

Jerome and The King James Version

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What is the connection between the King James Version of the Bible and Jerome (Eusebius Hieronymus) (c. 342- c. 420) that gives strong evidence for the inspiration of Scripture?

By way of background. By the end of the fourth century, it was felt that a revision of the Latin Scriptures was needed. So Bishop Damasus of Rome commissioned his secretary, Jerome, to produce a reliable Latin translation. After many years of work at Bethlehem in Israel, Jerome produced by the year 405 a complete translation of the Old Testament. His work was important because for hundreds of years, many Christians throughout England and Europe relied on the Latin translation; the language of the Roman Empire. It was not until 1384 that the Bible was translated into English (under the guidance of the great scholar, John Wycliffe).

When Jerome produced what came to be known as the Vulgate, the thinking at the time was that there was a solid sphere which surrounded the earth. Not wanting to go against this popular thinking, Jerome ignored the Hebrew text at a crucial point and inserted the Latin word *firmamentum*. Scholars producing the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible (first published in 1611) relied very heavily on Jerome's Latin translation (the Vulgate) because not many ancient manuscripts in the original languages were available to them in the seventeenth century. When they came across the word *firmamentum*, it was simply translated 'firmament'.

"And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years." (Gen. 1:14. KJV). Also, 1:15, 17, 20.

Eventually scholars discovered Jerome's deliberate change from the highly accurate text before him. The Hebrew word is actually '*raqi*' which does not refer to something which is firm or solid, but rather, something which is extenuated or stretched out. The word *raqi* is used to describe where the birds fly and where God places the lights in the sky. The English word 'Sky' (as used in modern Bible translations) is an excellent equivalent to the Hebrew word '*raqi*'.

The question here is, how did those who wrote Scripture know the facts about outer space? In another passage of Scripture we read that God "sits above the circle of the earth" (Isaiah 40:22). The obvious answer is that God revealed some facts about the cosmos to men such as Isaiah.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

From man, or from God?

The above brings before us an important point. Where does Scripture come from? There are those who insist that Scripture comes from the ideas of men. However, if that is the case, then we should see many ancient religious ideas

contained within Scripture. There was no shortage of ideas and religious practices in the ancient world. We will start with Egypt because Israel grew up in Egypt, starting with a small band of less than one hundred men (along with their wives), and then growing into a nation.

Egyptian Beliefs

I will mention some of the Egyptian gods simply to illustrate the fact that Israel did not grow up in a vacuum as far as religious ideas are concerned.

One authority depicts thirty-five pagan gods of Egypt. They were, in alphabetical order, Aker, Amon, Anubis, Apis, Aton, Atum, Bes, Edijo, Geb, Hathor, Heket, Horus, Isis, Khepri, Khnum, Kons, Maat, Meshenet, Min, Mut, Nekhbet, Nut, Osiris, Ptah, Ra, Sekhmet, Selket, Seshat, Seth, Shu, Sobedk, Sothis, Thermuthis, Thoth, Thouris.¹ The English spelling for some gods is not consistent. For instance, the god Amon can also be spelt Amun.

Many of the gods of the ancient world had human characteristics. They could be male or female and have children. Bastet for instance was a female deity, the daughter of Ra. How the god or goddess was depicted could change over time. Bastet at one stage was depicted as a woman with a cat's head. At another stage, she is depicted simply as a cat.

We should note how the God of the universe and the Bible is degraded in pagan worship. He is depicted in the form of the creatures of the earth. Further to this, we can see how man is degraded. Connecting an animal head to a human body is a feature of pagan worship. In Egypt, a crocodile head is connected to a man to form the god Sobek. The head of a mythical animal is connected to a man to form the god Seth. The head of a baboon or ibis is connected to a man to form the god Thoth. The head of a dog is connected to a man to form the god Anubis. Sometimes this god is simply depicted as a dog. As mentioned earlier, the head of a cat is sometimes connected to the body of a woman to form the god Bastet. Connecting an animal's head to a human is not limited to the pagan ideas of Egypt. In India, One of several gods which Hindus can worship is **Ganesh** (or Genesha).

He is depicted with an elephant's head, four arms and two legs. The arms and legs are of a man. According to one Hindu legend, Ganesh has an elephant's head because Shiva (his father) beheaded him, and then promised to replace his head with the first creature he saw, which was an elephant. Often, only the head of Ganesh is depicted (the elephant's head) leading some to believe the Hindus are worshipping an elephant. It doesn't seem to bother the Hindus that Shiva, the father of Ganesh had acted so foolishly. There is some variation between Hindu sources with regard to where the head of Ganesh came from, with some claiming he was born with the head.²

Pagan gods could have very human traits in the way they behaved. For instance, Horus, the falcon god, was involved in a long struggle with the evil god Seth to claim his place as king of Egypt.

Syncretism, where two or more gods were combined to form a single god was central to religion in Ancient Egypt. For instance, Amon and Ra were fused to create Amun-Ra. A god in one part of Egypt may not be the prominent god in another part.

The one true God who is revealed in Scripture is not limited in power or influence as are the pagan gods.

God rules the world

When God sent the ten plagues upon the Egyptians, he was letting them know that he rules the world, and not their gods. It must be remembered that the Jews were immersed in the religious thinking of their time and place, so they also needed teaching. When God led the people out of Egypt, it was by means of a supernatural fire during the night, and by a pillar of smoke during the day. In this way, God was taking the nation by the hand as it were, and leading to where they need to go, otherwise (because of the thinking of the day) they would have felt they were leaving God back in Egypt.

The Bible informs us, "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give the light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." (Exodus 13:21-2). See also Nehemiah 9:12.

Not just a god of the hills

There are several instances recorded in the Bible which show that ancient people in general, had a poor understanding of God, for instance, "The man of God came up and told the king of Israel, "This is what the Lord says: 'Because the Arameans think the Lord is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the Lord.'" (1 Kings 20:28). Not only does the king of Israel discover the power of God, the Arameans, at great cost to themselves, also discover his power.

In another instance of a group of people learning about the power of God, it is by means of a military commander obtaining the cure of his leprosy. The military commander was Naaman who commanded the army of the king of Aram. Naaman, discovered via a girl from Israel who was captured and placed in the service of his wife, that there was a prophet in Israel who could call on God to cure him.

Naaman went to Israel and came to the house of Elisha where he received instructions - relayed through the servant of Elisha - to "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." (2 Kings 5:10). Naaman despised the means by which he was to be cured, so he refused to go to the Jordan until his servants urged him to go. He went to the despised Jordan and washed as per instructions, and was cured.

Naaman returns to Elisha to express his gratitude with gifts. However, Elisha refuses the gifts because all praise belongs to God. There is one thing that Elisha allows - and

which to our modern minds is rather amusing - he permits Naaman to load two of his mules with dirt in order to take the God of Israel back to his own country and worship him there (2 Kings 5:17). The ancients just couldn't conceive a God who rules the entire universe. Science indicates that there is only one God, because one set of physical laws apply to the entire universe.

Beliefs in the promised land

The beliefs and practices of the people in the promised land were repugnant in the eyes of decent people and most certainly in the eyes of a holy and righteous God.

God planned in advance the punishment of the Amorites. He told Abraham, "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." (Gen. 15:16). Just what 'the sin of the Amorites' was, is not made clear, however, we can safely assume it was at least as bad as the sins of others in the promised land, which included the sacrifice of children to a pagan god.

When the Jews moved into the promised land, God's order to them was that they were to destroy everything. Every man, woman and child. Even the sheep and cattle. (Joshua 6:21, 8:2, 24-27). In this way, every detestable sin - even the memory of it - was removed from the land. Clearly, there was nothing among the religious beliefs and practices in the promised land which could contribute to the Jews understanding of God.

More recent pagan gods

Even when we move much further forward in history, we still find that there is nothing in the beliefs of the pagan gods which can add to the God of heaven and earth, the God of the Bible.

The gods of the Greeks and the Romans were similar to the Egyptians gods in that they had petty squabbles among themselves.

Greek gods

The Greek gods of the Pantheon were, Aphrodite, Artemis, Athena, Apollo, Ares, Demeter and Hestia, Hades and Dionysus, Hera, Poseidon, Hephaestus, Hermes, Zeus.

Artemis is mentioned in the Bible. She is the Greek goddess of the moon, and is the daughter of Zeus and Leto. Devotees viewed her as the goddess who watched over nature for both humans and animals. She is also viewed as giving fertility to mankind.

The most famous statue of her was located in the city of Ephesus. The Bible informs us that Paul in his proclamation of the Gospel in Ephesus was turning people away from their pagan worship. This soon caught the attention of Demetrius and fellow craftsmen who made silver shrines of Artemis (Acts 19:23-27). When Demetrius explained to his fellow Ephesians that the message of Paul was bringing the worship of Artemis into disrepute and endangering their silversmith trade, "... they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (19:28). After a temporary lull, we read that "... they all shouted in unison for about two hours: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians'" (19:34).

Paul survives the commotion after friends persuade him to not go into the crowd and speak to them (19:30-31). Here again, there is nothing among the pagan gods which can contribute to our understanding of the one true God, the God of the Bible.

God as revealed to us in the Bible

God, as revealed to us in the Bible is vastly superior to the gods of this world. Some Scriptural points about God:

- “Who is like thee among the gods ...” (Exodus 15:11).
- He does not change his mind (Hebrews 13:21).
- “... it is impossible for God to lie ...” (Heb. 6:18).
- We are not to make an image of God. (Exodus 20:4, Deut. 27:15).
- Secret things belong to God (Deut. 29:29).
- His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:9).
- He knows our innermost thoughts (Ps. 26:2).
- He corrects the errors in a man (Job 5:17).
- He is omnipresent (present everywhere) (Psalm 139:7-10, Jer. 23:23-24, Heb. 4:13).
- He is omnipotent (all powerful). “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1). “... none can stay his hand ...” (Dan. 4:35).
- He is omniscient (all knowing) (2 Chron. 6:9, 1 Sam. 2:3).
- He is righteous (Ps. 11:17, 18:30, 33:4-5, 92:15, Heb. 6:18).
- We are told to “be imitators of God” (Heb. 5:1)
- He is loving, even in the face of our rebellion (Rom. 5:8).
- He is incomprehensible (Job 11:7-9).
- “To whom then will we liken God ...” (Isaiah 40:15) also 1 Tim. 6:15-16).
- He is king of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16).

The Judeo-Christian faith is built on the dramatic actions of God (objective evidence) and not on the imaginations of the mind (subjective evidence) as are the pagan religions.

Christians believe certain things because of what happened in the past. For instance:

It is known that God spoke to the whole nation of Israel in a very dramatic way. He spoke with such a loud voice; mount Sinai shook, and everyone trembled with fear (Exodus 19:9, 19).

Jesus lay in the grave, guarded by soldiers. Three days later, the guards were gone and the grave lay open for all to see that he had risen (Matt. 28:2-4).

The very thick curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the general public was torn from top to bottom, showing that all who trust in Christ have access to the Father (Matt. 27:50-51).

On the day of Pentecost, the temple - the house of prayer - had a large number of people. The Bible reports that, “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.” (Acts 2:2). It is further stated about the apostles, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (2:4).

The Gospel message is shown to be true through the

mighty miraculous acts of God which were performed for a short while through the apostles. (Acts 3:1-10, regarding the cripple who was healed, the religious leaders had to admit, “Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we can not deny it.” (Acts 4:16). See also Acts 5:15-16.

“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul” (Acts 19:11). However, toward the end of his ministry, God brought to an end, miracle working which resulted in Paul not being able to cure Trophimus. He states, “... I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.” (2 Timothy 4:20). He also told the Philippians of the sickness of his good friend **Epaphroditus**, “Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him...” (Philippians 2:27). He provides medical advice to Timothy. He states, “Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.” (1 Timothy 5:23). The apostle Paul was given a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). In order to bear up under the suffering, he was informed, “My grace is sufficient for you” (12:9). Those of us who have had to endure, have learnt the truth of that message.

Those who love the Lord are to treasure what He has done in the past.

“One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.”
(Psalm 145:4)

End Notes

1. Nelson’s Complete Book of Bible Maps And Charts, 3rd Edition, © 1996, p. 26.
2. [Hindu deities](#), Ganesha, Wikipedia

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