

Part VI The Greek and Roman gods

Part two

Apollo: (Roman: Apollo)

Apollo was the son of Zeus and Leto. He was the god of music, playing a golden lyre, the Archer, far shooting with a silver bow, the god of healing who taught man medicine, the god of light, the god of truth, who cannot speak a lie. One of Apollo's more important daily tasks is to harness his chariot with four horses and drive the Sun across the sky. His twin sister was Artemis (known as Diana in Rome) was naturally associated with the moon.



This is probably where Apollos of Acts 18:24 derived his name. *Acts 18:24 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures.* Perhaps this is because Alexandria Egypt was under the heavy influence of Greece prior to this period.

- How well accepted in the Greek and Roman world was Matt 5:45 stating that Jehovah God "...causes His sun to rise on {the} evil and {the} good...?"
- It was said that it was Apollo that brought about healing for the Greeks, but the Christian knows better. -Jer 30:17 'For I will restore you to health and I will heal you of your wounds,' declares the LORD..."
- It was said of Apollo that he could not lie. What do you think the readers of the NT thought when they heard verses like the following?
 - 1) Titus 1:2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago,
 - 2) Heb 6:18 "...it is impossible for God to lie..."
- It was said of Apollo that he rode the sky in a chariot. What do you think the first century reader of the following verses thought? Ps 104:3-4 He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters; He makes the clouds His chariot; He walks upon the wings of the wind; He makes the winds His messengers, flaming fire His ministers.

Aphrodite: (Roman: Venus)



Aphrodite is the goddess of love, desire and beauty. In addition to her natural gifts she has a magical girdle that compels anyone she wishes to desire her. There are two accounts of her birth. One says she was the daughter of Zeus and Dione. The other goes back to when Cronus castrated Uranus and tossed his severed genitals into the sea. Aphrodite then arose from the sea foam on a giant scallop and walked to shore in Cyprus. She was the wife of Hephaestus. The myrtle was her tree and the dove, the swan, and the sparrow were her birds.

Corinth was an especially licentious city, a reputation it seems to have had in ancient times. Indeed, one of the Greek verbs for fornicate was *korinthiazomai*, a word derived from the city's name. It was in Corinth where Paul would have seen a temple built on an 1886-foot hill that was above the city to the south. It was this temple that 1,000 sacred prostitutes sold their services in worship to Aphrodite. Men actually worshipped her by partaking in their services. This was obviously referenced to the words of Paul in 1 Cor 6:16-20.

1 Cor 6:16-20 "Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body {with her} For He says, "The two will become one flesh...19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body."

Men would actually cave into infidelity and blame it on the power of Aphrodite. They actually justified ungodly behavior by making it godly through false teaching.

God call for us to follow the Spirit and not the flesh. -Gal 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

He wants us to flee immorality, not embrace it. -1 Cor 6:18-19 Flee immorality. Every {other} sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?

God wants purity, not impurity. -Titus 1:15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.

Special Note: The brightest object in the night sky second only to the moon is the planet Venus. It is either found in the evening sky after sunset or as the bright morning object in the sky coming out hours before the sunrise. The Romans actually named this object in the sky after Aphrodite. They referred to it as the bright and morning star. It signified there was going to be another day to live for the gods.

Jesus is the Bright Morning Star, not Venus

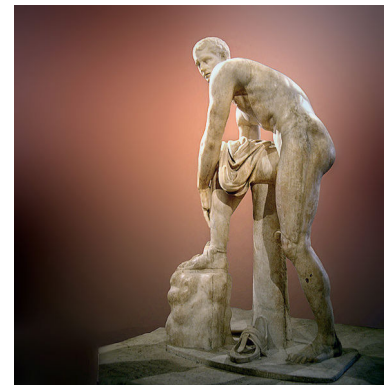
- 2 Pet 1:19 And {so} we have the prophetic word {made} more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.
- Rev 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star."

Hermes: (Roman: Mercury)

Hermes was the son of Zeus and Maia. He is Zeus messenger. He is the fastest of the gods. He wears winged sandals, a winged hat, and carries a magic wand. He is the god of thieves and god of commerce. He is the guide for the dead to go to the underworld. He invented the lyre, the pipes, the musical scale, astronomy, weights and measures, boxing, gymnastics, and the care of olive trees.

There is an interesting passage showing their conviction to the Greek god system and Hermes concerning the following text.

Acts 14:8-13 And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. 9 This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well, 10 said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and {began} to walk. 11 And when the multitudes saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." 12 And they {began} calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.



They naturally perceived Paul as the primary messenger of the gospel being preached, for they referred to him as Hermes, the messenger to the gods. This would naturally default Barnabas as the sender of a messenger, Zeus since Paul was with him. To them this was a great demonstration of the power of the Greek gods and they were determined to worship Barnabas and Paul. When the apostles refused to be pulled into their false worship, Paul was stoned at the convincing of the rebellious Jews that they were trouble-makers.

We are God's True Mercuries

- Mark 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."

- 1 Cor 9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.
- Rom 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation..."
- 1 Cor 2:2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

Artemis: (Roman: Diana)

Artemis was the daughter of Zeus and Leto. Her twin brother was Apollo . She was the lady of the wild things, the huntsman of the gods and the protector of the young. Like Apollo she hunted with silver arrows. She became associated with the moon. She was a virgin goddess and the goddess of chastity. She also presides over childbirth, which may seem odd for a virgin, but goes back to causing Leto no pain when she was born. The cypress is her tree. All wild animals were sacred to her, especially the deer.



The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus

Acts 19:24-28 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; 25 these he gathered together with the workmen of similar {trades,} and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. 26 "And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods {at all.} 27 "And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence." 28 And when they heard {this} and were filled with rage, they {began} crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

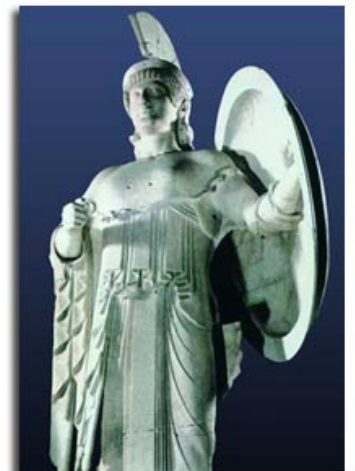
GREAT IS JEHOVAH!

- Ps 66:3 Say to God, "How awesome are Thy works! Because of the greatness of Thy power Thine enemies will give feigned obedience to Thee.
- Ps 66:5 Come and see the works of God, {who is} awesome in {His} deeds toward the sons of men.
- Ps 99:3 Let them praise Thy great and awesome name; Holy is He.
- Ps 48:1 Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, in the city of our God, His holy mountain.

Athena: (Roman: Minerva)

Athena was the daughter of Zeus. She sprang full-grown in armor from his forehead, thus has no mother. She was fierce and brave in battle, but only fought to protect the state and home from outside enemies. She was the goddess of the city, handicrafts and agriculture. The Greeks credited her for inventing the bridle for horses, the trumpet, the flute, the pot, the rake, the plow, the yoke, the ship and the chariot. She was the embodiment of wisdom, reason, and purity. She was Zeus's favorite child and was allowed to use his weapons including his thunderbolt. Her tree was the olive and the wise owl her bird. She was a virgin goddess.

Because her primary power was worldly wisdom, the wisdom-seeking debaters of Athens actually named their city after her. They taught there was contest to see what they would name the city with Athena and Poseidon competing against each other. During the contest, Poseidon struck his trident on the ground and brought forth a salt-water spring, something that proved no use the citizens. Athena offered them an olive tree, which was chosen by the king; hence the city was named for her.



To best understand Athena, one would do well to understand the Athenians. There is a very revealing account in the NT that exposes the attitudes of the people.

TO AN UNKNOWN GOD

Acts 17:15-34 Now those who conducted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they departed. 16 Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols. 17 So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing {Gentiles,} and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. 18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. And some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"-- because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? 20 "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; we want to know therefore what these things mean." 21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) 22 And Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; 26 and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined {their} appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.' 29 "Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. 30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." 32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some {began} to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." 33 So Paul went out of their midst. 34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

The people of Athens were constantly seeking wisdom. They were deeply polytheistic in their approach to religion, having many countless gods. They actually had a tomb to the UNKNOWN GOD just in case they missed one. These Athenians would sit around in the marketplace awaiting new information about new gods that they had not heard of. Some talked down to Paul as an idle babbler while pressing him for some new information. Paul made known the UNKNOWN GOD by preaching to them the KNOWN ONE AND ONLY GOD through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. Some sneered; some requested more information; some believed and converted. This was a WISDOM they had not known.

Athena is not the true source of wisdom, but Jesus and what He did for us on the cross!

- 1 Cor 1:19-24 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not {come to} know God, God was well-pleased through the

foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

- 1 Cor 2:1-2 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.
- 1 Cor 2:4-5 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.
- 2 Tim 3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (KJV)

Close:

1 Cor 8:5-6 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6 yet for us there is {but} one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we {exist} for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we {exist} through Him.

We now know a bit better the meaning of 1 Cor 8:5-6 through the culture of gods that Paul had to face in his evangelism efforts. For the true Christian it is necessary to rid ourselves of all others and put the Lord first in every way.

Closing Story:

Hideyoshi, a Japanese warlord who ruled over Japan in the late 1500s, commissioned a colossal statue of Buddha for a shrine in Kyoto. It took 50,000 men five years to build, but the work had scarcely been completed when the earthquake of 1596 brought the roof of the shrine crashing down and wrecked the statue. In a rage Hideyoshi shot an arrow at the fallen colossus. "I put you here at great expense," he shouted, "and you can't even look after your own temple."