

Common Sources of Allusions Mythological and Biblical

I. Mythology

Achilles: Born of mortal and Zeus; mother dipped him in the river Styx to give him immortality but neglected to include the heel she held him by. Eventually, during the Trojan War, he was shot in that spot and killed. An Achilles heel is the one vulnerable spot in an otherwise invulnerable thing or person.

Adonis: a mortal youth who was loved by Aphrodite for his great beauty and later killed by a wild boar.

Aphrodite / Venus: goddess of love and beauty (and spring and bloom).

Apollo / Sol: god of the sun; patron of healing; drove a chariot that pulled the sun, so it rose and crossed the sky each day

Arachne: a mortal who was a great weaver and very proud (arrogant) of her ability. She challenged Athena to a weaving contest and won. Athena was mad and turned her into a spider, so she could weave and spin non-stop. This is where arachnids get their name. She is a symbol of the problems arrogance can cause.

Ares / Mars: god of warfare

Artemis / Diana: sister of Apollo; drives a chariot that carries the moon; goddess of the hunt and patron of virgins. Seen as a huntress.

Athena / Minerva: goddess of wisdom and warfare; was "born" full-grown and wearing armor, by springing from the head of Zeus. Her symbol is the owl. She was a great weaver and spinner; in charge of arts and crafts.

Centaur: a race of beings half man (front) and half horse, known for fighting and lustiness (but sometimes for great wisdom!).

Cerberus: a three-headed watchdog who guards the entrance to Hades.

Chaos: Chaos is the void which came into being before anything else. But some say that Chaos was born from Mist, and that Mist was the first to exist. Others affirm that Chaos is not a void, but a rough unordered mass of things. It is also asserted that Chaos existed from the beginning, together with Nyx, Erebus (Darkness of the Underworld), and Tartarus, and consequently they consider Chaos to be as Nyx and Erebus: one of "the powers below the ground." It is told that during the war between the TITANS and the OLYMPIANS, the fight came to such a degree of intensity that an amazing heat seized Chaos.

Cronos: the wily, youngest and most terrible of the children of Uranus, whom he hated. He castrated his father and became ruler of the universe, but was later overthrown by his own son Zeus.

Cyclops: a race of one-eyed giants of whom the most famous is Polyphemus, the son of Poseidon; he was blinded by Odysseus.

Daedalus and Icarus: Daedalus was an inventor (the Great Artificer) who killed a rival in jealousy and fled to Crete (from Greece) where King Minos gave him refuge and put him to work. The king's wife lusted after a gorgeous bull which had been given to Minos by Poseidon. She had Daedalus make her a wooden cow in which she hid herself in order to mate with the bull; she conceived and bore the Minotaur from this union. The furious Minos ordered the Minotaur imprisoned in a labyrinth, which he commissioned Daedalus to design. Eventually, Daedalus and his son, Icarus, were also imprisoned in the Labyrinth, from which they escaped when Daedalus built wings from wax and feathers. On their escape to Crete, Daedalus warned Icarus not to fly too high because the sun would melt the wax; but Icarus ignored his father, his wings melted, and he fell to his watery death. Daedalus escaped safely.

Dionysus / Bacchus: god of wine and revelry. Wild feasts were held in his honor, which usually turned into drunken orgies, since that was what he was in charge of.

Eros / Cupid: god of love; often pictured as a winged boy.

Europa: a princess whom Zeus abducted and raped, when he was in the form of a bull.

Hades / Pluto: god of the underworld (sort of like hell but not so awful); the place itself is called Hades. Also, god of wealth (gold and silver came from the earth, which he ruled.)

Hephaestus / Vulcan: God of fire; a blacksmith; the only god who is deformed – rejected son of Zeus and Hera.

Hercules: a son of Zeus and a mortal, he was famous for his great strength and endurance; he performed twelve amazing feats of strength, called the "labors of Hercules."

Mercury: the messenger of the gods; wears shoes and hat with wings so he can fly very quickly. Known for living by his wits and cleverness.

Midas: was given his wish that everything that he touched would turn to gold but rethought this idea when he killed his daughter by touching her and was near starvation because all the food he touched turned to gold. He had the spell removed eventually.

Minotaur: monster half man and half bull, wild and violent, demands sacrifices yearly of Greek youths and maidens. Imprisoned in the Labyrinth (see Daedalus). Eventually slain by Theseus with the help of the king's daughter, who gives him a ball of string so he can find his way out of the Labyrinth.

Narcissus and Echo: Narcissus was a gorgeous male who admired himself enormously. Echo loved him but he ignored her. Eventually, she was cursed with not being able to speak her own thoughts but only repeat what other said. This bothered Narcissus even more and he taunted her and she eventually wasted away so that just her voice, repeating others' words, remained. He became so enamored with himself that he got stuck peering into a pond, admiring his reflection, and became a flower that grows there.

Nemesis: the goddess of retributive justice or vengeance.

Odysseus / Ulysses: (meaning "man of wrath" according to Homer, or more likely, from Greek "**a guide; the one showing the way**"), known as **Ulysses** in Roman mythology. Known for his guile and resourcefulness, he is the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, and a major character in the *Iliad*. Odysseus was the son of Laertes and Anticlea, although some sources, prominent among them *Iphigenia at Aulis* by Euripides, state that Sisyphus was his father. As a child, Odysseus was wet-nursed by Euryclea. Odysseus was the king of Ithaca, husband of Penelope and father of Telemachus, favorite of Athena, and wiliest of the Greeks involved in the Trojan War. Odysseus earns this title by, among other things, masterminding the Trojan Horse. He is most famous for the ten years it took him to return home from the war, which is described in the *Odyssey*.

Oedipus: abandoned at birth by his parents, who were trying to avoid a horrible prophecy that he would kill his father and marry his mother. Raised in Corinth, he eventually fled when he heard the same prophecy. In the road, he met and killed his father, solved the riddle of the Sphinx, and then went to Thebes and married his mother, with whom he had three children. When he learned the truth, he blinded himself and went into exile.

Pan / Satyr: Pan is one of the group of satyrs, which are half man and half goat, with goat's legs (including cloven hooves), a tail, pointy ears, and a wanton nature, who live in the woods. Pan is the god of forests, flocks, and shepherds. He usually plays pipes (a flute).

Pandora: the first mortal woman, sent to Earth as a punishment to man for Prometheus's theft of fire. She brought with her a box containing all human ills, which escaped into the world when she opened the box. Only hope was left at the bottom.

Paris: son of the last king of Troy (Priam), he is forced to award a golden apple (inscribed "for the fairest") to either Aphrodite, who promises him the love of the most beautiful woman in the world; Hera, who offers him great wealth; or Athena, who offers him wisdom. He chooses Aphrodite, who helps him steal Helen, who's married to Menelaus of Sparta. He takes her to Troy and the Greeks come after and we have the Trojan War.

Persephone and Demeter / Ceres: Demeter is the goddess of agriculture and fruitfulness (fertility): guardian of marriage. Persephone is her daughter whom Hades marries and takes to Hades to live. Demeter is so unhappy without her beloved daughter that nothing can grow. A compromise is reached and Persephone spends six months on Earth with Demeter and six months below, with Hades. This is the explanation for why we have seasons (winter is when Persephone is gone and Demeter is too unhappy to make things grow).

Phoenix: a bird that is immortal, but dies in a self-built pyre every 500 or 600 years and is then reborn from the ashes; a symbol of rebirth and/or immortality.

Poseidon / Neptune: god of the sea; often pictured with his 3-pronged scepter, the trident; has a son named Triton

Prometheus: a Titan (preceded Zeus and the Olympian gods) who created man from clay. Later, he stole fire from the gods and gave it to man against the will of Zeus. As a punishment, he was chained to a rock and had his liver eaten out every day by an eagle. The liver grew back each night, only to be eaten out the next day. Eventually, he was released by Hercules.

Psyche: a great mortal beauty, whom Venus was very jealous of, because of her beauty. Cupid loved her but didn't want her to know who he was, so he visited her only in the dark. She was curious and eventually snuck a light into their meeting place and shone it suddenly in his face. He was angry for a while but eventually forgave her and had her made immortal. She became the goddess of emotion.

Sisyphus: A wealthy man who cheated the living and, later, the gods. He was sentenced by Zeus to forever push a boulder up a hill, only to fail before it reaches the top.

Styx (river): the river that divides the land of the living from Hades, the land of the dead

The Sirens: a group of nymphs who lived on an island and lured men to their destruction with their sweet singing.

The Titans: The TITANS ruled the world after having dethroned their father Uranus, the first ruler of the universe. It was their mother Gaia who persuaded them to attack their father and overthrow him; for she grieved at the destruction of her children, the CYCLOPES and the HECATONCHEIRES, who had been cast into Tartarus by Uranus. The Titan Cronos then ambushed his father and castrated him with a sickle, being himself appointed by the TITANS to be their sovereign. However, once in power, Cronos behaved as his father, and again shut the CYCLOPES and the HECATONCHEIRES up in Tartarus.

Zephyr: the west wind, which is known for being warm and soft.

Zeus: king of the gods - Zeus was allotted the dominion of the sky, having waged war against Cronos and the TITANS. Zeus, some say, caused the Trojan War, so that the load of death might empty the world. Zeus got the thunderbolt, his ultimate weapon, from the CYCLOPES, and an eagle brings back the thunderbolts which he has flung. Zeus is married to his sister, Hera.

II. The Bible

Abraham and Sarah: He is the first patriarch of Judaism (first person to accept monotheism). She is his wife. They were married for a long time and had no children. She suggested that he mate with her maid-servant, Hagar, so that he would have an heir. After that child was born, Sarah became pregnant and forced Abraham to throw out the maid and her son, because she was jealous. Their son is Isaac.

Adam and Eve: the first man and woman; she's created from a rib taken from him. They live in bliss in the Garden of Eden until Eve is persuaded by a Serpent into eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which she then offers to Adam. After they eat, they realize they're naked and become ashamed. God (with some help from the Archangel Gabriel and his flaming sword) expels them from Eden as punishment; often referred to as the "fall from grace," or "loss of innocence."

Anti-Christ/Armageddon: the Anti-Christ is the antagonist of Christ who will appear before the Second Coming, claiming to be Christ, and make serious trouble until Christ actually appears and defeats him, probably at the battle of Armageddon, a great battle between the forces of good and evil that is to occur at the end of the world. Armageddon now means any great and decisive battle.

Babylon: an ancient city of Mesopotamia known for its wealth, luxury, and vice.

Cain and Abel: the two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was older and a farmer; Abel was a shepherd. They made offerings to God, who liked Abel's lamb better than Cain's wheat. Cain was jealous and slew Abel, for which he was forced to roam as an outcast, with a horrible mark on his forehead that showed that he killed his brother. He said, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Daniel: a young Hebrew prophet who prayed even when the king had ordered that no one pray. For this, he was thrown into a lion's den, where he should have been killed. Instead, God saved him and he came out of the lion's den unhurt. A symbol of God's protection and the rewards of faith.

The Divine Comedy: written by Dante Alighieri between 1308 and his death in 1321, is widely considered the central epic poem of Italian literature, and one of the greatest of world literature. Its influence is so great that it affects the Christian view of the afterlife to this day. *The Divine Comedy* is composed of three *canticas*, *Inferno* (Hell), *Purgatorio* (Purgatory), and *Paradiso* (Paradise). In the *Inferno*, Dante is led by the poet Virgil into the underworld, where he experiences and describes each of the nine circles of hell. The sign at the entrance to Hell reads: "*Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.*"

David: a young boy who had the courage to fight the huge enemy, Goliath, whom he killed with a slingshot. He became king and was quite good, except for lusting after a married woman (Bathsheba), whose husband he then sent to the front lines to get conveniently killed so David could marry her. They became the parents of Absalom and Solomon.

Eden: earthly paradise for Adam and Eve

Esther: a Jewish woman married to a Persian king. An evil man wanted to kill the Jews but Esther stopped him by pleading with her husband.

Gideon: an Israeli judge. In a major battle, when his forces were massively outnumbered, he fooled the opposition by making noise with trumpets that made the enemy think that the Hebrew forces were much larger than they really were.

Goliath: a huge warrior of the Philistines who was killed by a boy (David) with a slingshot; a symbol of great power that can be overpowered.

Good Samaritan: a famous New Testament parable, that appears only in the Gospel of Luke (10:25-37). The parable is told by Jesus to illustrate the precepts that a person's fitness for eternal life is defined by his or her actions, that compassion should be for all people, and that fulfilling the spirit of the Law is more important than fulfilling the letter of the Law. Jesus tells a parable about a traveler who was attacked, robbed, stripped, and left for dead by the side of a road. Later, a priest saw the stricken figure and avoided him, presumably in order to maintain ritual purity. Similarly, a Levite saw the man and ignored him as well. Then a Samaritan passed by, and, despite the mutual antipathy between his and the Jewish populations, immediately rendered assistance by giving him first aid and taking him to an inn to recover while promising to cover the expenses. By extension, a Good Samaritan is a generous person who is ready to provide aid to people in distress without hesitation.

Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John): the "Good News": first four books of the New Testament, all telling the life of Jesus, but from four different perspectives. "The Gospel" has come to mean any statement that is unquestionably true.

Hagar and Ishmael: Hagar is the maid of Sarah that Abraham had a child with and Ishmael is the child, who became a wandering outcast.

Herod: the king of the Hebrews who ordered John the Baptist beheaded for Salome's reward and who ordered all Jewish males under age two killed to prevent the "King of the Jews" from overthrowing him.

Holy Grail: the dish, plate, cup or vessel used by Jesus at the Last Supper, said to possess miraculous powers. It has long been the object of fruitless quests. By extension, the object of an extended or difficult quest.

Isaac: the son of Abraham and Sarah. God tested Abraham's faith by ordering him to sacrifice Isaac on a mountain. They went up to the mountain, with Isaac just a bit suspicious that there was no animal to sacrifice (Abraham said that God would provide). Just as Abraham was about to slit Isaac's throat, an angel stayed his hand and he then saw a ram caught in nearby bushes, which he sacrificed instead.

Jacob: Son of Isaac and brother of Esau, whose birthright and blessing he stole when Isaac was on his deathbed. Later, he dreamt of a ladder that one could climb to get to

heaven, with each rung being a good deed. He decided to apologize to Esau and then went on to have twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus Christ/carpenter/lamb: Jesus Christ is a figure of martyrdom, sacrifice, and loving forgiveness. He is often symbolized as either a carpenter (which he had actually been, along with Joseph) or a lamb (a common sacrificial animal).

Jezebel: the wife of Ahab (a king of Israel), notorious for her evil and vicious actions.

Job: a symbol of loyalty and faith in God. God and Satan made a bet as to whether or not Job would curse God, no matter what bad things occurred. God gave Satan free rein to test Job; everything bad happened that could possibly and still Job didn't curse God. Eventually, God won the bet and gave Job back all the things he had lost.

John the Baptist: born before Jesus and announced his coming. Baptized Jesus and was one of his followers. After Jesus's death, he was captured by Herod for preaching Jesus's word. Salome danced for Herod, who offered her any gift in payment for her wonderful dancing. She requested the head of John the Baptist, which was delivered to her on a silver platter.

Jonah: a Hebrew whom God commanded to go to Nineveh to tell the people there to stop sinning. He didn't want to and tried to escape by boat, but God made a great storm. When the others on board realized that Jonah was the person God was mad at, they threw him overboard. He was then swallowed by a "great fish" (whale). He lived inside it for several days, repented, and was regurgitated on the beach. He then went quickly to Nineveh and followed God's orders. A symbol of learning the hard way.

Joseph: firstborn son of Rachel and Jacob, who loved him more than all his other sons because he loved the mother (Rachel) more than the mother of his other children (Leah). Joseph flaunted his father's favor, especially by showing off his many-colored coat that was a gift from Dad. Other brothers were very jealous and planned to murder him; instead, they sold him into slavery and he was taken to Egypt, where his ability to interpret dreams led him to become the pharaoh's right-hand man.

Judas Iscariot: one of the twelve original disciples of Jesus. He sold out to the Romans for thirty pieces of silver. He kissed Jesus in public so the Romans would know which man was Jesus and could arrest him. The "kiss of Judas" is an act of betrayal, especially one that looks like a loving action.

Lazarus: a man who Jesus raised from the dead, even though he'd been buried for three days. A symbol of Jesus's power and of possibilities.

Loaves and fishes: one of Jesus's most famous miracles. Many people came to hear him preach to feed the masses he multiplied a few loaves and fishes. Everyone was fed with food to spare. Symbolizes a miraculous appearance of resources.

Lucifer/Devil/Beelzebub/flies: Lucifer was originally the top angel and sat at God's right hand. He got jealous and attempted a coup, which failed. He was sent to Hell, where he is more commonly called the Devil or Satan. Beelzebub was originally a Philistine deity

worshipped as the lord of the flies; that name (and image) was transferred to Christianity; in Paradise Lost, Beelzebub ranks next to Satan.

Mary and Joseph: the father and virgin mother of Jesus. Mary was told by the angel Gabriel that she and her husband would bear the son of God; a carpenter.

Mary Magdalene: a prostitute who came to hear Jesus preach and was accepted by him and became a devout follower. Initially, his other followers were shocked, but he said, "Let he among you who is without sin cast the first stone," so they shut up. She is a symbol of the absolute possibility of repentance and acceptance by God. She is referred to in the Bible as the "favorite" disciple.

Moses and Aaron: brothers who worked together to save the Israelites (Jews) from slavery in Egypt (they were still there from Joseph's time). Moses was the leader and God spoke to him, but he stuttered, so Aaron actually spoke to the people and told them what God told Moses. Moses led them across the Red Sea, which parted, and into the desert, where they roamed for many years. He went up to Mount Sinai, where God gave him the Ten Commandments. He was gone a long time and the people started to get nervous, so they built an idol to worship: a golden calf. When Moses came and found them worshipping an idol, he was so upset that he broke the tablets the commandments were on. After they destroyed the calf, he went back and got another copy of the commandments.

Noah: After receiving a message from God, Noah built an ark, on which all the animals on the earth went, two by two, to escape drowning in the great flood, which lasted 40 days and 40 nights.

Paradise Lost: (1667) an epic poem by the 17th century English poet John Milton. The poem concerns the Christian story of the rise of Man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Paul: largely the developer of Christianity as an organized system of beliefs; he took his information on the road and went preaching in towns all over the mid-East, just ahead of Romans out to kill him for being a rabble-rouser. After he left a town where he had preached, he often wrote numerous letters to his followers there, to keep them with the faith. The most famous are the Epistles (letters) to the Corinthians.

Peter: the first "pope" of the Christian church. His name means "rock" in Latin and he provided the foundation for building the church itself, figuratively.

Philistines: the traditional enemies of the Hebrews, known for their barbarism and indifference to art and culture.

Prodigal Son: a wastrel who returns home and is welcomed with open arms. His brother, who had remained home to serve their father, is angry and jealous of the wastrel's warm reception. Symbolizes the benevolence and generosity of God's (or anyone's) forgiveness; unconditional love.

Rachel and Leah: wives of Jacob. He fell in love with Rachel, the younger. Her father said Jacob could marry her if he worked for the father for seven years. Jacob did so. After the wedding, when he lifted the veil, he found that he'd married Leah, who had to marry first since she was older. He still wanted Rachel, so the father said Jacob could have her after another seven years of labor, which he did. Meanwhile, he and Leah turned out kids like crazy.

Ruth and Naomi: Naomi was a Hebrew whose son married Ruth, a Moabite (foreigner). After the son died, Ruth chose to stay with Naomi rather than returning to her own people. She is the first convert to Judaism and a symbol of loyalty.

Samson and Delilah: He had great strength because he had never cut his hair (he was a Nazarite, his life consecrated to the Lord). She was from the enemy tribe (the Philistines) and became his mistress and then betrayed him by cutting his hair while he slept. The Philistines captured and blinded him, but Samson eventually found enough strength to destroy his enemies by pulling down the pillars of the temple they were all in, even though doing so meant that he would die too.

Sinai: the desert where the Jews roamed for many years, before getting to the Promised Land.

Sodom and Gomorrah: According to the Bible, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah — called as a group *The Cities on the Plain* — were destroyed by God for their sins. It is often postulated that the sin of Sodom was homosexuality and rape. Before it was destroyed, a virtuous couple, Lot and his wife, were advised by God to leave the city immediately and not look back. Lot's wife submitted to temptation and, as she looked back on the city, she was turned into a pillar of salt.

Solomon: king of the Hebrews known for his wisdom. When two women appeared before him, both claiming that the same baby belonged to both of them, he ordered it cut in half, so each woman could have half. The woman who screamed not to cut the baby was given it, since Solomon determined that she must really love it, since she didn't want it to die.

The Magi: the Wise Men who followed the star to Bethlehem to see baby Jesus the night he was born and brought him gifts to honor his birth; often referred to as the "Adoration of the Magi."

Tree of Knowledge: the one tree whose fruit (apple) God forbade Adam and Eve from eating. After they do so (on the advice of Satan, disguised as a serpent), they gain knowledge of good and evil, but are banished from paradise.