

Hesiod – General Summary of the *Theogony*

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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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The following summary comes from the Cave's
The Best of Hesiod's Theogony & Works and Days.

ONE 1-103 HYMN TO THE HELIKONIAN MUSES—HESIOD'S VOCATION TO SING Hesiod begins with the Muses. Born of Memory (Mnemosyne) and Zeus, the nine Helikonian Muses sing and dance, glorifying the gods and men in their songs. They hymn Zeus, who "is now king in the sky," and his wife Hera, and Apollo and Artemis, and Poseidon, Athena, and Aphrodite, as well as many other gods. As for men, Hesiod explains that even though kings hail from Zeus and poet-singers from the Muses and Apollo, the Muses grant gifts to both. To kings they give skillful and gentle speech so they may pronounce judgments with wisdom. To poet-singers they offer sweet speech so they may relieve the overburdened man of sorrows. Hesiod is one of these poet-singers, called by the Muses to sing while herding his sheep on Mount Helikon.

TWO 104-125 BIRTH OF THE EARLIEST GODS—CHAOS, DESIRE, EARTH, NIGHT & OTHERS Hesiod asks the Muses to inspire him with a song about the earliest gods, about how the gods came to exist (how they were born), and about how they apportioned the wealth of the cosmos, and how some gods came to possess Olympus, dwelling on the sacred mountain. His song begins with the birth of Chaos, "the god who came into being first." Coming after Chaos are Earth (Gaia) and Desire (Eros), followed by the offspring of Chaos,

Darkness (Erebos) and Night (Nyx), and Night's offspring, bright upper Air (Aether) and Day (Hēmera).

THREE 126-210 EARTH AND SKY—THEIR OFFSPRING AND THE TITAN AMBUSH Earth (Gaia) independently gives birth to Sky (Ouranos), Sea (Pontos), the Nymphs, and others. Together, Sky and Earth engender the Titans, including Kronos, as well as the three Cyclopes and the three hundred-handers. Unhappy, Sky stuffs Earth with their children, not letting them see the light of day. Upset at this and in pain, Earth conspires with her children against Sky. Kronos courageously takes charge and lops off his father's genitals with a saw-toothed sickle made by Earth. The Furies (Erinyes), Giants, and Nymphs are born from the bloody drops that fall to Earth. Aphrodite is born from the foam that forms around Sky's genitals when they fall into the sea. She's escorted by Desire (Eros) and Longing (Himeros). Angry, Sky calls his offspring "Titans," meaning, "the ones who stretch out," and promises revenge.

FOUR 211-232 NIGHT'S OFFSPRING—AND THE OFFSPRING OF STRIFE Night gives birth to the gods that may be associated with darkness—including Death (Thanatos), Sleep (Hypnos), Dreams (Oneiroi), Woe (Oizus), the three Fates (Moirai), Nemesis (Indignation), Deceit (Apatē), affectionate Love (Philotēs), and Old Age (Gēras), among others. Night also gives birth to Strife (Eris). Strife in turn engenders many misery-bringing gods—Toil (Ponos), Hunger (Limos), Pain (Algos), Quarrels (Neikea), Battles (Machai), Murder (Phonos), Lawlessness (Dysnomia), and Oath (Horkos), among others.

FIVE 233-336 SEA'S OFFSPRING—AND LATER GENERATIONS DESCENDING FROM SEA Sea (Pontos) fathers Nereus, the Old Man, as well as Thaumas, Phorkys, Keto, and Eurybia. With Thaumas, Elektra brings into the world Iris and the Harpies. From Nereus and Doris are born the fifty Nereids, two of whom are Thetis and Amphitrite. With Phorkys, Keto engenders the Graiai and the Gorgons, including Medusa, whom Perseus kills. Chrysaor and Pegasus leap out from Medusa's severed head. With Kallirhoe, Chrysaor fathers Geryones. Returning to Keto, she also gives birth to Echidna, who, with Typhon, engenders various beasts: the dogs Orthos and Kerberos; the Lernaean Hydra, whom Heracles kills; and the three-headed Chimaera. Hesiod also relates the births of the Sphinx and the Nemean lion, whom Heracles overpowers.

SIX 337-410 OFFSPRING OF THE TITANS—OF OCEAN AND TETHYS; OF HYPERION AND THEIA; OF KREIOS (AND EURYBIA); OF KOIOS AND PHOEBE; AND LATER GENERATIONS With Ocean (Okeanos), Tethys engenders thousands of daughters and sons, the Okeanids, including Peithō (Persuasion), Dione, Plouto, Europa, Metis (Wise Counsel), Asia, Calypso, and Tychē (Chance or Fortune), as well as the rivers Meander, Ister (the Danube), and Scamander, and the river Styx, by whom the gods swear. With Pallas, Styx brings Nikē (Victory) into the world, among others. When Zeus promises honors and privileges to his allies, Styx sides with him. Hyperion and Theia engender Sun (Helios), Moon (Selēnē), and Dawn (Ēōs), who, with Astraios, gives birth to the three winds, Zephyros, Boreas, and Notos, as well as various stars. With Koios, Phoebe gives birth to Leto and Asteria, the mother of Hekate, whom Hesiod next hymns.

SEVEN 411-452 HYMN TO HEKATE—THE HONORED GODDESS With Perses, Asteria gives birth to Hekate. Zeus honors her with many gifts. The other immortals also honor her. Humans call upon the goddess, knowing she is able to benefit or harm them in whatever they do. If Hekate is willing, she is able to make a man happy in prosperity, making him preeminent in the assembly, victorious in battle, lucky in athletic competitions, successful in fishing and in increasing his livestock.

EIGHT 453-506 KRONOS AND RHEA'S OFFSPRING—ZEUS THE CONQUEROR With Kronos, Rhea brings into the world Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus. Kronos swallows each child as he or she is born to prevent the fated rule of one of his children, namely Zeus. Upset by Kronos' behavior, Rhea plots to trick him with the aid of her parents, Earth and Sky. She hides Zeus away on Crete, and in his place, she gives Kronos a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes to swallow. Zeus grows and returns to conquer his father. He also frees the three Cyclopes, and they give him thunder and lightning.

NINE 507-561 IAPETOS AND KLYMENE'S OFFSPRING—PROMETHEUS TRICKS ZEUS With Iapetos, Klymene gives birth to Atlas, Menoitios, Prometheus, and Epimetheus. Each has his own burden to bear—Atlas holds up the far-spread sky; Menoitios is imprisoned in Darkness (Erebos); Prometheus, chained to a pillar, experiences ongoing torture in the form of an eagle; and Epimetheus receives "a young maiden into his house." Hesiod explains Prometheus' punishment: it is because he tried to trick Zeus when the sacrificial portions were being chosen at Mekone.

TEN 562-616 ZEUS PUNISHES MORTAL MEN—FIRE AND THE FIRST WOMAN Remembering Prometheus' trick, Zeus prevents humans from using fire. Nevertheless, Prometheus steals fire and gives it to them. Consequently, Zeus orders Hephaestus to make from earth the young maiden from whom all other women will come. Athena dresses and crowns her with a beautiful crown made by Hephaestus. Woman is meant to be an evil that will offset the good humans have in fire. Marriage is both good and bad. Still, remaining unmarried is also a problem. The point? One cannot cheat Zeus—at least one cannot get away with it.

ELEVEN 617-720 THE TITANOMACHY—ZEUS BATTLES THE TITANS Zeus and the other sons and daughters of Kronos and Rhea free the fifty-headed hundred-handers Briareos, Kottos, and Gyges (offspring of Earth and Sky) from their imprisonment beneath the earth. They do this so that the three will join with them in the long war they've been waging against the Titans, the children of Earth and Sky, including Kronos. The Titans fight from Mount Othrys; Zeus and the younger gods from Mount Olympus. The prize is "victory and the power to rule." Zeus flashes lightning and thunders, causing a great conflagration of earth and sea. After a show of fireworks, the nectar and ambrosia-fortified hundred-handers defeat the Titans with a storm of rocks and imprison them beneath the earth.

TWELVE 721-819 THE COSMOS—FROM STARRY SKY TO TARTAROS FAR BELOW Without precision, Hesiod explains the layout of the cosmos, the order of things. Far below the starry sky are the earth, sea, and great ocean. Tartaros is below the earth, as well as the house of Night, where Night and Day greet each other, and the houses of Sleep and Death. The Titans are imprisoned in Tartaros, behind a wall of bronze built by Poseidon. Kottos, Gyges, and Briareos guard them there. The house of Hades and Persephone is also beneath the earth. The goddess Styx dwells nearby, the divine river by which the gods swear when a god is suspected of lying. Between Earth and Tartaros is a great chasm, where the roots of earth and sea extend all the way down to Tartaros.

THIRTEEN 820-885 ZEUS FIGHTS TYPHOEUS—ZEUS COMES TO RULE AND NOBLY DIVIDE THE HONORS After the Titanomachy, Earth gives birth to stormy Typhoeus, who has a hundred snake heads with fire-flashing eyes and terrible voices. Typhoeus nearly comes to rule the gods and men, but Zeus observes his birth and fights the windy monster. Thunder sounds, lightning flashes, hurricane-force winds blow, and long, tall waves crash as the two fight. Far below, Hades and the Titans tremble. Finally, Zeus defeats him, burning his many snake

heads, and hurls Typhoeus into Tartaros beneath the earth. From him come harmful, stormy winds. Now that he and the Titans are vanquished, the blessed gods ask Zeus to rule them. He does, dividing the honors in a noble manner.

FOURTEEN 886-962 ZEUS MAINTAINS HIS POWER—HIS MANY WIVES, BED-PARTNERS, AND OFFSPRING Zeus takes on many wives and bed-partners, fathering many children. With Metis, he fathers Athena—but rather than from Metis, Athena is born from Zeus’ head. With Themis, Zeus begets the Seasons (Horae), Good Order and Lawfulness (Eunomia), Justice (Dikē), and the Fates (Moirai). With Eurynome, the Graces (Charites). With Demeter, Persephone. With Memory (Mnemosyne), the nine Muses. With Leto, Apollo and Artemis. And with Hera, his chief wife, Hebe and Ares. Without Zeus, Hera gives birth to Hephaestus, who marries the Grace Aglaia. Zeus fathers Hermes with Maia. And with Semele, Dionysus, who marries Ariadne. And with Alcmena, Heracles, who marries Hebe. Hesiod sings of other divine unions and offspring. Triton is born to Amphitrite and Poseidon. Ares and Aphrodite engender Fear, Terror, and Harmony. He finishes with Circe’s genealogy and that of Medea.

FIFTEEN 963-1022 GODDESSES AND MORTAL MEN—DEMETER, APHRODITE, THETIS, AND OTHERS Bidding farewell, Hesiod asks the Muses to sing about the children the immortal goddesses have with mortal men. With Iasion, Demeter gives birth to Ploutos (Wealth). With Kadmos, Harmony gives birth to five children, including Ino and Semele. Kallirhoe has Geryones with Chrysaor, and Dawn has Memnon and Emathion with Tithonos, as well as Phaethon with Kephalos. With Jason, Medea gives birth to Medeios, and with Aiakos, Psamathe gives birth to Phokos. The hero Achilles is born to Thetis and Peleus, and Aeneas to Aphrodite and Anchises. Finally, after laying with Odysseus, Circe gives birth to Agrios, Latinos, and Telegonos, and Calypso to Nausithoos and Nausinoos. Finishing with the goddesses and men, Hesiod turns to sing about the “tribe of women.” But this is where the *Theogony*, the birth of the gods, ends.

So ends Item 11, “General Summary of the *Theogony*.” **See you in Item 12**, “General Summary of the *Works and Days*.”

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