



## **aLesson Eleven: Politicking Against Polygamy**

### **Inquiry Questions:**

- How do you feel when you have completed a large project?
- What would that feeling be like when your task has been going on publicly for decades?

### **Historical Context: The end of polygamy as detailed from the view out of Utah:**

*With “broken and contrite spirit,” President Woodruff “had sought the will of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit had revealed that it was necessary for the church to relinquish the practice of that principle for which the brethren had been willing to lay down their lives.”*

*After a brief period of silence, Woodruff asked the group for individual reactions. “The matter is now before you,” he said “I want you to speak as the Spirit moves you.” When no one spoke, Woodruff asked his counselor George Q. Cannon to respond. After his supportive comments, several men asked questions. Did this decision mean the absolute cessation of plural marriage? Would they be required to discontinue living with their plural wives and families? According to the account of Frank J. Cannon, the answer to both of these questions was yes. Woodruff explained that church agents in Washington saw no other solution to the problem and “that it was the will of the Lord; that we must submit.” “I saw their faces flush and then slowly pale again—and [then] the storm broke,” Cannon reported. “One after another they rose and protested, hoarsely, in the voice of tears, that they were willing to suffer ‘persecution unto death’ rather than to violate the covenants which they had made ‘in holy places’ with the women who had trusted them.”*

*After each man had had the opportunity to express himself, George Q. Cannon again addressed the group. He reviewed the long unsuccessful efforts of the church’s legal department and concluded that as “citizens of a nation, we were required to obey its laws. And when we found, by the highest judicial interpretation of statute and constitution that we were without grounds for our plea of religious immunity, we had but the alternative either of defying the power of the whole nation or of submitting ourselves to its authority.” Cannon declared himself “willing to do the will of the Lord. And since the Prophet of God, after long season of prayer, had submitted this revelation as the will of the Lord, he was ready for the sacrifice” (Cannon and Higgins 1911, 96-98).*

*That afternoon Woodruff dispatched a press release to the Associated Press in Chicago. The following day he sent a similar telegram to Utah’s congressional delegate John T. Caine and to First Presidency secretary L. John Nuttall in Washington. Nuttall labored the following week to print and distribute more than a thousand copies of the press release to “the President, Cabinet, Senate & House of Reps & other leading men.” Denying the Utah Commission’s report that plural marriages were still being encouraged and solemnized, Woodruff announced the policy change that had long been sought by government officials: “Inasmuch as laws have been enacted by Congress forbidding plural marriages, which laws have been pronounced constitutional by the court of the last resort, I hereby declare my intention to submit to those*



*laws, and to use my influence with the members of the Church over which I preside to have them do likewise.... And now I publicly declare that my advice to the Latter-day Saints is to refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the laws of the land.”*

-Pages 139-140 of “Mormon Polygamy: A History” by Richard S. Van Wagoner

**Pre-Class Reading:**

*Joseph Smith III: A Pragmatic Prophet* by Roger Launius, Chapter Eleven: Politicking Against Polygamy

**Discussion Questions:**

- Do you agree with Joseph’s approach of battling polygamy in the legislative system?
- What is Joseph’s response when polygamy is finally abandoned by the Utah Mormons?
- How do you imagine he may have felt at that moment?

In legislating polygamy, issues of Freedom of Religion came to the forefront. Joseph was careful to ensure that the Utah Mormons would retain their religious rights, even while polygamy was being shattered.

- Why did he do this? Why didn’t he simply look the other way and watch the complete destruction of polygamy, and potentially a significant chunk of Utah Mormonism? What does this reveal of his character?

Another significant event occurred when an 1880 lawsuit regarding the Kirtland Temple in Ohio, indicated the Reorganization was the lawful successor to the early church.

- How was this verdict received by members of the Reorganized Church and its leaders?
- What were they hoping to get from the trial?

**Class Activity:**

Read the bottom paragraph on 255 and page 256. Starting with Joseph Smith Jr., make a timeline of those who purchased the Kirtland Temple up until the time of the 1880 lawsuit. Include the year of purchase, and what work, if any, they did on the building.

**Reading Assignment:**

*Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet*, Chapter Twelve: Crisis in the Ranks

*Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* by Roger Launius and a variety of historical reprints are available at [www.redbrickstore.com](http://www.redbrickstore.com). All Red Brick Store purchases help preserve Community of Christ historic sites.

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