

Biblical Myths Study

Lesson 1: Introduction

Lutheran Study Bible

- Luther wanted to understand the meaning of biblical texts within his overall theological framework.
 - At the same time, he paid close attention to several factors, including historical context and literary style.
- Individual books of the Bible were written by human beings.
 - To understand any book of the bible, we need to know something about the circumstances in which it was written.
- Lutherans say that Scripture is to be interpreted in line with its “plain sense.”
 - This means that passages are to be understood in the sense that would have seemed obvious to their original readers.
 - They are not to be taken out of context or twisted to be read in a sense that never would have occurred to their original readers.
- Even though the Bible is God’s word, God speaks to human beings through created means, namely through human language that is stamped by various religions and cultures.
 - The Bible was inspired by God but written down in languages other than our own and by people whose cultural situation was very different from our own.
 - When we read the Bible, we remember that it was created by diverse people.
 - The marks of cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity that permeate the Bible’s structure and content do not make it less God’s word to us.

What is a Forum?

- This course will be presented as a **forum**.
 - ❖ a **meeting** or **lecture** intended
 - primarily for **adults familiar with the Bible** but
 - those with little or **no biblical knowledge** are welcome as well.
 - audience **discussion is important** and
 - questions are encouraged.
- We'll begin today by defining the word 'myth' and looking at the origin or the word.
- In the second lesson we'll discuss the question: '*Are there myths in the Bible?*'
- The third lesson considers the question: '*Does the Bible contain myths and legends intermixed with verifiable history?*'
- We will then evaluate scriptures that some think: '*Show that the Bible Is Mythology*'
- In the 5th lesson we will explore whether there are any '*Biblical Myths*' found in other cultures?
- Finally in lesson 6 we will discuss the advantages of reading of the Bible as history or myth.

How do you define a 'myth'?

1. Here is a definition found using a *Bing* search: a **traditional story**, especially one
 - concerning the **early history of a people** or
 - **explaining some natural or social phenomenon**, and
 - typically **involving supernatural beings or events**:
 - *Synonyms associated with these definitions*:
 - Folklore and Legends folklore the,
 - [folk tale](#), (folk story) traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community passed through the generations by word-of-mouth accounting imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment, originating in popular culture, typically passed on by word of mouth.

Some kinds of folktales, such as fairy stories, are not considered true by anyone, and may be seen as distinct from myths for this reason. As folktales spread between cultures or as faiths change, their divine characters are recast either as

- ❖ humans or
- ❖ demi (half) humans such as
 - ✚ giants,
 - ✚ elves and
 - ✚ faeries.^{[28][33][34]}

- [legend](#) a traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as **historical but unauthenticated** and generally feature humans as their main characters.^{[3][30]}

Though myth and other folklore genres may overlap, **myth is often thought to differ from genres such as [legend](#) and [folktale](#)** in that neither are considered to be [sacred](#) narratives.^{[23][24]} Main characters in myths are usually [gods](#), [demigods](#) or [supernatural](#) humans,^{[3][28][29]}

- ❖ Sacred describes something that
 - ✚ is dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of a deity;
 - ✚ is considered worthy of spiritual respect or devotion;
 - or
 - ✚ inspires awe or reverence among believers.

- [tale](#) a **fictitious or true** narrative or story, especially one that is imaginatively recounted
- [fable](#) a short story, typically with animals as characters, conveying a moral
- [saga](#) a long, involved story, account, or series of incidents

- **allegory** a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one
- **parable** a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels
- **tradition** the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way
- **lore** a body of traditions and knowledge on a subject or held by a particular group, typically passed from person to person by word of mouth
- **mythos** (mythus) a set of beliefs or assumptions about something

2. In colloquial (**conversational**) use, "**myth**" can also be used of a **collectively held belief that has no basis in fact, or any false story**.^[36]

This usage, which is often **pejorative (negative)**,^[37] arose from labelling the religious myths and beliefs of other cultures as incorrect, but it has spread to cover non-religious beliefs as well.^[38]

Examples:

"he wants to dispel the myth that sea kayaking is too risky or too strenuous"

"there is a popular myth that corporations are big people with lots of money"

• a **misrepresentation of the truth**.

Example:

"attacking the party's irresponsible myths about privatization"

• a **fictitious or imaginary person or thing**.

Example:

"nobody had ever heard of Simon's mysterious friend—Anna said he was a myth"

3. **Scholars in other fields use the term "myth"** in varied ways. In a broad sense, the word can refer to

- any traditional story,
- a misconception or imaginary entity,
- an **exaggerated or idealized conception of a person or thing.**

Example:

"the book is a scholarly study of the Churchill myth"

4. Definitions of "myth" vary to some extent among scholars, though

- Finnish folklorist [Lauri Honko](#) (6 March 1932) offers a widely-cited definition:
 - a story of the gods,
 - a religious account of the [beginning of the world](#),
 - the **exemplary deeds of the gods** as a result of which the world, nature and culture were created.
 - expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms;
 - it provides a pattern of behavior to be imitated,
 - testifies to the efficacy (usefulness) of [ritual](#) with its practical ends and
 - establishes the sanctity of [cult](#).^[2]
- Another definition of myth comes from myth criticism theorist and professor [José Manuel Losada](#) ((Zamora, 1962). Losada defines myth as
 - "a functional, symbolic and thematic narrative of one or several extraordinary events with a
 - Transcendent (beyond comprehension),
 - sacred and
 - supernatural referent;
 - that **lacks**, in principle, historical testimony; and
 - that refers to an individual or collective,
 - but always absolute, cosmogony or eschatology
 - cosmogony (the branch of science that deals with the origin of the universe, especially the solar system)
 - eschatology (the part of theology concerned with
 - ❖ death,

- ❖ judgment, and
- ❖ the final destiny of the soul and of humankind)".^{[14][15]}
- Among biblical scholars of both the Old and New Testament, the word "myth" has a technical meaning, in that it usually refers to "describe the actions of the other-worldly in terms of this world" such as the Creation and the Fall.^[40]

What is the origin of the word?

- The word "myth" comes from **Ancient Greek** *μῦθος* (*mýthos*),^[51] meaning 'speech, narrative, fiction, myth, plot'.
 - Ancient Greek includes the forms of the Greek language used in ancient Greece and the ancient world from around 1500 BC to 300 BC. It is often roughly divided into the following periods: Mycenaean Greek (c. 1400–1200 BC), Dark Ages (c. 1200–800 BC), the Archaic period (c. 800–500 BC), and the Classical period (c. 500–300 BC).
- In **Anglicised** form (Linguistic anglicisation is the practice of modifying foreign words, names, and phrases to make them easier to spell, pronounce or understand in English), 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."^{[36][48]}
- In turn, Ancient Greek *mythología*, ('story', 'lore', 'legends', or 'the telling of stories') combines the word *mýthos* with the suffix *-logía*,('study') in order to mean 'romance, fiction, story-telling'.^[52]
 - Accordingly, **Plato** used *mythología* as a general term for 'fiction' or 'story-telling' of any kind.
- The Greek term *mythología* was then borrowed into **Late Latin** (This somewhat ambiguously defined version of Latin was used between the eras of Classical Latin and Medieval Latin), occurring in the title of Latin author **Fulgentius'** 5th-

century *Mythologiæ* to denote what we now call *classical mythology*—i.e., *Greco-Roman* stories involving their gods.

- Fulgentius' *Mythologiæ* explicitly treated its subject matter as *allegories* (a narrative or visual representation in which a character, place, or event can be interpreted to represent a hidden meaning with moral or political significance.) requiring interpretation and not as true events.^[53]
- The Latin term was then adopted in *Middle French* (covers the period from the 14th to the 16th century) as *mythologie*.
- Whether from French or Latin usage, English adopted the word "mythology" in the 15th century, initially meaning
 - 'the exposition of a myth or myths,'
 - 'the interpretation of fables,' or
 - 'a book of such expositions'. The word is first revealed in *John Lydgate's Troy Book* (c. 1425).^{[54][56][57]}
- From Lydgate until the 17th or 18th century, "mythology" meant
 - a moral,
 - fable,
 - allegory or
 - a parable, or
 - collection of traditional stories,^{[54][59]} understood to be false.

It came eventually to be applied to similar bodies of traditional stories among other polytheistic cultures around the world.^[54]

- Thus "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.^[62]
 - Indeed, the Greek loanword (a word permanently adopted from one language (the donor language) and incorporated into another language without translation) *mythos*^[64] and Latinate *mythus*^[66] both appeared in English before the first example of "myth" in 1830.^[69]

