

Lesson 2: Are there myths in the Bible?

How would you answer this question?

Answering 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe depends largely on your definition of myth.

- **Yes there are myths in the Bible,**
- in Ancient Greek *mythología*, simply meant 'story', 'lore', 'legends', or 'the telling of stories'. From 1425 until the 17th or 18th century, "mythology" meant
 - a moral,
 - fable,
 - allegory or
 - a parable, or
 - collection of traditional stories understood to be false.
- It came eventually to be applied to similar bodies of traditional stories among other polytheistic cultures around the world. In **Anglicised** form (Mythology), this Greek word began to be used in English in the early 19th century, in a much narrower sense, as a scholarly term for a traditional story,
 - especially one concerning the early history of a people or
 - explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and
 - typically involving supernatural beings or events.
- **In the light of modern Biblical research**, if the term (myth) is correctly understood, there is **no reason why it could not be legitimately used in reference to the interpretation of several Biblical passages.**
 - With
 - 1) a reassessment of the nature of myth, however, and
 - 2) a growing tendency to consider polytheistic (the belief in many gods) elements as accidental to mythopoeic (the making of a myth or myths) mentality,more and more authors have begun to **affirm the presence of myth**, or something comparable to myth, in the Bible.
 - They refer to passages such

- ❖ The creation story and
 - ❖ accounts of
 - ✚ paradise and
 - ✚ the fall of man,
 - ✚ of the flood, and
 - ✚ of the tower of babel,
 - ✚ God's slaughter of, or domination over, the primeval sea monster (leviathan, dragon, etc)
 - It is argued that these passages
 - ❖ are neither historical (i.e., derived from human testimony based on direct observation of the events) nor
 - ❖ properly theological (i.e., deduced by discursive [ambiguous] reasoning process).
 - ❖ They take place in primeval times;
 - Their main actors share many of the characteristics of mythical personages; and
 - they constitute an attempt to explain present-day phenomena.
- **But**, The NT condemns myths so those passages referred to earlier such as the creation story and accounts of paradise and the fall of man, of the flood, and of the tower of babel, God's slaughter of, or domination over, the primeval sea monster (leviathan, dragon, etc) must not be myths. In the Septuagint the Greek word μ[symbol omitted]θος (myth) occurs only in Sir (Sirach or Wisdom of Sirach) 20.19, where, however, it has the meaning of 'proverb'.
- The NT condemns myths (μθοι) as
 - so many "**fables**" (1 Tm 1:4),
King James Bible
Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.
 - "**old wives' tales**" (1 Tm 4:7),

*7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and **old wives' tales**; rather, train yourself to be godly.*

- "**commandments of men**," incompatible with the truth (2 Tm 4:4; Ti 1:14), and

2 Timothy 4:4

New International Version

*4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to **myths**.*

- "Mythology" entered the English language before "myth".
Johnson's Dictionary (published on 15 April 1755), for example, has an entry for mythology, but not for myth.
 - You can say that all fables can be classified as myths but it would not be correct to say that all myths are fables.
- The Greek loanword **mythos**
 - (a word permanently adopted from one language [the donor language] and incorporated into another language without translation)

and Latinate **mythus** both appeared in English before the first example of "myth" in 1830.

Titus 1:14

New King James Version

*14 not giving heed to Jewish **fables** and **commandments of men** who turn from the truth.*

- "**fictitious tales**" (2 Pt1.16)

2 Peter 1:16

American Standard Version

*16 For we did not follow cunningly devised **fables** (possibly indicated—
heathen mythology, Jewish theosophy (a knowledge of God may be achieved through spiritual ecstasy, direct intuition, or special individual relations, and Apocryphal Gospels), when we made known unto you the power and [a]coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.*

- Consequently, **until recently scholars generally tended to exclude myth from the Bible.** ([Myth and Mythology \(in the Bible\) | Encyclopedia.com](#))
 - It was alleged that **Israel's staunch monotheism was incompatible with the polytheism essential to myth**, (15th to 18th century)
 - that **its linear approach to historical phenomena**
 - (one in which something changes or progresses straight from one stage to another, and has a starting point and an ending point)
 - ran counter to the cyclic pattern of myth**
 - (one in which a series of events happens again and again in the same order)

- **Maybe there are myths in the Bible,**
 - Biblical authors had, indeed, sometimes utilized mythical motifs for the sake of **poetic ornamentation** (Is 14:12–15)

What comes to mind when you read this verse?

- **Isaiah 14:12-15** *“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! -The Jews address him again as a fallen once-bright star.”*

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

*(12) How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!—The word for **Lucifer** is, literally, **the shining one**, the planet Venus, the morning star, the son of the dawn, as the symbol of the Babylonian power, which was so closely identified with astrology. “**Lucifer**” etymologically gives the **same meaning**, and is used by Latin poets (Tibull. i., 10, 62) for Venus, **as an equivalent for the phôsphoros** of the Greeks. The use of the **word**, however, **in medieval Latin as a name of Satan**, whose fall was supposed to be shadowed forth in this and the following verse, **makes its selection here singularly unfortunate**. Few English readers realize the fact that **it is the king of Babylon, and not the devil, who is***

addressed as Lucifer. While this has been the history of the Latin word, its Greek and English equivalents have risen to a higher place, and the “morning star” has become a name of the Christ (Revelation 22:16).

➤ **No there are not ‘myths’ in the Bible,**

- Many use the term ‘myth’ in
 - a pejorative (expressing contempt or disapproval) sense to mean that the stories described are not factually true
 - Others define myth as non-historical tales that contain a moral message.
- Both definitions miss the richness of the term.
 - Mythology is a form of literature that expresses fundamental truths in a way that ordinary conversation is inadequate to describe.
 - The stories that make up the myths are often anchored in some historical reality, but this need not be so.
 - Mythology adds a richness of detail and concreteness to metaphorical language