

“In the course of his journey Odysseus encounters trouble from the gods”. How Far Do You Consider That Odysseus Was Responsible For His Trouble?

I feel that throughout the *Odyssey*, a lot of what happens to Odysseus is hinged on fate, and is not his fault. For instance, when his men ask to land on Thrinacia, though they do not eat the cattle, Zeus whips up a storm and in the end they are forced to eat out of starvation. This gives the impression that the gods are intent on sticking to what the Fates say, and this is probably half of Odysseus' trouble. However, some of the problems are undeniably at least partly his fault, for instance the troubles with Poseidon, with Aeolus, and with Circe and Calypso.

Odysseus's troubles with Poseidon start when Odysseus blinds Polyphemus, Poseidon's son. Odysseus blinds the Cyclopes to save himself and his comrades, so that may not be his fault. However, Odysseus's pride is what brings Poseidon's wrath down upon him. Odysseus shouts back at Polyphemus from the ship, and tells him who blinded him, and this not only angers the Cyclopes, but also gives Polyphemus a name to curse. Poseidon in return sends rough seas that cause Odysseus and his men no end of trouble.

Aeolus causes him trouble, though inadvertently, by giving Odysseus a bag of winds. Odysseus does not tell his men what is in the bag, and in their ignorance they believe it to be gold. Within sight of Ithica, they open the bag and let the winds out, causing a tempest, which sweeps them back to Aeolia. This is mostly the fault of the men for not trusting Odysseus, and expecting that despite the way he has fairly shared out everything so far, he might be hiding some treasure from them. However, this is partly Odysseus's fault for not sharing the information with his crew.

At Aeaea, Odysseus saves his men by taking Hermes' advice almost word for word. However, he then stays in Aeaea a year with Circe, against his men's wishes. Although this may not be causing him "trouble" as such, I have included it here because it is stopping him from returning home, and we could argue that it is his fault that he spends a year there, as he clearly does not want to leave.

After he leaves Aeaea for good, Odysseus passes Scylla and Charybdis, and comes across the island of Thrinacia. He has been warned both by the Theban prophet Teiresias and Circe not to land on the island, as if he does his men won't reach home. However, after his men complain about not being able to land, Odysseus lets them, after making them swear an oath not to eat the cattle. After a month they have run out of food and are forced to eat the cattle, which they do whilst Odysseus is asleep. Zeus kills the men and destroys the ship with a lightning bolt, punishment for the cattle. This is partly Odysseus' fault for letting the men land on the island, and perhaps for not impressing on them enough why they have to keep on moving, though the men clearly play the biggest part in this. When Odysseus is stranded, therefore, without a ship or men, just a raft, he has in part brought this upon himself.

Odysseus also spends a lot of time in Ogygia with Calypso. Although again, this is not entirely his fault, as he has no choice but to stay, he is to blame for some of his imprisonment. Again, though this isn't really "trouble" from the gods, it is a goddess stopping him from going home by keeping him a prisoner on her island, and that is why I include it here. Odysseus has no way of escape, but part of the reason it took so long for the gods to free him was because of all those gods whom he had angered. Once Poseidon was out of the way, Zeus also needed convincing to let him free, and that took time.

It took Odysseus 20 years to return home, in which time he suffered much anguish, a lot of which was caused by the gods. Although not everything that happened to Odysseus was his fault, much of it was retribution for his mistakes, and occasionally, his disobedience.