

Theological Equipping Class

March 15, 2020

Does Christianity borrow ideas from pagan myths?

Introduction

Floods and creation: Enuma Elish and the Epic of Gilgamesh

Horus, the falcon god of Egypt (and Osiris, Dionysius, and Mithra...)

Seven Things to Know about Alleged Parallels:

1. There are actual similarities between Christianity and other religions.
 - Exercise 1: name this pastor

 - Exercise 2: Islam and Christianity

 - Exercise 3: Chairs and windows

2. Some similarities are inevitable.
 - "We might add that all religions, if they are to gain any converts, must appeal to universal human needs and desires. Should we be surprised, then, to discover parallels between Christianity and any other religion regarding the offer of life after death, identification with the deity, initiation rites, or a code of conduct." (*Reinventing Jesus*)

 - A Murder Mystery
 - A: explosion; B: fireworks; C: backfire; D: gunshot
 - Do you conclude that nothing at all happened?
 - Do you conclude that all of that happened?

3. Some of the so-called parallels are just completely made up.
 - "Wikipedia is the best thing ever. Anyone in the world can write anything they want about any subject. So you know you are getting the best possible information." (Michael Gary Scott)

 - Mithras:
 - Lion and Lamb?

 - Sacrifice of self?

4. The overwhelming majority of similarities are superficial.
 - Apples and oranges

 - Virgin birth

 - Resurrection
 - "Each mystery religion taught its own version of the myth of the dying and resurrecting Godman, who was known by different names in different places." (Freke and Gandy, *The Laughing Jesus*)

 - Osiris?

 - Cyclical "resurrection"?

 - "It is superficial and unfounded to say that the study of the history of religions has shown the dependence of the resurrection of Jesus on mythology. On the contrary, it is precisely the comparison with the history of religion that gives rise to the strongest objections to any kind of mythifying of the resurrection of Jesus." (Walter Kunneth)

5. Some of the similarities are intentional and apologetic.

- "the beginning of the gospel of..." Caesar?

- *So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for " 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, " 'For we are indeed his offspring.' Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:22-31)*

6. The borrowing often goes in the other direction.

- 33-100AD

- 101-300AD
 - blood sacrifice: good for 20 years!!!

 - "body and blood"

- 301-500AD

7. These claims have been around for centuries.

- “The Christians have used the myths of Danae and the Melanippe, of the Auge and Antiope in fabricating this story of virgin birth!” (Celsus)
- Why are they back?

THE QUESTION: *Did the events described in the New Testament actually occur?*

So what should you do the next time someone mentions some sort of pagan parallel?

1. Locate the primary source.
2. Determine if that parallel is actually all that parallel or if the similarity is superficial and shallow.
3. Determine whether the supposed parallel precedes or succeeds the New Testament.
4. Determine whether the supposed parallel connects to the New Testament—or to later Christian traditions.