



## Is the Story of Yeshua Pagan? 2004

Yeshua the Messiah issues a very strong warning to His followers in Matthew 12:35-37. He says, "The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." How many of us take these words seriously, and realize that what we say affects others?

As a Bible teacher, I must be very careful with what I say. James the Just tells us that as teachers, "we will incur a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). Whether this judgment is a positive one or a negative one is entirely up to us. As Yeshua admonishes us, the good person brings forth the good treasure out of his heart. This good treasure must be that which blesses people and helps them to grow spiritually. This good treasure must help people have a better relationship with God and with one another. This good treasure must include helping people have a greater respect for the authority and value of the Bible. It is the evil person who brings forth what is evil, that which curses others and leads them away from the Lord.

Today, many are wondering why there is a sector of individuals in the Messianic community who have denied Yeshua and either converted to Judaism, or their own primitive form of "Yahwism." While the reasons vary, one thing that is occurring in our midst is that idle words have taken root in the hearts of people, which are now coming to full fruition. One of the statements that is made far too frequently among certain Messianics today is: "**Christianity is pagan.**" This statement, while often said "innocently" to describe the ills and some non-Biblical practices of mainstream Christianity, can cause the naïve and spiritually unstable person to begin to think that if the pagans believed something, it must therefore be rejected.

The problem with this line of reasoning is two-fold: (1) The problem is not with non-Biblical and questionable practices in contemporary Christianity; the problem is rather with the fact that all of us have strayed from God's Word. God's people have not widely made the Bible and being Scripturally compliant their top priority. (2) If you believe that the message of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) is "pagan," you must hold the Tanach (Old Testament) to the same standard. If you believe that the story of Yeshua the Messiah and His resurrection are copied off of pagan myths, then you also have to believe that the Bible stories of the Tanach are also borrowed or copied from the mythology of the Ancient Israelites' neighbors.

As you can see, this can be a slippery slope—and unfortunately, there are many people slipping.

### Satan: The Master Counterfeiter

Satan, the accuser of the brethren, has only one simple goal in mind. The Adversary knows that his days are numbered, and he knows that his eternal fate in the Lake of Fire has been sealed. He knows that there is no chance for redemption on his part. So, because he cannot be redeemed, Satan wants to take as many people with him to eternal judgment as possible. If he is going down, he wants you to go down with him.

Throughout the centuries, the tactic of the enemy has been very simple. Rather than get the masses to believe something that is totally false, he has gotten the masses to believe many half-truths that are often a mix of Biblical truth and falsehood. Yeshua attested in John 8:44, "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Many of us in the Messianic community today used to celebrate the holiday of Christmas. We now know that Christmas is unbiblical. Why is it unbiblical? It is not unbiblical in the sense that Yeshua the Messiah was born of a virgin, that there were angels present at His birth in Bethlehem, that there were magi who later came to Him, and that His Earthly parents were Joseph and Mary. It is unbiblical in the sense that the veneration of trees is prohibited by Jeremiah 10, and that December 25 has historically been a day of pagan revelry. We do not celebrate Christmas as Messianics because it is not mandated in Scripture, and the specific practices related to it, notably the Christmas tree, are seemingly condemned by Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

This is one obvious example. But there are other things that are a bit more complicated. How many of us have studied ancient history or ancient mythology, and have seen the parallels which exist with the Bible? How many of us have read stories in the Bible, and have seen similar stories in other ancient cultures or religions? How did these stories come about? Did the Bible come first, *or* did the pagan myth come first?

Satan does not have any original ideas of his own, so to deceive people he must take the truth of God and distort it. He must take what the Bible says, change it around slightly, and repackage it. We are called as Believers to be spiritually discerning, and test everything against the final standard: Holy Scripture. So in this article, with understanding the fact that Satan is the father of lies and that he distorts the truth of God, we ask the question: **Is the story of Yeshua pagan?**

### Prometheus Bound

Perhaps one of the most interesting claims against why Yeshua cannot be the Messiah is the claim that the story of Yeshua, as espoused in the Gospels, is nothing new and that the early Christian movement copied and repackaged pagan myths. It is sometimes said among those trying to discredit the Messiahship of Yeshua that we cannot believe in Him because there are mythological stories of "god beings" coming down from the sky, performing miracles, and even resurrecting from the dead. Those in the Messianic community who are of the mentality that they must reject anything "pagan," as opposed to letting Scripture be the final standard, can easily fall prey to these sorts of arguments.

One of the stories that is often referenced, as being one of the so-called sources for the material that the early Believers supposedly borrowed from for the Gospels, is the Greek play Prometheus Bound by Aeschylus. Many scholars date its production about 463 B.C.E., in the period of the Persian Wars. The background of the play is how the god Zeus has recently

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<sup>1</sup> Consult the author's article "The Christmas Challenge" (appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper*).

defeated the Titans and his enemies led by his father Kronos. Prometheus and his mother are the only Titans who sided with Zeus in the conflict, and Zeus is now consolidating his power. The story opens up with the god Prometheus being punished because he has come down to Earth and given fire to humanity. Two characters, Strength and Violence (Kratos and Bia), are given the job of carrying the mighty Prometheus, who is to be nailed to a rock by Hephaestus:

Here we have reached the remotest region of the earth, the haunt of the Scythians, a wilderness without a footprint. Hephaestus, do your duty. Remember what command the Father laid on you. Here is Prometheus, the rebel: Nail him to the rock; secure him on this towering summit. Fast in the unyielding grip of adamantine chains. It was your treasure that he stole, the flowery splendour of all-fashioning fire, and gave to men—an offence intolerable to the gods, for which he now must suffer, till he be taught to accept the sovereignty of Zeus and cease acting as champion of the human race.<sup>2</sup>

Hephaestus, preparing to nail Prometheus to this rock to be exposed to the elements, attests that Prometheus was a god whose crime was loving humanity and trying to help mortals:

Son of sagacious Themis, god of mountainous thoughts, with heart as sore as yours I now shall fasten you in bands of bronze immovable to this desolate peak, where you will hear no voice, nor see a human form; but scorched with the sun's flaming rays your skin will lose its bloom of freshness. Glad you will be to see the night cloaking the day with her dark spangled robe; and glad again when the sun's warmth scatters the frost at dawn. Each changing hour will bring successive pain to rack your body; and no man yet born shall set you free. Your kindness to the human race has earned you this. A god who would not bow to the gods' anger—you, transgressing right, gave privileges to mortal men. For that you shall keep watch upon this bitter rock, standing upright, unsleeping, never bowed in rest. And many groans and cries of pain shall come from you, all useless; for the heart of Zeus is hard to appease. Power newly won is always harsh.<sup>3</sup>

Those who believe that Prometheus was some kind of a “prototype” of Yeshua the Messiah will note that Prometheus came down as a “god-man” from the sky to “save lowly humanity.” But this is an exaggeration when we read the play of Prometheus Bound. The message of the Bible is that Yeshua came to Earth to atone for the sins of humanity, so that those who believe might have eternal communion with God the Father restored to them. In contrast, Prometheus “stole fire from heaven and gave it to them; and he taught them the basic mental and manual skills...What wins our favour for Prometheus is largely the fact that he believed in, and wanted to help, the human race as it is.”<sup>4</sup> But Prometheus was not the Savior of fallen humanity as Yeshua is portrayed in the Apostolic Scriptures.

Prometheus, because of his crime of giving these advancements to human civilization, is shackled to a rock where he will remain for each day until the fury of Zeus subsides. He will be tormented each day by wild birds, specifically the eagle of Zeus. Because Prometheus is divine and immortal, this punishment will be never-ending. As Hermes, the messenger god, says near the end of the play,

First, Zeus will split this rugged chasm with the shock and flame of lightning, and entomb you underground still clamped on this embracing rock. When a long age has passed, you will

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<sup>2</sup> Aeschylus: *Prometheus Bound and Other Plays*, trans. Philip Vellacott (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

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return into the light; and then the dark-winged hound of Zeus will come, the savage eagle, an uninvited banqueter, and all day long will rip your flesh in rags and feast upon your liver, gnawing it black. And you may hope for no release from such a torment, till some god be found to take your pains upon him, and of his own will descend to sunless Hades and the black depths of Tartarus. So think again; this is no fabricated boast, but truth as Zeus has spoken it, who cannot lie, but will accomplish every word his mouth has uttered.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the dialogue that you see in *Prometheus Bound* is typical drama as would be consistent in any classical Greek play. Because of this, very little information itself about the story of Prometheus will be in the play, and so we are left with having to read between the lines and piece together what we think the story is telling us. *Prometheus Bound* ends with a dramatic conclusion, with Prometheus breaking loose of his chains and rising up:

Now it is happening: threat gives place to performance. The earth rocks; thunder, echoing from the depth, roars in answer; fiery lightnings twist and flash. Dust dances in a whirling fountain; blast of the four winds skirmish together, set themselves in array for battle; sky and sea rage indistinguishably. The cataclysm advances visibly upon me, sent by Zeus to make me afraid. O Earth, my holy mother, O sky, where sun and moon give light to all in turn, you see how I am wronged!<sup>6</sup>

We are told in this translation of *Prometheus Bound* that “The rock collapses and disappears, as the CHORUS scatter in all directions.”<sup>7</sup> *Prometheus Bound*, again being a play, is intended to entertain an audience and as such is given a dramatic conclusion.

## Are there parallels between Prometheus and Yeshua?

*Prometheus Bound* is just one of many mythological stories that some like to mention in order to discredit the gospel message and ministry of Yeshua the Messiah. The group that we have to commonly contend with in the Messianic movement today is the Jewish anti-missionaries, who not only target Messianic Jews in order to get them to deny Yeshua—but are now targeting Christians interested in their Hebraic Roots for conversion to Judaism. Many of these people who are examining their Hebraic Roots are spiritually naïve, and have been influenced by sensationalistic teachings that harp on the “paganism” of Christianity. They are easy targets for believing that the gospel message of Yeshua has been borrowed from pagan mythology.

Anyone who is objective can see that there are a few parallels between the story of Prometheus and the life of Yeshua. Prometheus was a god who came to Earth to help humanity. Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of God, “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7, NRSV). Prometheus was found guilty by Zeus for the crime of helping humans, and was ordered to be chained to a rock so that he could be tortured. Yeshua, in contrast, was bruised and beaten and nailed to a Roman cross. Yeshua had all the sins of the world placed upon Him so that the Father could not look upon Him: “About the ninth hour Yeshua cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?’ that is, ‘MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?’” (Matthew 27:46; cf. Psalm 22:1). Prometheus, at the end of the play, breaks loose of his chains and there is an earthquake. At the resurrection of Yeshua, there is an earthquake: “And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp 50-51.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it" (Matthew 28:2).

There are some similarities between the story of Prometheus and what the Gospels tell us about the story of Yeshua. But there are some serious differences as well. Prometheus rebelled against the authority of the god Zeus in aiding humanity. Yeshua the Messiah, the Eternal Son of the One True God, obeyed the will of His Father. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). Yeshua the Messiah was a willing servant to the point of death, unlike Prometheus who defied authority.

To be perfectly honest, what does the story of Prometheus, the story of a rebel who wanted to "help humanity," sound more like?

In Isaiah 14:12-14, we see a reference to the "star of the morning" or *heileil* (הֵילֵל), which the Latin Vulgate rendered as *lucifer*. This is often viewed as being a reference to Satan or the Accuser:

"How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High'" (cf. Luke 10:18).

The Adversary once had a high and exalted position in Heaven, but because he wanted to be like God, he was cast down to the Earth. His eternal fate is sealed, and his goal is to take as many with him as possible. One of the enemy's tactics is deceiving vulnerable human beings by getting people to think that he is actually helping them.

What is interesting is that just as Prometheus is bound to a rock, so will the Adversary be bound in the Bottomless Pit for a thousand years:

"And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time" (Revelation 20:2-3).

We are not told in the play *Prometheus Bound* what happens to Prometheus after he arises from his chains. We may safely assume that he tries to "help humanity" further. What is interesting, about the story of *Prometheus Bound*, is that it actually tells us more about Satan than it does about Yeshua. Satan has been trying to "help humanity" for millennia. People have been foolish enough to sell themselves to the Devil, thinking that it will advance their status. Satan defied the will of God, and during the thousand-year reign of the Messiah on Earth he will be bound. He will be given a short time of release until he and all the condemned are cast into the Lake of Fire for eternity. Satan will arise from his chains in the Bottomless Pit, just as Prometheus broke free.

The spiritually undiscerning person who wants to no longer believe in Messiah Yeshua is going to believe that *Prometheus Bound* was actually used by the early Christians and repackaged into the Gospels. What this person does not understand is that the enemy has always known his fate. Several centuries before Yeshua, did Satan inspire the Greek playwright Aeschylus to compose *Prometheus Bound*? The enemy knew that the Messiah was coming, and he knew the prophecies and typology of the Hebrew Scriptures of what the Messiah was to do. If he wanted to distort the truth so that people would reject the good news as a myth, he had ample opportunity to do so. Sadly, falling for various distortions of Biblical truth, is precisely what is happening among many people within today's broad Messianic movement.

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### Holding the Tanach to the Same Standard

The problem with people who are trying to make the message of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) into one where the early Disciples and Apostles of Yeshua copied off of pagan mythology to describe the Messiah, and thus we must reject their message—is that they are often always unwilling to hold the Tanach (Old Testament) to the exact same standard. If indeed the Apostles copied off of pagan mythology to describe the life story and purpose of Yeshua, how do we not know that the writers of the Hebrew Bible and the Sages of Ancient Israel did not do the same? How do we not know that the stories of the Tanach, including the Exodus, the giving of the Ten Commandments, Joshua and the Battle of Jericho, David and Goliath, etc., are not exaggerations and fabrications borrowed and rewritten from the pagan cultures which surrounded the Ancient Israelites?

### The Epic of Gilgamesh

There are many stories that those wishing to discredit the Bible have said that the Ancient Israelites borrowed from other cultures. Perhaps one of the most commonly known of these stories is the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh. The tablets of the Epic of Gilgamesh were discovered by British archaeologist A.H. Laynard between 1845-1851 in an excavation around the city of Nineveh. These tablets were sent to the British Museum for examination. George Smith produced a translation of these tablets in 1872, and published them in a report called the “Chaldean Account of the Deluge.” Archaeologists date the composition of the Epic of Gilgamesh anywhere from between 2000-1800 B.C.E. This pre-dates the composition of the Torah or Pentateuch by at least 300 years.

The Epic of Gilgamesh is a story that is two-fold. It is first the account of one man, Gilgamesh, who loses his immortality and becomes a human. Part of this same story, that often receives more attention, is Atrahasis, which is an account of a major flood that the gods send to destroy humanity. Many critics of the Bible are of the opinion that the Ancient Israelites used these, and other stories, to compose the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and Noah’s Flood. These liberals often never take into consideration the fact that the Biblical accounts could have been distorted following humankind’s dispersion at the Tower of Babel, and then those dispersed repackaged the accounts the Bible gives. Most disturbingly, the thought that the Ancient Israelites copied “myths” off of their neighbors is not just voiced by liberal Christians, but also by many in Judaism. The following comes from the introduction to the Book of Genesis in *The Jewish Study Bible*:

“Largely because of its focus on creation, the primeval history exhibits a number of contacts with Mesopotamian mythology. The account of creation with which Genesis opens (1.1-2.3), for example, has affinities with *Enuma elish*, a Babylonian epic, which tells how one god, Marduk, attained supremacy over the others and created the world by splitting his aquatic enemy in half. The story of Adam and Eve’s sin in the garden of Eden (2.25-3.24) displays similarities with *Gilgamesh*, an epic poem that tells how its hero lost the opportunity for immortality and came to terms with his humanity. And the story of Noah (6.5-9.17) has close connections with *Atrahasis*, a Mesopotamian story in which the gods send a flood to wipe out the human race, with the exception of one man from whom humankind begins afresh (the story was eventually incorporated into *Gilgamesh* as well). In each case, the biblical narrator has adopted the Mesopotamian forerunner to Israelite theology. The primeval history thus evidences both the deep continuities and the striking points of discontinuity of biblical Israel with its Mesopotamian antecedents and contemporaries.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Levenson, “Genesis,” in *Jewish Study Bible*, 9-10.

As you are probably aware, there is substantial debate among theologians regarding the Deluge or Noah's Flood. While there is endless speculation about where Noah's Ark is, there is also discussion about whether the Flood talked about in Genesis 6 was in actuality a worldwide Flood, or just a regionalized Flood. Liberals all hold to the position that the Flood was regionalized to a *very small part* of the Middle East, and that the Ancient Israelites borrowed its symbolism from the mythology of the Sumerians and Babylonians. Consider, for example, the construction of the ship as described by the Epic of Gilgamesh:

In the first light of dawn all my household gathered round me, the children brought pitch and the men whatever was necessary. On the fifth day I laid the keel and the ribs, then I made fast the planking. The groundspace was one acre, each side of the deck measured one hundred and twenty cubits, making a square. I built six decks below, seven in all, I divided them into nine sections with bulkheads between. I drove in wedges where needed, I saw to the punt-poles, and laid in supplies. The carriers brought oil in baskets, I poured pitch into the furnace and asphalt and oil; more oil was consumed in caulking, and more again the master of the boat took into his stores. I slaughtered bullocks for the people and every day I killed sheep. I gave the shipwrights wine to drink as though it were river water, raw wine and red wine and oil and white wine. There was feasting then as there is at the time of the New Year's festival; I myself anointed my head. On the seventh day the boat was complete.

Then was the launching full of difficulty; there was shifting of ballast above and below till two thirds was submerged. I loaded into her all that I had of gold and of living things, my family, my kin, the beast of the field both wild and tame, and all the craftsmen...<sup>9</sup>

Consider the parallel between this and Genesis 6:13-16:

"Then God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth. Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you shall make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and finish it to a cubit from the top; and set the door of the ark in the side of it; you shall make it with lower, second, and third decks.'

The Epic of Gilgamesh also describes the deluge that eventually came from the gods:

A stupor of despair went up to heaven when the god of the storm turned daylight to darkness, when he smashed the land like a cup. One whole day the tempest raged, gathering fury as it went, it poured over the people like the tides of a battle; a man could not see his brother nor the people be seen from heaven. Even the gods were terrified at the flood, they fled to the highest heaven, the firmament of Anu; they crouched against the walls, cowering like curs. Then Ishtar the sweet-voiced Queen of Heaven cried out like a woman in travail: "Alas the days of old are turned to dust because I commanded evil; why did I command this evil in the council of all the gods? I commanded wars to destroy the people, but are they not my people, for I brought them forth? Now like the spawn of fish they float in the ocean." The great gods of heaven and hell wept, they covered their mouths.<sup>10</sup>

This sounds similar to Genesis 7:17-23:

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<sup>9</sup> N.K. Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 109.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 110-111.

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“Then the flood came upon the earth for forty days, and the water increased and lifted up the ark, so that it rose above the earth. The water prevailed and increased greatly upon the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. The water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered. The water prevailed fifteen cubits higher, and the mountains were covered. All flesh that moved on the earth perished, birds and cattle and beasts and every swarming thing that swarms upon the earth, and all mankind; of all that was on the dry land, all in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, died. Thus He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth; and only Noah was left, together with those that were with him in the ark.”

The Epic of Gilgamesh is only one of many other mythological stories that sounds similar to events in the Bible. Many would have us believe that the Epic of Gilgamesh, and other such accounts, predated what is recorded for us in the Torah and the Tanach, and were copied and changed by the Ancient Israelites (specifically, the Jewish exiles in Babylon).<sup>11</sup> Liberal theologians like to tell us that these are just stories designed to inspire us and teach us lessons, but are not to be interpreted too literally or taken that seriously because they probably never happened. Or, if they did occur, they certainly did not occur on any of the kind of level that the Bible affords them.

If we are to accept the premise that the story of Yeshua the Messiah is pagan, because there are some mythological stories that are possibly similar to the account of Him as portrayed in the Gospels, **then to be consistent we must accept the premise that the stories of the Tanach could likewise borrowed from mythology as well.** If one is going to reject the Messiahship of Yeshua on the basis that the early Christian movement borrowed ideas from Greco-Roman mythology, so must we reject the message of the Tanach and the validity of the Law because the Ancient Israelites were only borrowing from their Ancient Near Eastern contemporaries. Where will this ultimately lead us?

### Messianic Higher Criticism

While there are individuals in the Messianic community who have denied Yeshua as their Lord and Savior, errantly believing themselves to have been led into “greater Truth” with a capital T, the reality remains that many of them have actually become liberals in their approach to theological issues—most often *without even knowing it!* They do not look at the Bible conservatively.

A term that is often used in Biblical apologetics is **higher criticism**. Higher criticism is to be distinguished from **lower criticism**. Lower criticism, also referred to as **form criticism**, tries to determine what the original reading of a Biblical text was. Lower criticism comes from the perspective that there is some variance in the readings of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts of the Bible, and tries to determine through comparison of manuscripts, manuscript fragments, ancient translations, and quotations of Scripture in ancient literature, what the original reading of a Biblical text probably was. Lower criticism is a somewhat scientific practice, which involves very few theological value judgments. Lower criticism is the source of the many valuable Hebrew and Greek lexicons and dictionaries that we use today in examining the Scriptures.

Higher criticism, in contrast, is much different. Higher criticism arose in Germany in the mid-1800s, in the midst of incredible social tension and the start of Darwin’s theory of evolution. The German political landscape of the time was quite authoritarian. Even though

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<sup>11</sup> Consult the entry for the Book of Genesis in the author’s workbook *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic*.

Germany was a democracy, it was largely this in name only. There was censorship of the media, and criticism of the government was unacceptable. As a consequence of intellectuals being unable to readily write about politics, many entered into areas of social science. The study of psychology arose with intellectuals trying to determine what human beings' problems were in the brain, without any major concern for the place of a Supreme Being or spirituality. It was with this backdrop that higher criticism arose.

Those in Germany who entered into the study of theology were often affected by these ideas. While the existence of God was assumed, the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures were not. Higher critics began to question not only the origin of the Scriptures, but also the purpose of them as well. Foundational Biblical beliefs that we might take for granted, such as the belief that salvation only comes from one Source, the reality that we are sinners, that unless we are spiritually regenerated we will be punished eternally, were widely looked at with levels of disdain by the higher critics. Later, it was assumed that ancient religions borrowed from one another, and the religion of the Old and New Testaments borrowed extensively from that of the ancient cultures of the Middle East. The historicity of the Hebrew Bible was surely challenged.<sup>12</sup> Over time, these sorts of beliefs began to be adopted by many Christian denominations, and they are the primary cause of many congregational and denominational splits in mainstream Christianity today.

It was from this same strain of thought that a great deal of Reform Judaism arose in Germany in the mid-1800s, extending itself to Jewish communities in the English speaking world (the British Empire and United States) in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. Reform Judaism could be easily defined as a "cultural Judaism," in addition to being theologically liberal. Reform Judaism today treats the Sabbath, appointed times, kosher laws, and other related practices as being only cultural observances of the Jewish people. Reform Judaism today does not often frown on abortion or homosexuality.

What is so sad is that today there are people in the Messianic movement who are questioning the Scriptures in the same way as the Nineteenth Century higher critics once did. This is not to say that we should not view the composition of Scripture in light of its historical context. But, what is happening is that people are asking questions—not with the purpose of confirming what the Bible says, so their faith can be confirmed and enhanced—but rather with the purpose of doubting the Scriptures. Higher critics ultimately do not want to deal with the issue of sin and the reality that they need a Redeemer. We should not be surprised that those denying Yeshua in our midst do not want to deal with their sin, either.

**Is the story of Yeshua pagan?** The story of Yeshua as outlined in the Gospels is *only* pagan and borrowed from mythology *if* other stories in Scripture are likewise pagan and borrowed from mythology. The ultimate result of this must be throwing away the Bible and becoming an atheist, or at least not being too sure if there is a Supreme Being because primitive peoples are those who are most apt to believe in some kind of a god. But we must know that the enemy always counterfeits God's truth, and that he is very crafty in copying off His Word.

Is the story of Yeshua pagan? Our answer must be a resounding: **No!**

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<sup>12</sup> Be sure to have resources like Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003) and K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) in your reference library.