

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 8: Philemon and Baucis

The myth of Philemon and Baucis is a story of piety rewarded. Jupiter and Mercury come to earth disguised as men to test the humanity of mortals. When they seek refuge as strangers, they are driven from village to village until they are received by a kindly old couple, Philemon and Baucis, who share their humble cottage and meager supply of food with the gods .

Ovid weaves an intimate picture of their modest peasant life, focusing on the preparation, and selection of food and a humorous scene of goose-chasing after the elderly pair has come to believe they have offended their guests and pursue their only suitable offering as a recompense.

The gods reveal themselves and ask Philemon and Baucis to accompany them up the mountain. When the old pair look down at their village, they see it has been flooded except for their own cottage which the gods have turned into a marble-columned temple. Because of their kindness and humanity, Jupiter asks the astonished couple to request anything and it will be granted.

Philemon and Baucis confer, and in the excerpt which follows the aged husband speaks for both of them.

Text and Translation

“Esse sacerdotes delubraque vestra tueri

“We ask to be priests and to watch over

poscimus, et quoniam concordēs egimus annos,
your shrine, and since we have spent (our) years in harmony,

auferat hora duos eadem, nec coniugis umquam
let the same hour take (us) two away (to death), and don't let me ever see

1. **sacerdotes:** *sacerdos, -dotis*, m/f: priest/priestess
delubrum: *delubrum, -i*, n.: shrine
tueri: *tueor, tueri, tuitus* (deponent verb): watch over
2. **poscimus:** *posco, -ere, poposci*: ask
concordes: *concor, -ordis*: compatible; here, in harmony
3. **auferat:** *aufero, auferre, abstuli, ablatum*: take away
duos: *duo, duae, duo*: two (accusative plural)
coniugis: *coniunx, -iugis*, m./f.: spouse

busta meae videam, neu sim tumulandus ab illā.”
the tomb of my spouse nor let me have to be buried by her (hand).”

Vota fides sequitur: templi tutela fuere,
Fulfillment follows (their) wishes: they were the guardian(s) of the temple,

5

donec vita data est; annis aevoque soluti
as long as life was given; weakened by years and age,

ante gradūs sacros cum starent forte locique
when they were standing before the holy steps and by chance

narrarent casūs, frondere Philemona Baucis,
were relating the history of the place, Baucis (saw) that Philemon was growing

4. **busta:** *bustum*, -i, n.: tomb; here, translate as singular
neu = neve: nor
tumulandus: *tumulo* (1): bury
5. **vota:** *votum*, -i, n.: wish
fides: *fides*, -ei, f.: trustworthiness; here, fulfillment (of a promise)
sequitur: *sequor, sequi, secutus* (deponent verb): follow
tutela: *tutela*, -ae, f.: guardianship; here, guardian(s)
fuere = fuerunt
6. **donec** (adverb): as long as
aevo: *aevus*, -i, m.: age
soluti: *solvo, -ere, solvi, solutum*: loosen; here, weaken
7. **gradūs:** *gradus*, -ūs, m.: step; ancient temples often had steps leading up to them
sacros: *sacer, -era, -erum*: holy
starent: *sto, stare, steti, statum*: stand
forte: *fors, fortis*, f.: chance
8. **casus:** *casus*, -ūs, m.: event; in plural, “history”
frondere: *frondeo, -ere, frondui*: grow leaves
Philemona: *Philemon, -onis*, m.: man’s name; Greek accusative

Baucida conspexit senior frondere Philemon.

leaves, (and) Philemon, the older (of the pair), saw that Baucis was growing leaves.

Iamque super geminos crescente cacumine vultūs

10

And now, with a tree-top growing above both (their) faces,

mutua, dum licuit, reddebant dicta “Vale”que

while it was permitted, they exchanged words back and forth and said, “Farewell,

O coniunx!” dixere simul, simul abdita texit

O spouse!” at the same time, (and) at the same time bark covered

ora frutex: ostendit adhuc Thyneius illic

(their) mouths, (now) hidden; even now an inhabitant of Bithynia shows

9. **Baucida:** *Baucis*, -idis, f.: woman’s name; Greek accusative
conspexit: *conspicio*, -ere, -spexi, -spectum: see
senior: *senior*, -oris, m.: elder
10. **geminus:** *geminus*, -a, -um: twin, two-fold
crescente: *cresco*, -ere, crevi, cretum: grow
cacumine: *cacumen*, -inis, n.: top; here, tree-top
vultus: *vultus*, -ūs, m.: face
11. **mutua:** *mutuus*, -a, -um: back and forth
licuit: *licet*, *licere*, *licuit*, *licitum est* (impersonal verb): it is permitted
reddebant: *reddo*, -ere, -didi, -ditum: return; here, exchange
dicta: *dictum*, -i, n.: word
12. **dixere** = *dixerunt*
simul (adverb): at the same time
abdita: *abdo*, -ere, *abdidi*, *abditum*: hide
texit: *tego*, -ere, *texi*, *tectum*: cover
13. **ora:** *os*, *oris*, n.: face
frutex: *frutex*, -icis, m.: shrub; here, bark
adhuc (adverb): even now
Thyneius: Bithynian, of Bithynia; Bithynia is in Asia Minor
illic (adverb): in that spot

incola de gemino vicinos corpore truncos.

in that spot tree trunks next to each other (made) of a two-fold body.

14. **incola:** *incola*, -ae, m.: inhabitant
vicinos: *vicinus*, -a, -um: next to each other
truncos: *truncus*, -i, m.: tree trunk; torso