



Creation

In the beginning, the universe was without form. It was just a vast hole, an abyss. This nothingness was called Chaos [KAY-ahs]. Out of Chaos were created Erebus [AIR-uh-bus] (Darkness) and Nox (Night). These two produced a gigantic egg, out of which was hatched a tremendous energy called Eros [AIR-ohss] (Love). Love created a goddess, Gaea [JEE-uh] (Earth), and a god, Uranus [YUR-an-uhs] (Heaven). Heaven and Earth were the first parents. Their children were a race of giants called Titans (or Elder Gods).

Uranus, first ruler of all things, proved to be very cruel and unjust. Finally his wife, Gaea, the Earth-Mother, helped one of their Titan children, Cronus [KRO-nuhs] to overthrow him. Cronus became king and married a Titaness named Rhea [REE-uh]. The rule of Cronus was called the Golden Age because all things on earth, including men (who had been fashioned by a Titan named Prometheus [pro-MEE-thee-uhs]), were living in harmony with the gods and with each other. The whole earth at this time was a paradise.

Cronus = Saturn

Zeus = Jupiter, Jove

Poseidon = Neptune

Hades = Pluto

But this Golden Age ended when one of the sons of Cronus, Zeus [ZOOS], overthrew his father with the help of Prometheus. Zeus made himself King of the Universe. He gave the sea to his brother Poseidon [poh-SIE-don] and the underworld to his brother Hades [HAY-deez]. After that the race of men declined morally from the Golden Age to the Silver Age. The Silver Age had some good things, too, but men had less respect for the gods and were absorbed by material pleasures. They continued to decline into the next Age, the Brazen (Bronze) Age. The Brazen period of constant violence and warfare did produce the heroes of the Trojan War. But as time went on this degenerated more into an Iron Age of poverty and misery, cold weather, crop shortages, and dwindling food supplies.



One version of the story of creation claims that the world became so

wicked that Zeus saw he must sweep it clean of people and make a fresh start. He caused a great rain to fall (one of his titles was "Cloud-Compeller") and a great flood to cover the earth. When it passed, only a good man, Deucalion [doo-KAL-lee-on], and his good wife, Pyrrha [PEER-uh], were left. They and their children repopulated the earth.

The authors of the Greek myths accepted a system of rewards and punishments. They believed that sin or wrong-doing—pride or greed or

Zeus caused a great flood to wipe the world clean.

disobedience to the gods—were always punished. Sometimes the fault was in being too curious, as when the nymph Pandora [pan-DOOR-uh] disobeyed her husband and opened a mysterious box, setting free all the evils in the world. Most religions try to explain the origins of evil, and the ancient Greeks explained it with this myth.

But sometimes, it would seem, people were punished unjustly. The good Titan, Prometheus, known as the “savior” of mankind because he stole fire from heaven for the good of men against the command of Zeus, was punished by being bound to a rock.

For the most part, the gods lived their own lives apart from men, free of sickness and pain. And, of course, they never died. Only through a god’s attachment to mortal persons could he know true suffering, as the drama of Prometheus shows.

Most of the time the gods lived happy lives, engaged in what we would call “trivial pursuits”—fun, feasting, and merrymaking. They even had their own special food, called *ambrosia*, and drink, called *nectar*.

The Greek gods had human traits and were fully capable of meanness, cruelty, and jealousy. Quarreling and feuding among the gods was fairly common. Most of them fell far short of perfection. But we must remember that the Greeks, unlike the Egyptians and the people of India, made their gods in their own image, in the image of nature, men, and women. Gods and natural objects were like people. A rushing stream was a lively young woman, a nymph, hurrying along to join her love, the sea. It is the humanity of the Greek myths that have given us some of the most beautiful stories the world has ever known.



Nymph