“Did Christianity Come From the Pagan Story of Nimrod and Ishtar?”

I am reading a book by Pastor David Jeremiah, *Escape the Coming Night*. In this book he tells of the “true legend” (his words) of Nimrod’s wife, how she was concieved by a sunbeam, whose son was killed and raised up after 40 days, and the celebration of Ishtar. I just read your article “Did Christianity Borrow From Pagan Religions?” about whether Christianity borrowed from other pagan religions, but this one wasn’t there and I wondered if you might know anything about it?

My question is. how did this story get around when Christ was not born yet? I have had someone actually tell me that Christianity copied this story. While I don’t believe it for a minute, I do want to have a defense for it and to file it away in the proper perspective.

[*Editor’s Note: It is unclear whether or not the above account of Dr. Jeremiah’s work is indeed accurate. Following is simply a response to the greater issue with guidelines for discernment in such matters.*] I have not actually heard of this story before, so I cannot really comment on the details. There are, however, some general principles to bear in mind when evaluating such claims.

First, we need to establish that this really was a story that was told in the ancient world. For that we need to know what the original source of the story was. Was this story recorded on ancient clay tablets or written on the walls of a temple, etc.? If so, where are these tablets housed today? Where is this temple?

If the story is recorded by an ancient historian, then which

historian is it? Where can we find this work for ourselves? When did the historian write his account? Where did he get his information from, etc? Does the historian claim the account actually occurred, or does he refer to it as a myth? And so on, and so forth.

Once one begins to ask such questions, one sometimes finds that the story hasn't been related correctly, or that it dates to after the time of Jesus and early Christianity, or that the details of the story are very different from what Christians claim about the life of Christ, etc.

All of this is important. If we cannot find any ancient record of the story, then maybe the story really isn't ancient after all. Maybe somebody invented the story more recently. If the story is ancient, but dates to after the time of Christ, then it's quite possible that the story actually copied early Christian beliefs—and not vice versa. Copying can work both ways, after all. Maybe this story copied from the early Christians.

Finally, if there is an ancient record of the story, and if it is prior to the time of Christ, then we have to ask whether early Christians actually borrowed the story. And this is often extremely unlikely. In the first place, the details of the stories are often so different that it would be absurd to say that one borrowed from another. Second, it's highly unlikely that the early Christians (who were, after all, predominantly monotheistic Jews) would borrow religious concepts from pagan myths. Jews typically regarded such myths as perverse, morally repugnant, and idolatrous. It's very difficult to believe that they would borrow from such myths to describe the life of Christ.

So let's take the story related in Jeremiah's book. Was Jesus conceived by a sunbeam? Was He raised after 40 days? The answer to both questions is "No." Also, how was Nimrod's son supposedly killed? My guess is that it wasn't by crucifixion,

a practice developed much later by the Romans. These are some of the questions we would want to ask to determine if it is reasonable to believe that Christianity borrowed ideas from a pagan religion. And you can see the point. Even if this story circulated before the time of Christ, it's a very different story than the Christians were telling about Jesus, making borrowing at least highly suspect.

In addition, we have plenty of good historical evidence for the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Not only do we have all of the New Testament documents (e.g. different Gospels, letters, etc.), we also have ancient evidence for Jesus from non-Christian sources. See my article by that title. But what good historical evidence do we really have for Nimrod's son? I'm guessing we don't have much of anything, quite honestly. This makes the events of Jesus' life much different from those of Nimrod's alleged son. In the one case, we have good historical evidence for Jesus, but we do not have equally good historical evidence for Nimrod's son.

These are just some of the issues that one must carefully investigate and consider before the charge of Christians borrowing from pagan religions can be seriously sustained. And once one begins to carefully investigate these matters, the charge of borrowing becomes less and less plausible. I honestly don't think we have anything to fear or worry about in these charges.

I hope this information is helpful. Shalom in our true Lord Jesus Christ!

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