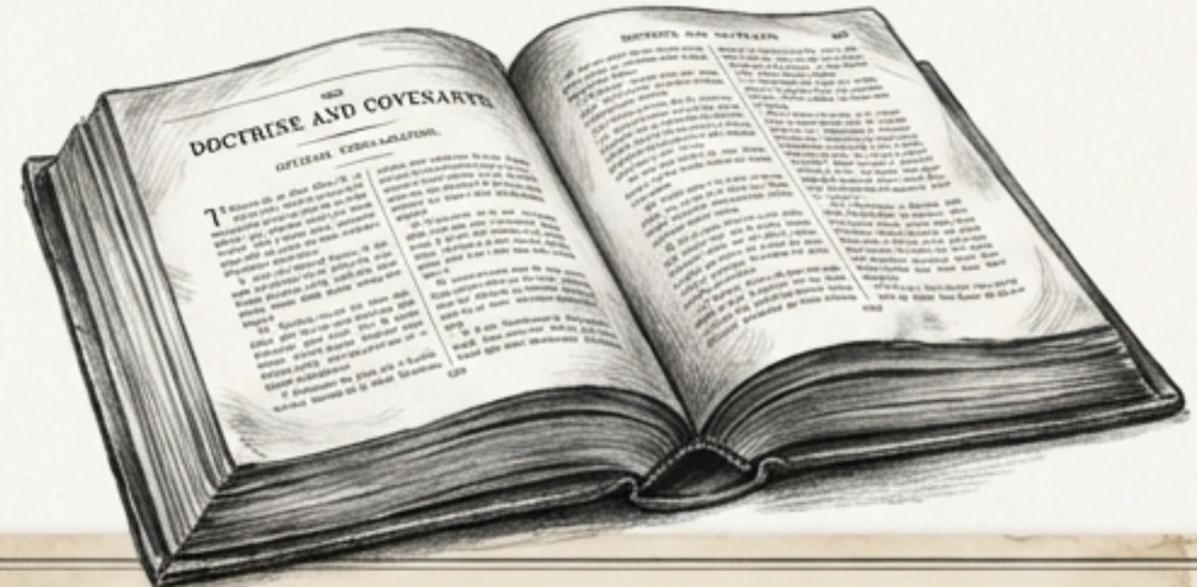
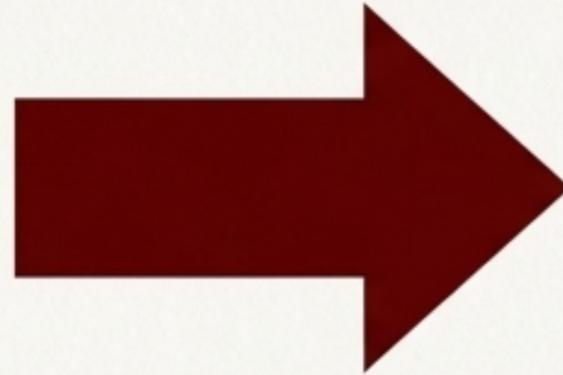
- Emma was “furious” and threw Fanny out of the house.
- The Church's essay describes this simply as a “separation,” omitting the volatile context of Emma's discovery and expulsion of Fanny.
- Joseph was forced to call Oliver Cowdery “at midnight... to come and endeavor to settle matters between them.”

In the Wake of Scandal, the Church Publicly Denounces Polygamy

With rumors swirling about Joseph Smith, the Church took a formal, public stance in 1835. This article on marriage was added to the Doctrine and Covenants.



Rumors



> "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..."

> "Faithful historian Todd Compton states this *“represented an effort to counteract scandal and perhaps to diffuse rumors of Fanny Alger’s marriage, possible pregnancy, and expulsion.”*”

The Next Layer of Complexity: Marrying Other Men's Wives.

Term: **Polyandry**

The practice of a woman having more than one husband at the same time. Joseph Smith was sealed to women who were already legally married to other living men.

The Church's essay vaguely states he was sealed to "a number of women who were already married."

11
polyandrous
wives

Historian Todd Compton



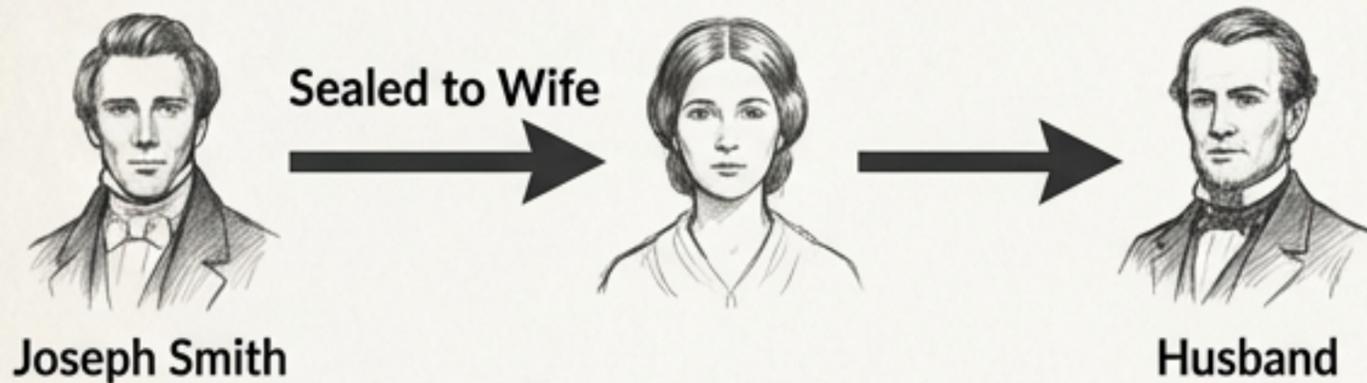
9 of the first 12 women
Joseph married in Nauvoo were
already married to other men.

Many of these women's husbands were faithful, active members of the Church, some in leadership positions. This was not about caring for widows or single women.

Was it Just About “Linking Families” for Eternity?

The Apologetic Argument

The Church suggests these sealings were a way to “create an eternal bond or link between Joseph’s family and other families within the church.”



The Counter-Evidence: The Law of Adoption

At the time, the Church practiced the “Law of Adoption,” where men could be sealed to other men as “adopted sons” for eternity.



Logical Question: If the goal was simply to link families, why not seal the husbands (like Heber C. Kimball) directly to Joseph Smith as adopted sons? Why was it necessary to be sealed to their wives and teenage daughters instead? Sealing the girls as “celestial daughters” would have also linked the families without preventing them from marrying men their own age.

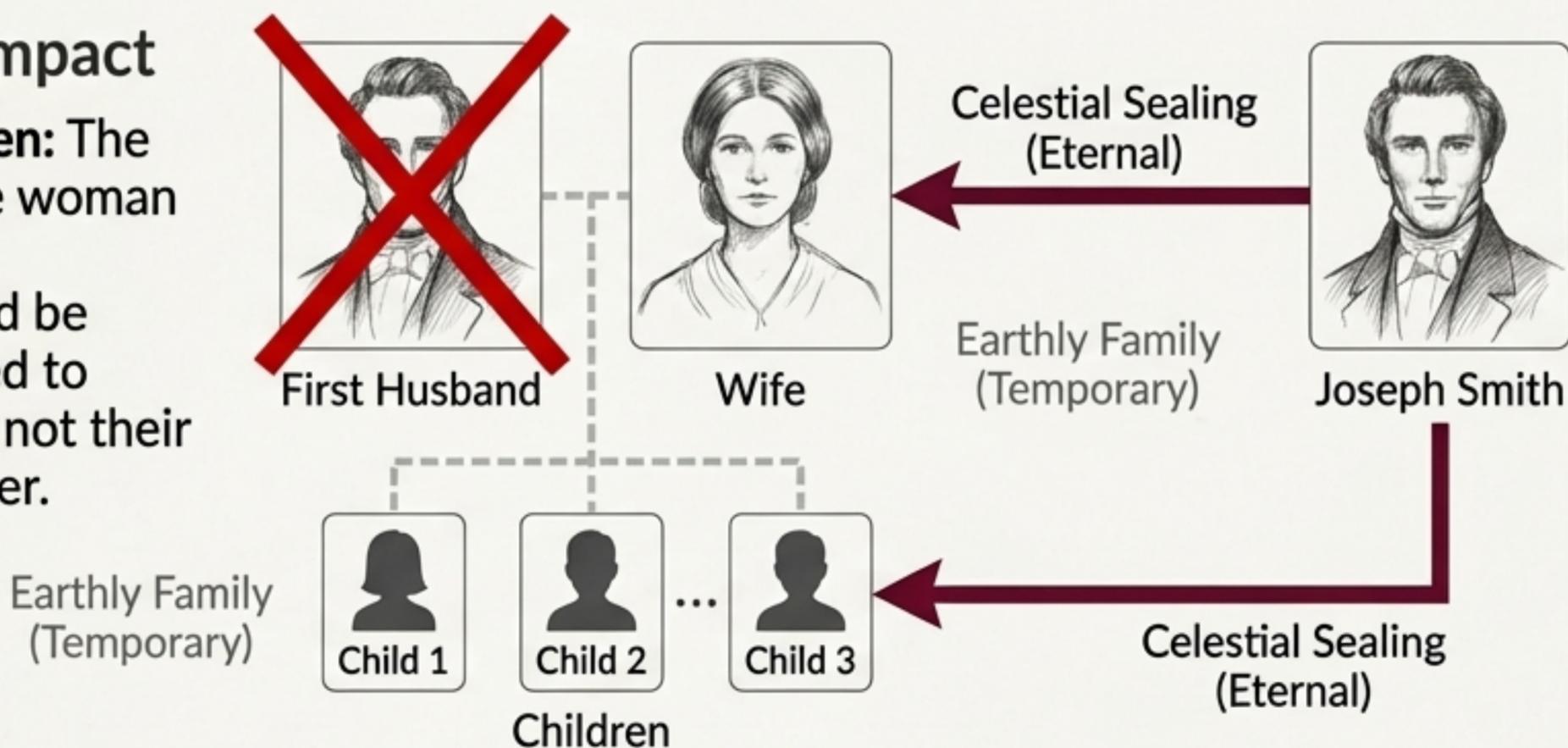
The “dynastic linking” explanation fails to account for why sealing to women—often involving secrecy and sexual proposals—was the chosen method over a non-sexual, male-to-male sealing ordinance that already existed.

The Eternal Consequences of Polyandry.

Under the doctrine of sealing, Joseph Smith's polyandrous marriages created massive problems for the eternities, particularly for the faithful first husbands.

Doctrinal Impact

Loss of Children: The children of the woman and her first husband would be eternally sealed to Joseph Smith, not their biological father.



Doctrinal Impact

Loss of Wife: The first husband would lose his wife for eternity. She would be Joseph's wife in the afterlife, tasked with "populating planets" with him.

The Core Problem: Even if the relationships were non-sexual on earth (a debated point), Joseph Smith was effectively taking the wives and children of other faithful men for the eternities, while those men believed they were following God's chosen prophet.

July 12, 1843: The Revelation is Finally Written Down

The Context

- This was not the start of polygamy, but a moment of crisis.
- Joseph Smith had already been **secretly married to over 20 women.**
- **Emma Smith** was aware of some relationships but was intensely **struggling** with the principle.

The Catalyst

Hyrum to Joseph:

If you will write the revelation, I will take it and read it to Emma, and I believe I can convince her of its truth.

Joseph's reply: *You do not know Emma as well as I do.*

DECEPTION IN THE DETAILS

The official Church history book *Saints* notes that Emma had "personally selected" a few wives, but omits that Joseph was already secretly married to two of them (Emily and Eliza Partridge) and had to perform a second, sham ceremony for Emma's benefit.

A 3,200-Word Revelation, Dictated from Memory.

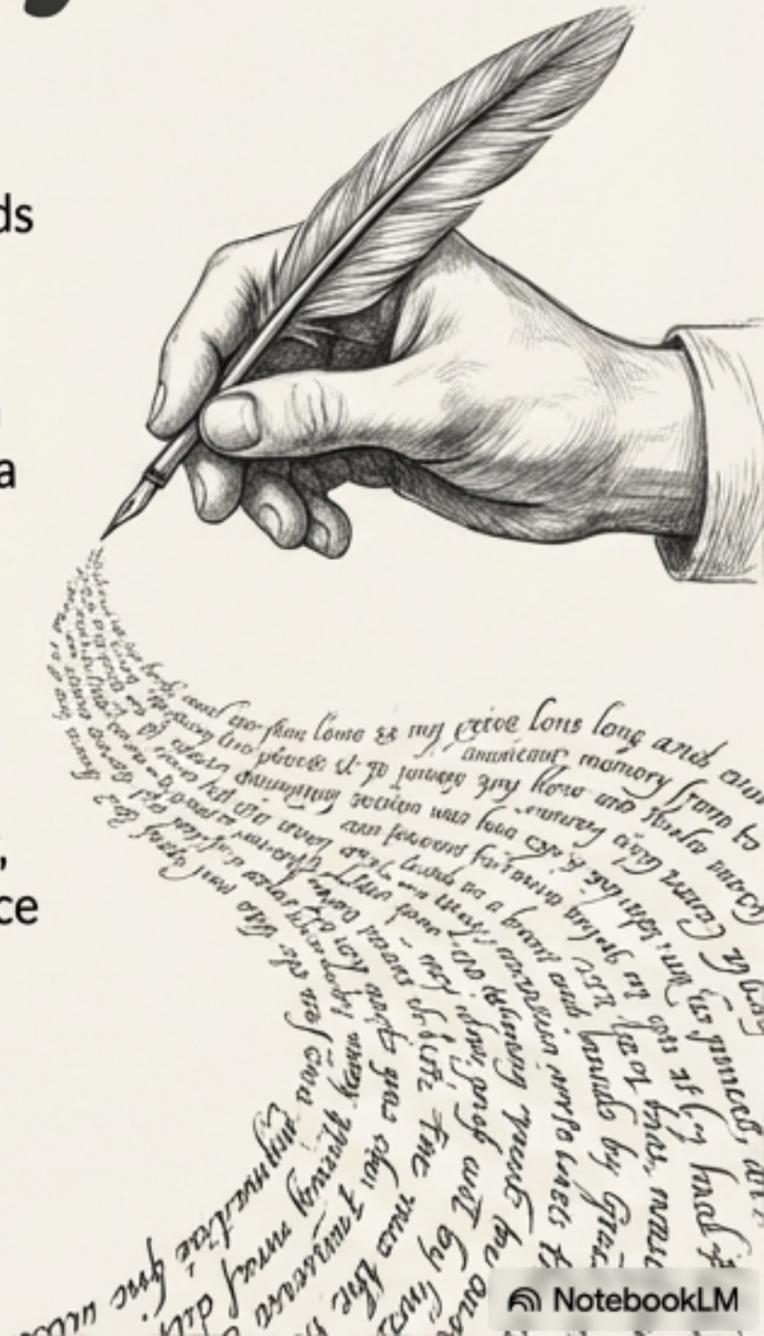
Hyrum urged Joseph to use the “Urim and Thummim” (seer stone) to receive the **revelation directly from God.**

Joseph replied: “...he did not need to, for he knew the revelation perfectly from beginning to end.”

— The Scribe’s Account (William Clayton)

The Implications

- D&C 132 is over 3,200 words long, dictated in the King James Bible style.
- This single dictation session was equivalent in length to a full day’s worth of Book of Mormon “translation.”
- This event demonstrates Joseph Smith’s capacity to produce large volumes of intricate scripture on the fly, without a stone or any source material. This ability is a central question in the debate over the Book of Mormon’s authorship.



The Timeline Reveals a Pattern of Contradiction and Escalation

Public vs. Private

A consistent conflict between public denouncements of polygamy and Joseph Smith's private actions.

Retrofitting Doctrine

Revelations and authority (like sealing keys) were often reinterpreted after the fact to justify practices already underway.

Evolving Practice

The practice evolved from racial ideas (1831) to affairs (Fanny Alger) to secret polyandry and marriages to young women.

This timeline is only the introduction. A full understanding requires examining:



- **The Text of D&C 132:** An analysis of the troubling theology of coercion and damnation within the revelation itself.



- **The Proposals:** A look at the patterns of persuasion, pressure, and secrecy Joseph used to convince women and girls.



- **The Happiness Letter:** A case study in spiritual manipulation.



- **Polygamy after Joseph:** How the practice defined the Church in Utah and its doctrinal implications today.