

# The Polygamous Prophet of the Last Days

*James Harmston says he's the reincarnation of  
Mormon founder Joseph Smith  
and believes that plural marriage is the only  
route to celestial exaltation.*

by Mark Teal

*Is Harmston a dedicated visionary  
or a harmful cult leader?*



James D. Harmston, leader of the Manti, Utah-based True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days

S nuggled in a verdant valley between the pine, aspen, and juniper mountains of central Utah, the rural town of Manti (pop. 1,750) is the epitome of homespun Mormon stability. The lone motorist heading south on Highway 89 through Sanpete County is greeted by the sacred Manti Temple, one of the first temples built by Brigham Young, the prophet who guided the Mormons to Utah in 1848.

Out of this small-town backdrop of millennial religion and pioneer history, a new prophet has risen. He is James D. Harmston, a radical Mormon polygamist who has made quaint little Manti the headquarters of his True and Living Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days — or simply the TLC, a polygamous sect of some 300 to 500 members.

Jim Harmston, 58, is a true enigma. A stocky chunk of a man whose arms hang at his side like parentheses, he sports a well-trimmed, graying beard and mustache. When not wearing temple robes, he likes to dress in black and white cowboy clothes. Before he went into the business of religion — selling faith, hope, eternal salvation, and plural marriages — he claims he was an affluent business consultant, although some of his old friends counter that he was really a part-time food storage merchant and real estate broker.

Harmston, who has eight wives today, has also pluckily claimed to be the reincarnation of Joseph Smith, the martyred founder of the Mormon faith. On November 25, 1990, four angels — Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Moses — appeared to Harmston and handed him the invisible “keys of the priesthood” that formerly belonged to the orthodox Mormon church — the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Harmston teaches that the Church has lost its authority because it abandoned plural marriage and other essential sacred doctrines. He recorded his divine mission and his de-



Eight is enough? Jim Harmston in front of his church headquarters in Manti with his collective better half (left to right): Gail, Laura, Karen, Elaine, Pauline, Anna Mae, Helen, and Jeannie

rogatory sentiments toward the Church on his Website ([www.tlcmanti.org](http://www.tlcmanti.org)), which has been instrumental in attracting affluent new converts.

Reporters have remarked that Harmston is charismatic neither in appearance nor in speech. Nevertheless, he loves the limelight. Many recordings of TLC meetings have been circulated by dissident members. Based on these recordings and from meeting him in person, Harmston's laurels seem to stem from his humor and audacity, his photographic knowledge of Mormon scripture, and his strange and innovative doctrines that heap immense recognition and the feeling of superiority upon his followers.

However, a closer examination of Harmston — and of the stories told by expatriate TLC members — reveals a very different picture of Manti's polygamous paradise. Several former TLC members are suing Harmston, saying he duped them out of more than \$250,000. These born-again critics charge that Harmston uses concepts like polygamy, reincarnation, and spirit communication as tools to gain power and coax cash out of his followers. Meanwhile, fellow residents of Manti are growing increasingly leery over the unwanted publicity that the pugacious Harmston has forced upon their quiet farming community. Is Harmston the savior and visionary he says he is? Or is the TLC living out a grand illusion?

### Everybody Needs a Little TLC

The orthodox Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (also known simply as the LDS Church) discontinued the practice of polygamy in 1890. In 1896, it was outlawed by the Utah Constitution as a precondition for statehood. But stalwart Mormons remained convinced that plural marriage was indispensable to a celestial exaltation. Whereas Joseph Smith and Brigham Young taught that the most righteous among them would each become Gods of a planet like Earth in the



afterlife, the polygamists believe that they will rule over as many planets as they have wives. This underground zealot faction, calling themselves Mormon fundamentalists, has since grown into a subculture of about 40,000 polygamists, much to the chagrin of the modern LDS Church.

In the 1940s, the fundamentalists began to splinter into separate factions. Little polygamist sects have since come and gone like blisters, but today three major groups number in the thousands, each led by a prophet claiming to possess the invisible priesthood keys. Even as the pious population of Utah pretends they don't exist, the fundamentalist groups are able to prosper under the indifferent nose of government. But because inordinate emphasis is placed on the quantity

of wives, the relationships between polygamous men and the women are often trivial, resulting in mothers and children being sequestered in poverty.

In June 1998, Mormon polygamy grabbed the national spotlight when a 16-year-old girl was belt-whipped by her father for refusing to become the fifteenth wife of her uncle. The father, John Daniel Kingston, pleaded "no contest" to assault and was sentenced to 28 weeks in jail. The uncle, David Ortell Kingston, was subsequently arrested for incest and in July 1999 was sentenced to 10 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. The brothers are members of the infamous Kingston Group, Utah's third largest polygamist cult with approximately 1,000 members, who are said to practice incest because





**This painting by former TLC member Kaziah Hancock portrays Harmston beside his past-life incarnation, Mormon founder Joseph Smith. The foreground shows Harmston in the role of John the Baptist.**

they believe their blood is pure and noble.

Of Utah's prominent polygamous cults, however, Jim Harmston's True and Living Church (with its ironic "TLC" acronym) is by far the most bizarre. According to a church "Time Line" distributed among TLC members, in September 1993 Harmston sent his apostles out to anoint, curse, and prepare for destruction all the "polluted" temples of the LDS Church — except for the Manti Temple, which Harmston plans to take over for himself. One ex-TLC member, Kaziah May Hancock, says that TLC followers are instructed to pray that Harmston will soon have the power to realize his heart's desires: to destroy the LDS Church, and then to destroy the United States government for supposedly killing Joseph Smith.

Harmston allegedly teaches that in the last days, Sanpete County and its several small towns will be cleansed of the wicked. All of Sanpete County has been anointed sacred ground in preparation for the expected "exodus of saints" when Armageddon arrives. At that time, Harmston and his righteous flock will take pos-

session of everything of value in the county. From there, they will march to Salt Lake City to zap the LDS hierarchy, turning them into "crispy critters and natural element."

Another one of Harmston's more radical teachings is his Doctrine of Multiple Mortal Probation, which is based on reincarnation. Harmston vested Phil Savage, the elderly patriarch of the TLC, with the power to discern and reveal to members who they were in prior "probations," or past lives. As it turns out, in previous lives, some TLC members were pretty important people. Among the distinguished past-life characters found among the TLC hierarchy are Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and the apostles Peter, James, and John.

Harmston teaches his flock that in a past life he was Mormon founder Joseph Smith.

This explains why Harmston has followed Smith's example in developing the TLC. Ex-cultists say they have heard Harmston claim that he was also John the Baptist, Isaiah, Shem, Melchizedek, Joseph of the coat of many colors, the Brother of Jared in the Book of Mormon, King Arthur, and Napoleon. After Harmston saw the movie *Braveheart*, he remembered he was William Wallace.

The TLC, not unlike most polygamist sects, requires members to consecrate their money and possessions to the church's greater good. Kaziah Mae Hancock says that Harmston teaches that total consecration of one's earthly goods is the ultimate test of righteousness, guaranteeing salvation. Those who donate the most also seem to have been the brightest and most important in previous lives. Hancock says her ex-husband, Douglas Jordan, who allegedly consecrated \$250,000 of her money, was informed by Harmston that he had been Mormon of the Book of Mormon, Nephi, Judea of the Tribe of



**Doug Jordan allegedly consecrated \$250,000 of his then-wife Kaziah Hancock's money to the TLC.**



Judea, and a brother of Adam.

Ex-TLC devotee Cindy Sue Stewart says she was present when Patriarch Savage told a follower named John Harper that he had been Brigham Young in a past life. "Afterwards, when Jim [Harmston] learned what Phil had done, he said, 'Oh no, how could Phil have done that? It's all over now, he has ruined everything!'" says Stewart.

"I didn't know it at the time, but Randy Maudsley, one of Jim's militant apostles, was bragging it up that he was Brigham Young. I said to Jim, 'Wouldn't it be convenient if there was a Brigham Young, Jr.?' I made the same comment to Phil, who was actually sobbing over his mistake.

"Jim and Phil were afraid that the jig was up," Stewart continues. "But the next day, they told John that Phil meant that he was Brigham Young, Jr. John was not happy but there was nothing he could do. He had been demoted to Brigham Young Jr. It was then that I realized Jim and the TLC were big frauds."

### Eight Brides for One Brother

Jim Harmston has eight wives, who comprise a female hierarchy known as the "Women's Society." Except for the first wife, Elaine, and the last wife, Helen, they have all been married to someone else. Karen, the second wife, manages the TLC greenhouses. Hancock and Stewart say that Karen confided to them that she provides Harmston with all his sexual needs. As Jim takes more wives, she makes it clear to each new wife that Harmston's sexual satisfaction is her domain.

Gail, the third wife, is the recognized matriarch and has the most authority, but according to ex-members, is an instrument in Harmston's hands with no mind of her own. She and two of Harmston's other wives, Laura and Helen, are transplants from the dissolved Shreeves polygamist group, who practiced uninhibited free sex. When the leader, Arvin G. Shreeves, was imprisoned for sexual exploitation, Gail, Laura, and Helen found their way to Harmston's bed.

Harmston's fifth wife, Anna Mae, is



After she and Doug gave up most of their property, Kaziah (above) says the TLC pressured her to sell her prized goats so she could donate more money.

the widow of the late murderer Ervil LeBaron, who masqueraded as the One Mighty & Strong, an End Times character from Mormon scripture. When LeBaron acted out the character in 1977, he killed two fundamentalists who wouldn't recognize his authority — including his own brother. John R. Llewellyn, a retired Salt Lake County deputy sheriff who has profiled LeBaron and Harmston, states that both men have many of the same characteristics.

There are claims that Harmston recently acquired a ninth wife, 16-year-old Angie, whom he described as a "gift of God." According to ex-TLC member Rodney Clowdus, angels sent by God repeatedly commanded Harmston to take tender Angie as his wife. The penitent prophet reluctantly obeyed. In a conversation that Clowdus tape-recorded without Harmston's knowledge, Harmston admitted that Angie was an inexperienced lover — but "she's the most cuddling little thing you ever saw in all your life," he professed. Clowdus turned the recording over to the local sheriff in hopes of having Harmston prosecuted, but Harmston cunningly denied the illicit affair and produced a marriage certificate proving that Angie was married to a boy her own age.

Mormon fundamentalists teach that

plural marriage is a prerequisite for supreme exaltation. When a woman is sealed to a man for eternity, only a prophet has the authority to release her from an abusive or incompatible marriage. Unless she has influence with the prophet and can inveigle a release, she is stuck with her husband literally for all time.

Harmston has introduced a doctrine that provides an extraordinary solution for a woman stuck in such an undesirable situation. According to his Doctrine of Rescue, a man with a higher priesthood can "rescue" a wife from a man with a lesser priesthood. The practice works for the woman's good: By leaving a lesser man for a better man, she not only enhances her prestige on earth, but increases her salvation in the afterlife. This is why those highest in the priesthood hierarchy have the most wives.

The Doctrine of Rescue is versatile in that either a man or a woman can initiate the rescue. For example, to induce the move a woman can approach another man, flutter her eyelashes and swing her hips back and forth, and say words to the effect of "Hey sugar, how would you like to rescue me?"

The doctrine caught on and ambitious wives got busy criss-crossing families. Stewart says that when a new couple





The home of Jim and Karen Harmston, with the Mormon Church's Manti Temple (which the TLC plans to take control of during Armageddon) in the background

is converted to the TLC, Harmston's apostles sometimes size up the wife and discuss among themselves whether she should be rescued — and by whom.

According to Stewart and Hancock, Harmston's first wife, Elaine, receives as much revelation from God as Harmston does, but she has been inclined to meddle in the TLC patriarchy. Her impertinence exasperated the apostles. The conflict between Elaine and the men grew serious and threatened to cause a split in the group until the wise old patriarch, Phil Savage, came up with a solution. He told Elaine that in a past life, she had been Emma Smith, the balky wife of Joseph Smith. Savage also told her she had been one of Lucifer's wives until rescued by Harmston. That seemed to put Elaine in her place.

Since then, she has assumed the role of official TLC necromancer. Mormons believe that membership in their church is essential for a meaningful exaltation. Therefore, they perform vicarious Mormon baptisms for the dead. The deceased will then have the option of accepting or rejecting membership in the Mormon Church. One goal of the LDS Church is to ultimately perform a vicarious baptism for every dead person who once walked the Earth.



Elaine Harmston's home is said to be the location of the "Pink Palace," where she communicates directly with the dead, soliciting proxy baptisms.

The TLC has improved upon this baptism program. After Elaine Harmston's demotion to an ex-wife of Satan, she subsequently set up shop in what Rodney Clowdus jokingly calls the Pink Palace. According to Clowdus, Elaine has a special pink room in her house in Manti with a white satin, pillowed altar in the center. During her rituals, Elaine, dressed in her temple robes and kneeling upon the altar, reportedly drifts into a séance and contacts Father Adam, who gives her permission to communicate with

the dead relatives of TLC members. Clowdus has made available transcripts of conversations, with Elaine acting as the medium, between TLC members and their eager dead relatives. It is amazing how many dead people jump at the chance to be members of the TLC.

### In Harmston's Way

Back in June 1988, Kaziah May Hancock, 40 years old and finally free of an abusive marriage, sold her reclaimed barrel business and purchased 67 acres of prime farmland near the town of Indianola in Sanpete County. She built a \$120,000 log house and pastured a small herd of sheep and goats. Kaziah took art lessons at the Salt Lake County College and fell in love with Ivan Douglas Jordan, her art teacher.

Doug Jordan soon became interested in the teachings of James Harmston. Harmston sealed Doug and Kaziah in a non-legal "spiritual" marriage, and Doug moved in with Kaziah. To alleviate her husband's complaints that he felt like "a hired hand," Kaziah suggested that they legally marry, which they did on March 20, 1991. To ease Doug's feelings of inadequacy, she placed his name on the deed to her property.

While Kaziah perfected her artistic skills, Doug got more and more involved



with Jim Harmston. Doug's infatuation with and imitation of Harmston was obvious. For two years, Doug says, he was the sole support of Harmston, and would slip him \$1,000 or more in cash on dozens of occasions. Kaziah says Harmston would put on a big show of appreciation each time, which made Doug stick his chest out with pride.

In January 1994, Doug and Kaziah were among the first to receive their endowment, a sacred and secret ritual performed in white priesthood robes. Shortly thereafter, Kaziah permitted Doug to take two more wives, LePrele and Rose, who, like Anna Mae Harmston, was a widow of the infamous Ervil LeBaron. Meanwhile, Harmston bestowed upon Kaziah a honey-coated blessing that is still engraved in her mind. He told her it was her calling to "paint the scenes of Zion, and that if she consecrated all, she would never want for the necessities of life." On another occasion, Kaziah was informed by the TLC patriarch that she had been one of the many brides of Christ, and had been present at many of the sacred events in the Bible, including the Crucifixion.

In August 1995, Doug fell deathly ill. Harmston and a few of his apostles came to Indianola to give Doug a blessing. When Harmston arrived, he professed that as he was driving up the lane, he had seen a bevy of evil spirits trying to penetrate the house. But a circle of angels, he said, would periodically zap an aggressive spirit into outer space. Harmston's inauspicious story left no doubt that the evil spirits were the cause of Doug's illness. He claimed that the ranch, despite being in the consecrated Sanpete County, was outside the "Holy Shekema," a



The TLC Assembly Hall in Manti, purchased with money from church members

protective ring that evil spirits cannot penetrate. He advised Doug and Kaziah to sell their property and move to the protection of nearby Manti.

Doug believed Harmston, but couldn't sell without a signature from Kaziah, who refused. So Doug withdrew his affection and would not speak to his wife for two weeks. In the meantime, the subject of consecration became the main topic in TLC meetings. Kaziah says that matriarch Gayle Harmston prepared a special lesson on consecration just for her, but she missed it, further angering Doug. Kaziah was also pressured by other members, who teased her about her goats.

*Utah's brouhaha over polygamy is expected to extend into the next millennium.*



A typical TLC member's home in Manti is marked with a "consecrated property" sign, effectively spooking neighbors.



Kaziah finally gave in. "I was worn out," she confides. "Doug simply outlasted me. I told him he had won, hoping things would work out." Before she would surrender, Kaziah says Doug promised she would have a house and at least ten acres of land to raise her goats.

After they purchased a new home in Manti, Harmston claimed he had a revelation that Kaziah was to sell her sheep and goats. When Kaziah — who was childless and regarded her goats as her babies — refused, Harmston and the

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