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# READ

## READING SKILLSMASTER

### The Stone People: A Greek Myth

All over Earth people had grown wicked. They lied and cheated and did not honor the gods.

Zeus grew very angry. Disguised as a poor traveler, he descended Mount Olympus, and what he saw on Earth disgusted him. The men were arrogant, the women, vain and silly. The children stole and lied and fought like snarling dogs.

Zeus wandered about until he reached the home of Lycaon's sons. Lycaon had been a great man who made sacrifices to the gods. But his sons worshiped only their money. "I am a poor traveler," Zeus told one son. "Have you room for me at your table?"

The son let the old beggar in. "Sit here," he said, gesturing to a crude wooden table far from the fire. He served Zeus a tepid, greasy bowl of soup filled with sheep intestines. Zeus stared at the slop.

"Why do you not eat?" the son asked, laughing with scorn. "Are you too proud to accept what I offer?"

In one swipe, Zeus upset the table and the loathsome soup. Then, with a bolt of lightning, he turned the arrogant man into a mangy wolf.

Zeus stormed back to Mount Olympus, determined to clean Earth of such evil. He gathered dark thunderheads and threw great bolts of lightning. The winds blew wildly. Then Zeus let loose a great flood.

He called upon Poseidon, the god of the sea, to help him. Great waves crashed over beaches and rushed through the towns. Roaring rivers rose and drowned the land and all its people. Except for two.

Deucalion was the son of Prometheus, the wisest of all men. Prometheus had tasted Zeus' anger: He had felt the punishing vulture's beak of that wrath while chained for giving fire to mortals. Prometheus warned his son of the coming flood and bid him build a great wooden chest and fill it with food and drinking water. Then he told his son to board the chest with his wife, Pyrrha, and to seal its lid shut.

For nine days, rain covered the earth. For nine days, Pyrrha and Deucalion huddled in fear as waves tossed the chest; but it remained afloat. On the tenth day, the tempest quieted and the rain ceased. Slowly, the waters subsided, and the wooden chest came to rest on a rocky ledge on Mount Parnassus. Pyrrha and Deucalion bravely unlatched the box and raised its lid. They stepped out onto still-wet rocks. All around them, the world was gray and cold and dead.

"There is no one but us," Pyrrha murmured in awe.

"We are the only living creatures in a drowned world," said Deucalion.

The couple entered a temple and made a sacrifice to the gods for their safe delivery. But great sadness and loneliness filled their hearts. At the seaweed-covered altar they pleaded humbly that humankind be reborn. Zeus took pity and caused the waters to withdraw further. Then his voice bellowed, "Cast behind you the bones of your mother!"

Pyrrha was struck with horror and confusion. "My mother is dead!" she cried. "She has drowned."

Deucalion was equally terrified. "My mother is also dead. I dare not cast her bones!"

The voice said no more. The two mortals stared at one another. Slowly, an idea came to them: "The earth is also our mother," Pyrrha said.

"Could these be her bones?" asked Deucalion. Behind him were boulders bleached from the flood.

Pyrrha lifted a boulder in her arms and cast it down the hill. It rolled and bounced, and when it came to rest against a tree, the stone became a fluid shape. Suddenly, a woman rose from the liquid! Deucalion heaved a white boulder. Before it stopped tumbling, it assumed the body of a man, who rolled to his feet and began to walk toward the receding river. "We may cast these bones without doing wrong," Pyrrha said.

One after another, the mortals pried boulders from the earth and tossed them down the mountain. In this way, the Stone People were born. Earth was renewed with an enduring race, strong enough to rescue the land from the evil of those who had lived before them and who had lost sight of what was good and right in the world.

#### Questions

- How was Lycaon different from his son?  
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- How did Lycaon's son show his scorn for Zeus?  
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- How did Zeus make Lycaon's son pay for the god's ill treatment?  
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- What was it about humans that caused Zeus to flood the earth?  
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- How was Prometheus' son different from Lycaon's son?  
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- How did Deucalion and Pyrrha survive Zeus' anger?  
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- Why did Zeus take pity on the two survivors?  
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- What were the "mother's bones"? \_\_\_\_\_
- Why were the new people made from stone? \_\_\_\_\_
- What more familiar story does this myth remind you of?  
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