

Genesis 47
Isaiah 46
Revelation 16

Genuine vs. “Knock-Offs”

You’ve heard the saying; Salvation is free but not cheap, as it cost God His only Son. In other words, God did all the “heavy lifting” to provide the means for us to be free from the curse of sin and eternal separation from Him (and, ultimately, eternal death). This is why we are called to give our lives to Him for His Kingdom (as songwriter Steven Curtis Chapman once put it, “It’s my turn, now”). This is also why God is so jealous of His Kingdom and the people He created to inhabit it – which means, all of mankind. He wants everyone to receive His Salvation, not the poor substitute offered by religions or cults or even the stuff we tell ourselves in order to dodge the question.

On a *much* smaller scale (over *far* less important things), the situation is similar to companies that make a product of some kind, especially one that prides itself on offering things of fine quality. Let’s say the company (let’s call it *Acme*... it was good enough for cartoon director Chuck Jones) makes ladies’ handbags. Quality, of course, is rarely inexpensive, so let’s say the Acme handbag sells for \$100.00 in an upscale department store. But another company (*ZCo.*) makes a “knock-off” product; it looks the same as the \$100.00 bag (down to the distinctive, trademarked Acme logo) but is made with lower quality materials in some sweatshop somewhere. It sells for \$40 .00 – not in an upscale department store, but in... well, let’s just say other places. Sales of such “knock-offs” hurt Acme’s business and cause orders of their bags to drop and people lose their jobs, so Acme takes legal action to stop *ZCo* from selling their cheap stuff.

Of course, there are *vast* differences between this analogy and the Kingdom of God – Salvation is offered freely and Satan cannot be sued (although he was defeated with Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary). The point I’m trying to make is that God put everything He had into the plan of Salvation, and does not want people to be *fooled by imitations*, if you’ll forgive an advertising phrase.

The Plan of Salvation has similarities to an earlier incident, described in the Book of Genesis. The Patriarch Israel (formerly known as Jacob) and his household entered Egypt after Israel’s son Joseph became second-in-command under Pharaoh during the great famine Joseph prophesied, in order to keep alive during the famine, and protect the promise of God to Israel’s grandfather Abraham that He would make his descendents into a great nation, one that would bless all the earth. I believe that God had in mind that at least some of the Egyptians, after seeing the deliverance for their nation and the world, would look past Joseph and look to the God of Joseph, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham, turning from worshipping Ra, Isis and the rest of that crew. Of course, we know that prophecy said the Israelites would be mistreated by the Egyptians and that God would come to their aid.

I’ve always wondered why this was so, why the Egyptians never honored Joseph, never built a statue to him or some pyramid for his tomb – maybe not as big as Pharaoh’s, necessarily, but still have *some* commemoration of the man who saved Egypt (indeed, the whole world) from famine. I think the chief reason is *pride*. At the time, Egypt was the

world's superpower, even more so once the seven years of bumper grain harvests came in before the famine, and now other countries were buying Egyptian grain until they could plant again. Egypt was sitting on "top of the heap," as it were, and the people (naturally, even if they were dead wrong) assumed their gods were the reason for this. The Egyptians were, in a word, *smug*. The hints come from the Scriptures themselves; living, even eating with other peoples – especially (*eeeww!*) shepherds – was detestable to the Egyptians. (Genesis 43:32). Even Joseph, in order to keep up the appearance of being Egyptian before revealing himself to his brothers, ate at a separate table from them. After revealing his true identity, and setting the family up in Egypt for the duration of the famine, Joseph told his father, Jacob, to tell Pharaoh that the family herded sheep as their livelihood, figuring that they would be given a corner of Egypt where no one would bother them.

The problem came after Joseph and his brothers passed away, and the generations of Israelites multiplied, until they actually outnumbered the Egyptians. Joseph and the deliverance he helped bring about was forgotten. Apparently any records of his contributions were either edited to make him look Egyptian (using the name Pharaoh gave him, *Zaphenath-Paneah*) or simply expunged so that all good things were by *Pharaoh's* hand, and not the son of – *eeeww!* – shepherds. Eventually, the Egyptians came to fear the Israelites; the new Pharaoh (Joseph? *Who's this Joseph?* Pharaoh *brought about the deliverance from famine some 400 years before; it says so in the records*) feared that if war came, the Israelites would join with Egypt's enemies. Why would he feel this way? What evidence did he have that the Israelites would turn against the very country where they had peace, food and prosperity? None but pride, perhaps; for pride, left to go its unrestricted way, can often lead to prejudice and bigotry and the most preposterous assumptions regarding a race of people, even if there isn't a shred of evidence backing it up.

So the Egyptians, instead of thinking to themselves, *Hey – maybe we should check out this God of the Israelites and start worshipping Him instead?* probably started thinking, *Who do these Israelites think they are?* The "real thing" was in town, offering Himself to the Egyptians through His people, and you couldn't beat the deal; just drop Ra and the gang and worship the true God. Instead, the Egyptians not only clung to their "knock-off" idols of stone but started to enslave and persecute the Israelites, prompting God to remember His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and rescue the Israelites to being them back to the Promised Land. You know the rest of the story, how the pride of Pharaoh as leader of the Egyptians caused them to be knocked down by God again and again (as told in the Book of Exodus) as Ra and the gang were judged and found to be powerless in the face of true Deity.

Despite this, Israel in the promised land eventually succumbs to the desire for its own "knock-offs," abandoning God and worshipping Baal, Moloch and all the rest of the bloodthirsty idols of the region, even making a few of their own in the process. (such as the brazen serpent God told Moses to make for the Israelites; refer to 2 Kings 18:4) In the passage of Isaiah referenced above, the prophet chastises Israel for the foolishness of believing that something made by human hands is on the same level as the Lord God Almighty, of desiring a cheap substitute for the true God.

Today, of course, we no longer make idols of wood, stone and precious metals; instead, we make them from our own vain thoughts and imaginations. We chafe at the

idea that we cannot do as we please, that we are not perfect (by our own hand, and not God's) and that we need Salvation. Our *pride* is offended by this idea, and so we say to ourselves that there is no God and, essentially, worship systems of belief (with their forms of godliness but lacking God's power) or ourselves or the Earth – anything to give feel good about ourselves, give our egos a good stroke. And these days, there are a *lot* of choices out there if all you want is a good ego stroke. So much so, that even when the Lord returns to execute final judgments on Satan and the deceptions he has generated among all mankind (see Revelation 16), people will see the clear, unmistakable truth and still refuse to glorify God and will curse Him... in all likelihood, for waking them up forever from their dreams and fantasies.

You want an ego stroke? Consider this; the God of Heaven, Creator of all things, loves you. Yeah, *you*. He loves me (despite everything). He made us for Himself. He wants us in Heaven with him and in the thousand-year Kingdom on Earth. He engineered all of Creation, set His plan into motion and sent His own Son to take the punishment we deserve to make *sure* you have opportunity to be with Him. As gruesome as the effects of practice of crucifixion are (once you learn how it kills a victim), in the case of Jesus it was the greatest act of true, *genuine* love ever expressed. He never sinned, yet He took the punishment for our sin so we wouldn't have to.

And once you realize what the real thing looks like, why would you want anything less... especially a lame, cheap “knock-off?”

For the Glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ
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