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Source text:

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Oedipus King of Thebes

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Sophocles, *Oedipus King of Thebes* (Simplified Edition by ChatGPT)

Part 1

CHARACTERS

OEDIPUS – King of Thebes. He is brave and proud.

JOCASTA – Queen of Thebes, wife of Oedipus.

CREON – Brother of Jocasta.

TIRESIAS – An old blind prophet.

PRIEST – A priest of Zeus.

MESSENGER – A man from Corinth.

SHEPHERD – A man who once served King Laius.

CHORUS – Old men of Thebes.

People of Thebes.

SCENE: In front of the palace of Oedipus. Many sick people sit near the steps. They hold branches in their hands. Smoke from prayer fires rises in the air.

OEDIPUS:

My children, why do you sit here with branches in your hands? Why do you cry in front of my house? The whole city is full of smoke and prayer. I hear cries in the streets. I know you suffer. I am not blind to your pain. I feel it in my own heart. Tell me, old man, what do you ask of me?

PRIEST:

O Oedipus, great king of our land, you see how people of all ages sit before you. The young and the old are here. The city is dying. The fields give no food. The animals grow weak. Women cannot give birth. A terrible sickness burns through the land. Death is everywhere. We come to you because you saved us once before. You freed us from the great monster that asked its dark riddle. You were wise when we were helpless. Now we ask you again: save us.

OEDIPUS:

My poor children, I know your pain. Do you think I have not wept for this city? I have thought day and night about how to help you. I have sent Creon, my wife's brother, to the holy place of Apollo to ask what we must do. When he returns, I will act. I will not rest until I find a way to save Thebes.

PRIEST:

Look, my lord. Creon is coming now.

(Enter CREON.)

OEDIPUS:

Creon, my friend, what word do you bring from the god?

CREON:

I bring hope, if we are brave enough to act.

OEDIPUS:

Speak clearly. What must we do?

CREON:

The god says that our land is sick because of blood that was not paid for. A murder

was done here long ago. The killer still lives among us. We must find him and punish him. Only then will the sickness end.

OEDIPUS:

Whose murder?

CREON:

King Laius, who ruled before you came.

OEDIPUS:

I know of him, but I never saw him. How was he killed?

CREON:

He went on a journey and never returned. We heard he was killed by men on the road.

OEDIPUS:

Men? Not one man?

CREON:

So the story says.

OEDIPUS:

Why was this not fully searched before?

CREON:

At that time the monster was killing us. We had no strength for more trouble.

OEDIPUS:

Now we must search. I will find this killer. I will bring him to justice. If he lives in this city, he shall not hide. I will fight for Laius as if he were my own father.

The man who killed him may try to kill me one day. I will not let that happen.

(To the people.)

Hear me, people of Thebes! If any man knows who killed Laius, let him speak. I promise he will not suffer. He may leave the land safely. But if any man hides the truth, I curse him. May he live in pain and fear. May no one give him food or shelter. The killer must be cast out.

(The people slowly move away. The CHORUS of old men enters.)

CHORUS:

A voice from the god has spoken. We are afraid. The sickness eats our city. We pray to Zeus, to Athena, to Apollo. Save us. Drive away this evil. Find the man who did this crime.

OEDIPUS:

You pray for help. I am here to help. I will search for the killer. If I do not act, I would be a coward. This crime must be cleaned from our land.

LEADER OF CHORUS:

O King, we trust you. But how will you find a crime so old?

OEDIPUS:

We will ask the prophet Tiresias. He sees what others cannot see.

LEADER:

Yes, he knows the truth of many things.

OEDIPUS:

Send for him at once.

(Enter TIRESIAS, led by a boy.)

OEDIPUS:

Tiresias, wise man, you know the signs of heaven and earth. Our city is dying. The god says we must find the killer of Laius. Tell us who he is. Save us.

TIRESIAS:

Oedipus, let me go home. It is better for you and for me.

OEDIPUS:

What do you mean? You know something. Speak it.

TIRESIAS:

Knowledge can bring pain. I do not wish to speak.

OEDIPUS:

This is not right. You must not hide the truth when your city suffers.

TIRESIAS:

You do not understand what you ask.

OEDIPUS:

I command you to speak.

TIRESIAS:

Then hear it. You are the man you seek.

OEDIPUS:

What? You dare say that?

TIRESIAS:

You are the killer of Laius.

OEDIPUS:

You lie! You speak to hurt me. Who sent you? Was it Creon? Does he want my crown?

TIRESIAS:

I speak what is true.

OEDIPUS:

You are blind in your eyes and blind in your mind. You could not solve the riddle of the monster. I did. I saved this city. And now you accuse me?

TIRESIAS:

You have eyes, but you do not see your own life. You live in shame and do not know it.

OEDIPUS:

Enough! You and Creon have planned this. You want my power.

TIRESIAS:

I want nothing from you. I serve Apollo. You will learn who you are. You will learn that you are both son and husband in one house. You will learn that you killed your own father. Then you will know that I speak the truth.

OEDIPUS:

Get out of my sight! Leave this place!

TIRESIAS:

I go. But remember my words. The truth will come, even if you try to run from it.

(TIRESIAS exits.)

CHORUS:

His words are terrible. We do not know what to believe. Oedipus saved us once. Can he truly be guilty? We wait for proof. We pray that he is innocent.

(OEDIPUS stands silent, troubled.)

End of Part 1

Part 2

SCENE: The same place. OEDIPUS stands in anger. The CHORUS watches in fear.

(Enter CREON.)

CREON:

Men of Thebes, I hear that the king has spoken hard words against me. He says I have planned evil against him. I come to answer this. I have done no wrong.

OEDIPUS:

You come with a calm face, but your heart is full of plans. You sent that prophet to accuse me. You want my throne.

CREON:

I sent for the prophet because you asked for help from the god. I did not tell him what to say. Why would I wish to be king? Think. As I am now, I have power without fear. I share rule with you. I have honor. I do not carry the weight of the crown. Why would I trade peace for danger?

OEDIPUS:

Because men love power.

CREON:

Some do. I do not. If you doubt me, go to Delphi. Ask the god if I spoke his words true. If you find that I lie, then kill me. I will not fight your judgment. But do not call me traitor without proof.

LEADER OF CHORUS:

King Oedipus, Creon speaks with reason. Do not act in anger.

OEDIPUS:

He is clever. His words are smooth. But I will not be fooled.

CREON:

You are quick to anger. That is your weakness. I have always been loyal. Do not destroy a friend with fear.

OEDIPUS:

Leave me. I do not trust you.

CREON:

I go. But I go wronged.

(CREON turns to leave. OEDIPUS draws his sword in sudden rage. The CHORUS cries out.)

LEADER:

Stop! Do not let anger rule you!

(Enter JOCASTA from the palace.)

JOCASTA:

What is this noise? Why do you shout in front of the palace while the city suffers?
Oedipus, Creon, are you not ashamed? Is this the time for hate?

CREON:

Sister, your husband says I plan to kill him.

JOCASTA:

Is this true, Oedipus?

OEDIPUS:

He worked with the prophet. They say I killed Laius.

JOCASTA:

That is madness.

CREON:

I swear by the gods I have done no wrong.

JOCASTA:

Oedipus, believe him. He is my brother. He has always been true.

OEDIPUS:

I fear him.

JOCASTA:

Fear can lie to the mind. Let him go.

OEDIPUS:

Very well. But I will watch him.

CREON:

That is enough for now. I leave you.

(CREON exits.)

JOCASTA:

My lord, why do you let such words shake you? Why do you listen to prophets? No man can see the future with clear eyes. I will tell you something. Once an oracle came to Laius. It said that he would die by the hand of his own son. But that never happened. Our son was left to die as a baby. His feet were tied. He could not live. And Laius was killed by robbers at a place where three roads meet. The oracle was false.

(OEDIPUS grows pale.)

OEDIPUS:

A place where three roads meet?

JOCASTA:

Yes. In the land near Phocis.

OEDIPUS:

How long ago?

JOCASTA:

Not long before you came to Thebes.

OEDIPUS:

Tell me more. What did Laius look like?

JOCASTA:

He was tall. His hair had begun to turn white.

OEDIPUS:

How many men were with him?

JOCASTA:

Five in all. A driver and four others.

OEDIPUS:

And one man lived?

JOCASTA:

Yes. A servant. He was the only one who came back alive. When he saw you as king, he asked to leave the city and work as a shepherd in the hills. I sent him away.

(OEDIPUS trembles.)

OEDIPUS:

Send for him. At once.

JOCASTA:

Why? What troubles you?

OEDIPUS:

I must know the truth. I will tell you my story. I was raised in Corinth as the son of King Polybus and Queen Merope. One day, at a feast, a man said I was not my father's true son. I was angry. I asked my parents. They were hurt by the words and told me the man was drunk and foolish. But I could not rest. I went to Delphi

to ask the god who I was.

JOCASTA:

And what did the god say?

OEDIPUS:

He did not answer my question. Instead he told me that I would marry my mother and kill my father. I was filled with fear. I left Corinth at once, so I would not harm those I loved. On my journey I came to a place where three roads meet. There I met a man in a chariot. His driver pushed me aside. I was angry. I struck the driver. The old man in the chariot struck me. In my rage I killed them all.

JOCASTA:

All?

OEDIPUS:

All but one, I think. If that man was Laius... then I am the killer.

JOCASTA:

No. The servant said robbers killed him. Many men, not one.

OEDIPUS:

But if he changes his story... if he says one man did it... then I am lost.

JOCASTA:

Do not fear shadows. You left Corinth. You did not kill your father.

OEDIPUS:

If Polybus is truly my father.

JOCASTA:

What do you mean?

OEDIPUS:

If the man at the feast spoke truth.

JOCASTA:

Stop. Do not let fear rule you. We will wait for the shepherd. He will clear this up.

LEADER OF CHORUS:

May the gods protect us. We see dark signs, but we pray they lead to light.

JOCASTA:

Come inside, my lord. Do not stand here shaking before the people.

OEDIPUS:

No. I must face this. I must know.

JOCASTA:

Very well. I will send for the shepherd.

(JOCASTA exits into the palace.)

CHORUS:

The king is strong, but his heart is troubled. The past rises like a shadow. We pray the truth brings peace and not ruin.

(OEDIPUS stands alone for a moment, deep in thought.)

OEDIPUS:

If I have done this thing, I am cursed. Yet I did not know. I did not mean to kill my father. O gods, let the servant prove me innocent. Let the old story of robbers

be true.

LEADER OF CHORUS:

Hope still lives. Do not give way to despair before the proof is clear.

OEDIPUS:

I will wait. But my heart is heavy.

(The stage grows quiet as they wait for news.)

End of Part 2

Part 3

SCENE: Before the palace. OEDIPUS and the CHORUS remain. The air is tense.

CHORUS:

We pray to the gods that pride does not bring a fall. A man who walks too high may fall hard. We fear what may come. Yet we still hope that our king is pure.

(OEDIPUS looks toward the road.)

OEDIPUS:

How long must I wait? Every moment feels like pain.

(Enter a MESSENGER from Corinth.)

MESSENGER:

People of Thebes, I bring news for King Oedipus.

OEDIPUS:

What news? Speak.

MESSENGER:

King Polybus of Corinth is dead.

(OEDIPUS pauses, then breathes deeply.)

OEDIPUS:

Dead? How?

MESSENGER:

By sickness. He died in peace. The people of Corinth wish you to return and rule as their king.

(OEDIPUS turns to the CHORUS.)

OEDIPUS:

Do you hear? The oracle said I would kill my father. But Polybus died by sickness. I did not kill him. The god's word was false.

(Enter JOCASTA from the palace.)

JOCASTA:

What is this news?

OEDIPUS:

Polybus is dead. I did not kill him.

JOCASTA:

Then fear no more. You see? Oracles are empty words.

OEDIPUS:

Yet one part of the oracle remains. It said I would marry my mother. While Merope lives, I dare not go to Corinth.

MESSENGER:

Why fear that? Merope is not your mother.

(OEDIPUS and JOCASTA stare at him.)

OEDIPUS:

What do you mean?

MESSENGER:

Polybus and Merope were not your true parents.

OEDIPUS:

Not my parents? Who then gave me life?

MESSENGER:

I cannot say who your true parents are. But I know this. I once worked as a shepherd near Mount Cithaeron. Another shepherd gave me a baby boy. His feet were tied together. I felt pity for him. I brought him to Corinth and gave him to Polybus and Merope. They had no child of their own. They raised him as their son. That child was you.

(OEDIPUS steps back in shock.)

OEDIPUS:

My feet... they were once tied. I carry the marks still. Who was the shepherd who gave me to you?

MESSENGER:

He was a servant of King Laius.

(JOCASTA grows pale.)

JOCASTA:

Stop. Do not ask more.

OEDIPUS:

I must ask. Where is that shepherd now?

MESSENGER:

I think he still lives. He was from Thebes.

JOCASTA:

Oedipus, do not search further. You have enough peace. Leave this alone.

OEDIPUS:

Peace? How can I have peace if I do not know who I am? I must know the truth, even if it destroys me.

JOCASTA:

Please. I beg you. Stop.

OEDIPUS:

Why do you fear this? If I am born from slaves, so be it. I will not be ashamed. I must know.

JOCASTA:

You are a good man. That is enough.

OEDIPUS:

No. Send for the shepherd at once.

JOCASTA:

O unhappy man... may you never learn who you are.

(JOCASTA rushes back into the palace.)

CHORUS:

Why does the queen speak so? Why does she tremble? The web of fate grows tight.

OEDIPUS:

She fears I am of low birth. That is all. Let her fear. I will not stop.

(Servants bring in the old SHEPHERD.)

SHEPHERD:

Why have you called me, my king?

OEDIPUS:

You once served King Laius?

SHEPHERD:

Yes.

OEDIPUS:

Did you give a baby to this man from Corinth?

SHEPHERD:

I... I do not remember.

MESSENGER:

You do remember. It was a baby with his feet tied.

SHEPHERD:

Do not force me.

OEDIPUS:

I command you. Speak the truth. If you lie, you will suffer.

SHEPHERD:

It was many years ago.

OEDIPUS:

Answer!

SHEPHERD:

Yes. I gave him the baby.

OEDIPUS:

Where did you get the child?

SHEPHERD:

From the palace.

OEDIPUS:

Whose child was it?

SHEPHERD:

It was... the child of Laius and Jocasta.

(OEDIPUS gasps.)

OEDIPUS:

And why did you give him away?

SHEPHERD:

The queen ordered me to leave the baby to die. An oracle said he would kill his father.

OEDIPUS:

So you saved him instead.

SHEPHERD:

I pitied the child. I hoped he would die far away and the curse would not fall on us.

OEDIPUS:

And I am that child.

SHEPHERD:

Yes, my king.

(OEDIPUS staggers.)

OEDIPUS:

Then it is true. I am the son of Laius. I killed him. And Jocasta... she is my mother.

(The SHEPHERD covers his face. The MESSENGER stands silent.)

CHORUS:

O terrible truth. The king has found what he feared.

OEDIPUS:

Everything is clear. I see it all. The oracle was true. I fled from Corinth to avoid fate. I ran straight into it. I killed my father at the crossing of three roads. I married my mother. I have lived in shame without knowing.

(OEDIPUS turns toward the palace.)

OEDIPUS:

Jocasta! O mother, wife, what have we done?

(He rushes into the palace.)

CHORUS:

The house of Laius is broken. The curse has fallen. No man can escape what is written for him.

(The stage remains empty as cries are heard from inside the palace.)

End of Part 3

Part 4

SCENE: Before the palace. The CHORUS stands in fear. Cries are heard from inside.

CHORUS:

What sound is that? It is a cry of pain. The king has gone inside. The queen ran before him. O gods, what is happening in that house?

(The doors of the palace open. A MESSENGER from the palace runs out, shaking.)

MESSENGER:

O men of Thebes, terrible things have happened.

LEADER OF CHORUS:

Speak. We are ready for grief. What has the queen done?

MESSENGER:

She is dead.

CHORUS:

Dead?

MESSENGER:

When she learned the full truth, she ran into her room. She locked the doors. She cried out to Laius, her husband long dead. She cried out to her son. She cursed the marriage bed where she bore a child to her own child. Then she tied a rope and hung herself.

CHORUS:

O sorrow beyond words.

MESSENGER:

The king broke open the door. He saw her hanging there. He gave a cry like a wounded animal. He cut her down. He held her in his arms. Then he saw the gold pins on her dress. He pulled them out. He raised them high and struck his own eyes.

CHORUS:

No!

MESSENGER:

Again and again he struck them. He cried that he would not see the world that had seen his shame. Blood ran down his face. He said he did not deserve to look on his children or the city. He blinded himself.

CHORUS:

O fate, how heavy you fall on man.

(The palace doors open again. OEDIPUS appears. His eyes are bloody. Servants lead him forward.)

OEDIPUS:

Do not hold me back. Let me stand before my people.

CHORUS:

Oedipus, what have you done?

OEDIPUS:

What I had to do. I could not see the truth when I had eyes. Now I see it in darkness. Why should I look on this world? Why should I see the faces of those I have harmed? My father, whom I killed. My mother, whom I married. My children, who are both my sons and my brothers.

LEADER OF CHORUS:

Who taught you to do this?

OEDIPUS:

Apollo brought these pains upon me. But the hand that struck was mine. I chose

to blind myself. I chose not to see.

CHORUS:

O man once great, how far you have fallen.

OEDIPUS:

Do not call me great. Call me cursed. Call me the most unhappy of men. I solved the riddle of the monster. Yet I could not solve the riddle of my own life.

LEADER:

Where will you go now?

OEDIPUS:

Cast me out. Drive me from this land. I am the sickness that must be removed. The god said the killer must be sent away. I am that killer.

CHORUS:

Wait for Creon. He now rules.

OEDIPUS:

Yes. Send for him.

(Enter CREON.)

CREON:

Oedipus, I do not come to mock you. I come to help as I can.

OEDIPUS:

You are king now. Do what must be done. Send me away. Do not let me stay in this city.

CREON:

I will not act without asking the god. We must know his will.

OEDIPUS:

You have power. Use it. Do not fear to touch me. I am no longer your rival.

CREON:

I do not fear you. I feel sorrow for you. But we must do what is right.

OEDIPUS:

Then let me see my children once more.

CREON:

They will come.

(Servants bring in ANTIGONE and ISMENE, the daughters of OEDIPUS.)

OEDIPUS:

My poor daughters. Come to me. Let me touch you. I cannot see you, but I know your voices.

(He reaches out and holds them.)

OEDIPUS:

What life will you have? Men will fear you. They will whisper about your birth. Who will marry you? Who will share your shame?

CHORUS:

O sorrow for the children.

OEDIPUS:

Creon, care for them. They are innocent.

CREON:

I will care for them as my own.

OEDIPUS:

And my sons?

CREON:

They are men. They will bear their own fate.

OEDIPUS:

I pray they never suffer as I have.

(He turns his face upward.)

OEDIPUS:

O Cithaeron, mountain where I was left to die, why did you not let me die? Why did you save me for this life of pain?

CHORUS:

No man can call himself happy until his last day is done.

OEDIPUS:

Take me away. Hide me from this sight. I am no king. I am a lesson for all men. See how a man can rise high and fall low in a single day.

CREON:

Come. It is time.

(Servants lead OEDIPUS slowly toward the palace doors.)

CHORUS:

People of Thebes, look at Oedipus. He was once strong and wise. He solved the great riddle. He ruled with power. Yet see how fate has struck him down. Let no man call himself happy while he still lives. Only at the end can we judge a life.

(OEDIPUS is led inside. The stage grows quiet.)

CHORUS:

Thus ends the house of Laius. The truth has come. The curse is known. May the gods bring peace to Thebes.

End of Part 4