

## Session 04: Is Christianity Just Paganism Repackaged?

I would like to start by pointing out just how fascinating Zeitgeist's claims about Christianity are, so fascinating, in fact, that an entire genre of popular Christian criticism has emerged from it. In fact, I now regularly hear people banter back and forth about the idea that Christianity is a simply a retelling of astrological and mythical lore. Occasionally, I even see these claims implied in popular media. The obvious question is: how should we as Christians respond to this criticism?

It is not necessarily easy to respond to the criticism that Christianity is a retelling of older pagan myths. The volume of data that Zeitgeist presents is, frankly, overwhelming, and worse (for the Christian) much of it seems plausibly true. This session, therefore, is dedicated to digging into these claims and forming some arguments against the accusation that Christianity is merely a retelling of older pagan myths.

### Logical Problems

Before we get too far, however, it is important to realize that Zeitgeist's claims, while disconcerting to many Christians, do not represent evidence that Christianity itself is a false belief. Those who would understand the possible pagan origins of Christianity to mean that Christianity is necessarily false are guilty of committing what is called the **genetic fallacy**.

The genetic fallacy is the idea that because we know where an idea originated, it is necessarily a good idea or a bad idea. Let's look at a couple of examples of the genetic fallacy:

#### **Example 1: Don't take financial advice from a homeless person.**

While this might seem reasonable, it is not sound. It depends entirely on the information that Mister or Miss homeless person gives you. If they tell you to spend your life savings on half-eaten Twinkies, then the assumption seems to hold true. But what if the homeless person told you in 1988 to invest in Apple stock? Well, I don't care if it came from a homeless person, that's good advice.

#### **Example 2: Islam is a righteous religion because it is based on the teachings of Biblical patriarchs, like Abraham and Moses.**

Many Christians today are using precisely this logic to justify solidarity with Islam; the assumption goes: if Islam comes from the God of

Abraham and Christianity comes from God of Abraham, then we are one and the same. Is this reasoning sound? Not necessarily. We would have to look at the teachings of the god of Islam and the God of Christianity in order to draw a conclusion.

The take-away is simple enough: knowing the origin of an idea has no bearing on the truthfulness of the idea. The truth is, however, understanding that the genetic fallacy that is at work in Zeitgeist does little to satisfy me as a Christian when faced with the claims made in Zeitgeist.

Let's look at these claims in more detail to see what information we might find.

## Credits

I owe most of the information in this document to researchers like Edward L. Winston, Chris White, Ethan & Elliott Nesch, S. Michael Houdmann, Nathan Dickey, and the numerous scholars whose works are cited in their writings. I take no credit for having done the primary research on this topic.

## Summarizing the Video:

In Zeitgeist Peter Joseph, the writer and director, makes hundreds of individual comparisons between Christianity and pagan religions. However, by carefully examining these criticisms we find that they all boil down to thirteen assertions:

1. Jesus is the "Sun" of God
2. Jesus birthday is a pagan high holy day.
3. Jesus' birth is an astrological reference.
4. Jesus is the latest in a long line of crucified saviours.
5. Jesus' miracles are stolen from other traditions.
6. Sunday worship is a pagan day of worship.
7. The stories of the Bible are based on the ages or houses of the Zodiac.

8. Jesus is just the Egyptian god Horus.
9. Jesus is just the Greek god Attis.
10. Jesus is just the Hindu god Krishna.
11. Jesus is just the Persian god Mithra.
12. The Bible and its stories are purely astrological.
13. Early Christians knew about these connections and blamed the devil.

Fortunately, the first seven points can be easily dismantled. Let's go through them quickly.

## 1. The Son and the Sun

One of the most egregious misrepresentations in Zeitgeist is that the phrase "Son of God" is derived from the phrase "Sun of God." Son and Sun are what are called **homophones**, or words that sound the same; however, this is only true in English, German, and a couple of other Scandinavian languages. In order for this assertion to be valid, one would have to show that Son and Sun are homophones in the original languages in question, specifically Egyptian, Hebrew, and Greek. Needless to say, Son and Sun are not homophones in any of these languages, let alone all three languages:

### Egyptian

Sun = Ra

Son = Emsi

### Hebrew

Sun = Shemesh

Son = Ben

### Greek

Sun = Helios

Son = Yiós

Greek it would appear comes the closest, but there is absolutely no evidence that any etymological connection exists and the pronunciations are not similar enough to make any obvious homophonic connection.

## **2. December 25th**

Zeitgeist also claims the Christ was born on December 25th in order to mark the winter solstice and the birth of the sun, warmer and longer days, and spring. There is, however, a serious problem with this. The Bible gives no evidence whatsoever that Jesus was born on December 25th. In fact, Jesus was born around the time of the Roman census, which according to most New Testament historians likely occurred in late March or early April, not December. We must recall that December 25th was not even proposed as the date of the birth of Christ until the rule of Constantine in 336 AD and not ratified as a holiday until the rule of Pope Julius I a few years later.

As a matter of curiosity Horus, the Egyptian god to whom Christ is likened was not born on December 25th either, but in the month of Khoiak, which is November (*Traditional Festivals: A Multicultural Encyclopedia, Volume 2, pg. 223*).

## **3. Three Kings Visit Christ**

Zeitgeist claims that three kings came to visit Christ as a child. This claim too can be dismissed easily. First, the Bible does not number the men who came from the east, only the presents they brought. Secondly, they were not kings but magi—wise men and likely spiritists.

## **4. Crucified Messiah**

Almost every god mentioned in Zeitgeist originated prior to 519 BC, the time of the first ever crucifixion. The fact that Zeitgeist repeat-

edly describes gods from cultures all over the world being crucified is nothing less than an embarrassing historical blunder. Crucifixion simply did not exist at the time that most of the pagan myths in Zeitgeist originated.

## **5. Miracles**

Miracles in ancient religious texts are as common as finding bugs under rocks and is evidence of nothing unless the similarities are uncanny.

## **6. Sunday Worship**

Sunday worship is by no means consistent among world religions. Jesus did rise from the dead on Sunday, but Sunday worship did not become a common practice in Christianity until the early 4th century AD, when Constantine and the Roman Catholic church adopted pagan practices under the auspices of making Christianity more familiar to people of other religions; in other words, the Catholic Church was interested in making Christianity seeker-friendly. Sunday worship is nowhere taught in the Bible; in fact, for the Jews and early Christians (who were Jews) Saturday was the Sabbath, or day of worship.

## **7. Ages of the Zodiac**

The Zeitgeist documentary makes several claims about Biblical figures and their relationship to various ages or houses of the zodiac. For instance, Moses is connected to Taurus because of the golden calf incident and Jesus is related to the age of Pisces because of the fish symbol used by Christians. The reality is that the houses of the zodiac are a 20th century invention. On this topic Noel Swerdlow, an expert in ancient astronomy at the University of Chicago says:

*“In antiquity, constellations were just groups of stars, and there were no borders separating the region of one from the*

*region of another... The modern ideas about the Age of Pisces or the Age of Aquarius are based upon the location of the vernal equinox in the regions of the stars of those constellations. But the regions, the borders between, those constellations are a completely modern convention of the International Astronomical Union for the purpose of mapping...and never had any astrological significance... so when [someone] says that the Christian fish was a symbol of the 'coming age of Pisces,' [he or she] is saying something that no one would have thought of in antiquity."*

These seven claims, therefore, are not even plausibly true. In fact, the claims are laughably silly and barely worthy of mention except for the unfortunate fact that these arguments are frequently used to attack Christianity.

## **8. The Egyptian God, Horus**

Zeitgeist draws, perhaps, the strongest comparisons between the Egyptian god Horus and Jesus Christ. To get to the bottom of this, let's list and answer the claims individually.

### **Born of a Virgin**

Not only was Horus not born of a virgin, but the story of Horus' birth itself speaks of Isis, Horus' mother, copulating with Osiris' magically animated corpse. Horus was not born of a virgin.

### **Star in the East**

Does not exist in the Horus myth.

### **Teacher at Twelve**

The Egyptian Form: Horus, the Child is the only known Egyptian story about Horus as a child and declares that he was hidden away in a marsh until he came of age to rule. Unless he was teaching swamp creatures, this claim is false.

### **Baptized and Began Ministry at 30**

This information does not exist in any historical bibliographic record of Horus' life. Anup, according to Zeitgeist, baptized Horus. However, there is no evidence for that claim. Anup was the god of embalming and had nothing to do with baptism.

### **Twelve Disciples**

The Liturgy of Funerary Offerings, the Fourth Ceremony speak of the followers of Horus, all four of them, and they were called Herushem-psu. Horus also had sixteen blacksmiths, but that number too has no bearing on the idea that Horus had twelve disciples.

### **Performed Miracles**

Horus did not walk on water but in one tale was thrown into the water, which we can all admit is not the same.

### **Called Lamb of God and Light of the World**

Horus was not known by any of these names. Most famously Horus was known as God on the Crocodile and God of the Sky.

### **Dead for 3 Days**

In some stories Horus is injured, especially it seems in the eyes, but does not die.

### **Resurrected**

Spiritist writings from Helena Petrova Blavatsky and Alice Bailey portray Horus rising from the dead as a sun rises in the east from the long night, but both of these women were 19th and 20th century occultists. This information is missing from the Horus myth. No Egyptological records confirm Zeitgeist's claims.

## **9. The Greek God Attis**

The story of Attis is as follows: Zeus raped Cybele and she gave birth to Agdistis, a hermaphroditic demon. Agdistis was so wild and powerful that everyone feared him, even the Gods. So they castrated him

and threw his genitalia to the ground, where an almond tree sprung up. Then Nana, a river demigod, ate an almond from the tree, became pregnant by it, and gave birth to Attis. Cybele, Attis' grandmother, of a kind, fell in love with Attis, but he wanted the king's daughter, not his grandmother. So Cybele used her magic to drive him mad, where-with he castrated and killed himself. Zeus, feeling for Cybele, whom he had earlier raped, agrees to cause his body to not decay, his hair to grow, and his pinky finger to move.

So pretty much exactly like the story of Jesus. Even the similarity of the resurrection of Attis (if you can call it that) does not first appear in literature until 150 years after Christ.

Dr. Walter Burkert says of Attis,

*“There is no evidence for a resurrected Attis, even Osiris [father of Horus] remains with the dead.”*

## 10. Krishna

The first known text of the Mahabharata, the work in which the Krishna myth is told, dates to the first century AD, which, of course, is after Christ.

The story of Krishna does not match any of the characteristics described in Zeitgeist. Krishna was not born of a virgin but was the youngest of seven children, there is no star in the east, there is no crucifixion, and there is no resurrection. Krishna is killed when a hunter mistakes him for a deer; Krishna does die and goes to heaven but stays dead.

## 11. Mithra

### Born of a Virgin

Mithra was never born, but emerged from a rock. There is no record of whether or not the rock was a virgin.

### Dead 3 Days

Mithra was immortal and could not die. Therefore, Mithra was not dead 3 days.

### Resurrected

And because Mithra was immortal and could not die, Mithra could not have been resurrected.

## 12. Questionable Astrology

### Virgo the Virgin

Peter Joseph claims that the constellation Virgo is the Virgin Mary and Bethlehem. Let's look at each of these claims:

1. Virgo does mean virgin and Mary was a virgin; is this enough evidence to say that the birth of Jesus is astrological? I don't think so, especially when a stronger case would be that Virgo means "House of Bread."
2. Bethlehem does mean "House of Bread," but I have yet to find any historical, archeological, or scholarly source for Virgo being referred to as the "House of Bread." It is possible, but I haven't seen it.

### Sun Rise on the Southern Cross

The main problem here should be obvious to any amateur astronomer—the rising sun on the winter solstice is nowhere near the southern cross. In fact the rising sun is never near the southern cross in any season. But there are even more problems with this theory.

Dr. Noel Swerdlow, Professor of Astronomy and Astrophysics at the University of Chicago and who specialized in the study of astronomy in antiquity, writes,

*“That Crux, the Southern Cross, was not recognized as a separate constellation in antiquity...because, as seen from the*

*Mediterranean, it is low on the southern horizon and is surrounded on three sides by the stars of Centaurus, which is a large, prominent constellation, and the four bright stars of the Crux are included as stars of Centaurus in Ptolemy's star catalogue. It is only when you go farther to the south, so that Crux is higher in the southern sky, that it become prominent as a group of stars by itself, so its recognition had to wait until the southern voyages of the sixteenth century.*

In antiquity, therefore, the southern cross and the rising of the sun were not only in completely different places in the night sky, but the Southern Cross was not even recognized as a constellation until the sixteenth century.

### **The Bible and Twelve**

Zeitgeist claims that Bible uses the number twelve in numerous places as a symbol of the twelve signs of the zodiac:

- 12 Tribes of Israel
- 12 Sons of Jacob
- 12 Great Patriarchs: These first three are the same people.
- 12 Judges of Israel: There are twelve if you count, but the Bible never mentions it.
- 12 OT Prophets of Israel: There are 17 OT Prophets.
- 12 Kings of Israel: There were 41 Kings of Israel.
- 12 Princes of Israel: King Ahab alone had 70 sons/princes.

Keep in mind that it was the Babylonians who divided the constellations into 12 parts in 500 BC. All of the accurate uses of 12 in the Bible with the exception of the twelve disciples occurred before 500 BC. There is a plausible connection between the twelve disciples and the twelve tribes of Israel, but that just implies that the Bible borrowed from itself, not from pagan astrology.

### **13. Early Christians, Like Justin Martyr, Think the Devil Did it**

The claim of the Zeitgeist documentary is that early Christian thinkers like Justin Martyr didn't know how to deal with the startling similarities between Christianity and pagan myths and blamed the devil for wiley going ahead of Judaism and Christianity and modeling pagan myths after the one true God. Nothing could be further from the truth. Martyr writes:

*“From what has been already said, you can understand how the devils, in imitation of what was said by Moses [1450 BC], asserted that Proserpine [205 BC] was the daughter of Jupiter, and instigated the people to set up an image of her under the name of Kore... For, as we wrote above Moses said, ‘In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and unfurnished: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.’ In imitation, therefore, of what is here said of the Spirit of God moving on the waters, they said that Proserpine [or Coral] was the daughter of Jupiter. And in like manner also they craftily feigned that Minerva [c.200 BC] was the daughter of Jupiter, not by sexual union, but, knowing that God conceived and made the whole world by the Word, they say that Minerva is the first conception; which we consider to be very absurd, bringing forward the form of the conception in a female shape.”*

As we can see Justin Martyr referenced Greek mythology which post-dated Moses, not predated. This claim is simply false.

## Conclusions

In this article we have surveyed the top thirteen claims which Peter Joseph and the Zeitgeist documentary utilize in an attempt to discredit Christianity. As we have seen, the citations in Zeitgeist are questionable at best, many claims are misleading, and many claims are simply false. This article, however, is not written to be an exhaustive look at the claims of part one of Zeitgeist; in fact, quite the opposite. A great many claims have been left untouched in this article, but I will be linking to other articles in the Enrichment section for Session 04, which, when taken together, act as a scathing and complete critique of the information in Peter Joseph's Zeitgeist.