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The Life of Zeus

Zeus was viewed as a king who oversaw the universe. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, he assigns the various gods their roles. In the *Homeric Hymns* he is referred to as the chieftain of the gods. He is also called the "Father of Gods and men", according to Hesiod's *Theogony*. He ruled the Olympians of Mount Olympus in ways representative as both a father as head of the family and a king. He was the god of sky and thunder in Greek mythology. His symbols are the thunderbolt, eagle, bull, and oak. In addition to his Indo-European inheritance, the classical "cloud-gatherer" also derives certain iconographic traits from the cultures of the Ancient Near East, such as the scepter. Zeus is frequently depicted by Greek artists in one of two poses: standing, striding forward, with a thunderbolt leveled in his raised right hand, or seated in majesty (Barlak 89).

Zeus was the child of Cronus and Rhea, and the youngest of his siblings. In most traditions he was married to Hera. He is known for his many lovers. This resulted in many godly and heroic offspring, including Athena, Apollo and Artemis, Hermes, Persephone, Dionysus, Perseus, Heracles, Helen, Minos, and the Muses. He is usually said to have fathered Ares, Hebe and Hephaestus (Anderson 54).

In Greek, the god's name is *Zeús* *Zeús* /zdeús/ or /dzeús/ (Modern Greek /'zefs/) in the nominative case and *Διός* *Diós* in the genitive case. His Roman counterpart was Jupiter and his Etruscan counterpart Tinia. In Hindu mythology his counterpart was Indra with ever common weapon as thunderbolt, which he could hold like a staff (Ghosts in the Attic Research Group).

Zeus's origin begins with his father Cronus. Cronus sired several children by Rhea: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon, but swallowed them all as soon as they were born, since he had learned from Gaia and Uranus that he was destined to be overcome by his own son as he had overthrown his own father. But when Zeus was about to be born, Rhea sought Gaia to devise a plan to save him, so that Cronus would get his retribution for his acts against Uranus and his own children. Rhea gave birth to Zeus in Crete, handing Cronus a rock wrapped in swaddling clothes, which he promptly swallowed (Thomas).

Rhea hid Zeus in a cave on Mount Ida in Crete. There are numerous accounts as to what happens next. Most of the legends agree that Zeus was raised by Gaia (Barlak 98).

After reaching manhood, Zeus forced Cronus to disgorge first the stone then his siblings in reverse order of swallowing. In some versions, Metis gave Cronus an emetic to force him to disgorge the babies, or Zeus cut Cronus' stomach open. Then Zeus released the brothers of Cronus, the Gigantes, the Hecatonchires and the Cyclopes, from their dungeon in Tartarus, killing their guard, Campe. As a token of their appreciation, the Cyclopes gave him thunder and the thunderbolt, or lightning, which had previously been hidden by Gaia. Together, Zeus and his brothers and sisters, along with the Gigantes, Hecatonchires and Cyclopes overthrew Cronus and the other Titans, in the combat called the Titanomachy. The defeated Titans were then cast into a shadowy underworld region known as Tartarus. Atlas, one of the titans that fought against Zeus, was punished by having to hold up the sky (Farber 76).

After the battle with the Titans, Zeus shared the world with his elder brothers, Poseidon and Hades, by drawing lots: Zeus got the sky and air, Poseidon the waters, and Hades the world of the dead (the underworld). The ancient Earth, Gaia, could not be claimed; she was left to all three. Gaia resented the way Zeus had treated the Titans, because they were her children. Soon

after taking the throne as king of the gods, Zeus had to fight some of Gaia's other children, the monsters Typhon and Echidna. He vanquished Typhon and trapped him under a mountain, but left Echidna and her children alive (Anderson 53).

Zeus was the husband of Hera. By Hera, Zeus sired Ares, Hebe and Hephaestus, though some accounts say that Hera produced these offspring alone. Some also include Eileithyia and Eris as their daughters. The conquests of Zeus among nymphs and the mythic mortal progenitors of Hellenic dynasties are famous. Olympian mythography even credits him with unions with Leto, Demeter, Dione and Maia. Among mortals were Semele, Europa and Leda (Thomas 12).

Many myths render Hera as jealous and a consistent enemy of Zeus' mistresses and their children by him. For a time, a nymph named Echo had the job of distracting Hera from his affairs by incessantly talking: when Hera discovered the deception, she cursed Echo to repeat the words of others (Barlak 2).

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