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PART I: GREEK MYTHOLOGY

A. THE CREATION AND THE PRE-OLYMPIANS

BACK AT THE BEGINNING of all things, before even Time began, there was only Chaos brooding over the darkness. Nothing had form; there was no light; there was no life. At last, slowly, the Earth, Gaia, the darkness under the Earth, Erebos, and the darkness above the Earth, Night, emerged. But Night and Erebos were lonely in the terrible blackness; so they lay together, and from their union came the glorious light of heaven, Aither, and the brilliant light of earth, Day. Now at least, there was light as well as darkness. The greatest creature, however, was still to be borne; Love, known as Eros. So black-winged Night laid a silver egg in the womb of Erebos, and when the seasons had rolled round, Eros came forth, Eros the longed-for, shining — and with wings of gold.

NOW GAIA LOOKED UPON EROS and was filled with desire for this beautiful shining creature, and they lay together in sweet delight. Not long after, three children were born to Gaia: the starry heavens, Ouranos (Uranus); the mountains; and the seas. Thus it came to be that Earth was no longer flat and formless, but had become beautiful. When Ouranos saw how beautiful Earth was, he came to her, desiring to sleep with her. She yielded at last, but strange creatures were born of this union, whom Ouranos came to hate. There were twelve Titans, three Cyclopes having one eye in the middle of their foreheads, and three giants who had one hundred hands and fifty heads. These last Ouranos hated and feared so much that he tried to stuff them back into Gaia's womb, but Gaia became enraged with the pain and the indignity. So she went to her other sons, the Titans, begging them to help her. All but the youngest, Kronos, were too afraid of their father to do anything. (Ouranos had managed to get rid of the Cyclopes too, by throwing them into Tartarus, a gloomy place in the underworld, so they could be of no use to their mother.) Kronos, however, had a brilliant idea of how to revenge his mother. The next night, when Ouranos came to sleep with Gaia, Kronos was hiding, waiting for him with a sharp sickle in his hand. After Ouranos had had his pleasure, and was lying asleep in the bosom of Gaia, Kronos seized his father's

genitals in his left hand, and striking them off with the sickle, threw them into the sea, together with the evil implement. But the drops of blood falling upon Gaia caused her to give birth to three horrible creatures, the furies, who avenged crimes of parricide and perjury. The names of these hideous, snake-encrusted Erinyes were Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megaera. The nymphs were also born from the drops of blood. But, one truly lovely being resulted from this horrible crime. For when the genitals fell into the sea, they floated away toward the island of Cythera, and there, fully formed in eternal beauty, the immortal goddess of love, Aphrodite, rose from the sea foam.

COMMENT: Since the act of sexual union was the most obvious means of creation to the primitive mind, almost all early legends of the beginning of the world have sex at their core. However, it is very difficult to combine the various versions of the creation story into one intelligible whole, since the different Greek and Roman compilers of mythological stories each chose the version they liked best. It is doubtful whether the Greeks actually believed that Mother Earth, Gaia, and Father Heaven, Ouranos, produced all those dreadful creatures, any more than we actually believe the creation myth in the book of Genesis in the Bible. The stories were only symbolic explanations for the powerful forces and incomprehensible movements of nature. And not even we, today, with all our scientific knowledge, can offer positive explanations for the creation of the world or the power of love.

KRONOS WAS NOW THE LORD of the world and the chief of the Titans. Just to make sure, he placed the hundred-handed Giants in Tartarus along with the Cyclopes, and to celebrate his sovereignty, took his sister Rhea as his wife. But these marriages of such close kinship always seemed to forebode trouble, for Kronos' father Ouranos, as he gasped out his last breath, had prophesied that one of Kronos' sons would overpower him in his turn. For this reason, every time Rhea gave birth to a beautiful baby, Kronos quickly grabbed it and swallowed it whole. For five years things went on in this way, while Kronos, hoping to prevent the fulfillment of the prophecy, swallowed both male and female babies: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, and Poseidon. Finally Rhea could not bear the cruelty of it any longer and hit upon a clever plan. In the middle of the night, when her sixth child, Zeus, was born, she hastily gave the new

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infant to his grandmother, Gaia, who carried him away secretly to the island of Crete. There he was hidden in the cave of Dicte, tended by nymphs and his foster brother, *Pan*, and fed honey and goat's milk. Meanwhile Rhea had totally deceived her husband by wrapping a large stone in swaddling clothes and presenting it as the newborn baby. Ignorant of the whole plot, Kronos immediately swallowed the stone, (apparently unaware of the difference).

KRONOS WAS NOT LONG DECEIVED, however, and soon went to look for his sixth child. But the nymphs had been very clever and had hung Zeus' golden cradle from a tree so that his angry father would not find him, either in heaven or on earth, or even in the sea. Not only that, but whenever the infant started to cry, the spirits of the cave (some versions make them sons of Rhea), the *Kuretes*, made such a din by banging on their cymbals, that the noise of the child was completely drowned out. Search as he might, Kronos was not able to find the whereabouts of the baby. So Zeus grew to manhood among the shepherds of Mt. Ida in Crete, plotting all the while how he might rescue his poor brothers and sisters and overthrow his cruel father. One day he went to visit his aunt, the Titaness *Metis* (Insight) who lived beside the stream of the Ocean, to get her advice. (She was not only a wise woman, but beautiful as well, and their next encounter was to have a more interesting outcome.) At this first meeting, assistance for his schemes was all Zeus was after. *Metis* told him to seek out his mother, Rhea, and ask her to help him to become Kronos' cup-bearer. When he achieved this position, he was to make a cocktail of mustard, salt, and honey-sweetened liquid, and give it to his father to drink. The results would be immediate.

ZEUS HASTENED OFF, enchanted with the whole plot, and soon found his mother Rhea. Needless to say she was still wretched and furious over the loss of her other children and was only too eager to do what she could. In this way Zeus became cup-bearer to his unsuspecting father, and the nauseating mixture that Rhea and Zeus concocted from the recipe *Metis* had invented proved too potent for even the strong digestive system of Kronos. In very short order he vomited up first the stone (which Zeus later set up at Delphi) and then one after the other, quite alive and unhurt after their many years in their father's belly, all of Zeus' older brothers and sisters. Full of gratitude for their deliverance, the brothers and sister unani-

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mously made Zeus their leader. War was declared, and the inevitable conflict between the generations which Kronos had sought to avoid took place.

THE SEVEN TITANS aligned themselves with their brother Kronos, with Atlas (his nephew) as second in command, and bitter war which nearly destroyed the universe raged for ten years. In fact, Zeus began to despair of ever attaining victory. Finally his grandmother, Gaia, suggested to him secretly that he release from Tartarus the Giants and the Cyclopes (who were also his uncles) whom Kronos had long ago consigned to eternal imprisonment. Zeus' response to this brilliant inspiration was not just to release his uncles, but also to strengthen them with a meal of divine food and drink. The Cyclopes immediately rewarded Zeus for their deliverance by giving him a thunderbolt for his weapon, by giving his brother Hades a helmet of darkness, and his brother Poseidon a trident. Thus strategically armed, the brothers held a council of war. It was decided that Hades was to put on his helmet of invisibility, sneak into Kronos' presence, and steal his weapons, and while Poseidon diverted Kronos' attention with the trident, Zeus would kill his father with the thunderbolt. The plan was carried out without a hitch, except that Kronos was not actually killed, but only forced to surrender. The hundred-handed giants took up huge rocks and joined in the fray by putting to flight the rest of the Titans. The punishment for Kronos and all the defeated Titans, except Atlas, was banishment to that same old gloomy prison, Tartarus. (Another version says they were banished to Britain or some other island in the far west.)

ATLAS, as chief of the Titans, was given a special punishment, that of having to carry the sky on his shoulders. The whole vault of the heavens and the crushing weight of the world was to rest on his back forever. His brother, *Prometheus*, however, earned the temporary friendship of Zeus because he had sided with him against his fellow Titans. (The story of his aid to mortals and banishment from Zeus' presence comes later. Atlas and Prometheus were actually second generation Titans, not of the original seven brothers and five sisters.) But, although the Titans' power was at an end, Zeus was not undisputed ruler, for the giants who had helped him wanted their share of power; and what was worse, his grandmother Gaia turned against him and gave birth to the most frightful of all her offspring, Typhon. He was a terrible monster, with eyes that flashed fire from one

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hundred flaming heads, but Zeus now had the thunderbolt and lightning to use. It was not long before he vanquished Typhon and imprisoned him under the volcano Aetna in the island of Sicily. The Giants were temporarily mollified by being given the guardianship of the Titans in Tartarus, but as the Titans were in actuality their own brothers, they did not tolerate this humiliating duty long. As will be seen, they later made a mighty attempt to overthrow Zeus and his brothers and sisters after the latter had established their home on Mt. Olympos. But in the meantime, Zeus was—if somewhat shakily—supreme.

SUMMARY: This chapter attempts to retell the legendary creation of the earth and the first generations of gods and giants who ruled it until they were overthrown by the mighty Olympian (so named because his home was Mt. Olympos), Zeus. It by no means incorporates all the different stories, but sticks most closely to the earliest recorded tales, those of the Greek poet Hesiod, who wrote during the eighth century B.C.

LOOKING AROUND AT THE EARTH, Zeus grew tired of seeing only the same old nymphs and Titans, and decided that it was time another race of creatures should come into the light. The task of creating mortals he entrusted to the Titan Prometheus, who had been so helpful in Zeus' struggle for power against his father Kronos. Prometheus set to work immediately, and from a lump of clay softened with water he fashioned the first man, into whom Athena breathed the breath of life. In the beginning, man lived without a care, feeding on fruits, milk and honey. There were no troubles and no women, for this was the idyllic Golden Age, and no matter how long men lived, their bodies did not become decrepit. Eventually, however, this generation passed away, and a Silver Age took its place. This was a foolish race of beings, whose children remained children for one hundred years, and when they grew up they refused to worship the gods. So Zeus in his anger consumed them.

gold
silver

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THE NEXT RACE OF MEN lived in the Bronze Age, and these men were fierce indeed, tough warriors, and always fighting among themselves. One day, at a gathering of gods and men called to decide about the ritual of sacrifices, Prometheus decided to play a trick on Zeus. So he killed an ox and took the best portions of the meat and the innards and wrapped them inside a thick piece of the hide. Then he took the bones and wrapped them in a few pieces of meat covered over with nice, juicy looking fat. Going up to Zeus, he told him to choose whichever portion of the animal appealed to him the most. Of course Zeus saw through the trick, being a god, but he deliberately chose the portion which looked good, but contained only bones, because he wanted to have a reason to punish man. This he did by taking away the gift of fire; from now on, man would have to eat his food raw.

PROMETHEUS, HOWEVER, had made man in the first place, and could not bear to see him punished, especially when it was his own fault. So when Zeus wasn't looking, the clever Titan stole a torch of fire from the eternal flame on Olympos, and hiding it in a giant fennel stalk, carried it down to man. Upon discovering this new treachery, Zeus was furious beyond belief. He devised two terrible punishments, one for man, and the other for Prometheus. It would be hard to decide which fate was worst. The punishment for man was to be that implacable creature, woman. Summoning Hephaistos, he gave the smithy instructions on how to make the new being. She was to be formed of plaster and water in as perfect a shape as Hephaistos could devise. The goddess of wisdom, Athena, gave her every skill necessary for a woman, and Aphrodite, the ravishing goddess of love and beauty, made her the most gorgeous looking creature the eye or heart of man might desire. But to compensate for her cleverness and beauty, Hermes gave her a deceitful spirit hidden beneath her lovely exterior so that man could never trust her. When this creature of delight who was called Pandora, was completed, she was sent to Prometheus' not very intelligent brother, Epimetheus, (Prometheus means forethought, and Epimetheus means afterthought.) Prometheus, sensing trouble afoot, warned his brother not to accept any gift from Zeus, but needless to say, after one look at the all-too-desirable Pandora, Epimetheus received her with open arms.

PANDORA'S BOX. As part of her dowry the lovely young girl had brought with her a beautifully made jar (some versions say it was a jewelled box), which was sealed fast. Her instructions were to give it to Epimetheus without opening it, upon pain of death. These had been Hermes' parting words, as the clever god of tricks had taken her to Epimetheus himself. Obedient at first, Pandora gave the jar to Epimetheus, but when day followed day and he did not open the jar, her curiosity finally won out. The next time Epimetheus left the house she furtively reached for the jar, taking a quick look behind her to make sure no one was watching, and broke the seal. Ever so slightly she lifted the lid in order to take a quick peek inside. But the little crack was enough. Into her face buzzed the most horrid winged things—all the diseases and miseries that would plague man forever after. As fast as she could she closed the jar, but only one creature was left inside. This was Hope, who alone might compensate in some way for all the terrible evils of man, and make his life bearable.

IF THE GIFT OF SUCH EVILS to man seemed dreadful, Prometheus' own punishment was even more ghastly. Zeus ordered that he be chained to a rocky summit with a spike driven through his stomach. There he was at the mercy of a ravenous eagle who gorged on his liver all day long. But being a Titan, Prometheus could not die, and every night his liver grew back again. Thus his torture was unceasing. Only generations later was he to be pardoned and set free—by the great hero, Herakles.

ALTHOUGH MEN NOW HAD FIRE, they were not able to live righteously, but went from bad to worse in their relations to each other and to the gods, until finally Zeus resolved to destroy the race completely. There were only two good people on the whole earth, Deucalion, the son of Prometheus, and Pyrrha, the daughter of Pandora and Epimetheus. These two were warned of the terrible flood that was to come, and took refuge in a great chest which was stocked with provisions. Then Zeus and his brother, the mighty sea god Poesidon, caused a great deluge of water to descend upon the earth. The seas, rivers, and lakes were flooded and rose over their banks. And still it rained, on and on, till the tops of the trees disappeared, and soon even the tops of the mountains. At last on the ninth day, only the highest point of Mt. Parnassos remained above the water, and there the chest in which Deucalion and Pyrrha were cowering came to rest. The rain was finally over, and the two lonely mortals stepped out to look around. There was nothing to see but water, and even as the flood began to recede only drowned bodies and slime met their eyes. As the solitary survivors descended the mountain, they came to a half-ruined temple.

Having gone in to pray to Zeus in thankfulness for their deliverance and to beg for release from their loneliness, they heard an awesome voice telling them that if they wanted to repeople the earth, they must pick up the bones of their mother and cast them behind them. At first Deucalion and Pyrrha were totally dismayed, for their mothers were dead, and how could they know where their bones were after the terrible flood? All at once, Deucalion understood that since the earth is the Great Mother of all, the bones of their mother were therefore stones. Without further ado, Pyrrha and her husband bent down and began to fling stones over their shoulders as fast as they could. As they hit the ground the stones took on human shape, and in this way the race of the great heroes was created.

COMMENT: The story of the great flood resembles of course the story of Noah and the Ark in the book of Genesis in the Bible. In fact the great flood was a legend common to many cultures and probably had its origin somewhere in the east, before the dawn of history.

1st Test: Friday, April 12

- 1) Titans
- 2) Creation Chart
- 3) Packet "Part One: Greek Mythology"
- 4) Zeus v. Cronos
- 5) Prometheus and Epimetheus
- 6) Pandora
- 7) Ages of Man
- 8) The Flood

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