



Myth Made Fact with Dr. Louis Markos

Lesson 6: The Tragic House of Atreus

Outline:

The Tragic House of Atreus

- Myth Summary:
 - Tantalus was a son of Zeus.
 - The god's loved him so much that they would come and eat with him in his castle (Asia Minor).
 - Tantalus killed his son and cooked him into the dinner for the gods.
 - The gods did not eat, they reassembled Pelops's body.
 - Tantalus was punished in Tartarus with nothing to eat or drink.
 - Pelops moved his family to Greece, to Mycenae in the southern peninsula of Greece.
 - Atreus' brother, Thyestes seduced and slept with Atreus' wife. Atreus cooked Thyestes children and fed them to Thyestes.
 - Thyestes rushed off into exile with his one remaining son Aegisthus.
 - Agamemnon is told that he has angered Artemis, who watches over nature, and is told he must sacrifice his daughter in order to go to Troy.
 - Agamemnon's wife is Clytemnestra and their children are Orestes (boy), Electra (girl), Iphigenia (girl)
 - Iphigenia goes to be married to Achilles, but she meets her father, who sacrifices Iphigenia.
 - As Clytemnestra's rage grew, Aegisthus thinks his time has come.
 - Aegisthus and Clytemnestra become lovers and they wait for Agamemnon to return.
 - Agamemnon brings a concubine, Casandra, who is a prophetess.
 - Clytemnestra stabs Agamemnon and kills Casandra.
 - After seven years Orestes comes back to Mycenae to avenge his father with Electra. Orestes kills Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.
 - The furies rise out of Clytemnestra's blood and they hound Orestes. Orestes goes to Athens where with the help of Athena he is declared innocent and an end is brought to the cycle of violence.

Aeschylus

- Greek tragedy is a formal affair with actors on stage and a chorus, who chants in unison.
- Two ways to name a tragedy:
 - Named after its main character.
 - Or named after the chorus.



- Oresteia
 - Aeschylus is trying to capture the forces of history as they move from one generation to the next.
 - The Bible is similar. One of the ways the Bible keeps cohesion is that there are certain symbols and archetypes that recur again and again.
 - Many of the Old Testament prophecies are difficult to understand because many of the prophecies are spoken in a heavenly symbolic language. They use loaded images and metaphors and symbols that keep showing up.
 - Water, wind: Holy Spirit
 - Olive tree, fig tree: Israel
 - Shepherds: leading up to Christ
 - Often a prophecy has three fulfillments.
 - Aeschylus fills it with metaphors and symbols.
 - Net: Treachery (persistent image)
 - Blood wedding: Marriage leads to death
 - Lion cub
 - Aeschylus is looking for the greater pattern.
 - Sometimes when you are living in a world when it takes a long time to work out a divine plan, sometimes the only way you can express that is through symbols.
 - Sometimes there are things that can only be conveyed by the imagination.
- Libation Bearers (chorus)
 - Orestes comes back as a messianic character from exile.
 - He has been commissioned by Apollo to kill his mother.
 - He sees the furies coming and he runs off into exile.
 - Orestes is a more moral character, in his guilt, there is hope.
- The Eumenides
 - The chorus are the furies themselves.
 - By the end of the play, Orestes is put on trial in Athens. When Orestes is on trial, the gods themselves are on trial.
 - How do we move from vengeance to a higher sense of justice and mercy?
 - Athena breaks the tie and takes the side of Orestes.
 - The furies say they will bring plague and death to the city. “I honor you, you are older than me, I invite you to live in Athens to be goddesses of marriage and childbirth.”
 - She domesticates the furies, and they have their name changed to Eumenides (well minded, or the kindly ones).
 - This is a real foreshadowing of Christianity. Jesus defeated death, but now death is the doorway. Jesus is the true Orestes, Athena, the true Messiah.
 - The true Messiah swallowed up death in life.