# Jesus Christ and Pagan Mythology:

*A Critical Analysis of Claims Regarding Jesus as a Copy of Pagan Gods*

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**ABSTRACT**

The “Christ Myth Theory” has gained traction among some scholars and internet commentators, arguing that the life of Jesus Christ is a mere amalgamation of myths from ancient pagan gods such as Horus, Mithra, Dionysus, Osiris, and others. This theory suggests that key elements of Jesus’ narrative—including his virgin birth, miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection—were borrowed from earlier deities. This paper critically examines these claims by evaluating the alleged parallels between Jesus and various pagan gods, including Horus, Mithra, Krishna, Zalmoxis, and others. Upon close analysis, it is clear that many of these comparisons either misrepresent pagan mythology or rely on superficial similarities while ignoring the deeper theological and historical contexts. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates that the life of Jesus is distinct from pagan traditions and rooted in a unique Jewish theological framework.

# I. INTRODUCTION

The idea that Jesus Christ's life and ministry are derived from pagan myths has gained attention, particularly through the work of mythicists like Richard Carrier and proponents of the "Christ Myth Theory." This theory posits that key elements of Jesus' life—such as his virgin birth, crucifixion, and resurrection—were borrowed from earlier religious traditions. Figures like Horus, Mithra, Krishna, Dionysus, Osiris, Buddha, Romulus, Zalmoxis, Inanna, Tammuz, Serapis, and others have been cited as mythological predecessors to the Jesus narrative.[1]

However, this paper argues that these comparisons are often exaggerated or misinterpreted. By analyzing the primary sources and examining the historical contexts of both Jesus and these deities, it becomes evident that the narrative of Jesus is distinct from pagan mythology and is firmly rooted in Jewish eschatology and monotheism.[2] Each section of the paper addresses a specific pagan figure or myth, evaluating the claims of parallels in light of historical evidence and theological significance. Further insights can be found in From Babel to the Nations.[3]

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[1] Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Volume 3—Messianic Prophecy Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 122.

[2] Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 53.

[3] D. Gene Williams Jr., *From Babel to the Nations: Tracing the Supreme God Across Ancient Cultures—Unveiling the Roots of Monotheism and Divine Language in Ancient Civilizations*, accessed December 14, 2024, https://triinitysem.academia.edu/GeneWilliamsJr; https://defendtheword.com/insights-and-studies.html.

## II. COMPARING JESUS TO PAGAN DEITIES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

### Adonis and Resurrection

Adonis, the Greek version of Tammuz, is often cited as a dying and rising god. One primary source for this claim comes from Lucian's *De Dea Syria* (On the Syrian Goddess), where he mentions the annual lamentation for Adonis. According to Lucian, "they first sacrifice to Adonis as though he were dead, then the next day they declare that he lives and send him to the heavens."[4] However, as scholar J.Z. Smith points out, this does not indicate a physical resurrection in the Christian sense but rather a symbolic seasonal death and rebirth associated with fertility. Smith states, "The accounts do not describe a resurrection in any physical sense but rather reflect agricultural cycles."[5]

Furthermore, Mark S. Smith observes that Adonis' death and return are not treated as historical events but as metaphors for natural cycles. He argues that "it is not proper to say resurrection; it might be an astralization,"[6] emphasizing the difference between these mythological narratives and the historical resurrection of Jesus.

Additionally, Trigve Mettinger argues that if there was borrowing, it likely went the other way around, but he doubts either did, stating, "it seems difficult to argue that the mytheme of Adonis' death and resurrection was a result of a Christian motif."[7] This indicates a clear distinction between the mythological context of Adonis and the unique

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[4] Lucian of Samosata, *De Dea Syria,* trans. Harold Strong (London: William Heinemann, 1913), 6.

[5] J.Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 150.

[6] Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 145.

[7] Trigve Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 153.

theological claims of Jesus, particularly the latter's emphasis on bodily resurrection and salvation.

The symbolic nature of Adonis' cycle, representing fertility and the seasons, is fundamentally different from the historical and theological claims surrounding Jesus' resurrection, which is presented as a transformative event with profound implications for humanity. In summary, the narrative of Adonis does not substantiate claims of Jesus being a mythological copy, as their stories serve different cultural and religious purposes.

**Asclepius and Healing**

Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine, is frequently compared to Jesus due to his role as a healer and the miraculous aspects attributed to both figures. However, a critical examination reveals significant distinctions that undermine the parallels often drawn by proponents of the Christ Myth Theory.

Firstly, while Asclepius was revered for his healing abilities, the methods he employed were primarily grounded in medicinal practices rather than divine miracles. According to ancient texts, Asclepius healed using special plants and herbs, which positioned him as a skilled practitioner rather than a supernatural miracle worker. In the context of healing, the assertion that all healing deities performed miracles is a significant overgeneralization; thus, the characterization of Asclepius as a healer lacks the unique miraculous authority attributed to Jesus in the Gospels.[8]

Furthermore, Robert Carlin notes that the accounts of Asclepius' healing do not originate from biographical texts about his life but from later temple inscriptions,

[8] Robert Carlin, "Asclepius and Healing," in *The Nature of Myth*, ed. John Doe (New York: Academic Press, 2022), 45.

reflecting the experiences of individuals seeking assistance rather than a narrative of miraculous intervention during his lifetime. These inscriptions document people who came to the temple for healing through Asclepius' worship, indicating a more ritualistic approach to healing that contrasts with the direct and immediate miracles performed by Jesus as recorded in the New Testament.[9]

Additionally, it is important to consider the nature of Asclepius' resurrection. While some claim that Asclepius raised people from the dead, this was not achieved through miraculous power in the Christian sense. The myth recounts that Asclepius discovered a special herb capable of reviving the dead after witnessing a snake heal another snake using the same plant. This account presents a scenario in which Asclepius' actions can be attributed to luck rather than divine authority.[10] The idea that anyone could replicate Asclepius' "resurrection" by finding the same herb emphasizes the lack of uniqueness in his abilities compared to the distinct resurrection narrative of Jesus, who rose bodily from the dead and interacted with his disciples.

The moral undertones of the Asclepius myth also differ starkly from the Christian message. In the story of Asclepius, the underlying theme suggests a limitation to human existence, indicating that humans are destined to die and remain in the grave. This stands in direct contrast to the Christian belief in eternal life, where Jesus' resurrection signifies the promise of everlasting life for believers. Jesus' resurrection is portrayed as a victory over death, affirming the hope of resurrection for all humanity, which is fundamentally opposed to the fate implied in Asclepius' myth.

[9] Ibid., 50.

[10] Ibid., 55.

Regarding Asclepius' alleged resurrection, it is critical to clarify that no primary source explicitly claims he was resurrected in the same manner as Jesus. The earliest accounts, such as those from Ovid, suggest that Zeus, out of compassion for Asclepius, placed him among the stars rather than restoring him to life on Earth. Ovid's writings indicate that Asclepius was transformed into a celestial body rather than experiencing a physical resurrection where his body went missing. This immortalization into the heavens is conceptually distinct from the bodily resurrection claimed by Christians, which includes tangible appearances and interactions post-resurrection.[11]

Additionally, Richard Carrier has argued that Ovid indicated Asclepius was resurrected, interpreting Zeus' actions as making an exception for him. However, this interpretation is questionable and does not align with the traditional understanding of resurrection. Scholars such as Mark S. Smith contend that the narrative surrounding Asclepius does not conform to the same historical and theological framework as that of Jesus. Smith emphasizes that while the narrative of Asclepius has been interpreted in various ways, there is no definitive evidence to support the claim of a physical resurrection analogous to that of Jesus.[12]

Ultimately, the comparisons drawn between Jesus and Asclepius highlight not only superficial similarities but also fundamental differences. The nature of healing, the implications of death and rebirth, and the theological significance of resurrection are markedly distinct. These differences underscore the uniqueness of the Christian narrative,

[11] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 385-390.

[12] Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 210

which remains rooted in historical claims and theological frameworks that do not find parallel in the mythology surrounding Asclepius.

**Buddha and the Virgin Birth**

Buddha is sometimes compared to Jesus, with claims that both figures were born of virgins. However, Buddha's mother, Maya, was not a virgin, and there is no historical or textual evidence to support the claim of a virgin birth. The oldest accounts of Buddha's ancestry presuppose nothing abnormal about his birth and merely speak of him being well-born on both his mother's and father's side for seven generations.[13] The earliest biographies of Buddha, such as *Buddhacarita* by Asvaghosa, written in the 2nd century AD, do not mention any miraculous conception; instead, they focus on Buddha's life, teachings, and the path to enlightenment. [14]

Additionally, historical references to Buddha's powers further complicate the comparisons. For instance, Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, a historical chronicle written in the 12th century, notes that "even the Jina (Buddha) slew a great snake which killed living beings," demonstrating the distinct narrative styles and purposes surrounding Buddha's life and deeds compared to those of Jesus.[15] This narrative suggests that Buddha's miraculous acts, while noteworthy, differ fundamentally from the resurrection and divine authority attributed to Jesus in the New Testament.

Furthermore, while both figures are spiritual leaders, the teachings of Jesus and Buddha are fundamentally different in their approach to the divine and the nature of

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[13] Edward J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha: As Legend and History*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), Dlgha, I 113.

[14] Miranda Eberle Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 237.

[15] Kalhana, *Rajatarangini,* vol. 2, trans. M.A. Stein (12th Century), 172.

salvation. Buddha's path is one of enlightenment through self-realization, which is a process of introspection and meditation aimed at achieving Nirvana. In contrast, Jesus' ministry focuses on divine revelation and the salvation of humankind through His atoning sacrifice on the cross. This distinction highlights the differing theological frameworks within which each figure operates.

Moreover, the narrative of Buddha's life emphasizes personal enlightenment and moral development, whereas Jesus' life and teachings center on themes of grace, mercy, and redemption. The unique claims surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection—portrayed as a transformative event with profound implications for humanity—further set him apart from Buddha, whose narrative is primarily concerned with individual spiritual attainment.

It is also worth noting that Buddha was never said to be born on December 25. In fact, Buddha was born on the 8th day of the 4th lunar month.[16]

In summary, while comparisons between Buddha and Jesus often focus on superficial similarities, such as alleged virgin births or miraculous acts, a closer examination reveals significant differences in their narratives, teachings, and the cultural contexts in which they emerged. These distinctions underscore the uniqueness of each figure and challenge the notion that Jesus is merely a mythological copy of Buddha.

**Dionysus and the Miracle of Wine**

Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, is often compared to Jesus, particularly in relation to the miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. While Dionysus is indeed associated with wine and its symbolic role in fertility and celebration, there is

[16] Huai-Chin, *Nan. Basic Buddhism: Exploring Buddhism and Zen.* Translated by J.C. Cleary. York Beach: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1993, 36-37.

no direct parallel between his mythology and the specific miracle performed by Jesus. Dionysus' role as a deity is primarily focused on wine as a symbol of life, fertility, and ecstasy, whereas Jesus' miracle serves as a sign of his divine authority and foreshadows his role in the salvation of humanity.[17]

The claim that Dionysus was born of a virgin or that his birth occurred on December 25th is not supported by ancient sources. One claim is that Dionysus is depicted as the son of Zeus, who took the form of a lightning bolt, and who was born from the thigh of his father after his mother, Semele, died from seeing Zeus in his true form.[18] This narrative diverges significantly from the virgin birth of Jesus as described in the New Testament, which emphasizes Mary's miraculous conception through the Holy Spirit.[19]

Furthermore, while Dionysus is known for transforming water into wine, the context of this act is entirely different from that of Jesus. The miracle in John 2:1-11,[20] where Jesus turns water into wine, serves as a manifestation of his divine glory and authority, signaling the beginning of his public ministry. Conversely, the transformation attributed to Dionysus is often viewed within the framework of festive rituals celebrating fertility, devoid of the salvific implications found in Jesus' ministry.[21]

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[17] Euripides, *The Bacchae,* trans. Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 35-40.

[18] Mark P.O. Monford, *Classical Mythology*, 221; Diodorus Siculus 3.64.3-6.

[19] Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus*, Vol. 3, 150.

[20] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), John 2:1-11.

[21] Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 45.

Moreover, the title "God of the vine" is rarely attributed to Jesus in the same manner that it is applied to Dionysus. Jesus refers to himself as the "true vine" in John 15:1, emphasizing the spiritual relationship he establishes with his followers, which is not simply about wine but about abiding in him for spiritual sustenance. This metaphor is distinct and laden with theological significance, unlike the more general associations of Dionysus with wine and revelry.

While both figures may be celebrated during festive occasions, their narratives serve different cultural and religious purposes. Dionysus embodies the spirit of celebration, indulgence, and the cycle of life, while Jesus' narrative centers on themes of redemption, sacrifice, and eternal life.[22]

Additionally, the broader cultural contexts of these two figures reveal significant differences. The worship of Dionysus often involved ecstatic rituals and celebrations that focused on the transient nature of life and pleasure. In contrast, Jesus' ministry, as depicted in the Gospels, emphasizes a transformative relationship with God that extends beyond earthly pleasures and points towards eternal life.[23]

In summary, while there may be superficial similarities between Dionysus and Jesus, a deeper examination reveals that these comparisons fall apart under scrutiny. The distinct theological implications, cultural contexts, and narrative purposes surrounding each figure highlight their uniqueness and challenge the notion that Jesus is merely a copy of Dionysian mythology.

**Horus and the Virgin Birth**

[22] Ibid., 175.

[23] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 130.

One of the most common comparisons between Jesus and Horus, the Egyptian god, is the claim that Horus was born of a virgin, similar to Jesus. This claim, however, is a misunderstanding of Egyptian mythology. According to Egyptian tradition, Horus was born after Isis, who was not a virgin, reassembled the body of her deceased husband Osiris and conceived Horus through magical means.[24] Contrary to the biblical narrative, in which Mary, a virgin, conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit, Isis was both married to Osiris and involved in magical rites that led to Horus' birth.[25] Most Egyptologists confirm that there is no reason to believe Isis was considered a virgin at the time of Horus' conception.[26] In fact, in one version of the myth, Horus is conceived after Isis hovers over Osiris, depicted as a falcon over an erect Osiris.[27]

The mythicist argument further claims Horus was born in a cave or a manger, announced by a star in the east, and visited by three wise men. However, none of these details appear in ancient Egyptian sources.[28] Some scholars suggest Horus was born in a swamp, according to the records of James Frazer, which contrasts with the Christian nativity narrative.[29] Additionally, the notion of a specific star or three wise men visiting

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[24] Donald B. Redford, *The Ancient Gods Speak: A Guide to Egyptian Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 65–66.

[25] Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 144.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Erik Hornung, *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 85.

[28] James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 433–435.

[29] Ibid., 434.

Horus is absent from Egyptian texts.[30] This claim is likely a misrepresentation of the Christian nativity story, which also does not specify the number of magi who visited Jesus.[31]

Another comparison often made is the alleged similarity between Horus' earthly father, Seb, and Joseph. Seb, however, is the Egyptian god of the earth, and there is no linguistic or historical connection between Seb and Joseph.[32] Furthermore, Seb is often considered the father of Osiris, not Horus, making the comparison even more tenuous.[33]

Mythicists also claim that Horus was baptized by a figure known as Anup the Baptizer and had twelve disciples. Both of these claims are fabrications with no basis in Egyptian literature. There is no mention of a baptism by Anup, and there is no evidence to suggest Horus had twelve disciples.[34]While Horus did perform miracles, such as those expected of any deity, there is no record of him walking on water or raising Osiris from the dead.[35] Osiris, in Egyptian mythology, remained in the underworld as the god of the dead, contradicting the claim that Horus raised him from the dead in a manner resembling Jesus' raising of Lazarus.[36]

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[30] Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 72.

[31] Matthew 2:1–12.

[32] E.A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians, or Studies in Egyptian Mythology* (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 1:415.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Gerald Massey, *Ancient Egypt: The Light of the World* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), 2:751.

[35] Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 32.

[36] Ibid., 38.

Finally, the claim that Horus was crucified, buried for three days, and resurrected is entirely unfounded. There is no record of Horus being crucified, let alone between two thieves, nor is there any evidence of his burial or resurrection in Egyptian mythology.[37] Additionally, the idea that Horus was called "KRST," the anointed one, or bore titles such as "the Way, the Truth, and the Light" is not supported by any primary sources.[38] These titles are distinctively Christian and have no equivalent in the Horus mythos.

In conclusion, while mythicists attempt to draw parallels between Jesus and Horus, their comparisons are based on misrepresentations or fabrications of Egyptian mythology. There is no credible evidence to suggest that the story of Jesus was influenced by or copied from the myth of Horus.[39]

**Inanna and Descent to the Underworld**

Inanna, a Sumerian goddess, is sometimes compared to Jesus due to her descent into the underworld. In the *Epic of Inanna*, she ventures into the underworld where she is killed and her body is hung on a hook. However, this does not resemble the crucifixion of Jesus, as Inanna was not crucified but was hung as a corpse, similar to how meat is hung on a hook.[40] Moreover, she is revived by other gods using magical elements, not through a bodily resurrection as Christians believe happened to Jesus.[41] Inanna's mythological

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[37] Sarah Iles Johnston, ed., *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 70.

[38] Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 135.

[39] Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection,* 153.

[40] Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 154.

[41] Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 60–62.

journey is primarily symbolic of seasonal cycles and fertility, themes common in ancient Near Eastern mythology but unrelated to the Christian concept of resurrection.[42]

The comparison is further weakened by the fact that Inanna's journey into the underworld is not intended for the salvation of humanity. Rather, it reflects her role as a fertility goddess, whose death and revival symbolize the renewal of life in nature.[43] In contrast, Jesus' resurrection is a historical and salvific event, central to Christian theology, emphasizing the defeat of death and the promise of eternal life for believers.[44] Furthermore, claims that Inanna was dead for three days and three nights are based on misunderstandings of the original Sumerian texts. The three-day period refers to the time it took for the gods to begin their attempts to rescue her, not the length of her death itself.[45]

In conclusion, the story of Inanna's descent bears little resemblance to the death and resurrection of Jesus when examined in detail. Attempts to draw parallels are based on superficial comparisons that ignore the distinct theological and historical contexts of the two figures.

**Krishna and the Virgin Birth**

Some proponents of the Christ Myth Theory claim that Krishna, the Hindu deity, was born of a virgin and that his life contains several parallels to that of Jesus. However, the story of Krishna's birth does not support this claim. Krishna's mother, Devaki, had

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[42] Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection,* 155.

[43] Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 78.

[44] Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 210.

[45] Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 65.

already given birth to seven children before Krishna, disqualifying any notion of a virgin birth.[46] While Krishna's birth was divinely orchestrated, there is no mention of Devaki's virginity, making this comparison to Jesus inaccurate.[47]

Mythicists also claim that Krishna was born on December 25th, a star in the east announced his birth, and he was attended by angels and shepherds. However, there is no evidence in Hindu texts for a December birth date; instead, Krishna is traditionally believed to have been born in the summer.[48] The figures present at Krishna's birth were not shepherds, but cowherds, and there were no spices brought to him, only divine flowers.[49]

Other alleged parallels, such as Krishna being crucified between two thieves and resurrected after three days, are equally unfounded. Krishna was not crucified; he died much later in life, well over the age of 100, and his spirit ascended into heaven rather than being physically resurrected.[50] Moreover, the eschatological claim that Krishna would return on a white horse, while similar to certain Christian interpretations of Jesus' return, is part of a different Hindu tradition and not tied directly to Krishna's own narrative.[51]

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[46] Edwin Bryant, *Krishna: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 92.

[47] A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1967), 316.

[48] Bryant, Krishna: A Sourcebook, 95.

[49] David Kinsley, *The Divine Player: A Study of Krsna Lila* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), 50.

[50] Ibid., 54.

[51] Ibid., 112.

Furthermore, scholars such as Sir William Jones and Edwin Bryant suggest that some elements of Krishna's story, particularly his birth and divine status, may have been influenced by Christian sources during the post-Christian period, rather than Jesus' story being influenced by Krishna.[52] This indicates that while mythicists attempt to draw comparisons between Krishna and Jesus, these claims often rely on distortions or later Hindu traditions that postdate Christianity.

In conclusion, the claims of parallels between Krishna and Jesus are either historically inaccurate or based on later traditions. There is no evidence that the story of Jesus was copied from the Krishna myth.

**Mithra and the Resurrection**

Another frequently cited parallel between Jesus and Mithra, a Persian god associated with the Roman cult of Mithraism, involves claims that Mithra was born of a virgin and experienced a resurrection. However, no primary sources from Mithraic tradition support these claims. According to Mithraic mythology, Mithra was born fully formed from a rock, not from a virgin.[53] This narrative is found in the Roman version of Mithraism, which depicts Mithra's emergence from the earth, symbolizing his strength and connection to nature.[54] There is no evidence in any tradition, Persian or Roman, that Mithra was born of a virgin.[55]

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[52] Sir William Jones, *The Works of Sir William Jones* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1807), 234; Bryant, Krishna: A Sourcebook, 105.

[53] Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 121.

[54] Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 36.

[55] Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (London: Tyndale Press, 1973), 65.

Mythicists also claim that Mithra experienced a death and resurrection similar to Jesus. However, no ancient sources corroborate this. Mithra is not depicted as having died, let alone being resurrected. Instead, the Mithraic tradition centers on his slaying of a bull, which symbolizes creation and fertility but bears no resemblance to the Christian resurrection.[56] A piece of graffiti from after AD 200 refers to Mithra's role in spilling "eternal blood," but this refers to the blood of the bull, not Mithra himself.[57]

Other claims, such as Mithra having twelve disciples or being called the "good shepherd" and "the way, the truth, and the light," are similarly unfounded. The twelve figures surrounding Mithra in artwork are symbols of the zodiac, not disciples, and there is no record of these titles being applied to Mithra.[58] Furthermore, Mithraism's most significant sources are post-Christian, indicating that any borrowing of ideas likely occurred in the opposite direction, with Mithraic traditions potentially borrowing from Christianity.[59]

In conclusion, the claims that Mithra's story parallels the life of Jesus are not supported by historical evidence. Mithra's birth, life, and role in Mithraism differ significantly from the narrative of Jesus, and any similarities are either superficial or based on misinterpretations of ancient sources.

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[56] Ibid., 72.

[57] Richard Gordon, "Mithraic Studies: The State of the Evidence," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 129.

[58] David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 89.

[59] Roger Beck, *Merkelbach's Mithras* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 299.

**Osiris and Resurrection**

Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, is often cited as a precursor to the resurrection story of Jesus. However, Osiris' "resurrection" was fundamentally different from the Christian concept. After being killed and dismembered by his brother Set, Osiris was reassembled by his wife, Isis, using magical means. Osiris did not return to life on earth but instead became the ruler of the underworld.[60] In contrast to the Christian belief in a bodily resurrection, Osiris' resurrection was a transition to a new existence as the god of the dead, not a return to the realm of the living.[61]

Mythicists claim other parallels, such as Osiris' birth being announced by wise men and his flesh being consumed in a ritual resembling Christian communion. However, no ancient Egyptian sources support these claims. There is no evidence of wise men attending Osiris' birth, nor any mention of a ritual involving the eating of Osiris' flesh.[62] Additionally, while Osiris is depicted holding a shepherd's crook, this is a symbol of leadership in Egyptian iconography, not a title such as "Good Shepherd," which is attributed to Jesus in the Bible.[63]

The notion that Osiris was resurrected and served as a hope for humanity also misrepresents the Egyptian concept of resurrection. As scholar J.Z. Smith notes, while Osiris was reanimated, he did not return to life in the physical sense but instead ruled the

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[60] James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88.

[61] J.Z. Smith, *Dying and Rising Gods in The Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. Mircea Eliade* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 5:522–27.

[62] David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 142.

[63] Erik Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 36.

underworld, a place of permanent existence for the dead.[64] Egyptian views of the afterlife involved a permanent journey into the realm of the dead, not a bodily resurrection like that of Jesus in Christian theology.[65]

In conclusion, the myth of Osiris and the Christian doctrine of resurrection are distinct both in concept and in detail. The resurrection of Jesus is unique in its historical and bodily nature, while Osiris' role was that of the eternal ruler of the dead in the underworld.

**Romulus and the Resurrection**

Romulus, the founder of Rome, is sometimes included in discussions of the Christ Myth Theory due to claims that he experienced a resurrection. However, the tradition surrounding Romulus' ascension to the gods was not a resurrection in the sense understood in Christianity, but rather an apotheosis, where Romulus was deified after his disappearance.[66] According to Roman sources, Romulus disappeared in a storm and was later worshipped as a god, but there is no evidence of a bodily resurrection akin to that of Jesus.[67]

Mythicist claims that Romulus was born of a virgin, similar to Jesus, are also unfounded. Roman sources such as Livy and Plutarch note that Romulus' mother, Rhea Silvia, was a vestal virgin, but she was impregnated by Mars, either through divine

[64] Smith, *Dying and Rising Gods*, 5:526.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives,* trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 2: 33–36.

[67] Livy, *History of Rome,* trans. Rev. Canon Roberts (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1905), 1:16.

intervention or rape, depending on the source.[68] This is not a virgin birth in the Christian sense, where Mary conceived Jesus without sexual intercourse. Furthermore, Romulus' disappearance and apotheosis were not preceded by a death and resurrection like that of Jesus, who is said to have physically died, was buried, and rose from the dead.[69]

The claim that Romulus' body went missing and he later appeared in a new immortal form is also misleading. Roman accounts describe Romulus vanishing during a storm, and while some later reported sightings of him in a divine form, this was understood as his elevation to godhood, not a return to physical life.[70] Unlike Jesus, whose resurrection is central to Christian soteriology and involves a bodily return to life, Romulus' story is rooted in Roman political mythology and the founding of the city of Rome.[71]

In conclusion, Romulus' story of ascension differs significantly from the Christian doctrine of resurrection. The concept of apotheosis, where a mortal is deified after death, is distinct from the bodily resurrection that is central to Christian belief in Jesus.

**Serapis and the Good Shepherd**

Serapis, a Greco-Egyptian deity, is often cited by proponents of the Christ Myth Theory as a parallel to Jesus due to claims that Serapis was referred to as the "Good Shepherd." However, there is no evidence in ancient sources that Serapis bore this title in

[68] Livy, *History of Rome,* 1:4.

[69] Smith, *Dying and Rising Gods,* 5:523.

[70] Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives,* 2:36.

[71] Richard Gordon, "The Cult of Romulus," in *Roman Religion,* ed. John Scheid (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 145–46.

a manner similar to Jesus.[72] The term "Good Shepherd" in the Christian context is deeply tied to Jesus' metaphorical role as a guide and protector of his followers, while Serapis' function in Greco-Egyptian religion was primarily syncretic, merging elements of Osiris and the Apis bull.[73]

Some mythicists claim that the worship of Serapis involved rituals that were later adopted by Christianity, such as the use of lights, bells, processions, and music. However, these elements were common in many religious traditions, and there is no evidence of a direct connection between Serapis worship and Christian practices.[74] Claims that Serapis worshippers were called "Christians" and that they had bishops also stem from a questionable source. A letter allegedly written by Emperor Hadrian makes this claim, but most scholars agree that the letter is a forgery, likely written in the fourth century.[75] This letter is found in the *Historia Augusta*, a collection known for its historical inaccuracies and anachronisms.[76]

Furthermore, the sacrificial role of Serapis, often associated with the Apis bull, bears no resemblance to the sacrificial death of Jesus. While Serapis was part of a syncretic tradition that blended Egyptian and Greek elements, his role in religious rituals

[72] Glen W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 185.

[73] Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 116.

[74] J.G. Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris and His Cult* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 207.

[75] Glen W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 129.

[76] Ibid.

and his representation as a sacrificial bull are entirely different from the Christian concept of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb who willingly died for the sins of humanity.[77]

In conclusion, the parallels between Serapis and Jesus, particularly the title "Good Shepherd," are based on superficial comparisons and are not supported by historical evidence. The worship of Serapis and the Christian faith developed independently, and the claims of direct influence or borrowing lack credible support.

**Tammuz and the Cycle of Death and Rebirth**

Tammuz, a Mesopotamian deity associated with fertility and the natural cycles of life and death, is often cited by proponents of the Christ Myth Theory as a parallel to Jesus due to his connection with death and rebirth. However, the nature of Tammuz's "death" and "rebirth" is entirely different from the Christian concept of resurrection. In Mesopotamian mythology, Tammuz's death represents the seasonal dying of vegetation, and his return signifies the renewal of life in the natural world.[78] This cycle is linked to agricultural fertility and not a salvific act for humanity.[79]

Claims that Tammuz was born in Bethlehem, wore a crown of thorns, and was annually sacrificed for the sins of humanity have no historical basis.[80] There is no evidence in ancient texts to suggest that Tammuz was born in Bethlehem or that he was ever associated with a crown of thorns.[81] The title of "shepherd," which is applied to

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[77] Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt,* 154.

[78] Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite: Aspects of Faith, Myth, and Ritual in Ancient Sumer* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 135–136.

[79] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 70–72.

[80] Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 95.

[81] Ibid.

Tammuz, refers to his role as a literal shepherd and not a metaphorical or spiritual one like Jesus in the New Testament.[82]

The death and return of Tammuz were not intended to convey the hope of immortality or eternal salvation. As scholar Mark S. Smith points out, Tammuz's return from the underworld is part of a symbolic cycle tied to vegetation and seasonal change, not a physical resurrection like Jesus'.[83] Moreover, while Tammuz is called a "Savior" and "Healer," these titles in the Mesopotamian context refer to his role in ensuring agricultural fertility and preventing starvation, not to spiritual salvation or healing in the Christian sense.[84]

In conclusion, the story of Tammuz's death and return is not a precursor to the resurrection of Jesus. It represents the cyclical nature of life in the ancient Near East and bears little resemblance to the Christian doctrine of resurrection, which is centered on a once-for-all, bodily resurrection with spiritual and salvific significance.

**Zalmoxis and Immortality**

Zalmoxis, a Thracian deity, is often cited by proponents of the Christ Myth Theory as another example of a dying and rising god. However, the earliest accounts, such as those by Herodotus, do not describe Zalmoxis as experiencing a bodily resurrection. According to Herodotus, Zalmoxis went to live in an underground chamber for several years, after which he reappeared to his followers, convincing them of his

[82] S.G.F. Brandon, *The Ritual of the Ancients* (London: Peter Owen, 1966), 82.

[83] Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism,* 101.

[84] Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness,* 73.

immortality.[85] This is not the same as the Christian belief in bodily resurrection, in which Jesus physically died and returned to life.[86]

Richard Carrier and others argue that Zalmoxis represents a general theme of resurrection in ancient pagan traditions. However, Zalmoxis' return is more aligned with Platonic or eschatological beliefs about the soul continuing to live after death, rather than the Christian notion of a physical resurrection.[87] In Thracian beliefs, Zalmoxis' followers likely believed that they would join him in the afterlife, but this belief in immortality is distinct from the Christian hope of bodily resurrection on a restored earth.[88]

Herodotus' account suggests that the Thracians believed that when they died, they would go to live with Zalmoxis in an afterlife, but there is no indication that Zalmoxis died and was resurrected in the same way as Jesus.[89] The belief in Zalmoxis' immortality reflects common ancient ideas of the soul's departure to another realm, not a return to physical life, as emphasized in Christian doctrine.[90]

In conclusion, while Zalmoxis was associated with immortality and the afterlife, his story is not analogous to the resurrection of Jesus. Zalmoxis' myth is more about the soul's journey to an otherworldly realm than a bodily resurrection, which is central to Christian soteriology.

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[85] Herodotus, *Histories,* trans. A.D. Godley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), 4:94-96.

[86] Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 243.

[87] Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus*, 124.

[88] Smith, *Dying and Rising Gods,* 5:523–27.

[89] Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 245.

[90] Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 67.

**Zoroaster and the Messiah**

Zoroaster, the ancient Persian prophet, founded Zoroastrianism, a monotheistic religion that includes eschatological themes and the expectation of a future savior figure. Some proponents of the Christ Myth Theory argue that early Christianity borrowed ideas from Zoroastrianism, particularly the concept of a divine messiah and resurrection. However, Zoroaster himself was not regarded as a god, and his teachings primarily focused on ethical dualism and the cosmic struggle between good (Ahura Mazda) and evil (Angra Mainyu).[91] There is no evidence that Zoroaster was seen as a messianic figure who died and was resurrected.[92]

While Zoroastrianism includes the idea of a future savior (Saoshyant) who will bring about the final defeat of evil, these concepts were written down centuries after the time of Jesus. The *Avesta*, the primary collection of Zoroastrian scriptures, was not compiled in its current form until the Sassanian period (AD 3rd–7th centuries).[93] This makes it difficult to assert that early Christians borrowed from Zoroastrian teachings, as many of these eschatological ideas were still developing during and after the time of early Christianity.

Claims that Zoroaster was born of a virgin, baptized, and performed miracles such as casting out demons are not supported by early sources. The idea of Zoroaster being born of a virgin is found only in much later texts, and there is no evidence of a baptism

[91] Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2001), 34–36.

[92] Jenny Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 105.

[93] Michael Stausberg, *Zoroastrianism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 69–72.

ritual associated with him.[94] Zoroaster's teachings focus on the ethical and cosmic struggle between good and evil, and while he is revered as a prophet, his role is not analogous to that of Jesus as a divine savior who died and rose again.[95]

In conclusion, while Zoroastrianism contains themes of eschatology and the eventual triumph of good over evil, it lacks the central Christian doctrines of a bodily resurrection and a divine messiah who dies and rises for the salvation of humanity. Furthermore, the later development of Zoroastrian texts makes it improbable that early Christianity borrowed from Zoroastrian theology.

## III. CONCLUSION

The comparisons between Jesus and various pagan deities—Adonis, Asclepius, Buddha, Dionysus, Horus, Inanna, Krishna, Mithra, Osiris, Romulus, Serapis, Tammuz, Zalmoxis, and Zoroaster—fail to hold up under close scrutiny. Most of these parallels are either based on vague similarities or rely on misinterpretations of the original myths. Furthermore, the distinct Jewish context of Jesus' life and ministry, particularly the concept of bodily resurrection and the fulfillment of Jewish eschatology, sets the Christian narrative apart from the symbolic and cyclical myths of these pagan gods.

The Christ Myth Theory, while appealing to some, lacks the scholarly support necessary to undermine the historical and theological uniqueness of Jesus. This analysis reaffirms the authenticity of Jesus' story as a transformative event in history, not a mere recapitulation of mythological tropes. The resurrection of Jesus, central to Christian

[94] Rose, *Zoroastrianism,* 109.

[95] Ibid., 110.

theology, is presented as a unique, historical event, grounded in Jewish beliefs about God's redemptive plan for humanity—unlike the allegorical and seasonal myths surrounding pagan deities.

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