

**"Truth without Love is too hard; Love without Truth is too soft"**

# Through *the* Maze

**Living Faith Church**

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# BLOOD ATONEMENT

*I wrote this piece some fifteen years ago. Since then I have written extensively on Mormon Polygamy and its underlying enforcement tool, Blood Atonement. Recently a pastor friend urged me to republish this in my newsletter.*

Tom Jones was singing "The Green Green Grass of Home" on my car radio as I swung into Idaho's maximum security prison parking lot. I walked up the sidewalk and through two security gates set amid twelve foot high pyramids of razor wire. Then a guard checked my ID, took my brief case, and checked me through what Rolf Kehne, the appeal lawyer, said would

be "the most sensitive metal detector" I would ever go through.

I was subpoenaed as an expert witness in the death penalty appeal of murderer James Wood. I was to testify on the Mormon doctrine of blood atonement.

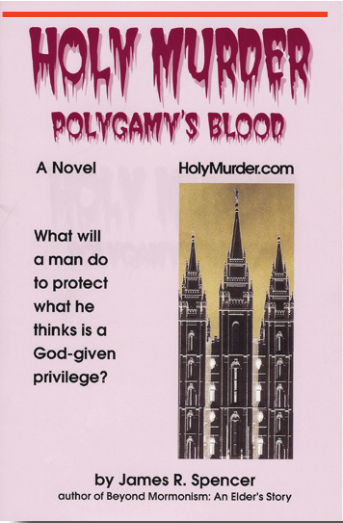
I had mixed emotions. Wood had confessed to the grizzly murder of an eleven-year-old girl—who he had abducted while she was

collecting money for her paper route. No

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one has seriously doubted his guilt. He has in fact confessed to the crime.

Judge Winmill sentenced Wood to death.

Wood's attorneys, Kehne and John Adams, see some problems with the trial. First

**A tape recording of a conversation in Wood's cell reveals that Mormon Leaders discussed Blood Atonement with the defendant.**

of all, everyone involved in the case is Mormon: the judge, the original defense attorneys, the victim, and Wood himself. The trial of a Jack Mormon in a predominately Mormon town who has committed a heinous crime against a Mormon girl raises serious questions about the ability of justice to prevail. The emotion-charged atmosphere may well have been more than the local stewards of justice could control.

I am not suggesting that Wood is anything but guilty. Also, I am in favor of the death penalty and see no reason it should not be administered in this case. Even Kehne and Adams think he should be imprisoned for life. However, they think he did not get a spirited defense. They believe that if he *had*, he would probably not have received the death penalty but rather life in prison. For them (and for Wood, of course), that is a very important distinction.

At any rate, the question for me is one of procedure. Rolf Kehne said it best when he said, "Everybody deserves a \_\_\_\_\_ defense!" The original trial lawyer admitted, during the appeal process, to making "mistakes" in Wood's defense. Even the judicial review board for the State of Idaho has wondered why judge Winmill did not disqualify himself from the case.

### BLOOD ATONEMENT IN THE CELL

A tape recording of a conversation in Wood's cell between him and two Mor-

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mon leaders—a Stake President and a Bishop—reveal they talked to him about the Mormon doctrine of blood atonement.

The Stake President, Kert Howard, asked Wood, "You don't believe that a person needs to give his own blood to be forgiven, as it says in the scriptures?"

Wood answered, "I know my sins are forgiven through God's grace."

Then the Bishop, Thomas Clark asked, "You don't believe you need to shed your own blood to make restitution for Jeralee?"

Wood answered, "I sure don't. If I did, if that would be the case then why did Jesus die on the cross?"

Clark said "Christ cannot make restitution for the sins. He paid the penalty for the sins, but I don't know about the restitution."

**Bishop Thomas Clark asked Wood, "You don't believe you need to shed your own blood to make restitution for Jeralee?"**

My testimony was offered in a courtroom at the maximum security prison. Wood was brought in chains and sat attentively at the defense table.

Kehne had advised me that the judge was not going to consider my testimony in his decision. However, he was going to

allow it to be entered into the record. The judge thought the discussion of blood atonement was irrelevant to Wood's defense. However, Kehne said the judge didn't dare forbid the testimony because so doing

would open him up to criticism in a court of review.

Kehne does not expect any judge in Idaho—at any level—to consider the evidence. However he is committed to taking the case all the way to the Supreme court.

### MY TESTIMONY

My Testimony was divided into seven parts:

I. My qualifications to testify.

II. My estrangement from the Mormon Church.

III. The Christian Theology of Atonement.

IV. The Mormon Theology of Blood Atonement.

V. Historical Evidence that the Mormon Church Believed and Practiced Blood Atonement.

VI. Would the Defense Attorney Know About Blood Atonement?

VII. Why Would He say He Did Not?

Of course, my qualifications to testify in this matter include the fact that I was a Mormon Elder for ten years, married in the temple, and taught Gospel Doctrine classes

in the Mormon Church for five years.

In 1974

I was born again, left the Church, and subsequently was called to

full-time Christian ministry, where I have now served for fifteen years (now thirty years). I have written eight books, four of which deal specifically with Mormonism and another which deals with it in a lesser degree. The judge did not seem to question my ability to comment on Mormonism, but he continued to assert that he could not see how the Mormon doctrine of blood atonement had anything to do with the Wood case.

### ATONEMENT

Atonement is a central doctrine of orthodox Christianity. In order to understand the Mormon confusion over atonement, forgiveness, and restitution, it is important to understand the biblical position. Here is a dictionary definition of atonement:

*1. Amends or reparation made for an injury or wrong; expiation.*

*2a. Theology. Reconciliation or an instance of reconciliation between God and human beings.*

*b. Atonement. The redemptive life and death of Jesus.*

*c. Atonement. The reconciliation of God and human beings brought about by Jesus.*

As you can see, the secular, as well

as the religious world defines atonement in terms of reparation or expiation. Expiation has to do with fully settling a debt—appeasing, paying the penalty, ending guilt. Reparation has to do with making amends, or repairing, or paying for something.

*Propitiation* is another word the Bible uses to talk about the settlement of the debt of sin. To propitiate is similar to expiate; it means to conciliate or appease an offended power.

God is the offended party when we sin. When we degrade or destroy his creation, His justice demands we make an appropriate repayment to him. However, we discover we do not have the ability to offer a suitable payment for sin. God made an idyllic kingdom in the Garden of Eden, and Adam rebelliously mucked it up. Mankind continues in Adam's footsteps. God's whole creation is disturbed by man's sinful actions. (Rom. 8:22)

**How then is restitution to be made to God? How is His righteous anger to be assuaged? How is His demand for justice to be satisfied? The Bible offers a solution to those problems. It is a solution which is unique to Christianity. Every other religious system contends that mankind has within itself the ability to handle the debt of sin. Christianity disagrees.**

**The Bible says that God's compassion viewed mankind's inability to undo his sinful actions. God undertook to do what man was unable to do.**

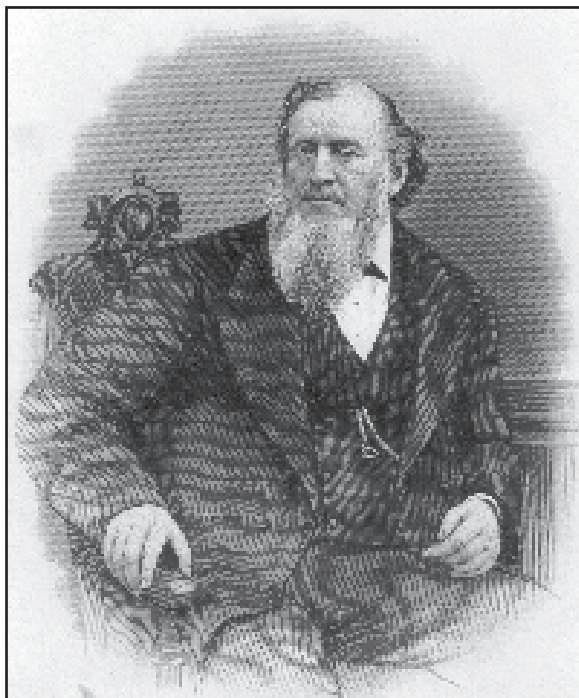
*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God... (Rom. 3:23-25—KJV)*

The word *propitiation* occurs only two other places in the New Testament:

•*And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for [the sins of] the whole world. (I John 2:2).*

•*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. (I John 4:10—KJV)*

In the Old Testament, the Hebrews spoke of the "mercy seat" of the Holy of Holies. This mercy seat was the lid which was placed upon the ark of the covenant. It had great significance to the Jews: The Hebrew concept of the mercy seat is revealed in the word they used for it—*kapporeth* {kap-po'-reth}:



*Mercy-seat, place of atonement: The golden plate of propitiation on which the High Priest sprinkled the seat 7 times on the Day of Atonement symbolically reconciling Jehovah and His chosen people. The slab of gold on top of the ark of the covenant which measured 2.5 by 1.5 cubits; on it and part of it were the two golden cherubim facing each other whose outstretched wings came together above and constituted the throne of God.*

Exodus tells us that God explicitly

instructed Moses to build a wooden casket, or "ark" to house the broken tablets of the Law which Moses had received at Mt. Sinai. It was also to include a gold jar filled with manna and Aaron's rod which budded. (Num. 17:8) Here were the instructions for the ark and its covering:

*And thou shalt make a mercy seat [of] pure gold: two cubits and a half [shall be] the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof... And thou shalt put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which [are] upon the ark of the testimony... (Ex 25:17 & 21-22 KJV)*

An accurate rendering of those Old Testament into English (as done in the Septuagint Version: *Greek and English*, by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, Zondervan, 1970) is:

*And thou shalt make a propitiatory, a lid of pure gold; the length of two cubits and a half, and the breadth of a cubit and a half... And thou shalt set the propitiatory on the ark above, and thou shalt put into the ark the testimonies which I shall give thee. And I will make myself known to thee from thence, and I will speak to thee above the propitiatory between the two cherubs, which are upon the ark of testimony...*

**The Gospel of Christ is centered in the idea that man owes a debt of sin he cannot pay. The broken law of God's commands lays in a casket to condemn us. We need to be protected from the just requirements of that broken law. So God prepares a golden mercy seat to cover the casket.**

**In the New Testament, Jesus becomes that merciful covering. He shields all who will allow Him, from the requirements of the broken law. He is the mercy seat, the cover of propitiation for us.**

The Good News is that Christ's Atone-



ment is our shield. It is an atonement we could not make for ourselves. Our only part is to acknowledge it and allow Jesus to pay it for us—individually. We have to consent to His intervention to appropriate it on our behalf.

### **MORMON BLOOD ATONEMENT**

The concept of “Blood Atonement” in Mormonism is vastly different from that just described and has been articulated by the Mormon Church for more than a hundred years. The Mormon teaching states:

*There are some sins for which the blood of Christ cannot atone and a man's own blood must be shed if he is to find forgiveness.*

This doctrine is pervasive in Mormonism. It has been taught since at least the 1850's by Presidents and Apostles of the Mormon Church. It is the doctrine Kert Howard and Thomas Clark discussed with James wood in his jail cell. However, in Mormonism's distinctive, enigmatic way, the doctrine of Blood Atonement is both taught and denied—at the same time.

Brigham Young taught the doctrine of Blood Atonement to the Saints in Utah on September 21, 1856:

*It is true that the blood of the son of God was shed for sins...yet men can commit sins which it can never remit...There are sins that...must be atoned for by the blood of the man.<sup>1</sup>*

That very same day, his second counselor, Jedediah M. Grant, said to the same crowd:

*I say, that there are men and women that I would advise to go to the President immediately, and ask him to appoint a committee to attend to their case; and then let a place be selected, and let that committee shed their blood.*

*...Brethren and sisters, we want you to repent and forsake your sins. And you who have committed sins that cannot be forgiven through baptism, let your blood be shed, and let the smoke ascend, that the incense thereof may come up before God as an atonement for your sins, and that the sinners in Zion may be afraid.<sup>2</sup>*

President Heber C. Kimball also taught the doctrine. Just before Christmas in 1857,

he addressed the congregation, speaking in the Tabernacle at Salt Lake City. **He told them that the original Apostles actually kicked Judas to death—kicked him until his bowels gushed out:**

*They “kicked him until his bowels came out...I know the day is right at hand when **men will forfeit their Priesthood and turn against us and against the covenants they have made, and they will be destroyed as Judas was.**”<sup>3</sup>*

He also said the reason there were no **unclean women** in the church was because “We wipe all unclean ones from our midst; we not only wipe them from our streets, but **we wipe them out of existence.**”<sup>4</sup>

Many other similar examples could be given from Mormon history. But what of the present? What is the position of the Mormon Church today?

### **BLOOD ATONEMENT TODAY**

Blood Atonement continues to be practiced among the so-called fundamentalist Mormons. These are breakaway—usually polygamous—groups, mainly located in Utah. Frequent news stories describe someone getting a “revelation” to spill the blood of a group member in order to cleanse his sin. Many of these people are tried in state courts and convicted of murder.

Do I think the Mormon leaders in Salt Lake City routinely practice or order Blood Atonement? No, but they have failed to set the record straight. By failing to do that, they *allow* the practice to continue among the so-called Mormon fundamentalists. **And they allow Mormon Stake Presidents, Bishops, lawyers, and judges to carry the hellish seed of that doctrine in their hearts. Ultimately their sin stirs itself—as it may have done in James Wood's case—to pervert justice.**

**The Mormon Church needs to own up to Blood Atonement. They need to admit the Church taught and practiced Blood Atonement. Then they need to repent of the doctrine and condemn the specific teaching of it in the past.**

**But they do not do that. Instead, they deny it was ever taught or practiced. And they try to cover up and explain away the doctrine, without ever really decrying it.**

For example, The Church today has a “position paper” on Blood Atonement which they provide in legal cases where

this issue is raised—as they did in the James Wood case. The paper attempts to give us the impression that the Church never has practiced or taught Blood Atonement, other than in a *theoretical* way. But the paper does confirm that the only hope for a murderer is in having his own blood shed. It just won't work *now*, the Church says—it must wait until the Church and the State are one Theocracy. Then Blood Atonement can work again, as it did in the distant past.

There is a wealth of evidence that Mormons, including Brigham Young, believed in and participated in this ungodly doctrinal aberration. The infection of it continues to haunt the Church today. It is a ghostly rumor always circulating throughout the Church. Mormon fundamentalists return to it again and again. In fact, in the past **decade, potential jurors in every Utah capital homicide were asked whether they believed in the Mormon concept of Blood Atonement.** Utah is the only state that offers those condemned to death by the state the option of being shot, so their blood can literally be spilled. Utah murderers like Gary Gilmore and Gary Bishop believed the Mormon doctrine required their lives for forgiveness of sin.

In addition, the Utah brothers, Ron and Dan Lafferty, in a ritual resembling early Mormon Blood Atonings, slit the throats of their sister-in-law and her fifteen-month-old daughter, “upon command of the Lord.”

Blood Atonement needs to be faced by the Mormon Church and dealt with in a straightforward way. Until then, the blood of its victims lays at the Church door.

<sup>1</sup> Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Jedediah M. Grant, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4, p. 49-51.

<sup>3</sup> Heber C. Kimball, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 6, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> Heber C. Kimball, Journal of dDiscourses, Vol. 7, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Concept of Blood Atonement Survives in Utah Despite Repudiation,” Salt Lake Tribune (November 5, 1994) D-1.