



WHY STUDY GREEK MYTHOLOGY?

Next to the Bible, Greek myths are the most important set of stories in our history. Greek myths are universal stories that describe human character types and the human situation in a wonderfully imaginative and entertaining way. They are everywhere in English literature and in our culture, from the names of cars and shoes to the names of constellations and planets.

Except for the Hebrews, all ancient cultures possessed a mythology. The Greeks developed the most extensive, imaginative, and literary mythology in the Western world. Many ancient mythologies had dark and evil gods like the Baal religion in the Old Testament, the religion that Phoenicia and Carthage had spread throughout the Mediterranean world.

The Greeks had the good sense to create their gods in the image of man and give them the better, if sometimes comical, attributes of the human race. The Greek gods, being quite human themselves, detested human sacrifice. As a literary creation, Greek mythology provides us with symbols and metaphors for human types, attributes, and ideals. Greek mythology is universal in our culture, because like Latin and Greek, artists, writers, musicians, and scientists have mined it extensively for two millennia.

Greek myths and other ancient myths and legends often have similarities to Bible stories. These parallels provide good opportunities for distinguishing between the Bible and other ancient writings. The fashion today is to lump Scripture with all other ancient writings as unreliable myth and legend.

For instance, the human race seems to have a collective memory of a universal flood and a “Garden of Eden” since almost all ancient mythologies have these two stories. This can be taken as nearly conclusive evidence for the opposite conclusions that (1) these two “myths,” in fact, refer to things that are really true or (2) the universality of these stories shows that they are merely myths.

One way to approach this with your students is to ask them what they would think if these stories were found only in Scripture and nowhere else. The skeptic could then say that their uniqueness is conclusive evidence for their unreliability since if they were actually true, other cultures would have also had myths about such universal events. So “evidence” can be used to support whatever position one wants to believe. Students who have gone through these thought processes will be prepared for the mythologizing of the Bible that will confront them later in life.

A mythology is a culture’s attempt to supply answers to the mysteries of human life. Man uses his imagination to penetrate beyond what his senses and reason can tell him. The Greeks in both their mythology and philosophy represent man’s best efforts to penetrate to the divine. The Greeks show the limitations of the unaided human mind and, by doing so, witness to the divine origin of Scripture. The Greeks who created gods in the image of man, prepared the way for the God who created man in His own image.