

China and the Bible

You might possibly be thinking 'what possible connection can there be between China and the Bible!' However, you will be surprised to find that China is mentioned in the ancient Hebrew scriptures. Although there is no specific mention of England, France or the USA in the Bible, if we examine an ancient prophecy from Isaiah 49v12 (about 700BC), we do discover a mention of China:

Surely these shall come from afar; Look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim.

In context, this prophecy appears to refer to the return of exiled Israel from the nations of the world. The '*north*' probably refers chiefly to Russian Jews and the '*west*' to American and European Jews. But while '*north*' and '*west*' are general terms, '**Sinim**' is a specific term, thought by many scholars to be China. The 'Strongest Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible' explains Sinim as 'Chinese?'. In fact the nouns 'Sinology' or 'Sinologist' use the same root word 'Sin' meaning China. Isaiah thus prophesied that one day Israel's exiles would return from China back to their own land. Other Christians have interpreted the above scripture to imply 'Christians' rather than 'Jews' meaning that many Chinese would come to believe in God. Maybe both interpretations are correct. However, regardless of how you interpret Isaiah's prophecy, one important fact is that China (Sinim) is mentioned in the Bible!

Those of us who have lived in China or Taiwan know that the Chinese are very proud of their long history, and rightly so. Some years ago when I lived in Taiwan, I recall telling a young Chinese man how I had become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He listened very politely while I spoke and then replied: 'We Chinese have 5000 years of history, how can it all be wrong'. My attempts to share the gospel with him came up against his strong patriotism which was based on almost 5000 years of unbroken history. He felt, as have so many Chinese people, that becoming a believer in Jesus meant turning his back on his historical and cultural roots as well as his family. At the time, I had no satisfactory answer to help him with his dilemma, but if I had known then what I do now, I would have been able to assure him that believing in Jesus was actually the fulfilment of what his ancestors had believed many thousands of years previously. Most Chinese people traditionally view Christianity as a western or foreign religion. This is not really surprising as the gospel was brought to China by western missionaries. However, there is much evidence to show that at the beginning of their history, the ancient Chinese were believers in the one true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and worshiped Him in a similar way to the ancient Hebrew people.

Confucius, believer in God

One of the most revered men in China's history is the philosopher Confucius (551-479BC). In fact proof of his importance is shown by the fact that he is also very well known in the West! Confucius lived in a place called Qufu in Shangdong Province, on the eastern border of China and like all truly great men, he was also a humble man! He described himself in the following words:

'The sage and the man of perfect virtue'—how dare I rank myself with them? It may be simply said of me that I strive to become such without satiety and teach others without weariness.'
The Analects

Clearly, from the above quote, Confucius never claimed to be anyone special and certainly not perfect. In fact he considered himself to be a very normal person and like most normal Chinese people, he also had a family. In fact you can still visit his home today in Qufu. In addition, you can visit his grave and also those of his son and grandson, at a place called 'Kungling' not far from his home in Qufu.

So since Confucius was a man like you or I, what were his religious beliefs? Fortunately we do not have to speculate, for he has recorded for all time his belief in a supreme Creator whom he, and all of ancient China, called '**Heaven**' or '**ShangDi**':

'Heaven gave birth to the multitudes of people'

The Book of Odes

'How vast is ShangDi, the Ruler of men below'

The Book of Odes

Clearly, to the mind of Confucius, **Heaven (ShangDi)** was the one true Creator-God of all people. In fact Confucius tells us that he became a very devoted believer in God, at about fifty years of age. He wrote:

'When I was fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven'

The Analects

In addition, Confucius ascribed any virtue that he possessed, not to his own innate goodness, but to God's work in him:

'Heaven produced the virtue in me'

The Analects

Mozi (408-382 BC), another ancient Chinese philosopher, was also a believer in '**Heaven**' or '**ShangDi**'. Like Confucius, he also describes 'Heaven' as the Creator God:

'Now Heaven loves the whole world universally. Everything is prepared for the good of man. Even the tip of a hair is the work of heaven. Heaven ordered the sun, the moon, and the stars to enlighten and guide them. Heaven ordained the four seasons, Spring, Autumn, Winter and Summer, to regulate them. Heaven sent down snow, frost,, rain, and dew to grow the five grains and flax and silk so that the people could use and enjoy them.'

The Works of Mozi

In conclusion, from the writings of Confucius and Mozi, we discover that the ancient Chinese were originally monotheists who worshiped a Creator-God whom they called '**Heaven**' or '**ShangDi**'. In fact, an eastern Han (202 BC-8AD) scholar also confirms 'ShangDi' as an alternative name for 'Heaven' as follows:

'ShangDi is another name for Heaven'

The scholar Zheng Xuan

The ancient Chinese, unlike their modern counterparts, did not believe in the theory of Evolution, which is a Western atheistic philosophy. How sad that today's Chinese have accepted a Western philosophy in place of their own indigenous religion!!

The original religion of ancient China

Now that we know that the original God of China was called '**Heaven**' or '**ShangDi**', how did the ancient Chinese people, including Confucius, worship Him. The following quotes

from the writings of Confucius have left behind a clear record of ancient China's original religious beliefs:

'Emperor Sun sacrificed to ShangDi (2255 BC)'.

The Book of History

'The Border Sacrifice ceremony is how men serve ShangDi' .

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The Doctrine

Sz Ma Qian, an official during the western Han dynasty (222 BC-8AD), affirms Confucius's quotes and gives us additional information about the worship of God in ancient China:

'Erect an altar of earth on Mt. Tai and offer a burnt offering to Heaven'.

Sz Ma Qian, The Book of Historical Documents

'There has never been any Emperor of China who has not performed the sacrifices to Heaven'.

Sz Ma Qian, The Book of Historical Documents

From the above quotes we can deduce that the God of ancient China was worshiped in a ceremony involving animal sacrifices, with the chief participant being the Emperor. This ceremony, also known as the 'Border Sacrifice', was performed annually on the top of Mt. Tai in Shandong province, on the eastern border of China. Therefore, it should not be surprising to find that Confucius was a believer in **Heaven (ShangDi)**, as he lived in Shandong province not too far from Mt. Tai. Even HuangDi (the Yellow Emperor), from the so-called 'Legendary Period', is reported to have sacrificed to **Heaven (ShangDi)**.

In the 15th century AD the 'Border Sacrifice' site was moved to the Altar of Heaven in Beijing and continued there until 1911 AD when the last Emperor of China was deposed. Thus in China we have a religious belief system and sacrificial ceremony of more than 4000 years continuous observance!

Worship of Heaven (ShangDi) at the Altar of Heaven in Beijing

The Altar of Heaven complex, which is today an important tourist site, comprises 3 main edifices. The northern most structure, the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests, has on its north wall, a tablet inscribed with the following characters:

'Heavenly Sovereign ShangDi'

These characters clearly indicate that ShangDi (Heaven) was the God worshiped at the 'Border Sacrifice'. This sacrifice took place every year at the winter solstice (December 22) and by reviewing some of the prayers and songs used in the ceremony it becomes obvious how the Chinese revered their God:

When Di (ShangDi), the Lord, had so decreed, He called into existence heaven, Earth, and man.

The Statutes of the Ming Dynasty

If we compare this with the Hebrew text of the Bible it becomes clear that the Creator-God of the Chinese and Hebrews is one and the same:

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made... For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.

Psalm 33v6,9—The Bible

Heaven (ShangDi) simply spoke everything into being by His commands. In addition, the religious ceremony of the ancient Chinese appears to be identical to that of the Hebrews as recorded in the Bible:

Then God (Yahweh) said to Moses... 'An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings.

The Bible, Exodus 20v24—Moses

Remember, as mentioned above, the Chinese Emperors also offered their sacrifices and burnt offerings on an altar of earth at Mt. Tai. Truly the God of ancient China is the one true God as mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. This is confirmed by further Chinese prayers and songs used at the 'Border Sacrifice':

All the numerous tribes of animated beings are indebted to Thy favour for their beginnings. Men and things are all emparadised in Thy love, O Di(ShangDi). All living things are indebted to your goodness, but who knows from whom his blessings come to him? You alone, O Lord, are the true parent of all things.

The Statutes of the Ming Dynasty

From the above quote we learn that the ancient Chinese believed that their God was a God of love, as we learned previously from the philosopher Mozi quoted above. One final recitation from the 'Border Sacrifice' is of note:

Of old in the beginning, there was the great chaos without form and dark. The five elements had not begun to revolve, nor the sun and moon to shine. You, O Spiritual Sovereign, first divided the grosser parts from the purer. You made heaven. You made earth. You made man. All things with their reproducing power got their being.

The Statutes of the Ming Dynasty

The above quote can be compared with the Biblical record:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.' ...and God divided the light from the darkness... Then God made two great lights, the greater light (sun) to rule the day and the lesser light (moon) to rule the night... Then God said let Us make man in Our image... Then God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply'...

Genesis chapter 1, The Bible

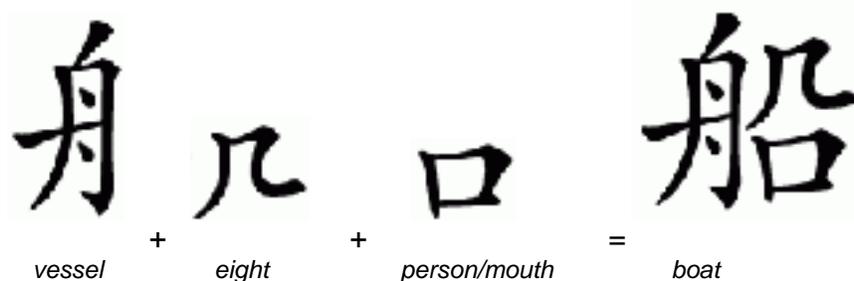
In conclusion, the original religion of China is similar to that of the Hebrew people as recorded in the Bible. From ancient times right up until 1911 AD it had been the Emperor of China's responsibility to obey the 'Mandate of Heaven' i.e. God's will. This included the 'Border Sacrifice'. We are now going to discover the reason why both the ancient Chinese and Hebrew peoples worshiped God in a sacrificial ceremony.

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Why did both the ancient Chinese and Hebrew peoples worship the Creator God in a sacrificial ceremony involving the death of animals? From beginning to end, the Bible teaches that all people are separated from a holy God by their sin (Romans 3v23; Isaiah 59v2). The Bible also teaches that God is just and must punish sin. Unfortunately, the penalty for sin is death (Genesis 2v17; Romans 6v23). This means that all people will ultimately face the death penalty and be separated from God for all eternity in the Lake of Fire! However, the good news is that because of His great love for us, God has provided a substitute to die in our place so that He might still be just (i.e. punish sin) but also be able to justify and forgive the sinner (John 3v16; Romans 3v21-26). The animal sacrifices offered by the ancient Hebrews and Chinese symbolised or pointed to the death of God's own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was punished on the Cross for the sins of the whole world. As a result anyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Saviour can be reconciled to God the Father and receive the free gift of eternal life based entirely on the merit of Jesus' substitutionary death. Conversely, anyone who rejects Jesus' substitutionary death remains condemned and on 'death row' ready for the day of judgement. In the new testament, Jesus is called 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1v29). This is a perfect description of Him being sacrificed for our sins and is the complete and final fulfilment of the Chinese 'Border Sacrifice'. Animal sacrifices for sin are no longer required by either Hebrews or Chinese. God has Himself provided the 'one sacrifice for sins for all time' in His own Son (Hebrews 9 v11-12).

The Genesis story hidden within the ancient Chinese written symbols

Since the original religion of the ancient Chinese is similar to that of the ancient Hebrews, as described in the Bible, it should not be surprising to discover that the inventor(s) of the ancient Chinese writing system knew and believed in an identical account of creation and earth's beginnings as found in the book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible. The oldest extant forms of the Chinese written characters have been preserved on bronze vessels and tortoise shells or scapula bones from sheep and bulls. For example the Chinese character meaning 'boat' is composed of three parts (radicals):



How amazing that the Chinese character for '**boat**' is defined as a '**vessel**' with '**eight people**' on it! This is identical to the first boat mentioned in the Bible which was also a vessel with eight persons on it, namely, Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives (Genesis 7v13). In addition, the Genesis record tells us that all the different people groups of the world, including the Chinese, are descended from Noah' three sons (Genesis 9v19). Therefore, since the ancient Chinese were descendants of Noah and originally believers in the one true Creator God of the Bible, it would be quite logical for them to want to preserve the true record of earth's history as recorded in the early chapters of Genesis -- and what better way of doing that than by means of a pictographic written language? Every picture

tells a story! Obviously if the character for 'boat', as shown above, was the only example that supported this hypothesis then it could be dismissed as mere coincidence.

On the contrary, our research has demonstrated hundreds of additional examples and interested readers are referred to the books of which I am a co-author: '**God's Promise to the Chinese**' by Ethel R Nelson, Richard E Broadberry and Ginger Tong Chock, ISBN 0-937869-01-5 and '**The Beginning of Chinese Characters**' by Ethel R Nelson, Richard E Broadberry and Samuel Wang, ISBN 0-937869-03-1. Both books are obtainable from Read Books Publisher, 1054 Meadowlark Rd., Dunlap, TN 37327, USA. Additionally interested readers can watch a DVD presentation of my talks in Chinese or English obtainable from Lehrke Productions at www.mntelevision.com or linda@mntelevision.com -- ask for 'God's promise to the Chinese' Mandarin version or 'Chinese and the Bible' English version.