

A MESSIAH WHO “SNEAKS” INTO HISTORY?

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As Paul stood before King Agrippa’s throne, relating the story of Christ, he declared of the Messiah’s life: “This thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26). Those few words have reverberated through centuries of history as one of the hallmarks of the story of Jesus. Never was the life, death, or resurrection of Christ meant to be kept secret—as something might be when it is stored away in a box in an abandoned attic, to be discovered later by accident only by a fortunate few. Rather, the many facets of Christ’s earthly ministry were readily available for inspection by anyone, anytime, anywhere.

In fact, centuries before Christ set foot on the Earth in human form, the prophets of old repeatedly had spoken of His impending arrival. Over 300 messianic prophecies fill the pages of the Old Testament. God did not try to “sneak” the Messiah into human affairs under cover of darkness and without warning. Truth be told, He went to considerable effort to announce to the world the news of its heralded Savior.

One such instance can be found in Genesis 49:10, wherein Moses wrote: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes.” The word “Shiloh” has long been recognized by biblical scholars as another name for the Messiah. This verse, then, explains exactly when the Messiah was to arrive—when the scepter had departed from Judah.

So what is the “scepter,” and when did it depart from Judah? The scepter was a staff kept in possession of the elders of each of the twelve tribes of Israel and engraved with the name of the tribe. It symbolized the national sovereignty

and judicial power of God’s people. As long as the scepter was in place, the Jews could govern themselves, excommunicate one of their own, and even administer corporeal punishment (including the death penalty).

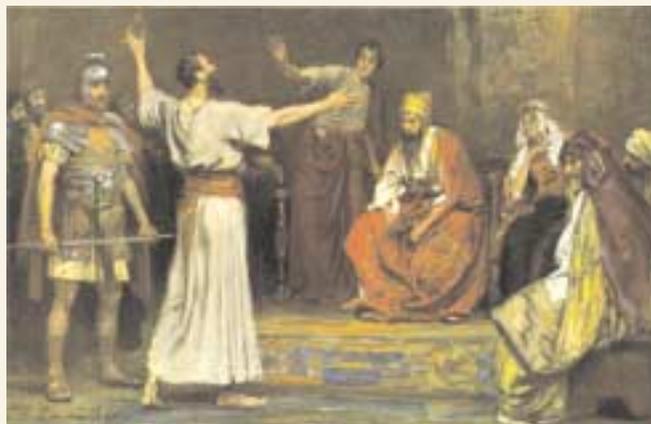
Interestingly, the scepter remained in place even while the Jews were in captivity under both the Babylonians and the Medes and Persians. It also remained in place for a time under Roman captivity—until the Emperor instituted procurators. When that occurred, even first-century Jews recognized the departure of the scepter because the Romans (around A.D. 11) took away the Jews’ right to administer capital punishment. One Jewish teacher, rabbi Rachmon, put the situation in these terms: “When the members of the Sanhedrin found themselves deprived of their right over life and death, a general consternation took possession of them; they covered their heads with ashes, and their bodies with sackcloth, exclaiming: ‘Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and the Messiah has not come’ ” (as quoted in McDowell, 1999, p. 195).

When the members of the Sanhedrin found that they could not put Jesus to death themselves, but had to request instead that Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, do so on their behalf (Luke 23:24), they should have known the Messiah was in their midst, for that was the exact prophecy Moses had recorded. The scepter had indeed departed from Judah—and the Messiah had indeed come! Yet the Jews ignored the voice of God and demanded the death sentence for His only begotten Son. Why? Because they were the people who “always resisted the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51).

Woe to those individuals in our day and age who ignore the powerful evidence that God has provided as proof of the deity of His precious Son, Jesus Christ! Let us ensure that we today do not become as blind to Christ’s Sonship as those first-century Jews.

REFERENCES

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Artist’s conception of Paul before King Agrippa
(Image courtesy of ArtToday.com)

RESOURCES

Q Was the robe placed upon Jesus scarlet or purple (Matthew 27:28; John 19:2)?

A All would agree that we sometimes see colors a little differently. What one person calls blue, someone else may be more specific and call navy blue. A die-hard football fan may refer to his team's color as dark red, whereas someone else who sees the team's faded uniforms for the first time at the end of a grueling season might conclude that the team's color is more maroon. While coloring pictures for their parents, one child may color an orange-yellow Sun, while the other draws a Sun that is bright yellow.

Surely no one would accuse these individuals of lying or being deceitful because one was more specific than another. Likewise, skeptics have no solid ground on which to stand when they disregard common sense and create biblical contradictions that do not exist. The simple fact is, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote from different perspectives. In the same way that individuals today look at colors and see different tones, shades, and tints, the writers of the gospels wrote about the trial and crucifixion of Jesus from different angles.

The garment placed upon Jesus after his brutal scourging likely was similar to faded football uniforms, but in His case we read of "a scarlet robe...faded to resemble purple" (*Wycliffe*). [It is difficult to imagine Pilate arraying Jesus' bloody body with a new robe. More likely, it was one that had been worn and cast off as worthless.] Furthermore, according to Greek scholar A.T. Robertson, there were various shades of purple and scarlet in the first century and it was not always easy to distinguish the colors or tints. In fact, the ancients (especially the Romans) frequently used the term "purple" when speaking of various shades of red. Consequently, these different colors sometimes would be called by the same name. The charge of a contradiction occurring within the Scriptures in this instance simply cannot be sustained in light of the facts.

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—Eric Lyons

IN THE NEWS

A series of recent studies by psychologist Margaret Evans shows that children not only are learning how to spell, add, and write in elementary school, but they also are learning organic evolution. The first study demonstrated that children in their middle elementary-school years (8- to 10-year-olds) were exclusively creationists, whereas the oldest children (10.5- to 12-year-olds) were almost exclusively evolutionists, with a smaller number being creationists (Evans, 2000). So at the time when most students are being introduced to the life sciences, they also are receiving a heavy dose of Darwinism. This battle over origins takes place around the time your child or grandchild enters the 5th grade, and for all practical purposes is over when he or she finishes the 7th grade—just a mere vapor of time. But the victor of the war ultimately will control your child or grandchild's belief system for decades yet to come.

Additionally, Dr. Evans discovered that the emergence and distribution of beliefs about the "origin of species" is highly influenced by parents and school systems (Evans, 2001). During this study, children were asked questions such as "Did dinosaurs and people live on the Earth at

the same time?" The study showed that 90% of students who had **active** parents with **strong** beliefs in the Creation and who attended schools that promoted similar beliefs would grow up believing that a supernatural Creator played a role in their existence. Children's natural history and religious background predicted whether they eventually would believe in evolution.

Be proactive! Make sure that you do not wake up one morning and realize that this vapor of time has completely passed you by, only to discover that your son or daughter has been caught in the clutches of godless evolution—and has abandoned his or her faith.

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—Brad Harrub

