Tantalus and Eternal Longing

The gods of Greek mythology often did terrible things when they

were displeased. (1) Knowing this made most humans *wary* of

misbehaving or displeasing the gods. It seems that a king named Tantalus,

however, was unconcerned. This is the story of his unusual punishment.

In their home on Mount Olympus, the gods fed on nectar and

ambrosia. Nectar, a beverage made with honey, was said to give

immortality to anyone who drank it. Ambrosia, the food of the gods, was

made from honey, water, fruit, cheese, olive oil, and barley. As with nectar,

those who fed on it lived forever.

(2) Many humans had *aspirations* of dining with the gods of Mount Olympus. They imagined themselves enjoying the good food, luxurious surroundings, and the view, not to mention the precious gift of immortality! (3) But Zeus, the king of the gods, was *reluctant* to invite humans to his table. In fact, in all of history, he invited only one, Tantalus. We do not know what gave Zeus the inclination to admit Tantalus to the gods’ realm. Some people believe that Tantalus was Zeus’s son. (4) Whatever, the reason, Tantalus found himself in the *enviable* position of being an honored guest on Mount Olympus. As he ate, ambrosia and drank nectar, he listened to gossip at the table, learning many secrets of the gods.

Tantalus should have been grateful for this great privilege. Instead, he was quite willful and unworthy of Zeus’s hospitality and trust. Some people believe that he told the secrets of the gods to other humans. (5) According to another version of the story, Tantalus stole the *coveted* nectar and ambrosia and shared them with his friends. Whatever his crime was, it caused Zeus to become extremely angry.

Zeus devised a horrible punishment for Tantalus. He was sent to the terrible region of Tartarus, a place located beneath Hades, the underworld. There, he lived a life of eternal hunger and thirst. Although he stood up to his chin in a pool of water, every time he bent down to take a drink, it drained away. Hanging over his head were trees bearing delicious fruit, but whenever he tried to pick a piece, the wind blew the branch out of his reach. (6) To try to satisfy his longing, Tantalus *persevered* at his task, but over and over again, he met with frustration. How wistfully he must have thought of the nectar and ambrosia of his former feasts.

Tantalus now gives his name to an English word. To tantalize people is to make them long for something they cannot have.

Choose the letter whose choice gives the sentence a meaning closest to the original sentence.

1. Knowing this made most humans \_\_\_ misbehaving or displeasing the gods.
   1. Carefully avoid b. feel jealousy for c. dislike d. tend to prefer
2. Many humans had \_\_\_ dining with the gods of Mount Olympus.
   1. Requests for b. ambitions to c. resistance to d. no interest in
3. But Zeus, the king of the gods, was \_\_\_ to invite humans to his table.
   1. Stubborn b. tempted c. happy d. unwilling
4. Whatever the reason, Tantalus found himself in the \_\_\_ position of being an honored guest at Mount Olympus.
   1. Ambitious b. tempting c. determined d. desired
5. According to another version of the story, Tantalus stole the coveted nectar and ambrosia and shared them with friends.
   1. Jealous b. persistent c. delicious d. desired
6. To try to satisfy his longing, Tantalus persevered at his task, but over and over again, he met with frustration.
   1. Kept at b. gave up on c. felt sad about d. did not want to do
7. Use TANTALIZE in a sentence.