

Pagan Precedents for Jesus

(from Richard Carrier's book *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason to Doubt*, pages 222 - 230.)

Rank-Raglan Hero Narrative – fable of the divine king

This is the most ubiquitous hero narrative, which pagans revered prior to Jesus. He meets 20 of 22 of the following criteria:

1. The hero's mother is a virgin.
 2. His father is a king or the heir of a king.
 3. The circumstances of his conception are unusual.
 4. He is reputed to be the son of a god.
 5. An attempt is made to kill him when he is a baby.
 6. To escape which he is spirited away from those trying to kill him.
 7. He is reared in a foreign country by one or more foster parents.
 8. We are told nothing of his childhood.
 9. On reaching manhood he returns to his future kingdom.
 10. He is crowned, hailed, or becomes king.
 11. He reigns uneventfully (i.e., without wars or national catastrophes).
 12. He prescribes laws.
 13. He then loses favor with the gods or his subjects.
 14. He is driven from the throne or city.
 15. He meets with a mysterious death.
 16. He dies atop a hill or high place.
 17. His children, if any, do not succeed him.
 18. His body turns up missing.
 19. Yet he still has one or more holy sepulchers (in fact or fiction).
 20. Before taking a throne or a wife, he battles and defeats a great adversary (such as a king, giant, dragon or wild beast).
- and*
21. His parents are related to each other.
 22. He marries a queen or princess related to his predecessor.

Socrates and Aesop Parallels

This hero-type was widely revered among pagans: the pre-Christian narratives of the life and death of Socrates and Aesop. They match Jesus in the following respects:

1. They all came from a humble background (Socrates was the son of a stonemason; Aesop was a slave).
2. Yet all were exalted as a moral hero and an exemplary man, who was in the right, and whose teachings one ought to follow.
3. And that despite all of them having opposed and denounced the established religious authorities and having challenged the received wisdom of their people.

4. All attacked the sin and greed of the religious and political elite.
5. All attended the parties of sinners and ate and drank with them.
6. Yet all consistently denounced sinners, and sought to reform them.
7. All taught with questions, parables and paradoxes.
8. All taught to love truth, despise money and have compassion on others.
9. All taught that they wanted to save everyone's soul.
10. All were despised by some and beloved by others for their teachings.
11. All were publicly mocked in some way.
12. All were renowned to be physically ugly or deformed.
13. All were executed by the state for blasphemy, a crime they did not commit.
14. All were *actually* executed for speaking against the sin and greed of the authorities.
15. All voluntarily went to their deaths, despite all having had the power to escape.
16. All prophesied God's wrath would befall their killers; and all were right.
17. All were subsequently revered as martyrs.
18. And all at the outset had been given a gift of the spirit from God.

Romulus Parallels (ascension to godhead)

The myth of Romulus (from 4th century BCE) and the narratives of Jesus' death and resurrection contain the following parallels:

1. The hero is the son of God.
2. His death is accompanied by prodigies. [amazing or unusual things]
3. The land is covered in darkness.
4. The hero's corpse goes missing.
5. The hero receives a new immortal body, superior to the one he had.
6. His resurrection body has on occasion a bright and shining appearance.
7. After his resurrection he meets with a follower on a road from the city.
8. A speech is given from a summit or high place prior to ascending.
9. An inspired message of resurrection or 'translation to heaven' is delivered to a witness.
10. There is a 'great commission' (an instruction to future followers).
11. The hero physically ascends to heaven in his new divine body.
12. He is taken up into a cloud.
13. There is an explicit role given to eyewitness testimony (even naming the witnesses).
14. Witnesses are frightened by his appearance and/or disappearance.
15. Some witnesses flee.
16. Claims are made of 'dubious alternative accounts' (which claims were obviously fabricated for Romulus, there never having been a true account to begin with).
17. All of this occurs outside of a nearby (but central) city.
18. His followers are initially in sorrow over the hero's death.
19. But his post-resurrection story leads to eventual belief, homage and rejoicing.
20. The hero is deified and cult subsequently paid to him (in the same manner as a god).