



Greek Mythology and Customs

All aspects of Greek culture reflected belief in the Olympian gods.

Ancient Greek religion was based on a belief in many gods. Zeus was king of the gods; Hera, his beautiful and powerful wife. Other gods and goddesses were associated with different aspects of nature or human behavior. The most important ones were said to dwell on Mount Olympus, the tallest mountain in Greece, where Zeus sat on a throne of gold.

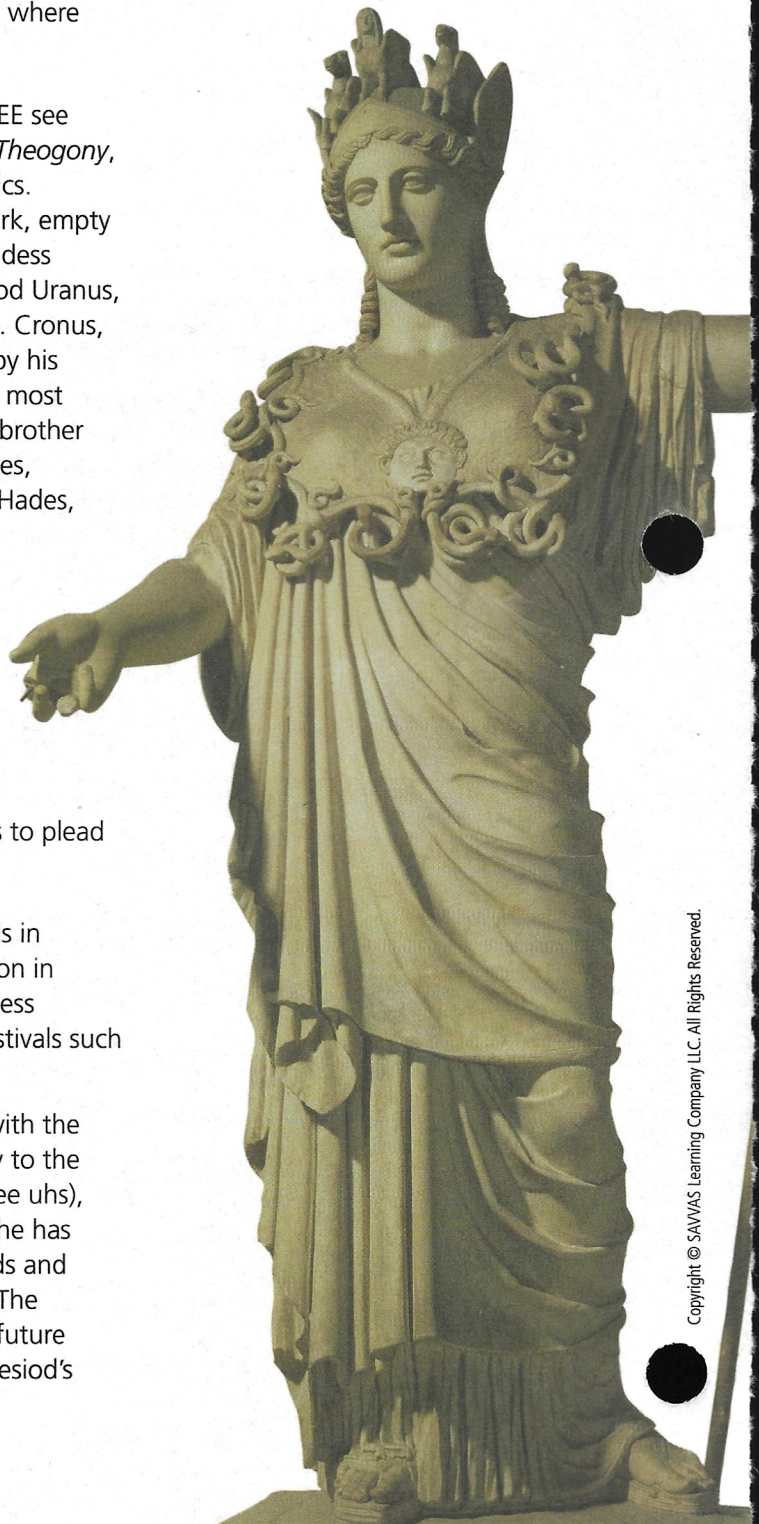
The Titans Are Overthrown The early poet Hesiod (HEE see uhd) wrote a mythic account of the origin of the gods in *Theogony*, a work the Greeks revered almost as much as Homer's epics. According to that origin myth, first there was Chaos, a dark, empty void. Out of chaos came the Earth, personified as the goddess Gaea. The Earth generated the skies, personified as the god Uranus, who with Gaea produced the giant gods known as Titans. Cronus, the chief Titan, ruled the universe until he was displaced by his three sons, who split the universe among them. Zeus, the most powerful of these sons, became ruler of the heavens. His brother Poseidon became ruler of the seas. The third brother, Hades, became ruler of the underworld, a dark region also called Hades, which was inhabited by the dead.

The Greek gods were powerful, but they were not all-powerful: even Zeus had to bow to fate. The gods displayed many human qualities and were often vengeful and quarrelsome. They were also quick to punish human beings guilty of hubris (HYOO brihs), or excessive pride. To appease the gods, human beings performed sacrifices, which often involved the killing of animals. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus makes several sacrifices to plead for divine aid on his journey home.

Celebrating the Gods The Greeks worshipped the gods in temples dedicated to many gods or just one. The Parthenon in Athens, for instance, was a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena. The Greeks also celebrated their gods at great festivals such as the Olympic games, which were dedicated to Zeus.

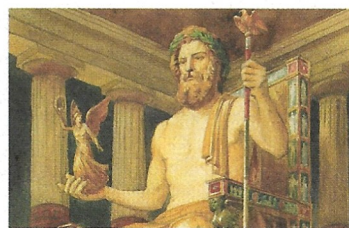
The Greeks believed in prophecy, which they associated with the god Apollo. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus journeys all the way to the underworld to consult the blind prophet Tiresias (ty REE see uhs), who continues to have the gift of prophecy even though he has died. The Greeks also believed in myths, stories about gods and heroes that they used to explain the world around them. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* drew on these myths; however, for future generations of ancient Greeks, Homer's two epics—like Hesiod's *Theogony*—took on the aura of myths themselves.

> a statue of the Greek goddess Athena



Gods in Greek Mythology

You may be more familiar with the Roman names for the Greek gods. The ancient Romans accepted Greek mythology, but they had their own names for its gods and heroes. For example, they called Odysseus *Ulysses*. For each Greek god listed below, the Roman equivalent is also given.



^ Zeus, or Jupiter

GREEK NAME	DESCRIPTION	ROMAN NAME
Zeus (zoos)	king of the gods and ruler of the heavens	<i>Jupiter</i> , sometimes called <i>Jove</i>
Hera (HEHR uh)	wife of Zeus and goddess of married women	<i>Juno</i>
Poseidon (poh SY duhn)	god of the sea	<i>Neptune</i>
Aphrodite (af ruh DY tee)	goddess of love and beauty	<i>Venus</i>
Ares (AIR eez)	god of war	<i>Mars</i>
Apollo (uh POL oh)	god of prophecy and music; also called Phoebus (FEE buhs)	<i>Apollo</i>
Artemis (AHR tuh mihs)	goddess of the hunt and the moon	<i>Diana</i>
Athena (uh THEE nuh)	goddess of wisdom, skills, and war	<i>Minerva</i>
Hephaestus (hee FEHS tuhs)	god of fire and metalwork	<i>Vulcan</i>
Hermes (HUR meez)	god of commerce and cunning; messenger of the gods	<i>Mercury</i>
Demeter (dih MEE tuhr)	goddess of the harvest	<i>Ceres</i> (SEER eez)
Dionysus (dy uhn Y suhs)	god of wine and revelry, also called Bacchus (BAK uhs)	<i>Dionysus</i> or <i>Bacchus</i>
Hestia (HEHS tee uh)	goddess of home and hearth	<i>Vesta</i>
Helios (HEE lee os)	sun god	<i>Sol</i>
Uranus (YOO ruh nuhs)	sky god supplanted by his son Cronus	<i>Uranus</i>
Gaea (JEE uh)	earth goddess and mother of the Titans and Cyclopes	<i>Tellus</i> or <i>Terra</i>
Cronus (KROH nuhs)	Titan who ruled the universe before his son Zeus dethroned him	<i>Saturn</i>
Rhea (REE uh)	wife of Cronus and mother of Zeus	<i>Cybele</i> (SIHB uh lee)
Cyclops (SY klops)	any one of three Titans who forged thunderbolts for Zeus; plural, Cyclopes (sy KLOH pee)	
The Fates	three goddesses who wove the threads of each person's life; Clotho (KLOH thoh) spun the thread; Lachesis (LAK ih sihs) measured out the amount of thread; Atropos (A truh pohs) snipped the thread	
The Muses (MYOO zihz)	nine goddesses who presided over the arts and sciences, including Calliope (kuh LY uh pee), the Muse of epic poetry	