

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 359

The Myth Made Fact

January 16, 2021

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Guest: Dr. Louis Markos (LM)

Episode Summary

Should Christians read classical mythology? Such material is, after all, pagan (i.e., non-Christian) and has a great deal to say about what Greeks and Romans believed about their gods—gods opposed to the God of Israel and Jesus. If we were only to look at how classical mythology departs from biblical truth, the answer seems easy. But why is it that those pagan stories so often sound like biblical stories from both the Old and New Testament? The early church fathers were well versed in classical mythology, and often saw biblical truth embedded in the material—and wondered if God had providentially intended that to be the case. In this episode of the podcast, we take a deep dive into these and related issues with Dr. Louis Markos as we discuss his new book, *Myth Made Fact: Reading Greek and Roman Mythology Through Christian Eyes*.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 359: The Myth Made Fact with Louis Markos. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

MH: Well, we're in 2021, Trey.

TS: Still, yep.

MH: Yeah, still. [laughs]

TS: Yeah, it's still 2021.

MH: 2021, yeah. Well, I say that because at first it was like a release, a week or so ago, back when it happened [January 1st]. "Oh, we're finally in 2021!" Now it's like, "Yeah, we're in 2021. Here we go again." [laughs]

TS: Well, I... Yeah, I mean...

MH: Lots of stuff going on that we wish was different.

TS: Yeah, no words to describe what's going on, other than that everybody needs to turn to the Lord. That's all I got to say, Mike.

MH: People need the Lord. That's pretty much it.

TS: That's it.

MH: And the Church needs to remember the Lord.

TS: Yeah.

MH: Wouldn't it be nice?

TS: Obviously we...

MH: So Lord willing...

TS: Yeah. Alright...

MH: So... Other than that, though, busy. Our term at the Awakening School is about... We're on the threshold of that beginning. So we're just hunkering down, doing what we do, and enjoying good content—good discussions. And I think today is going to be another one of those.

TS: Absolutely. Never get tired of Lou here. His energy is [MH laughs] uh...

MH: Yeah. Can you bottle that? [laughter]

TS: Yeah, it's infectious.

MH: It's a good thing it's infectious.

TS: Absolutely. There you go. No pun intended, if that is a pun. Technically. But alright... Also, Mike, I don't know if I said this already, but Lou's coming on to talk about his new book. I do have a few copies of his book to give away, so please continue to use the hashtag #NakedBible out there and help promote the podcast. And I will reach out to you. So with that...

MH: Yeah, let's just jump into it.

MH: Well, we're thrilled to have Doctor, Professor, utterer of profundities [laughs] Louis Markos back on the podcast with us. And Louis, for those who have not caught your first two interviews, why don't you introduce yourself again. Because you know, we always get new listeners. So why don't you introduce yourself real

briefly: who you are, where you teach, what you teach. And then we'll get into this new book that you have.

LM: Hey, thanks, Mike. Third time's the charm, as they say. My name's Lou Markos and I'm a professor of English and Scholar-In-Residence at Houston Baptist University in Houston, TX. I'm in my 30th year teaching. My PhD specialty was the Romantic and Victorian poets, and I've written on them. But I also do anything that has to do with ancient Greece and Rome, and also anything to do with C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. And I even do film. And again, I'm sort of a Renaissance man, and I really make C.S. Lewis my model, not only as an apologist, but he's my role model as an English professor—as a generalist who wants to make lots of connections and synthesize things. I've even written a couple of children's novels and I've written some novels, Mike. I decided you really need to approach these things from all different angles. And actually, on my birthday last year (which was January 22nd, so it's almost been a year), one of my students gave me a copy of your *Unseen Realm* book for my birthday. And she said, "I know you're going to love this." And of course, I read it and I wrote a review and compared it to J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. And then I heard from you and we went ahead and we did our first podcast on *Lord of the Rings* and the amazing connections (especially *The Silmarillion*). And that sort of led to the second podcast on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and "Where is Milton getting these ideas?" and how much he shaped our understanding of angels and devils and heaven and hell and the whole cosmic thing.

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And this time (the third time we're getting together) I've got a new book out from Classical Academic Press called *The Myth Made Fact: Reading Greek and Roman Mythology through Christian Eyes*. And like you, Mike, I'm somebody that loves to draw from antiquity. And it used to be that evangelicals like myself were a little bit nervous about pagan things and stuff like that, and thought they would go astray. But I really believe that the more we study these things and the more we understand the culture... Because you know, God chose to become incarnate in this Greco-Roman world. So the more we know about that world, I think the more we're going to understand not only the gospel but the fuller plan—the whole (to quote you) "supernatural realm" of this.

And one of the entry points into my book and into this discussion, Mike, is something you talk about often in your books, and that's Genesis 6—when the sons of God and the daughters of men came together and gave birth to the Nephilim. And it actually says in Genesis that these were the heroes of old. Now whether that literally means they're Hercules and Theseus and Jason, I don't know, but it certainly suggests a connection between those. And I think the more we understand it, the fuller we're going to get this whole biblical picture.

MH: Yeah, that is probably the easiest point of intersection to see. I mean, on my end, I have to remind the audience... Because this is going to reference an interview we (in terms of me—I'm using the editorial "we" there) [LM laughs] did

with Gerald McDermott. But my exposure to... Was there anybody in early Christian studies that was at all in tune with, really, an ancient biblical worldview? Especially since, to be fair, I wasn't so much asking myself that when it came to the Old Testament, the Israelites, and the ancient Near East. I was really asking it about, "Well, what about the people who inherited that worldview—the Hellenistic intertestamental, Second Temple Jewish period? I mean, who in the Church Fathers (the 2nd, 3rd, 4th century)... Was anybody reading that stuff? Was anybody grasping the original context, not only for the New Testament, but for a lot of things that, of course, go from the Old and bleed into the New?" And really, it was negative. There was sort of a negative context. You could see sort of people rejecting specific things after the time of Augustine. Earlier... You know, there were Tertullian, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr. They understood what the context for a lot of these things were.

But you know, I thought, "Well, when those guys are gone, that was pretty much the end of the story." But that wasn't really true. And Gerald McDermott we had on. He wrote a book called *God's Rivals*. And really, it was put on my radar because he references my work on the Divine Council in that book. And then somebody alerted me to that and then I went and checked it out. And really, the book is about how the early Church had this discussion about, "Hey, what do we do with pagan religious ideas—pagan texts?" Because some of it is clearly antithetical to the truth of the gospel, the story of Jesus, the biblical metanarrative. But then there are other parts that are, like, "Wow." There are some striking similarities here. And so there was this huge discussion over what that meant, like how to parse the similarities and the differences. Because they were both there. And here, along you come with this book.

And I want to get into the prefatory material and the introduction. Because you (and others who wrote the preface and the foreword) point out that, "What Lou is doing here actually is a modern version..." You are the current installment of a long tradition within the Church of not wholesale turning your back on pagan material (in this case, the Greco-Roman material). And you're right, that is sort of the evangelical reflex.

LM: It has been for a long time.

MH: But rather, we have this long tradition early on of, "Well, maybe these similarities are there because God graciously mediated truth to these people. And they got it wrong or they rejected parts of it or whatever." But there are elements here that can be found in these religions and in these texts that later on (post-Jesus) the apostles and others are going to use to build bridges and to win them over. So, like, maybe that was intentional. There's this whole discussion. And you're continuing in that tradition.

LM: [inaudible] We've been emailing, Mike, this week, getting ready for this podcast. And I mentioned one of my very favorite writers is a man named Don

Richardson. He died a few years ago. And he's famous for *The Peace Child* and for another book called *Eternity in their Hearts*. And he, when he was in these inaccessible places (Papua New Guinea and places like that), was looking for what he called redemptive analogies. He believed that if he looked hard enough, he would find that flickering candle—something that God wrote in their hearts. A lot of times it was unbelievably twisted. Like when I was reading *The Peace Child*... Most of us know about the “peace child”—this idea that one tribe would give the son of their king over to the other king. And as long as that child was alive, there was peace between them. So literally Jesus was God's peace child. But he tells another horrible, ugly ritual that these pagans did, where after somebody died, they stood there by the body and watched it decay and put their hands in it. It was horrendous. But there was just this little flickering shadow of this sense or desire for a resurrection of the body. And when he saw this, he was able to show them the truth.

And so we've got to be prepared, Mike, to be shocked a little bit sometimes. Because a lot of times this little reflection can be kind of twisted and kind of scary and bloody and violent and things like that. We always talk about Acts chapter 17 (Paul at the Areopagus), but a little bit earlier (I think it's chapter 14) is when Paul says to another audience, “God did not leave himself without witness. He did not leave himself without a testimony.” It's there. Sometimes it's there in nature (in creation) and our conscience. But it's also there in these stories. And I think it's up to us to try to learn how to read these stories. Because, Mike, I think we talked a little bit about this when we talked about *Paradise Lost* and Milton, that there's always, when you see a connection (as we're going to see in this podcast) there's always four ways to read it. One way is to say it's a coincidence and forget about it. But we wouldn't be having this discussion if we thought everything was a coincidence. Okay? So there's three other ways to read it. One is that it's a demonic deception. And some of those early Church Fathers (Justin Martyr and all) often just said, “This is a demonic deception.” Other times, they say (and this is a more modern thing) that, “Well, it's just proof that Christianity, too, is only a myth, and it's the Hebrew or Jewish/Christian version of a myth.” But in between is that reading that says no, that in a very shadowy way, God was preparing the heart of these pagan people for the coming of the true gospel. So they were being prepared.

MH: The trajectory actually makes sense if you're going to assign any validity to the biblical story. Let's just think about Genesis 1-11. I mean, Genesis gives us this picture that originally the people of the world (whoever they were, scattered wherever they were, and so on and so forth) believed that there was a one true God. They obviously believed in other animate beings and a supernatural world that's heavily populated and all this kind of stuff that we talk about on the podcast all the time. But they had a sense for what you might call original monotheism. In other words, there's one deity that's above it all that created all the rest. And then when you get past Babel, that deteriorates because of the judgment at Babel and the fragmentation of the nations. And then, if you're going with biblical

chronology, a couple of hundred years pass and we have Abraham. And his parents are idolaters. Like, where'd that come from?

LM: Right.

MH: You know, so you have this notion of truth. You have these ideas that are true. And then they get lost or distorted or perverted or whatever it is—inverted. And then history sort of moves along. And then you get the fulfillment of the plan of the true God in Christ. And then on the other side of Christ, then you can look back at the pagan world as the gospel expands to the Gentiles—to the nations—these nations in which in great antiquity had truth. And it's still embedded there. [laughs] Okay? It's still... It's fragmented and embedded. And so you could see, "We should sort of expect these remnants—these vestiges, these ideas—to be there." And then it's up to the apostles to be led, either figure out or led (I think both) by the Spirit to latch onto these things and to use them to turn the Gentiles back.

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LM: One of the things that we forget is that evolution is not just a scientific theory. It is a worldview. A lot of Christians don't realize that in the academy the evolutionary mindset or paradigm or worldview has invaded everything. So we have just taken it for granted...

MH: Yeah, it's going to reject an original monotheism. When you apply evolution to anthropology, the anthropology of religion, it's very much opposite.

LM: Yeah! What they say basically is we all started as a bunch of animists running around in the woods. And we slowly evolved to polytheism, pantheism, up to Christianity. Then up to science, of course, right? But actually, what the record shows is the opposite—not evolution, but entropy. We started as monotheists and fell away. And what Don Richardson found and documented in *Eternity in their Hearts* (that second book I mentioned) is that there are scattered tribes where he found they still had a memory of monotheism, but they were afraid. They knew that they'd somehow broken with that one God and now they were terrified of the spirits that were tormenting them and were afraid, but they still had that concept of monotheism deep, deep down.

MH: Were you the one who recommended to me Win Corduan's book, *In the Beginning God*? Was that you?

LM: Oh, I haven't... It wasn't me. I'll have to look for it myself.

MH: You know what, now that I said it, it was a listener that I met at ETS (not last year, because it was virtual, but the year before that). Yeah, Winfried Corduan, who was a philosopher. He had his PhD in Philosophy—a professor of philosophy and a Christian. But he actually wrote a book. I have it. I haven't read

it yet. But it's called *In the Beginning God: A Fresh Look at the Case for Original Monotheism*.

LM: Oh!

MH: So basically, he argues the same point. And I bring this up for the sake of the listener. Because the idea that these pagans (and they're certainly pagan in their theology)... They have nuggets of truth, but a lot of distortions and just false teaching. But the idea is that embedded in that are the vestiges of things that are true. And then as they write about their belief system and how they view the gods and who they worship and how this and that happened. Trying to... Explaining the world as the way it is in light of these supernatural characters and so on. How they conceived that. They can't help [laughs] but draw some of these things into their own literature—their own way of talking about this thing. And so someone sitting on the other side and looking back on that (looking at their literature, knowing what the truth is) it's like, "Oh yeah. Here's something that's very... You're onto something here, Mr. Pagan. But let's think about that. Let's talk about that. And then we'll talk about Jesus and so on and so forth." That whole enterprise is not new.

LM: No!

MH: You're just trying to revive it.

LM: And you know, because I'm writing a book on the early Church right now as we're talking here. And one of the things I found reading Justin Martyr, Tatian, the Athenagoras... They're all 2nd century apologists and they also wonder about things. I'll just give you an example. One of the things the early apologists remind their pagan audience of again and again is that Moses is much, much older than all of the Greco-Roman wisdom. He's older than Homer, Plato, all of them. But they're never quite sure, does that mean that Homer and all the other great poets and philosophers, did they actually have access to the Torah? Were they quoting it somehow? Or was it just a general revelation? And they kind of go back and forth.

MH: Yeah.

LM: They also do the same waffling, not because they're indecisive, because they're trying to figure out (just like we are, right here as we're talking)... They also noticed some of the links between paganism and Christianity. And sometimes they do treat it as a demonic deception. But sometimes they treat it as a *praeparatio evangelium*—as a sort of pagan preparation for the gospel (the evangel that comes).

MH: It's... Providentially, there it is. So let's use that foothold to steer them back home, essentially. I want to read, just for the audience, just a couple of slices

from the foreword and the prefatory material. They're just some interesting things that stuck out to me. The example of Orpheus. Pagans had their myth of Orpheus descending to the underworld and playing music so beautiful that it compelled Hades to release one of the souls he held captive. And here's the line:

Is it any surprise that the Greeks and Romans saw Christ as the fulfillment of such a story? The one who sets us all free from the bonds of death, the true Orpheus, the mega Orpheus, if you will, the myth made fact.

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MH: And then there's another quotation about how medieval Christians believed that the coming of Christ was the fulfillment of pagan yearnings and longings. Not pagan theology, but just these things that you read their literature and you know they're looking for... And we've talked about this before in terms of the modern world about how humans still yearn for a world that is not the chaotic mess that this one is.

LM: Right.

MH: You know, this hunger for utopia, this hunger for justice, this hunger for setting things straight and so on and so forth. And of course, their answer is always, "Well, here's how we do it without God in the picture." [Laughs]

LM: Right.

MH: But the impulse is the point, not the solution. The impulse is the point. It's there. And you, in your introduction, you talk about some art like Michelangelo, and you look at the Sistine Chapel and how you can pick out the biblical images. But if you don't have an eye trained for the classical—the pagan images—they're mixed in there.

LM: They are!

MH: So there's an amalgam in Michelangelo's "Christian art," we'll say. We'll just use that term for the sake of the discussion here. But there's an amalgam within the clearly biblical themes of this pagan stuff. And so it's like, "Why is he doing that?" Well, could it possibly be that he thought, "Well, these two things are related, even though they're different." You know, now the modern evangelical impulse is to say, "Well, Michelangelo must've wanted to destroy the Christian... He wanted to throw pagan stuff in there to pervert it." Maybe it's the other way around. Maybe we have the cart before the horse, or something like that.

LM: One of the things that C.S. Lewis (you know, he's my role model, too, as an English professor)... One of the things he thought... He tried to convince people that (this is his phrase) "the Renaissance never happened." [MH laughs] Now what did he mean by that? What he means by that is, we still have this idea that

the modern world (that is, of course, the secular humanist progressive world) that it began in the Renaissance. It didn't. It began in the Enlightenment. The Renaissance is still very much in continuity with the classical and medieval world. And as he said, take any Renaissance man, from Shakespeare to Galileo to any of them, to Michelangelo. They have much more in common with a medieval like Dante, or even a pagan like Plato or Aristotle, than they have in common with Kant or Hume or Darwin or Freud or Nietzsche or any of those people. And why is this important? Because in Michelangelo, we are not getting somehow a rejection of the Christian, but we're getting the full fusion—the full synthesis. When we think of the Sistine Chapel, there's two important things in terms of our conversation today. First, the main frescoes along the spine of the ceiling, notice they're all Genesis 1-11. So he decides to focus on God's work amongst all mankind, before he narrows it down to...

MH: Yep, where we get Abraham, yeah.

LM: Abraham. So it's all, it's actually even pre-Babel. It's really creation, Fall, and the Flood. That's the focus, right? So again, this is the God working in *all* the nations. And then around them are those gigantic frescoes of all the major Old Testament prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, etc. But interspersed between the Old Testament prophets are the Greek and Roman Sybils. Okay? The prophetesses. What are they doing there? Well, they too are bearing witness, but in a much lesser way, and usually in an unconscious way. And yet God is using them to prepare the pagan world for the coming... As your own poets have said, "We are his offspring." That's Acts chapter 17.

MH: I mean, for our audience, I think an easy illustration... And please indulge me. I'm not comparing my little book to Michelangelo. [laughter] But when I wrote the little book about the *World Turned Upside Down: Finding the Gospel in Stranger Things*, this is all I'm doing. It's like I know the biblical metanarrative. And so I watch the show and I see embedded within the show (unconsciously—I don't think the creators, the producers, and the directors are doing anything deliberately Christian in *Stranger Things*)... But they can't tell the story that they're telling without these elements that are embedded. And I'm just cherry-picking. I'm cherry-picking the show and saying, "Okay, here's this idea. Here's this scene. It's part of this narrative. It's part of this trajectory in the story—the plot or this subplot. Isn't it awesome how that same trajectory is found over here in the biblical story?" That's all I'm doing. And so this is what the early Church was doing with... They don't have Netflix, okay? They have the writings of the classical authors. And they're reading this stuff and they're going, "Okay. Okay, I see what you're tracking on here. You get a little lost, but the thought you're tracking on is significant. And we have the answer to this."

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LM: And it's not just Michelangelo. The earliest Christian art is what we see on the walls of the catacombs, where they buried their dead. And on the walls of the catacombs we see some images of Christ as if he were Orpheus (which you

mentioned a moment ago)! Because he's the true Orpheus. He is the one whose music saved us. But he's better than Orpheus because Orpheus looked back and Eurydice was dragged back down into Hades.

MH: Yeah.

LM: But our savior does not look back, right? He truly saves us. And remember, that's quite literal. In the old Apostles' Creed, he descended into hell—the idea that Christ broke down the doors of hell and reached out his hands and rescued the righteous people of the Old Testament.

MH: That's an interesting example. Because a Jew would look at that and think "Enoch" (for obvious reasons)...

LM: That's a good point, yeah.

MH: But a Gentile... And a Gentile might know Enoch, but a Gentile is going to know the Orpheus story.

LM: Yeah!

MH: So it's like a different entry point to the same destination, you know? And the New Testament says, "Hey, we don't really care what door you come in, as long as you wind up [laughs] at this destination."

LM: Yeah, there you go!

MH: There you go. You know?

LM: They would also know that the great Hercules (their greatest hero) descended into the underworld and defeated Cerberus, the three-headed dog of hell. It was one of his 12 labors. And he grabbed him by the collar and took him up. So I mean, they know this. It's amazing. And the best way I think we can understand the classic world is that the one biblical figure in the Old Testament who is the most like a Greek hero is Samson. Right? He even dies as a suicide. (I mean, I guess it depends how you want to say suicide.) But he is the Hercules of the ancient world. He's gifted with this strength. And one moment he's righteous and then he gets impulsive and he goes crazy the other way. And yet still, in the end, he is rewarded. Because the belief was that Hercules burned himself to death on a pyre, but then he was taken up to Mount Olympus. He was deified in a sense—apotheosized. So they...

MH: Yeah, and that example gets talked about a lot in Old Testament scholarship with Judges. And the discussion (as you can imagine) can go both ways. It's a chicken or egg problem. But the similarities are the point that's obvious.

LM: Well, you know, Mike, one thing I always tell my students, there's a difference between data and the interpretation of data.

MH: Mm hmm.

LM: Right? And the best example of that is (we might have talked about this in an earlier podcast) you go to take a Social Studies class in a regular public school in America. Sixth grade. You read the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. It's got this wonderful flood story. Then your teacher, trained in secular humanism, says, "See, children? We now know that every single ancient culture has a story of a universal flood. Therefore, the Bible is nothing but a myth." And even as a kid, I thought, "You know, there's another way to read this evidence!" Okay? Maybe there was one, and maybe only amongst the Jews does it retain some historical validity. Another one that I like to use is what's called homology, the fact that the bend of a man's arm and the bat wing and the dorsal fin of a fish all have the same basic design. And some people look at that and say, "Proof of Darwinian evolution." I say, "I look at it and see proof of common design." Right? Why does a designer keep reinventing the right angle? You know?

MH: These things are, especially as they're taught... And look, I'm not going to say that every public school teacher who handles this material has some sinister motive.

LM: No.

MH: Okay? Because they're so locked into a "we've got to get through this content this day or I'm in trouble" kind of thing. But having said that (giving them the benefit of the doubt, because I have a lot of people in my family who teach in public school and they would be in lockstep with what you're saying here), but it's a classic either/or fallacy. And that's the way a lot of things are presented to kids especially. Because they don't have either the time to discuss it or the teacher either isn't comfortable discussing it or really isn't prepared to discuss it. But you get these classic either/or fallacies. "See, here's this. And there's only one way to look at it." You either embrace something that's true or false. Like there's no way to nuance anything. It's this or that. And it's really unfortunate.

Now this is actually a good pivot point. Because what we've been talking about is one thing of two, reading through your book, as I sort of categorized things—one of two things as far as your goals. One is to get into the reader's head. For the most part this is going to be... And I would like to talk about who the specific target audience is, too. So we'll throw that in here. But for the most part, you're probably going to have Christian readers here, either homeschooling or reading themselves. They're interested or curious. And you want to fix in their minds, "Look, this is not only a legitimate discussion, but it's a really old one. Your forefathers in the Church did this all the time, trying to look at this material and

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looking for truth nuggets and using that as a bridge to have these conversations about the bigger truth.”

But the other thing that you hit on as you go through the episodes and you have questions at the end of each one, is virtue. And you actually have a prefatory section note on virtue. And so you talk about that, that basically you reduce it to several time-tested virtues. And in sort of the secular world, you have four of what you call Classical or Cardinal Virtues: courage, self-control, wisdom, and justice. And then there are the three Christian or theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. So what you’re essentially saying is that these stories are going to contain the classical virtues and they’re also going to be bridge points in these other virtues that get you into theological discussion.

So can you talk a little bit about just the way you approach virtue? As an Old Testament theologian, I’ll tell you, this is how... And I don’t want to steal your thunder here, but this is how we are taught in grad school to think about wisdom literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon). You’re taught that this is... In a secular context, you’re taught, “Well, this just reflects common sense that everybody basically has. Every functional human being is going to be able to pick up Proverbs whether they’re Jewish or not and see the wisdom, just practical living in it.” And that’s true. But theologically, it’s like a form of common grace that God embeds within the human (with humans in what they are)—common sense and wisdom principles that are just going to work out in life. So talk a little bit about your goals as far as virtue.

LM: It really is. One of the reasons I enjoyed writing this book is that I kind of saw it as a sequel to two different books I wrote. One is called *From Achilles to Christ: Why Christians Should Read the Pagan Classics*. And that’s the part of this book where I’m tracing the connections between the Greek mythology and Christian truth. But it’s also, in a way, a sequel to a book I wrote called *On the Shoulders of Hobbits: The Road to Virtue with Tolkien and Lewis*. And in that book, I showed how elements of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* are teaching us those seven virtues that we just talked about. And so I’m also taking that approach but winding them together. Because I love Classical Christian schools. I speak for them all the time. Both of my kids are teaching at Classical schools now. And one thing about Classical schools is they not only have restored the canon (the full Greco-Roman/Judeo-Christian canon), they’ve also restored the idea of an education in virtue. Now it’s really, really tricky (and this is why I added that note on virtue in the beginning—in the preface to the book)... I used to think (as a lot of Christians think) that the problem with the public schools is that they had thrown out virtue. That’s not exactly true, I discovered. It almost might have been better if they threw it out [MH laughs], because then there would be a void and people would seek after it.

MH: Instead of putting something else in its place. [laughs]

LM: Right, exactly! They've substituted with what I would call "phony virtues" or "pseudo virtues" or "values." And they still teach "values" in school, but as far as I can tell, there's only five of them: inclusivism, egalitarianism, multiculturalism, environmentalism... These are the ones that are taught. And I'm not saying those things are bad. I mean, it's certainly good to be tolerant. But those things have never been the center of virtue. And so what you do is... It's like junk food. It fills you up but it has no real nutritional value. But because you're full, you're not seeking after the good fruits and vegetables or whatever. And always... And this is why I wrote *On the Shoulders of Hobbits* and why I wrote this book, too. People need to understand that until the modern period, the way you taught virtue—the best, most effective way of passing down the real virtues to our children—is through stories. By telling them stories.

MH: Mm hmm.

35:00

LM: And that's why... Another book I wrote called *Restoring Beauty*, about C.S. Lewis, I began by critiquing the movie *Shrek*. Now I do enjoy *Shrek*. I mean, it is funny. It's funny the way it makes fun of Disney. But I *don't* like *Shrek* because it's part of these whole new politically correct fairy tales, and that is really destructive. Right? If we start screwing with our fairy tales and our myths to teach kids crazy politically correct ideas, then we're robbing them of the chief way... You know, Bill Bennett, who used to be the Department of Education, Secretary of Education...

MH: Yeah.

LM: ... wrote a great book a while back now called... What was it called?
[laughs] You know what I'm talking about.

MH: I know what you mean. It was actually... It was on virtue.

LM: It was right... Oh my gosh. I can't believe it just...

MH: I'll come up with the title here in a second.

LM: *The Book of Virtues*...

MH: Oh, yeah, *The Book of Virtues*.

LM: *The Book of Virtues*! That's what it was called.

MH: [laughs] It was right there in front of our faces. [laughs]

LM: Right? What he did is he told stories, both from the Bible but also Greco-Roman myth and legend and everything like that, to illustrate virtues. And when the book came out it was best-seller. And the funny thing about it was, it was a great book, Mike, but if that book came out 150 years ago, people would say,

“Duh, that’s what we’re already doing.” But because we’d forgotten the proper way of teaching virtue, he had to write that book. And thank God that he did.

And so again, just a quick example. The cover of my book (and they did a beautiful job illustrating this book) is the story of Daedalus and Icarus. Right? And I think most people listening know that story. Daedalus and Icarus had been imprisoned in the very labyrinth that Daedalus invented. And the only way to escape was to fly. Because there was a window, but it overlooked a cliff going down to the water—the only way to escape. And so Daedalus, the great inventor, made wooden frames. He took feathers from birds. He used wax to affix the feathers. And he created wings so that he and his son could fly to freedom and safety. But of course, he told his son, “Now son, listen to me. Don’t fly too low or the water will make your wings heavy. Don’t fly too high or the sun will melt the wax. Keep a middle course.” But once they started flying, young-person Icarus forgot all about that and enjoyed things. He went flying up and down. And he got so high that the sun melted the wax. The feathers fell off. And he plunged to his death.

Now what we’re learning is self-control or temperance. But what I like about this story, Mike, and what I want to emphasize is here is a pagan story that can teach Christians something. Because too often, we as Christians think about God’s moral law as something that’s a killjoy that wants to stop us from having joy or fun or happiness, when in fact no, God’s law is there to *protect* us! We have to remember that the law (the Torah) was not given to a group of free men to turn them into slaves. It was given to a group of former slaves to make them free men. Without the law of Moses, the Jews would’ve... Already they weren’t going to go back to the fleshpots of Egypt. So what I’m saying is that by meditating on these stories, I’m not only learning the virtue again, I’m learning that virtue is a positive thing and not a negative thing. It’s there to protect me from disaster. And a lot of the great myths that I cover in the book are cautionary tales, very much like the wisdom literature of the Bible—of Proverbs and things like that.

MH: Mm hmm.

LM: We learn from those stories.

MH: Yeah, or parables or allegories. You know, I mean, it’s very obvious that Scripture does this, too. Well, you brought up Daedalus and Icarus. Right after that, because it’s kind of similar, is Phaethon and the Chariot of the Sun. So let’s talk about that one a little bit. That’s probably a story that the audience may be familiar with.

LM: Good. And thank you for pronouncing it right. You know these words. One of the things I insisted (and the publisher agreed) is that I start each chapter by retelling the story as if I’m a storyteller. But what I did is, embedded in the story is the pronunciation guide. Kind of like the old King James that’s self-pronunciating (I think it’s called). Because I find that a lot of kids (especially homeschoolers)

are big readers but then when they start talking to you, you don't know what they're talking about because they don't know how to pronounce these words. And of course they don't! The book doesn't talk to you, right? So I've really made sure that all the names... And when I've put in the pronunciation guide, Mike, I don't use the ridiculous pronunciation guide they use in the dictionary. Nobody knows what that means. [MH laughs]

MH: With all the dots and dashes and symbols.

LM: Yeah. Forget all that nonsense. I do it... And if it's supposed to be accented you put it in capital letters and all that sort of stuff. You make it... So Phaethon... I'm teaching it by writing "FAY" in big letters, then "e," then "thon." Then you can actually [inaudible] it, right? I want people to... Because a lot of people are afraid to speak up because they're afraid they'll mispronounce a word! I found that with my first book, *Lewis Agonistes*. I think that was a mistake on my part. I loved that title, but nobody wanted to push it because they were afraid they'd mispronounce the word Agonistes, right? [laughter]

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But anyway, so Phaethon... Wonderful story. And you're right, I kind of treat it as a companion to Daedalus and Icarus. Another young man who is actually the son of the sun (Helios, the sun god) wants to know for sure that he is the son of the sun. And so the sun does something very foolish. He says, "Alright, son, anything you ask me I'll give you." Watch out for rash oaths. You remember the story of Jephthah, who told God, "I'll sacrifice the first thing that comes into my house," and it turns out to be his daughter? Right? And then Saul does the same thing when he says, "Anybody that eats before this battle is going to die." And then of course, as we all remember the story, his son Jonathon eats some honey and his eyes brighten. He gets away with it because Saul is the king. But anyway, so don't make foolish vows, first of all. Don't swear by the River Styx. And the boy says, "I want to ride your chariot." And he says, "Don't do it, son! You can't control these horses!" But he foolishly goes ahead. And at first he does well. But as they reach the arc of the sky, the horses start recognizing the weakness of the charioteer and they start madly going up and down and up and down, burning everything, destroying the constellations, until finally Zeus just has to zap Phaethon, and he dies. [MH laughs] Right? He, like Icarus, wasn't able to keep that central course.

You know, what Aristotle would call the Golden Mean (the mean—the middle way)... He went to extremes and was too impulsive. And again, we see... We do live in a world of cause and effect. Now we do live in a fallen world, so sometimes it seems the ways of sinners prosper and whatnot. But we still do live in a world where choices have consequences. And we need to realize that. I don't know... Of course I love the old cartoons, but maybe they're not great. Because when I grew up watching the Roadrunner and Wile E. Coyote, every time Wile E. Coyote died, he popped up to life in the next cartoon! What's that all about? I'm not sure what we're teaching kids. Right? [laughs]

MH: Yeah. Well, now you're dating me, too. [laughs] Because I grew up on Looney Tunes. And the Three Stooges, but we don't want to talk about that. [LM laughs] How about... Here's another one that a lot of listeners will be familiar with: Prometheus. Let's talk about Prometheus.

LM: Great story. And he's just everywhere. Prometheus was a Titan who loved mankind. And Zeus was kind of holding us in thrall—in slavery. And what Prometheus did is to help man... He stole the fire from the gods—the secret of fire from the gods and gave it to man. And because he did that, Zeus was enraged and he punished him by chaining him to a rock up in the Caucasus Mountains. And there he was, naked, chained to the rock, crucified to the rock. And every morning, a giant eagle (or sometimes it's a vulture) came and devoured his liver, but then every night the liver grew back so that it could be devoured all over again. Now Mike, a lot of people think that eagle's a myth, but it's not. It actually exists. It's called the IRS, okay? [MH laughs] So just remember that. It devours all our money, gives it a year to grow back, and devours it again. So sometimes there's truth to myths. [laughter] But what I find fascinating about Prometheus is that he is a very odd mixture of both Satan and Christ, in a way.

MH: Yeah.

LM: He's a satanic figure in the sense that he has rebelled against Zeus, against Jupiter. But at the same time, he is a Christ figure because he's literally being crucified on behalf of man. And interestingly, in the end, Prometheus was saved and the chain that chained him was broken by Hercules (probably the greatest Christ figure, who is literally the son of Zeus). So all of these stories come together. And Prometheus has a lot of... Okay, we need to understand that when Prometheus stole the fire... Even the ancient Greeks understood this. Fire not only means “keep you warm at night, keep away the wild animals, cook your food,” fire is also the crucible of creativity. Without fire you don't have pottery.

MH: Technology.

LM: Basically technology, right? So the reason I mention that it's important is that the fire not only represents power, if you will, the fire represents knowledge. And it often represents a *forbidden* kind of knowledge. And so Prometheus also becomes a type of the over-reacher who steals forbidden knowledge and pays a terrible price for it. Whether we call that guy Darth Vader [laughs] or we call him Dracula or we call him Dr. Frankenstein or we call him Dr. Jekyll, he's that over-reacher who seeks after a wisdom not meant for him. And it ends up cutting him off from his fellow man and isolating him.

MH: The whole discussion of Prometheus (and you more or less just summarized what you have in the book)... But this is a myth that gets drawn on a lot in science fiction. And I wish at this point... If I was at HBU and I was teaching theology class and you were on the faculty, too, I'd say, “You know what we're

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going to do? We're going to assign our respective classes... They have the watch the movie "Prometheus," which is the..."

LM: Oh, you mean the one with the aliens.

MH: The prequel to Aliens. Because in that movie, it blends Christology with Satan in a Prometheus figure. Okay? It'll actually blend birth imagery from the Gospels that you would associate with Jesus and a few other things (the woman, the main character, I think her name is Elizabeth, she has red hair). So you get some Gnostic Christology in there, with Jesus' bloodline mythology.

LM: Oh, that's right! That's right! Yeah!

MH: But the whole thing tracks on the Promethean story. And again, you're left at the end, "Well, who's the hero? Is this good or evil?" You know what I mean? There's this muddying of the waters of clarity on this point. And of course, Ridley Scott wants to steer people... I could on and on and on about this. Because there's actually stuff... I don't know if it's on the internet anymore. But right after the movie, I found an article on Ridley Scott's original script and stuff that got taken *out*.

LM: Ooh!

MH: Okay? And how Jesus was actually one of the spawn of the engineers. And you have the whole [inaudible]...

LM: Oh my gosh!

MH: It's just unbelievable. That didn't make it into the movie, but it tells you where Scott's mind is. It tells you where his head is.

LM: Here's the funny thing. And I don't know if you're kind of getting at this, Mike, but sometimes the real archetypes, the real metanarrative, the real myth, is so strong, sometimes it forbids them from trying to destroy it. And I'll give you a perfect example of this. [MH laughs] This is Star Wars, Episode 3. Right? And if you remember, there's a scene where George Lucas thought, "Oh, let me be real liberal," and he has the bad guy—he has the evil emperor—say, "You're either for me or against me." Right? In other words, he's trying to make fun of George Bush, because he said something like that. Right? And he says something where the good guys say, "Well, you know what? The Sith are always given to absolutist thinking." So it's like George Lucas, trying to be politically correct and say, "Absolutist thinking is the cause of all evil," like he's Chris Hitchens or somebody. But if you listen carefully, later on...

MH: He undermines... [laughs]

LM: Later on, when Anakin is talking to the evil emperor about goodness and evil, he says, “Well, you know, those things are slippery categories.” Okay? It is the good guys who are the absolutists. The bad guys are the relativists who have no sense of right or wrong. They just do whatever’s expedient. The funny thing is George Lucas tried to be politically correct, but the power of his story would not allow him to be so. Isn’t that wonderful? [laughs]

MH: Yeah, it does sort of double back on itself, you know? But I mean, what we’re talking about here... These things... If for no other reason to be acquainted with some of the main stories of Greco-Roman mythology, they just get repurposed all the time. I mean, biblical stuff gets repurposed, this stuff gets repurposed. I hate to put it this way, but there’s very little original imagination going on...

LM: Yeah. [laughs]

MH: ... in our entertainment media. They’re constantly looking back toward great stories. And they largely come from these two pools, at least in the West—Greco-Roman, Classical tradition or the biblical tradition. And sometimes they try to force one into the other, or they dabble in... But you’re right. Sometimes when they do that, it just doubles back on them. Because they don’t quite have a handle on [laughs] really what’s going on there.

LM: Here’s another amazing.... Because what I like about you, Mike, is you and I are willing to move from biblical stuff to popular culture because we know that popular culture is an expression of these very archetypes.

MH: Yeah.

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LM: And this... A good example of this is that the biggest problem with environmentalism now is if it just means being a good steward of the environment, well, duh, that’s Christianity. But a lot of times, it’s an actually anti-human thing. “Human beings are the problem.” It’s that old book, *The Population Bomb*, by Paul Ehrlich, right? Well, then, we wait for that whole long arc that we’ve waited for about *The Avengers*, right? And what does *The Avengers* end with? It ends with the ultimate villain, Thanos, who does what most of these radical environmentalists would do if they could: snap his finger and eliminate half the population of human beings. So it’s kind of amazing that all of a sudden very, very radical environmentalistic Hollywood turns around and shows us that the true villain is Thanos, the one that is against humanity.

Another example of this that shocked me... Oh, I was going to say it and now I forgot what it was. But you know, again, they try to do one thing, but it circles back on them because I guess there’s an understanding of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong. We keep coming back to those stories because they are written into us. God has written eternity on the hearts of

men (in Ecclesiastes). And we said this before, it's not always knowledge in the sense of philosophical or theological knowledge worked out, it is a yearning. Acts 17: "From one man God has created all the races, that they might reach after him and grope after him, though he is not far from any of us, 'for in him we live and move and have our being,' as your own poets are saying, 'we are his offspring.'" So we grope and yearn and reach. Oh! I remember! It wasn't very good, but did you see the movie, *Dante's Inferno*? That was the newest Dan Brown novel turned into a movie.

MH: No. Is that what it was called?

LM: Yeah, I think it was called... Maybe it was just called *The Inferno*.

MH: No, I hadn't seen it.

LM: Anyway, in it, these crazy people are about to put something in the water supply that is going to kill off half the planet. Right? Now here's the amazing thing. I haven't read the novel, but I went on IMDB and I wanted to see if it was the same as the novel, and I discovered that in the original Dan Brown novel, what's actually happening is the bad guys are putting something in the water that will *sterilize* half the population. Now I know why Hollywood's changed it: because there are a whole lot of people out there that would do that if they could. I don't think they'd be willing to kill half the population, but they'd love to sterilize as many people as they could. That's where Margaret Sanger started, anyway. So again, it's sort of amazing that Dan Brown ends up becoming this defender of humanity! This crazy guy that writes *The DaVinci Code*...

MH: I'll tell you, one that I'm wondering about... I don't know if we'll ever see it because of Covid, and I don't keep up enough with what's going on in the Marvel Universe and all this stuff as far as filming schedules. But you brought up Thanos. And again, his solution (you're right in the characterization, of course—then the ensuing film has to reverse all that and so on and so forth)... But in the Marvel Universe... And this is hinted at in the second *Guardians of the Galaxy*, at the end, when there's this character introduced, this creation of this character (Adam Warlock)...

LM: Hmm...

MH: And for those who are familiar with the Marvel Universe (the comic book series), Adam Warlock is an overt Christ figure.

LM: Oh, okay!

MH: So it made me wonder, okay, this is... Are they going to loop back to *Guardians* and then address the Thanos thing from a different angle using a Jesus figure? You know what I mean. It's like, here we go again, where... It's like they can't get away from it. And in this case, the Marvel Universe had a lot of this

stuff in it because it's good storytelling, it's archetypes and whatnot. But the whole Adam Warlock thing, for those who are into comic books, this story was originally written by Jack Kirby, who is responsible for so much of this stuff.

LM: Right.

MH: But it was revised by another guy whose name was Roy Thomas. And he was the one who sort of editorially presented Adam Warlock as a messiah figure—as a Jesus figure. I mean, you could go look it up on the internet and hear him talk about that. But again, the whole point is that it's, like, subverting itself. [laughs]

LM: Yeah!

MH: The further they go in the storyline, they loop back and subvert themselves. And in the modern use of some of these things, whether they be Greco-Roman or biblical, the truth kind of leaks out. [laughs] You know? It just shows up.

LM: Well, you know, it's funny. Here's a place where we can be discerning. If you read the Gospels, one time Jesus says, "If they're not for us, they're against me." And the other time, "If they're not against me, they're for me." And it just needs to be understood in the proper context.

MH: Right, it's the context.

LM: And I think that in many ways...

MH: How is it repurposed—how is that context either repurposed or subverted? Yeah.

LM: Right! I mean, at the end of the *Avengers*, Iron Man becomes the perfect Christ figure.

MH: Yep, yep.

55:00 **LM:** The selfish rich guy becomes a Christ figure.

MH: He even has the "I am" line at the end.

LM: Oh that's right! [laughs]

MH: "I am Iron Man." You know, in response to "I am inevitable," that Thanos talks about.

LM: That's right!

MH: You know, there's just a lot of that stuff that is done... Some of it might be intentional; some of it is just unconscious. And I actually, in my book about the *Stranger Things* series, I think most of it is unconscious. There might be one exception to this in my head. But to me, that is even more interesting and more noteworthy—that these trajectories just can't be done away with. [laughs] They're just there.

LM: Well, maybe a good example... And maybe this is not true. You would be the guy to tell me. But I'm sure you've been to a messianic Passover seder.

MH: Yeah, a long time ago, but yes.

LM: Yeah. And as far as I know, this is the way that a lot of Jews still do it today. And yet the entire gospel is embedded in what they're doing. It's unbelievable. They've got this thing that holds three pieces of matzah. And they pull out the second one and they break it and then they hide it, and then the kids find it. And it's brought back. And it's like a working out of the crucifixion and resurrection. And it's being done even now by Jews.

MH: Yeah, it's interesting you mention that. We haven't scheduled it yet, but we're going to have (Lord willing) Seth Postell on the podcast, who is an Old Testament scholar. He teaches in Israel and he's a messianic believer. But last year he came out with a book, *Reading Moses and Seeing Jesus*. So it has a lot of that kind of stuff in it.

LM: Oh, and by the way, you should know that if you go to the Sistine Chapel, everybody's so impressed by the ceiling and also by The Last Judgment, but you might miss it. Closer to eye level, underneath the ceiling, are a series of great, great paintings by people like Botticelli and other great Renaissance people. And on one wall it tells the life of Jesus, and on the other wall it tells the life of Moses. And they parallel each other in the most beautiful way. Now of course that's much clearer typology between the Old and the New Testament. But we see similar typologies, though more unconscious, between a lot of the Greco-Roman and ultimately world mythology. I mean, I'm hoping...

MH: It just tells you where their head was at, you know? It's not, "Well, I need to fill in space. I used too many biblical characters; let's throw in something else." You know? It's not random. It's not unintentional. It's messaging. And it just tells you where their head was at.

LM: Yeah! And people from Cyprian to Origen to Augustine himself, they could read the Old Testament allegorically without thereby losing the literal sense. They still believed in the literal historical. That was still the grounding. But they believed that there were layers of meaning—the allegorical pointing to Christ, the moral pointing to ethical choices, and what they called the "anagogical," pointing to the end—to the end things.

MH: I don't want to get boring here and talk about method. [laughs] That's usually the killer of interest in class. But there is a methodological point to be made here. Just the fact that we have a long Christian tradition of methodologically looking at pagan material and looking at their narrative—their metanarrative, if you will—and seeing (being able to discern) the points of connection between the way a pagan thinks about the metanarrative (the whole story of human history, why we're here, what our relationship to the gods or God is)... The fact that they can do that and then intentionally used that knowledge for evangelism, to tell the biblical story, I think that is a methodological point that's important in a postmodern era.

LM: It is.

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MH: Because what the Church needs to do in terms of evangelism and apologetics is the Church needs to be able to approach the stories that our secular repaganized culture is telling and be able to discern from that the points of contact with the real story—with the *mega*-narrative, if you will. And that's going to lead to being able to have conversations with people who have been repaganized, the whole postmodern mind kind of thing. It's a different approach to Scripture, not different from what biblical writers were doing, because they're ultimately focused on metanarrative, and... We do this over and over and over again on this podcast. We talk about metanarrative. And so does the Bible Project, things like this. So this is not new in the sense that it's not biblical. It is biblical. It's new in the sense that in our post-Enlightenment institutionalized Church, for centuries it hasn't done that. It's reduced the Bible and theology to propositional statements. And again, I'm going to be the first one that says, "Truth propositions are critical."

LM: Right.

MH: I understand that. but there's a way to communicate a truth proposition other than just reading it. [laughs] You know?

LM: One way to think of the metaphor is that those propositional statements (the doctrinal statements, the creeds)—that is like our skeleton. But if you want to put flesh on that skeleton, you need the stories. You need the imaginative.

MH: Right. Skeletons aren't that attractive to look at. [laughs]

LM: And it's no coincidence... Yeah. That's right. I don't want you to look at the naked skeleton... We *need* a skeleton, because if we go too far, like the extreme Emergent churches, if you remove my skeleton from me, I'm going to be like a jellyfish. Right? [laughs]

MH: Yeah.

LM: So we *need* that. But we also don't want to be bare bones. And it's no coincidence, Mike, that it was my college students who turned me on both to you and to the Bible Project. Because it's important to them. Because they're... First of all... It's two things, I think. They're looking for the imaginative. They're looking for the story. But I think they're also looking for truth that has power. And I don't mean political power now, but I mean spiritual power. And what they're finding... Again, that wonderful Bible Project, not only about the Divine Council, but about holiness... That is such a difficult concept for our world to understand, and yet they bring it alive with this simple animation and this wonderful narrative going on.

MH: Mm hmm.

LM: But we need it. Maybe a couple of generations ago we had seekers who only wanted facts and science. But this generation wants story. They want truth that is incarnational. They want... And it's really ironic, right? Because...

MH: Yeah. They can see it everywhere.

LM: Right.

MH: And that's what they're talking about by authenticity. You know? It's been just a bullet point list. Yeah.

LM: You know, this just struck me, Mike. I wish I'd put it in my book. What we're getting here is a new kind of intelligent design. What do I mean by that? In science, intelligent design means looking at nature for evidence of intelligent design. But we're looking at all the stories and metanarratives and all of the myths, and we're finding a different kind of intelligent design: a single storyteller that... As it says in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, "Aslan is at the back of all the stories." Well here, the gospel is at the back of all the stories. And it goes all the way back to Jesus' parables. Mike, you know this. When we were in Sunday school, we were all taught, "Jesus spoke in parables so that everyone could understand him." And then we read the Bible for ourselves and we saw that Jesus says completely the opposite. "I speak in parables so only those with eyes will see and ears will hear." So it's about opening eyes and ears to see. Because I believe that evidence for God is not only throughout nature but is also throughout the stories—throughout the myths and the legends—all those yearnings that we've been talking about. They're crying out, "Here I am! Here I am! Look at me!" Okay? You know, Augustine comes to that moment in *Confessions* where Nature starts crying out, "Don't look at me, look behind me at the Creator!" Well, I think the stories are doing that as well. And we (I mean evangelicals) made a categorical error about 100 years ago. Now the Fundamentalists fought a good fight against the extreme Darwinists. But they made a categorical error. They decided to buy in to the false notion that the only

kind of truth is scientific, logical, systematic, mathematical proof. And even though I believe that the Bible has a lot to tell us about origins, it's not a science textbook and wasn't meant to be. And so we put ourselves in a box where we said, "The only way we can trust the Bible is if we can show it to be scientifically, mathematically accurate in this modern, positivistic sense that did not exist when the Bible was being written. So they sentenced it..."

MH: Right. Yeah, we have to bend it to the modern context for it to be acceptable.

LM: Yeah! It's crazy.

MH: Yeah, we spent a lot of time on this podcast pointing that out. And again, I just think... Maybe the word "method" put the audience to sleep. Maybe "tactically" is a little more invigorating. [laughs]

LM: There you go.

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MH: You know, tactically, we need to be able to discern points of the narratives that are being given to our kids or that our culture generates. And being able to take that thing that they can see clearly and use that to open their eyes to this thing that they can't see clearly yet. You know, that's all really that... The Church Fathers are just wondering about what to do with the similarities. We know what to do about the differences.

LM: Right, there we go.

MH: That's the easy part. You know? Because we have the gospel, we have Jesus, the Spirit, the whole thing. We know what to do about the dissimilarities. That's easy. But what was a conundrum for them is, "Why do these similarities keep showing up?" What does that mean? How'd they get there? Is there design behind that? Is this Providence?

LM: Yeah.

MH: And that's what we need to be thinking about when we try to interact with and build bridges to our own culture.

LM: You know, it's funny. I don't know if you know this, but at least three of the key words that apologists use to show God's presence were actually invented by the secular humanists. Okay? First of all, the anthropic principle. The idea that everything we see in our world seems to be there to allow human life to exist. Now the funny thing is that it wasn't intelligent design theorists that came up with it. It was the radical secular Darwinists who came up with that term. But by that term, they only mean that it *appears* to be like that. [MH laughs] But they don't actually believe it. But we've co-opted that word. They also did it with

logocentrism, that everything is centered in the logos—that there's a center of meaning. Well, that was invented by deconstructionists like Derrida to say, "No, all the logocentrists were wrong!" But we've taken their word. And finally, metanarrative was also invented by the postmodern theorists as a way of saying that the metanarrative doesn't exist! But they gave us a word that we can use because in fact it *does* exist, Mike!

MH: And we just keep showing up. [laughter]

LM: Yeah! You know, they fight against it and end up proving the very thing they're trying to disprove.

MH: Let's wrap up with this little thing to talk about. What's the primary audience, is there more than one audience, and how would *you* recommend someone use this book?

LM: I really wanted this to be a one-stop book. And I had so much fun with this. Something happened that's never happened to me, Mike. My original version of this book was about 60,000 words. Classical Academic Press said, "We love it. Give us twice as much." Okay? No publisher ever does that. They always make you cut it in half. So that's why this was the hardest book I've ever worked on, but I've done it with a smile on my face. Because we decided to expand every chapter... In the beginning, every chapter only had the retelling of the story and the Christian interpretation. But together with Classical Academic Press, we decided that each one would have an application section made up of questions, but not simple questions—open-ended questions to allow people to really discuss and dig into these stories. And whether you are homeschoolers or you're in a Classical Christian school or you're in a Sunday school or you're part of a reading group, almost any... Because I put so many questions that they're there for all levels and then also I added notes.

MH: Listeners need to know that—that the questions aren't just about the myth (the story). The questions invariably align the story with either biblical stories or parts of biblical stories and biblical ideas.

LM: Yeah. And you know, it's full of biblical passages... And see, I don't do this. I've never written a... This is a book and a textbook at the same time. It can be read (and I hope a lot of people will actually read this book) devotionally. Every night or every morning, whenever you do devotions, read one or two chapters about myths and then reflect on it. Reflect on the verses and whatnot. It can also be actually used as a textbook for schools or for homeschooling moms. And I'd never written a book where I put together so many questions. And so how did I do it, Mike? I actually sat down and I reviewed in my head all the different speeches I'd given, but I looked at the Q&A part of all my speeches. And I tried to remember what were the questions that people most often asked me. And that was kind of the way I was able to come up with *real* questions that people can

struggle with. This can be read by young kids. It can even be read by grammar school kids, middle school, high school, college. And it can be used by pastors that are looking for Bible illustrations for their sermons. So I really wanted this... And it's also just a beautiful book. I mean, it's kind of a coffee table book in the sense that it's beautifully put together. It's hard cover. It's got full-color illustrations of famous images of art from the Renaissance and whatnot. So I wanted something... It's got... And they really pulled out all the stops, because they put together so many appendices of every kind and all sorts of helpful guides. And there's even stuff online that I did for them. And also, I turned the book into an 18-lecture series (nine hours, each one is 30 minutes). And I'm not reading the book out loud, I'm sort of retelling the story and rearranging it and just speaking right to the camera. And that's Classical University. That is Classical U. It's one of those subscription services. But it includes lots of other things for Classical folks. But I did that as well, because again, I just think that the time is ripe to *invite* people into this mythological dialogue. Because I really enjoyed writing *From Achilles to Christ: The Iliad, the Odyssey, the Aeneid, and the Greek Tragedies* but I thought in this book, "Let's go even deeper than the epics and the tragedies. Let's get to the raw material that is *behind* the epics and the tragedies and almost every other kind of literature and art and music until the modern period, and tap the raw material."

And so again, this is just about for everybody. And I did have Christians in mind, but this is a good book for seekers, too, for people that love mythology and love stories and love Marvel Comics and are open... if they're open enough to follow the argument wherever it leads and look for patterns. I mean, people love archetypes. You know that Star Wars was based... because George Lucas was reading Joseph Campbell (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces, The Power of Myth*, and all that stuff). It focuses on the archetypes—the images that keep recurring again and again. And so anybody that's excited about that, that watches *Stranger Things* will enjoy this book—be challenged.

MH: The archetypes are going to be there. You mentioned the appendixes. Appendix A is just sort of a brief survey of where Classical or mythology shows up in music and film and modern stories and whatnot. I mean, if you were familiar with the content of the book and read through that appendix, too, the appendix really covers sort of the more obvious connections with how some of these stories are repurposed. But as an adult, if you know those movies, either a Hollywoodized version of a Greek myth or something like *West Side Story* (you actually bring up) that sort of reenacts something... If you're familiar with the Classical material enough, you will be able to pick it out of a lot of movies, and there you go. You could use the modern movie that your audience... Maybe you're teaching a class—Sunday school or whatever. You're going to be able to use that. Even like *Harry Potter*. J.K. Rowling dips into Classical stuff a lot.

LM: Oh, yeah.

MH: You know, so you have this thing you can talk about to move them from what they know (this visual representation) to this story that, “This is really where that came from, and here’s how that story dovetails with this point of truth that we want to talk about. Have you thought about this scene in *Harry Potter* or this scene in *Stranger Things* in light of the way that the Bible really does the same thing, but with a little bit of a twist?” And these are good discussion generators. But if you don’t have that body of knowledge, then you’re a little bit hampered.

LM: Right.

MH: So going through the book, I think, actually would alert readers to when they are watching other things, that, “Oh, okay, that looks familiar. That sounds familiar.” “Yeah, it sure is, because it’s just a rehash of [laughs] this much older stuff.”

LM: I mean, and the weird thing... You can use the book sort of as an encyclopedia as well, because it’s got a very full index. And I’m also hoping... Because again, I spend the time to retell the myth at the beginning of each chapter because I don’t want kids just going on Wikipedia and looking it up there. It needs to be *told* to them as a story. And so I’m hoping the parents will read the stories, or most of them. There are a few that might be too scary. But I hope they will read the stories out loud to their kids and get them involved in that discussion. Because I don’t know, Mike, it sort of knocks down the walls and barriers. If you say, “Hey, let’s have a discussion of religion,” people are going to shut off. But, “Let’s have a discussion of mythology. And let’s move from mythology to the big questions, ‘Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose? What is the nature of goodness, truth, and beauty?’” All these questions, they will be asked in a context of story that is much more appealing and that will open people’s hearts to really wrestling. And my first book is called *Lewis Agonistes*, because *agonistes* means “wrestling.” And all my books are about wrestling with ideas and wrestling with issues. And I speak a lot at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, which is in Montrose, in a very secular, liberal place, but they don’t boo me because I take it from the point of view of those questions. And everybody needs to answer these big questions, or at least think about them. Let’s draw you into this and just avoid a little bit of evangelical jargon that scares them and go right to the heart of the matter, like tell a parable. And it will open them up to these deeper possibilities.

1:15:00

MH: Yeah. It’s a useful stepping-stone to having discussions that need to be had, you know? It’s not terribly complicated, but we often either don’t think about how much of this kind of material (I’m speaking of the Greco-Roman material here) is actually woven into our entertainment so that we *could* do that, or we’re taught as believers that we *shouldn’t* do it (for an older generation). But I think the younger generation, they’re not thinking about do’s and don’ts when it comes to this. But they just are soaking in these stories. And I think it would just be very useful in terms of apologetics or evangelism or whatnot to say, “Hey, yeah, I saw that movie, or I heard about that movie, or I read a review of it, or whatever. I saw this

or that on the internet. And you know where that comes from is this thing over here, this older Greco-Roman, this older Classical story. And you know, what's really interesting is that *that* story (the older story) is actually bridging off of or miming or mimicking or playing off of a biblical story. Look at that! Isn't that kind of cool? Isn't that kind of amazing? And now that we see the similarities, what might the differences be?" [laughs] You know? And you can have real content discussions.

But it's a means to get people into the conversation. You never know what that's going to be for somebody. Which is why I use the *Stranger Things* book—the little book that I wrote. That's what I was thinking. And yeah, I love the show. To me, the show is very entertaining. It reminds me of my childhood in so many ways. So I was sucker-punched by the first episode. [laughs] You know? They just had me the first episode. But as you watch it, it was so easy to see these archetypal themes—these trajectories. And I just thought, "Boy..." When somebody at Lexham proposed the idea, I thought, "This is a no-brainer. This is just such a no-brainer to do this." So I enjoyed that. I understand it. I appreciated it. And I like certain types of science fiction films, too. So when you came along with this book, I just thought, this is kind of a sweet spot. Because we do mostly biblical stuff here, but we do these either pop culture things or these literature things—these things that intersect with the biblical storyline and biblical content in significant ways. So I'm just glad you wrote the book. I'm glad that you alerted us to it, and that you were able to come on to do this episode and have this conversation.

LM: One thing I think your readers will really enjoy is... I mentioned before that Paul says, "God did not leave himself without witness."

MH: Yeah.

LM: Well, that speech comes from that hysterical moment when through Paul, God heals this crippled guy. And immediately the pagan crowd jumps up and say, "Paul is Mercury (Hermes)! And Barnabas is Zeus (Jupiter)!" And they start worshipping them. And they're like, "No, no! Stop! We're only men!" Well, you could find the backstory to that in my book. Because in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which is just one generation before this story is happening, Ovid tells an old story of Baucis and Philemon, a story kind of like Sodom and Gomorrah, where in fact Zeus and Mercury (Jupiter and Mercury or Hermes) come to a town and everybody closes the door on them, and only this poor couple shows them hospitality. And they destroy the whole town. And that town is very close to where that incident happens in the book of Acts. So these people must have known their mythology to say, "Hey, we're not going to make the same mistake our ancestors did."

MH: [laughs] "We'd better start worshipping right about now." [laughs]

LM: Yeah, that's right! [laughs]

MH: Look how the gospel inverts that. "No, no, we're not the ones you're supposed to worship. Let's tell you about the One you *are* supposed to worship."

1:20:00

LM: It's just funny. But you know, like you said, sometimes you've got to get people where they are. And I'm sure this is one of your favorite moments. It's in *The Mummy*—the first *Mummy* movie with Brendan Fraser [MH laughs], where the stupid bad guy (the mummy) is coming at him and he pulls out a cross and the mummy keeps coming. [laughter] So he pulls out a Buddhist thing, he pulls out a Hindu thing. He keeps pulling things out until he starts quoting the Shema or something and he says, "Oh, you speak the language of the slaves." [laughter] But it's a start, okay? Let's start right there.

MH: [laughs] It's a start. [LM laughs] Well, thanks for being on with us again. And I hope that listeners will check out the book and get it, if they're homeschooling or just if they like archetypes—they like Classical mythology, these things that just wound up getting thrown into the entertainment media that we are so familiar with today. Again, just for a pragmatic purpose, you learn something about this old question with the Church, you're reminded of virtue, and it gives you a bridge to have conversations with other people. So thank you for being on with us.

LM: Well, thanks so much! Like I said, the third time's the charm. It was great being back on. And Happy New Year to you and the listeners!

TS: Alright, Mike, another great conversation with Lou. I love his energy. It just does not get old. And it's good stuff. Again, I want to remind people, I have a few copies of his book, *The Myth Made Fact*, that I'm giving away. So again, hashtag #NakedBible, help promote the podcast out there. I'll contact you and give you a book of Lou's. It's a nice book, Mike. It's like he said, full color pictures of some of the stuff. I enjoy these...

MH: It's very nice.

TS: Yeah. I enjoy these Greek mythology stories. So to see it presented the way that he has in his book... It's a good book.

MH: Yeah. I've got to go out and watch *Clash of the Titans* now. [laughs]

TS: Well, I kid you not. I just watched *Wrath of the Titans* last night.

MH: Yeah? Okay.

TS: Literally last night. I just saw it. They remade the *Clash of the Titans* movie back in 2010-ish, maybe. And the sequel to that was *Wrath of the Titans*.

MH: Yeah, I've not seen *Wrath*.

TS: Yeah, that was a good one.

MH: I tend to watch the *Titans* stuff just because I want to see what they do with the Kraken. I'm a big Kraken fan. [laughs]

TS: Ah, okay. Alright, alright.

MH: "How are they going to make that look?" It's kind of like the Godzilla thing with me. But anyway.

TS: Yeah, but the original *Clash of the Titans* is just still awesome. I actually made my son watch the original *Clash of the Titans* and then we were going to watch the new one. We haven't watched the new one yet. But just watching the old '80s...

MH: Oh yeah.

TS: ... Claymation and stuff. It was pretty rough for us.

MH: Right, Claymation effect. Yeah.

TS: Yeah. It was pretty rough for him to sit through. [laughter] But I was like, "You've got to watch this! This is so good!" And then we watched it.

MH: [laughs] It was like a punishment. [laughs]

TS: [laughs] Yeah. And when we watched it, I'm like, "Oh. It's pretty rough." But to me, it's still good. You know. It doesn't even compare to the new *Clash of the Titans*, you know, but still. I love it.

MH: Right. That's a creative punishment, though, maybe you could use someday. "Don't get out of line or you're going to have watch something made in the '70s and '80s." [laughs]

TS: Oh, I'm having to force him to watch Star Trek. Because he's just so Star Wars. And he hasn't been exposed to Star Trek. So that flusters me, because I love all of it. So I actually had to force the first remake of Star Trek for him to watch it. And then of course he enjoyed it. He likes it. But he's just so far gone in Star Wars.

MH: It's slow, but it's a good story, though.

TS: Yeah. But he's just so far gone in Star Wars, so I'm trying to balance it out with some Star Trek. I'll keep at it. But just those older movies just don't compare to the new stuff today with special effects and whatnot. But you know, every movie that Lou was mentioning, *The Mummy* and... I've just got so many movies to show him. Because I want him to watch some of these movies, like *Terminator*, when he gets older. And *Lord of the Rings*. He hasn't even watched *Lord of the Rings* yet. Because I'm waiting till he's about 13 or 14.

MH: Yeah, that'd probably scare him. Yeah.

TS: Yeah, I'm waiting till he's about 13 or 14. That's my education.

MH: Just tell him, "You're grounded. That means you can watch all you want pre-CGI."

TS: [laughter] That's perfect. Alright, Mike. Well, that was a good conversation. Next week we're getting back into Revelation. So we'll pick back up after a nice little break. Happy New Year again to everybody. With that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.