

THE FOREST HILL NEWS



Forest Hill Church of Christ

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VISIT US SOON!

Sunday:

Bible Study..... 9:30 A..M.
Morning Worship.....10:30 A.M.
Evening Worship..... 6:00 P.M.

Wednesday:

Bible Study7:00 P.M.

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RESURRECTED “SAVIOR-GODS” AND THE PROPHETS OF OLD

ERIC LYONS

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 to the above questions in past articles, 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. Jon. 3:1-10; Nah. 1-3). At other times, they were about one particular person or tribe of people (e.g. Gen. 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” (Gen. 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” (Gen. 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” (Gen. 5:22; Jude 14). His great-great-grandson Noah, whom the apostle Peter described as “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 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-Gen. 6:13-21). Centuries later, non-Jewish, God fearing men such as Melchizedek, king of Salem, “the priest of the Most High God” (Gen. 14:18; Heb.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 foundations 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” (Mat. 2:1). From where did these men receive such knowledge? How did they know that a particular “star in the East” (Mat. 2:2) would indicate the Messiah’s entrance into the world? The fact is, they received Divine direction (cf. Mat. 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

(from *Reason & Revelation*, March 2006)

(continued from Forest Hill News, June 27)

666: IMPENDING DOOM, OR MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING? (part 3)

Matthew Martin

Third, it must be understood that Revelation was written for a specific *purpose*, and that purpose was not to tell of some destroyer of the world 2,000 years in the future.

The purpose of the book was to encourage persecuted Christians to remain faithful to the Lord, in spite of death and other adversities. It was also written, as Bob Winton said, “to prepare saints for the persecution to be brought upon the church by unbelieving worldly and religious forces.”

Since (as already explained, previously) John wrote in apocalyptic language, and since his purpose was to write about those enemies that sought to destroy the church, it stands to reason that John would write about the church’s primary enemy of that time: The Roman Empire.

Perhaps the biggest misunderstanding about the book of Revelation, is the idea that it is filled with prophesy concerning the present day (which why this 666 nonsense was such a big deal last month). It makes more sense, however, to assume that the book focuses primarily on subjects to which the original audience could relate. If John had written about the number of the beast (666), and had intended for it not to be understood for thousands of years, what value would that be to his original audience? Obviously, none. There must, therefore, be a first century explanation for it.

WHAT WOULD “666” MEAN TO THE FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIAN?

It is interesting to note how the King James version adds a simple word and makes the verse (Rev. 13:18) much more confusing. In the original language, John simply says “...for it is the number of man...” Note, he did not say, as the KJV words it, “for it is the number of **a** man...” Only reading the KJV gives the indication that John is talking about a specific person (hence, the “a”). Instead he is talking about a number that represents something **about** man, not the name of a man.

What does it mean, exactly? Next week, hopefully, that question will be answered.

(to be continued...)

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