

POLYGAMY

Doctrine and Covenants 132:61-62, 2 Samuel 12:8

By Raymond White

Polygamy (or more properly, polygyny) is that taboo subject which many Mormons would rather just not talk about. That's unfortunate, really, because the subject deserves better, if for no other reason than, if it weren't for polygamy, not a single one of us would be here on this planet. Oh, the world would still be populated with humans of course, but other humans, not us. Every one of us (9 billion and counting) can trace his or her ancestry back to some male who had more than one wife. And if that male had not been polygamous, then the human pedigree would be different, and over time, completely different. Some simple math will show this is true. To get a grip on the mathematics of genealogy, do a Google search on "ancestor paradox" or "pedigree collapse" and you'll soon understand that every single person who lived a few thousand years ago who had a surviving posterity is *your* ancestor, and an ancestor of the entire human race.

Also, the subject of polygamy should be of interest to us because of our natural concern for justice and fair play. Provocative questions include these: Is polygamy unfair? Is prohibiting polygamy unfair? And for Christians, is polygamy a sin? I mean a really bad sin, the kind of sin that would damn a man's soul to eternal hell?

I will tell you a true story that will illustrate that the answers to these questions are not as simple as we might wish. A missionary in Africa converted an African native to Christianity. But the convert had two wives. The missionary told the convert that it was a sin to have two wives, and in order to be baptized, he must divorce one. The convert agonized for days, but finally he made his decision. He kept one wife and divorced the other. He and his one wife lived happily ever after. The abandoned wife, however, in her despair, wandered off into the jungle and died. So I ask, how was righteousness served in this true story?

No, the missionary was not Mormon. But he could have been, because Mormons do not baptize polygamists, even in countries where polygamy is legal.

There is plenty of opportunity here for ethical debate. But it is not ethics, or morals, or philosophy that interest me (well, they do, but not here), it is the Bible that interests me. What does God have to say about this perplexing subject? And how did Mormons get tangled up in it?

[1] MORMONS AND POLYGAMY

Everyone knows that the Mormon church was originally polygamous, almost from its beginning. All of its early church leaders had multiple wives. The first seven Mormon presidents — Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilfred Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith, and Heber J. Grant — were all polygamists.

But where did Mormon polygamy come from? It came from this Mormon scripture:

Doctrine & Covenants 132:61 And again, as pertaining to the law of the priesthood — if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him; for he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else. :62 And if he have

ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, and they are given unto him; therefore he is justified.

And there you have it. Notice that in this verse polygamy is not a commandment, it is merely permission. There are three views about polygamy among Mormon circles: [1] The Fundamentalist view of satellite sects which believe God requires polygamy as “the principle” then and now. [2] The Orthodox view of the proper Mormon church which sees polygamy as intrinsically sinful but is tolerated by God and commanded by him under circumstances of extreme urgency, although it is never explained what such extreme urgency might entail. And [3] the middle view (my view) which holds that polygamy is *never* a sin per se but becomes a sin when it is illegal because Mormons believe in obeying the law even unreasonable law. But neither is it a commandment — it is merely allowed. Thus section 132 gives blanket permission but nowhere compulsion. That, I think, is the defensible position.

Some Mormons (and certainly Fundamentalists Mormons of whom the proper church insists there is no such thing) believe that section 132 commands polygamy. It nowhere does. Now there may have been a subsequent revealed commandment from God to Joseph Smith to practice polygamy as “the principle” but there is no such thing in any scripture, only permission. But that permission is important because it identifies polygamy as not a sin. And that is the biblical position as well, which is the subject of this article.

But before I move into that, what about this text, section 132? Where did it come from? And what’s to be done about it? Well, nothing is to be done about it. It’s discussion of polygamy stays, cast in concrete. Of all Mormon scriptures, this section, 132, is the most sacred and cannot be changed for any reason. Why? Because section 132 is the foundation of “the new and everlasting covenant” of marriage; that is, eternal marriage between a man and a woman in heaven. And therefore, this most sacred text simply cannot and never will be tampered with.

Some Mormons may have a secret wish to gut section 132 and remove all references to polygamy. But that is impossible because section 132 was born from Joseph Smith’s question to God about polygamy. The whole notion of eternal marriage was secondary. So eliminating the first, polygamy, would destroy the second, eternal marriage. And so, for better or for worse, Mormons are stuck with the polygamy wording of section 132. And I think that’s a good thing.

So, what about Joseph Smith’s question to God about Polygamy? Here it is:

Doctrine & Covenants 132:1 Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines — :2 Behold, and lo, I am the Lord thy God, and will answer thee as touching this matter. :3 Therefore, prepare thy heart... [in other words, brace yourself]

The answer that Joseph received was unexpected, and, I suppose, unwelcomed — the polygamy part that is. God’s answer had two parts: polygamy and eternal marriage. Mormons love eternal marriage, but Mormons are not keen on polygamy. But the two are joined.

Why the question? Why did Joseph ask God about polygamy?

One possible answer is that Joseph was concerned for Abraham’s soul. Was Abraham a sinning polygamist? And if so, how did he escape damnation? Or maybe he didn’t.

That possibility, that Joseph was concerned for Abraham's soul, is absurd. In Jesus' thinking, Abraham is the very definition of salvation (**Luke 16:22**). So that's off the table. Joseph was not concerned for Abraham's soul.

What had to be concerning Joseph was the contradiction he faced. He had been raised in protestant circles. Not quite a Methodist, not quite a Presbyterian, but hanging around them both. And he had been taught that polygamy was bad, bad, bad; a soul damning sin.

But how can that be when Abraham, the father of God's people, was a polygamist?

And there's this: Was Joseph's question purely academic? Did he just want to be doctrinally pure, wanting to understand, or did he have a genuine practical reason for asking?

Here's my suggestion. Joseph faced not an academic dilemma but a very real practical problem. He and his fledgling church were surrounded by very real polygamists whom he would very soon have to approach and attempt to convert; namely, native Americans commonly called Indians, or, in Book of Mormon language, Lamanites. Native American tribes were polygamous and Joseph could not ignore that fact or them. After all, they, the Lamanites, were the foundation of the faith Joseph had brought to the world, the subject of the Book of Mormon. Joseph needed to know precisely what God expected him to say to the Indians about this very issue: polygamy. And so, Joseph asked, and section 132 came to be. That's as good an explanation as any, I think.

[2] BOOK OF MORMON POLYGAMY

What about the Book of Mormon? What does it have to say about polygamy? Most Mormons believe that it says very little. And what it does say, in the Book of Jacob, is a denouncement of polygamy. In fact, neither is true. Jacob is not a denouncement, and the Book of Mormon has plenty to say about polygamy, if you know where to look. Let's start with Jacob.

Jacob 2:24 *Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord. :27 Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none.*

That seems clear enough. Polygamy is bad. Don't do it. But if polygamy were so bad and absolutely, irrevocably wrong, then it's hard to understand why Jacob also wrote —

Jacob 2:30 *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.*

So God leaves a backdoor open. He is saying that polygamy is generally bad *unless* he has a reason why he wants polygamy. Then polygamy is not so bad; in fact, it's good. God does that a lot; commands people to do the very thing he has prohibited. In other words, "do as I say unless I tell you otherwise," which prompts the question, how do we know when God is telling us otherwise? Suppose half our men are killed in a war. Would we consider that a statement from God to allow polygamy? Isaiah thinks so (**Isaiah 4:1**). What do you think?

And if the prohibition were absolute, then how can God "command my people" to do exactly the opposite? Well, to "raise up seed unto me." So, God has us break his commandment for expediency? Is that reasonable? I suppose it is. Or maybe it's not *really* a commandment.

And just what is God prohibiting anyway? Polygamy per se? Or something else? Let's go to Moses and find out just what it is about polygamy that annoys God.

Deuteronomy 17:17 Neither shall he [the king] multiply wives to himself, that his heart be not turned away,

What's wrong with polygamy? There's nothing wrong with polygamy but there is something wrong with harems. It's not multiple wives that God objects to, it's so many wives that the king's mind isn't on his work. If we look at polygamy that way then maybe we can better balance *Jacob 2* with *D&C 132* and not see them as flat out contradicting each other.

Now, are there polygamists in the Book of Mormon? I mean other than the unnamed villains of *Jacob 2*. Yes, there are. Let's begin at the beginning, the real beginning, the Jaredites.

Ether 6:20 And accordingly the people were gathered together. Now the number of the sons and the daughters of the brother of Jared were twenty and two souls...

So that great prophet, the brother of Jared, had 22 children. And that was when they first arrived and began forming their government; in other words, Jared and his brother were likely young. Who knows how many children the prophet had when he was old.

Humm. Do you believe the 22 were from one mother? It is possible. There are large families from a single mother. For instance, there is Christy Brown, the quadriplegic of the movie "My Left Foot." His mother Bridget had 22 children, 13 of them survived. And then there is Michelle Duggar who with her husband Jim Bob parented 19 children.

So, yes, it's possible that the prophet's 22 children came from one mother, but it is so rare and so unlikely that I don't believe it. And besides, they were young and just getting started.

One may argue that they lived longer. But that would be a flawed argument. No, they didn't live longer. Those super long lives that the Bible talks about were all before the flood. Jared lived during the Tower of Babel and their life spans were not exceptional.

This hints that the Brother of Jared was polygamous, as were others as we're about to see.

Ether 7:2 And he [Corihor] begat sons and daughters; yea, he begat thirty and one ... :12 And it came to pass that Shule also begat many sons and daughters. :14 ... Corihor had many sons and daughters. :26 And because the people did repent of their iniquities and idolatries the Lord did spare them, and they began to prosper again in the land. And it came to pass that Shule begat sons and daughters in his old age.

Corihor had thirty-one children. Obviously Corihor was a polygamist.

Shule was a polygamist too. That he "also begat many" means that Shule kept pace with Corihor. But Shule, in the end, upstaged Corihor in that he had children "in his old age," that must mean with young wives, because old wives don't have children. Now this was a result of their repentance and God's favor, therefore God approved of their polygamy. This concurs with my understanding of *Ether 6:20* — the Brother of Jared was likely a polygamist.

Ether 10:5 ... *Riplakish did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord, for he did have many wives and concubines, and did lay that upon men's shoulders which was grievous to be borne; yea, he did tax them with heavy taxes ...*

So Riplakish was one of those *bad* polygamists. But it's unclear why his polygamy was bad other than he was keeping a harem at the tax payer's expense.

And there is this —

Ether 14:2 ... *every man kept the hilt of his sword in his right hand, in the defense of his property and his own life and of his wives ...*

Were only the Jaredite kings polygamous, or were the rank and file males also polygamous? This verse says that polygamy was common: every man protected *his wives*. So polygamy was not a rare thing, it was a common thing.

Let's move on to the Nephites.

Mosiah 11:4 *And all this did he [King Noah] take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines.*

What's the point here? King Noah was a polygamist.

So what? The "so what" is that Alma the senior was also a polygamist. That's what it says. "And also his priests" means *all* his priests, not "except Alma."

Yes, but Alma was a sinner then. Then he got religion from Abinidi and became God's prophet. Well, okay, but what did he do with his wives? Did he dump them like Lorenzo Snow did? Or did he keep them like Joseph F. Smith did? The text doesn't say. What's the right thing to do? — especially since he had children by them, Alma the Younger by one of them anyway.

The author appears to want us to believe that Alma's polygamy is a non-issue — the book is quite silent about the matter. Maybe Alma just didn't want to talk about it anymore, or maybe he just didn't think it needed discussion.

My opinion? I think he kept his wives and lived with them in Zarahemla. But that's just me. What he did with them is open to speculation. That he had them is not.

Onward. Alma the Younger, that great missionary, had this to say to the people of Gideon.

Alma 7:27 *And now, may the peace of God rest upon you, and upon your houses and lands, and upon your flocks and herds, and all that you possess, your women and your children...*

Why did Alma the Younger use the word "women" instead of wives? Was he referring to all the women in each man's life, like sisters, mother, cousins? Not likely because the reference is to "your women *and* your children." So in the context these are conjugal women who bare children, and it is a plural.

Then why didn't Alma say "wives"? Because they are not just wives, implying that they were concubines as well, or Rabbinic pilegash (common-law wives), or maybe slaves. No other

conclusion satisfies the text. Alma, rather than cursing these men for polygamy as Jacob did, blessed them.

But, you may observe, to talk about men and their wives, does not necessarily imply polygamy. Not so. In this context, it is more likely that it means *each* man and *his* multiple “women,” all conjugal unions. (See *1 Chronicles 7:4* below.)

And here is a really good reason why that must be so —

Alma 10:9 And the angel said unto me [Amulek]... :**11** For behold, he [Alma] hath blessed mine house, he hath blessed me, and my women and my children and my father and my kinsfolk...

Here we have one specific man with multiple women with varying relationships (wives, concubines, slaves, whatever) and all conjugal — *with children*. And Alma blessed him, and them. Also note that Amulek was having conversations with an angel, so we ought not to doubt his righteousness. This was a good man.

There can be no doubt that Amulek was a polygamist. These women of Amulek’s were not scullery maids, unless they were scullery maids who gave him children which is possible. Further, Alma blessed these women, and there was nowhere a reprimand. God never said anything like: “Well, Amulek, you’re a good man but you have to give up your polygamous wives/women in order to be baptized,” which is what Mormons would say today. God required Alma to accept Amulek as he was, a righteous man who was polygamous who was ready to serve God as a fulltime prophet, *with his* “women.”

Now, the Bible.

[3] OLD TESTAMENT POLYGAMY: PRE-DIASPORA

We’ll begin with the pre-captivity epoch and start with one of the earliest hints of polygamy.

Job 27:15 ...*his widows shall not weep.*

How can a man leave widows (plural) if he doesn’t have wives (plural)?

Before we look at actual polygamists, let’s explore some rules for polygamy. My assumption is that if there are rules governing polygamy then that is strong evidence that polygamy was not forbidden.

Leviticus 18:17 *Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter...*

This rule forbids a man from marrying a woman and her daughter, which, by the way, Joseph Smith did do. I guess he didn’t spend a lot of time in Leviticus.

Deuteronomy 17:17 *Neither shall he [the king] multiply wives to himself, that his heart be not turned away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold.*

This rule forbids a king from building harems. If polygamy was forbidden, such a prohibition would be pointless, it would simply say, “neither shall the king nor any man have more than one wife.” *Multiply wives* clearly does not mean two wives, it means many wives, as in collecting cars. How many cars is multiple cars? Not two, but a dozen or so, enough to turn a king’s heart away. Thus a king with multiple wives has his heart on his harem and not on the important matters of state. The reason for the prohibition is not an issue of fidelity but an issue of keeping his mind on his work. For a king, his job is to run the country, not pander to his harem.

Deuteronomy 21:15 *If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the first born son be hers that was hated :16 Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the one of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn.*

This rule says that if a man has two wives, he might like one more than the other, but that does not permit him to disinherit the children of the less loved wife.

This is also true of a widower who remarries. He can’t give his children’s inheritance to his new sexy young wife and her children, his first children are protected by law. Maybe we should have such laws today.

Okay, now that we’ve seen a few rules governing polygamy, let’s look at actual polygamists.

Genesis 16:3 *And Sarai ... gave her [Hagar] to her husband Abram to be his wife.*

Genesis 29:28 *... and he [Laban] gave him [Jacob] Rachael his daughter to wife also.*

Abraham was a polygamist and Jacob was a polygamist. And thus the covenant family begins — with polygamy. That is how Israel became Israel: its twelve tribes, from twelve sons from one man, and from four women. If polygamy is a sin, the Bible knows nothing of it.

Judges 4:11 *Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses...*

Hobab, the father in law of Moses, was certainly not Jethro. This shows that Moses was a polygamist. He had two father-in-laws, therefore he had two wives. Of course Moses could have been widowed, but that was not the case. Ziporah married Moses early and she lived to a ripe old age. Moses was a polygamist.

Numbers 31:5 *12,000 soldiers (1000 from each tribe) :35-36 divided up 16,000 virgins (half of 32,000) .*

Obviously polygamy was happening. And unless we believe that all the 12,000 soldiers were unmarried men (which would be silly), then a *lot* of polygamy was happening. And certainly 16,000 is greater than 12,000 so some of the men (4,000 of them) doubled up.

1 Chronicles 2:46 And Ephah, Caleb's concubine...:**48** Maachah, Caleb's concubine.

Two concubines is polygamy. And this is Caleb, that great contemporary of Joshua.

Judges 5:30 Have they [Israel's army] *not divided the prey* [won the battle] *to every man a damsel or two?*

Part of the spoils of war: one *or two* women to each soldier. That's the deal. And again, it is highly likely that many of the soldiers were already married when they took their spoils.

Judges 8:30 And Gideon had threescore and ten [70] sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives.

This was not some evil Amalikite, this was Gideon, the hero of Israel, and God's man. How many wives he had is unknown, but he had a bunch. And they gave him seventy sons and who knows how many daughters.

Judges 8:33 And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god.

In case there was any doubt that Gideon was God's man, as soon as he was dead, the people turned from God again. In other words, while he was alive, Gideon was the keystone that held the true religion together, and no one, not even God, judged him because of his polygamy.

Judges 10:3 And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. **:4** And he had thirty sons...

This judge of Israel had enough wives to produce thirty sons and, no doubt, as many daughters, unless one is silly enough to believe that his brood really came from one woman.

Judges 12:8 And after him [Jephthah] Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel **:9** And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters, whom he sent abroad, and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons.

Ibzan had enough wives to produce 60 children. His sons, however, may have been monogamous, 30 girls for 30 boys. That's all that dad was willing to pay for. If they wanted more, they were on their own.

Judges 12:13 And after him Abdon the son of Hillel, a Pirathonite, judged Israel. **:14** And he had forty sons...

Polygamy is not an aberration. It is so common that it doesn't seem to need expounding or justifying. "Forty sons" does not need an explanation because it's obvious.

Ruth 4:6 *And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself [give Ruth a baby], lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.*

The only plausible scene here is that this near kinsman is married with children. If he married Ruth and they produced children, that would somehow mess up his estate. Not only would his wife be annoyed but his children would resent a new claim on the family inheritance.

Still, complicated or not, it was not forbidden. The offer was made, the kinsman just refused it.

Ruth 4:11 *And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses [that Boaz can marry Ruth]. The LORD make the woman [Ruth] that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem.*

This blessing to Boaz is that Ruth would be a blessing to him as Rachel and Leah were to Jacob. But people who hate polygamy believe that Jacob sinned by marrying the two women. But how can that be? Jacob's wives are the exemplar family used here to bless Boaz — *the LORD make the woman...like Rachel and like Leah*. Rachel and Leah were not God's curse to Jacob but God's blessing to him. Where is there sin in that? Polygamy is nowhere condemned in the Bible. Excessive polygamy is, as is excessive money and excessive wine, but never polygamy per se.

1 Samuel 1:1 *Now there was a certain man...Elkanah :2 And he had two wives...Hannah...and Peninnah...:19 And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife: and the LORD remembered her [she is now pregnant with Samuel]. :20 Wherefore...she bare a son and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.*

Elkanah had two wives: Hannan and Peninnah. And this family, far from being cursed by God for being polygamous, was blessed by God. It produced one of Israel's greatest prophets: Samuel. If Elkanah having sex with his polygamous wives was a sin, God was unaware of it.

1 Samuel 2:1 *And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.*

This does not sound like a woman who is grieving over her polygamous status. It never entered her mind to despair about her husband's polygamy. She did despair, but it was over her childlessness. Now that she has a child, she is blessed. Polygamy is a non-issue for Hannah.

1 Samuel 25:42 *And Abigail hasted, and arose and rode upon an ass, with five damsels of hers that went after her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife. :43 David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel; and they were also both of them his wives.*

When David married Abigail, that made David a polygamist because he was still married to Michal, Saul's daughter. Saul actually married her off to someone else (:44), but no text tells us if that had happened yet or not, or if David has received news of it. In any case, it is for sure that as far as David was concerned, Michal was still his wife, and he took her back at his first opportunity. And it's a moot point anyway because his marriage to Ahinoam settles the question: David was now a polygamist.

1 Samuel 27:3 And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Hezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife.

Not only does David have two wives, but they appear to be quite happy with the arrangement. Nobody is complaining and they are living together as a cohesive family.

2 Samuel 2:2 So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail Nabal's wife the Carmelite.

The author seems to want us to remember that David has two wives. Why he keeps mentioning this to us is not clear, except maybe he's pointing out that David's life is improving.

2 Samuel 2:2 And unto David were sons born...of Ahinoam :3 of Abigail...of Maacah :4 of Haggith...of Abital :5 by Eglah.

These six wives bore David six sons. David's life is going well.

2 Samuel 3:7 And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah.

Saul was also a polygamist.

2 Samuel 3:12 Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, Whose is the land? Saying also, Make thy league with me, and behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee. :13 And he [David] said, Well; I will make a league with thee [David agrees] but one thing I require of thee [David has a condition] that is, Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face.

Abner switched his allegiance. Whereas he had been Ishbosheth's general, he now wants to give the kingdom to David.

David now has six wives, but he can't get Michal off his mind. And why should he give her up? She was his first wife, the love of his life, and he paid a dear price to Saul to have her: he killed Goliath and a bunch of other Philistines, risking his life over and over, all for her. Then Saul ripped her away from David and gave her to another man, and that was a gross injustice. Now David makes his demand, *I will have her back!* It was his right, or so he thought.

2 Samuel 5:13 And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David.

There's not much to say about this. It's pretty clear. David has a harem.

2 Samuel 9:10 Ziba [Saul's servant] had fifteen sons...

And likely as many daughters. It's unlikely that he, Ziba, had them all by one woman. So the king's servants also are polygamous. It's not just a royal prerogative.

2 Samuel 12:8 And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

Another reference to David's polygamy — but that's a minor point. The major point in this verse is that not only is David a polygamist, which we already know, but that his polygamy has God's approval. And not just God approval, but God gave David his wives as gifts and would gladly give him more if the ones he had were not enough. So, if polygamy is a sin, an act of adultery, God sure has a strange way of objecting to it. Fact is, God doesn't object to it at all. So if God doesn't object, why should we?

2 Samuel 20:3 And David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them, but went not in unto them. So they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood.

This is a pretty rotten way for David to treat his ten concubines who were raped by Absalom. It wasn't their fault that they were raped. This pick-and-choose male privilege is the dark side of polygamy. Okay, if he didn't want them, why didn't he divorce them and let them get on with their lives? But this, turn them into nuns, is so unfair. Especially from the man who screwed Bathsheba!

1 Chronicles 3:1 ...the sons which were born unto him [David]...Amnon of Ahinoam...Daniel of Abigail...:2 Absalom the son of Maachah...Adonijah the son of Haggith :3 Shephatiah of Abithal...Ithream by Eglah his wife :5 ...Shimea and Shobab and Nathan and Solomon, four, of Bathshua :9 These were all the sons of David beside the sons of the concubines.

This is a list of some of David's wives. Michal is conspicuously missing. She is missing because she had no children by David and because of the perpetual hatred between them.

Bathsheba gets special mention. The others are noted for one son each but Bathsheba is noted for four. David seems to have a high regard for her — no doubt because he had paid such a high price to have her.

To David's credit, he was not a flake. Once he had made a decision, even though loving her was a wrong decision, he stuck by it. Once done, it could not be undone. By comparison, had

Amnon been as honorable as his father, he would have married Tamar, his half sister whom he had raped. But instead, he hated her as though it was her fault that he had raped her (**2 Samuel 13:15**). All of that led to the evils surrounding Absalom, and Amnon ended up dead. David, for all his faults, was a better man than Amnon.

1 Chronicles 14:2 And David perceived that the LORD had confirmed him king over Israel, for his kingdom was lifted up on high, because of his people Israel. :3 And David took more wives at Jerusalem: and David begat more sons and daughters.

No surprise here, except perhaps to note that God is not offended. David takes many wives *because* Israel is doing so well. If polygamy was a sin, God certainly would have said so by now.

1 Kings 11:3 And [Solomon] had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.

The implication is that Solomon did not sin by having a harem, he sinned because his harem consisted of foreign women. If these 1000 women had all been Jewish, then God might have been okay with that. But Solomon sought the variety and that was his undoing.

Song of Solomon 1:4 Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.

This female author has to be one of king Solomon's wives — the plural pronoun “we” is pretty conspicuous. And she shows not a hint of jealousy towards the others. And they are not “groupies” like today's fickle girls who just want to get back stage with the latest celebrity for a quickie. Why are these not fickle girls? Because “the upright love thee.” She is claiming that she and the others who love this man are good women (“upright”). I don't think groupies qualify, or would even wish to be considered “upright.”

Song of Solomon 3:11 ...in the day of his espousals...

Plural for multiple marriages.

1 Chronicles 4:5 And Ashur the father of Tekoa had two wives, Helah and Naarah.

1 Chronicles 4:27 And Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters.

With 22 children, it's highly likely that Shimei was a polygamous.

1 Chronicles 7:4 ...they had many wives and sons.

Does this mean that they all, collectively, had many wives and so had many sons? That's an impossible meaning. It can only mean they *each* had several wives and therefore many sons.

1 Chronicles 8:8 *And Shaharaim begat children in the country of Moab, after he had sent them away; Hushim and Baara were his wives. :9 And he begat of Hodesh his wife, Jobab, and Zibia, and Mesha, and Malcham.*

Shaharaim had three wives: Hushim and Baara and Hodesh.

1 Chronicles 25:5 *All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to lift up the horn. And God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters.*

It is unlikely that seventeen children came from one woman. And note that Heman was a seer, and a polygamist blessed by God.

2 Chronicles 11:18 *Rehoboam took him Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David to wife, and Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse. :20 And after her he took Maachah the daughter of Absalom... :21 And Rehoboam loved Maachah the daughter of Absalom above all his wives and his concubines: (for he took eighteen wives, and threescore concubines; and begat twenty and eight sons, and threescore daughter.) :23 ...and he desired many wives.*

So now the third generation of the Davidic dynasty — first David, then Solomon, and now Rehoboam,. And Rehoboam also was a polygamist. I'll point out that when the kingdom split, the northern tribes became entirely idolatrous while the southern tribes, Rehoboam's tribes (Judah and Benjamin), continued their temple worship of the true God. Thus we ought to class Rehoboam as one of the "good" kings — he never turned to idolatry, he just had a lot of wives.

2 Chronicles 13:21 *But Abijah waxed mighty, and married fourteen wives, and begat twenty and two sons, and sixteen daughter.*

Abijah was a good king, no one can argue against him. This verse intentionally drives home the point: "*But Abijah* — (as opposed to his enemy Jeroboam who God destroyed) — *waxed mighty and married fourteen wives.*" Abijah's victory was not just that he won the war and defeated his enemy, but that his enemy lived a ruined life while he, Abijah, had a great life and married fourteen wives. In other words, rubbing Jeroboam's nose in it. The evidence that he lived a great life is his wives and children. Like it or not, that's what the Bible says.

2 Chronicles 21:17 *And they came up into Judah, and break into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king's house, and his sons also, and his wives...*

This polygamous king is Jehoram who was Judah's first truly rotten, evil king. So he certainly didn't give polygamy a good name.

2 Chronicles 24:3 *And Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he begat sons and daughters. :16 And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God, and toward his house.*

No one can detract from this great priest, Jehoiada. He ended the evil reign of Athaliah and put the righteous king Joash on the throne. Jehoiada was at all times right with God and he was a polygamist. There is no mention of his polygamy as a negative. He was a good man who risked everything for God and country.

1 Kings 20:3 Thy silver and thy gold is mine; thy wives also...

The king of Syria, Benhadad, waged war against Israel and threatened Ahab, the king of Israel. Among the things he threatened to take from Ahab was his harem. Of course, whatever Ahab had and did, does not impress us because of the rotten sort a man he was. But still, that there is no special note of it, just this passing mention, indicates that for a king in Israel to have a harem was considered no big deal. Nobody cared, and apparently, not even Jezebel who probably enjoyed her own Baal “worshipping” parties, and maybe her own quality time with her husband’s harem.

Isaiah 4:1 And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.

Want a justification for polygamy? War decimates men, and when the war is over, what are the war-widows supposed to do? When there is such a surplus of women, why would we insist that polygamy is evil? Isaiah makes no such judgment.

Now we arrive at the last kings of Israel.

2 Kings 24:15 And he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king’s mother, and the king’s wives...

Jehoiachin, the second to the last king, was a polygamist.

Jeremiah 38:22 And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah’s house... :7 Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king’s house...

And finally, Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, he also was a polygamist. These women must be Zedekiah’s wives. This is evidenced by the eunuchs. Eunuchs were kept for one purpose: to tend to the harem. Harems needed men around to help, but men that lacked the capacity to violate the harem.

The entire Davidic dynasty, from beginning to end, good men and bad, were all polygamous.

[4] OLD TESTAMENT POLYGAMY: DIASPORA AND AFTER

But the Jewish kings weren’t the only ones. In the Diaspora, we are not surprised to learn that gentile rulers were also polygamous.

Daniel 5:2 Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. **:3** Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them.

Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, was a polygamist.

Esther 2:3 And let the king [of Persia] appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them.

It is no secret that the kings of Persia kept harems, and Ahasuerus had his own. The *house of the women* is where the women of his harem lived. When Esther married this man, she married into polygamy. But she did, however, get the top spot, queen of all Persia.

Esther 2:14 ...the king's chamberlain which kept the concubines...

That cinches it. Ahasuerus had a harem of concubines, and Esther married him.

But let's return our attention to the Jews. When the Diaspora was over (after 70 years of exile) and the Jews returned to their homeland, what about polygamy then? We do know that the Jews, given a second chance, turned completely away from idolatry and child sacrifice, and applied their devotion entirely to God. But what of polygamy? Was that gone too? It was not.

In the post-Diaspora portion of the Old Testament, there is no mention of polygamy that I could find. But that doesn't mean that Jews were not polygamous, it just means we have to find other sources.

Josephus wrote in the first century that the "ancient practice among us to have many wives at the same time" continued to his current day. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII, 1, § 2.

Justin Martyr wrote in the second century that Jewish men were allowed to have 4 or 5 wives. *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, §134.

Suffice it to say, Jewish polygamy continued through and beyond the Diaspora, up to the time of Christ and later, even past the Roman conquest of Jerusalem.

[5] NEW TESTAMENT POLYGAMY

Matthew 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

If Jesus intended to override the law's tolerance of polygamy, he certainly would have said so. He didn't. Instead, he went out of his ways to put people at ease — he was not intending to change the law.

Matthew 19:29 *And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

If you lose your wife for Jesus, you get a hundred in heaven. But, you might argue, I don't want 100 fathers or 100 mothers, why would I want 100 wives? So this verse must be figurative.

I'll argue back, I think I *do* want 100 fathers: my father, my paternal grandfather, my maternal grandfather, my great-grandfathers, and so on. And my mother and grandmothers and so on. I mean that's why we do genealogy, isn't it? So, why should I not take this verse literally?

1 Timothy 3:12 *Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife...*

Titus 1:5 *...and ordain elders...:6 If any be blameless, the husband of one wife...*

These are the verses that Christians typically use to condemn polygamy, pointing out that deacons and elders should have one and only one wife.

Back in collage, I took a debate class. The instructor gave us an excellent example of what not to do when presenting evidence. He pretended there was a barrel of apples in front of him, and said, "These apples are rotten. I'll show you." He picked up an imaginary apple and said, "Ahah! There's a worm in this apple. See? These apples are rotten!" Then he asked us, "What's wrong with that argument?" None of us knew. Then he proceeded. "What's wrong with that argument is that worms will not eat rotten apples." Bingo! "Do not," he said, "give evidence that proves that your opponent is correct."

And that is exactly the mistake that anti-polygamy people make when they appeal to these two verses to make their point. These two verses, far from proving that polygamy is a sin, prove exactly the opposite, that it is *not* a sin. The anti-polygamy argument fails for the simple reason that it asks church leaders *in particular* to be monogamous and not other Christians.

Here is precisely what these verses are saying: If you're going to be a leader in the church, a deacon or an elder, you should have only one wife, but all other Christians can have two or more wives. Therefore, this verse, instead of proving that polygamy is a sin, proves exactly the opposite, that polygamy is *not* a sin. At worst, polygamy is a social embarrassment and therefore something that church leaders should not be doing.

Paul is telling Timothy and Titus don't ordain Christians who are polygamists. He is not saying excommunicate them, as Mormons and all Christians do today which is atrocious.

This is the proper moment to mention that there are many Bible scholars who believe that the three pastoral epistles were not authored by Paul but by someone else. The reason they believe that is because these pastoral epistles have a different writing style then the undisputed Pauline epistles. I'm not saying that's true (there are capable scholars on both sides), but if that is true, then the anti-polygamy argument of Timothy and Titus vanishes. I'm not making that claim, I'm just being thorough and needed to mention it.

1 Corinthians 7:2 *...let every woman have her own husband.*

1 Corinthians 11:11 *... neither is the woman without the man in the Lord.*

A little math here please. Ah, there are more women than men. And that is true at every age. So how does Paul expect every woman to have her own husband? It can't be done, unless we allow polygamy. With polygamy, every woman who wants to be married can be married. Without polygamy, many women must do without.

[6] MORAL HIGH GROUND

Which has the moral high ground? Monogamy or Polygamy? I think that is the wrong question and the wrong point. The right point is that they both have a moral high ground over philandering. There are far too many men who consider themselves to be alpha-males because they are good at seducing many women. That is not what an alpha-male is, a man who uses and abandons women. An alpha-male is a man who, when he takes a woman, keeps her — not by force, not slavery, not rape, but by love and commitment. That may be one woman, monogamy, which is the norm, or several, polygamy. But in either case, what defines him as an alpha-male is his determination to stay put and remain true to his commitments; that is, marriage or marriage.

I read last week (December 2014) that a male actor, a well known celebrity, left a night club with forty groupy women in tow. That's not an alpha-male, that's not even a polygamist. That's an abuser of women who has no concept of what it means to be a man.

The irony is that his behavior is legal and even praised, whereas if a man wants to marry and be true to two women, *that* is illegal and is scorned as unfair to women. Sorry, but I don't get it. It is the polygamy that ought to be legal. Take what you want, okay, I get it, but keep what you take. And ladies, if you want to share a man, I mean as a life time partner, why should the law prohibit that? Of course, ladies, if all you want is one-night-stands, that is legal, but, really, don't you want better? I mean, at least for your children?

[7] THE FUTURE OF POLYGAMY

Mormonism's worst nightmare is that polygamy might happen again in the church. If it does, it will cause embarrassment, make people nervous, and anger a lot of Mormon women.

But could it happen? And if so, how so? Certainly not by anything that the Mormon church or Mormons themselves would do (Mormons *don't* want polygamy). If it happens that the church readopts polygamy, it will happen because polygamy will be forced upon them by a court order from a civil lawsuit. And in today's sexual freedom climate, that is a real possibility.

How might that come about? Like this:

Imagine that polygamy actually becomes legal. That could happen as an offshoot of the gay-rights legal battles. Sooner or later some polygamists are going to jump into that fray and convince the courts that polygamists also deserve the legal right to marry whoever they wish — in their case, multiple wives.

Then once polygamy is declared legal (Mormons will have nothing to do with it except to submit opposing briefs which the courts will ignore), then some polygamists who want to be Mormons will sue the church for specific performance (do what you promised), claiming that the church ought not be allowed to discriminate against polygamists. The reason such discrimination should be illegal, they will insist, is because of church's own covenants; which says —

Doctrine & Covenants 132:61 ... if any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent ... and if he espouse the second ... then is he justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him ...

The church typically says that polygamy is a sin unless the church commands otherwise. But this verse says otherwise. It says that polygamy is not a sin period and does not need church approval. The words are “if any man...” which removes all restrictions. Since the church’s own covenants declare that polygamy is not a sin, then how can the church possibly deny membership to polygamists or excommunicate polygamists?

That’s a strong legal claim and I think that the courts would pay attention.

In its defense, the church will claim, “Ah! But **D&C 132** is not the operating document. The manifesto is, as the law demanded of us, and the later manifesto overrides **D&C 132**.”

Now it gets interesting, because the plaintive can argue this way:

“Good point. Judge, let’s read the manifesto. It says: ‘Inasmuch as laws have been enacted by Congress forbidding plural marriages, which law have been pronounced constitutional by the court of last resort, I [Wilfred Woodruff] hereby declare my intention to submit to those laws...’ Here’s the problem: Those laws which compelled the Mormons to issue and adopt the manifesto, are now repealed. That those laws are now null, also nullifies the Manifesto rendering it meaningless. The Manifesto says: ‘because of certain laws, I will...’ So it no longer matters what the manifesto does ‘because of certain laws,’ because those laws are now gone. Therefore the void Manifesto is *not* the operating document, and that leads us right back to the one operating document that has always been in effect: **D&C 132**. And that document says that polygamy is no sin. And since the church declares, by its own covenants that polygamy is no sin, the church has no right to exclude polygamists. And that is why, your honor, we are asking the court to enjoin the church to honor its own covenant by allowing polygamous members.”

I don’t think the church would have a legal defense against that argument, and I think that, should such a case ever come to court, the plaintive would win.

Which would be a very odd irony, that what courts once forced the church to do, abandon polygamy, courts could now force the church to undo. But courts are like that: fickle.

What about separation of church and state? Do courts have a right to tell churches what to believe? Or course not. That’s the first amendment of our constitution, freedom of religion.

But freedom of religion is not the issue here. The issue is contract law, plain and simple. Freedom of religion does not exempt churches from abiding by their own contracts any more than a business or a marriage or any entity. The point of a contract is to document what an entity binds itself and its members to so that the entity cannot be capricious. The entity makes the rules therefore the entity, and its members, must abide by them; It’s the courts’ duty to insure that. And for the Mormon church, the Doctrine and Covenants *is* its contracts with its membership. That’s why they are called *covenants*. Therefore, **D&C 132** is legally binding on the church, and the church could be required to allow polygamy if polygamy becomes legal.

Is change imminent? In our legal climate of judicial tyranny, change is *always* imminent.

How would such a change affect you and your testimony of the church? Well, that would depend on you, wouldn’t it? But keep in mind two things: *first*, no one is forced into polygamy, so legalizing polygamy would have no impact on *you*, none. And *second*, it will mean, however, that you would have to learn to be tolerant of yet another group of people who are different than yourself. But we’re getting used to that. We are growing accustomed to sharing life with people

of different race, different religions, different sexual orientation, different everything. A relevant question would be: would you share a church pew with a polygamous family or would you walk out of church in a huff? Well, that's a decision you'll have to make when the time comes, *if* the time comes. Likely, it never will. But it could.