

**THE BIBLE & POLYGAMY.
DOES THE BIBLE
SANCTION POLYGAMY?
DISCUSSION, PP. 5-104**

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The Bible & Polygamy. Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy? Discussion, pp. 5-104 by Orson Pratt & J. P. Newman

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ORSON PRATT & J. P. NEWMAN

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PRELIMINARY CORRESPONDENCE.

5

SALT LAKE CITY, Aug. 6th, 1870, eight o'clock, P. M.

TO PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG:

Sir:—In reply to your note just received to preach in the Tabernacle to-morrow, I have to say that after disclaiming and declining, as you have done to-day, the discussion which I came here to hold, other arrangements to speak in the city were accepted by me, which will preclude my compliance with your invitation.

Respectfully,

J. P. NEWMAN.

SALT LAKE CITY, U. T., Aug. 6, 1870.

REV. DR. NEWMAN:

Sir:—In accordance with our usual custom of tendering clergymen of every denomination, passing through our city, the opportunity of preaching in our tabernacles of worship, I sent you, this afternoon, an invitation tendering you the use of the small tabernacle in the morning, or the New Tabernacle in the afternoon, or both, at your pleasure, which you have seen proper to decline.

You charge me with "disclaiming and declining the discussion" which you came here to hold. I ask you, sir, what right have you to charge me with declining a challenge which I never gave you, or, to assume, as a challenge from me, the writing of any unauthorized newspaper editor? Admitting that you could distort the article in question to be a challenge from me (which I do not believe you conscientiously could), was it not the duty of a gentleman to ascertain whether I was responsible for the so-called challenge before your assumption of such a thing? And certainly much more so before making your false charges.

Your assertion that if you had not chosen to construe the article in question as a challenge from me, I "could then have adopted the 'Telegraph' as your [my] organ and the said article as a challenge," is an insinuation, in my judgment, very discreditable to yourself, and ungentlemanly in the extreme, and forces the conclusion that the author of it would not scruple to make use of such a subterfuge himself.

You say that Mr. Sloan is the author of the article; if so, he is perfectly capable of defending it, and I have no doubt you will find him equally willing to do so; or Professor Orson Pratt, whose name, it appears, is the only one suggested in the article. I am confident he would be willing to meet you, as would hundreds of our elders, whose fitness and respectability I would consider beyond question.

In conclusion I will ask, What must be the opinion of every candid, reflecting mind, who views the facts as they appear? Will they not consider it a paltry and insignificant attempt, on your part, to gain notoriety, regardless of the truth? This you may succeed in obtaining; but I am free to confess, as my opinion, that you will find such notoriety more unenviable than profitable, and as disgraceful, too, as it is unworthy of your profession.

If you think you are capable of proving the doctrine of "Plurality of Wives" unscriptural, tarry here as a missionary; we will furnish you the suitable place, the congregations, and plenty of our elders, any of whom will discuss with you on that or any other scriptural doctrine.

Respectfully,

BRIGHAM YOUNG.

SALT LAKE CITY, Aug. 8th, 1870.

TO PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG:

Sir:—Your last note, delivered to me on Sunday morning, and to which, of course, I would not on that day reply, does not at all surprise me.

It will be, however, impossible for you to conceal from the public the truth, that, with the full knowledge of my being present in your city for the purpose of debating with you or your representative the question of polygamy, you declined to enter into any arrangements for such a discussion; and after this fact was ascertained, I felt at liberty to comply with a subsequent request from other parties, which had been fully arranged before the reception of your note of invitation to preach in your tabernacles.

I must frankly say that I regard your professed courtesy, extended under the circumstances, as it was, a mere device to cover, if possible, your unwillingness to have a fair discussion of the matter in question in the hearing of your people.

Your comments upon "disclaiming and declining the discussion" are simply a reiteration of the *disclaimer*; while, in regard to your notice of my construction of the article in the *Telegraph* of May last, I have only to leave the representations you have seen fit to make to the judgment of a candid public, sure to discover who it is that has been resorting to "subterfuge" in this affair. Your intimation that Elder Sloan, Prof. Pratt, or hundreds of other Mormon elders, would be willing to discuss the question of Polygamy with me from a Bible standpoint, and your impertinent suggestion that I tarry here as a missionary for that purpose, I am compelled to regard as cheap and safe attempts to avoid the appearance of shrinking from such a discussion by seeming to invite it after it had, by your own action, been rendered impossible. As to the elders you speak of, including yourself, being ready to meet me in public debate, I have to say that I came here with that understanding and expectation, but it was rudely dispelled, on being definitely tested. Were it possible to reduce these vague suggestions of yours to something like a distinct proposition for a debate, there is still nothing in your action, so far, to assure me of your sincerity, but, on the contrary, every thing to cause me to distrust it.

I have one more point of remark. You have insinuated that my motive is a thirst for "notoriety." I can assure you that if I had been animated by such a motive, you give me small credit for good sense by supposing that I would employ such means. Neither you, nor the system of which you are the head, could afford me any "notoriety" to be desired.

But, to show how far I have been governed by merely personal aspirations, let the simple history of the case be recalled.

You send your Delegate to Congress who, in the House of Representatives, and in sight and hearing of the whole Nation, throws down the gauntlet upon the subject of Polygamy as treated in the Bible. Being Chaplain of the American Senate, and having been consulted by several public men, I deemed it my duty to preach upon the subject. The discourse was published in the New York "Herald," and on this reaching your city one of your Elders published an article which is generally construed as a challenge to me to debate the question with you, or some one whom you should appoint, here in your tabernacle. Acting upon this presumption, I visit your city, taking the earliest opportunity to inform you, as the head of the Mormon Church, of my purpose, and suggesting the steps usual in such cases. You then reply, ignoring the whole subject, but without a hint of your "pleasure" about my preaching in the Tabernacle.

Subsequently other arrangements were made which precluded my accepting any invitation to speak in your places of worship. The day passed away, and after sunset I received your note of invitation, my reply to which will answer for itself. And this you intimate is an attempt on my part to obtain an "unenviable notoriety."

Sir, I have done with you—make what representation of the matter you think proper, you will not succeed in misleading the discriminating people either of this Territory or of the country generally by any amount of verbiage you may choose to employ.

Respectfully, etc.,

J. P. NEWMAN.

[The communication referred to in the letter below was addressed to Dr. Newman by five persons, who asked him whether it was a fact that he was unwilling to debate the question of polygamy now and here, as that was the impression, they say, the *Deseret Evening News* and *Salt Lake Herald* conveyed.]

SALT LAKE CITY, Aug. 9th, 1876.

TO MR. BRIGHAM YOUNG:

Sir:—In view of the enclosed communications, received from several citizens of this place, asking whether I am ready now and here to debate the question, "Does the Bible Sanction Polygamy?" with you, as the Chief of the Church of Latter-day Saints, and in view of the defiant tone of your Church journals of last evening and

this morning; and in view of the fact that I have been here now four days waiting to have you inform me of your willingness to meet me in public discussion on the above question, but having received no such intimation up to this time of writing, therefore, I do now and here challenge you to meet me in personal and public debate, on the aforesaid question. I respectfully suggest that you appoint two gentlemen to meet Rev. Dr. Sunderland and Dr. J. P. Taggart, who represent me, to make all necessary arrangements for the discussion.

Be kind enough to favor me with an immediate reply.

Respectfully,

J. P. NEWMAN.

Residence of Rev. Mr. Pierce.

SALT LAKE CITY, U. T., August 9th, 1870.

REV. DR. J. P. NEWMAN:

Sir:—Your communication of to-day's date, with accompanying enclosure, was handed to me a few moments since by Mr. Black.

In reply, I will say that I accept the challenge to debate the question "Does the Bible sanction Polygamy?" Professor Orson Pratt or Hon. John Taylor acting as my representative, and in my stead in the discussion. I will furnish the place of holding the meetings, and appoint two gentlemen to meet Messrs. Sunderland and Taggart, to whom you refer as your representatives, to make the necessary arrangements.

I wish the discussion to be conducted in a mild, peaceable, quiet spirit, that the people may receive light and intelligence and all be benefited; and then let the congregation decide for themselves.

Respectfully,

BRIGHAM YOUNG:

CITY, Aug. 9th, 1870.

REV. DR. J. P. NEWMAN:

Sir:—I have appointed Messrs. A. Carrington and Jos. W. Young to meet with Messrs. Sunderland and Taggart, to arrange preliminaries for the discussion.

Respectfully,

BRIGHAM YOUNG.

SALT LAKE CITY, Aug, 9th, 1870.

TO MR. BRIGHAM YOUNG:

Sir:—I challenged you to a discussion and not Orson Pratt or John Taylor. You have declined to debate personally with me. Let the public distinctly understand this fact, whatever may have been your reasons for so declining. Here I think I might reasonably rest the case. However, if Orson Pratt is prepared to take the affirmative of the question, "Does the Bible sanction Polygamy?" I am prepared to take the negative, and Messrs. Sunderland and Taggart will meet Messrs. Carrington and Young to-night at 8 o'clock at the office of Mr. Taggart to make the necessary arrangements.

Respectfully, &c.,

J. P. NEWMAN.

SALT LAKE CITY, U. T. Aug. 10th 1870.

REV. DR. J. P. NEWMAN:

Sir:—I am informed by Messrs. Carrington and Young that at their meeting last evening, with Drs. Sunderland and Taggart, they were unable to come to a decision with regard to the wording of the subject of debate.

Bearing in mind the following facts: Firstly, that you are the challenging party; secondly, that in a sermon delivered by you in the city of Washington, before President Grant and his Cabinet, Members of Congress and many other prominent gentlemen, you assumed to prove that "God's law condemns the union in marriage of more than two persons," it certainly seems strange that your representatives should persistently refuse to have any other question discussed than the one "Does the Bible sanction Polygamy?" It appears to the representatives of Mr. Pratt that if Dr. Newman could undertake to prove in Washington that "God's law condemns the union in marriage of more than two persons," he ought not to refuse to make the same affirmation in Salt Lake City. Mr. Pratt, I discover, entertains the same opinion, but rather than to permit the discussion to fall, he will not press for your original proposition, but will accept the question as you now state it: "Does the Bible sanction Polygamy?"

I sincerely trust that none of the gentlemen forming the committee will encumber the discussion with unnecessary regulations, which will be irksome to both parties and unproductive of good, and that no obstacles will be thrown in the way of having a free and fair discussion.

Respectfully,

BRIGHAM YOUNG.

THE

BIBLE AND POLYGAMY.

DOES THE BIBLE SANCTION POLYGAMY?

DISCUSSION BETWEEN PROFESSOR ORSON PRATT, SEN., AND DR. J. P. NEWMAN,
CHAPLAIN OF THE U. S. SENATE, IN THE NEW TABERNAACLE,
SALT LAKE CITY, AUGUST 12, 13 AND 14, 1870.

FIRST DAY.

At two o'clock yesterday afternoon Professor Pratt and Dr. Newman, with their friends and the umpires, met in the stand of the New Tabernacle: the two former gentlemen prepared for the discussion of the question, "Does the Bible sanction Polygamy?" An audience of three or four thousand—at least half of which was of the gentler sex—assembled to hear the discussion. At a few minutes past two, the audience was called to order by Judge C. M. Hawley, the umpire of Dr. Newman, on the negative, he (fortunately we presume) being absent from his district at this juncture—and Elder John Taylor offered the opening prayer. The same umpire, who somehow or other had got the idea that he was the master of ceremonies on the occasion, and that he would relieve the umpire of the affirmative side from all his duties, then introduced Professor Pratt to the audience, which, as the Professor was so well known and the umpire almost unknown, created a slight titter, which, however, speedily subsided, and the assemblage listened quietly to the

Argument of Professor Orson Pratt.

I appear before this audience to discuss a subject that is certainly important to us, and no doubt is interesting to the country at

large, namely: the subject of plurality of wives, or, as the question is stated, "Does the Bible sanction Polygamy?" I would state, by way of apology to the audience, that I have been unaccustomed, nearly all my life, to debate. It is something new to me. I do not recollect of ever having held more than one or two debates, in the course of my life, on any subject. I think the last one was some thirty years ago, in the city of Edinburgh. But I feel great pleasure this afternoon in appearing before this audience for the purpose of examining the question under discussion. I shall simply read what is stated in the Bible, and make such remarks as I may consider proper upon the occasion.

I will call your attention to a passage which will be found in Deuteronomy, the 21st chapter, from the 15th to the 17th verse:

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 be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved first-born before the son of the hated, which is indeed the first-born: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the first-born, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath; for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the first-born is his.

Here is a law, in the words of the Great Law-giver himself, the Lord, who spake to Moses; and it certainly must be a sanction of a plurality of wives, for it is given to regulate inheritances in families of that description, as well as in families wherein the first wife may have been divorced, or may be dead; wives contemporary and wives that are successive. It refers to both classes; and inasmuch as plurality of wives is nowhere condemned in the law of God, we have a right to believe from this law that plurality of wives is just as legal and proper as that of the marriage of a single wife. This is the ground we are forced to take until we can find some law, some evidence, some testimony to the contrary. They are acknowledged as wives in this passage, at least—"If a man have two wives." It is well known that the House of Israel at that time practised both monogamy and polygamy. They were not exclusively monogamists: neither were they exclusively polygamists. There were monogamic families existing in Israel in those days, and therefore in the Lord giving this he referred not only to successive wives, where a man had married after the death of his first wife, or if the first wife had been divorced for some legal cause, but to wives who were contemporary, as there were many families in Israel, which can be proved if necessary, that were polygamists. I might here refer to the existence of this principle concerning the rights of the first-born in monogamic and polygamic families prior to the date of this law. This seems to have been given to regulate a question that had a prior existence. I will refer, before I proceed from this passage to the monogamic family of Isaac, wherein we have the declaration that Esau and Jacob, being twins, had a dispute, or at least there was an ill feeling on the part of Esau, because Jacob at a certain time had purchased the right of the first-born—that is, his birth-right. The first-born, though twins, and perhaps a few moments intervening

between the first and second, or only a short time, had rights, and those rights were respected and honored centuries before the days of Moses. This was a monogamic family, so far as we are informed; for if Isaac had more than one wife, the Bible does not inform us. We come to Jacob, who was a polygamist, and whose first-born son pertained to the father and not to the mother. There were not four first-born sons to Jacob who were entitled to the rights of the first-born, but only one. The first-born to Jacob was Reuben, and he would have retained the birth-right had he not transgressed the law of heaven. Because of transgression he lost that privilege. It was taken from him and given to Joseph, or rather to the two sons of Joseph, as you will find recorded in the fifth chapter of 1st Chronicles. Here then the rights of the first-born were acknowledged, in both polygamic and monogamic families, before the law under consideration was given. The House of Israel was not only founded in polygamy, but the two wives of Jacob, and the two handmaidens, that were also called his wives, were the women with whom he begat the twelve sons from whom the twelve tribes of Israel sprang; and polygamy having existed with Israel or Jacob, the founders of that nation, was continued among them from generation to generation down until the coming of Christ; and these laws therefore were intended to regulate an institution already in existence. If the law is limited to monogamic families only, it will devolve upon my learned opponent to bring forth evidence to establish this point.

We will next refer to a passage which will be found in Exodus, 21st chapter, 10th verse. It may be well to read the three preceding verses, commencing with the 7th: "And if a man sell his daughter to be a maid-servant, she shall not go out as the men-servants do. If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed; to sell her into a strange nation he shall have no power, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her. And if he hath betrothed her unto his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters. If he take him another wife, her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage shall he not diminish." Also the following verse, the 11th: "And if he do not these three unto her, then shall she go out free without money." I think from the nature of this passage that it certainly does have reference to two lawful wives. It may be that objection will be taken to the word "wife"—"another wife"—from the fact that it is in Italics, and was so placed by the translators of King James, according to the best judgment they could form, taking into consideration the text. I do not intend at present to dwell at any great length upon this passage, merely declaring that this does sanction plurality of wives, so far as my judgment and opinion are concerned, and so far as the literal reading of the Scriptures exhibits, it does sanction the taking of another wife, while the first is still living. If this word "wife" could be translated "woman," that perhaps might alter the case, providing it can be proved that it should be so from the original, which may be referred to on this point, and it may not. We have the privilege, I believe, of taking the Bible