

Kreon's Downfall: Total Rule, Total Hubris

A king has power and authority over his state, but at times his power can not control his own downfall. In *Antigone* by Sophocles, Kreon is a king that most citizens admire, but after he decides to kill Antigone, the state becomes chaotic and a nightmare. As king, Kreon controls all the citizens and happenings in the state. Additionally, in killing Antigone, he faces a dilemma and ends up making a calamitous mistake. Kreon eventually realizes his downfall and his ungodliness. Ultimately, only Kreon himself is responsible for his own downfall.

Kreon presides over the state and since he is a total ruler, he has influence over every aspect of the state. Kreon starts the tragedy as a powerful king of Thebes in control of every citizen's life. The one stubborn rule in Thebes is that no one must touch the body of Polynices, and anyone who tries to bury him will be executed. Kreon dislikes anyone who betrays the state and prioritizes relationships over it. His initial decision ignores the human aspect of burial rites. His focus on state authority leads him to forget the emotional needs of his citizens, including Antigone's right to bury her brother. This mistake is the starting point of the chaos because it is human to celebrate the dead through a funeral; not burying the dead body is disrespectful. The citizens "won't say anything because they're scared to say anything." Kreon's decision frightens the citizens, who begin to fear him. As Antigone goes against Kreon, her reputation improves because she is fighting Kreon for the citizens and her brother. The chorus, other characters, and even his son Haemon try to reason with Kreon and tell him that it is wrong to execute Antigone. Although Antigone is the bride of Haemon, Kreon decides to execute her anyway. This decision comes from his hubris as king.

Kreon also faces a difficult dilemma, whether to execute Antigone or appear weak; he ultimately makes a disastrous decision for himself and the state. The citizens justify Antigone's decision to bury Polynices because he is her brother, and if Kreon executes her, his reputation as king will decrease rapidly. The citizens will believe that he is abusing his power. Deciding to execute Antigone starts a series of events that lead to the downfall of Kreon and his family. The citizens also believe Kreon's law to not bury Polynices can only reflect his thoughts and no one else's given his harsh rhetoric: "the inflexible heart breaks first, the toughest iron cracks first." Kreon is essentially forced to execute Antigone because if he does not and listens to the citizens instead, they would say

that he has no authority, and others might also start disobeying him. Kreon wants to ensure that the citizens follow his orders to keep the state in order. He believes that “never at [his] hands will the traitor be honored above the patriot.” That is, Kreon values loyalty to the country above that to the family.

Kreon recognizes his ungodly decision and from that, his responsibility for his own downfall. After Tiresias tells him of how he has disobeyed God, Kreon changes his mind about “[shackling] her, [setting] her free [himself],” even though “[he is] afraid [since] it’s best to keep the established laws to the very day we die.” When Kreon goes to the cave to see Antigone and free her, he realizes that she has taken her own life. Antigone's suicide shocks and saddens Kreon deeply. His son Haemon could not believe what had happened and commits suicide as well next to her. The sorrow does not end there as when Eurydice hears of her son committing suicide, she also commits suicide. Kreon then realizes that “the guilt is all [his]—can never be fixed on another man, no escape for [him]. I killed you, I, god help me, I admit is all.” The tragedy leaves Kreon in a state of profound regret and sorrow. Due to Kreon’s stubbornness, Antigone and his son Haemon both end up committing suicide, as well as his wife Eurydice.

Thus, Kreon’s downfall happens so quickly, making it difficult for him to make the right decision at every moment. Kreon’s crucial mistake is refusing to let Polynices have a proper burial. This decision causes a lot of disagreement, leading to unhappiness against Kreon's rule. Even though he changes his mind later, it is too late. The most tragic aspect of *Antigone* is that Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice all end up taking their own lives. This play teaches us that stubbornness and not listening to others can cause a lot of pain and sadness. It is important for leaders to care about the state's rules and equally, the people's feelings.