

Oedipus Rex Summary

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Mythical Story: The play *Oedipus Rex* (also known as *Oedipus the King*) is one of the greatest tragedies ever written. It was composed by the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles around 429 BCE. It is a powerful tragedy based on a famous Greek myth. Oedipus, the main character, was born to King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes. The tragedy describes the life cycle of King Oedipus of Thebes. He unknowingly fulfilled a prophecy from the oracle at Delphi.

The prophecy was that he would kill his father, King Laius, and marry his mother, Queen Jocasta. His parents, King Laius and Queen Jocasta, heard the prophecy when Oedipus was an infant. To stop this from happening, his parents abandoned him with his ankles pinned (hence his name, "Oedipus" means "swollen foot"). But a shepherd saved him. He handed the baby to the Corinthian shepherd. Then he was raised in Corinth in the house of the Corinthian king Polybus and queen Merope.

He was unaware of his true identity. He believed Polybus and Merope were his real parents. When he became young, he heard the same prophecy from the Delphic oracle, and he left Corinth to protect himself from doing such a hateful task. On his journey, he killed a man in a roadside fight. The man was his real father, Laius, but he did it unknowingly. Later, he arrived in Thebes and solved the riddle of the Sphinx with his intelligence and quick thinking. The Sphinx was a mythical creature. Its body was like a lion and the head of a woman.

She guarded the entrance to the city of Thebes and challenged anyone who wanted to enter with a riddle. If they failed to answer correctly, she would kill them. The riddle was: **"What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?"** Oedipus gave the correct answer that it is "A human being." He explains, in the morning of a human life (as a baby), a person crawls on four legs (two hands and two knees).

In the noon of life (adulthood), a person walks on two legs. In the evening of life (old age), a person uses a stick, so they walk on three legs. The Sphinx was defeated by his answer and threw herself off a cliff. As a reward, Oedipus was welcomed into Thebes and became the king of Thebes. He married the widowed queen, Jocasta, who was actually his mother. Thus, he unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy.

Background: The story of *Oedipus Rex* is based on an old Greek myth. Oedipus was the king of an ancient city called Thebes. Thebes was an important city in ancient Greece. Before Oedipus was even born, a prophecy said that he would kill his father and marry his mother. Although the events in *Oedipus Rex* are not real history, this story was very well known to the Greek people.

The famous writer Sophocles turned this popular myth into a play. Sophocles wrote this play in the 5th century BCE, during the "Golden Age" of Athens. This was a time when drama, politics, and philosophy were growing and becoming very important.

The play reflects the culture and deep questions of that time, especially about religion, power, and human weakness. In ancient Greece, there was a real religious place where people believed they could hear messages from the god Apollo. The story of this play is based on one of those messages (a prophecy). The play shows important ideas like human limits, pride, and the plan of the gods.

Plot Summary

Oedipus Rex

is a famous Greek tragedy written by Sophocles. It tells the story of Oedipus. He was the king of Thebes. It also tells how he unknowingly fulfills a terrible prophecy. The prophecy was that he would kill his father, Laius, and marry his mother, Jocasta. That prophecy was made about him before he was born.

Beginning of the Story: Oedipus became king of Thebes after he had solved the riddle of a monster. It is called the Sphinx, made with a lion's head and a woman's body. People respected and loved him for saving the city. He married the queen, Jocasta, and ruled the city peacefully.

But now, Thebes is in trouble again. A deadly plague has spread in the city. People are dying, crops are failing, and women cannot have children. The people beg Oedipus to save them, just like he did before.

The Oracle's Message: Oedipus has already sent Creon, his brother-in-law, to ask the god Apollo what to do. Creon comes back with a message from the oracle: The plague is happening because the former king, Laius, was murdered, and the killer was never punished. The only way to save the city is to find the killer and punish him.

Oedipus promises to solve the mystery and curses the killer. He says that he will suffer and be thrown out of the city. Oedipus does not know yet that he is the killer himself.

The Prophet's Warning: Oedipus calls for the blind prophet Teiresias to help him find the killer. At first, Teiresias refuses to speak. He knows the truth but says it will cause pain. When Oedipus forces him to speak, Teiresias says something shocking. He says that Oedipus is Laius's murderer. Oedipus becomes angry and thinks Teiresias is lying. He even accuses Creon of plotting against him for the throne. But Teiresias warns Oedipus that he will soon discover who his real parents are—and that he will be shocked.

Clues from the Past: Creon tries to defend himself. He has no reason to want to be king. Jocasta also tries to calm the situation. She tells Oedipus not to trust prophecies. She says that many years ago, a prophecy was told to her and her first husband, Laius. That was their son who would kill his father and marry his mother. To stop it, they left their baby in the mountains to die. Laius was later killed, but Jocasta says it was by a group of robbers, not their son.

But something about this story makes Oedipus suspicious. He remembers killing an old man at a place where three roads met. He starts to think that he may have killed Laius without knowing who he was. Oedipus sends for the shepherd who witnessed the murder to find out more.

Oedipus also tells Jocasta about his past: he grew up in Corinth, raised by King Polybus and Queen Merope. But a man once told him that they were not his real parents. When Oedipus asked the oracle about this, he was told that he would kill his father and marry his mother. To avoid this, he ran away from Corinth and never returned.

Truth Comes Out: Later, by chance, he became the king of Thebes, married Jocasta, and began to rule. A messenger from Corinth arrives with news that King Polybus has died. Jocasta is happy because she believes that this proves the prophecy was false. Because Oedipus did not kill his father. But Oedipus is still afraid he might marry his mother, Merope.

Then the messenger says something shocking: Polybus and Merope were not Oedipus' real parents. The messenger explains that he got baby Oedipus from a Theban shepherd. He gave him to the king and queen of Corinth.

This shepherd turns out to be the same man who witnessed Laius' death. Oedipus forces the old man to speak. Finally, he says the baby he gave away was Laius and Jocasta's son. Jocasta had told him to leave the baby to die because of the prophecy. But instead, the shepherd gave him away to the messenger.

Now, Oedipus knows the terrible truth that he killed his real father, Laius. He married his real mother, Jocasta. The prophecy has come true.

The Tragic Ending: Jocasta realizes the truth before Oedipus does. She is horrified and runs into the palace. Later, a messenger reports that she has killed herself; she hanged herself in her room. Oedipus finds her dead. Overcome with grief and guilt, he takes the brooches from her dress and blinds himself. He says he cannot bear to see the world anymore.

Now, Oedipus is blind and broken. He appears before the people. He discloses everything and says he is the one who caused the plague. He begs Creon to exile him from Thebes, as the prophecy said the killer must be banished. Oedipus requests that Creon take care of his only daughters, not sons. Creon agrees to take care of Oedipus' daughters, but says Oedipus cannot take them with him. Oedipus sadly says goodbye to them. He is no longer a king, but a suffering man who has lost everything.

The Chorus' Final Words: The Chorus ends the play with a message to the audience: Even the greatest people can fall because of fate. No one can escape their destiny. True happiness only comes at the end of life, when a person has faced all their suffering and finds peace.

Detailed Summary

Prologue

Plague in Oedipus' Kingdom: Oedipus, the king of Thebes, became ruler after solving the riddle of the Sphinx, a monster with the body of a lion and the head of a woman. The Sphinx had terrorized the city, but Oedipus saved Thebes by solving its riddle. Now, Oedipus comes out of the palace to talk to the high priest. Because Thebes is suffering again from a terrible plague. The plague is killing people, destroying crops, and causing women to become infertile. The priest begs Oedipus to save the city, just as he did before when he defeated the Sphinx.

Oedipus shows concern for his people and says he will do everything to help them and save the city. He even says that his own life is less important than the health of the city. He adds that it will be heartless if he does not act to stop their suffering. The priest suggests that they ask Apollo, the god of prophecy, for guidance. Oedipus tells the priest that he has already taken action. He has sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to consult Apollo's oracle for advice.

Creon soon returns with the oracle's message. He says that the plague is happening because of the murder of the city's former king, Laius. The murderer is living in the city without punishment. Apollo's prophecy says the city will only be saved when Laius' killer is found and punished. Hearing this, Oedipus promises to solve the mystery of Laius' murder and punish the guilty person. He promises the people that he will do everything in his power to protect them.

and end the plague.

Parados: In a Greek tragedy, Parodos is the first song sung by the Chorus as they enter the stage. Parodos is present in *Oedipus Rex*. Here, the Chorus sings about the fear and sadness of thebes people caused by the plague. They fear that the plague is happening because Laius' murder was never punished. They pray to the gods—Zeus, Apollo, Athena, and Artemis—to save Thebes and end the suffering.

Episode 1: Oedipus speaks to the people of Thebes and demands that anyone who knows anything about the murder of King Laius must come forward. He warns them not to protect or hide the killer. If someone helps him find the murderer, they will be rewarded. But if anyone shelters or protects the killer, they will be punished. Oedipus is determined to find the person responsible for Laius's death. He wants to save the city from the plague at any cost.

The Chorus suggests that Oedipus should ask Teiresias for help. He is a wise and blind prophet. He is known for his ability to see the truth. They tell Oedipus that Teiresias has a strong connection to Apollo, the god of prophecy and healing. Apollo's advice has already helped them to understand the cause of the plague. The Chorus believes Teiresias may help to solve the mystery of Laius' murder.

Soon, Teiresias is brought to Oedipus. A young boy helps Teiresias, as he cannot see. Oedipus greets the prophet respectfully and asks for his help. At first, Teiresias refuses to speak. He knows the truth about Laius' murder. But he says that revealing the truth will bring great pain and destroy lives. Oedipus becomes angry and demands that Teiresias tell him everything he knows.

After being pressured, Teiresias finally tells Oedipus something shocking: Oedipus himself is the cause of the plague. Because he is the one who killed King Laius. Oedipus is furious at this accusation. He accuses Teiresias of lying and working with Creon to take the throne away from him.

Teiresias insists that he is only telling the truth. But Oedipus refuses to believe him. He mocks Teiresias and orders him to leave. Before leaving, Teiresias gives Oedipus another warning. He says that Laius' killer was born in Thebes and now lives in the city. This man will lose his sight and will turn out to be both the son and the husband of his own mother. Oedipus dismisses Teiresias' words and believes them to be lies.

Episode 2: Creon is shocked and hurt that Oedipus has accused him of taking over the throne. Creon assures that he has no interest in being king. He explains that he enjoys the benefits of being part of the royal family. Besides, he does not have the hard responsibilities of ruling a city. Creon swears he has no idea what Teiresias is talking about. He suggests Oedipus check with the Oracle of Delphi to confirm his innocence. However, Oedipus is furious and wants to punish Creon. He wants either to kill him or banish him from the city for treason. Creon remains calm and offers to die if he is lying. But he firmly stands by his oath that he did nothing with Teiresias.

Jocasta enters and begs Oedipus to believe Creon's oath. She scolds both men for arguing and wasting time when the city is suffering from the plague. Oedipus unwillingly listens to her and allows Creon to leave without any punishment. Then, Jocasta tries to comfort her husband. She tells Oedipus that prophecies are not always true. She shares an example from her own life. She reveals that she and her first husband, Laius, were told by a prophecy. The prophecy was that their son would kill his father and marry his mother. To stop the prophecy, Laius tied the baby's ankles together and left him in the wilderness to die. Because of this, Jocasta believes the prophecy was false, and their child must be dead. She also adds that Laius was not killed by his son. He was killed by a group of robbers at a crossroads (a place where three roads meet).

Hearing this, Oedipus becomes very uneasy and starts to worry. The description of the crossroads and Laius' death is familiar to him. He asks Jocasta to send for the one surviving witness of Laius' murder. He was a slave, and he was there at the time. Then Oedipus shares more about his own past. He was raised by the king and queen of Corinth as their son. He tells Jocasta about his childhood in Corinth. However, one day, a drunken man told him that his parents were not his real parents. Being confused and upset, Oedipus secretly left Corinth. He went to the Oracle of Delphi to find out the truth. Instead of answering his question about his parents, the oracle gave him a terrifying prophecy. The prophecy was that he would kill his father and marry his mother. Being horrified, Oedipus ran away from Corinth and determined never to return. Actually, he wanted to avoid the prophecy coming true.

Oedipus says that while he was traveling, he encountered a group of people at a crossroads. One man was in a carriage, and his guide tried to force Oedipus off the road. Oedipus got angry when the old man in the carriage hit him. As a result, he struck back and killed the man along with almost everyone in his group. Oedipus now realizes this incident might be connected to Laius' death. He asks Jocasta for more details. She tells him about the slave who witnessed the murder. He is now living as a shepherd. Jocasta sends for the slave but reassures Oedipus that everything will be fine. She insists the prophecy could not be true. Because the slave said Laius

was killed by a group of robbers, not one man. Besides, she and Laius made sure their son was abandoned long ago.

Episode 3: Jocasta goes to the altar of Apollo and offers a prayer. She hopes to calm Oedipus and stop him from worrying about the prophecies and his past. She wants him to forget the troubling ideas that are disturbing him. While she is there, a messenger arrives with news from Corinth. He tells Jocasta that Polybus has died of natural causes. Jocasta is relieved because this proves that the prophecy about Oedipus killing his father is false. She believes that if Polybus died naturally, Oedipus would not be responsible for his death.

When Oedipus hears this news, he feels somewhat reassured. Then he begins to question the truth of the oracles. However, he is still troubled by the second part of the prophecy. It says that he will marry his mother, Merope, and have children with her. Oedipus worries because Merope is still alive. He also fears that the prophecy could still come true. Jocasta tells him not to worry and to let go of his fear.

The messenger then offers what he thinks is even better news. He tells Oedipus that he has no reason to fear going back to Corinth. Because Polybus and Merope are not his real parents. The messenger explains that many years ago, a shepherd gave him a baby boy. His ankles were bound, and he brought the baby to Polybus and Merope. Since they could not have children, they raised the baby as their son. The messenger reveals that he removed the pin from the baby's ankles. Then, he gave him to Polybus and Merope, but he did not find the baby himself.

Oedipus is stunned and asks the messenger who gave him the baby. The messenger says it was another shepherd, a servant of King Laius. Hearing this, the Chorus leader mentions that the shepherd they are looking for is the same man. He (the shepherd) saw everything on the day Laius was killed. They have already called him to explain.

At this moment, Jocasta begins to realize the terrible truth about Oedipus' identity. She desperately tries to stop him from asking more questions. She argues with him to drop the matter. She tells him that it is better not to dig deeper. But Oedipus misinterprets her distress. He assumes she is worried that he might come from a low-born family. He ignores her warnings and determines to uncover the truth about his birth. Jocasta begs him one last time and says she is trying to protect him. But she runs into the palace in despair when he refuses to listen. Before leaving, she declares that she will never speak again. Now, she knows the truth but cannot bear to reveal it.

Episode 4: The shepherd (who used to work for King Laius) is brought to Oedipus for questioning. This shepherd was also the one who used to tend sheep in the area of Mount

Cithaeron. This was the place where Oedipus was found as a baby. At first, the shepherd claims he does not remember Oedipus, even when the messenger reminds him of the baby they both know about. The shepherd becomes defensive and tries to avoid talking about it. He calls the messenger a “busybody” for bringing it up.

Oedipus becomes frustrated. He warns the shepherd that he must tell the truth. To force him to speak, Oedipus orders the shepherd’s hands to be tied and threatens to hurt him if he refuses to answer. Finally, the shepherd says he gave the baby to the messenger many years ago. But he does not want to say where the baby came from. The shepherd is clearly terrified and begs Oedipus to stop asking him questions.

Oedipus refuses to back down and demands to know the truth. He even threatens to kill the shepherd if he keeps silent. Under pressure, the shepherd reveals the shocking truth that the baby was born in the palace of Laius and Jocasta. He confesses that the baby was their son. He had been ordered to leave the child on a rock to die. Jocasta had given this order because she wanted to avoid a terrible prophecy. The prophecy was that her son would kill his father and marry her.

The shepherd further explains that he did not dare to kill the child. Instead, he took pity on the child and gave him to the messenger. He took the baby to Corinth. Oedipus listens in horror as the truth unfolds. He now realizes that he is the child who was meant to die. The prophecy has come true: he has killed his father, Laius, and married his mother, Jocasta.

At this moment, both the shepherd and Oedipus fully understand the horrifying reality. Despite all their effort, the prophecy has been fulfilled.

Episode 5: A second messenger comes out of the palace and delivers terrible news. He explains that Jocasta was in her grief and despair. She cried out to her first husband, Laius, and then hanged herself. Oedipus had been madly searching for Jocasta, shouting for a sword, and finally finding her. When he broke down the door to her room, he discovered her lifeless body hanging there.

Feeling guilty, Oedipus took the brooches from Jocasta’s clothes and used them to uproot his own eyes. The messenger explains that Oedipus did not stop with one strike. He kept stabbing his eyes to make sure he was completely blind. Oedipus said he could not bear to see the horrors of his life anymore. Now, Oedipus orders the palace gates open. He wants to declare himself to the people of killing Laius and marrying his mother.

The Chorus reacts with shock and pity. Some members say Oedipus should have ended his life instead of living in blindness. But the Chorus leader feels sympathy for him. Oedipus

recognizes the Chorus leader's voice and begins to speak. He blames Apollo for his fate. He says the god caused these events. But he takes full responsibility for blinding himself. Oedipus does not understand why the gods allowed him to have such a terrible fate.

Soon, Creon comes to help Oedipus. Creon acts kindly even though Oedipus had wrongly accused him of treason earlier. Creon knows that Oedipus always loved and found comfort in his daughters (Antigone, Ismene). That is why Creon brings them to him. Oedipus is heartbroken and calls them his daughters and sisters. He says to them he is both their father and brother. He begs Creon to take care of them. Because no one will forever carry the shame of his sins. He mentions that his two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, can live on their own.

Oedipus then asks Creon to send him far away from Thebes, where no one will ever have to see him again. Creon feels sorry for him and tries to convince Oedipus to stay in the palace. However, Oedipus insists that he must be banished and live in isolation. Creon finally agrees to let him leave. But tells Oedipus that he cannot take his daughters with him. From now on, Oedipus has no power over his children.

Exodos: The Chorus sings about the tragic story of Oedipus. It reflects on how a great king fell into misery. They tell the people of Thebes that life is full of suffering. True happiness can only come with death. The story serves as a warning to everyone that no one escapes pain, not even the strongest. Mortal life is filled with pain and hardship.