

The Odyssey

Book XI-

BOOK XI

- **How does Odysseus gain access to the underworld?**

Odysseus follows Circe's instructions and digs a votive pit. He pours libations to the dead and sacrifices the lamb and ewe given him by Circe.

- **What does Odysseus promise Elpenor?**

He promises to return to Circe's island and bury Elpenor's body.

- **Why does Odysseus not let his mother come near the blood?**

He is waiting for Teiresias to speak to him first.

- **What does Teiresias tell Odysseus?**

He tells him that his homecoming will be a hard one and gives Odysseus a warning not to harm the sheep and cattle of Helios on the island of Thrinakia. If they are harmed, Teiresias says he will lose all his companions and find trouble at home upon his long-delayed return. He also tells Odysseus that when he has put his home in order he must set out again on a journey and find a land where people do not know of the sea or the use of an oar, and there he must make generous sacrifices to Poseidon. If he does this, he will be assured of a peaceful life and seaborne death.

Who comes to speak to Odysseus after all the souls of the women have departed?

- Agamemnon does.

What does this person tell Odysseus?

- He describes how his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthos murdered him and his companions at their homecoming.

Many other heroes speak to Odysseus, and he learns of their fates.

What happens to Tantalos?

- He is tortured by having an abundance of food and water always just beyond his grasp, so that he is constantly starved.

What punishment is Sisyphos enduring?

- Sisyphos must constantly push a large boulder up a steep hill. As soon as the boulder reaches the top of the hill, the gods send it rolling down, and he must start his labors all over again.

BOOK XII

- **How do the Sirens destroy men, and how do Odysseus and his men avoid destruction?**

Their singing entices men to land on their island, where, enchanted, they die on the beach.

Odysseus orders his men to plug their ears with beeswax so they won't hear the singing.

He also orders them to lash him to the mast, so that he can hear the Sirens' songs and not succumb to them.

What are Scylla and Charybdis?

- They are two horrible monsters who destroy men as they sail through the narrow straight between them.
- Scylla has six heads with which she snatches up men from their ships and eats them.
- Charybdis is a whirlpool that sucks down men and ships, destroying them.

What happens to Odysseus' companions?

- The crew members are hungry and ignore Odysseus' order not to harm Helios' sheep.
- Enraged, Helios threatens to shine only in the underworld unless Zeus punishes the men.
- The men and ships are able to leave the island, but once they are at sea, Zeus creates a hurricane that destroys the ships and drowns all but Odysseus.

What happens to Odysseus?

- Odysseus manages to lash pieces of the mast and keel together to create a small raft.
- He drifts north, back to Charybdis and Scylla. His raft is consumed by Charybdis, but Odysseus grabs onto a branch of a fig tree and saves himself.
- He hangs there until the whirlpool spouts, releasing his raft.
- Then Odysseus rows furiously and, nine days later, arrives at Calypso's island.

BOOK XIII

- How does Poseidon react when he discovers that the Phaeacians have aided Odysseus in reaching Ithaca?

Poseidon is angry that Odysseus has reached Ithaca easily and with great presents.

He punishes the Phaeacians by turning their ship to stone just as it reaches their harbor.

He then erects a ring of high mountains around the island, cutting them off from their livelihood.

How does Odysseus react when he awakens on land?

- Odysseus does not recognize his homeland.
- He thinks the Phaeacians have left him on an undisclosed shore.
- It is not until he meets Athena, disguised as a swineherd, that he discovers he is indeed home.

Why does Athena now reveal herself to Odysseus?

- She wants to help him plan his revenge on Penelope's suitors.

Where does Athena send Odysseus first?

- She sends him disguised as a beggar to his loyal swineherd.

What task does Athena first set out to do?

- She goes to Lacedaimon to bring Telemachus home.

BOOK XIV

- **Who is Eumaeus?**

He is Odysseus' faithful swineherd.

Why does Odysseus hide his identity from Eumaeus?

- He does not want it known that he has arrived home, and he wants to test Eumaeus' loyalty to his master.

Does Eumaeus believe Odysseus' tale?

- Eumaeus believes all but the part about Odysseus still being alive.

Telemachus receives an omen as he is about to depart. What is it, and what does it mean?

- A mountain eagle holding a white goose in its talons flies to the right over the horses.
- Helen interprets the sign to mean that Odysseus will soon return to Ithaca and take revenge on the suitors.

Who journeys to Ithaca with Telemachos and his companions?

- Theoclymenos, a descendant of Melampus, of a noble Greek family, asks to join them.
- He is a gifted prophet and is also a fugitive from Argos, where he has murdered his cousin.

Odysseus has a plan that he shares with Eumaeus. What is it?

- Odysseus plans to go to his own house and ask for a job as a servant for the suitors.

What is Eumaeus' reaction to Odysseus' idea?

- Eumaeus tries to discourage Odysseus, saying the suitors prefer young boys.
- He fears that the suitors may mistreat such an old beggar.
- Eumaeus suggests that Odysseus stay where he is.
- He assures Odysseus that Telemachos will offer him care and protection when he returns.

How did Eumaios come to be swineherd for Odysseus?

- Eumaeus is really of noble lineage.
- He was kidnapped as a child by his nurse, who ran off with Phoinician traders.
- When she fell overboard, (possibly killed by the gods) the Phoinicians sold him to Laertes.

Which are the two signs that the gods send to Telemachus and Odysseus?

- An eagle carrying a white goose flies past Telemachos on the right side and a falcon carrying a pigeon flies past Odysseus on the right side.
- These symbolize that both men will catch the prey (suitors) they are after.

BOOK XVI

- **What action does Odysseus take?**

At first, Odysseus urges Telemachus to act against the suitors on his father's behalf.

Telemachus replies that, since he has no brothers to help him, this is not feasible.

At Athena's suggestion, he reveals his true identity to Telemachus.

What instructions does Odysseus give to Telemachus?

- He tells him to go home and wait for his father's arrival as a beggar.
- He warns Telemachus not to interfere if the suitors are rude, but to wait for the signal to hide all weapons except their own.
- He also reminds Telemachus not to let anyone know that he (Odysseus) has returned.

BOOK XVII

Penelope greets Telemachus when he arrives home and asks to hear his news.

Telemachus' version and that of Theoclymenos differ. How are they different?

They differ in the news of Odysseus's current whereabouts.

Since Telemachus is under orders from his father not to reveal his presence, he ends his version saying that Odysseus is still a prisoner on the island of Calypso.

Theoclymenos, the prophet, says that Odysseus is present on the island and is about to avenge himself.

Identify the speaker: "See now how the rascal comes on leading a rascal about: like guides what is like itself, just as a god does."

- It is spoken by Melanthios, disloyal goat herder of Odysseus, to Eumaeus and Odysseus.

What two physical assaults does Odysseus endure?

- First he is kicked by Melanthios at the fountain and then he is hit with a footstool thrown by Antinous in his own house.

Who is Argus, and what happens to him?

- Argus is Odysseus' beloved hunting dog.
- He recognizes Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, when Odysseus and Eumaios approach the house.
- He is old, and now dies, happy that he has seen his master one last time.

BOOK XVIII

**What occurs between Odysseus and Iros?
Why?**

They have a fist fight to decide which beggar may stay and which may leave.

Odysseus wins with one powerful blow, and he drags Iros outside the courtyard where he orders him to scare away stray pigs and dogs.

What reward does Odysseus (still disguised) give to Amphinomos for helping him?

- Odysseus, while concealing his true identity, warns Amphinomos of the fate awaiting the suitors.

What does Penelope do that makes Odysseus happy?

- She speaks to the suitors, hinting that there may soon be a marriage, but that in times past suitors of a noble woman always offered great gifts as well as cattle and sheep.
- So the suitors send for glorious presents to be brought to Penelope.
- Odysseus is happy that his cunning wife has enriched his house.
- It may be supposed that her description of marriage to any of the suitors as "hateful" would also please Odysseus.

How does Odysseus come to be a target for the foot stool again?

- Eurymachus insults Odysseus and accuses him of preferring to beg rather than work.
- Odysseus boasts that in any contest between them, working or fighting, he would be the better man.
- Eurymachus hurls the footstool after Odysseus points out that Eurymachus considers himself brave and powerful but has only cowardly and little men around him for comparison.

BOOK XIX

What action does Odysseus take now?

Odysseus reminds Telemachus of the plan to remove the weapons from the hall.

The two of them carry out this part of the plan.

As they work, Athena holds a lamp that shines on the walls.

How does Eurycleia discover the identity of Odysseus?

- Eurycleia had been Odysseus' nursemaid when he was a child.
- Now she recognizes a scar on his leg when she washes his feet.
- Odysseus orders her to be silent and not reveal his identity, and she complies.

What contest does Penelope devise to test the suitors?

- She remembers a contest which Odysseus used to set up, where he would send an arrow through the iron of twelve axes.
- She decides whoever can string the great bow of Odysseus and repeat this feat shall be her husband.

BOOK XX

Who tells Odysseus (the beggar) that if Odysseus were to return he would help to destroy the suitors?

Philoitios the cowherd does.

While the suitors are plotting Telemachus' death, they see an omen. What is it, and what does it mean?

- They see an eagle with a dove in its claws crossing their path from the left. Amphinomos says the sign means that their plan will not work.

Who warns that evil will come to the suitors before he leaves the house?

- Theoclymenos does.

BOOK XXI

Who, other than Odysseus, has the strength and power to string the bow?

Telemachus does.

He would have strung the bow on his fourth attempt, but a signal from his father stopped him.

To what men does Odysseus reveal his identity?

- He reveals his identity to Eumaeus and Philoitios.

What is Odysseus' plan?

- Eumaeus will give the bow to Odysseus, and then tell the maids to stay in their quarters.
- Philoitios will close the door to the courtyard and block off the escape route.

BOOK XXII

- Which men does Odysseus spare from the slaughter?

He spares Phemios, the minstrel, and Medon, the herald.

What happens to the disloyal serving women?

- Telemachus takes them outside, after they have cleared and cleaned the house of their dead lovers.
- He ties them up against the round house and with a rope hangs all of them.

XXIII

- **Why is Penelope so hesitant to greet her husband?**

She fears it is a trick or a device of the gods. She wants to be sure it is really Odysseus.

How does Penelope test Odysseus?

- She tells the servants to bring out his bed, and then waits for his reaction. (His bed has been built from a rooted tree and cannot be moved).
- When Odysseus protests about moving the bed, she realizes he is truly her husband.

BOOK XXIV

Where does Odysseus go next?

He, accompanied by Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Philoitios, goes to the home of Laertes.

Why does Laertes wear rags and not bathe?

- He is despondent that he will never see his son again.

What does Athena do when the families of the dead suitors attack Odysseus?

- She makes both sides pledge peace, and threatens them with the wrath of Zeus.

In the oral epic there is a lot of repetition. List some lines that have been used by the poet repeatedly.

- *"when they had put aside their desire for eating and drinking"
- *"grey-eyed Athena"
- *"Dawn's rosy fingers"
- *"But when the young Dawn showed again with her rosy fingers"
- *"They would all find death was quick and marriage a painful matter"
- *"what sort of world has escaped your teeth's barrier?"
- *"Son of Laertes and seed of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus"
- *"A maidservant brought water for them and poured it from a splendid and golden pitcher, holding it above a silver basin for them to wash, and she pulled a polished table before them."
- *"A grave housekeeper brought in the bread and served it to them, adding many god things to it, generous with her provisions."
- *"What man are you and whence? Where is your city? Your parents?"

