

Perseus, so the legends say, was a son of Zeus. In Greek mythology, there were many sons of Zeus.

Some were gods (born to "divine mothers"), such as: Apollo, Ares, Hephaestus, Hermes. Others were demigods (born to mortal mothers), such as: Heracles (also known as Hercules), Dionysus and Minos.

Perseus, son of Zeus, was also a demigod. His intellect and physical abilities helped him to accomplish what no mortal man could do.

For example ... he killed the Gorgon (meaning he was able to cut off Medusa's head without looking at her) and threw a discus so far he stunned himself (when it flew into rows of spectators, killing someone).

Although the gods of Greek mythology were divine, demigods were mortal (meaning they would die). As a demigod, Perseus' life would eventually end. There are different versions of that part of his story.

Then ... there were always the oracles, and their predictions, to think about (if one believed in the Greek gods). The most famous prediction about Perseus, for example, is that he would ultimately kill his own grandfather (Acrisius).

Acrisius took extraordinary measures, to avoid such a catastrophe, but ... in the Greek world ... how could one really circumvent an oracle's prediction?

We pick up Perseus' story here ...

The oracle's prediction did come true, regarding the death of Acrisius, but the king was an old man when he died of an accident:

King Acrisius heard of his grandson's great deed. Fearing Perseus would seek him out, Acrisius hid on the remote island of Larissa.

Athletic games were held annually on Larissa [look south of Mt Olympus] and that year Perseus competed in the discus event. He threw the discus and watched in amazement as it flew far into the rows of spectators, striking an old beggar on the head. The beggar was killed instantly. He was Acrisius, who had hidden in the crowd to watch his grandson. And so the prophecy was fulfilled. (Perseus the Gorgon-Slayer, by Jane O'Loughlin and Katharine Stafford, page 32.)

In the end, at least according to one version of the legend, Perseus himself was killed by looking at the Gorgon's head. We have the story from a 5th-6th century writer, John Malalas, which is split into paragraphs here for easier reading:

After some time King Cepheus, the father of Andromeda, came against him [that is, Perseus] from Aethiopia [a place which some scholars believe to be Joppa, a Phoenician town], and made war upon him. Cepheus was unable to see because of old age.

Perseus, hearing that he was making war on him, became very angry and went out against him brandishing the head [of Medusa, which Perseus still had], and he showed it to him. Because he was unable to see, Cepheus rode against him on his horse.

Perseus did not realize that he could not see, and reasoned that the head of the Gorgon he held was no longer working. So he turned it towards himself and looked at it. He was blinded and frozen like a corpse and killed. (John Malalas, pages 38-39 Dindorf [cf George Cedrenus 1.41], quoted in Perseus, by Daniel Ogden, at page 32.)

Other accounts put the end of Perseus differently. Although he was the son of Zeus, he was just a demigod (half man, half god), which meant that he died (like other mortals). Even so, according to legend, Perseus became a beautiful constellation (as did Andromeda).

He and Andromeda, his wife, had many children and (so the story goes) ultimately lived in Mycennae. A famous Greek hero, the lion-killing Heracles, was one of their descendants. So, it is said, were the Persians (whom Leonidas and the 300 Spartans fought at the Battle of Thermopylae):

But another report is prevalent throughout Greece that Xerxes sent a herald to Argos before he set out on his expedition against Greece; and it is related that he, on his arrival, said: "Men of Argos, King Xerxes speaks thus to you. We are of opinion that Perses, from whom we are sprung, was son of Perseus, son of Danae, born of Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus. Thus, then, we must be your descendants; it is, therefore, neither right that we should lead an army against our progenitors, nor that you should assist others, and be opposed to us; but should remain quiet by yourselves: and if I succeed according to my wish, I shall esteem none greater than you." (Herodotus - Book VII, Polymnia, page 414.)

Isn't that an interesting, unexpected twist on the "300" story?

See, also:

Perseus - Clash of the Titans

Perseus - Severs the Head of Medusa

Credits:

Clip from "The Storyteller: Greek Myths," Perseus & the Gorgon (1991). Online, courtesy YouTube.

Creator:

Jim Henson

Director:

David Garfath

Writers:

Anthony Minghella (creator) and

Nigel Williams (screenplay)

From a U.K. television series:

"The Storyteller: Greek Myths" (1990)

Original Air Date:

December 8, 1991 (Season 1, Episode 2)

Cast:

Michael Gambon - The Storyteller

Brian Henson - The Dog (voice)

Jeremy Gilley - Perseus

Frances Barber - Medusa

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Perseus-Son-of-Zeus1>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Perseus-Son-of-Zeus1>