

1.) BACKGROUND ON THE TENSION

Some background on why this issue (D&C section 132) is so touchy. We have pushed this issue into a black/white : Either/Or. Is there middle ground?

A.) This issue seems to make many really uncomfortable

- It has been suggested that Joseph Smith doesn't follow his own rules
 - wives should be virgins
 - should seek consent
 - should not already be married to other men

- discomfort with 14 year old(s) being sealed to the prophet
- discomfort with Joseph being sealed to sisters
- discomfort with Joseph being sealed to a mother daughter
- discomfort with polyandrous marriages (define)
- discomfort with Joseph's not being honest about the practice publicly

(apologists argue that Joseph did follow the rules of 132 but it seems like a fairly big leap when those rules seems to be plainly stated)

It feels like Like one is left to throw out one's faith in the restoration or accept 132 within it. Is there not some middle ground to explore where one could both disregard section 132 while also remaining faithful to the restoration?

2.) SECTION 132 HINGES ON DIVINE DELIVERY

Section 132 hinges on this story of an angel with a drawn sword – While there is debate on whether the angel is historical the strength that 132 has to bind us once we grapple with the messiness of Mormon History seem to hinge on a divine delivery of section 132 by an angel with a drawn sword or perhaps even Jesus himself.

That without a divine imposition having occurred to the Prophet Joseph by a messenger of God or God himself that for many of us our ability to trust such a revelation is deeply diminished.

The prophet Joseph himself seemed to validate this as it is he who told some of the women about the angel with the drawn sword in order to convince them of the magnitude of said revelation.

That in essence Joseph himself realized that it was crucial to tell others of how the message was delivered in order to impose on them just how crucial it was to enter into the principle

3.) DECEIVING SPIRITS WITHIN SCRIPTURE

Let's first set the stage and show that deceiving spirits throughout scripture have attempted to deceive prophets and even Jesus

- Lucifer in the garden
 - he identifies himself as the god who should be worshiped

- Moses 1 (POGP) has Satan tempting Moses

- Jesus when tempted by Satan
 - Again Satan identifies himself as the one who should be worshiped

One could argue that in each of these cases the deceiver failed. That God could not and would not allow his prophet to be deceived in such a serious way by the adversary.

The fallacy here is two fold.

#1 - Why would a deceiving spirit make the attempt if there was no chance of God's servant falling for it.

#2 - we can show reasonable room that some did. That It is in some cases plausible that the scriptural narrative is indicative of God's servants being deceived as well as showing that LDS leaders have also shown that they believed God's servants on occasions had been deceived.

LETS START WITH A SCRIPTURAL STORIES

1st Nephi CH 8 – Lehi is visited by a spirit in a white robe

- this spirit in the account leads him for many hours into darkness
 - then Lehi in despair prays and god leads him into view of the tree of life .
- From the point of being told of Lehi's despair as he finds himself led into darkness, we hear no more of this angel in a white robe. The angel leads him into darkness and vacates and then God leads Lehi into light

(There are parts of The Prophet Joseph in the Grove that come to mind)

LDS apologists argue that it is not clear that the spirit is bad.

They also argue that other scriptural apocrypha and pseudo scriptura, and other non canonical texts portray a pattern of prophets in vision having good spirits lead them through their visionary experience

I acknowledge and validate their two points but add 3 points to that argument

- 1.)** I have shown the opposite, that evil spirits in the appearance of heavenly messengers also attempt to deceive Prophets and even Jesus himself. And that such existence permits my interpretation of the angel with the white robe as a valid scriptural interpretation
- 2.)** that the story narrative itself seems to make this a valid, if not the most valid interpretation
- 3.)** My view still encourages us to hold Lehi as a prophet and that such interpretation is still faithful view of the Book of Mormon. In other words I can't see why the apologists might want to argue against such a view in the first place since The LDS Church holds no official view, that such a view is faithful, and that such an interpretation seems at least as valid if not more so than any other

Now Lets discuss where LDS Leaders have given such room

4.) DOES THE LDS CHURCH'S VIEW OF SCRIPTURE/REVELATION ALLOW US TO DISMISS PORTIONS THAT WE CAN'T RECONCILE

Can We Dismiss Portions of Canonical Scripture?

IS THE WRITTEN CANON IMPOSED ON US TO BE TAKEN ENTIRELY AS THE “WORDS OF GOD”

– 1870 Brigham Young's view of bible (quote on what scripture is?)

I have heard some make the broad assertion that every word within the lids of the Bible was the word of God. I have said to them, "You have never read the Bible, have you?" "O, yes, and I believe every word in it is the word of God." Well, I believe that the Bible contains the word of God, and the words of good men and the words of bad men; the words of good angels and the words of bad angels and words of the devil; and also the words uttered by the ass when he rebuked the prophet in his madness. I believe the words of the Bible are just what they are; but aside from that I believe the doctrines concerning salvation contained in that book are true, and that their observance will elevate any people, nation or family that dwells on the face of the earth. The doctrines contained in the Bible will lift to a superior condition all who observe them; they will impart to them knowledge, wisdom, charity, fill them with compassion and cause them to feel after the wants of those who are in distress, or in painful or degraded circumstances.
Journal of Discourses 13:175 (May 29, 1870)

what about the church today

LDS NEWSROOM

“There is a broad range of approaches within the vast mosaic of biblical interpretation. For example, biblical inerrancy maintains that the Bible is without error and contradiction; biblical infallibility holds that the Bible is free from errors regarding faith and practice but not necessarily science or history; biblical literalism requires a literal interpretation of events and teachings in the Bible and generally discounts allegory and metaphor; and the “Bible as literature” educational approach extols the literary qualities of the Bible but disregards its miraculous elements. The Church does not strictly subscribe to any of these interpretive approaches. “

Notice that the wording indicates that the Church seems to be saying that it uses each of these though not to an extreme.

What is Scripture?

- For example Elder Bednar has claimed on an occasion that “HE IS SCRIPTURE”. Such a comment raised the eyebrows of many when he said it but when his statement is measured against how Brigham here defined scripture than we see that simply “being” scripture does not makes the words contained necessarily that of God's. Elder Bednar is certainly within reason to claim such when we define scripture in this way.
- Brigham here not only lowered the bar but also suggests that we learn to differentiate between the “Word of God” and the “Words of God” and seems to be giving us permission to dismiss certain parts of scripture that we in conjunction with the Holy Ghost can not reconcile. Just as we should feel free to dismiss a prophet who claims to be scripture when that prophet is not speaking/acting as such.

CAN WE DISMISS A REVELATION BY A PROPHET?

- The Church itself has done this very thing with the 1886 revelation of John Taylor

My son John, you have asked me concerning the New and Everlasting Covenant how far it is binding upon my people. Thus saith the Lord:

Notice this revelation begins with Jesus Christ talking to President John Taylor in the first person and saying Thus Sayeth the Lord.

If I am not mistaken this is the last occurrence we have of a Prophet sharing a first hand conversation with Christ and Christ saying Thus Sayeth the Lord.

And yet this revelation has been ignored, dismissed by the Church today in a way that most members are not even aware of its existence. This should give great pause and show that there is room to dismiss revelation from Christ to his prophet even when in the first person.

Do we have room to dismiss the Doctrines of the Church?

– Adam/God Doctrine

When speaking of the Adam God Doctrine Brigham Young stated

"How much unbelief exists in the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to them, and which God revealed to me"

In other words Brigham was saying that no matter how hard it was for the saints to accept it, he knew it was from God and hence there was little room to walk back from it.

Brigham also stated that

"Some have grumbled because I believe our God to be so near to us as Father Adam. There are many who know that doctrine to be true."

Other Saints had received confirming spiritual answers that his imparted knowledge from God was true

This teaching went so far as to be implemented into the discourse at the veil of the temple where the saints were to be instructed that.

"Father Adam's oldest son (Jesus the Savior) who is the heir of the family is Father Adams first begotten in the spirit World. who according to the flesh is the only begotten as it is written."

And yet the modern Church has disavowed and dismissed and preferred to ignore any reconciliation with such

- President Kimball's disavowal of Adam/God from conference
 - "Another matter. We hope that you who teach in the various organizations, whether on the campuses or in our chapels, will always teach the orthodox truth. We warn you against the dissemination of doctrines which are not according to the scriptures and which are alleged to have been taught by some of the General Authorities of past generations. Such, for instance, is the Adam-God theory. We denounce that theory and hope that everyone will be cautioned against this and other kinds of false doctrine. " <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1976/10/our-own-liahona?lang=eng>

Elder McConkie's very nuanced approach to scripture and prophets as he disavows Adam/God - Listen carefully as there is a lot in this quote

I am a great admirer of Brigham Young and a great believer in his doctrinal presentations. He was called of God. He was guided by the Holy Spirit in his teachings in general. He was a mighty prophet.....

Nonetheless, as Joseph Smith so pointedly taught, a prophet is not always a prophet, only when he is acting as such. Prophets are men and they make mistakes. Sometimes they err in doctrine.

....

Sometimes even wise and good men fall short in the accurate presentation of what is truth. Sometimes a prophet gives personal views which are not endorsed and approved by the Lord. Yes, President Young did teach that Adam was the father of our spirits, and all the related things that the cultists ascribe to him. This, however, is not true. He expressed views that are out of harmony with the gospel. ...

I think you can give me credit for having a knowledge of the quotations from Brigham Young relative to Adam, and of knowing what he taught under the subject that has become known as the Adam God Theory. President Joseph Fielding Smith said that Brigham Young will have to make his own explanations on the points there involved....

As for me and my house, we will have the good sense to choose between the divergent teachings of the same man and come up with those that accord with what God has set forth in his eternal plan of salvation....

I do not know all of the Providences of the Lord, but I do know that he permits false doctrine to be taught in and out of the Church and that such teaching is part of the sifting process of mortality....

I repeat: Brigham Young erred in some of his statements on the nature and kind of being that God is and as to the position of Adam in the plan of salvation....

What he did is not a pattern for any of us. If we choose to believe and teach the false portions of his "doctrines", we are making an election that will damn us.

- Notice that Elder McConkie seems to give us not only permission to dismiss false doctrines in the Church but a salvific responsibility to reject them or risk our exaltation
 - How messy this is in weighing one Prophets teachings and words against another Prophets own words and perhaps even that very Prophet against his own words.
 - Many examples including Past Doctrines and prophetic teachings surrounding the PH ban, Blood Atonement, teachings on who are the Lamanites, Understanding of where the Book of Abraham came from, diminishing positions on cremation, birth control, women working outside the home all have shifted, diminished, or been disavowed. Things that were once declared doctrine and officially held by all leadership in our church have been dismissed and disavowed as now known to be false or something different.

Implications

Prophets can be deeply wrong (Elder McConkie says so), Scriptures can be wrong, All 15 men untied can be deeply wrong, revelation can be dismissed, and doctrines can be disavowed

(Apologists have argued that Adam/God is not a apples to apples comparison because it never became canon. In my mind it seems silly that we would make the exercise of the church in raising its hand to agree to make something canon as the sure and certain way to know that something is really from God or not (Take the November Policy for instance as an example of something they would publicly defend). This also would seem highly illogical and doesn't mesh with Brigham's view of scripture already mentioned.)

This argument also ignores items that were sections in our canon that have also been dismissed as well

- section 101 of the D&C which became later section 109 and then was removed and dismissed.
- Lectures on Faith removed from Canon

(Apologists argue that such a view of Doctrine, canon, scripture, and revelation throws all certainty under the bus and places everything up for grabs)..... Absolutely..... that is exactly what I am saying and It also seems to be what Elder McConkie is saying, and what our history is saying.

6.) WHICH BRINGS US TO AN ANGEL WITH A DRAWN SWORD

Joseph Smith reported that an angel with a drawn sword had commanded him to implement the principle of plural marriage. Brian Hales indicates that there are some twenty different reminiscences from 9 witnesses and that Lorenzo Snow and Mary Elizabeth Lightner almost certainly heard the account directly from the Prophet Joseph

We should regardless of the position we take at least acknowledge that witnesses reported Joseph to be under much duress as he contemplated how to implement plural marriage

Eliza R Snow

“afraid to promulgate it.”

Helen Mar Kimball stated

“Had it not been for the fear of His displeasure, Joseph would have shrunk from the undertaking and would have continued silent, as he did for years, until an angel of the Lord threatened to slay him if he did not reveal and establish this celestial principle.”⁹She also said that “Joseph put off the dreaded day as long as he dared.”

Lucy Walker

“had his doubts about it for he debated it in his own mind.”

Joseph himself

‘Brother Levi, if I should make known to my brethren what God has made known to me they would seek my life.’”

&

Many men will say, ‘I will never forsake you, but will stand by you at all times.’ But the moment you teach them some of the mysteries of the kingdom of God that are retained in the heavens and are to be revealed to the children of men when they are prepared for them, they will be the first to stone you and put you to death. It was this same principle that crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, and will cause the people to kill the prophets in this generation.

HANDSHAKES AS A WAY TO DISCERN SPIRITS

1. D&C 129

- Lays out handshakes as the way to discern the messengers of God from the messengers of the adversary
- Our present Temple practices also hit on this idea.

THE QUESTION WE MUST ASK IS

Is it possible that Joseph Smith was deceived by an evil spirit coming in the personage of a heavenly messenger?

It seems entirely plausible from the evidence shared prior that it is possible

This begs the second question

Would Joseph have thought to ask the angel to shake his hand considering that the angel came with a drawn sword and with harsh threatening words?

Would you have thought to ask the angel to pause and shake your hand?

(Apologists argue that my line of thinking is invalid since we also have God's first person voice in section 132

Hence we must acknowledge that not only did an angel deliver this instruction but apparently so did Christ himself since obviously it is Christ who delivers the actual wording of section 132.)

This is a fallacy and one that Fairmormon and other apologetic entities agree with.

For example FairMormon and the Church officially both agree that heavenly messengers can and have come and delivered messages as if God himself was speaking. This is called "Divine investiture"

In other words an angel comes and delivers a message in the first person voice of God or Christ and the Prophet records it as having com from the angel himself.

Fair Mormon states -

“There are numerous examples of divine investiture in scripture. The clearest biblical examples involve angels speaking in behalf of God or Christ (Genesis 22:11—12; Exodus 3:2, 6; 23:20–21; Revelation 1:1; 19:9–13; 22:8–16) http://en.fairmormon.org/Mormonism_and_the_nature_of_God/Elohim_and_Jehovah

The Church itself states in its April 2002 ensign article “The Father and The Son” - ““And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. “Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God” (Rev. 22:8–9). And then the angel continued to speak as though he were the Lord Himself: “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last” (Rev. 22:12–13). - <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2002/04/the-father-and-the-son?lang=eng>

as well as in the October 1978 Ensign “I Have a Question Section when it states.

“Sometimes it seems as if God the Father is speaking and then it seems to be Christ. Even angels speak as if they were Christ.” (See Rev. 22:8–9, 12–16.) <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1978/10/i-have-a-question?lang=eng>

One could argue that we have no account on record of an evil spirit speaking in the voice of Christ but that is false. Moses Chapter 1 speaks of a visit Satan makes to Moses to try to deceive him and at one point Satan cries out “I am the Only Begotten, worship me.” While Moses saw right through this it should be noted that evil spirit seemingly can speak as if in the voice of Christ”

LASTLY THE STRONGEST EVIDENCE AGAINST SUCH A THEORY

(Apologists argue that Mary Elizabeth Rollings Lightner stands as a witness against this idea. This is the best evidence that my theory is untenable.

Mary Lightner 1905 Address, typescript, BYU

Mary Lightner, Address to Brigham Young University, 1905

"Well," said I, "don't you think it was an angel of the devil that told you these things?" Said he, "No, it was an angel of God. God Almighty showed me the difference between an angel of light and Satan's angels. The angel came to me three times between the years of 1834 and 1842 and said I was to obey that principle or he would slay me. "But," said he, "they called me a false and fallen prophet but I am more in favor with my God this day than I ever was in all my life before. I know that I shall be saved in the Kingdom of God. I have the oath of God upon it and God cannot lie; all that he gives me I shall take with me for I have that authority and that power conferred upon me."

I find her story believable. I think she is being honest to her memory and I think it is possible that she may also be historically accurate enough that my theory falls on its face.

But..... consider the depth and wording of that conversation she repeats from Joseph..... We must note that She is recounting this at the age of 87 years old.....

62 years after the event occurred and she is recounting secondhand what Joseph told her. Could she be mixing memories of more than one conversation? Could she be mixing up the timeline of events? Could she be mixing things Joseph told her directly with conversations she had with others who are reporting their experiences?

The LDS Church itself when speaking on evidence that diminishes faith that is a late word of mouth account states

“Something told second-hand sixty years after the fact is less verified history than it is vague memory.”

<https://www.lds.org/ensign/1987/08/the-alvin-smith-story-fact-and-fiction?lang=eng>

In the end we each must dig into the details, we must each make up our minds. The view I presented today is a faithful view that allows one to discard section 132 personally without having to leave the Church and lose complete faith in the restoration. Rather it does though compel us that we must leave black and white perspectives behind and gravitate towards more nuanced approaches to our faith.

In conclusion:

Knowing that Prophets can and have been wrong. Knowing that Scripture can be more nuanced than simply being word for word "The Mind and Will of God". Knowing that False Doctrine can and will be found among the Church's teachings. And Knowing that Angels can come and deceive and have through scripture might we be more open to letting go of the Black and white assertions made on both sides and instead leave room for approaches that may be a whole lot messier?