



The Zeitgeist Movie

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The Zeitgeist Movie & Other Myth Claims about Jesus

Why should we consider the stories of Osiris, Dionysus, Adonis and Attis as myth, yet think Jesus of Nazareth is history? The answer is because there is good primary source documentation for the latter and not for the former, for Jesus of Nazareth and not for the others.

There's a challenge to Christianity that seems to be growing in popularity: the Jesus we worship is just a fiction, a conglomeration of myths from the past. A film on the Internet called *Zeitgeist*, apparently well done, attempts to make the case that Jesus was a fiction created by cobbling together pieces of various myths. Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, has a whole chapter on this subject, and I recommend it highly for the case it makes for the historical Jesus. The challenge in *Zeitgeist* is why we should consider the stories of Adonis, Osiris, and the other pagan mystery saviors as fables, yet treat as factual essentially the same story told in a Jewish context.

I want you to think about this for a moment. Part of what we do at Stand to Reason is not just teach you what to think, but teach you how to think. So I'm going to sum up the argument, and I want you to ask yourself whether it works. What is the big idea of this challenge?

People make the challenge that Jesus is a fiction. How do we know He's a fiction? Because some of the details of His life have appeared in other literature from the past. There are some past mythical figures that have virtually all the

characteristics Jesus has in the Gospels: born of a virgin, 12 disciples, betrayed by a friend, died and rose again, etc. The Jesus story is just a reworking of those myths. You can see bits and pieces of the details borrowed from different myths that are just cobbled together to create the story of Jesus. This is taken as evidence.

Think about this. The claim is that Jesus is a fiction, a myth like the other so-called saviors in ancient literature. The evidence for that claim is pieces of seemingly similar detail from clearly and uncontroversially mythical characters. And the conclusion is that the story of Jesus must also be fictional.

Is that a good argument? And if not, why not?

I say these stories are allegedly similar because we are presuming the facts asserted in the challenge are true. In the *Tactics* book, you'll find a chapter called Just the Facts, Ma'am. Sometimes certain challenges with regards to Christianity can be resolved by just getting the facts straight. And that's one of the keys to answering this challenge. The facts in the challenge just aren't accurate.

Mithras is an individual in one of these mystery religions. The claim is that Mithras was born of a virgin and that's a parallel with Jesus, but not even the mythical Mithras was born of a virgin. Mithras was born out of a rock so there is no parallel there. The challengers claim Mithras was born on December 25th, but Jesus wasn't born on that date. There is no biblical or Christian claim that Jesus was actually born on this date. We simply celebrate His birth on that date.

It turns out that a lot of the facts don't match up as claimed. There are problems with the factual characterizations of these other mythologies insofar as they allegedly parallel the life of Jesus. But even if we take the facts offered at face value even if Mithras was born of a virgin, and Jesus was born on December 25th there's something else even more fundamental with this challenge. This is a classic example of application of the Colombo tactic, the second question. Once we get a clear picture of what they believe Jesus is a myth we want to know why they believe it.

Here's the problem. This is an example of circular reasoning. It's an example of assuming what you are trying to prove. (It also falters in another way and I'll explain that in a moment.) I have said in the past that whenever anyone attacks something other than the Christian claim itself that they're missing the point. For example, they are missing the point when we say that Jesus is the Messiah, risen from the dead, and someone responds by sayings that we believe that only because we were raised in a Christian country. Notice how these objections are not focusing on the idea, they're focusing on you. That's a mistake. That should be a red flag whenever the argument is about something else.

So what is the something else here? The something else is the myths. So Jesus is a fictitious person. How do you know? I know because I have these other myths. What does the evidence of myths from the past, even prior to the time of Christ that sound like Christ, have to do with whether Jesus is a historical person? Here's the answer: absolutely nothing. Those myths are unrelated to the question of whether Jesus' story is true. Those myths are only valuable if you first determine that Jesus is a fiction by looking at the primary source historical documentation. If you look at the historical record and decide that it is unreliable, if you first conclude that there is no good reason to believe that Jesus of Nazareth existed the way the Biblical records say He did, then it might then, and only then be useful to ask the question: How did this story come to be?

Here I'm using C.S. Lewis's words: *It does no good to talk about how a person came to be wrong unless you first establish that he is wrong to begin with.*

Here's why he lied. Do you notice that when I make that statement "Here's why he lied" I am presuming something? He lied. I have to show that a person lied before it makes any sense to say that I have good reasons to show why he lied. We first have to show that Jesus is a fiction before it makes any sense to ask how the fiction came to be. All of this evidence from other myths turns out to be evidence for how a fiction could come to be, but only after you know it is a fiction. It is not evidence that it's a fiction. That's a different question. Yet that is how this evidence is offered

in *Zeitgeist* and other times I've heard it.

So why should we consider the stories of Osiris, Dionysus, Adonis, and Attis as myth, yet think Jesus of Nazareth is history? The answer is because there is good primary source documentation for the latter and not for the former, for Jesus of Nazareth and not for the others. The documentation is very different. And if the historical evidence for Jesus of Nazareth taken on its own merits is good, then it doesn't matter if there are other myths that have some similar details.

Michael Shermer raises this myth challenge in his debates with Christians. He says there are other dying messiahs and rising messiahs all over ancient literature. Jesus is just another one of them.

Part of my response to that is this. I could go up to Michael Shermer and say to him that he was Michael Shermer, right? And when he responded he was, I could say no, he couldn't be. Why not? Because I just met five different people who said they were Michael Shermer in the last three weeks. Of course, it doesn't mean this is the real Shermer no matter how many imposters there are. The existence of impostors doesn't undermine the possibility that there could be the real Shermer. That fact is determined by different information and not by counting the heads of the impostors.

Did you know there's a book that was written around the turn-of-the-last-century about a ship that was an unsinkable ship, which hit an iceberg on its maiden voyage and sank? The name of the ship was the Titan. This is remarkable because some 15 years later the Titanic sank on its maiden voyage after hitting an iceberg. Now what if you had read the novel and then later heard that a ship called the Titanic had actually sunk? I'm sure you can see that rejecting the story of the Titanic on its face would be foolish [if it was] only because you'd read a novel similar to the actual event. Whether or not the Titanic sank is determined by the evidence for its sinking, unrelated to any other fictional stories that were like it.

By the same token, the story of Jesus described in the primary source documents, the historical

documents we know popularly as Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, stands alone on its own merit. The story stands or falls on the strength of the historical evidence.

If it turns out, based on the historical information, Jesus story is false, then it becomes interesting to ask where such a story come from if it isn't rooted in history. But you only do that work, the explaining how the fiction came to be, after you can demonstrate by separate evidence the story is a fiction to begin with. And that's what's wrong with Zeitgeist and every other similar challenge.

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