



Kronos and Zeus

Kronos became god of the sky, as his father had been before him. Like his father, he feared the Hundred-Handed Giants and the Cyclopes, so he ignored his promise to Gaea and kept his brothers bound and imprisoned in Tartarus.

Gaea, disappointed and angry, watched and waited for the next opportunity to free her children. Being a goddess of prophecy, she enjoyed informing Kronos that one day a son of his would overpower him just as he had overpowered his own father.

“I shall fool the Fates,” he said to himself, with a clever smile. “If I do not have any children, then I will be able to rule forever!”

However, it was not so easy to change his destiny. Kronos loved his wife, Rhea, and in time she gave birth to a lovely daughter, Hestia. When Rhea proudly presented their baby daughter to Kronos, the words of his fate screamed inside Kronos’ head. His great fear of losing power brought a mad, distraught glint into his eyes. Without considering whether the baby was female or male, Kronos took the baby lovingly from his wife, opened his gigantic mouth, and swallowed the infant in one gulp. “Now,” he thought with satisfaction, “I have cheated the Fates of their prophecy and my child of his throne!”

Four more children were born to Kronos and Rhea: Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon. Each time Kronos embraced the infant so lovingly that Rhea was certain he would accept this child. However, each time the glint of madness would steal across his eyes as the words of the prophecy roared in his ears, and each time he would open his gigantic mouth and swallow the infant in one gulp. Then, once again, Kronos would grin with satisfaction and think to himself, “I have cheated the Fates of their prophecy and my child of his throne!”

By this time, Rhea’s heart was overflowing with grief. When she was about to give birth to her sixth child, she went to Gaea and said, “Mother, please help me! Kronos has robbed me of our children just as Uranus robbed you of the Hundred-Handed Giants and the Cyclopes. I cannot bear to let him steal this baby, too! What can I do? Can we hide the infant from Kronos before he sees it? How can I trick him?”

Gaea replied, “My heart understands your pain, my daughter, and I think I can

help you. I know that Kronos is destined to be overpowered by his son just as he overpowered his father before him. Surely, the child about to be born to you is the son who is destined to take revenge upon Kronos for his treatment of his father, his brothers, and his own children. When your time to give birth arrives, go to the island of Crete and take refuge in the deep, hidden cave high on the slopes of Mount Dicte. I shall see that nymphs nurse your infant son with goat’s milk, and I will have them hang his cradle from a tree so that Kronos will not be able to find him on land, or sea, or in the air. Young boys, the Curetes, will march beneath his cradle, clanging their spears against their bronze shields to smother the sound of his cries.”

Gaea continued, “And as for how to trick Kronos, he is so crazed with fear that an ordinary rock should be all you need to fool him!”

So it came about that Rhea gave birth to the infant, Zeus, in the cave of Mount Dicte, on Crete. She left her mother, Gaea, in charge of the baby and quickly returned home. She then found a rock about size of her newborn infant and wrapped it in swaddling clothes as if it were an infant. Soon, Kronos entered the room.

“How are you feeling?” he asked her sweetly. “Let me admire our latest child. Not every infant is born into such a royal family!”

Rhea forced herself to think of the fate of her other five children as she handed the well-wrapped rock over to her husband. As usual, Kronos took the bundle she gave him and lovingly embraced it. Then the words of the prophecy screamed in his head, and the look of madness shone forth from his eyes. Beside himself with fear of his destiny, Kronos opened his gigantic mouth and swallowed the rock in one gulp. “Now,” he said to himself, smiling with the greatest satisfaction and relief, “once again, I have cheated the Fates of their prophecy and my child of his throne! I shall rule forever, after all!”

Years passed, and Zeus became a mature god. Kronos never realized that a son had escaped his eye and evaded his gigantic mouth. He ruled untroubled and unthreatened, never thinking that his destiny might be rapidly approaching.

One day when Kronos was thirsty, Rhea gave him a tasty drink. He was delighted and asked for more. A young stranger walked in and handed him the cup, and Kronos had swallowed the drink before it occurred to him that he had never seen the young man before.

“Who is he?” he wondered. “Why should he have brought me the drink? What if he has poisoned me? Wait, why does my stomach feel so strange?”

Suddenly, Kronos felt an excruciating pain in his stomach. He vomited up the rock, followed by Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Demeter, and Hestia, all of whom were fully grown by now.

Rhea then entered the room, with the young stranger, Zeus, by her side.

“Your destiny is upon you, Kronos!” she exclaimed. “The Fates prophesied that a son would overpower you just as you overpowered your own father. That son, Zeus, now stands before you. You are reaping the fruits of the seeds you sowed when you swallowed our children and kept your brothers in chains in Tartarus! We will now see

whether Zeus will rule with more intelligence and kindness than you did. Your mind has been as blind and your heart as hard as that rock you swallowed!”

“If this stranger, son of mine or not, thinks that he is going to take my kingdom from me, he is not as intelligent as you seem to think he is,” Kronos responded. “Anyone who wants to rule in my place will have to fight me, and all of the other Titans, too!”

So it came to pass, that Zeus and his brothers and sisters, the first Greek gods, waged war against Kronos and the Titans who allied themselves with him. The gods and the Titans were so evenly matched, in numbers and in strength, that they fought for ten years without victory for either side.

Finally, Gaea, who had given Zeus the poisoned drink to give his father, helped Zeus once again. She told him about her lost children, the Hundred-Handed Giants and the Cyclopes, whom Uranus and Kronos had kept imprisoned beneath the ground at the borders of the earth, and how they were chained in grief and sorrow, far from the light of Helios and the companionship of the deathless gods. She prophesied that the gods would win the war if they brought the Hundred-Handed Giants and the Cyclopes up from Tartarus as their allies.

Zeus and his brothers went down to Tartarus to rescue Gaea’s children and encourage their alliance. Once they had killed the guard, removed their uncles’ bonds, and fed them, Zeus said, “Listen to these words from my heart. We have been fighting the Titans for ten years without success. If you will repay our kindness to you by fighting on our side, your great strength will make us victorious.”

To these words, one of the Hundred-Handed Giants replied, “We know that you are fighting to defend the deathless gods from the cruelty of Titan rulers. And we know what it is to be the victims of Titan power. Had you not freed us, we were doomed to face an eternity of darkness, bondage, and isolation. Uranus and his son Kronos do not understand suffering and know nothing of mercy. We know that you will rule the world with greater wisdom, Of course, we shall fight with you against the Titan tyrant!”

Then one of the Cyclopes said, “In return for our freedom, we present each of you with a special gift. To you, Zeus, we give the gift of thunder and lightning in the form of a thunderbolt, an invincible weapon against any enemy. We shall make more of these for you when we set up on Mount Olympus.”

“To you, Poseidon,” he continued, “we give the trident. Not only is it a superior fishing spear, but you will find it a most effective device for shaking the earth and creating waves at sea. Until then, its three-barbed prongs will make it a useful weapon against the Titans.”

“And to you, Hades,” he concluded, “we give the helmet of invisibility. In time to come, the hero Perseus will need your weapon to kill the monstrous Gorgon,

Medusa. Until then, it will serve you well against Kronos and his Titan allies.”

With high spirits, Zeus and his allies returned to the upper world and renewed the battle. The Hundred-Handed Giants broke cliffs off the mountains until they had a huge crag in each of their multitude of hands. Then they pelted the Titans with their stone weapons.

The Titans responded with arrows and spears. The combatants could not kill each other, for they were all immortal. However, they could injure and overpower one another. The battle caused an upheaval across the earth. The mountains quaked, and even Tartarus felt the impact of the mighty rocks upon the earth high above him.

Then Zeus hurled his invincible lightning bolt, which engulfed in flames what ever it touched. The earth resounded with the roars of mighty thunder as the blazing

woods and the scalding sea scorched the air. Finally, the Hundred-Handed Giants hurled the Titans beneath the earth into Tartarus and placed them in chains for eternity in that dark, dismal land. The war was over. When the three male gods drew lots for their kingdoms, Zeus drew the sky, Poseidon the sea, and Hades the Underworld. In addition to maintaining peace and order among all of the immortal beings in the world, Zeus taught human beings to be just in their treatment of one another. Those who did not respect the deathless gods and other mortals were severely punished. Poseidon could use his trident to cause earthquakes as well as storms at sea, but he also taught mortals how to tame horses to work for them and how to build ships. Hades taught mortals to have respect for the dead by conducting proper funeral ceremonies and following



certain burial practices.

Zeus married his sister Hera, who became the goddess of marriage and child birth as well as queen of Olympus. Hestia became the guardian of the home and taught mortals how to build houses. Demeter became the goddess of grain. She taught mortals how to save the kernels of wild corn, plant them where they wanted corn to grow, and harvest the mature plants.

Zeus became the father of many other gods: Athena, the goddess of arts and crafts and defensive war; Apollo, the god of prophecy, medicine, and archery; Artemis, the goddess of the hunt; Hermes, Zeus’ messenger; Persephone, the queen of the Underworld; Ares, the god of war; and Hephaestus, the renowned metal-smith.

The rule of the Titans had ended. The rule of the gods had begun.