

## A BIT ABOUT... ROMAN RELIGION

The Romans had thousands of gods. They believed that there were spirits and guardian gods for **everything**. Trees, rocks, streams, bridges, everything had its own guardian spirit or god. There were guardians gods for your house and even for the different parts of the house. There was a kitchen god, a door god, a bath god, and of course a sleeping god. It was the gods' job to take care of the people of the house, to watch over and protect them. If you or your family were forgetful about proper worship or the giving of sacrifices to the gods, then bad things would happen to you. The Romans blamed everything that went bad on people forgetting to worship the gods properly.

As Rome expanded and grew, the Romans came in contact with people who worshiped other gods. If those people had fought extremely well, the Romans figured that their gods must be pretty good, so the Romans adopted those gods and made them Roman gods as well.

The Romans loved the Greek gods so much that they adopted the gods and all the myths and legends about them. They changed some of the personalities of the ancient Greek gods to better fit the Roman way of life.

Zeus / Jupiter  
Hera / Juno  
Poseidon / Neptune  
Hades / Pluto  
Ares / Mars  
Hermes / Mercury  
Apollo / Apollo  
Artemis / Diana  
Athena / Minerva  
Hestia / Vesta  
Demeter / Ceres  
Aphrodite / Venus  
Hephaestus / Vulcan  
Heracles / Hercules  
Eros / Cupid  
Dionysus / Bacchus

### Some of the gods



Jupiter was the most powerful of the gods. Should he have to bring order, he would hurl a thunderbolt. Jupiter was not afraid of anyone or anything. He was the king of the gods, the ultimate authority, and his word was final.

Juno was the sister and wife of Jupiter, and thus, the Queen. Juno watched over all the women of Rome.

Neptune, the lord of the sea, was the brother of Jupiter. Neptune was very powerful. He was also quite

moody. One minute he'd be sparking and sunny, and the next he would rage and crash about. People were terrified of Neptune, especially the people who made their home along the coast.

**Pluto**, another brother of Jupiter, was the lord of the underworld.

**Mars**, Jupiter's son, was the god of war. Nobody liked Mars, much, not even his own brothers and sisters. He was tall and handsome and cruel and vain. The only person who liked Mars at all was Venus (the wife of Vulcan.)

**Mercury** was Jupiter's son and the messenger of the gods. Things were *always* going on in the roman mythical world. The job of messenger to the gods allowed Mercury to have the inside scoop on just about everything. The other gods trusted him.

**Apollo** was Jupiter's son and god of the sun, light and music.

**Diana** was goddess of the hunt and Apollo's twin sister. She was cold and ruthless. She loved her dogs, though. They loved her.

**Minerva** was the goddess of wisdom.

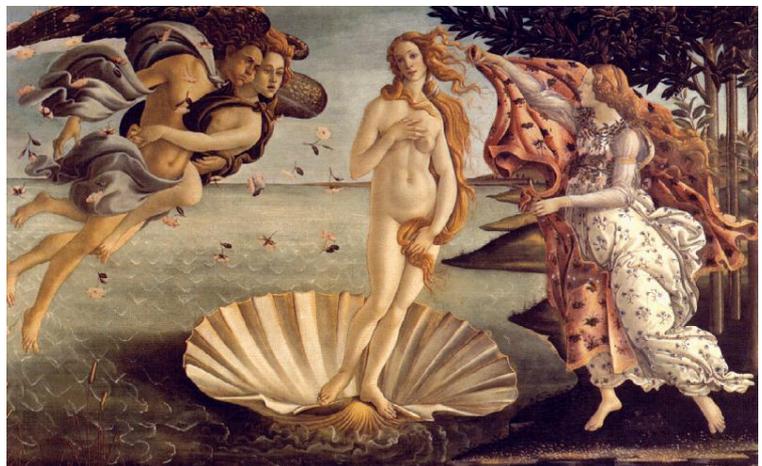
**Vesta** was the goddess of hearth and home, and Juno's sister. Juno, queen of the gods, watched over Roman women. Vesta watched over their homes and children.

**Bacchus** was the god of wine and civilization, law and calm.

**Ceres** was the goddess of the harvest, and Juno's other sister.

**Venus** was the goddess of love and beauty.

**Vulcan** was the son of Jupiter and Juno, and the husband of Venus, the goddess of love. Vulcan made the first woman out of clay. He named her Pandora.



### **The rapture of Proserpine**

Jupiter, the king of all the Roman gods, had three sisters. His third sister, Ceres, was in charge of the harvest. If Ceres was upset, the crops could die. Everyone, gods and mortals, worked hard to keep Ceres happy. What made her the happiest was enjoying the company of her daughter, Proserpine.



Proserpine had grown into a beautiful young woman. She had a smile for everyone. One day, while picking flowers in the fields, Pluto, her uncle, the god of the underworld, noticed her. Pluto was normally a gloomy fellow. But Proserpine's beauty had dazzled him. He fell in love instantly. Quickly, before anyone could interfere, he kidnapped Proserpine and hurled his chariot down into the darkest depths of the underworld, taking Proserpine with him.

Locked in a room in the Underworld, Proserpine cried and cried. She refused to speak to Pluto. And she *refused* to eat. Legend said if you ate anything in Pluto, you could never leave. She did not know if the legend was true, but she did not want to risk it in case someone came to rescue her.

Nearly a week went by. Finally, unable to bear her hunger, Proserpine ate six pomegranate seeds. It seemed her fate was sealed. She would have to live in the Underworld forever.

Meanwhile, back on earth, Jupiter was worried about the crops. The people would die if the crops failed. If that happened, who would worship Jupiter? He had to do something. Jupiter did what he often did. He sent Mercury, his youngest son, the messenger, to crack a deal, this time with Pluto.

When Mercury heard that Proserpine had eaten six pomegranate seeds, he had to think quickly. The deal he made with Pluto was that if Proserpine would marry Pluto, she would live as queen of the underworld for six months out of the year. However, each spring, Proserpine would return and live on earth for the other six months of the year. Pluto agreed. Jupiter agreed. Proserpine agreed. And finally, Ceres agreed.

Each spring, Ceres makes sure all the flowers bloom in welcome when her daughter, Queen of the Underworld, returns to her. Each fall, when Proserpine returns to Pluto, Ceres cries, and lets all the crops die until spring, when the cycle starts again.

According to the ancients, it's the reason for the seasons.

### Bibliography

<http://rome.mrdonn.org/gods.html>

<http://greece.mrdonn.org/greekgods/>



1. Choose one god or goddess and investigate a myth about him or her.