

Lesson #12 – How do we explain Polygamy being practiced in the early LDS Church?

We are often asked by non-members how the Church could have lived polygamy if it is a Christian church. That is easily explained. The best way I have found to explain it is to refer the person to the Bible. Most people have heard the Old Testament stories of the Bible as a child and know them well enough to at least know the story. They may not know all of the details but they normally do remember to characters in the Bible story.

To start out, ask the person if they believe that the Old Testament Prophets were called of God. Ask them if they believe that they were Prophets. It is important that you get them to express their feelings related to the Old Testament prophets being God's servants on the earth at the time and true and living prophets. Ask them if they believe Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were prophets of God. Ask them if they believe Moses was a prophet of God. Once you have established that as one of their fundamental beliefs about the Bible you can proceed.

Ask them if they remember the story in the Bible where Jacob worked 7 years to marry Rachael and then her father tricked him on the wedding day and he actually married Leah who was the oldest daughter because it was Jewish law that the oldest daughter be married first. (Genesis 29:16-30 see story below)

Most people will remember that story from Sunday School when they were a child. If they are not familiar with the story you can read it to them from the Bible so they know the story. It is very important that they know the full story of how Jacob first married Leah and then worked 7 more years so he could marry the daughter that he really loved, Rachel.

Once they understand that story then you can ask them how many wives Jacob had. They will of course say 2. Then ask them again if they believe that Jacob was a prophet of God. Ask them how a prophet of God could live the law of polygamy and still be a prophet. That is the key point to the discussion.

Once they come to the realization of the fact that Jacob legally had two wives then you can further explain to them that Jacob was the father of the 12 tribes. I have never met any person with any religious training that did not know about the 12 tribes of Israel. They may not know much about them but at least they know that they are a central figure in the history of Christianity. This Jacob who is the father of the 12 tribes is the same Jacob that is referred to when we so often say Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is also the same Jacob who worked 7 years to marry Rachael and then worked 7 more years to finally be able to marry her. (Genesis 29:16-30.... see Bible story below)

Now that you have established that part of the story you can further relate to them the story about how Leah was able to have children and Rachel was not able to. So Rachael gave her handmaiden to Jacob to have children for her. Now he has 3 wives. So Leah gave her handmaiden to Jacob to have children for her as well. Now he has 4 wives. Those 4 woman are the mothers of the 12 tribes. Leah was the mother of 6 of the 12 tribes. Rebecca was the mother of 2. The other 4 were sons of the handmaidens. All of the sons that we know as the 12 tribes had the same father, Jacob, but they did not have the same mother. They were the sons of Jacobs 4 wives. That is a very important point. The 12 tribes of Israel are a very central figure in Christianity and they were the sons of a polygamist marriage relationship. (Genesis 30:1-12... see Bible below)

Now that you have established the fact that a Prophet of God did in fact have more than one wife, you can point out that the question then really is not if polygamy is right or wrong. The point is only if God commanded or allowed the law of polygamy to be lived.

Here is the key point of the discussion. You can then say to them that the point of this discussion is to show then that if the prophet Joseph Smith lived the law of polygamy he did it because God commanded him to live it. So the discussion here is not whether polygamy is right or wrong. The discussion is only whether God commanded it to be lived or not.

So now you can tell the person that the thing that they need to do is to find out for them selves if Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. If he was then we can see that God could command him to live the law of polygamy just like he did the Old Testament prophets. If he is not a prophet of God then all that he taught is of no consequence anyway. We can only know that by finding out if Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. The only way you can do that is by reading the Book of Mormon. Then invite them to read the Book of Mormon and pray and ask God if it is true. When they receive a witness that it is true then they will also know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God called in our time.

~~~~~

## SUPPLAMANTARY INFORMATION

### **The Story of Jacob, Leah and Rachel**

Genesis 29:16-30

16 Mutta Laabanilla oli kaksi tytärtä; vanhemman nimi oli Leea, nuoremman nimi oli Raakel. g

17 Ja Leealla oli sameat silmät, mutta Raakelilla oli kaunis vartalo ja kauniit kasvot.

18 Ja Jaakob rakasti Raakelia; niin hän sanoi: "Minä palvelen sinua seitsemän vuotta saadakseni Raakelin, nuoremman tyttäresi".

19 Laaban vastasi: "Parempi on, että annan hänet sinulle, kuin että antaisin hänet jollekin toiselle; jää luokseni".

20 Jaakob palveli siis seitsemän vuotta saadakseen Raakelin, ja ne tuntuivat hänestä muutamilta päiviltä; niin hän rakasti häntä.

21 Senjälkeen Jaakob sanoi Laabanille: "Anna minulle vaimoni, sillä aikani on nyt kulunut umpeen, mennäkseni hänen tykönsä".  
22 Silloin Laaban kutsui kokoon kaikki sen paikkakunnan asukkaat ja laittoi pidot;  
23 mutta illalla hän otti tyttärensä Leean ja vei hänet hänen luokseen; ja hän yhtyi häneen.  
24 Ja Laaban antoi orjattarensa Silpan tyttärellensä Leealle orjattareksi.  
25 Aamulla hän näki, että se oli Leea. Ja hän sanoi Laabanille: "Mitä oletkaan minulle tehnyt? Olenhan palvellut sinua saadakseni Raakelin! Miksi petit minut?"  
26 Laaban vastasi: "Ei ole meidän maassamme tapana antaa nuorempaa ennen vanhempaa.  
27 Vietä nyt vain tämä hääviikko loppuun, niin annetaan sinulle toinenkin, kunhan olet palveluksessani vielä toiset seitsemän vuotta."  
28 Ja Jaakob suostui siihen, ja kun hän oli viettänyt sen viikon loppuun, antoi Laaban myöskin tyttärensä Raakelin hänelle vaimoksi.  
29 Ja Laaban antoi orjattarensa Bilhan tyttärellensä Raakelille orjattareksi.  
30 Ja hän yhtyi myös Raakeliin, ja Raakel oli hänelle rakkaampi kuin Leea; ja hän palveli Laabanin luona vielä toiset seitsemän vuotta.

### **Mothers of the 12 Tribes**

Genesis 30:1-12

1 Kun Raakel näki, ettei hän synnyttänyt Jaakobille, kadehti hän sisartaan ja sanoi Jaakobille: "Hanki minulle lapsia, muuten minä kuolen".  
2 Niin Jaakob vihastui Raakeliin ja sanoi: "Minäkö olen Jumala, joka on kieltänyt sinulta kohdun hedelmän?"  
3 Mutta Raakel sanoi: "Tässä on orjattareni Bilha; yhdy häneen, että hän synnyttäisi minun helmaani ja minäkin siten saisin lapsia hänestä".  
4 Ja hän antoi hänelle orjattarensa Bilhan vaimoksi ja Jaakob yhtyi häneen.  
5 Ja Bilha tuli raskaaksi ja synnytti Jaakobille pojan.  
6 Niin Raakel sanoi: "Jumala hankki minulle oikeuden, ja hän kuuli minun ääneni ja antoi minulle pojan". Sentähden hän antoi hänelle nimen Daan.  
7 Ja Bilha, Raakelin orjatar, tuli jälleen raskaaksi ja synnytti Jaakobille toisen pojan.  
8 Niin Raakel sanoi: "Jumalan taisteluja minä olen taistellut sisareni kanssa ja olen voittanut". Ja hän antoi hänelle nimen Naftali.  
9 Kun Leea näki lakanneensa synnyttämästä, otti hän orjattarensa Silpan ja antoi hänet Jaakobille vaimoksi.  
10 Ja Silpa, Leean orjatar, synnytti Jaakobille pojan.  
11 Niin Leea sanoi: "Onneksi!" Ja hän antoi hänelle nimen Gaad.  
12 Ja Silpa, Leean orjatar, synnytti Jaakobille toisen pojan.

There are many other stories in the Bible that tell of God's prophets having more than one wife.

### **The story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar**

Genesis 16:1-4

1. Saarai, Abrammin vaimo, ei synnyttänyt hänelle lasta. Mutta Saarailla oli egyptiläinen orjatar, jonka nimi oli Haagar.
2. Ja Saarai sanoi Abramille: "Katso, Herra on sulkenut minut synnyttämästä; yhdy siis minun orjattareeni, ehkä minä saisin lapsia hänestä". Ja Abram kuuli Saaraita.
3. Ja Saarai, Abrammin vaimo, otti egyptiläisen orjattarensa Haagarin, sitten kuin Abram oli asunut kymmenen vuotta Kanaanin maassa, ja antoi hänet miehellensä Abramille vaimoksi.
4. Ja hän yhtyi Haagariin, ja Haagar tuli raskaaksi.

### **Moses**

Numbers 12:1

Mutta Mirjam ja Aaron parjasivat Moosesta etiopialaisen naisen tähden, jonka hän oli ottanut vaimokseen; sillä hän oli ottanut vaimokseen etiopialaisen naisen.

Moses had already married Zipporah (Exodus 2:21). Aaron and Miriam criticized their brother for taking this second wife, but they were immediately punished by the Lord for their criticism, making it plain that Moses had done no wrong in His sight (Numbers 12:1-15).

### **King David**

1 Chronicles 3:1-5

He had 8 wives

### **Kings Solomon**

Kings 11:1-3

He had 700 wives and 300 concubines

### **King Rehoboam of Judea**

2 Chronicles 11:21

He had 18 wives and 60 concubines.

### **New Testament**

1 Timothy 3:2

There are strong indications that during the first century AD some new Christians brought their plural marriages into the Church (in 1 Timothy 3:2 the comment is made that a man to be ordained an Elder should only have 'one wife'. Why would he not just say they should be married. His statement implies that there were others who did legally have more than one wife.

[Return to Home Page](#)