

## Resurrected “Savior-Gods” and the Prophets of Old

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Periodically, critics of Jesus question why there are so many stories of “savior-gods” (outside of Judaism and Christianity) that sound somewhat similar to the story of Jesus. Why would various civilizations (e.g., Egyptians, Greeks, etc.) that existed centuries before the time of Christ have “legends” about god-like characters who worked miracles, conquered death, and were revered by their followers? What logical answer can be given as to why stories similar in some ways to the Gospel story existed hundreds or thousands of years before Jesus?

Although several reasonable answers have already been given to the above questions in past articles (e.g., Butt and Thompson, 2001a and 2001b), another logical explanation for the presence of these stories revolves around the prophets of old. When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and lawyers for their hypocrisy, He mentioned their unrighteous ancestors and made the following statement:

Therefore the wisdom of God also said, “I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,” that the blood of all the prophets which was shed **from the foundation of the world** may be required of this generation, **from the blood of Abel** to the blood of Zechariah who perished between the altar and the temple. Yes, I say to you, it shall be required of this generation (Luke 11:49-51, emp. added).

According to Jesus, God used prophets as far back as “the foundation of the world,” specifically from the time of Abel, Adam’s second son recorded in Scripture. The apostle Peter made a similar statement while preaching to thousands of Jews in Solomon’s Portico.

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, **which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began** (Acts 3:19-21, emp. added).

“Since the world began,” God has revealed messages to mankind via His prophets. Sometimes these messages were regarding the coming physical destruction upon a particular nation (e.g., Jonah 3:1-10; Nahum 1-3). At other times, they were about one particular person or tribe of people (e.g., Genesis 40; 49). But

no prophecies were more important (nor more prevalent in Scripture) than those concerning Christ. And, God’s spokesmen have been foretelling His Coming specifically **since the earliest of times**. Luke recorded how, after the birth of John the Baptizer, his father, Zacharias, “was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying,”

Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who **have been since the world began** (Luke 1:67-70, emp. added).

God’s prophets have not foretold the coming of a great Redeemer only since the Mosaic period, nor were prophecies concerning the Savior of the world limited to the Jewish people. Zacharias rejoiced that God was sending the Redeemer and Savior of Whom the prophets had spoken “**since the world began.**” Admittedly, most all of the Messianic prophecies recorded in Scripture appear after God revealed to Abraham that through his seed “all the nations of the world shall be blessed” (Genesis 22:18; 12:1-3; 49:10; etc.). Yet, one recorded messianic prophecy goes back centuries before Abraham—all the way to Adam and Eve’s tenure in the Garden of Eden. There God informed the serpent following his deception of Eve: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15). In this very first messianic prophecy, a suffering, but victorious, Redeemer is pictured.

Thousands of years later, hundreds of similar prophecies about the Christ were given to the Israelites. It is logical to conclude, however, that similar messianic prophecies would have been delivered by other prophets outside of Judaism. The patriarch Enoch, just seven generations from Adam, “walked with God three hundred years” and “prophesied” (Genesis 5:22; Jude 14). His great-great-grandson Noah, whom the apostle Peter described as “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5), very likely knew of the Messianic prophecies during patriarchal times, and may very well have received direct revelation from God on the matter (similar to how God spoke to him regarding the Flood—Genesis 6:13-21). Centuries later, non-Jewish, God-fearing men such as Melchizedek, king of Salem, “the priest of the Most High God” (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1), Job, and others worshipped and served the one true God.

We have no way of knowing how many of God's spokesmen through the centuries have prophesied about the coming of a Savior. We do know, however, that some prophecies about Christ are virtually as old as the world itself, and the Bible nowhere pretends to contain every Messianic prophecy ever spoken.

One may reasonably conclude that a chief reason nations outside of Israel possessed stories of savior-gods who share many commonalities with Jesus is because **they had heard either inspired prophets foretell the Redeemer's coming, or the prophecies made "from the foundation of the world" had been passed down to them by word of mouth.** Interestingly, some of the first people on Earth to recognize the arrival of the Messiah were men the Bible calls—not Jews—but "wise men (magi, NASB) from the East" (Matthew 2:1). From where did these men receive such knowledge? How did they know that a particular "star in the East" (Matthew 2:2) would indi-

cate the Messiah's entrance into the world? The fact is, they received Divine direction (cf. Matthew 2:1-12).

Truly, God's scheme of redemption through a "hero" that would save the world from sin and death has been revealed since the fall of man. Simply because civilizations from the past (outside of Judaism and Christianity) possessed similar "redemption" stories and/or knowledge of a Redeemer should not be troubling or surprising. They likely were based (at least partly) on messages preached by the prophets of old.

#### REFERENCES

- Butt, Kyle and Bert Thompson (2001a), "Jesus Christ—Unique Savior or Average Fraud? [Part 1]," *Reason and Revelation*, 21[2]:9-15, February, [Online], URL: <http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/156>.
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## IN THE NEWS

You are aware of the systematic cleansing of America's public schools and government buildings by the elimination of references to God and the Bible. This conspiratorial departure from the nation's origins has been illustrated once again—but in a rather unexpected place: the detention center for suspected terrorists at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The politically correct crowd saw to it that every Muslim had access to a Quran. Oh, yes, inmates who want a Quran are carefully accommodated. But when a Pakistani Muslim inmate (detained for alleged ties to Osama bin Laden) requested a copy of the Bible—no can do (Serrano, 2005).

Though the Quran is preeminent to the Muslim, Islam nevertheless acknowledges the Bible as Scripture from God. So, when he requested that his lawyer ship him a copy of the Bible, prison officials promptly confiscated the package. U.S. government lawyers said the detainee had not shown that the practice of his religion had been "substantially burdened" by being deprived of a Bible.

Unbelievable! Our own people no longer see the Bible as necessary, or its unavailability as adverse and creating a hardship. We live in a time warp far removed from America's origins. The Founders clearly believed that the initial existence and future survival of the Republic was heavily, if not exclusively, dependent on the successful diffusion of the Bible throughout society. While abundant evidence for this assertion exists, consider just one example. A year after declaring independence from England, the Colonies began to feel the effects of the British embargo. Consequently, the Continental Congress directed a committee to investigate ways by which Bibles could be secured. The committee made its re-

port on September 11, 1777, stating "that the use of the Bible is so universal, and its importance so great...your Committee recommends that Congress will order the Committee of Commerce to import 20,000 Bibles from Holland, Scotland, or elsewhere, into the different ports of the States of the Union." Congress promptly ordered the importation (*Journals of...*, 1907, 8:734-745). Four years later, as the shortage continued, importation became sufficiently impractical that Congress was again petitioned for approval, this time to print Bibles in America rather than purchase them abroad. The request was approved and upon completion of the printing, on September 12, 1782, the full Congress not only approved the edition, but their endorsement was given in the front of the Bible: "Whereupon, Resolved, That the United States in Congress assembled...recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States" (*Journals of...*, 1914, 23:574). Who today would believe that the original Congress of the United States considered the Bible so important to national existence that they would expend effort—even in wartime—to make certain that Bibles were available to the American population? The present widespread loss of respect for and interest in the Bible, if continued, will spell our national doom.

#### REFERENCES

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- Serrano, Richard A. (2005), "Guantanamo Bay Prisoner Sues U.S. to Get a Bible," *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, [Online], URL: [http://www.algeria-watch.org/pdf/pdf\\_en/press\\_21\\_27\\_11\\_05.pdf](http://www.algeria-watch.org/pdf/pdf_en/press_21_27_11_05.pdf).

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