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The Glory of Salvation

Many historians will claim that Christianity is not the oldest religion in the world. They teach that religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism predate Christianity, some by thousands of years, with the implication that Christianity is a recent religion *invented* in the first century as an answer to the emptiness of life in Rome.

Amazing as it may seem, God's people throughout church history have had to frequently answer claims like this one. In fact, it was one of the attacks that the Romans leveled against the Christians during the Neronian persecution of 64 AD. And it is one of the questions Peter

addresses in 1 Peter which was written to encourage his persecuted brethren during this time.

Peter encourages us in just a few short verses- addressing such things like these:

- The Old Testament office of prophet.
- How the prophets went about their ministry.
- What the prophets understood.
- The focus of the prophet's teaching and preaching.

And a whole lot more. Yet before Peter addressed these issues, he addresses the accusation that Christianity was invalid because it was new! We begin by understanding the salvation which the Romans were attacking, specifically salvation's content.

1 Peter 1:10, "As to this salvation..."

When we read these words, it is natural to think that Peter is addressing the forgiveness of sin, and our reconciliation to God. While that no doubt is involved here, nevertheless, based on what we've seen in this epistle, we note that salvation is much bigger than simply the forgiveness of sin. Consider how Peter already has spoken about it previously.

1 Peter 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope..."

When you and I were saved, we were saved unto "a living hope." That means as Christ is in glory, someday we also shall be! That is the expectation each one of us has in Christ!

1 John 3:2b, "...We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is."

Peter continued; we were saved for this purpose:

1 Peter 1:4, "To *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."

Recall that this ultimately is speaking of the New Heavens and Earth which is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise that God made to His people concerning the land. O. Palmer Robertson puts it this way:

The concept of a land that belongs to God's people originated in Paradise. This simple fact, so often overlooked, plays a critical role in evaluating the significance of the land throughout redemptive history and in its consummate fulfillment. Land did not begin to be theologically significant with the promise given to Abraham. Instead, the patriarch's hope of possessing a land arose out of the concept of restoration to the original state from which man had fallen. The original idea of land as paradise

significantly shaped the expectations associated with redemption. As the place of blessedness arising from unbroken fellowship and communion with God, the land of paradise became the goal toward which redeemed humanity was returning. (Robertson, 2000, p. 4)

In this regard, “the meek” someday literally “will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5)! That too is in mind when we speak of “salvation.” We were saved unto this glorious future!

1 Peter 1:5, “Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Here we saw that God’s redemptive plan for us has just begun! What we see and experience when it comes to Christianity in our life today is but the *beginning* of all that God has planned for those who love Christ! On the last day, this world is going to burn up after which time God is going to refashion its remains into a world which will be undefilable. When we enter into that place and age, our growth in grace and apprehension of the love of God will go into warp speed and “we will know as we today are known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Speaking of our tempered/tried faith, Peter wrote this:

1 Peter 1:7, “That the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

Recall that this has reference to the final state, specifically the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (cf. Revelation 19:7; Matthew 26:29) and the verbal commendation Christ will give to His people. At this time Christ is going to gaze upon you and me and express “praise, glory, and honor” to us as His servants! Recall the words of Christ when He told them of the importance of being “ready” and “spiritually vigilant”:

Luke 12:37: “Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes [how are they ‘blessed’?]; truly I say to you, that he [the Master/Jesus] will gird himself *to serve*, and have them recline *at the table*, and will come up and wait on them.”

Do you understand? At the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, Christ is going to honor us all by waiting on us! And yet there is more.

1 Corinthians 4:5, “Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men’s* hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.”

That no doubt is what is in mind when Christ spoke of a time when He would say to His servants, “Well done, good and faithful slave... enter into the joy of your Master!” (Matthew

25:21)

With this as the background, Peter then wrote in our text, “As to this salvation...” Clearly Peter is talking here about much more than simply the forgiveness of sin. Rather, He is talking about it all:

- The choice of God in eternity past to redeem us (v. 1).
- The resulting implanting of the New Life in time (v. 3).
- Our faith (vv. 5, 8).
- Our forgiveness (v. 2).
- Our growth in grace (v. 2).
- Our struggle for holiness (v. 2).
- Our perseverance in the faith (vv. 6-8).
- Our life in the New Heavens and Earth (v. 7b).

This is the “salvation” Peter is referencing here! And it was that “salvation” that the Romans in Peter’s day, this world, and Satan would have us doubt and draw into question. The enemy doesn’t want us to live with this before us! He would rather that we would be preoccupied with the here and now — for to lose sight of this hope is to fall into all manner of doubting and compromise. speaking of the salvation Peter just described, the apostle wrote:

2 Peter 3:14, 17-18a, “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless... You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...”

Do you see how important it is that you and I live our lives Coram Deo- before the face of God- and so before the glorious future that awaits us? When we forget or neglect that which God has planned for us who love Him, we easily become “...hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). And so rather than maintaining our vigilance, diligence, and faithfulness, we shrink back thinking that the service of Christ is not worth it!

Now one of the ways Satan would bring us to that point is by attacking the validity of Christianity and making us doubt and draw back in our boldness and service. One way he has and continues to do that is by suggesting that Christianity is a “new” religion, created in the first century AD to address the emptiness that accompanied the old gods of Rome. And this brings us to Peter’s second point; Christianity predates the first century.

1 Peter 1:10b-11, “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful search and inquiry. Seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.”

There is a lot here as it relates to The Origin of Christianity. First off notice, if it was spoken about by Old Testament prophets then it clearly predates the first century! Now this is NOT a surprise to us, BUT most certainly contradicts the assertion that Christianity began in the first century AD. In this regard, when did Christianity begin? To answer this, we have to consider what specifically is Christianity? Did it in fact begin in the first century AD? Notice with me a couple of New Testament passages which address this where Paul having shown that both Jew and Gentile outside of Christ are going to hell, Paul gives this important definition as to what constitutes a Jew:

Romans 2:25-29a, "For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law [that is, the gentile in Christ], will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law [again through the work of Christ imputed to him], will he not judge you who though having the letter *of the Law* and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law? [now this is the point which helps us date the beginning of Christianity] 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter..."-

Don't miss this very important statement. Paul gives us a definitive definition of what constitutes a Jew and so Judaism. It has nothing to do with ethnicity or the nation of which one might be a citizen. Rather, it has everything to do with redemption, the forgiveness of sin, being a child of the Living God! If that is what you are, then you are, in Paul's estimation, a Jew!

From this we understand that Christianity was NOT a new religion springing up in the first century AD. Rather in the minds of the Apostles, it constituted true/realized Judaism and so the fulfillment/continuation of what God purposed in Abraham so long ago (which is why Peter roots Christianity in the Old Testament). Paul, addressing an almost exclusively Gentile congregation, wrote this:

Philippians 3:2b-3, "...beware of the false circumcision; for we are the *true* circumcision [‘the circumcision’ was a title used throughout Redemptive History of Jews in contrast to Gentiles. Paul here says that in Christ Gentiles constitute the ‘true circumcision’- specifically those...] who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh."

And yet it wasn't just Paul. Peter also held this view. Listen to the titles Peter uses to describe what by this time were primarily Gentile congregations:

1 Peter 2:9a, 10, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession [if you know your Old Testament at all, then you know that

these are some of the more important titles used of the Old Testament Jew; yet here Peter applies these titles to Gentile churches. How so?...]... for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God...”

Who are “the people of God” in the Bible? Looking only at the Old Testament we would say the Jews. Yet based on 1 Peter 2 and many other New Testament passages, we would say any who are in Christ- whether they be ethnically Jew or Gentile!

This ought NOT to surprise us, for recall: for the first fifteen years of its existence, the church was comprised solely of ethnic Jews! It wasn’t until 45 AD that Gentiles were brought into the church (cf. Acts 11:19-26). So many miss this! Because today the church has been taken over by Gentiles, we assume that the church is a Gentile institution separate/distinct from Judaism. Yet that was NOT true the first fifteen years of its history. The first fifteen years of its existence, the church was comprised of 100 percent ethnic Jews!

From all of this we conclude that Christianity is NOT separate or distinct from Judaism. Christianity is the fulfillment and thus the continuation of it! Accordingly, just as Paul taught in Romans 4, we trace the origin of Christianity back to the time of Abraham and so the prophetic work of this man. You say, “Prophetic work? Abraham was a prophet?” Indeed, he was. When Abraham spoke to Abimelech king of Gerar who took Sarah as his because of Abraham’s lie, God said this:

Genesis 20:7a, “Now therefore, restore the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live...”

Now if God “prophesied of the grace that *would come* to us” through the former prophets including Abraham, then we conclude that Christianity must have preceded Abraham! Is that possible? Indeed, it not only is possible, but it in fact is the case. THE Prophet after which all other prophets get their calling and ministry — Jesus Christ — spoke these words to Satan on account of the devil’s role in the Fall of mankind into sin:

Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He [Jesus] shall bruise you on the head, and you [Satan] shall bruise him on the heel.”

We call this the Proto-Evangelium- the First Gospel! Here the Second Member of the Godhead most certainly “...predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.” Now while Jesus did NOT “grapple to understand what the prophesy meant” (He was and is the fulfillment of it), nevertheless this demonstrates that the substance of Christianity is one of the oldest religions in the world. But as I said before, it is NOT the oldest religion. For that we have to go back to Genesis chapter 2 where God established the first religion which we identify as The Covenant of Works.

Genesis 2:16-17, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the

garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.”

By way of note, when we speak of “religion” we are talking about the fact that man was created to have a relationship with God. Accordingly, man was created with a knowledge of God and so possesses a reverence/fear of the Lord (cf. Romans 1:18-19; Ps. 111:10). This is what we mean by “religion.”

In this regard, the first religion established on this earth involved mankind in Adam relating to God on the basis of Adam’s conduct. When Adam failed, God established a second religion which was designed to fulfill the aim of the first religion. And that religion was and is Judaism which, as we have seen, Christianity is the fulfillment of! In light of this, we conclude that Christianity goes way back, almost to the very beginning!

Now why is this important? Why is Peter making such a big deal about this?

Peter makes a big deal of this because the culture of the Roman Empire

- (1) Valued that which was old and
- (2) Despised that which was new.

With this in mind, you can imagine during the Neronian persecution that many a Christian was humbled/discouraged/depressed as they were criticized for following a religion that was only a couple decades old! Accordingly, in this defense of the faith, Peter wrote to demonstrate that Christianity goes way back in time, well beyond Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism — well beyond anything Rome could imagine! Dr. Robert Godfrey in his Ligonier lecture series on church history said this:

[The spiritual longing of Rome] was linked to trying to find ancient truth... there was this sense that truth must long had been known. And so you looked back to Aristotle and Plato, already 300 years old, as great guides to truth. That was part of the fascination of Isis. Egypt was seen to be one of the most ancient of civilizations, and therefore the goddess of Egypt must be more insightful, more helpful to us than these newcomer gods that have come to us... One of the initial problems that Christianity faced was that it was new; at least that’s what it appeared to most people to be. ‘Your founder is Jesus? He died a few decades ago? What could we learn from a religion like that?’ And that is why in much of the early Christian writing what we find is the effort... to show Christianity is the fulfillment of all that Judaism awaited. (Godfrey, 2006)

That is exactly what Peter is doing here. God’s people needed to know during this time of persecution that what they believed was NOT a newly invented religion, BUT that which went back to the very beginning! And so, he says that the early prophets, some of whom lived 2,000 years before, grappled with the reality of what we have in Christ today!¹

So Christian:

- Don't doubt God's kind intention toward you! If you are saved, you got it all!
- Do not grow weary and lose heart! What you believe is true!
- Christ "has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20)!
- The Bible is God's word.
- Christ remains "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)! If you have come to the Father through Him then you really are saved!
- "Your work in the Lord is NOT in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58)!

As this is the case, don't allow any attack, disappointment, or discouragement to cause you to compromise your fidelity to the Lord. Satan would have you be discouraged! The world would have you be compromise! Your flesh would love to take a day off. Yet the Way, the Truth, and the Life will hear nothing of the sort!

Jonah 2:8, "Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness."

Oh Christian! We have begun well; let us not allow any one or thing to hinder us!

Bibliography

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End Note(s)

¹ In this regard, there are many apologetical passages in the Bible which we read over so quickly. Let me give you the first one found in Scripture. It is Genesis 1:1-5 which says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day." One of the earliest attacks on Christianity that I have ever encountered was in the classroom when my professors spoke of the many creation accounts throughout world history which precede the writing of Genesis, some by 3,000 years (most notably the Epic of Gilgamesh which is a Sumerian creation story). The implication was that Judaism/Christianity borrowed its content and so teaching from the religions that surrounded it! It wasn't/isn't from God! It clearly was the creation of man.

So how do we respond to the critic's charge that Moses simply copied ancient creation stories and placed it in the bible? If you compared the many ancient accounts with what the Bible says you will discover that what sticks out about these stories is NOT their similarity with Genesis, BUT how they are different! In this regard the Genesis account is unique. It clearly was written NOT as an elaboration on

other creation stories, BUT as a detailed presentation of what really happened. In other words, Genesis 1:1-31 was written as an apologetic! It was written to explain to the people of God- who would have been familiar with other creation stories- what really happened!

And so it is with The Flood Account of Genesis 6-9 as well as Psalm 29 & 82 (which clearly are copies of earlier psalms written by the Canaanites to Baal; but instead of writing Baal, the Psalmist inserted Yahweh). These were written to explain what really happened and so to give the glory and honor to the one who alone deserves it: God Almighty!

All of this is to say: don't let anyone tell you that Christianity is a new religion or that Christianity simply borrowed its content from the religions that surrounded the people of God. The truth be known, Judaism/Christianity has been around from the very beginning and so has and continues to present the glorious message that in Christ man is able to be reconciled to God!