

ARE JESUS AND THE GOSPEL UNIQUE? A LOOK AT THE METHODS OF
COMPARISON BETWEEN CHRIST AND OTHER MYTHS WITH AN EMPHASIS ON THE
ISIS/OSIRIS/HORUS MYTHS OF ANCIENT EGYPT

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Abstract

This thesis explores the topic of comparative religion especially in regard to the prevalent argument that Christ and the account of him which the New Testament gives is in part borrowed from other figures in ancient myth and religion. In the first part of the thesis the general issues one must consider in comparative religious studies is addressed; in the second part a special focus will be given to considering the similarities and differences between Christ and the Isis/Osiris/Horus myth from ancient Egypt. The thesis shows how the gospel of Jesus Christ is in its essence unique, i.e. in Christ's person, the purpose of his work, and the results of his work.

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Introduction

Lord Raglan, a 19th century British noble, claimed that there were certain characteristics that were common to heroes in many myths. He included figures from Scripture since he believed Scripture was a myth. The list is as follows:

1. The hero's mother is a royal virgin
2. His father is a king
3. The king is often a near relative of his mother.
4. The circumstances of his conception are unusual.
5. He is also reputed to be the son of a god.
6. At birth an attempt is made on his life, usually by his father or his maternal grandfather to kill him.
7. He is then spirited away.
8. Raised by foster parents in a far country.
9. We are told nothing of his childhood.
10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.
11. After a victory over the king and/or giant, dragon, or wild beast,
12. He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor.
13. He becomes king.
14. For a time he reigns uneventfully.
15. He prescribes laws.
16. Later he loses favor with the gods and/or his subjects.
17. He is driven from the throne and city.
18. He meets with a mysterious death.
19. His death is often at the top of a hill.
20. His children, if any, do not succeed him.
21. His body is not buried.
22. Yet, he has one or more holy sepulchers.¹

He concluded that many myths had to be related on the basis of the similarities, and heroes in the Bible were not unique but were simply built upon the same heroic characteristics found in other myths.

What we conclude, at least I do, is that the pattern career for a hero was generally known, and that either from flattery, or from a genuine belief that the career of a hero must conform to type, mythical incidents were introduced into the story of genuinely historical heroes. It follows from this, however, that the earlier heroes must have been mythical, else the mythical type could not have arisen. The only possible alternative, and that seems to me highly improbable is that Oedipus was a really historical character, who killed his father, married his mother, and so on, but did it all as part of a fixed ritual.²

¹ Lord Raglan, *The Hero*, (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003), 174,175.

²Ibid., 157

Do some of these characteristics on Lord Raglan's list sound familiar? Do some sound like the life of Jesus? Does this show that the biblical account of Christ is dependent upon other religious or mythic figures? And does this similarity mean that Jesus was a man who became legend when people attributed to him heroic characteristics? This line of thinking is nothing new. People both ancient and modern have made the connection between Christ and other religions, and they have declared that the story of Christ is borrowed from pagan gods and myths. This idea that Christ and Christianity find their basis in other world religions that pre-date Christianity is an idea that is behind much of the academic exercise of comparing religions.

This belief has seeped into popular culture and has taken root for obvious reasons. The general emphasis on science and its importance in solving problems leads people to interpret all religion through a Darwinian lens that sees all religion as beliefs which have developed over time. A pluralistic culture leads people to conclude that there is no absolute truth; therefore the claim of Christ as the only way to heaven is invalid. There is no absolute truth, no revelation by which to judge right and wrong, fact from fiction. Scripture is seen as one myth among many, a religion that evolved just like any other. If Christianity entered the timeline of earth's existence after many other religions (though the promise of the Savior has existed since the Garden of Eden), the possibility exists that it most likely came from them. Similarities in religions seem to be evidence for the belief that Christianity really did find its beginnings in pagan thought. Even those who claim to be Christian are not opposed to the idea that God's truth can be found in other religions apart from Christianity; they claim it is arrogant for Christians to state otherwise. John Macquarrie, a Scottish philosopher and Anglican theologian who wrote *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*, says in his article "Christianity and Other Religions,"

The notion of a normative revelation must be rejected just as firmly as the notion of a uniquely true religion. It is, incidentally, very surprising that some Christians should be so alarmed at the thought that after all, they may not have been granted an exclusive or even an immeasurably superior revelation. Should they not rather rejoice to think that the knowledge of God and the saving work of God extend far beyond what their forefathers supposed?³

This idea is prevalent among atheists and theists alike, and one can find many forums online discussing how Jesus Christ is simply a copycat savior found in other religions.

³ John Macquarrie, "Christianity and Other Faiths," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 20, no. 1 (1964): 44.

The idea that Christ is really just a copy of other pagan myths was a scholarly view more than one hundred years ago. It arose during the Age of Rationalism in Europe, but among modern scholars it has ceased to be a commonly held view that Christianity finds its genesis in ancient religions or is essentially the same thing. Yet this idea persists among the less educated, and so it is necessary to address the thought that Christ is a Savior who is the same as the gods of other religions.

What are other reasons for a consideration of this topic? It is important for a few reasons. First, it is important in order to protect the faith of Christians who may be troubled by this theory. Secondly, it is important because it will help Christians to understand the extent of Christianity's unique essence. Thirdly, it is important so that one can intelligently respond to the claims made against Christ. In this regard it is also important for Christians not to dismiss all of the similarities in one broad stroke, but to admit that there are similarities while at the same time explaining the key differences. It also will help to point out flaws in the logic used when others compare Christianity to pagan religions. Finally, it is important because it gives the Christian an opportunity to testify to the unique essence of Christianity.

At first this may seem like a very easy topic with a straightforward answer, and like many things in life this is not the case. It does not do the topic justice to just simply sweep the accusations under the rug and make the bold claim that the story of Christ is completely unique since this leaves many questions unanswered. At the outset it is important to realize that ultimately the argument which this paper presents is based upon the assumption that God's Word is truth, and in the end it must stand as the truth. The gospel in its essence is unique. Christ is a unique Savior, and the gospel portrays him as such. He is unique in his person, in the purpose of his work, and in the results of his work. While this paper will not be able to address every argument in depth, or look at every seeming parallel, it will show the unique essence of the gospel is found in no other religion. It will also show that the arguments leveled against Christ can be refuted many times through scholarly research and Scripture itself.

Issues When Comparing Christ to Pagan Religions

If one wants to honestly compare another religion to Christianity, a superficial understanding of either religion is not sufficient. Alexander Pope's often quoted phrase is true, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." It is dangerous to know only a little about a given subject and then to assert things which may in fact not be true. This is especially true in matters

that have eternal significance as is the case of the comparison of Christianity to other ancient religions. Only after one looks at both similarities and differences can one attempt any sort of honest comparison between religions.

Historical and Religious Settings

A few things need to be considered when comparing Christianity to other religions. First, one needs to keep the distinct differences intact. To compare Christianity to another religion with only a superficial understanding of one or the other or both is to not see the distinct differences of each religion. This is done when the differences are glossed over, and the comparison is reduced to a few similarities. This ignores the unique context of each religion's historical and religious setting. Jonathan Z. Smith, an expert in comparative religion, says, "It is to put matters bluntly, poor method to compare and contrast a richly nuanced and historically complex understanding of Pauline Christology with a conglomerate of 'mystery texts' treated as if they were historically and ideologically simple and interchangeable."⁴

Reductionism

It is wrong to emphasize the similarities to the exclusion of the differences because many times the comparison ends up as an oversimplification of the problems at hand. One uses a few details in each religion and then assumes that those details make both religions similar. Even more dangerously, the assertion is made that both are essentially the same thing or one is borrowed from another. This is reductionism.⁵ Reductionism is when a complex issue is explained by looking to more simple issues within the framework of the overarching issue in order to arrive at a solution or explanation. Simply put, reductionism is an attempt to explain a complex issue in an oversimplified manner. This could be demonstrated with a silly illustration. Two animals need to be classified. Both have a coat of brown fur, both have four legs, both have whiskers, both have brown eyes, both have tails, both have claws. Therefore, both are cats, right? Well, no. Actually, one is a cat and the other is a dog; both are essentially different creatures. Both have many similarities, and if one only focuses on a few details, one would conclude they are the same. However, the differences which make each unique have not been taken into account.

⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 108.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

While it would be wrong to oversimplify the argument by glossing over the differences, it works the same way conversely. It would be unwise for a Christian to oversimplify this issue by glossing over the similarities and then to state, “There is no other story like the story of Christ.” Why would this be unwise? Because to a certain extent there are some similarities, and claiming otherwise discredits the Christian speaker. This is especially important for a pastor to remember as he tries to answer the individual who may be struggling with the issue of similarities between Christ and pagan myth. Jonathan Z. Smith says concerning this point, “Lacking a clear articulation of purpose, one may derive arresting anecdotal juxtapositions or self-serving differentiations, but the disciplined constructive work of the academy will not have been advanced nor will the study of religion have come of age.”⁶ In other words, if one doesn’t see to what extent similarities exist by honestly looking at the evidence, the conclusion one comes to will be an unfair biased answer. This would not be a proper comparison.

Boundaries

Another important aspect to keep in mind when comparing Christ to other pagan myths is the role of subjectivity. A reductionist argument is not a valid argument for or against a position for it is based upon subjectivity. Reductionist arguments in comparative religion are subjective to the extent in which they deal with boundaries – boundaries which man sets up to compare the two religions. Because the comparison is a man-made undertaking to classify information, one could find comparisons between the two religions depending on how inclusive or how wide the boundaries are for comparison.⁷ Gerhard Van Den Heever makes an excellent point about the exercise of comparing religions. He says,

Comparing involves boundaries. This is an ambiguous activity, as boundaries can either include or exclude. When one deals with boundaries in comparative studies the point can either be to elucidate what is commonly human or to profile one tradition (or part of it) against other traditions. In the one case the similarities are the objects of focus, in the other case the differences. The drawing of boundaries can furthermore serve to demarcate the essential from the non-essential.⁸

It should be recognized that in this paper the attempt will be made to insulate the Christian belief in a unique Savior; this is a bias. Yet, this will be done only with respect to what

⁶ Smith, 53.

⁷ Ibid., 51,52.

⁸ Gerhard Van den Heever, "Jesus in the World of Religions: A Preliminary Plotting of a Route Map," *Religion & Theology* 5, no. 3 (1998): 324.

is essential to Christianity, not to that which is non-essential to the gospel message. As Christians we should be careful about being too general or too sweeping in our statements such as “Christianity is a one-of-a-kind religion,” or “Christianity is completely unique,” or “The story of Christ is like none other.” What is meant is this: there may be seeming similarities between Christianity and other religions, whether in rituals such as blood sacrifice, or resurrections and miraculous births, yet when it comes down to it the essential nature of these events in Christianity are different because they have a different purpose and result than other religions.

To make the statements “Christianity is a one of a kind religion,” or “Christianity is completely unique,” or “The story of Christ is like none other,” raises questions. To what extent is Christianity a one of kind religion? In what sense is Christianity completely unique? In what sense is the story of Christ like none other? People can become confused and think if another religion has a miraculous birth, a son of the gods, a resurrection, sacrifice on behalf of others, etc. that it is the same as Christianity. Yet they fail to realize a distinction. Christianity is not just about events or rituals taken out of context, but Christianity is about what those events were meant to do, what they accomplished, and who did them which makes them decidedly unique. This will be discussed more later.

Correlation Is Not Causation

Another point to keep in mind when comparing religions is that correlation is not causation, and similarities do not signify equivalence. Just because one religion may have similarities does not mean that one came from the other. One can see this with the simple illustration of the cat and dog from before. Both animals have four legs, both have a coat of brown fur, both have whiskers, both have brown eyes, both have tails, both have claws. Therefore, one is the offspring of the other, right? No, it is impossible for a dog to give birth to a cat or a cat a dog. Yet, this same logical leap is often times involved in the comparison of Christianity and other religions.

Genealogy/Analogy

Here a distinction is made by many scholars concerning the relationship between Christianity and other ancient religions. The relationship between the religions is seen as

analogous by some and as genealogical by others.⁹ An analogical relationship between religions means that each religion developed independently, yet both religions contains similar thoughts. A genealogical relationship is a relationship in which one religion gave rise to another whether through borrowing of ideas or evolution of thought. This is the position of people like George Massey and Alvin Boyd Kuhn which will be discussed more thoroughly later.

In reference to the analogical relationship, some scholars like Joseph Campbell and Clyde Cluckhohn think that these analogies arise from something that is common to all men's psychological makeup, something that is inherent in man's spirituality.

While a comprehensive interpretation of any myth or of mythologies must rest upon the way in which themes are combined—upon, as Levi-Strauss says, “a bundle of features”—nevertheless the mere recurrence of certain motifs in varied areas separated geographically and historically tells us something about the human psyche. It suggests that the interaction of a certain kind of biological apparatus in a certain kind of physical world with some inevitable [experiences] of the human condition...brings about some regularities in the formation of imaginative productions, of powerful images.¹⁰

It is indeed true that there are certain aspects of religion which are common to all man, i.e. any issues concerning the natural knowledge of God, but it is not true that the truths which are essentially Christian are found in other religions because the beliefs of Christianity can only be found in Scripture, the revealed knowledge of God.

At this point one must also distinguish differences in analogous relationships between Christianity and other religions. For what may appear to be analogous, may be different in essence. We could agree that all religions outside of Christianity are to some extent analogous with each other for a few reasons.

The first reason there are similarities that exist between other religions and Christianity is that the conscience exists in all men. As far as other religions deal with the law of God that is written on the heart, they are similar to Christianity (though in Christianity the moral law is clarified). As Paul says,

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the

⁹ Smith, 47-48.

¹⁰ Alan Dundes, *The Study Of Folklore*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 161. Joseph Campbell and Bill D Moyers, *The Power Of Myth*, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), gives insight into this kind of thinking.

requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.¹¹

The second reason there are similarities is because man has a natural knowledge of God which understands that there is an almighty being from whom the universe came. As Paul says, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”¹²

The third reason there are similarities between other religions and Christianity is because many religions deal with the afterlife. The fact that other religions are concerned about where the human goes after death is a concern all humans have in their hearts by nature.

While we can say that Christianity is analogous to other religions in all the areas which pertain to the natural knowledge of God; we must state, however, this is where the analogous relationship ends. We must say this because Christianity differs from all other religions in reference to the revealed truth that can only come through Scripture.

The first way in which Christianity differs from any religion is the teaching of man’s total depravity. The fact that man is completely sinful and can do nothing to save himself but Christ alone provided forgiveness of sins for the world is uniquely Christian. A few passages make this very clear.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.¹³

The second way in which Christianity is unique is in the fact that God, purely out of his grace, provided the payment for the sins of the human race through the death of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ As Paul says “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the

¹¹ Romans 2:14,15, *Holy Bible: NIV: New International Version*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011. The NIV 2011 will be used for all following quotations.

¹² Romans 1:20

¹³ Ephesians 2:1-3

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:4-9

ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them."¹⁵

Another way that Christianity is uniquely Christian is that the bodily resurrection is connected to our justification as Paul says, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."¹⁶ Furthermore, the Christian resurrection is unique from ancient Near Eastern religions because Christ has won for us a bodily resurrection from the dead, and there will be a universal bodily resurrection at the Last Day for all who ever lived.¹⁷ Though other religions may have sacrifice and resurrection (these topics will be discussed further later), these sacrifices have different purposes and results. Bruce Metzger also realizes these differences.

In all the Mysteries which tell of a dying deity, the god dies by compulsion and not by choice, sometimes in bitterness and despair, never in self-giving love. But according to the New Testament, God's purpose of redeeming-love was the free divine motive for the death of Jesus, who accepted with equal freedom that motive as his own. Christianity is *sui generis* in its triumphant note affirming that even on the cross Jesus exercised his kingly rule...Contrary to this exultant mood..., the pagan devotees mourn and lament in sympathy with a god who has unfortunately suffered something imposed on him. As Nock points out, "In the Christian commemoration the only element of mourning is the thought that men have betrayed and murdered Jesus. His death is itself triumph."¹⁸

It is true that some hold to the claim of analogous relationships between Christianity and other religions, but other scholars claim that there is a definite genealogical relationship between Christianity and other religions. Bruce Metzger gives a very good analysis and explanation of why a genealogical view of the relationship between Christianity and other ancient religions is untenable.

Even when the parallels are actual and not imaginary, their significance for purposes of comparison will depend upon whether they are genealogical and not merely analogical parallels. That is to say, one must inquire whether the similarities are to be regarded as arising from more or less equal religious experience, due to equality of what may be called psychic pitch and equality of outward conditions, or whether they are due to borrowing one from the other. Interesting as the parallels are which Sir James G. Frazer collected from the four corners of the earth in his monumental work, *The Golden Bough*, by no means all of them are to be regarded as the result of demonstrable borrowing. In

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

¹⁶ Romans 4:25

¹⁷ I Corinthians 15; John 5:28,29

¹⁸ Bruce Manning Metzger, "Considerations of Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review* 48, no. 1 (January 1955): 17-18.

seeking connection it is not enough (as F.C. Conybeare pointed out) “for one agent or institution or belief merely to remind us of another. Before we assert literary or traditional connection between similar elements in story and myth, we must satisfy ourselves that such communication was possible.” It is a fact that in various spheres close similarities even in phraseology have been discovered which are related to each other by nothing more direct than analogy. For example, in a letter published in *The (London) Times* at the end of July, 1938, the late Professor Harold Temperley pointed out two quite remarkable parallels between speeches made by Canning in 1823 and 1826 and their modern counterparts in Neville Chamberlain’s utterances on July 26, 1938. In a subsequent letter, the Prime Minister disclaimed having previously read either of Canning’s speeches, and concluded that the parallels “indicate simply the continuity of English thought in somewhat similar circumstances, even after an interval of more than a hundred years.” Or to take an example from ancient times, a close parallel to the docetism expressed in the apocryphal Acts of John has been discovered in Ovid’s *Fasti*. It would be vain, however, to imagine that Greek Christian writers were indebted to Ovid for their docetic interpretation of Christ’s sufferings...The uniformity of human nature sometimes produces strikingly similar results in similar situations where there can be no suspicion of any historical bridge by which the tradition could have been mediated from one culture to the other.¹⁹

The belief a Christian should have when comparing religions to Christianity is that the essence of the gospel message is not found in other world religions, nor more narrowly in ancient near eastern religion. Instead, the essence of the gospel is unique and finds its source in the Holy Spirit as it was revealed to mankind. It was a message that did not find its origin with man. As Peter says, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”²⁰

Similarity in Language

Language is another way in which people try to draw a connection between Christ and pre-Christian religion and myth. The argument is that since there are definite similarities in the language of one religion concerning its gods or heroes and in the language of Christianity concerning Christ, Christianity must have borrowed from those religions. For example concerning Christ as God and man, Wilfred L. Knox says that Paul was either intentionally or unintentionally borrowing from pagan cult-figures partly human and partly divine in the Greek

¹⁹ Metzger, 9,10.

²⁰ 2 Peter 1:20,21

world and “the language of the Christological passages...show a close affinity with the descriptions and panegyrics of these figures of the pagan world.”²¹

However, though some believe this to be true, others do not. In the same article above Knox grants that while similarities in language exist, he does not see Christianity as the same as other religions. Rather than a genealogical relationship, he believes in a more analogous relationship between the religions. He makes a few important points. He says that pagan heroes did not influence the Gospels even though at “one or two points we notice a considerable verbal similarity, but never enough to prove a direct connection.”²² Another point he makes is that though there are similarities, the differences must be noted as well when comparing Christ to pagan myth or religion. Even though demi-gods or deities have divine parentage and “infancy legends,” they were never believed to have existed as gods before they appeared on earth.²³

Often times in comparisons based on similar language close enough attention is not paid to a thorough lexicographical study. Bruce Metzger notes that while there may be similarities in language, the words that are used are either infrequent or they have different meaning in context. Ultimately it is an inconclusive way to prove one religion springs from another. Another linguistic issue is the use of false etymology with different names to prove one’s point. This will be looked at later in both the example of El-Azar-us and Iu-em-hetep and Iusu.

Dating of Texts

Still another issue which must be kept in mind when comparing religions is the important issue of dating source material. Dating of source material is important when trying to prove the genesis of one religion from another. For instance, if a source concerning the practices of a myth or cult is used to support the idea that Christianity was based upon it, the dating is essential. When was the source produced? Does it predate the founding of Christianity? Or was it after? If it was after, no foolproof argument can be made for the generation of the Christian religion since the text post-dates the foundation of the Christian Church. Bruce Metzger says concerning mystery religions that a large part of the little evidence of the Mysteries is from the second to the fifth centuries A.D. Therefore, it cannot be assumed they were the same in the pre-Christian era.

²¹ Wilfred Lawrence Knox, "The 'divine hero' Christology in the New Testament," *Harvard Theological Review* 41, no. 4 (October 1948): 231,233.

²² Knox, 233, 247.

²³ *Ibid.*, 233.

Not only that, but the pagan religions also differed from region to region depending on the time in which they were practiced.

[The fact that] pagan doctrines would differ somewhat from place to place and from century to century is not only what one should antecedently expect, but also what the sources reveal to be a fact. Methodologically, therefore, it is extremely hazardous to assume, as has sometimes been done, that a certain rite or belief which a Christian author cites must have existed in the same form in pre-Christian days.²⁴

Another possibility could very well be that Christianity influenced other religions, rather than other religions Christianity. However, this argument must not be proposed as foolproof for it cannot be proven, even though it may be plausible.

It must not be uncritically assumed that the Mysteries always influenced Christianity, for it is not only possible but probable that in certain cases the influence moved in the opposite direction. In what T.R. Glover called “the conflict of religions in the Early Roman Empire,” it was to be expected that the heirophants of cults which were beginning to lose devotees to the growing Church should take steps to stem the tide. One of the surest ways would be to imitate the teaching of the Church by offering benefits comparable with those held out by Christianity.²⁵

Jewish Perspective

What also must be considered concerning ancient religions as the basis for Christianity is the Jewish perspective since Paul had at one time been a Pharisee who understood that God did not tolerate syncretism. The Jews, like Paul, who understood the truth of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and those who understood that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of those prophecies would not have tolerated borrowing of essentially pagan ideas to incorporate them into Christianity. Metzger says to this point,

Another consideration often overlooked by scholars who are better acquainted with Hellenistic culture than with Jewish, is necessarily involved in the circumstance that the early Palestinian Church was composed of Christians from a Jewish background, whose strict monotheism and traditional intolerance of syncretism must have militated against wholesale borrowing from pagan cults.²⁶

Bias

Finally, the last issue which must be kept in mind when comparing religion is what the bias of the individual is. Is the individual coming with a bias to prove the Christian message is

²⁴ Metzger, 6,7.

²⁵ Ibid., 10-11.

²⁶ Ibid., 7.

one of a kind? Is the individual approaching the topic with a Darwinian bias? Not all who are unbelievers believe that Christianity springs from other religions. It is also true that while individuals such as Frazer, Massey, Kuhn, Campbell and others may approach the topic with a naturalistic bias, Christians also come to the table with a bias which believes there to be essential unique differences. The information that is discovered must fit with what we know from Scripture and if it does not, we must throw it out. Yet, if the information doesn't contradict Scripture we let it stand. We do not need to speculate as to the how or why religions came about for we cannot prove the speculations true. Instead, Christians must focus on unique nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ to defend Christianity. The essence of the gospel is unique regarding the person of Jesus Christ, the purpose of his work, and the results of his work

Ancient Egyptian Religion

Since it is important to understand the historical and religious context of both religions when comparing other religions to Christianity, the historical and religious context of ancient Egypt will be looked at a little more closely, especially the myth of Isis/Osiris/Horus.

It was stated previously that it is dangerous to attempt to compare religions to one another with only a very limited understanding of the subject, and yet many times this is the case. It is no different with ancient Egypt. Many people think they know something about it because they have read something here or there, whether about mummies or about pyramids. Stanley E. Porter, a professor of New Testament studies and editor of *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, and Stephen J. Bedard, a Baptist pastor and apologist, note in their book *Unmasking the Pagan Christ*,

The problem is that ancient Egyptian religion is both too well known and not known well enough by the general public. What we mean by this is that there is a general, though superficial, acquaintance with Egyptian history due to archaeological discoveries such as that of King Tutankhamen's treasures and the resulting publicity. Everyone knows what the pyramids look like, what the sphinx looks like and that the Egyptians buried some of their dead mummies...Still, to much of the public, Egypt remains shrouded in mystery.²⁷

So it is necessary to look at the actual historical and religious context to better compare the myth of Isis/Osiris/Horus to Christ and the gospel.

²⁷ Stanley E. Porter and Stephen J. Bedard, *Unmasking The Pagan Christ*, (Toronto: Clements Pub., 2006), 47.

The first thing that should be stated from the start is that it is not as if there is one source one can go to in order to find what the ancient Egyptians believe. The topic is much more complex than that. Egypt went through many different stages in its history and so did its religion.²⁸ It is not as if Egypt had one unchanging religion to which its people adhered for thousands of years. The sources that exist concerning ancient Egypt and its religion are many and varied. The dates when they were written span thousands of years. The sources that scholars use include funerary texts, myths, wisdom literature, pessimistic literature, temple inscriptions, Aten hymns and accounts by classical authors.²⁹ Rosalie David, a renowned Egyptologist, says, “The difficulties posed by the source material include the unevenness and fragmentary nature of the archaeological remains, problems with translation and interpretation of the textual sources, and the effect of individual bias in understanding the evidence.”³⁰ In his book *Ancient Egypt: Its Culture and History*, J.E. Manchip White states that the doctrine concerning the god Osiris was so well known that the ancient Egyptians did not have to record it in its entirety on papyri or temple walls. In fact, the longest account we do have of the story of Osiris is not even from an Egyptian, but from Plutarch, a Greek who lived from A.D. 50-120.³¹

The fact that the sources for studying the ancient religion of Egypt are taken from throughout its history and even from those which post-date its existence is an important point to make to those who would simply like to point to a specific fact about Egyptian religion and apply that to all time. The whole matter is not so cut and dried. Just because the Egyptians believed something at one time, does not mean they believed it at another. While their religion developed and evolved, Christianity didn’t evolve. The truth of God’s Word is unchanging as Christ says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”³²

The other significant point is that the greatest resource in understanding the religion of Egypt and the Egyptian’s belief in Isis/Osiris/Horus is taken from Plutarch, a Greek who lived well after the height of the Egyptian kingdoms. He was removed from their culture and historical context, and he also would have been influenced by the understanding of their religion at the

²⁸ Porter and Bedard, 48.

²⁹ Ibid., 50.

³⁰ Rosalie David, *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*, (London, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002), 18.

³¹ Jon Manchip White, *Ancient Egypt*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 3.

³² Matthew 24:35

time he was writing it which was probably toward the end of his life around A.D. 120.³³ In fact, the purpose he had in writing a history of the religion of ancient Egypt was to show that its ancient myths were in harmony with the Platonism of his day.³⁴ This bias would affect how he saw the religion of ancient Egypt, and would to some extent employ the same kind of reductionism that modern comparative religion scholars fall into. Not only was his writing done with a bias to try and explain the harmony that existed between ancient Egyptian religion and Platonism, but he and other classical writers didn't have enough firsthand knowledge to do this. Porter and Bedard say,

Plutarch did draw on other sources for his work although the nature of those sources is not always clear...Plutarch and other Classical writers who produced works on Osiris did not have exact knowledge of the history of Osiris or the nature of the Osiris cult. This is understandable, as they would not have been able to read the Egyptian texts and had to rely on the traditions popular during the Greek-dominated period of Egyptian history.³⁵

Therefore, to think that he could accurately portray and understand the Egyptian religion as someone would have believed it hundreds, if not thousands of years before, is saying too much. To then base an argument that Christ is really the same as the story of Isis/Osiris/Horus by using historical evidence that may not be accurate is to base the argument on unstable ground.

Another factor to keep in mind regarding Plutarch is the time in which he lived. This is important in order to understand his view of the Osiris cult. An argument for the non-unique nature of the gospel is made based upon what Plutarch said. The argument is that the Osiris cult is what spawned Christianity. However, this cannot be proven, and it is likely that the reverse is true. Christ lived around B.C. 4- A.D. 29/30 and Christianity had spread rapidly by God's grace across the Mediterranean. Christianity was a religion that was making a name for itself with its many wild claims that went against human nature such as total depravity, salvation from sin by Christ alone through faith alone, and a bodily resurrection from the dead. The books of the New Testament were already completed and in circulation by 100 A.D., not to mention the Gospel message being spread already from A.D. 30 through the evangelism work of Jesus' early followers. It is entirely possible that the Osiris cult, and the other mystery cults at the time of Plutarch, which had been influenced by Ancient Near Eastern gods, had been influenced by

³³ Porter and Bedard, 52.

³⁴ Ibid., 52.

³⁵ Ibid., 52.

Christianity and that these cults assimilated certain Christian ideas into their religions. Rather than saying Christ is a copycat of these other religions, one could make the case that other religions in their evolution over time took Christian concepts and melded them with their own.

In some ways the accounts of the Classical authors who wrote in Greek might be the most useful, in that they describe the Egyptian beliefs that had passed into the Greek culture, the same Greek culture that permeated Galilee and Judea, and in the same Greek language in which the New Testament was written. The challenge with this is that the fullest account, written by Plutarch in A.D. 120, appeared many decades after the Gospels had been written. The oldest surviving New Testament fragment is a portion of the Gospel of John called the Rylands fragment, dating from approximately A.D. 125, found in Egypt. Considering that John was written after Matthew, Mark and Luke and was found so far away from its place of origin (which probably was Ephesus in western Asia Minor, now Turkey), it is likely that some form of the Gospel story was widely known either orally or even in written form influenced Plutarch's record of Osiris, rather than the other way around.³⁶

Yet, some scholars say definitively that Christianity was in no way based upon Ancient Near Eastern religions (and not all of these scholars are Christians), some that Christianity was based upon the other religions, and still others that other religions borrowed from Christianity; however, none of these can be proven from history.³⁷

For Christians this means a few things. First, the argument that Christianity is based upon ancient religions such as Egyptian religion doesn't really take everything into account such as dates. The possibility remains open that Christianity influenced the other religions in its evolution though this cannot be proven from history but is a purely speculative argument.

Second, the Christian should guard against using this speculative argument as something that is the truth simply because it fits their bias. For just as it is speculative to say Christianity is based upon other religions, it is also speculative to say other religions are based upon Christianity. As was discussed before reductionism is often the result of such an argument, and it does not take into account the distinct differences between the two religions.

Third, though this argument is speculative, this should in no way shake the faith of the individual for we know what we believe and we know those from whom we learned it.³⁸ We know the Bible is the truth. Jesus is the only way to heaven; there is no other. Seeming

³⁶ Porter and Bedard, 60.

³⁷ Tryggve Mettinger N. D., *The Riddle of Resurrection*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001), 22.

³⁸ 2 Timothy 3:14

similarities should not bother the Christian for in essence the religions are different, and we have been convinced of this by faith. Secular scholars realize the essential differences as well.³⁹

Fourth, realize many times the unshakeable argument we come back to is one of faith-filled bias. Many times the only argument we can really make about the essential differences between two religions is only understood by the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, as Paul says, “The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit,” (I Corinthians 2:14).

Afterlife

What then can be known about the Egyptian religion in general? The Egyptians believed in life after death. J. Gwyn Griffiths, a famous Egyptologist, has found a number of pyramid texts that equate the resurrection of the king with that of Osiris.⁴⁰ It is a strange trait to ancient Egyptian religion that at first the afterlife only pertained to the king, or so it is thought by scholars. As the religion developed, the afterlife eventually became something that everyone had a shot at through a judgement by the gods in which the heart of each individual was weighed on scales.⁴¹ If the heart was heavy with good works, they gained the afterlife. If their heart was light from a lack of good works, then they would not get the afterlife. They had to earn their own way to their “heaven.”

Certainly this sounds like Christianity doesn't it? A belief in life after death? A judgment for the individual? While Christianity does have these things, the events themselves are described differently in the Egyptian religion and in Christianity. This should not bother us that other religions also have life after death and judgments of the soul since these things flow from what is in everybody's heart. Every person is born with the knowledge that this world is not it; there is some existence after this life although some try to cut that knowledge out of their heart.

It also should not surprise us that in other religions there is a judgment for the individual soul either. For by nature man has a conscience which gives witness to the law that is on his heart. The conscience realizes that it is accountable to a higher being. People suffer from guilt

³⁹ Mettinger, 221.

⁴⁰ Porter and Bedard, 57.

⁴¹ Ibid., 57.

when they transgress the law written on their hearts because they know they have done what is wrong, and they know they will have to answer for what they have done.⁴²

There are essential differences between Christianity and Egyptian religion. The primary being that Christ has saved us, declared us righteous and holy, not because of what we have done, but only because of what he has done. Therefore, when our souls are judged, it will be Christ who saves us, not our own good works.

Another difference is that Egyptian religion is polytheistic. They did not believe in one, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient Trinity, but in a pantheon of many and varied gods and goddesses each with their own realm to govern and rule. Therefore the gods of the Egyptian religion and the God of Scripture are essentially different.⁴³

Deities

But who was Osiris and what is the Isis/Osiris/Horus myth? Rosalie David gives a summary of it.

In brief, the myth describes Osiris as an early human king who introduced agriculture and civilization to Egypt. Osiris was murdered by his brother Seth, and his body was dismembered and scattered throughout Egypt. His wife/sister Isis, who was a skilled magician, gathered together his limbs and reunited them; she then posthumously conceived a child, Horus, by Osiris, and reared him in the marshes where Seth could not find him. When Horus grew to adulthood, he sought out Seth to fight him and avenge his father's death, but in the ensuing conflict, the two gods inflicted physical damage on each other. The dispute was then brought before the divine tribunal whose judgement favoured Horus and Osiris. As a result of this, Osiris was resurrected from the dead, and then continued his existence in the underworld where he became king and judge of the dead, while Horus, with whom every living king was identified, became ruler of the living on earth.⁴⁴

Although Rosalie David assumes in this summary that Osiris was an actual historic human king who later became deified, not all scholars think this. Some scholars like J. Gwyn Griffiths believe he was not an historical figure at all.⁴⁵ Whatever the truth is regarding the historicity of Osiris as a king in Egypt's pre-historical past, one thing can be adduced – the

⁴² Romans 2:15

⁴³ David, 230.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁴⁵ Porter and Bedard, 53.

Egyptians believed that he was based in historical fact. They believed Osiris did at one time live, and the events of the myth, whatever they were, did in fact happen.

This is key in understanding to what extent Christians can refute the claims that other religions, and in this instance the Egyptian religion, are not similar to Christianity. The argument some Christians level goes something like this, “Jesus was the only historical figure who came in space and time, while all the other ancient near eastern religions only have mythic figures with no basis in historical reality.” Bruce Metzger uses a form of this argument when he says,

In all the strata of Christian testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ‘everything is made to turn upon a dated experience of a historical Person,’ whereas nothing in the Mysteries points to any attempt to undergird belief with historical evidence of the god’s resurrection.⁴⁶

In the sense that the Isis/Osiris/Horus myths and other mystery religions do not speak of historical people such as the disciples who viewed the resurrection of Jesus, this argument is true. It is also true to say Osiris didn’t actually rise from the dead. Yet, that does not mean that the events of the myth were still not seen as historical by the adherents of the Egyptian religion. Just because there may not be historical evidence for Osiris as a king cannot be used to prove that a man named Osiris never existed.

Since Osiris may have existed as a historical figure, Christians should hesitate using this argument in the secular world. They should also not use this argument because the adherents of the Egyptian religion believed that Osiris actually was triumphant over death, at least to a certain extent. The adherents of the Egyptian religion did not necessarily see their yearly celebration of Osiris as his resurrection again and again. Just as we celebrate Christ’s resurrection yearly but realize he rose one time never to die again, the Egyptians’ celebration of Osiris did not mean they believed he was rising and dying again and again. Jonathan Z. Smith says about the argument used by Metzger, “In the case of the so called ‘dying and rising’ gods, understood in their myths to have lived in ‘historical’ times, their death occurred but once; it was not repeated in the mysteries.”⁴⁷ This does not mean, however, that Osiris did live or that he was a real god who died and rose, nor does it mean that the author believes this to have happened.

⁴⁶ Metzger, 17,18.

⁴⁷ Smith, 104-105.

What attributes did Osiris possess? What kind of god was he? First, we know that he was a god of nature. Not only was he a god of nature, but he was also considered the god of the dead.⁴⁸ At first he was the god of the dead who only bestowed an afterlife on Pharaohs, but as the history and religion of Egypt progressed, he soon became the god who provided resurrection for all. As the religion evolved every individual who was mummified and buried was called “the Osiris” to show the individual’s hope in life after death. Over time Osiris became greater and greater. He took on the attributes of many different gods. He became a very central figure in Egyptian religion, and according to E.A. Wallis Budge, “at no time in Egypt’s history do we find that the position of Osiris was usurped by any other god. On the contrary, it is Osiris who is made to usurp the attributes and powers of other gods...”⁴⁹

What about Horus? What kind of god was he? Some would like to claim that Jesus and Horus are both savior figures. But here one needs to carefully define what it means to be a savior. In what sense was Horus a savior? In what sense was Jesus a savior? Horus was a savior. He was a savior for his father Osiris in the Egyptian myths but not from sin, only from death.⁵⁰ Jesus was the savior of all mankind who came to save mankind from its sinfulness in order that all people might be saved from eternal death.

It should not bother us when there are savior figures in other religions who benefit individuals or their followers at large as in the case of Horus with his father or in the case of Osiris delivering his followers to the afterlife. This belief in a god fits what we know from Scripture. Mankind by nature has knowledge of a god. Not only that but he knows that this god is powerful.⁵¹ Man is also fallen into sin, and he knows from his conscience that he has sinned. He can see around him the disastrous results of sin in the world. The worst effect of sin is death, and man is confronted by death. Man doesn’t want to be taken away by death, but wants deliverance from it as does the rest of creation.⁵² Even though he may want deliverance, by nature he does not know who exactly can save him. He knows there is a god, and he knows that death is a problem so why wouldn’t his false god, whom he sees as a powerful being, offer a way

⁴⁸ Mettinger, 175.

⁴⁹ Porter and Bedard, 28.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵¹ Romans 1:20

⁵² Romans 8:22

to overcome death? It makes sense that other religions would have gods who make it possible to overcome death.

But what is the difference? There are a number of substantial differences. A simple difference which can only be believed by faith is that none of the other gods exist, and though they claim to be able to save from death, in reality they cannot. Only God alone is God, and he alone can deliver from death. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”⁵³ Hosea also says, “But I have been the LORD your God ever since you came out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but me, no Savior except me.”⁵⁴ God says the same through the prophet Isaiah when he says, “I, even I, am the LORD and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you.”⁵⁵

Another difference is the type of deliverance from death. While other pre-Christian religions may believe in a deliverance to an afterlife, they do not teach a bodily resurrection on the Last Day when the body will be transformed and will join the soul in a glorious, sinless, imperishable existence. Nor do the other religions deal with the matter of sin in regard to having forgiveness extended on behalf of a gracious God freely given to men with nothing men can do to earn or deserve it.⁵⁶ The entrance into the afterlife in other religions as was discussed previously is determined by practicing funerary rights and upright living of the individual. This all stems from man’s *opinio legis* - the thought that man can contribute in part or wholly to his salvation. The Egyptian religion is no different from every other non-Christian religion; it is work righteous. J.E. Manchip White, an Egyptologist, confirms this when he says,

Whether you were a good man or a bad man [the Egyptian religion] supplied you with a gratifying assortment of magical formulae guaranteed to get you by hook or by crook into heaven. Whatever sort of terrestrial existence you led, if you recited the rubrics correctly you would obtain everlasting bliss.⁵⁷

⁵³ John 14:6

⁵⁴ Hosea 13:4

⁵⁵ Isaiah 43:11

⁵⁶ Romans 11:6

⁵⁷ White, 36.

If salvation of the Egyptians was by works, they did not believe in salvation by grace alone. Osiris did not save them through his work and extend eternal life to them freely, they had to accomplish it on their own. Thus the results of what Jesus did for us are essentially unique.

Another difference is the type of resurrection Osiris had. Did he have a bodily resurrection as Christ did? No, but the issues concerning Horus' and Osiris' resurrection will be discussed in greater detail later.

Miraculous Births

In what way is the account of Jesus like the Isis/Osiris/Horus? Are there any similarities? What are the differences? People like Tom Harpur definitely don't think Jesus is anything unique. He says about Jesus in his book *The Pagan Christ: Recovering the Lost Light*,

I will clearly document that there is nothing the Jesus of the Gospels either said or did—from the Sermon on the Mount to the miracles, from his flight as an infant from Herod to the Resurrection itself—that cannot be shown to have originated thousands of years before, in Egyptian Mystery rites and other sacred liturgies such as the Egyptian Book of the Dead.⁵⁸

However, before any conclusions can be drawn, some of the claims made that supposedly show the connection between the Isis/Osiris/Horus myth and Jesus need to be examined. The first claim is that the birth of Christ is actually very similar to that of the Egyptian god Horus. The reasons are as follows.

1. The virgin birth of Jesus is based upon the birth of the Egyptian god Horus from the virgin Isis.
2. The god Seb (Seth) gave food to Horus just like Joseph provided for Jesus, and the name of Joseph is borrowed from the name Seb. The consort of Seb was Nu, mother of heaven. Another Egyptian name for heaven is Meri, which is the basis for Mary, Jesus' mother.
3. The ox and donkey were present at Horus' birth just as they were at Jesus' birth.
4. Just like Jesus was threatened by Herod who tried to kill him, Horus's life was in danger from a monster called Herut.
5. The three Magi that visit Jesus are just copies of the Egyptian triad of solar gods, and the star in the east is similar to the morning star that heralds the birth of Horus.

⁵⁸ Porter and Bedard, 59.

A few of these can be dispensed with a very simple answer. The argument that the ox and the donkey were present at Horus's birth just as they were at Jesus' is irrelevant because Scripture never mentions the animals that were present at Christ's birth. Next, the argument that the three magi that visit Jesus are copies of Egyptian solar deities is irrelevant as well because Scripture never states how many magi came to Jesus. All that is recorded in Scripture are what gifts were brought to him and that there were magi who came.

For the rest of the claims, the story of Horus should be examined. In an account from the birth of Horus taken from the 18th Dynasty (1593-1293 B.C.) the actions of Horus' mother Isis are described as she has sexual intercourse with Osiris's dead body. She appears to reanimate him only in so far as the male reproductive organ was concerned so she could copulate with him. It says,

She flew round and round over this earth uttering wailing cries of grief, and she did not alight on the ground until she had found him. She made light [to come forth] from her feathers, she made air to come into being by means of her two wings, and she cried out the death cries of her brother. She made to rise up the helpless members of him whose heart was at rest, she drew from his essence, and she made therefrom an heir. She suckled the child in solitariness and none knew where his place was, and he grew in strength. His hand is mighty (or victorious) within the house of Keb, and the Company of the Gods rejoice greatly at the coming of Horus, the son of Osiris, whose heart is firmly established, the triumphant one, the son of Isis, the flesh and bone of Osiris.⁵⁹

In this and other accounts the basic story is the same. Isis has intercourse with her dead brother and husband Osiris, who miraculously impregnates her. She then gives birth to Horus. The accounts that exist refute the claims made by people like Massey, Kuhn, and Harpur.⁶⁰ Horus was not born of a virgin, but rather he was born to a goddess who had intercourse with her dead husband. The monster Herut, though he may exist in Egyptian mythology, is nowhere to be found in the accounts of Horus's birth; not only this, but King Herod is a well-established historical figure who really lived. There is also no mention of Meri or Seb in the myth. Joseph is not linguistically related to Seb, but means "may God add."⁶¹ The English name Mary is taken from the Greek form of Mary which is taken from the Hebrew name Miriam. Most scholars say

⁵⁹ Porter and Bedard, 62. Quoted from Budge's *Legends of the Egyptian Gods*, 105.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

Miriam means “rebellious” or “disobedient,” but what is clear is that it is not connected to the Egyptian word for heaven.⁶²

There is no basis to say that the story of Jesus was based on the account of the birth of Horus. Though there may be a miraculous birth, it is not like the miraculous birth of Jesus whose Father did not have intercourse with Mary. Instead the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in Mary in a miraculous way as Luke says, “The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.’”⁶³ Jesus birth was essentially different also in the fact that he was true God and true man in one person.⁶⁴ The claims that the births are the same thing ignore important differences between the accounts.

To be fair one should recognize that there are similarities but very insignificant ones, and they are not enough to signify that the Gospels’ account of the birth of Christ was stolen or borrowed from the birth of Horus. The similarities are these: Horus and Jesus were both conceived supernaturally and both were sons of a divine King. The similarities that exist are simply that, nothing more. The essential nature of the gospel has not been impinged upon if one says that these are similarities. Again, similarities do not signify equivalence, nor are similarities grounds for logically concluding that Christianity came from Egyptian myth. This would be speculation, and faulty speculation at that. It also should not surprise us that other gods have offspring in other religions since many times gods of ancient cultures are anthropomorphized and given human qualities.⁶⁵

Violent Deaths

Not only was Horus supposedly conceived and born in the same way that Jesus was, but he also supposedly died in the same way. Tom Harpur says,

Horus was crucified between two thieves, buried in a tomb, and resurrected...Born of a virgin (through whom he became flesh and entered matter), he then became a substitute for humanity, went down into Hades as the quickener of the dead, their justifier and redeemer, ‘the first fruits’ and leader of the resurrection into the life to come.⁶⁶

⁶² www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Miriam.html#.V15TEo-cH4g (accessed Dec. 1, 2015)

⁶³ Luke 1:35

⁶⁴ Matthew 1:23; I John 5:20; Romans 1:3,4; I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:14

⁶⁵ White, 22,23.

⁶⁶ Porter and Bedard, 64. Quoted from Harpur’s *Pagan Christ*, 84,43.

Those are certainly bold claims. Are they true? Did Jesus die in the same way that Horus did? Did he die for humanity? The only way to know for sure is to look at the evidence we have. The story of Horus's death is found on the Metternich Stele which is dated to the fourth century B.C., the only recognized story of Horus' death.⁶⁷ It says,

Horus was bitten (i.e. stung) in Sekhet-An, to the north of Hetep-hemt, whilst his mother Isis was in the celestial houses making a libation for her brother Osiris. And Horus sent forth his cry into the horizon, and it was heard by those who were in...Thereupon the keepers of the doors who were in the [temple of] the holy Acacia Tree started up at the voice of Horus...A scorpion hath smitten (i.e. stung) him, and the reptile Aun-ab hath wounded him. Then Isis placed her nose in his mouth so that she might know whether he who was in his coffin breathed, and she examined the wound of the heir of the god, and she found that there was poison in it. She threw her arms round him, and then quickly she leaped about him like fish when they are laid upon the hot coals, [saying]: "Horus is bitten, O Ra. Thy son is bitten, [O Osiris]."⁶⁸

Here a few dissimilarities must be noted. When Jesus died, his death did not come as a surprise, but he knew that it would happen. He said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priest and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."⁶⁹ This is why Jesus came into the world. Yet, in Horus's case it is an accidental scorpion sting.⁷⁰ Jesus was not a powerless victim in his death, but he made known that he would lay down his life of his own accord. He said about his death, "No one take it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."⁷¹ Yet, in Horus's case he had no control over his death.⁷² When Jesus died, he was a full grown man submitting himself to his heavenly Father's will.⁷³ Yet, when Horus died, he was a child who was left alone and who was then killed by the evil god Seth.⁷⁴ The essence of the gospel is not found in the story of the

⁶⁷ Porter and Bedard, 66.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 65. Quoted from Budge's *Legends of the Egyptian Gods* 171, 183-185.

⁶⁹ Luke 9:22

⁷⁰ Porter and Bedard, 65.

⁷¹ John 10:18

⁷² Porter and Bedard, 65.

⁷³ Philippians 2:8

⁷⁴ Porter and Bedard, 65.

death of Horus. Jesus died to pay the punishment for the sins of man.⁷⁵ Yet, when Horus died it was not for expiation of anyone's sin. When Jesus died to pay the punishment of the sins of man, it was for the whole world; his death was for the benefit of the entire human race spiritually and eternally.⁷⁶ Yet, in the story of Horus his death was not salutary for anyone, but his death was the murder of a small child.

There are a few similarities that exist between the Isis/Osiris/Horus myth and the story of Jesus. The son dies, and the mother grieves (though Mary most certainly grieved for her son as would any mother, we have no actual reference in Scripture to Mary grieving at the death of Jesus).⁷⁷ If one really stretches, one could compare Jesus being pierced with nails to being pierced with a scorpion tail.⁷⁸ However, both of these do not affect the unique essence of the gospel or who Jesus is.

Although Horus's death may not be on behalf of others but was simply an accident, are there other religions or belief systems where someone dies on behalf of the people? For if that were the case would that mean the story of Christ was not unique? Did not Christ die on behalf of people for their benefit? Yes, he did. But before one answers if that would make the gospel just one of many other vicarious sacrifice stories, it is important to see if there is any evidence of such things in other religions. There are cases in other religions where one dies for the sake of the many. One person is put to death for the benefit of the many, and in fact at times a king is put to death for the sake of his people. Frazer in his book *The Golden Bough* gives an example in which a tribal king is killed for the sake of his people. He uses an example of the Shilluk tribe in Africa,

The reverence which the Shilluk pay to their king appears to rise chiefly from the conviction that he is a reincarnation of the spirit of Nyakang, the semi-divine hero who founded the dynasty and settled the tribe in their present territory. It is a fundamental article of the Shilluk creed that the spirit of the divine or semi-divine Nyakang is incarnate in the reigning king, who accordingly himself invested to some extent with the character of a divinity. But while the Shilluk hold their kings in high, indeed religious reverence and take every precaution against their accidental death, nevertheless they cherish "the conviction that the king must not be allowed to become ill or senile, lest with his diminishing vigour the cattle should sicken and fail to bear their increase, the crops

⁷⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:18,19

⁷⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:18,19

⁷⁷ Porter and Bedard, 65.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 65.

should rot in the fields, and man, stricken with disease, should die in ever-increasing numbers.” To prevent these calamities it used to be the regular custom with the Shilluk to put the king to death whenever he showed signs of ill-health or failing strength.”⁷⁹

It is true that in other religions that the kings or individuals die for the sake of their people, but at this point the proper question to ask is this: “Of what benefit is the death of the individual for the many?” To say that Christ died for people’s benefit is true, but it is also true of other people and other beings in other religions.

However, there is a difference. In this instance provided, the death of the king for his tribe is only done to win secure earthly benefits for his people that leave him behind. Jesus died to bring the forgiveness of sins to people.⁸⁰ The king of the tribe dies for his tribe, while Jesus died for all people. The king died, never to come back to life; Jesus died only to rise again. What is essential to the Gospel, which is found in no other religion, is that Jesus, true God and true man, died so that the punishment for the sins of all mankind would be paid once and for all so that people could be reconciled to God. Even if other religions try to deal with sin itself, it is through what acts the individual can perform⁸¹, or through a sacrifice (material, animal, or human) which is essentially worthless because it is not the perfect God-man, Jesus Christ.

If other religions contain deaths of individuals on behalf of the people this is not a retention of the gospel message, or a bit of truth of the gospel for these are based upon lies of Satan. It is a lie to think that man has an inherent moral worth to God and that man can offer a service to God to pay for his sins. As Psalm 49:7-9 says, “No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them—the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough—so that they should live on forever and not see decay.” J.E. Manchip White, a non-Christian, even recognizes that Jesus is a savior in a different sense than any figure in Egyptian religion.

He says,

The ideas of sin and redemption as Christians recognize them appear to have played no part in Egyptian religion. The gods certainly awarded punishment, but rather because their rites had been neglected than because the worshipper had committed wicked acts.⁸²

⁷⁹ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), Chapter XXIV, 10.

⁸⁰ 2 Corinthians 2:18,19

⁸¹ Mettinger, 18.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 35.

This is essentially different than Christianity in which God deplores keeping outward commands apart from faith in Christ as Savior, just as Hosea says, “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.”⁸³

While the purpose and result of Christ’s sacrifice can be said to be different essentially from other religions, I believe Bruce Metzger goes too far with one of his reasons for why Christianity is unique compared to other ancient religions or myths. He says that the Mysteries are about recurrence of seasons and vegetative cycle, while the resurrection of Christ is a one-time event that happened in history as a form of deliverance. He says,

Myths of the cults lack entirely that reference to the spiritual and moral meaning of history which is inextricably involved in the experiences and triumph of Jesus Christ. In fact, not until the fourth century, when doubtless this stark contrast between the two became increasingly apparent to thoughtful pagans, is there any indication of an attempt to read moral values into certain cultic myths.⁸⁴

Though it is true Christ’s act was a one-time historical act, and though it may be true, as in the example of the Isis/Osiris/Horus myth that the deaths of the gods do not directly deal with man’s sinfulness and morality, to claim that the cults had nothing to do with morality is not completely accurate. The assumption that the ancient religions were purely based on earthly seasons and only involved vegetative cycles is an assumption made by comparative religion scholars through the view of a Darwinian lens. It is assumed that as religions evolved and developed in their early stages the adherents were merely concerned about the continued life here and now on earth. This is a faulty assumption. These other religions were concerned with more than just the welfare of crops. They had to have been concerned with spiritual matters as beings with souls.⁸⁵ The fact that there was a divine judgment in which people had to give an accounting for their lives is evidence that these other ancient religions were concerned with morality. But the difference between Christianity and ancient pagan religions is that they looked to the answer for their spiritual problems in what they could give to the gods, or what they had to do in order to gain favor and an afterlife from the gods.

Resurrections

⁸³ Hosea 6:6

⁸⁴ Metzger, 20.

⁸⁵Smith, 106-107.

The last claim to be addressed is the claim that Jesus' resurrection is nothing unique. In regard to the resurrection people point to both Osiris and Horus and say that the resurrection is found in accounts of both gods. Is this true? Did Osiris and/or Horus rise from the dead? Tom Harpur claims that "Horus, like Jesus at his Resurrection, rose in a new body of light on the third day...In the Gospels, it is the women who announce the Resurrection. 'The goddesses and the women proclaim me when they see me,' shouts Horus as he rises from the tomb, 'on the horizon of the resurrection.'"⁸⁶

There is a problem with this argument since the only known resurrection story for Horus is also taken from the Metternich Stele.⁸⁷ It says,

And Isis sent forth her voice into heaven, and made supplication to the Boat of Millions of Years, and the Disk stopped in its journeying, and moved not from the place whereon it rested. Then came forth Thoth, who is equipped with his spells (or, words of power), and possesseth the great word of command of *maa-kheru*, [and said:] "What [aileth thee], what [aileth thee], O Isis, thou goddess who hast magical spells, whose mouth hast understanding? Assuredly no evil thing hath befallen [thy] son Horus, [for] the Boat of Ra hath him under its protection. I have come this day in the Divine Boat of the Disk from the place where it was yesterday,--now darkness came and the light was destroyed—in order to heal Horus for his mother Isis and every person who is under the knife likewise...Wake up, Horus! Thy protection is established. Make thou happy the heart of thy mother Isis. The words of Horus shall bind up hearts, he shall cause to be at peace him who is in affliction. Let your hearts be happy, O ye who dwell in the heavens (Nut). Horus, he who hath avenged (or protected) his father shall cause the poison to retreat. Verily that which is in the mouth of Ra shall go round about (i.e. circulate), and the tongue of the Great God shall repulse [opposition]. The Boat [of Ra] standeth still, and travelleth not onwards. The Disk is in the [same] place where it was yesterday to heal Horus for his mother Isis."⁸⁸

Here a few dissimilarities should be examined. There is no mention anywhere in this account of three days spent in a tomb. For Harpur or anyone else to make that claim, unless evidence is provided, is a gross misrepresentation of the facts. The resurrection of Horus also was not a foreordained act which was planned for the spiritual benefit of mankind. Instead it was a resurrection in response to a desperate mother's plea.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Porter and Bedard, 66.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 67.

There are a few more details in this story that could be seen as parallels, though in fact they are only similarities at best. Both are divine children who die and return to life. One could also say in both the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of Horus the resurrection is brought about by someone outside the individual. In the resurrection of Horus, it is the god Thoth; in the resurrection of Jesus, it is God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.⁹⁰ However, this is not a problem because really they are essentially different. Though God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are said to have raised Jesus from the dead, the Bible also speaks of Christ raising himself from the dead.⁹¹ This is what showed Jesus is God just as God had claimed in the past as Paul says,

I Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.⁹²

Yet, Horus was unable to do this. Though he was a god, he was not an omnipotent God. Another obvious point that almost goes without saying is that even though the claim is made that others raised Horus, in actuality this didn't happen since only God exists as a deity and only he can raise the dead. The Egyptian myth makes claims about that which could not have actually happened, while Scripture makes claims about that which God has already brought about (though this is an argument from a faith-driven bias).

Another similarity one could say exists between the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of Horus is that both are of some benefit for people. Yet, there is an essential difference. Though the resurrection of Horus would allow him to once again speak to people and be a benefit to them, e.g. “The words of Horus shall bind up hearts, he shall cause to be at peace him who is in affliction,” the resurrection itself is not to have benefited anyone, while the resurrection of Christ seals our justification, earns a resurrection for us, and makes the resurrection of all people on the last day possible.⁹³ It was claimed by the Egyptians that Horus' words would provide peace to those in affliction and they would bind up hearts, but not in the

⁹⁰ 2 Corinthians 4:14, Romans 8:11

⁹¹ John 11:25

⁹² Romans 1:1-4

⁹³ I Corinthians 15

same way as the Word of God does such things. For in the story of Horus, though his words bring comfort to those in affliction, there is no mention of them being able to provide spiritual comfort and assurance of sins forgiven. The Word of God alone holds out to us the promise of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus and a certain hope of a life to come.⁹⁴

But what about Osiris and his resurrection? Porter and Bedard say,

The nature of the resurrection of Osiris is much closer to that of Jesus than to that of Lazarus...It was in Osiris that people found hope after death, to the point that Osiris absorbed many of the characteristics and earlier gods of the dead. The dead took on the title “the Osiris” having their families re-enacting the rituals of Horus so that they might share in Osiris’s original resurrection⁹⁵

It seems that Osiris’ resurrection provided hope for the Egyptian; if this is the case, then how is Osiris’ resurrection different? First, in recent years, it has been suggested that in fact there is no such thing as a “dying and rising” god as for instance in the case of Osiris or Horus. Instead there are two distinct categories of gods: those that disappeared and those that returned.⁹⁶ Most gods, if not all, do not fit both of the categories; they are either in one or the other. Or, if they are in both, the order is not in the same order as that of Christ. Yet, some scholars like Tryggve Mettinger still debate that the ancient near eastern gods, who may or may not find their roots in the Egyptian Osiris myth, do in fact rise from the dead.

The issue then comes down to how resurrection is defined. Do the gods die and rise physically as Jesus did, or is their mode of existence after their death something other than a bodily existence? In the case of Osiris, his resurrection is not a bodily resurrection. Rather, his is a continued existence in the netherworld as the lord of the dead. This is essentially different than the resurrection of Christ from the dead. His resurrection was bodily as Jesus says of himself, “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”⁹⁷ His bodily resurrection was also essential for the forgiveness of sins so that one could enjoy eternal life at the resurrection from the dead.⁹⁸ Not only that but now

⁹⁴ 2 Timothy 1:10,3:15; Romans 1:16; John 5:39

⁹⁵ Porter and Bedard, 79.

⁹⁶ Mettinger, 15,16.

⁹⁷ Luke 24:39

⁹⁸ I Corinthians 15; Romans 4:25

Christ rules over all things and is everywhere, as opposed to Osiris, who according to myth, remains in the underworld.⁹⁹

The followers of Osiris and the followers of Christ are also to obtain life in different ways. It has been said that the religion of the Egyptians was one of works righteousness and that the entrance into the afterlife was based upon what the followers of the cult had to do. However, what did they have to do exactly? There was a speech which every dead person had to recite to the gods; it was called “The Declaration of Innocence.”¹⁰⁰In this “Declaration of Innocence”, the person speaking must claim that they have been perfect in life, after listing off a laundry-list of things that they have not done, finally culminating in the statement, “I am pure, pure, pure, pure!”¹⁰¹

However, this stands in sharp distinction to what the sheep say to God on the last day. Instead of trusting what they have done, those who are saved question if they have done any good for God. “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’”¹⁰² They do not claim innocence but ask when they ever did good things for God. The Egyptian judgment is in sharp contrast to how Paul speaks of God keeping Christians worthy for the day of his judgment in 1 Corinthians. “He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁰³ For Christians, the hope of the resurrection on the last day and a favorable judgement from God are found in Christ alone, the Lamb of God who has washed us in his blood.¹⁰⁴

Same Names

Beside the similarities that supposedly exist between the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus and Horus in the Isis/Osiris/Horus myth, are there any other similarities that people ascribe to the Isis/Osiris/Horus myth? There are a number of similarities which are posited. Tom Harpur claims “according to the historian Herodotus, the ‘father of history,’ the Egyptian Jesus,

⁹⁹ Ephesians 4:10

¹⁰⁰ R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2000), 29.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰² Matthew 25:37

¹⁰³ 1 Corinthians 1:8

¹⁰⁴ Revelation 7:14

known as Iu-em-hetep, or Iusu, was one of the eight great gods who was described in papyri almost twenty thousand years ago.”¹⁰⁵

Harpur assumes the following in his argument:

1. Herodotus uses these names and refers to a person that is identified as Jesus.
2. The similarity of Jesus with the names Iu-em-hetep and Iusu proves that Jesus was based upon this Egyptian figure.
3. There is archaeological textual evidence from twenty thousand years ago.

Each of these assumptions needs to be addressed. The first and most easily dismissed of these assumptions is that Iu-em-hetep or Iusu was in an ancient papyri text from twenty thousand years ago. This cannot be since A.C. Moorhouse says that the earliest evidence of writing that exists is from the third millennium B.C. which is around five thousand years ago.¹⁰⁶

The next assumptions that needs to be examined is that Herodotus uses these Egyptian names and that the names prove Jesus was based upon an Egyptian figure. Iu-em-hetep is probably a form of Imhotep who was the architect of the Step Pyramid at Saqqara and who was also later deified as a god of medicine.¹⁰⁷ He may be likened to Jesus in a very narrow sense in that Jesus used his divine power to heal people, yet this is not enough to equate Jesus to Imhotep. It would be a reductionist argument to say so.

A difference remains even in these few facts about Imhotep and Jesus; Jesus did not become deified, he always was and will forever be God.¹⁰⁸ It should also be noted that if Jesus is based upon one individual, this individual should contain in themselves all the attributes Jesus did, yet Harpur, Massey, and Kuhn pick and choose various attributes from different gods, first from Horus here, and then Iu-em-hetep there. It begins to feel like the piecemeal process of making Frankenstein’s monster.

As far as the claim that Imhotep is mentioned in Herodotus, this never happens. In Alvin Boyd Kuhn’s book *The Lost Light*, he says that Herodotus mentions Imhotep as one of the eight gods in his *Histories* 2.43, but what it says is this. “They say that seventeen thousand years before the reign of Amasis the twelve gods were produced from the eight; and of the twelve they

¹⁰⁵ Porter and Bedard, 71.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 72.

¹⁰⁸ Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 13:8

hold Heracles to be one.”¹⁰⁹ Imhotep is mentioned nowhere, and the eight gods to which he refers are Nun, Naunet, Huh, Hauhet, Kuk, Kauket, Amun and Amaunet.¹¹⁰

As for the name Iusa, according to the Egyptologist and Professor at the University of Toronto, Ron Leprohon, it doesn’t even exist.¹¹¹ Instead, a set of questionable linguistic moves are employed. Kuhn says,

For many thousands of years before Christ, the prototype of all coming saviors was the Egyptian Iusa. The name is from *Iu* (*Ia, Ie, Io* or *Ja, Je, Jo, Ju*), the original name of biune divinity, combined with the Egyptian suffix *sa* (or *se, si, su* or *saf, sef, sif, suf*), meaning with the grammatical masculine “f,” the male heir, son, successor, or prince.¹¹²

According to Ron Leprohon, it is true that “sa” means “son” in ancient Egyptian and “iu” means “to come,” yet the order is completely backwards for Egyptian construction. It instead would be “suiu” rather than “iusu.” Not only that but the two syllables combined to form the name “Iusu” are found nowhere in Egyptian.¹¹³ Also it should be noted that Jesus’ name in English is derived from the Greek name which is taken from the Hebrew name that means “The LORD saves” or “The LORD is salvation.” The name Jesus does not mean “Son of God.”

There is also another linguistic similarity noted by Harpur in his book *The Pagan Christ* which should be examined as well. He claims that the title “Christ” is also found in Egyptian. Where does he see it? “There is so much more to explore and share—how the letters KRST appear on Egyptian mummy coffins many centuries B.C.E., and how this word, when the vowels are filled in (they frequently omitted in ancient languages) is really Karast, or Krist, signifying Christ.”¹¹⁴ However, this word is the Egyptian for “burial”¹¹⁵ and the name “Christ” comes from the Greek which means “the anointed one” and is the Hellenized form of the Hebrew “messiah” which also means “the anointed one.”

¹⁰⁹ Porter and Bedard, 72. Quoted from Herodotus *The Histories* (London: Penguin, 1996), 562.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 72.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 73.

¹¹² Porter and Bedard, 73. Quoted from Kuhn’s *The Lost Light*, 544.

¹¹³ Ibid., 73.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 74.

Miracles

Another supposed similarity between the story of Christ and the Isis/Osiris/Horus myth concerns another event in the ministry of Christ. It is the resurrection of Lazarus. Tom Harpur does this by claiming that the use of the name Lazarus in the Gospels is meant to evoke the Egyptian god Osiris and the resurrection he went through. Harpur, basing his thoughts upon Alvin Boyd Kuhn says,

The Egyptians regularly expressed their reverence by placing the definite article “the” before the names of their gods. Just as Christians say, or should say, “the Christ,” the Egyptians said “the Osiris.” But that was the equivalent of saying “Lord Osiris.” When the Hebrews took up the name of the Osiris, or Lord Osiris, they used the Hebrew word for “lord,” *el* – hence El-Asar. Later on, the Romans, speaking Latin, of course, took El-Asar and added the *us* ending used for most male names. The result was El-Asar-us. In time, the initial *e* “wore off,” as linguists describe it, and the *s* in Asar changed to *z*, its constant companion in language. Thus, we have Lazarus, the Osiris of the Beth-Anu story.¹¹⁶

There is a simple explanation for this. Porter and Bedard deconstruct this argument.

The use of the definite article with the name of the god misses a number of points. Yes, “the Christ” is an appropriate way to describe Jesus, but not as an expression of reverence but rather because “Christ” is a title, meaning “Anointed One,” and not a name. Yes, “the Osiris” was also used but not for the god Osiris (his name, not his title), but for each dead person who hoped to experience the same resurrection as Osiris and was therefore called “the Osiris.” Harpur is incorrect in claiming that that Hebrew *el* means “lord,” as it actually means “God.” The amount of linguistic gymnastics required to explain a story written in Greek, by combining Hebrew, Egyptian and Latin languages into one name, clearly demonstrates the forced nature of this argument.¹¹⁷

Lazarus is the English form of the Greek “Lazarus” which is more than likely taken from the Hebrew “Eleazar” which means “The Lord helps.”

In regard to the role each of the stories play in its own religion, an important distinction should be made which Bedard and Porter point out as well. While Osiris is raised to permanent life in the underworld, Lazarus is raised to life in the physical world. Lazarus must die again; his resurrection isn’t permanent. In respect to the importance of the event, the death and resurrection is central to the worship and belief in Osiris. In contrast, the resurrection of Lazarus was a display of Jesus’ power as the Son of God. This would set in motion events that would lead to

¹¹⁶ Porter and Bedard, 76. Quoted from Harpur’s *Pagan Christ*, 133-134.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

Jesus' ultimate death at the hands of the Jews, which in turn would set the stage for his resurrection, one of the central events of Christianity.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

Is the gospel unique? Yes, the gospel's unique essence is found in no other religion. The arguments leveled against Christ can be refuted many times through research and through Scripture itself.

Is Jesus unique? The world would not have us think so. The world would have us believe that Jesus Christ is not the way, the truth, and the life. Instead the world would have us think that Jesus is just one among many saviors, that he is just one mythical figure among many others. To many unbelievers whether or not he was a real man does not matter since the claims of Christianity concerning Christ are "unscientific" and very much similar to other heroic figures in other religions.

However, we need to realize that the world bases its arguments against Christianity on shaky ground. Whether the methods used by some do not take into account the essential differences between Christianity and other religions, or they simply are based upon poor research and faulty conclusions, Christians can point out these errors with some research and a proper understanding of Scripture's teachings.

Is the Christ unique? Yes, he is, and we as Christians know why. Yet, as Christians who must be ready to give an answer to those who ask us the reason for the hope we have, we must not be too quick to simplify the issue ourselves lest we say too much. While it is true that Christianity is unique in its essence, we do not want to say too much. If Christians are troubled with the issue of similarities between Christianity and other religions, or if unbelievers are legitimately concerned about the similarities that exist, it does no one any good to try and say there really are no similarities in an attempt to protect the unique nature of Christ and the gospel. The similarities that exist can be admitted without impinging upon the unique nature of the gospel. We can admit religions have blood sacrifice, water purification rituals, vicarious deaths on behalf of others, and even gods who may have power over death, but then we can point to why these other religions are concerned about sin and its effects. Other religions have blood sacrifice, but it is about what they have to do to appease angry gods; it is about trying to deal with sin and receive favor by their own devices. Other religions have water purification rituals,

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 78.

but none which truly save and wash away sins by connecting them to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Other religions have individuals who die on behalf of others, but none have Jesus, Christ, the God-man, who alone could atone for the sins of the world and gave himself up to redeem mankind. Other religions have gods with power over death, but they do not have Jesus Christ who not only claimed to have power over death, but died and bodily rose victorious so that all mankind will one day rise from the dead with all those who believed in him made imperishable forever. Other religions claim to have gods that exist, Christianity alone has the only true, eternal, God. We still hold to what makes Jesus and the gospel truly unique.

Is the gospel unique? Is Jesus Christ unique? Yes, undoubtedly, unequivocally, most certainly, yes. He is the only true God from all eternity, and true man from the moment of his incarnation, who descended to this earth to deliver mankind all because of his grace and mercy. When others make the claim that Christ is a copycat, it does not need to shake our faith in the least because by grace through the faith he has given us we know the truth. He is the only one who through his life, death, and resurrection has provided forgiveness of sin to mankind, and new life and salvation to all who believe in him. He alone is our hope. He alone is our Savior. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life.

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- Wright, N T. (Nicholas Thomas) Bp. "Jesus' Resurrection & Christian Origins." *Stimulus* 16, no. 1 (February 2008): 41-50. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed December 1, 2015).
- www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Miriam.html#.VI5TEo-cH4g (accessed Dec. 1, 2015)
- Yamauchi, Edwin M. "Tammuz and the Bible." *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 3 (September 1965): 283-290. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed December 1, 2015).

Literary Review

Craig, William Lane, John Dominic Crossan, William F Buckley, and Paul Copan. *Will The Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*

Derrett, J Duncan M. "Oracles, myth, and Luke's nativity story."

Eriksson, Stefan. "The resurrection and the incarnation: myths, facts or what?"

Price, Robert M. *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*.

Wright, N T. (Nicholas Thomas) Bp. "Jesus' resurrection & Christian origins."

These sources proved to be beneficial to understand the view that because Christ was a man whose story was embellished or mythologized, it cannot be historically and factually true. These sources also gave some insight into a dichotomy of Christ that some hold – the Christ of Faith and the Christ of History. Though many of these did not play directly into the issues addressed in the thesis, the underlying tenets of historical criticism and evolution of religion play key roles in the argument that Christ is not unique from other ancient mythical figures.

Dundes, Alan. *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore*.

Dundes, Alan. *The Study Of Folklore*.

Eliade, Mircea, and Mircea Eliade. *Gods, Goddesses, and Myths Of Creation*.

Campbell, Joseph, and Bill D Moyers. *The Power of Myth*.

Jung, C. G, and Karl Kerenyi. *Essays on a Science of Mythology*.

Raglan, Lord. *The Hero*.

Rank, Otto. *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero, And Other Writings*.

Knox, Wilfred Lawrence. "The 'divine hero' Christology in the New Testament."

Koester, Helmut. "The divine human being."

Many of these sources proved to be helpful in understanding further the idea that concepts, themes, and events in many religions are found all around the world. These authors then often compared Christianity to many other religions to try to prove that Christianity is simply another religion like any other with the same themes and events. Christ himself, in the view of these authors, was nothing new, instead he fit an heroic archetype found in many other myths.

Macquarrie, John. 1964. "Christianity and other faiths."

Van den Heever, Gerhard. "Jesus in the world of religions: a preliminary plotting of a route map."

Though not very influential in the writing of this thesis, these authors provided a worldview of Christianity in which the effects of pluralism and faulty comparative religious studies can be seen.

Balch, David L. "The suffering of Isis/IO and Paul's portrait of Christ crucified (Gal 3:1): frescoes in Pompeian and Roman houses and in the temple of Isis in Pompeii."

Barton, George A. (George Aaron). "Were The Biblical Foundations Of Christian Theology Derived From Babylonia?"

Croy, N Clayton. "A God by any other name: polyonymy in Greco-Roman antiquity and early Christianity."

Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough*.

King, Charles. "Orphism and Christianity."

Ubruhe, J O. "Traditional Sacrifice: A Key to the Heart of the Christian Message."

James George Frazer's book *The Golden Bough* was a work in which he undertook to compare many tribal religions around the world to prove that they all evolved from the same place. This book was a seminal work in comparative religious studies and has influenced many scholars since it was written. Many of the ideas in this book find their way into popular belief about the relationship between Christianity and other religions. All of these sources dealt with the general idea that Christianity is based upon some ancient religion/religions, and they were useful for this reason.

Metzger, Bruce Manning. "Considerations of methodology in the study of the mystery religions and early Christianity."

Porter, Stanley E, and Stephen J Bedard. *Unmasking The Pagan Christ*. Toronto: Clements Pub., 2006.

Ferguson, Everett. "Apologetics in the New Testament."

House, H. Wayne, and Joseph M Holden. *Charts of Apologetics and Christian Evidences*.

These sources, especially Bruce Metzger's article as well as Stanley Porter and Stephen Bedard's book, were key in comparing the facts of the other ancient religions to Christianity itself. Metzger's article offered many valuable insights into much of the assumptions and methods which are involved in comparative religious studies. Porter and Bedard's book played a very large role in understanding the arguments regarding the similarities between Christ and the Isis/Osiris/Horus myth which was a main focus of this thesis.

Mettinger, Tryggve N D. "The 'dying and rising God': a survey of research from Frazer to the present day."

Mettinger, Tryggve N. D. *The Riddle Of Resurrection*.

Parrish, John W. "It's all in the definition: the problem with 'dying and rising gods'."

Ring, George Cyril. "Christ's resurrection and the dying and rising gods."

Smith, Jonathan Z. *Drudgery Divine*.

Yamauchi, Edwin M. "Tammuz and the Bible."

These sources were also very valuable in my research, especially Tryggve Mettinger's work as well as Jonathan Z. Smith's book. They discussed 'dying and rising' gods of the Ancient Near East and whether or not they should be classified as such. Mettinger believed that "dying and rising gods" did exist in ancient religion, while Smith believed that the title "dying and rising gods" was a misnomer and that the gods should be classified in different ways. Smith's book was also very valuable for understanding the issues one must consider when comparing religions to one another.

White, Jon Manchip. *Ancient Egypt*.

Falkner, R.O. *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*.

David, Rosalie. *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*.

These sources were influential in my research because they provided much information on the religion of ancient Egypt both in regard to Osiris but also regarding the reliability of ancient texts.