

# The Flood Story, Greek Style

**Version One:** One of the Greek versions can be found in the book called *The Library*, attributed to Apollodorus of Alexandria, a second-century BCE author. Section 1.7.2 is offered here in a translation by James Frazer.

And Prometheus had a son Deucalion. He reigning in the regions about Phthia, married Pyrrha, the daughter of Epimetheus and Pandora, the first woman fashioned by the gods. And when Zeus would destroy the men of the Bronze Age, Deucalion by the advice of Prometheus constructed a chest, and having stored it with provisions he embarked in it with Pyrrha.

But Zeus by pouring heavy rain from heaven flooded the greater part of Greece, so that all men were destroyed, except a few who fled to the high mountains in the neighborhood. It was then that the mountains in Thessaly parted, and that all the world outside the Isthmus and Peloponnese was overwhelmed.

But Deucalion, floating in the chest over the sea for nine days and as many nights, drifted to Parnassus, and there, when the rain ceased, he landed and sacrificed to Zeus, the god of Escape.

And Zeus sent Hermes to him and allowed him to choose what he would, and he chose to get men. And at the bidding of Zeus he took up stones and threw them over his head, and the stones which Deucalion threw became men, and the stones which Pyrrha threw became women. Hence people were called metaphorically people (laos) from laos, "stone".

And Deucalion had children by Pyrrha, first Hellen, whose father some say was Zeus, and second Amphictyon, who reigned over Attica after Cranaus; and third a daughter Protogenia, who became the mother of Aethlius by Zeus.

**Version 2:** The following version is the same story from the *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE - 17 CE), translated by Samuel Garth, John Dryden et al. In this version, the degeneration of mankind is paralleled with the revolt of the giants (titans).

[143] Now (brandish'd weapons glittering in their hands)  
mankind is broken loose from moral bands.  
No rights of hospitality remain:  
the guest, by him who harbor'd him, is slain,  
the son-in-law pursues the father's life,  
the wife her husband murders, he the wife.  
The step-dame poison for the son prepares;  
the son inquires into his father's years.  
Faith flies, and piety in exile mourns;  
and justice, here oppress'd, to Heav'n returns.

## Revolt of the Giants

[151] Nor were the Gods themselves more safe above;  
against beleaguer'd Heav'n the giants move.  
Hills pil'd on hills, on mountains mountains lie,  
to make their mad approaches to the sky.

## Conclusion of Zeus' Speech

[242] "Mankind's a monster, and th' ungodly times  
confed'rate into guilt, are sworn to crimes.  
All are alike involv'd in ill, and all  
must by the same relentless fury fall."

### Decision to Destroy Mankind

Thus ended he; the greater Gods assent  
by clamors urging his severe intent;  
the less fill up the cry for punishment.  
Yet still with pity they remember Man,  
and mourn as much as heav'nly spirits can.  
They ask, when those were lost of humane birth,  
what he would do with all this waste of Earth:  
if his dispeopl'd world he would resign  
to beasts, a mute, and more ignoble line;  
neglected altars must no longer smoke,  
if none were left to worship, and invoke.  
To whom the Father of the Gods replied:  
"Lay that unnecessary fear aside:  
mine be the care, new people to provide.  
I will from wondrous principles ordain  
A race unlike the first, and try my skill again."

### Not by Fire, but by Water

[253] Already had he toss'd the flaming brand,  
and roll'd the thunder in his spacious hand,  
preparing to discharge on seas and land,  
but stopp'd, for fear, thus violently driv'n,  
the sparks should catch his axle-tree of Heav'n.  
Remembring in the fates, a time when fire  
should to the battlements of Heaven aspire,  
and all his blazing worlds above should burn,  
and all th' inferior globe to cinders turn.  
His dire artill'ry thus dismiss'd, he bent  
his thoughts to some securer punishment:  
concludes to pour a wat'ry deluge down  
and what he durst not burn, resolves to drown.

[262] The northern breath, that freezes floods,  
he binds:  
with all the race of cloud-dispelling winds.  
The south he loos'd, who night and horror brings,  
and fogs are shaken from his flaggy wings.  
From his divided beard two streams he pours,  
his head, and rheumy eyes distill in show'rs,  
with rain his robe, and heavy mantle flow,  
and lazy mists are lowring on his brow;  
Still as he swept along, with his clench'd fist  
he squeez'd the clouds, th' imprison'd clouds resist:  
the skies, from pole to pole, with peals resound  
and show'rs inlarg'd, come pouring on the ground.  
Then, clad in colors of a various dye,  
Junonian Iris breeds a new supply  
to feed the clouds: impetuous rain descends.  
The bearded corn beneath the burden bends:  
defrauded clowns deplore their perish'd grain  
and the long labors of the year are vain.

### Flood

[274] Nor from his patrimonial Heaven alone  
is Jove content to pour his vengeance down.  
Aid from his brother of the seas he craves,  
to help him with auxiliary waves.  
The wat'ry tyrant calls his brooks and floods,  
who rowl from mossy caves (their moist abodes)  
and with perpetual urns his palace fill,  
to whom in brief, he thus imparts his will.

### Speech of Neptune

[277] "Small exhortation needs; your pow'rs employ:  
and this bad world, so Jove requires, destroy.  
Let loose the reins to all your watry store:  
bear down the dams, and open ev'ry door."

### The Great Flood

[281] The floods, by Nature enemies to land,  
and proudly swelling with their new command,  
remove the living stones that stopp'd their way,  
and gushing from their source, augment the sea.  
Then, with his mace, their monarch struck the ground.  
With inward trembling Earth receiv'd the wound,  
and rising streams a ready passage found.  
Th' expanded waters gather on the plain,  
they float the fields, and over-top the grain.  
Then rushing onwards, with a sweepy sway,  
bear flocks, and folds, and lab'ring hinds away.  
Nor safe their dwellings were, for, sapp'd by floods,  
their houses fell upon their household gods.  
The solid piles, too strongly built to fall,  
high o'er their heads, behold a wat'ry wall:  
now seas and Earth were in confusion lost,  
a world of waters, and without a coast.

### Destruction of Mankind

[293] One climbs a cliff; one in his boat is born,  
and ploughs above, where late he sow'd his corn.  
Others o'er chimney-tops and turrets row,  
and drop their anchors on the meads below,  
or downward driv'n, they bruise the tender vine,  
or tost aloft, are knock'd against a pine.  
And where of late the kids had cropp'd the grass,  
the monsters of the deep now take their place.  
Insulting Nereids on the cities ride,  
and wond'ring dolphins o'er the palace glide.  
On leaves, and masts of mighty oaks they brouze  
and their broad fins entangle in the boughs.  
The frightened wolf now swims amongst the sheep,  
the yellow lion wanders in the deep,  
his rapid force no longer helps the boar,  
the stag swims faster than he ran before.  
The fowls, long beating on their wings in vain,

despair of land, and drop into the main.  
Now hills, and vales no more distinction know,  
and levell'd Nature lies oppress'd below.  
The most of mortals perish in the flood,  
the small remainder dies for want of food.

### Deucalion and Pyrrha

[312] A mountain of stupendous height there stands  
betwixt th' Athenian and Boeotian lands,  
the bound of fruitful fields, while fields they were,  
but then a field of waters did appear:  
Parnassus is its name, whose forky rise  
mounts thro' the clouds, and mates the lofty skies.  
High on the summit of this dubious cliff,  
Deucalion wafting, moor'd his little skiff.  
He with his wife were only left behind  
of perish'd Man - they two were human kind.  
The mountain nymphs, and Themis they adore,  
and from her oracles relief implore.  
The most upright of mortal men was he;  
the most sincere, and holy woman, she.

### End of the Flood

[324] When Jupiter, surveying Earth from high,  
beheld it in a lake of water lie,  
that where so many millions lately liv'd  
but two, the best of either sex, surviv'd,  
he loos'd the northern wind. Fierce Boreas flies  
to puff away the clouds, and purge the skies:  
serenely, while he blows, the vapors driv'n  
discover Heav'n to Earth, and Earth to Heav'n.  
The billows fall, while Neptune lays his mace  
on the rough sea, and smooths its furrow'd face.  
Already Triton, at his call, appears  
above the waves; a Tyrian robe he wears;  
and in his hand a crooked trumpet bears.  
The sovereign bids him peaceful sounds inspire,  
and give the waves the signal to retire.  
His writhen shell he takes; whose narrow vent  
grows by degrees into a large extent,  
then gives it breath; the blast with doubling sound,  
runs the wide circuit of the world around.  
The sun first heard it, in his early east,  
and met the rattling echos in the west.  
The waters, list'ning to the trumpet's roar,  
obey the summons, and forsake the shore.  
A thin circumference of land appears,  
and Earth, but not at once, her visage rears,  
and peeps upon the seas from upper grounds.  
The streams, but just contain'd within their bounds,  
my slow degrees into their channels crawl;  
and Earth increases, as the waters fall.  
In longer time the tops of trees appear,

which mud on their dishonor'd branches bear.

### A New World

[348] At length the world was all restor'd to view;  
But desolate, and of a sickly hue:  
Nature beheld her self, and stood aghast,  
A dismal desart, and a silent waste,  
which when Deucalion, with a piteous look  
beheld, he wept, and thus to Pyrrha spoke:  
"Oh wife, oh sister, oh of all thy kind  
the best, and only creature left behind,  
by kindred, love, and now by dangers join'd,  
of multitudes, who breath'd the common air,  
we two remain; a species in a pair:  
the rest the seas have swallow'd; nor have we  
ev'n of this wretched life a certainty.  
The clouds are still above; and, while I speak,  
a second deluge o'er our heads may break.  
Should I be snatch'd from hence, and thou remain,  
without relief, or partner of thy pain,  
how couldst thou such a wretched life sustain?  
Should I be left, and thou be lost, the sea  
that buried her I lov'd, should bury me.  
Oh could our father his old arts inspire,  
and make me heir of his informing fire,  
that so I might abolish'd Man retrieve,  
and perish'd people in new souls might live.  
But Heav'n is pleas'd, nor ought we to complain,  
that we, th' examples of mankind, remain."  
He said; the careful couple join their tears:  
and then invoke the gods, with pious prayers.  
Thus, in devotion having eas'd their grief,  
from sacred oracles they seek relief,  
and to Cephysus' brook their way pursue:  
the stream was troubled, but the ford they knew,  
with living waters, in the fountain bred,  
they sprinkle first their garments, and their head,  
then took the way, which to the temple led.  
The roofs were all defil'd with moss and mire,  
the desart altars void of solemn fire.  
Before the gradual, prostrate they ador'd;  
the pavement kiss'd; and thus the saint implor'd.

### Prayer of Deucalion and Pyrrha

[377] "O righteous Themis, if the Pow'rs above  
by pray'rs are bent to pity, and to love,  
if human miseries can move their mind,  
if yet they can forgive, and yet be kind -  
tell how we may restore, by second birth,  
mankind, and people desolated Earth."

### Reply by Themis

[381] Then thus the gracious Goddess, nodding, said:

"Depart, and with your vestments veil your head,  
and stooping lowly down, with loos'd zones,  
throw each behind your backs, your mighty  
mother's bones."

### Mankind Restored

[384] Amaz'd the pair, and mute with wonder stand,  
'till Pyrrha first refus'd the dire command.

"Forbid it Heav'n," said she, "that I should tear  
those holy reliques from the sepulcher!"

They ponder'd the mysterious words again,  
for some new sense; and long they sought in vain.

At length Deucalion clear'd his cloudy brow,

and said: "The dark Enigma will allow  
a meaning, which, if well I understand,  
grom sacrilege will free the God's command,  
This Earth our mighty mother is; the stones  
in her capacious body are her bones:

These we must cast behind." With hope, and fear,  
the woman did the new solution hear.

The man diffides in his own augury,  
and doubts the Gods; yet both resolve to try.  
Descending from the mount, they first unbind  
their vests, and veil'd, they cast the stones behind.

The stones (a miracle to mortal view,  
but long tradition makes it pass for true)  
did first the rigor of their kind expel,  
and suppl'd into softness, as they fell;  
then swell'd, and swelling, by degrees grew warm  
and took the rudiments of human form.

Imperfect shapes: in marble such are seen,  
when the rude chizzel does the man begin;  
while yet the roughness of the stone remains,  
without the rising muscles, and the veins.

The sappy parts, and next resembling juice,  
were turn'd to moisture, for the body's use;  
supplying humors, blood, and nourishment.

The rest, too solid to receive a bent,  
converts to bones, and what was once a vein,  
its former name and Nature did retain.

By help of pow'r divine, in little space,  
what the man threw, assum'd a manly face,  
and what the wife, renew'd the female race.

Hence we derive our nature: born to bear  
Laborious life; and harden'd into care.

