



CONTEXT FOR THE CHRIST EVENT:

Egyptian II

THE EGYPTIANS BELIEVED that Horus, as Pharaoh, was the human manifestation of the gods. His role was to convey the power of the gods to the people, to administer justice [*ma'at*] for them, and, like a shepherd, to lead them to safe pastures. In Egyptian murals Pharaoh is often portrayed carrying a shepherd's rod.

Similarly, in Hebrew monotheism YHWH was the ultimate shepherd: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:1-3).

The shepherd theme was likewise adopted by Jesus Christ when he said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11; cf. Hebrews 13:20, 21).

In stark contrast to Pharaoh's care for his own people, there is the tradition of Pharaoh's vigorous aggression and victory against all perceived enemies, who were regarded as agents of the serpent, Apophis, and of chaos. The murals of Egyptian temples and palaces are filled with scenes in which Pharaoh is conquering the enemies of the kingdom. Many of these murals depict fictitious events. "What was expected of the king did not and could not change, and it determined what was claimed for him. . . . [Many examples could be given but, for instance,] Tutankhamun (1361-1352), who died at the age of eighteen, was portrayed as victorious over peoples to the south and east of Egypt, although he is known never to have campaigned against them. To call such accounts falsifications of history is to miss the point. Their factual accuracy or inaccuracy was irrelevant: their intention was to show that the

In Egyptian murals Pharaoh is often portrayed carrying a shepherd's rod. Similarly, in Hebrew monotheism YHWH was the ultimate shepherd.

pharaoh in question had indeed fulfilled his allotted role; he had indeed affirmed and strengthened cosmos.”

It is undoubtedly in this same context that YHWH, the God of Israel, is so often portrayed as forcefully punishing his own people and violently leading repeated aggressions against the perceived enemies of his people (e.g., Numbers 26:9, 10; 1 Samuel 15:1-3). The literary tradition of fictitious battles against the enemy is actually a form of proto-apocalyptic. In this context the factual accuracy or inaccuracy of apocalyptic itself is irrelevant. Like the literary genre of the Egyptian Pharaohs, the intention of apocalyptic is to show that YHWH and the Chosen People have fulfilled or will fulfill their allotted roles against all odds. YHWH will emphatically affirm, strengthen and transform the cosmos. Moreover, YHWH has already inaugurally accomplished this in the Christ event, which overturned all prior suppositions.

. . . [T]he Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. — Isaiah 53:6, 7.

Endnote

1. Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 17.

Copyright © 2005 Worldview Publications