

How the Trojan War Began

The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis

In ages past, mighty Zeus fell in love with Thetis, loveliest daughter of Nereus, the Old Man of the Sea. Although Zeus wanted to lie with Thetis, he was stopped by a prophecy. It was foretold that Thetis would bear a son who would become greater than his father. Zeus, who had overthrown his own father, knew that if he or any other god had a child with Thetis, his throne would be placed in jeopardy. To protect his throne, Zeus arranged for Thetis to marry Peleus, the mortal king of the Myrmidons. Peleus won Thetis' hand by defeating her in a wrestling match.



“Peleus Wrestling Thetis”



“The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis”

The Golden Apple

The wedding was lavish and every god and goddess on Mount Olympus was invited except for Eris, the “goddess of discord”. She was left out for obvious reasons. Who would invite a goddess, whose main mission was to cause trouble, to a happy occasion like a wedding? Eris was deeply offended and she decided to get her revenge. She created a golden apple on which she inscribed "For the Fairest." Then, when the wedding party was at its height, she threw the apple into the middle of the revelers. Little did she know how much discord she would actually create.

At first, the wedding guests were stunned. Once they regained their composure they discovered what was written on the apple. Hera, wife of Zeus and queen of the gods, Athena, favorite daughter of Zeus and goddess of wisdom, and Aphrodite, goddess of love, immediately began to fight over the apple. Each believed that she was the fairest and that the apple was meant for her. Finally, the three goddesses asked Zeus to settle the dispute. Wise Zeus knew if he chose one of the goddesses, the other two would make his existence miserable. Zeus avoided the trap by sending the three goddesses, accompanied by Hermes, to Mount Ida, near the walled city of Troy.

The Judgement of Paris

On top of Mt. Ida stood the youngest son of King Priam of Troy, Paris, also known as Alexandros. Although Paris was the son of the king and therefore a prince, he had been disowned by his father and was living as a shepherd because it had been prophesized at his birth that he would be the cause of the downfall of Troy. But since he was said to be one of the most handsome men to ever walk the earth, Zeus chose him to judge the contest between the three goddesses. The goddesses were not content to simply allow Paris to choose. Each tried to bribe Paris into choosing in her favor. Hera offered Paris all of Asia as his kingdom as well as infinite riches. Athena offered Paris victory in war and wisdom beyond all other mortals. Aphrodite offered Paris the hand of the most beautiful woman in the world. Paris was a bit of a ladies’ man so he gave the apple to Aphrodite.



“The Judgement of Paris”

The Greek Compact

At this time another mortal was faced with a difficult decision. All the kings of Greece were courting Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world and the daughter of Zeus and the mortal Leda. To make choosing a husband among the suitors even more difficult, she knew that once she chose, a war would erupt between the suitors. To avoid a war and protect the husband Helen chose, King Tydareus, Helen's step-father, had all the suitors make an alliance requiring them to respect the rights of the suitor Helen chose and to come to his aid if Helen was ever forcefully taken from her chosen husband. All the suitors agreed because they all wanted to wed Helen. Now that the threat of war was abated Helen made her decision. She chose King Menelaus of Sparta.

The Abduction of Helen

Aphrodite knew that Helen had chosen a husband and was happily married but she wanted to keep her promise to Paris so she came up with a plan. First she told Paris to go to Sparta where he would meet the woman promised to him. When he arrived, Menelaus welcomed Paris as a guest in his palace and a celebration immediately ensued. Menelaus asked Paris to stay as long as he wanted and Paris agreed. During his first week in the house of Menelaus, Aphrodite made Helen fall in love with Paris. On the tenth day, King Idomeneus of Knossos, in Crete, sent word that he needed to see Menelaus. Menelaus, not suspecting the plans Aphrodite had for his wife, packed and left for Crete. Immediately after Menelaus left, Helen eloped with Paris. They spent the first night on Kranai, an island near Githeon and the next day they sailed for Troy.

Paris, accompanied by Helen, went to king Priam and asked him to recognize him as his son. Hecuba, Priam's wife was in favor of welcoming back her lost son but Priam and his ninety-nine other children were at first hesitant. There was still the prophecy of doom for Troy. And now after Paris had so blatantly broken the laws of hospitality by running off with the wife of a man who had taken him in as a guest, the gods would surely be offended. Also, war with the Greeks was a foregone conclusion. However, they were soon won over by Helen's magnificent beauty and accepted the two lovers into the family.

All, that is, except for Cassandra, who had the gift of prophecy and knew what would be the outcome if Paris and Helen were taken in. Cassandra had received this gift from Apollo when they were lovers, but when she tired of Apollo and broke off with him he turned the wonderful gift he had given her into a curse. Although Cassandra always knew the future Apollo saw to it that no one would ever believe her. So here again her warning went unheeded.



“The Abduction of Helen”

The Coalition

Soon, news of Paris' action reached Menelaus in Crete. Menelaus was understandably upset. He left Crete and went directly to Mycenae to seek the aid of his brother, King Agamemnon. Agamemnon, the most powerful of the Greek kings, agreed to lead the Greeks to Troy to get Helen back and exact revenge for this grave insult. Agamemnon hesitated to commit all of Greece to a war so far away without first trying to settle the matter diplomatically. First he sent envoys to Troy to demand Helen's return. King Priam refused. He had grown to love Helen as a daughter. After being rejected several times, Agamemnon had no choice but to go to war. In preparation, Agamemnon sent King Nestor of Pylos, the oldest and most respected king in Greece, to remind the kings of the alliance they had made.

Not all of the kings were willing to go off to war. Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, had just recently married Penelope and had a newborn son. He did not want to leave them to go to such a far away place to fight a war in which he had no stake. When Nestor came to remind him of his duty, Odysseus pretended to be insane. Nestor found Odysseus plowing his fields in crooked rows and sowing them with salt. Nestor suspected that Odysseus was pretending but he needed to prove it. Nestor came up with a plan. He placed Odysseus' baby son, Telemachus, in front of the plow. If Odysseus plowed over his son, Nestor would know that Odysseus really was insane. If Odysseus avoided his son, then he would be found out. Odysseus loved his son very much so he stopped the plow before running over his son and agreed to go to war.

Even brave Achilles, the son of Peleus and Thetis, was hesitant to go to war. His mother, Thetis, being a goddess, had foretold that if he went to Troy, he would earn great glory but would be killed. Not wanting to die, Achilles dressed himself up as a woman and with the help of a spell from his mother, was able to hide among the women in the harem of his good friend king Scyrus. But Odysseus felt that if he had to go to war, so did Achilles. Getting information as to where Achilles was hiding, Odysseus came up with an ingenious scheme to force Achilles to betray his true identity. Odysseus went to the palace of Scyrus, pretending to be a merchant selling his wares. He set up a table on which he placed all types feminine fineries; jewelry, fine silks, perfumes and delicate footwear and then among them he placed a magnificent sword. When all of Scyrus' concubines rushed to view the merchant's goods, only Achilles picked up the sword to admire it. Achilles was exposed and had to agree to go to Troy or face being called a coward by the other Greek heroes.



“Achilles”



“Odysseus”

The Sacrifice of Iphegenia

All the kings of Greece met at Aulis, a centrally located bay, where Agamemnon was chosen as the supreme leader of the forces of Greece. Before the armies could sail for Troy, they needed to wait for the proper winds because ancient ships could only travel in the direction that the wind was blowing. When the right winds did not come the Greek kings began to get frustrated and threatened to return to their homes. If the gods would not send favorable winds, maybe they did not approve of the Greek expedition. Worrying that the coalition would fall apart, Agamemnon sought out the help of his chief soothsayer, Calchas who could read the will of the gods. Calchas told Agamemnon that he had received an oracle foretelling that a war with Troy would last for ten years, but that because Agamemnon had offended one of the gods, favorable winds would never come and the war would never begin. To appease the offended god, Agamemnon was forced to sacrifice his daughter, Iphegenia. After the sacrifice, the winds changed and the Greek flotilla set sail for Troy. The Greeks swore that they would not return without Helen, who would forever be known as “the face that launched a thousand ships”. **Thus, began the Trojan War.**



“Iphegenia Sacrificed”

The Cause of the Trojan War

Eris

Thetis

Peleus

Hera (Juno)

Aphrodite (Venus)

Athena (Minerva)

Paris (Alexandros)

Helen

Menalaus

Agememnon

Odysseus (Ulysses)

Achilles

Iphigenia

Calchas

Priam

Hecuba