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Does the Book of Mormon Forbid Polygamy?

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Abstract: In Jacob's sermon on immorality (Jacob 2) polygamy is not forbidden. What is forbidden is the taking of wives and concubines without the sanction of God.

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EDITORIAL

DOES THE BOOK OF MORMON FORBID POLYGAMY?

PLURAL MARRIAGE is mentioned incidentally but unmistakably, in a powerful discourse delivered by the prophet Jacob against immorality (Jacob 2: 22-35.) In this one instance, certainly polygamy, as a possible practice, is not forbidden.

The Nephites had fallen into grievous sin; they were committing whoredoms; and excusing themselves "because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son." The Prophet Jacob takes them to task for this in sober, strong words, and declares that "David, and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord" (verse 23), which by reading the context, clearly means that the *unlawful* association of David and Solomon with women whom they had taken as wives and concubines, without the authority of the Lord, was an abomination to the Lord. That this is really the meaning, is amply confirmed a few sentences later, where the Lord says, "For there shall not any man among you (the Nephites to whom Jacob was speaking), have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none" (verse 27). That was to be the law to the Nephites at that time. Yet, it was not a prohibition of polygamy as such, everywhere and for all times, since the statement follows, "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."

An intelligent, honest reading of Jacob's splendid discourse makes it clear that plural marriage may be practised, but only under the express command of the Lord; and that a man sins whether it be a David or Solomon or some humbler person, who takes more than one wife when the practice is forbidden by the Lord, or when the woman is not given to the man by the authority of the Lord.

In the early history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the Lord commanded his people to practise plural marriage. About two per cent. of the people entered into the practice. The polygamy thus practised bore no resemblance to "whoredom," for the wives were lawfully wedded to their husbands, and they and the children received equal honour and had equal rights. Later, in 1890, the Lord forbade the further practice of polygamy; and to-day as to the Nephites of Jacob's day, a man shall have but "one wife, and concubines he shall have none."

Whether polygamy may be practised is always determined by the Lord and not by man.

Persons who read only part of a statement and overlook the other parts seldom find the truth. One sentence from Jacob's fine discourse, would appear to prohibit polygamy; but the reading of the whole discourse compels the belief that polygamy is justified whenever the Lord commands it to be practised.

Most of the religious misunderstandings of men come from imperfect or incomplete knowledge; and, indeed, the multiplicity of Christian sects have been founded upon some Biblical text to the exclusion of the full meaning of the subject under discussion. Latter-day Saints will avoid making this serious mistake.—W.

DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE WORD OF WISDOM

(Concluded from page 295)

And in regard to drunkenness we will not be contaminated nor disgraced with infamy of such conduct—and as the honesty of a man can only be tested by his having temptation within his reach, so no man can be considered as acting properly who cannot let liquor alone, when that is within his reach. Virtue does not consist simply in being prevented from committing evils, but in having temptations presented before us and then governing our passions and appetites. When good and evil are placed before us, no matter by whom, it is for us to resist evil and cleave to the right. We are told that it is “to him that overcometh I will grant to sit down on my throne, as I have overcome and sat down on my Father's throne.” Neither do we want any excuses for any of these things, for God will condemn us if we bear them, and his wrath will be enkindled against us, and we shall find it a hard matter to pack such infamies upon our shoulders. Now it is for us to choose what course we will pursue.

We want men who are saints from principle, men who love God, who keep His commandments, men who are pure and virtuous, men who are seeking to glorify God through obedience to His laws, and men who do these things because they love to do them.

We have entered into covenants with God, and it is only on the condition of our keeping our covenants inviolate that we shall be entitled to the exceedingly great and precious promises which he has made to us. And he does expect us to be true to Him.

President Wilford Woodruff:

We are sent into this world to accomplish a great purpose, and to fulfil the object of our creation we must observe the commandments of God, and obey the ordinances of His house, and walk in them while we live in the flesh, that when we have done with this body we can go back into the presence of our Father and our God and receive in fullness the blessings and promises made to His children.

Those persons who will not walk according to the light they have, must sooner or later inherit sore afflictions to themselves; they do not