

Theseus and the Minotaur

An Ancient Greek Myth

As the story goes ...

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a king named Minos. King Minos lived on a lovely island called Crete. King Minos had everything a king could possibly want. Now and then, King Minos sent his navy to attack the tiny village of Athens, across the sea.

The king of Athens did not know what to do. He was desperate. He figured if he had some time, he could build a strong navy, strong enough to send King Minos packing the next time he attacked Athens. The king of Athens offered King Minos a deal. If he would not attack Athens for 9 years, Athens would send 7 boys and 7 girls to the island of Crete to be eaten by the awful monster that King Minos kept as a pet, the dreaded minotaur.

The minotaur lived in the heart of a maze on the island of Crete. King Minos loved that old monster. King Minos only attacked Athens when he was bored. He really didn't want anything. This way, his beloved monster could look forward to a special treat every 9 years or so. King Minos took the deal.

Although Athens did build a navy, King Minos did not attack as the king of Athens had expected. In fact, King Minos kept his word. And now it was time for Athens to keep theirs. Everyone in Athens was crying.

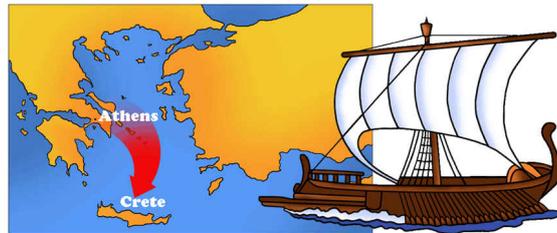


Prince Theseus of Athens knew the importance of keeping your word. He knew that a deal was a deal. But, he was also quite sure that it was wrong to send small children to be eaten by a monster. Prince Theseus told his father (the king) that he was going to Crete as the seventh son of Athens. He was going to kill the Minotaur and end the terror.

"The Minotaur is a terrible monster! What makes you think you can kill it?" cried his father.

"I'll find a way," Theseus replied gently. "The gods will help me."

His father begged him not to go. But the prince took his place as the seventh Athenian boy. Along with six other Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls, Prince Theseus sailed towards Crete.



When the prince and the children arrived on the island of Crete, King Minos and his daughter, the Princess Ariadne, came out to greet them. The Princess Ariadne did not say anything. But her eyes narrowed thoughtfully. Late that night, she wrote Prince Theseus a note and slipped it under his bedroom door.

Dear Theseus (Ariadne wrote)

I am a beautiful princess as you probably noticed the minute you saw me. I am also a very bored princess. Without my help, the Minotaur will surely gobble you up. I know a trick or two that will save your life. If I help you kill the monster, you must promise to take me away from this tiny island so that others can admire my beauty. If interested in this deal, meet me by the gate to the Labyrinth in one hour.

*Yours very truly,
Princess Ariadne*

Prince Theseus slipped out of the palace and waited patiently by the gate. Princess Ariadne finally showed up. In her hands, she carried a sword and a ball of string.



Ariadne gave the sword and the ball of string to Prince Theseus. "Hide these inside the entrance to the maze. Tomorrow, when you and the other children from Athens enter the Labyrinth, wait until the gate is closed, then tie the string to the door. Unroll it as you move through the maze. That way, you can find your way back again. The sword, well, you know what to do with the sword," she laughed.

Theseus thanked the princess for her kindness.

"Don't forget, now," she cautioned Theseus. "You must take me with you so that all the people can marvel at my beauty."

The next morning, the Athenian children, including Prince Theseus, were shoved into the maze. The door was locked firmly behind them. Following Ariadne's directions, Theseus tied one end of the string to the door. He told the children to stay by the door and to make sure the string stayed tied so the prince could find his way back again. The children hung on to the string tightly, as Theseus entered the maze alone.

Using the sword Ariadne had given him, Theseus killed the monstrous beast. He followed the string back and knocked on the door.

Princess Ariadne was waiting. She opened the door. Without anyone noticing, Prince Theseus and the children of Athens ran to their ship and sailed quietly away. Princess Ariadne sailed away with them.

On the way home, they stopped for supplies on the tiny island of Naxos. Princess Ariadne insisted on coming ashore. There was nothing much to do on the island. Soon, she fell asleep. All the people gathered to admire the sleeping princess. Theseus sailed quietly away with the children of Athens and left her there, sleeping.

After all, a deal is a deal.

Icarus & Daedalus -Wings

An Ancient Greek Myth

As the story goes...

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a talented artist. His name was Daedalus. He used his art to make buildings and temples. He was probably the finest architect of his time.

King Minos invited Daedalus to the lovely island of Crete. The king wanted Daedalus to build a maze, a Labyrinth, as a home for the king's beloved pet, the Minotaur. The Minotaur was a horrible monster, with the head of a bull on a human body. The king loved that awful monster and wanted him to have a lovely home.

Daedalus was a bit amazed at the king's choice of pet, but a job was a job. Daedalus planned to make the maze a challenge, so complicated that anyone who entered it would be lost until rescued. That way, the king would be happy, the monster would be contained, and the people would be safe. Daedalus had no doubt he could design such a maze. He really was a fine architect.

Daedalus brought his young son Icarus with him. He was sure the child would enjoy swimming and playing with the other children on the island. Both Daedalus and Icarus were happy they had come. King Minos was happy with his maze. It was peaceful and pleasant on the island. Daedalus was in no hurry to leave.

One day, a group of Greek children sailed to the island. The next day, they sailed safely away, taking with them the king's lovely daughter, and leaving behind them one dead Minotaur.

King Minos was beside himself with grief. He did not believe anyone could have entered the maze and escape alive without help from someone, most probably help from the man who had designed the maze in the first place. (Actually, the children did have help, and not from Daedalus, but that's [another myth](#).) King Minos punished the innocent Daedalus by keeping Daedalus and his young son Icarus prisoners on the island of Crete.

Daedalus tried to think of ways to escape. One day, Daedalus noticed birds flying overhead. It gave him an idea. Wings. He needed wings. Daedalus began to gather all the bird feathers he could find. He glued them together with wax. When two pairs of wings were ready, he warned his young son not to fly too close to the sun or the wax would melt.

Daedalus fastened the wings to their arms. They flapped their wings and took to the sky. They left the island of Crete far behind them. Water sparkled beneath them as far as they could see. The sky was blue. The breeze was brisk, more than enough to keep them in the air. It was glorious!

Icarus flew higher and higher. He flew so high that before he knew what was happening, the sun had begun to melt the wax on his wings. Icarus felt himself falling. He flapped his arms faster and faster. But it was no use. Poor Icarus plunged into the water and drowned.

Sadly, Daedalus continued on alone.

King Midas and his Golden Touch

A Greek Myth

Cartoon by Gareth Pitchford



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King Midas was a foolish and greedy man. He wanted to be the richest man in the world.



One day an old satyr (half man, half goat) came to King Midas' palace. Midas recognised him as Silenus, a friend of the god Dionysus.



Instead of sending Silenus away King Midas invited him to stay and enjoy his food and drink.



The god Dionysus was pleased Midas had helped his friend and offered to grant Midas a wish.



King Midas wished that everything he touched would turn to gold. Then he would be the richest man in the world.



The god kept his promise and sure enough, everything Midas touched turned to gold. He went round his palace using his new power.



But Midas' wish turned against him. He found that he couldn't eat or drink as all his food and wine turned to gold when he touched it! Even his daughter turned into gold when she gave him a hug.



Midas begged the god Dionysus to remove the spell. Dionysus told Midas how he could get rid of the gift, by washing himself in the Pactolus river.



Midas washed his 'golden touch' away in the river Pactolus. He sprinkled water from the river on everything he had turned into gold. Everything turned back to normal. Even now the soil along the riverbank has a golden gleam.

PERSEPHONE & DEMETER

The Reason for Seasons - Demeter & Persephone



Zeus, the king of all the gods, had two brothers and three sisters. All the gods had jobs, but his sister Demeter had one of the most important jobs - she was in charge of the harvest. Nearly everyone did their best to keep Demeter happy. If Demeter did not do her job, the crops would die and everyone would starve. The gods did not want the ancient Greek people to starve. They were having too much fun interfering in their lives.

As the story goes

Demeter loved her little daughter, Persephone. They played together in the fields almost every day. As Persephone smiled up at her mother, Demeter's heart swelled with happiness, and the crops grew high and healthy. Flowers tumbled everywhere. As time passed, Persephone grew into a lovely goddess. That's when the trouble started.

Hades, the king of the underworld, was a gloomy fellow. He normally hung out in the Underworld.

One day, Hades felt restless. He decided to take his three-headed dog out for a chariot ride. Cerberus, his dog, usually stood guard at the gate to Underworld. But Hades gave his pup a break now and then. He scooped up Cerberus, and left a couple of spirits in charge instead.

Hades flew his chariot up to earth. Cerberus leaped out of the chariot and ran around, sniffing flowers with all three of his heads.

The dog ran up to a lovely young woman, the goddess Persephone. Some people might have been startled if a three-headed dog came tearing up. But Persephone only laughed and scratched his heads.

Hades loved that old dog. He watched his dog playing happily with Persephone. He heard Persephone's delighted laugh. Hades fell deeply in love. Before anyone could stop him, he grabbed his niece, his dog, and his chariot and dove deep into the darkest depths of the Underworld.

Hades locked Persephone in a beautifully decorated room in the Hall of Hades. He brought her all kinds of delicious food. Persephone refused to eat. She had heard if you ate anything in Hades, you could never leave. She had every intention of leaving as soon as she could figure out how to do so.

Over a week went by. Finally, in desperate hunger, Persephone ate six pomegranate seeds. She promptly burst into tears.

She was not the only one crying. Demeter, her mother, missed her daughter terribly. She did not care if the crops died. She did not care about anything except finding her daughter. No one knows who told Zeus about it, but it was clear this could not go on. Zeus sent his son Hermes to work a deal with Hades.

This was the deal Hermes worked out: If Persephone would marry Hades, she would live as queen of the Underworld for six months each winter. In the spring, Persephone would return to earth and live there for six months. No one especially liked the deal, but everyone finally agreed.

Every spring, Demeter makes sure flowers are blooming and crops are growing and the fields are green with welcome. Every fall, when Persephone returns to the underworld, Demeter ignores the crops and flowers and lets them die. Each spring, Demeter brings everything to life again, ready to welcome her daughter's return.

To the ancient Greeks, that was the reason for seasons - winter, spring, summer, fall.