



Having passed through Inferno's Gate, Dante and Virgil soon see a ship coming toward them. It is helmed by Phlegyas, a ferryman on the River Styx.

In ancient mythology, the Styx is the river of the underworld. Should Dante and Virgil get into the boat? If they do, where will they go? What will they see?

Remember ... they have already passed through the gate which warns everyone who enters to "abandon all hope." Is Dante about to see what abandoning hope means?

The beginning of Canto VIII sets the scene. Gustav Dore's engraving, depicted in this image, specifically illustrates lines 27-29 (the last three in this Canto-VIII excerpt):

*MY theme pursuing, I relate that ere
We reach'd the lofty turret's base, our eyes
Its height ascended, where two cressets hung
We mark'd, and from afar another light
Return the signal, so remote, that scarce
The eye could catch its beam. I turning round
To the deep source of knowledge [Virgil], thus inquir'd:
"Say what this means? and what that other light
In answer set? what agency doth this?"*

*"There on the filthy waters," he replied,
"E'en now what next awaits us mayst thou see,
If the marsh-gender'd fog conceal it not."*

*Never was arrow from the cord dismiss'd,
That ran its way so nimbly through the air,
As a small bark [a type of boat], that through the waves I spied
Toward us coming, under the sole sway
Of one that ferried it, who cried aloud:
"Art thou arriv'd, fell spirit?"—"Phlegyas, Phlegyas,
This time thou criest in vain," my lord [Virgil] replied;
"No longer shalt thou have us, but while o'er
The slimy pool we pass." As one who hears
Of some great wrong he hath sustain'd, whereat
Inly he pines; so Phlegyas inly pin'd
In his fierce ire. My guide [Virgil] descending stepp'd
Into the skiff, and bade me enter next
Close at his side; nor till my entrance seem'd
The vessel freighted. Soon as both embark'd,
Cutting the waves, goes on the ancient prow,
More deeply than with others it is wont.*

In short ... Phlegyas is about to take Dante and Virgil on a frightening trip to the City of Dis.

What (and where) is the City of Dis? In Dante's *Inferno*, Dis is Lower Hell. Dis, in Dante's view, is where demons throng. (See this [chart depicting the various layers of Dante's Inferno](#).)

Even the water, of the River Styx, is filled with people who seem to have no hope.

Click on the image, depicting Dore's illustration, for a better view.

Credits:

Gustave Dore created this engraving to be included in a version of the "Divine Comedy" which was published in 1890. It is from "Dante Alighieri's Inferno from the Original by Dante Alighieri and Illustrated with the Designs of Gustave Doré" (New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1890).

Public Domain

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Boatman-of-the-Styx-0>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Boatman-of-the-Styx-0>