

Mythological Heroes

The subject of mythology deals mainly with the notion of battle, or good versus evil. In this struggle many individuals are singled out for either the evil they cause, or from the good they bring to people. When you mention heroes in mythology, there are two distinct names that a majority of people bring up, those names are Achilles and Hercules.

Achilles was born to King Peleus and the sea-nymph Thetis. Soon after Achilles was born his mother dipped him in the River Styx, she was told, by doing this, that the water would make every part of his body that it touched invincible. Little did she know that the one part of his heel which he was held by would not touch the water.

When Achilles mother found out about the war in Troy between the Greeks and the Trojans she did not want her son to fight because she knew that he would eventually be killed there. The way that she tried to prevent him from going into the army was to hide him among the women of the court so that he could not be persuaded by his close friend Odysseus to join the Greek forces. While trying to find Achilles, Odysseus easily spotted him among the women, and persuaded him to join the Greek army.

After many years of battle with the Trojan forces, Achilles ended up in a famed duel with Trojan hero Hector, over the slaying of Achilles close friend Patroclus. After killing Hector, Achilles tied his dead body behind a chariot and dragged around the walls of Troy seven times to show his hatred and anger towards the Trojans and their hero. Shortly after the famed battle, Achilles was killed when he was struck, with a poisonous arrow, in the one small spot on his heel which was vulnerable. The arrow was fired by the Trojan prince Paris and was guided by the sun god Apollo.

Hercules was the strongest and swiftest man ever to walk the earth. As the son of Zeus and mortal woman Alcmene, Hercules was destined to be a hero. This destiny was shown before he was one year old. Enraged at his affair with a mortal woman, Zeus' wife Hera set out on a plot to kill Hercules.

One night after Alcmene put her children to bed, Hercules' twin brother Iphicles was awoken by two huge serpents that were sent by Hera to kill the son of Zeus. When Hercules awoke he grasped the two snakes in order to play with them, and squeezed the life right out of them. When Alcmene awoke to see what all the commotion was about, she was amazed at the sight of her infant son holding two snakes that he had killed with his bare hands.

When Hercules grew to manhood, he married and had six sons, and again fell victim to Hera's hatred towards him. What Hera did was send a fit of madness upon Hercules who mistook his wife and children for enemies and killed them. When his sanity returned he realised what he had done he shut himself up from the world for a long time. After a long time in seclusion Hercules finally emerged and went to the Oracle of Delphi to beg for punishment for his crime. Hercules was sent to King Eurystheus and told that the king would assign a punishment to Hercules. The punishment was to perform twelve nearly impossible tasks which are known as the twelve labours of Hercules.

The first of these tasks was to kill and skin the Nemean Lion, whose skin could not be punctured by any weapon. His second labour was to kill the Hydra of Lerna which had numerous heads, one of which was immortal. Every time one of the mortal heads was cut off two or three new heads would grow in its place. The third of his tasks was go to the Ceryneian Hill and capture a beautiful bronze-hoofed hind without spilling one drop of its blood. For his fourth task Hercules was to capture alive a huge wild boar which often killed humans and lived on Mount Erymanthus. The fifth task assigned to Hercules was to clean the filth of many years out of the stables of King Augeias of Elis. The sixth labour of the great Greek hero was to get rid of a flock of birds which resided in the Stympthalian Marsh. The birds had long straight bronze beaks, sharp bronze claws, and a taste for human flesh. For his next labour, Hercules was to capture the wild bull of Crete. For the eighth task Hercules was to bring King Eurystheus the mares of the King Diometes. These mares were fed human flesh for food. The ninth labour Hercules was to perform was to go to the tribe of the feared Amazon women and steal the golden girdle of Hippolyta, the Amazon queen. Hercules tenth task was to bring King Eurystheus the cattle of Geryon. Geryon was the owner of the cattle and he split above the waist into three bodies which were difficult to defeat. Hercules' eleventh task was to try and find the Garden of Hesperides and fetch the fruit from the golden apple tree, this was difficult for him because he had no idea where the Garden of Hesperides was. For his twelfth and final labour Hercules was venture the most feared place on earth, the realm of Hades, and bring up

the three-headed watchdog Cerberus.

After spending nearly his entire life completing the twelve labours, Hercules decided to settle down and he married the fair maiden Deianeira. When Deianeira was captured by a centaur named Nessus, Hercules shot the centaur with a poisoned arrow. With the centaur's dying breath he gave Deianeira a vial of his poisoned blood telling her she could use it to rekindle Hercules' love for her if it ever faded. One day when she felt that his love was fading, she made him a robe that was dipped in the blood. When Hercules received the gift from his wife he was overjoyed and put it on, almost immediately his skin started to burn and he caught on fire. Knowing his

death

was near he called his servants to bring him a funeral pyre which he placed himself on. As the pyre burned it was carried up to Mount Olympus where he became the god of strength.

Each of these heroes have at least one thing that separate them from regular men, something that is special about them. For Achilles it is his invulnerability and his incredible courage that make him a great Greek hero. For Hercules it is his god-like strength, and his luck of being the son of the king of the gods. Each of these Greek heroes was destined to be great at a very early age. Just after Achilles was born he was dipped in the River Styx by his mother which made him invincible. In the case of Hercules, his heroic effort was shown when he was less than one year old when he saved himself and his brother from two deadly serpents.

Both of these warriors fought great battles and suffered tremendous hardships, neither of them were perfect, they both had their faults. In the case of Achilles, during the Trojan War, in the middle of battle his favourite slavegirl was taken away from him and instead of continuing to battle, he stayed in his tent and sulked until his close friend ,Patroclus, was killed. For Hercules, his temper was his weak spot, it could be easily become deadly if he was told to do something that he did not want to do.

One thing that both men possess a great deal of is courage. Neither of these great heroes would back down to any challenge or battle that would come before them, no matter how hard the battle may be both of these great men would die trying.

Out of all the many stories told about mythology, the stories of these two great men will never be forgotten. Both of these men conquered hardships, and turmoil. They overcame all of these ailments to conquer their task and fulfil their goal, qualities which could regard them as two of the greatest heroes of all time.

