

## A Guide for Parents to *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*

The power of media and the story have a compelling impact on the culture, but especially on children. The newest book series and movie to captivate audiences is the *Percy Jackson* series by Rick Riordan. The series is a contemporary story of a twelve-year-old boy who discovers that his father is really the Greek god Poseidon. The book portrays the story of a young boy's quest to discover his past and save the future of a world ruled by less than perfect Greek gods who have now claimed the skies above New York City as their Mount Olympus. The first book, which is the subject of the movie to be released this week, retells the story of the clash between the Titans and the gods of Olympus and the Titans' renewed attempt to regain control of the world from the gods of Olympus. Percy is unknowingly framed into this controversy because it is believed that he has stolen Zeus' master bolt of lightning to give his father Poseidon control over the other gods. The story does a good job of incorporating the history of the Greek gods who evolved as a way to explain the natural and unnatural events of the world of ancient Greece.

The release of these books and movie offer Christian parents an opportunity to talk about the differences between the one true God, the God of the Bible, and the Greek gods of Percy Jackson's quest. In talking with children who read the books or see the movie, it is important to help them understand the difference between faith and fiction. These books and others like it are unique opportunities to talk with children, whether or not they have read the books or seen the movie. This article does not suggest that children should read the books or see the movie. Actually, for preschoolers and younger children the content will be confusing, especially the issue of multiple or fallen deities. However, if parents allow their children to read the books, see the movie or find themselves in situations where children encounter these issues, here are suggestions for dealing with the gods of Olympus and the God of the Bible:

*The gods of Olympus are limited in power and knowledge.* They are limited in what they know and in their power to control. They represent aspects of nature and human nature. Poseidon is the god of the oceans but does not have power over land elements. Zeus is the god of the sky but does not have power over elements of the sea. The gods of Olympus are subject to tricks and schemes of humans and other deities and often find themselves trapped by their own selfish desires. The God of the Bible is Lord of all elements and Creator of the universe. (Genesis 1)

*The gods of Olympus do not have a good plan for humans. They use humans for their selfish desires.* The gods of Olympus do not even love their own children in the same way the God of the Bible loves His creation. The God of the Bible was willing to create and redeem His children. Even when humanity was in sin, God sent His one and only Son to die for everyone. The sons and daughters of the gods are often unclaimed or only claimed when they have a purpose to their semi-god parents. At the end of the book, Percy Jackson is still unsure of his father's love and appreciation. (John 3:16)

*The gods of Olympus represent the worst of human nature.* While the gods of the Percy Jackson story demonstrate issues of selective power, beauty, and wisdom, they also represent the sinful nature of humanity. The gods of Olympus and their parents, the Titans, demonstrate greed, hatred, jealousy, and lying. The God of the Bible represents perfection in His love for all creation. The God of the Bible does not lie, nor does He need gold or human power. He represents truth. He does punish those who do not follow His commands, but His loving-kindness is seen throughout the Bible. (Romans 8:35)

*What is Olympians' view of Christians and the afterlife?* Percy takes a trip to the underworld in an attempt to retrieve the master bolt of lightning. Christians are mentioned in reference to a television evangelist who is facing punishment for stealing money from orphans. This reference is confusing because while the evangelist is being punished, there is a caveat here that Christians may experience hell/heaven differently because of their belief system or because humans see events the way they want to. Either way, Hades, the god of the underworld, is punishing the "Christian" evangelist. The inclusion of this part begs the question, "What is the author attempting to say about Christians in the example of the evangelist or in the

afterlife?" The book clearly indicates that the ultimate decision on the afterlife will be based on works or deed. (Ephesians 2:8)

*The books may not be designed to deal with the bigger issue of the one true God.* Percy Jackson asked about the God above the gods in book one and the response from his guide/teacher, the Centaur, Chiron, is that he is not going to deal with issues of the metaphysical. In other words, the bigger issues of an ultimate God may be beyond the nature of this book. This gives parents a reference point within the book to explain that this story is only a fictional retelling of the ancient Greek stories. In a recent retreat with 270 older children, 1/4 of the children had read the first book and many more were planning to see the movie. In dialogues with the children who read the first book, it was obvious that they were struggling to work through the realities of the book. One bright young girl said, "I know that the Greek gods are pretend, but the story seems so real."

*Is Percy Jackson like Jesus, God's Son?* Whether the author intended it or not, Percy Jackson does appear to be a form of a half-human/deity messianic figure from the point his father claims him in the river and where instead of a dove descending from heaven, a glowing trident appears over him to the on looking crowd, at which point they bow. However, in this story Percy is saving not only the world but the status of the Olympus gods from war as well as the honor of his father. For parents, this is a good point to show that Jesus came and lived an unselfish life for others and that His willing death on the cross was not to save God or God's honor, but fallen humanity from eternal hopelessness and separation. (John 14:6)

*Percy Jackson* is a fun and easy read for children that captivates their imagination. The book also includes all of the politically correct themes of protecting the environment and following your own path in life. The context of the pagan gods, druids, and nymphs is not a new one to literature and can be found in writers such as C.S. Lewis. Children in today's world might need to be reminded that the idea of many gods is not a new one and that this was one of the major struggles for people in the Bible. The children of Israel struggled to deal with other cultures and their nature gods in the Old Testament. Paul also addressed this issue in his presentation about the "unknown god" in Acts.

Parents may want to protect their children from all elements that may challenge their faith, which is difficult when children are part of a larger community through school, the internet, television, books, and movies. There are times when parents definitely need to protect their children because of age or content. However, the inability to protect children does not mean that parents should give up and let their boys and girls participate in every book or movie that is released. Parents need to be informed by reading and viewing along with their children. This joint participation gives parents and children the opportunity to analyze themes and contents together. Giving children the skills to think through issues is their foundation for later developing the ability to defend their faith against intellectual assaults.

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Written by Thomas Sanders, Ph.D., Director, Master of Arts in Christian Education: Childhood Ministry, Dallas Baptist University with the assistance of his son, Kyle Thomas Sanders (15). The Sanders, father and son, enjoy reading popular fiction for children and adolescents. They started reading together in such a way when Kyle was 5.