

Up on Olympus, Latona saw what was going on. She determined to punish Niobe. Her heart shut itself against all thoughts of kindness or gentleness, and she called Apollo and Diana to her.

"Go!" she commanded them. "Punish the proud Queen of Thebes as she deserves. She has tried to put shame upon me, and now will I be revenged!"

Both Apollo and his sister were angry when they realized what Niobe had done, and they hastened together to the city of Thebes.

All Thebes was gathered for the sports that were held during the festival. Among those who ran and wrestled, were the seven sons of Niobe. Handsomer than all others, and more skilled in the games, the seven princes were always victors. Apollo singled them out at once. The oldest son of Niobe was the first to fall from the arrow which the god let fly at him; a second brother followed immediately after. Two others of the princes were locked in each other's arms, wrestling; the god let an arrow fly which passed through both their bodies, pinning them together. The remaining three sons met with a similar fate in a few minutes.

Niobe was summoned out to see what had happened. Great was her grief! She knew that this was the punishment of Latona, and her heart was filled with hate. She made an even greater mistake than she had made in the first place. She gave way to her hatred for Latona, and she also expressed her contempt for the mother of the gods. "She has killed my sons," the grief-stricken queen cried; "but I have still seven lovely daughters! Try, O Latona! to match their beauty with that of thy only son and daughter."

Then Diana was filled with wrath. Even as her brother had shot down Niobe's seven sons, so she now sped her arrows, one by one, against Niobe's daughters. Six of them fell, and when it was the turn of the last and youngest, the poor queen, heart-broken and ready for repentance, begged for mercy. Diana, however, knew no mercy; with a laugh, she took the smallest girl even as she had taken the others.

The King of Thebes killed himself when he realized that his children were dead. As for Niobe, she sat with the bodies of her children, and for nine days never left off weeping. Even the gods were moved by her tears. At last it was decided to turn the bodies into stone and bury them. But what to do with the stricken mother they scarcely knew. Finally, they turned her to stone too, and a great tempest carried her up to a mountain-top. But even then her tears did not cease to flow, so that from her eyes came a spring of clear water, which flows on and on to symbolize her never-ending and undying grief.