

"A PARTIAL COMPARISON OF EGYPTIAN THEOLOGY
AND THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST"

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Shortly after I began studying Egyptian theology, I realized that some of its doctrines seemed to parallel closely some of the doctrines of Jesus Christ. Upon further investigation I found that these parallels were quite numerous. That such parallels ought to exist is suggested by the Pearl of Great Price where we learn that the early Egyptians ~have known a great deal about the gospel.

The book of Abraham informs us that the first Pharaoh, the grandson of Ham, was a righteous man who patterned his government after the patriarchal system that the Lord had revealed to his fathers. While it is not clear that this first Pharaoh made any claim to the patriarchal priesthood, the Pearl of Great Price does say that some pharaohs, by virtue of their being descendants of Noah through Ham, did make this claim. Now, as these men had a working knowledge of the governmental orders of the patriarchal priesthood and sufficient knowledge of the powers and offices of that priesthood to effectively incorporate it as part of their kingly powers, it is not illogical to suppose that they had knowledge of other fundamentals of the gospel. If this were so, we ought to find in the more ancient Egyptian records a theology that closely parallels the fundamentals of the gospel which Christ taught the Ancients.

In the following report I have made no attempt to exhaustively compare the two theologies. I have simply extracted those few parts of ancient Egyptian theology that most obviously run parallel to the gospel of Christ, and I have drawn attention to those parallels.

Upon first consideration a reader may object to such a comparison on the basis that the religion Christ taught is monotheistic while Egyptian theology is polytheistic. However, a closer study reveals that there is a definite comparison rather than contrast in these theological concepts.

In the first place, the gospel of Jesus Christ is monotheistic only in that it insists that there is but one God through whom men may gain their salvation. Otherwise, it is a very complex polytheism. Christ not only taught that there are three separate persons in the trinity, but that the Chief God in the trinity is himself a part of a society of gods. To add to the complexity, the title "god" is given to many who have or are yet to live on this earth.

In the second place, most Egyptologists agree that Egyptian religion long before Akhenaton is a pure monotheism, which manifested itself externally by a symbolic polytheism (Budge, p. xcii) because it was simpler to comprehend one god for each of the powers of nature than to comprehend one unknown god who held within his hands all the powers of earth and eternity. It may be, however, that this Egyptian monotheism was at first an attempt to explain a much more complex polytheism. That this latter idea is true becomes more credible when it is

remembered that the Hebrews were taught to accept a simple monotheism which manifested all the complexities of that polytheism of which Christ is a part. This can be illustrated by the fact that the Genesis account of the creation says the earth was organized by a plurality of gods, and that the plural, "Elohim," came to be the Hebrew title of their "One God." (Smith, p. 327.)

That the Egyptian monotheism paralleled the scriptural monotheism is further indicated by an Egyptian text quoted by Dr. Budge (Budge, xcii-xciii) which ascribes to their "One God" many of the plural characteristics of the scriptural "One God" as Christ revealed Him in ancient times to the Hebrews and in more recent times to the Prophet Joseph Smith. This text begins: "God is one and alone, and none other existeth with Him--God is the One, the One who hath made all things. . . ." Then, describing this god as the great first cause of all intelligent organizations in the universe, it says:

God is from the beginning, and He hath been from the beginning, He hath existed from old and was when nothing else had being. He existed when nothing else existed, and what existeth He created after He had come into being. . He createth, but was never created; He is the maker of his own form, and the fashioner of His own body--God Himself is existence.

This statement is especially interesting in view of another similar statement made by Orson Pratt. Though Elder Pratt based his theories primarily on information he found in Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants it cannot be over-emphasized that he was expressing only his own opinion and that the Church never officially accepted his views. In spite of this lack of Church acceptance, his statement deserves being quoted here because it emphasizes the probability that both he and the ancient Egyptians had the same premises upon which to build their conclusions. Elder Pratt said:

We are compelled to believe that these--the most superior of all personages--must have had a beginning, for inasmuch as they indicate a design there must have been an anterior designer--this design must have been a self-moving intelligent substance capable of organizing itself into one or more most glorious personages. We are compelled to admit that the personage of God must be eternal, exhibiting no marks of design whatever, or else we are compelled to believe that the all-powerful, self-moving substance of which he consists organized itself. (Pratt, p. 16.)

At some risk, admittedly, but because of the unavoidable similarity, I have shown the comparison between the "One God" of the scriptures and the Egyptian "one god":

Egyptian text (Budge, pp. cit.)

"God is truth,"

"and He liveth by truth and feedeth thereon."

"He is the king of truth,

"and he stablished the earth thereupon

"God is life and through Him only man liveth."

Doctrine and Covenants Sec. 93

"I am the Spirit of truth." (v . 26.)

"The glory of God is . . . light and truth." (v. 36.)

"And no man receiveth a fullness [of truth] unless he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things." (v.27-28.)

[He is] the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him,

"and in him was the life of men and the light of men." (v. 9.)

As does the Bible, this Egyptian text describes this "One God" as the god of creation, who, when He spoke, caused the heavens and the earth and all therein to be created, and who breathed the breath of life into the nostrils of man.

In light of the fact that the proper name of the Hebrew "One God" was unknown, it is especially interesting to note that this Egyptian text also says that "No man knoweth how to know Him--His name remaineth hidden."

The text ends with words that sound as though they might have been lifted from the Hebrew scriptures:

God is merciful unto those who reverence Him, and He heareth him that calleth upon Him. God knoweth him that acknowledgeth Him, He rewardeth him that serveth Him, and He protecteth him that followeth Him.

Moving from the similarities of the natures of the gods, the next logical comparison is between the roles of these gods. In the Pearl of Great Price we have an account of a council in which the gods met to determine the means by which men would gain their salvation. Two plans were proposed: One was championed by Jesus Christ, the favorite son of the Great God; the other was proposed and championed by Christ's brother, Lucifer. Christ's plan won the approval of the council, and the other brother rebelled and was driven from heaven. The plan Christ championed was essentially this: He would come to the earth, live a perfect life, and voluntarily subject himself to the pains of death. In this death he would take upon himself the sins of all m~n. Thereafter he would accomplish the resurrection by which he and all men may regain their bodies.

I have not been able to find a direct parallel to this story in Egyptian theology. However, I have found this story:

Osiris, the lord of creation and king of Egypt, spent the fore-part of his reign civilizing his subjects and teaching them the arts and crafts of husbandry. He gave them a code of laws and established peace throughout Egypt. Having done this, he set out to instruct the rest of the nations of the earth. When he returned, his brother, Set, the evil one, conspired to take his life; Set and his followers, according to Plutarch, induced Osiris to lie down in a chest which they immediately closed and carried from Egypt. They slew Osiris and cut his body into pieces. His devoted mother found the pieces, and the Gods restored life to them. As a result of his suffering, death, and resurrection, all future Egyptians had claim to the promise of a resurrection into eternal life. And because of his rebellion, Set was expelled from the society of the gods. (This, and most of the following information about Osiris can be found in Budge, pp. xlix-liv; or in Breasted, pp. 18-48.)

Even though the worship of Osiris did not dominate Egypt until rather late in her history, he was worshiped in pre-dynastic times. In fact, Menes chose as the site of Memphis the place where Osiris had been resurrected.

At first reading, these stories seem to be unrelated except for the fact that they both provide a resurrection for their believers. However, if we consider this story as one of an early Egyptian king to whom was ascribed the characteristics of the creator god, and then if we compare his characteristics with those of the god Jesus Christ, we find a striking similarity.

As Osiris is often called the Firstborn, so is Christ. When Osiris was born, "a voice was heard to proclaim that the lord of creation was born. (Budge, p. xlix); this earth was created under the supervision of Jesus Christ. Osiris is called the beloved and most favored of the Gods; the Pearl of Great Price calls Christ the beloved and chosen from the beginning. Osiris was king of Egypt; Christ, until the time of Saul, was king of Israel. Even before that, he seems to have had a kingly station in the city of Enoch. Osiris' brother, Set, conspired against him and tried to usurp from him the throne of Egypt; Christ's brother, Lucifer, not only tried to seize his earthly power, but also sought to usurp their Father's godly power. In both cases the favored son triumphs and the rebellious son is ousted from the society of gods. Osiris, the great law giver, is credited with having given Egypt a codified law system and with having set out to teach it to the world; Christ is the god who gave Moses the laws of Israel; He taught Joseph Smith and Brigham Young the law that was to govern the saints; He inspired the Framers of the Constitution of the United States.

Christ gave his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He held within himself the powers of life so that on the third day he re-entered and glorified his body, throwing from it all the seeds of death and corruption. By so doing he provided a way that all men might be resurrected. By way of comparison and assumption, if Osiris were as all-knowing as he must have been, it is not unlikely that he knew of his brother's plot and willingly entered the chest that brought him to his death. If this be the case, it can be said that he gave his life freely. He did not resurrect himself by virtue of his own power, but his resurrection did prepare the way for all to follow. Christ's sacrifice involved an atonement for the sins of mankind that, on condition of their repentance, they might have eternal life. However, Osiris does not seem to atone for any repented sins, but he does require that those who enter into his eternal rest must have a heart that

is unburdened by the sins of the world. Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants states that the light of the sun is an expression of the light of Christ. Osiris, too, is manifest in the light of the sun.

As there is a close resemblance between the roles of Osiris and Christ, so is there a close resemblance between many of their more unique doctrines.

The Egyptians believed that there were three parts to men: their physical bodies, their spiritual bodies, and the eternal part of them--the part represented by the heart, called the Ka. This eternal part of man had an independent existence from the rest of the man. It contained all the essentials of man's personality and all of his powers of life. It could move at will and seemed to be independent from the body. This idea seems to be in accord with the Latter-day Saint doctrine of intelligences that is revealed in Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants. The doctrine is this: There are three parts to men: their physical bodies, their spiritual bodies, and the eternal part of them called the intelligence. This intelligence existed from the beginning and has always contained within it the essential parts of man's personality and his powers of life. (Roberts, chapters 1-5.) I must mention here that while the particulars of these and other "doctrines" we shall discuss are very different, their broad, overall ideas are quite similar.

Here is another unique and interesting idea, already alluded to, found in the literature of both ancient Egyptians and the modern followers of Christ. As a result of their desire to discover the origin of their gods, the Egyptians developed this theory: In the beginning there was one eternal mass of water that contained within it, in embryo, all the powers of life, as well as all of the elements from which the earth was created, even as the Nile seemed to contain all the elements of the earth and all the powers of life. The first god organized himself from this mass and lifted himself above it. Thereafter his identity was associated with the sun. Then he created from his own body the other gods. When this was done, he created the earth and the heavens. (Budge, pp. xcvi-xcviii.) By contrast, there is in the scriptures no account of the origin of the gods. However, it is interesting that Orson Pratt, using mostly information contained in Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants, concluded that in the beginning there were two eternal masses: One contained, in embryo, all the powers of life; this he called intelligence. The other eternal mass contained all the physical elements. Then, Elder Pratt continues, the first god united himself, or rather his intelligence, for he was only an intelligence then, with the elements and thus rose above these masses to become the originator of all life. It is through his power that all subsequent life came into being and through his power that the universes are created. (Pratt, "Great First Cause.") Let me emphasize again that this is Elder Pratt's theory, though the fact that he reached conclusions comparable to those of the Egyptians suggests that he used the same premises.

It is interesting that the Egyptian account identifies the sun with the first god of life. This may simply be because the Egyptians observed that the sun was a necessary source of life, but the sun may be identified with the Egyptian first god of life for the same reason that Brigham Young said that the sun was a celestial orb and was inhabited, presumably by celestial beings. (Young, XIII, 271.)

Again, as there is a resemblance between the roles of Osiris and Christ and between some

of their doctrines, there is also a unique similarity between the rites essential for exaltation.

A major duty of the Osirian priests was to teach the living how to attain eternal life. This instruction seems to have come chiefly from their mystery rites. Unfortunately these rites were very secret and exclusive-so much so that we have almost no firsthand information on them, to say nothing of an actual account of the rites themselves. However, this much we can say about them with a good degree of certainty: Following a period of preparatory instruction, the candidate was baptized. The next ten days he spent in meditation. Then he was introduced into the sanctuary where he was clothed in a linen robe. After all this preparation, he was admitted to a performance of a drama which portrayed the life, death, and resurrection of Osiris. During this performance, the candidate for eternal glory received the various saving rites that would enable him to enter heaven. It may be that these are the keys, prayers, and symbols that are found in the Egyptian funerary texts. At the end of the drama, when the candidate had received all these rites, he was symbolically brought into the presence of the gods, Osiris and Isis. (Spence, pp. 218-27.)

The gospel of Christ teaches that after a man has purified his life through repentance and baptism, he may enter the temple of his God. There he may "lay aside the clothing of the street and . . . clothe [his body] in the clean white linen . . ." (Brown, p. 38) preparatory to receiving the endowment. The endowment "comprises instruction relating to the significance and sequence of past dispensations, and the importance of the present. This course of instruction includes a recital of the most prominent events of [the various dispensations and] . . . the plan of redemption by which the great transgression may be atoned." (Talmage, pp.99-106.) In this endowment men also "receive all those ordinances . . . which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, 'the signs and tokens pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain your eternal exaltation in spite of earth or hell.'" (Young, II, 31.)

The parallels do not end with the instructions given the living, for after death the ancient Egyptians and the believers in Christ are both subjected to the same type of judgment.

Plates III and IV of the Papyrus of Ani (Budge, pp. 255-63) tell of the judgment of the dead. This account is especially interesting because it describes two judgments rather than one. It tells that the spirit of the deceased is first led before a council of twelve gods where his heart is weighed on a balance of truth and justice to determine his worthiness to dwell with the gods. When these twelve gods are convinced of his worthiness, the deceased is presented to Osiris for a final judgment. If Osiris agrees, the deceased may dwell with the gods as one of them for eternity. Christ also taught that men must pass through a series of judgments. One of the last of these is the presentation of the candidates for the celestial kingdom to the original council of twelve apostles to be judged by them. (Doctrine and Covenants 29:12.) However, before a man can enter into the celestial kingdom and become as God, he must be admitted by Christ himself (John 5:22), for it is he who holds the keys to the gate of eternal life and not Peter as modern sectarian Christianity claims. (Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 9:41.)

Once an Egyptian has entered the kingdom of the gods, the Ka, the glorified part of his body, may live in their paradisiacal gardens. Here he eats with his mouth and exercises other natural functions of the body, and even continues progression in knowledge and power. In his

heavenly state the Ka is independent of his earthly body, but still it is of vital importance to him.

It is the only means by which he may communicate with the earth, and if it is destroyed, his association with the people of the earth is totally obliterated. To an Egyptian, the destruction of the body seems to have been the same as the eternal death of the Ka. (White, p. 109.)

Christ teaches that all matter is eternal and must be eternally united with the spirit or man cannot receive a fullness of joy. But when the spirit and body are sealed with a celestial bond (D&C 93:33-35), men are denied none of the joys of life: they may increase in knowledge and power; they may eat and love and have eternal increase.

When we recall that "in the Osiris myth the institution of the family found its earliest and most exalted expression in religion, a glorified reflection of earthly ties among the gods" (Breasted, p. 37), and that an Egyptian life was preoccupied with an intense need to preserve his name and his earthly body in order to preserve a relationship with his children and their children through all time, we remember Christ's doctrine that the sanctity of the home and the eternal continuance of the family relationships are the greatest blessings eternity offers to man.

After all this comparative analysis, we must remember this one essential fact: Though their basic doctrines are impressively similar, we have not sufficient Egyptian records which date back far enough to allow us to say for certain that Egyptian theology was once equated with the gospel of Jesus Christ.