

MYTHS, LEGENDS & IDOL WORSHIP

“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” — Exodus 20:1-3

PART ONE

Enticing stories of powerful god-men performing superhuman feats are not new. This has been the stuff of myths and legends from ancient civilizations and has been at the very root of idol worship, false gods and false religion. Understandably, today, entertainment seekers are equally fascinated with the subject of god-like super-heroes. Movies, television programs and comic books draw millions to their spellbinding stories, and the number of these titles flooding the market have more than tripled in the past ten years.

These stories make for appealing fiction, but the Bible reveals an interesting but disturbing foundation for these hero figures. The true source of these half man-half god creatures originates with Satan and his demon host, and the Bible warns that in our day they will be increasingly active with more subtle deceptions. *“We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.”* (Ephesians 6:12, 13) We truly are

living in *the evil day*, and Christians need to be particularly on the alert for the beguiling influences of these demonic forces.

But, it may be asked, why educate ourselves on the subject of mythology? Mythology was the root of evil from which idol worship grew and consumed the true faith of Israel. It is important to learn from ancient Israel's fall into idolatry and how remarkably successful Satan has been in perverting the truth — drawing attention away from the one true God and His loving plan of salvation. A brief look into the development of myths, legends and idols will reveal the devastating effect that compromise with paganism had on God's people.

THE ORIGIN OF MYTHOLOGY AND IDOL WORSHIP

The Bible demonstrates clearly the degrading influences of mythology upon man's faith in God. From man's early history, the fallen angels have had an insatiable appetite for meddling in man's thinking and influencing his downward tendencies. These angels who materialized before the Flood of Noah's day were the original gods of mythology, while their offspring, the *giants*, were *demigods*. These god-men wreaked havoc on the society of Noah,

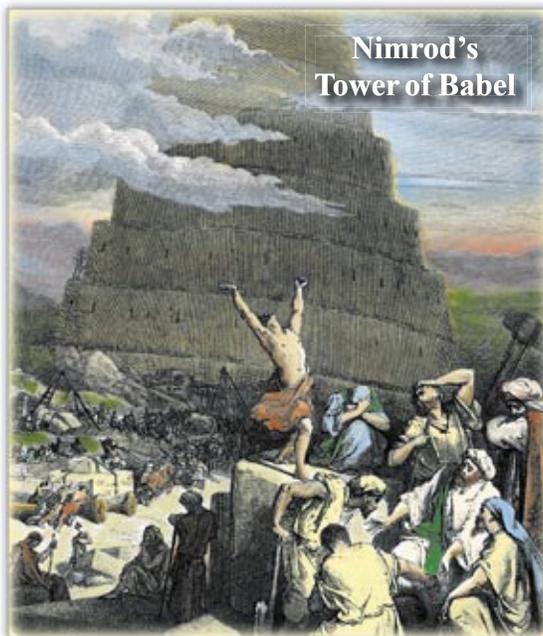
and God saw that *“the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”* (Genesis 6:1-10) After the destruction of these super-men in the flood, God did not permit these wicked angels to materialize among men again, but banished them from heaven and placed them in *chains of darkness*. Jude 6

It was not long after the Biblical Flood that evil began to take root again in the heart of man. We read in Genesis 9:21-25 that one of Noah's three sons, Ham, had a propensity for evil, and because of this, a penalty for his sin fell upon the generations that proceeded from him — *“visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children.”* (Exodus 20:5) This unfavorable influence upon Ham's offspring served to weaken whatever respect remained in his family for the true God. With this departure from the reverence of the Lord came a consequent exposure of heart and mind again to the malevolent influences of the fallen angels. This was a test upon these angels and the men they sought to control. While some of the angels may have determined not to rebel against God again, others continued to invade the

thoughts of man with suggestions of rebellion. (1 Peter 3:18, 19, 1 Corinthians 6:3) Soon, careless humanity embraced false gods of every imaginable perversion.

Ham's grandson was the legendary character Nimrod. His history and fame is sculpted in numerous artifacts held in museums throughout the world. Genesis Chapter 10 notes how Nimrod, the founder of the Babylonian empire, began to set himself up as a god over his fellow men. *“And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter...”* Having a prideful character that craved adoration made him an easy target for the suggestions from fallen angels who implanted exaggerated delusions of grandeur — fueling his thirst for power and influence. Nimrod, trusting to his own prowess as a hunter of powerful beasts, came forward as the bold hero of the world — a mighty one in the earth attracting men's attention away from the one true God.

According to Rabbinical tradition, Nimrod initiated open rebellion against God after the great Flood and was responsible for building the *Tower of Babel*. Certainly, the rapid decline of civilization under the influence of Nimrod is evidenced in the



Nimrod's
Tower of Babel

Eleventh Chapter of Genesis where this infamous tower is noted. In their arrogant attempt to reach heaven and find protection from another flood, this idolatrous civilization angered the true God of Heaven. Seeing what the people had done, God confounded the languages and scattered the people throughout the earth. Hence, the word *Babel*, of which Nimrod's great city Babylon is associated, means confusion. It is interesting to note that the word Babylon in symbol throughout the Scriptures is often synonymous with a system of confused beliefs – truth mixed with error.

ISRAEL AND THE WORSHIP OF FALSE GODS

This mixture of seeking to serve both the true God and false gods was the downfall of the nation of Israel, until, in a strange irony, Israel was taken captive to the actual city of Babylon in B.C. 606. The prophet Jeremiah quoted the words of his people in their open rebellion against God: *"We will not hearken unto thee, but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her... for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine."* (Jeremiah 44:15-19, 25) To Israel's shame, Judges 2:11-13 notes: *"And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord unto anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth."*

Who was this *queen of heaven* in whom the erring Jews had such implicit confidence? Who was *Baal*? Who was *Ashtaroth*?

The study of mythology reveals the fact that the god *Baal* (meaning Lord), and the goddess *queen of heaven*, were universally worshiped under various names and titles — all synonymous with Nimrod and his queen. Two such names are *Ninus* and *Semiramis* – the first king and queen of ancient Babylon. In Genesis 10:11 we read that Nimrod built the city of Nineveh — a clear connection with the name *Ninus*, because the name Nineveh literally means *the habitation of Ninus*. In one of the famous sculptures of ancient Babylon, Ninus and Semiramis are represented as actively engaged in the pursuits of the hunt; Semiramis is bearing the quiver which holds the arrows for the *mighty hunter* Ninus – Nimrod. Ninus was both the son, as well as the husband of Semiramis, the queen of Babylon. Not only were they living in open defiance against God in taking glory unto themselves, but they also were living in an incestuous relationship. Historians agree that Semiramis was a beautiful but very depraved woman, and it is to her that much of the extravagant and licentious character of the heathen religions has been ascribed.

1 Kings 18:17-40 illustrates just how firmly established the worship of Baal became among the Israelites. God instructed His prophet Elijah to call together 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Ashtaroth in a trial between the true God and these false gods. Elijah came boldly forward to Israel and cried: *"How long halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah is God, follow*

him; but if Baal, then follow him." The test was to be an answer by fire. The people agreed that this would be a proper test because Baal was the sun or fire god, and what could be more reasonable than to expect an answer by fire from him? The test vindicated the name of Jehovah, and 450 prophets of Baal were slain that day.

Closely associated with Baal is Molech – yet another false god in the record of Israel's grim history. In Jeremiah 32:35, we read: *"And they [the Israelites] built the high places of Baal... to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination..."* Because Nimrod was the first Babylonian king, and associated with Baal, historians apply the title Molech primarily to him, for Molech means king. The Scriptures indicate Molech to be the terrible god of fire — the earthly representative of the sun god Baal. It was claimed that the act of passing through the fire was for the purpose of purifying the children sacrificed to Molech — making them ready for the afterlife.



God's abhorrence of this practice and Israel's chronic deviation from His holy commandments is stated again by the prophet Jeremiah: *"...they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods... and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; they have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind."* (Jeremiah 19:4, 5) Yes, Israel presented their children as burnt

offerings to Baal, but what is worse, as part of the burnt offering ceremony to their false god Molech, the priests ate part of the human sacrifice! Interestingly, the Chaldean word for *the priests* is *cahna*, so that *Cahna-Bal*, that is, *Priest of Baal*, became *cannibal*. (Edgar's *Mythology and the Bible*, pg. 39) What a horrible testimony against Israel and a stern warning against the dangers of compromise!

The title *queen of heaven* given to Semiramis, has been connected by historians with the term *ashtoreth* (plural form—*ashtaroth*). *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, under the article *ashtoreth* states: *"From the connection of this goddess with Baal or Bel we should naturally conclude that she would be found in the Assyrian Pantheon, and in fact the name Ishtar appears to be clearly identified in the list of the great gods of Assyria. There is no reason to doubt that this Assyrian goddess is the Ashtoreth of the Old Testament and the Astarte of the Greeks and Romans...It is certain that the worship of Astarte became identified with that of Venus (or Aphrodite)." The Roman goddess Diana was a huntress bearing a quiver of arrows. In this character she was the complement of Nimrod the *mighty hunter* — Semiramis. It is evident by these various associations that the primary root of most major mythological characters of paganism stems from Nimrod and Semiramis.*

NIMROD, THE FATHER OF EGYPTIAN MYTHOLOGY

The name Nimrod means literally *the subduer of the leopard*, being derived from *nimr*—*a leopard*, and *rad*—*to subdue*. Nimrod's name, therefore, implied that his fame as a hunter rested mainly on the fact that he had discovered the art of training the leopard to aid him in hunting the other wild beasts. This connection between the *mighty hunter* as the *subduer of leopards* is key in understanding the link between Nimrod and the Egyptian god *Osiris*. It is well known to

historians that Nimrod, on becoming mighty, extended his dominion, conquering Egypt. Osiris and his priests are represented arrayed in leopard's skins, symbolizing that their god Osiris was in reality Nimrod, the renowned leopard-tamer. Edgar's *Mythology and the Bible*, pg. 12

In Egypt the mother figure was worshipped as *Isis*, and the son as *Osiris*, though more often as *Horus*. The historian Bunsen shows that Osiris was represented as both the son and husband of his mother, and actually bore as one of his titles of honor the name *Husband of the Mother*. (Bunsen, Vol. i, pp. 438,439) This again serves to identify Osiris with Nimrod who married his own mother.

As Nimrod's alter-ego, Osiris was the god of the sun, and Semiramis was identified as the goddess of the moon and stars. In addition, Persian records associate Nimrod with the constellation Orion — "*the mighty hunter placed among the stars.*" (*Paschal Chronicle*, tom. i, p. 64) The constellation Virgo is admitted by the most learned astronomers to have been dedicated to Ceres, who was identical with the Egyptian goddess Isis — Semiramis. (See *Landseer's Sabean Researches*, p. 201) In fact, all the signs of the Zodiac were associated with various pagan gods by the Chaldean astrologers. Here again, Israel failed to see the danger in compromising with the heathen nations. The Lord especially commanded the Israelites not to worship the sun, moon or the stars because of the degrading influence it would have upon them. (Deuteronomy 4:15-19) Yet Israel disregarded the Lord's command and "*burned incense unto Baal, to the sun and to the moon and to the constellations...*" (2 Kings 23:4-5) There is no question that the origin of astrology, consulting the signs of the Zodiac, has been carried through the millennia from the worship of Osiris (the Egyptian Baal) *the sun god* and his celestial mate, *the queen of heaven — the goddess of the moon and stars.*

The mystical Egyptian symbol of Osiris was the young Apis bull — another sign of the Zodiac, the constellation Taurus. This bull, portrayed in Egyptian hieroglyphs, was the express symbol of Nimrod — the powerful one. In Assyria the word for bull signifies also a ruler or prince; and it was for this reason that the mighty kings of Babylon who succeeded and imitated Nimrod, the first king, were represented by great human-headed bulls. The Jewish nation was clearly influenced by this pagan god — worshipping the image of a young golden bull soon after leaving Egypt under Moses, and claiming that this was the god who had delivered them out of their bondage. See Exodus Chapter 32

There is an ancient tradition that Nimrod's end was violent. This is yet another connection with Osiris, for the violent death of Osiris was the central theme of Egyptian idolatry. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (a copy of which is frequently found entombed with mummies) states that while Osiris was absent on a certain occasion, his enemy, who was named Sem, entered into a conspiracy with 72 of the judges of Egypt to put Osiris to death. Sem is one and the same as Shem — Nimrod's great uncle — the faithful patriarch son of Noah. (See Luke 3:36) Shem, the great opponent of idolatry, was enabled by the power of God to convince the tribunal of judges that Nimrod's enormous offense against the true God was worthy of death. Osiris was slain, and his body torn into 14 pieces which were scattered throughout the country. Isis (Semiramis) greatly lamented his death, and searched about for the pieces of his body, erecting a shrine over each one — the subtle beginnings of an attempt to deify him.

Historians confirm that Semiramis was a woman of unbounded ambition. She had shared with Osiris (Nimrod) his kingdom and glory, but now all honor had suddenly come to an end. In a further attempt to extend her legacy, she would claim that Osiris was none other than the promised *seed of the woman* who had been destined to *bruise the serpent's head*. (Genesis 3:15) The Egyptian names of Semiramis and Nimrod, *Isis* and *Osiris*, signify *the woman and the seed*; for Isis is the Greek form of *H'isha-the woman*, and Osiris is inscribed on Egyptian monuments as *He-siri-the seed*. It was not enough that Nimrod had been honored as the mighty hunter and hero of the world, for though he was now dead, Semiramis would declare that he had risen and had been deified, and she would thus have him worshipped as a god!

Thus, Nimrod owes his prowess as a mythical god to his mother and wife Semiramis. The monuments of Egypt show that the worship of Osiris as a god dates from the earliest times, and that he was regarded as the "*god-man who suffered, died, rose again, and reigned eternally in heaven.*" He was worshipped as the "*king of eternity, lord of the everlastingness, the prince of gods and men, the god of gods, king of kings, lord of lords, prince of princes, the governor of the world, whose existence is everlasting.*" (Papyrus of Ani, Plate I, in the British Museum) To ancient Egyptians, Osiris was the god who granted life from the dead and bestowed everlasting life. (*Guide to the Egyptian Collection in the British Museum*, page 39) Semiramis succeeded in not only claiming that her dead husband was to be venerated as a god, but that she, too, should share in his glory as the *Mother of god*.



THE COUNTERFEIT VERSES THE TRUE

As it has been the aim of Satan to discredit and confuse true worship, it is not hard to see that he was responsible for suggesting to Semiramis this bold scheme. Satan and the fallen angels have taken the beauties in God's truth and perverted these with the intent to draw attention away from the true God and the true path to salvation. (2 Corinthians 11:14) This very short summary of mythology has revealed the devastating effects of Satan's deceptions. In Nimrod and Semiramis we see counterfeits of the true: *the seed of the woman, the resurrection and the life, the king of kings, the mother and son, the savior of man, and the Messiah* — all counterfeits of the true.

That old serpent, the devil not only caused the fall of mankind through his lying suggestion to Eve, but has continued to attempt to frustrate Jehovah's glorious plan of redemption by introducing many false messiahs. (Genesis 3:1-6; John 8:44; Revelation 12:9) In consequence of this, the whole world has been led astray over and over again, and few indeed have had the privilege of knowing the true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. The confusion brought forth by mythology has distorted even many Christian doctrines — especially from the time of Constantine through the dark ages when compromise with paganism was rampant. *Part Two* of this series on *Myths, Legends and Idol Worship* will discuss in detail this influence of paganism upon Christendom.

Though God has permitted His truth to be distorted for a time, it will not always be so, for "*The knowledge of the Lord will cover the whole earth as the waters cover the sea.*" Yes, God "*will have all men to be saved [through the rightful Messiah], and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*" Isaiah 11:9; 1 Timothy 2:4