

The *Theogony* of Hesiod

Lines 721-819 – The Cosmos – From Starry Sky to Tartaros Far Below

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"Let him hear the advice of Hesiod. . . . The advice of Hesiod is good." —Aristotle

"Lampon . . . greatly honors the sayings of Hesiod, the one he declares and recommends to his sons."
—Pindar

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Reading 10

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This reading comes from the Cave's
The Best of Hesiod's Theogony & Works and Days
(where it appears as chapter twelve).

FOR THE DISTANCE IS just as great from the earth to gloomy Tartaros. A bronze anvil falling down from the sky for nine nights and days would reach the earth on the tenth day just as a bronze anvil falling down from the earth for nine nights and days would come to Tartaros on the tenth. A wall of bronze runs around Tartaros, and on all sides night flows in three layers around its neck. Yet the roots of earth and the barren sea grow above it.

And there, beneath the shadowy gloom of the netherworld below, the Titan gods [730] are hidden away by the will of cloud-gathering Zeus in a damp,

moldy place at the very edge of huge earth. And they cannot escape because Poseidon put there gates of bronze and a wall that goes around both sides. Gyges, Kottos, and great-spirited Briareos (Obriareos) dwell there, the reliable guards of aegis-bearing Zeus.

And there is the beginning and the end, the sources and limits of murky earth and gloomy Tartaros, and of the barren sea and the starry sky, and of everything, one thing after another. It is painful, damp and moldy there—something which even the gods abhor. [740] It is a chasm, a great gulf. And once a man has passed

inside the gates he would not come to the bottom of the chasm even if he travelled for a whole year. But he would be carried here and there by one grievous and furious storm after another. And this monstrosity is awful for the immortal gods as well.

There also stands the frightful house of dark Night buried within dark clouds. It is before this house that the son of Iapetos, Atlas, stands immovably and tirelessly holds up the far-spread sky with his hands and head. And it is here where Night and Day draw near and greet each other as they pass the great bronze threshold. [750] While the one is about to go down into the house, the other comes out at the door so that the house never holds them both within. But one is always outside the house wandering over the earth while the other remains at home awaiting her own departure time. The one holds much-seeing light for those on earth, while the other—destructive Night, buried in misty clouds—holds in her arms Sleep, the brother of Death.

And there the children of dark Night, the frightful gods Sleep and Death, have their houses. [760] The shining Sun never looks at them with his rays of light when he goes up into the sky or when he goes down again from the sky. One of them wanders over the earth and the broad back of the sea, quiet and kind to men. But the other has an iron heart and feelings within his chest that are pitiless as bronze. Once he seizes any human being, he keeps him. Even the immortal gods hate this one.

There beneath the earth stand the echoing halls of strong Hades and of dread Persephone.

And in front of them a terrible hound keeps guard. [770] Without pity, the dog employs an evil trick: he greets those going in with a wag of his tail

and the wiggling of his ears. But he doesn't let them go out again, backward. Instead he watches them closely and eats those he catches going out of the gates of strong Hades and dread Persephone.

And the goddess dwells there, terrible Styx, who is hated by the immortals. She is the oldest daughter of back-flowing Ocean. She dwells apart from the gods in a glorious house covered over with large stones.

[778-812] *Whenever the gods strive and quarrel with one another, and a god is suspected of telling a falsehood, Zeus sends the messenger Iris, the daughter of Thaumas, to fetch a golden jug full of Styx's cold water. The suspected one then pours out a libation with this water and swears an oath. If the oath is false, punishment follows in the form of an illness. The god falls into a heavy trance for a year, breathless and without voice, eating neither ambrosia nor nectar. After the year is up, the god spends another nine years apart from the gods in exile, never feasting with them or participating in their assemblies. Finally, the god rejoins the other immortals in the tenth year.*

Hesiod recaps the most important points made in this part of the Theogony: Styx lives near the sources and limits of earth and Tartaros, the sea and sky, and near the unmoved and "self-generated" bronze threshold with long roots.

[813-819] And ... away from all the gods the Titans dwell beyond gloomy Chaos. But the glorious allies of loud-thundering Zeus dwell in houses upon Ocean's foundations—both Kottos and Gyges. But the heavy-sounding Earth-shaker made Briareos, since he was noble, his son by marriage. He gave him his daughter Kymopoleia to marry.

So ends Reading 10, "The Cosmos – From Starry Sky to Tartaros Far Below." **See you in Reading 11, "Zeus Fights Typhoeus – Zeus Comes to Rule and Nobly Divides the Honors."**



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