

Question: Is Jesus a myth? Is Jesus just a copy of the pagan gods of other ancient religions?

Answer: There are a number of voices claiming that the accounts of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament are simply myths and were the result of the writers borrowing stories from pagan mythology, such as the stories of Osiris, Dionysus, Adonis, Attis, and Mithras. The claim is that these mythological figures are essentially the same story as what the New Testament ascribes to Jesus Christ of Nazareth. As Dan Brown claims in, *The Da Vinci Code*, "Nothing in Christianity is original."

However, once the facts are examined, these claims are proven false. To discover the truth about these particular claims and others like them, it is important to: (1) unearth the history behind their assertions, (2) examine the actual historical portrayals of the false gods being compared to Christ, (3) expose the logical fallacies that the authors are making, and (4) look at why the New Testament Gospels can be trusted as accurately depicting the true and historical Jesus Christ.

First, the claims of Jesus as a myth or an exaggeration originated in the writings of 19th century liberal German theologians. Their claim was essentially that Jesus was nothing more than a copy of the widespread worship of dying and rising fertility gods in various places "Tammuz in Mesopotamia, Adonis in Syria, Attis in Asia Minor, and Osiris in Egypt. None of these works ever advanced in the realm of academia and religious thought because their assertions were investigated by theologians and scholars and determined to be completely false and baseless. It has only been in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century that these assertions have been resurrected, primarily due to the rise of the internet and mass distribution of information that has no historical foundation or accountability.

This leads us to the next area of investigation "do the mythological gods of antiquity really mirror the person of Jesus Christ? As an example, the Zeitgeist movie makes these claims about the Egyptian god Horus:

- " He was born on December 25th of a virgin - Isis Mary
- " A star in the East proclaimed his arrival
- " Three kings came to adore the new-born "savior"
- " He became a child prodigy teacher at age 12
- " At age 30 he was "baptized" and began a "ministry"
- " Horus had twelve "disciples"
- " Horus was betrayed
- " He was crucified
- " He was buried for three days
- " He was resurrected after three days

However, when the actual writings about Horus are competently examined, this is what we find:

" Horus was born to Isis; there is no mention in history of her being called "Mary."
Moreover, Mary is our anglicized form of her real name "Miryam" or Miriam. "Mary" was not even used in the original texts of Scripture.

" Isis was not a virgin; she was the widow of Osiris and conceived Horus with Osiris.

" Horus was born during month of Khoiak (Oct/Nov), not December 25. Further, there is no mention in the Bible as to Christ's actual birth date.

" There is no record of three kings visiting Horus at his birth. The Bible never states the actual number of magi that came to see Christ.

" Horus is not a "savior" in any shape or form; he did not die for anyone.

" There are no accounts of Horus being a teacher at the age of 12.

" Horus was not "baptized." The only account of Horus that involves water is one story where Horus is torn to pieces, with Isis requesting the crocodile god to fish him out of the water he was placed into.

" Horus did not have a "ministry."

" Horus did not have 12 disciples. According to the Horus accounts, Horus had four semi-gods that were followers and some indications of 16 human followers and an unknown number of blacksmiths that went into battle with him.

" There is no account of Horus being betrayed by a friend.

" Horus did not die by crucifixion. There are various accounts of Horus' death, but none of them involve crucifixion.

" There is no account of Horus being buried for three days.

" Horus was not resurrected. There is no account of Horus coming out of the grave with the body he went in with. Some accounts have Horus/Osiris being brought back to life by Isis and going to be the lord of the underworld.

So when compared side by side, Jesus and Horus bear little, if any, resemblance to one another. Another popular comparison done by those claiming that Jesus Christ is a myth is with Jesus and Mithras. All the above claims of Horus are applied to Mithras (e.g. born of a virgin, being crucified, rising in three days, etc.). But what does history say about Mithras?

" He was born out of a solid rock and not from any woman.

" He battled first with the sun and then a primeval bull, thought to be the first act of creation. Mithras killed the bull, which then became the ground of life for the human race.

" Mithras birth was celebrated on December 25, along with Winter solstice.

" There is no mention of him as being a great teacher.

" There is no mention of Mithras having 12 disciples. The idea that Mithras had 12 disciples may have come from a mural in which Mithras is surrounded by twelve signs of the Zodiac.

" Mithras had no bodily resurrection. The myth is told that Mithras completed his earthly mission then was taken to paradise in a chariot, alive and well. The early Christian writer Tertullian did write about Mithras believers re-enacting resurrection scenes, but he wrote about this occurring well after New Testament times, so if any copycatting was done, it was the cult of Mithras copying from Christianity.

More examples can be given of Krishna, Attis, Dionysus and other mythological gods, but the result is the same. In the end, the historical Jesus as portrayed in the Bible is thoroughly unique. The claimed similarities are greatly exaggerated. Further, while belief in Horus, Mithras, and others pre-dated Christianity, there is very little historical record of the pre-Christian beliefs of those religions. The vast majority of the earliest writings about these religions is dated to the third and fourth centuries A.D. It is illogical and unhistorical to claim the pre-Christian beliefs in these religions (of which there is no record) were identical to the post-Christian beliefs in these groups (of which there is record). It is more historically valid to attribute any similarities between these religions and Christianity to the religions copying Christian beliefs about Jesus and placing those attributes on their own gods/saviors/founders in an attempt to stop the rapid growth of Christianity.

This leads us to the next area to examine: the logical fallacies committed by those claiming that Christianity borrowed from pagan mystery religions. Two fallacies in particular are obvious" the fallacy of the false cause and the terminological fallacy. If one thing precedes another, it does not mean that the first caused the second. This is the fallacy of the false cause. Even if pre-Christian accounts of mythological gods closely resembled Christ (and they do not), it does not mean they caused the gospel writers to invent a false Jesus. Claiming such a thing would be like saying the TV series *Star Trek* caused the NASA Space Shuttle program.

The terminological fallacy occurs when terms are redefined to prove a point, when in fact such terms do not mean the same thing when compared to their source. So for example, the *Zeitgeist* movie says that Horus "began his ministry," but Horus had no actual ministry " nothing like that of Christ's ministry. Those claiming Mithras and Jesus are the same talk about the "baptism" that initiated prospects into the Mithras cult, but what was it actually? The Mithras priests (using a ritual also performed by followers of Attis) would suspend a bull over a pit, place those wanting to join the cult into the pit, slit the bull's stomach, which then covered the initiates in blood. Such a thing has no resemblance whatsoever to Christian baptism" a person going under water (symbolizing the death of Christ) and then coming back out of the water (symbolizing Christ's resurrection). But advocates of the mythological Jesus position deceptively use the same term to describe both in hopes of linking the two together.

The last issue to examine on this subject is the truthfulness of the New Testament itself. While much has been written on this topic, no work from antiquity has more evidence with respect to historical veracity than the New Testament. The New Testament has more writers (nine), better writers, and earlier writers than any other document from that era. Further, history testifies to the fact that these writers went to their deaths for claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. While some may die for a lie they think is true, no person dies for a lie they know to be false. Think about it "if someone was about to crucify you upside down, as happened to the Apostle Peter, and all you had to do to save your life was renounce a lie you had knowingly been living, what would you do?

In addition, history has shown that it takes at least two generations to pass before myth

can enter into a historical account. Why? Because eyewitnesses can refute error put in print. Those living at the time could refute the errors of the author and expose the work as being false. All the Gospels of the New Testament were written during the lifetime of the eyewitnesses, with some of Paul's epistles being written as early as 50 A.D. That early dating acts as a key protective mechanism against any falsehoods being accepted and circulated.

Finally, the New Testament attests to the fact that the portrayal of Jesus was not mistaken for that of any other god. When faced with Paul's teaching, the elite thinkers of Athens said this: "He seems to be a proclaimer of *strange deities*," "because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this *new teaching* is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some *strange things* to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean" (Acts 17:18-20). Clearly, if the accounts of Jesus were simply rehashing stories of other gods, the Athenians would not have referred to them as "new" teaching. If dying and rising gods were plentiful in the first century why, when the apostle Paul preached Jesus rising from the dead in Acts 17, did the Epicureans and Stoics not remark, "Ah, just like Horus and Mithras"?

In conclusion, the claims that Jesus is nothing more than a myth, a copy of mythological gods, originated from authors whose works have been discounted by academia, commit logical fallacies that undermine their veracity, and cannot compare to the New Testament Gospels which have withstood nearly 2,000 years of intense scrutiny. The alleged parallels disappear when they are compared with the original historical texts. Similarities between Jesus and the various mythological gods can only be argued for by employing selective and misleading descriptions.

Jesus Christ stands unique in history, with His voice rising above all false gods and continuing to ask the question that ultimately determines a person's eternal destiny: "*Who do you say that I am?*" (Matthew 16:15)