

Hesiod – Works and days

Hesiod was an early Greek poet who flourished around 700 BCE. His two works: "Theogony" and "Works and Days" are the sources of a great deal of what we know of early Greek religion. The following is a brief excerpt from the poem.

THE PROMETHEUS-PANDORA STORY

For the gods keep hidden the livelihood of men.
Otherwise you might easily do enough work in a day to have enough for a full year
with no further need to be
working,
and might immediately hang up your rudder in the smoke of
your fireplace
and release your oxen and hardworking mules from their
labor.

But Zeus hid our livelihood when he was angered at heart because Prometheus, the
clever deviser, tried to deceive him.

This is why he devised anguishing miseries for men.

And he hid fire, which the goodly son of Iapetos stole back, taking it from Zeus of the
Counsels to give it to men, secretly carrying it in a fennel stalk's hollow from Zeus of
the Firebolt.

Then, stirred to anger, Zeus of the Storm Cloud addressed
him as follows:

"Son of Iapetos, you who surpass all others in planning,
you rejoice in your theft of my fire and in having deceived me, being the cause of
great pain to yourself and men in the
future.

I shall give them in payment of fire an evil which all shall take to their hearts with
delight, an evil to love and embrace."

Thus the Father of God; and of Men addressed him, and
laughed.

And he commanded far-famed Hephaistos immediately to
make it

out of water and clay, and give it the voice of a human and put in it strength and
cause it to look like a goddess immortal, having the lovely, desirable shape of a
virgin. And then he ordered Athena to teach her the skill of intricate weaving. And
Aphrodite the Golden he ordered to shed on her charm
and

make her an object of painful love and exhausting desire. And he ordered Hermes
the Guide, the Slayer of Argos,
to put in her mind a dog's shamelessness and the deceit of a
thief.

Thus spoke their king, Zeus, son of Kronos, and they obeyed
him.

Immediately the famous Lame-Legged One molded of clay an image resembling a virgin demure, as Zeus had decreed. And the goddess gray-eyed Athena girdled and dressed her: the Graces divine along with our Lady Persuasion hung golden necklaces on her, and the lovely-haired Horai crowned her head by setting upon it a garland of spring flowers,
all of which things Pallas Athena arranged in good order. And the Guide, the Slayer of Argos, enclosed in her breast lies and wheedling words and the treacherous ways of a thief, following Zeus the Thunderer's decree; and he, heaven's herald,
gave her a speaking voice and announced that her name was Pandora,
"The Gift of All," because all the gods who dwell on Olympos gave a gift to this plague for men who are eaters of bread.
But when he had completed this sheer inescapable snare, Zeus Father had her led off as a gift to Epimetheus by the famous Slayer of Argos, heaven's swift herald.
And Epimetheus took no heed of Prometheus's advice not to receive any gift the Olympian Zeus might send him but to reject it lest some evil should happen to mortals.
So he received it and learned by experience the evil he had. For the tribes of men had previously lived on the earth free and apart from evils, free from burdensome labor and from painful diseases, the bringers of death to men.
In the power of these evils men rapidly pass into old age. But then woman, raising the jar's great lid in her hands and scattering its contents, devised anguishing miseries for men.
Only Hope was left within, securely imprisoned, caught there under the lip of the jar, unable to fly out and away, for before this could happen she let the lid drop,
as the Lord of the Aegis, Zeus of the Storm Cloud, decreed. But as for those others, those numberless miseries, they
wander among men,
for the earth is abounding in evils and so is the sea. And diseases come upon men by day and by night,
everywhere moving at will, bringing evil to mortals
silently, for Zeus of the Counsels has deprived them of voices. Thus in no way can anyone escape the purpose of Zeus.

THE STORY OF THE AGES OF MAN

Now if you please I shall sketch another story for you, telling it well and skillfully, and beg you deeply to ponder how the gods and mortal men are born from the same source. First of all the immortals who dwell in Olympian homes brought into being the golden race of mortal men.
These belonged to the time when Kronos ruled over' heaven, and they lived like gods without any care in their hearts,

free and apart from labor and misery. Nor was the terror of old age upon them, but always with youthful hands and feet
they
took their delight in festive pleasures apart from all evil; and they died as if going to sleep. Every good thing was theirs to enjoy: the grain-giving earth produced her fruits spontaneously, abundantly, freely; and they in complete satisfaction
lived off their fields without any cares in blessed abundance. They were rich in flocks and dear to the blessed gods.
But when this race had been hidden under the cover of earth, they became, as almighty Zeus decreed, divinities,
powers of good on the earth, guardians of mortal men,
who keep a watch on cases at law and hard-hearted deeds, being hidden in air and going all over the earth,
blessing men with wealth, as this is their kingly right.

Then, after these, the gods who dwell in Olympian homes created the second, the silver race, much worse than the first, being unlike the golden both in thought and appearance. Then the child spent a hundred years being nursed at home under his mother's protecting care, playing, a great fool;
but when they had come to adulthood and man's full estate, they had only a short time to live, and this with much torment because of their folly, for they committed acts of ruinous hybris against one another and refused to worship the gods
and
offer the blessed ones sacrifice on their holy altars,
as is prescribed for men in their customs. So then these were put out of sight by Zeus, son of Kronos, for he was angry at their refusal to honor the blessed gods of Olympus.
But when this race had also been hidden under the earth, they were called underground spirits, blessed mortal men, who though second in rank still are given some honor. Then Zeus Father created a third race of mortal men, that which was bronze, one completely unlike the silver, men sprung from ash trees, terrible and mighty, devoted to
doing
war's wretched works and acts of hybris; nor did they eat any bread but had in their bosoms strong-hearted spirits of
adamant.
These were misshapen beings of great strength with invincible arms
growing out of their shoulders over their powerful limbs. Bronze was the metal
their weapons were made of, bronze were their houses,
bronze were the tools they used; the black metal iron came later.
These fell as victims to each other's slaughtering hands and
went down
under the ground and into cold Hades' house of decay, leaving no glory or name; in spite of their fearsomeness
black Death seized them and forced them to leave the bright
light of the sun.

But when this race had also been hidden under the earth, Zeus, son of Kronos, created another, a fourth race of men to live on the boundless earth, one much juster and better, which was the divine race of heroes. They are called demigods, and are the race that lived earlier on the boundless earth. These were destroyed by the evil of war and terrible battle, some under seven-gated Thebes in the country of Kadmos, there brought down to destruction when they were fighting for Oidipous's flocks; others died after sailing across the great gulf of the sea to Troy in order to fight for the right to the lovely-haired Helen. There, to be sure, some met with the covering darkness of death; but on others Zeus, son of Kronos, bestowed the blessing of life and abodes far off from men at the ends of the earth. There these dwell and take their delight with carefree hearts, off in the Isles of the Blessed by the streams of deep-swirling Okeanos, fortunate heroes, for whom the grain-giving earth produces a honey-sweet harvest three times a year, a bountiful yield. Would that I now were no longer alive in the fifth age of men, but had died earlier or had been born at a later time. For we live in the age of the iron race, when men shall never cease from labor and woe by day, and never be free from anguish at night, for hard are the cares that the gods will be giving. Yet there shall be even for these some good with the evil. But Zeus shall also destroy this race of mortal men, when their babies are born with their temples covered with gray hair. Then the father will quarrel with his sons, the sons with their father, guest will quarrel with host, comrade will quarrel with comrade, nor will one's own brother be dear as in earlier times. Men will dishonor their parents as soon as they see they are old, finding them worthy of blame and cruelly railing against them, hard-hearted children without any thought of divine retribution, not repaying their parents grown old the price of their rearing. Might will be justice; and one will destroy the other's city. Neither will he who swears truly be favored nor he who is just nor he who is good, but he will be granted promotion to honor who is a doer of evil and hybris. Might will be justice and shame will no longer exist. The bad will injure the

good, speaking crooked untruths and bearing false witness thereto. Envy will be in attendance upon men, every miserable mortal, causing commotion, rejoicing in evil, with face full of hate.

Then to Olympos retiring, leaving the broad-wayed earth, wrapping their lovely forms in robes of gleaming white, Shame and Nemesis, abandoning men, will return to their lives among the immortals; and what will be left for mortal men are only the anguishing pains, but no defense against evil.

THE FABLE OF THE HAWK AND THE NIGHTINGALE

Now I shall tell a fable to the perceptive kings.
Thus spoke the hawk to the nightingale, the speckle-necked bird
as he was carrying her gripped in his talons high in the clouds,
and she was piteously crying, for she was pierced by the grip of his
bent talons; thus he spoke and strongly advised her:
"Foolish thing, why are you shrieking? Your captor is much stronger than you.
There shall you go wherever I take you though you're a singer,
and, as I wish, I shall eat you for dinner or let you go free. Foolish the man who wishes to fight against those who are stronger;
he loses the victory and suffers pain in addition to shame."
Thus spoke the swift-flying hawk, the long-winged bird.

AN EXHORTATION TO JUSTICE

But you, Perses, hearken to Justice and don't honor Hybris. Hybris is a bad thing for the poor man, for not even the rich man easily bears it but staggers under its burdensome weight and meets with calamity. Better it is to go on the road in the other direction to Justice. Justice wins over Hybris, finally coming in victor. The fool by suffering learns this. For the oath-god Horkos runs after crooked injustice, and there's an uproar when Justice is dragged off, when she is seized by gift-eating men who interpret the laws with crooked decisions. Justice departs deploring the city, its people and ways, being hidden in air and bringing evil to men

who would make her an exile and do not apportion her
straightly.

But for those who give justice to stranger and native alike, straight pronouncements
of justice, and stray not at all from

her path,

theirs is a flourishing city, a people who prosper and grow. Peace, the nurse of the
young, is over their land, and they are never afflicted with anguishing war by far-
seeing Zeus. Never do famine and ruin accompany men of straight justice, but they
enjoy in bountiful feasts the fruits of their labors. Earth produces her plenty for
them. The trees in the

mountains

bear for them nuts on their outsides, swarms of bees in their
centers.

Thick and soft is the wool which heavily covers their sheep. And their wives are
bearers of children resembling their
fathers.

They abound in continuous plenty and have no need to travel in ships, for the grain-
giving earth provides them with
food.

But upon those who are lovers of hybris and hard-hearted
deeds

far-seeing Zeus, son of Kronos, dispenses his punishing
justice.

Often even a whole city pays for the wrong of one person who is a doer of evil and
worker of ruinous folly.

Zeus, son of Kronos, sends terrible suffering from heaven
upon them,

famine together with plague, and makes the people to perish. Nor do their women
bear children, but they have withering
homes,

as the Olympian Zeus devises. And sometimes he makes them pay by giving their
broad army defeat or bringing their wall
down,

or he, Zeus, son of Kronos, destroys their ships on the sea. Kings, I beg you to take
careful note of this punishing justice, for there are here nearby among men
immortal spirits who take note of all who with crooked injustice trample each other
down, having no thought of divine retribution. There are thirty thousand spirits on
the bountiful earth, immortal sentinels of Zeus, strict guardians of mortal men, who
keep a watch on cases at law and hard-hearted deeds, being hidden in air and going
all over the earth.

And there is also the virgin Justice, the daughter of Zeus, who is honored and held in
respect by the gods of Olympos.

When she is harmed by anyone scorning her, crookedly
speaking,

she immediately goes to her seat by Zeus, son of Kronos, her
father,

and informs on the unjust judge, so that the people pay for the crimes of their kings
who making baneful
decisions

twist what is right into wrong with crooked pronouncements
of justice.

Beware of these things, O Kings, and see that you straighten
your verdicts,

eaters of gifts, and no longer think of crooked decisions.

He who devises harm for another is harming himself, and from the plan that is
harmful most harm comes to the
planner.

The eye of Zeus that sees all things and observes all things now, if only it so wills,
sees this state of affairs, and

this sort of justice that our city harbors does not escape it. Now neither would I
myself be just in my dealings with men

nor

hope that my son be, since it will be a bad thing to be just, if the deviser of greater
injustice will have greater justice. But I hope Zeus of the Counsels will not yet bring
this to pass. Perses, I beg you carefully to ponder these things in your
heart and

hearken to Justice and think not at all of insolent might. For this law is allotted to
men by Zeus, son of Kronos: fish and beasts of the wild and birds that fly in the air
eat one another, since Justice has no dwelling among them; but to men he gives
Justice, which is the greatest of blessings. If one is willing to speak what he sees to
be justice, what he knows is the right thing, far-seeing Zeus grants him a, blessed
life.

But if he witnesses falsely and willfully perjures himself, being a liar, a harmer of
Justice, incurably blind,

he is leaving his family a gloomier future existence.

He who swears truly creates for his family future prosperity.