

## Greek Mythology

The ancient Greeks used stories containing God's to explain the way life was. Often times there were lessons to be learned that described human behavior. To the Greeks the myths were looked at as examples of good and bad behavior and its effects. They worshipped the Gods and tried not to offend them in any way. The story of creation is a prime example of how the Greeks viewed the heavens and the earth. Zeus was the king of the sky, earth, and men. Zeus' son Apollo urged all Greeks to follow these words: "Nothing in excess" and "Know your limitations." These are words that even humans today should take to heart. The Greeks believed in manlike deities as well, whom were capable of spite, favoritism, and jealousy. The only difference being their ability to perform supernatural powers and immortality.

The creation of the world according to the Greeks goes as follows:

In the beginning there was only chaos. Out of this void appeared Erebus, the unknowable place where death dwells, and Night (Nyx). All else was empty, silent, endless, darkness. Upon the birth of Love (Eros) brought a start of order. From Love came Light and Day. Once there was Light and Day, Gaea appeared. Gaea was the Earth goddess. Erebus then slept with Night, producing Aether and Day. Aether was the heavenly light and Day was the light of the Earth. Night solely produced Death, Doom, Dreams, Fate, Nemesis, Sleep, among others that come to man out of the darkness. Meanwhile Gaea gave birth to Uranus. Uranus was the sky god and first ruler who later became married to his creator, Gaea. Together they proceeded to have the three Cyclopes, the three Hecatoncheires, and twelve Titans.

However, Uranus was a bad father and husband. He disliked the Hecatoncheires and expressed his hatred by imprisoning them into the hidden places of the earth, Gaea's womb. This angered Gaea and she plotted against Uranus. She tried to get her children to attack Uranus. All were too afraid except, the youngest Titan, Cronus. Gaea and Cronus set up an ambush of Uranus as he lay with Gaea at night. Cronus grabbed his father and castrated him, with a sharp object, throwing the severed genitals into the ocean. After this Uranus either died, withdrew from the earth, or exiled himself to Italy. As he departed he promised that Cronus and the Titans would be punished. From his spilt blood came the Giants, the Ash Tree Nymphs, and the Erinyes. From the sea foam where his genitals fell came Aphrodite. She arose from the sea and walked to the shore in Cyprus. She was the goddess of love, desire, and beauty. Along with her natural gifts she was able to compel whomever she desired with the use of a magical girdle. After the absence of Uranus,

Cronus became the next ruler. He imprisoned the Cyclopes and the Hecatoncheires in Tartarus and married his sister Rhea. Together the Titans had many offspring while Cronus ruled for many ages. However, Gaea and Uranus both had prophesied that he would be overthrown by a son. To avoid this Cronus swallowed each of his children as they were born. Rhea was angry at the treatment of the children and plotted against Cronus. When it came time to give birth to her sixth child, Rhea hid herself, then she left the child to be raised by nymphs. To conceal her act she wrapped a stone in swaddling cloths and passed it off as the baby to Cronus, who swallowed it.

The surviving child was Zeus. He was the lord of the sky and the rain god. His weapon was a thunderbolt which he threw at those who upset him, often punishing those that lie or break oaths. He grew into a handsome youth on Crete. He consulted Metis on how to defeat Cronus. She prepared a drink for Cronus design to make him vomit up the other children. Rhea convinced Cronus to accept his son and Zeus was allowed to return to Mount Olympus as Cronus's cupbearer. This gave Zeus the opportunity to slip Cronus the specially prepared drink. This worked as planned and the other five children were vomited up. Being gods they were unharmed. They were thankful to Zeus and made him their leader. Metis presided over all wisdom

and knowledge. However, she was seduced by Zeus and became pregnant with Athena. Zeus became concerned over prophecies that her second child would replace him. Out of this fear Zeus ate her. It is said that she is still the source of wisdom for Zeus.

Cronus was yet to be defeated. He and the Titans, except Prometheus, Epimetheus, and Oceanus, fought to retain their power. Since Cronus was old of age, Atlas became their leader in battle and it looked for some time as though they would win and put the young gods down. However, Zeus was cunning. He went down to Tartarus and freed the Cyclopes and the Hecatoncheires. Prometheus joined Zeus as well. He returned to battle with his new allies. The Cyclopes provided Zeus with lighting bolts for weapons. The Hecatoncheires he set in ambush armed with boulders. With the time right, Zeus retreated drawing the Titans into the Hecatoncheires's ambush. The Hecatoncheires rained down hundreds of boulders with such a fury the Titans thought the mountains were falling on them. They broke and ran giving Zeus victory.

Zeus exiled the Titans who had fought against him into Tartarus. Except for Atlas, who was singled out for the special punishment of holding the world on his shoulders. However, even after this victory Zeus was not safe. Gaea angry that her children had been imprisoned gave birth to a last offspring, Typhoeus. Typhoeus was so fearsome that most of the gods fled. However, Zeus faced the monster and flinging his lighting bolts was able to kill it. Typhoeus was buried under Mount Etna in Sicily. Much later a final challenge to Zeus rule was made by the Giants. They went so far as to attempt to invade Mount Olympus, piling mountain upon mountain in an effort to reach the top. But, the gods had grown strong and with the help of Heracles the Giants were subdued or killed.

The Gods and the stories of their being were important to the Greeks. To us these ideas are unheard of, but to the Greeks this was their way of life. In 2000 years from now our ideas may be unrealistic also. The creation story allows us to see how they viewed they world and those in it.