

Word Magazine # 57

Did the Gospels “plagiarize” from pagan myths?

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I have recorded and posted [WM # 57 Did the Gospels “plagiarize” Pagan Myths?](#)
Below are some notes from this episode:

I recently stumbled upon a youtube video by a young atheist apologist named Jaclyn Glenn titled [“Disproving Christianity: Jesus is a Lie”](#) (posted in 2013). I thought it might be worthwhile to offer a brief critique.

Her main argument: She claims that that Christians plagiarized the life of Jesus from myths of various pagan deities, including:

The Egyptian god Horus,

The Hindu/Indian god Krishna,

And the Persian/Roman god Mithras.

Here are five logical and factual problems with this claim:

1. She does not use primary sources to make these claims but biased and inaccurate summaries.

She makes reference to only one original source (the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* for Horus), and that in name only with no direct citations. Her other references are to either her own summaries of these accounts or to those made by others, all of which are surely hostile to historical Christianity.

For an example of a refutation of Horus/Jesus parallels [see this site](#).

There is a major difference between pagan mythological accounts and the Biblical narrative which are rooted in recognizable reality.

Example: She suggests that Horus also may have experienced a virgin birth. This is how the Wikipedia article on Horus summarizes the myth of his origin:

Horus was born to the goddess Isis after she retrieved all the dismembered body parts of her murdered husband Osiris, except his penis, which was thrown into the Nile and eaten by a catfish, or sometimes by a crab, and according to Plutarch's account used her magic powers to resurrect Osiris and fashion a golden phallus to conceive her son (older Egyptian accounts have the penis of Osiris surviving).

Once Isis knew she was pregnant with Horus, she fled to the Nile Delta marshlands to hide from her brother Set, who jealously killed Osiris and who she knew would want to kill their son. There Isis bore a divine son, Horus.

This is hardly comparable to the virginal conception in the historical Biblical narratives of Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2.

2. She makes the unsubstantiated claim that the wide circulation of these myths pre-date Christianity.

In fact, though there were pre-Christian myths of various deities, those in the Western world did not come to know many of them until they were written about by Greek and Roman authors. Example: Those in the Greco-Roman world would most likely have come to know about Horus not by reading the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* but by reading Plutarch's retelling of the Isis, Osiris, Horus myth in his [*Moralia*](#). Plutarch lived from c. 40-120 AD. Those in the larger Greco-Roman world might not have even heard of Horus till long after the Christian movement began and the NT Gospels had been written.

For a similar problem with supposed parallels between Christianity and Mithraism, see Ronald H. Nash's book *The Gospel and the Greeks* (P&R, 1992, 2003): pp. 133-138. Nash concludes that the major problem with this theory is "the fact that the timing is all wrong," since "the flowering of Mithraism occurred after the close of the NT canon, too late for it to have influenced the development of first-century Christianity" (p. 137).

3. She ignores the possibility that the influence may have run in the opposite direction.

Pagan articulation of their divine myth may have been influenced by the rising popularity of the Christian Gospels.

4. She wrongly assumes that there would have been a large gap of time between the life of the historical Jesus and the development of myths borrowed from other religions.

She does not deny the historicity of the life of Jesus. But she does not acknowledge that the Gospels and other Christian writings were written soon after his life, that they share in wide agreement about the basic facts of Jesus' life across multiple sources, and that contemporary eyewitnesses might easily have challenged anything that was inaccurate.

5. It does not make sense to posit that monotheistic Jewish Christians would have borrowed from polytheistic pagan myth to enhance the story of Jesus.

For Israelite hostility to paganism read Isaiah's attack on idolatry in Isaiah 44 or the Psalmist's in Psalm 115. Then read about Paul's visit to pagan Athens in Acts 17.

Conclusion: You may embrace or reject the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus but to claim that they have their origin in pagan myths is illogical and historically inaccurate.

JTR