

Odysseus

by James Hunter

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Odysseus (called Ulysses in Latin) was the son of Laertes and was the ruler of the island kingdom of Ithaca. He was one of the most prominent Greek leaders in the Trojan War, and was the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*. He was known for his cleverness and cunning, and for his eloquence as a speaker.



Odysseus was one of the original suitors of Helen of Troy. When Menelaus succeeded in winning Helen's hand in marriage, it was Odysseus who advised him to get the other suitors to swear to defend his marriage rights. However, when Menelaus called on the suitors to help him bring Helen back from Troy, Odysseus was reluctant to make good on his oath. He pretended to have gone mad, plowing his fields and sowing salt instead of grain. Palamedes placed Odysseus' infant son in front of the plow, and Odysseus revealed his sanity when he turned aside to avoid injuring the child.

However reluctant he may have been to join the expedition, Odysseus fought heroically in the Trojan War, refusing to leave the field when the Greek troops were being routed by the Trojans, and leading a daring nocturnal raid in company with Diomedes. He was also the originator of the Trojan horse, the stratagem by which the Greeks were finally able to take the city of Troy itself. After the death of Achilles, he and Ajax competed for Achilles' magnificent armor; when Odysseus' eloquence caused the Greeks to award the prize to him, Ajax went mad and killed himself.

Odysseus' return from Troy, chronicled in the *Odyssey*, took ten years and was beset by perils and misfortune. He freed his men from the pleasure-giving drugs of the Lotus-Eaters, rescued them from the cannibalism of the Cyclopes and the enchantments of Circe. He braved the terrors of the underworld with them, and while in the land of the dead Hades allowed Thiresias, Odysseus' mother, Ajax and others to give him advice on his next journey. They gave him important advice about the cattle of the sun (which Apollo herds), Scylla and Charybdis and the Sirens. From there on the travels were harder for Odysseus, but they would have been much worse of it wasn't for the help of the dead.

With this newly acquired knowledge, he steered them past the perils of the Sirens and of Scylla and Charybdis. He could not save them from their final folly, however, when they violated divine commandments by slaughtering and eating the cattle of the sun-god. As a result of this rash act, Odysseus' ship was destroyed by a thunderbolt, and only Odysseus himself survived. He came ashore on the island of the nymph Calypso, who made him her lover and refused to let him leave for seven years. When Zeus finally intervened, Odysseus sailed away on a small boat, only to be shipwrecked by another storm. He swam ashore on the island of the Phaeacians, where he was magnificently entertained and then, at long last, escorted home to Ithaca.

There were problems in Ithaca as well, however. During Odysseus' twenty-year absence, his wife, Penelope, had remained faithful to him, but she was under enormous pressure to remarry. A whole host of suitors were occupying her palace, drinking and eating and behaving insolently to Penelope and her son, Telemachus. Odysseus arrived at the palace, disguised as a ragged beggar, and observed their behavior and his wife's fidelity. With the help of Telemachus and Laertes, he slaughtered the suitors and cleansed the palace. He then had to fight one final battle, against the outraged relatives of the men he had slain; Athena intervened to settle this battle, however, and peace was restored.

Hercules In Greek Mythology - What Made Him So Special?

The honorable penance of Hercules and his eventual success is what makes him so special. His success brought him immortality, which would have been unthinkable for ordinary mortals. Hercules' first task was to peel off the skin of the horrifying Nemean Lion after capturing one. His next task was to kill The Lernean Hydra. The Lernean Hydra was a serpent with nine heads, which never gave peace to the lives of those around it. The third task for him was to bring a Hind (a sacred red deer) from Ceryneia to the king. The deer was the pet of Diana, the Moon goddess.

The fourth task for Hercules was to bring a live Erymanthian Boar. It was very dangerous to men and animals living around the mountain Erymanthus. Then Hercules was asked to clean up King Augeas' stables in one day. Are you thinking what is so great about it? King Augeas had an awesome amount of cattle of cows, bulls, goats, sheep and horses. Hercules proposed to King Augeas that he would clean the stable only if he rewarded Hercules with a tenth of his cattle.

After this success, Eurystheus was planning to make something tougher for Hercules. He commanded Hercules to force out an enormous flock of birds, which assembled at a lake near the town of Stymphalos. Goddess Athena helped him with a pair of bronze krotala, an item similar to castanets. The Cretan Bull was an easy task for Hercules. Hercules wrestled the bull, and then delivered it back to King Eurystheus.

The eighth task was to bring the Man-Eating Horses of Diomedes. It was followed by the battle against the Amazonian female army to get the belt of Hippolyte, the queen. The tenth labor was an awesome one. Hercules had to go around the world, to bring the cattle of the Monster Geryon. It had three heads and three sets of legs all attached at the waist.

The tricky assignment was the eleventh one. Eurystheus asked Hercules to get the Apples of the Hesperides. These were the golden apples gifted by Hera to Zeus. These apples were strictly guarded by a hundred-headed dragon, named Ladon, and also by Hesperides, daughters of Atlas. The other obstacle was that Hercules had no idea where these apples of Hesperides were located. Eventually, Hercules found the location from Nereus whom he seized until Nereus gave him the location of the apples of Hesperides.

Then Hercules found out through Prometheus, whom Hercules had helped, that he would have to have Atlas retrieve the apples. Hercules agreed to hold the sky and the earth while Atlas retrieved the apples. When Atlas returned with the apples, he told Hercules that if he would hold the sky and earth for the rest of time, that he would take them to Eurystheus himself. But Hercules fooled Atlas by asking him to hold the earth until he padded his shoulders. Atlas took Hercules place holding the earth, and Hercules picked up the apples and ran.

After making the great Hercules do all sorts of unbelievable errands, Eurystheus made sure that he did not succeed the last time. So, he ordered Hercules to abduct Cerberus, the underworld beast. Did you ever hear a living man visiting the Hades? However, Greek mythology tells us Hercules was no ordinary man. He was a hero.

He eventually did complete all the tasks, purified his soul and rescued the princess of Troy from a ravenous sea-monster. He also facilitated Zeus to beat the Giants in a great battle for the control of Olympus. He married again, to the charming Deianira. She presented him a cloak, which was coated with what she mistakenly thought to be a magic love potion. She was told that the balm would make the person love her forever.

Ironically, it was poison, which burned Hercules skin. Hercules, not being able to endure the pain asked his friends to kindle a fire. Then Hercules placed himself on the fire to be burned up alive. But the gods looked down, and Zeus thought that Hercules had suffered enough. So he asked Hera to end her anger toward Hercules, which she did. Then Hercules was brought to Olympus in Athena's chariot by Zeus' request.

This Greek mortal Hercules is undoubtedly the greatest hero of Greek Mythology. Hercules is still considered to be the perfect mythical character.

Medusa in Greek Mythology

compiled by Tracy Marks

<http://www.windweaver.com/as/index.htm>

Medusa, originally a beautiful young woman whose crowning glory was her magnificent long hair, was desired and courted by many suitors. Yet before she could be betrothed to a husband, Poseidon (Neptune) found her worshipping in the temple of Athena (Minerva) and ravished her. Athena was outraged at her sacred temple being violated, and punished Medusa by turning her beautiful tresses into snakes and giving her the destructive power to turn anyone who looked directly at her into stone.

In both Greek and Roman mythology, Perseus, attempting to rescue his mother Danae from the coercive King Polydectes, needed to embark on the dangerous venture of retrieving Medusa's head. With the help of Athena and Hermes - magic winged sandals, a cap, a pouch and a mirror-like shield, he fought her and beheaded her by viewing her image in the mirror of his shield rather than looking at her directly. From her decapitated head sprang the winged horse Pegasus and the giant Chrysaor, who became king of Iberia. Medusa's sisters, the Gorgons, chased after him, but were unable to catch him because his magic cap made him invisible.

Perseus was then able to use Medusa's head as a weapon during other battles (which included rescuing Andromeda), but he eventually returned it to Athena, who then placed it at the center of her Aegis as a symbol of her power, and her own capacity to turn her enemies into stone.