

DISCOURSE

BY

ELDER ORSON PRATT,

DELIVERED

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REPORTED BY DAVID W. EVANS.

I HAVE been requested, this afternoon, to preach upon the subject of marriage. It is a subject which has been often laid before the Latter-day Saints, and it is certainly one of great importance to the Saints as well as to the inhabitants of the earth, for I presume that no person, who believes in divine revelation, will pretend to say that marriage is not a divine institution; and if this be the case, it is one which affects all the human family.

I will select a passage of scripture in relation to this divine institution as it existed in the days of Moses. In selecting, however, this passage, I do not wish the congregation to suppose that we are under the law of Moses particularly. There are many great principles inculcated in that law which the Lord never did intend to come to an end or be done away—eternal principles, moral principles; then there are others that were done away at the coming of our Savior, he having fulfilled the law. Because we find certain declarations, contained in the law given to Moses, that does not prove that the Latter-day Saints are under that law; that same God that gave the law of Moses—the Being that we worship—is just as capable of giving laws in our day as in Moses' day; and if he sees proper to alter the code given to Moses, and to give something varying from it, we have no right to say that he shall not do so. Therefore, in selecting the passage which I am about to read, it is merely to show what God did in ancient times, and that he may do something similar in modern times.

In the 21st chapter of Exodus, speaking of a man who already had one wife, Moses says—"If he take him another wife, her food, her raiment and her duty of marriage shall he not diminish." It will be recollected that this law was given to a polygamic nation. When I speak of a polygamic nation I mean a nation that practiced both plural and single marriage, and believed one form to be just as sacred as the other. Their progenitors or ancestors were polygamists; and they were considered patterns for all future generations. Their piety, holiness, purity of heart, their great faith in God, their communion with him, the great blessings to which they attained, the visions that were made manifest to them, the conversation that God himself, as well as his angels, had with them, entitled them to be called the friends of God, not only in their day, but they were considered by all future generations to be his friends. They were not only examples to the Jewish nation, but in their seed, the seed of these polygamists, all the nations and kingdoms of the earth were to be blessed.

I hope that pious Christians in this congregation will not find fault this afternoon with their Bible, and with the prophets and inspired men who wrote it. I hope that they will not find fault with God for selecting polygamists to be his friends. I hope that they will not find fault with Jesus because he said, some two thousand years or upwards after the days of these polygamists, that they were in the kingdom of God, and were not condemned because of polygamy. Jesus says, speaking of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—"Many shall come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God." Do not find fault with Jesus, you Christians, because he has these polygamists in his kingdom, and because he has said that the Gentiles will be blessed through the seed of these polygamists; neither find fault with him because he has taken these polygamists into his kingdom, and that many will come from the four quarters of the earth and have the privilege of sitting down with them therein.

Jacob married four wives, and may be considered the founder of that great nation of polygamists. He set the example before them. His twelve sons, who were the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel, were the children of the four wives of the prophet or patriarch Jacob. So sacred did the Lord hold these polygamists that he said, many hundred years after their death—"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, and this shall be my memorial unto all generations." Now, Christians, do not find fault if God chose these polygamists and, at the same time, wished to make them a sample, a memorial to all generations, Christians as well as Jews.

Several hundred years after God raised up these, his friends, and founded or began to found the twelve tribes of Israel, he saw proper to raise up a mighty man called Moses to deliver the children of Israel from the bondage in which they had been oppressed and afflicted by the Egyptian nation. So great had this affliction become that the King of Egypt issued a decree commanding the Israelitish midwives to put to death all the male children, born among the Israelites. This murderous law was carried out. This was about eighty years before Moses was sent down from the land of Midian to deliver the children of Israel from this cruel bondage. How long this great affliction of putting to death the male children existed, is not given in the Bible; but it seems to have waxed worse and worse during the following eighty years, after which Moses was sent to deliver them. We may reasonably suppose that the oppressive hand

of Pharaoh was not altogether eased up, but continued on for scores of years, destroying many of the male children, making a great surplus of females in that nation. A great multitude of females over and above that of males, will account for the peculiar passage of Scripture to which I will now refer you. It will be found in the third chapter of Numbers. I have not time to turn to it and read it, but I will quote you the substance thereof. Moses and Aaron were commanded to number all the males in Israel from a month old and upward that were called the firstborn among the various tribes. Now the firstborn does not mean the oldest male child of the first wife, for sometimes the first wife has no children, but it means the first born son that is born to the father, whether by the first wife, or second, or third, or any number of wives that he may have; the term firstborn pertains to the first male child that is born to the father. So it was accounted to Jacob's family of twelve sons. Reuben only was called the firstborn of Israel until he lost his birthright, through transgression, which, we are told in the 5th chapter of first Chronicles, was taken from him and given to one of the sons of Joseph. But so far as age or birth was concerned, Reuben was the firstborn; and had it not been for his transgression, he would have inherited a double portion of his father's substance, for that was the law in ancient times.

Now how many of the firstborn could be found in the midst of Israel? We are told that there were twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three firstborn males among the eleven tribes; the tribe of Levi was not reckoned at that time, but all the male members of the tribe of Levi, from a month old and upwards was twenty-two thousand souls. Now if the tribe of Levi numbered in proportion to the other eleven tribes, the number of firstborn males in all the twelve tribes would probably amount to between twenty-four and twenty-five thousand souls, it could not have run over that. There might have been some of the firstborn who were dead, which would make a few more families; then there might have been other families who never had any male children, which would increase the families still more. Supposing then, in order to give all the advantage possible, and to make as many families as we possibly can consistently, that we say, instead of twenty-five thousand firstborn in the midst of all Israel, that there were thirty thousand; that allowing for all these contingencies I have named—where families had no males, and those families that had male children under a month old which were not reckoned, and those families which might have had firstborn male children who died and the number might possibly be increased to four or five thousand more, making the total number of families about thirty thousand.

Thus we see that the number of firstborn males from a month old or upwards gives us a clue to the number of families; we may not be able to determine the number exactly, but these data will enable us to approximate very closely. It is generally admitted, that Israel, at that time, numbered twenty-five hundred thousand souls. There might have been a variation from this of a few thousand souls, but according to the Scriptural and all other evidences that can be gleaned, the number above referred to is about the number of souls that existed in Israel at that time. Among that twenty-five hundred thousand souls then, there were thirty thousand families. How many were there in a family? All that you have to do to tell how many there were in a family, is to divide twenty-five hundred thousand by thirty thousand and you will find that the quotient is eighty-three, showing that number of souls on an average in each family. Now if these families were all monogamic, how many children must have been born to each wife? Eighty-one.

This argument is founded on Scripture, and it shows plainly, even if you should double the number of families or of the firstborn, that they could not be all monogamic families, for if we suppose there were sixty thousand families it would make every married woman the mother of forty odd children, and if such a supposition could be entertained it would go to show that women in those days were more fruitful than they are now. These declarations are given in your Bible, which is also my Bible; that is, in King James translation. We all believe, or profess to be Bible believers or Christians. Do not be startled my hearers at these declarations of your Bible. No wonder then that this passage which I have taken for my text was given to that people, because they were a people who needed to be guided in relation to their duty. "If a man take another wife," that is, after he has got one, if he take another one, "her food"—whose food? the food of the first wife;—"her raiment," that is the raiment of the first wife, "her duty of marriage, he shall not diminish." Now this is plain, pointed and positive language in regard to polygamy as it existed among the house of Israel in ancient times. Why did not the Lord say, if polygamy were a crime or a sin—"If a man take another wife let all the congregation take him without the camp and stone him and put him to death?" or if that was too severe let them incarcerate him in a prison or dungeon for several years? If it be a crime why did he not say so? It is just as easy to say that, as to give directions as to what course a man shall pursue with regard to his first wife, if he take another one.

This is Bible doctrine as it existed in those days. I know that it has been argued that the first woman, here spoken of, was merely a betrothed woman, and not married. But if this be so, what a curious saying this in our text—that her duty of marriage shall he not diminish if he take another wife. This and other expressions show clearly that they were both wives, and that there was a certain duty

to be attended to by the husband, besides providing them with food and raiment. It was argued here in this tabernacle before some eight or ten thousand people, on a certain occasion, that the Hebrew word translated "duty of marriage," ought to have been translated "dwelling"—"Her food, her raiment and her dwelling he shall not diminish." I recollect asking the learned gentleman, Rev. Dr. Newman, why he translated it dwelling, instead of translating it as all other Hebraists have done? I asked him to produce one passage in all the Bible where that word translated "duty of marriage," meant a "dwelling," but he could not do it. The Hebrew word for "dwelling," and the Hebrew word for "duty of marriage," are two entirely distinct words. I referred him to the learned professors in Yale College, and to many others who have translated this Hebrew word "duty of marriage." These professors and other learned translators, have referred to this special passage, and have translated it in two ways, one is "duty of marriage," and the other is cohabitation. Now, if this latter be correct—her food, her raiment and her cohabitation, shall not be diminished. I asked him why he varied in his translation of the Hebrew, from all these translators and lexicographers? His only answer was that he found a certain Jew in Washington who told him that it meant "dwelling," or rather that its original root referred to a "dwelling." I thought that was a very poor argument against all the translators of the Christian world, who are mostly monogamists. But we will pass on. I do not intend to dwell too long on these subjects.

So far as the law of Moses is concerned, to prove that the house of Israel kept up their polygamous institution from generation to generation, let me refer you to another law to show that they were compelled to do this, or else to come out in open rebellion against the law of Moses. In the 25th chapter of Deuteronomy, we read something like this—"When brethren dwell together, and one of them die, the living brother shall take the widow of the deceased brother, and it shall come to pass that the firstborn that is raised up shall succeed in the name of his brother." This was a positive command given to all Israel. Now was this command confined to young men who were unmarried, or was it an unlimited command so far as living brothers were in existence? This is a question to be decided. There is nothing in all the Scriptures that makes any distinction between a married brother who survives and an unmarried brother; the law was just as binding upon a living brother, if he had already a wife living, as it was upon a living brother if he had no wife, it being a universal law, with no limits in its application, so far as the house of Israel was concerned. This law, then, compelled the children of Israel to be polygamists; for in many instances the living brother might be a married man, and in many instances there might be two or three brothers who would take wives and die without leaving seed, and in that case it would devolve upon the surviving brother to take all the widows. This law was not given for that generation alone, but for all future generations. Some may say, that when Jesus came, he came to do away that law. I doubt it. He came to do away the law of sacrifices and of burnt offerings, and many of those ordinances and institutions, rites and ceremonies which pertained to their tabernacle and temple, because they all pointed forward to him as the great and last sacrifice. But did he come to do away all these laws that were given in the five books of Moses? No. There are many of these laws that were retained under the Christian dispensation. One of the laws thus retained was repentance. The children of Israel were commanded to repent, and no person will pretend to say that Jesus came to do away the law of repentance. Another was the law of honesty, upright dealing between man and man; no one will pretend to say that that law ceased when Jesus came. The laws concerning families and the regulation of the domestic institutions were not intended to cease when Jesus came, and they did not cease only as they were disregarded through the wickedness of the children of men. The laws concerning monogamy, and the laws concerning polygamy were just as binding after Jesus had come, as they were before he came. There were some laws which Ezekiel says were not good. Jesus denounced them, and said they were given because of the hardness of the hearts of the children of Israel. Ezekiel says that God gave them statutes and judgments by which they should not live. Why did he do it? Because of their wickedness and hardness of heart. I will tell you how this law became done away and ceased to exist among the children of Israel—it was in consequence of their rejection of the Messiah. In consequence of this their city was overthrown, and their nation destroyed, except a miserable remnant, which were scattered abroad among the Gentile nations, where they could not keep the law in regard to their brothers' widows. When John the Baptist was raised up to that nation, he must have found thousands on thousands of polygamists, who were made so, and obliged to be so, by the law which I have just quoted.

Some of you may enquire—"Had not a surviving brother the right to reject that law of God?" He had, if he was willing to place himself under its penalty. I will quote you the penalty, and then you can see whether he could get away from polygamy or not. One penalty was that he should be brought before the elders and that the widow whom he refused to marry, according to the law of God, should pluck his shoe from off his foot, and should then spit in his face, and from that time forth the house of that man should be denounced as the house of him that hath his shoe loosed, a reproach among all Israel. Instead of being a man of God, and

a man to be favored by the people of God; instead of being a man such as the Christian world would now extol to the heavens because he rejected polygamy, he was a man to be scorned by all Israel. That was the penalty. Was that the only penalty? I think not. Read along a little further, and it says—"Cursed be he that continues not in all things written in this book of the law." Oh, what a dreadful penalty that was, compared with being reproached by the whole people! Oh, what a fearful curse upon a man that refused to become a polygamist, and would not attend to the law of God! A curse pronounced by the Almighty upon him, also the anathemas of all the people as well as from God! The word of the Lord was that all the people should say amen to this curse. Now, if I had lived in those days, I should not have considered it very desirable to bring myself under the curse of heaven, and then have the curse of all the twelve tribes of Israel upon my head. I should not have liked it at all. I would rather have gone into polygamy according to the command, even if it had subjected me to a term of five years in a penitentiary.

We find many other passages, touching upon this subject. I will quote one, which will be found in the 21st chapter of Deuteronomy. It reads as follows: "If a man have two wives, one beloved and another hated, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the first-born son be hers that was hated, then it shall be when he makes his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved, firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn." Now this applies to two classes of polygamists. First, to those who may have two wives living at the same time, and then to those who may have married two wives in succession. It applies to both classes, for both classes existed in those days, and the Lord gave this, not to condemn polygamy, not to do away with it, but to show that the individual who had two wives should be impartial in regard to his children. Did he appropriate this man that might have two wives in his hatred of one, and in loving the other? No, he did not, but inasmuch as man is weak and may sin against God, and suffer himself to be overcome with prejudice and hatred to one person, and feel in his heart to love and respect another, the Lord gave laws in case any such crime should exist among them as a husband's hating one wife and loving another; he gave laws to regulate it, not that he approved the hating part.

As I have already proved to you that there were great and vast numbers of polygamic families in Israel, and that there were thousands of firstborn from these plural wives, these firstborn persons, whatever might be the conduct of their mothers, were entitled to their inheritance, namely a double portion of all that the father had to bestow. That was the law in ancient times. We might close here so far as the law of Moses is concerned, but I wish to call your attention to a peculiar saying in this law.

This law has got to be restored again. Says one—"You astonish me beyond measure, I thought it was done away for ever." Well, listen to what the Lord said to Israel in the closing of this book of Deuteronomy. When the children of Israel shall be scattered in consequence of their iniquities to the uttermost parts of the earth among all the nations, and their plagues shall be of long continuance, and they shall be cursed in their basket and in their store, and with numerous curses which he mentioned should come upon them; after these things had been of long continuance, the Lord says—"After they shall return unto me and hearken unto all the words contained in this book of the law, then I, the Lord God, will gather them out from all the nations whither they are scattered, and will bring them back into their own land." Oh, indeed! Then when they do absolutely return and hearken to all the words of the book of this law God has promised to gather them again; that is, they must enter into polygamy, they must believe when their brother dies and leaves no seed, that the surviving brother, though he has one, two, or a half a dozen wives living, shall take that widow. That is part of the law, and they must fulfill all the words of this law, and then God has promised to gather them again. Says one, "When that is fulfilled it will be in the days of Christianity." We can't help it; polygamy belongs to Christianity, as well as to the law of Moses.

Says one—"The children of Israel have been scattered now some 1800 years among all the nations and kindreds of the earth, in fulfillment of this curse, but if we believe that saying which you have just quoted, we are obliged to believe that the children of Israel are yet to return to attend to all these institutions, and that too while the Christian religion is in vogue, and that they are to regulate their households according to the law of God, whether those families are monogamic or polygamic." What will the good Christians think when that is fulfilled? They cannot help themselves, for God will not gather Israel until they do return with all their hearts unto him, and hearken to and obey all the words of this law, written in this book. This is the word of the Lord, and how can you help yourselves? Says one—"We will pass laws against them." That will not hinder, when God sets his hand to carry out his purposes, laws that may be passed by England, Denmark, Norway or any other Christian community will not hinder the Israelites from attending to all the words contained in the book of his law; for they will want to get back again to their own land.

Inasmuch then as the Lord has promised to restore all things spoken of by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began, supposing that he should begin this great work of restoration in

our day, how are we going to help ourselves? I can't help it. Brigham Young, our President, can't help it, Joseph Smith could not help it. If God sees proper to accomplish this great work of restoration—the restitution of all things, it will include what the Prophet Moses has said, and it will bring back with it a plurality of wives. The 4th chapter of Isaiah could never be fulfilled without this restoration. The passage to which I refer is familiar to all the Latter-day Saints—"In that day the branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely, 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." Now will this prophecy ever be fulfilled, unless this great restoration or restitution shall take place? It cannot. If this great restoration does not take place Jesus will never come, for it is written in the New Testament, in the 3rd chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, that "the heavens must receive Jesus Christ, until the times of the restitution of all things which God has spoken by the mouths of his holy prophets, since the world began." Jesus will have to stay a long time in the heavens providing that monogamist principles are the only principles that will be introduced, in fact he never can come, for the Scriptures say the heavens must retain him until all things are restored.

God has said that seven women shall take hold of one man for the purpose of having their reproach taken away, that they may be called by his name, not cast off as harlots or prostitutes; not to take away the name of the father from the children, and cast them into the streets, as the Christian nations have been doing for many long centuries that are past. But these seven women will be desirous of having the name of their husband for themselves and their children. Isaiah says it shall be so, and it will have to be under the Christian dispensation. How are the Christians going to get rid of this? Can you devise any way? Is there any possible way or means that you can think of that will put a stop to the Lord's fulfilling his word? I will tell you one way—if you will all turn infidels and burn up the Bible, and then begin to persecute, the devil will tell you that you can successfully overcome, and that God will never fulfill and accomplish his word; but if you profess to believe the Bible, by the Bible you shall be judged, for saith the Lord, "My words shall judge you at the last day." The books will be opened, God's word will be the standard by which the nations will be judged; hence if you wish a righteous judgment I would say—Fear God, do not destroy the Bible because it advocates polygamy; but remember that every word of God is pure, so it is declared, and he has nowhere in this book, condemned plural marriage, even in one instance.

I know that it has been argued that there is a law against polygamy; but in order to make the law the Scripture had to be altered. It is in that famous passage which has become a byword in the mouth of every schoolboy in our streets, Leviticus 18th, 18th. Now let us examine for a few moments that passage and see what it says. You will find that the fore part of this chapter forbids marriage between certain blood relations. Prior to this time it had been lawful for a man to marry two sisters. Jacob, for instance, married Rachel and Leah, and there was no law against it prior to this time. It had also been lawful for a man to marry his own sister, as in the days of Adam, for you know there were no other ladies on the face of the earth for the sons of Adam except their own sisters, and they were obliged to marry them or to live bachelors. But the Lord saw proper when he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, to regulate the law of marriage, so far as certain blood relations were concerned, called the law of consanguinity, which speaks of a great many relationships, and finally comes to a wife and her sister. This law was given to regulate the marriage relations of the children of Israel in the wilderness. It was not to regulate those who lived before that day who had married sisters; not to regulate those who might live in the latter days, but to regulate the children of Israel in that day. It reads thus: "Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness besides the other in her life time."

This passage has been altered by certain monogamists in order to sustain their ideas of marriage, and we find in some large Bibles what are called marginal readings that these monogamists have put in, and instead of taking this in connection with all other blood relationships, they have altered it—Neither shalt thou take one wife to another. The men who translated King James' Bible were monogamists, yet they had sense enough to know that the original Hebrew would not bear that construction which has been given by later monogamists. The original Hebrew, when translated word for word, makes it just as King James' translators have made it. The Hebrew words are—*Ve-ishaw el-ahotah-lo tikkah*. These are the original Hebrew words, and if they are translated literally, word for word, the translation stands just as it is in the text. But this is not saying but what the words, *El-ahotah*, under certain circumstances, are translated in another form, namely, "one to another," "one sister to another," and I am willing that it should be translated that way. Then it would read—"Thou shalt not take one sister to another to vex her in her life time." So you may take it either way, and it bears out King James' translation, or the meaning given by him.

I do not profess to be a Hebraist to any very great extent, although I studied it sufficiently many years ago, to understand