

JESUS AND SUPERMAN

Jesus, and Superman!
What do they have in common?

What do they have in common?

Well, first, both are Jewish! Both are superhuman! Really only one! But the one that is imaginary, Superman, has been sown into the fabric of American culture and lore. It was the 1930's, Cleveland Ohio, when Jewish artists were excluded from more "legitimate" illustration. But comic book publishers actively hired Jews as Siegel and Shuster. What was their inspiration? Being Jewish and persecuted for one.

The 1930's was arguably the most anti-Semitic period in American history. It was a time when such individuals as Nazi sympathizer Fritz Kuhn of the German-American Bund led legions of rabid followers on marches through many cities, including Siegel and Shuster's hometown. There was radio superstar Father Charles E. Coughlin of the pro-fascist Christian Front, one of the nation's most powerful men. Ivy League colleges at the time kept the number of Jewish students to a minimum, while country clubs and even entire neighborhoods barred Jews altogether. In response, Jews did what Jews have done for centuries; look for a hero and wait. Throughout, they draw inspiration from their adolescence living in a period of deep and abiding antisemitism home and abroad.

Superman was published in the summer of 1939. Then, across the Atlantic, in Germany, Adolph Hitler was exploiting his nation's economic and social ills by scapegoating Jews. Living in a country that had stripped them of their citizenship yet perversely obstructed their exit, German Jews resorted to desperate measures. Just as the baby Superman was sent away from Krypton to avoid the mass destruction of his people, many Jewish children were sent on the [Kindertransports](#) to seek safety with families in England.

Shortly after the attacks on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, America entered World War II, and so did Superman. In Siegel and Shuster's comic, Clark Kent tries to enlist in the Armed Forces, but he fails the routine medical examination. Clark accidentally uses his X-ray vision to read the next room's eye chart. Distraught, he muses, "I've got the most perfect body the world has ever known, and through a sad trick of fate, the army turns me down as hopeless!" This reflects the feeling of desperation and despondency across the country at the time.

BUT TO THE QUESTION:

WHAT DO JESUS AND SUPERMAN HAVE IN COMMON?

Well, first, both are Jewish! Both are superhuman! Really only one! But the one that is imaginary, Superman, has been sown into the fabric of American culture and lore. It was the 1930's, Cleveland Ohio, when Jewish artists were excluded from more "legitimate" illustration. But comic book publishers actively hired Jews as Siegel and Shuster. What was their inspiration? Being Jewish and persecuted for one.

The 1930's was arguably the most anti-Semitic period in American history. It was a time when such individuals as Nazi sympathizer Fritz Kuhn of the German-American Bund led legions of rabid followers on marches through many cities, including Siegel and Shuster's hometown. There was radio superstar Father Charles E. Coughlin of the pro-fascist Christian Front, one of the nation's most powerful men. Ivy League colleges at the time kept the number of Jewish students to a minimum, while country clubs and even entire neighborhoods barred Jews altogether. In response, Jews did what Jews have done for centuries; look for a hero and wait. Throughout, they draw inspiration from their adolescence living in a period of deep and abiding antisemitism home and abroad.

Superman was published in the summer of 1939. Then, across the Atlantic, in Germany, Adolph Hitler was exploiting his nation's economic and social ills by scapegoating Jews. Living in a country that had stripped them of their citizenship yet perversely obstructed their exit, German Jews resorted to desperate measures. Just as the baby Superman was sent away from Krypton to avoid the mass destruction of his people, many Jewish children were sent on the Kindertransports to seek safety with families in England.

After the attacks on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, America entered World War II, and so did Superman. In Siegel and Shuster's comic, Clark Kent tries to enlist in the Armed Forces, but he fails the routine medical examination. Clark accidentally uses his X-ray vision to read the next room's eye chart. Distraught, he muses, "I've got the most perfect body the world has ever known, and through a sad trick of fate, the army turns me down as hopeless!" This reflects the feeling of desperation and despondency across the country at the time.

As news of the Nazis' murderous Holocaust plan emerged, American Jews felt utterly powerless to help their European brethren. But the word of Superman and his ethnic undertones did not escape the enemy's notice in real life. Josef Goebbels, the Nazi minister of propaganda, denounced Superman as a Jew. In April 1940, *Das Schwarze Korps*, the weekly newspaper of the Nazi S.S., attacked the comic and its Jewish writers:

Jerry Siegel, an intellectually and physically circumcised chap who has his headquarters in New York. . . The inventive Israelite named this pleasant guy with an overdeveloped body and underdeveloped mind “Superman.

Amazing, Nazis wringing their hands over a cartoon character cooked up by a couple of Jewish boys across the sea. Yet this ideologically driven rant actually touched on something vital—the importance of Shuster and Siegel’s Jewish heritage.

Superman and Biblical Overtones:

Superman begins with a brief synopsis of the hero’s escape from Krypton, which draws heavily on Jewish sources. Superman’s journey closely reflects the story of Moses. Like the people of Krypton who faced total annihilation, the Israelites of biblical Egypt faced the murder of their male offspring. To ensure her son’s survival, Jochebed places Moses in a reed basket and sets him afloat on the Nile. Her desperate decision is clearly echoed by Superman’s father, Jor-El, who launches the little rocket ship containing his son into outer space.

Moses, Superman and even Jesus are eventually discovered but raised in foreign cultures. Moses came from Jewish culture, Superman from Krypton, and Jesus from Heaven. Baby Moses is found by Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, and raised in the royal palace. Superman is found by Jonathan and Martha Kent in a Midwestern cornfield and given the name Clark. From the onset, both Batya and the Kents realize that these foundling boys are extraordinary. Jesus would be found by anyone spiritually desperate enough to open the door of their heart. We can say that all of them as Superman leads a double life. Superman is the stuttering, spectacle-wearing reporter whose true identity no one suspects. In the same way, for his own safety, Moses kept his Israelite roots hidden for a time. Jesus could not get his people to understand that He was the Son of God.

Superman’s original name on Krypton also reveals biblical underpinnings. Superman is named Kal-El and his father Jor-El. The suffix “El” is one of the ancient names for God, used throughout the Bible. It is also found in the names of great prophets like Samuel and Daniel and angels such as Michael and Gabriel. We may never know to what extent Siegel and Shuster were aware of these precise Hebrew overtones, but the similarities are uncanny and couldn’t be more apt. the suffice “El” speaks to the Father of Names Himself. Consider the names of our God and Father in Heaven from where His Son Yeshua was sent.

El Shaddai (Lord God Almighty)

El Elyon (The Most High God)

El Olam (The Everlasting God)

Elohim (God)

El Elhoe Yisrael (The mighty God of Israel)

El Elyon (The Most High God)

El Emunah (The Faithful God)
El Hakabodh (The God of Glory)
El Hayyay (God of My Life)
Elohim Kedoshim (Holy God)
El Kanna (Jealous God)
Eli Maelekhi (God My King)
Elhohenu Olam (Our Everlasting God)
El Rai (God Seest Me)
El Sali (God, my Rock)
Elohim Tsebaoth (God of Hosts)
Elohe Yakov (God of Jacob)