

# Beowulf and the bible essay



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Throughout the epic poem, Beowulf, our main hero puts others before himself. Over the many years of research and analysis of the poem, scholars came to the conjuncture that the author of Beowulf was indeed Christian. However, we know so little of the author that one could not even attach a name to this medieval poem. So the presumption of the academic authority is really all we have to go by, other than the reader's own interpretation.

But can the poem not also be considered pagan by the same comparison? One would most likely find more substantial evidence in the Christian theory, however, there are a few indications throughout the poem that hints towards a pagan author. Be that as it may, there could hardly be any debate over the author's use of allegorical interpretation and heavy symbolism to support morals and meaning to instill a virtuous code of ethics into the reader.

As the Christians believe that Jesus was sent here by God to protect mankind and to ultimately die for our sins, the unknown author of Beowulf places our hero in Denmark, fighting off monsters for a country he is not even from. It may come off as a bold statement, and may even be considered a cliché, to compare anyone with Jesus; however, both put mankind before themselves and ultimately sacrificed their lives for the benefit of others.

Most importantly, and maybe more convincingly, their friends betrayed both right before their death. Before Beowulf's battle with the dragon, his companions ran out of fear, just as Judas sold Jesus out. In theory, Beowulf reads as an allegorical text just as much as the Bible. The poems use of monsters alone show a strong similarity to the biblical stories we are all used to. One can easily find a fair comparison between Beowulf's encounter with

the first monster in the poem, Grendel, to the very familiar story of David's run in with Goliath.

Here we have our hero Beowulf fighting off the evil Grendel without a weapon, in which he finds himself victor when tearing off the arm of the hellish beast. Just as limited and meager, in comparison to his opponent of course, we have the small boy David fending off the evil Goliath, a giant of a man and a beast by nature. Just by looking at the battle of David and Goliath, just as one could do with the story of Beowulf and Grendel, one could safely assume that any spectator at that particular battle would put their money on the oversized brute.

But if that were the case with either of these two stories we would not have much of a story at all. There would be no allegorical symbolism and there would be no lesson learned by the end of the tale. However unlikely, David does defeat the evil Goliath by using something so little and common as a small stone.

So just as we have the weaponless Beowulf ripping the arm off of the monster Grendel, we see an unlikely hero in David as he slays the gargantuan Goliath with nothing more than a rock. In some places in Beowulf it seems as though the author may have had some struggles accommodating both Christian and pagan moral code. Scholars agree that the poet was indeed Christian, but that was only established as of recent.

Before, it was open to heavy speculation that the poem was actually a pagan poem with some Christian morals interjected here and there. As we know, the common Christian belief is to “turn the other cheek”, which is hardly the

practice of warriors like Beowulf in the Middle Ages. The warrior culture that is represented in Beowulf gains morality and ethics by contributing noble acts to society. They believe that it is better to respond with vengeance than it is to grieve.

That's the environment that our main character Beowulf is coming from. Christians believe in peace and the forgiveness of one's enemy to achieve glory in the afterlife. Beowulf's pagan warrior culture does not have the conception of the hereafter. Their notion of the afterlife is only gained through renowned greatness that's instilled in societies memory after their death. As much as he may come across as a Jesus figure, at times the character Beowulf shows more signs as a pagan warrior than anything else, although the poem as a whole comes across more Christian.

In his youth, Beowulf strides for personal glory, ensuring that his fame and achievements will be remembered and recognized long after his life is lived. Also, he very clearly follows a more vengeful and violent route opposed to the "turn the other cheek" method that Christians practice.

However much Beowulf may come off as a pagan warrior, the poem is very much enriched with Christian symbolism and allegorical interpretation comparable to the bible. We may not know anything at all of the medieval poet of Beowulf. All we have to go by is the epic poem itself. And although it is full of heavy symbolism and works as a great window into the medieval world, it is not enough to pin point any exact motive the author may have.

There is, however, a substantial amount of evidence supporting the Christian theory, but it can never amount to fact, it will have to remain as just theory.

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Beowulf may not come off to be exact or perfect representations of the “Jesus” figure in the poem. It may be a tough sell convincing one to find a comparison in Beowulf and Jesus. For example, the Son of God would never have resorted to the use of a sword or ever have condoned the act of violence.

However, they both executed unselfish acts to benefit others and acted as a protector of their people. Maybe the strongest resemblance is the betrayal that the two figures faced before their death. Beowulf may have lived if his friends were there to help defeat the dragon, just as Jesus may have lived if it was not for Judas’ disloyalty.

However, both faced an inevitable death by sacrificing their lives for the sake of mankind. Beowulf would not necessarily be the best companion piece to the bible, and it may come off as a stretch to compare Jesus with Beowulf, but the two hold enough strong similarities to earn a fair comparison.