

# Tales from Ancient Greece

## 6. ODYSSEUS AND THE TROJAN HORSE

- HERMES**            The young men of Greece - they're at it all day, endlessly training for war. The cities here in Ancient Greece are always competing, always likely to go to war. And today I'm going to tell you about the biggest war of them all here in our ancient world - the war at Troy.
- It all began with a wedding party and an apple given to Zeus, father of the gods. But it was no ordinary apple. Zeus holds it up and says:
- ZEUS**                A golden apple! With letters, carved in the skin. It says: 'This apple is made for the most beautiful goddess of all'. Oh dear.
- HERMES**            Yes, oh dear! Zeus saw the problem straight away! You see, goddesses aren't exactly modest, and three of them - Athena, Hera and Aphrodite - each claimed the golden apple, insisting she was the supreme beauty.
- Zeus wanted to stay well out of it - so he dumped the decision-making problem on a human. He sent them to have their beauty judged by a young man called Paris - the son of the king of Troy, a magnificent city on the other side of the sea. And he sent Yours Truly as well, to help out.
- PARIS**              Oh, Hermes! How can I, a mortal, judge between goddesses?
- HERMES**            Paris - I feel for you, mate. But you'll have to plump for one them and hope you survive! Over to you ladies!
- HERMES**            Then the goddess Hera turns slowly round showing off her beauty and Athena sweeps off her helmet to reveal a tumble of golden hair. But then Aphrodite, goddess of love, goes slinking up to Paris and whispers in his ear:
- APHRODITE**        If you choose me, and give me the apple, I'll see that you win Helen of Sparta!
- PARIS**              Helen of Sparta? I've heard she's fabulously beautiful.
- APHRODITE**        Yes! Award the apple to me, and she'll be yours!
- PARIS**              But - she's about to be married - to King Menelaus! I've been invited to their wedding!

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- APHRODITE      Go to Sparta, go to their wedding, and I'll make sure Helen falls in love with you!
- HERMES          Well, after that, it didn't take him long to make up his mind.
- PARIS            All three of you are very beautiful. But I award the apple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love!
- APHRODITE      How wise!
- HERMES          Aphrodite goes away flushed with pleasure, but the other two goddesses go off fuming - and plotting revenge on Paris and his home, the magnificent city of Troy. I could tell it was going to end in tears. And I wasn't the only one.
- CASSANDRA      Paris, brother, don't board that ship!
- PARIS            Prepare to set sail!
- CASSANDRA      You mustn't go! I know what's going to happen!
- PARIS            Cassandra! You and your prophecies!
- HERMES          Do you believe people can see the future? Paris's sister Cassandra always said she could, and as Paris prepared to set sail to Sparta for the wedding, she stopped him on the harbour side.
- CASSANDRA      Paris, I beg you, don't board that ship! If you make this voyage our city of Troy will be consumed in fire!
- PARIS            Oh, Cassandra, you're always so dramatic!
- CASSANDRA      But brother!
- PARIS            You can't tell the future, and nor can anybody else! I'm going!
- CASSANDRA      Brother!
- HERMES          So, Paris sees Helen married to Menelaus, and then well, the goddess Aphrodite goes to work on Helen - and before you can say 'but you've only been married half an hour', Helen's gazing at Paris over the banquet table, all goggle-eyed, and that very night they're off together, down to the sea, on to his ship, and sailing back to Troy! Well, her husband Menelaus goes ballistic.



- MENELAUS I want Helen back! And I'll take her back! I'll summon kings and warriors from all over Greece! I'll raise the greatest army the world has ever seen! We'll sail to Troy together and wage a war like none before it!
- HERMES And so the Greeks got ready to go to war.
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- HERMES Among the Greeks there was one king who didn't want to go to war at Troy - his name was Odysseus, king of Ithaca. He was married with a baby son - he didn't want to leave his family. I know that, because one day I heard him praying to me as he wandered along the shore.
- ODYSSEUS Oh, Hermes, tell me, what can I do? An oracle has prophesied that if I go to the war at Troy, I won't return for twenty years! How can I leave my lovely wife, my infant son? By the time I return he won't know me!
- HERMES I felt really sorry for Odysseus. At first I couldn't think how to help. But then I had a seriously nifty idea - or so I thought. So down I flew!
- HERMES Odysseus!
- ODYSSEUS Hermes!
- HERMES You've got to pretend you're bonkers!
- ODYSSEUS What?
- HERMES Pretend you've gone stark raving mad, then they won't want to take you!
- ODYSSEUS How - how shall I do that?
- HERMES I don't know - pants on your head?
- ODYSSEUS Pants? What are pants?
- HERMES Oh, yeah, they haven't been invented yet. Well, try spoons up your nose.
- ODYSSEUS What are you talking about?
- HERMES I don't know. Just an idea.
- ODYSSEUS How about ploughing the beach?



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- HERMES            What?
- ODYSSEUS        I could plough the beach - here. Dress myself in a farmer's smock, fix a plough to a team of horses and drive them up and down the beach, ploughing the sand.
- HERMES            That's completely daft.
- ODYSSEUS        I thought that was the point.
- HERMES            Oh. Oh, yes, that's right! Yes, brilliant!
- HERMES            So off he goes to fetch the plough and horses...
- ODYSSEUS        *I am a merry ploughman,  
A-ploughing I do go...*
- HERMES            King Menelaus comes along to plead with him to join the war...
- MENELAUS        Odysseus?
- HERMES            ...And finds Odysseus ploughing the beach, singing his terrible song.
- MENELAUS        Odysseus!
- ODYSSEUS        *I am a merry ploughman,  
Most people plough the land...*
- MENELAUS        Odysseus, can you hear me?
- ODYSSEUS        *But what I like ploughing most of all,  
Is loads and loads of sand.*
- MENELAUS        Odysseus, it's me, Menelaus!
- ODYSSEUS        What's that? 'Many layers'? Yes, sir! Many layers of sand! Many, many layers!
- HERMES            But it doesn't work. Menelaus isn't taken in.
- MENELAUS        All right, Odysseus! If you're really mad, you won't mind me doing this.
- HERMES            He snatches Odysseus's baby son and lays him in the sand - right in front of the tramping horses!



- ODYSSEUS No! Wooaahhh!
- HERMES Odysseus reins the horses in, but of course it's a complete give away.
- ODYSSEUS Menelaus! What are you doing?
- MENELAUS Honestly! Did you really think I'd fall for the 'mad' act?
- ODYSSEUS I thought it was going rather well.
- HERMES So Odysseus's cover is blown and off he has to go to war, leaving his lovely wife and son, and knowing that if the oracle's right, he won't see them again for twenty years.
- A thousand ships set sail from Greece - imagine that: a thousand ships filled with warriors, all launched to recapture Helen. They cross the sea and land on the shore outside the walls of Troy. And they're camped there - get this - for ten years.
- ODYSSEUS For ten years we've attacked the city, day after day, week after week, and still we can't breach the walls.
- MENELAUS Another attack!
- ODYSSEUS Prepare for battle!
- HERMES Sometimes the men of Troy would charge from the city and do battle on the shore.
- MENELAUS They're trying to drive us back into the sea!
- HERMES And a great many warriors on both sides were killed. But still the walls of Troy stood firm. What a waste.
- But one day it all changed. Remember how the goddesses Athena and Hera wanted revenge on Troy? Well, Athena was really cheesed-off that Troy was still not taken, and she planted in Odysseus's head the idea for a plan: a plan for capturing the city at last. It was like this: Odysseus called the Greek leaders to his tent and said -
- ODYSSEUS I've worked out how to capture Troy. We'll build a wooden horse!
- MENELAUS A wooden - ? Oh, no! He's pretending to be mad again!



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- ODYSSEUS      No, listen -
- MENELAUS      He thinks we'll send him home!
- ODYSSEUS      Listen, Menelaus!
- MENELAUS      Don't tell me: we put a rocking horse outside the gates, and when they all come trooping out to play, we ambush them and round them up!
- ODYSSEUS      Did I say anything about a rocking horse?
- MENELAUS      A wooden horse, you said. What other kind is there? A clothes horse?
- ODYSSEUS      No, a giant horse, made of planks of pine. A hollow horse, with a trap door in its belly, big enough to hold twenty men -
- MENELAUS      Eh? What's the point of that?
- ODYSSEUS      - and in the side we carve letters saying: 'This horse is an offering to our goddess Athena, praying for our safe return to Greece.'
- MENELAUS      Odysseus, what are you talking about? Are you saying we're giving up this war? Sailing home defeated after ten years and thousands dead?
- ODYSSEUS      No. But that's what we'll pretend. Twenty of our bravest men will hide inside the horse, which we'll leave outside the city gates. The rest will put to sea as if we're heading home, but wait behind that island - there - until the signal's given.
- MENELAUS      What signal?
- ODYSSEUS      The signal that the horse has been taken into the city. Then, at night, the men in the horse will clamber out and open the gates, the ships will return and our troops rush in.
- MENELAUS      But why will the horse be taken into the city?
- ODYSSEUS      You'll see.

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- HERMES            So the Greeks followed Odysseus's plan: they set to work and built the giant wooden horse.
- ODYSSEUS        Come on, men!
- HERMES            And twenty men, led by Odysseus, all fully armed, climbed up a long rope ladder, high, high up into the belly of the horse. Then, when night fell...
- MENELAUS        Fire the camp!
- HERMES            All the other Greeks set fire to their tents, boarded their ships and sailed away. So, next morning, the people of Troy awoke to find.
- PARIS              Gone! The Greeks have gone!
- HERMES            There was nothing at all left on the shore but the huge wooden horse! Paris was the first to speak.
- PARIS              It's a gift to the goddess Athena! Let's take it into the city and keep it as a glorious trophy!
- HERMES            But his sister Cassandra, who'd prophesied that his journey to Helen's wedding would end in disaster, was looking at the horse in fear.
- CASSANDRA        No! Stop! We must burn it, destroy it utterly!
- HERMES            Inside the wooden horse, the twenty Greeks heard every word.
- MENELAUS        They're going to burn us! Odysseus -
- ODYSSEUS        Don't panic, Menelaus! Listen!
- HERMES            And outside the horse...
- PARIS              No, Cassandra. We can't destroy an offering to a goddess. Open the gates. Let's wheel the horse inside.
- CASSANDRA        Wait Paris! I've seen this in a dream - there are men inside it!
- PARIS              Your dreams!
- CASSANDRA        I tell you there are men inside! I'll prove it! Give me that spear!
- HERMES            Cassandra snatched a spear from a guard and hurled it at the horse. And inside the belly, as the spear struck.





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- MENELAUS      What was that?!
- ODYSSEUS      Keep still, everyone!
- HERMES          There was a rattle of armour and weapons, as the Greeks jumped in alarm.
- CASSANDRA      There! Hear that?
- PARIS            Hear what? I heard nothing.
- CASSANDRA      You can't trust the Greeks! They're full of tricks! Burn it! Burn the horse!
- PARIS            That's enough, Cassandra! A gift to the gods must be respected! Take the horse into the city! Victory is ours!
- CASSANDRA      But brother!
- HERMES          Cassandra couldn't persuade anyone, so they pulled the horse into Troy on its massive wooden wheels. Oh, the celebration! They set the horse outside the palace, then danced and feasted round it all day long. But at last the sun sank - and the Trojans took to their beds, exhausted - but safe, they thought, for the first time in ten years.
- The night passed, and at last, through tiny cracks in the horse's flanks, Odysseus saw the first glimmering of dawn.
- ODYSSEUS      Now! Open the trap door! Lower the rope ladder, and it begins!
- HERMES          Down from the horse they climbed.
- ODYSSEUS      Where are the guards? There are no guards!
- MENELAUS      They're so sure we've gone, they've left no one on watch! Give the signal!
- HERMES          No-one saw the torch waved by Odysseus, summoning the Greek fleet to return. No-one saw the Greek ships sailing back. No-one saw their warriors wade on to the beach, and steal in thousands into Troy, as Menelaus unbarred the gates and threw them open.
- MENELAUS      In, Greek heroes! In!
- HERMES          I knew what was going to happen. I wanted to fly down and beg the Greeks to show mercy. But the goddess Athena - well, she wanted revenge, didn't she, and held me back. The Greeks poured through the streets breaking into houses looting, killing.





- HERMES            They smashed their way into the palace and in the innermost chamber, Cassandra ran to find her brother, Paris.
- CASSANDRA      I told you Troy would burn!
- PARIS             I know!
- CASSANDRA      I warned you against the horse!
- PARIS             I know!
- CASSANDRA      Why would you not believe me?!
- PARIS             Too late for that! Where's Helen?
- CASSANDRA      Your beloved Helen, who you stole from Menelaus? She's in his arms!
- PARIS             What!
- CASSANDRA      And begging for forgiveness!
- PARIS             No!
- CASSANDRA      Paris - look out!
- HERMES           Too late: as Paris turned and saw the Greeks break in, an archer loosed his arrow. And that was the end for Paris.
- CASSANDRA      Curse you!!! Curse you!!!
- HERMES           The Greeks took what they wanted - plundered everything of value - and then:
- MENELAUS       Burn it! Burn the whole city!
- HERMES           They set fire to the city. They burned it all to the ground, leaving Troy a black, smoking ruin. So, Menelaus had Helen again. And Athena and Hera had their revenge. And as for Odysseus and the other Greeks:
- ODYSSEUS
- HERMES           Home. Let's go home.

But remember: an oracle had told Odysseus that he wouldn't return from Troy for twenty years. The war had lasted only ten. So what happened to him on his voyage home, to keep him so long from the wife and son he loved? Well that's another story.

