

an essay:

REFUTING GNOSTICISM FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

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I. THE CHALLENGE – A GNOSTIC PREACHER COMES TO TOWN

“You are a first generation Jewish Christian involved in a local church in a small town. A gnostic preacher comes to town and starts making converts. You do not have any New Testament to cite in any argument to refute him, but you do have your Old Testament (You don’t call it that, though.) and you are familiar with the events of the Gospels. What do you say to a friend who is taken by this preacher and invites you to come to a gnostic worship service?”

II. THE PLAN - STANDING FIRM UPON THE OLD TESTAMENT

Certainly if a friend invites one to hear a preacher preaching about JESUS CHRIST and making many converts, a Christian no doubt would accept the invitation. General knowledge of the events of the Gospels could very well easily fit in to what the gnostic preacher says, which will focus around JESUS CHRIST and salvation through Him and ascetic piety.^{1 2} One would thus be in great danger of hearing and accepting false doctrines. Indeed, gnosticism was very common in the early Church.³

As a Jewish Christian in an age where there is no universally agreed upon canon for a New Testament, nor a centralized Church structure to standardize doctrine, one would be left to compare what the gnostic preacher says with what the then known established Holy Scriptures say. Being a Jewish Christian suggests one would be familiar with The Old Testament. Let us therefore examine some common doctrines of the gnostics and use Old Testament Scripture to refute them.

III. LESSER GOD, GREATER GOD?

Gnostics believed that a lesser evil God -The Creator of The Old Testament – is opposed by a greater good God - JESUS CHRIST of The New Testament.^{4 5} But as a Christian, you would hopefully know that GOD The Son is equal with GOD The Father. DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5 commands, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our GOD is one

¹ 1, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Page 307-313.

² 2, Historical Theology - An Introduction, Page 18, 19, 38.

³ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

⁴ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

LORD. And thou shalt love The LORD Thy GOD with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”⁶ If we are to love GOD The Father with all our heart, soul and might, and The Creator and The Saviour are one, could then The Father be any less good and loving than The Son? Certainly not!

JOSHUA 24:16-17 records, “And the people answered and said, “GOD forbid that we should forsake The LORD, to serve other gods; For The LORD our GOD, He it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed.”⁷ How can we not then serve GOD The Father as well as GOD The Son? As The Book of JOSHUA says, “GOD forbid!” PSALMS 100:3-5 states, “Know ye that The LORD He is GOD: it is He that hath made us... For The LORD is good...”⁸ For The Psalmist declares that GOD The Father made us, that He alone is GOD and that He is good. And as GOD The Son, so GOD The Father!

IV. THROW AWAY THE OLD TESTAMENT?

Gnostics rejected The Old Testament.⁹¹⁰ But how can the faithful Christian man reject The Holy Scriptures which we now call The Old Testament? PSALMS 19:9b declares, “The Judgments of The LORD are true and righteous altogether.”¹¹ For The Psalmist declares that The WORD of GOD contained therein is good and “righteous altogether.” PSALMS 119:11 tells us, “Thy Word [O LORD] have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee.”¹² The Word of GOD contained in The Old Testament gives men the knowledge of what is good and what is evil; what is righteous and what is sin. When a man hides The Old Testament within his heart, that It might guide all things in his earthly life, he is kept from sin. How then can the faithful man of GOD dispose of

⁵ 1, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Page 307-313.

⁶ 4, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5.

⁷ 4, KJV, JOSHUA 24:16-17.

⁸ 4, KJV, PSALMS 100:3-5.

⁹ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

¹⁰ 1, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Page 307-313.

¹¹ 4, KJV, PSALMS 19:9b.

The Old Testament? GOD forbid!

V. PHYSICAL CREATION EVIL?

Gnostics believed that the created material world was evil.^{13 14} This directly contradicts what The Old Testament declares in The Creation account in GENESIS 1:31a, “And GOD saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.”¹⁵ Creation itself is not evil, but good. Men do however often turn that which GOD has given them stewardship of and, because of sin and the darkness of the heart, turn things within creation to evil and sinful purposes. But is creation itself evil? Certainly not!

VI. SECRET KNOWLEDGE THE KEY TO SALVATION?

Gnostics possessed “secret knowledge” known only to the initiated.¹⁶ But The Almighty has revealed his Word to all mankind, that they might know Him and turn from the sin that separates them from fellowship with Him. What The Creator has revealed is to all men, and its purpose is made clear as in PROVERBS 2:5-6, “Then shalt thou understand the fear of The LORD, and find the knowledge of GOD. For The LORD giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”¹⁷

And if the knowledge of salvation for men from GOD is to be kept secret and so guarded, as the Gnostics claimed, why then does The Almighty declare that all men turn from sin and not perish? For we read in EZEKIEL 33:11, “Say unto them, As I live, saith The Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”¹⁸

¹² 4, KJV, PSALM 119:11.

¹³ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

¹⁴ 1, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Page 307-313.

¹⁵ 4, KJV, GENESIS 1:31a.

¹⁶ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

¹⁷ 4, KJV, PROVERBS 2:5-6.

¹⁸ 4, KJV, EZEKIEL 33:11.

Gnostics claimed that salvation is achieved by liberation from this evil world via spiritual “secret knowledge” revealed by JESUS CHRIST to The Apostles.^{19 20 21} But this is contrary to what The Psalmist declares in PSALMS 3:8a, “Salvation belonged unto The LORD.”²² And again in PSALMS 37:39a, “But the salvation of the righteous is of The LORD.”²³ GOD The Son affirms and declares “the salvation of the righteous” by affirming that salvation is from GOD The Son through Him – not by any supposed secret knowledge that would free us from alleged evil material existence!

VII. SALVATION FROM IGNORANCE AND NOT FROM SIN?

Gnostics held that salvation is thus from ignorance and not from sin.²⁴ But we read in PROVERBS 12:28, “In the way of righteousness is life; and in the pathway thereof there is no death.”²⁵ If the pathway of “righteousness is life” – which is of The LORD – then the opposite is just as true: the pathway of sin is death! JESUS CHRIST as The Word Incarnate offers men salvation not from ignorance in and of itself, although ignorance of GOD’s Law can open the doors of men’s lives to sin, but rather from sin.

We read of the wages of sin, which is death in EZEKIEL 33:15-16, “If the wicked restore the pledge, given again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity: he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him; he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live.”²⁶ A righteous man armed with the knowledge that JESUS is The Messiah and The Word of GOD contained in The Old Testament will understand that CHRIST saves men from sin and thus from spiritual death!

¹⁹ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

²⁰ 1, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Page 307-313.

²¹ 2, Historical Theology - An Introduction, Page 18, 19, 38.

²² 4, KJV, PSALMS 3:8a.

²³ 4, KJV, PSALMS 37:39a.

²⁴ 1, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Page 307-313.

²⁵ 4, KJV, PROVERBS 12:28.

VIII. THE PLANETS ARE DEMONS THAT ENSLAVE MANKIND?

The Gnostics claimed that the planets are actually demoniac astrological spiritual powers that enslave mankind.²⁷ But Moses wrote in GENESIS 1:16-17, “And GOD made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: He made the stars also. And GOD set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.”²⁸ The Torah proclaims the work of creation of The Creator, which here clearly declares that the heavenly bodies which men gaze upon in the night sky are that and that alone – heavenly bodies of stars, planets and moons. They are nothing less than what The Almighty declares them to be, but neither are they anything more! GOD alone is GOD and not anything within creation – physical or spiritual!

IX. GNOSTIC FREEDOM FROM EVIL DEMONS BY SPEAKING THEIR NAMES?

The Gnostic “secret knowledge” were the seals of power, names and characters of these supposed demoniac gods that - when spoken by the believer - liberated that person from those powers.²⁹ But the prophet Jeremiah declares in JEREMIAH 1:8a, “For I am with thee to deliver thee, saith The LORD.”³⁰ Only The LORD brings salvation to men and frees them from the afflictions of sin and death. No heavenly body within the galaxies of stars, moons and planets – no matter how glorious – can do this. Nor can any created spiritual being – an angel of light nor an angel of darkness – rescue men’s souls from the consequences of iniquity and eternal separation from GOD!

Further, the Psalmist writes in PSALMS 33:16-20, “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host; a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. Behold, the eye of The LORD is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waited for The LORD: He is our help and our shield.”³¹ Men’s deliverance from pain, suffering, death and damnation

²⁶ 4, KJV, EZEKIEL 33:15-16.

²⁷ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

²⁸ 4, KJV, GENESIS 1:16-17.

²⁹ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

³⁰ 4, KJV, JEREMIAH 1:8a.

³¹ 4, KJV, PSALMS 33:16-20.

is not to be had from any vain multitude of earthly wealth or power. Only the great mercy of The Almighty avails to save men from afflictions both earthly and eternal. Only the soul that faithfully seeks The LORD shall be delivered and redeemed!

X. JESUS CHRIST ONE DIETY AMONG MANY IN HEAVEN?

The Gnostics claimed that JESUS CHRIST is but one of many heavenly spiritual powers called “aeons.”³² But if this is so, why then does Job confess that The Saviour lives, not for a time, but for all time? Why does Job attribute the omnipotence and everlasting Presence of GOD The Father to The Messiah? Why does Job see all this before JESUS CHRIST came to His earthly ministry and mission? It can only be because Job was shown that GOD The Son – JESUS CHRIST – is one with GOD The Father as in JOB 19;25-26 declares, “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see GOD!”³³

XI. THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST WAS A DIVINE ILLUSION?

The Gnostics claimed that The Messiah JESUS CHRIST - did not take on a human body, but only appeared to do so.³⁴ Thus, they deny His Resurrection because they hold that His actual physical death was but a mere Divine illusion.^{35 36} Yet we read in ISAIAH 53:3-5, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief... But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”³⁷

If CHRIST did not experience physical death in a physical human body, how then could He have been for us “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with [our] grief?” His wounding for our transgressions and bruising for our iniquities would have been of no

³² 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

³³ 4, KJV, JOB 19;25-26.

³⁴ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

³⁵ 1, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Page 307-313.

³⁶ 2, Historical Theology - An Introduction, Page 18, 19, 38.

³⁷ 4, KJV, ISAIAH 53:3-5.

effect in paying the penalty for men's sins under The Law of GOD if JESUS lacked a true material human Body! The chastisement of our peace would not have been upon Him, nor would we His saints be healed from our own sin and resulting spiritual death if His stripes were not upon GOD fully Incarnate in The Flesh!

XII. JESUS CHRIST DID NOT SUFFER REAL DEATH ON THE CROSS?

The Gnostics therefore claimed that JESUS CHRIS, being Divine, could not and did not suffer and die, but only appeared to suffer and die.³⁸ But the prophet Isaiah foresaw of The Redeemer in ISAIAH 53:9-10, "And He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death... Yet it pleased The LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin..."³⁹ Was then Isaiah mistaken and The Word of GOD a false revelation? GOD forbid! For what the prophet was shown and recorded under unerring Divine inspiration clearly declares that The Messiah would lie down in the grave in death. Only in this way could JESUS CHRIST be made by The Father "an offering for [our] sin," that the penalty of our iniquity be paid for completely and that we be reconciled with The Almighty!

XIII. GNOSTIC SALVATION DETERMINED BY FATE?

The Gnostics held that one's potential for salvation is only open to some of mankind, thus introducing fate: all of the pneumatikoi (the spiritual ones), some of the psychikoi (followers of the soul) and none of the sarkikoi (followers of the flesh).^{40 41 42} Here these men forget that, though The Almighty is sovereign over all things – including who shall be saved and who shall not be saved – He also bestows upon men free will. GOD desires that we love Him as He loves us. Therefore The Old Testament documents The LORD's constant call to men to choose life, to decide to embrace repentance, to seek after righteousness – that they might live and be in fellowship with Him in both this life and for eternity!

³⁸ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

³⁹ 4, KJV, ISAIAH 53:9-10.

⁴⁰ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

⁴¹ 1, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, Page 307-313.

So we note the free will of which Moses recorded in GENESIS 2:16-17a, “And The LORD GOD commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.”⁴³ And we read of Joshua’s call to ancient Israel to choose to serve The LORD and not false idols in JOSHUA 24:15a, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve The LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve...”⁴⁴

So also we read the words of Moses in DEUTERONOMY 30:19-20, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love The LORD thy GOD, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him...”⁴⁵ The Creator sets before men life and death, blessing and cursing. And what does GOD desire and call men to do? To choose life, that He might bless us; to choose to obey His voice, that we may be in fellowship with us; to choose to cleave to Him, that our earthly lives and eternal souls might be delivered and live!

XIV. BAPTISM OF HOLY SPIRIT DEPENDANT UPON SECRET FORMULAS?

The Gnostics claimed that The Holy Spirit - not of The Creator JEHOVAH - but another good, superior and better deity - enters the “pneumatioi” magically during baptism via baptismal waters as a result of a special formula of initiation.⁴⁶ We have seen the gross error of the ancient Gnostics. Now we see clearly the great haughtiness of these same heretics. For the Gnostics blasphemed against The Holy Spirit, denying The Father from Whom The Spirit is in part sent!

They denied the need of humility, claiming that only they – the special pneumatioi – were wise enough to be earthly vessels for The Holy Spirit. Thus they discounted the need for Divine Grace, focusing on what men do instead of what GOD

⁴² 2, Historical Theology - An Introduction, Page 18, 19, 38.

⁴³ 4, KJV, GENESIS 2:16-17a.

⁴⁴ 4, KJV, JOSHUA 24:15a.

⁴⁵ 4, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 30:19-20.

does to redeem the faithful man. And they denied the need for jumble faith, placing their trust in mechanical and magical words and ceremonies that would presumably force The Holy Spirit to their will, that He should be obliged to automatically comply with their desires to be filled with His Presence!

The prophet Isaiah records that GOD's Spirit seeks men who are humble and penitent before His Holy Presence. So we read in ISAIAH 61:1-2, "The Spirit of The LORD GOD is upon me; because The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: To proclaim the acceptable year of The LORD, and the day of vengeance of our GOD; to comfort all that mourn."⁴⁷ Were among the Gnostics were the meek, the brokenhearted, the captives, the prisoners and those that mourned on account of their affront to The Almighty because of their sins?

Was the prophet here mistaken in what he recorded for us? Did The Holy Spirit Who directed his pen deceive him and all men thereafter? GOD forbid! For as MICAH 6:8 declares, we are told what The Creator seeks in the hearts of men, that He might dwell with and within them: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth The LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD!"⁴⁸

XV. IN CONCLUSION

To conclude, a first generation Jewish Christian - if possessing true faith that JESUS is The CHRIST and sufficiently versed in what we now call The Old Testament Scripture - should be able to refute, challenge or at least question such Gnostic preaching when exposed to it. The early Jewish Christian would have known in some way that The Father and The Son are one. And though he would not have had the written Word of GOD in The Book of JOHN, he would have understood what Saint John declares in

⁴⁶ 3, A History of Christian Thought, Page 33-37.

⁴⁷ 4, KJV, ISAIAH 61:1-2.

JOHN 1:1, “In the beginning was The Word, and the Word was with GOD, and The Word was GOD.”⁴⁹

The first generation Jewish Christian would have understood that JESUS CHRIST, GOD Incarnate as The Messiah, is “...The Light [that] shineth in darkness” to reconcile men lost in sin back to Himself by His sacrifice of Himself on their behalf.⁵⁰ Therefore he would have seen and confessed what many men in our supposedly enlightened modern age refuse to see and confess, that JESUS CHRIST is The Light Personified come to save the faithful from sin and death! For as it is written in PSALMS 119:105, “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path!”⁵¹

⁴⁸ 4, KJV, MICAH 6:8.

⁴⁹ 4, KJV, JOHN 1:1.

⁵⁰ 4, KJV, JOHN 1:5.

⁵¹ 4, KJV, PSALMS 119:105.

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