

URBAN LEGENDS OF THEOLOGY (Part 4)

Dismantling common misconceptions about God, the Bible and the Christian life

Fall 2025.1

Class Objective: To refine our faith and understanding by dismantling misconceptions regarding God, the Bible and the Christian life.

Class Overview

1. Introduce *Urban Legends of Theology* by Michael Wittmer
2. Clarify the meaning of the term urban legend as used in this class
3. Understand the degree of personal impact connected with various misconceptions
4. Elevate the pursuit of truth as the ultimate goal of analyzing error
5. Emphasize edification as the primary purpose of this study
6. Explore the following misconceptions in light of biblical truth:
 - ➔ a. The name of the Son of God is Jesus.
 - b. Unbelievers are annihilated in hell.
 - c. Justification means “just as if I had never sinned.”
 - d. We should forgive others for our own good.
 - e. Christianity is not a religion—it’s a relationship.
 - f. I don’t need church to have a relationship with God.

Notes

Review

- I. *Urban Legends of Theology* by Michael Wittmer, B&H Academic, 2023
 - A. Wittmer covers 40 myths or legends.
 - B. It is a companion book to three previous books by David Croteau:
 1. *Urban Legends of the Old Testament*
 2. *Urban Legends of the New Testament*
 3. *Urban Legends of Church History*
- II. The Meaning of Urban Legend
 - A. Wittmer’s use of urban legend
 1. “Something popularly believed—in the church or in culture or both—that is not true.”
- III. The Potential Impact of Various Myths or Urban Legends
 - A. “Some legends are more wrong than others, and some are more damaging than others. Some legends will rob you of peace and joy while others will damn you to hell. We must discern one from the other so we know how to handle each. Briars and wolves are both detrimental to sheep, but not in the same way. Wise shepherds gently guide sheep away from dense thickets, where as they shoot wolves dead. Likewise, some of these legends will merely scratch you faith, while others will have you for lunch. Still others are setups, meant to slow your walk so you are easier the catch.” *Wittmer*
 - B. ¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Matthew 7:15-18
 - C. ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. Acts 20:28-31

IV. The Pursuit of Truth Is the Ultimate Goal of Analyzing Error.

A. "Deconstruction [of error] is only the first, and by far easiest part, of following Jesus. Anyone can deconstruct, even those who do not believe in him. As we tear down these legends, we must give ourselves wholly to the truth that supplants them, lest we become wise as demons (James 2:19)." *Wittmer*

V. Edification Is The Primary Purpose of This Study.

A. "This is not a book to wave in someone's face for misstating doctrinal points. . . . If theology does not lead you to trust in Jesus more . . . you are doing it wrong. You are not following the truth but, quite possibly, an urban legend." *Wittmer*

B. ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds¹ and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ **Rather**, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. Ephesians 4:11-15

I. Urban legend: The Son of God is named Jesus.

A. Two important terms:

1. **Transliteration:** converting the spelling of a word from one alphabet to another.

a) The Aramaic word 'abbā' is transliterated into English as "Abba" (Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The Aramaic letters are represented by letters from the English alphabet.

2. **Translation:** conveying the meaning of a word from one language to another.

a) The Aramaic word 'abbā' means "father" and could have been translated by the English word father.

B. An illustration of the confusion arising from transliteration:

1. Yahweh became Jehovah through a process of vocalization and transliteration in which the consonants of the Hebrew name יהוה (YHWH) were combined with the vowels from another Hebrew word, Adonai ("my Lord"). This hybrid name, "Yehowah," was then Latinized to "Jehovah" by medieval Christian scholars, and this Latin version was later adapted into English. Jehovah is essentially a Germanic pronunciation of the Latinized transliteration of the Hebrew YHWH. It is the letters of the tetragrammaton (YHWH), Latinized into JHVH, with vowels inserted.

II. What shall we call Mary's Son?

A. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Matthew 1:20, 21

1. The name Joshua (יהושע *yehoshu'a*) means "Yahweh is salvation."

B. The chronology of translations with regard to the name of Jesus.

1. The Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek (Septuagint) about 200 years before the New Testament was completed. It transliterated the name *Jeshua* (Joshua) as *lēsous*.

a) For example, the Greek version of Joshua 1:1 reads, "It came to pass, after the death of Moses, the Lord spoke to *lēsous*."

2. The New Testament was written in Greek by the end of the first century. The New Testament authors substituted (transliterated) the Greek letters for the Hebrew letters for the name *Jeshua* (a shortened version of the Hebrew), resulting in *Iēsous*.
3. 100 years later the New Testament was translated into Latin (later as the Vulgate) where *Iēsous* was transliterated as *Iesus*.
4. The first **English** translation was the Wycliffe Bible (1382) and was a translation of the Latin versions transliterating the Latin to English as *Ihesus*.
5. Later English versions (the Tyndale Bible, 1534 and the Geneva Bible, 1560) though translated from Greek manuscripts, both read *Iesus*.
6. Only 50 years later, the King James Version (1611) was published and also used *Iesus*.
7. This means that the English name Jesus is a transliteration of a transliteration!
 - a) The Hebrew was transliterated into Greek and the Greek was transliterated into English.
8. Given that the KJV is the most influential Bible translation in history, modern English versions have not attempted to change the long-standing use of the name Jesus to its Hebrew form of Joshua.

III. Why should we connect the New Testament Jesus with the Old Testament Joshua?

- A. The whole Bible is telling us one story all connected to one man.
 1. “The Bible is not ultimately an instruction book for life or a moral encyclopedia of do’s and don’ts. It’s a great drama, an epic saga in which Jesus Christ is the heroic leading man.” Jeramie Rinne
 2. Both names, meaning “Yahweh is salvation,” point to the central story of the Bible.
- B. Jesus is at the center of all Scripture including the book of Joshua.
 1. And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Luke 24:27
- C. Joshua pictures imperfectly what Jesus has done perfectly.
 1. **Joshua** was to keep the law perfectly.
 - a) ⁶Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. Joshua 1:6, 7
 - b) **Jesus** is the perfectly obedient servant of the Lord.
 - (1) You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 1 John 3:5
 - (2) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15
 2. **Joshua** is to lead the people of Israel out of God’s judgment in the wilderness.
 - a) For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord; the Lord swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. Joshua 5:6

- b) **Jesus** delivers the people of God from judgment.
 - (1) ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned. John 3:17, 18
 - (2) For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:9
- 3. **Joshua** is to vanquish the enemies of God's people.
 - a) ⁵No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Joshua 1:5
 - b) **Jesus** has conquered the ultimate enemies of God's people.
 - (1) ¹⁵He [God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him [Jesus]. Colossian 2:15
 - (2) The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8
- 4. **Joshua** conquers through God-ordained military might.
 - a) **Jesus** conquers through God-ordained suffering and death.
 - (1) ¹⁴Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Hebrews 2:14-16
- 5. **Joshua** is to lead the people of Israel into a land of promise.
 - a) ²"Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. ³Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. Joshua 1:2, 3
 - b) "Remember the word that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, "The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land." Joshua 1:13
 - c) **Jesus** leads the people of God into the ultimate rest, salvation.
 - (1) ⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Hebrews 4:8-10
 - d) **Jesus** will bring the people of God into the new land of the new creation.
 - (1) But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:13