

Ancient Greek Creation Story

Based on Hesiod's Tale

Place your definitions for the vocabulary in this right-hand column.

In the very beginning, there was no earth, or sea, or sky. There was only a mass of confusion, shapeless and meaningless known as **Chaos**. Without explanation, Chaos gave birth to Nyx, a goddess of night and all that sleeps, and later to Erebus, a god of darkness and death. Then out of the deep darkness, Chaos created love or Eros. Eros was said to be a **perpetual** young boy and is often confused with Cupid, whom the Romans said was the son of Aphrodite. Order began to appear in the universe, and Chaos then created Tartarus, the god of the lowest region of the world and a place of punishment for evil doers. After many years, the final child of Chaos was created and she was known as Mother Earth or Gaea (Gaia). These early gods are what the Greeks called the **primordial deities**.

Many years passed when Gaea gave birth to two sons. One was named Uranus, and he became Father Heaven, the ruler of the sky and all that is above the earth. The other son was Pontus, the god of the sea and all that is found in its waters.

As time went on, Gaea then took Uranus as her mate. Father Heaven loved Mother Earth, and he made rain fall on her, so that her flowers and trees and grass would grow. The rain also fell into caves and crevices, forming seas and rivers and lakes.

Mother Earth and Father Heaven had many children together. First, Gaea gave birth to three monstrous sons called, the Hecatoncheires. Their name meant "hundred-handed ones." Each son had fifty heads and one hundred hands. Then she gave birth to three more gigantic sons who were just as ugly, called the Cyclopes. Each Cyclops had only one eye in the middle of his forehead and their name meant "wheel-eyed." These six sons were as strong as earthquakes and tornadoes put together, and they were often just as devastating.

Uranus grew to despise his six monstrous sons, not just because they were so ugly, but they were so destructive and sometimes they used their power unwisely and irresponsibly and destroyed the beautiful earth's landscape. As they would play, they would think nothing of toppling trees or causing earthquakes and this made Uranus sad and angry.

In time Father Heaven could not stand the sight of his six ugly sons, and he was afraid of them, too. One day he tricked them into going to a dark, ugly hole beneath the earth known as Tartarus. Inside this prison he locked them away never to be seen.

Mother Earth through her union with Uranus bore six more sons and six daughters who became known as the Titans. They too were gigantic, but they

resembled humans more than her first children. They were so gigantic that the word titanic has become synonymous with gigantic.

Upon learning of her husband's **deceit** in locking away her six monstrous children, Mother Earth cried **resentfully** over this cruelty to her children. She was also one of the few deities who had the power to **foresee (prophetic)** what will come to be in the future. She knew what she would have to do to have her sons released from prison. She decided to destroy Father Heaven's power and bring back her beloved children, but she would need assistance. She made a weapon, a **scythe** (a sickle) and gave it to her Titan children. "Strike your cruel father," she begged, "and then go down into that dark hole of Tartarus and bring your brothers back to me."

Cronus, the strongest and most **valiant** of the Titans, led the attack on his sleeping father and wounded him dreadfully with the scythe. As a portion of Uranus' blood fell into the sea, foam appeared upon the water and brought forth a large clam-like shell to the surface. Eventually the shell opened revealing the beautiful goddess, Aphrodite. Her appearance represents the goodness and love that Uranus has for earth. She will eventually become one of the Olympian gods.

From the blood that fell upon the land, there came forth three evil sisters known simply as the Furies or the Furious Ones. The Greeks called them the Erinyes, which means "the furious ones." Their purpose became to **avenge** sin. Both god and mortals would come to fear the Furies and the **wrath** that they would bring. They were said to have **hideous** screeching voices with hair that contained writhing snakes. They were known to throw snakes upon those who were to be punished. From the same blood of Uranus came opposites, love and evil.

Another portion of the Uranus' blood that fell upon the rocks brought forth large giants (Gigantes) who were human in form though extremely large with serpent-like feet. There were many of these giants and they were said to be dressed in armor and to become foot soldiers.

By injuring their father and taking his power, the Titans had weakened Uranus. The Titan brothers and sisters made Cronus the ruler of heaven and earth, and their sister, Rhea, his wife and queen.

But power changed Cronus, and he chose to keep the one-eyed Cyclopes and the hundred-hand Hecatoncheires in Tartarus.

This **infuriated** Mother Earth, and she warned Cronus that one day he too would be overthrown. She **bided** her time while Cronus' wife, Rhea, bore sons, for she knew that one of them was destined to overthrow and destroy Cronus.

Cronus, too, knew that one of his children was **destined** to rise up against him and take his place as “King of the Gods.” Therefore, to keep his children from growing up and becoming powerful, he swallowed them up as soon as they were born.

Rhea was deeply distressed by this; as one by one Cronus swallowed her first five children: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon. When she was expecting her sixth child, she was determined to save it from Cronus.

She went to Mother Earth to ask for her help and together they devised a plan. After her baby son, Zeus, was born, she gave him to Mother Earth, who hid the baby in a cave on the island of Crete.

Then Rhea went to Cronus and said, "Here is our sixth child, a son. Do whatever you wish with him." She handed Cronus a bundle that looked like a baby wrapped in a blanket.

Of course, Cronus swallowed the bundle immediately, just as Rhea had expected. However, to his surprise, Cronus ended up swallowing a stone which was wrapped in a blanket instead of the baby, Zeus.

Now Rhea was happy. She hoped desperately that Zeus was indeed the son who would destroy his frightful father Cronus.

Zeus grew up on Crete among shepherds and nymphs, far from his wicked father, Cronus. He drank the milk of a goat nymph, who fed him honey, too. He slept in a golden cradle that was hung from a tree, and armed guards protected him. Whenever he cried, the guards banged their spears on their shields so that Cronus would not hear Zeus's loud wails and realize that he was still alive.

Nevertheless, Cronus found out that his son was alive on Crete, and went after him, intending to swallow him. However, Zeus was too clever for Cronus. He changed himself into a serpent, and though Cronus searched high and low, he could not find Zeus.

Rhea, Zeus's mother, had warned him about the terrible deeds of his father, and Zeus **vowed** that when he was fully grown, he would rescue his brothers and sisters.

At last, the time came for Zeus to return to Rhea, and he secretly disguised himself as a cupbearer in service in Cronus' palace. Zeus, Gaea, and Rhea plotted Cronus' **demise**.

"If you **concoct** a poisonous potion," said Zeus to his mother, "I will mix it into Cronus' drink."

His mother agreed immediately, and went to the Titaness Metis for her assistance in creating the magical **elixir**. When the poisonous drink was prepared, Zeus served it to his father. Cronus was thirsty and gulped it quickly down. Suddenly, he became very ill and vomited up the stone he had swallowed. As he yelled in pain, one by one, out of his mouth sprang his five children each fully grown!

Zeus's brothers and sisters hugged him and thanked him for releasing them from the prison. "And now that you have set us free," they said to Zeus, "You must lead us in battle against Cronus and the Titans. We must defeat our cruel father and rule the universe, and never again will we be imprisoned."

A terrible war raged for ten long years and became known as the **Titanomachy**. Cronus was no longer young, so the strongest of all the Titans, Atlas, led the Titan army into battle. However, two other Titans, Prometheus and Epimetheus, betrayed their Titan brothers and joined Zeus and his brothers and sisters. That made the sides nearly equal in strength. Neither could gain the advantage.

Finally wise Mother Earth told Zeus that his side would be victorious if he followed her advice. "Go down into the dark hole under the earth and release the one-eyed Cyclopes and their hundred-hand brothers, the Hecatoncheires, and they shall help you defeat our enemy."

Zeus followed Mother Earth's advice and descended bravely into the dark hole to release the Hecatoncheires and the Cyclopes.

The Cyclopes, in turn, gave Zeus and his brothers gifts to use as weapons against Cronus and the Titans.

"To Zeus," said one of the Cyclopes, "we give our powerful weapons, the thunderbolts."

"To Zeus's brother Hades," said another, "we give this magical helmet of darkness."

"And to his brother Poseidon," said the third, "we give this sharp-pronged **trident**."

Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon thanked the Cyclopes and discussed how to best use their gifts against the enemy.

Then Hades put on the helmet of darkness, which made him invisible and he crept up behind Cronus and stole all of his weapons.

Poseidon struck the ground with his trident, which caused the earth to shake. Cronus was terrified and was **rendered** powerless.

Then Zeus threw his thunderbolts, and Cronus, Atlas, and the rest of the Titan army retreated.

Meanwhile the three hundred-hand brothers hurled rocks from each of their hands at the Titans, until the enemy fell and continued to retreat.

The earth was almost torn apart by the horrible battle, but fortunately before its destruction was complete, Zeus and his siblings won. They punished all of the Titans except for Prometheus and Epimetheus, who had helped them. They made Atlas, the Titans' leader, carry the sky on his shoulders, forever. Also, they chained Cronus and the others in the dark hole under the earth in Tartarus.

Zeus could not rest long, though, for Mother Earth gave birth to one more enemy, the most terrible of all, a monster named Typhon. Typhon had one hundred heads and **emitted** a steam of fire from each eye. But Zeus hurled thunderbolts and struck down this hideous creature. At last, there was peace on earth.

Now, which of the three brothers, Zeus, Poseidon, or Hades, should be the ruler of the universe? They were tired of fighting, and they wanted to settle this problem without further argument. So, they decided to draw **lots** to see who would rule the World. Hades won the underworld, and Poseidon won the sea. Zeus drew the long stick and became the ruler of Heaven and all the gods of Mount Olympus.