

EPISODE 1 – A Stranger from Troy

total running time: 11:12

Paris' choice (⊕ 6:45)

Prince Paris, the youngest son of the king of Troy, was out hunting on the foothills of the great mountain that stretches up behind the city walls. And as he was hunting with his bow and his quiver full of arrows, suddenly Hermes, the messenger of the gods, appeared in front of him. And Hermes said "Paris, I've been sent by great father Zeus, and he has told me to tell you
5 that you must decide which of these three goddesses is the most beautiful."

And Hermes clicked his fingers, and out of the light three goddesses appeared in front of Paris. There was Hera, the wife of Zeus, the queen of heaven, magnificent. There was owl-eyed Athene, the goddess of war and wisdom. And there was beautiful, beautiful Aphrodite, the goddess of love. And Hermes said, "Paris you must decide which of these three is the most
10 beautiful and you must give her this golden apple". And Hermes dropped into the palm of Paris' hand a golden apple and he vanished. And Paris was left standing with the golden apple cold against the palm of his hand. And he looked from one goddess to the other to the next, but his eyes kept wandering towards Aphrodite, the goddess of love. And so Hera stamped her foot. She said, "It's not fair. Aphrodite is wearing her belt of love and desire. Paris must decide
15 when he has seen us naked". And Athene agreed.

And so it was the three goddesses took off their clothes, until they were standing stark naked in front of Paris. And Paris was looking from one to the other and now he could not decide who was the most beautiful. And so Hera, the queen of heaven, the wife of Zeus, came forwards and she said, "Paris, choose me and I will give you power. Choose me and I will make you a
20 great king over the whole of Europe and the whole of Asia – half the world will be yours."

And she stepped back. And then Athene came forwards, the goddess of war and wisdom. And she said, "Paris, choose me and you'll never lose a battle. Choose me and you'll be famous the length and breadth of the world for your cleverness, for your wisdom." And she stepped back.

25 And then Aphrodite the goddess of love came forwards. And she said, "Paris, choose me and I will give you the most beautiful woman in the world." And Paris said, "Who is she?"

"Her name is Helen. She's the wife of Menelaus, the king of Sparta. I will blind her with love for you. She will give you everything!"

And Paris said, "What does she look like?"

30 "She's as beautiful as I am." And Aphrodite stepped back. And Paris lifted the golden apple above his shoulder and without a moment's hesitation he gave it to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. And Hera and Athene were furious. They flashed into the sky and they were gone. And as for Aphrodite, she loosed an invisible arrow which struck Paris in the heart, and from that moment, even though he had never seen her, even though she was nothing more than a
35 name, an idea, he was in love with Helen, the wife of Menelaus, the king of Sparta. And up in the heavens Hera and Athene were already pondering and planning in their hearts, how they could bring about the death of Paris, and the destruction of the whole city of Troy.

And so it was only a matter of time then before Aphrodite, the goddess of love, caused Helen to fall in love with Paris. And Paris stole her from her husband. He took her across the blue
40 Aegean Sea to the great city of Troy. And Helen's husband Menelaus, when he discovered that his wife had been stolen, was furious. He sent messengers to all the other Greek kings. And an army was mustered – a huge army the like of which the world has never seen before. And the army set sail across the blue sea in a thousand ships and laid siege to the city of Troy. And Hera and Athene, furious that they hadn't been given the golden apple, threw in their lot with
45 the Greek army. And they didn't rest until Troy's walls were crumbling blood-soaked rubble, and Prince Paris was dead.

The Trojan War. Ten years of the ebb and flow of defeat and victory with its flotsam of corpses. Ten years of the weeping of women over the bodies of their husbands, their fathers, their brothers, their sons. Ten years of the sweet stench of rotting flesh and great black clouds of
50 flies. Ten years of blood-crazed warriors cutting the armour from the backs of the dying. And when at last that awful war was over, the victorious Greek kings, Agamemnon, Menelaus, Odysseus, their hearts swollen with pride, their ships crammed with treasure, set sail for home.

***Food for the soul* (🕒 4:27)**

Our story begins nine years after that great and bloody victory. There was an island and staggering up the slope from the sea onto the sand there was a man, half-dead with exhaustion, his hair and beard tangled and matted with salt, his body caked in brine. He staggered across the sand and threw himself down onto a pile of dead leaves, and he fell
5 instantly fast asleep.

And he was found there, sleeping, by the daughter of the king of that island, King Alcinous. She saw the stranger and she shook his shoulder. She woke him up. She gave him a piece of cloth to wrap around his waist. She gave him a cup of water and then she led him to her father's palace. She showed him to a room where there were bowls of water and jugs of oil,
10 and fresh clothes to wear. And the stranger washed himself. He rubbed the oil into his skin. He put on the clothes. And then the princess led the stranger to her father's bronze-floored feasting hall. And King Alcinous said, "Sit down, eat, drink." And meat and bread and wine and honey cakes and water were served.

And the stranger ate and drank and drank and ate and ate and drank. And when at last his
15 raging appetite had been satisfied, King Alcinous said, "There is food for the body, and there is food for the soul. Stranger, now that you have eaten, listen. And my storyteller will tell you a story."

And the doors of the hall opened and an old, blind storyteller called Demodocus was led into the hall. And Demodocus lifted his lyre to his shoulder and he began to tell the story of the
20 siege of Troy.

"The great bronze gates were thrown open," he said. "And with a whirring of wheels and a creaking of chariots and a neighing of horses and a shouting of men and a thundering of

hooves and feet, the Trojan army poured across the plain. And with a clash of bronze against
bronze the Trojan army met the Greek army, wading ashore from their ships. And among the
25 Greeks, mighty Achilles, severing heads with every stroke of his sword, thrusting his spear to
the left and the right, leaving a wake of dead behind himself.”

And King Alcinous said, “Stop! Stop! Our guest – he is weeping. His face is buried in his
hands. His shoulders are shaking. Stranger, what is it? Who are you? Why are you crying?
Nobody, whether of high or low degree goes nameless in this world. Tell us who you are, that
30 we may listen to your story and learn, and that I may send one of my high-prowed ships to
carry you to that place you are seeking.”

And the stranger lifted his head, his cheeks wet with tears. And he looked at the king, and he
looked at the old storyteller. And he drew breath and he began to speak.

“I have used several names, but the name by which you would know me is Odysseus.”