

*“Glorious phoenix,”
cried the Sun [god].
“You shall be my bird
and live forever!”*

*The immortal phoenix
is a powerful symbol of
hope – the triumph
of new life over death.*

*The true home of
the phoenix is Paradise.
In our world, only one
such bird can live at
any one time.*

The Phoenix

Fantastically beautiful birds often appear in mythological stories connected to ideas of death, rebirth and immortality. The phoenix is one such bird, from the Middle East. Every five or six centuries, the bird senses it is time to die, and it builds a ‘funeral nest’ out of sweet-smelling sticks and herbs from Arabian spice groves. The phoenix then lies down to rest and sings an enchanting song, as the Sun rises and sets fire to the nest. Both the bird and the nest are turned to ashes – but a seed of life remains...

A tiny worm crawls from the ashes and grows into a new young phoenix. This chick collects the ashes into an egg made from myrrh, a gum-like material that comes from trees. According to some versions of the legend, the phoenix takes to the sky – surrounded by other birds – and carries the egg to Heliopolis, the Egyptian City of the Sun. Here, the egg is delivered to priests at a temple, where the ashes may be buried. The bird is now free to return to Arabia and begin its new life.

In ancient Egyptian mythology, the phoenix is a female firebird, with dazzling, red-and-gold feathers, that lives for either 500 or 1,461 years. This bird is sometimes pictured as a heron, or a flamingo-like bird from East Africa, and can also regenerate itself if wounded by an enemy. In ancient Greek and Roman legends, the bird looks more like a peacock or an eagle. Most of the phoenix stories feature a Sun god, riding across the sky in a horse-drawn chariot, who stops to listen to the bird's haunting song.