



MYTHS & LEGENDS OF ANCIENT GREECE

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MYTHS & LEGENDS OF ANCIENT GREECE

Time: 19:02

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The video opens with the legend of *Daedalus and Icarus*. Daedalus, a famous engineer who has been accused of plotting to kill his nephew, has been banished from Athens. However, he is welcomed in Crete, where King Minos uses the engineer's services to design and build a giant labyrinth to house the king's monstrous stepson, the Minotaur. For nourishment, the Minotaur has an annual feeding of fourteen sacrificial humans. One year, Prince Theseus of Athens is to be fed to the monster. But Minos's



daughter, Ariadne, falls in love with the prince, and goes to Daedalus to find out how to save him. The engineer gives Ariadne a magical cord that unwinds through the maze until it reaches the Minotaur. There, Theseus slays the monster. Then, the prince follows the thread back to

the entrance of the maze, after which he flees to Athens with Ariadne. Meanwhile, Minos figures out Daedalus's role in the death of his stepson, and incarcerates the engineer and his son, Icarus, in the labyrinth. Daedalus, however, makes wings from eagle feathers and wax, and he and his son fly from the maze.

Ignoring his father's warnings, Icarus ventures too close to the sun, and the wax on his wings melts. The feathers drop off, and the youngster falls to his death. Daedalus finds his way back to Greece, but spends the rest of his days wandering from place to place.

The next story, *Pandora's Box*, opens in an idyllic world where there are no adults. Pandora, Epimetheus's companion, discovers a box in the young man's home. When she inquires about it, Epimetheus tells her that he has made a solemn oath to never open it. Moreover, he does not know its contents. Pandora's curiosity gets the best of her and she later opens the box, allowing all the troubles of the world to escape. One creature in the box is not a worldly trouble, however. It is hope, and that has allowed humans to live in happiness, despite all the tribulations found in the world.



The final story, *Jason and the Golden Fleece*, begins as Jason sets out to reclaim his father's throne from the evil warrior, Pelias. On his way, he meets an old woman. After Jason carries her across a turbulent stream, the old woman turns into the goddess Hera, and informs him that the gods will help him in his quest. When Jason arrives at the court of Pelias, the evil ruler and his oracle notice that Jason wears only one sandal — a sign, says the oracle, that Jason will overthrow Pelias. To prevent losing the throne, Pelias sends Jason on a quest for the golden fleece, saying that if Jason returns with it, he will relinquish the crown. The young man gathers the greatest heroes and heroines of



the ancient world and along with this group, the Argonauts, sails to the distant land of Colchis, where the evil ruler Aeëtes tells Jason and his companions they must plant dragon teeth in the field of Ares to prove they are worthy of the fleece. Aeëtes's daughter, Medea, falls in love with Jason, and instructs him what to do when the teeth grow into warriors. With further help from Medea, and the musician Orpheus, Jason finds his way to the fleece (guarded by a fire-breathing dragon), retrieves it, and then returns to Colchis, where he reclaims the crown once held by his father.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

After viewing this video and participating in the suggested activities, students should be able to do the following:

- (1) Briefly review the plots of the three stories shown in the program.
- (2) Discuss the cultural aspects of the stories.
- (3) Tell the themes of the stories.
- (4) Describe the historical, cultural, religious and psychological aspects of the stories.
- (5) Relate the stories to what the class might be studying in its social studies program.

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Introduction

While it may be best in some circumstances to show all the stories in one screening, it is recommended that they be shown one at a time. As is true with most other myths, the stories in the video are

outwardly simple; yet, in reality, they are rich in cultural, historical, religious, philosophical and psychological meaning. You may begin your introduction with a general discussion of mythology. Explain that many Greek myths and legends have been told for thousands of years, and they have survived the ages because they offer much to the reader/viewer/listener — entertainment, insight into human nature, and lessons about morality and justice. To increase your students' understanding of the stories, mention that myths may appear simple, but they are somewhat like an onion. They have many layers of meaning. When one layer is peeled away, another is revealed. Explain that for purposes of discussion, the class will focus on four layers: historical, cultural, religious and philosophical, and psychological. (For younger viewers, or for older students who may not be ready for a sophisticated, in-depth discussion, the philosophical and psychological aspects of the stories may, of course, be ignored or mentioned only briefly.)

Previewing Activities

Tell the class that they will now see a video entitled “Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece.” If it would be useful, have the class locate Greece on a map or globe, then discuss briefly ancient Greek culture — drama, literature, and the development of democracy. Then, on the chalkboard, write the following: “Analysis of the stories plot, theme, culture, history, philosophy and religion, psychology.” Define each term and tell the students you will want them to analyze the story according to the criteria mentioned. You may also analyze each story as a class activity.

Post viewing Activities

As your class analyzes each story, you may want to highlight the following factors:

1. The lack of high technology in ancient Greek culture.

2. Ways of dressing.
3. Belief in fantastic creatures such as centaurs, minotaurs, dragons and harpies.
4. Polytheism, and the role of gods in determining the fate of humans.
5. The glorification of bravery.
6. Views of good and evil, and the genesis of them.
7. The role of women as helpers, bringers of justice and bringers of sorrow.
8. The nature of quests.
9. Intelligence versus brute strength.
10. Reward for good deeds.
11. Seeking justice as a human motivation.
12. Overcoming obstacles as a virtue.
13. The role of curiosity in human affairs.
14. The role of hope in helping humans deal with misfortune.
15. Political systems depicted.
16. The role of love in human affairs.
17. The virtue of truth; the evil of falsehood.
18. Failure to heed warnings.
19. Divine justice.

20. How the ancient Greeks viewed their relationship to each other and to their gods.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

Our story begins thousands of years ago, south of Greece, on the island of Crete.

It was there that one could find a huge labyrinth that covered several acres.

The structure was designed and built by Daedalus, the ancient world's most noted engineer, architect and scientist.

Once, he had lived in Athens, in Greece, but many years ago had been forced to flee across the sea to Crete when he was accused of killing his nephew, Talus.

The King of Crete, Minos, welcomed Daedalus, for the architect was, thought the ruler, the only person capable of designing a maze complex enough to imprison his stepson, the monstrous Minotaur.

Once the labyrinth was built, the beast was placed at its center, where he paced day after day, waiting for his annual feeding of fourteen humans.

Now, on one particular year, those to be sacrificed were to come from Athens, and one of them was the fair-haired Prince Theseus.

He was, however, determined that he and his companions would not die deep in the recesses of the labyrinth.

Now, as it happened, Theseus was the cousin of Daedalus.

Days later, when Minos greeted the young prince and his comrades, he instructed them to prepare for their deaths.

Unknown to him, however, his daughter, Ariadne, had other ideas. For as soon as her gaze fell upon Theseus, she fell in love with him.

Vowing to save the prince, she immediately went to Daedalus, whom she knew was the only person in all of Crete who could help her.

At first, the architect scowled and refused her request for assistance

because it was Theseus's father who had forced him to flee Athens many years ago.

But when Ariadne persisted, Daedalus finally relented and told her that the Minotaur could be killed with one of his own horns — and no other way.

He then gave a silken cord to the princess.

“If you roll the cord at the door of the maze,” he said, “it will unravel, all the way to the center, where the monster lives.

“Then, the thread can be followed back after the Minotaur is slain. But beware! If the cord is not used, Theseus will be lost forever in the labyrinth.”

Late that very night, Ariadne and Theseus went to the labyrinth, and just as Daedalus had said, the cord began to unravel, stringing a route to the Minotaur.

Theseus followed it, until, at last, he came face to face with the monster.

And just as Daedalus had said, the Minotaur was slain with one of its very own horns — lodged in its neck.

The prince escaped with Ariadne that night, and took her to Athens.

It did not take King Minos long to figure out what had happened.

And so he ordered Daedalus and his son, Icarus, to be imprisoned in the labyrinth for the rest of their lives.

Yet, the king wanted the engineer to continue working for him, so Daedalus was allowed to have his tools in the maze.

One day, the engineer looked up and saw several eagles lazily riding the warm air currents, above. The birds sparked his imagination and a plan began to form in his mind for his, and his son's, escape.

Within an hour, he and Icarus set to work making a bow and arrows.

He then shot a large number of eagles, which, when injured, dropped into the labyrinth below.

With their feathers, Daedalus made two huge pair of wings, the feathers

glued together with an especially strong wax, which hardened as it cooled.

Several nights later, the two prepared for their escape and then flew out of the maze — into the skies of glorious freedom.

As morning arrived, Icarus became increasingly enthralled at his power of flight, and so began to fly higher and higher.

Daedalus, knowing that the sun's heat would melt the wax, desperately called out to his son to fly downward.

But his pleas went unheeded. Up and up Icarus went, up into the eye of the sun — like a moth drawn to a candle.

Soon, one feather, then another, and still another, and yet another, fell from his wings until Icarus himself dropped from the sky into the waters below, never to be seen again.

As for Daedalus, he eventually set down in his homeland, Greece. But he was not welcome there and so spent the rest of his years wandering westward. It is said that he died in poverty. Nobody knows where.

But our story does have a happy ending. Theseus became king of Athens and Ariadne eventually married the god Dionysus. And the world, at least for a time, was at peace.

Countless ages ago, when the earth was still young and fresh, there were no adults — only children who danced and played all day.

There was no need for work in those times, for the gods provided enough food for everyone, in the trees and bushes, on the vines, and in the good earth itself!

The gods also provided companions to anyone who wished for one.

And that is how our story begins, on the day that Pandora came into the life of Epimetheus; he was to be her companion, and she was to be his.

Shortly after Pandora arrived, the young man showed her the inside of his small cottage. Almost immediately, Pandora's attention was drawn to something, a large box that sat near the center of the room.

She was curious about it, and its contents.

When she asked Epimetheus where it had come from and what was inside, he responded that he did not know the contents of the box, nor could he reveal its source, for he had made a sacred promise never to tell who brought it — and to never open it.

As the days passed, Pandora's curiosity grew more intense.

One afternoon, while alone in the cottage, she noticed that the gold and silver cord that fastened the box's lid appeared to have no beginning and no end.

"Hmmm," she said. "How curious! Perhaps I could find out where the ends are by unraveling the cord. Certainly, there can be no harm in that!"

Suddenly, the cord glowed and began untying itself! The box now could be easily opened.

Then, just as suddenly, the box began to shake, and voices could be heard from within, pleading, "Let us out! Let us out! LET US OUT!"

Now, at that very moment, Epimetheus was out with the other children, but was not playing. For the first time in his life, he was gloomy.

So he decided to return to his cottage to see if Pandora could cheer him up.

He arrived just as his companion was about to lift the lid.

But Epimetheus did not stop her, for if truth be known, he was just as curious as she.

The creatures were the troubles of the world — evil passions, pain, disease, sorrows, anger, intolerance, and all the rest.

And out they flew to spread to the four corners of the earth.

And as they did, everyone changed and everything changed.

And yet, not all that came from the box that day was an earthly trouble. One last creature remained.

Her wings, which appeared to be made of rainbows, lifted her out of the box, until she hovered near Pandora and Epimetheus.

“My name is Hope,” she said, “and I will be here as long as you need me. It is true that you released the earthly troubles today, but as long as you have trust in me, I promise to make things better.”

Pandora and Epimetheus did trust her.

And so things did get better. Yes, the troubles remained — and still remain to this day. But Hope showed that today’s troubles can turn into tomorrow’s happiness.

Long ago, a centaur named Chiron lived atop a mountain in Thessaly. He was wise and beloved, a teacher who shared his wisdom with all who came to learn the lessons of the gods.

One of those who sat Chiron’s feet was Jason, the son of King Aeson of Iolchis, who had been dethroned by the evil warrior, Pelias, many years before.

When Jason learned all that Chiron had to teach, he set out to reclaim the throne of his family.

He had not traveled far when he came upon a flood-swollen stream.

Although Jason could see the danger of crossing (one false step and he would be swept under the currents) he was determined press on.

Just as he was about to step into the swirling waters, he felt a nearby presence. It was an ugly, old woman.

“Young man, I, too, must get to the other side, but I am too weak to cross by myself. Would you carry me on your back?”

Jason thought of the added danger. But, to him, it did not matter. Carefully stepping on the stones, he bravely ventured across the rushing waters, the old woman on his shoulders.

Somewhat later, on the opposite shore, the young man lay collapsed on the ground, barely able to catch his breath.

After several moments, he recovered enough to notice that he had lost one of his sandals in the stream.

“I was responsible for losing it, not you!” said an unfamiliar voice.

To his astonishment, Jason saw the old hag changing into a beautiful woman. It was Hera, wife of the great god Zeus. She told Jason that because he had carried her across the stream, the gods would now smile upon him in his quest.

And then, she disappeared into thin air!

For many months, Jason continued his journey, until, at last, he found himself before the loathsome Pelias.

The evil ruler immediately spied Jason’s bare foot, as did his oracle, the fortuneteller who had prophesied that the king would one day fall to a youth wearing but one sandal.

“And who are you?”

“I am Jason, son of Aeson. I have come to claim my rightful crown!”

“I yield my crown only to the person worthy of it! But it is not easy to devise a test to determine such worthiness.”

“If a person would bring back the golden fleece of Colchis, surely that would prove him worthy enough, don’t you think?”

The evil king agreed. He did not know how the idea came to Jason — nor, in fact, did Jason know himself! But both did know that the golden fleece was found at the northern edge of the known world, in far-away Colchis.

Both also knew that it was guarded by a fierce, fire-breathing dragon that burned anyone who dared set foot near the fleece.

And so Pelias eagerly sent the young man on the quest. Jason gathered the greatest of the Greek heroes and heroines for the journey.

The adventurers, called the Argonauts, escaped a number of perils and battled many grotesque creatures on their journey.

But at last, they reached their destination, Colchis, an uncivilized land ruled by Aeëtes, a cunning, deceitful wizard, incapable of speaking the truth.

“You may have the fleece, but Zeus has told me personally that those who covet this prize must first plant these dragon teeth in the fields of Ares.”

Now, as it happened, the King’s daughter, Medea, was nearby as he spoke these words, and she knew the terrible magic of the dragon’s teeth.

As it also happened, Medea fell in love with Jason as soon as she saw him. And so, she told the young adventurer how to escape the horrible events that would occur if he followed her father’s instructions.

“As soon as the teeth are planted,” she said, “they will grow into a regiment of warriors. The soldiers will then advance upon you and your companions. They will slay all of you unless throw the bronze helmet that held the dragon’s teeth into their midst. If you do so, each warrior will turn upon another with such ferocity that, within moments, they will be found lifeless on the ground.”

And so it was.

When Jason returned to Aeetes, the evil king publicly stated that the young adventurer could now lay claim the fleece.

But in secret, he instructed his soldiers to slay Jason and the rest of the Argonauts as they slept on their ship.

Fortunately, Medea overheard the plan, quickly rushed to Jason, and told him to bring the golden-haired musician, Orpheus, to a nearby forest as soon as darkness settled over Colchis.

That having been done, the three, with Medea leading the way, rode for several hours, deeper and deeper into the woods until, at last, they found themselves confronted by the dragon.

Just as Jason was about to draw his sword to do battle,

Medea told him that, instead, Orpheus should play his lyre.

And he did. And as he played, the musician’s sweet tune worked its

magic upon the horrid beast. And he soon fell fast asleep.

Jason's chance had come!

Within a short time, he was on his way back to Iolchis.

Pelias, having made his promise in public, had no choice other than to surrender his crown.

In truth, there was no choice at all. For the great god Zeus and his wife Hera had ordained the entire adventure in order that the golden fleece would be returned to its rightful place, to the city of Iolchis.