

THROUGH

THE

MAZE

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Where was God?

We'll never be the same again. A hundred years from now, should the Lord delay His coming, September 11, 2001 will doubtless remain as the paramount event of the twenty-second century. Not even nuclear war will eclipse the significance of the destruction of the World Trade Towers.

I will not attempt to speak to the causes nor implications of the event, only to address a cry which has gone up around the world. A cry, by and large, directed at Christians. That cry is "Where was your God?" How can the God of Christianity—the God you say is both all-powerful and all-loving—allow such an event to occur. Why didn't He intervene? Why didn't He stop the terrorists or hold up the towers until everyone exited them? Your God must not really be all-powerful, or if He is, He must not be all-loving.

Of course such questions on the lips of unbelievers are not new. They are always asked in times of great tragedy. I don't resent the questions and God is unthreatened by them. And, in a sense, they are *reasonable* questions. Someone who does not know God *must* ask such questions.

I remember hearing the same questions asked when Korean Airlines flight 007 was shot down, with its 269 passengers and crew, after it had strayed off course over a Soviet missile installation in the far Pacific. Maj. Gennady Osipovich, flying a Sukhoi-15 fighter fired a missile that downed the plane. Evidence presented at the time suggested that

the Soviets wantonly shot down what they knew to be a passenger plane without firing warning shots or giving any signal for the plane to land. Many of the passengers were Americans, including Congressman Larry P. McDonald from Georgia.

"Where was God?" "Why didn't he

Continued on page 2

Attention Boise!

Boise Area Bible Study

Beginning Wednesday, January 5th, I will be teaching a Bible Study at Meridian Assembly of God. Meetings are Wednesdays at 7:00 PM at 1830 North Linder Road, Meridian. We will be studying the Book of Hebrews. For directions call 888-0063. ■



End-of-year Giving

As in past years, those who contribute to *Through the Maze* and want to receive a deduction for the year 2001, simply need to date their checks before December 31. Even if your check arrives after the first of the year, you will receive credit for 2001 giving.

We especially need your help at this time. It is no secret that charitable giving to small ministries such as this one has fallen sharply this fall. Everyone I know is facing a shortfall for 2001. So, please, ask God what your gift should be.

We greatly appreciate your help. It is what makes it possible to send tapes and literature to all who ask. ■

Where was God?...

intervene to save the innocent passengers?" Often, I have flippantly answered those questions by saying, "God didn't shoot down KAL 007, the Russians did!" But, of course, that is not a real answer. It is an answer born of my impatience. People who know God, and know Him to be *always* good, often become impatient with those who know neither Him nor His goodness. These are the ones who ask such questions.

Sometimes a flippant answer is OK. When I am being baited by a hardened atheist or skeptic, I think it's OK to respond in that way. But, when the question is spoken by someone with a searching heart, a better answer is required.

Shortly after the destruction of the World Trade Towers, I received an email from a young man who had been in just such a discussion with a coworker. His friend was wondering why God let sin and suffering occur. He said his friend had asked:

If God is omniscient, and knew everything that was going to happen in history (including the fact that man would fall into sin), why did He create man in the first place, knowing that billions of people would reject Him and end up in hell? (This coworker considers it "a cruel joke.")

Indeed, it isn't always easy to reconcile God's power and goodness with the pain and suffering we see in the world. I responded, trying to help a little.

I told him that God—in creating mankind—created an order of beings with a capacity to choose good over evil. Such a being has the capacity to be either very good or very evil. Borrowing an illustration from the late C. S. Lewis, I said that lower animals don't have this capacity—at least not to the same degree humans do. A cow, for example, can't be really good or really bad. Likewise a sheep is very limited in its ability to be good or evil. Maybe dogs (especially Chihuahuas) have the capacity to be especially good, but not on the level of a Mother Teresa. Neither can they be as evil as Hitler or Stalin.

Mankind, on the other hand, is created in the image of God. That is, man has self-awareness in a way that lesser creatures do not. His self-awareness allows

him freedom to choose to interact with the world in whatever way he desires. The key is that God has given men and women the ability to *choose* how they act. They can be extremely selfish, or they can be extremely generous. They can "lay down their life for a friend," or they can use people as objects for their own pleasure.

Men and women would merely be robots if their destiny were predetermined by God. Sure, he could program them so that their actions were always good, but then they no longer would be intelligent, rational, and *free* beings. One who chooses to be evil is evil indeed. But how much more good—Godlike—are human beings who face real choices and choose good over evil?

God knew creating creatures who have the capacity to choose between good and evil would be risky; some, He knew, would choose evil.

Just as the Russians, not God, shot down KAL 007, so human terrorists, not God, attacked the World Trade Towers. Evil men decided to take a particular course of action that resulted in the loss of upwards of five thousand of their human brothers and sisters. In God's system such evil is permitted. But it never goes unnoticed and God has said to the sinner, "I will repay."

The same system that tolerates evil actions provides opportunities for heroic actions. In fact, it is only in such a system the heroic actions can exist. For every evil choice, there is an opportunity for a genuinely good choice. I told the young man that his friend couldn't have it both ways: If he wants a world without pain, he must settle for a world in which people do not have real choices.

God was present on September 11th. He was in charge of the Universe. Those who perished in the World Trade Towers or in the crashing airliners, if they knew Him, were instantly in His presence in heaven. Those who perpetrated the terrorist acts either have, or one day will, answer to God for their actions.

For those of us who remain, our duty is to declare the goodness and mercy of God—even when we don't always fully understand it ourselves. ■

Witnessing To Mormons Answering Recurring Questions about Mormonism

Should I pray about the Book of Mormon?

Much of my correspondence has to do with answering questions posed by those in contact with Latter-day Saints they are trying to reach. I'm hoping to make this column, "Witnessing to Mormons," a regular part of *Through the Maze*.

The following correspondence deals with the Mormon challenge to read the Book of Mormon and pray about it. Mormon missionaries quote Moroni 10:4 (from the Book of Mormon):

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The missionaries tell people to read the Book of Mormon and ask God to reveal to them if it is not true (which, by the way, is an interesting formulation of the question). At first glance, this seems like a fair enough request. But actually it is a trap.

In the following exchange, I try to help a young man who was trying to witness to a Latter-day Saint.

Dear Jim,

I have been trying to reach a Mormon I work with and have found your site absolutely wonderful and full of information. One thing I noticed is they [Mormons] come to belief kinda backwards from us Christians. They read the Book of Mormon and then are supposed to pray and ask for the truth. It all looks good, pray to

the Father in Christ's name for truth, why does it seem the prayer is answered by Satan and not God? Is there something in the prayer that directs it to Satan?

Thank you,
Larry

Larry,

It isn't that Satan does or does not answer their prayer as much as it is that their approach to truth is wrong. Hearing something from God is not as easy as one might think.

When we pray to God for an answer, we need to know how to ask the question. And we need to know how to judge the answer. False prophets abound. Millions of people seek spiritual answers from mediums, psychics, shaman, and gurus. How many Muslims have prayed and asked if the Koran is "true"? (About a billion.) And they believe that God told them that their book is sacred.

How many people have fallen victim to men like Jim Jones based on their "spiritual discernment" that such a person is a "man of God?" Many such deceived people have prayed countless hours to know whether they should follow a particular guru, or spiritual leader, or spiritual discipline.

But spiritual truth is not normally discovered in one-word answers, "Is Jim Jones a prophet?" or "is the Koran the word of God?" Rather, we look at the *words* of the prophet, or the *words* of the so-called book of scripture and find out if they are consistent with what we already know about God.

When we approach the discovery of spiritual truth properly and prayerfully, we *will* find truth. That is what Jesus meant when He said, "Ask and ye shall receive..." (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9). On the other hand, when we "dive bomb" for answers we are often misled.

So, Larry, it is the assumption that we may discover whether or not the Book of Mormon is true by throwing up a prayer and waiting for a spiritual experience that is wrong. It's not that simple, and it's dangerous.

A better question to ask might be, "Is there any evidence that the Book of Mormon teachings are true?" Or, "Is the Book

Continued on back page

The Other 9-11 Atrocity



A sign warns off intruders where victims' bones were uncovered in 1999 during the erection of a new monument at the Mountain Meadows Massacre Site

The World Trade Towers stands as the worst massacre of American citizens in the history of our country. The greatest massacre of Americans at the hands of other *Americans* was the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. There Timothy McVeigh murdered 168 people.

Before McVeigh's feat, however, the single most furious attack on American citizens by other Americans occurred at Mountain Meadows in Southern Utah in the late summer of 1857. There, under the orders of Brigham Young, a wagon train of Arkansas settlers was set upon by Mormons dressed as Paiute Indians. After keeping the wagon train under siege for several days, John D. Lee, an officer in the Utah Militia and a personal friend and bodyguard of Brigham Young, rode into the circle of wagons under a flag of truce. He said that he had made a deal with the Indians to rescue the settlers.

Lee told the settlers that, in order to escape the Indians, they must surrender all their weapons and be escorted to safety by a contingent of Lee's officer's and men. However, as the settlers filed out of the train, Lee's men executed them—men, women, and children. Only eighteen children, ages eight and younger, were spared. Twenty years later Lee was finally executed, shot while sitting on his coffin at Mountain Meadows. Young and all other conspirators escaped prosecution.

In all, 127 people were brutally murdered at Mountain Meadows. The date? September 11, 1857 A fascinating new look at this tragedy is published in *American Heritage Magazine*, October, 2001, by historian Sally Denton. Her book on this subject will be published by Knopf in 2002. Her article can be seen on my web site at mazeministry.com

Witnessing to Mormons...

of Mormon consistent with other truth, or even with *itself*?" Is it consistent with the Bible? What if the Book of Mormon is full of silliness, obvious falsehood, and unbelievable fabrications? What then? Should I still kneel down and desperately pray, "Is it *true*?"

If I were choosing a medical doctor, I would want someone who could present to me a good reason to believe he knew a lot about human physiology. I would not simply walk down the street and pray about who I should have take out my appendix. So why should I allow someone to "touch my soul" based on a good or bad feeling I get when I meditate about it? How can I be sure that the "feeling" I get really is from God? What makes me think that God will answer a prayer fashioned in such a manner? Am I to tell God that He must respond to my questions by making me feel good or bad? Perhaps I should first ask God to teach me how to find out about *Him*.

For example, if a young man wants to get married should his first question for God be, "Shall I marry such and such a woman?" Or should he first find out if she is already married, or if she might be compatible with him, or if she has similar beliefs as he does, or if she is a psychopath, or if she has eleven children from other marriages?

Seeking spiritual truth by such "test case questions," *without further religious preparation and background* is nothing more than divination. God tells us that if we would know His ways, we must know *Him*. The Mormon formulation for discovering if the Book of Mormon is true or not is a formula for disaster. No one should join a religious organization, pick a mate, buy a house, or enter any other important transaction *solely* based upon a test question. The possibility of missing God is too high.

The Bible says "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof is destruction." (Proverbs 14:12 & 16:25) The Bible says "False prophets shall arise and deceive many." (Matt. 24:11)

So, it behooves us to make certain when we search for truth, we don't take any shortcuts that could open us up to making serio■ spiritual mistakes.

Jim

Hard Case Witnessing

Sorry to report to those of you who have ordered the reprint of *Hard Case Witnessing*, I am having a little trouble pulling the financing together. Hoping to have it printed within the next few weeks. I'll keep you posted. ■

Your Last Newsletter?

We never charge for *Through the Maze*, however, we must hear from you once a year in order to continue to send it to you. You do not have to send a donation, just return the purple card and check the box., "Renew my subscription." ■

== Letters ==

A friend sent me *Beyond Mormonism*. I had barely finished that when another friend gave me *Have You Witnessed to a Mormon Lately?* I didn't even know the books were out there. I could not put them down. Everything I read was so real to me—it's just like these people I have been involved with for the past (almost) nine years! I have read several other books on Mormonism, but none have spoken to me the way yours have.

Lisa

I've just finished reading *Beyond Mormonism* and found it to be very informative and encouraging. I live in Northern Arizona and am surrounded by the Mormon cult. Many of my close friends are Mormon, and this book gave me a new sense of hope for them. Thank you for sharing this knowledge with me.

Sarah

Thank You Le Grande

It is always exciting when my 800 number starts ringing and people are asking for "The Free Pamphlet about B. H. Roberts." I know that someone has put an ad in the paper similar to one of those below.

That happened a couple of weeks ago. All of the callers were from La Grande, Oregon. So, some friend of the ministry went to the local paper and placed the ad. I don't know who you are, but thank you! Again, I don't know any of the two dozen people who called and asked for the material, but I have faith that at least one of them will respond to the challenges in the pamphlets I sent them. We may never know, this side of heaven, what was accomplished by the simple act of faith partnering with me in this endeavor.

"The Disappointment of B. H. Roberts." How one Mormon General Authority and well known author discovered that the Book of Mormon is Not Divine.

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The Book of Mormon: Another Witness for Christ? A Mormon General Authority discovered that the Book of Mormon is Not divine. For a copy of the pamphlet, "The Disappointment of B. H. Roberts," contact:

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Free Pamphlet: Is Mormonism Christian?

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