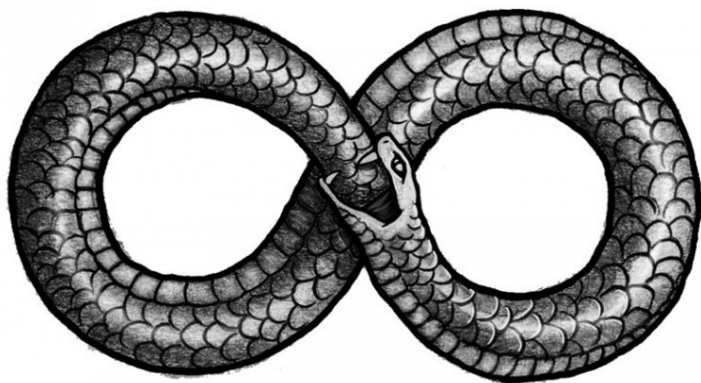


EVOLVING FAITH:
A JOURNAL OF DISCOURSES
VOL 2

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. It 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.

The conversation eventually spilled over onto a new blog post entitled [Everything is Possible](#), about creating a more perfect and moral world that the god of The Bible.

ONE – JAKE

This was Lucifer's plan in heaven. You didn't mention that. Oh except Lucifer's plan did not have agency. What exactly are you free to choose in your plan? If you choose to inflict suffering on someone you are banished from existence? What sort of agency is that?

"You can do whatever you want, except you can't do "a", if you do "a", you will cease to exist and nobody will remember you or your existence. So your can do "a" if you really want, but you can't."

There is no growth in your plan because there is no suffering. There is no human frailty to overcome, there is no learning to be done. Your plan is also for your children to be on the earth forever. Because there will be no death.

So why is your plan better than the plan of my God? Because your plan has the earth as paradise? Well my God's plan has heaven as paradise.

October 12, 2016

TWO – JUSTIN

What sort of agency is it to be killed in an earthquake? Or be maimed by a parasite? Drowned in a flood? Murdered by a stranger?

How is being blinked out of existence for rules you know worse than being banished to hell for rules you can only guess at?

There's plenty of room for growth and learning. My creation can create music, literature, artwork, architecture. How is suffering a requirement for learning? How is human frailty a virtue?

My creation exists exactly for how long I choose them to exist. Just as in God's creation. They exist and de-exist by my whim, but without any needless and pointless suffering.

Really, I don't think this plan is better. I think it's silly. As silly as I think it would be for an omnipotent being to create *this* elaborate and mean-spirited test. But mine is certainly more humane.

Cheers,
Justin

October 12, 2016

THREE – JAKE

Who said you were banished to Hell for rules you can only guess at? At least my God's plan has mercy in the life to come. I assume you have heard of grace? Sin is willful rebellion against God. Which rebellion would need to be intentional to be rebellion, I would propose that you cannot sin in ignorance.

I could not make art freely in your plan, because that art (especially mine) could cause another person suffering (I can't draw a straight line...) . I could not make music that caused pain to another persons ears or heart, I could not freely make any decision that could negatively effect another person, remember?

Omnipotent and omnicontrrolling are not the same. My God rules the skies, and the seas, and all things. But that doesn't mean he has to take away consequences for actions. That he has to end global warming, when it could be an effect from previous generations. He could allow the changing temperatures to cause powerful winds and raging tornadoes to exist as a result of a previous generation. He could take it away, but if he takes away consequences, is there agency at all? Could he take away the evolution of a species of parasite that was most likely influenced by the existence of mankind? He could, but would it in some way

take away a consequence of someone's choice? That would limit agency. Could God have made us not subject to hunger? Or sleep? Of course, but because of our hunger we have more choices. To eat, to not eat, how much to eat, what to eat, how to prepare it, how to eat it, when to eat it, who to eat it with, how often to eat it, etc.

It seems like you don't really understand his plan.

October 14, 2016

FOUR – JUSTIN

There are many sects who believe that anyone who is not 'saved', who does not accept Jesus into their lives, are damned. Similarly, Islam believes that those of us in ignorance of their law are damned. I wish there was some fair and methodological manner in which we could evaluate all the different claims for their validity.

According to God's rules as you understand them, it seems immoral that parents would teach their children about God. At least, in their ignorance, children would not be shackled by nonsense commandments, nor damned for misunderstanding them.

God's "grace" has different meanings to different believers. Some evangelical Christians believe it simply means believing and trusting in Jesus Christ. Mormons, on the other hand, believe that there are 'works' and ordinances and rituals that must be performed to attain God's glory. Again, it would be nice if there were some methodology to evaluate which was true.

I have asked you many times, but either you don't answer, or you haven't provided an answer I can understand; how does a natural disaster affect agency in any way? Evil people don't create hurricanes. They are a natural process of this

oddly spinning orb. If we assume that God created the laws of physics, He created this planet and it's processes intentionally. Either that or God could not foresee the consequences. And if God did not foresee the consequences, at the very least He still allows these physical processes to kill, maim, and disfigure believers and non-believers alike. To cause immense suffering. God either created the hurricane or does nothing to stop it. He is immoral. He is a father who puts his toddler near the street, then does nothing as the toddler runs into traffic.

You're right. I don't understand it.

Cheers,
Justin

October 14, 2016

FIVE – JAKE

“According to God’s rules as you understand them, it seems immoral that parents would teach their children about God. At least, in their ignorance, children would not be shackled by nonsense commandments, nor damned for misunderstanding them.”

What the heck? What is sin? Willful rebellion against God is sin. Can a child who is in ignorance willfully rebel? No. So you claim we should all be ignorant of the knowledge of God because... Ignorance is bliss?

You forget the proxy temple work that is part of the Mormon faith. For those who do not get all things they needed from this life, their work can still be done and they can be saved. The only thing that prevents their salvation is willful rebellion that is not repented of.

Through the grace of God, our judgment will be just, and merciful. Those who did not know God, can learn in the next life. Those who willfully reject him are those in need of repentance.

You should figure out if there even is a God before you worry so much about which church you want to join.

I do not refuse to answer your question. How do natural disasters effect agency?

What is agency? We are agents unto ourselves. Agents “act on behalf of another person or group”. We are agents that act on behalf of ourselves.

What is the relation to natural disasters? Ummm, I think it's similar to hunger, and sleep, it's survival.

Storms, rain, lightning, snow, freezing rain, scorching heat. Why any of them? It's part of the test. Where will our priorities lie? How will we respond? What will we do?

You see death as the end. You see suffering as pointless pain.

I see death as a transition into a better life.

I see suffering as a means to learn and grow.

My perspective extends beyond this life, and death which we will one day all face. This earth existence is a speck of time compared to all that lies beyond in the next life. The suffering is brief. Death is not the end.

In Liberty Jail Joseph was in absolute misery. His friends and family were suffering, and being brutally murdered by people of faith, or of no faith. He was being fed poison on multiple occasions. He was in a terrible jail for false crimes

he was accused of. He prayed and asked the lord why. Why the lord would let this happen.

5 If thou art called to pass through tribulation; if thou art in perils among false brethren; if thou art in perils among robbers; if thou art in perils by land or by sea;

6 If thou art accused with all manner of false accusations; if thine enemies fall upon thee; if they tear thee from the society of thy father and mother and brethren and sisters; and if with a drawn sword thine enemies tear thee from the bosom of thy wife, and of thine offspring, and thine elder son, although but six years of age, shall cling to thy garments, and shall say, My father, my father, why can't you stay with us? O, my father, what are the men going to do with you? and if then he shall be thrust from thee by the sword, and thou be dragged to prison, and thine enemies prowl around thee like wolves for the blood of the lamb;

7 And if thou shouldst be cast into the pit, or into the hands of murderers, and the sentence of death passed upon thee; if thou be cast into the deep; if the billowing surge conspire against thee; if fierce winds become thine enemy; if the heavens gather

blackness, and all the elements combine to hedge up the way; and above all, if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good.

8 The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?

9 Therefore, hold on thy way, and the priesthood shall remain with thee; for their bounds are set, they cannot pass. Thy days are known, and thy years shall not be numbered less; therefore, fear not what man can do, for God shall be with you forever and ever.

If the very jaws of hell shall gape open after thee, know that these things will give your experience and be for your good.

Remember? You read the D&C. You should know this if you paid attention. You read all the scriptures, so why do you err in what is believed in The LDS faith?

Terrible things can give us unique experience and can teach us a lot. The lessons we learn extend beyond this life.

If you insist on arguing this point, know that it's scripture versus your word. Your argument is not with me, it's with God because you are bitter I suppose. Because if you really

read the D&C, that scripture should not be surprising and new, you should have known it.

October 15, 2016

SIX – JAKE

Btw, I didn't really clarify, this makes no sense to me.

“According to God’s rules as you understand them, it seems immoral that parents would teach their children about God. At least, in their ignorance, children would not be shackled by nonsense commandments, nor damned for misunderstanding them.”

What rules? How do you know my understanding of them? How is it immoral to share truth you have with your children? Why should they not know where they came from? Or where they will go when they die? Why should they not know the purpose of life? As stated before, sin is willful rebellion against God. Which cannot be done unintentionally or in ignorance. The grace of God makes up for the things you did not know.

I don't think it's right to force your child to believe, and go to church, and be so controlling when they have matured.

I know why I'm here, and where I will go when I die. I have hope because of my savior. I would want to share that hope I have with my children, they will see it in my actions. It's been said that “a good father teaches his children, and sometimes uses words.” I will want my children to see the

hope I have gained from my faith. The peace and understanding I have gained. I will want them to know why they are here, and where they will go when they die. I do not want to force them to “go to church” or to do any meaningless action that they just do because they are forced to. If they desire to go to church, and to learn of God, then I will be thrilled. But it cannot be forced on someone, and it should not be attempted to be forced on someone.

You are not at peace. You feel the need to still fight against the church with your blog. You show by your actions that you are unsatisfied. It's one thing to share truth, it's another to fight against something. You claim you are sharing the truth. It appears more of a fight though then sharing of knowledge. Considering your posts that are mockery of faith and God, I would consider them not to be about “sharing the truth”. If you desired to share the truth you have, there would be no need for mockery. The need would be for the knowledge you have to share. Your mockery shows your frustration.

October 15, 2016

SEVEN – JUSTIN

As you explained it, only those of us who are aware of God's commandments are subject to them. Therefore, if I teach my child about God and His commandments, I make her subject to God's punishments. To protect my child from God's punishments and arbitrary judgment, it seems that ignorance is preferable, especially as I have no evidence that He exists. I can teach her the scientific explanations for where we come from and what the purpose of life is. I can show her the evidence for these things and encourage her to ask questions. I can teach her that "I don't know" is a much better answer than "God works in mysterious ways."

All my temple work can be done after I die. Great. While I'm here on Earth, I can enjoy coffee, tea, a healthy sex life, and a 10% increase in my salary. Perfect.

I am trying to determine if there is a God before I choose a church. I'm asking you and other readers for evidence. You have yet to provide any.

If I understand you correctly, God creates/allows natural disasters to cause pain, suffering, dismemberment, starvation, and disease for children, innocent people, evil people, believers, and nonbelievers alike so that humans have the "agency" to survive them? I'm sure that is

reassuring to some. To me, it seems horrifyingly evil and immoral.

“Son, I’m going to chop your arm off so that you have the opportunity to learn from your disability.”

Awful.

If there is no god, suffering due to natural disasters is the natural result of an indifferent universe. A result of the physical laws of the universe interacting with human beings. If there is a God, suffering at the hands of natural disasters is the result of His immorality and ill-temper.

Those would be some very moving scriptures if you were corresponding with someone who didn’t believe that Joseph simply wrote them about himself. As I do believe that he simply composed them himself, they aren’t particularly relevant nor convincing. Mr. Smith did not deserve persecution nor execution, but the ‘false accusations’ upon which he was jailed was that he and his city council ordered the destruction a printing press for correctly reporting that Smith was practicing polygamy/polyandry. Did he not do those things?

We can learn and grow through horrible experiences. But, either they are natural, the result of our mistake or the

result of evil beings; either evil humans using their “agency”, or an evil deity.

If I were born Catholic, I am sure that this blog would focus a lot more on that organization. My parents, however, raised me in The LDS Church.

I am not at peace with The LDS Church. I feel that it hurts people. I feel that it hurts my family. I feel that it hurts my friends. I feel that it hurts my neighbors. I feel that it willfully lies to people. I feel that it encourages hate and bigotry. I feel that it steals from people for the monetary gain of a few. I feel that it steals from the poor and gives to the wealthy.

Cheers,
Justin

October 17, 2016

EIGHT – JAKE

So if there was a God who created this beautiful world and give you your life he would have to control absolutely everything and make this life perfect?

There aren't natural disasters if there is a God? Why couldn't God have made this world that has natural disasters, and given us these amazing, yet flawed bodies? So if there is a God then he is evil because this life can be hard and we can suffer? No, I can't say I agree with your assumptions.

If you expect God to not allow suffering then you expect him to follow the Devil's plan. He does not follow the Devil's plan so you call him the Devil by insisting that he is evil?

Have you ever done anything hard in your life? Ever tried to do anything despite opposition?

"Son, I'm going to protect you, so I built this padded cell for you in the basement. I'm going to put you in this straight jacket and lock you in there so nothing can hurt you. Don't worry, i'll change your diapers and I will feed you plenty (wouldn't want you to feed yourself, you could get hurt) You'll be able to choose to look at the blue padding, or the

white, so you can still make choices, but nothing will hurt you because I love you.”

Is that parent any less abusive then a parent that would chop off their child's arm so that they suffer? Does it matter which is worse? They are both terrible.

To what extend should a parent limit a child's freedom to protect them? To what extent should a parent give a child freedom to learn and practicing making their own choices and dealing with consequences?

So God should lock us in a safe environment and let us choose between the blue padding or the white padding to look at? Agency would not be affected. We would be safe, and would not suffer.

You blame God for everything (although you deny he exists). His hand is in all things. He destroyed Zarahemla to protect the children that would be born that would never have an opportunity to know him because of the wickedness of then parents and city. Is that cruel and evil? Or is that merciful and just? If you are hypothetically speaking of God, why can't you hypothetically speak of an afterlife that God wishes to prepare us for?

You would rather be ignorant than know the truth if there is a God. That's not the action of a truth seeker. You will be

held accountable for what you intentionally did wrong. You will be held accountable for refusing to do what you would need to know there is a God considering that you know what you would need to do but won't.

When you are standing before God with a recollection of all your sins, you will not want to stand in his presence, you will not be comfortable, and you will not want to dwell with him. You will be held accountable for the ignorance you force upon your child. They will be judged both just and mercifully. As will you. There judgment will make sense, and so will yours.

God trusts you with his precious children, and if you treat them poorly, you will be held accountable.

If you teach them all the wonderful things we have learned from science, that's not a problem. If you tell them that God does not exist you are lying and leading them astray. You have no evidence there isn't a God. You could tell them you don't know or think there is a God, but if you teach them those lies, you will be justly and mercifully held accountable for it. Could God restrict who can and can't have children. I absolutely believe so, but that doesn't mean he will interfere.

My God will let you prove yourself guilty or not guilty.
Have you seen the movie “Minority Report”?

In it, these autistic children have special minds that help the futuristic society know who will commit crimes before they happen. “Precrime” officers will come and arrest the person before the crime is committed.

The problem arises when the main character who works for precrime, is accused of a murder he will commit of a man he does not know. He runs and tries to escape the law. He finds out that he was actually being framed, in the end and is fine. But “precrime” does not work.

God knows what we all will do, he knows. But he will still let us have our agency. And I’m grateful.

I’m grateful that any condemnation I face will be because of my own decisions. That I will know and have a guilt for my actions. I’m grateful that although it is a challenge, and we find ourselves tested God can help us make it through all of it. A good teacher, is usually silent during the big test. Sometimes we will feel alone, and won’t immediately get the answers we seek, but God is there for us anyways.

October 19, 2016

NINE – JUSTIN

Apparently I need to make it clear – for this post as well as for your most recent comment on the other article – I don't blame God or gods for anything. I don't believe they exist. As I have made clear, there is no evidence that I find convincing of their presence. I don't blame them at all for natural disasters. Natural disasters are the result of physics. I don't blame them for disease; that's biology. I don't blame them for immorality. They aren't there.

You propose, however, that there is evidence that I am somehow missing or for which I am not privy. You claim that knowledge of this God is necessary for maximum happiness, well-being, and morality. Very well. For the sake of discussion, I've taken the position, giving the benefit of the doubt, that the supernatural is real and that gods are, at least, possible.

Therefore, for the sake of discussion and argument, I am proposing that I find their actions, if you and others are correct and they do exist, illogical, immoral, unreliable, and unjustified.

If the argument is made that God is benevolent and moral and is somehow required for morality, then I disagree with the premise. Natural disasters are a compelling argument

that God is equivalent to “a mean kid with an ant farm and a magnifying glass.”

If the argument is made that God created the scriptures so that we know His mind and wishes, then I propose that they would need to be an accurate representation of those wishes. The many mistakes, logical inconsistencies, immoral commands, mistranslations, misinterpretations seem to indicate that either an immoral and deeply flawed deity created them, or they were created by men. Occam's Razor would lead me to accept the second premise.

Imagine, if you will, a world without natural disasters. Everything else is the same, but, no earthquakes, no hurricanes, no flooding, no volcanoes, no heat waves, no monstrous hail and thunderstorms. Is the world now without conflict? Would humans be free from the learning they could gain from difficult challenges?

(Why are these bodies flawed and subject to disease? Are they not made in God's image? Does God get a cold?)

We've discussed adversity, at great length, but you seem to think that if we eliminate suffering that is caused outside of human control that we will somehow eliminate all adversity, trials, and suffering. That's clearly not the case. It

would just eliminate needless, inconsequential, agency-free suffering. It would simply eliminate God's magnifying glass.

Putting a child in a room and eliminating freedom is just as immoral as chopping off an arm. I suggest that God, by allowing or ceasing to stop suffering outside of conscious control, if He has that ability, is equally as immoral.

My kid is always in some danger. Driving to school. Walking at the zoo. Playing outside. I do my best to alleviate the risks to which I have knowledge and access, but, living in this indifferent universe, and not being an all-knowing, all-powerful being, I cannot eliminate them all. If I could, I assure you, I would.

The idea that God needs put humans through some kind of 'test' is as senseless as the suffering it inflicts. It is much more logical and evident to me that physics, this planet, and the universe behaves with an expected indifference to the small primates on one of the smaller planets orbiting one of the smaller stars of one of the smaller galaxies of the trillions and trillions of other galaxies.

"He destroyed Zarahemla to protect the children that would be born that would never have an opportunity to know him because of the wickedness of the parents and the city."

Yet, you repeatedly talk so highly of agency, and God's inability/unwillingness to stop needless and senseless death because of that agency. How did God know that they would continue to be so evil? He has the power to know all things, and to prevent "ignorance" in such a direct and influential way? How is this not akin to Lucifer's plan? Is God cheating on this test?

God allows us to have our agency, except when He doesn't. He respects our agency, until we become too wicked and he drowns innocent babies, innocent toddlers, wicked pregnant mothers, wicked fathers, wicked giraffes, wicked ostriches, wicked platypus to protect us from that precious agency. Then, He has to do it again, but with fire, to destroy Sodom. Then he strikes Korihor down, because God didn't like the way Korihor's used his agency. Then, on the other hand, he takes away suffering when He sees fit; curing the blind, healing lepers, making wine, etc. God seems to appreciate our agency, until He doesn't. Again, to be clear, I don't believe any of this, but, if you believe The Bible and the scriptures, I'd like to know how you can reconcile it.

I am clearly seeking truth. You and I are both seeking for truth through this conversation. At the very least we both have a curiosity for the contents of the discussion. Sure, we disagree, but perhaps that is only momentary. Maybe in

your next missive, you'll teach me something new. I hope so. I enjoy learning. I thank you in advance.

Our disagreement seems to stem largely from how we arrive at facts and evidence. You claim that you have received evidence, but can't show me this evidence or re-create that evidence for me. I don't dispute that you believe that you received evidence, but that is hardly useful for me.

You can't know what I have or haven't done to know God. I take you at your word that you have and you believe that you have received evidence. Please take me at my word that I believe that I have also done what you propose but have not.

Clearly, I don't believe I will ever stand in God's presence, but should I, I hope he is not the god of The Bible, or of Islam, or of Judaism, or any of the other thousands of proposed "supreme beings" who, to paraphrase Galileo, are the same gods who endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect, but intends us to forgo their use.

I like how you use the term, "My God." It demonstrates that there are as many gods and sects and religions as there are butts in the pews. For example, you seem much less hard-nosed about certain moral issues than Boyd Packer was. Much less hard-lined. Yet, you claim to follow the same

scriptures, the same prophets, and the same God. My wife used to do the same thing in an attempt to reconcile her belief in God with His seeming immorality and sinful judgment. She no longer bothers.

I prefer teachers who give a few public lessons and lectures and not just a few outdated textbooks before the final exam.

Cheers,
Justin

October 19, 2016

TEN – JAKE

So what do you care? You don't understand faith in things supernatural. You only care about what you can prove with science and facts. So why do you care to fight against others way of understanding life because you don't get it?

It's one thing to share the good things you have learned that have brought you joy. That's in no way bad. But fighting against that which you don't understand seems foolish.

Seriously... you keep forgetting what I say I guess. Earlier I explained what I mean by "My God". I told you the God that you speak of that you are sure does not exist isn't the same as the one I know. This unwise, unmerciful, immoral God you speak of is not the one I know, so I told you that I guess we are speaking about different Gods. So I figured I would tell you about my God, whom you don't know.

What makes you an expert on God? The fact that you don't believe or understand him?

How does that make you a credible source for anyone listen to what you know about him?

Maybe to help explain I can give you a scenario.

I'm gonna teach you what's wrong with playing Kalimba. (Even though I don't know how to play Kalimba, don't own one, and have never actually played one.)

The tines aren't chromatically arranged. And when you play it too much it hurts your thumbs. They are tiny and there are much better instrument alternatives. It's not worth learning to play it, it's not even a professional instrument.

Can't you see the evidence? Playing Kalimba is terrible. You can trust me, I know all about the Kalimba! As you can tell, I have studied the Kalimba and know a lot about it!

Okay, I hope that clarifies my point.

You don't believe there is a God. You have no room for the supernatural. You speak about some God that I don't know, the God you speak of isn't the one I believe in.

So why are you the expert? What makes you a credible source for learning there isn't a God? Does your lack of evidence of his existence make you a credible source?

It's simply not logical.

I won't tell you why Kalimba is terrible if you won't tell me why God is terrible.

You don't actually know God, just like I have never actually played Kalimba. I know what a Kalimba is. It's referred to

often as a thumb piano, it's made of pitched strips of metal called tines. It comes from Africa. They traditionally are not chromatic (in A, Bb, B, C, Db, D, etc. A piano is chromatic) but they can come chromatic and be made chromatically. They can come with as few as about four tines and as many as... well I don't know.

Obviously I know what a Kalimba is, but never having played one, Am I an expert? With no experience playing one, can I accurately teach you the problems of playing it?

I would think not, because I have never played one.

Similar with you teaching about some God who you don't believe in and explaining what's wrong with him.

October 20, 2016

ELEVEN – JAKE

Justin, maybe it would be helpful to see your argument flipped.

You said, “I don’t blame God or gods for anything. I don’t believe they exist. As I have made clear, there is no evidence that I find convincing of their presence. I don’t blame them at all for natural disasters. Natural disasters are the result of physics. I don’t blame them for disease; that’s biology. I don’t blame them for immorality. They aren’t there.”

Prove this. Until you give me proof I will not believe. Prove to me there is nothing supernatural and that everything you experience is all that exists, there is nothing more.

The lack of evidence you have of God, is not evidence there is not a God.

As a secular atheist, you must denounce all things supernatural as impossible and nonexistent. I do not reject supernatural things without reason.

You have faith that there is nothing supernatural. How could one such as myself gain such faith? What is the basis for it?

Am I ignorant for being open to both the supernatural and natural? Am I foolish for excepting logic and reasoning as

well as the supernatural? I should just reject just because it's simply impossible?

Give me the proof. Give me the evidence there is nothing supernatural about this existence and I will no longer believe.

Because nobody so far has been able to do so. You have not been able to do so. All you do is say you “don't believe in anything supernatural”, but I don't believe that. Not even a little bit.

I need to reject that there could be a God to know there isn't a God? There is the circular logic you were talking about.

“Give me no sugar and you will no longer have any sugar.

But I already have sugar, if I don't give you any, how will I no longer have any?

Give me no sugar, and you will no longer have any sugar. Even if you only have a little no sugar.

But I will still have sugar if I don't give you any... having “a little no sugar” doesn't even make sense..”

I have gone to secular schools and to secular public events. I have read books written by atheists. What more do I need to be convinced there is no God? Where is the evidence me

and so many others cannot find that proves there is no God?
(Mormon.org)

Where are the answers to my issues with Atheism? What about the claims of death being the end forever? Can you just explain away the contradictory views and statements given by well quoted and respected atheists? You claim to not be angry or bitter, but other atheists have spoken differently. What about the lack of evidence that there isn't a God? Archaeologists and scientists haven't found the evidence yet. Shouldn't such a substantial claim be backed by substantial evidence?

That's what I ask for then. A mountain of evidence that there is nothing supernatural. If you can provide me with that, I will no longer believe.

Thus you see your argument flipped. Feel free to notice what you will about such an argument.

October 20, 2016

TWELVE – JUSTIN

“Why do you care?”

This past weekend, I visited the site of The Mountain Meadows Massacre. In 1857, with the call of “Do your duty to God!” from Mormon militia commander John Higbee , 127 men, women, and children were brutally murdered. Some shot in the head. Some viciously stabbed to death. Some had their throats cuts. Some had their skulls crushed in. I care about that.

I care that my family and others waste 10% of their income.

I care that LDS teens feel it necessary to take their own lives because they are repeatedly taught that they “suffer” from homosexuality.

I care that children are denied medical care because their Christian Science parents irrationally believe that praying will cure disease better than science.

I care that women are denied basic education and rights in Islamic countries for irrational, religiously-based thinking, and trust in a book that cannot be demonstrated to be supernatural in origin.

I care about what is true.

I believe that magical thinking is dangerous. It leads to people making decisions for irrational reasons. It can lead people to make decisions that are demonstrably contrary to the natural world.

Your God can also be different from Thomas Monson's god. And from Dallin Oaks god. And from The Pope's god. And from Ali Khamenei's god. How do we determine which is correct? Who interprets The Scriptures correctly? Which of you really gets inspiration/signs from the supernatural? What tangible, reproducible evidence can you provide?

I'm not an expert on god. As I don't believe a god exists, I don't think anyone can really be an expert. I attempt apply logic, reason, and skepticism.

A kalimba. Yes, you can be an expert on instruments you don't play. There are many experts on violins, etc. who don't play in the symphony. I do not play and, in fact, have never touched a violin, but I can see the inherent difficulty in playing a violin with no strings. The instrument is flawed.

How am I not speaking about The God you know? I still don't agree that it affects agency, but you claim He highly values agency – so much so that he will not stop earthquakes nor disease nor heal amputees. Yet, you also

profess belief in The Bible and The Book of Mormon, in both of which God repeatedly interferes directly with human life and human actions. He prevents “evil” by flooding the Earth. He willfully causes 3 days of darkness & suffering. He creates storms to punish and curb the actions of Laman and Lemuel. Please explain how you reconcile these positions?

You claim you have evidence. I do not have evidence. I ask you to demonstrate your evidence. You claim you received evidence by reading the scriptures and praying. I read the scriptures and pray. I receive no evidence. Thus, I have no good reason to accept the claim that there is a god, just as you have no good reason to accept the claim that there is a teapot in space beyond Mars.

“Prove this.”

I am not claiming there is no god. I apologize for the poor wording of “They aren’t there.” I was using a short-cut to describe my current state of belief. This would have been better phrased, “The universe behaves as if they aren’t there.”

You are correct, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Absence of evidence, however, is a good reason to

be skeptical. The time to believe a claim is after there is good evidence for the claim, not before.

I do not reject the supernatural. I am unaware of any evidence, beyond anecdotal, for the existence of anything supernatural. I see no evidence for ghosts, demons, angels, dowsing, psychics, life-after-death, or god. If you have some, please reveal it.

It may be possible for me to fly. There is not, however, convincing evidence for this claim. I am open to evidence as it presents itself, but until such evidence is presented, I will continue to live my life as if I cannot fly.

You need to reject nothing to disbelieve in god. There are many agnostic atheists. I am one of them. There may be a god. There is not, however, convincing evidence for this claim. I am open to evidence as it presents itself, but until such evidence is presented, I will continue to live my life as if there is no god.

The negative of a claim cannot be proved. Anyone who claims it can is incorrect. I cannot prove that there is not a civilization of superpowered aliens on Planet Krypton, nor that such a planet does not exist. There is not, clearly, evidence for this claim, thus, the logical position is to withhold belief until positive evidence is presented.

Again, I apologize for my unclear wording. I hope I have adequately explained the 'agnostic atheism' position to which I currently hold.

Cheers,

Justin

October 25, 2016

THIRTEEN – JAKE

I addressed many of the things you said on my other comment, but I'll respond here as well.

You state:

“This past weekend, I visited the site of The Mountain Meadows Massacre. In 1857, with the call of “Do your duty to God!” from Mormon milita commander John Higbee , 127 men, women, and children were brutally murdered. Some shot in the head. Some viciously stabbed to death. Some had their throats cuts. Some had their skulls crushed in. I care about that.

I care that my family and others waste 10% of their income.

I care that LDS teens feel it necessary to take their own lives because they are repeatedly taught that they “suffer” from homosexuality.

I care that children are denied medical care because their Christian Science parents irrationally believe that praying will cure disease better than science.

I care that women are denied basic education and rights in Islamic countries for irrational, religiously-

based thinking, and trust in a book that cannot be demonstrated to be supernatural in origin.

I care about what is true.

I believe that magical thinking is dangerous. It leads to people making decisions for irrational reasons. It can lead people to make decisions that are demonstrably contrary to the natural world.”

I agree with you on (almost) all of this. The Mountain Meadows Massacre is absolutely horrible. It should never have happened, it is awful.

I don't think that the way the church spends money is a waste. You may not agree with the spending to maintain and build temples and churches that you don't believe are needed, I'm sure you do not disagree with the massive worldwide relief efforts of the church though. I think the lottery is a waste of money personally. Although it provides money to education, I think it's a waste of money and I don't like when people contribute to it. So I think I understand the frustrations you might have towards that.

I don't know how many homosexual LDS teens commit suicide for some sort of religious reason, I think it is horrible that that happens though. I don't think it should.

I know that “faith without works is dead”. Those that put their faith in prayer and do not put forth any effort of their own I think misunderstand God. I think it’s a crime for the members of the exclusive “church of Christ” LDS branch-off to allow their children to die of easily curable diseases because they only believe in prayer. I think it’s irrational, illogical, and immoral. They blame others for not having enough faith, “If only “...” had more faith than he would have been healed”. I think the people who reject science, reasoning, and logic are dangerous and scary.

I do not really understand Islamic communities or faith. I don’t know what standard can be used to compare their culture and way of life to ours. I think women should be given the same rights and freedoms as men. There are peaceful, kind Muslims. There are, like in everything, extremists who don’t act logically and reasonably. I think that is scary.

I think magical thinking can be very dangerous. I know there is a God, does that make me dangerous? If it causes me to abandon logic and reasoning, i think it very well could. But the glory of my God is wisdom.

Soooo, illogical religious extremism is scary. I do not think that you must choose either supernatural thinking or logic

and reasoning. I do not think it's either or. I think both can work together, and should.

I think it's unwise to abandon logic and reasoning and only have "magical thinking". I also think it's unwise to abandon spiritual knowledge and only have logic and reasoning.

Does that make sense? I'm not arguing that you should abandon logic and reasoning. You can have it all! I encourage you to know there is a God.

This life is temporary. Our time here will end. God allows it to end. Our agency is time limited in this life.

Our test is to see how we will act with our agency. How will we act when our life is at stake? Or when our loved ones lives are at stake? When our job is unsecured? How will we act while everything is seemingly fine? How will we act while we are sick? How will we act despite the circumstances of this life?

Our struggles, natural disasters, and opposition allow it to be a test. It would not be agency to me if you took away a lot of the problems.

Agency only exists with opposition. You may try and argue that the opposition should be different because you don't like it. But that's not how it works.

October 26, 2016

FOURTEEN – JUSTIN

If either The LDS Church is not true (<http://cesletter.com>) or there is no god, the way The Church (and all churches by the same standard) spend their money is wasteful. The buildings, temples, books, pamphlets, fliers, hymnbooks, television broadcasts, radio broadcasts, missionary flights/housing, etc. are all needless and wasteful.

You mention The Church's aid work. Great. Assuming you pay tithing, I thank you for helping The UN Food Program.

The LDS Church recently invested \$1,500,000,000 in a commercial mall.

The LDS Church recently gave \$3,000,000 to The UN.

Do you think that distribution of zeros would sit well with a poor carpenter from Nazareth?

I give to charity too, but I cut out the highly inefficient middle-man.

I remember a time when I gave money to The American Diabetes Association. Months later, they sent another letter asking for more money. That was fine, but they included, for some marketing gimmick, a real nickel in the letter. I was immediately enraged that they would waste my nickel,

and many other nickels presumably, on this marketing ploy rather than using it for the reason I gave it. I give to different charities now.

Imagine my response if I still paid tithing to The LDS Church and saw them buy a \$1.5B for-profit mall.

The Church decries greed and materialism, yet they build a massive monument to both.

I think I could only be more upset if The American Diabetes Association sent me a Twinkie.

Many LDS teens have taken their lives (<http://www.lindquistmortuary.com/notices/Braxton-Taylor> | [Stockton & Wyatt](#)). Many more LDS teens will. You can find their stories if you search hard (families often seem to scrub the obituaries, etc.). The reasons vary. Some have families that refuse to accept them. Some have families that forcibly evict them. Some can't justify in their own mind why God would punish them. Some can't justify why their tortured prayers go unanswered. Some, like Alex Cooper in the book 'Saving Alex' were violently physically and emotionally abused due to her sexuality. Fortunately, Alex failed in her suicide attempt. Many are not so lucky.

Magical thinking led to their deaths. Either their own, or their parents, or others. Due to religious, faith-based, non-

evidence based thinking, someone believes that these children are spiritually defective in some way. Rather than understanding the simple fact that their biology and psychology just causes them to be different in some way. Rarely do we punish our children for freckles or being drawn to music class, but, in this case, because someone believes the words of an archaic text, and the words of men who claim to speak for a loving God, lives are irrevocably harmed and tragically ended.

Is every magical thinking person dangerous? Will every magical thought lead to murder or suicide. No. But some are. But some will.

I see no benefits or reason to accept and incorporate religious or magical thinking. There are people who do good deeds who believe in god. There are people who do good deeds who don't believe in god. What benefits do you find? Does nothing bad ever happen to you? Do only good things happen to you? Do you receive great wealth? Do you never get sick? Do your broken bones heal themselves after a blessing or prayer?

I expect that you'll quickly dismiss those premises.

*“And I say fine, pray for anything you want.
Pray for anything. But...what about The Divine
Plan? Remember that? The Divine Plan. Long*

time ago God made a divine plan. Gave it a lot of thought. Decided it was a good plan. Put it into practice. And for billion and billions of years The Divine Plan has been doing just fine. Now you come along and pray for something. Well, suppose the thing you want isn't in God's Divine Plan. What do you want Him to do? Change His plan? Just for you? Doesn't it seem a little arrogant? It's a divine plan. What's the use of being God if every run-down schmuck can come along and mess up your plan?

And here's something else, another problem you might have; suppose your prayers aren't answered. What do you say? 'Well it's God's will. God's will be done.' Fine, but if it is God's will and He's going to do whatever he wants to anyway; why bother praying in the first place?"
– George Carlin (edited for vulgarity)

If God isn't going to provide any evidence of His existence, and He's not going to follow any kind of reliable pattern with respect to believers, non-believers, prayers, non-prayers, punishments, rewards, agency, non-agency – He seems a lot like Sagan's dragon. He may be there, but, really, what does it matter one way or the other?

String Theory proposes that there may be endless universes outside of our own – all with their own potentially different

laws of physics, physical properties, etc. We currently have no way of investigating that hypothesis. Does it make it an invalid hypothesis? No. It may be interesting to think about. May be interesting to theorize about. Until there is real evidence and a way to interact and investigate their properties, however, they might as well not be there, and, as such, I'll go on living my life as if they aren't.

Cheers,
Justin

October 27, 2016

FIFTEEN – JAKE

“The rate of suicide attempts is 4 times greater for LGB youth and 2 times greater for questioning youth than that of straight youth.”

A tragic statistic from “CDC. (2016). Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Risk Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9-12: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.”

You seriously want to blame the deaths of those gay teens on the LDS church? What gives you the right to try and use their deaths to justify your opinions. That really really frustrates me that their deaths are so trivial to you that they are used in your “evidence” against the church. Shame on you Justin.

Nonmagical thinking led to their deaths. They probably attended secular schools where religion was not taught openly, and they could not find their place in this world. Can we blame it on secularism the same way you arrogantly blame it on “magical” thinking? Can we blame their death on one cause when there are so many influences in a persons decision to commit suicide? My straight, formerly LDS sister attempted suicide (while LDS). It wasn't

because her parents didn't love her, or because of what was taught at church. It was because of chemical imbalances in the brain that have been and are being treated. You may try and use her suicide attempt to draw some ridiculous conclusion, but it does not seem moral or logical to do so.

What is your issue with that mall? Is it the root of all that is evil in this world? Is it really incomprehensible to you that not every penny goes to the poor and needy and to buildings construction and maintenance?

Why is that such a big deal? Especially since you don't pay it?

"Well surely now I know there is no God because of how tithing was spent! You've convinced me!!!"

Is that what you expect? I have no problem with the church investing money. What happens with tithing does not effect my understanding of God in any way. Not all your taxes go towards things you agree with I assume, should you separate yourself from the government? Why is it logical to separate from the church because of investments it has made, but not the government?

"Due to religious, faith-based, non-evidence based thinking," this statement is inherently wrong by definition. Faith if I must compare again is trust and belief. You believe

in evidence of gravity right? You have trust in gravity right? You have faith in gravity right?

Your “faith” in gravity clearly must be “non-evidence based thinking” then because it is faith. You believe that faith cannot be based on evidence. That is quite contrary to what faith actually is. I have defined it so many times and you still do not get it I think.

I encourage you to gain evidence of the existence of God! And you ignore my encouragements, you ignore my instruction, you willfully choose to remain ignorant of information you do not desire. You show me by your (lack of) actions that you willfully choose to remain ignorant of the existence of God.

“I see no benefits or reason to accept and incorporate religious or magical thinking. There are people who do good deeds who believe in god. There are people who do good deeds who don't believe in god. What benefits do you find? Does nothing bad ever happen to you? Do only good things happen to you? Do you receive great wealth? Do you never get sick? Do your broken bones heal themselves after a blessing or prayer?”

The benefit I find is the knowledge of truth, and hope. If the only benefits you care about are temporal, how are you the truth seeker you claim to be? I know there is a God. I encourage you to know there is a God. I have hope. When my loved ones die, I have hope that they are not gone forever. You do not. I have hope for this life, and the life to come. That does not mean I do not enjoy this life, it just brings me peace to understand the death of my loved ones and the death I will one day face. Maybe you are not interested in that, but many are.

Many desire to know “Why am I here?”, and “Where will I go?” But perhaps such knowledge does not interest you.

What if it's a part of God's plan that when you do pray the answer will come? Is that too incomprehensible? That prayer could be a part of his plan?

What is the purpose of conversation if it does not change someone's plan? When you speak to your parents, do you simply make demands? Do you demand things from them or not talk to them? When you have a conversation with someone, is it wasted if you did not entirely change their course of actions? I would hope you would say no.

When you pray to God, do you simply make demands? I would hope not, because you are a terrible conversationalist

if so. Prayer is less about demands and more about conversation. You can actually talk to God! It's not about demanding that he reveal himself to you and give you all the things you want.

Maybe the God you think I believe in is some sort of Genie? That I must offer a prayer and then he comes in his full glory and does whatever I wish? How many wishes would this God Genie you imagine need to grant to convince you Justin?

I assure you, THAT, is not my God. That is not my "religious/magical understanding". I do not believe God is some Genie you summon by uttering a prayer. Sorry to disappoint you.

"If God isn't going to provide any evidence of His existence, and He's not going to follow any kind of reliable pattern with respect to believers, non-believers, prayers, non-prayers, punishments, rewards, agency, non-agency" ... "He may be there, but, really, what does it matter one way or the other?"

"IF" is a key word you used. If he does not, then I suppose you are right. But he does provide evidence. You refuse to try and "drive the car" which I cannot more simply explain or instruct you on. So I must ask "why?" Why do you refuse

to know there is a God? If you do not refuse, then why do your actions say otherwise? If you want evidence, you know where and how to find it.

If I said “the answers are on the paper on the top shelf, you must reach it and read it.” Would you refuse?

There is an Old Testament story of the Israelites being attacked by poisonous (fiery) serpents. Moses made a staff and encouraged all to look on it, for once they did they would be healed. Many refused and died because it seemed too simple.

(Going off memory, might not be exact) There is another story of a military captain who had leprosy. He was told (essentially) by the prophet that he needed to go bathe in the river (which was a dirty river) 7 times and he would be healed. He got mad because he did not like that instruction. His servant told him (summarizing) “if you had been commanded to do some great thing, would you not do so and be healed? Then why would you refuse to do that which is easy and be healed?”

Do you see where I am going with this Justin?

Please don't respond “trust me, I tried in the past”

I encourage you to do so now. To know there is a God the same way I do, I have given you a three step simple list. If you do not follow it, I can make no guarantee of anything.

If you are a truth seeker, why would you refuse? What do you have to lose? Why are you scared of the truth? Would you rather remain blissfully ignorant than know the truth?

If the LDS church is wrong, that's a separate issue. Those people could be wrong without it effecting the existence of God.

If you do not know there is a God, it does not matter which church is right because to you they would all be wrong. If there is a God, I encourage you to join his church, whichever he tells you to join. I encourage you to listen to him. That's another thing about prayer. It's not just about speaking, it's also about listening.

Justin, I know that Christ is my savior. I know he lived by faith/trust/belief in science, history, facts, evidence, reasoning, and the answers to my prayers. I know that he is my savior only by answer to prayers. But it does not conflict with history, facts, evidence, logic, or reasoning. The truth is truth. I encourage you to find it.

October 27, 2017

SIXTEEN – JUSTIN

I did not blame The LDS Church. I blamed magical thinking – shared by all religious sects.

Being aware of the immense struggle that these teens face – piled atop the already horrifying struggles that every teen faces – is not trivializing them. The tears in my eyes as I listen to Mama Dragons

(<http://www.mormonstories.org/mama-dragons-and-the-mama-dragon-story-project/>) tell their stories are not trivial. The rage I feel as I read about Alex Cooper being forced to carry a backpack of rocks on her back until it nearly crushes her spine (a “symbol” of her “sin”) is not trivial. It is not shameful to point them out.

Ignoring the problem is trivializing their struggle. Ignoring the problem is shameful.

“There are no homosexual members of the Church.” – David Bender

I certainly didn’t say or even imply that this was the only reason some choose to take their lives. Most teens face severe stressors — believers, non-believers, LDS, non-LDS, straight, and gay alike. But imagine all of those already existing struggles, then add on the fact that you are told

that you are spiritually defective and the only cure is a lifetime of celibacy.

<http://ldshomosexuality.com/results-of-lds-lgbt-study/>

I believe you miss the point. It's not the mall. It's the fact that they spend far more on commercial ventures than on good works. Than on humanitarian aid. WWJD? Do you believe that Jesus would build a billion dollar hotel whilst children starve?

In their sermons, The LDS Church leaders decry greed and materialism. A massive mall seems the very antithesis of that philosophy. It seems that there's a verse in The Bible about knowing the truth of a prophet by their works rather than their empty words. (Matthew 7)

"Why is that such a big deal? Especially since you don't pay it?"

Because I am not a selfish person. Because I have empathy. Because I wish members of my family didn't have to struggle so hard – which would be a lot easier by keeping 100% of the wage they worked so hard to earn. Because I wish all LDS members had a 10% raise that they could use to give to charities like The Road Home or The Utah Food Bank or any other "charity" who doesn't use the generosity of others to enrich themselves.

“Is that what you expect?”

I expect nothing. I would hope that you take a moment and contemplate the behavior of a church you claim speaks for a just, loving, charitable god. I am doubtful of that outcome. I am more hopeful that, mayhaps, someone else will stumble across our discussions and find something that causes them some thought and pause.

I pay taxes. Those are involuntary. I have a vote, however, which I use in an attempt to elect men and women who will use that money wisely. Taxes and government spending are also open to the public. If The LDS Church behaved similarly, I would blame the congregation much more vociferously than I do The Brethren.

Thank you for your encouragement. From where shall I gain this evidence for god?

I also seek truth. Which is why I continue this largely circular discussion. It's why I continue to read, write, think, and debate. If I thought I had all of the answers, I would stop.

Imagine, if you will, a 'tarzan' like man. We'll call him 'Greg'. Greg was somehow raised completely outside of human society. He's never heard of God, or Yahweh, or Allah, or Brahma, or Vishnu, or Pele, or Zeus, or Xenu, or

Joseph Smith, or Warren Jeffs, or L. Ron Hubbard. Never read a sacred text. Never prayed.

You, a Muslim Cleric, a Scientology, and a Hindu are all trying to teach him why your texts are right. That your beliefs represent the “most complete” gospel of an almighty, supernatural being. How do you demonstrate without question that the validity of your claims exceeds that of the others?

Why am I here? The stunning and beautiful collaboration of physics and biology and chaos that somehow culminated in my eventual birth. If that is not correct, please educate me, and provide evidence.

Where will I go? I did not exist for ~13 billion years. I will cease existing somewhere between now and approximately 40 years from now, on average. If that is not correct, I have great interest in learning of my future destination. Please educate me, and provide evidence.

When I speak to my mother, I sometimes make demands. I do make arguments. I do listen to her responses. The difference between my mother and God is that my mother speaks back – in an unambiguous way – and does not claim to be omnipotent or omniscient.

“How many wishes would this God Genie you imagine need to grant to convince you Justin?”

Let's start with one, and move on from there.

If there is a God and He knows me, He knows what it would take to convince me. He either doesn't care, or has chosen not to act to accomplish this task.

I'm trying to “drive the car”, but it is out of gas. It is impossible to drive the car if it won't start. It is impossible to start the car without gasoline. I am waiting for some gasoline (evidence). You seem to say, “The gas is over there. Take them some gas, and they'll give you more gas.” Of course, we know where this argument goes. Round and round and round and round and round and round and round.

“If you want evidence, you know where and how to find it.”

I have your evidence-free assertions that if I read...wait... study the Mormon scriptures and if I already know the answer I want to get, then pray for the answer I want to get, that I'll get my precious evidence.

I have my mother-in-law's evidence-free assertions that if I read and study The Bible, and pray, that I'll know that Mormonism is false and that God will save me by grace alone.

Jake, why do you refuse to know there is a teapot? If you know there is a teapot, and you ask NASA, with real intent, then NASA will confirm that there is a teapot. If they don't confirm that there is a teapot, it must be that you didn't already know there was a teapot, and your intent was too weak.

“Please don't respond ‘trust me, I tried in the past.’”

I am supposed to take you at your word that you have evidence and a reliable method to receive evidence. You can't take me at my word that I faithfully accomplished these tasks in the past? You can't take me on my word that I would have been having this exact same type of conversation with an atheist were I back at 16 years old? That I knew “without a shadow of a doubt, that my Heavenly Father loves me and watches out for me.”?

I eventually learned that what I knew was not knowledge at all, but merely oft-repeated, evidence-free assertions of knowledge. Now I search for reliable evidence.

What other proof will you accept that I have done these things? Only if I begin to believe in god? “I'm right because, when you agree with me, I'll be right.”

“What do you have to lose?”

Please read about [Pascal's Wager](#).

I am sure that you believe all you say. I will take you at your word on your actions and beliefs. If they are the truth, I hope that your god and/or savior will provide you with the necessary evidence or reasoning or wording to finally convince me. Mayhaps you could pray on that.

Until then, I remain a skeptic and an atheist.

Cheers,
Justin

October 28, 2016

SEVENTEEN – JAKE

So the “wasted” tithing of your loved ones doesn’t even go towards that project you despise so much.

Maybe if your research was as well conducted as you might try and suggest, it would actually be supported by the internet which easily dismantled that issue.

Who is getting rich off of that? The people who work for it I imagine, just like any other corporation. It is separate from tithing though.

Why must I justify the actions of a church full of hypocrites, sinners, and the unrighteous? You heard me, myself included. “I am not a saint, unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying.” -Nelson Mandela

My argument is not that the church is perfect. My argument is that there is a God. He can speak to you. He speaks to prophets. His teachings are perfect. He is perfect.

You have a vote in the church. You could choose not to sustain the brethren. There is an increasing number of individuals who do show that they oppose the brethren. That’s for them to decide. They are then encouraged to go talk to their stake presidents (or whoever they are supposed to) and tell them their issues, and concerns, so that they may be properly addressed.

“You, a Muslim Cleric, a Scientology, and a Hindu are all trying to teach him why your texts are right. That your beliefs represent the “most complete” gospel of an almighty, supernatural being. How do you demonstrate without question that the validity of your claims exceeds that of the others?”

My argument is not that my texts are right. My argument is that there is a God. He told me the texts are right. I would encourage them to ask Him and to do whatever he says. Even if he says something contrary to what I have said. I'm a flawed, imperfect human who is not all knowing. It's less about knowing “the Church” and more about knowing “the Gospel” and actually knowing God. Yes, actually knowing him.

It's not blind acceptance to know God. It's blind acceptance to act like you do when you don't.

“Why am I here? The stunning and beautiful collaboration of physics and biology and chaos that somehow culminated in my eventual birth. If that is not correct, please educate me, and provide evidence.”

You are correct! Ladies and Gentleman, we have a winner! What about the chaos part? The part you don't understand?

The chaos, the random chance? My God used a stunning and beautiful collaboration of physics and biology to create you. I know this because he told me. My only evidence is a firsthand statement. If you want evidence, I encourage you ask him yourself.

“Where will I go? I did not exist for ~13 billion years. I will cease existing somewhere between now and approximately 40 years from now, on average. If that is not correct, I have great interest in learning of my future destination. Please educate me, and provide evidence.”

“Cease existing”. What does this mean? Can you imagine a void? The nothingness of death? The incomprehensible lack of everything? I have tried to many times, and I cannot grasp it. What I also know from a firsthand statement from God is that there is more after death. That our bodies will die and decay and become part of the earth, all while still existing. Our bodies will continue to exist even while spiritless. Our spirits will continue to exist even while bodyless. Which is harder to “Imagine” or understand? The void of existence? Or continued existence? I do not argue you should accept continued existence because it’s easier to believe, but I do point it out because you demand “A mountain of evidence” for continued existence, but do not

demand “a mountain of evidence” for the void after death that I think is a much more substantial and hard to except claim which should be supported by substantial evidence.

“When I speak to my mother, I sometimes make demands. I do make arguments. I do listen to her responses. The difference between my mother and God is that my mother speaks back – in an unambiguous way – and does not claim to be omnipotent or omniscient.”

That’s great Justin. You should try listening to God’s responses the same way then. How has God claimed anything? Remember, you don’t believe in him. To you, he has claimed nothing.

“How many wishes would this God Genie you imagine need to grant to convince you Justin?”

Remember where I clearly said “That is NOT my God”? Yeah, my God isn’t a Genie even if you totally misunderstood me. He’s not going to appear just because you rubbed the lamp (said a prayer), and start granting wishes.

“If there is a God and He knows me, He knows what it would take to convince me. He either doesn’t care, or has chosen not to act to accomplish this task.”

He does care very much. He has given you the agency to learn of him for yourself which you refuse to do. He does not force you to know him and bow down before him. He knows what it would take to convince you, he could do it too. But he also knows if you will reject him no matter what, or learn of him for yourself. Either way, the action required is yours, not his.

“I’m trying to “drive the car”, but it is out of gas.”

Nope. Just simply nope. Did you forget the car analogy? I know my analogies aren’t perfect, but I thought it was alright! Do you remember it? in it, You said you wanted to drive, but you did not know if the “thing” was actually a “car”. I have drove the car, and often do. I encouraged you to come drive it. You decided to look under the hood and were confused and decided that it was not a car and could not be driven. I told you to come drive it, and see for yourself. You refused. I told you how to drive it. You refused. This is the problem.

The steps were

1. Start the car.
2. Put it in the right gear.
3. Push the gas (and wait for the engine to respond).

Which translates to

1. Pray to him.
2. Pray 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.

Assume this car isn't reliant on Gas, because it doesn't make sense with my analogy and because it's confusing you. We can change 3. Push the "gas" to 3. Push the "go pedal" so that you will not be confused as to what the fuel of the car is.

"I have your evidence-free assertions that if I read... wait...study the Mormon scriptures and if I already know the answer I want to get, then pray for the answer I want to get, that I'll get my precious evidence."

No, apparently you have lies that did not come from my mouth. I encourage you to talk to God. Get a first hand statement from him. Then you will have your evidence. Talk to him. Express to him your concerns, frustrations, doubts,

fears, understanding, questions, etc. Pour out your soul to Him. What do you have to lose if he doesn't exist? You could spend the time that you would spend responding to me if you need to find time. What do you have to lose if He does exist and you refused to? Pascal's Wager.

"Jake, why do you refuse to know there is a teapot? If you know there is a teapot, and you ask NASA, with real intent, then NASA will confirm that there is a teapot. If they don't confirm that there is a teapot, it must be that you didn't already know there was a teapot, and your intent was too weak."

I do not refuse to know there is a teapot. You have not given me a way to know that there is. I have given you a way to know there is a God, and you refuse to do it. Thus you refuse to know God by refusing to do what you would need to know him.

I do not blame a lack of knowing a teapot on a lack of intent. I do blame not honestly talking to God on not getting an answer. This is a comparison of two unlike things. A better comparison might have been to "Ask the teapot if the teapot exists". But teapots don't talk, and there is no way to communicate with the teapot. God talks though, and there is a way to communicate with him, so the comparison still would not have worked.

“That I knew “without a shadow of a doubt, that my Heavenly Father loves me and watches out for me.”?”

How did you know this? What evidence would you have had for such a claim? This is again a comparison of two unlike things. I know there is a God because I have talked to him. You have never known that there is a God, or had a conversation with him. You have blindly accepted his existence in the past and wisely no longer blindly do.

I have many doubts, and questions still. I am a skeptic. I do not know all things related to the gospel or church. What I do know, is that there is a God. And that Jesus Christ lived, and is God. I know from evidence. There are things I believe in without having a knowledge of. The existence of God is not one of them.

I do not blindly accept God. I put him to the test. I do not encourage you to blindly accept him, rather, to put him to the test. What good is idle gossip about God who you don't think exists?

The point of my statement was that you should try again now. And that you have nothing to lose from trying again now. Why are you scared to try again? Why do you refuse to try again? What will you lose if you try again? If you are

open to his existence still, isn't it only logical to keep seeking to know He exists?

What about Pascal's Wager would you like to discuss? I am familiar with it, and I refamiliarized myself with it. I do not think you should blindly accept God just in case he actually does exist. I think that if he does exist (which he does), and you didn't take the time to find that he does, that you will regret it.

My God doesn't prove himself by giving me the words I would need to convince you. It's not human words that should convince you at all. It's not me who should convince you at all. It's the spirit that should overwhelm you when God speaks to you that should convince you. It's the actions that you are refusing to take that should convince you. My prayers are not that I will have words that will be convincing to you. It's not my words that should convince you at all. The words that should convince you, are God's.

P.S. "Mayhaps" is not a word I have heard before, but I do like it and find that it's meaning is clear. I think I'm going to need to start using it XD

October 28, 2016

EIGHTEEN – JUSTIN

Should you accuse me of trivializing or mocking the suicides of suffering teens again, LGBT or otherwise, this conversation will abruptly end. You cannot conceive of how much this topic pains me and breaks my heart and you will respect that, or you can feel free to debate another atheist on their blog.

I do not believe that acknowledging their suffering is trivializing them. I do not believe that acknowledging *one* of the many causes of that suffering is trivializing them. Acknowledging that many teens feel severe and debilitating conflicts over their sexuality and their religious beliefs is not trivializing them. Pointing out a cause of their suffering is not trivializing them. One of the biggest problems these children face is that they feel alone with their issues because too many choose to ignore it.

Why did I leave that off the quote? Because it's nonsense. We're not defined by my race, but one might say I'm a "White American" or a "Black American" or a "Mormon." This seems nothing more than a dismissive ploy to diminish and "trivialize" (him, not you) the suffering being felt by individuals and families. Suffering that sometimes ends in irrevocable tragedy. Suffering that is not, in any way, trivial.

If you want to go on with Mr. Bendar's nonsense, he equates homosexuality with a birth-defect. Why? Because an ancient, evidence-free, magic-based book tells him that it's a "sin."

There is no reason for homosexuals to feel shame, or guilt, or conflict about their sexual desires. Yet, LDS leaders (like many other religious leaders) constantly rail against them. Rail against their desire for a healthy sex life. Rail against their desire for loving relationships and marriages. Rail against their desire for loving families and children. Tell them their love is a "sin." Encouraging demonstrably harmful and damaging practices like celibacy, or sham-heterosexual marriages, or, worst of all, reparation therapy to overcome this perceived 'sin.' All based on magical thinking. All based on religion. All based on irrational thought. That is why I think magical thinking/religious thinking is dangerous and harmful. Outside of those irrelevant texts, there is no rational reason for their continued persecution of innocent members and citizens.

Yes, yes, yes. The Church doesn't pay for commercial ventures with tithing money. Bravo. Apparently accounting tricks and monetary shell games are enough to placate God, Jesus, you, and the rest of the congregation. I find it

shamefully transparent and irresponsibly arrogant. I've written of this before:

<http://www.secular-reality.com/2016/06/17/laying-up-treasures/>

<http://www.secular-reality.com/2015/07/08/a-quicksand-of-deceit/>

I have read the dishonest apologetic nonsense that attempts to explain away this obvious moral failing. I find it laughable. Billions of people on this planet suffer in poverty while The LDS Church, who claims moral superiority and authority, spends \$1.5B non-tithing money so that rich folk in Utah can buy an iPhone. I find this hypocritical, unethical, and immoral. If you were in charge, Jake, I believe you would be far more moral and responsible.

North Korea has unanimous elections too.

Have you ever heard of Douglas Wallace? He was an LDS member in the 1970's. He opposed the brethren for their racism and, in fact, ordained a black man to the priesthood before the 1978 "revelation." According to current LDS Church positions and essays, Douglas Wallace was far more righteous on this issue than the brethren of the time. Yet, he was excommunicated for his righteousness. I wonder why

God would let that happen? Maybe this isn't His church? Maybe He isn't there?

<https://mormonheretic.org/2011/07/10/events-leading-up-to-the-1978-revelation/>

You previously argued that your texts are “the most complete”. I hearken back to your pizza analogy. How do you demonstrate to Greg that, although The Qu’ran and The Bible may have some truth to them, that The Book of Mormon, D&C, and Book of Abraham make a more complete pizza? Do you have any verifiable methodology which demonstrates this? You’ll have him talk to God? Greg doesn’t know or believe yet that there is a god. How will Greg know that God is talking back? How do you describe the experience he should expect? What if Greg doesn’t get an answer from God about any of the religious texts? Are you all right? Are you all wrong?

I do believe it is blind acceptance to know God. I did it myself. You know because God himself told you. I believe that you believe that. When He tells me, I’ll believe it too. Until then, the universe seems to work precisely as if He isn’t there. There is very little difference between an incorporeal, floating, heatless dragon and no dragon at all.

“Do you ever think of yourself as actually dead, laying in a box with a lid on it? Nor do I really. Seems silly to be depressed by it. I mean, one thinks of it like being alive in a box. One keeps forgetting to take into account that fact that one is dead. Which should make all the difference. Shouldn’t it? I mean, you’d never know you were in a box would you? It would be just like you’re asleep in a box. Not that I’d like to sleep in a box mind you. Not without any air. You’d wake up dead for a start and then where would you be? In a box. That’s the bit I don’t like frankly. That’s why I don’t think of it.” – Tom Stoppard, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead

“Cease existing”, in this context, means that the biological and chemical processes responsible for consciousness in my brain will cease and I will no longer be conscious. Just because we can’t imagine something, or don’t know something, doesn’t mean we get to make up whatever answer most appeals to us. No, I can’t imagine oblivion. Nor can I imagine an omnibenevolent, omniscient, omnipotent being who would allow such suffering as exists on this planet. That’s not evidence for or against either proposal.

I’m listening for God as I do my mother. My mother has called. God hasn’t. I’ll let you know if He does.

“God is not a genie.” He’s just a powerful being who sometimes grants wishes, only if He feels like it, but the wishes He continues to grant seem to get much less impressive as our scientific understanding of history, biology, geology, astronomy, and physics increases.

“Assume this car isn’t reliant on gas.”

But cars are reliant on gas, aren’t they? And ‘God’ is reliant on faith. I’m not trying to derail your analogy, but I do think it’s a good analogy from my perspective. If I have no gas, the car will not start. Doesn’t matter how nice the car is, what gears it has, how nice the sound system, or how much I want it to go. The car will not go.

If I have no faith, I have no “knowledge” of this god. Doesn’t matter how much I like the idea of an afterlife, or seeing loved ones, or having divine powers, or divine knowledge. The car will not go. Without faith, I have no reasonable expectation of an answer from a god who provides no evidence of his existence.

I don’t believe I did, but I apologize if you feel I put words in your mouth.

“I encourage you to talk to God. Get a first hand statement from him. Then you will have your evidence.”

Following your exact words,

“God? Are you there?”

Can I write it down like that? Or, do I have to say it in my mind? Or, do I have to speak it aloud? Or, do I have to kneel on a prayer mat and face east? Because, thus far, I've gotten no answer. Let me know what I'm doing wrong, what prayer method you used, what words you spoke, and what evidence you have to support your particular methodology.

The teapot is there, Jake. I testify of its existence. I know if you just contact NASA they will confirm to you that there is a teapot. That's the way you can know there is a teapot. I have given you the means. Why do you refuse to do it? I received a phone call from NASA. They told me there is a teapot. I know without a shadow of a doubt that there is a teapot. Why don't you ask NASA? What do you have to lose?

“How did you know this? What evidence would you have had for such a claim? This is again a comparison of two unlike things. I know there is a God because I have talked to him. You have never known that there is a God, or had a conversation with him. You have blindly accepted his existence in the past and wisely no longer blindly do.”

That's very alike a conversation I had with myself just before I became an atheist.

I have only your word that you have really spoken to God. I believe that you believe it. I believe that most Mormons believe it. I also know many former Mormons who were convinced that they had spoken personally with God but no longer do. When you can demonstrate that you have, beyond anecdotal claims, then you'll have something to convince me.

I am trying now. Really. I just prayed, just as my mother, father, grandparents, bishops, primary teachers, Sunday school teachers all taught me to do. Just as I did innumerable times as a teenager. Just as I did when I begged God for knowledge and help in overcoming my doubts. "Heavenly Father, please help me to know that you exist. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen."

Either He doesn't hear me, doesn't care, or isn't there. In combination with all other evidence (and extreme lack thereof), the latter seems most likely to me.

Cheers,

Justin

P.S. – 'Mayhaps' is a gift to my vocabulary from Stephen King and, now, from me, to you. Enjoy.

October 31, 2016

NINETEEN – JAKE

Okay, so the thing about the car analogy, was that you were confused how the car worked so you didn't drive it.

The thing about you bringing up that you are convinced it is out of gas and thus doesn't work, fits my analogy. I'm telling you the car runs, and you are convinced it won't.

I do believe you Justin, I do believe you are at least praying. I'm not gonna tell you what you must physically do to pray, but I encourage you to pour out your frustrations, questions, and concerns to God. Pour out your heart, don't just ask a question. Talk to him, and when He answers, you will know it.

You will know when he answers, there are times where I forget he has answered my prayers. There are many times where I forget something that is that substantial and should be easy to remember, so I try and pray often so it don't forget. I also write a really not well maintained journal.

The exact words, and the exact method you pray I think are less important than that you pour your heart out to God. It's a hard thing to do if you're convinced He isn't there and won't respond, I recognize that. The questions and concerns you have are very valid, maybe the LDS church is wrong, if there is no God, then it for sure is. I encourage you

to honestly, and truly pour out your heart to your maker. If he does not answer immediately, wait. If he doesn't answer ever, then know that it wasn't because of a lack of faith. It's because he is not there. If you have really done all your best, and been honest, you know it. If you truly pour out your heart to him, he will respond.

Put me to the test, put him to the test Justin. That's how I got my answer, and that's all I can offer for you to get yours.

How will you recognize the answer? You WILL recognize the answer. God speaks to people different, he speaks to them personally, the way he speaks to you will make sense to you. It will be clear. That's what I know from my experience and that is all I have to offer you.

How could God let his members do something awful? Well he gave us agency didn't he? How could he let Douglas Wallace be excommunicated? I don't have an answer that will satisfy you. You blame it on God not being there, I blame it on the people not asking God or communicating with him. I don't know a person who manages to pray about all things and never make mistakes. That includes everyone in the church. Everyone.

As I stated before, you shouldn't believe in an afterlife simply because it appeals to you more. But the point of my

statement was that you accept that death is the end. Which I think is more substantial of a claim than life after death. So I wonder what the mountain of evidence you have is. How could you know with more certainty that the person's "spirit" (however you want to think about it) is gone forever?

Mayhaps you can teach me as you have done a lot in this discussion :)

October 31, 2016

TWENTY – JUSTIN

“What can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence.” – Christopher Hitchens

You assert that prayer works. You provide no evidence that it does.

I put God to the test For years and years and again as I replied to your comments yesterday. You assert that I will know when He answers. I never have and still have not. I have no evidence that He does or will. Almost as if He isn't there. I'm pretty sure He isn't.

I must take your assertion of what you have done and what you “know.” You, apparently, cannot accept my assertion that I have repeatedly conducted your proposed experiment and spent countless hours pouring out my heart to a god I “knew” was there and would answer my prayers. Except He didn't and hasn't, almost as if He isn't there. I'm pretty sure He isn't.

“And it came to pass that I did pray aloud, and in my mind, “Is there no god?”, and answer there came none.”

Now, before I pour my heart out to anyone, I ensure that they exist. I do not find any value in talking into a phone with no one on the other line. I find that talking to myself is

just as therapeutic. I also ensure that anyone to whom I will pour out my heart is trustworthy and moral. I find the Christian god lacking in both existence and morality.

Furthermore, why? What value will God provide? If there is a god or gods, sure, I would like to know it, but are there any benefits beyond that? I am happy and well adjusted. I do not feel like I need to wish for anything. I do not feel like I need to worship anything. I do not feel that I need to give thanks to someone who either hasn't affected my life or has affected my life so minimally that He might as well not exist.

I appreciate you acknowledging that you don't have answers that are satisfactory. I find it odd that the prophets who claim to speak to, for, and on behalf of God never brought up the racist priesthood ban until 1978. From Brigham Young to Spencer Kimball. Every prophet defended it. Countless apostles both defended it and justified it (Let me know if you need me to post the links). I also find it odd that God wouldn't just bring it up in conversation, if prophets actually have conversations with Him as Joseph Smith claims he did. I find it morally reprehensible that both God and the prophets, as they watched so many of their faithful followers, so persecuted by both society and their church, begging for a revelation,

could fail to bring it up. Almost as if the prophets were simply the racists The Church acknowledges they were, merely talking to themselves.

I am aware of no evidence of a spirit. Nor a soul. It's somewhat logical to assume that the soul that doesn't exist still won't exist after death. All the scientific evidence seems to demonstrate that we are physical, biological beings and nothing more. If you claim there is such a thing as a spirit or a soul, all you need to provide is...well...you know.

Cheers,
Justin

November 1, 2016

TWENTY-ONE – JAKE

Okay, I guess I agree with your first claim.

“What can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence.”

You have yet to disprove the existence of God. You claim that you don't believe he is there, and have not provided any evidence that he isn't. I can dismiss your claims and assume he is there even if i didn't have evidence then.

“Have you met my neighbor Bob?”

“Nope”

“Oh he's great, you should go meet him!”

“There is no Bob! You cannot prove it! I do not know Bob, or believe he is there or is your neighbor! You have no proof so I will live my life as if you are neighborless!

“But if you go to his house and knock on the door (not ring the doorbell, only knock), and wait for him to get to it, (sometimes he walks a little slow), you'll see him for yourself!”

“I will not, why can't you understand I've never met Bob! Bob is not there, you have no neighbor.”

“That's ridiculous...”

Why is your understanding the most correct? Why is your secular, agnostic, atheist understanding the only correct

and the most sensible? Why do you believe anyone besides yourself exists? Why do you accept more than solipsism? Nothing can be verified. How do you know that you aren't alone in an empty void and your mind has created everyone else and everything around you? How can you verify anything as existing? If everything is electrical signals to the brain, why couldn't your brain easily trick you into existing when you really don't? What evidence do you have that anyone besides yourself actually exists?

At some point, you just accept things. You accept a concept of "existence". You accept that other people really exist, you accept the claims of scientists who died years ago that you never met and have never seen, heard, or felt in person. You accept that they did exist.

Please, explain to me, why there is nothing supernatural? Nothing "magical" about this life.

Nothing can be verified. Who invented science? Your senses can easily be tricked. What you see, can be an illusion. What you hear, can be synthesized. What you feel, can be synthesized. What you smell, can be falseified. What you taste can be fooled by molecular gastronomy.

At what point are your sense accurate? At what point is reasoning real?

Why are you able to accept the existence of yourself but not of anything supernatural? You except many unverifiable things that could be dismissed by a lack of evidence.

I accept existence of myself and others. I accept logic and reasoning. I accept the existence of God.

You can argue that they are all wrong, I do not understand the picking and choosing though. Seems illogical to me.

I do not ask you to blindly accept God until you know he exists. I believe you have tried and have not found he exists. I also believe that you have not found any proof that he doesn't exists.

You may say that you do not argue that there isn't a God. But if you don't argue there isn't a God, then there really isn't a point to this blog. If there is no God, all the people who believe in God are wrong. If there is no God then all who believe in Him are wrong.

So where is your evidence? Why should I recognize my beliefs are all wrong and in vain and yours are right? I do not understand why Justin. If you have no answer, then what is your motive for this blog?

November 1, 2016

TWENTY-TWO – JUSTIN

Your current tactic is known as shifting the burden of proof and I suspect you know that. I made no assertions with regards to the existence of the supernatural, god, nor gods. I am unconvinced by the evidence, and lack thereof, that you provide of your assertion.

Claimant: "I have discovered a new species of red gorilla in the deserts of Africa."

Skeptic: "Awesome. Do you have photos?"

Claimant: "Oh. I ran out of film."

Skeptic: "Did you bring back specimen."

Claimant: "No. They're too big."

Skeptic: "A blood sample?"

Claimant: "I couldn't get close enough."

Skeptic: "Then, I guess I'll have to withhold judgment that you discovered a new species."

Claimant: "Why won't you believe me? You can't prove that I didn't discover a new species of red gorilla."

Skeptic: "No more than you can prove you did, apparently."

Claimant: "I can fly like Superman."

Skeptic: "Show me!"

Claimant: "I can't do it while people are watching."

Skeptic: "Can we record it?"

Claimant: "Nope. Still doesn't work."

Skeptic: “How about we release a balloon, let it raise for five minutes, then you retrieve it.”

Claimant: “I can’t carry anything whilst I fly.”

Skeptic: “Then I guess there’s no way to know if you can fly like Superman.”

Claimant: “Why won’t you believe me? You can’t prove that I can’t fly like Superman.”

Skeptic: “No more than you can prove you did, apparently.”

These two conversations demonstrate a few logical fallacies that I encourage you to research. “[Special Pleading](#)”, “[Shifting the Burden of Proof](#)”, and “[Moving the Goalposts](#).” Once again, I recommend “[The Demon Haunted World](#)” by Carl Sagan.

I believe that the secular, agnostic, atheist understanding is the most internally consistent position that has been demonstrated to me. To me, the theory of God and supernatural events introduces inconsistencies between reality as we can measure it and experience it. No supernatural event has ever be consistently reproduced.

“Throughout history, every mystery ever solved has turned out to be ‘not magic.’” – [Tim Minchin](#)

My brain does trick me, all the time. As does yours. One example is often referred to as “optical illusions” or, as Neil

DeGrasse Tyson refers to them, “brain failures.” See shapes in the clouds? [Pareidolia](#). Your brain seeing patterns that are not really there. In fact, the human eye is so flawed, our brain has to make up large portions of our apparent acute vision – which may not be a completely accurate representation of our environment. That’s the price of being an imperfect, biological, evolved species.

I don’t know that I’m not the only person, or that I’m not living in some simulation. It doesn’t seem that I am, but I can’t prove it. Since I know of no way of testing or evaluating that hypothesis, however, it doesn’t currently effect me; just like the String Theory multiverse. Until I can test it and evaluate it, I’ll go on living and experiencing this universe in the best way my senses allow. That’s the evidence I currently have.

Not all religions can be right, since they are inconsistent and contradictory, but they can all be wrong.

My motive for this blog, and this conversation, is to discuss logical inconsistencies and errors in critical thinking. To encourage thought, debate, skepticism, reason, and rationality. To help free minds from the dangers of magical and religious thinking, as I see them.

Cheers,
Justin

November 2, 2016

TWENTY-THREE – JAKE

I'm not pulling tactics from some play book. I'm not educated in that way, I'm just trying to use logic to explain something you don't understand in whatever way makes sense to you. You can call it whatever you would like.

If only your blog had been around years ago, maybe then the works of Sir Issac Newton, Galileo Galilei, Copernicus, Sir Frances Bacon, and Gregor Mendal would have been logical humans. They would have been critical thinkers who sought for truth by not excepting the supernatural.

Albert Einstein was not religious, but even he recognized the impossibility of a non “created” universe. The Encyclopedia Britannica says of him: “Firmly denying atheism, Einstein expressed a belief in “Spinoza’s God who reveals himself in the harmony of what exists.”

This actually motivated his interest in science, as he once remarked to a young physicist: “I want to know how God created this world, I am not interested in this or that phenomenon, in the spectrum of this or that element. I want to know His thoughts, the rest are details.” Einstein’s famous epithet on the “uncertainty principle” was “God does not play dice” – and to him this was a real statement about a God in whom he believed. A famous saying of his was “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.”

November 4, 2016

Twenty-four – Justin

I did not intend to imply that you were working from a playbook. I was merely pointing out that there are known logical fallacies with which you might like to familiarize yourself. If you continue to research and debate religion with atheists, you'll come across them quite frequently. Sagan's book is not necessarily anti-religious, but explains many of these failures of logic in a readable and entertaining way.

Even the smartest men are capable of mistakes. Einstein introduced his cosmological constant. Along with being religious, Isaac Newton was convinced that alchemy was a real science. Alchemy is long dead, but fortunately, along the way, Newton invented something evidence based, like calculus.

Many scientists are religious. Because they are largely incompatible, many compartmentalize their religious beliefs away from their scientific knowledge. A fine strategy if it makes them happy. I see no reason for it.

I believe most of the Einstein quotes are misinterpreted, but allowing that you and other religious believers are correct, Einstein demonstrated evidence for his Theories of Light,

Gravity, and Relativity. When he does the same for a science loving, dice playing deity, I'll accept that to.

It seems we've probably run out of steam in this conversation, but thank you for the amiable discussion. Feel free to comment further should your studies bring up new information and discussion points.

Cheers,
Justin

November 4, 2016

Twenty-five – Jake

My point is not bandwagon. Not that you should be religious because many others have been and are. It's that religious belief doesn't have to be illogical.

Einstein did not know if there was a God, but he thought it was illogical to assume there wasn't. Are you really more logical than him ya think?

November 4, 2016

TWENTY-SIX – JUSTIN

Albert Einstein:

“The word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weakness, the Bible a collection of honorable, but still purely primitive, legends which are nevertheless pretty childish. No interpretation, no matter how subtle, can change this for me.” – 1954

It seems that Dr. Einstein may have had deep, philosophical, and evolving thoughts on the subject of God and religion and it's role in science.

I do not quote or believe scholars and philosophers and scientists like Dawkins, Darwin, Hitchens, Dillahunty, Sagan, Minchin, et. al. because they are smarter than I. There are many religious individuals who are much smarter than I. I read and quote them because the arguments they present are convincing and logical.

“The further the spiritual evolution of mankind advances, the more certain it seems to me that the path to genuine religiosity does not lie through the fear of life, and the fear of death, and blind faith, but through striving after rational knowledge. In this sense I believe that the priest must become a

teacher if he wishes to do justice to his lofty educational mission.” – Einstein

Cheers,
Justin

November 4, 2016

TWENTY-SEVEN – JAKE

Justin, I agree with you that people can become very blinded by religion and believe very non-logical things. I agree. I do not defend all religions, I recognize the points your being up and I've noticed the same thing in my life.

I cannot honestly deny my experiences with God. If you accepted my experiences without proof, it would be illogical. I cannot provide proof for you. So I've encouraged you to get evidence the same way I did.

It is not illogical to believe in a God you know exists. I want you to recognize that. The glory of the God I believe in, is wisdom. Belief in God is not incompatible with logic, or accepting science and biology.

November 5, 2016

INTERLUDE

After his last post, I did not hear from Jake until January of 2017.

Needless to say, I was shocked by the contents of his next comment.

TWENTY-EIGHT – JAKE

Justin, it has been a long time since I've commented. I have continued to study, and am losing my faith in the LDS church. The points you brought up were fair points, but aren't the reason that I'm losing my faith. When I spoke to you earlier, I defended God. I still believe in God. I don't think the God I believe in is the same that Mormons believe in.

I was going to serve a mission, and was told I was unworthy because of a past transgression that I had repented of. They told me I was unworthy because a specific amount of time had not passed since it happened. They encouraged me to study the atonement, where Christ paid the price for us all. I realized that waiting will not make me worthy, only the atonement of Christ could ever make someone worthy. That was what started this realization. The God I believe in had forgiven me, but that was unimportant to them.

Mormons believe in a certain degree of salvation by works (Baptism, Celestial Marriage, Endowments, Temple work, fulfilling callings, etc.) The Christ I believe in is full of grace and would not reject someone for failing to do these things.

I am sick of trying to justify polygamy in my mind. Times were quite different, but I do not feel comfortable with the

idea of God threatening to take away Joseph's salvation unless he became a Polygamist. I have tried to justify it, as you have seen, but it never has felt right.

I am sick of trying to justify the racist exclusion of the priesthood. Joseph Smith was not a racist, he defended the Native Americans and the black people. In his day, there were black men who were given the priesthood. After his martyrdom that changed and Black men were withheld the priesthood due to racism. I don't believe God's church would not know that all men are equal under God.

Christ taught that the spirit of Elias (Elijah) had come before him, and the people did what they wanted with him. The apostles understood that he spoke of John the Baptist who was beheaded by the people and prepared the people for the coming of Christ. The prophecy in the end of Malachi was fulfilled in Christ's day. It doesn't make sense that the Spirit of Elijah came again to Joseph Smith to restore lost keys, Elijah had already come, at least according to Christ.

Brigham Young taught a doctrine called "Blood Atonement" which was that some Sins are too heinous for the Atonement of Christ to cover them. Upon committing those sins, people were supposed to be executed in a way that made their blood spill onto the floor to atone. To me, the

Blood Atonement of Jesus Christ was good enough to cover our sins. The sins this doctrine applied to were “miscegenation, apostasy, theft, murder, fornication, and adultery”. Anyone who ever illegally downloaded a song cannot be redeemed by Christ and must die in a way that their blood spills on the ground according to this... It’s a horrible teaching.

Bruce R McConkie says that this “doctrine” was only ever theoretical and was never applied. He says there is no doctrine of Blood Atonement, and that it would only apply in a theocracy and only apply to people who were “enlightened” and committed these sins. (Such as someone who had a perfect knowledge of God and then did these things.) It’s believed that John D. Lee (mixed up in the Mountain Meadows Massacre, possible in charge of it) was executed in a way related to “Blood Atonement” and Brigham Young said that he still has “yet to pay for the half of his crimes”. I do not like the speculation of this teaching.

From the official LDS website it says “At times during the reformation, President Young, his counselor Jedediah M. Grant, and other leaders preached with fiery rhetoric, warning against the evils of those who dissented from or opposed the Church. Drawing on biblical passages, particularly from the Old Testament, leaders taught that

some sins were so serious that the perpetrator's blood would have to be shed in order to receive forgiveness."

John D. Lee said that he was a scapegoat to protect the other Church leaders who were involved, and his final words were "I do not believe everything that is now being taught and practiced by Brigham Young. I do not care who hears it. It is my last word... I have been sacrificed in a cowardly, dastardly manner." In 1961, he was reinstated as a member. About 85 years after his execution.

I have been studying the New Testament for the first time in my life, and I don't think that the God in the New Testament is the same as the one in the LDS church. I'm not entirely sure about it all yet, but I am no longer sure that the modern prophets are not the "false prophets" Christ warned of who would show "many signs" unto man and perform miracles.

I still do not except the belief that there is nothing spiritual about this existence and that God does not exist. I have had experiences with God that I can provide no proof of to you, but I do have faith in God whether I leave the LDS church or not.

January 6, 2017

TWENTY-NINE – JUSTIN

Jake, good to hear from you. I'm glad you've continued to consider and study your beliefs. Before I respond to your specific comments, I just want to point you to

<http://www.mormonstories.org> &

<http://www.mormontransitions.org/> – a couple of sites/blogs/podcasts that provide some help and resources for Mormons who are experiencing a faith transition. I think it's important to know and feel that you are not alone on your journey.

From your experience, it sounds as if you have come to the conclusion that many have; that The LDS Church is more of a bureaucracy than a caring, loving representation of a benevolent god. It was part of the reason I point out the seeming hypocrisy of how The LDS Church spends the vast resources in their charge. To me, it seems more businesslike than Christlike.

I completely agree with you; if there is a god, God's church would not subjugate women through polygamy, command bigotry against those of different races, nor order and condone murder.

Having recently finished reading Blood of The Prophets by Will Bagley, a history book dealing with The Mountain

Meadows Massacre and the early founding of Utah, Mr. Young's 'blood atonement' doctrine is one of the most disturbing policies brought by The LDS Church, and certainly does not seem to be a teaching directed by "The Prince of Peace." To those of us who study the history of Utah and The LDS Church, and in defiance of Mr. McConkie's strident denial, 'blood atonement' was certainly employed, with bloody, vicious, and barbaric results, by faithful and obedient saints.

As you know, I currently believe all prophets to be "false prophets", but in November of 2015, I stood [alongside many others in a park](#) across the street from The Church Office Building in Salt Lake City. We were all decrying the new Church policy which called LGBT spouses "apostates" and denied their children any Church ordinances. Many, [including myself](#), also tendered our resignation from membership in The Church. Having read The Book of Mormon, standing beside City Creek, in the shadow of that massive building, I couldn't help but be reminded of Lehi's dream; as Mr. Monson chided those gathered with a dismissive "[tweet](#)." I felt far more love, acceptance, and joy amongst those people than I ever felt in a chapel. (A heart-rending speech from [that event here](#).)

I sincerely wish you the best of luck on your journey, wherever that takes you, and hope that you will keep in touch. Skepticism, doubt, study, and learning are all valuable companions on any journey for knowledge.

Cheers,
Justin

January 6, 2017

THIRTY – JAKE

Thanks Justin. In studying theology, Mormons believe in some really wild stuff.

The Mormons in transition webpage has access to a book called “where does it say that?” Which is a book containing quotes about LDS beliefs. The Adam-God section has all sorts of quotes from different places Brigham Young taught it for example.

I don't know that the Christian theological God makes much sense. In Mormonism, God can be described like this: A kitten becomes a cat, a puppy becomes a dog, a child of God becomes God. Your physical father, will always remain your father. Whether he passed away, or you one day too become a father. He will always be “father”.

Mormons believe in an eternal, yet created God. A God who made this earth and sent us to it so we could learn and grow. A God with logic, and with an actual reason behind creation.

Biblical Christians often teach that God only made us to worship him, and that heaven is where we worship God for all eternity. That sounds so self absorbed, it doesn't sound like the compassionate Christ in the New Testament. But they believe in an eternal God, that always was, and always

will be. A God that created all things. I just don't understand why this God loves to watch people. People are his animal of choice, he just really loves people to worship and fear him.

There is also division between who goes to heaven, and what it means. Mormons have a strange theological position sometimes called "universalism". That basically teaches that all people will be held accountable for what they did based on what they know. If you knew stealing was wrong, and did it anyways, you are a sinner in Mormonism. Everyone in Mormonism gets a kingdom of Glory. Everyone goes to heaven pretty much. Just a different degree.

Biblical Christianity is pretty different in that it teaches simple Heaven, or Hell. Repent and come unto Christ and put your faith in him, or go to hell. All people are accountable to Christian sins in their theology. Whether you were taught it or not.

They are also divided on the atonement. Mormons believe that "AFTER all we can do, it is by grace that we are saved". Christians believe in salvation by faith, which leads us to do good works after, not before.

After much study, on those three points, I think I'd score 1 Mormon, 2 Christian, and 3, Christian.

I'm unsure of how Joseph Smith did what he did if it was fake. I love the sincerity of the story of a regular farm boy going out to pray in the woods and being answered by God, but I'm not sure about what he did after anymore.

Thank you for the resources, I just thought I'd update you, because we're both searching for the truth.

January 11, 2017

THIRTY-ONE – JUSTIN

Mormon theology is certainly unique. Though it is likely an artifact of my own Mormon childhood, I have always thought the origination of The Book of Mormon was a far better story than the origination of The Bible. The direct translation of prophetic recordings rather than a by-committee pick-and-choose between myriad religious texts. D Michael Quinn has some very interesting theories on **“Early Mormonism and the Magic World View.”**

Whether it was invented or borrowed, Joseph Smith created a rich cosmology with some unique religious ideas.

All the differing interpretations of The Bible and other religious texts are a primary reason why I continue to disbelieve their veracity. If these are the words of a deity who desires us to understand his commandments from these books, how are the texts so easily interpreted in so many different ways? How are we to determine exactly how this god wishes us to behave? Is eating pork right or wrong? Are women allowed to teach? Is polygamy a sin? Are we saved by faith alone, or “faith without works is dead?” Why are there dozens of branches of Mormonism? Hundreds of sects of Islam? Thousands of branches of Christianity? (Satirical, irreverent, but informative [video here.](#))

All of the differing religions and Biblical sects can't all be right – because they contradict one another – but they can all be wrong.

The stories of Joseph Smith and his discovery of gold plates, and angels, and translation are powerful. A good story can be compelling, but doesn't make it true. I think the history and evidence cast overwhelming doubt on claims that those events were factual. Have you discovered Fawn Brodie's '[No Man Knows My History](#)'? I think you'll find a lot of the stories familiar, with the benefit of history and detailed documentation. Though it used to be considered an anti-Mormon tome, because it revealed the the method of Joseph's translation with the seer stones, The Kinderhook Plates, Joseph's polygamy, etc., Mormon historians and scholars like Richard Bushman now consider it to be an invaluable resource.

Cheers,
Justin

January 11, 2017

THIRTY-TWO – JAKE

Thanks for sharing “Brother Jake”. I’ve seen all of his videos and they are really well made, using the sort of apologetics you find on official LDS websites.

I think it’s fascinating the Bible is translated from ancient Hebrew and Greek by the power of men, who claim there are errors. Yet after years of additional archaeological documents being found the Bible has been found to be about 99% accurate in translation.

Yet the BoM claims to be “translated” from modified Egyptian by the power of God alone. It was claimed to have the fullness of the gospel and no errors, yet thousands of “corrections to typos from printing” have been fixed. Many of which just happened to teach Christ was the same person as the Father... It has thousands of errors. Yet was supposed to have none.

Surely all the people interpreting the Bible however they want can’t all be right though. I think the Methodist movement, and the Nazarene church and Pentecostal churches (part of the same movement, are the most accurate to what I’ve read so far.

People love to attack the “Mormon God” as if a God who wanted us to continue to grow and learn for all eternity is

the worst thing imaginable. Some Christians believe in a crazy unknowable, incomprehensible, incorporeal, omnipotent, omnipresent, God who judges his kids so harshly that if they do anything wrong they will be put in hell and torment forever.

Which dad makes more sense to you, one that punishes you for something bad you did, but forgives quickly. Or a dad that punishes you as much as possible whenever they see you for all eternity and never forgives you. Some people worship a God like that!? Sounds like he needs help!

In college, in a communication class we've been learning about "self fulfilling prophecies." The LDS church is full of them. The idea is that you become so convinced something will happen that it does. (Like if you tell yourself you'll bomb the test and then you do.)

February 7, 2017

THIRTY-THREE – JUSTIN

I don't believe The Bible is a monument to correct translations. Comparing two of the oldest, most complete manuscripts of The Bible ([Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus](#)) shows a massive number of differences between the two. In addition (I was unaware of this until somewhat recently), different editions of modern Bibles have different books inside. Then there are the "[Gnostic Gospels](#)" which were deemed, by humans, not to be worthy of inclusion, but nonetheless claim the same prophetic source. Why the discrepancies? Which books are actually the unalterable, infallible word of God?

Most archaeologists agree there is [no evidence for Jewish slaves in Egypt](#), nor for [their 40-year journey through the desert](#). Much like the lack of evidence for Lamanites and Nephites, this lack of evidence doesn't prove it didn't happen, but, for me, it begs for further skepticism.

I think I've mentioned before my position that all religions can't be right, but they can all be wrong. How can a powerful god provide such a poor record of His desires & commandments that can be interpreted so many different ways? Is eating pork OK or not OK? Clothes of mixed fabric? Polygamy? Homosexuality? Capital punishment? All of these have different believers pointing to The Bible to

justify their contradictory positions on each. Shouldn't it be more clear cut?

The kind of dad that doesn't make any sense to me is the one who hides from us, leaves hard to find, vaguely worded notes of his desires, and judges us when we can't find them or understand them.

The dad that makes the most sense to me is the one who, is willing to stand by our side, hold our hand, bandage our wounds, do his best to prevent us from hurting ourselves or others, and teaching us how to make good decisions. It's the kind of father I had. [It's the kind of father I try to be.](#)

I'm glad that you continue to share your thoughts and observations as you continue your faith journey. I look forward to each new installment.

Cheers,
Justin

February 21, 2017

THIRTY-FOUR – JAKE

I hear you on the Bible man. The Catholic Bible has I think 7 more Old Testament books. I've actually read some of the Apocrypha too, the Book of Dragon to be exact. It tells the story of Daniel in the lion's den. And then some wandering prophet comes, and I guess pulls him out and they share brunch and have a lovely conversation, then the prophet leaves, and I guess Daniel jumps back down? Anyways, the next day they pull him out and then he goes and destroys the temple of Baal and the temple of the Dragon... it's weird, and it's not a part of the Bible. It was kinda interesting though.

In my experience, all cults follow the ideology of one (or a small group) of people. Mormons follow Joseph Smith. Methodists follow John Weslyn, Catholics follow the Pope, etc. Many Christians can end up following the ideology of one man and make it their theology. They form a Presuppositional opinion.

That's something I did. Which basically meant, no matter what you said Mormonism was right. I would dodge evidence that said otherwise, or I would bend evidence until it confirmed Mormonism. You've seen this firsthand from me! (Sorry about that XD)

I've been talking with an Atheist who has this like crazy. He thinks all Christians are horrible, and immoral people. That's his opinion, and he has no margin for error. He doesn't want there to be a God because he's mad at God (which doesn't make sense because he doesn't believe in him..?) he doesn't want there to be a God, he says God is immoral (which again doesn't make sense if he doesn't exist).

He has no margin for error. He denies the eyewitness accounts of Jesus Christ. Over half of the entire world population is Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, and all 3 religions revere him as a prophet (Christians also see him as the son of God). We have separate eyewitness accounts of him, and his ministry. You can actually read some homicide detectives that have tested the eyewitness accounts as they would test eyewitnesses in a homicide case. Some of these homicide detectives then converted to Christianity because they came to the conclusion that these eyewitnesses were sincere, and what they describe really happened.

This Atheist says "well there aren't very many Roman documents that prove he existed". But we have eyewitnesses! It's 2017 AD, which doesn't make much sense if he never actually lived 2017 years ago! He uses the lack of evidence in one place, as lack of evidence in all places. It's

kinda like saying “The recipe for Grandma’s pie is not in her recipe book. There obviously is no recipe (when in reality she kept it in a separate book)”

The Oldest written language is Hebrew, which was found in Egypt. I forget what it was called, but wasn’t there a writing system created that used Egyptian characters for the Hebrew language? I’m not sure on that, but I thought there was. There is speculation on the Hebrews being slaves in Egypt, but there are also artifacts that show that they were. Also speculative, there have been a couple different archaeologists who have claimed to find chariots, and bones at the bottom of the Red Sea (which Moses parted, and then it swallowed up Pharaoh's army). That’s more controversial though.

Places, and people, and things in the Bible are at least mostly verified by world history. When the Bible talks of these kings, and wars, and cities, they actually exist (unlike the Book of Mormon). Jesus had a spear thrust into his side, and it says that both water and blood came out. Humanity learned over a thousand years later that water comes out of extreme wounds, not just blood, but water too. Which makes sense that they wrote it down even though they didn’t understand it at the time.

That atheist has a presuppositional view, and he CANNOT be wrong.

I have been trying hard to cast away mine. To cast away opinions. To cast away bias.

I have had spiritual experiences I cannot deny. There is evidence the Big Bang happened, but we don't know how the dense sphere of matter came to be. I think it makes sense, that an all powerful God that wasn't created (unlike the Mormon God) would have been able to create the matter needed to cause the Big Bang. I think it makes sense that God would make "the earth" in a spot where life could exist on it. I think it makes a lot of sense that God would somehow bring us humans into being (however he did, that's disputed). I think it makes sense that our universe, species, world, and life are all for a reason. There isn't just a "what, where, who, and how" but there is also a "why". The evidence (notice, not "feelings" but evidence) of my spiritual experiences, and the fact that we exist proves there is a creator. If the universe always existed, and matter was neither created nor destroyed, then the Big Bang is not the origin. There is none. All the matter always existed, and we have to go to where the matter that was In that dense point came from. Perhaps there is more truth another way. But I seek to follow the evidence.

If there isn't a God, so be it. I will go where the evidence leads. Where the evidence points. I don't want to let presuppositional opinions hinder a search for truth.

Biblical Christianity does not follow any one man. No Joseph Smith, no Charles Tayze Russel, no John Weslyn, just God, and the Word of God in the Bible. No mixed in presuppositional opinions, or denominational titles, I think that's where the evidence leads. But I will continue to seek and follow. I'm glad that you keep learning, and doing the same.

Now I meet with missionaries, and it's hard to discuss with them. They have no margin for error. My dad is the same way. I used to be the same way. I can't believe that I was like that. It's crazy!

February 25, 2017

THIRTY-FIVE – JUSTIN

I don't know the atheist to whom you are speaking, but I do know of some atheists who are just as irrational and illogical as the theists against whom they rant. I have relatives who bring them up at any opportunity. Mayhaps he is one of these. Like you, I try and follow the evidence rather than what I want to be true. "Wishing cannot make it so."

You mention anger. Myself, I am not necessarily mad at Christians or Mormons or Muslims or Jews themselves. I am, however, pretty mad at religion and many of the things that human beings do in the name of the deity of their choice. I am mad that people cite The Bible, Qu'ran, Book of Mormon, and Torah to justify sexism, ignorance, violence, hate, and bigotry. Atheist Greta Christina wrote a book about "Why Are You Atheists So Angry" (but here is a shorter video version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUI_MLIqkQE)

As I have pointed out before, I do not believe in god, but, if someone were to provide evidence, I would still consider that deity to be immoral and unworthy of worship. We've discussed this at length. (*"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?”) In fact, I can imagine being extremely angry at said unproven deity should He/She/They ever make themselves known.

Most Biblical scholars agree that “Mark” (not written by anyone named “Mark”) was the first gospel to be written and was written at least 40 years after the supposed death of Christ. Though there are non-Christian references to Jesus, they were written even later. Seeing as how many humans can’t seem to agree on factual evidence today, in a world of high literacy, video, audio, and photographic recording, it seems that many of the “facts” of Jesus’ history are worthy of some tremendous skepticism; especially those claims of supernatural origin, supernatural behavior, and a supernatural power over death.

“Even before he was born, it was known that he would be someone special. A supernatural being informed his mother the child she was to conceive would not be a mere mortal but would be divine. He was born miraculously, and he became an unusually precocious young man. As an adult he left home and went on an itinerant preaching ministry, urging his listeners to live, not for the material things of this world, but for what is spiritual. He gathered a number of disciples around him, who became convinced

that his teachings were divinely inspired, in no small part because he himself was divine. He proved it to them by doing many miracles, healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead. But at the end of his life he roused opposition, and his enemies delivered him over to the Roman authorities for judgment. Still, after he left this world, he returned to meet his followers in order to convince them that he was not really dead but lived on in the heavenly realm. Later some of his followers wrote books about him.” – Bart Ehrman

Mr. Ehrman was not describing Jesus Christ, but rather “Apolonius of Tyana” whose followers believed Jesus to be a fraud and a false prophet. There are also ancient documents, books, and letters inspired by Apolonius.

<http://www.livius.org/articles/person/apollonius-of-tyana/>

<http://www.livius.org/articles/person/apollonius-of-tyana/apollonius-of-tyana-3/>

<http://www.livius.org/articles/person/apollonius-of-tyana/apollonius-of-tyana-4/>

Why isn't Apolonius more famous and revered? Who can know? The popularity of an idea, however, has no bearing on its truthfulness.

From The Exodus to Jesus to Roman History, The Bible, regardless of version, has demonstrated unreliability. I'm not convinced that there is any evidence to trust The Bible as a trustworthy source or historical document.

Sumerian and Mesoamerican glyphs are usually considered to be the oldest written languages – invented independently of one another. Egyptian and Hebrew are considered to be much newer and advanced compared to those.

In my high school years, I held to a similar idea; that God was the “first mover.” The cause of The Big Bang. The instigator of evolution. Ultimately, however, the idea of a supernatural being, outside of time and space, doesn't really explain anything. It's just another mystery without evidence. “What created The Big Bang?” “What created God?” Without evidence, there's no more reason to believe the god cause than any other evidence-free hypothesis.

Keep in touch.

Cheers,
Justin

March 1, 2017

THIRTY-SIX – JAKE

I definitely hear what you're saying man. Even if I respectfully disagree.

I wish you could hear the atheist I've been discussing with. He believes that his cat farted out the universe because "it's a credible theory because my cat exists". He doesn't care about evidence, or truth. He is a drunkard with some very strong opinions.

I don't see God as immoral. I don't think we would need to not have suffering in this life for God to be good. The early apostles in the New Testament were stoned, and beaten for their faith in Christ. They suffered much. Jesus suffered more than any man ever would in Christian theology. In the christian view, suffering breeds strength. A God who wouldn't want us to learn, and experience, and grow, wouldn't be a God I want to worship.

Jesus's story has many contrasts with Apolonius, which is a great point. Jesus's birth, life, and ministry were totally prophesied of in the Old Testament! The "messiah" who modern Jews are still waiting for. The Gospel of Matthew points out many of the prophecies that his life fulfilled. I heard once that there are 353 prophecies that Jesus fulfilled.

“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?”

Christianity is fascinating as a worldview. It's a very futuristic worldview. Where all things are made right in the afterlife. Where this world is unjust, unfair, and mercy seems to be lacking. But the world to come will be perfectly just, and mercy. Where Christians live the best life they can, and try and love everyone, but when they don't get treated well in return, they don't fear because they have hope for the future.

I've been studying Shinto, and it's really interesting because they are a very present and now “religion” (it's more of a worldview and culture than a religion). Shinto is more of a way of life, but it's very very in the present, and not based on hope of the future like Christianity.

Shinto, doesn't teach right and wrong. It doesn't really teach much “good and evil”. I think that both “good” and “evil” are necessary. I think suffering has a place, and a purpose. Suffering can make people break, it can make them grow stronger though.

I learned that not even Mormon missionaries are saved in their own theology. 18-21ish year old Mormon missionaries are damned for not being married (which they can't be and serve a mission). "For behold, I reveal unto you a new and an everlasting covenant; and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can reject this covenant and be permitted to enter into my glory."

Because Mormon Missionaries are not married, they are damned! I never realized that as a Mormon, I wasn't even saved by my own theology!

That's so crazy. I think the teachings of Jesus Christ, and the message he taught, and my understanding of the world and universe makes sense as a Christian. I don't condemn you for believing different. I appreciate your use of facts, evidence, and how well read and educated your responses and thoughts are.

I appreciate the time you spent to talk to me while I was totally unreasonable. You being patient and willing to discuss with me softened my heart to where I could accept the LDS church wasn't everything I thought it was. I hope you continue to seek truth, and to share what you find.

March 2, 2017

THIRTY-SEVEN – JUSTIN

Not all people, regardless of faith, or lack thereof, can hold their liquor. Your “atheist” friend seems like one of these.

No matter how much I think it will improve another person’s character or knowledge, I’ll not intentionally infect that person with a disease; or amputate a limb. That would be horrifyingly unethical and immoral. Nor would I decline to prevent a disease or an injury for a similar “learning experience.” An all-powerful (or maximally-powerful, however you want to put it) creature that does either of these things is immoral and not worthy of my worship.

A deity who allows His most faithful followers to be violently killed, when He is capable to prevent it, as an example to others is unethical and immoral.

A deity who requires a ritual blood sacrifice of one of His children to save His other children from some form of His own judgment and damnation (on the condition that they worship Him) is unethical and immoral.

Many people claim that Nostradamus was a prophet too. Some of his believers claim that he predicted the Shah of Iran’s fall and the rise of Khomeni. Others claim that the same quatrains point to Saddam Hussein, or Osama Bin

Laden, or Kim Jong Il. Prophecies so vaguely written are worth very little and should elicit severe skepticism.

The Bible predicted a “Savior.” Was it Jesus or Apolonius who fulfilled it? Or one of the many, many, many, many other prophetic Messiahs in Israel at the time? Mayhaps Constantine and The Romans backed the wrong Messiah? (Film homework: “Life of Brian”)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_messiah_claimants

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monty_Python
%27s_Life_of_Brian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monty_Python_%27s_Life_of_Brian)

Not just missionaries are damned by the very gospel they spread. I believe the D&C verse you quote is from Section 132, regarding polygamy; so by that rational, all current members of The LDS Church will be damned.

Some of the messages taught in ancient books by ancient teachers and philosophers still hold value, but I believe their value is self-evident and doesn't require belief or worship. As Sesame Street taught me and my kid the other day, “It's nice to be kind.” Most of the time, it's as simple as that.

Thanks again for reading and writing. I enjoy our exchanges.

Cheers,
Justin

March 15, 2017

THIRTY-EIGHT – JAKE

Yeah, that atheist is totally ridiculous. He offers no reason why I should be an atheist. If you cannot explain what you believe, why you believe it, and if you can think of absolutely no reason why anyone else should also believe it, it's a pretty illogical belief.

About Jesus, there were specific prophecies that not just any “messiah” figure would fill.

Of course he was supposed to be the seed of a woman.
(Genesis 3:15)

He also had to be a descendant of Abraham (that's why his lineage is given) Genesis 12:3)

He had to be a willing sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-18)

He would be the Passover lamb to the slaughter. (Exodus 12:1-51)

The Messiah would be like the “fiery serpent” lifted up on a

pole, so that whoever looks upon him may see him and live (Numbers 21:6-9)

He was the “star coming out of Jacob”. (Numbers 24:17)

Psalms 22:1 “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The whole chapter is about the Messiah.

Also in Psalms 22 “For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones, they stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

Jesus had no broken bones, (they were going to break the legs of everyone on the crosses so that they die faster, but he was already dead so none of his bones were broken, they also divided his garments and cast lots for it)

Psalms 118:22-23 “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”

He would be a Nazarene, be called “out of Egypt”, be born in Bethlehem Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah 53:3, Hosea 11:1, Micah 5:2

He would be a healer Isaiah 35:5-6

There would be a forerunner Isaiah 40:3-5

Etc.

Some prophecies were vague, but some were very specific.

The idea that God doesn't always save his followers I don't think makes him immoral. If he promised he would, and then didn't that would be dishonest and immoral, but I don't think it's some sort of requirement for him to save his followers. It's an interesting thought though.

I think a God who had no Law, no Justice nor Mercy, wouldn't be a God at all. A God who had a Law, but did not enforce punishment/rewards, would be unjust. Mercy only makes sense within context of a Law. For God to be both Merciful, and Just. There needs to be a Law, and there needed to be punishment. For there to be Mercy, the price would have to be paid by a mediator. (I'm thinking of student loans, the school needs to be paid for me to be there, but with the mediation of whoever gives the loan I can go to school despite not being able to afford it, and the school can get paid. Both Justice, and mercy are satisfied (but I go into debt so it's not quite the same.))

The question as to why it had to be a blood atonement is interesting. Surely God could have done anything. I think

the Blood Atonement was necessary because the punishment for sin is death. So only death, through a blood atonement, would be payment. Christ took our debt, and paid it all. There's nothing we can do to earn salvation, "we are justified by faith, apart from works". We are made "new" through Faith in Jesus. That's the good news of the Gospel, and it wasn't something I was taught as a Mormon.

You might find this website interesting, it's got a lot of good sources on claims against God's Character. Mayhaps it's not very good, but it might answer some concerns you have.

http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/criticisms_gods_character.html

Regarding section 132 of the D&C, you are right! To be honest, Mormons still practice polygamy. A man can get sealed to infinite many wives, and in their belief, that man will spend the afterlife as a polygamist. They don't practice it while alive, but they still believe in and some prepare for it in the afterlife.

I meet with missionaries, and they have no answers for me other than to "read and pray about The Book of Mormon" and that I'll have "peaceful feelings that will testify of it's truth". I don't think feelings are a good test of truth. I don't think praying about the Book of Mormon is at all the biblical test of a prophet. You may know a tree by it's fruit.

Tree's don't just have one fruit, they have many. You look at all the fruit, not just one specific example. A bad tree, will have many bad fruits, even if it has a few good ones. Etc. They try and tell you the only fruit that's important of Joseph Smith is the Book of Mormon, but I don't believe that's true. He changed the bible, he "translated" the book of Abraham, which isn't actually a translation in any sense of the word. In D&C 42 it says there is no forgiveness for murderers in this life, or the life to come. He taught and practiced polygamy. There's so much to look at besides the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith taught a different Gospel then the one that already existed. He taught that the Bible had been corrupted and many plain and precious truths were missing even though Christ said that "even though the heavens and the earth shall pass away, my word shall not pass away".

Muhammed is the major prophet of Islam. It's been claimed that there was no way he could have written the Quran. It's very poetic in Arabic, and really only makes sense in Arabic. Muslim's know Muhammed was a prophet once they read the Quran. Muhammed was also a polygamist. I asked the missionaries how they could refute a Muslim who had "peaceful feelings" while reading the Quran and KNEW that Muhammed was a prophet. They had no answer. I find it very odd that they have no answer to that...

In my experience, cults follow the ideology of one man. The ideology of that man, becomes their theology. Examples being

Mormonism=Joseph Smith

Jehovah's Witnesses=Charles Taze Russell

Islam=Mohammad

Catholicism=The Pope

Buddhism=Gautama Buddha

Hebrew Israelites=Wentworth Arthur Matthew...etc

I think true Christians just follow Jesus(God) (whom they learn about from the bible). Unlike Mormons who have to follow God and Joseph. Unlike Jehovah's witnesses who follow God and Charles. Unlike Muslims who follow Allah and Muhammed. Etc. I don't think I'm wording it very well, I hope it makes sense XD

True Christians follow just God. Mormons believe a lot of misconceptions about denominations, and consider them different churches, but almost all Christians are united in 1. Who God is. and 2. We are saved by faith in him, not works. That's why many people don't consider Mormons Christian, because they believe in a created God, who wasn't always God, but became exalted. "We believe that

all mankind may be saved through the atonement of Jesus Christ BY OBEDIENCE TO THE LAWS AND ORDINANCES OF THE GOSPEL.” Mormons don’t believe in salvation through faith apart from works. They believe in salvation through obedience to laws, and getting saving priesthood ordinances by the “proper priesthood authority”.

I always enjoy your insights and thoughts. What do you think? Have I gone off the deep end?

March 21, 2017

THIRTY-NINE – JUSTIN

Is it not possible (and likely) that the “specific” prophecies you cite were known by the people writing the story, long after Jesus had died? And mayhaps they created those stories, which were woven into the Messiah narrative? Stories to make The Savior in which they believed sound more credible in retrospect?

There is a man dying on the side of the road, from a peanut allergy. You have never met him before. Never given him a promise to help him in times of need. You happen to have an epi-pen that can save his life. If you choose to keep it to yourself, are you moral or immoral? Ethical or unethical? Benevolent or evil? According to The Bible, Torah, Qu’ran, God/Allah/Elohim has the power to cure blindness, leprosy, deafness, etc. Yet, He keeps that power to himself. Is that deity moral or immoral? Ethical or unethical? Benevolent or evil?

The idea of a law-giving deity is OK with me, insofar as He had ethical, logical, and/or moral reasons for giving those laws. The law that you are forbidden to touch a woman during menstruation (Leviticus 15), is given by a ridiculous, bigoted, & sexist god. An ethical god would not create human beings with a natural inclination to break the very laws He invents.

Mercy must be paid by a mediator? I disagree. Mercy is forgiveness. I don't show mercy to an enemy soldier by shooting one of his compatriots twice. I show mercy by turning away entirely. I don't forgive a debt by making an innocent stranger pay me instead. I forgive a debt by freeing the debtor. Without condition.

Imagine you have two children. One of them is caught in a lie. You choose to spank the child as punishment. But, before you can, the innocent child says, "No. Don't spank him. Spank me instead." Is it ethical and moral to allow that substitution?

I eat shellfish & pork. According to The Bible, that is a sin. Why is it a sin? Because God said it was. For what reason do I owe God anything? Why must a savior take upon himself that debt? If anything, I owe the shrimp and pig. If someone must pay for that "sin", it should be me. God gains nothing by punishing another; unless He is a sadist. I don't learn, and someone else is hurt. Unethical. Immoral.

The Atonement is, in my opinion, nothing more than an ancient idea of "blood magic." A magical idea that persisted long into modern day in the form of "Blood Atonement."

God created a list of rules. Then, God created man. And then God made man such that man would instinctively

break that list of rules. Then God made another rule that the man who broke such rules could be redeemed only if they believe in His Son, whom He would have tortured and killed; all because of their aforementioned sins (which God, himself, created).

I haven't been a father for very long, but that seems like a terrible way to raise well-behaved children.

Well said. Feelings are a terrible test of truth. Muslims, Jews, Mormons, Baptists, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Catholics, Scientologists. Every member of every sect on Earth has "good feelings" about the way they believe. Of course, they all contradict one another. So, they cannot all be true; but they can all be false.

You make perfect sense. But I would argue that the good things that Jesus supposedly said are self-evident; "Be kind." "Be nice." "Love others."

I would be wary of the words "true Christian" or "true Mormon" or "true Muslims" – because the Westboro Baptist Church claims they are "true Christians" and The FLDS Church claims they are "true Mormons" and ISIS claims they are "true Muslims."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_true_Scotsman

As for what I think, I think you're far from the deep end.
You're reading, the same as I. Learning, the same as I.
Expressing different thoughts and reason. Having a dialog.
The Greeks did it incessantly. It's the basis for knowledge.
Of course, it's entirely possible we're both off the deep end,
but we'll never know unless we keep swimming.

Cheers,
Justin

March 21, 2017

FORTY – JAKE

I kinda hear what you are saying, but I don't think that because there is suffering (blindness, leprosy, etc.) that it makes God unethical. Godandscience.com has a pretty good explanation of suffering if you are interested in it. I don't think that just because God can do something, means he should. Because he could destroy the whole world, and there'd be no more suffering. He could have us live without suffering too. I don't think that just because things could be different means that they should be. Looking at my first relationship if we want to get personal XD It could have gone a lot better. I was the best guy I could be, and did the best things I could for her. I loved her so much, and always treated her the best that I knew how. We broke up, we were going in different life directions. But looking back on the relationship, there are a lot of things I would have said different, and done different. In fact, if I could do it again, and not get into that relationship knowing that it would end in heartbreak, wouldn't I want that? I'm not sure that I would. I learned so much from it, even when it hurt. I wouldn't want to give up all I learned from it, even though it hurt really bad. Does that make any sense to you? Maybe that's a bad example. Not all suffering is like that.

I think forgiveness is important, but I don't think forgiveness pays for things. You could rear end my car on the freeway, and I could instantly forgive you, but you still have to pay to fix my car. Forgiveness doesn't pay for it. I think there's a difference between mercy and forgiveness in comparison to justice.

I can forgive you for hitting my car all I want, but you still have to pay for it. That's justice. I could also not forgive you, and it doesn't change anything. You still have to pay for the car. Can mercy rob justice? Can justice rob mercy?

When I think of Mercy, I think of Compassion. Sparing somebody from punishment that they would otherwise deserve. Mormons view Christ as a spirit Child of Elohim. They view him as an "elder brother". The Christian view (which is now my view) is that he was always God. And was "Immanuel" (God with us). So it's not the same as substituting one child for another, does that make sense?

I think it's interesting when people quote from the Law. The Law was given by Moses, but fulfilled through Christ. Christ taught the greatest two commandments were to love one another and to love God. Eating shellfish and pork would be a sin if you only read the Law. (The 5 Books of Moses) but if you read the Bible (which contains the New

Testament) you would understand why it's no longer a Sin.

Do you see the problem with God not enforcing his Law? What could you possibly give your creator? (I know you don't believe in him, so think hypothetically) What would you have to offer God? He rules the earth, he created everything, including you, what could you offer him? I don't pick and choose what should and shouldn't be a Sin. And that's a good thing. If I was John Joubert, I might not have a problem with killing three kids for no reason. If sins were up to individual interpretation, then it would be highly inconsistent, and as a result quite unjust.

The only thing you really own, is your soul (or your conscious, or spirit, mind, or thought, or whatever you'd prefer to call it). Everything else is already his. Would you try and offer things that already belong to him? That would be why the only punishment that makes sense for transgression against his laws would be spiritual death in Hell.

If God gave Laws, but gave no punishment, he would be unjust! If I killed you, and took a million dollars from your pocket, and made world peace with it. And then was put on trial, and the judge let me go, he would be an unjust judge!

You wouldn't want a judge like that! A judge that robs justice.

If God had no Law, and no Punishment, would a reward make any sense? Would heaven make sense without Hell? I don't think it would. If God was only merciful, and exercised no Law, it wouldn't make much sense.

If God said "Here's my Law, here's the reward for keeping it, here's the punishment, but there isn't actually a punishment..." it would be a lie just like the cake in Portal. It wouldn't really make sense. We already know God forgives us when we sin, but does forgiveness pay for things? We are condemned by the laws of Justice, which mercy cannot rob. That's why God himself paid the demands of Justice in full, so that justice would not be robbed, and mercy could be extended.

God created man. And then he created laws. Adam and Eve. God was incredibly gracious, because he gave them so many wonderful fruits to eat, except for the fruits from one specific tree. Obedience only makes sense if there is disobedience. God wanted us to choose to obey him, not to be forced to, so there had to be alternative options. Adam and Eve could choose to eat the fruit, or they could choose not to. God had told them not to. When they disobeyed, they sinned by choice. It wasn't God's fault that they

sinned, it was their choice. If you told a child not to jump on the furniture knowing they likely would again, and they did it, would it be your fault for telling them not to do something they would probably do? Of course not! It was their choice, knowing that they would probably do it doesn't really matter.

God gave us the choice to obey. He does not force us to. He made us knowing what we would do, yes. But we don't know our future, and we have a choice.

The ancient Israelites sacrificed animals for the remission of sins. John the Baptist taught baptism (representing rebirth) for the remission of sins. And then Christ (God) became the ultimate prophesied sacrifice who justifies us through faith for the remission of sins.

Yeah, I'm familiar with the No True Scotsman fallacy XD "True Christians" I was meaning to say are "Biblical Christians". They follow God and the Bible alone. Other Christians follow the interpretation of the Bible given by some other person. Or an interpretation of God given by some other person. I was just trying to clarify denominationalism. The "No True Scotsman" wasn't what I was trying to suggest.

Hahaha, awesome Yeah, there's so much to study, and learn. If I'm wrong, I want to know. And I think all people should be that way. So I'll continue to study

“Just keep swimming, just keep swimming” -Dory

March 22, 2017