

PRESBYTERIANS AND POLY-GAMY.

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Editors Deseret News:

In my letter of the 5th inst., I father freely canvassed the Bible record of that great man and faithful polygamist, Abraham, to see if I could find in it anything to justify the Presbyterian preachers, assembled at Saratoga, in denouncing plural marriage as unchristian and criminal. But I could not find the first word to sanction or sustain or inspire such a sweeping denouncement, or any denouncement at all. On the contrary, I did find abundant evidence that Abraham's household was fashioned in the very order of plural marriage, and that during the very time he was living in that order of matrimony, he and his polygamous wives were in communion with the heavens, God visiting and conversing with them and sending his angels to comfort and bless them, and all this to an extraordinary degree. Had I been a strenuous unbeliever in plural marriage, on reading this remarkable evidence of the great favors shown by God to that ancient polygamous family, I must have been astonished by the overwhelming weight of testimony going to prove that plural marriage was not displeasing in the sight of the Great Jehovah, and therefore I could not have resisted the conclusion that weak, puny, finite man was exceedingly presumptuous if not desperately wicked, in branding as unchristian and criminal that which the great judge of all men had not condemned, but had sanctioned by the promise of some of the greatest blessings that man ever received from heaven. For is it not true that God did visit that ancient polygamist and bless him in a wonderful degree? Those who say it is not true do not believe in the Bible. But those Presbyterian ministers do profess to believe in the Bible, yet they denounce the works of Abraham, and brand his family arrangements as unchristian and criminal, and as an affront to the civilization of the present day! How is this? Has the Almighty God spoken to those Presbyterian preachers, as he did to Abraham? Has he sent his angels to them, to comfort and instruct them? Has he blessed them repeatedly with great blessings, as he did Abraham? Has he given them special instructions in regard to the proper order of family matters? Has he told them that Abraham's polygamy was a crime, a sin and a shame? Has he told them that monogamy alone is pure and virtuous, and that polygamy is impure and vile? Were their resolutions, so denunciatory of plural marriage, actually inspired by the Spirit of God? Were those resolutions based upon special instructions from heaven, upon special revelations from Almighty God, or upon the ministrations of angels? Those Presbyterians make no declarations of this kind, make no pretensions of communication with God or with angels concerning this highly important subject. What right, then, have they to denounce as wicked and criminal now, the very order of matrimony which God so signally blessed in Abraham's day? Come, reverend gentlemen of the Presbyterian persuasion, whence did you derive your authority to denounce the marriage record of Abraham? When did God tell you that plural marriage was unchristian and criminal? When did he authorize you, by his own voice or by the voice of an angel from heaven, to denounce, as worthy of condign punishment, those who practise the same order of marriage as Abraham, the friend of God, did? Come, gentlemen, show your authority for this denunciatory reversal of a marriage system honored of God. Or would you rather be branded as religious impostors, pretenders to an authority to declare what is right and what is wrong in the sight of God, but destitute of all shadow of that authority?

Pursuing the Bible record a little further, I find that Abraham had a grandson, whose name was Jacob. This man Jacob was a great man in those days. He took two wives, who were sisters, the daughters of Jacob's mother's brother, Laban. This does not appear to have been considered a strange or sinful thing, not by Jacob, not by his two wives, not by their father, not by anybody in those days, the days when God and the angels of God talked

with men. Laban appears to have been perfectly willing to let his two daughters become the wives of Jacob, and the daughters were willing. Not one of the four principal parties appears to have had the slightest idea they were doing wrong in practising plural marriage, they had not the slightest compunction in contracting that kind of a marriage. Nobody charged them with committing a crime therein. It appears to have been reserved for such wise people as the Presbyterian preachers at Saratoga in these latter days to make the wonderful discovery that plural marriage is a crime in the sight of man, an unpardonable offence to decent society, and a sin against God. Those preachers are evidently very "wise above that which is written" in the word of God.

But taking two wives was not the full extent of Jacob's marriage relations. It happened with Rachel, one of Jacob's wives, as it did with his grandmother Sarai, and his mother Rebekah—sterility fell upon her for a time. Rachel grieved over this, and she said to her husband, "Behold my handmaid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife; and Jacob went in unto her. And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son." Gen. xxx, 3, 4, 5. Did Rachel feel condemned in the sight of God in giving a third wife to her husband? Not in the least. On the contrary, when Bilhah bore a son to Jacob, Rachel exclaimed, "God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son." See verse 6. She acknowledged the hand of the Lord in the matter, and received the son of her husband's third living wife—how? With reproaches and curses, as a bastard, a child of sin, an heir of shame, the hateful fruit of illegitimate union? No, but as a blessing from God, for she said, in the gratitude of her soul, "God hath given me a son!" When Bilhah bore a second son to Jacob, Rachel gave vent to similar expressions of joy.

Sometime after Rachel had thus increased the number of her husband's wives, she herself became fruitful. The Bible says, "God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her and opened her womb, and she conceived and bare a son." See verse 22 and 23. How did Rachel express herself over this happy event? She said, "God hath taken away my reproach." she also said, "The Lord shall add to me another son." See verses 23, 24. Thus it will be seen that the Lord did not bless Rachel with children of her own until after she had given her husband a third wife. Is not this rather remarkable? It does not look as if God was displeased with Rachel for increasing the number of her husband's wives.

The extent of Jacob's plurality, however, does not rest with his third wife. After his wife Leah had borne him four sons, she became unfruitful, and she gave her husband another wife. The scriptures say, "When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah, her maid, and gave her to Jacob to wife. And Zilpah, Leah's maid, bare Jacob a son." See verses 9, 10. Did Leah think she had done anything sinful in giving her husband his fourth living wife? No, not in the least. When Zilpah bore Jacob another son, Leah rejoiced greatly and exclaimed, "Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed; and she called his name Asher," which signifies blessedness, or happiness. See verses 12, 13. Leah evidently considered herself blessed of the Lord, and not cursed of him, for giving her maid Zilpah to her husband to be his fourth living wife, and that blessing was children by that fourth wife. This may sound strange in the ears of many modern religionists, but it is not a romance got up by me, it is the Bible record of a notable family, a polygamist family, notable men and women of God. If those modern religionists believe the Bible, they must believe these extracts that I have been giving from it. If they do not believe the Bible, then they are infidels to that sacred book, and their profession of religion is only a cloak and a pretence, for what ulterior purposes they ought to know best.

After a time, Leah again became fruitful. The Bible says, "And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived and bare Jacob the fifth son." See verse 17. Do I read aright? Did the Lord hearken to a

woman's prayers for more posterity, a woman who had given her husband his fourth wife? Did the Lord answer that prayerful polygamous woman's supplications, and answer them by giving her more children after she had been some years barren? Yes, so the Scriptures say. What did Leah say about this? She said, "God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maid to my husband; and she called his name Issachar." See verse 18. This is more remarkable and emphatic still. It must be perfectly astounding to religious opposers of plural marriage. Here a woman who had given her husband his fourth wife distinctly declares that God had rewarded her for that act, had restored her fertility and caused her to bear children again after having ceased for years to do so, because she had given her maid to be a polygamous wife to her husband, and to signalize her convictions in this regard to all generations she called her son by a name that signifies reward or recompense. Her son Issachar this God-blessed polygamous wife considered to be her special reward or recompense from God for freely giving her maid to her husband to be his fourth wife. When Leah bore her husband another son she said, "God hath endowed me with a good dowry." See verse 20.

How many professedly Christian wives in these days would administer to their husbands in this way in order to obtain a blessing, a reward, a recompense from the Lord? Would that Saratoga assembly of Presbyterian ministers recommend any of the lady members of their churches to do any thing of this kind? And if not, why not? If those reverends would not do this, how could they expect to be ever in full communion with the great men and women of God who held communion with him and were blessed abundantly of him in ancient times, according to the plain, ungarbled Bible record? May I not well say of those Presbyterian preachers, and of all who endorse their anti-scriptural resolutions, that there are more things in the Bible record than are dreamt of in their shallow and unphilosophical philosophy, or their superficial and unchristian Christianity?

It is well known that, among the ancient people of God, posterity was considered one of the greatest of blessings, and good men and good women who had no children would pray fervently to God that he would bless them in this respect and cause their hearts to rejoice by taking from them their infertility, which they looked upon as a great misfortune, or, in Scripture phraseology, as a "reproach" to them. Now there are some noteworthy facts in this connection in the Bible history of the families of Abraham and Jacob, which I may refer to more pointedly than I have. Sarai, the wife of Abraham, was barren, and so she remained while she was a monogamous wife. While she was Abraham's only wife she had no children, nor promise of children. But a few years after she had given her maid Hagar to her husband to be his wife, and had thus voluntarily caused herself, her husband, and her handmaid to enter into the plural order of marriage, the Lord blessed her with the promise of a son, and twelve months afterward he blessed her with that son of promise, although she was beyond the natural period of child-bearing. Was not this an extraordinary thing and an evident approval of the plural order of marriage? It seems to me that all candid people must accept it as such.

Not only was Sarai barren until she had given her husband another wife, and fruitful afterward, but her grand-daughter-in-law Rachel had a similar experience. Rachel had no children before she gave her maid Bilhah to be a wife to her husband, Jacob, albeit Rachel herself had been a polygamous wife all her married life. But after she had given Bilhah to Jacob, and Bilhah had borne children to him, then the Lord blessed Rachel with children, and not before, or, as the Bible says, "God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her." Was not this very extraordinary? Which does it look most like—a condemnation or an approval of polygamous marriage? The correct answer is obvious and unavoidable to honest men and women.

Leah, Jacob's wife, did bear to him four children, and then she left off bearing and became barren as Sarai and Rachel were. This fact of her infertility pressed itself upon

Leah's mind, and then she took her maid Zilpah to Jacob to be his wife. After Leah had done this and the marriage of Zilpah to Jacob had become patent by Zilpah bearing children to him, then God hearkened to Leah's prayers for more posterity of her own, and as a consequence her sterility ceased, and she again conceived and bore children to her polygamous husband Jacob. Was not this very remarkable? Could any sane man or woman imbibed the idea, from the experience herein recorded, as taken from the Bible, that the Lord God was displeased in the least degree with the polygamous acts and relations of Leah and her husband? No, not by any manner of means.

Now I am not going to say that an infallible remedy for barrenness in a wife is for her to give her handmaid or any other maid to her husband to be his polygamous wife. But I do mean to say, judging by the Bible record of the families of Jacob and of his noble grandfather Abraham, that the giving of their handmaids to their respective husbands polygamously to wife, was apparently an influential cause of the removal by the Lord of the original infertility of Sarai and Rachel, and of the renewal by him of the fertility of Leah after several years of barrenness, and as such indeed it was evidently regarded by those women of God themselves, considering the recorded expression of their feelings and sentiments of those once barren women, when their barrenness was removed and their children were born. Least of all could it be said of those women that plural marriage was a preventive of fertility, a cause of barrenness. The facts look most decidedly the other way.

I have not said much yet of the character of this man Jacob, this man of four wives, nor of his standing in the sight of God. But here I may ask, was he a man of God, was he blessed and highly favored of heaven? Let us look into the record as to these important matters. When Isaac sent Jacob away to take a wife from among his relatives, Isaac blessed him "with the blessing of Abraham." When Jacob, on his journey, was sleeping in a certain place, the Lord appeared to him in a dream, and said unto him, "I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." Gen. xxviii, 13, 14, 15. When Jacob awoke he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." "And he called the name of that place Beth-el," or the house of God. See verses 16, 17, 19. This was while Jacob was young and unmarried. But after he had been married and a polygamist, having four wives, he moved to go away from his uncle Laban's, from whose household Jacob had obtained his four wives, and Laban said unto him, "I pray thee, if I have found favor in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." Gen. xxx, 27. Pretty strong evidence, this, that the Lord was not angry with Jacob because he had four wives. If he was not angry at such a thing then, why should he be now? Jacob confirmed Laban's words, for Jacob said, "The Lord hath blessed thee since my coming." See verse 30.

By and by, Laban's sons, Jacob's cousins began to grow envious of Jacob's prosperity, and Laban also changed towards him. "And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee." Gen. xxxi, 3. Jacob thereupon held a conference with Rachel and Leah, and Jacob related the heavenly vision he had received and the divine instruction to return to his own kindred, and Jacob and his family went away privately. His uncle Laban pursued them, but "God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad." See verse 24. Being thus forewarned, Laban refrained from injuring Jacob. "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him,

And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host." Gen. xxxii, 1, 2. These visitations from the Lord were to a man with four wives, and this preserving care manifested in his favor. At another time on the journey a personage wrestled with Jacob in the night and until daybreak, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was miraculously put out of joint at the touch of the mysterious stranger. But Jacob desired to be blessed. "And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." "And he blessed him there." "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." See verses 27, 28. Subsequently, "God said unto Jacob, Arise go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." Gen. xxxv, 1. Proceeding further we read, "and God appeared unto Jacob again when he came out of Padan-aram; and blessed him. And God said unto him, Thy name Jacob: thy name shall not any more be called Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name; and he called him Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins. And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up from him, in the place where he talked with him." See verses 9-11. Thus it will be seen that the Lord God of Abraham was also the God of Jacob, and comforted and led and instructed him from his youth up, confirming the blessings of Abraham upon Jacob and continuing them through him and in his seed, although, according to the Bible record, he had more wives than his father. Notwithstanding the fact that Jacob had four wives at the same time, and children of his own begetting by all of them, yet there is no relation of the Lord concerning him in the least degree of that account, nor ceasing to instruct and bless him after he became a polygamist, but, on the contrary, he received his greatest blessings after he had entered into that order of marriage. Yet those Presbyterian preachers consider Jacob was guilty of a great crime, an offense to society, in becoming the husband of several wives. How was it that the Lord never thought to tell Jacob this? How was it that the Lord blessed Jacob, blessed him repeatedly, confirmed the blessings of his grandfather Abraham upon him, instead of condemning him and casting him off as a wicked man, a great criminal, in living with four wives at the same time, and becoming the father of their children? It must have been because the Lord judgeth not as that Presbyterian assembly judgeth, but the Lord judgeth righteous judgment, but that assembly evidently judgeth unrighteous judgment, to punish men and to obtain popular favor. Abraham was a confirmed polygamist and Jacob was a confirmed polygamist, yet God declared himself the God of Abraham and the God of Jacob, and is so regarded by all Bible believers to this day. Saratoga Presbyterian assembly were monogamists, confirmed monogamists, and they severely denounced plurality of wives as unchristian, as criminal, as an offense, as an affront to God. Christian men and women worthy of fine and improvement, yet God has declared himself the God of the Presbyterian ministers, he never visited and talked with them as he did with Abraham and Jacob; he has never promised them great blessings as he did Abraham and Jacob; he has never told them that their seed should become numerous as the stars of heaven, the sands on the sea-shore, as he did Abraham and Jacob; he has never told them that in them and in their seed should all the families of the earth be blessed, as he did Abraham and Jacob. If the Lord ever did do any such great things for those Presbyterian preachers, he did for Abraham and Jacob, where is the record, where is the testimony of it? "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak