

Greek Gods/Mythology Notes

- Information on the Greek belief system comes from many sources. Unlike followers of religions such as Christianity, Judaism, & Islam, the Greeks did not have a single sacred text, such as the Bible or Koran from which their beliefs and religious practices derived. Instead, they generally used oral traditions, passed on by word of mouth, to relate sacred stories. Priest and priestesses to various gods would also guide people in worship in various temples across Greece. We know something about these beliefs because Greek poets such as Homer, Hesiod and Pindar, and Greek dramatists such as Euripides, Aristophanes & Sophocles mention the myths in their various works. Greek mythology, however, was not static- it was constantly changing and evolving. Thus, there are often many different versions (and some that are contradictory toward one another) of the various Greek myths. Thus, some of the example myths you read in here may differ from ones you have previously heard. It does not necessarily make either version “wrong”- simply different.

- The Greeks had many Gods & Goddesses- over three thousand if one were to count the many minor gods and goddesses. These deities made up the Greek pantheon, a word used to mean all the gods and goddesses (from the Greek word “pan” meaning all, and “theos” meaning gods). However, throughout Greece, there were always twelve (called the Twelve Olympians) that were the most important. They are: 1. Zeus 2. Hera 3. Poseidon 4. Athena 5. Apollo 6. Artemis 7. Hephaestus 8. Ares 9. Hermes 10. Aphrodite 11. Demeter 12. Dionysus 13. Hestia 14. Hades. (Note: you will notice I listed 14, not 12 deities. This is because the first 10 were more or less constant, while the last 4 rotated depended on who made the list and what part and time period the list was made in). Please note roman names are in parentheses.

1. **Zeus (Jupiter)**- God of Storms, lightning & the sky; king of the gods. Son of Cronus (Saturn) & Rhea (Ops); Husband of Hera (Juno). Weapon: Lightning bolts.
2. **Poseidon (Neptune)**- God of the sea, horses & earthquakes. Son of Cronus and Rhea. Husband of Amphitrite (sometimes). Weapon: Trident (causes tidal waves & earth quakes.)
3. **Hades (Pluto)**—God of the dead, the underworld & the riches of the earth. Son of Cronus & Rhea. Husband of Persephone (Proserpina). Weapon: Helmet of invisibility.
4. **Hera (Juno)**- Goddess of marriage, childbirth & family. Queen of the Gods. Daughter of Cronus and Rhea. Wife of Zeus.
5. **Demeter (Ceres)**- Goddess of Grain, fertility, the seasons & the harvest. Daughter of Cronus & Rhea. No husband. Mother of Persephone.
6. **Hestia (Vesta)**- Goddess of Home & the Hearth. Daughter of Cronus & Rhea. No Husband. Virgin Goddess.
7. **Apollo (Apollo)**- God of light, archery, medicine, prophecy, music, sun (& other things). Son of Zeus and Leda (Latona). Twin Brother of Artemis. Weapon: Bow & Arrow. Wife: none (but had many children by various goddesses & mortals).
8. **Artemis (Dianne)**- Goddess of the hunt, the moon, virginity & wild animals. Daughter of Zeus & Leda. Twin sister of Apollo. Weapon: Bow & Arrow. Virgin goddess.
9. **Athena (Minerva)**- Goddess of wisdom and war strategy. Daughter of Zeus and Metis. Virgin goddess. Symbol: Aegis (armored breastplate that once belonged to Zeus).
10. **Hermes (Mercury)**- God of merchants, thieves, boundaries, roads & many other things. Escorted the dead to the afterlife (Psychopomp). Messenger of the gods. Had shoes with wings that allowed him to travel quickly. Son of Zeus & Maia. Generally no wife but many children by various Mortals & Goddesses.

11. **Ares (Mars)**- God carnage & Excessive war. Son of Zeus & Hera. No wife, but carried on affairs with many, including Aphrodite.
12. **Hephaestus (Vulcan)**- God of Metalwork, blacksmiths, craftsmen & the forge. Son of Zeus & Hera. Husband of Aphrodite.
13. **Dionysus (Baachus)**- God of wine, revelry & the theater. Son of Zeus & Semele (a human princess) making him the only demigod that was an Olympian.
14. **Aphrodite (Venus)**- Goddess of love. No parents (arose from the foam of the sea). Wife of Hephaestus. Mother of Eros (Cupid).

Muses

Nine daughters of Zeus that served as inspiration for literature, science and the arts. They are as follows (only need to know Calliope)

Calliope: Epic Poetry

Clio: History

Euterpe: Music, song & lyric poetry

Erato: love poetry

Melpomene: Tragedy

Polyhymnia: Hymns

Terpsichore: Dance

Thalia: Comedy:

Urania: Astronomy

Other

Nymphs: Minor nature Goddesses. Often lived in a specific tree, river, mountain, grove, etc.

Centaurs: Half man, half horse creatures. The most famous is Chiron (though many say he is not related to the others) who tutored many Greek kings and heroes, including Achilles, Ajax, Hercules, Perseus and Jason.

Satyrs: Half-human half-goat creatures who followed the nature God Pan (who looked just like them).

Helios: God of the sun. In later mythology, he would be identified with Apollo. But in homer's time, they were two different gods.

Aeolus: King (or god) of the winds.

Demigod: Child of a God & a mortal.

Fate: Something that was bound to happen no matter what. Even the gods could not stop fate.

Achaean: A Homeric term for Greeks.