

The First Apology of Justin Martyr

Excerpt 2*

A Comparison of the Resurrection & Virgin Birth to Pagan Myths & Philosophies and Evidence from Prophecy

Look at the end of each of the former emperors, how they died the common death of all. And if this were merely a departure into unconsciousness, that would be a piece of luck for the wicked, but since consciousness continues for all who have lived — and eternal punishment awaits — do not fail to be convinced and believe that these things are true. For the oracles of the dead and the revelations of innocent children¹, the invoking of [departed] human souls, the dream-senders and familiars of the magi², and what is done by those who know about such things — all this should convince you that souls are still conscious after death. Then there are the men who are seized and torn by the spirits of the dead,³ whom everyone calls demon-possessed and maniacs; and the oracles, so well-known among you, of Amphilochus and Dodona and Pytho and any others of that kind; and the teaching of writers, Empedocles and Pythagoras, Plato and Socrates, and the ditch in Homer and the descent of Odysseus to visit the dead.⁴ Treat us at least like these; we believe in God not less than they do, but rather more, since we look forward to receiving again our own bodies, though they be dead and buried in the earth, declaring that nothing is impossible to God.

Indeed,... if you were not such as you are, born of such parents, and someone were to show you human sperm and a picture of a man and assure you that the one could grow into the other, would you believe it before you saw it happening? No one would dare to deny [that

you wouldn't]. In the same way unbelief prevails about the resurrection of the dead because you have never seen an instance of it. But as you at first would not have believed that from a little drop such beings [as humans] could develop, yet you see it happening, so consider that it is possible for human bodies, dissolved and scattered in the earth like seeds, to rise again in due time by God's decree and be clothed with incorruption.⁵ I cannot imagine how any adequate concept of divine power can be held by those who say that everything returns into that from which it came and that not even God can do anything more than this. But I may remark that they would not have believed it possible for such creatures as they are to have come into being, yet they see themselves as they are — and indeed the whole world — and what they were made from. We have learned that it is better to believe things impossible to our own nature and to men than to disbelieve like others, since we know that our Teacher Jesus Christ said, "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God."⁶ And: "Fear not those who put you to death and after that can do no more, but fear him who after death is able to cast both body and soul into Gehenna."⁷ (Gehenna is the place where those who live unrighteously will be punished, and those who do not believe that these things will come to pass, which God has taught through Christ.)

Both Sybil⁸ and Hystaspes⁹ declared that there will be a destruction of corruptible things by fire. Those who are called Stoic philosophers

¹ Babies and fetuses were often slaughtered so that their internal organs could be inspected for prophetic signs.

² This refers to "friendly" spirits that served the magi.

³ Both Greek and Hebrew thought of that time held that demons were the spirits/souls of deceased wicked people.

⁴ Homer, *Odyssey*, XI. 25.

⁵ See 1 Co 15.

⁶ Lk 18:27

⁷ Lk 12:4-5

⁸ a writer of oracles who was originally thought to be Jewish but now consider heathen.

⁹ a legendary Persian sage

teach that God himself will be resolved into fire and that the universe will come into being again. We think that God, the Maker of all, is superior to changeable things. But if on some points we agree with the poets and philosophers whom you honor and on others [teach] more completely and more worthily of God and are the only ones who offer proof, why are we above all hated unjustly? When we say that all things have been ordered and made by God, we appear to offer the teaching of Plato; in speaking of a coming destruction by fire, [we seem to offer] that of the Stoics; in declaring that the souls of the unrighteous will be punished after death, still remaining in conscious existence, and those of the virtuous, delivered from punishments, will enjoy happiness, we seem to agree with [various] poets and philosophers; in declaring that men ought not to worship the works of their hands, we are saying the same things as the comedian Menander and others who have said this, for they declared that the Fashioner is greater than what He has formed.

In saying that the Word¹⁰, who is the first offspring of God, was born for us without sexual union, as Jesus Christ our Teacher, and that He was crucified and died and, after rising again, ascended into heaven, we introduce nothing new beyond [what you say of] those whom you call sons of Zeus¹¹. You know how many sons of Zeus the writers whom you honor speak of: Hermes¹², the interpreting Word and teacher of all; Asclepius, who was also a healer and, after being struck by lightning, ascended into heaven — as did Dionysus¹³ who was torn in pieces; Heracles¹⁴, who to escape his torments threw himself into the fire; the Dioscuri born of Leda and Perseus of Danae; and Bellerophon, who, though of human origin, rode on the [divine] horse Pegasus. Need I mention Ariadne and those who like her are said to have been placed among the stars? And what of your deceased

emperors, whom you regularly think worthy of being raised to immortality, introducing a witness who swears that he saw the cremated Caesar ascending into heaven from the funeral pyre?¹⁵ Nor is it necessary to remind you what kind of actions are related of each of those who are called sons of Zeus, except [to point out] that they are recorded for the benefit and instruction of students — for all consider it a fine thing to be imitators of the gods! Far be it from every sound mind to entertain such a concept of the deities as [to believe] that Zeus, whom they call the ruler and begetter of all, should have been a parricide and the son of a parricide and that, moved by desire of evil and shameful pleasures, he descended on Ganymede and the many women whom he seduced and that his sons after him were guilty of similar actions. But, as we said before, it was the wicked demons who did these things. We have been taught that only those who live close to God in holiness and virtue attain to immortality, and we believe that those who live unjustly and do not reform will be punished in eternal fire.

Now if God's Son, who is called Jesus, were only an ordinary man, He would be worthy because of His wisdom to be called Son of God, for all authors call God father of men and gods. When we say, as before, that He was begotten by God as the Word of God in a unique manner beyond ordinary birth, this should be no strange thing for you who speak of Hermes as the announcing word from God. If somebody objects that He was crucified, this is in common with the sons of Zeus, as you call them, who suffered, as previously listed. Since their fatal sufferings are narrated as not similar but different, so His unique passion should not seem to be any worse — indeed I will, as I have undertaken, show, as the argument proceeds, that He was better; for He is shown to be better by His actions. If we declare that He was born of a virgin, you should consider this something in common with Perseus. When we say that He healed the lame, the paralytic, and those born

¹⁰ Greek λογος *logos*, a well known philosophical concept

¹¹ or Jupiter

¹² or Mercury

¹³ or Bacchus

¹⁴ or Hercules

¹⁵ Such stories were told of both Julius and Augustus Caesar.

blind, we seem to be talking about things like those said to have been done by Asclepius.

In order to make this clear to you I will present the evidence, [first,] that the things we say, as disciples of Christ and of the prophets who came before Him, are the only truths and older than all the writers who have lived — and we ask to be accepted, not because we say the same things as they do, but because we are speaking the truth; [second,] that Jesus Christ alone was really begotten as Son of God, being His Word and First-begotten and Power, and, becoming man by His will, He taught us these things for the reconciliation and restoration of the human race; and [third,] that before He came among men as man, there were some who, on account of the already mentioned wicked demons, told through the poets as already having occurred the myths they had invented, just as now they are responsible for the slanders and godless deeds alleged against us, of which there is neither witness nor demonstration.

The first point is that, though we say the same as do the Greeks, we only are hated, because of the name of Christ. We do no wrong but are put to death as offenders [because of our worship, though] others everywhere worship trees and rivers, mice and cats and crocodiles and many kinds of irrational animals. And the same objects are not honored by all but different ones in different places, so that all are impious to each other, because of not having the same objects of worship. Yet this is the one complaint you have against us, that we do not worship the same gods that you do and do not bring libations and offerings of fat to the dead, crowns for their statues, and sacrifices. Yet, as you know well, the same beings are gods to some and wild animals to others, while still others think of them as sacred victims.

Secondly, out of every race of men, we who once worshiped Dionysus the son of Semele and Apollo the son of Leto (who in their passion for men did things that it is disgraceful even to speak of) or who worshiped

Persephone and Aphrodite¹⁶ (who were driven mad by [love of] Adonis and whose mysteries you celebrate) or Asclepius or some other of those who are called gods now through Jesus Christ despise them, even at the cost of death, and have dedicated ourselves to the unbegotten and impassible God. We do not believe that he ever descended in mad lust on Antiope or others, nor on Ganymede. Nor was He, receiving help through Thetis, delivered by that hundred-handed monster. Nor was He, because of this, anxious that Thetis' son Achilles should destroy so many Greeks for the sake of his concubine Briseis.¹⁷ We pity those who believe [such stories], for which we know that the demons are responsible.

A third point is that, after Christ's ascent into heaven, the demons put forward various men who said that they were gods, and you not only did not persecute them but also thought them worthy of honors. One was a certain Simon, a Samaritan from the village of Gitta, who in the time of Claudius Caesar, through the arts of the demons who worked in him, did mighty works of magic in your imperial city of Rome and was thought to be a god. He has been honored among you as a god by a statue, which was set up on the River Tiber between the two bridges, with this inscription in Latin, *SIMONI DEO SANCTO*, "To Simon the holy god."¹⁸ Almost all the Samaritans, and a few in other nations, confess this man as their first god and worship him as such, and a woman named Helena, who traveled around with him in those days and had formerly been a public prostitute, they say was the first Concept produced from him. Then we know of a certain Menander, who was also a Samaritan, from the village of

¹⁶Or Venus

¹⁷*Iliad* 2:3-4

¹⁸In 1574, near the Tiber, a piece of marble was discovered with the inscription *Semoni Sanco Deo*. It is thought to be the base to a statue to the Sabine god Semo Sancus. It has been commonly argued that Justin must have seen this statue, misread it, and made up a story about Simon Magus (Acts 8) being deified. Others argue that it is not likely that someone writing to people who could easily check the facts would have made such a stupid mistake and that there must have been another statue to which Justin was referring.

Capparetaea, who had been a disciple of Simon's and was also possessed by the demons. He deceived many at Antioch by magic arts and even persuaded his followers that he would never die. There are still some who believe this [as they learned] from him. Then there is a certain Marcion of Pontus, who is still teaching his converts that there is another God greater than the Fashioner. By the help of the demons, he has made many in every race of men to blaspheme and to deny God the Maker of the universe, professing that there is another who is greater and has done greater things than He. As we said [earlier], all who derive [their opinions] from these men are [still] called "Christians", just as men who do not share the same teachings with the philosophers still have in common with them the name of "philosophy", thus being brought into disrepute. Whether they commit the shameful deeds about which stories are told [about Christians] — the upsetting of the lamp,¹⁹ promiscuous intercourse, and the meals of human flesh — we do not know,²⁰ but we are sure that they are neither persecuted nor killed by you — on account of their teachings anyway. (I have compiled and have on hand a treatise against all the heresies that have arisen, which I will give you if you would like to consult it.)²¹

...Some even prostitute their own children and wives, and others are admittedly mutilated for purposes of homosexuality and treat this as part of the mysteries of the mother of the gods, while beside each of those whom you think of as gods a serpent is depicted as a great symbol and mystery.²² You charge against us the actions that you commit openly and treat with honor, as if the divine light were overthrown and withdrawn²³ — which of course does no

harm to us, who refuse to do any of these things, but rather injures those who do them and then bring false witness [against us].

Among us, the chief of the evil demons is called the Serpent and Satan and the Accuser, as you can learn by examining our writings. Christ has foretold that he will be cast into fire with his host and the men who follow him, [all] to be punished for endless ages. God delays doing this for the sake of the human race, for He foreknows that there are some yet to be saved by repentance — even perhaps some not yet born. In the beginning, he made the race of men endowed with intelligence, able to choose the truth and do right, so that all men are without excuse before God, for they were made with the powers of reason and observation. Anyone who does not believe that God cares for these things either manages to profess that He does not exist or makes out that He exists but approves of evil or remains [unaffected] like a stone and that virtue and vice are not realities but that men consider things good or bad by opinion alone. This is the height of impiety and injustice.

...

But lest someone should argue against us, "What excludes [the supposition] that this person whom you call Christ was a man, of human origin, and did these miracles you speak of by magic arts and so appeared to be God's Son?" we will bring forward our demonstration. We do not trust in mere hearsay, but are forced to believe those who prophesied [these things] before they happened, because we actually see things that have happened and are happening as was predicted. This will, as we think, be the greatest and surest demonstration for you too.

There were among the Jews certain men who were prophets of God, through whom the prophetic Spirit announced in advance events that were to occur. The successive rulers of the Jews carefully preserved their prophecies, as they were spoken when they prophesied, in their own Hebrew language, [and] as arranged in books by the prophets themselves. When

¹⁹ a reference to incest, which was performed in the darkness

²⁰ Many of the apologists mention that people commonly spread false stories of Christians being sexually promiscuous and cannibals.

²¹ Justin discusses a variety of sexual perversions practiced by the Romans and claims that true Christians do not do them.

²² Other writers have also indicated that the serpent was then used as a symbol of mystical power.

²³ Justin is probably likening their sexual practices to the "upsetting of the lamp" that Christians were accused of doing.

Ptolemy, king of Egypt, was founding a library and set out to gather the writings of all mankind, he learned about these prophecies and sent to Herod, then king of the Jews, asking him to send him the prophetic books. King Herod sent them, written in the aforementioned Hebrew language. Since their contents were not intelligible to the Egyptians, he again sent and asked him to send men who could translate them into Greek.²⁴ This was done, and the books remain in the hands of the Egyptians down to the present; the Jews everywhere have them too. But though they read them, they do not understand what they say but consider us their enemies and opponents, putting us to death or punishing us, as you do, whenever they can, as you can believe. (For in the Jewish War recently past,²⁵ Bar-Kokhba, the leader of the revolt of the Jews, ordered Christians only to be subjected to terrible punishments, unless they would deny Jesus the Christ and blaspheme [Him].) We find it predicted in the books of the prophets that Jesus our Christ would come, born of a virgin, grown to manhood, healing every sickness and every disease and raising the dead, hated and unacknowledged and crucified, dying and rising again and ascending into heaven, both really being and being called Son of God. [We find also that] men sent by him would proclaim these things to every race of mankind, and that men of the Gentiles especially would believe in him. This was prophesied over 5000 years before he appeared, then 3000, and 2000, and again 1000, and once more 800 [years before]. For there were new prophets again and again as the generations passed.

Thus Moses, who was the first of the prophets, said in these very words, "The ruler shall not depart from Judah, nor the governor from his thighs, until He come for whom it is reserved; and He shall be the expectation of the nations, binding his colt to the vine, washing His

robe in the blood of the grape."²⁶ You can inquire precisely and learn up to whose time the Jews had their own ruler and king. [It was] until the manifestation of Jesus Christ, our teacher and the expounder of the unrecognized prophecies, as was predicted by the divine and holy prophetic Spirit through Moses, that a ruler would not depart from the Jews until He should come for whom the Kingdom is reserved. For Judah was the forefather of the Jews, after whom they are called "Jews";²⁷ and after [Christ's] appearance you began to rule over the Jews and gained control of their whole land. The saying, "He shall be the expectation of the nations," is a testimony that men of every nation will look forward to His coming again, as you can clearly see and be convinced by the fact, for men of every race are looking for Him who was crucified in Judea, immediately after which the land of the Jews fell to you as spoil of war. "Binding His foal to the vine and washing His robe in the blood of the grape" is a symbolic exhibition of the things that would happen to Christ and His actions. For an ass's foal was standing at the entrance of a village, bound to a vine, which He then ordered His companions to bring to Him. When it was brought, He mounted and sat on it and entered into Jerusalem, where was the great Temple of the Jews, which you afterward overthrew. After this, He was crucified, so as to fulfill the rest of the prophecy. For "washing his robe in the blood of the grape" was predictive of the Passion that He was to suffer, cleansing by His blood those who believe on Him. For the men who believe on Him in whom dwells the seed of God, the Word, are what the divine Spirit through the prophet calls a garment. The "blood of the grape" that was spoken of was a sign that He who was to appear would have blood, though not from human seed but by divine power. The first Power after God the Father and Master of all, even [His] Son, is the Word. (How He was made flesh and became man we shall describe below.) As the blood of the grape was not made by man

²⁴This is the story of the origin of the Septuigint, although in actually, it was Eleazer the high priest to whom Ptolemy wrote, not King Herod.

²⁵the Bar-Kokhba Revolt of AD 132-135

²⁶Gen 49:10-11

²⁷The words "Judah" and "Jew" are derived from the same Greek root.

but by God, so it was testified that [His] blood should not come from human seed but from divine power, as we said before....

And again, hear how it was literally prophesied by Isaiah that he would be born of a virgin. He said, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they will call his name, God with Us."²⁸ For God testified in advance through the prophetic Spirit that things that are unbelievable and thought impossible among men would happen, so that when this should occur, it would not be disbelieved but received with faith because it had been predicted. Lest some, not understanding the prophecy that has been referred to, should bring against us the reproach that we bring against the poets who say that Zeus came upon women for the sake of sexual pleasure, we will try to explain these words clearly. For "Behold, the virgin shall conceive" means that the virgin would conceive without intercourse. For if she had had intercourse with anyone, she would not have been a virgin. But God's power, coming upon the virgin, overshadowed her and caused her to conceive while still remaining a virgin. The angel of God who was sent to this virgin at the time brought her this good news, saying, "Behold, you will conceive in the womb by the Holy Spirit and will bear a son; and He will be called Son of the Highest, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins,"²⁹ — as those who recorded everything about our Savior Jesus Christ have taught us. We believe them, since the prophetic Spirit, through the above-mentioned Isaiah, said that this would happen, as we noted before. The Spirit and the Power from God cannot rightly be thought of as anything else than the Word, who is also the First-born of God, as Moses, the above-mentioned prophet, testified. So this [Spirit], coming upon the virgin and overshadowing her, made her pregnant — not by intercourse but by [divine] power. The name "Jesus" in Hebrew means the same as "Savior" in Greek, and so the angel said to the virgin, "And you shall call

his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Even you will agree, I think, that those who prophesied were inspired by none other than the divine Word.

Hear also in what part of the earth he was to be born, as another prophet, Micah, foretold. He said, "And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a Ruler who will shepherd my people."³⁰ This is a village in the land of the Jews, thirty-five stadia from Jerusalem, in which Jesus Christ was born, as you can learn from the census that was taken under Quirinius, who was your first procurator in Judea....³¹

²⁸Is 7:14

²⁹Lk 1:31-32; Mt 1:21

³⁰Mic 5:2

³¹Justin continues in this manner for a long time discussing prophecies and their fulfillments in Jesus.