



Voodoo & Christianity in NOLA Bible Study

Written by Rev. Ken Babin of St. John Lutheran Church, New Orleans, LA



Leader Version



In Christ Alone

We Stand

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

At the 2016 LCMS Youth Gathering, you will have opportunities to walk the city and observe many unique aspects of the Crescent City. Things ranging from food to religion will be different from your hometown and daily experience. As Pastor Babin, the author of this study, reminds us, “New Orleans is a very multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious city. Just about every form of belief and religion is represented in some form in the city.”

As the study states, Louisiana Voodoo is a “cafeteria” religion in that followers often pick and choose from different cultural and religious belief systems. We live in a multi-religious country in which many citizens follow a cafeteria religious system. They want to pick a “religion” or spiritual discipline which is simply convenient or fulfills their desires or makes them comfortable without sacrifice. These false religions pull on our desires and thoughts as well, regardless of our time in the Christian faith. If only they were as easy to spot as “Voodoo” signs or tourist traps connected to Voodoo in New Orleans!

Through your preparation and time in New Orleans, you will have many opportunities to discuss belief systems present in your daily lives. By God’s grace, in that discussion you and your youth are able to celebrate the gift of faith in the one true God and the gift of abundant and eternal life in Jesus Christ. We pray for God’s blessings upon your study and discussion around topics of Voodoo, evil, temptation, and the blessing of faith in Christ above all things.

In Christ Alone,
LCMS Youth Ministry



INTRODUCTION: AN OVERVIEW ON VODOO

As you will discover, New Orleans is a very multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious city. Just about every form of belief and religion is represented in some form in the city. One of the most famous religious beliefs is Voodoo.

Q: What have you heard about Voodoo? How have you seen it portrayed on TV or in movies? What words or images come to mind?

Allow for discussion. There's no right or wrong answer.

Voodoo first originated in West Africa and then traveled over to North America with the bringing of slaves to America. The Voodoo that is practiced in Haiti and Louisiana is derived from West African Voodoo blended with aspects of Roman Catholicism. This happened when the slaves reached the New World and were then pressured to convert to Catholicism. The mixing of Voodoo and Catholicism is found in Latin America, Cuba, Haiti and Louisiana.

Louisiana Voodoo has a strong emphasis on spirits that supervise everything. Spiritual forces, which can be kind or mischievous, shape daily life and intercede in the lives of their followers. Connection with these spirits can be achieved through dance, music, singing, and the use of snakes.

Deceased ancestors can also intercede in the lives of Voodoo followers. Slaves changed the African names of these spirits to the names of Catholic saints as part of the blending of West African Voodoo with Roman Catholicism.

Voodoo is incompatible with God's Word in several ways: the true God is not worshiped, Jesus is secondary to the spirits, and mystical practices prevail.

Women in Louisiana Voodoo who presided over rituals and ceremonies used charms and magical potions to become known as Voodoo Queens. The most well-known Voodoo Queen was Marie Laveau of New Orleans who also considered herself a devout Catholic. Because of Marie Laveau's popularity, Voodoo and Roman Catholicism became even more entwined. Marie Laveau has a Voodoo shop on Bourbon Street. Inside you will find various voodoo items - charms, potions, statues, knick knacks, t-shirts and more. Some people may feel uneasy and a presence of evil as they walk around the shop. Others may feel nothing at all. Growing up in New Orleans, my mother used to tell me, "If you go looking for trouble or evil, it will find you."



Most people in New Orleans look at Voodoo as a gimmick or tourist attraction. It's rare to find someone who will say that they actually practice Voodoo. Even so, there are some important things to remember about Voodoo, the occult and other practices that remind us that it is definitely not compatible with Christianity.

- Voodoo rites involve the worship of spirits and occult practices like fortune telling and sorcery. God has always forbid these practices in the Bible (Deut. 18:14).
- The worship of Voodoo spirits is the worship of false gods which is condemned throughout the Bible (Deut. 5:7-8).
- The god of Voodoo is not the God of the Bible, but a god who is far away and not involved with humanity. The God of the Bible is actively involved in the workings of His creation and even took on flesh to come to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to redeem the world (Phil 2:5-11).
- Voodoo denies the importance of Jesus Christ, His atoning work on the cross and the need for redemption through faith in Him.

So, Voodoo is incompatible with God's Word in several ways: the true God is not worshiped, Jesus is secondary to the spirits, and mystical practices prevail.

DIG DEEPER: MAGIC & SORCERY

Throughout history, God warned His people about false teachers and practices like Voodoo. Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, God told them what they should and should not do. *Read Deuteronomy 18:9-13.*

Q: What does God tell them to avoid?

See verses 10-11.

Q: How long have people been practicing magic and sorcery?

We read here in Deuteronomy 18 that it was taking place in the Promised Land before the Israelites arrived. We also have biblical references of the Egyptian sorcerers performing supernatural things with the help of the devil in Exodus 7-8. The book of Deuteronomy was written around 1400 BC. So we, as people of God, have had a problem dabbling in magic for a very long time.

Q: In verse 13, God tells His people to be blameless. How are we found blameless? Who is the Only One who can forgive us and make us whole again?

We are found blameless in Jesus. "For our sake he made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Cor. 5:21

"He has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him." Col. 1:22

DIG DEEPER: TEMPTATION

Evil does exist in our world. Sometimes, it happens by our own hands. Satan tempts us to treat others poorly and deny them the forgiveness and love first shown to us in Jesus.

The Israelites would be tempted to follow gods other than the one true God who had delivered them from Egypt. They would forget all the good things God had done for them and turn their back on Him.

We, too, face temptations. Satan tempts us to turn our backs on God. Satan tempts us to take matters into our own hands, which leads to our destruction. *Read 1 Peter 5:6-11.*

Q: How has the devil tempted you? Do you think your friends and classmates have been tempted in the same way you have?

Approach this question with sensitivity. It may be best to make this question a personal reflection/journaling question instead of a group discussion depending on the comfort level and openness of your group. Or, it may be easier to talk more generally about ways in which friends and classmates are tempted as opposed to individuals speaking about themselves.

Q: Do you find it easy or hard to cast all of your anxieties and cares upon God when you are being tempted?

Answers will vary.



“Though devils all the world should fill
 All eager to devour us,
 We tremble not, we fear no ill
 They shall not overpower us.
 This world’s prince may still
 Scowl fierce as he will.
 He can harm us none,
 He’s judged; the deed is done;
 One little word can fell him.”
 — A Mighty Fortress is our God, verse 3

Q: How can verses 6-7 comfort you during times of temptation?

*We are reminded of a promise of God – He will lift us up at the proper time.
 We are also reminded of an attribute of God – He cares for us. Therefore, we can come before Him with our anxieties, temptations and fears “with all boldness and confidence as dear children ask their dear father”.*

Q: How can you resist what the devil offers?

By standing firm in the faith. 1 Peter 5:9

“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” Ephesians 6:10-11

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Cor. 10:13

Q: How is the devil already defeated?

“Though devils all the world should fill/ All eager to devour us / We tremble not, we fear no ill / They shall not overpower us. / This world’s prince may still / Scowl fierce as he will / He can harm us none, / He’s judged; the deed is done; / One little word can fell him.” – A Mighty Fortress is our God, verse 3

If you look at “A Might Fortress is our God” in response to this question, consider discussing what that ‘one little word’ is. We do not know what word Martin Luther had in mind when he wrote the hymn. Certainly, “one little word” could be Jesus. The evil we create or experience as a result of sin is also defeated in the death and resurrection of Jesus.



DIG DEEPER: REVENGE

You may have seen references to Voodoo in movies or on TV that focus on people seeking revenge on others through Voodoo (spells, Voodoo dolls, etc.). Exacting revenge on others has little to do with the religion, but it makes for a good story line and can sell a lot of dolls in New Orleans (buyer beware!). However, we should take some time to discuss evil and revenge. In His Word, God says a lot about how we understand and respond to evil and injustice around us. *Read Romans 12:17-21.*

Q: What should we do when someone does evil against us?

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” Romans 12:17-18

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. *Philippians 2:12-13*

Q: Is it our job to enact revenge?

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” Romans 12:19

Q: What counter-cultural thinking does Paul instruct us to do? How can evil be overcome?

To the contrary, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:20-21

Q: How is this approach to vengeance counter-cultural?

Answers may vary. The world tells us to seek revenge.

Q: Is it possible to respond in this counter-cultural way to evil? How?

Certainly, we cannot by our own reason or strength overcome evil or its temptations, but the Holy Spirit empowers us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts and keeps us in the faith. We can endure all things through the strength of Jesus (Phil. 4:13).

Read Philippians 2:12-18. “Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

DIG DEEPER: EVIL SPIRITS

We confess our belief in the Holy Spirit and rely on His work to call, enlighten, sanctify, and keep us in the one true faith. But what about other spirits? Evil spirits? False spirits? *Read 1 John 4:1-6.*

Q: Do evil spirits exist today?

Yes.

Q: What do they do?

Evil spirits do not confess Jesus is from God and Lord over all. 1 John 4:3

They are from the world; therefore they speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 1 John 4:5

Q: How should we react to them?

"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." 1 John 4:4

Q: How can we test the spirits to see if they are from God?

"We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." 1 John 4:6

Q: Does wearing a cross protect you from evil spirits?

Wearing a cross doesn't protect you. Rather, it is the cross of Christ in which you have faith and belief that protects you.

"With might of ours can naught be done / Soon were our loss effected; / But for us fights the Valiant One, / Whom God Himself elected. / Ask ye, who is this? / Jesus Christ it is. Of Sabbath Lord, / And there's no other God; / He holds the field forever." – A Might Fortress is our God, v. 2

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Protect and defend us from all evil and the attacks of Satan. Fill us with the peace and presence of Your Holy Spirit that we might overcome evil with good and rejoice in the knowledge of Christ's death and resurrection for us. For we know, Lord, that You will rescue us from every evil attack and bring us safely to Your heavenly kingdom. In Jesus name, Amen.

Wearing a cross doesn't protect you. Rather, it is the cross of Christ in which you have faith and belief that protects you.