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The Legend of Quetzalcoatl

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Abstract: The author claims that a comparison of Quetzalcoatl, the Book of Mormon, and biblical passages reveals many similarities.

The Legend of *Quetzalcoatl*

By

NORMAN C. PIERCE

WITHOUT doubt the most beautiful and authentic legend of all Indian folklore is that of "The Great White God With a Beard," the supreme deity of Mexican Indians, Quetzalcoatl, who is the same deity known by different names among many Indian tribes throughout the continent and the islands.

Quetzalcoatl, according to the legend, visited the early inhabitants of Mexico and Central America. He appeared out of the East and was known as the god of the air and rain, that which made life to all possible. Quetzalcoatl means "Serpent decked with feathers" and this symbol of him is everywhere in evidence in Indian shrines, both ancient and modern. The legend relates that he was a high priest of Tollan, and that he was a man with a white skin, a high stature, a broad forehead, large eyes, long black hair, and a bushy beard. For propriety's sake he always wore ample garments. A time came in his life when he was crucified and died for his people, his flesh was broken by arrows and spears—but he lived again! He was a god!

As stated, Quetzalcoatl came out of the East, and, although a deity, he dwelt among the common people and taught them the things they should know. He taught them virtue, penitence and fasting, and discouraged animal and human sacrifice; he showed them how to become skilled artisans, teaching them such things as metallurgy and agriculture. He gave freely of wisdom, and to those who had faith he granted immunity from distress and cured their ills and afflictions. When he wished to promulgate a law, he sent a hero whose voice could be heard a hundred leagues away, to proclaim it from the summit of Tzatzitepetl ("mountain of clamors"). Even their calendar, that causes modern science to marvel, was attributed to him.

IN Quetzalcoatl's time, according to the legend, maize attained such enormous dimensions that a single ear was all a man could carry. Gourds and melons measured not less than four feet, and it was no longer necessary



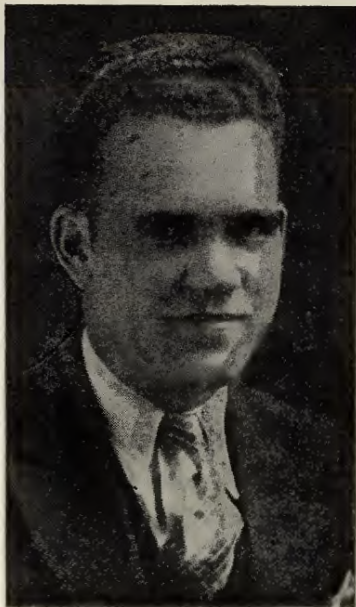
Quetzalcoatl, as depicted by the Mexican government.

to dye cotton, because all colors were produced by nature. Indian corn, singing birds and birds of brilliant plumage abounded. All men were then rich. In a word, the general belief of all tribes is that the time of Quetzalcoatl's appearance was the Golden Age of their country. And while the country was at the height of its prosperity, he disappeared by way of the ocean, saying that it was the will of higher gods that he should betake himself to another kingdom. However, he charged his followers to tell the people that he would return some day with white men, bearded like himself, and rule the people in wisdom forever.

Through the ages they waited patiently and watched carefully for his coming while priests and soothsayers prophesied the event. Finally the prophecy was thought to be fulfilled when the Europeans first touched the shores of America and the Islands. The Indians of San Salvador saw the return of this Great White God With a Beard in the coming of Columbus, the Mexicans saw him in Cortez, the Hawaiians saw him in Cook, those of the Mississippi saw him in De Soto, while the Incas saw him in Pizarro—and all were sadly, grievously disappointed, as history clearly reveals.

It is interesting to note how memory of Quetzalcoatl has been kept alive, even to this day. Everywhere beautiful temples were erected to this God, where, on periodic occasions, they would gather and have a great feast in his honor. On the steps of the temple they would perform a colorful pageant depicting deaf, lame, blind and paralyzed people. These were prayed for before his image, whereupon they would enact a miracle. The dumb at once began to speak, the lame performed acrobatic feats, and the blind opened their eyes. Even effigies of him were crucified anew.

THERE was also a special religious order in which the individual who entered was dedicated to this God. In early infancy they were consecrated to Quetzalcoatl by being presented to the superior priest and receiving an incision in the breast. At the age of seven they entered a seminary, where, after first listening to a long moral discourse, they were exhorted to conduct themselves carefully, and



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Quetzalcoatl in the Scriptures

A FEATHERED Serpent idea:
" . . . be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." (Matt. X:16.)

High priest of Tollan: " . . . the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." (Heb. III:1.)

A voice heard over a hundred leagues away from Tzatzitepetl (the mountain of clamors): " . . . they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven—it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice . . ." (3 Nephi 11:3.)

Golden Age: " . . . And they had all things in common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor . . . And the Lord did prosper them exceedingly in the land." (4 Nephi 1:3-7.)

He healed: " . . . Bring them hither and I will heal them." (3 Nephi 17:7.)

He left saying that it was the will of higher gods that he should betake himself to another kingdom: " . . . But now I go unto the Father, and also to show myself unto the lost tribes of Israel." (3 Nephi 17:4.)

He would return at a later day at the head of white bearded men like himself to dwell with them forever: " . . . I shall come in my glory with the powers of heaven." (3 Nephi 28:7.)

to pray for the people and the nation.

Even today there are so many Mexicans who still believe in Quetzalcoatl, that he will even yet return and fulfil his promises, that the Mexican government declared that Quetzalcoatl must supplant the Americanized Santa Claus as the Spirit of Christmas. And so, he it is, instead of Santa, who brings gifts to Mexican children, and reminds them that their forefathers had a white God whom they called Quetzalcoatl.

These legendary facts I gather from standard encyclopedias and the elaborate work of the eminent French archaeologist, Lucien Biart, in his book entitled "The Aztecs." Mr. Biart clinches his story by saying: "It is an incontestable fact that Quetzalcoatl created a new religion, based on fasting, penitence, and virtue; and certainly, he belonged to a race other than the one he civilized." The actual existence of this crucified God is further strengthened by the many stone crosses that have been found throughout Mexico and Peru. In fact the presence of the cross, in the proportions of the Christian symbol, on so many Mexican monuments led early Catholic missionaries to believe that Christianity had already been preached to the Indians, and St. Thomas was given the credit of having discovered America before Columbus.

A large stone cross was first noted at Vera Cruz (True Cross) where the Spaniards first settled, and from which they found immediate inspiration for a name, calling it "La Ciudad de la Vera Cruz (The City of the true cross)." Many more crosses were found throughout the land that gave strength to the St. Thomas belief until leading Catholic priests took it upon themselves to discourage the idea and to destroy all available evidence in support thereof.

Yet the beautiful legend of Quetzalcoatl still lives on, and the world at large is still in darkness regarding its true significance!

IF we traverse the world, it is possible to find cities without walls, without letters, without kings, without wealth, without coin, without schools and theatres; but a city without a temple, or that practiseth not worship, prayer, and the like, no one ever saw."—*Plutarch.*