

The *Odyssey* of Homer

Book 5

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Book 5

Odysseus Sails to Scheria (the Phaeacians)

Reading 5

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This reading comes from the Cave's

The Best of Homer's Odyssey.

NOW DAWN AROSE FROM her bed beside noble Tithonos to carry light to the immortals and the mortals. And the gods met in council. Among them was high-thundering Zeus, whose power is greatest. Athena began to tell them about the many sorrows of Odysseus, for she was bothered by his stay at the dwelling of the nymph Calypso.

"Father Zeus and all you other blessed gods who live forever, I hope there will never be such a thing as a kind and well-disposed scepter-bearing king anymore, nor one who knows what is right and reigns fairly. [10] No—I hope they will all be harsh and unjust. I hope this because every last one of his people has forgotten Odysseus, the man who ruled them

gently as though he were their father. Ah, but there he is lying in great pain upon the island where the nymph Calypso dwells. Keeping him there by force, she will not let him go, and so he does not have the power to return home to the land of his fathers."

16-28 Athena reminds Zeus that Odysseus has no way to get home, and now the suitors are waiting in ambush to slay Telemachus.

Hearing her, Zeus is shocked by Athena's hope for future rulers. He tells her to bring Telemachus home by her own wisdom and reminds her of her plan to see Odysseus home so that he will get his revenge. He then turns to his son Hermes and orders him to take a message to Calypso.

29-43 “Hermes, since you in all other things are my messenger, [30] go and tell the beautiful-haired nymph my infallible plan—that stouthearted Odysseus may now return home. He may go without the escort of the gods or of mortal men. But upon a well-fastened raft, and after suffering miserable woe, he may come to fertile Scheria, the land of the Phaeacians, who were born the near kin of the gods, on the twentieth day. These people will wholeheartedly honor him as if he were a god, and they will send him in a ship to his dear fatherland. They will do this after giving him loads of bronze and gold and clothing—more than Odysseus would have ever squeezed and taken from Troy itself [40] had he returned unharmed with his allotted share of plunder. Just as I have explained, then, it is his fate to see those who are dear to him, to come to his high-roofed house in his own fatherland.”

That’s what Zeus said. And the messenger of Zeus, the slayer of Argus, did not disobey.

44-84 *Hermes speeds off. Like a low-flying seabird he flies over the water to Calypso’s distant island and cave. Arriving at her home, he marvels at its lush vegetation, the various trees and grape vines heavy with clusters, and the many kinds of birds. There is a great fire burning on the hearth, and nearby the nymph is weaving upon a great loom, singing. When he enters her cave dwelling, Calypso immediately recognizes him, “for the immortal gods are not unknown to one another” no matter how far apart they may dwell.*

85-90 And now Calypso, the heavenly goddess, questioned Hermes after seating him on a radiant and shining chair. “Tell me, Hermes of the golden wand, why have you come? I revere you and hold you dear, but you haven’t visited often before now. So, tell me what is on your mind. My spirit commands me to accomplish it [90] if I have the power to do it and if it is something that can be done.”

91-115 *Before hearing his reply, Calypso offers him the usual refreshment given to guests. Rather than bread and wine, however, she sets a full table of ambrosia before him*

and pours out cups of nectar—the food and drink of the gods. Once he eats and is satisfied, Hermes explains his mission from Zeus. She must release Odysseus so that he might make his fated journey home to his friends, house, and land.

116-120 Calypso, the divine goddess, shuddered! And speaking with winged words, she said, “You gods are cruel and jealous above all others! You bear a grudge against any goddess that openly goes to bed with a man [120] if she makes him her cherished lover.”

121-148 *Calypso offers a few examples. Artemis, for instance, slew Dawn’s lover Orion, and Zeus evaporated Demeter’s man Iasion with a thunderbolt. And now me, she complains—now the gods will take Odysseus from her, a man she saved when his ship sank, and his comrades perished. She loves and cherishes him and hopes to make him immortal and ageless. Still, she will give in to the will of Zeus, she says, as it is impossible to get around it. She will let him go. And more, she will give him good counsel on how best to make his way home.*

Hermes reminds her to do as she promised for fear of Zeus’ wrath. Then he leaves the island.

149-161 And so the queenly nymph went to greathearted Odysseus [150] after she had heard the message of Zeus. She found him sitting on the shore.

His eyes were never dry from all the tears he shed, and his sweet life drained as he mourned for his return home since the nymph no longer pleased him. He always passed the night by Calypso’s side in her hollow cave dwelling. Yet he was unwilling and did it because he had to, whereas she was willing. During the day he sat upon the rocks and the sandy seashore racking his spirit with tears, heart-groans, and grief. With a clear view of the barren sea, he let the tears flow.

Drawing near to Odysseus now, the divine goddess said to him, [160] “Ill-fated man, do not mourn any longer here upon the beach nor let the years of your life waste away. I will now willingly send you off.”

162-213 *Calypso explains how Odysseus will make a raft*

and how she will provision him with clothing, water, wine, and food “to restrain his hunger,” as well as wind for the sail. Odysseus doubts her good intentions and promises not to go home unless she swears that she is willing to let him leave. Smiling, she swears by Earth, Sky, and the river Styx that she is not plotting to harm him. Rather, she feels compassion for him and will give him her honest counsel. With that, she brings him to her cave dwelling and feeds him the food and drink “that mortal men usually consume,” while she feasts on ambrosia and nectar. Finally, once they’re both satisfied, she asks him why he must return home even though she would make him immortal if he remained with her. Is his wife truly that remarkable to look at? she asks. Not only that, but she warns him that he must suffer much before reaching his homeland.

214-224 In reply, Odysseus of many counsels said to her, “Queen goddess, do not be angry with me. I myself know that in comparison with you thoughtful Penelope is nothing to look at in form or in stature. This is because she is mortal whereas you are immortal and ageless. Even so, every day [220] I long and wish to go home and see the day of my return. And if a god shipwrecks me again upon the wine-faced sea, then I will endure that too with a spirit in my chest that is able to endure sorrow and misfortune. For I have already suffered very much upon the waves of the sea, and I have toiled even more in battle. If I’m meant to undergo even more suffering than this, then let it happen!”

225-261 *The sun sets and the two retire to “delight in love” for the night. The following day Calypso gives Odysseus the equipment necessary for making a raft. After felling twenty trees, he builds the raft like a man well-skilled and knowledgeable in the art of carpentry. He lastly sets the mast and attaches a sail made of cloth provided by Calypso.*

262-270 The fourth day came, and Odysseus had finished everything. So, on the fifth day divine Calypso sent him from the island after giving him a bath and putting fragrant clothes on him. The goddess also gave him a skin full of dark wine, another large one

full of water, and a leather sack full of other provisions for his journey. And she set many other good things in the raft that would satisfy his many desires. Finally, she sent him a fair wind, one kindly and warm.

Full of joy, then, godlike Odysseus let the sail unfurl before the wind. [270] And with the rudder he skillfully steered from where he sat.

271-277 *Odysseus sails without sleep, steering with the help of the stars.*

278-281 He sailed for seventeen days across the sea. On the eighteenth day, there appeared nearest to him the thickly wooded mountains that rise from the [280] land of the Phaeacians. The island looked like a hide-covered shield rising from the misty sea.

282-296 *Just as Odysseus is about to reach the island, Poseidon spots him on his way back from feasting with the Ethiopians. And seeing him, he’s angry!—still angry with Odysseus over the blinding of his son, Polyphemus, and irritated with the gods for changing their plans. Now he vows to deliver the hero over to a full measure of misfortune, even if he is near to Scheria where he is fated to escape all the misery he has known. Consequently, Poseidon stirs the sea with his great trident and fosters rushing winds that blow tall waves toward Odysseus’ raft. And now a massive wave is rolling straight for him!*

297-316 And right then Odysseus’ knees were loosened beneath him, and his dear heart was unstrung. Frustrated and angry he spoke to his greathearted spirit:

“Ah me! I am a wretched man! What will happen to me now? [300] I fear that the goddess spoke the infallible truth when she said that I would suffer my fill of pain upon the sea before I came to my homeland. Now it’s happening! Look at the many clouds Zeus has scattered in the wide sky. And see him stir the sea. And feel the winds that blast me now. Now I am utterly destroyed! My salvation is gone! Three times—no, four times blessed—were those Danaans who died upon the wide plain of Troy to benefit the

sons of Atreus. I wish that I had died and met my allotted destiny on that day when a multitude of Trojans hurled bronze-tipped spears at me [310] as we fought over the body of Achilles, the son of Peleus. Then I would have received my share of funeral gifts and honors, and the Achaeans would have broadcast my fame and glory. But now it is my portion to be conquered by a pathetic death."

Then—while he was yet speaking—a massive wave crashed on him from above, sweeping over him with might and whirling his raft around. He fell far from the raft and sent the rudder flying from his hand.

317-436 *Odysseus plunges into the water and is held under thanks to the waves and his heavy clothing. Above him the wind snaps the raft's mast. When he finally reaches the surface, he makes a swimming dash for the raft, seizes it, and hoists himself aboard where he sits in the middle, buffeted by the winds this way and that.*

From the depths of the sea, the once human but now immortal nymph Ino observes Odysseus' plight and pities him. She comes up to him and tells him how to save himself. He should strip down, leave the raft, and swim for Scheria, "where you are fated to make your escape." Poseidon's anger will not destroy him, she says. She gives him an immortal veil to tie around his chest. It will preserve his life until he reaches the island of the Phaeacians. After commanding him to return the veil to the sea once ashore, she vanishes.

Odysseus is skeptical. Rather than trusting the nymph, he resolves to stay and endure his pains upon the raft until it breaks up. It's not for long. Just then Poseidon sends a towering wave that shatters the raft. Still, Odysseus hangs on—to one plank of wood. Just barely. As soon as he can, though, he strips off his clothes, ties the veil around his chest, and hurls his body toward the island, willing himself to make it to the shore.

Observing Odysseus' move, Poseidon determines to make his swim hard and full of suffering. Athena, however, has other plans. When Poseidon departs for his glorious house at Aegae, she calms the winds and helps to bring him to the island. Nevertheless, the swim is long and hard. Tossed by the waves and fearing destruction all the way,

by fish or sea monster, he swims for two days and nights before finally spotting the island on the third day. And now he's so close that a man could have heard him shout had he been standing there on the shore. Even so, he has to fight the angry surf as it crashes against the cliffs, rocks, and reef. So close, Odysseus dreads being swept out to sea once again. He knows that Poseidon still hates him. Just then, a great wave carries him toward a jagged promontory, rough with rocks and reef. He grabs for a jutting rock, but another wave covers him and threatens to suck him back into the deep sea.

436-453 Then, beyond his fate, wretched Odysseus would have been destroyed if bright-eyed Athena had not given him presence of mind. Emerging from the waves that thundered along the shore, he swam outside, eying the land in the hope of finding [440] a sloping beach or a harbor from the sea.

As he swam, he reached the mouth of a beautifully flowing river—the best place to come ashore. There were no rocks, and the place would shelter him from the breeze.

Feeling the river flowing into the sea, he prayed in his spirit, "Hear me, lord, whoever you are! To you I come, you the fulfillment of all my prayers as I was escaping the sea and Poseidon's abuse. Even the immortal gods revere the wandering man who comes to them. Just so I now come to your flow and your knees after much suffering and toil. [450] But pity me, lord. I pray as your suppliant."

That's what Odysseus said. And right away the god stilled his flow and settled the waves, making the sea calm before him, and he brought him safely into the river's mouth.

454-473 *Waterlogged and beat up, Odysseus rests and catches his breath. Once revived, he returns the immortal veil to the sea nymph Ino before anxiously mulling over what to do. He considers staying by the water or going up into the woods. Either way has its dangers. He fears the bitter cold on the one hand and preying animals on the other.*

474-477 As he pondered what to do in this way, this

BOOK 5 ▪ ODYSSEUS SAILS TO SCHERIA (THE PHAEACIANS)

conclusion seemed to him the better one: he walked into the wood that was right by the river's water and found an opening. There he crept under a pair of shrubs sprung from a single spot—the one was wild olive, the other common.

478-490 *Beneath these shrubs, Odysseus is protected from*

the wind and rain. He makes for himself a bed of leaves and lays down within the pile, thereby keeping warm.

491-493 In this manner Odysseus hid himself in the leaves. And upon his eyes Athena poured out sleep so that it might cover his eyelids on every side and bring his toilsome troubles to an end.

So ends Book 5. **See you in Book 6, "Odysseus Meets Nausicaa."**

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