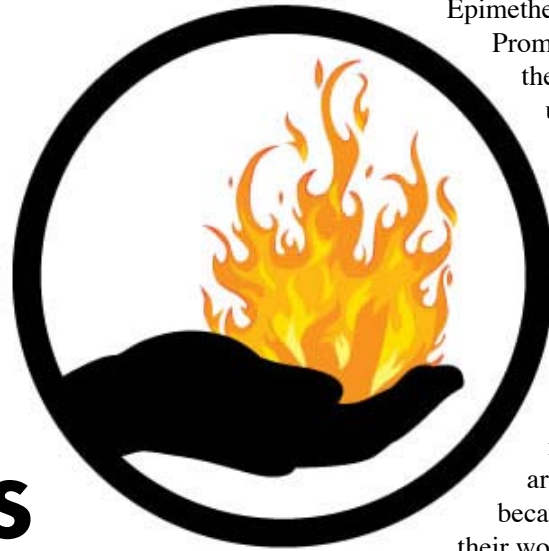


Prometheus



The earth was young when Prometheus, the clever Titan, created all the living creatures from a mixture of earth and water. From his imagination, he fashioned birds for the air, fish for the sea, and animals for the land. However, from the image of the immortal gods, he fashioned man.

Gentle Epimetheus observed his brother's creative activity with amazement and with envy. He also wanted to have some part in the creative process, so he pleaded with Prometheus to let him do something for each living creature. Because Prometheus loved his gentle brother, he decided to let him distribute the qualities that each of his creatures would need in order to survive.

With joy in his heart, Epimetheus set out to do his part. To creatures who were slow, he gave strength. To creatures who were weak, he gave great speed. Some creatures he armed with tusks, sharp claws, or stinging tails so that they could defend themselves. To other creatures, he gave either great or small size; the first to instill fright, the second to avoid detection. When he had assured himself that the land, sea, and air creatures were suitably defended, Epimetheus proceeded to protect them from the hazards of their natural environment: heat, cold, and starvation. Depending upon the climate, he gave them skins of thin leather, or of heavy fur. He gave creatures the ability to climb, to dig, or to stalk their food. He proceeded thoughtfully from creature to creature until he had distributed all of the qualities that each would need in order to survive upon the earth.

He was feeling quite proud of his accomplishments when suddenly he came upon man. Man was naked and defenseless. He, alone, of all Prometheus' creatures, had received no gifts. How would he ever survive? Epimetheus did not know what to do. He stood there, gazing at man, hoping that somehow everything would be all right.

Epimetheus was still standing there when his clever brother joined him. Prometheus had followed Epimetheus, and had been very pleased with the distributions his brother had made. However, with one glance he understood the terrible problem.

"There isn't anything left for man, is there?" he questioned softly, trying to remain calm in the face of his tremendous disappointment. Slowly, gentle Epimetheus shook his head, tears welling up in his eyes as he realized the magnitude of his mistake.

Of all his creations, Prometheus most loved man. He resolved to do whatever was necessary to insure man's survival, regardless of the risk to himself. During the next moonless night, the clever Titan stole up to Mount Olympus, home of his cousin Zeus and the other immortal gods. He knew that the Lord of Olympus would not help him. However, he realized that Zeus' children, strong-armed Hephaestus and grey-eyed Athena, would sympathize with him because they, too, were creators. The clever Titan immediately went to their workshop.

Even though they feared Zeus' thunderbolts, Hephaestus and Athena risked their great father's wrath in order to help their fellow creator. Silently and secretly, they taught Prometheus their knowledge of arts and crafts so that he, in turn, could impart this knowledge to humankind. As a parting gift, Hephaestus, the lame smith, gave Prometheus fire so that mortals could use their new knowledge.

Prometheus returned to earth to become humankind's great teacher. He taught mortals to understand their environment, to calculate, to read and to write, to build houses and sailing ships, and to tame wild animals for food, labor, and protection. He showed them treasures within Mother Earth: copper and iron, silver and gold. He taught them how, with the gift of fire, mortals could use these treasures to improve and beautify their lives. Thus it was that man, frail as he was, became master of his environment. Once mortals had this knowledge, they became aware of the gods. They worshipped the gods by building altars, by making images, and by offering sacrifices.

Then Prometheus became concerned that mortals would give the gods the best fruits of their labors, leaving little for their own uncertain existence. Therefore, the clever Titan designed a scheme whereby mortals would be able to offer pleasing sacrifices to the gods and still eat well themselves.

Prometheus carefully carved the carcass of a great ox, dividing the parts into two sacrificial piles. Into one pile, he put the rich organs and the nourishing meat, craftily hiding them away in the ox's stomach. He then covered this sacrifice with oxhide. Into the second pile, he wrapped layers of white fat over the bare white bones of the ox, covering this sacrifice also with oxhide. Then the wily Titan called upon great Zeus, Lord of Olympus, to choose which portion should be for the eternal gods and which portion for humankind.

As Zeus lifted up the hide that covered the fatty portion, he was quite impressed

with the quality of the sacrifice. Clearly, mortals had not skimmed in their efforts to please the gods. However when the Lord of Olympus raised the hide that covered the second sacrifice, he was repulsed by the appearance and the smell of the ox's stomach. Searching no further, he made the natural decision, announcing, "From now on, the fatty portion will be for the immortal gods and the stomach portion for humankind."

Then, anxious for some of the tender, tasty meat, the Lord of High Thunder quickly unwrapped the fat – and found *bones!*

With new insight, Zeus sought the eyes of his crafty opponent. Under his great cousin's scrutiny, clever Prometheus could not hide the joy he felt in having succeeded in his deception.

Zeus' mind became clouded with rage, and he thundered at Prometheus, "Wily schemer and deceiver! You have given man good meat to eat, but from now on he will have to eat it raw. I forbid man the use of fire!"

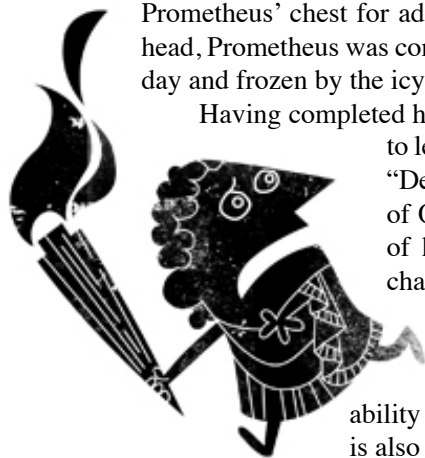
Then Olympian Zeus gathered up all fire and hid its flame from man.

Prometheus knew that man could not survive without fire. In spite of the devastating power of Zeus' thunderbolt, clever Prometheus tempted the great Olympian's rage by daring to steal fire from the gods a second time. This time, he succeeded by hiding its bright flame within a huge hollow fennel stalk.

When Zeus looked down from Mount Olympus and saw fire gleaming among Prometheus' mortals, he controlled the fury in his heart. With cruel laughter, he decided how he would punish both Prometheus and humankind.

He called his son Hephaestus, the renowned smith, and commanded that he bind the rebel Prometheus to Mount Caucasus far in the north, in Scythia.

Although Hephaestus felt great admiration and sympathy for the clever Titan, he obeyed his great father's command. Against his will, he took Prometheus through the pathless wilderness of the far north until they reached the high-ridged, winter-bitten, and rocky gorges. There, the renowned smith fastened the defiant Titan to the icy cliffs with unbreakable stone chains. He then drove an equally strong stake through Prometheus' chest for additional security. Thus, able to move only his head, Prometheus was condemned to be parched by the blazing sun each day and frozen by the icy winds each night.



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Having completed his terrible task, strong-armed Hephaestus tried to leave Prometheus with a few comforting words. "Dear friend," he said, "remember that the Lord of Olympus has just acquired the supreme power of his father Kronos. In time, his nature might change."

To this, the shackled prisoner replied, "Hephaestus, although the Fates have denied me the blessing of death and the ability to foresee my own future, Olympian Zeus, too, is also subject to their will."

"My mother has given me secret knowledge that will either humble his pride, or destroy him. The Lord of Olympus is destined to pursue a goddess, whose name I shall not reveal. This goddess is destined to give birth to a son who will become greater than his father. If his father is Olympian Zeus, then this son will hurl Zeus into the darkness of Tartarus, just as Zeus once hurled own father, Kronos."



"Far-seeing Zeus can avoid this prophecy only by freeing me. For without my advice, he is surely doomed. Until then, he can devise no cruel torment or evil scheme that will force me to divulge this knowledge."

As soon as strong-armed Hephaestus had reported this information, the Lord of Olympus sent his swift-footed son, Hermes, to Prometheus' side.

"Prometheus, thief of fire! Look at me when I speak to you!" Zeus' herald commanded. "The Father of the gods demands that you declare the secret knowledge that will destroy him."

To these words, the unconquerable Prometheus replied, "Nothing in your great father's power will force this knowledge from me unless he unshackles these chains of bondage. Therefore, let Zeus hurl thunderbolts upon me! Let his tempests lash the earth until its subterranean foundations quake and crack! He cannot force me to prevent his downfall. It is not in my nature to fear the immortal gods."

"Then I must warn you," replied Hermes, "that the Lord of High Thunder will send wave after wave of tortures upon you. First, he will strike this rugged ridge with his thunderbolts, splitting the rock apart so that it will enfold you within its darkest depths. Only after many ages have passed will you return to the world of sunlight."

"Then you will face an even more horrible torture, for Olympian Zeus will set his predatory eagle upon you. Each day, this greedy vulture will tear open your body and gorge his voracious appetite upon your defenseless liver. Each night, your liver will regenerate itself to provide a renewed feast for the eagle on the following day."

"So consider my message, defiant friend. Loud-thundering Zeus does not lie. His wishes become deeds. You can escape from this agony only if some immortal, of his own free will, chooses to give up his own immortality and take your place in the depths of Tartarus. No matter how you twist and turn in the attempt to lessen your torture, just as you are handcuffed and staked to this cliff, so are you chained to your fate. As brilliant as you are, you are not able to outwit Olympian Zeus!"

"Return to your great father, Hermes," commanded the strong Titan. "No immortal can intimidate me. Let Zeus shake the atmosphere with violent storms and flaming thunderbolts! Let his great wrath hurl my body down into the darkness of Tartarus! I will endure even his mighty, ravenous eagle! For although Zeus may batter my body, he cannot shatter my spirit."

Suddenly, the sky clouded over and became black and ominous. Swift-footed Hermes quickly sped away as a fierce wind began to batter the lonely figure chained to the frostbitten cliff.