

Excerpted from Don Richardson,
Eternity in their Hearts
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PART I

A World Prepared for the Gospel

—The Melchizedek Factor—

Excerpt from: Eternity in Their Hearts
by Don Richardson
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CHAPTER ONE

Peoples of the Vague God

THE ATHENIANS

*Sometime during the sixth century
before Christ, in a council chamber
on Mars Hill, Athens. . .*

"Tell us, Nicias, what advice has the Pythian oracle sent with you? Why has this plague come upon us? And why did our numerous sacrifices avail nothing?"

Cool-eyed Nicias faced the council president squarely. "The priestess declares that our city lies under a terrible curse. A certain god has placed this curse upon us because of King Megacles' grievous crime of treachery against the followers of Cylon—"

"Yes, yes! I recall now," said another council member grimly. "Megacles obtained the surrender of Cylon's followers with a promise of amnesty. Then he promptly violated his own word and slew them! But which god still holds this crime against us? We have offered atoning sacrifices to all the gods!"

"Not so," replied Nicias. "The priestess says still another god remains unappeased."

"Who could he be?" the elders asked, eyeing Nicias incredulously.

"That I cannot tell you," Nicias said. "The oracle herself seems not to know his name. She said only that. . ."

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Nicias paused, surveying the anxious faces of his colleagues. Meanwhile, the tumult of a thousand dirges echoed from the stricken city around them.

Nicias continued: ". . . we must send a ship at once to Knossos, on the island of Crete, and fetch a man named Epimenides here to Athens. The priestess assures me that he will know how to appease that offended god, thus delivering our city."

"Is there no man of sufficient wisdom here in Athens?" blurted an indignant elder. "Must we appeal for help to a . . . a foreigner?"

"If you know a man of sufficient wisdom in Athens, summon him," said Nicias. "If not, let us simply do as the oracle commands."

Cold wind—cold as if chilled by the terror in Athens—swept through the white marble council chamber on Mars Hill. One elder after another pulled his magisterial robe around his shoulders and weighed Nicias's words.

"Go on our behalf, my friend," said the president of the council. "Fetch this Epimenides, if he will hear your plea. And if he delivers our city we will reward him."

Other members of the council concurred. The calm-voiced Nicias arose, bowed before the assembly, and left the chamber. Descending Mars Hill, he headed for the harbor at Piraeus, two leagues distant by the Bay of Phaleron. A ship stood at anchor.

Epimenides stepped briskly ashore at Piraeus, followed by Nicias. The two men set out at once for Athens, gradually recovering their "land legs" after the long sea journey from Crete. As they entered the already world-famous "city of philosophers," signs of the plague were everywhere. But Epimenides noticed something else—

"Never have I seen so many gods!" the Cretan exclaimed to his guide, blinking in amazement. Phalanxes of idols lined both sides of the road from Piraeus. Still other gods in their hundreds festooned a rocky escarpment called the acropolis. A later generation of Athenians would build the Parthenon there.

"How many gods does Athens have?" Epimenides added.

"Several hundred at least!" Nicias replied.

"Several hundred!" Epimenides exclaimed. "Gods must be easier to find here than men!"

"Well said!" Councilman Nicias chuckled. "Who knows how many proverbs men have coined about Athens, the city gluttoned

→ with gods.' As well haul rock to a quarry as bring another god to our city!"

Nicias stopped in his tracks, pondering his own words. "And yet," he began thoughtfully, "the Pythian oracle declares that we Athenians have yet another god to reconcile. And *you*, Epimenides, are to provide the necessary liaison. Apparently, in spite of what I have said, we Athenians still do need another god!"

Suddenly Nicias threw back his head and laughed. "For the life of me, Epimenides, I cannot guess who this other god could be. We Athenians are the world's foremost collectors of gods! We have already ransacked the theologies of many peoples around us, gathering every deity we can possibly transport to our city by cart or by ship!"

"Perhaps that is your problem," said Epimenides mysteriously.

Nicias blinked at Epimenides without comprehension. How he itched for clarification of that final remark. But something in Epimenides' demeanor hushed him. Moments later they came to an ancient marble-floored stoa near the council chamber on Mars Hill. Word of their arrival had already reached the elders of Athens. The council sat waiting.

"Epimenides, we are grateful for your—" began the president of the assembly.

"Learned elders of Athens, there is no need to thank me," Epimenides interrupted. "Tomorrow at sunrise bring a flock of sheep, a band of stonemasons, and a large supply of stones and mortar to the grassy slope at the foot of this sacred rock. The sheep must all be healthy, and of different colors—some white, some black. I will now rest from my journey. Call me at dawn."

Members of the council exchanged curious glances as Epimenides strode across the stoa to a quiet alcove, pulled his cloak around him for a blanket, and sat down to meditate.

The president turned to a junior member of the council. "See that all is done as he commands," he ordered.

"The sheep are here," said the junior member meekly. Epimenides, tousled and drowsy with sleep, emerged from his resting place and followed the messenger to a grassy slope at the base of Mars Hill. Two flocks—one of black and white sheep and one of councilmen, shepherds and stonemasons—stood waiting

beneath a rising sun. Hundreds of citizens, haggard from another night of nursing the plague-stricken and mourning the dead, climbed surrounding hillocks and watched in suspense.

"Learned elders," Epimenides began, "you have already expended great effort in offering sacrifice to your numerous gods, yet all has proved futile. I am now about to offer sacrifices based upon three assumptions rather different from yours. My first assumption . . ."

Every eye fixed upon the tall Cretan; every ear tuned itself to catch his next word.

" . . . is that there is still another god concerned in the matter of this plague—a god whose name is unknown to us, and who is therefore not represented by any idol in your city. Secondly I am going to assume also that this god is great enough—and good enough—to do something about the plague, if only we invoke his help."

"Invoke a god whose name is unknown?" blurted an elder. "Is that possible?"

"The third assumption is my answer to your question," Epimenides countered. "That assumption is a very simple one. Any god great enough and good enough to do something about the plague is probably also great enough and good enough to smile upon us in our ignorance—if we acknowledge our ignorance and call upon him!"

Murmurs of approval mingled with the bleating of hungry sheep. Never had the elders of Athens heard this line of reasoning before. But why, they wondered, must the sheep be of different colors? ←

"Now!" called Epimenides, "prepare to release the sheep upon this sacred slope! Once you have released them, permit each animal to graze where it will. But let a man follow each animal and watch it closely." Then, looking up to heaven, Epimenides prayed in a very rich and supremely confident voice: "O thou unknown god! Behold the plague afflicting this city! And if indeed you feel compassion to forgive and help us, behold this flock of sheep! Reveal your willingness to respond, I plead, by causing any sheep that pleases you to lie down upon the grass instead of grazing. Choose white if white pleases; black if black delights. And those you choose we sacrifice to you—acknowledging our pitiful ignorance of your name!"

Epimenides bowed his head, sat down upon the grass and waved a signal to shepherds guarding the flock. Slowly the shepherds stepped aside. Quickly, eagerly, the sheep spread out across the hillside and began to graze. Epimenides, meanwhile, sat still as a statue, eyes to the ground.

"It's hopeless," a frowning councilman muttered under his breath. "It's early morning, and I've seldom seen a flock so eager to graze. Not a one will choose to rest until its belly's full, and who will then believe 'twas a god that caused it to recline?"

"Epimenides must have chosen this time of day on purpose, then!" responded Nicias. "Only thus may we know that a sheep which lies down does so by the will of this unknown god and not by its own inclination!"

Nicias had hardly finished speaking when a shepherd shouted, "Look!" Every eye turned to see a choice ram buckle its knees and settle into the grass.

"And here's another!" roared a startled councilman, beside himself with wonder. Within minutes a number of choice sheep lay resting on grass too succulent for any hungry herbivore to resist—under normal circumstances!

"If only one rested, we'd have said it must be sick!" the council president exclaimed. "But this! This—can only be an—*answer!*"

Turning with awe-filled eyes, he said to Epimenides, "What shall we do now?"

"Separate the sheep that are resting," the Cretan replied, raising his head for the first time since he had called upon his unknown god, "and mark the place where each one lay. Then let your stonemasons build altars—one altar on each animal's resting place!"

Enthusiastic masons set to work mortaring stones. By late afternoon the mortar was sufficiently hardened. Every altar stood ready for use.

"Which god's name shall we engrave upon these altars?" asked an over-eager junior councilman. All heads turned to hear the Cretan's reply.

"Name?" replied Epimenides thoughtfully. "The Deity whose help we seek has been pleased to respond to our admission of ignorance. If now we pretend to be knowledgeable by engraving a name when we have not the slightest idea what His name may be, I fear we shall only offend Him!"

"We must not take that chance," the president of the council agreed. "But surely there must be some appropriate way to—dedicate each altar before it is used."

"You are right, learned elder," Epimenides said with a rare smile. "There is a way. Simply inscribe the words *agnosto theo*—to an unknown god—upon the side of each altar. Nothing more is necessary."

The Athenians engraved the words as their Cretan counselor advised. Then they sacrificed each "dedicated" sheep upon the altar marking the spot where that sheep rested. Night fell. By dawn the next day the plague's deadly grip upon the city had already loosened. Within a week, the stricken recovered. Athens overflowed with praise to Epimenides' "unknown God" and for Epimenides himself, for bringing such amazing help in such an inventive manner. Thankful citizens placed garlands of flowers around that huddle of unpretentious altars on the side of Mars Hill. Later they carved a statue of Epimenides in a sitting position and placed it before one of their temples.²

According to a passage in Plato's *Laws*, Epimenides at the same time also prophesied that 10 years in the future a Persian army would come against Athens. He assured the Athenians, however, that their Persian foes "will return back again with all their hopes frustrated, and after suffering more woes than they inflict." This prophecy was fulfilled. The council, for its part, offered Epimenides a talent of coins for his services, but he refused to accept payment. "The only reward I desire," he said, "is that we here and now establish a treaty of friendship between Athens and Knossos." The Athenians agreed. Ratifying a treaty with Knossos, they then gave Epimenides safe transport back to his island home.

(Plato, in that same passage, pays tribute to Epimenides as "that inspired man, and credits him as one of the great men who helped mankind rediscover inventions lost during "The Great Flood.")

With the passage of time, however, the people of Athens began to forget the mercy which Epimenides' "unknown God" had bestowed upon them. At length they neglected His altars on the slope below Mars Hill. They returned to the worship of the several hundred gods who had proved helpless to remove the curse from their city. Vandals demolished some of the altars and pried stones loose from others. Grass and moss encroached upon the ruins until . . .

One day two elders who remembered the significance of the altars paused among them on the way home from council. Leaning upon their staffs, they gazed wistfully upon the creeper-covered relics. One elder removed a patch of moss and read the ancient inscription hidden beneath: "Agnosto theo. 'Demas—remember?'"

"How could I forget?" Demas replied. "I was the junior member of council who stayed up all night to make sure the flock, the stones, the mortar and the masons would all be ready by sunrise!"

"And I," responded the other elder, "was that over-eager junior member who suggested that each altar should have some god's name engraved upon it! How foolish of me!"

The speaker paused, deep in thought. Then he added, "Demas, you will think me sacrilegious, but I cannot suppress my feeling that if only Epimenides' 'unknown God' would reveal Himself openly to us we might soon dispense with all these others!" The bearded elder waved his staff with mild contempt toward rank beyond rank of deaf-mute idols—more now than ever—lining the crest of acropolis.

"If ever He should reveal Himself," said Demas thoughtfully, "how will our people know that He is no stranger but a God who has already participated in the affairs of our city?"

"I think there is only one way," the first elder replied. "We must seek to preserve at least one of these altars as evidence for posterity. And the story of Epimenides must somehow be kept alive among our traditions."

"A great idea!" Demas glowed. "Look! This one is still in fair condition. We'll hire masons to polish it up. And tomorrow we'll remind the entire council of that long-ago victory over the plague. We'll get a motion passed to include the maintenance of at least this altar among the perennial expenditures of our city!"

The two elders shook hands in agreement. Then, locked arm in arm, they hobbled off down the path, jubilantly clicking their staffs against the stones of Mars Hill.

The foregoing is based mainly upon a tradition recorded as history by Diogenes Laertius, a Greek author of the third century A.D., in a classical work called *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (vol. 1, p. 110). The basic elements in Diogenes' account are: Epimenides, a Cretan hero, responded to a request borne to him from Athens by a man called Nicias, asking him to advise the city of

Athens in the matter of a plague. Arriving in Athens, Epimenides obtained a flock of black and white sheep and released them on Mars Hill, instructing men to follow the sheep and mark the places where any of them lay down.

Epimenides' apparent purpose was to give any god concerned in the matter of the plague an opportunity to reveal his willingness to help by causing sheep that pleased him to lie down to rest as a sign that he would accept those sheep if they were offered in sacrifice. Since there would have been nothing unusual about sheep lying down apart from one of their usual grazing periods, presumably Epimenides conducted his experiment early in the morning, when sheep would be at their hungriest.

A number of sheep rested, and the Athenians offered them in sacrifice upon unnamed altars built especially for the purpose. Thus the plague lifted from the city.

Other details in this account concerning the cause of the curse are from an editor's footnote on Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* book 3, 17:10, found in the Loeb Classical Library, translated by J.H. Freese and published in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The explanation that none other than the Pythian oracle instructed the Athenians to summon Epimenides is found in the previously mentioned reference from Plato's *Laws*.

Diogenes Laertius himself does not mention that the words *agnosto theo* were inscribed upon Epimenides' altars. He states only that "altars may be found in different parts of Attica with no name inscribed upon them, which are memorials of this atonement."

Two other ancient writers, however—Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* (vol. 1, 1:4) and Philostratus in his *Appolonius of Tyana*—refer to "altars to an unknown god" implying that an inscription to that effect was engraved upon them.

That such an inscription was engraved upon at least one altar in Athens is verified by a first-century historian named Luke. Describing the adventures of Paul, the famous Christian apostle, Luke mentions an encounter awesomely illuminated by the foregoing story of Epimenides:

"While Paul was waiting . . . in Athens," Luke began, "he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols" (Acts 17:16). If Athens boasted several hundred gods in Epimenides' time, by

Paul's day there may have been hundreds more. Idolatry, by its very nature, has a built-in "inflation factor." Once men reject the one omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God in favor of lesser deities, they eventually discover—to their frustration—that it takes an infinite number of lesser deities to fill the true God's shoes!

And when Paul saw Athens prostituting man's sacred privilege of worship upon mere wood and stone, horror gripped him! He took action. First: "He reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks" (Acts 17:17).

Not that Jews and God-fearing Greeks were the ones practicing idolatry! Not at all. They were, however, the people most responsible to oppose the idolatry rampant in their city.

Perhaps Paul found them so accustomed to scenes of idolatry that they had compromised with the "Sodom factor" and thus could no longer mount a persuasive offensive against it. In any case, Paul launched his own offensive. He reasoned also, Luke says, "in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there" (Acts 17:17).

Who *did* happen to be there? And how did they react? Luke explains: "A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbling trying to say?'"

Even an apostle can experience difficulties in cross-cultural communication!

"Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods'" (Acts 17:18).

Why this latter comment? Doubtless the philosophers heard Paul speak of *Theos*—God. *Theos* was a familiar term to them. They, however, commonly used it not as a personal name, but as a general term for any deity—just as "man" in English means any man and is not considered suitable as a personal name for any one man.

The philosophers must have known, however, that Xenophanes, Plato and Aristotle—three of the greatest philosophers of all time—used *Theos* as a personal name for one Supreme God in their writings. (See, for example, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., vol. 13, p. 951 and vol. 14, p. 538.)

Two centuries after Plato's and Aristotle's time, translators of the Septuagint—the first Greek version of the Old Testament—

grappled with a major problem: Could a suitable equivalent of *Yahweh* be found in the Greek language? They considered the name *Zeus*, but rejected it. Even though Zeus was called king of the gods, pagan theologians had chosen to make *Zeus* the offspring of two other gods, *Cronus* and *Rhea*. An offspring of other beings cannot equal *Yahweh*, who is uncreated. Finally the translators recognized the above three philosophers' fortuitous use of *Theos* as a personal Greek name for the Almighty. *Theos*, in this special usage was a name still unencrusted with barnacles of error! They adopted it. Just as Abraham freely adopted *El Elyon* when speaking of *Yahweh* among Canaanites, so also did Paul adopt *Theos* for his New Testament preaching and writing!

It may therefore have been not *Theos*, but the unfamiliar name *Jesus* which caused the philosophers to think that Paul was "advocating foreign gods." Perhaps also they were astonished that anyone would want to bring still more gods to Athens, god capital of the world! Athenians, after all, must have needed something equivalent to the Yellow Pages just to keep tabs on the many deities already represented in their city!

How did Paul respond to the suggestion that he was advocating superfluous foreign gods in a city already glutted with gods?

Jesus Christ had already given Paul a masterful formula for coping with cross-cultural communication problems like this one at Athens. Speaking through a vision so persuasive that it filled Paul with new insights and so bright it left him temporarily blind, Jesus had said: "I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light" (Acts 26:17, 18).

Jesus' logic was faultless. If people are to turn from darkness to light, their eyes must first be opened to see the difference between darkness and light. And what does it take to open someone's eyes?

An eye-opener!

But where could Paul—born a Jew, reborn a Christian—find an eye-opener for the truth about the supreme God in idol-infested Athens? He could hardly expect a religious system totally committed to polytheism to contain an acknowledgement that monotheism is better.

Ah, but as Paul "walked around and observed" (Acts 17:23) he found something in the midst of "the system" that was not "of" the system—an altar not associated with any idol! An altar bearing the

curious inscription "to an unknown god." Just as Abraham did not lump Melchizedek together with the king of Sodom, so also Paul discerned a difference between that altar and the idols. It was his ally—a communication key which would probably fit the locks on the minds and hearts of those Stoic and Epicurean philosophers. When they invited him to present his views formally in a setting more conducive to reasoned discussion than the marketplace, Paul was ready.

Paul's venue was a meeting of "The Areopagus," i.e., *The Mars Hill Society*—a group of prominent Athenians who met on Mars Hill to discuss matters of history, philosophy or religion. It was on that same hill, nearly six centuries earlier, that Epimenides once grappled with the problem of pestilence in Athens.

Paul could have launched his Mars Hill address simply by calling a spade a spade. He could have said, "Men of Athens, with all your fine philosophies you are still wicked idolaters. Repent or perish!" And every word might well have been true!

Further, he would have been trying to "turn them from darkness to light," as Jesus commanded. But it would have been like a batter hitting the ball and running straight to second base. One must touch first base first! That is why Jesus included the command "open their eyes" as a prerequisite for turning people from "darkness to light."

Paul "ran for first" with the following words: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious [remarkable restraint, considering how much Paul loathed idolatry]. For as I walked around and observed your objects of worship [some with Paul's background might have preferred to call them 'filthy idols'], I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD."

Then Paul voiced a pronouncement that had waited six centuries for utterance: "Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:22,23). Was the God whom Paul proclaimed really a *foreign* god as the philosophers surmised? Not at all! By Paul's reasoning, *Yahweh*, the Judeo-Christian God, was anticipated by Epimenides' altar. He was therefore a God who had already intervened in the history of Athens. Surely He had a right to have His name proclaimed there!

But did Paul really understand the historical background of that altar and the concept of an unknown god? There is evidence that he did! For Epimenides, in addition to his ability to shed light

upon murky problems of man/god relationships, was also a poet!

And Paul quoted Epimenides' poetry! Leaving a missionary named Titus to strengthen churches on the island of Crete, Paul later wrote instructions to guide Titus in his dealings with Cretans: "Even one of their own prophets has said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:12,13).

The words Paul quotes are from a poem ascribed to Epimenides (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Micropaedia*, 15th ed., vol. 3, p. 924). Notice also that Paul calls Epimenides "a prophet!" The Greek word is *prophetees*, the same word Paul commonly used for both Old and New Testament prophets! Surely Paul would not have honored Epimenides with the title of prophet apart from knowledge of Epimenides' character and deeds! A man whom Paul could quote as rebuking others for certain evil traits was, by implication, judged by Paul as not noticeably guilty of those traits himself!

Further, in his Mars Hill address Paul states that God has "made every nation of men . . . so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26,27). These words may constitute an oblique reference to Epimenides as an example of a pagan man who "reached out and found" a God who, though unknown by name, was in reality not far away!

Presumably members of the Mars Hill Society were also familiar with the story of Epimenides from the writings of Plato, Aristotle and others. They must have listened with admiration as Paul began his address on that perceptive cross-cultural footing. But could this Christian apostle, trained under Gamaliel the Jewish scholar, hold the attention of men, weaned on the logic of Plato and Aristotle, long enough to get the gospel across to them?

Following his stunning opening remarks, Paul's success in the main part of his address would depend upon one thing. Call it "gapless logic." As long as each successive statement which Paul made followed logically from statements preceding, the philosophers would listen. If he left a gap in his reasoning the philosophers would cut him off at once! It was a rule of the philosophical training they had received—a discipline they imposed upon themselves and would just as readily require of any stranger who claimed to have propositions worthy of their attention.

Could Paul's gospel presentation pass this severe scrutiny on Mars Hill?

For several minutes Paul fared very well indeed. Beginning with the testimony of Epimenides' altar Paul proceeded next to the evidence of creation. Then he moved on from the evidence of creation to the inconsistency of idolatry. By then he had worked his way to a position where he could even identify Athenian idolatry as "ignorance" without losing his audience. He went on to say, "[Theos] now . . . commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed" (Acts 17:30,31).

In other words, having found and used an "eye-opener" to get to "first base," Paul was "heading for second" in obedience to Jesus' second command—he was seeking to turn the Athenians "from darkness to light!" Then he went on to say: "He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

And here—for the first time—Paul left a gap in the logic of his Mars Hill address. He mentioned the resurrection of the man God authorized to judge the world without first explaining how and why He had to die in the first place.

The philosophers pounced at once—to their own spiritual impoverishment. "When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, 'We want to hear you again on this subject.' At that, Paul left the Council" (Acts 17:32,33).

Paul had already exposed their inconsistency in tolerating, if not actually abetting, idolatry. That alone was no small accomplishment among a panel of men who prided themselves for rational consistency! Genuine seekers of truth would have followed through with Paul on the implications of at least his opening remarks, instead of faulting him for a subsequent technicality.

Not all, however, discredited Paul for his mention of the resurrection: "A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus" (Acts 17:34). Second-century tradition says that Dionysius later became the first bishop of Athens! His name is derived from that of Dionysus—a Greek god whose theology included a death-resurrection concept! Could there be a connection between that concept and Dionysius's personal response to a man who so boldly championed a teaching of resurrection?

Later the apostle (John) continuing Paul's approach to the Greek philosophical mind, appropriated a favorite Stoic philosophical term—the *Logos*—as a title for Jesus Christ. A Greek philosopher named Heraclitus first used the term *Logos* around 600 B.C. to designate the divine reason or plan which coordinates a changing universe. *Logos* means simply "word." Jews, for their part, emphasized the *memra* (Aramaic for "word") of the Lord. John saw the Greek *logos* and the Jewish *memra* as describing essentially the same valid theological truth. He represented Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of both when he wrote, "In the beginning was the [Logos], and the [Logos] was with [Theos], and the [Logos] was [Theos]. . . . The [Logos] became flesh, and lived for a while among us" (John 1:1,14).

With this vital juxtaposition of both Greek terms—Theos and Logos—in relation to Jesus Christ, Christianity presented itself as fulfilling rather than destroying the "Melchizedek factor" in Greek philosophy!

In fact, such terms and concepts were clearly regarded by Christian emissaries to the Greeks as ordained by God to prepare the Greek mind for the gospel! They found these fortuitous Greek philosophical terms to be just as valid as Old Testament messianic metaphors such as "Lamb of God" and "The Lion of the Tribe of Judah." And they used both sets of terminology with equal freedom to set the Person of Jesus Christ within the context of both Jewish and Greek culture, respectively.

Do you not feel a certain question rising now within you? It cannot be avoided—if the Almighty ordained God-and-Christ-foreshadowing metaphors and concepts to facilitate the redemptive process in one Gentile culture—that of Greeks—could He not also have manifested a similar providence within other Gentile cultures as well? Perhaps even in all of them?

In other words, has the God who prepared the gospel for the world also prepared the world for the gospel? If He has, then the current assumption, held by millions of believers and non-believers alike, that pagan people cannot understand and generally do not want to receive the Christian gospel, and that it is therefore unfair (and almost more work than it is worth) to try to get them to accept it, must be a false assumption.

In the rest of this book (and in a companion volume to follow in

the future) I will prove that this assumption is false. God has indeed prepared the Gentile world to receive the gospel. Significant numbers of non-Christians, therefore, have proved themselves 10 times more willing to receive the gospel than Christians have been to share it! Read on—

THE INCAS

The apostle Paul called Epimenides a “prophet.” One wonders what title he would have ascribed to Pachacuti, whose spiritual insight as a pagan far surpassed even Epimenides’.

Pachacuti (sometimes spelled *Pachacutec*) ruled as king of South America’s incredible Inca civilization from A.D. 1438 to 1471.³ According to Philip Ainsworth Means, late authority on Andean antiquities, it was Pachacuti who brought the Inca empire to its finest flowering.⁴ What were some of his accomplishments? Well, for example:

When Pachacuti rebuilt Cuzco, the Inca capital, he worked on a grand scale indeed, replete with palaces, forts, and a refurbished temple to the sun. Then he added a “fabulous golden precinct” at Coricancha—a building of “magnificence rivaling even Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem!”⁵ He also constructed a long line of fortresses protecting eastern frontiers of his empire from invasion by tribes of the Amazon basin. One fortress, majestic Machu Picchu (portrayed on the dust jacket of this book), became for a time a last refuge of the Incan upper class in its flight from Spain’s brutal conquistadores. In fact, the conquistadores never found Machu Picchu. Pachacuti built it on a soaring mountain ridge, rendering it invisible from lower elevations.

For several centuries, knowledge of Machu Picchu’s existence was lost to the outside world. Thick jungle overwhelmed the site. Only a few Quechua Indians knew how to find it. Then, in the early 1900s, a Scottish Presbyterian missionary named Thomas Paine befriended some Quechua Indians and learned about the ruins from them. Paine visited the site. Then he wrote a letter to Britain’s Royal Archaeological Society recommending that an expedition explore the ruins.⁶

The Royal Archaeological Society declined. Yale anthropologist Hiram Bingham, however, heard of Paine’s discovery. Soon he too located Machu Picchu. Shortly thereafter, Hiram Bingham became

world famous as “discoverer of Machu Picchu, Lost City of the Incas!” Bingham, incidentally, chose not to give a single byline of credit to Thomas Paine, mentioning only “local rumor” as the factor which guided him.⁷

Medical doctor Daniel Hayden, who knew Thomas Paine personally over a period of years in Peru, affirms that Paine—a humble man beloved by Inca descendants throughout Peru—chose not to try to correct Bingham’s “oversight.” Paine remains just one of innumerable Christian missionaries whose contributions to science have been denied recognition by men of science.

Millions of tourists have visited Machu Picchu since Peru’s new Hiram Bingham Highway made it accessible in 1948. Anyone who has been awed by the splendor of Machu Picchu should know that Pachacuti, the king who founded it, is credited with accomplishing something far more significant than merely building fortresses, cities, temples or monuments. Like Epimenides, Pachacuti was a spiritual explorer who, in the words of Paul (see Acts 17:27), sought, reached out for and *found* a God far greater than any popular “god” of his own culture. Unlike Epimenides, however, Pachacuti chose not to leave the God of his discovery in the category of “unknown.” He identified that God by name, and more:

Almost everyone who knows anything about Incas knows that they deified Inti—the sun.

Yet in 1575, in Cuzco, a Spanish priest named Cristobel de Molina collected a number of Inca hymns—and certain traditions associated with them—which prove that the deity of Inti was not always left unquestioned by Incas themselves. De Molina wrote the hymns and their associated traditions in the Inca language, called Quechua, with orthography adapted from Spanish. The Incas themselves had no writing system. That entire collection of traditions and hymns trace back to the reign of Pachacuti.

Modern scholars, rediscovering de Molina’s collection, marveled at their revolutionary content. Some at first refused to believe they were genuinely Inca! Surely, they thought, de Molina himself must have edited his own European thought into the original Inca composition. Alfred Metraux, however, in his *History of the Incas*, agrees with Professor John H. Rowe who, he says, “has succeeded in restoring the hymns to their original version, [and is] convinced that they owe nothing to the missionaries’ teaching. The forms

ETERNITY IN THEIR HEARTS

He has made everything beautiful in its time.
He has also set *eternity in the hearts of men*;
yet they cannot fathom what God has done from
beginning to end
(Eccles. 3:11, italics added).

Don Richardson

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