

Homer's "The Odyssey" (A Condensed Translation)

Chapter 2 - [Book 7-9]

So the king of Phaeacia, land of the oar-loving people, entreated Odysseus to tell his tale. The man of many schemes began his story.

I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, and Ithaca is my homeland. I am known among the bronze-coated Greeks and the horse-taming Trojans for my many schemes. Even the deathless gods are aware of my deeds. Since your poet sings to you about the war the Greeks fought at Troy, I shall tell you about my travels as I have tried to return home to Ithaca from Priam's great city.

Upon leaving Troy, we tried to sail homeward with our twelve ships, but Zeus, the Cloud-Gatherer, turned day into night with a fearful storm. The winds were our captain, leading us where they chose.

On the tenth day we arrived at the land of the Lotus-Eaters, where the inhabitants eat the fruit of the lotus plant. When we stopped to acquire fresh water, I sent three of my men to investigate the area. The Lotus-Eaters, being friendly and hospitable, gave them the honey-sweet fruit of the lotus to taste. But as soon as they ate it, they lost all desire to rejoin their companions and to return home; they only wished to remain among the Lotus-Eaters and eat the lotus fruit.

I had to find them, drag them tearfully back to our ships, and tie them securely beneath the benches in order to take them with us. Fortunately, we were able to leave that land before anyone else among us tasted the lotus fruit.

Next we came to the land of the Cyclopes, a one-eyed race who live easily off their rich land. They spend their time gathering wild wheat, barley, and grapes, and tending their sheep and goats. The people themselves are as free as their plants. Each family lives high in the mountains in a hollow cave and makes its own laws. There we anchored our ships and feasted upon the local mountain goats.

When Dawn next shone forth upon us, I said to my comrades, Stay here while I take my ship and my men over to the Cyclopes to see whether they are wild and without welcome or whether they befriend the stranger in their midst and honor the gods.

We had not gone very far when we spied a high cave very close to the shore, which appeared to house goats and sheep at night. Choosing twelve of my best men to investigate with me, I ordered our companions to remain behind and guard our ship. As a precaution against a cold welcome, I carried with me some food and a large goatskin container filled with sweet wine.

We could leisurely examine the large cave, for the Cyclops who lived there was probably out pasturing his flocks. At least, he was nowhere to be seen. When we noticed many crates of cheese, one of my comrades asked, 'Why don't we simply take this cheese down to our ship?' We can return for the goats and sheep and then leave this place.

I had no desire to leave so soon after our arrival, so we kindled a fire and ate the Cyclops' cheese while we waited for him to return. When it was time for the unyoking of oxen, a giant of a man entered the cave. He stood above and apart from other men as a lone, lofty mountain peak towers in isolation above lower ridges. At the sight of this monstrous being we fled toward the darkest part of the cave, where we hoped we would be safe from his gaze.

The giant Cyclops brought into the cave a huge armful of firewood and the animals that needed to be milked. He left the males outside in the high-walled stone courtyard he had built. Then he closed the entrance to his cave with a rock so huge that twenty-two four-wheeled wagons could not have moved it. Yet, he picked it up and set it in place with no apparent effort.

He had performed his evening chores and kindled his dinner fire before he noticed us watching him from the deep recess of the cave. 'Who are you strangers?' he asked. 'Have you come with some good purpose, or are you troublesome pirates?'

Although we were terrified by his enormous size and his deep voice, I replied, 'We are Greeks returning home from Troy. The winds have driven us here, and we seek your hospitality in the name of Zeus, patron god of strangers.'

'We Cyclopes do not honor Zeus,' he responded, 'because we are far better than those gods. How I treat you will depend upon how I feel about it. Tell me, where did you moor your ship?'

I was clever enough to spot a trap, so I answered, 'Poseidon, the Earthshaker, destroyed our ship on your rocky coast. We were fortunate to escape with our lives!'

His only reply was to leap to his feet, grab two of my companions, and kill them by slamming them upon the floor of the cave. Then he tore them apart and ate them—flesh, bones, and all—drank his milk, and lay down to sleep on the floor of the cave among his sheep.



Odyssey Chapter 2answer Key

Christian G. Meyer



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