



A Peek into the Thai Religious Worldview

The Life of One, Exchanged for the Lives of the Many

By Ron Myers

Greetings in Jesus' Powerful Name,

I assume we've all been aware of the plight of the Thai boys' soccer team that crawled deep into a dark twisty cave in Chiang Rai Province, Northern Thailand a few weeks ago, along with their coach. They then became hopelessly trapped there, due to a sudden rain storm that flooded lower sections of the cave's passageway, effectively sealing them in. It was a miracle that they were ever located in the first place, learned through someone who knew of their plans to explore the cave.

Then, British diver Richard Stanton, along with a small team, made their way into the dark and narrow flooded passageways to make the discovery. It was followed up by the joint efforts of a multinational team of divers and rescuers, who were able to save every last one of them before more rains came. For those of you who are wondering, the location of the cave was way up in Northern Thailand, over 1,000 kilometers or 600-plus miles from our ministry headquarters, located in Nakhon Phanom Province, Northeast Thailand, called the Isan Region. (See map).

The actual rescuers were the Thai Navy SEALS (initially trained with US Navy SEALS in San Diego). They had the support of special-ops divers from Britain, Australia, and the US. It was certainly touch and go for a while, and many of us, including the rescuers, were concerned that they might not be able to get all of the boys out alive, due to the difficulty of the situation. The whole thing was a *cause célèbre* that attracted great public attention, both in Thailand and worldwide.

I feel that the greatest miracle was that they were all brought out alive, including their coach, who had shared all of his own meager food supplies with the boys, sacrificing his own health for theirs. After they had all been safely rescued, I heard an interview with one of the British divers. He said that some of the boys didn't know how to swim. However, swimming wasn't the problem because the submerged sections were so small and narrow that they had to inch their way along, following a nylon strap lifeline. He explained how they developed a plan to get all the boys out safely while keeping them from panicking due to claustrophobia. The concern on the part of the divers was that the boys might struggle and knock their SCUBA masks off while traversing narrow flooded passageways with protruding jagged rock walls. The plan was to sedate the boys, which apparently worked well.

If you watched the news, you might have seen mothers and close relatives of the boys praying. Being Buddhists (except for one Christian family), who do you suppose they were praying to? It likely wasn't the Buddha, since Buddhism teaches that he attained the state of *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* means that, through countless reincarnations, he finally reached a stage in life where he shed all fleshly wants and desires—Buddhism's goal. This meant he attained the state of *Nirvana*, or non-existence, where reincarnation is canceled. That's Salvation, Buddhist style. So, these mothers were likely praying to three different types of spirit beings. It was to either (a) territorial guardian-owner spirits, (b) the spirits of deceased ancestors, or (c) the spirits of Buddhist monks who, having reached Buddhist sainthood, are worthy of *Nirvana* but have postponed it, remaining in the spirit world to help others, answering prayers for those in need. Does that sound similar to Catholic Saints? It should. Actually, it's all related to the Occult. We're talking about demons (*fallen Angels*); not beloved ancestors, righteous saints or friendly imps. Scary stuff.

The sad part is, one of the Thai Navy SEALS lost his life while preparing to save the boys. I recently spoke with a Thai Restaurant manager friend. He informed me that the spirits had allowed the boys to live, but took the Thai Navy SEAL in exchange. Wow! The cave dwelling territorial owner spirits took the life of one, allowing the boys to live?? That is a good example of the view many Thais hold. Yes, they're 94% Buddhists, but it's a thin syncretistic veneer over their ancestral belief in malevolent spirits that must be pampered, fed and appeased. The life of one was sacrificed

By God's Grace and for His Glory,

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sparing the many. Ever hear of that before? It's a Biblical principle. (*John 11:48-50*) This could be adapted and used carefully as a *redemptive analogy* to present the Gospel—I would do it. The Thai have many such analogies imbedded within their culture that are usable to present the truths of the Gospel message. I use them when and where I can. One of the best I know is their love of nature, yet they don't know nature's Creator-God: The Lord Jesus Christ! **Please join me in earnest prayer that their eyes will be opened, that they might receive their Savior, whom they don't yet know.**

NOTE: I return to Thailand on August 14th to continue to encourage believers and oversee the audio narration process of the Isan New Testament.

