

## JESUS THE COPY CAT?

*By Lee Strobel*

The idea of the mythological Jesus is all over the internet and in popular books. The claim is basically this: Christianity is actually a copycat religion that stole its beliefs from earlier mythology or so-called 'mystery religions'. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus never happened – it was merely a story that Christians plagiarised from ancient mythology.

This idea was popularised by **The Da Vinci Code, which said: "Nothing in Christianity is original."** And when the claim is first presented, the evidence sounds strong. For instance, proponents say that long before Jesus, there was a mystery religion built around worship of a mythological god named **Mithras. They say Mithras was born of a virgin... in a cave... on December 25... was considered a great traveling teacher... had 12 disciples... sacrificed himself for world peace... was buried in a tomb... and rose again three days later.**

Does that sound familiar? On the surface, it seems like strong evidence that Christianity stole its beliefs about Jesus from Mithraism. In fact, you might be feeling spiritual vertigo. How would you **answer this challenge? Well, let's look at the other side of the story. We'll go down the list of supposed parallels between Mithras and Jesus.**

**Mithras was born of a virgin in a cave. That's what popular writers say, but when you go back to the original myth, you find that Mithras actually emerged fully grown out of a rock – and he was wearing a hat! There was no virgin and no cave. Besides, nowhere does the Bible say Jesus was born in a cave anyway.**

**Mithras was born on December 25. Okay, but so what? The Bible doesn't tell us the date that Jesus was born. Some think it was in the spring; others think it was in January. It wasn't until centuries later that Christians chose Dec. 25 as the date to celebrate his birth because it was close to the Winter Solstice when there were many pagan celebrations and Christians hoped to influence those celebrations for Christ. So there's no parallel between Mithras and Jesus here either.**

Mithras was a traveling teacher with 12 disciples. No, he was supposedly a god, not a teacher, and the Iranian Mithras had one follower while the Roman Mithras had two – not 12.

Mithras sacrificed himself for **world peace. No, he didn't! He was known for killing a bull. He didn't sacrifice himself for anything or anyone.**

**Mithras was buried in a tomb and resurrected after three days. No, there's no record of any belief regarding the death of Mithras, and hence there was no resurrection at all.**

Look what happened: The parallels between Mithras and Jesus evaporated when they were put **under the light of scrutiny. And here's the clincher: Though some of its ideas were in circulation before Jesus came, the Mithras mystery religion as we now know it didn't even exist in the West until after Christianity! So Christianity couldn't have stolen its beliefs from it.**

The nearly universal consensus of scholars around the world is that there are no examples of any mythological gods dying and rising from the dead that came before Jesus. These resurrection myths came after Christianity! So obviously Christianity could not have borrowed from them. On the contrary, they borrowed from Christianity.

Senior Swedish scholar T.N.D. Mettinger said he was going to take a decidedly minority position and claim there may have been a few of these stories before Jesus, but then he analysed them and said there were absolutely no parallels between them and Jesus because these myths dealt with such

things as the vegetation cycle. Ultimately, Mettinger concludes: "The death and resurrection of Jesus retains its unique character in the history of religions."