



# Ch 13-2 Oedipus

## Greek and Roman Mythology

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Oedipus in the arms of Phorbas.

King Laius of Thebes was the third descendant from Cadmus. He married a distant cousin, Jocasta.

Oracle warned Laius that he would die at the hands of his son.

To make oracle impossible to happen, Laius deserted his baby son in a mountain where he must soon die.





Laius was killed, indeed, but until his death he thought the man attacked him was a stranger. He never knew that in his death he had verified Apollo's truth.





Many years had passed since the baby had been left on the mountains. It was reported that a band of robbers had slain Laius and his attendants, all except for one, who brought the news to Thebes. The matter was not carefully investigated because there was another thing bothering the country -- the Sphinx.





## Oedipus and the Sphinx



The Sphinx lay in wait for the wayfarers along the roads to the city and whomever she caught she put a riddle to. Anyone who failed to answer would be eaten. No one could, and the horrid creature devoured man after man until Oedipus came.



Oedipus banished himself from home, Corinth, for another Delphic oracle had declared that he was doomed to kill his father. (He was held to be the son of King Polybus in Corinth)

To prevent the oracle from realizing, Oedipus resolved not to see Polybus again.

As he wandered, he came to Thebes.





# Oedipus answered the Sphinx's question...



What creature goes on four feet in the morning, on two at noonday, on three in the evening?

“Man,” answered Oedipus.

The Sphinx killed herself and the Thebans were saved.



The grateful citizens made Oedipus the King of Thebes, and he married the dead King's wife, Jocasta.

Years later, Thebes was visited by a terrible plague.

Creon (Jocasta's brother) brought the oracle from Apollo, declaring that the plague would not cease until the murderer of King Laius got punished.







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Investigation began, it was revealed in the end that Oedipus was the one who had unknowingly killed his father Laius and married his own mother, Jocasta.

Jocasta realized the fact first and then Oedipus.

Jocasta committed suicide. When Oedipus found her dead in the chamber, he stabbed his own eyes.



# Antigone

Oedipus had two sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene.





Oedipus resigned the throne. The Thebans accepted Creon, Jocasta's brother, as the regent. Creon expelled him and Oedipus' sons consented.

Antigone went with him and Ismene stayed in Thebes to look out for his interests and keep him informed.



After he had gone his two sons asserted their right to the throne. Eteocles succeeded and expelled his brother Polyneices from Thebes. Polyneices took refuge in Argos and intended to collect an army to fight against Thebes.





Oedipus died in Colonus. The two sisters were with him when he died and they were both sent safely home by Theseus.



They arrived to find one brother marching against their city, resolved to capture it, and the other determined to defend it to the end.

Polyneices had been joined and supported by six chieftains, one of them the King of Argos, Adrastus, and another Adrastus' brother-in-law, Amphiaraus.







There were seven champions to attack the seven gates of Thebes, and seven others within as bold to defend them.



Eteocles and Polyneices killed each other. In the end the Thebans prevailed and of the seven champions were all killed except for Adrastus.





In Thebes, Creon was in control and his proclamation said anyone who buried Polyneices would be put to death.



But Antigone buried her brother.

Creon asked, “You knew my order?”

“Yes.” Antigone replied.

“And you transgressed the law?”

“Your law, but not the law of Justice who dwells with the gods. The unwritten laws of heaven are not of today nor yesterday, but from all the time.”





And she was led away to death penalty, she spoke to the bystanders:

...Behold me, what I suffer

Because I have upheld that which is high.



Ismene disappeared. There is no story, no poem, about her. The House of Thebes, the last of the royal family of Thebes, was known no more.





# The Seven Against Thebes



Adrastus, the only one alive of the seven who had started the war, came to Theseus, King of Athens, to plead for inducing the Thebans to allow the bodies to be buried. With him were the mothers and the sons of the dead men.





- Theseus' mother, Aethra, told Theseus:  
“ You are bound to defend all who are wronged. These men of violence who refuse the dead their right of burial, you are bound to compel them to obey the law. It is sacred through all Greece. What holds our states together and all states everywhere, except this, that each one honors the great laws of right?”



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Theseus went to summon the assembly which to decide the misery or happiness of their dead children.

They would ask Thebes, “Yield to our request. We want only what is right. But if you will not, then you choose war, for we must fight to defend those who are defenseless.”



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Creon would not listen to Theseus' plea, and the Athenians marched against Thebes. They conquered.





The messenger brought the news to the people of Athens. Some comforts finally came to the sorrowful mothers as their sons were laid upon the funeral pyre with all reverence and honor.



Peace came to the mothers, with the knowledge that at last their children's spirits and bodies were at rest. Not so to the young sons of the dead men. They would take revenge upon Thebes when they were grown.



Ten years later they marched to Thebes. They were victorious; the conquered Thebans fled and their city was leveled to the ground. Teiresias the prophet perished during the flight.







The only thing left was Harmonia's necklace, which was taken to Delphi and for hundreds of years shown to the pilgrims there.



# Discussion Questions

- In this chapter, Theseus said :

“ We hold there is no worse enemy to a state than he who keeps the law in his own hands. “

Do you agree or disagree with him?

Do you think your country is a role model of “democratic country”? Take some examples to illustrate your ideas.














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