

# Tales from Ancient Greece

## 4. KING MIDAS

- HERMES All of us Greek gods are different - we all have our different characters. And there's one I'm going to introduce you to, who's frankly, well, more different than most! His name's Dionysus, and if I tell you he's the god of wine and rides in a chariot pulled by panthers, you'll probably guess that, yes, he's a bit of a wild one. Let's just say he likes to let himself go. And, well, here he is, letting himself go right now.
- DIONYSUS Oh, my friends, enjoy!
- HERMES Him and his band of followers, dancing and singing and...well... drinking rather a lot of wine.
- DIONYSUS More honey, friends! And figs! And wine! More wine!
- HERMES He does like to enjoy himself. And it was on a day just like this one, while Dionysus was revelling, that I remember him suddenly look round and jump up.
- DIONYSUS Stop! Stop the music! Where's Silenus? My dear Silenus, he's not with us. Have we lost him along the way?
- HERMES They certainly had. Silenus had got left behind, plodding along on his donkey, and you'll soon see why.
- SILENUS *We really fancied Venus  
By Jove you should've seen us!*
- HERMES He was in a right old state!
- SILENUS Here where'sh everyone gone?
- HERMES Get the picture? Silenus, by the way, was a *satyr*. They're funny creatures, satyrs: men from the waist up, goats from the waist down. But Dionysus loved Silenus, because for some reason the satyr had been his tutor - his teacher, when Dionysus was growing up. What an example! No wonder Dionysus turned out the way he did! But this day, travelling with Dionysus through the land of Phrygia, Silenus had had enough - he was completely sloshed.

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- SILENUS Oh, dear, I think I've had a bit too much...ooooohhhh!
- HERMES And he toppled off his donkey and landed in a ditch. The donkey wanders off and Silenus just lies there snoring. For ages. But then... more hooves...and an altogether grander rider. A king, in fact, and his soldiers...
- MIDAS Hello. What have we here? Sergeant, wake him up.
- SOLDIER Hoi! Up you get! You've had one too many, pal!
- SILENUS I'm not your pal. I'm the best pal, I'll have you know, of glorious Dionysus!
- SOLDIER You what?!
- SILENUS So you'll show me some respect, young man!
- SOLDIER You old tramp! Get along with you!
- MIDAS No, wait! Are you Silenus?
- SILENUS The very same. And who might you be?
- SOLDIER What, you rogue! You're talking to his majesty Midas, King of Phrygia!
- SILENUS Majesty? Ha! What are kings compared to gods?!
- SOLDIER Why, you slave, I'll teach you -
- MIDAS No, stop! If this is Silenus, show him every courtesy! He's Dionysus's treasured tutor!
- SILENUS Now there speaks a wise man!
- MIDAS Where is he, the great god Dionysus? Have you been with him?
- SILENUS I thought I still was. I was on the road with him an' his followers, but I must've nodded off.
- MIDAS Where were you going?
- SILENUS To the vineyards at the foot of Mount Tmolus. That's where he'll be now.



- MIDAS            I've always longed to meet him face to face. Would you - could you - take me there?
- SILENUS           Well since you've treated me right - unlike some I could mention - provide me with a horse and I'll be your escort.
- MIDAS            Give him your horse.
- SOLDIER           My lord!
- MIDAS            Give it to him! He's going to lead me to the great god Dionysus!
- HERMES            So off King Midas rode with Silenus, who led him straight to Dionysus, revelling with his followers...
- DIONYSUS        Silenus! Where have you been? Come here to my embrace, sweet fool! And who's this you've brought with you?
- SILENUS           Midas, King of Phrygia!
- HERMES            And when the satyr told how Midas had treated him with respect, Dionysus was well impressed.
- DIONYSUS        A wise king! A rare thing indeed! So then: for returning my dear Silenus to me, you must be rewarded. Choose anything - I will grant your heart's desire!
- MIDAS            Thank you, great lord!
- DIONYSUS        So, then: what shall it be?
- MIDAS            Do you mean it? I can have anything?
- DIONYSUS        Anything!
- MIDAS            Anything at all?
- DIONYSUS        Absolutely anything!
- HERMES            How about that? If you were given such an amazing offer, I wonder what you'd choose

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## 4. King Midas

- HERMES            So King Midas stood there thinking about what to ask for and the god Dionysus asked him again.
- DIONYSUS        Well, king?
- MIDAS             Ummm...I've had the most amusing idea!
- DIONYSUS        Go on.
- MIDAS             I want everything I touch to turn to gold!
- DIONYSUS        But you already have more riches than anyone needs.
- MIDAS             I know!
- DIONYSUS        All the pleasures you could wish for.
- MIDAS             I know! But how can you ever have enough? If everything I touch will turn to gold, I can spend and spend and spend!
- HERMES            Dionysus looked sort of disappointed. Maybe Midas wasn't the wise king that he'd thought. Still, he was bound to keep his promise.
- DIONYSUS        So be it! If that is your heart's desire -
- MIDAS             It is!
- DIONYSUS        - everything you touch will turn to gold.
- MIDAS             Thank you! Bless you, gracious god!
- HERMES            And back went Midas to his royal palace, his face red with excitement. First stop was his garden, and what do you think happened the moment he touched a twig? It turned into -
- MIDAS             Solid gold!
- HERMES            He found a bird's egg lying on the grass. When he picked it up -
- MIDAS             A golden egg! Ha ha! What next?
- HERMES            He touched a statue - it turned to gold. He sat on a bench - it turned to gold.
- MIDAS             This is glorious!



- HERMES            He picked up a huge bunch of roses, and carried them, a spray of solid gold, back into his palace. His courtiers were amazed - and even more so when...
- MIDAS            Watch this!
- HERMES            ...he touched a chair...and they saw it turn, of course, to gold. He put his hand on the banquet table...yep, you guessed it. Then he went and stroked a wall...and his whole vast palace turned to shining gold.
- MIDAS            What do you think of that, my friends? But come, it's time for dinner!
- HERMES            Ah! Dinner! Can you guess what's going to happen now? Midas strode up to the table.
- MIDAS            What a spread! My compliments to the cooks!
- HERMES            Yes, they'd been slaving away all day, but they might as well not have bothered, because -
- MIDAS            Ow!
- HERMES            He nearly broke his teeth on the very first bite: the chicken leg he held was suddenly a lump of gold. He picked up an apple - it turned to gold. So did the bread. And the fish. And the cheese. He was starting to panic.
- MIDAS            Help - I can't eat! Oh, Dionysus! Forgive me for my foolishness! Take back your gift, I beg you! Help me! Help me!!
- HERMES            I felt I had to do something for him, and I was about to fly off and tell Dionysus...but suddenly he was right there in the palace!
- DIONYSUS        Good day, my friends!
- MIDAS            Lord Dionysus!
- MIDAS            I'm sorry I asked for such a foolish gift! Please release me!
- DIONYSUS        Release you? From such a blessing?
- MIDAS            It's not a blessing! It's a curse!
- DIONYSUS        Endless, effortless wealth, a curse?



## 4. King Midas

- MIDAS            It is! It is! Please release me! I beg you!
- DIONYSUS        Return to Mount Tmolus, where we met. Climb up to the river's spring and plunge into the pool. Immerse yourself entirely. Let it wash you clean.
- MIDAS            Oh, thank you, lord!
- HERMES            And Midas ran straight out and jumped on his horse. Of course - it turned into a lump of gold.
- MIDAS            Oh!
- HERMES            So Midas had to trudge all the way back to the mountain. Then he did as Dionysus said...and as he dived into the icy pool, streams of gold came flowing from him. He clambered out, shaking with fear - fear that the gift wasn't washed away. He ran to a tree and touched the bark...
- MIDAS            Ah! Ha ha!
- HERMES            ...and laughed with joy to see it still a tree. He touched a rock and...
- MIDAS            Yes! Oh yes!
- HERMES            ...it was still a rock.
- MIDAS            A what a lovely lump of chalk!
- HERMES            And he turned and saw the river flowing gold, and wished for gold no longer. In fact:
- MIDAS            I can't go back. I never want to see my palace again - all the marble, gold and pointless glitter! I want the rocks and the earth. I want to be here, in the mountains, with Dionysus!
- HERMES            And he threw off all his royal robes and went running down the hill, down to the vineyard where Dionysus and his band were revelling
- DIONYSUS        Ah! The king has come to join us!
- HERMES            And where they welcomed him with open arms! Midas had given up his wealth and his palace for the wild life with Dionysus!

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- HERMES            What King Midas liked best about his wild new life was the music - played on drums of every shape and size and an instrument made from a goat's bladder. Silenus the satyr was amazing on it.
- MIDAS            I love the sound of the bladder!
- SILENUS           It's called a bagpipe, friend! Pick up a drum and join in!
- MIDAS            Yeah!
- HERMES            Soon Midas's palace and his kingdom were forgotten - he'd never had such fun in all his life! But then one night, who should turn up but Apollo, god of the sun - and also god of music. And really, you should've seen the look on his face as he listened to the bagpipe and the other stuff. So when the music and dancing came to a stop...he sat there under the spreading vines, giving a superior smile and clapping...
- APOLLO            Oh, that's awfully good. You are having fun, aren't you?
- MIDAS            It's the best! The best music I've ever heard! And played!
- APOLLO            Really! Where have you been? No music in the world compares with mine...
- HERMES            And Apollo produced his lyre. You see, Apollo is very proud of his lyre-playing...
- MIDAS            Yes, yes - boring!
- APOLLO            Boring?
- MIDAS            You can't dance to it - it's all stiff and proper and boring!
- APOLLO            I think a contest's called for - don't you, Dionysus?
- DIONYSUS        A contest?
- APOLLO            Yes. Your lot with their drums and bladder -
- MIDAS            It's a bagpipe!
- APOLLO            - against me and my lyre.
- MIDAS            Game on!





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- APOLLO           And this fool here shall be the judge.
- MIDAS            Come on, then! Who goes first?
- APOLLO           You decide.
- MIDAS            The bagpipe and the drums!
- HERMES           Then Silenus played and stomped his goaty foot and the music was the very spirit of the mountains. And at the end, Midas, breathless from his dancing, turned to the god Apollo and said:
- MIDAS            Now beat that with your lyre!
- HERMES           Apollo swept his cloak aside and set his golden lyre on his knee. I have to say, he was a bit good. And Dionysus and I, we looked at each other and just nodded. We knew what the result would be. At least we thought we did...
- DIONYSUS        I think we're all agreed. Apollo, golden god, your music is supreme.
- MIDAS            No! No! I don't think that at all!
- APOLLO           What's he saying?
- MIDAS            Apollo's music is marvellous, I don't deny it. But it's too - too - golden. It's too rich, too perfect!
- APOLLO           The man's a fool!
- MIDAS            Give me the wail, the stomp - the spirit of the mountain!
- APOLLO           Only a donkey would make such a judgement! So let him have the ears of the donkey that he is!
- MIDAS            Oh!
- HERMES           Suddenly Midas's ears were long and floppy! Apollo had given him the ears of a donkey! Midas was horrified - and went sloping back to his palace, where he sadly donned his kingly robes once more.





- HERMES            He had a special hat made, to hide his donkey ears. So no one knew. Except when he had to get his hair cut, well, there was no way of hiding them from his barber.
- BARBER            There we are, your majesty. Just pop your hat off for me. That's lovely. Been anywhere nice for your - oh!
- MIDAS             You're not to tell anyone! Do you hear me?!
- BARBER            No, my lord! I mean yes, my lord!
- MIDAS             Or you'll have no ears at all!
- BARBER            Super! Mum's the word! Short back and ears, sir? I mean sides! Sides!
- HERMES            But how could the barber keep what he'd seen a secret? He was gagging to tell someone and, one day, he could hold it in no longer. He went out to his garden and dug a hole in the ground. Then he huddled over and whispered in to it:
- BARBER            King Midas has donkey's ears!
- HERMES            Then he filled in the hole and went to bed, relieved. But come the spring, green shoots came sprouting from where the hole had been and grew into a clump of reeds! And they brushed together in the breeze in a whisper of:
- WHISPER:        Midas has donkey's ears! Donkey's ears! Midas has donkey's ears! Donkey's ears!
- HERMES            And the whisper was carried everywhere, blown on the wind: soon everyone knew King Midas's secret!

