

Prometheus

PROMETHEUS was one of the TITANS who was given the task of creating mankind by Zeus. He felt great compassion for his creations and stole fire from heaven and cheated the gods in the apportionments of the sacrifice to aide them. This incurred the wrath of Zeus who had him chained to Mount Caucasus and sent the gigantic Kaukasian Eagle to feed on his ever-regenerating liver. Many generations later Herakles freed him from this torture.

Parents

- (1) IAPETOS & KLYMENE (Theogony 507, Works & Days 54, Hyginus Fab 142)
- (2) IAPETOS & ASIA (Apollodorus 1.8)
- (3) IAPETOS (Quintus Smyrnaeus 10.190, Diodorus Siculus 5.67.1)
- (4) THEMIS (Prometheus Bound 8 & 211 & 873)

Offspring

- (1) DEUKALION (by Pronoia) (Catalogues of Women Frag 1)
- (2) DEUKALION (Apollodorus 1.45)
- (3) AIDOS (Pindar Olympian 3)

"Now Iapetos took to wife the neat-ankled mad Klymene, daughter of Okeanos, and went up with her into one bed. And she bare him ... clever Prometheus, full of various wiles ... And ready-witted Prometheus he [Zeus] bound with inextricable bonds, cruel chains, and drove a shaft through his middle, and set on him a long-winged eagle, which used to eat his immortal liver; but by night the liver grew as much again everyway as the long-winged bird devoured in the whole day. That bird Herakles, the valiant son of shapely-ankled Alkmene, slew; and delivered the son of Iapetos from the cruel plague, and released him from his affliction -- not without the will of Olympian Zeus who reigns on high, that the glory of Herakles the Theban-born might be yet greater than it was before over the plenteous earth. This, then, he regarded, and honoured his famous son; though he was angry, he ceased from the wrath which he had before because Prometheus matched himself in wit with the almighty son of Kronos. For when the gods and mortal men had a dispute at Mekone, even then Prometheus was forward to cut up a great ox and set portions before them, trying to befool the mind of Zeus. Before the rest he set flesh and inner parts thick with fat upon the hide, covering them with an ox paunch; but for Zeus he put the white bones dressed up with cunning art and covered with shining fat. Then the father of men and of gods said to him: `Son of Iapetos, most glorious of all lords,

good sir, how unfairly you have divided the portions!' So said Zeus whose wisdom is everlasting, rebuking him. But wily Prometheus answered him, smiling softly and not forgetting his cunning trick: `Zeus, most glorious and greatest of the eternal gods, take which ever of these portions your heart within you bids.' So he said, thinking trickery. But Zeus, whose wisdom is everlasting, saw and failed not to perceive the trick, and in his heart he thought mischief against mortal men which also was to be fulfilled. With both hands he took up the white fat and was angry at heart, and wrath came to his spirit when he saw the white ox-bones craftily tricked out: and because of this the tribes of men upon earth burn white bones to the deathless gods upon fragrant altars. But Zeus who drives the clouds was greatly vexed and said to him: `Son of Iapetos, clever above all! So, sir, you have not yet forgotten your cunning arts!' So spake Zeus in anger, whose wisdom is everlasting; and from that time he was always mindful of the trick, and would not give the power of unwearying fire to the Melian race of mortal men who live on the earth. But the noble son of Iapetos outwitted him and stole the far-seen gleam of unwearying fire in a hollow fennel stalk. And Zeus who thunders on high was stung in spirit, and his dear heart was angered when he saw amongst men the far-seen ray of fire. Forthwith he made an evil thing for men as the price of fire; for the very famous Limping God formed of earth the likeness of a shy maiden as the son of Kronos willed So it is not possible to deceive or go beyond the will of Zeus; for not even the son of Iapetos, kindly Prometheus, escaped his heavy anger, but of necessity strong bands confined him, although he knew many a wile." -Theogony 507f

"For the gods keep hidden from men the means of life [crops]. Else you would easily do work enough in a day to supply you for a full year even without working; soon would you put away your rudder over the smoke, and the fields worked by ox and sturdy mule would run to waste. But Zeus in the anger of his heart hid it, because Prometheus the crafty deceived him; therefore he planned sorrow and mischief against men. He hid fire; but that the noble son of Iapetos stole again for men from Zeus the counsellor in a hollow fennel-stalk, so that Zeus who delights in thunder did not see it. But afterwards Zeus who gathers the clouds said to him in anger: `Son of Iapetos, surpassing all in cunning, you are glad that you have outwitted me and stolen fire -- a great plague to you yourself and to men that shall be. But I will give men as the price for fire an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction.' So said the father of men and gods, and laughed aloud. And he bade famous Hephaistos make haste and mix earth with water and to put in it the voice and strength of human kind, and fashion a sweet, lovely maiden-shape, like to the immortal goddesses in face [Pandora] ... But when he had finished the sheer, hopeless snare [Pandora, the first woman, created by the gods], the Father sent [Hermes] ... to take it to Epimetheus as a gift. And Epimetheus did not think on what Prometheus had

said to him, bidding him never take a gift of Olympian Zeus, but to send it back for fear it might prove to be something harmful to men. But he took the gift, and afterwards, when the evil thing was already his, he understood." -Works & Days 42-89

"Deukalion was the son of Prometheus and Pronoia, Hesiod states in the first Catalogue." -The Catalogues of Women & Eoiae Frag 1 (from Scholiast on Apollonius Rhodius Arg. iii.1086)

"Against the wise Prometheus bitter-wroth the Sea-maids [Nereides] were, remembering how that Zeus, moved by his prophecies, unto Peleus gave Thetis to wife, a most unwilling bride. Then cried in wrath to these Kymothoe: 'O that the pestilent prophet [Prometheus] had endured all pangs he merited, when, deep-burrowing, the Eagle tare his liver aye renewed!" -Quintus Smyrnaeus 5.334

"And there [depicted on the shield of Eurypylos son of Herakles], at the world's end, were Kaukasos' long glens, where Herakles, rending Prometheus' chains, and hurling them this way and that with fragments of the rock whereinto they were riveted, set free the mighty Titan. Arrow-smitten lay the Eagle of the Torment there beside." -Quintus Smyrnaeus 6.269

"There [depicted on the quiver of Herakles] was the Titan Iapetos' great son [Prometheus] hung from the beetling crag of Kaukasos in bonds of adamant, and the eagle tare his liver unconsumed -- he seemed to groan!" -Quintus Smyrnaeus 10.190

"After creating men Prometheus is said to have stolen fire and revealed it to men. The gods were angered by this and sent two evils on the earth, women and disease; such is the account given by Sappho and Hesiod." -Greek Lyric I Sappho Frag 207 (from Servius on Virgil)

"The story goes that Prometheus stole the fire and Zeus in a rage rewarded those who reported the theft with a drug to ward off old age." -Greek Lyric III Ibycus Frag 342 (from Aelian, On the Nature of Animals)

"That is why Melanippides says that Thetis was pregnant by Zeus when she was given in marriage to Peleus because of the remarks of Prometheus or Themis [that she would bear a son greater than his father]." -Greek Lyric V Melanippides Frag 765 (from Scholiast on Homer's Iliad)

"The Titanes had children ... Atlas (who holds the sky on his shoulders), Prometheus, Epimetheus, and Menoitios (whom Zeus struck with a thunderbolt in the Titane battle and confined to Tartaros), were all sons of Iapetos and Asia." -Apollodorus 1.8-9

"When it came time for the birth, Prometheus (or Hephaistos, according to some) by the river Tiron struck the head of Zeus with an ax, and from his crown Athene sprang up, clad in her armor." -Apollodorus 1.20

"Prometheus, after forming men from water and earth, gave them fire, which he had hidden in a stalk of giant fennel to escape the notice of Zeus. When Zeus found out, he ordered Hephaistos to rivet the body of Prometheus to Mount Caucasos, a Skythian mountain, where he was kept fastened and bound for many years. Each day an eagle would fly to him and munch on the lobes of his liver, which would then grow back at night.

That was the price that Prometheus paid for stealing fire, until Herakles set him free later on ... Now Prometheus had a son Deukalion and was married to Pyrrha, the daughter of Epimetheus and Pandora, the first woman created by the gods. When Zeus was ready to obliterate the bronze generation of men, Prometheus advised Deucalion to fashion an ark, which he then outfitted with provisions and launched himself with Pyrrha aboard. Zeus presently flooded most of Hellas with a great downpour of rain from the sky, destroyed all the people except for a few who took refuge on high mountains nearby." -Apollodorus 1.45-46

"There they [the Kentauroi] took refuge with Kheiron, who, after the Lapiths had driven him from Mount Pelion, settled on Malea. Herakles let loose an arrow at the kentaroï as they huddled round Kheiron, which penetrated the arm of Elatos and landed in Kheiron's knee. In horror Herakles ran to him, pulled out the arrow and dressed the wound with a salve that Kheiron handed him. The festering wound was incurable, however, and Kheiron moved into his cave, where he yearned for death, but could not die because he was immortal. Prometheus thereupon proposed Herakles to Zeus, to become immortal in place of Kheiron: and so Kheiron died." -Apollodorus 2.83-87

"Then after proceeding through Libya to the sea beyond, he appropriated the goblet from Helios [for the trip from Libya to the Caucasos mountains]. When he [Herakles] reached the mainland on the other side he killed with an arrow the eagle on the Caucasos, the product of Ekhidna and Typhon that had been eating the liver of Prometheus. Then he selected for himself a restraining bond of olive, and released Prometheus; and he offered Zeus Kheiron, who was willing to die in Herakles' place.

Prometheus advised Herakles not to go after the apples himself, but rather to relieve Atlas of the celestial sphere and dispatch him. So when Herakles reached Atlas among the Hyperboreans, he remembered Prometheus' advice and took over the sphere." -Apollodorus 2.119-120

"Some say that, when Zeus was eager to have sex with Thetis, Prometheus told him that his son by her would take over dominion of the sky." -Apollodorus 3.169

“It was that year when the winged fowl and the dweller in the sea and the four-footed creature talked even as the clay of Prometheus ... Zeus the just, dispensing injustice, he robbed four-footed things of speech.” –Callimachus, Iambi Frag 1 & 8

“If Prometheus has moulded you, and you are not made of another clay.” –Callimachus Frag 493

“And him [the Caucasian Eagle] who devoured the liver of the protector of mankind [Prometheus].” –Callimachus Frag 551

"The mountains which the Greeks named Kaukasos, which is more than thirty thousand stadia distant from India; and here it was that they laid the scene of the story of Prometheus and of his being put in bonds; for these were the farthest mountains towards the east that were known to writers of that time. And the expedition of Dionysos and Herakles to the country of the Indians looks like a mythical story of later date, because Herakles is said to have released Prometheus one thousand years later ... Prometheus was bound at the ends of the earth on the Kaukasos." -Strabo 11.5.5

“In the Akademia [outside Athens] is an altar to Prometheus, and from it they run to the city carrying burning torches. The contest is while running to keep the torch still alight; if the torch of the first runner goes out, he has no longer any claim to victory, but the second runner has. If his torch also goes out, then the third man is the victor. If all the torches go out, no one is left to be the winner.” –Pausanias 1.30.2

"For Aras, they say, was a contemporary of Prometheus, the son of Iapetus, and three generations of men older than Pelasgus the son of Arcas." -Pausanias 2.14.4

“[In the temple of Zeus at Olympia are paintings] Prometheus still held by his chains, though Herakles has been raised up to him. For among the stories told about Herakles is one that he killed the eagle which tormented Prometheus in the Kaukasos, and set free Prometheus himself from his chains.” –Pausanias 5.11.6

“At Panopeus [in Phokis] there is by the roadside a small building of unburnt brick, in which is an image of Pentelic marble, said by some to be Asklepios, by others Prometheus. The latter produce evidence of their contention. At the ravine there lie two stones, each of which is big enough to fill a cart. They have the colour of clay, not earthly clay, but such as would be found in a ravine or sandy torrent, and they smell very like the skin of a man. They say that these are remains of the clay out of which the whole race of man was fashioned by Prometheus.” -Pausanias 10.4.4

“And now the last recess of the Black Sea opened up and they [the Argonauts] caught sight of the high crags of the Caucasus, where Prometheus stood chained by every limb to the hard rock with fetters of bronze, and fed an eagle on his liver. The bird kept eagerly returning to its feed. They saw it in the afternoon flying high above the ship with a strident whirr. It was near the clouds, yet it made all their canvas quiver to its wings as it beat by. For its form was not that of an ordinary bird: the long quill-feathers of each wing rose and fell like a bank of polished oars. Soon after the eagle had passed, they heard Prometheus shriek in agony as it pecked at his liver. The air rang with his screams till at length they saw the flesh-devouring bird fly back from the mountain by the same way as it came.” –Argonautica 2.1238f

“She [Medea] took a magic ointment from her box. This salve was named after Prometheus. A man had only to smear it on his body, after propitiating the only-begotten Maiden [Hekate] with a midnight offering, to become invulnerable by sword or fire and for that day to surpass himself in strength and daring. It first appeared in a plant that sprang from the blood-like ichor of Prometheus in his torment, which the flesh-eating eagle had dropped on the spurs of Caucasus. The flowers, which grew on twin stalks a cubit high, were of the colour of Korykian saffron, while the root looked like flesh that has just been cut, and the juice like the dark sap of a mountain oak. To make the ointment, Medea, clothed in black, in the gloom of night, had drawn off this juice in a Caspian shell after bathing in seven perennial streams and calling seven times on Brimo [Hekate], nurse of youth, Brimo, night-wanderer of the underworld, Queen of the dead. The dark earth shook and rumbled underneath the Titan root when it was cut, and Prometheus himself groaned in the anguish of his soul.” –Argonautica 3.844f

“It [Akhaia in Greece] is a land ringed by lofty mountains, rich in sheep and pasture, and the birthplace of Prometheus’ son, the good Deukalion, who was the first man to found cities, build temples to the gods and rule mankind as king. Its neighbours call the land Haemonia, and in it stands Iolkos, my own town.” –Argonautica 3.1083f

"There was once a time when there were gods, but no mortal creatures. And when to these also came their destined time to be created, the gods moulded their forms within the earth, of a mixture made of earth and fire and all substances that are compounded with fire and earth. When they were about to bring these creatures to light, they charged Prometheus and Epimetheus to deal to each the equipment of his proper faculty. Epimetheus besought Prometheus that he might do the dealing himself; 'And when I have dealt,' he said, 'you shall examine.'

Having thus persuaded him he dealt; and in dealing he attached strength without speed; to some, while the weaker he equipped with speed; and some he

armed, while devising for others, along with an unarmed condition, some different faculty for preservation. To those which he invested with smallness he dealt a winged escape or an underground habitation; those which he increased in largeness he preserved by this very means; and he dealt all the other properties on this plan of compensation. In contriving all this he was taking precaution that no kind should be extinguished; and when he had equipped them with avoidances of mutual destruction, he devised a provision against the seasons ordained by Heaven, in clothing them about with thick-set hair and solid hides, sufficient to ward off winter yet able to shield them also from the heats, and so that on going to their lairs they might find in these same things a bedding of their own that was native to each; and some he shod with hoofs, others with claws and solid, bloodless hides. Then he proceeded to furnish each of them with its proper food, some with pasture of the earth, others with fruits of trees, and others again with roots; and to a certain number for food he gave other creatures to devour: to some he attached a paucity in breeding, and to others, which were being consumed by these, a plenteous brood, and so procured survival of their kind. Now Epimetheus, being not so wise as he might be, heedlessly squandered his stock of properties on the brutes; he still had left unequipped the race of men, and was at a loss what to do with it. As he was casting about, Prometheus arrived to examine his distribution, and saw that whereas the other creatures were fully and suitably provided, man was naked, unshod, unbedded, unarmed; and already the destined day was come, whereon man like the rest should emerge from earth to light. Then Prometheus, in his perplexity as to what preservation he could devise for man, stole from Hephaistos and Athene wisdom in the arts together with fire--since by no means without fire could it be acquired or helpfully used by any--and he handed it there and then as a gift to man. Now although man acquired in this way the wisdom of daily life, civic wisdom he had not, since this was in the possession of Zeus; Prometheus could not make so free as to enter the citadel which is the dwelling-place of Zeus, and moreover the guards of Zeus were terrible: but he entered unobserved the building shared by Athene and Hephaistos for the pursuit of their arts, and stealing Hephaistos's fiery art and all Athene's also he gave them to man, and hence it is that man gets facility for his livelihood, but Prometheus, through Epimetheus' fault, later on (the story goes) stood his trial for theft." -Plato Protagoras 320c-322a

"And Asia [was named] after the wife of Prometheus; yet the Lydians claim a share in the latter name, saying that Asia was not named after Prometheus' wife Asia." -Herodotus The Histories 4.45.3

"And Zeus, when Prometheus had taken fire and given it to men, put him in chains and set an eagle at his side which devoured his liver. But when Herakles saw him suffering such punishment because of the benefit which he had conferred upon men, he killed the eagle with an arrow, and then

persuading Zeus to cease from his anger he rescued him who had been the benefactor of all.” –Diodorus Siculus 4.15.2

“To Iapetus was born Prometheus, of whom tradition tells us, as some writers of myths record, that he stole fire from the gods and gave it to mankind, though the truth is that he was the discoverer of those things which give forth fire and from which it may be kindled.” –Diodorus Siculus 5.67.1

“The shining eagle which was eating out the heart of Prometheus he killed with his arrows.” –Hyginus Fabulae 31

“A prediction about Thetis, the Nereid, was that her son would be greater than his father. Since no one but Prometheus knew this, and Jove wished to lie with her, Prometheus promised Jove that he would give him timely warning if he would free him from his chains. And so when the promise was given he advised Jove not to lie with Thetis, for if one greater than he were born he might drive Jove [Zeus] from his kingdom, as he himself had done to Saturnus [Kronos]. And so Thetis was given in marriage to Peleus, son of Aeacus, and Hercules was sent to kill the eagle which was eating out Prometheus’ heart. When it was killed, Prometheus after thirty thousand years was freed from Mount Caucasus.” –Hyginus Fabulae 54

“Prometheus, son of Iapetus, first fashioned men from clay. Later Vulcanus [Hephaistos], at Jove’s [Zeus’] command, made a woman’s form from clay. Minerva [Athene] gave it life, and the rest of the gods each gave some other gift. Because of this they named her Pandora. She was given in marriage to Prometheus’ brother Epimetheus. Pyrrha was her daughter, and was said to be the first mortal born.” –Hyginus Fabulae 142

“Men in early times sought fire from the gods, and did not know how to keep it alive. Later Prometheus brought it to earth in a fennel-stalk, and showed men how to keep it covered over with ashes. Because of this, Mercury, at Jove’s command, bound him with iron spikes to a cliff on Mount Caucasus, and set an eagle to eat out his heart; as much as it devoured in the day, so much grew again at night. After 30,000 years Hercules killed this eagle and freed Prometheus.” –Hyginus Fabulae 144

“The Kneeler. Others say he is Prometheus, bound on Mount Caucasus.” –Hyginus Astronomica 2.6

“Arrow. This arrow, they say, is one of the weapons of Hercules, with which he is said to have killed the eagle which ate the liver of Prometheus. It seems not unprofitable to speak of Prometheus at greater length. When the men of old with great ceremony used to carry on the sacrificial rites of the immortal gods, they would burn the victims entire in the flame of the sacrifice. And so, when the poor were prevented from making sacrifices on

account of the great expense, Prometheus, who with his wonderful wisdom is thought to have made men, by his pleading is said to have obtained permission from Jove for them to cast only a part of the victim into the fire, and to use the rest for their own food. This practice custom later established. Since he had obtained this permission, not as from a covetous man, but easily, as from a god, Prometheus himself sacrifices two bulls. When he had first placed their entrails on the altar, he put the remaining flesh of the two bulls in one heap, covering it with an oxhide. Whatever bones there were he covered with the other skin and put it down between them, offering Jove [Zeus] the choice of either part for himself. Jupiter, although he didn't act with divine forethought, nor as a god who ought to foresee everything, was deceived by Prometheus – sine we have started to believe the tale! – and thinking each part was a bull, shoe the bones for his half. And so after this, in solemn rites and sacrifices, when the flesh of victims has been consumed, they burn with fire the remaining parts which are the gods.

But, to come back to the subject, Jupiter, when he realized what had been done, in anger took fire from mortals, lest the favour of Prometheus should seem to have more weight than the power of the gods, and that uncooked flesh should not be useful to men. Prometheus, however, who was accustomed to scheming, planned by his own efforts to bring back the fire that had been taken from men. So, when the others were away, he approached the fire of Jove, and with a small bit of this shut in a fennel-stalk he came joyfully, seeming to fly, not to run, tossing the stalk so that the air shut in with its vapours should not put out the flame in so narrow a space. Up to this time, then, men who bring good news usually come with speed. In the rivalry of the games they also make it a practice for the runners to run, shaking torches after the manner of Prometheus.

In return for this deed, Jupiter, to confer a like favour on men, gave a woman to them, fashioned by Vulcanus [Hephaistos], and endowed with all kinds of gifts by the will of the gods. For this reason she was called Pandora. But Prometheus he bound with an iron chain to a mountain in Scythia named Caucasus for thirty thousand years, as Aeschylus, writer of tragedies, says. Then, too, he sent an eagle to him to eat out his liver which was constantly renewed at night. Some have said that this eagle was born from Typhon and Echidna, other from Terra [Gaia] and Tartarus, but many point out it was made by the hands of Vulcanus and given life by Jove.

The following reason for the release of Prometheus has been handed down. When Jupiter [Zeus], moved by the beauty of Thetis, sought her in marriage, he couldn't win the consent of the timid maiden, but none the less kept planning to bring it about. At that time the Parcae [Moirai] were said to have prophesied what the natural order of events should be. They said that the son of Thetis' husband, whoever he might be, would be more famous than his father. Prometheus heard this as he kept watch, not from inclination but from necessity, and reported it to Jove. He, fearing that what he had done to his father Saturnus in a similar situation, would happened to him,

namely, that he would be robbed of his power, gave up by necessity his desire to wed Thetis, and out of gratitude to Prometheus thanked him and freed him from his chains. But he didn't go so far as to free him from all binding, since he had sworn to that, but for commemoration bade him bind his finger with the two things, namely, with stone and with iron. Following this practice men have rings fashioned of stone and iron, that they may seem to be appeasing Prometheus. Some also have said that he wore a wreath, as if to claim that he as victor had sinned without punishment. And so men began the practice of wearing wreaths at times of great rejoicing and victory. You may observe this in sports and banquets.

But to come back to the beginning of the inquiry and the death of the eagle. Hercules, when sent by Eurystheus for the apples of the Hesperides, out of ignorance of the way came to Prometheus, who was bound on Mount Caucasus, as

we have shown above. When victor, he returned to Prometheus to tell him that that Draco we have mentioned was slain, and to thank him for his kindness since he had pointed out the way. Straightway he gave what honour he could to the one that deserved it, for he killed the eagle and since it was slain, men began, when victims were sacrificed, to offer livers on the altars of the gods to satisfy them in place of the liver of Prometheus." –Hyginus *Astronomica* 2.15

"[Typhoeus to Zeus declaring his intentions when he seizes the throne of heaven:] 'And the soaring round Kaukasos, another and better eagle shall tear the bleeding liver, growing for ever anew, of Hephaistos the fiery: since fire was the for which Prometheus has been suffering the ravages of his self-growing liver.'" –Dionysiaca 2.298

"[Aion father time addresses Zeus:] Prometheus himself is the cause of man's misery – Prometheus who cares for poor mortals! Instead of fire which is the beginning of all evil he ought rather to have stolen sweet nectar, which rejoices the heart of the gods, and given that to men, that he might have scattered the sorrows of the world with your own drink." –Dionysiaca 7.7

See also Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (link to the translation at Perseus). The entire work is about Prometheus.

Sources:

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