

Cursed: Denied Priesthood

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For Joseph Smith, 1838 was a terrible year. Rumors of immorality, begun that year by Oliver Cowdery, were given credibility because Oliver was the scribe who recorded most of the Book of Mormon text. They are still believed by most Mormon sects, including the LDS church. Cowdery's insinuations resulted in him being brought before a church court on April 12, 1838 by the Far West High Council. A total of nine charges were brought against Cowdery.

At the time, Cowdery was the Assistant President to the Church and respected as the "second elder" of the church. Cowdery had been one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon and was responsible for selecting and ordaining the first Twelve Apostles. Cowdery's church trial was perhaps the most significant to be held in the history of the church.

The nine charges against Cowdery included this one: "For seeking to destroy the character of President Joseph Smith Junior by falsely insinuating that he was guilty of adultery etc." After taking evidence, the High Council ultimately ex-communicated Oliver Cowdery and cleared Joseph of the charge. The minutes of the High Council said they dealt with "the girl business," meaning Oliver's allegations against Joseph. Joseph was exonerated. (See Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830-1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1983), 162-163.)

The un-substantiated charge that Joseph was an adulterer has remained with Mormonism, moving from rumor, to widespread accusation, and finally into accepted LDS history. Today, essentially every Mormon sect either reluctantly admits, or vigorously advocates that carnal relations with plural wives originated with Joseph Smith, and therefore Oliver Cowdery was justified in accusing Joseph Smith of adultery. The closer the historical record is examined,

however, the less evidence there appears to support Joseph as the instigator of sexual relations with multiple women. That same historical record has more evidence to implicate Brigham Young and consider that he changed what Joseph Smith believed. Joseph denounced adultery, and fathered children with Emma Smith alone. Brigham Young vigorously advocated carnal sexuality in the here-and-now with multiple women as a religious sacrament.

Unlike Joseph Smith, Brigham Young not only publicly advocated the practice, but also fathered children with many women. Joseph denounced it publicly and excommunicated those who he found engaged in it, and fathered children only with Emma Smith, his lawful wife. Despite this clear difference, the LDS church claims Brigham Young only practiced publicly what Joseph Smith did privately.

Even if you believe the LDS account of history (which I do not), the differences between the public statements and open conduct of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young could not be more dissimilar. The way the LDS institution has reconciled the great disparity between them is to assert Joseph was a liar, and Brigham Young was not! They cannot be reconciled, and one of them will be damned. (See D&C 76:103-106.)

Oliver Cowdery was not alone in forsaking Mormonism and Joseph Smith in 1838. Many of the most prominent members and leaders of the church likewise abandoned Joseph that year.

David Whitmer, another of the Three Witnesses, resigned his membership in 1838, but was not formally excommunicated. His brother John Whitmer, the church historian, was excommunicated and took the history with him, refusing to return it to Joseph.

Prominent and respected Mormons, Hiram Page (one of the Eight Witnesses) and W.W. Phelps (a member of the high council), also left the church in 1838. So did three members of the twelve, and other church leaders and members.

On July 4, 1838 Sidney Rigdon delivered the infamous “Salt Sermon,” warning that dissenters were worthy of being “trodden, like salt that lost its savor” under the feet of the saints. Because of the talk, former close friends and church leaders Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, W.W. Phelps and Lyman E. Johnson were warned to leave Far West or face “a fatal calamity.” They became enemies of Joseph. Mormons were in turmoil. In response to the threats against these men, all but Phelps fled Far West.

Rigdon’s Salt Sermon did not just threaten disaffected Mormons. He also threatened a “war of extermination” against the non-Mormons of Missouri if they did not stop annoying the Mormons. The threats ignited anti-Mormon opposition. Many of the disaffected Mormons changed sides and joined the Missouri mobs attacking Mormon settlements. These former leaders used their credibility as insiders to incite greater anger and hostility toward the church. The animosities soon turned into armed conflict and arson.

Missourians believed Mormons threatened them. Mormons thought they were acting in defense, and justified their own violence as “defending” themselves. Civil order completely broke down. Historians have named the resulting conflict “The Mormon War.” Angry Mormons fought against angry Missourians. Both sides blamed the other for causing the violence.

In October 1838, responding to the outbreak of hostility between Mormons and Missourians, Missouri Governor Lilburn Boggs issued an “Extermination Order” directing that Mormons be slain or driven from the State of Missouri. The Order gave violence *against* Mormons legitimacy and made Mormon *responses* an act of war against the state.

Many of these former Mormon leaders signed affidavits accusing Joseph Smith and his church organization of criminal and moral wrongdoing. Thomas Marsh, president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, signed an affidavit on October 24, 1838 condemning and blaming Joseph for causing all the violence. The Marsh allegations were endorsed by a second affidavit from fellow apostle Orson Hyde. The Marsh affidavit was signed the same day open

warfare commenced and stated in part that “Joseph Smith, the Prophet, had preached [at Far West]...that all the Mormons who refused to take up arms, if necessary, in difficulties with the citizens, should be shot, or otherwise put to death[.]” The affidavits identified Joseph Smith as the one responsible for Mormon violence directed at Missouri citizens. After recounting circumstantial evidence of thefts by Mormons that he claimed were supervised by Joseph, the Marsh affidavit stated,

They have among them a company consisting of all that are considered true Mormons, called the Danites, who have taken an oath to support the heads of the Church in all things, that they say or do, whether right or wrong. ... On Saturday last, I am informed by the Mormons that they had a meeting at Far West, at which they appointed a company of twelve, by the name of the Destruction Company, for the purpose of burning and destroying; ... they passed a decree that no Mormon dissenter should leave Caldwell county alive; and that such as attempted to do it, should be shot down, and sent to tell their tale in eternity. In a conversation between Dr. Avard and other Mormons, said Avard proposed to start a pestilence among the Gentiles, as he called them, by poisoning their corn, fruit, &c., and saying it was the work of the Lord; and said Avard advocated lying for the support of their religion, and said it was no harm to lie for the Lord!! The plan of said Smith, the Prophet, is to take this State; and he professes to his people to intend taking the United States, and ultimately the whole world. This is the belief of the Church, and my own opinion of the Prophet’s plans and intentions. It is my opinion that neither said Joseph Smith, the Prophet, nor any one of the principal men, who is firm in the faith, could be indicted for any offense in the county of Caldwell. The Prophet inculcates the notion, and it is believed by every true Mormon that Smith’s prophecies are superior to the law of the land. I have heard the Prophet say that he should yet tread down his enemies, and walk over their dead bodies; that if he was not let alone, he would be a second Mahomet [Mohammad] to this generation, and that he would make it one

gore of blood from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean; that like Mahomet, whose motto, in treating for peace, was “Al Koran or the Sword,” so should it be eventually with us, “Joseph Smith or the Sword.” These last statements were made during the last summer.

In calmer days, both Marsh and Hyde would recant their sworn affidavits. But in 1838 their statements were thought to be entirely truthful, and provided justification for the Missouri political leaders, militia and general population to see Joseph Smith and Mormons as a clear and present danger to them and their property.

The first skirmishes between Mormons and Missourians began in August 1838 at a polling station when Mormons tried to vote. A band of Mormons led by Sampson Avard confronted election judge Adam Black about the failure to protect Mormon voting rights. Joseph Smith was among these Mormons. Judge Black attributed threats of violence to Avard, and said Joseph did not approve and instead possessed no such heart for violence.

In the aftermath of the fight at the polling station, Avard’s authority to direct the Mormon militia was removed by Joseph Smith and Avard was reassigned as a surgeon. The re-assignment was because Joseph did not want violence to be used to resolve conflicts and Avard thought otherwise. Avard testified in November 1838, “I once had a command as an officer, but Joseph Smith, jr., removed me from it, and I asked him the reason, and he assigned that he had another office for me. Afterwards Mr. Rigdon told me I was to fill the office of surgeon, to attend to the sick and wounded.” (Testimony before Judge Austin A. King, 5th District Court of Missouri, November 12, 1838.)

Avard continued to support violence against perceived enemies, and formed a group that came to be known as the “Danites.” Joseph denied that he approved or supported Avard’s group or violent actions. Historians have debated the question of Joseph’s involvement with

the Danite organization and activities. Joseph's denials have been questioned largely because of testimony against Joseph given by Avar in late 1838 before Judge King.

While Avar was acting in the role of a surgeon, the battle of Crooked River was fought on October 24, 1838. The Extermination Order was issued immediately after, on October 27, 1838. Three days later, October 30, 1838 at Haun's Mill, the Missouri Militia, led by Colonel William Jennings, Sheriff of Livingston County, massacred a group of Mormons. Some even after they surrendered. None of the Missouri Militia were killed. The Mormon dead totaled at least 17, including a 78 year-old Revolutionary War veteran, whose body was decapitated and dismembered after he had surrendered, and two boys, ages 9 and 10.

Joseph Smith was tricked by George Hinkle into surrendering at the city of Far West while it was under siege. He thought he was going to meet with Missouri Militia leaders to negotiate peace. Hinkle lied to Joseph and brought him and other leaders to the militia, to be immediately arrested for treason.

On November 1st Joseph was sentenced to death "at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning in a public square at Far West." Militia leader Donaphin refused to carry out the order, and Joseph's life was spared.

In the lead up to his arrest, and then during imprisonment, disaffected Mormons were far more dangerous and threatening to Joseph than the non-Mormons. It was Mormon lies about him that caused the peril.

Joseph's original arrest at Far West was arranged by an agreement George Hinkle made with the commander of the Missouri Militia. The church leaders were inside Far West, which at the time was fortified and would be difficult for the militia to take without serious loss of life. Hinkle was sent to negotiate with the militia poised outside Far West as the representative for the community.

Hinkle agreed with militia commander Colonel Lucas to surrender church leaders to the militia, but lied to Joseph and the others. He did not disclose they would be arrested, but led them to believe they were going to meet with Col. Lucas to negotiate an end to the conflict. Joseph was surprised when Hinkle led him into the camp as a prisoner. George Hinkle was a traitor.

Joseph Smith wrote several documents while imprisoned in Missouri. Specific dissidents are named and their treachery explained in those documents. The individuals and their wrongdoing are set out below:

From jail Joseph petitioned for habeas corpus. In the petition he mentioned George Hinkle:

“Joseph Smith Jr is now unlawfully confined and restrained of his liberty in Liberty jail Clay County (Mo) that he has been restrained of his liberty near five months your petitioners clame that the whole transaction which has been the cause of his confinement ~~was~~ (is) unlawfull from the first to the Last he was taken from his home by a fraude being practised upon him by a man by the name of George M Hinkle...” (*JSP, Documents Vol. 6, p. 344; as in original.*)

Hinkle is mentioned in another letter, along with John Corrill, Reed Peck, David Whitmer and WW Phelps:

“Look at Mr [George M.] Hinkle. A wolf in sheep’s clothing. Look at his brother John Corrill Look at the beloved brother Reed Peck who aided him in leading us, as the savior was led, into the camp as a lamb prepared for the slaughter and a sheep dumb before his shearer so we opened not our mouth But these men like Balaam being greedy for a reward sold us into the hands of those who loved them, for the world loves his own. I would remember W[illiam] W. Phelps who comes up before us as one of Job’s comforters. God suffered such kind of beings to afflict Job, but it never

entered into their hearts that Job would get out of it all. This poor man who professes to be much of a prophet has no other dumb ass to ride but David Whitmer to forbid his madness when he goes up to curse Israel, and this ass not being of the same kind of Balaams therefore the angel notwithstanding appeared unto him yet he could not penetrate his understanding sufficiently so but what he brays out cursings instead of blessings.” (*JSP, Documents Vol. 6, p. 300-301; as in original.*)

Sampson Avard led the Danites, a secret Mormon, quasi-military organization that terrorized Missourians and exacted revenge against them. They burned houses and engaged in assaults to retaliate against the local non-Mormons. Avard was responsible for Joseph, Hyrum and others being held on the charge of treason. Without Avard’s testimony it was unlikely for enough evidence to be shown for probable cause to hold them on the charge of treason. Joseph wrote from jail about Avard the following:

We have learned also since we have been in prison that many false and pernicious things which were calculated to lead the saints far astray and to do great injury (have been taught by Dr. [Sampson] Avard) as coming from the Presidency ~~taught by Dr Avard~~ and we have reason to fear (that) many (other things) designing and corrupt characters like unto himself (have been teaching many things) which the presidency never knew of being taught in the church by any body untill after they were made prisoners, which if they had known of, they would have spurned them and their authors from them as they would the gates of hell. Thus we find that there has been frauds and secret abominations and evil works of darkness going on leading the minds of the weak and unwary into confusion and distraction, and palming it all the time upon upon the presidency while mean time the presidency were ignorant as well as innocent of these things, which were practicing in the church in their name[.]” (*JSP, Documents Vol. 6, p. 306*)

Joseph wrote about the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon (David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris) along with William McLellin, John Whitmer, Thomas Marsh and Orson Hyde. All of these were identified in the following condemnation written by Joseph in Liberty Jail:

Such characters as [William E.] McLellin, John Whitmer, O[liver] Cowdery, Martin Harris, who are too mean to mention and we had liked to have forgotten them. [Thomas B.] Marsh & [Orson] Hyde whose hearts are full of corruption, whose cloak of hypocrisy was not sufficient to shield them or to hold them up in the hour of trouble, who after having escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of God and become again entangled and overcome the latter end is worse than the first. But it has happened unto them according to the words of the savior, the dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. Again if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking (for) of judgement and firey indignation to come which shall devour these adversaries. For he who despiseth Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses of how much more severe punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy who hath sold his brother and denied the new and everlasting covenant[.]” (*JSP Documents Vol. 6*, pp. 307-308.)

WW Phelps was another Mormon dissenter who was removed from leadership and then excommunicated in June 1838. He was one of the witnesses who testified against Joseph Smith in the Missouri treason hearings and accused him of being responsible for violence and treason. Phelps may have been motivated to testify against Joseph Smith to protect himself from criminal charges. He had been seen by Patrick Lynch, the clerk in Stolling's grocery store, as one of the Mormon mob that robbed the store and then burned it. (*JSP Documents Vol. 6*, pp. 417-419.)

Joseph was not fooled by these men. He recognized they were traitors and liars. But he revealed to his wife his own spirit of forgiveness about them. Writing from jail to his wife, after 5 months and 5 days of imprisonment, Joseph counseled Emma “neither harbor [sic] a spirit of revenge.” (*JSP, Documents Vol. 6*, p. 405.) Joseph’s advice to his wife contrasts sharply with the revealed word from the Lord to Joseph.

Early in 1839, after nearly a half-year of imprisonment, Joseph Smith wrote a letter from Liberty Jail to the saints. The letter included several revelations. One revelation declared these words:

[C]ursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed saith the Lord and cry they have sin[n]ed when they have not sined before me saith the Lord but have done that which was meet in mine eyes and which I commanded them but those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin and are the children of disobediance themselvs and those who swear false against my servants that they might bring them unto bondage and death. Wo unto them because they have offended my little ones they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house their basket shall not be full their houses and their barnes shall famish and they themselvs shall be dispised by those that flattered them they shall not have right to the priesthood nor their posterity after them from generation to generation it had been better for them that a millstone had been hanged about their necks and they ~~having~~ drownd in the depth of the see...” (*JSP, Documents Vol. 6*, p. 366; all as in original.)

It was the Lord who said those men who bore false witness against Joseph “**shall not have right to the priesthood nor their posterity after them from generation to generation[.]**” Even as late as the 1830s it was possible for men to so offend God that He will curse both them and their posterity from any right to the priesthood.

Such a heavy cursing raises two questions: First, upon whom was this curse imposed? Second, what did they do to merit such a heavy burden?

The probable candidates who earned this cursing are those Joseph identified in his letters describing the lies and false testimony against him. They were: George Hinkle, John Corrill, Reed Peck, Sampson Avard, William McLellin, John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, Thomas Marsh, Orson Hyde and WW Phelps. Each of these men and their wrongdoings are mentioned by Joseph Smith in his correspondence from jail in Missouri.

The three witnesses to the Book of Mormon are in almost every priesthood line of authority throughout Mormonism. Think of the irony of that for a moment. They were cursed and “shall not have right to the priesthood nor their posterity after them from generation to generation” yet Mormons point to them as the source through which the priesthood authority has descended until today.

This loss was because God sent a messenger, Joseph Smith, to say what God gave him to speak as God’s message to that generation. But these men rejected the messenger and fought against him. They accused Joseph of wrongdoing and sin when there was none.

What are the implications today for those historians and institutions who, like Oliver Cowdery, say Joseph Smith was an adulterer and a liar? Are they any different from those who testified against him in 1838 and 1839? It calls to mind another revelation God declared while Joseph remained in Liberty Jail:

“fools shall have thee in derision, and hell shall rage against thee; While the pure in heart, and the wise, and the noble, and the virtuous, shall seek counsel, and authority, and blessings constantly from under thy hand. And thy people shall never be turned against thee by the testimony of traitors.” (D&C 122:1-3.)

Are fools who hold Joseph Smith in derision today any less accountable?

I DO NOT believe Joseph Smith was an adulterer. He was not a liar, nor a hypocrite. But almost every Mormon institution, and certainly the largest ones, either proclaim or admit Joseph was all these things. I do not. I think he was pure in heart, noble, and virtuous. Must a person themselves be pure in heart, wise, noble, and virtuous before they qualify to seek worthy counsel, authority and blessings through Joseph Smith's legacy?

One of the most ghastly legacies still happening as a result of Brigham Young's openly adulterous version of Mormonism is best understood in a recent article in a December 28th Salt Lake Tribune article: *After polygamist leaders used underage girls for sex, lawsuit says, one teen was forced to be a scribe for the rituals*. The article describes the allegations in a newly filed lawsuit against the FLDS leaders. Among other things it relates the following:

Starting when she was 8 years old, the woman [victim] says, she would be taken from her home, wearing a bag over her head, to an unknown location — typically an FLDS temple in the Colorado City, Ariz., area or other church- or trust-owned properties — where she would be assigned a number for a religious ritual, according to the lawsuit.

There, she was reportedly sexually assaulted by the Jeffses, Nielsen or other church members and leaders. When the men weren't assaulting her, she says, they watched.

While these are unproven allegations at present, the lawsuit will be based on these and other horrific allegations. These contemptible deviant sexual practices are an outgrowth of the legacy bequeathed to the LDS by Brigham Young. Carol Lynn Pearson's recent book, *The Ghost of Eternal Polygamy*, recounts how plural wivery continues to invade and haunt the thinking of LDS Mormon women. Though the LDS church finally abandoned the practice in 1904 this cancer originated with it. I do not believe the deviant sexual legacy is Joseph's, who

denounced adultery, but is Brigham's, who celebrated sexual access to multiple women as a religious sacrament.

How many descendants of George Hinkle, John Corrill, Reed Peck, Sampson Avard, William McLellin, John Whitmer, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, Thomas Marsh, Orson Hyde and WW Phelps today think they hold priesthood, when God said they were cursed as part of these men's posterity? It would be interesting to know how many men today *are* cursed and have forfeited any right to priesthood because they, like those who were responsible for Joseph's imprisonment, foolishly hold Joseph in derision.

As for myself, I believe Joseph when a sermon of his on May 26, 1844 is quoted in *DHC* 6:411: "What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can find only one." He made this comment in response to the false accusations contained in the Nauvoo Expositor.

I believe Joseph when he, referring to the 1835 D&C, CI, affirmed it was his belief that: "Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy; we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife; and one woman, but one husband, except in the case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again." I believe Joseph Smith was truthful when, as editor of the *Times and Seasons*, he disavowed polygamy and stated the foregoing verse was "the only rule allowed by the church." (*Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, p. 909 (1842).) He repeated that same position again at *Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, p. 939 (1842).

In 1844 Joseph and Hyrum Smith announced the excommunication of Hiram Brown for "preaching Polygamy, and other false and corrupt doctrines, in the county of Lapeer, state of Michigan." (*Times and Seasons*, vol. 5, p. 423 (1844).)

Hyrum Smith, with Joseph's approval, published a statement denying plural wives or polygamy, explaining all such teaching is false doctrine: "... some of your elders say, that a man having a certain priesthood, may have as many wives as he pleases, and that doctrine is taught here: I say unto you that that man teaches false doctrine, for there is no such doctrine taught here; neither is there any such thing practiced here." (*Times and Seasons*, vol. 5, p. 474 (March, 1844).)

God identified those who deride Joseph and Hyrum Smith as "fools." Writing histories and teaching as doctrine that Joseph and Hyrum were liars is, to any reasonable mind, "derision" of them. Like those condemned in 1839, should all who deride Joseph as a liar today question their claim to hold priesthood authority? Has God continued to curse both them and their posterity from any right to the priesthood?

As explained in the talk on Priesthood given in Orem, Utah on November 2, 2013, priesthood is a fellowship. Joseph Smith was clearly in fellowship with God and angels, and therefore one whose priesthood included the ministering of angels, the Son of God, and God the Father. He held priesthood.