Hades and Persephone: Life in the Underworld

The three brothers, Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades, traveled to the underworld and to Tartarus and freed the Cyclopes. The Cyclopes were famed at their ability to craft amazing weapons, and it was for this reason that Cronus imprisoned them there. Once free the ever grateful Cyclopes endowed the three Olympian each with their own weapon: Thunderbolts for Zeus, a trident for Poseidon, and a magical helmet for Hades. With his helmet Hades was rendered invisible as long as he was wearing his helmet.

The war was very long and very bloody, and Hades fought ferociously in battle. With his helmet, he was able to do many things a lot of other Gods could not, including his other Olympian brothers and sisters. There is the story that during the war, Hades stole into the enemy camp in the night, wearing his magical helmet and destroying the weapons of the Titans, giving the Olympians an upper hand.

The war finally ended with the death of Cronus, where Hades got Cronus off guard, Poseidon pinned him with his trident, and Zeus dealt the finishing blow with his thunderbolt.

The war was finally over and the Gods were finally at peace. All the Titans had been justly punished for their part in the war. Now, Poseidon, Hades, and Zeus had to figure out a way to split the rule of all the lands. How did they solve this pertinent and important decision that would alter the very world and its foundation permanently? They drew lots randomly. After drawing lots Poseidon had won the oceans, Zeus the sky, and finally Hades won dominion over the entire underworld.

Hades was well suited to his role as king of the underworld. His dark and morbid personality made him none too loved by the Gods and the mortals. Because of his position, Hades was able to distance himself far from the others, and he rarely took part in the affairs of Olympus.

The one thing that Hades was missing from his large dominion was that he was a king but had no queen. Eventually he would find his wife, Persephone. Not very surprisingly, Hades wasn’t as entirely as faithful as he should’ve been. Also not surprisingly, Persephone wasn’t usually very sympathetic towards his affairs and vented her wraith upon the mistress.

In one such instance Persephone found out about Hades having an affair with a beautiful nymph known as Mintha. Persephone simply found her and stepped on her. Upon stepping her she was turned her into the plant, mint. However, Hades did love his wife very much, and their relationship was a relationship of equals. Together they ruled Hades as king and queen of the underworld, and both ruled equally over all the underworld.

The underworld that Hades and Persephone ruled over could be divided into three main areas: Elysian fields, Tartarus, and Asphodal fields. Upon entering the underworld one reaches the sacred trivium, and it’s there that three of Hades’ subjects, known as the three judges of the underworld,

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judge your life. After being judged, one was sent to either of the three places; Tartarus if one was morally corrupt and if you lived a morally corrupt and impious life where one suffered eternally, Elysian fields if you were great hero who lived a pious life with good deeds living in eternal happiness, and finally Asphodal fields for those who fell in between which was just okay.

In the realm of Hades there also existed five rivers; Acheron the river of sorrow or woe, Cocytus river of lamentation, Phlegethon of fire, Lethe river of forgetfulness, and Styx river of hate. The river of Styx was also the river in which Charon resided. Charon was the ferryman of the river Styx who ferried departed souls for the price of one coin. Any soul who entered the underworld had to pay a fee to Charon who ferried the souls of the underworld on the river of Styx. Any who weren’t able to pay the fee of one coin were cursed to roam the earth for one hundred years.

One responsibility of Hades and Persephone was that they needed to prevent any soul from escaping the underworld and returning to earth. To do this they had the help of Cerberus, given to them by the goddess-sorcerer Hecate. Cerberus was a vicious three headed dog who guarded the underworld with an abandon.

Since once you entered you couldn’t leave, Hades didn’t have many visitors.

Few gods ever visited the underworld and even fewer mortals. One such mortal was Orpheus who wanted desperately to save his wife from the underworld. When he went, he played beautifully for Hades and Persephone. Both gods, moved to sympathy, decided to let him leave with his wife Eurydice. However, Hades gave him the condition that he needed to never look back. The moment that he did look back Eurydice would instantly become a shade and return to the underworld. In the end Orpheus couldn’t resist and had to look back to make sure it was his wife who was with him, and he lost her in instant. They would only reunite later in death.

In one instance, Theseus and Pirithous traveled to the underworld because Pirithous wanted deeply to abduct Persephone and take her for his own wife. Hades found out about their plan and being none too pleased that someone was trying to steal his woman, he decided to stop them. He asked Hephaestus, god of the forge, to forge two special chairs, chairs of forgetfulness. Full of hospitality and mirth, Hades invited Theseus and Pirithous to dine with him, but the instant they sat in their chairs, they forgot everything and sat in their chairs dazed forevermore.

Hades was the “good counselor” of the gods, the quiet judge who loomed in the background who was just and fair. He transitioned people from one life to the next, removing the distraction of the external world to enjoy the internal happiness of their new existence.

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