

Review of The Heliand The Saxon Gospel



**By
Jan Stadler**

The Heliand Saxon Gospel

A Page of The Original Text

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About The Review Author Jan Stadler

Jan Stadler is a Dutch-American citizen currently residing in Amsterdam. Jan is a student of European history and reverences the great European conquests of the Americas. Jan specializes in writing on current European topics as well as culture and religion. In addition to his work with the Tea Party, Jan has also worked significantly with other European parties such as the Dutch Freedom Party and the Vlaams Belang in Flanders. In his free time, Jan enjoys hiking, reading and when in America, shooting guns and hunting. You can reach Jan at:-

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The Saxon Gospel

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THE HELIAND: THE SAXON GOSPEL IS A SAXON REINTERPRETATION OF THE MESSAGE OF JESUS CHRIST into a fashion that the proto-Vikings could comprehend. Much in the same way the Gospel of St. Mark was written to accommodate a Greek audience, and the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke to accommodate Hebrew audiences, the Heliand was written to adapt Christianity to people who had very little connection with the Mediterranean world.

This text is beginning to experience a revival as of late among dissident right-wingers seeking a way to better understand folkish religion. It should be of prime importance that Christians be familiar and (if possible) well-versed with the text in order not only to better understand their own folkish traditions and identity, but also to help bring identitarians struggling with the vapidness of modern, liberal Christianity into a deeper understanding of the faith.

History of the Text

The Heliand, meaning “saviour,” was written sometime in the eighth century after Charlemagne conquered the Saxon pagans of northern Germany. Nobody is sure who exactly wrote it, but it was probably written by a monk or missionary who was both literate and intimately familiar with north German culture, customs, and language.

Around the time the text was coming into existence, the Merovingians had secured their royal foothold on the Frankish monarchy and were consolidating their new Holy Roman Empire. One of the most troublesome parts of the empire was the resistance of the pagan Saxons of Northern

Germany against the Catholic Franks. In the time period between the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the year 1000 when the Viking raids began, this was probably one of the most violent episodes in European history, with many violent atrocities committed by both sides.

Unlike previous barbarian tribes, such as the Franks and Visigoths who converted to catholic Christianity to partake of the spirit of ancient Roman majesty, the Saxons, generally speaking, were staunchly resistant to any form of conversion. The nature of the Gospel was alien to their pagan ways, and Christianity was viewed as the religion of these foreign Frankish conquerors. For by this stage, Christianity had become the “folkish” religion of the Romans, to whom the Franks were the western successors.

In addition to the problem of initially converting the Saxons, there also existed the problem of getting the Saxons thoroughly converted. For example, as historian Peter Brown notes in his popular work *The Rise of Western Christendom*, in the north and throughout Germania, “Christianity might be the religion of [the] family; but it was not, as it was in Francia, expected to be the sole religion of the entire community. In Bavaria, a pagan sorceress would bring animals to the local church, as a thank-offering for the success of her incantations[1].”

Nonetheless, between this inability for the Franks to peaceably convert the Saxons by word of mouth and bring them into the Catholic political fold and the problem of incorrect Christian practices occurring in semi-converted areas, it was time to purify and then unify the north by conveying the Catholic faith to the Northmen in a language they would understand.

Nature of The Text

G. Ronald Murphy, a leading expert on the text and author of other Germanic Christian books, speaks of the author writing the Heliand using “the words and the events of the Gospel as if they had taken place and been spoken in his own country and time.” It is a poetic piece that is in keeping with the same literary tradition as other notable Anglo-Saxon works, such as *Beowulf*.

The text contains many linguistic alterations that lead the reader to believe he is in Northern Europe rather than first-century Palestine. For example, there are many references to ascending to the “hill-fort” instead of “entering the city.”

Many towns have their names adapted with the word “burg.” In the English translation, it comes out as “hill-fort Nazareth” or “Nazaretburg” instead of Nazareth. This is because in ancient Germanic languages, just as in modern German, the word burg is used to describe a city that is also a military fort upon a hill. This is the way in which most Saxon settlements were constructed, hence the readers would need to have proper context.

The existence of the Heliand leads us to see that the Gospel message was to be conveyed in the common tongue and to be understood by the masses. It is even rumoured that Martin Luther had a copy of the Heliand and used it as justification, in some cases, for the translation of Scripture into the vernacular and for the preference of the vernacular to the Latin Vulgate.

Jesus as Commander-in-Chief

In the Heliand, Jesus is described as drothin, a title given to a lord who had dictatorial command in a time of war. The visual imagery used to describe Jesus is in such language as “the most powerful person ever born,” “chieftain,” and perhaps most insightfully, “Christ the Rescuer.” Jesus’s mission as drothin is constantly described in the form of a rescue mission, as He, the All-Ruler’s son, is coming down from heaven to do battle with the forces of evil and “help all of mankind against the oppressive forces of Hel,” the realm where souls go if not entering Valhalla[2].

The apostles, in accompanying Christ on His mission, are described as “His personal warrior-company” who are fighting loyally beside their Chieftain. Even though desertion is a grave sin, when Jesus is taken in the garden and the apostles scatter, it is described in the form of “desertion under fire[3],” whereas the traitor Judas is described as a knight who has broken his vows to his earl. But more than a military commander, Jesus is portrayed symbolically as the supreme fulfilment to the legacy of Odin

and Thor. This comes in two forms: first, through Christ's ability to transcend and control fate and time, and second, through the author's use of Germanic mythological symbolism that synchronizes Odin and Jesus together, demonstrating that Jesus Christ is the coming fulfilment of Odin.

A good example is when Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River. The two famous ravens Nunin and Hugin – memory and mind – that sit perched atop Odin keeping him aware of all things, are adapted to this moment of the Bible for the Saxons see the Holy Spirit descending and sitting on Christ's shoulders, speaking to Him the will of the "All-Ruler."

As Murphy writes, "With this image, Christ becomes a Germanic god, one into whose ears the Spirit of the Almighty whispers[4]." As He rises out of the water and the Holy Spirit descends upon Him, the Heliand takes the extra time to note that "the Holy Spirit came down from the All-Ruler above to Christ—it was like a powerful bird, a magnificent dove—and it sat upon our Chieftain's shoulder, remaining over the Ruler's Child[5]." Moreover, as Murphy describes it, "Jesus is depicted as Woden, knowing secret sayings that grant divine contact and placing power into the hands of selected followers who know the secret formulas[6]."

Interestingly enough, the author does not make an attempt to negatively slander or insult the pagan audience. Respect is shown to the legacy of the old gods having served a purpose, but now, as fate would have it, a "Ragnarök" is taking place: the age of Odin and the old gods is passing, and the fulfilment of the Christ-God is emerging. If anything, a lot of grace is conveyed to the now-passing pagan age, according to Murphy, by "putting the Good News into the form of a spell, a god's spell: to sing the song of the Savior to the melodies and refrains of the old music—that Christ might live in the hearts of his Nordic countrymen as a compatriot and that Woden, and the unfortunate past, might now be able to sleep in peace[7]."

Fatalism

Perhaps in spite of the various vocabulary, grammatical, and cultural changes, the philosophical nature of fatalism dominates Nordic

mythology. This dominance is quite profound upon the reader when reviewing the text.

One notices the fatalism of the Heliand in the infancy narratives of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Describing John the Baptist's and Jesus Christ's coming as a matter of fate rather than Hebraic prophecy makes more sense to a people who have never heard of Hebrew prophecy before. In this context, fatalism becomes a stand-in for Old Testament prophecy.

However, deeper than simply being a stand-in for prophecy, fate becomes a co-worker with God and a means to establish Christ's supremacy. In Nordic mythology, the gods were subject to fate. All were to fight and perish at Ragnarök. In contrast, however, Christ is exalted over the fatalist bonds of the old gods, because His Father brought into existence creation and has dominion over all things. The fact that Christ can control creation and transcend it, most notably through the Resurrection, is proof of His supremacy. The Christ-God, unlike Odin or Thor, can conquer death and have even greater power after death, unlike the bleak end for Odin and Thor against Fenrir and Jörmungandr.

In the Heliand, according to Murphy, while "fate controls the accidentals of creation, God then alters these accidents as so He chooses."⁸ It is a deviation from orthodox theology and definitely an example of syncretism, but the reader, whether Nordic or orthodox, winds up in the same place: that God is in command of fate.

Nonetheless, Christ is not immune from fate. Fate is clearly at work in the Gospel. Murphy describes that "Christ himself foresaw the Fate that was to overtake Jerusalem: Christ Himself gave adequate acknowledgement of the effectiveness of the workings of Fate when He wept over Jerusalem[9]."

Magic and Runes

In Nordic society, runes were not just an alphabet used for communication, but a means of tapping into the supernatural. Casting runes and reading the meanings and symbols gave one access to the will of the gods. In the

Heliand, the author taps into the Nordic meaning behind the runes by referring to the working powers of Jesus as “magic” and the teachings He brings from the Father as runes.

For example, when the Apostles are with Jesus after He gives the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals to them the secrets of the runes in the form of the Lord’s Prayer. The power of runes could often come in the form of immediate results, so for one to pray to the Father and consult the wisdom of the runes in the Bible, one is immediately tapping into the power of the supernatural. As well, the description of the creation of the world by God’s words in the beginning is considered a form of runic magic.

In addition to the use of runes, the Heliand diverts from the Gospel in describing objects with magical powers, which would be taken from the Nordic mysticism of the time. Objects such as swords, stones, natural objects, helmets, and the like are given supernatural powers in the Gospel story to explain to the Nordic audience the means by which supernatural power is conveyed to us in Midgard. The most infamous example in the text is the devil wearing a magical helmet called in Nordic society a “helidhelm” to conceal himself from Pontius Pilate’s wife.

The Jews

In both the original Gospels and the Heliand, the Jews are portrayed in a negative light and are definitely depicted as central antagonists. However, in the Heliand their role as the villains is much more explicit. Whereas the New Testament tells the account of how Jesus Christ came for the Jews and then the Gentiles and was rejected by His own as a manner of prophecy, the Heliand explicitly portrays the Jews as traitors to God.

The Heliand does not devolve too deeply into the essence and wordings of Hebraic prophecy, but it does convey that the Christ came for the Hebrews’ salvation and that they turned against Him for their own selfish ambition. The language used in the text makes the Jewish leaders out to be earls with their own retinue that turn against Jesus when the opportune moment strikes. It is quite similar to the “Red Wedding” scene in Game of Thrones (major spoiler alert).

Refuting the Pagans

Many contemporary pagans, in an attempt to undermine Christianity, charge that the Heliand is the beginning of a new era of Christianity that marks a departure from the orthodox, biblical Christianity we see in the New Testament, synthesizing the Christian message and imagery with pagan idealisms and practices. This has led many scholars and writers to deem “Germanic Christianity” as in fact a “folkish” rendition and falsification of the Christian message, rather than the actual, genuine (albeit adapted) message of Jesus Christ. It is because of this synthesis between Christian nobility and Germanic warriorhood that Europeans came to embrace such concepts as chivalry and knighthood and to launch the Crusades.

There are a number of problems with this claim. First, the Heliand is not the first time the Gospel message was reinterpreted to accommodate a non-Hebrew culture. The first text on record is the Gospel of St. Mark, which took the Hebrew narrative and adapted it to the Greeks and Romans; later, the Gospel of Luke was written by St. Paul’s disciple, St. Luke, to reach out to the Greeks. As an extension, the Acts of the Apostles could also be considered a second part to the Gospel of Luke for the Greeks. Hence in the New Testament itself, folkish presentations of the Gospel are codified in the official canon. So from the beginning, the Gospel message began to deviate from an exclusive east-Mediterranean audience. Therefore the Heliand is just another text, tailored to another folk group.

As well, asserting that a synthesis of Germanic paganism with Christianity in the Heliand gave us chivalry and Christian warriorhood completely ignores the previous 700 years of Christian interaction with the Greek, Roman, Armenian, Gothic, Arab, and Persian cultures that began to absorb Christianity into their societies and had embraced both the meekness of Christianity and the rugged masculinity needed for Armenians to fight off the Zoroastrian Persians and for the Christian Romans to fight off, in the name of Christ, “the scourge of God,” Attila the Hun. Furthermore, Constantine himself saw the cross in the sky while in the middle of war, and placed the Chi Rho on his soldier’s shields as a sign of loyalty to the Christ-God. This martial valour in Christianity came to the faith and

culture of Europe before Christianity encountered any influence of Nordic paganism. In simplified terms, militant Christianity was being practiced by a myriad of diverse cultures and nations before the Gospel even reached Scandinavia. Lastly, the concepts of knighthood and chivalry emerge from the hierarchical warriorhood concepts of Roman warfare and nobility far more than quasi-egalitarian Germanic societies. The hierarchical nature of the Christ-God as King of kings in the Bible synthesizes more with the absolute rule of Caesar than with a Nordic chieftain.

What the Text Can Mean for Us

Though the Heliand has long passed out of the mainstream of Christian texts, it nonetheless still speaks to European Christians and is quite applicable to us. In the modern age of so many different, confusing, and often poorly translated copies of the Bible along with philosophy and theology that in no way complements a proper, orthodox, and masculine interpretation of Jesus's words, the Heliand gives us a wonderful glimpse back into the past. It gives us not only a more accurate understanding of the Christ-God's words and their universal meaning, but also a view into how the Christ-God decided to speak to us as a people. It is the text that gives proper perspective as to who we are as Europeans, especially Norsemen.

Furthermore, the Heliand should be embraced as a tribute to Christianity's triumph over paganism in the north. Far too often symbols, signs, essences, and themes of Germanic and Nordic culture are absorbed by the rugged masculinity of modern day heathenry. The Heliand gives us a glimpse into the reality of a world that does an end run around modern heathenry's claims that Nordicism is exclusively pagan.

The Heliand gives us the vocabulary, the narratives, and the needed imagery to counter pagan stereotypes and slanders against our Holy Faith. By using this text, we as traditional Christians gain added insights on how to understand and better articulate our faith to each other, and also to unbelievers as well. Many unbelievers, sadly, become discouraged away from Christianity thanks to the effeminate and uninspiring nature of modern evangelicalism and Catholicism. The Heliand helps us give light

to a world that not only proves the historical irrelevancy of modern evangelicalism and mainstream Christianity, but also gives us the ability to communicate a vibrant, active faith of warriors that can inspire men to transcend the languishing within modern effeminate “Christianity.”

The Heliand should be embraced by all Christians, but especially Christians of Germanic, Anglo-Saxon and/or Scandinavian background to better understand the message of Jesus Christ from our peoples’ historical perspective.

FOOTNOTES

1. Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom (The Making of Europe)*, Wiley-Blackwell, 1997, p. 258
2. *The Heliand: The Saxon Gospel*, p. 44
3. Ronald Murphy, *The Saxon Savior: The Germanic Transformation of the Gospel in the Ninth-Century Heliand*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 96
4. *Ibid.*, p. 80
5. *The Heliand*, p. 35
6. *The Saxon Savior*, p. 90
7. *Ibid.*, p. 93
8. *The Heliand*, p. 35
9. *The Saxon Savior*, p. 42

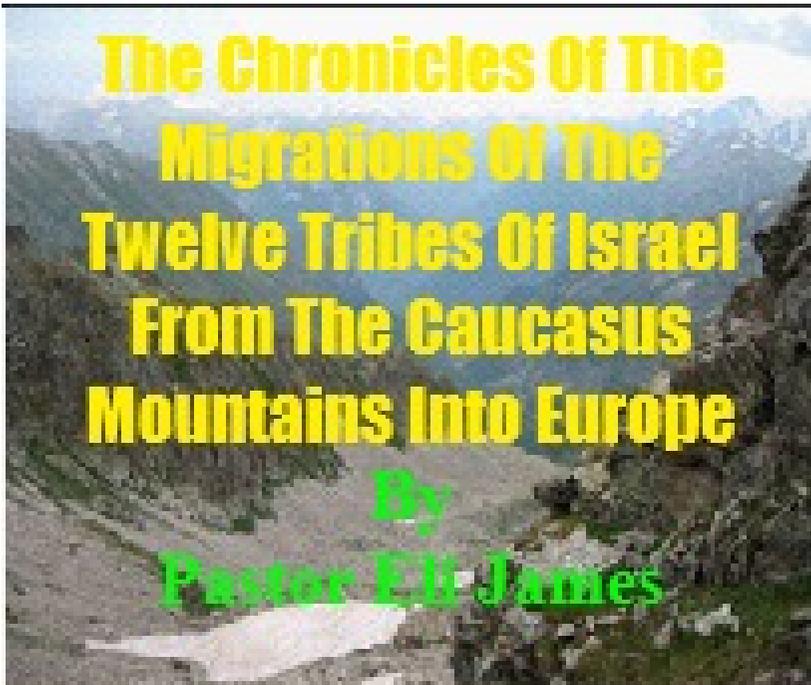


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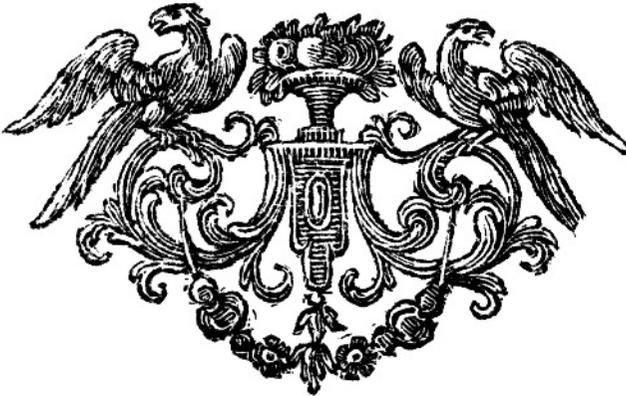
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