



Voodoo & Christianity in NOLA Bible Study

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



Participant Version



In Christ Alone

We Stand

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?

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?

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

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?

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?

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

“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’d 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?

Q: How can you resist what the devil offers?

Q: How is the devil already defeated?



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?

Q: Is it our job to enact revenge?

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

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

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

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*



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?

Q: What do they do?

Q: How should we react to them?

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

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.

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.