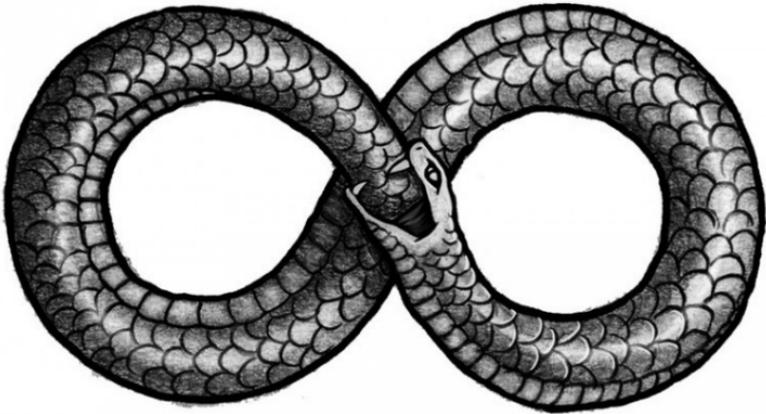


EVOLVING FAITH:
A JOURNAL OF DISCOURSES
VOL I

COMPILED BY
JUSTIN



INTRODUCTION

In 2014, I began to blog at Secular-Reality.com. I used the blog as a journal or diary to write anything with regards to religion, skepticism, or atheism. I told [my own story in a version of 1 Nephi](#), wrote [some satirical commentaries](#), and even eventually posted my LDS resignation letters ([Version 1](#), [Version 2](#)).

In August of 2015, [I wrote a response](#) to a [Deseret News article](#) that attempted to defend the latest LDS Essay revelation; that Joseph Smith “translated” *The Book of Mormon*, not from plates of gold, but by using a magical seer-stone tucked into a hat. Nearly a year later, the article inspired a comment from “Don”:

“The proof is in the pudding”. As crazy as it sounds you have still got to deal with the fact that over 150 million copies in 110 different languages of The Book of Mormon have now been printed. And hundreds of thousands of twenty-first century bright minds have carefully read and studied The Book of Mormon and are strongly convinced the book is authentic. You cannot brush this off as a bunch of gullible people being deceived . The loudest critics of The Book of Mormon have never really read and studied the book with an open mind. – I mean like from cover to cover.

Have you? Seriously? Who ever heard of anyone doing a book review without reading the book? That is even crazier than Joseph Smith looking in a hat.”

Mayhaps my response was a bit terse, but not undeserved:

“More copies and translations exist of Superman comics. Does that make them true as well? Numbers mean nothing. A lie is a lie no matter how many people believe it. The majority of people once believed The Sun orbited The Earth. Did that make it true?

Yes I can brush this off as gullible people being deceived, and then spreading that deceit to their children, and their children’s children. Happened to me. Even if I bought your story, your prophet put a rock in a hat and read magic words off of it. That is silly in the extreme. There are no steel swords. No chariots. No wheels. No horses. No elephants. There is ZERO archaeological evidence that your book is true. There is zero DNA evidence that your book is true. There is ZERO evidence, full stop, that anything in that book happened.

And, according to your rules, I can critique your book. I have read that book; at least six times. Shall I make it seven? Do you think that will help or hinder your argument.

*Thank you for reading,
Justin”*

Secular-Reality has never been a overly well-visited or well-commented blog. It isn't intended to be. We don't promote it. It's merely an outlet for our thoughts and writing. But, this last comment inspired a long and interesting discourse in the comments between a Mormon named 'Jake' and I. We began a cordial and respectful back and forth from September 2016 until the current day.

This is an attempt to collect some of these interactions in a single location. I applaud Jake for his willingness to engage and continue the conversation.

ONE - JAKE

I'd love for you to watch "The Lost Civilizations of North America" truly fascinating, without religious persuasion, the facts regarding archaeological evidence found and not found largely depend on who you talk to. Westward expansion destroyed a lot. Now, we have a greater understanding of Native Americans than we have ever had before.

I know many people who were force fed a religion they never wanted by parents who cared about them, but did not fully understand or accept their child's agency. People are imperfect. Plain and simple.

There is archaeological evidence and biological evidence found that link the people of the Hopewell civilization with the ancient Israelites. The people of the Hopewell civilization made things of metal, which shows that they lived more intelligently than most believed they did. Metal working would require smelting, and mining. Not the typical thing that most people growing up in America were taught Native Americans did. I know I wasn't. I'm 18, so it wasn't that long ago for me. I was taught they were savages. Who scalped people and fought against the Americans. Who robbed people and only desired to acquire money.

It's been a desire of mine to learn more about them. Native Americans are a people who had their homes taken, lands destroyed and altered, and had their history largely destroyed by the ideology that they were "savages" and less than the "civilized". Now that research is being done into them, we see more of the negative effects of the early years of America.

I do not claim to be an expert on anything. I cannot fully understand your perspective on life and reasoning behind fighting the realization that the Native Americans weren't quite the savages that we originally thought.

The Book of Mormon teaches the Jaredites were kind of the first of what we would call "Native Americans". They most likely have similar traits to the Asian people, which would explain modern Native Americans having an "Asian" Skull type. (The children of Laman and Lemuel who mixed their seed with the Jaredites would have inherited this. Lamanites.)

Those of Israelite descent were found in burial sites. So the Native Americans The Book of Mormon tells that are of Israelite lineage are most likely them. (Nephites had the "cursing" on their children if they mixed seed with Lamanites. those that did not mix would have most likely remained fair skinned, and in most ways, as the Israelites.)

The Book of Mormon teaches that the Nephites were wiped out by the Lamanites. Which makes sense with what we know.

These are things Smith could not have known in his era. Another fact. Smith had very very little formal education. He could “not so much as write a decent letter”. Which wasn’t terribly uncommon for a farm boy in those days.

This same Smith translated a book of 351 (current edition) pages in 65 working days. Just over 8 pages a day.

The quality of writing of that man, if he made it all up. Should definitely be noted. I know it’s easy to believe that it was all a hoax. But Joseph did not come to power for it. Or acquire wealth. And was tortured and martyred for it eventually. I fail to see the motive behind the deception.

You may try and say The Book of Mormon could not possibly be true. That’s fine. There are things we still do not know about the Native Americans. To some, it provides answers. To others, they find answers from other sources. To not believe it because you don’t like it, will not make it not so. To not believe it because you have another explanation for the mysteries of the Native Americans. Is your own decision and reasoning.

Just because we don't have proof on how the universe came into existence does not mean that it did not. People believe in scientific theories, others in a creator. Neither side has room to argue because there is a mystery. Who is to say which belief is true and untrue of that mystery. How could I deny the Big Bang theory? I have no evidence to do that. How could one deny God, or a creator? They could not, they have no evidence. So it's up to you to choose what to believe.

I believe in what I do because of what I've seen in my life. I've seen miracles. I've seen prayers answered. I have felt the spirit of the lord, and I cannot deny it. I have sought answers. I have prayed. I have read The Book of Mormon and The Bible and The Doctrine and covenants. My faith was not forced upon me. It's always been a choice to have or not. I believe in God. He has answered my prayers.

I hope that helps you to understand my background, and where I come from, and why I believe what I do.

I know your situation has not been the same as mine. I do not expect you to believe what I do, because you have not seen, or done what I have. You are loved. I want you to know that. If it's not evident by this long response. I care about you. Please understand that if you experienced all the

things another human had and acted the same way. You would understand and do the same things as they did.

September 20 2016

TWO – JUSTIN

Jake,

Thanks for reading and commenting.

Your experiences in private, without reproducible evidence, are not of use to me. I've also prayed. I've read *The Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine & Covenants*, *The Pearl of Great Price*, multiple times. I've suffered guilt for my supposed "sins", repented, and felt no relief. Why are you more worthy than I? Why was Saul/Paul? Why are some worthy of actual evidence, but others are not?

I'll watch that movie if you will read *The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle of The Dark*. Carl Sagan teaches the reader the process of collecting and accessing evidence based on magnitude of the claim being made. A claim that I ate haggis for breakfast requires relatively little evidence. A claim for an all-powerful god requires all-powerful amounts of evidence. A claim that chariot riding, steel sword wielding, horse riding, elephant taming civilizations in The New World requires...well...any of those things (chariot, sword, horse, saddle, elephant).

As Sagan demonstrates, the time to believe something is **after** you have good evidence, not before. Otherwise, you are believing a conclusion without evidence, and will twist

evidence (moving goalposts, special pleading, etc.) to fit the already arrived-at conclusion.

I also suggest that you re-research the methodology by which Mr. Smith supposedly translated The Book of Mormon with folk magic. Research 'View of The Hebrews' and Oliver Cowdrey's involvement. Also, research the King James Bible translation errors that The Book of Mormon contains.

Thank you for your professions of care and love. I understand that our experiences make us, but they are not always reliable evidence. That is why we need science, critical thinking, and skepticism.

Thanks again for reading and your comments,
Justin

P.S. - Searching for the film you mention, one of the first websites I found was this one, containing comments from scholars who appeared in the DVD (and were apparently edited out of context):

<http://apps.ohiohistory.org/ohioarchaeology/statement-about-the-lost-civilizations-of-north-america-dvd/>

“As scholars committed to increasing public understanding of Native American history and archaeology, we want to make it clear that we

do not support the theories presented in “The Lost Civilizations of North America” DVD. In our opinion, there is no compelling archaeological or genetic evidence for a migration from the Middle East to North America a few thousand years ago, nor is there any credible scientific evidence that Old World civilizations were involved in developing Native American cultures in pre-Columbian times. Many of the artifacts used to support the film’s claims, such as the Newark “Holy Stones,” have been proven fraudulent based on convincing scientific evidence and historical documentation. Like the great majority of professional archaeologists and anthropologists, we have seen overwhelming evidence that Native Americans were independently responsible for designing and creating the Newark Earthworks, Cahokia Mounds, and the myriad other pre-Columbian sites across the United States.”

September 21, 2016

THREE – JAKE

Interesting. I understand the placebo effect. I have often wondered if all religions are similar to it. Where the mind can warp what we think something is, or want something to be. I just watched the documentary a few months back, I didn't read any of their remarks. It's interesting how they clearly point out in the video that mitochondria testing results from the Cahokia site (from 5 different burial sites) showed that those buried there were of Israelite descent. They also mention speculation to the credibility of some discovered artifacts in the documentary itself. So I don't know what to think of their comments after the documentary.

I understand your frustrations with the concept of faith. It requires trust before proof. Living life only based on the results of things you've seen seems logical, but isn't always best. It's not wrong to ask questions, or to have doubts of things. But faith does not work by receiving evidence first. There are exceptions, such as Alma the younger. Who was going about destroying the church and persecuting those that believed in God, and an Angel appeared to him.

What qualified him, or Saul/Paul, but not you or I? I think that's a wonderful question. My experiences were not of that kind. Were not of the presence of an Angel bringing me

down into the ground. So what made the exceptions special? Why did they not have to lead by faith? After an experience like that, Alma had a knowledge of God. More than a belief.

You may not like the answer I have, but I will try and answer the best I can. I'm no expert.

In the case of Alma, we know his father was praying for his son to change. His son was doing horrible things. And I imagine he didn't know how to help him. He prayed and asked for divine intervention. He asked the Lord to help. Which was up to the Lord. If it needed to be done, it would be. If it wasn't supposed to, than it wouldn't. In the case of Alma the younger, it needed to happen. Alma changed, and served wonderful ministries and was a man of God after his experience. I'm not an expert on any of this, but I would imagine that Alma would not have changed his ways otherwise. God knew who he could become.

God knows who you and I can become too. I believe that we are judged based on what we did based on what we know. If you and I do not believe in God. If we do not have faith. Our judgement is limited. We wouldn't be held as accountable as Alma would have been after seeing that angel. If he saw that angel and then denied it. He would be

held accountable for what he did/didn't do that he should have.

You and I are not in that same position. I'm by no means more worthy than you are. I'm a very imperfect man. I have exercised faith at hard times in my life, and have been fortunate to see miracles. Not on the same "level" as what Alma experienced, but enough to help me keep my faith. Repentance only comes with a true and deep change of heart. I have "repented" of things I felt guilty of by praying and saying I will not do it again (even though I knew I probably would). It never brought me peace to do that. The peace I have found has been through a major change in my life. I changed and became new. My guilt was washed away as time demonstrated the change. That's how I found peace to my guilt.

I spent so long denying my guilt. Pretending it didn't matter and I didn't feel it. It went away only after I changed. Then was when I could truly repent. When I had changed.

Faith comes before evidence does. Which if you believe that it is foolish to put trust in what you cannot see, I don't blame you. I've only seen what I have because I tried it. Alma the younger taught as a missionary that "faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true."

And “But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.”

I have met people who are angry at God, and have no desire to believe. So they never will. I know people who have no more than a desire to believe. From that desire, grows faith.

I see the logical approach to faith, that it doesn't make sense. It also seems illogical to deny the possibility of a supreme being on the other hand though. I understand agnosticism, but I do not understand atheism. (Not accusing you of either, I do not know which you are). The atheists I have encountered are often formerly religious. They grew angry and now fight against their respective faith (and others). I know atheists that have no desire for their to be a God. So to them, there isn't. I know atheists that are mad at God, and hope He doesn't exist because they believe He has forsaken them if He does. Those are the types atheists I have encountered. Agnostics, on the other hand, recognize that there is no proof there isn't a God. You cannot prove there isn't. I can say that your very existence is proof. And the world, and universe all around us are.

Because they are proof to me of a creator. An agnostic believes there could be a God, but they do not know if there is, or which religion is true.

As far as the all powerful evidence you require, to me, the universe is sufficient. What are the odds that of all star systems, a planet would be this distance from the sun, this rotation speed, and this orbit. Which is enough to allow the growth of life. If you are an evolution guy, for us to develop into the creatures that we are.

It seems a little too perfect for me.

Many people try and disprove God by the Big Bang theory as well, stating that there couldn't be a God because the universe came from one big explosion. There are different theories, one being that the center of mass was spinning, and when it exploded, everything flew out in different in a clockwise direction. (Although not all planets spin clockwise). Who's to say that an all powerful God could not have caused such and explosion.

Genesis says, "And God said, Let there be light"

Who can prove that wasn't the explosion that started the universe? There is no proof it was. There is no proof it wasn't. If all you believe is what you see, than it couldn't be.

If you are able to believe in things without having a perfect knowledge, then it could have been.

I'm sorry you have not yet seen the power of God. I'm sorry you have not felt the relief of repentance, the mercy of the atonement, and the love of God. I'm sorry you have not felt the spirit of God testify of his love for you yet. I cannot tell you why you haven't. Not can I provide answers to all your questions. But I hope this helps.

September 22, 2016

FOUR – JUSTIN

Thanks again for reading and commenting.

I don't believe only things I can see or experience. I believe things that demonstrate evidence enough to convince me based on the magnitude of their claims. I've never met my friend's cat, but I believe her when she tells me that she has one. I do not, however, believe all of the claims of String Theory because they have not yet been tested and demonstrated sufficiently. Similarly, I do not accept that anything supernatural exists, as little (no) evidence of such things having occurred has been presented. As before, the time to believe something, or even trust something, is after you have good evidence for that belief or trust; not before.

A faithful man, before he passed, I am sure that my father prayed fervently that his son would be shown the error of his ways and return to The Church. I am sure that my grandparents similarly prayed. I am sure my mother continues to pray that I see The Light of Christ. Why did Heavenly Father deny their prayers? Why does He continue to deny my mother's? My siblings'? Might not I, like Paul and Alma, become a powerful messenger for The Gospel if only I were given knowledge or evidence of its truth? I assure you, given evidence of His existence and will, I would try.

We cannot choose belief. We cannot choose what we believe. We are either convinced or we are not. You seem to be convinced by claims unbacked by evidence and, in many cases, refuted by evidence. “Faith.” I, obviously, am not. If there is a God and there is something that could convince me, God knows what it is and He is withholding that from me. Why would He do that? If He knows and loves me, as you claim, why would he wish that I dwindle in unbelief while rescuing others like Alma and Saul from the same fate? Why would He wish to keep sadness in the hearts of those who pray for my salvation by denying their sincere and heartfelt prayers, when He can and does intervene?

I am an atheist. Proudly. As a young man, I had faith. Loved Jesus and my Heavenly Father with all my heart. I served Them for years as a priesthood holder as best I could. I lost friendships because I chastised those whom I oversaw as a Leader and were not keeping their covenants. I worked so hard toward each step in my spiritual progression – Baptism, Confirmation, Priesthood, Patriarchal Blessing, Temple, etc.

And when I had my crisis of faith, I called out for Them to help me. I asked them to give me back my faith. The silence was deafening. The questions I posed went unconvincingly answered. Why would I be allowed down this path?

Having such faith and having so many faithful around me and guiding me? Why were my questions not answered convincingly?

As to your science observations, I hardly see this planet, this galaxy, or this universe as perfect for human life. Two-thirds of this planet is uninhabitable to humans. The planet has volcanoes and earthquakes and hurricanes and tsunamis, etc. that kill the faithless and the faithful alike. Could not have God created this world without these flaws? All without affecting the free-will decisions of His creations? Could not God create a solar system without meteors and comets destined to, eventually, crash into his beloved creation? Solar flares? Tornadoes? How are these horrifying and arbitrary yet suffering-inducing events at all necessary to a plan to test our faith?

As I have observed in a [different post](#), It seems to me that The Universe works as randomly and indifferently as if God isn't there. "Maybe He isn't. Maybe He never was."

Thank you again for your thoughts and comments,
Justin

September 22, 2016

FIVE – JAKE

Another Book of Mormon story you may be familiar with is the account of Korihor. Korihor was teaching there would be no Christ and many other things against the church. He was hard hearted. He taught that nobody could know if there was a God. And that there wasn't one. He taught there was no afterlife. He was brought before the high priest. Who did not know what to do with him, who sent him to the highest priest.

He did speak with Alma. He denied the existence of God "unless ye shall show me a sign I will not believe" he said. He said, "show me a sign and then I will believe." Alma told Korihor that there was no proof there wasn't a God. But that he had all things to prove there was a creator. He asked again if Korihor would deny God. He said yes, unless he should have a sign. Alma said "ye have had signs enough, will ye tempt your God that he should give you another?"

Alma warned him that he would be struck dumb (unable to speak) if he would again deny God. Korihor denied God again, and received his sign. They wrote "are you satisfied with the sign you have received?" (In summary) and he wrote back "I always knew there was a God, but I was deceived by the devil, and got caught up in teaching that

there wasn't a God and have thus denied him and brought this curse upon myself".

Korihor spent the rest of his days as a beggar until one day he was trampled by the people of the city. The devil does not support his children in the last day.

I'm not telling you this because you are like Korihor. I'm telling you this story because Korihor had had signs enough, but desired another (unrighteously).

You may blame your lack of signs on God, and you may say that he is horrible for not answering your loved ones prayers. But I think God withholds his signs because you have had signs enough. Walking by faith is hard at first. But then God backs us up after we but our faith first.

You sound like you have no desire for there to be a God. So you'd never except him without a sign. He's not going to send you a sign if you are unwilling to walk in faith.

God wasn't going to make a perfect world. I said "it seems a little too perfect for me". For a planet to be able to have life like ours by simple coincidence and evolution. God could have made this world perfect. But he didn't. Does that disprove his existence? Not at all. Just because he didn't do something he could have doesn't disprove him by any means. Just like how America didn't launch nukes in the

Cuban missile crisis doesn't disprove the fact that we have nukes.

If all your questions were perfectly answered you wouldn't have to walk in faith. You wouldn't have to choose God even while having doubts. You would not be tested. If this world was perfect, we would lose a lot of valuable lessons we are here to learn. Like how Adam and Eve never would have progressed if they stayed in the Garden of Eden forever.

I have asked countless questions. I have had so many doubts, yet I have held on to my faith despite my doubts and studied and waited for answers. It was the waiting that tested me. That made it a challenge for me to maintain my faith without having a perfect knowledge. But faith doesn't require a perfect knowledge.

Faith is for more than religion. We demonstrate faith with loved ones and friends. We put our trust in them without always having sufficient data to do so.

You claim there is no evidence, and that the evidence contradicts faith. It does not. Saying "we haven't found swords, saddles, and chariots so there are none". Is jumping to conclusions without sufficient data. How do you know? Did you look where they would be found? Do you know

what parts of the American continent the things described in the Book of Mormon take place? How come the fact that they have yet to be found is sufficient data to disprove God? It's like saying "I might have once had a pair of pink socks, but I don't know where they are, so they never existed." You can't just jump to that conclusion because you haven't found them.

The Book of Ether (which is where the elephants are mentioned) contains a record of the Jaredites, I'm not sure exactly the time-frame of when the Jaredites arrived in the American continent, sometime shortly after the fall of the Tower of Babel, but it is believed due to travel time that they came from Japan to Mexico. (Remember, the Jaredites are kinda what we would consider Asian ancestors (native Americans have Asian skull types.)) well, I googled "Elephants in North America", and the first article that popped up says "A recent archaeological dig in Mexico shows that Gomphotherium — an extinct elephant-like animal believed to have disappeared from North America long before humans got there — actually roamed the continent longer than previously thought. Incredibly, the new evidence suggests these large mammals were hunted by the Clovis people." Which may not be proof enough for you, which is fine. But there were elephants in the American continent.

Also, as far as horses go, a quick google search, and I quote from the first source, “By contrast, in North America, there are found Equus samples which do indeed appear in the time frame between the last ice age and the arrival of Columbus. The first of these was found in Pratt Cave near El Paso, Texas, by Prof. Ernest Lundelius of Texas A&M University. Prof. Lundelius responded to my inquiries and provided a horse bone from Pratt Cave which dated to BC 6020 – 5890. This date is well since the last ice age, into the time frame when all American horses should have been absent according to the prevailing paradigm.

Another Equus specimen was identified by Elaine Anderson, an expert on Equus identification, at Wolf Spider cave, Colorado. It dated to AD 1260 – 1400, again clearly before Columbus. Note that horses arrived on the new-world mainland with Cortes in 1519 AD [Henry, Marguerite and Wesley Dennis. All About Horses. Random House, 1962.]”

Horses were around El Paso (which is on the border between Mexico and Texas) before Columbus. Which is possibly east of where the Jaredites landed, and also possibly just east where Lehi’s family landed.

I’m not even in depth researching, these are first result pages I’m reading. Whoever told you there is Zero

biological, or archaeological evidence anything in The Book of Mormon happened, must not have checked google first.

As far as ancient swords from there. All found are now destroyed, but there is a macuahuitl. “A macuahuitl ([ma: 'k^wawit[†]] (singular)[1]) is a wooden sword with obsidian blades. The name is derived from the Nahuatl language. Its sides are embedded with prismatic blades traditionally made from obsidian, famous for producing an edge far sharper than even high quality steel razor blades.”

It may be from later than the Jaredites though. There are things we don't know about them still. I'm not sure exactly where the Jaredites first landed though, so it's hard for me to say.

Now, I wouldn't want you to believe in the Book simply because of archeology. Nor do I want you to discredit the Book because of archeology, but if you believe Joseph wrote the book, you gotta give him credit for knowing about the elephants and horses.

Facts are good to have, but faith does not require facts. Faith can come before the facts.

I'm sorry your questions went unanswered. I'm sorry you went through that. God loves you, and knows who you are. I hope that you will pray to him. Talk to him. Tell Him

what's on your mind, and tell Him your frustrations. He loves you, and will listen to you. I'm not an expert on any of this, i'm just an 18 year old kid from Idaho. I encourage you to pray. You are important to God, and to me.

September 23, 2016

SIX – JUSTIN

I'm very familiar with the story of Korihor. To me, it seems like the kind of story leaders would create in order to discourage followers from dissenting with logic and reason.

What signs have I seen that I didn't recognize? And, what good is a sign that is difficult to recognize? Is a sign that can be missed any better than no sign at all? How about the sign of my father lying on his deathbed just 24-hours after being given a Priesthood blessing that it wouldn't be? Is that a sign that I should have recognized? A sign of what?

And, if prayers and blessings aren't answered because of "God's Will", what purpose is there in praying? Or commanding by the power of The Holy Melchizedek Priesthood that "you will recover and have many good years ahead of you?" when it has no effect?

I certainly have no desire for there to be a God if He is anything like the god of The Old Testament or The Book of Mormon. But, my desire is beside the point. Show me the evidence and I will accept that there is a god. Then we can go about arguing about whether His behavior is worthy of my praise and worship.

For example, I'm not sure that a being who demands my allegiance, worship, and obedience without providing any

reproducible evidence for His existence deserves any of those things. I don't think a deity who could have produced a planet without earthquakes, or could certainly intervene to prevent suffering, watches from afar and does nothing as innocent children are maimed and murdered is any kind of source for morality. Natural disasters have nothing to do with free agency or free will and their absence would not interfere with His "test."

"You claim there is no evidence, and that the evidence contradicts faith. It does not. Saying "we haven't found swords, saddles, and chariots so there are none". Is jumping to conclusions without sufficient data. How do you know? Did you look where they would be found? Do you know what parts of the American continent the things described in the Book of Mormon take place?"

Again, the time to believe something is after you have evidence. Not before. I have never seen The Gold Plates, nor any evidence of the events that happen within. All I have is the word of believers.

On the other hand, as you point out, we do have clear evidence of The Clovis people and The Anasazi. We find a lot of evidence for their existence and their ways of life – and they had much, much smaller societies than those described in The Book of Mormon. Why is that? Why can

we find more from small groups of people from more ancient times than we can for massive cities and civilizations from much more recent?

I implore you to look at the rest of your arguments about the historicity of The Book of Mormon from my perspective. Each is a point of little or no evidence twisted to fit the conclusion to which you have already arrived. You claim that archaeologists have found horse bones that are more recent. Great! I love science, and I love finding new species! Horses died out later than we thought! New knowledge!

But, was a chariot nearby? A steel sword? Was it inside the ruins of a massive city the size of Mexico City (Zarahemla) filled with these things? The paragraph you write regarding the ‘macuahuitl’ is almost a textbook definition of special-pleading and “moving the goalpost” fallacies.

Here’s the final point, if I must have faith, and I must not look for signs and evidence – simply believe – then what does the science matter to you at all? The argument could be, “You’re right. There are no steel swords now. I don’t know why. I just have faith.” Fair enough, but then it’s not proper to turn around and try to twist other artifacts to back the claim.

I assure you, I've prayed more than you could imagine, and yet, God either refuses to provide me with whatever it is that could convince me, or He isn't there. Until other evidence provides itself, I'm going with the latter.

Thanks again for your thoughts and comments,
Justin

September 23, 2016

SEVEN – JAKE

You are so hard hearted it does not matter what I say.

You believe that if there was a God, that nothing bad would happen ever?

That's not the God I believe in. If that's the God you refuse to believe in, that's fine with me.

You are mad at God, so you claim he doesn't exist. So you try and find proof He doesn't, and destroy the faith of others so you feel like you are justified because others agree with you.

Again, you refuse to lead by faith, you have no desire to believe. There is no point in me discussing further with you I'm afraid.

I'm truly sorry that bad things have happened in your life, and that you felt alone when you thought God would be there. Prayers don't change God's will. Prayer is talking to God. It's not about making demands, or begging for things contrary to his will. That's not what conversations are usually about.

I'm sorry about your father. I don't believe that just because the blessing he had didn't keep him alive means that there isn't a God. I have no right to speak of your father, and I

don't know enough about the situation to understand it, and even if I did, it's not my place to speak about what happened. I'm sorry.

I don't think trying to tear down other people's faith with convincing speak will solve anything.

I don't think anything I say will effect you. It would seem that you have made up your mind.

You seem to have done a lot of research, and I have learned a lot from our discussion. I wish I had a feeling you did too.

I will not abandon the faith I already do have because of the doubts I have. The faith I do have is ground that has been won without much ease. I will not give up that ground because of answers I do not yet have. If that makes me foolish in your eyes, that's alright with me. I haven't always been a man of faith, I wasn't born into the church.

Faith does not require a perfect knowledge. Faith is not supposed to be easy. You ask what I care about science if I have faith. Both of the two work together.

I have faith, which is sufficient on it's own for me. But when you make claims that my faith is in vain because. "There is ZERO archaeological evidence that your book is true. There is zero DNA evidence that your book is true. There is ZERO evidence, full stop, that anything in that book happened."

It's hard not to share the archaeological evidence and DNA evidence that I have found. You're right, I don't have all the archaeological evidence on the first results of a google search. The sword, elephants, and horses were all the first result of google searches.

September 23, 2016

EIGHT – JAKE

You expect an all powerful God to be responsible for everything bad that ever happens. That He was behind it if He was real, so He couldn't be real.

We all have our agency. You have the ability to choose to write all sorts of crap about The Church because you are bitter and angry. You have the ability to choose to try and tear others faith down. You have that agency. Just like we all have our agency.

You assume that God must be responsible for all things anyone does, all though you prove that you exercise your agency how you want without consulting Him in the least.

You are full of anger, and bitterness. You try and destroy the peace that so many have found in The Church because you have not found it. From trials comes strength. A God that would not allow us to have trials, or for bad things to would not allow us to grow. You say natural disasters happen because He is mad at people (if He was real). Then you say they seem to be random so He is not real.

God doesn't hang out in heaven seeing whose lives He can ruin. He doesn't send a hurricane to a people who don't believe in Him to send a message that they will not recognize. The God I believe in doesn't sit there controlling

each person to do evil and each natural disaster to exercise wrath on his children. He allows people to exercise agency poorly, knowing that this life will not be just. Knowing that all will be made right in the life to come. Sometimes He brings his children home when we don't expect Him to. I don't worry about it, because I have faith that all will be made right in the next life. That this life is for us to learn, and to grow, and to choose for ourselves what we will do and who we will follow.

The God I believe in is infinitely just, and infinitely merciful. Justice establishes right and wrong, punishment and reward. Mercy allows us to grow and learn from our mistakes. It's not God who will punish us in this life, or in the next. Our guilt when we stand before God with a knowledge of what we willingly did against him is what will be the cause of our damnation. We will not want to be in the presence of God in that day. We will not be comfortable in his presence.

So many people have had their lives richly enhanced as being a part of this church. 50% of births from women under the age of 30 are done outside of a marriage. And 50% of marriages end in divorce. Of the 50% that don't, many relationships are abusive, in one way or another. I see it everyday at work. Broken families, and people. Do you

know what wonders it does to people to have a strong emphasis on family like the members of The Church? The increased (statistical) grades of children in school, the increased statistics of success and happiness in life?

Why would you ever desire to destroy that? Why would you try and tear people from The Church, and the lasting joy they can have with it? The comfort a mother could have knowing she will see her dead child again? In my case, the comfort I have knowing my severely disabled younger brother will be resurrected with a perfect body? The comfort that all the wrongs shall be made right, and that I may be forgiven of the wrongs I have done.

What is your real goal? Why do you do this?

September 23, 2016

NINE – JUSTIN

I believe if there was a god that nothing bad that He could reasonably prevent without interfering with free-will and agency would happen.

If you were an omnipotent being would you stand idly by whilst a child suffered and died of leukemia? Would you watch as one of your cherished believers drowned in a tsunami? All the while calling for your help? As one of the parasitic insects you created bored itself into the eye of an innocent young girl? Blinding her for life? I would not. I think that makes me more moral than the god of The Bible.

I am not mad at something I disbelieve in.

Yes. I refuse to lead by faith. Do you have faith in the Qu'ran? Billions of people do. Billions of people insist that you should accept that book on faith. Why don't you? What evidence do you have that your book is correct and theirs is not?

Prayers don't change God's will? Do Priesthood blessings? If they don't then what is their purpose?

I was an atheist before my father's blessing mishap, but, you claimed that I was missing the signs God sent me. I asked you which signs I missed. It seems to me that was a pretty good way for God to show himself. Again, He either

declined, or never existed. As you claim I have missed these clear and unmissable signs, can you please tell me what they were?

I am not trying to tear down your faith, or the faith of anyone else. What I am trying to do is have a discussion about how we know what we know, and how we should act and why. If you have better reasons and evidence for those things, I would love to hear them. I am genuinely interested, but thus far, it seems that your arguments rely on a faith I do not possess. Thus, it is unconvincing. You are not, I assume, convinced by the arguments for Islam for the same reason.

You are probably right; nothing you say will effect me. That's not because I am "hard-hearted", nor because your arguments are not well-formed. I am not, and they are. The problem, for me, is that your arguments are not based on facts or evidence. They are based on faith, which, again, I do not accept as convincing.

"You have the ability to choose to write all sorts of crap about the church because you are bitter and angry."

The inevitable, ["You can leave the church, but you can't leave it alone"](#) argument.

I write what I do because I believe that it is true. I want to share newfound knowledge with others who also seek it. As a member of a church who sends out millions of missionaries, doesn't this seem like a noble goal? To share what you believe to be the truth? Do you not want to share what you believe to be the truth with others? I hope you do. And I am willing to listen (read) and respond. We just disagree.

I understand the idea of "trials" and "tests", but do you not think that there would be plenty of that without natural disasters? Again, those do not affect free will, nor agency, nor faith, nor belief. If there is no god, they are the processes of physics. If there is, He idly watches as they cause endless pain and suffering – all while knowing that He could stop them. Would you stop them? If you could simply throw a switch and save millions of lives from an earthquake, would you? I would like to think I would.

You must have a different definition of 'mercy' than I. A merciful god would not create Ebola, Zika, cancer, nor childhood leukemia. A merciful god would not create innocent children with horrifying defects. He would heal amputees who prayed to Him. He would heal a man who received a blessing in His name. But, he did create those

things, and He doesn't do those things. Almost as if He wasn't there.

I am an atheist, as is my wife. We have a child. We've been married for 15+ years. We also put a strong emphasis on family. Religion doesn't have a monopoly on that message.

Again, I'm not trying to destroy anything. Merely have a discussion. But, I think it is important to believe as many true things as possible and as few false things as possible. And, because I believe the evidence and facts support the idea that The LDS Church is false, as is God, I do not like seeing my friends, family, and neighbors wasting their time and money on it.

And, yes, I would love for their to be some cosmic justice. Some ultimate punishment for Hitler, Stalin, Jeffrey Dahmer, Jack the Ripper, etc. I would also love to see my father and my grandparents again. But, just because it is a comforting thought, and just because I wish it to be true, doesn't make it so.

My real goal is to find the truth. I will follow the evidence wherever it leads. I have not already reached a dogmatic, unchangeable conclusion. If you have the truth, I merely insist that you provide the evidence that backs your position.

Thanks again for your thoughts and comments,
Justin

September 26, 2016

TEN – JAKE

When we learn something that is of value, it's common to want to share it. You claim to be Atheist, which means you believe there is no God. No chance, no way, it is set in stone. Agnosticism is open to possibilities. Agnosticism recognizes that you can neither prove nor disprove God. Agnostics don't know what is true, they are unsure, and are open to all possibilities.

If you are open to possibilities, the term atheist doesn't make sense to me. Someone who has faith, "a believer", can have doubts. Someone who is agnostic, is open. This is the first I've met an open minded, undecided atheist.

Is death the worst thing you can think of? It's sad, but I don't believe it is the end. I believe in an afterlife. Which is not something that can really be proven.

Does God take His children home early sometimes? Yes He does. My cousin, aunt, two nephews, and cousin's husband are all dead as a result of a quadruple murder/suicide. None of them were religious. Why would God let this happen? The youngest was 5.

I believe that all will be made right in the next life. If those children needed to stay alive, God would have made it so. How could we ever assume we know who should live and

who should die? I don't delight in death, especially not of little children. As a former lifeguard, I have saved lives. Death is tragic, and hard. Should God have not taken them home? How could you tell?

What about my brother who was going to be born with a major heart defect and die? Remarkably, he was born with scar tissue on one of the walls of his heart where a big hole was. Doctors were unsure how it healed so quickly, or so densely. Could we prove anything in relation to God based on either scenario? Does one disprove him and the other prove him?

No. I don't know the mind of God. I can't tell you why to all the answers. Why did God let Samson who was a murderer, and terrible man, be strengthened. Yet his prophets were slain, and killed by the wicked? Why did God not spare them? Why did God not preserve their life? What about Job? God sure didn't stop bad things from happening to him.

Surely no one ever was more loving, patient, caring, and compassionate as Jesus himself. Yet He was mocked, betrayed, beaten, and slain. He said "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" He let himself be slain. Why didn't Heavenly Father intervene and stop it?

Was there anyone who ever was as pure? I would dare ask, if there was anyone more deserving.

God does not make believers have perfect, nothing goes wrong, immortal lives. That would take away the purpose of this being a temporary state, and having agency.

Death is not the end. God receives those little children, and they will dwell with him in paradise.

The God I believe in doesn't like to see His children suffer. But that doesn't mean He intervenes. If we never had hardships, how would we grow? He didn't send us here so we could start to be tested, but he couldn't bear to watch anymore so he gives us the answer key.

Could an all powerful God save the lives of all children? Yes, so why wouldn't he? If you didn't have the agency to hurt a small child, you be missing some of your agency. Do I have the agency to get mad, and break stuff? Yes I do. Would we all be better off without the agency to hurt each other? In this life, I would think so. But we wouldn't get to choose, so how would we know.

You may have never felt the spirit, or felt the love of God. I don't know all the mysteries of your life. I don't know if you've had signs. You said you were active, and felt guilt for your sins. Were there signs then? I don't I don't know. It's

just hard to believe that there never was one. I guess it depends on how you define a sign.

September 27, 2016

ELEVEN – JUSTIN

Gnosticism/Agnosticism refers to what we can know. Theism/Atheism refers to what we believe. I do not claim there is no god. I believe there is currently not enough evidence to support or justify belief in the supernatural nor a supreme being. Thus, I am an agnostic atheist. I do not believe in a god, but I do not believe it is possible to prove a negative. Other people may consider themselves to be gnostic atheists; knowing that there is no god.

An analogy used by Matt Dillahunty is the example of a courtroom. You don't judge guilty or innocent; you judge guilty or not guilty. Not guilty means that you were not convinced by the prosecution and the evidence. It does not mean that the defendant is necessarily innocent. I judge God not guilty of existing.

If an afterlife can't be proven, why do you believe it? Why do you believe the Mormon "celestial progression" version of the afterlife, and not the standard Heaven/Hell version of Catholicism and classical Christianity? What convinces you of one over the other? Or the Nirvana of Hinduism? Or Valhalla? What are the arguments and evidence that support your belief in one over the others?

Why would your brother be born with a heart defect? I believe it's an accident of biology. Biology is messy. A believer, on the other hand, would have to assume that it was the will of God. Similarly, heart defects sometimes heal themselves – for the children of believers and non-believers alike. Sometimes it doesn't. Biology is messy. Thankfully for your family it went that way. I am glad of it. What would you be saying, however, if it had gone the other?

I love the story of Job. It shows just how immoral the god of The Bible must be. He allows and even encourages suffering on a dare? On a bet? I assure you, I would not allow someone to harm my child just to test her love of me. I think that's revolting. I am glad it is likely just a story.

I also love the story of Jesus for the same reason. That God would create human beings destined to sin? And the only way that those sins could be forgiven is by a bizarre blood-magic ritual in which one of his children is tortured and murdered whilst He watches? Why can't God just forgive each of us? Why did He require a surrogate? And why did that surrogate have to suffer so much? Again, it seems immoral and revolting to me.

As I wrote in [another post](#), I believe that my daughter will likely endure many hardships as she grows up. She doesn't need extra challenges from her loving father to make things

more difficult with some odd intention to somehow make her a better person:

“I would never move her into a poorly constructed house prone to causing death and dismemberment and, when the inevitable accident occurred, write on a Post-It, ‘It’s just a test of your character. I think you’ll do fine with one arm. You can thank me and love me, but blame me or question my motives for this latest hardship and I’ll punish you more.’”

I’ve been clear that I am not talking about stopping horrible things interfering with free-agency. Parasites that blind children in India have no effect on free-agency or free-will. Why did God create that parasite? Why did God not keep it from out of their eyes? Why doesn’t He heal them when they pray? How does a tsunami interfere with free-will and free-agency? It doesn’t. It merely causes immense suffering.

It does depend on how you define a sign. So how do you define it? What signs have convinced you of your particular beliefs? Have shown you that The LDS Church is the only true church?

Thanks again for your thoughts and comments,
Justin

September 27, 2016

TWELVE – JAKE

In terms of other religions. I believe what is true is true. Catholicism, Judaism, and (to keep it simple) Protestant faiths all believe in the biblical afterlife. But they all believe in it differently. Paul was taken up into the third heaven. Most protestants (with several exception) believe that the three heavens are, first the atmosphere, second space, and third, where God dwells. They use that scripture differently. They understand the levels of heaven differently. I believe in Heaven and Hell. They believe in Heaven and Hell.

My sister (who is kinda agnostic theist, she doesn't know which God, but she believes in a God). Just graduated with a major in Anthropology, and a double minor in Chinese, and Linguistics. She has studied evolution, the origin of the species of Homo sapiens, and many different cultures, and religions. Most major religions all come from the same root. (There where isolated countries, such as Japan that have had different belief systems originate that are exceptions.)

God exists without scripture. People have different scripture, and believe in God. I don't claim they believe in a false God. Nirvana is the final state of life, where the cycle of Samsara comes to an end. Living in heaven is the final

state of life (for those who will go), where there will be no more death, and resurrection will have been completed.

Are their specifics different? Yes. There are flaws in the comparison, Buddhist beliefs are different, but it is a very similar concept. Why do you believe there isn't an afterlife? What proof do you have? Why do I need proof there is an afterlife, and you don't need proof there isn't? What happens to the energy of a person when they die? Do you believe that it all stops and dies? Many people, and cultures of many different faiths believe that the energy does not die even when the body does. I do not discredit fellow Christians that only believe in a straight forward heaven or hell. I don't say that their belief is wrong because it doesn't have the details that my personal belief does. Or the details that The LDS Church has.

Do you believe in justice, and mercy? I do. The God I believe in has established laws. Our agency lets us choose to follow them or break them. With no justice, there is no wrong, for there is no right. It doesn't matter what you do, you could just do whatever.

Imagine taking a math test, where there are no rules, no problems, and no scale of grading. What kind of test is that? That's not what I would call a test. God needed there to be rules, problems, and a scale for grading or this wasn't a test

at all. If you transgress, then you fail the test. The scale of grading is pass/fail. We all would fail if there was only justice. We would all inherit the result of that failure. Christ took upon himself the sins of the world that the demands of justice could be fulfilled for each one of us. Which is kinda like being graded on a curve. I had a difficult chemistry class, where almost every test was graded on a curve because there were questions that we had not been taught the answers too. Equations we had not been taught to solve. If that teacher only used the test, we all would have failed the class (except for maybe a lucky guesser). You could describe it as mercy that the test was not graded for every question. She would give points for the questions we did not know, and add more points until the person who did best would have 100%. Because of mercy, our test on this earth is graded on a curve. We are graded on a curve of what we did based on what we know. We are not graded on the questions that were unfair.

If there was a time when we should have known better, and acted differently. That is a wrong answer that is graded. That is on us. We were responsible for that. But even then, we can go up to the teacher, and say "I know I got that answer wrong, but I've learned from it, and am trying my best to learn, and keep growing" Then the merciful teacher can give us the point back.

That is (in my imperfect descriptions and analogies) how both justice and mercy are balanced by God.

Many children with Down syndrome are born with heart defects. The results of scans indicated that my brother would be one of those children.

How would it have disproved God's existence if he would have died? Maybe all that he needed in this life was to be born with a body. Maybe his spirit was already prepared for the next life and he needed to receive a body so that when the time comes, he could be resurrected with it. Maybe he would die right after birth. Why does it seem impossible to you that death (which is inevitable) is part of God's plan? That suffering, and death are a part of that plan. Is justice robbed by suffering and death? Is mercy? No. Those are for the next life. If the God you claim doesn't exist wouldn't allow suffering in any degree (whether it be from "Parasites that blind children in India" or from the consequences of our actions, or the pains of death, or anything at all that could bring about suffering) Then I agree with you. I do not believe in a God that doesn't allow suffering. The faithful don't get a free pass from suffering. God is there to help them, and can ease some of the sufferings though. But he will not take away all sufferings.

My current argument is not that The LDS Church is the only true church and all others are false. There are many people who believe in the same God, yet call Him a different name, and understand Him different. I don't believe that The LDS Church is the only true church. From what I have seen it is the most true church. From what I have read and studied, it has the most truths that I have found.

A sign is “an object, quality, or event whose presence or occurrence indicates the probable presence or occurrence of something else.”

September 27, 2016

THIRTEEN – JUSTIN

What about Zoroastrianism? Or Hinduism? Is ‘truth’ limited only to the western, Judea-Christian based religions? Why don’t you accept their very different claims? Again, what do you use to verify that your particular beliefs are accurate, but theirs are not? They may share some basic commonalities – a feature you would expect from a species that shared common ancestry and origin – but there are many incompatibilities. They can’t all be true, but they can all be false.

God can exist without scripture? I’d agree that’s possible, but then does He really care what we do? Does he really care if we drink coffee? Eat pork? Have plural wives? Marry someone of the same sex?

I don’t believe in an after-life because I’ve never seen evidence of an after-life. I’ve never seen evidence of someone coming “back” from the dead. Again, there simply is no evidence. No reason to believe it until such evidence is presented.

I believe that societies attempt to dispense justice. I believe that I and my fellow humans tend towards empathy and mercy. I don’t believe that God has anything to do with that. I believe we evolved as empathetic, social species and

that 'justice' and 'mercy' benefit our species and our society as a whole. There are societies that exist without The Bible. Without The Quran. Without The Book of Mormon. Without any sacred texts at all. They still behave by a set of rules they consider to be moral and ethical.

On the other hand, many of those who claim to act by the rules of those sacred texts behave in ways our society considers to be horribly immoral. Warren Jeffs, for example. Honor killings in Afghanistan. They can "prove" that their actions are "moral" by pointing to their religious texts. To me, that demonstrates that if scriptures and "God's will" can be thus twisted, they have little to do with morality.

If God established these "laws" and "rules", why didn't He ensure we all knew them? Why are we not all born with a Bible, or Quran, or Torah, or Book of Mormon attached to our heel? Or, mayhaps, a giant wall with His rules irrevocably engraved upon it? If, as The LDS Church teaches, we are not to drink coffee, how is someone in rural Africa, who has never met a Mormon, or have the Internet, supposed to know God's rules? Writing these rules down, in languages not everyone understands, and having them disseminated by flawed human beings seems horribly inefficient as well as inevitably error prone. It seems that an omnipotent being could come up with something much

more clear and less prone to missing, overlooking, or misunderstanding.

Neither birth defects, natural disasters, nor parasites disprove god. They disprove the notion of a merciful, involved, and ethical god. They disprove the notion of a god who loves and cares for each of us and wants us to be happy. The fact that some health maladies are cured – for those who pray and those who don't, for those who believe and those who don't – leads me to believe that either He doesn't care, doesn't play by any of His rules, or simply isn't there.

Bad things happen to good people. Bad things happen to bad people. Good things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people. Almost as you might expect from a universe, galaxy, and planet indifferent to your behavior and belief.

According to The LDS Church, only those who are temple worthy, receive their endowments, and are celestially sealed are worthy of the highest kingdoms of Celestial Glory. Forget that I'm an atheist for a moment and assume that I'm a Muslim, or Jewish, or Hindu. I believe in the "same god", as you put it. What can you show me that would demonstrate that my understanding of Heaven is incorrect? That I should follow your books and your prophets, and not

my own? Assume that I have an equally sincere faith in my beliefs. Your and my beliefs are incompatible. Thus, there must be some way to differentiate between which of our faiths is correct and which is not.

To my knowledge, I have not received any signs as you describe them. If you continue to insist that I have, then, again, I must have missed them. I can't help but think that a sign I can miss is exactly the same as no sign at all.

Thanks & cheers,
Justin

September 28, 2016

FOURTEEN – JAKE

None are so blind as those that will not see.

To many, one day they look in the mirror, and wonder “who am I? Why am I here? Where did I come from?” And other questions. Some of them go look outside, and their own very existence, and everything around them is a sign to them that it all came from a higher being.

I’m not saying that’s why you should believe in God, or why I do either. But to some, they see signs you do not, they see signs I do not, if you refuse to see signs, you will not. If you’re looking for a sign that is so incredibly obvious that there is no need for uncertainty or faith, then I highly doubt you will find one. A sign that is hard to find is wasted on a man who will not look.

Do you learn from trials? From struggles, suffering, and mistakes? What kind of God would send us here to learn for ourselves, and choose things for ourselves, but not let us learn from trials, struggles, suffering, or mistakes? Not the God I believe in.

You claim that the God I believe in is not a “merciful, involved, and ethical god.” ... “who loves and cares for each of us and wants us to be happy.” Why would allowing us to exercise agency, face consequences, and grow from trials

that come from others, our selves, and our mortal existence, show that He does not care?

Did your parents ever let you make your own decisions and learn from bad ones? Do you ever let your children make bad decisions, and watch as they suffer and struggle, and offer the advice you have, but let them choose what to do?

The God I believe in is more deeply caring about us than His own desires to protect us from all harm. He doesn't become blinded by short term suffering, when He knows the long term positive effect it can have on us. (In this life or the life to come) He would let us suffer, and He would know our pains having felt all the pains of the world.

The God I believe in weeps when we are hurt, and when we sin.

Remember my little test analogy from earlier? My teacher would take the questions that were unfair, and give us full credit for them.

God's judgment is the same. When you choose evil, knowing you are choosing evil, then you are guilty. A man cannot sin in ignorance. You can deny sin, pretend it never happened, justify actions, etc. But when you have sinned, you know it.

“What can you show me that would demonstrate that my understanding of Heaven is incorrect?” You ask. Why must I demonstrate their understanding of Heaven is incorrect? Are not all three kingdoms of heaven, kingdoms of heaven in the LDS faith? Why must I dispute that they won’t receive one of those kingdoms? Why would I need to convince them that, “I should follow your books and your prophets, and not my own?”

I don’t see a need to discredit the truths that they hold. In a conversation with them, I would want to expand on what it is they already believe and hold to be true. The objective would not be to convince them their faith is wrong and mine is right.

You are right about certain incompatibilities between different religions. Christian denominations demonstrate this often. Even within the denomination, each pastor understands scripture different and teaches to their understanding. Some people teach that man can talk with God like a man talks to a friend. (Which Moses did) Some teach that no man can survive being in the presence of God. (Which is from the same chapter, right across the page)

Everyone of a faith is an individual that is part of a group. A relationship with God comes individually. People are flawed, and can be confused, and make all sorts of mistakes.

The faith that they have may not be all the same doctrines of the religion they are a part of. For their relationship with God, if they have one, is personal. I would not need to prove them wrong, and destroy the faith they do have.

Rather, I would build on the truths they already do have. If there were things they held true, that I did not. There would be a difference between right and wrong. Not everything is “Right, or wrong” though. Some things are on a scale of “Good, Better, and Best”.

The LDS church is the best I know. The Mormon culture is flawed, and people are imperfect. But doctrinally, it's the best that I know.

The reason I do not share the all the signs I have seen is similar to something you said before. About how my experiences do not give you reason to believe. They are fine for me, because I'm the one who saw them. But as for you, you will need to have your own experiences.

If I were to tell you the answer to your questions was in a book. And you refused to read that book, would that mean there was no answer? Just because you would refuse to do what you needed to get the answer does not mean it's not there.

If I told you that “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” And you refused to ask of God, in faith, nothing wavering, and wait for an answer that will come on the Lord's time. That would not mean there is no God because he didn't make his presence obvious enough for you.

I'm not discrediting your past prayers which you described as “more than I could imagine”. I'm not discrediting your past attempts to answer the questions you have, or your years of studying the scriptures, and history and the gospel. I'm not discrediting them. I'm just saying that if you ask in faith, nothing wavering, and wait for the Lord's answer, it will come.

If you refuse to exercise faith, without evidence first, then you refuse to know there is a God. That is why I opened with “None are so blind as those that will not see”.

If you have no desire for there to be a God, then that's your decision. If you have no desire to do what you would need to know that there is a God, then it's your decision not to know Him. But you seem too focused on God to simply not care. But then again, I really don't know much about you. If

you have warped God into an unethical, unloving, unjust being. Then I would see why you would no longer desire for His existence. But that's not the God that I believe in that you deny. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he should lay down his life for his friends" says my God, who gave His life for all mankind. That we may be redeemed.

Earlier I mentioned the relationship between families and The Church. You misinterpreted it. Correctly stating that religion does not have the monopoly on families. And that families do not have to be religious to be moral, wholesome, and ethical. But I can tell you, the huge effect I have seen on the life of a person who is converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The people I know who were addicted to drugs, and were violent and hurt people and went to prison. The people I know who were addicted to alcohol and no longer had positive relationships with anyone they associated with. The people I know who were addicted, and were far from the person they wanted to be. The people I know that changed from their old ways as a direct result of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I do not claim that people can't change without the Gospel. Because they sure can, and I have seen that too. But it is always a marvel to see somebody change from a selfish, destructive lifestyle, to a selfless, constructive lifestyle.

That's the fruit of the Gospel I have beheld. The fruit that changes a person, and has made them the caring, loving, friend, spouse, and sometimes parent I know them as today. The people who have left their faith (from the people I have seen at least), are usually bitter. They have found a reason to leave the faith they once had, which happens, but it does not usually lead to positive changes. From what I've seen at least. I do not say this because I think you are a bad, confused, angry, bitter person. You are a person who does the best they can based on what you know (from what I can see). Which is commendable.

I'm curious, what do you think the fruits of the Gospel are? What have you seen from the converts you have met? What are the fruits of the people that read your blogs? Does it bring them the same fruits? How are the two different and alike?

September 29, 2016

FIFTEEN – JUSTIN

I seem blind to you.

We both seem blind to the clerics of Islam.

We both seem blind to the Pujaris of Hinduism.

We both seem blind to the Auditors of Scientology.

Why do you not ‘see’ their truths? Why are you blind?

I used to go outside and see a higher being in the beauty of creation. Now, instead, I see the beauty of chaos. Now I see the magnificence of the beautiful and amazing process of biological evolution. I see the brilliance of the stellar life-cycle – from diffuse gas clouds, becoming so dense and hot it initiates stellar fusion. To planetary accretion disks so very slowly coalescing into planets both in our own solar system and in billions of others. And when science shows me something new, I’ll likely see the beauty in that as well. My conclusions aren’t set. “The joy is in the journey; not the destination.”

I learn from experiences. Some painful. Some not. Never, however, in my memory, did my parents or those who care for me, including church leaders, intentionally inflict suffering to encourage learning. Intentionally put me in harms way so that I may learn. They were more ethical,

caring, and loving that the god in whom they purport to believe.

What did the 8-year-old who died of childhood cancer in my childhood ward learn? Their parents and our ward learned how to justify that all of our prayers, fasts, and blessings ultimately did nothing, but must have been “God’s Will”. Hopefully she learned that the people around loved her and cared more for her well being than did her Heavenly Father.

My parents never, intentionally, allowed me to make decisions that would put me in bodily harm. They didn’t just allow me to run out in the street, for example. Nope, they ran, intervened, and possibly saved my life. I would do the same for my child. Would you? Would you save a stranger’s kid? I believe you likely would. Congratulations. You’re more moral, loving, and empathetic than your god.

By your analogy, it seems far better to keep our children ignorant of God’s laws. If we never teach them about sin, they will always be clean?

In order to convert someone to Mormonism, you must discredit the incompatible beliefs that the investigator holds. You can’t convert a Hindu without dissuading them from beliefs in Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, and reincarnation.

They are incompatible. I'm not saying you have to be rude, but, ultimately, you must somehow demonstrate to them that your beliefs are more correct than theirs. How do you propose that you would do that should you serve a mission in India?

What does it tell you about a "truth" when it is held differently by every member of a congregation? To politely paraphrase an axiom, "There are as many denominations as there are butts in the pews." When the same book can be interpreted so many different ways? Does it seem that, mayhaps, sacred texts and mortal leaders are a poor way to deliver God's will? Maybe the wisdom of God should devise a less error-prone methodology?

Please demonstrate how you know that The LDS Church is the best that you know of. How is celestial progressions a better/more correct doctrine than reincarnation? How is The First Vision a more valid experience than Mohamed's First Revelation? Why do you accept one and not the other? What more evidence for the first versus the latter? Why do you find the idea of Kolob more acceptable than Xenu?

To paraphrase your sentence, "If you refuse to exercise faith in The Qu'ran, without evidence first, you refuse to know the truth."

“If you refuse to exercise faith in L Ron Hubbard, you refuse to know the truth.”

The time to believe something is after you have sufficient evidence; not before.

If God is so free with signs for others, why does Heavenly Father not see it fit to give me my own signs? To give me my own experiences? To lead me to the book that will convince me? To inspire you with the words that will finally open my “blind” eyes? Or, much simpler, just appear to me as He has to so many before me (believers and unbelievers alike)?

Could it be that those of faith see things through their own lens? Muslims see signs of the truth of Mohamed? Hindus see the generosity of Brahma? Scientologists see the truth of L. Ron Hubbard’s methodology? Mormons feel the truth of The Book of Mormon when they perform Moroni’s Challenge?

I’ve read The Book of Mormon at least six times. Praying after each time. Do you think seven will finally convince me? In point of fact, I was reading portions just last evening. I’ve read The Doctrine & Covenants twice. The Pearl of Great Price, once. Joseph Smith’s History of The Church at least twice. Paul H Dunn’s books. *Miracle of Forgiveness*. Where are the answers? In which book? Which chapter? Which verse?

If you have evidence and answers, again, I ask, just as Jeremy Runnells (<http://cesletter.com>) and countless, countless others have asked, please provide them.

I have no desire for God, or General Relativity, or Evolution. I have a desire for truth. There is evidence enough to believe two of those things, not for the other. I have a desire to believe as many true things as I can whilst disbelieving as many false things as I can. That is where my desire lies. I have warped god into nothing. Any being that can stop a parasite from boring itself into a child's eye and doesn't is unethical, unempathetic, and unloving. How is that a warped view? How is anyone that could simply end cancer from across the planet; from every living being, who refuses to do so a good person? An ethical being? Moral? Empathetic? Please explain how letting a toddler run onto the freeway, so as not to take away their free-agency, so that maybe they'll learn a valuable lesson, a loving, caring thing to do?

I know a lot of atheists who are no longer addicted to drugs. I know a lot of atheists who drink responsibly. Another message upon which religion does not have a monopoly. Religion works, except when it doesn't. Non-religion also works, except when it doesn't. Not really

evidence of anything except that sometimes people can overcome their failings, other times, they can't.

A lot of former Mormons are angry because they feel betrayed by their religion, their god, their parents, their grandparents, their ward members, their leaders, and more. Mormons of my age were never told that Joseph Smith was a polygamist; quite the opposite. Never told that, like FLDS leaders they condemn, he wed teenage girls. We were never told that he put a stone in a hat in order to translate The Book of Mormon. We were never told that he never needed The Gold Plates for translation. Never told that there are numerous changes that have been made to the text of The Book of Mormon. Never told that the ban on blacks in the priesthood was racism and not gospel doctrine. Never told Joseph Smith had four very different versions of his First Vision. Never told that the seer stone he used to translate The Gold Plates was also used for treasure hunting.

Now The Church confirms all of that, but when I was growing up, people were excommunicated for disseminating those facts. The Church actively suppressed them. Now they don't. People feel betrayed. We feel that The Gospel to which we gave so much time, money, and complete obedience abused our trust. We also feel angry that so many of those around us still refuse to hear these

facts as facts – even though The Church readily admits everything that I mentioned; on their own websites and texts. “Yesterday’s anti-Mormon lie is today’s Church history.”

The fruits of The Gospel. I don’t know about The Gospel, but The Church builds a lot of buildings. Invests in commercial real-estate. A giant mall in downtown SLC. Grandiose luxury condominiums in Philadelphia. Huge cattle ranches in Florida. Donations to charity far less than they spend on those.

As far as converts, I’ve met a few. Just like life-long Mormons, mostly they are good people. Sometimes they are selfish. Just like Catholics I have met. Most are nice, some are less so. Just like some Jewish people. Just like atheists. Thus, based on my admittedly anecdotal evidence, it seems that, regardless of denomination, religion mostly produces good, empathetic people, and some who are selfish and greedy. Just like non-religion.

The fruits of people who read my blog? I only know about those whom I know personally. Some of them have happy, productive marriages. Some of them have happy, productive children. Some have been divorced. Some never married. Some graduated college. Some didn’t. Some are healthy, some have health challenges. Some like cats. Some like dogs.

As far as I know, all of them are law-abiding, members of society, who pay their taxes, give to charity, try and get along. Some are law-enforcement officers, some work for charities, some work for humanitarian groups. Others are simple capitalists who run businesses. Thus, they probably look a lot like a small cross-section of any metropolitan Mormon ward.

Thanks again, and cheers,
Justin

September 29, 2016

SIXTEEN – JAKE

When I speak of fruits, I'm speaking of the effect something has. A bad tree has bad fruit. Not all the fruits are the same, a bad tree can have a good fruit. A good tree produces good fruit, but not all the fruit will necessarily be good.

The fruits (effects) I have seen of the Gospel (when people live it) have been an increase of love, patience, peace, comfort, honesty, and integrity. The fruits of the people who read your blog aren't "who" reads your blog, but the effect your blog has had on them. The direct effect of reading the blog.

The fruits of the Gospel are not how the church spends money. The Gospel is not the church. The fruits of the church would be the effects the church has on people, it still wouldn't be how they spend their money.

In terms of blindness. I said that none are so blind as those that will not see. If you had a question, and were told the answer was on a paper on a shelf, and then refused to reach up, grab the paper, and read it. You would not have the answer. If you then stated that there was no answer because you didn't do what you needed to get it, that would be ridiculous.

That's what is meant by "those who will not see". I will see. I have read a lot of the CES letter. I was not invited to read the Qu'ran because of my questions, would I be blind to not just randomly pick it up and read it? No.

Are you atheist or anti-LDS? Just because you have problems with The LDS Church doesn't mean there isn't a God. My faith is not in the church. My faith is in God. My faith is not in any book. It is in God. I have faith that God called Joseph Smith to be the prophet of the restoration. My faith isn't in Joseph Smith the man.

Why does it matter how Joseph translated The Book of Mormon? If it was by the power of God why would it matter that you didn't know the method until later? Why are all of these things proof there isn't a God? That the church makes investments? Why is that unacceptable? On tithing slips you can specify how you want the money spent. If you do not specify, The Church will spend it how they see fit.

The prophets see God. Adam, Abraham, Moses, Alma the younger, Joseph Smith. Only prophets see God. So you refuse to believe in God unless you are a prophet? You will not see God. The prayers of Man don't subject the Lord to Man's will. Man did not make God, God made Man.

You cannot change The Lord's plan, and will. Sometimes His plan relies on you to ask for something though. But you have agency to do so or not, and His purpose will not be stopped because of your failure to act.

You said that, "We feel that The Gospel to which we gave so much time, money, and complete obedience abused our trust." The Gospel was not what you gave money, time, and obedience too. I give my money, time, and obedience to God. I give the money through the church, but the others have no middle man. You continued "We also feel angry that so many of those around us still refuse to hear these facts as facts – even though The Church readily admits everything that I mentioned; on their own websites and texts"

I don't understand the term anger to describe such a situation. I cannot speak for the past of the church, but I know that they do share the things you mentioned. I fail to see the importance though.

Why is it inconceivable that man could misprint The Book of Mormon. Requiring later changes? The LDS faith does not believe in the catholic doctrine of "biblical inerrancy" which states that the Bible (scripture) cannot have errors, or mistakes. They also believe that the Bible cannot be mistranslated, and is the complete knowledge of God.

When Joseph was going to print the Book of Mormon, all the major printing offices turned him down. The people at the printing offices had agency.

I do not understand the correlation you seem to have between temporal knowledge and spiritual. They are different.

I do not claim that reading The Book of Mormon accomplishes anything on it's own. It's not reading it that has the effect. It's acting on what you learn from it that does. If you read it a 7th time and did nothing different, it would have no effect on you.

You stated that "I have no desire for God". So why do you care enough to blog against Him if he doesn't exist?

"In order to convert someone to Mormonism, you must discredit the incompatible beliefs that the investigator holds." Is not from any missionary handbook, from any work of scripture, or from "Preach my Gospel" (the missionary guidebook).

"Hindus believe that there is one true god, the supreme spirit, called Brahman. Brahman has many forms, pervades the whole universe..." "Most Hindus believe that Brahman is present in every person as the eternal spirit or soul, called the atman."

Brahman has many forms and is in all of us. Brahma (not Brahman) is the creator. Vishnu is the preserver/sustainer. And Shiva is the destroyer.

They believe in all those forms of God, and each one is “a God”. Yet they only believe in one true God. All the forms combined make God.

The God I believe in is the creator. And he also sustains our life, and redeems our soul through the atonement, and in his wrath, he has demonstrated that he is also a destroyer.

With the flood in Noah’s day, and the destruction of wicked cities, and with the second coming that will occur. My God is more than just those three, but he is those three.

So why do I have to tell them they are wrong? Can’t I expand on what they already know? The truths they already have? The LDS church is not the only true church. It is the most true. It’s not The LDS Church versus all the other churches. It’s truth versus lies.

I have been to other churches. And felt the spirit of God just like at The LDS Church. I have heard the true things they believe in, that have helped widen my perspective. There are true things that they do not know. But that doesn’t make them wrong. There are true things that they do know.

When I used to teach swim lessons. I had a very very difficult student passed down to me. A four year old named Brighten. She was a sweet, and stubborn girl. She had been taught for 9 months with no progress at all. She was stubborn, and would sometimes just refuse to try and swim. I eventually got her to be able to float independently (not consistently though). I knew her favorite color, toys, movies, and things to do. I cared for all my students, but I especially worried about her and tried to think of ways to teach her. After three months, we had made some progress. She was as prepared as I could have her be for an exercise we were going to move on to.

She would need to jump into the pool, get to the surface of the water, and float on her back for 10 seconds without help.

We were both nervous. I wanted her to be able to do it so bad. I had worked so hard to prepare her for this moment, I hoped she would be able to do it. She jumped in the water, I was right there, with full power to pull her out, and with my lifeguard training, if anything bad happened, I was prepared to do emergency treatment prior to the EMTs arrival if it was necessary. She immediately began to struggle. She was disoriented, and didn't rise to the surface immediately.

I did not pull her out. Sometimes, it's best to give a student room to learn things on their own. I watched, as she figured out where the surface was, and rose to it. She couldn't have been under for more than 5 seconds, but it seemed like minutes had passed. She rose up, got to her back and floated as I counted out loud 10 seconds.

We were both so proud. From that moment on, she gained confidence, and knew that if she was disoriented she could figure it out, and rise to the surface. I was so proud that she had been able to remember what I had taught her, and was so much more comfortable in the water now.

Was I unloving, uninvolved, and unmerciful for not pulling her out the second there was a problem? Of course not.

To you, death is the end. It is the worst thing that could happen. There is no hope, and no life after death.

To me, I recognize that God calls His children home in their time. This life was supposed to be temporary. We are going to die. When God is ready for me to come home, He will call me home. He will call anyone home at any time. Death is not the end.

Suffering should not be encouraged or sought for. But if you can change your perspective to long term, you see the benefits and strengths that can come from suffering. God

allows agency, suffering, and death. In fact, they are a major part of his plan.

God's plan extends beyond this life. The time we have here is almost nothing in comparison to all that is ahead of us in the eternity.

Because of my faith in Jesus Christ I have hope for my future in this life, and in the life to come. I have hope in the knowledge that I can see my family again, and live with them in paradise.

If you have any desire to be with your family even after this life, then you have a small desire for there to be a God. I would encourage you to let that work in you.

If you have no desire, than why do you do this? What is your objective?

October 2, 2016

SEVENTEEN – JUSTIN

Do you believe that most people have love, patience, honesty, and integrity? Do Catholics? Muslims? Atheists?

I also see the fruits of The Gospel to those who are different. I read about suicides among teens of LDS families who are homosexual. There is data about how many homeless teens in Utah come from LDS [families who rejected them](#). listen to Mormon Stories episodes about people who have dared question The Church, who then lose contact with their friends and family, who reject their new outlook. I've also seen unscrupulous members of The LDS Church [take advantage of their fellow ward members](#).

I can't say I know the fruits of this blog. I can only hope the fruit is an increase in critical thinking, skepticism, and rationality. I hope that it causes thought and reflection on what is believed and why. I would like readers to consider if they have good, rational reasons for believing what they do.

Do you agree with how The LDS Church spends its money? Do you think The LDS Church accurately represents The Gospel, as you see it? Do you think the organization representing The Gospel should have a 'for-profit' business arm? Do you think the organization representing The Savior should build a billion dollar mall whilst people are still

hungry? Whilst downtown SLC is still filled with homeless people? Is that a proper representation of The Savior's gospel?

The answer is on a paper on the shelf? Where is that paper? Where are the answers? Again, I ask you, which book? Which pamphlet? Which Ensign article? Which sermon? I am willing to look and read. Again, I have read many of the scriptures multiple times. Which material do you find most convincing? And if I am not convinced by these materials, why would I alter my life to fit their claims? Do you read Scientology texts and then alter your behavior to verify their veracity? Jehovah's Witness texts? Christian Science? Perhaps foregoing blood transfusions, and medical treatments, etc. will convince you of their truth and correctness?

I am likely both an atheist and anti-LDS, but I am also anti-Catholic, anti-Baptist, anti-Islam, anti-Hindu, anti-Zoroastrian, anti-Scientology, and anti-any-supernatural-belief. Until someone can provide me with rational, evidence-based reasons for believing in the supernatural, I'll hold to the null-hypothesis that there isn't any.

What does it matter how Joseph Smith translated the plates? Well, for me, it points to the honesty and integrity of The LDS Church. I was never told about the seer-stone

and the hat. I was taught that Joseph Smith directly translated the reformed Egyptian from The Gold Plates. Now, both are supernatural processes, both have no evidence, but my leaders, parents, and even official paintings and narratives describe the process as real translations; “I see this character, I understand its meaning.” That The Gold Plates weren’t necessary to the process offends my sense of logic in retrospect.

As I point out in the article above, once you believe anything is possible, everything is possible. Why did he need the stone? What function did it serve? It didn’t help J.S. find buried treasure, but could be used to read sacred text? Why not just use the bottom of the hat? Why not just inspire Joseph Smith directly to write down what God wanted him to know? Bypassing the need of a scribe?

Similarly, The Church either lied or omitted that The Book of Abraham, which is the basis for the ideas of Celestial Progression and LDS cosmology. I was taught, again, that it was directly translated from Egyptian papyrus. Turns out, this is untrue as well. If I can’t trust the LDS leaders and teachers on these, why should I trust them with other claims?

Was Saul already a prophet when he saw God? Was Alma? Maybe I'm just a pre-prophet, like them, who will become a powerful messenger for God should I see Him as they did.

It seems that it is better off being a younger member and having these things taught in the open, but they were not taught before. Before those essays were posted, about polygamy, First Vision accounts, racism, Book of Abraham, and more, people were excommunicated for pointing out these, now, facts. The September Six, for example. Douglas Wallace was excommunicated in 1977 for baptizing and ordaining a black man to The Priesthood. This was before the ban was lifted, but according to the essay "Race & The Priesthood", that ban was always wrong and only a product of "the times." Mr. Wallace was, according to The Church today, doing God's true will while The Apostles opposed him. Why was he excommunicated? Why would God let The Apostles lead The Church astray? Denying otherwise obedient and righteous black members the gift of The Priesthood and also Temple Blessings?

Fawn Brodie was excommunicated for apostasy; for pointing out Joseph Smith's treasure hunting, polygamy, polyandry, etc. Now The LDS Church admits all of that and more. Why was she punished for writing and disseminating the truth?

Though they may no longer teach the falsehoods that Joseph only married Emma, didn't marry other men's wives, didn't use a treasure-hunting rock to "translate" The Book of Mormon, etc., in the past, they did teach those things. If The Gospel is constant, why would this be? Again, I must ask, do you believe that The LDS Church is a proper representative of The Gospel as you understand it?

When you have been lied to, or misled, seeming with intention, by a trusted friend or family member, do you not feel some anger? Some betrayal? Do you continue to trust, with impunity, that same individual? Or do you have some trepidation? Do you simply believe what they claim today, or do you do some more research to what they tell you?

It is not inconceivable to me that man could misprint The Book of Mormon. I am sure that is exactly what happened. It is, however, inconceivable to me that God would/could allow this "marvelous work and a wonder" to be at all altered from His will. If this is the primary source for His plan, His will, and His commandments, it seems that it should be perfect and unalterable. I am sure the men had agency, but, as God was apparently willing to guide Joseph through so many other tedious tasks with prophecies, it seems that he could ensure that Joseph and Oliver and Martin never made a translation error (especially since they

weren't really translating, but merely reading spiritual words from a stone), and would lead them to a printer who would print without error.

Again, the familiar "you can leave The Church, but you can't leave it alone" trope.

I care because people make decisions based on their beliefs. Those beliefs should be based on facts, evidence, critical thinking, and rational thought. Lawmakers making decisions based on what they believe God to want, affects all of us. Our neighbors voting based on who they believe is most religious affects all of us. People believing in supernatural cures for disease rather than science, vaccines, evidence, etc., affects all of us. That's why I care. Also, I'm happy to hear from people like yourself who may bring me answers and arguments to which I have not yet been exposed.

Why do you not find the Hindu view of polytheistic monotheism more convincing than yours? Why do you find your view of celestial progression more convincing than their view of Nirvana and reincarnation? I suppose, stretching my brain, I could see some similarities between the two; but is one right and one wrong? If not, why is it necessary to send missionaries to these places? What additional knowledge to you have to proffer?

I don't teach swimming, but frankly, I do find your approach dangerous and unnecessary. Just as I find God's. In this case, however, your student did have agency to jump or not. Do I have agency for leukemia? For earthquakes? For tornadoes? Volcanoes? Meteors? Parasites? God does. Or He isn't there.

If I have to live with this immoral god, I'd rather there not be an afterlife. And though I miss my loved ones, they are not cheapened by my memories of them. It ensures I appreciate them more each day as I know this life is fleeting. Do today, for tomorrow may not come.

To quote Tim Michin and his epic poem 'Storm':

*"Isn't this enough?
Just this world?
Just this beautiful, complex
Wonderfully unfathomable, natural world?
How does it so fail to hold our attention
That we have to diminish it with the invention
Of cheap, man-made Myths and Monsters?"*

I understand that it can seem as if I am "angry with God", but I'm not. I'm angry with the idea of God because, if I accept it, I have to believe that He gives children leukemia. That He creates blinding parasites and also allows them to

blind innocent children. I have to believe that He flooded the whole of The Earth mercilessly killing evil men, evil women, but also innocent children, and millions of innocent animals, when He just as simply could have given all those evil men and women cancer, or Ebola, or heart-attacks, sparing the innocents and foregoing immense suffering.

Once you believe that anything is possible, everything is possible.

My objective is to find the truth and spread the truth. Convince me. Show me good evidence. Restore my faith and this will become a theist blog.

Thanks again, and cheers,
Justin

October 3, 2016

EIGHTEEN – JAKE

Your understanding of the Gospel and the Church is not the same as mine. The two are not the same.

The Gospel is the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is what missionaries teach, they don't teach the Church.

The Church is an organization. A group of flawed people who unite in similar beliefs. You can go to church, and live "Mormon culture" while not knowing the Gospel, or living the Gospel.

I am not a fan of Mormon culture. Mormons are just as flawed as anyone else. Mormons do terrible things. Not all Mormons know the Gospel. Most the kids in my seminary classes did not want to be there, but their parents made them sign up for the class and tried to force them to be a believer. I think that sort of behavior is terrible. That sort of thing falls under "Mormon Culture", not the Gospel.

I know so many Mormons who only live Mormon culture, not the Gospel.

I do not speak of the fruits of Mormon culture, or of the church. I speak of the fruits of the Gospel. There are none Mormons who also believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ. They also know and live the Gospel and experience the fruits of it.

Living the Gospel means living the teachings of Jesus Christ.

I used the example of the answer to a question (unspecified) being on a paper on a shelf. I did this to illustrate a point. Not to tell you that the answer to your question is on a shelf. I apologize for the confusion you had.

If you had to do “a” for the answer, and you refused to do “a”, would that mean there is no answer? Of course not. That is all I was trying to express.

James 1:5-6 tells you how you get the answer to your question on the existence of God. But you would have to do exactly what it says, and wait for the answer. If you refuse to do that, and claim that there is no answer, then your claim is illogical. If you truly desire to know, your actions will speak louder than your words.

Spiritual knowledge is not temporal knowledge. Temporal proof does not bring spiritual knowledge. You seek temporal proof for spiritual knowledge. You cannot disprove spiritual knowledge with temporal.

Saul and Alma were not yet prophets, but they became prophets. (Paul was an apostle, and apostles are “prophets, seers, and revelators” You refuse to believe in God unless

you are a prophet, yet claim to be open minded? That is not agnosticism.

You think her being in the water for 5 seconds was dangerous? You must suck at swimming or something man. It's not like I watched her drown. Have you ever been under water for more than 5 seconds? That's not enough time to drown. Or for it to be dangerous. If she had been under longer I would have pulled her out.

You missed the point of the analogy I think. It was the effect that struggle had on her. The confidence she gained. If I had pulled her out immediately, or not let her do the exercise at all, that effect would not have came about.

Similarly, we are here because we chose God's plan. To receive bodies, and to suffer, and die, but to learn and grow. We chose to jump in.

You refuse to accept God how he truly is, because you have a warped view of him. If he fit your warped view, you would believe in him? If he didn't allow suffering or death, if he bowed down to your will whenever you prayed for something, then would you believe?

I'm glad my God isn't your servant. I'm glad my God doesn't bow down to your will and pleasure. I'm glad my God has a

plan that isn't based on short term, that is based on long term.

Why would God show himself to you when you don't put the effort to know Him? Why should He bow down to your demands when you put forth no effort to acknowledge Him? You might respond "but I've read The Book of Mormon and The Pearl of Great Price, etc." That's not God. God is not words. You might respond (like you did earlier) "I've prayed more than you could possibly imagine". Did you pray with real intent? Nothing wavering? And did you wait humbly, and patiently, willing to accept the answer? Did you pray because you wanted to know? Because you trusted that God would answer? Did you pray in faith? I do not require a response, it's for you to consider.

You have yet to mention The Bible. Have you read it? It's great if you haven't. In the New Testament, Christ tells a parable of Ten Virgins. 5 were ready for the wedding when the bridegroom came to town. 5 were not.

Christ is referred to symbolically as the "Bridegroom". When he comes again, half of the (I think "Christians" might be a good name for them) (virgins) will not be ready.

Half of the people of profess to follow Christ will not be ready for the second coming.

Half of the people in The LDS Church (not exclusively, others of other faiths are included) will not be prepared that day. I do not believe that Mormons are perfect. Even of the half that will be ready in that day. It does not mean they are perfect.

Christ often rebuked his apostles. They were with him so much, yet were still so imperfect. He taught them, and corrected them. But even the first apostles were imperfect. I do not believe that the current apostles are perfect. The apostles are men. But they are also apostles. The revelation they receive is true. But not all words that leave their lips are revelation. They are imperfect and in need of the atonement just like all of us.

It doesn't sound like the God you refuse to believe in, is the same God that I believe in. That's why I continue to say things as "My God". But he is not my God. He is God. He's who I believe in.

Summary

1. Gospel and Church are not the same
2. Mormon culture is flawed, but is not the Gospel.
3. The Gospel is the teachings of Christ. Not just Mormons believe in the Gospel.

4. “If you had to do “a” for the answer, and you refused to do “a”, would that mean there is no answer? Of course not.”

5. Spiritual knowledge is not temporal knowledge.

6. It is not open mindedness to demand you are a prophet.

7. ... she wasn't going to drown in 5 seconds...

8. I'm glad that God isn't servant to man. And that his plan extends beyond this life.

9. Again, Christians are imperfect, even the scriptures say so.

10. Apostles are imperfect men. The revelation they receive is not imperfect. Not everything they say and do is inspired.

I think that covers all the topics. It's like 10 conversations at once, it's hard to keep track of all of them.

Seriously, if you want to know why God lets bad things happen to good people? Or at all, you should look up General Conference talks. “Opposition in all things” might not have the answers to all your questions, but it's got some. There have been many talks throughout the years. I am just some 18 year old kid, I don't have all the answers. But I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

It does appear that you are angry at God. It appears so because of your frustration. The Church is not all the things you thought it was. You feel betrayed. You feel lied to and deceived. I cannot say I feel the same. I know the effect of the teachings of Jesus Christ are far more important to me than how Joseph translated the plates.

The ancient Israelites were God's chosen people. They made so many mistakes. And forgot their God, and were imperfect. I don't think things have changed. People who follow God are still flawed, forget their God, and make mistakes.

I hope you realize I am not fighting skepticism. It's good to question things, and to question what you believe in. I have asked so many questions to seminary and institute teachers. I have prayed about so many of my questions and studied them out. My lack of understanding of all things does not mean that I cannot have faith. And it does not change the spiritual knowledge I have gained. I do not require God to prove himself to me. Rather, I need to humble myself so that I am willing to follow Him.

I hope to increase in understanding, and to help you increase in understanding as well. I think it's good to hear different ways of thinking.

October 3, 2016

NINETEEN – JUSTIN

Should not the representative organization for Christ's Gospel produce fruits that demonstrate His teachings? If His prophets, seers, and revealators talk to Him and receive His words and will, should they not act accordingly?

“...go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”

I understand the apologists who claim that The Church needs buildings, temples, cars, airplanes, etc. in order to spread The Gospel, but how does a billion dollar for-profit mall serve that purpose? Luxury condominiums? Massive cattle ranches? Could not that money eased the suffering of so many across the planet? Built new churches? New welfare houses? New temples? Distributed more Books of Mormon? More clothes? More food? More shelters?

As far as Gospel fruits? What does it provide that secularism, or other religions, for that matter cannot. This past weekend, Atheists of Utah packed up food for the homeless. Warren Buffet, a secular humanist, gives billions to charity – as does Bill Gates. I love my wife, my kid, my extended family. I help them when they need it. As Christopher Hitchens once asked, “Name one moral act

that a religious person can do that an atheist cannot?” To me, it seems we’ve found more fruits (love, patience, charity) on which religion and The Gospel do not have a monopoly.

Some apologists claim that it’s just so that The Church has more capital to serve their first purpose, but do they not trust in The LORD? That, if they live according to His commandments and His Gospel, He will provide? If they live according to His commandments and His Gospel, that they will attract more members, more tithing, etc.? That, ultimately, God will provide all that they need to continue His work? It often seems that those who purport to trust in God entrust in Him very little.

I was continuing your analogy. If you know where the answers are, please tell me – which book, which magazine, which sermon. Where is the evidence? Where are the explanations for why God creates natural methods, requiring and altering no agency, to cause suffering? Why are there mis-translations of the King James Version of The Bible copied verbatim into The Book of Mormon? Why cannot we find ancient chariots, steel swords, shod and saddled horses in New York? Why is there no Middle Eastern DNA to be found in the Native Americans? You say there are answers “on a shelf”, understanding your analogy,

someone must tell me where the shelf and paper are, so that I may discover them. I've looked for them. I've read the unsatisfactory and unconvincing arguments at FairMormon.org. I've read the essays. They do not provide evidence, nor logical, reasonable, or rational arguments. They have arrived at a conclusion and attempt to twist the facts to match. Should you know where the paper/answers are, please share them.

Do you live according to The Qu'ran? If not, how do you know it is not true? Do you live according to the words of L. Ron Hubbard? If not, how do you know they are not true? How about the claims of James Strang, who was also followed by Martin Harris? Warren Jeffs? To say that we must accept and live a thing before we can know its truthfulness seems folly.

You claim now that the answer is in The Bible. I will do what is in James 1:5-6. In fact, I have, but maybe I missed something. I'll try again. I will choose to believe in God and ask Him if He exists. How will I know the answer is from God? How long must I wait? One hour? Two? 40 years? Or maybe choosing belief is impossible. Can you choose to believe in something? Can you choose to believe that there is a teapot in orbit around The Sun just past Mars?
(Bertrand Russell's Teapot analogy)

You claim I speak against God, just as Saul and Alma did. God “fixed” them by appearing to them and telling them His will. Maybe He’ll do the same for me. If He does, will you believe me? Will you accept my claim that God appeared to me, blinded me for a time, changed my heart, and now I wish to spread his message? Or might you be rightly skeptical of my claims? Especially if my newfound message conflicts at all with your established understanding of The Gospel? Why do you not believe that James Strang was a prophet? Or Warren Jeffs? How do you propose we sort out “real” revelation from “false”? Real visions from fabricated visions? What evidence might we use? What methodology?

I’m not asking to be a prophet. I am simply asking why anti-Gospel men like Saul and Alma were given tangible, physical, sensory evidence of God and His will and I am not. Why are not Dawkins, or Hitchens, and Sam Harris, or Daniel Dennett, or Matt Dillahunty similarly struck? Ostensibly, they lead many from His glory and His Gospel, but God sits idly by whilst they do. They reach a far greater audience than Saul or Alma could have ever dreamed, so why are they and I not “punished” with knowledge and commanded to spread His message?

Mayhaps I do suck at swimming, or mayhaps I just disagree with your methods. Not saying you are wrong. I disagree with the methods of many teachers. I understand that she gained confidence. Good for her! But, did you push her in? If not, she had a choice. When we experience naturally occurring causes of suffering (earthquakes, hurricanes, parasites, etc), God, being able to stop them but refusing (or being able to create a world without them), is pushing us into the water and, in some cases, holding us down. No matter the outcome – confidence or otherwise – do you consider that a moral act?

Again, if fail to see how I warp God. To use a tired but accurate atheist trope:

“Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.

Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?

Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?”

How have I not put in the effort to know him? I think about the existence of god and gods. I read about the history of religion and gods. I watch endless debates on YouTube about his existence. I interact with people like yourself, trying to ask for answers. Read books. Read apologetics. What more must I do? I have read, at the very least, the

western scriptures. I am an active seeker of religious history and philosophy. What more must I do to know Him? It seems that I have to know already know Him in order to know Him. That seems the definition of circular logic.

“I will give you this sugar if you give me some sugar.”

“But I have no sugar and am need of sugar.”

“Very well, I will give you this sugar if you give me some sugar.”

I have read The Old Testament and The New Testament in seminary class. Have you read it? You accept the things in The Old Testament? The actions of God and His prophets? These are valuable stories of faith and morality? Abraham and Isaac? Jephthah? The genocide of the Midianites? Slavery? Compulsive marriages? Polygamy? Worse?

What must I do to be ready for ready for Christ’s Second Coming? What are the requirements? Baptism? Priesthood? Temple? Endowments? Marriage? How are we to be ready? Will all those who either haven’t heard or don’t believe Joseph Smith’s story be left behind for The Millennium? If not, what guidelines will God follow to judge our readiness?

The revelations The Apostles receive are true? Even those they now admit were false? As codified in the essay “The

Blacks and The Priesthood”, for example? I won’t list them all here, but do you know how many Apostles repeatedly, and from the pulpit, defended that “revelation” and it’s truthfulness and correctness? Some even all-but apologizing for it while still claiming that it was revelation? All of the Presidents of The Church from Young to Kimball and countless Apostles in between. If they were merely making a mistake of man, how may we know their mistakes? How do we determine when they are speaking as men and not as Prophets? How do we know that women aren’t to be ordained to The Priesthood? That the restriction to males is not just a product of The Apostles’ paternalistic upbringings? That their opposition to same-sex marriage is not just the product of the bigotry in which they were raised? Just as Brigham Young, Mark E. Petersen, Spencer Kimball, Ezra T. Benson and the rest were raised in more racist times? What methodology do you use to determine when they are speaking as men and when they speak on behalf of God?

Clearly you do not feel angry and betrayed by The Church. Apparently you were not told the same lies that I and many older than you were. That likely makes it easier to believe what they say today. Might even explain why The Church released the essays in the first place.

I understand that you have faith and understand the world through that faith. I do not and I see no way of telling the difference between people who make supernatural claims without some kind of evidence. I do not see why I should accept Joseph Smith's story any more than I accept Mohamed's, or James Strang's, or L. Ron Hubbard's. They are all equally fantastical and unlikely. That is why I attempt to use critical thinking and evidence as a way to guide my beliefs and assumptions about our Universe. Maybe all of those things happened. Maybe none of them did. But, until someone can provide me with evidence, I'll continue to live my life as if none of them happened.

“Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” –
Carl Sagan

Thanks again for your time and thoughts.

Cheers,
Justin

October 4, 2016

TWENTY – JAKE

I understand your uncertainty and skepticism. Joseph Smith himself was deeply confused at why so many different churches were around. He wondered which he should join, and how he could possibly know.

Joseph read James 1:5-6, and he followed it. If you truly want to know (which you said you don't) I would encourage you to try the same as Joseph did. As so many others have done, and as I have personally done.

You bring up many points of concern you have. I do not wish to demean them, or not answer them, but I would like to explain my understanding of them.

I have read part of the CES, and have read many anti-LDS things.

Correct me if I'm wrong but it appears, that most the issues boil down to,

1. Problems of text.
2. Problems of people.
3. Uncertainty of history/lack of details.

The scriptures aren't perfect, God is. Apostles, prophets, members, and non members are all flawed and imperfect. There are things we don't have many details of in church

history, things that we do not fully understand. Which are very valid points, but still missed the mark of atheism.

Why do any of those issues prove that there is not a God? None of them are about God. Why must we doubt absolutely everything with no trust in anything before evidence? Should I have not gone to school because I didn't know that I would learn anything? I didn't have evidence that I would learn anything? How could I trust it wasn't a waste of my time? How can I do anything prior to evidence? How am I supposed to gain evidence if I never try anything?

I'm not against skepticism. I just fail to see a "one size fits all" approach to understanding things. Why would you assume you can never trust in things prior to evidence?

The answers you seek are at the source. They aren't in a book or article. They are at the source. If you have no desire to believe and just ask because I suggested it, then you won't find the answer. If you refuse to have a desire to believe in God because you have warped him into unloving, unmerciful, and uncaring by your perspective, then you will not find your answer. Pray to God, ask Him. Pour out your heart to Him, tell Him your doubts, concerns, questions, and problems. Open yourself up the best way you know how for the answers that will come. Believe they will come.

If you demand you get the answer your way and not the Lords, you are not asking in humility.

As you hinted at, it does appear to be circular logic. You increase in faith by first putting forth faith. I wouldn't describe it quite like your sugar analogy though. Because you can have faith even if it's only a little.

One of my favorite stories from Christ's ministry is when a man brings his sick son to him. And asks for the Lord to do anything if he can. Christ tells him if he can believe, all things are possible. The man says "Lord, I believe, helpst though mine unbelief."

He puts his faith first, and doubts after. He asks for help in honesty.

You may look at that story and bring up your argument that if you believe all things are possible, then why ...

My God is all powerful. That does not mean He has to do all things the way you expect Him to.

You expect Him to gain money only through tithing, and you expect tithing to only be for maintenance and the needy. He doesn't do it that way. He didn't say he would, He did not say that the money was only for the purposes you randomly assume it is. Why couldn't He inspire someone to make investments? Investments which would

make profits that would go towards the relief efforts of the church?

You warp Him into something He's not and then say He isn't that... Of course He isn't. You either misunderstand Him, or want to misunderstand Him and convince yourself to.

You claim that He's unmerciful, unloving, unjust, and uninvolved based on your understanding.

Why is your understanding so perfect? What makes you better than so many? I don't understand why you already have your understanding of God, and claim to be open minded. You view His plan for this life as unmerciful, unloving, and uncaring. I don't. I see his plan extending to the afterlife. You refuse to accept an afterlife.

His plan is unmerciful and unloving and uncaring because you refuse to believe in an afterlife, because you have no desire to because you view it as miserable to be with God because He is unmerciful and unloving and uncaring because you refuse to believe in an afterlife...

How is that not the same type of circular logic you accuse me of having?

Imperfect people do not somehow mean that there isn't a God. When you warp God to expect Him to not allow for

human mistakes, you are mistaken. When you expect Him to not allow suffering, or death, you are warping Him into something He is not. When you view his allowance of suffering and death as cruelty, and a lack of care, you are warping him into something he is not.

Can you see the God that I believe in and the God you fight against are not the same?

God is not hypothetical. He is not just stories in books from flawed people. God is real, and I encourage you to talk to Him. Ask your questions in faith, with nothing wavering.

If you study the scriptures (not just read), you might find the answers you demand. The quantity of reading is not near as important as the quality. I've spent hours on individual chapters.

I don't know that you haven't studied. I don't know all the questions you have, or that you will find all the answers you want in the scriptures. I encourage you to pray in faith. And truly ask, with no hypocrisy. Ask in humility.

I hope this helps increase understanding. If you are unwilling to know God, then that's your decision and there's nothing I could say to prove him to you. I hope you are genuine in your openmindedness.

October 4, 2016

TWENTY-ONE – JUSTIN

When did I say that I didn't want to know? I said that I have no desire for god, but, if a god is there, of course I want to know! Why do you think I ask you for your evidence. I don't bury my head in the sand. I am looking and asking for how you know there is a god. Your response seems to be, "I know because I know." All well and good for you, but how is someone like me, who has no faith, supposed to get that faith?

Why aren't the scriptures perfect? Why would the only way God communicates His will and commandments with us be imperfect? If one part of the scripture is imperfect, how are we to know that the entire scripture is imperfect? How are we to know which parts are valid and which parts are not?

The issues in CES Letter have nothing to do with the existence of god or gods. They have to do with the truth claims of Joseph Smith and The LDS Churches which came after him. If the evidence points to the fact that, perhaps The Book of Mormon is more likely an invention of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdrey (and mayhaps others) rather than the translated word of God, then what reason do I have to believe that the substance within it is of any more value than any of the excellent advice and philosophy books

from Barnes and Noble. I don't mean to be dismissive, but, if it is an invention of man, then I can compare to other inventions of men, and determine it's value therein. Since the historic claims within The Book of Mormon seems extremely doubtful, and the history surrounding its composition also seems suspect with respect to Mr. Smith's supernatural claims, then the basis upon which The LDS Church claims its moral authority also seems doubtful.

There is a statue of Jesus on Mars. Do you believe me? Why don't you believe me? Why ought we doubt this claim before I provide any evidence of my claim?

I have a jar of jelly beans. The number of jelly beans in the jar is 3,442. If you don't believe me, you will be given a severe electric shock. If you do, then you get the jelly beans and a ticket to Disneyland. Do you believe me? Wait, you might just say that to get the jelly beans. Put on this lie detector. Now, answer again. Do you believe me? Truthfully? Have you chosen to believe me at my word, before I give you any evidence?

I must have faith to get faith. I must know there is a god to know there is a god. It "does appear" circular? Allow me to expand my analogy:

“I have no sugar.”

“I want you to have sugar.”

“Then, please give me sugar.”

“I will give you sugar if you give me sugar.”

“I have no sugar.”

“I want you to have sugar.”

“Then, please give me sugar.”

“I will give you sugar if you give me sugar.”

What does it matter how much sugar you require me to give? “Only a little” doesn’t mean much to someone who doesn’t have any.

“I am starving and have no food.”

“I want to give you food.”

“Please give me food.”

“I will give you food if you give me food. Even if it’s just a little food.”

“I have no food, and I am starving.”

“I want to give you food.”

“Please give me food.”

“I will give you food if you give me food. Even if it’s just a little food.”

God doesn’t have to act how I want. But, if you claim that He is a just, loving, ethical, and moral God, he should act in a just, loving, ethical, and moral way. I argue that He does

not. Either He created suffering, or He refuses to prevent it. I find these incongruous with a just, loving, ethical, and moral god.

God doesn't have to get money just through tithing. But He seemingly does allow his General Authorities to live lives of relative luxury whilst building a billion dollar luxury mall whilst also watching so many of His children die of poverty related suffering. Thus, again, He doesn't seem particularly just, loving, ethical, nor moral. If He exists, He is not worthy of my worship.

If, however, He's manmade, it's exactly the kind of thing you would expect. I remember lessons in Primary and Sunday School about how repulsive and evil The Catholic Church was for their audacity and worldliness. Their buildings of gold, how their priests dressed so extravagantly. Now, those lessons ring in my memory with hollow hypocrisy.

My understanding is not perfect. It is an understanding based on observation and evidence. If there is a god, which I argue there isn't, He clearly creates and/or allows suffering. If no supernatural cause exists, which is my contention, then biology, geology, and astronomy is the unintelligent, uncaring, indifferent cause for this suffering, with no moral

or ethical implications. I can't be mad at Newton's Second Law. It claims no power, no morals, no ability to intervene.

I do not believe in an afterlife, not because I refuse, but because either you, every other believer, or God refuses to provide me with any evidence of such.

In this exchange, I have not blamed God for human mistakes. I have done my best to stick to horrific events either created by natural processes, or, as needs be, created by God. Events that cause suffering to innocent people – believers and non-believers alike. Suffering that God watches with indifference, or that simply exists as a byproduct of the natural process.

If I encouraged you to talk to Ba'al; also a god in The Bible, to know that he is real, would you? Ask Ba'al your questions, and He will answer you? But only if you first believe that he will?

What do you find as the most convincing chapter? In which book? Which chapter do you recommend I study for hours? I will do so.

I can't pray in faith. I don't have any. But God will give me faith, if I just have faith. But I don't have any faith. But God will give me the faith, if I just have faith – even a little. But I don't have any faith.

I am as open minded as I know how to be. I have a genuine inquiry; "Is there a god." The only answer I seem to find is various forms of, "There is if you know there is." That's not evidence. It demands a conclusion before facts, and that is not a way to find truth.

Cheers,
Justin

October 5, 2016

TWENTY-TWO – JAKE

I'm glad to hear honest questions, and I will do my best to explain them. I'm by no means an expert or good teacher, but I hope to increase understanding.

Justin, you asked “Why aren't the scriptures perfect? Why would the only way God communicates His will and commandments with us be imperfect? If one part of the scripture is imperfect, how are we to know that the entire scripture is imperfect? How are we to know which parts are valid and which parts are not?”

They are imperfect because man is imperfect. God lets us have agency, if you wanted to make a false translation or edition of scripture, you have that agency. God does not take away the agency of small mistranslations. There are so many editions of the Bible, where the Hebrew words of the Old Testament don't have an English equivalent. For example take the phrase “an help meet”. Which comes from the Hebrew “ezer Kenegdo” which essentially describes a saving, complimentary force that is equal to something. Different editions of the Bible translate that phrase differently, because it's hard to describe in English.

God communicated with Adam. There was no scripture. He communicated with Moses before Moses ever read

scripture. Why did more scripture come after the 5 Books of Moses? Because God still spoke to his children. He still does speak to his children.

Man is imperfect, scripture is not perfect, God is. God can communicate to his children without scripture. It's not the only means of communication.

If you are open to the possibility of God. You have faith that there could be a God. Even if it's small. If you do not have even that little faith and have somehow proved there isn't a God and know for a fact there isn't. Then you have the only answer you are willing to receive.

It doesn't matter how little sugar you have. It grows exponentially as you give sugar for sugar. You exercise your faith.

If you are confused of what faith is, it does not require a perfect knowledge of God, or of all things, or of complete understanding. It only requires belief, or even a desire to believe.

Hear that? Even if you only desire to have sugar, you can eventually have it.

If you have no desire... then I don't know what more to tell you.

Why do you bring up other Gods? Why does it matter that I'm LDS as opposed to other faiths to you?

The reason I believe in God, is as I have stated before. I prayed, and poured my heart out in my crisis of faith. I received a personal answer and witness of God. I may not know all things, but I do know there is a God. My words, and experience will not be sufficient for you to also believe. I recognize that. That's why all I can do is encourage you to do what I did, and receive your own witness. I do not just believe because I do. That would not be sufficient for me to be able to stand here and tell you that there is a God. I can tell you there is, because I have talked with him through my prayers. My experience, and word alone are not sufficient reasons to have faith for anyone besides me. So I encourage you to speak to God. If you are worried about other faiths, and which to join. Ask Him.

Talk to him. Don't pray at Him, or talk at Him. Talk to, and with Him. Wait for the answers. That's all I have if you truly desire your own witness.

October 8, 2016

TWENTY-THREE – JUSTIN

If the scriptures are imperfect, how are we to determine the ‘perfect’ pieces from the imperfect pieces? How are we to know which parts are correct and which are incorrect? Mormonism used to, when I was young, claim that The Book of Mormon was perfect while The Bible was translated incorrectly (“We believe The Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe The Book of Mormon to be the word of God.”) which provided an easy answer. Now, both are “imperfect”, so how are we to know which parts are important and which can be discarded?

I agree that translation is difficult. Especially with complex themes. It makes me wonder why God would not provide us with a universally understood scripture instead of this clumsy written/translated method.

If scripture is not perfect, and there is no rational way to determine the imperfect portions from the perfect portions, I see no reason to believe them, accept them, nor follow them.

God still speaks to His children? I assume that you would mean that he gives modern revelation through LDS Prophets? Yet, often we are told that these prophets

sometimes speak as men. How are we to know when they speak for God and when they speak as men? Were they speaking for God or as men when they denied black people The Priesthood and Temple sealings and blessings? Are they speaking for God or as men when they deny homosexuals the same? Deny women ordination? How do you know which is which?

I am as open to the possibility of God as I am to String Theory. I don't accept either position because I don't believe there is sufficient evidence to support them. I have more hope for String Theory since it is based on a bed of rational evidence, but neither convinces me.

“It doesn't matter how little sugar you have. It grows exponentially as you give sugar for sugar. You exercise your faith.”

The amount of sugar I have is none. I don't know how to make this more clear; I have no faith. None. Zero. I do not accept any premise without evidence. Not scientific. Not supernatural. Not religious. And I certainly don't accept a premise so extraordinary as God without extraordinary evidence.

I don't have a perfect knowledge of the process of biological evolution. I do have, however, a mountain of evidence, so, I

accept it. That's all I ask for the hypothesis of God; a mountain of evidence upon which I can build an understanding and acceptance.

I desire to know truth. If God is truth, then I have always expressed a desire for Him, yet, the evidence is not forthcoming. It leads me to believe that the truth lies elsewhere.

I bring up other gods to try and illustrate that you are an atheist with regards to many, many other proposed deities. You are likely unconvinced by their arguments. You probably don't have a desire in your heart for these other gods. You claim that I don't know God because I don't express the faith in Him. You don't, I assume, express faith in Zeus. How do you know that Zeus is not a real deity? If faith is the only manner in which to verify the supernatural, it seems that we must first have faith in everything. Millions of people once believed in Zeus, Hera, Poseidon. Do you? If not, what are your reasons for dismissing them?

"I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer gods that you do. When you understand why you dismiss all other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours." – Stephen Roberts

The reason I disbelieve in God, is as I have stated before. I prayed, and poured my heart out in my crisis of faith. I did not receive a personal answer and witness of god. I may not know all things, but I do not believe there is a god.

I believe you have talked to God. I believe that you believe you received an answer. Do you believe that I also talked to God. Do you believe that I believe that I did not receive an answer? If you believe that I did receive an answer, that I seemingly dismissed, what good is an answer that is so easily missed?

Why are you, Saul, and Alma more deserving of a sure answer than I? Might it be possible that you received your answer because you expected to receive an answer?

Cheers,

Justin

October 10, 2016

TWENTY-FOUR – JAKE

“I bring up other gods to try and illustrate that you are an atheist with regards to many, many other proposed deities. You are likely unconvinced by their arguments.”

Who brings these arguments to me? Who. Seriously, nobody is presenting this argument to me. I have a feeling you might not be the best representative of Hindu beliefs, or any for that matter. So why am I not a Hindu? Because I don't have a desire to be, and nobody is presenting Hinduism to me, and nobody is encouraging me to do something to become Hindu. I also don't actively try and tear down Hinduism, and discredit their beliefs just because I don't share them.

You actively try and tear down the beliefs of the LDS church using your “research”. Remember earlier when I googled some of your claims and the first result from non LDS websites disproved your argument? I don't believe you really have done your research, and if you have, I don't think you've viewed both sides.

If your “research” can be disproven in the “evidence” I get from a single google search, how well done was it? Was it really done well enough for you to accurately make the claims you have? No. It was not.

So the whole universe came into existence randomly? An all powerful God could not have started the Big Bang? Why not? Because you don't know he did? Where's your evidence that God didn't do it? Where's your mountain of evidence that he could not possibly have done such a thing? That it must have been the laws of physics at work.

You accuse me of having false beliefs not based on data. Aren't you guilty of the same by your own logic though?

So you tell me "I already didn't receive my answer and never will" in summary. That's close minded logic Mr. Atheist.

I'm not more worthy of an answer. I was just patient to receive mine. How patient were you?

You say "I contend that we are both atheists. I just believe in one fewer gods than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all other possible gods, you will understand why I dismiss yours."

Atheism doesn't work like that. Theism is the belief in God or Gods. How am I A(without)theist (belief in God or Gods).

My argument isn't that all other faiths are wrong. "indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured

many things, and hope to be able to endure all things.” -
Articles of Faith 13

Many people would agree with you that only one church can possibly be true. I do not. There is value, knowledge, and truth in all churches. Why must I disprove the God of the skies above? Of the depths of the oceans? Of the underworld and all things in the earth? My God is ruler of the universe. Why does that disprove anything?

Why do you intentionally miss the point of my responses? I'm defending the lies you are sharing, and encouraging you to do research at the source. Why would you not do that research? Why would you not “prove me now herewith; saith the Lord God of Hosts.”

If you are too scared to try James 1:5-6, you're not much of a truth seeker as you claim.

You can distinguish between truth and error with the spirit. Revelation, and the words of men.

If you want to encourage me to make an action to see that my God is wrong, go ahead, I will do what you request. But why are you unwilling to try what I did to learn of my God?

If you have no desire to know that God is truly there, do you have a desire for truth? Why would you be closed to a the possibility that you are wrong? Is your desire limited to

the decision you have made that he isn't there? Why would you not have a desire to know that he is there? If you lack that, you are close minded. If you have that, then you have a small desire to believe.

I don't see how you are open minded yet can't except the possibility (belief) of a God. So are you open minded or not? If not, this discussion is pointless.

"Might it be possible that you received your answer because you expected to receive an answer?"

Now you are getting it. I had faith that God heard me, and would answer, and he did. I had faith I would receive an answer and I did. If I was unwilling to listen, why would God answer when I would just ignore?

You did say "I desire to know truth. If God is truth, then I have always expressed a desire for Him, yet, the evidence is not forthcoming." So you have a desire to know God. So are you willing to commit to follow the counsel in James 1:5-6?

If you must demand a mountain of evidence, consider Laman and Lemuel. Did they not see the power of God in Nephi and Lehi? Did they not see angels that came to protect Nephi from them?

Was the evidence sufficient for them? No, because they had no place in their hearts for God. They were hard hearted

and stiffnecked. What good is evidence you refuse to accept? As we see with Laman and Lemuel, the evidence did not matter, because they already knew they would not except God. That they would live their lives how they wanted, despite the evidence.

If you are hard hearted, and stiffnecked, what good would such evidence be to you? Are you greater than them? Why would you be able to remember it so much better than they?

October 10, 2016

TWENTY-FIVE – JUSTIN

It was more a thought experiment than a literal question. I propose that someone is trying to convince you of the truth of Zoroastrianism, or Hinduism, or Zeusism. They tell you, “Read these sacred scriptures and then pray/meditate about them, and if you believe them, you’ll get a feeling that they are true.” Would you? Would you choose to simply accept the truth of their sacred texts so that you could discover their truthfulness?

A single “Google search?” Have you listened to this?

(<http://www.mormonstories.org/three-geneticists-respond-lds-essay-dna-book-of-mormon-michael-ash/>), in which three real geneticists, including a believing faculty member from BYU, discuss the fact that DNA evidence for The Book of Mormon is nonexistent? Have you ever wondered why BYU doesn’t have a Book of Mormon archeology department out looking for the ruins of Zarahemla and the myriad of other large cities mentioned? Have you wondered how people can simply stumble across Clovis Points and ancient pottery by accident, but people who have gone seriously looking can’t find a single steel sword? A chariot? A saddle? Have you read from professional archaeologists and their positions on Mormon archeology?

(<http://www.mormonstories.org/michael-coe-an-outsiders->

[view-of-book-of-mormon-archaeology/](#)) Have you heard about View of The Hebrews? The story written by Oliver Cowdery's pastor? How about The Kinderhook plates? A single Google search disproves and explains away all of that? I think you may already have a conclusion and are twisting "evidence" to match it. (BTW: If you're rather not listen to those podcasts, there's resource links on those pages that can help your research – http://mormonstories.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Dialogue_V08N02_42-1.pdf)

How did The Universe come into existence? I don't know. Science continues. "Science knows it doesn't know everything, otherwise it would stop." I don't claim to have all the answers. But I'm searching. I'm reading. I'm thinking. I'm debating.

How patient? How long did I wait? I'm still waiting, now 20+ years later.

Do you believe in Brahma? If not, then with respect to Brahma, you are an atheist. Do you believe in Zeus? Then, with respect to Zeus, you are an atheist. Do you believe in Elohim/Yahweh/Jehovah? If you do, then you are a theist with respect to Elohim. The semantics aren't really the point. The point is, you are not convinced that Zeus, Hera, Vishnu exist as distinct deities, but many do. There are

thousands and thousands of other gods who have been proposed over the course of human history. Do you accept any of those? Why do you not? Would you choose to attempt to believe in them in order to get confirmation of those beliefs?

It's a question I've asked several times in various ways, but can you choose to believe? If someone makes a claim – regardless of whether it has anything to do with gods or the supernatural – can you simply choose to believe it? I propose that you cannot. Belief is not a choice. You are either convinced by a claim and the supporting evidence, or you are not. Bertrand Russell famously used the analogy of a teapot orbiting The Sun around Mars. If I made that claim, would you simply believe it? Could you simply choose to believe it?

“There's a teapot orbiting The Sun just beyond Mars.”

“That sounds strange, but I like the idea, so I will choose to believe it.”

Again you claim that I have not tried James 1:5-6. I've told you that I have. I've told you that I've taken Moroni's challenge. You claim that I don't get an answer because I don't already believe. But, if I want to believe, all I must do is pray while believing. Right, but I don't believe. If you

don't believe, you won't get an answer that will give you belief. Truly, a dizzying argument.

I am not unwilling, but, as I proposed, I don't think it is possible to "choose" to believe, and I am unconvinced, both by the arguments for any gods as well as from the empty, hollow answers to my many prayers.

I certainly accept the possibility of a god and gods; I just see no convincing evidence thus far. The claim for a omnipotent being is substantial, and the evidence to support the claim should, likewise, be substantial – not ephemeral. Not simply "a feeling." It will take much more than that to convince me.

I'm not asking you to see if your god is wrong. I'm only attempting critical thinking, skepticism, and rational, logical arguments. When I employ these, I seem to find that nature is enough of an explanation for how the natural world works. No supernatural forces, gods, demons, angels, psychics, are necessary to explain it. What we don't know, we can discover, but not by assuming that we already have the answer.

Some people find relief for pain an illness in taking sugar-pills that they believe are medicine. They believe that the

inert pills will help, they seem to help. I know you may take offense to that, but I cannot ignore how much it sounds like your proposal that you wanted prayer to work, so it worked.

Anymore that you can prove your personal experiences to me, I cannot prove my personal experiences to you, but I assure you, there were times in my young, true believing years in which I wept and cried in desperate prayer to my Heavenly Father, whom I was sure was there and loved me, begging for help and comfort. None came.

From my perspective, Laman and Lemuel are the antagonists in a story, so their experience is not particularly relevant. I can say that I believe should I have a similar experience, I would behave much differently than they, but I haven't. The story does bring up the same point I've attempted to make over and over again; why did God and angels unequivocally appear to human beings in the past – both evil and righteous – but now we must seemingly rely on ephemeral feelings of truth for evidence?

Cheers,
Justin

October 11, 2016

TWENTY-SIX – JAKE

What is belief? Can you choose belief? “Acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists.” That’s the dictionary definition (the one apple uses at least). So can you accept something as true or false? Yes. What it takes to allow such acceptance depends on the person. For you, I would imagine if a single article was released by non LDS archaeologists that an ancient city was somehow found with signs in reformed Egyptian block letters spelling “Zarahemla” right on the front, that you would not accept such a claim. You would not believe in it with just the one source. Neither would I, I would not believe, because I have requirements to hold a belief, as do you.

Your requirements to know there is a God have been set so high, that God will not bow down to them, and subject Himself to your will.

To be able to say, I don’t know all things, but I accept “...” as truth, is sometimes all you need for belief. Like when your friend says it’s their birthday, and you believe them without requiring a copy of their birth certificate to prove it. You’re willing to accept it as truth without the same amount of evidence you would need if you had been told that your friend was actually a clone sent from the future to remind you that it was going to be their birthday, and if you did not

celebrate with them they were destined to become a serial killer. In which case, you would most likely have some serious doubts to such a claim.

Some things are harder to believe in than others. But belief is a choice. You set the parameters (to an extent).

What's so bad with View of The Hebrews? Why couldn't God reveal such knowledge to a righteous man to prepare Oliver for the work that would be ahead of him? The church doesn't claim pastors are uninspired. You said you remember growing up in the church learning that the Catholic Church was evil. I have never been told that at church. Members may believe it, but it's not in the doctrine of the church.

Why do you not accept the researchers who put together Lost civilizations of North America? The DNA evidence they found that a large group of people at the Cahokia site were of Israelite descent? I know they later said weird stuff, but why do you not believe that evidence, and do believe there is no DNA evidence? What makes you pick and choose and so certain?

What made you say there were no horses, and no elephants? When a single google search stated otherwise? It was a belief you held, without your own research.

You have set parameters for God to exist that He does not match. He doesn't work the way that you want Him too. That doesn't disprove Him. Moroni's challenge is often misinterpreted. "Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts."

His challenge when you read the book is to know that God has been merciful. That's what he wants you to know is true when he says "ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost."

Why is that knowledge good? Because it will humble you. It's in humility that you need to ask God. It's been said "there is no atheist in a foxhole". Because when people have truly been humbled, then their hearts are prepared for the gospel.

When bad things happen to you, are you made humble? Or are you made frustrated, upset, and hard hearted? If it's the latter, then you are not prepared to accept the Gospel. Just

because bad things happen, it doesn't mean you are humbled.

If your problems are with Joseph, church history, and the lack of archaeological evidence of the Book of Mormon, why don't you accept the Bible? The Old Testament is so symbolic. You can read it like it's written and miss a lot if you don't recognize the symbols. For example, let's take Jonah. He is an example of Christ. Jonah was on a boat, God was angry and causing a raging storm. All the sailors would lose their lives, except that Jonah's life was the only life that could satisfy and calm the storm. Jonah was willing to sacrifice himself, and he was swallowed up in the belly of a "fish" for three days, but came out alive.

Christ was on the earth where the wickedness of mankind would lead to all having spiritual death (no unclean thing can dwell in the presence of God) Christ's life was the only one that could spare all the others. He willingly sacrificed himself to save them, and was swallowed up in the belly of the earth for three days, yet was resurrected.

If you read it just as written. It's some weird story about some guy getting eaten by a fish, and it's a little confusing. But if you read it trying to related it to Christ, it makes a lot more sense. Christ lived. Whether you accept that he was more than man or not, he lived. I testify that he lives.

I hope this helps clarify what I stated earlier about studying scripture as opposed to just reading scriptures. If you just read it, you miss the valuable insights that prophets gave us on Christ before he came. There are so many stories in which you can draw the similarities like that.

As far as why angels aren't seen so much anymore, I don't really know. If they are seen, I at least don't hear about it much. You could ask God if you really want to know.

I see why you would think of faith as a placebo effect, I used to think about it the same way. In my crisis of faith, I didn't really understand it. I had belief that God would answer my prayers, and he has. And I have spoken with him since. I have seen miracles since as I have stated. I have seen the power of God through them. I can't deny what I've seen. I started seeing these things after I led with faith. I encourage you to do the same.

How are you still waiting with "nothing wavering" if you are writing on an anti-LDS blog? I think you are wavering a lot to be honest. I don't know how long you have been, but you are wavering a lot now at least. If you really followed James 1:5-6 and waited for an answer with nothing wavering, would you be writing on this blog?

October 12, 2016

TWENTY-SEVEN – JUSTIN

To accept something is not what I asked. I asked, “Can you choose belief?” To accept something is to be convinced by it. But to choose is to make a conscious decision. If I tell you that $6+6$ equals 14, can you choose, by force of will alone, to honestly believe that?

What an insulting assertion. Thank you. If archaeologists unearthed an ancient city with clear ties to Middle Eastern cultures, of course I would be skeptical at first, but as scientists presented peer-reviewed evidence – reformed Egyptian blocks, Hebrew texts, swords, chariots, horses, compasses, Hebrew temples, etc. – I would accept it and necessarily reevaluate my position on many related topics. Of course, I have to wonder why that’s not happened?

The requirements to know there is a God should be high considering the repercussions of such a being existing. I demand that He do nothing but bow to the principles of logic, rationality, and evidence.

“I have a doomsday device in my garage. Give me \$10 Trillion dollars, or I shall destroy The Earth.” Would people be correct in demanding some sort of evidence of such a device existing before paying? Would just a photograph do? Maybe a lengthy description of how the device exists

outside of time and space and is therefore undetectable, but nonetheless real and very dangerous?”

The time to believe something is after you have evidence, not before.

Why do you not accept Russell's Teapot? My claim of the statue of Jesus on Mars? Is it because they are extraordinary claims and might require more than trivial assertions as evidence?

I don't know everything about evolution. I accept it. I have seen enough convincing evidence to justify the acceptance thereof. I have not seen any convincing evidence for the existence of God. Neither physical nor logical.

A birthday is a small and inconsequential claim, thus it requires a small and inconsequential amount of evidence. As the unlikelihood and improbability of a claim increases, so does the amount of evidence required to justify belief.

“I drove to work.”

(Evidence required: none, anecdotal)

“I flew to work.”

(Evidence required: photographic, perhaps personal knowledge that the individual owns a helicopter or other aircraft)

“I flew to work like Superman.”

(Evidence required: scientific, peer-review, laboratory experimental results)

“I flew to work on the back of a supernatural being.”

(Evidence required: Massive.)

The book I mentioned in our first exchange, “The Demon Haunted World” by Carl Sagan explains this principle much more eloquently than I.

Nothing is “wrong” with View of the Hebrews. Have you heard of a principle called “Occam’s Razor”? The idea that “Among competing hypothesis, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected.” We have two claims:

1) Joseph Smith received ancient, engraved plates in an unknown language from an angel, after being directed there by God/Angel/Pillar of Fire, and translated the plates into King James English, which just so happened to include translation errors from The King James Bible, with a story eerily similar to View of The Hebrews, which just happened to be written by Oliver Cowdery’s pastor.

2) Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery borrowed the basic ideas from View of The Hebrews and other texts, as well as copied large portions of The King James Bible, including the translation errors, in order to compile a new book.

I select the second as having the fewest new assumptions (supernatural beings, unknown language, , and is thus the simpler answer. This doesn't mean it is correct, it just means that, barring additional evidence, it seems far more likely, and thus casts significant doubt upon the first claim.

I don't believe the evidence because I listened to three actual geneticists; including one from BYU, who said that every credible study about DNA evidence has revealed zero link between Israelis and Native Americans. They have done extensive testing of Native American genomes. It all leads back to Asia; not the Middle East. From the working geneticists in question:

<http://simonsoutherton.blogspot.com/2013/05/could-lamanite-dna-just-disappear.html>

<https://www.amazon.com/Losing-Lost-Tribe-Native-Americans/dp/1560851813>

<https://medium.com/@jamiehandy/dna-7aed195ccb9b#.rvnkiwyie>

My standards of evidence extend past a single Google search and apologist websites. You pointed to a link saying that a species of Native American horse may have lived during Book of Mormon times might have been found. I did a little more research and, it seems, you might be correct.

What does that prove? That proves that a species of Native American horse may have lived longer than originally thought. I asked you, did it have a chariot nearby? A saddle? And considering that, supposedly, the horses used in The Book of Mormon came from stock that Lehi and co. brought with them, what does a Native American horse have to do with the story at all? Let me know when they find a fossilized domesticated Middle Eastern horse.

I set parameters for evidence and logic. God, thus far, meets neither. There is no logical reason to accept the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent being because they are self contradictory. Physical evidence is nonexistent.

I have asked with a sincere heart. To my knowledge, I received no answer. "That's because you don't believe..." and around in circles I go once more.

"I want to give you sugar. Give me some small amount of sugar and I'll give you lots of sugar."

"I have no sugar."

"Just give me a little, and I'll give you lots!"

"I have no sugar."

When bad things happen to me, am I humble? I don't even know what that means in this context. Am I hard-hearted?

I have no idea what that means in this context. When bad things happen to me, I work through them, and since I don't believe in a god, I don't blame Him, I don't blame Satan, I don't ask either for help, I just work through it myself. My failures, I blame myself. My triumphs, I praise myself. It's a great feeling.

I don't accept The Old Testament as it justifies genocide, rape, murder, & slavery, and archaeological evidence for The Exodus is as non-existent as it is for Zarahemla, though you'll find apologists trying to explain away these problems as well.

I have studied the scriptures. I've even "ponderized" a few. Probably more as an atheist than I did as a theist. It leads to some interesting moral quandaries when you stop thinking of blind obedience and faith as virtues. For example, if God appeared to me, convinced me, by whatever method, that He was, in fact, God, and told me to kill my child, I would refuse. Point blank. And I would never look back on my long, long road to Hell. Would you obey, or refuse Him?

I've just prayed and asked, "Why don't angels appear to mankind anymore?" I'll let you know when I get a response.

You are likely correct. I'm probably not waiting with "nothing wavering" anymore. God left me on hold so long, I

wavered; or He just isn't there. Which is fine with me, because I don't really need Him, or Her, or Them. I don't think any of us do.

Cheers,
Justin

P.S. - BTW: Atheists in Foxholes:

<http://militaryatheists.org/atheists-in-foxholes/>

October 12, 2016

TWENTY-EIGHT – JAKE

Ummm... did you read my last response? I thought the definition of belief was clear...

Belief “an acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists.”

Accept “believe or come to recognize (an opinion, explanation, etc.) as valid or correct.”

Belief is directly correlated to acceptance. As you can see from the definitions.

If you'd like to use other definitions, that's fine, but I'd like to know what they are because when I was speaking about Belief and Accept, these are the ways in which I was using those words.

What do we accept? What do we believe? We decide what we accept and what we don't. Sometimes we test things, sometimes we just accept things, and sometimes we just reject things.

What qualifies for acceptance? What is necessary for me to know the truth of something? We set those standards in our heads.

Under the logic of “The time to believe something is after you have evidence, not before.”.

You cannot believe it is your friend's birthday, because there are too many ways it could be a trick. You cannot prove such a claim. Birth certificates can be forged, friends and strangers can be bribed to pretend that it is that person's birthday, memories can become corrupted and falsified.

There is no proof that can be given, even if you were there on the day of birth, you could remember the day wrong. Your memories could have become corrupted.

You will never have sufficient evidence. You cannot prove that this was the day which that friend was born. You simply cannot prove that it is the same day as the day of birth.

So the question is, at what point do you accept?

Do you accept after the family and birth certificate have been confirmed? Do you accept right after your friend says it's their birthday?

At what point do you have sufficient evidence? At what point do you not need further or any evidence?

You claim that a substantial claim requires substantial evidence?

Isn't that based on perspective? What if I choose not to believe my friend really was born at all? How do I know he

has a birthday? This claim is substantial because I don't know for a fact that he was born! I need a lot of evidence to see that he was born. I assume he is living, but he could be a convincing robot! I have no proof he was actually born.

If he is a robot, at what point do I accept that? What amount of evidence is required to know he is a robot?

I hope this helps illustrate the flaw in demanding evidence for all things and questioning absolutely everything. At some point, it stops. There is acceptance at some point. Questioning things is not wrong. Questioning everything and having evidence for everything, seems impossible. You would need to know all things (past, present, and future) to be able to do so, but if you knew all things, there would be no need for questions.

You claim the idea of an all powerful God is so substantial that you need a substantial amount of evidence. That's your perspective. To another person, they could see it as "it's so obvious that there is a God, that I don't need much evidence."

It's based on your perspective.

Could I accept that $6+6=14$? I certainly could. At what point would I though? When would I be convinced?

I would accept that $6+6=17$ in music theory.

Because 6 whole steps from C, with 6 more whole steps from the stopping point of the first 6, is a total of 12 whole steps. Which would move you from C, (through the next C), to F. From the low C, to the high F is 17 half steps.

I could accept the claim simply by understanding that the units of measurement are not the same for the product.

We accept what we choose to. We reject what we choose to. I can accept something like a birthday without evidence. I can reject the idea of actually being a squid instead of human without demanding evidence. Belief is a choice.

You choose not to believe God could answer your prayers. It's not "something you have or something you don't." It's your choice.

Your culture, society, and upbringing also play a role in what type of amounts of evidence are required for different claims.

You choose to believe that no valid research done on Native Americans proves there is DNA evidence that they are of Israelite descent.

I choose to believe the "fair skinned" Nephites who died out could very well be the people of the Cahokia burial site (note, they are a "lost civilization of North America",

emphasis on “lost”, there is mystery on what happened to those people and where they went.) where 5 grave sites had samples extracted, and all 5 showed that those people were of Israelite descent.

I choose to accept the Nephites died out, and that the Lamanites mixed seed with the Jaredites who were of Asian descent. Interestingly, the people Native to Mexico, do not have a distinguished skull type. There are 5 types of skulls a person can have, and those Native to México have been known to have different types. Some Asian, some not. Perhaps the Lamanites who mixed with the other people there, do not appear to be Israelite, but are not purely Asian either because a different group of people mixed seed with them?

I obtained the information for this theory from my atheist sister who just graduated with a major in linguistics, and a double minor in Chinese and anthropology. I also gained the rest from my own studies of The Book of Mormon. How do I know it is credible? At what point should I accept it as truth?

How much money does Jeremy T Runnells make for his letter? How do we know that he genuinely sent it to a CES director? Is it possible he made it up and wrote it just to make money? That’s what Joseph Smith is often accused of,

why not Jeremy T Runnells? Why do you accept the literature from Jeremy T Runnells?

Do you know what the giant “luxury hotel” in SLC is used for? Hotel Utah is the Joseph Smith memorial center. A place where people can learn history from missionaries. Why is that unacceptable but museums are fine?

The cattle ranches? The church buys orchards, farming land, and cattle ranches. It also invests in all of the above. Having volunteered at a nearby church invested Apple orchard. I know the apples go to the cannary right next to my house. Where they are sliced, and/or mashed into canned products by volunteers, which are shipped to needy places in the world. Is the investment in that orchard not apart of the welfare program? Could the welfare program not work the same way for cattle ranches?

Could the “for profit mall” owned by the church not obtain revenue to pay for the welfare program?

Could the money the church “invests” simply be to make money for business men? Or to provide revenue to help pay for a top secret addiction that Thomas S Monson has of buying Uranium from Russia? How much evidence is required to accept these claims?

What does Jeremy T Runnells do with his money? Where does it go? Could it go towards welfare and the needy? Could it go towards important research towards the investigations he and others have had of church history? Could it go towards a luxury vehicle that Jeremy has always wanted? Maybe he never receives any of the money that his website has a spot for you to pay to “pay it forward”. What would convince you of any of these claims?

At some point, you chose to accept the CES letter. It was a choice. You can simply reject things if you'd like. You can choose what you believe, all people can. Belief is a choice. I could choose to believe that Jeremy is a greedy liar with no truth in his writings. Or I could read it and compare it with other things and gain evidence. I could also just accept that it is infinitely true. That it contains all the truth in the entire world and does not have a single error and could not contain an error.

I could choose to believe whatever I want. The real thing to consider is what would convince you of a claim?

I told you what has convinced me there is a God. The miracles I have seen, the answers to my prayers both initially, and all the times since. I can tell you from my own experience that I know there is a God because of the answers I received after asking in faith. The answers are

sufficient, the miracles I saw after were not necessary, but also confirm that belief/knowledge.

At some point you decided “there is no God”. You might prefer the term “realized” as opposed to “decided”. But that realism is limited to what you have chosen to be real or not. None of us have obtained enough knowledge to know all things, one could argue that without a full knowledge of all things, we only believe in things because we cannot know for a certainty anything. Our minds could be playing tricks, none of this could even be real, what is reality? Is reality limited to our 5 basic senses? Do we include the other senses we have? Such as equilibrium and time?

I could argue that you cannot know for a certainty that there isn't a God. Just the same way you could argue that I cannot know for a certainty that there is one.

So how do we know anything? We believe. We could believe what we see is there, but there can be illusions. We could believe what we feel is there, but nerves can be tricked. We could trust in what we hear, but sounds can be artificially synthesized. (The dinosaurs in Jurassic park might be good for reference to some of this.)

We decide what we will believe and what we won't. Experience helps us to make those decisions because we can learn from when we make bad ones.

If you'd like to know that there is a God, like I do. I can encourage you to do what I did, to the best of your ability. But you would need to ask in belief/acceptance that an answer will come. If you will not accept that an answer can come until it has already come, then it's your own stubbornness that is preventing you from learning what I have learned.

Belief is definitely a choice. At least the way I use the word it is.

I don't try to come off as rude with this response. I do not try and belittle your different understanding. I think in pictures, not words, so I try to describe my thoughts the best way I know how. I try and use analogies, and things you can imagine to help you understand what I do. I hope this helps you understand my perspective if nothing more.

October 13, 2016

TWENTY-NINE - JUSTIN

It seems we may agree on belief, but use some different semantics.

Thus, the problem for me is that God requires me to believe before He will give me evidence of his belief.

He has given me no convincing evidence to accept. I am not convinced of His existence. Therefore, I do not believe in Him.

But, you claim, I simply need to ask Him if He exists and He will give me evidence, if I already accepted the evidence He did not give me.

It seems once again, I am stuck with an empty crock of sugar and a magic man standing on my doorstep pleading to give me sugar if only I will give him sugar, no matter how little.

But, I have no sugar.

“I plead with you to choose to believe in The Statue of Jesus on Mars. And when you believe, ask Jesus if it is true. If you believe it to be true already, Jesus will affirm that it is true.”

If you can not do that, you should understand why I can not do as you suggest.

My friend's birthday may be a trick. But the belief that it is has few, if any, consequences. I may not even like this friend that much. Don't even have to buy him a present.

Belief in God has many, many, many consequences. For me, it would mean that now I have to accept anything and everything is possible, and that I now have to study the thousands (if not millions) of different god claims that have been made throughout the history of mankind and try and determine which is correct. I also have to try and understand how such powerful beings could be so immoral and justify possibly worshiping that immoral being or beings.

By definition, I have sufficient evidence for the things that convince me that they are true. You have sufficient evidence for the things that convince you that they are true. The evidence you find sufficient are insufficient for me.

I accept a premise when I am convinced. A trusted friend telling me that it is their birthday. That's enough for me. A stranger, um, sure, as long as they are not asking for money. If they ask for some special treatment, I might ask for a Driver's License, etc. At which point, if they hand me a lousy photocopy of a Birth Certificate, then I probably won't accept it. The quality of the evidence is poor. It's about balancing the claim and quality of evidence with the

consequences of the claim. Again – Carl Sagan, “The Demon Haunted World” explains this very well.

Of course it’s based on perspective. You, seemingly, don’t consider an omnipotent being to be a substantial claim. Likely because you already accept it. You have enough evidence that you are convinced. I consider an omnipotent being and supernatural forces to be an immensely significant claim. I find your evidence severely lacking for a claim as is the proposed methods for obtaining my own evidence.

Great. Music theory. Semantics. It was an analogy. It was a question of whether you could will yourself to believe/accept something for which you have no evidence. You say (paraphrased) that I must will myself to believe that God exists before I have any evidence so that I can then ask God if He exists, at which point He will provide evidence. I cannot will myself to believe something for which I have no evidence or unconvincing evidence or evidence of poor quality.

My culture, society, and upbringing are all LDS. Fortunately, from my perspective, I managed to discover that ‘feelings’ are not the optimal way to determine truth from fiction. Scientists don’t use their “feeling” or “prayers” to determine whether matter and energy are

interchangeable. They don't ask God if vaccines work. They use a proven methodology of hypothesis, experimentation, observation, etc.

You are, seemingly, willing to accept flimsy evidence that is easily dismissed by real geneticists, archaeologists, paleontologists, and astronomers. I am not. I do not find the 'mound builders' hypothesis to be convincing. I do, however, find the Asia/Clovis connection to be. We have different standards. I do not have a dogmatic conclusion to which I am morally obligated to defend.

How much money does Jeremy Runnells make for his letter? I have no idea, but I would guess far less than any single Utah ward makes on any given Sunday, and his materials contain far more facts and evidence. He gives it away for free on his website – which is better than Joseph Smith did in his time – who sold his books and once tried to sell the rights to The Book of Mormon (yup – got that last one from Mr. Runnells).

I know what The Joseph Smith Building is used for. I've been there. The luxury condos that I referenced are in Philadelphia. They are used to make money. How about the billion dollar mall? City Creek? Used to make money. Do they give all the profits to the poor and starving? No. They are given back to the prophets. Who then invest in more

real-estate development in Florida and in Riverton. While God's children die of Ebola, or starvation, or AIDS in Africa, India, etc., thank Heavenly Father that I can get the new iPhone at The Apple Store at City Creek.

Making money is not immoral. Making money while claiming to be a mouthpiece for charity is. Making money whilst claiming to speak for the same Jesus who decried the money changers and those who practice priestcraft, is.

I chose to accept much of the evidence in the CES Letter. I was convinced by it. I was convinced because I can verify much of that evidence for myself. I didn't accept one source. I followed the sources. I read other books like 'No Man Knows My History', 'Under the Banner of Heaven', 'Blood of The Prophets', 'South Pass', etc.

But, if you disagree with Mr. Runnells work, does The Book of Mormon not contain known translation errors, copied from The King James Bible? Did Joseph Smith not marry 14-year-old girls, just as Warren Jeffs does? Did Joseph Smith not marry many wives who were already married to other men? Did Joseph Smith, in defiance of his own prophecy, marry additional wives without Emma's consent or knowledge? Was Joseph Smith not completely duped by The Kinderhook Plates? Does the papyrus from which The Book of Abraham was "translated" not contain the text of a

common Egyptian funerary scroll? Is not the Temple ceremony almost completely plagiarized from The Masons?

You're correct. We can be easily fooled. Which is why a methodology for determining what is true, repeatable, and trustable is important. Prayer works, except when it doesn't. Priesthood blessings work, except when they don't. God intervenes in our affairs, except when He doesn't. It isn't trustable, repeatable, and, IMO, not true.

Hydrogen plus oxygen always equals water. Mammals minus oxygen always equals death. Energy is always equal to mass multiplied by the speed of light, squared. It is trustable. It is repeatable. It is, IMO, true.

We agree, belief is an acceptance of evidence. I do not accept the evidence that The Book of Mormon is of divine translation nor of divine inspiration. I do not accept the evidence thus far presented for God. Thus I have no belief. Thus I am not a Mormon. Thus I am an atheist.

Cheers,
Justin

October 14, 2016

THIRTY – JAKE

I'm glad that you have chosen a side. It's more clear to me where you stand in your beliefs now.

Answers to prayers could be just a feeling. But they can be so much more. For me, they have been so much more than just a feeling I had. If you had experienced what I had, you would believe exactly as I do. And if I had experienced all you have, I would believe exactly as you do.

So how do we bridge the gap?

Your “facts” and “evidence” do not explain away the miracles I have seen, or the way in which my prayers were answered.

It's your “facts”, and “evidence”, versus God. Who I know through much more than just feeling. You cannot disprove Him to me, you cannot disprove what He has said to me. His word will always beat yours in my understanding. I believe things He hasn't told me though, those can be disproven by you until I know for sure from Him.

The circumstances of my trial of faith were quite different than yours from what I understand. Your doubts seemed to (feel free to correct me if I am wrong) come from a lack of answer to prayers/blessings, and doubts/questions of church history.

Mine was only a lack of the knowledge of God. A very hard point in my life, where I wanted to know more than anything if he was or was not there.

Maybe it was easier for me to accept the possibility than it has been for you. I accepted, that He would answer my prayer. "Lord, I believe, helpst though mine unbelief". If He did not answer, I would know He wasn't there. I expected and accepted that He would though. I led by my faith despite the doubts I had.

I still have doubts and lead by faith. I will always have doubts until I have a knowledge of all things I think. They can be small random things that are hard for me to believe.

You do not need to doubt that I recognize the substantial claim I have repeatedly made that there is an all powerful God. I know many people who grow up in faith, and don't really care about God. They don't care that He's omnipotent. The gravity of that, is lost on them. It's not a bad thing you find it to be a substantial claim. It means you've really considered it, and thought about it. I hope you understand that I have really considered and thought about it too.

Some statement that Joseph did one thing or another that was bad in his life, does not effect my faith in an

omnipotent God. Even if you have genuine evidence that He actually did it, It still doesn't matter to me, not because I have evidence against your claim, but because it doesn't matter towards my faith.

My faith is not in Joseph Smith. I do not put my faith in a man who was flawed like all the rest. My faith is in God, and I have faith that God calls prophets. My faith in God is not dependent of my faith in prophets, but my faith in prophets is dependent on my faith in God.

The most important thing to begin a journey of religious faith is to know there is a God. From there, you can gain faith of more things. But it starts with a knowledge of God.

(Sorry to go into another analogy, but it's the only way I can think of to explain it.)

Kinda similar to how the first step towards learning to drive a car is not understanding the exact specifications and screw positions of the engine of that car. Could that info help? It sure could, but you don't have to know everything about driving (having faith), or everything about the car (God), to successfully drive (be theist). You could get in there with no instruction and figure it all out on your own. Or you might need a lot of practice even with a wonderful instructor.

Justin, if you want to know if the car is really a car, and not just a box of metal, you might desire to know if it works. Now I'm telling you, if you are willing to accept that it could really be a car, and willing to put it to the test that should make it clear that it will respond when you push that gas pedal. Then you refuse because you don't already know that it can drive? It baffles me. Sure you could have seen other people driving cars, but how do you know this car is a real car, and really works? I suggest you try it, put it to the test.

You tell me okay, then you open up the hood and you find weird stuff going on in there. You're not sure what everything is and you aren't sure how it works. You tell me it doesn't work because you looked in the hood. I tell you that proves nothing if you don't know how it works. I tell you the way to know for sure, is to get in there, and try and drive. So you go in there and turn it on and push the gas, it does not move, you weren't in the right gear (pure intention). You tell me it doesn't work.

I say, noooooo!!! Wait! It does work, you have to be in the right gear or it won't. You say you don't know that that gear will make it work, and you can't put it in that gear, I tell you that it won't work unless you do.

So we reach a stalemate. I have drove the car. The car (God) is really a car (God, not just some made up thing), and I can drive (Worship, have faith, etc.) I have done it. I started the car (began to pray). I was in the right gear (the right intention), and I pushed the gas (expected a response). I waited for the car (God) to respond. He did, so I can both drive and verify the car works.

I know this may not be a perfect analogy, but I hope it helps you understand my perspective/confusion at this scenario.

And just like the analogy, I'm not a qualified driving instructor, I haven't been driving very long myself to be able to teach you. I can just teach you what I know.

Looking in the hood (examining church history, the flaws of man, the workings of God, etc.) won't prove if the car works (God is real). Can that information be helpful, yes definitely! You do not need it to drive though.

Do you want to learn to drive? If you are don't, why would you try and convince others they can't drive because underneath the hood is confusing? (I think it confuses you because you don't understand how God works. You don't understand all the things that have happened in His church (maybe the radiator in the analogy?) you can make assumptions (like He is unmerciful, and unloving, and

immoral (maybe leaky, squeaky, and covered in grease)) but I don't really think you are an expert on "under the hood", especially since you don't even drive.)

If you don't drive, and never have and never will, what sort of car expert are you? You are not the expert on God, you make all sorts of assumptions though. Some of the assumptions come from what you heard from pro drivers, some from the car manual, but if you have never drove yourself, you're missing a lot of what you could learn.

If that analogy lost you, I apologize. It made sense to me and I hope it helps and makes sense to you.

I'm no magic man, and I have no sugar to conjure in return for sugar. If you aren't willing to 1. Start the car. 2. Put it in the right gear. And 3. Push the gas for the car to respond. You really can't tell if the car works.

I'm here to help you if you'd like to learn, or even if you are just curious about how I personally drive.

I wish you would stop trying to convince people the car doesn't work because of how you think it looks under the hood. Because I know the car does work.

October 15, 2016

THIRTY-ONE - JUSTIN

I certainly never had any experience more than a feeling. Not when I was baptized. Not when I was ordained a deacon, nor set apart as quorum president, nor when I had my patriarchal blessing, etc. I had good feelings at the time. Now I know they were what was expected of me. Now I know that I felt good because I was doing something to make my parents proud. My faith was being celebrated. Looking back, I know they were just placebo.

Of course facts and evidence can't explain away "the miracles" you believe you have seen. You believe them. But, you can't reproduce them for me. I'm left with anecdotal evidence at best. I don't believe you are, but you could just be lying to me. I can't know. Without reproducible evidence, I have no way of knowing. Thus, I will accept the null hypothesis, that nothing supernatural exists, until such evidence is produced.

You expected a result and you got one. Sounds very much like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Sounds very much like a placebo.

I didn't know what result I would get. I didn't get one. Sounds very much like God isn't there.

You don't have faith in Joseph Smith? You don't have faith that he saw an angel/Pillar of Fire/God/God & Jesus? There's nothing but anecdotal evidence for that event. Nothing but Joseph's four contradictory and differing accounts of that First Vision. Everything in The LDS Church stems from that event.

“Well, it's either true or false. If it's false, we're engaged in a great fraud. If it's true, it's the most important thing in the world. Now, that's the whole picture. It is either right or wrong, true or false, fraudulent or true. And that's exactly where we stand, with a conviction in our hearts that it is true: that Joseph went into the Grove; that he saw the Father and the Son; that he talked with them; that Moroni came; that the Book of Mormon was translated from the plates; that the priesthood was restored by those who held it anciently. That's our claim. That's where we stand, and that's where we fall, if we fall. But we don't. We just stand secure in that faith.”

– Gordon Hinckley

I believe that four contradictory accounts of such an ostensibly monumental event casts severe doubt on that event ever having occurred. I think that four contradictory

accounts of such an ostensibly monumental event casts severe doubt on the honesty of the man giving them. Thus, I think that trusting any other claims by an ostensibly dishonest man, especially when combined with his many other flaws and reprehensible practices (treasure hunting, Kirkland banking scandals, selling The Book of Mormon copyright, polyandry/polygamy, etc.), is unwise.

These alone disprove nothing. I wasn't with him in the grove, and neither was anyone else, but I do believe it justifies severe skepticism. I think if a witness in a courtroom described the same criminal event in four different ways, the judge and jury would be justified in dismissing the witness as unreliable.

“The most important thing to being a journey of religious faith is to know there is a god.”

I once did. When I was a boy, I knew with every fiber of my being that there was a Heavenly Father and Jesus and they loved me. I even got up in Fast and Testimony meaning to tell my ward of my knowledge. I also knew there was a Santa Claus. I knew there was a Tooth Fairy. I knew that Joseph Smith translated The Book of Mormon from Golden Plates. Now I realize that what I “knew” was nothing more than indoctrination. I “knew” what I “knew” because I was told to “know” that.

Great analogy. Allow me to explain it from my perspective.

I can see a car. I can feel a car. I can smell a car. I can test a car. It doesn't even have to look like a car. But, I can inspect it. Even though I am not a mechanic, I can compare the workings of the car with the scriptures (mechanical manuals, etc.). I'll accept a god when I can do the same with Him.

These cars don't seem to work. I've tried to start them, and they don't go. The inner workings are illogical and non-functioning. The controls seem to move at random. The shapes make no aerodynamic sense. Some have pedals, some have buttons. Some have a steering wheel, some do not. Some come with manuals. Some do not. Some manuals describe the car in incomprehensible analogies and irrelevant mythologies. Some people claim to represent the manufactures, but can't provide any reliable credentials, and can't really tell you how to make the car work, and blame you when it doesn't. Some cars force you to contort your body into shapes in which it was not made to go in order to fit within it.

In spite of this, some people seem determined to buy these lemons. They are desperate that they work. I can't stop them from sinking money into the worthless car, but I can try and tell them why it seems unwise.

Cheers,
Justin

October 17, 2016

THIRTY-TWO – JAKE

I appreciate the response. You do know that Joseph was speaking to different people, so he told it differently. You can throw the word “contradictory” around, but what I tell my coworker happened at a job, won’t be exactly the same as what I tell my boss, or my friend. I will emphasize different points, cover different details per each. It may be small, it may be large. It depends on what I’m telling. My Coworker might be more interested in what the person did, so I’d cover that better. My boss might be more interested in what I did, and how the job went, so I’d emphasize that stronger. My friend might be more interested in what it is I do for work then for the specifics of that job, so I might mention things I did not mention to other two people.

You cannot tell everyone absolutely everything. You might remember different details later that you forgot, etc. It does not speak to a persons honesty that they emphasize different things to different people. It could, it could be a dishonest thing to do. But that doesn’t mean it is. It’s natural for me to cut out details my busy boss doesn’t care about, and to emphasize the info he needs to know. You don’t have to say everything you have ever experianced to be an honest person.

My faith is still not in Joseph Smith the man. President Hinkley did not say that our faith should be in Joseph the man. It's not his word versus mine.

Joseph was flawed like all the prophets and apostles that ever have been and ever will be. My faith isn't in man. My faith is in God. Should I define faith again? Did you forget what it is again?

All your problems with the Book of Mormon and with Joseph and the church do not disprove the fact that Jesus lived.

Jesus lived, feel free to research all the documented evidence that has been found. There was even an analysis done by an atheist former homicide detective. He analyzed the 4 gospels as eyewitness accounts, used all of his methods, and found that this man truly did live. (He wrote a fascinating book) And later became a Christian because it was "evidentially true".

You can choose to deny that he was your savior. That he died for you. That his sacrifice was for anything. But that does not change the fact that Christ lived, and was crucified. Our entire date system is based on BC and AD. Which would have been an impressive feat for a man who never existed.

My faith is in Christ my savior. My faith is in Christ my God. Joseph was a man, just as Christ was. My faith is in Christ my savior. Not Christ the man.

My faith is in Joseph the prophet, not Joseph the man.

I'm speaking about the only car I have drove. The one and only car. You missed that part of the analogy. I have drove this car, it's not some random car. I have drove it. Just because you don't understand how it works and refuse to operate it as instructed does not mean it doesn't.

October 17, 2016

THIRTY-THREE - JUSTIN

Your justifications sound precisely like the position of Elder Richard Maynes, who made these same arguments in May of 2016. I wrote a rebuttal and a short one-act play to demonstrate my reaction to his rationale:

<http://www.secular-reality.com/2016/05/02/well-documented-evidence/>

If a witness to a crime were to give depositions with as many differences and contradictions as Mr. Smith gave for what many would believe to be the most important event since The Resurrection, their claims would be dismissed immediately, as they should be.

I'm pretty sure that, should God and The Savior appear to me, and/or a lowly angel, and/or a massive Pillar of Fire, and/or just God by himself, I would immediately record that event in as much detail as I possibly could. And, I'm pretty sure I would tell that event to anyone exactly the same way.

When I tell a story about a car accident from my youth, it is told the same way, and if I forget a detail with the passing of time and biological frailty, it's written in my journal. And, even if I do get a bit foggy with the passage of time, the

most important details (who was there, where I was, what color the car was) do not change.

We'll assume, for the moment, that Jesus existed. Fine. What does that have to do with The LDS Church and their assertions that they are "The Only True Church" and that their authority to speak on behalf of Jesus Christ flows through Joseph Smith and the current "prophets?"

(I can also point you other learned texts about the mythology of Jesus, but I'm not convinced one way or another, and that's another show)

Joseph Smith was an unsuccessful and "disorderly" treasure hunter. Joseph Smith told different and contradictory versions of the most important moment in his life. Joseph Smith lied about The Kinderhook Plates. Joseph Smith lied about the Egyptian papyrus. He repeatedly and publicly lied about polygamy and polyandry. Therefore, I find him an unreliable witness, and feel it justified to reject the claims of the churches and sects based upon his elaborate stories.

Cheers,
Justin

October 18, 2016

THIRTY-FOUR – JAKE

I will not make up answers I do not have for you. I don't have all the answers, I can tell you what I do know though and hope it helps.

The LDS church is not the only True church. Depending on how you merit that claim I guess.

I would confidently say it's "the only true AND LIVING church". It's the only living church. Living because it is led by Christ.

I would not say it's the only perfect church. Because it's not perfect because the people in it are flawed. Like all the other churches. There is truth in the doctrines of other churches.

I would say it's "the most true church" because it follows the organization of God's ancient church before Christ's ministry, and the Church organization Christ established in his mortal ministry. It contains the most truths because it is still led by a prophet. Who just like Moses, and Abraham, is flawed. But who receives revelation for the believers.

You keep using that term. "Only True Church" but I don't believe it is, so I do not agree. Joseph got a personal answer to his prayer, when he asked about which of the churches HE should join, the answer he received I believe is personal.

None of THOSE churches were right. The churches near HIM. The ones he was asking about were probably the ones around him. Those specific churches.

Christ did live. There are more than 36 pieces of evidence that prove he lived. There are of course people who haven't researched the evidence and write that it is still mythology "because there isn't enough evidence". There is evidence, even if they wish to pretend there isn't. Christ did for a fact live, and was crucified. What did his life and death mean? It was important enough to set our calendar system around his death. That would be totally strange if he never existed.

Why was he crucified? Does it mean what he said it meant? You can disagree with me on that. But he did live.

If you don't see the significance of Christ's life, message, ministry, and sacrifice, you must have skipped a lot of the Book of Mormon. You have claimed that you have read it six times, yet you do not understand why it's called "another testament of Jesus Christ"?

If you missed Jesus Christ, you missed the whole point of the Church of JESUS CHRIST of Latter-Day Saints.

You might respond that a 7th time READING would not convince you. And I think I'd have to agree. Maybe if you STUDIED it cover to cover for the 1st time it would though.

One of the many reasons I do not think you really studied it is because of what you just said about Jesus Christ. And another is the fact that you expect us to find Zarahemla. To find the major cities spoken of, the city of Moroni, etc. Did you miss what happened to them all 6 times? It's in 3rd Nephi.

It's not proven, but widely believed that most of the events in the Book of Mormon happened in South America, and later moved North. If so, I think where the cities were sunk into the depths of the sea, and buried deep in the earth and made into valleys, that maybe the the San Andreas fault and the Gulf of California are the evidence you seek?

If you take Christ out of The Book of Mormon and The LDS church, it's pointless and makes no sense. I would agree with you on that.

You don't have to know The Book of Mormon to know God. He exists without it. He existed before it's time period. It's valuable because it's another witness of Christ. Of a people who predicted and looked for his coming, and then he came and visited them.

You also claimed that the Old Testament condones rape and murder, etc. (or something like that). You did not study it if you believe that. Sure, maybe some verses taken out of

context and twisted could make you believe something like that. But if you figure out the context, the who, what, where, why, and when. I think your experience will be quite different. What about the New Testament? What exactly is your issue with Christ?

If you never knew him, no wonder you left the church. Without him, there is no point to any of it. Without him, there is no need for a restoration at all.

If you would take Jesus Christ out of the picture because he doesn't matter, then you really do not show that you have done any of the reading you have claim to done. I haven't gone cover to cover in the New Testament. I have studied a lot of it though. I'm studying The Book of Mormon right now actually, cover to cover. I studied pretty in depth The Doctrine and Covenants all the way and same with The Old Testament. I'm not an expert. I do not have all the answers you might want. I think you were a member for longer than I have been if you left when you were 17.

I can tell you what I have studied and my experiences, and I can answer your questions as best as I know how, but I cannot answer everything for you. I encourage you to keep studying. The thing is, I know there is a God. You do not YET. You decided you never will I guess and became an Atheist. Why do you choose to accept there isn't a God

because you don't know him YET? At what point can you safely say you will never know him?

Similar to your other post, I want to share this quote with you. There's a famous passage from "The Grand Inquisitor" section of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* in which Ivan Karamazov claims that "if God does not exist, then everything is permitted. If there is no God, then there are no rules to live by, no moral law we must follow; we can do whatever we want."

If there is no God, all things are possible. I'm not saying you cannot be a moral atheist, but there really isn't a point to morals or a basis for right and wrong without God. You could say actions that hurt others establish what is wrong, but if there is not a God, it really doesn't matter.

I'm going to start reading a book called "Is Reality Secular?" In honor of your blog. It goes through the four major worldviews people have. It sounds interesting, I can report back to you if it's a good or not. There are positive atheist reviews as well as Christian. It sounds like a good book.

October 19, 2016

Thirty-two – Justin

And also those to whom these commandments were given, might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually.” – D&C 1:30

“For these reasons and others still, I am a member of the only true Church upon the face of the earth, and I shall be eternally grateful for this.” – Enrique Falabella, LDS Seventy

“This is the true Church, the only true Church, because in it are the keys of the priesthood.” – Henry Eyring, LDS Apostle

“I bear witness to you today that we have the only true, living church upon the face of the earth that the Lord recognizes that has divine authority to administer the saving ordinances of the gospel.” – LeGrande Richards, LDS Apostle

I apologize. I will not ask you to defend a position you do not hold. I merely assumed, since I have heard that phrase so many times over the years, in and out of The Church,

that it must be a position held by most members. Apparently you are taught much differently than I. I was *always* taught that The LDS Church was God's "only true church." I was encouraged to say so in my "testimony." I was taught how other churches were incorrect; how The Catholic Church was "The Great and Abominable Church" and "The Whore of Babylon." How Jews were wrong because they were still waiting for a savior. How sects that baptize by christening or "sprinkling" were wrong. How no other church has the restored Keys to The Gospel. Either The Church has become more liberal or your ward/stake were far more liberal than my Ogden-based ward.

Where in The Bible or The Book of Mormon does Christ mention a Relief Society? A Young Mens organization? A Young Womens organization? Quorum of the Seventy? Presiding Bishopric? Zone Leaders? Area Leaders? The office of High Priest was ridiculed in The Book of Mormon. As David Whitmer observed, the high priests of Third Nephi were wicked, "I will tell you one thing which alone should settle this matter in your minds; it is this: you cannot find in the New Testament part of the Bible or Book of Mormon where one single high priest was ever in The Church of Christ."

For that matter, where in The Scriptures is The Endowment ceremony? The Endowment ceremony and Initiatory ordinances have changed many documented times in the last 20-30 years. How do you know that it is still being done correctly without a written prophecy or scriptural reference?

If you claim it's the "most true", I'm afraid that, once again, I have to ask you for evidence. As I have demonstrated, I find the origin claims for The LDS Church to be questionable at best, so, how is it more true than The First Southern Baptist Church? The Second Southern Baptist Church? The Pentecostals Church? Presbyterian Church? What evidence do you have that demonstrate that the claims of The LDS Church are more true than any other?

I find myself forced to ask once more why a perfect being cannot create a perfect scripture nor a perfect version of His gospel. He can appear to man, affecting his agency. He can talk to man, affecting his agency. He can heal the sick which, according to your perspective, affects their agency and ability to learn through suffering. Yet, He seeming cannot interfere with the proper translation of His scriptures. He can't correct prophets who lead the flock astray and tell members that Black people are unworthy. I find this a troubling and somewhat indefensible position.

There are many scholars who are convinced that Jesus was a real man. There are many scholars who are not convinced that Jesus was a real man. I am not a scholar. I am unconvinced one way or other. I believe it to be possible, but I remain unconvinced. Similarly, I am unconvinced that Apolonius of Tyana was a historical individual, but should you wish to reference him as such for the purposes of this discussion, we'll assume that both Apolonius and Jesus existed as historical beings.

What did the life and death of Jesus mean? To me, very much akin to the life of Socrates. He taught many people his philosophy. Some of his students taught others. Eventually, someone wrote those teachings down. We can learn from these past philosophies. We can compare them to our modern world. We can debate their influence and veracity and usefulness.

The life of Jesus certainly has significance. I wouldn't dispute that. Severe significance. If it didn't, I might not feel it necessary to write this blog in an attempt to diminish that influence and the influence of a magical worldview. Lawmakers claiming divine authority for their laws. Government leaders claiming to know the mind of God and Jesus. In addition, wars and skirmishes fought in Jesus' name. Genocide committed in His name (Catholic

Inquisitions, expulsion of The Jews from Spain, England, etc). Severe significance.

I do know the story of Zarahemla. I also know that modern archaeologists and paleontologists are AMAZING. They find evidence for much smaller and much older civilizations – all over North, Central, and South America, but not Lamanites. Not Nephites. Not ancient Jews in America. No inscriptions in “Reformed Egyptian” nor even regular Egyptian. I wonder why that is? Combine this with a lack of DNA evidence. Combine this with a questionable source for The Book of Mormon. Does it mean it isn’t true? Does it prove it isn’t true? No. But neither does it give any good reason to believe. You believe all the cities and artifacts fell into the sea? Sucked into faults? What evidence do you have for those assumptions and hypothesis? Modern archaeologists and geologists would love to evaluate the evidence. I would love to evaluate the evidence.

The time to believe something is after you have good evidence, not before.

Please let me know how I know God without The Book of Mormon or Bible. Remember, I have no sugar.

Bible condones murder: Numbers 30-31. Deuteronomy 13, 17, 22, Exodus 21, 22, 31, Leviticus 20

Bible condones rape: Numbers 31, Judges 5, 21,
Deuteronomy 20, 21, 22

Bible condones slavery: Leviticus 25, Exodus 21, Ephesians
6, 1 Timothy 6, Luke 12

Should you feel it necessary to explain to me how I am misunderstanding and misinterpreting these scriptures and their acceptance and encouragement of such horrifying, immoral, and unethical crimes, I would like God to know that I would prefer a less obscure, unclear, and endlessly interpretable text of his laws, commandments, and wishes. These seem irreparably broken.

I do not find any convincing evidence for the existence of God or gods. Thus I have no good reason to expect I ever will. You do not have any convincing evidence for Russell's Teapot. Why do you accept there is not a teapot simply because you don't know YET? You could know in the future. Maybe NASA will launch a teapot finding satellite. Maybe a spectral being will assure you of its existence. Until you have good, convincing evidence, however, you are right in remaining an ateapotist.

As to you Karamozov quote, I point to society. I point to evolution. We are a social species. Helping one member of society helps the species as a whole. Hurting one member of

society hurts the species as a whole. No, I don't believe in a final justice and a final arbiter of morality. But, yes, it does matter. In fact, IMO, it matters FAR more if there is no god and afterlife than if there is. This is all we have. Just this beautiful world and this beautiful life. I feel I owe it to my species, my neighbors, my family, my daughter and other life on this fragile planet to leave it better than I found it – thus preserving life and, selfishly, my own genes and those of my species. No, I won't know if I succeed, but I can merely live my life toward that goal.

Cheers,
Justin

October 19, 2016

Thirty-three – Jake

“I find myself forced to ask once more why a perfect being cannot create a perfect scripture nor a perfect version of His gospel. He can appear to man, affecting his agency. He can talk to man, affecting his agency. He can heal the sick which, according to your perspective, affects their agency and ability to learn through suffering. Yet, He seeming cannot interfere with the proper translation of His scriptures. He can’t correct prophets who lead the flock astray and tell members that Black people are unworthy. I find this a troubling and somewhat indefensible position.”

Do you not see the error in this logic? That the God which you do not know doesn’t do all the things you expect him to?

That God doesn’t do some things and does do others is not something you are an expert on. He knows all things. Just because I don’t know the reasons for all things doesn’t mean there isn’t one.

You know about Zarahemla? Really? What are the archaeologists going to find? Zarahemla is gone. Along with many other cities. What is my basis for this claim? It’s in

The Book of Mormon... in 3rd Nephi if you have read it why don't you know?

What is the basis for the claims "only true church"

Your first example "the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth" basis for the claim, it is the restored church. The only living church. Truth is in other churches, but this is the true one.

"This is the true Church, the only true Church, because in it are the keys of the priesthood" do I need to state the basis for the claim. It's the only church that had the truth of the keys of the priesthood...

If you'd like me to, I could look up more for the others. Let me explain it with an analogy.

One pizza is complete with all the toppings.

One pizza is half complete with all the toppings.

One pizza is a full pizza, but has no toppings.

Are they not all Pizza? Yes they are. Are they all the same. No they are not. Which is the best? The full pizza with all the toppings. The others are still pizza. Can we say that the standard should be to the best pizza? All others are no longer considered pizza because they are incomplete in

comparison. Yes. In which case, that pizza would be the only pizza.

The only pizza, because all others are not pizza depending on how you are defining pizza now.

The LDS church is Christ's only church. It's the True church. The other churches teach of Christ, and bring people closer to him, but are not the complete the most true church. They are not the true church. In some ways that makes them false in some areas, but they do contain truth.

I hope that helped you understand.

So the only reality is secular? All things can be solely explained by your worldview? Feel free to say yes, but there are four major world views you are excluding. How do we identify which is true? Is it a combination? How come your explanations for life are the only true ones when there are others who also have explanations for life.

It's now commonly believed and practiced that in matters of the public, things are secular and if the person is not secular, they kept it private. It's excepted that yhe only way to effectively communicate with other all the other nations is from a secular stand worldview. But is a secular worldview the most accurate?

Philosopher Dallas Willard states “Is reality secular? Is adequate knowledge secular? And is that something that has been established as a fact by thorough and unbiased inquiry? Is this something that today’s secular universities thoroughly and freely discuss in a disciplined way? Certainly not! Nowhere does that happen. It is now simply assumed that every field of knowledge or practice is perfectly complete without any reference to God. It may be logically possible that this assumption is true, but is it true?”

The atheist German philosopher Jürgen Habermas wrote “For the normative self-understanding of modernity, Christianity has functioned as more than just a precursor or catalyst. Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical re-appropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. Everything else is idle postmodern talk.”

That was from an Atheist. Even he recognized the importance of the monotheistic theism and Judeo-Christianity.

“Historian Charles Taylor claims that secularism has been the hegemonic master narrative for the last several hundred years in the West. Unpacking this popular academic phrase, the term master narrative or metanarrative means the “grand story” around which we build our lives, individually and culturally. These stories may differ by culture, language and individual as well as across time.

In the last few decades, metanarratives are believed to be social constructions made by human beings rather than truths to be discovered and believed. Taylor explains the metanarrative that shaped the west and it’s ascendancy was the Judeo-Christian story of God, man, and nature, but that story has been replaced with the “metanarrative of secularism”. It is hegemonic because we are all forced to submit to this reality and public life, whether or not we believe it, and regardless of the fact that it may not be true or in our best interest.

In place of the Judeo Christian story, the current metanarrative promulgated largely by the Western academy and the media go something like the following. After the enlightenment, and particularly in the 20th

century, we humans finally matured and no longer needed to social construct god or gods or any supernatural entities to understand airlines or guide our behaviors. We have now about enough to go out on our own, armed only with human reason and scientific evidence to steer the course of progress in break away from limiting rules and regulations.

To hold secular world views is considered normal, more “progressive” and “safer” because such worldviews transcend specific faith commitments. These are superior to religious world views which are “prescientific” or “pre-political” justifications based on faith.”

This all sounds very similar to some of what you have been saying.

It goes on to say “secularists have a number of reasonable arguments for avoiding religious worldviews. For example, religious worldview holders believe in a spiritual world not verified by science; They often disagree with one another; and they do not limit their understandings of reality to important but insufficient scientific facts about the natural world. Secularism is believed to be the necessary foundation on which to build a peaceful one world global order world that will be run solely on the lessons of science and human reason.”

Despite what you might think, all worldviews (material naturalism, secular humanism, pantheism and monotheism) begin with a faith commitment, a belief outside the reach of what we can verify with science. They are just different faith. “A naturalists faith is that all things ultimately can be reduced to material phenomena, including, for example, religious beliefs, the mind, the soul and consciousness. Secular humanists place their faith solely in human reason as the bedrock upon which to build “progressive” consensual, social, moral, cultural, and intellectual foundations. Pantheist faith lies in the ultimate spiritual reality (e.g., Brahman or Nirvana) that is the substance of all phenomenal embedded in an ever evolving cycle of rebirth or levels of consciousness.”

My world view is monotheistic, so you do not understand it and do not share it.

She tells the second part of this new Secular western metanarrative. (That humans invented the idea of God and no longer need him or foolish superstitions). Note, this address religious worldviews directly, both pantheism and monotheism. “This new narrative contends that if for some reason individuals want or need some other support system for their lives (outside of secular descriptions of reality), they are relatively free to choose privately from among the

various existing religions or construct their own understandings of the “spiritual” outside of specific religious commitments, that is, become spiritual and not religious. These various spiritual options are basically similar; they lead more or less the same place. More importantly, these are personal choices for our private lives, not to be racing contemporary public spaces such as government, law, business, education, arts and entertainment, or public media; nor are they to be entertained with running our businesses and going about our public work. they are optional embellishments that may be important to particular individuals, or historically, or sociologically interesting. But they are not candidates for knowledge or truth.”

On the other hand, the metanarrative of the west from the early middle ages well into the enlightenment is the Judeo Christian story, which was believed to be universally true (and still is for approximately one third of the world).” “It was from this place that Western culture began to flourish- intellectually, socially, canonically, technologically, and morally. It was here that the great tradition of science, literature, art, music, and architecture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance Europe were born.

The narrative of this grand story was introduced by the Jews to the world about 1500 B.C. (the time of Moses). The revelations were transmitted orally for many generations before being written as the Books of Moses. (The Torah) the biblical revelations depict God's character as living and active, inviting us to know him and to know ourselves through him. Also in this central narrative are revelations about the natural world, early human history, the uniqueness of human beings (triumphal and fallen), and God's special provision to redeem humanity and the earth through Christ. Because of the emphasis in Christianity on knowing God, man and nature, monasteries established schools, universities, and hospitals to understand the true principles around which the universe operates (natural, human, and spiritual) and work alongside God to tend the earth and it's inhabitants-to become our brother's and sister's keepers."

Fascinating huh? I think so. We have different world views because I believe in the old Judeo-Christian metanarrative. You believe in the Secular Metanarrative that claims the Judeo-Christian metanarrative was made solely by mankind, is flawed, and we no longer need it.

So which is true? Which worldview is true? That there is nothing supernatural, and all things are natural? You've

tried to make that point you might recall. That religion is all made up and all we can trust is reasoning and science? You've also hinted at that argument.

The conflict is that you have chosen that there is nothing supernatural, and then you used that way of thinking to analyze the Church. If there is nothing supernatural it makes no sense. If there is no God, then it is all wrong and does not matter. You have faith that all things can be explained naturally without any supernatural explanations. I believe the things which we cannot explain with just natural explanations and reasonings are explained by my faith.

If you'd like, I'll say the conflict is that I have chosen that there is a supernatural God. The problem is I even claim to have spoken with him and seen his power! Which you do not agree as possible because there is nothing supernatural.

So which of us is right Justin? If you desire to increase skepticism I encourage you to be skeptical of the belief that there could not be anything supernatural.

Why do you keep bringing up the teapot as if I assume it's impossible. I don't have neither a reason to not believe it or to believe it. For me, the lack of evidence is not evidence. The lack of evidence of such a teapot does not prove

anything except for that we don't know anything about it. If I made an assumption that it existed, you would think that was illogical. If I made an assumption it didn't exist, I would be logical.

How is that logical? We don't know about the teapot, how can you be sure it doesn't exist? The lack of evidence is not evidence. Why would it be logical for me to make assumptions without facts?

To me, holding beliefs without reasons is illogical. I know there is a God, my beliefs are based on that. I don't know there if this teapot is real. I don't assume it isn't just because I don't know it is. That is not a reason. "I know there isn't a teapot because I don't know there is a teapot". What kind of circular thinking is that?

"I know there is no God because I don't know there is a God." Same problem. You are making an assumption without any evidence.

All you know by a lack of information, is that you are lacking information. If you somehow had proof there is no God, that would be another deal. If we both had proof, me for, and you against that would be a different conflict altogether.

Christ lived and I testify he lives. I don't have physical proof he lives. I have eyewitness accounts of him, but you reject them, so I have no physical proof that you demand. I have spiritual knowledge that he lives though. But you deny all spiritual knowledge.

The time to believe there isn't a God is after you have evidence there isn't.

Your lack of evidence is not somehow evidence to support your claim that God does not exist and there is nothing supernatural. Sorry, but you do not have evidence. You do not have facts to support this claim.

You can respond with some issue you have with the world, or with members, or with scripture all you want, but you have no proof there is not a God.

So why is my evidence wrong and your lack of evidence more accurate? How does that make sense? If you have evidence of something Joseph Smith did that I've never heard of and know nothing about, you would expect me to trust your evidence because I have a lack of evidence.

How come the same logic doesn't work the other way? If I know there is a God and you don't, why am I wrong?

This was a long post, thank you for reading what I write and taking the time to respond Justin. You make excellent

points, and are very well written and read. I disagree with your logic, but I think I understand your perspective.

Elders and high priests are there. The Levitical (which is another name for the Aaronic) priesthood was exercised. The prophet was considered a high priest who held a higher priesthood (like Moses who could part the Red Sea). They speak repeatedly about the high priest and his duties. He would go commune with God in the Holy of Holies.

In the New Testament James 5:14 “Are there any sick among you? Let them call for the elders of the church;...”

The priesthood holders would anoint with oil and give blessing in the old, and new testaments.

You think there is no reference to communing with God in the “holy of holies” in the temple? And it does not relate to the endowment? You are mistaken. I believe you can find several things contrary to your statement in Leviticus, which outlines essentially how to use the Levitical priesthood anciently. It speaks of the different things they would do and how it was done.

October 19, 2016

Thirty-four – Justin

No, I'm afraid I don't see the error in logic. I don't expect God to do anything. You claim that God values agency, so much so that He doesn't stop evil and suffering. You also claim that The Bible and The Book of Mormon are true and accurate accounts of human interaction with God. The Bible and The Book of Mormon both claim that God interferes in ways that specifically interfere with agency. Something is out of joint. How do you reconcile this?

If massive cities as described in The Book of Mormon existed, I would expect that archaeologists would find evidence. Troy was destroyed too. Wiped from the face of The Earth. Archaeologists find evidence and can determine how many times it was rebuilt. Same with many other ancient cities. But, none of the cities they find here in "America" match the descriptions in The Book of Mormon. None of the artifacts match Jewish design. None of the petroglyph/hieroglyphs they show Jewish/Old World influence or "reformed Egyptian." Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, but it justifies skepticism.

A rough analogy, but, OK, how do you know your pizza has all the toppings? Muslims believe their pizza has all the toppings. Catholics believe their pizza has all the toppings. Jews believe the pizza can't have bacon. Some of the

toppings are the same, some are not. Some have iced-cream and anchovies. How is someone attempting to find the most complete pizza to know which is complete? Not too many toppings, not too few, and not the wrong ones.

“The only true church because in it are the keys of the priesthood.”

If I don't believe in these priesthood keys, this justification carries no weight.

The only reliable, reproducible evidence of which I am aware only supports a natural universe. There is no evidence for the supernatural. Does that mean it doesn't exist? No, but we have no good reason for assuming anything else.

Religious belief may be a natural and necessary stage in the evolution of a self-aware consciousness. I don't know. I'll wait for the science. I don't dispute that religious belief has had a profound effect on human history and psychology. Even if that effect is profoundly positive (which I would argue against), it still does not make it true.

I disagree that my “worldview” begins with faith. As far as I am aware, my “worldview” begins with trust, which is quite different. I trust in science because I have experience and

evidence that it is reliable. I trust in logic because I have experience and evidence that it is reliable.

I do not claim that “all things ultimately can be reduced to material phenomena”, only that there is no reliable, credible, nor convincing evidence that anything else exists, thus I do not find it necessary to make assumptions as if such things might exist. The time to believe something is after you have good evidence; not before.

George Carlin once said, “The only good thing to ever come out of religion was the music.”

Not literally true, but the point being, sure – art, music, literature, architecture, etc. are/were influenced by religions. What does that have to do with the truth claims of those many contradictory religions? “A lie is a lie no matter how many people believe it. The truth is the truth even if nobody believes it.”

With which metanarrative you label me or yourself doesn't matter much to me. How do we determine which is true? What methodology might we use? You seem to find “spiritual” and anecdotal evidence to be convincing. I do not. I do not even know what “spiritual evidence” means, nor can you seem to explain it to me.

I believe, until another methodology besides reason and science is demonstrated to be reliable, it is the best way in which to evaluate our experiences in the natural world.

“Science is the best thing humans have ever come up with and, if it isn’t, science will fix it.” – Bill Nye

I find no credible evidence for the supernatural so, yes, I analyze church claims as though the supernatural does not exist. I also analyze religious claims as though people cannot fly without help from scientific inventions. When someone claims that they read God’s words off a rock in a hat, I analyze that claim with the same skepticism as though someone says that they fly naturally like Superman.

You and I may have a difference in opinion as to the definition of skepticism. I am delaying belief in the supernatural until someone can provide credible and reliable evidence that it exists. To me, that is skepticism.

Please compare and contrast the following:

“Why do you keep bringing up the teapot as if I assume it’s impossible. I don’t have neither a reason to not believe it or to believe it. For me, the lack of evidence is not evidence. The lack of evidence of such a teapot does not prove anything except for that we don’t know anything about it.”

vs.

“Why do you keep bringing up God as if I assume it’s impossible. I don’t have neither a reason to not believe it or to believe it. For me, the lack of evidence is not evidence. The lack of evidence of such a god does not prove anything except for that we don’t know anything about it.”

You have no evidence for the teapot’s existence, thus, you don’t have a reason to believe it. You have never seen any evidence for anything like the teapot Russell and I describe. Thus, it makes logical sense to withhold belief until such evidence presents itself.

I have no evidence for God’s existence, thus, I have no reason to believe it. I have never seen evidence for anything like the god you, or The Bible, or The Book of Mormon, or the Qu’ran describe. Thus, it makes logical sense to withhold belief until such evidence presents itself.

I know there is a teapot.* You don’t. The claim that a teapot exists has been made. Claims need the backing of reliable, credible, and convincing evidence. I have none to give but my assertion. Do you accept the claim? Do you live your life as if there is a teapot? Do you tell your friends about the teapot at parties?

You know there is a God. I don't. The claim that a god exists has been made. Claims need the backing of reliable, credible, and convincing evidence. What evidence have you?

Cheers,
Justin

* An analogy, not a literal claim.

October 25, 2016

THIRTY-FIVE - JUSTIN

If I may, I think Dr. Sagan will make my point better than I:
From 'The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in
The Dark' by Dr. Carl Sagan:

"A fire-breathing dragon lives in my garage.

*Suppose I seriously make such an assertion to you.
Surely you'd want to check it out, see for yourself.
There have been innumerable stories of dragons over
the centuries, but no real evidence. What an
opportunity!*

*'Show me,' you say. I lead you to my garage. You
look inside and see a ladder, empty paint cans, an
old tricycle – but no dragon.*

'Where's the dragon?' you ask.

'Oh, she's right here,' I reply, waving vaguely.

*'I neglected to mention that she's an invisible
dragon.'*

*You propose spreading flour on the floor of the
garage to capture the dragon's footprints.*

'Good idea,' I say, 'but this dragon floats in the air.'

Then you'll use an infrared sensor to detect the invisible fire.

'Good idea, but the invisible fire is also heatless.'

You'll spray-paint the dragon and make her visible.

'Good idea, except she's an incorporeal dragon and the paint won't stick.'

And so on. I counter every physical test you propose with a special explanation of why it won't work. Now, what's the difference between an invisible, incorporeal, floating dragon who spits heatless fire and no dragon at all?

If there's no way to disprove my contention, no conceivable experiment that would count against it, what does it mean to say that my dragon exists? Your inability to invalidate my hypothesis is not at all the same thing as proving it true.

Claims that cannot be tested, assertions immune to disproof are veridically worthless, whatever value they may have in inspiring us or in exciting our sense of wonder. What I'm asking you to do comes down to believing, in the absence of evidence, on my say-so.

The only thing you've really learned from my insistence that there is a dragon in my garage is that something funny is going on inside my head. You'd wonder, if no physical tests apply, what convinced me."

October 25, 2016

THIRTY-SIX – JAKE

Faith” comes from (is not the same as) the Latin word “fides” which is translated from Latin to mean “to command, to persuade, to trust”

Faith is trust.

Faith is belief.

You have “faith” in the existence of cars.

You have “trust” in the existence of cars.

You have “belief” in the existence of cars.

Your worldview begins with faith.

Your worldview begins with belief.

Your worldview begins with trust.

Okay, you don't know there is a God. So why do you disbelieve?

There is a difference between disbelief, and not knowing.

As an agnostic atheist, you disbelief in God, yet you admit that all you know from a lack of information is that you are lacking information. What makes you a decided disbeliever as opposed to the gray middle ground?

Saying there isn't a God by stating to be Atheist, agnostic or not, is a decided position. The agnostic part seems to just imply that it could change to you.

I do not understand your decided belief/faith/trust that there is no God. If all you know is that you don't know, how can you decidedly not believe? You could just state that you do not know. That you are in the middle. But what grounds have you for deciding there is no God?

I present to you the universe. All matter came to be by some means. You have no explanation. I do.

Thus I am wrong? I am wrong by an explanation that you can't analyze like regular scientific knowledge?

To me it's more than an explanation. You do not understand spiritual knowledge?

Okay. Have you ever felt/experienced something beyond explanation? Beyond feelings, emotions, logic, and reasoning? If not, it's like describing the taste of salt.

Salt is salty. If you want to know what that means, you have to taste it. I find myself unable to effectively describe spiritual knowledge. You don't have any, so I can't really describe it.

If all that exists is what we see, feel, hear, touch, smell, or understand by human sensory. Than existence is limited to electrical impulses in the brain. If there is nothing supernatural, what more is there to believe in?

A materialist naturalist sees the world only as the results of nature. Everything you see and do is a result of brain chemistry, agency is an illusion to a materialist naturalist. Their faith/belief/trust lies in science and that science will one day explain all things.

A secular humanist also understands logic, reasoning, philosophy, psychology, and human rights/will. Their faith/trust/belief lies in all things existing with logic and reasoning alone (as in explainable with logic and reasoning). Without supernatural existence.

You may find yourself a mix of those, but I do believe you will find yourself somewhere in that spectrum.

You may believe that somehow you have to throw out logic and reasoning to have belief in God. I don't believe that at all. Logic and reasoning don't explain everything. I believe there is something supernatural to this existence.

Okay, you still don't get agency?

Nowhere did I say that "agency means that you can choose to do whatever you want forever on this earth."

If that was the agency I believe in, I would obviously be wrong because there is death. So yes, I guess it's safe to say that our agency is influenced by a number of factors. One might argue the agency of the mentally handicapped has

been limited as their decision making is influenced by whatever is influencing it.

Yes, my God does allow death. Which should not be a surprise because people do indeed die. I don't hold a belief as illogical as "we have agency in this life forever because God doesn't allow death".

Yes God does influence agency by allowing death. This is a temporary state. Just like a timed test you would take in a class, there is a limited amount of time to choose how you will answer the questions.

Yes, problems do in fact come before us, the test of our agency is to see how we react despite problems and in reaction to problems. If you think our decision making would not be influenced by the probability of natural disasters, I don't know what to tell you. Coastal cities usually build precautions for tsunamis and hurricanes. Their decision making process, and agency are effected by it.

Could we have some form of Agency without those same problems. Yes we could. So what?

Our world obviously has natural disasters. The God I believe created this world made it so it would. The natural disasters influence our agency.

The God I believe in gave us agency, so he has influenced it beyond measure in my understanding. If you think having agency would mean that we will never be separated from our bodies, I think the truth is quite contrary.

Why is God's body immune to disease and problems and ours isn't if ours is made in his image?

Because this body is not perfected. We will die and our spirits will leave this body and at resurrection our spirits will enter our bodies which will have been perfected like our Father's is perfect.

I believe in death. I believe in the resurrection. I believe that we have agency in this temporary state.

I have encouraged you to do what I have to know there is a God. You say that I knew there was a God by reading scriptures and praying. Which was not what I told you I had to do to know there is a God.

To know there is a God, I did use scripture to help understand Him. To know he was there I

1. Prayed to Him.
2. Prayed with a desire to know him and act according to His existence or not.
3. Ask if He exists, and expect a response. Ask in faith/trust/belief he will answer.

So yes, I read scriptures and prayed. But I know there is a God from the answer I received.

If I may, I will remind you of the car analogy. You need to

1. Start the car.
2. Put it in the right gear.
3. Push the gas (and wait for the engine to respond).

You may learn there is a God different than how I did. But if you desire to know how I know there is a God, it's because of the answer I received.

I give you the formula I used to receive that product.

I give you the method I used to answer that question.

If you deviate from it, I cannot promise the same results.

October 26, 2016

THIRTY-SEVEN – JUSTIN

I really find semantic arguments less than useful.

I am using the word ‘trust’ and ‘faith’ different from you. I trust in things for which I have evidence. I don’t know if I drop this banana that it will hit the ground. I trust that it will. I have ‘faith’ that there will be a Deadpool 3, but I have no evidence nor reason to believe that.*

Theist: one who believes in a god.

Atheist: one who does not believe in a god.

Gnostic: One who claims knowledge.

Agnostic: One who does not claim knowledge.

I do not know that there is no god. I do not believe there is a god. I am an ‘agnostic atheist.’ I do not claim to be able to “prove” the negative.

You are, from your claims, a ‘gnostic theist.’ You believe there is a god, and you believe you know there is a god.

There are ‘gnostic atheists’ who claim to be able to prove there is no god. I am not one of those.

There are ‘agnostic theists’ who believe in god, but do not purport to be able to prove it in any way.

I don't believe because there is no reason to believe. No evidence. No reasoning.

I don't believe that I can fly like Superman because there is no reason to believe that I can fly. No evidence. No reasoning.

I do have a decided position. As the evidence now stands, the universe behaves as though there is nothing supernatural and no god. I am agnostic in that I am aware that I do not currently know everything. Maybe the evidence is out there. It's possible. But, until such time that it is presented, it is logical that my position will remain unchanged.

I'm not sure I can explain it any better than – do you believe there is a teapot? No, you don't.** Why? Because there is no evidence. Are you open to the extremely remote possibility that maybe NASA played a joke on all of us who have read Russell?

I do not believe in the teapot, but I am aware that I do not know everything; That I have not been part of every meeting of every NASA launch crew. Maybe there is a tiny teapot on the MRO. Is it possible? Sure. Likely? No. Thus, I disbelieve it. I am an agnostic ateapotist.

“I present to you the universe. All matter came to be by some means. You have no explanation. I do.”

You have an explanation. You have no evidence. I have no explanation, but I do have an answer; “I don’t know.”

No, I have never felt/experienced something beyond explanation. I received blessings that made my broken leg feel better, but they didn’t heal it. Placebo. I felt “the spirit” when I received The Priesthood. Of course I did. My father and mother and grandparents all beaming at me! Placebo.

“If there is nothing supernatural, what more is there to believe in?”

What more do you need?

I experience awe all the time. Pure awe. Watching SpaceX land a rocket back on a barge filled me with awe. Listening to Beethoven’s 9th fills me with awe. Reading ‘The Greatest Show on Earth’ and learning how the Lenski experiment with e. Coli demonstrated just how complex yet simple and understandable biological evolution can be is invigorating. Learning about stellar evolution. Particle physics I can’t even begin to describe or understand! Realizing that, yes, all of those little electrical impulses are all that I am. And realizing that the physical laws of this indifferent universe came together in such a way as to allow the rise of a species

of shoe-wearing apes that is able understand at least a small part of the mechanics that created them.

“We are a way for The Universe to know itself.” – Carl Sagan

“The God I believe created this world made it so it would [have natural disasters].”

If that is the case, God intentionally created suffering. I believe this is immoral and unethical, as we have discussed. To challenge your children is one thing. To willfully set up scenarios in which thousands/millions of them will eventually be killed, maimed, dismembered & injured while you watch and have the power to stop it is immoral and evil.

I know there is a God(s) now.*** To which shall I pray? To which scripture shall I hold? How shall I judge the validity of The Qu'ran vs. The Bible vs. The Book of Mormon, vs. Dianetics vs. The Journal of Discourses vs. The D&C vs. The Book of The Dead?

How shall I act as if gods exist? Shall I not drink coffee? Or can I drink coffee, but not eat pork? Or can I drink coffee, and eat pork, but not eat meat on Friday? Or, shall I act as many theists do, that God really loves us all in some immaterial way, doesn't interfere with this world, and lives

outside of time and space, and I should really just try and treat the fellow living beings on this planet with love and respect? The last one is most preferable, but I have no way to reliably judge.

“Start the car.”

“There’s no gas in the car.”

“I will give you some gas if you give me some gas.”

“But there’s no gas in the car.”

“I want to give you gas. Give me just a little gas from your car, and I will give you gas.”

Cheers,

Justin

*Humor

**Admitted assumptions

***[Pascal’s wager](#)

October 27, 2016