



CONTEXT FOR THE CHRIST EVENT:

Persian II

IN REUNITING THE ZADOKITE and Levitical priesthods, Ezra and Nehemiah effectively established a theocracy. The Zadokites, who adhered to the unconditional covenant with Abraham, focused on the Temple services and represented the people to God. Gradually they came to believe that, in effect, they had become immanent to God and thus had assumed some level of divinity. Meanwhile, the Levites, who adhered to the conditional covenant with Moses, focused on the sacred documents and represented God to the people. They came to believe that God had become immanent to them through the indwelling law and that they thus had begun to assume the human manifestation of divinity. In this situation the prophetic office — which looked to the future for covenantal fulfillment — was terminated.

In coming to these conclusions, the dual priesthods began to draw — both intuitively and explicitly — from the Zoroastrian belief system of Persia. Likewise, while the dual priesthods vigorously contended for monotheism, they drew from Zoroastrianism to introduce the concept of an errant archangel, Satan, who was responsible for the origin of evil. Since archangels and angels were actually regarded as attributes of god(s), Satan became, in effect, the alter ego of YHWH.

Because the ultimate victory of good over evil involved the cooperative support and obedience of the people, the Jews, like the Zoroastrians, were required to engage in good thoughts, good words and good deeds. They were also required to perform purification ceremonies, liturgies, sacrifices and religious rituals.

Although the Jews rejected the dualism of a good God and an evil god,

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they began to accept the dualism of human beings — the Zoroastrian view of the ethereal soul (*menog*) and embodied flesh (*getik*). At least some of the Jews also believed that at death the soul dwelled in an intermediate state for three days. The soul (*menog*) then passed into an intermediate judgment that would decide whether it would rest in glorious paradise, in a shadowy boundary area, or in the utter darkness of *gehenna*. The Jews also were enthralled with Zarathustra's (ca. 1000 BCE) belief that in 1,000 years a World Savior (Saoshyant) would be born of a virgin. This Savior would launch a ministry that would ultimately bring all humanity and the entire created order to a final judgment, to a resurrection from the dead, and either to an eternal afterlife in an earth made new for those who had been good or to utter destruction for the wicked.

It is therefore clear that Persian Zoroastrianism — first introduced to the Jews by the Cyrus the Great, whom they regarded as the Messiah — had a profound impact on the beliefs and practices of the Jews as well as on their anticipation for the future. Furthermore, these beliefs and practices had a profound impact on the Christ event itself. In a sense, Zoroastrianism, like Judaism, found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. That is undoubtedly why the Persian magi were so determined to find the baby born of a virgin in Bethlehem.

Endnote

1. See "The Second Temple: Persian Period," *Outlook* (January 2002); "The Divine Presence," *Outlook* (January/February 2003); "Origins of Human Destiny," *Outlook* (September/October 2003); "The Second Temple: Reformation Period" *Outlook* (November/December 2003); "We Will All Be Changed," *Outlook* (May/June 2004); "The Mythology of Evil," *Outlook* (November/December 2004).