

# Myths and Legends: Zeus, supreme god of the ancient Greeks

By E.M. Berens, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.13.16

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A statue of Zeus throwing a lightning bolt. Wikimedia Commons

*Greek mythology is thousands of years old. The Greek made the gods to explain weather, disasters and events in history. Myths were created about gods and goddesses that had supernatural powers, but acted like humans.*

## **Strongest God In The Universe**

The ancient Greeks believed Zeus is the most important god. He is the strongest god in the universe, and the ruler of heaven and Earth. He is also the god of the sky and the father of gods and men.

His power allows him to control the weather. He can make storms, rain and darkness. At his command, the thunder rolls, the lightning flashes, and clouds rain upon the Earth.

As the father of the gods, Zeus makes sure that each god does his or her job. He punishes their mistakes and settles their fights. For each of them, he acts as a counselor and friend.

### **Zeus Is Helper And Protector**

Zeus is also the defender of the state. He serves as a special friend to princes, helping and protecting them. He looks after people and watches over the whole community. When people are honest, kind and noble, he rewards them. But when they are mean, unfair and wicked, he punishes them. Zeus looks out for even the poorest people by telling the rich and powerful to help them.

The Greeks believed that Zeus lived on the top of Mount Olympus. This is the tallest mountain in Greece. Its peak is hidden from view by clouds and mist. Zeus lived there with his wife Hera in a palace made of gold and silver.

All of the Greeks worshipped Zeus. They built many splendid statues of him, which show the god as a grand and noble man. Zeus always has long hair and a flowing beard. In one hand he carries a bundle of thunderbolts, ready to be thrown. He frequently wears a crown of leaves on his head.

### **People Were Dedicated To Zeus**

The Greeks first worshipped Zeus at Dodona, an ancient oracle in Greece. The oracle sat at the foot of a mountain in a region called Epirus. At the oracle, people claimed to hear Zeus' voice in the whispering leaves of a giant oak tree. The voice told the wishes of heaven, they said. Later, people worshipped Zeus at Olympia in Elis. There was a giant temple dedicated to him at Olympia.

The Greeks believed that Zeus sometimes transformed himself into a human. He did this so that he could visit Earth. On Earth, he rewarded good people and punished the bad.

One time, Zeus went to Earth and made a journey through the kingdom of Phrygia. None of the people there offered to help Zeus. Finally, he reached the home of an old man and his wife, who gave Zeus some food. To thank them, he promised to grant any wish they desired. The old couple wished that they could serve the gods and end their lives at the same time. After they died, Zeus transformed the couple into two trees. They remained forever side by side.

Another time, Zeus made a journey through a place called Arcadia. The people there recognized him and honored him as the king of heaven. Yet their own king Lycaon questioned Zeus. He said he would kill the god. To stop him, Zeus turned Lycaon into a wolf.

### **Roman God, Greek God**

The Roman god Jupiter is often confused with the Greek god Zeus. Both are the head of the Olympic gods. But Jupiter has complete power over life and death. In this way, he differs from Zeus, who was sometimes controlled by the Fates.

The Fates were three goddesses who controlled the lives of gods and men. Zeus often descends to visit Earth. However, Jupiter always remains in heaven.

*From "The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome" by E.M. Berens.*