

# The heroes' descent to the underworld essay



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The underworld is the domicile of the dead. It is the dwelling of souls which passed on from the physical world. It is a place where people who are still alive are not allowed to enter.

However, in the case of Odysseus and Aeneas, they were granted access to the underworld due to their special purpose. The heroes of "The Odyssey" and "The Aeneid" had to take a journey through the underworld in order to understand their fate. In the process, they learned the stories behind the deaths of the souls they encountered. Indeed, the heroes' descent to the underworld proved to be a significant undertaking. In "The Odyssey," Odysseus traveled to Hades to find and speak with Teiresias (Homer 84). In Book 10, he narrated the story of his stay in Aea, which is home to the enchantress and goddess Circe.

Odysseus and his men stayed with Circe for a year. Despite living in abundance under the care of Circe, the men expressed to Odysseus their desire to travel homeward. As a result, Odysseus asked the goddess to help him return home. It was Circe who sent him to the underworld.

She said, "There is another journey which you have got to take before you can sail homewards. You must go to the house of Hades and of dread Proserpine to consult the ghost of blind Theban prophet Teiresias" (Homer 84-85). Odysseus' descent to the underworld was significant because it allowed him to encounter Teiresias. Consequently, the encounter with the blind prophet was crucial for Odysseus because it enabled him to learn about his fate. In Book 11, Teiresias warned Odysseus that his voyage back home will be met with difficulties, due to the wrath of Neptune (Homer 88).

Teiresias instructed him against harming the sheep and cattle in the island of Thrinacia; according to the prophet, harming the animals would result in the ruin of their ship and the demise of his men.

With regards to Ithaca, Teiresias informed Odysseus that he would kill all the suitors who have taken advantage of his household. After he reached his home, Odysseus learned that he must bring an oar to a country whose people are not familiar with the sea. He will meet a wayfarer who will tell him about a shovel, which he would use to fix the said oar. He would then kill animals as a sacrifice to Neptune.

Upon his return home, he would offer hecatombs to all the gods. Lastly, Odysseus found out from Teiresias that he would live a long life and perish in the sea (Homer 88). There are similarities and differences between Odysseus and Aeneas with regards to their descent to the underworld. Like Odysseus, Aeneas descended to the underworld to learn his fate in "The Aeneid.

" However, it was not merely his fate that was in question. He traveled to Dis to determine the importance of his voyage to Italy and its outcome. Also, it was not a goddess who sent Aeneas to the underworld; it was the ghost of his father who instructed him to go there (Virgil). In Book V, the spirit of Anchises visited Aeneas and told him to go to the underworld.

In Book VI, Aeneas journeyed to Dis with the assistance of the priestess Sybil. When Aeneas arrived, his father told him about the future of Rome and the role he will play in ensuring this future. According to Anchises, it would be the descendants of Aeneas who would be founders of Rome. Romulus, a Trojan descendant, would establish Rome.

Anchises said, " See Romulus the great, born to restore/ The crown that once his injur'd grandsire wore" (Virgil). Also, Aeneas was told that Caesar, who descended from the line of Ascanius, would reign over the Roman Empire. Virgil wrote, " The mighty Caesar waits his vital hour,/ Impatient for the world, and grasps his promis'd pow'r. " In the end, Anchises informed Aeneas that Rome will become so powerful that its influence would spread throughout the world. Anchises noted, " But, Rome, ' t is thine alone, with awful sway,/ To rule mankind, and make the world obey" (Virgil).

Hence, Aeneas' journey to Dis was important because he discovered the reason behind his voyage to Italy and its significance. Odysseus and Aeneas were also similar in their experience with the other souls in the underworld. Their interaction and conversations with the souls allowed them to learn the different tales of death. In their descent, both Odysseus and Aeneas once again encountered some people they knew who have passed away. For example, both heroes met their parents in the underworld. While Aeneas sought Anchises in Dis, Odysseus found his mother Anticlea in Hades (Homer 88).

They also had the opportunity to see and speak with some acquaintances. Odysseus talked to Elpenor, one of his men who met his demise when he fell off the roof in Circe's island (Homer 87). Meanwhile, Aeneas also talked with Palinurus (Virgil). He also saw Dido, the queen of Carthage, in Dis; he learned that she killed herself with his sword because of his departure.

Lastly, both heroes were able to see some of the important individuals who were involved in the Trojan War. Odysseus encountered Agamemnon and

Achilles in Hades, wherein they narrated their stories to him (Homer 92-93). He also saw Antilochus, Ajax and Patroclus. Lastly, Aeneas saw Misenus, the friend of Hector (Virgil).

The descent of Odysseus and Aeneas in the underworld is relevant stage in their respective journeys. Both men have been traveling for a long time, and their voyage seemed endless. Through a visit to the underworld, the heroes rediscovered what their journeys were all about. As they were told about their fate, they were reminded of their purpose and learned the outcome of their tedious journeys.

Because of their descent, they proceeded to their destinations with renewed vigor, knowing that there were doing something had a relevant result. Therefore, the descent to the underworld was a crucial endeavor in the journeys of both Odysseus and Aeneas which allowed them to finish their lengthy travels.