

Lesson 3: Origins of Judeo-Christian Religion

Teacher: Russ LaGrone

1.) Challenges Made by the World

The terms Christianity or Christian have positive connotations to someone who believes in Christ, but for many in the world they are held in disdain. The same is true for the term Judeo-Christian. Some of the reasons for this disdain are obvious – there is a claim of exclusivity that strikes many as arrogant or unfounded. Think of Jesus' statement in John 14:6 "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" or the insistence on one true God and no others. For many it seems natural and fair-minded to think that no one religion is better than any other, that no one idea about God or gods that should be thought better than any other belief.

Then there are the unspeakable deeds done by many under the banner of Christianity. The term Judeo-Christian now serves as a short-hand reference for all kinds of evil and injustice that have occurred in the centuries since Christ. In this lesson we will examine these objections made against the Judeo-Christian religion along with other challenges. We will also try to establish the validity and unique nature of Christianity as we examine its origins.

- What do you think is meant or implied by the term Judeo-Christian?
- What other challenges have you heard made against Christianity or Judeo-Christian religion?

2.) What is Different About Judeo-Christianity Compared to Other Religions

For Christianity to sustain a claim of exclusivity, it must be clearly different from other religions or beliefs.

- List what you believe distinguishes Christianity from other religions (i.e. compare and contrast). Include in those other religions, groups like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons). To the extent you have knowledge, your answer(s) should address:
 - Difference in moral teachings
 - Differences in religious or social practices
- What is distinctive about Christianity from Judaism?
- In your answers above consider the roles of the following:
 - Age of the religion
 - Texts (writings) that claim to be and are considered sacred or inspired
 - Evidence for the age and reliability of the texts
 - The number of writers of those texts and the requirement that they agree

3.) Transition from Judaism to Christianity

Consider this important fact – Christianity claims to be connected with another religion (Judaism) yet asserts that it has completely replaced it. This certainly distinguishes it from other beliefs, but also raises the standard that must be met. To defend his faith, a Christian must be able to establish the connection of the new religion to the old, defend the validity of the first religion and explain why it was replaced by the new. Yet, if this is successfully done, it goes a long way toward proving the truth of Jesus' claim in John 14:6. Here are some ideas we will cover in class:

- Predictions in the Old Testament that a new covenant would be established which would replace the covenant that existed solely between God and the Jews. List any such prophecies you know:
- The criticism made from the beginning by Roman skeptics that Christians should not claim to both be connected with Judaism and its sacred texts and to have replaced them.
- The continued strong emphasis on monotheism (different than all the ancient world) that characterized Christianity as well as Judaism. But with a new and important revelation regarding the nature of God (see the next section).

4.) The Unique Nature of Christ's Resurrection and Its Implications

The central claim of Christianity is that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and a future resurrection is assured for all who are faithful to him. It is also his death and resurrection that serve as the justification of the establishment of a new covenant replacing the old. For this reason, the resurrection of Christ has always been attacked by skeptics of Christianity – most recently that it is a myth similar to many other myths of the ancient world. We will examine what sets it apart and what confirms its reality.

- There were myths in the ancient world about gods who died or appeared to die and were found to be alive, but nowhere do you find the idea that a literal man died and was found alive in physical form never to die again. Note the mocking of this idea by the philosophers of Athens (Acts 17:16-34 emp. on vs. 32).
- The belief by all Christians from the very first that Jesus was physically resurrected. The immediacy of this belief cannot be questioned and it destroys any idea of a myth about Christ slowly developing over generations.
- The conversion of Jews in the city where Jesus died and their immediate embracing of the fact that he was not only Christ (despite being crucified) but was also God. He is repeatedly called Lord by his earliest followers and other terms that were solely devoted to God, yet he is seen as God the Son, distinguished from God the Father. This groundbreaking historical fact cannot be explained logically other than by the reality of his resurrection.