



The Story Of Prometheus - Part 1

How Fire Was Given To Men

In those old, old times, there lived two brothers who were not like other men, or like the mighty gods who lived on the mountain top. They were the sons of one of those Titans who had fought against Zeus and been sent in chains to the prison of the Lower World.

The name of the elder of these brothers was Prometheus (which means Fore-thought). Prometheus was always thinking of the future and making things ready for what might happen tomorrow, or next week, or next year, or even in a hundred years time. The younger was called Epimetheus (which means After-thought). Epimetheus was always so busy thinking of yesterday, or last year, or a hundred years ago, that he never worried at all about what might come to pass in the future.

Zeus had not sent these brothers to prison with the rest of the Titans.



The Olympians

Prometheus did not want to live with the Olympians amongst the clouds on the mountain top. He was too busy for that. While the gods were spending their time in idleness, drinking wonderful drinks and eating heavenly food, he was planning how to make the world wiser and better than it had ever been before.

Prometheus noticed that the people were no longer happy, as they had been in the Golden Age when Cronus was king of the world, and that made him very sad. So he went to live amongst the people to try to help them. Oh dear, how very poor and miserable they were! He found them living in caves and in ditches, shivering with the cold because there was no fire, dying of starvation, hunted by wild beasts and by one another. Humans had become the most miserable of all living creatures.

"If they only had fire," said Prometheus to himself, "they could at least warm themselves and cook their food; and after a while they could learn to make tools and build themselves houses. Without fire, they are worse off than the beasts."



Prometheus went boldly to Zeus and begged him to give fire to the people, so that so they might have a little comfort through the long, dreary months of winter.

"Not likely!" said Zeus. "Not likely at all! If the people had fire they might become strong and wise like us, and after a while they would drive us out of our kingdom. I'm happy to let them shiver with cold, and live like the wild animals. It is best for them to be poor and ignorant, that so we gods can rule the world without threat and be happy."



Prometheus didn't answer, but he had set his heart on helping mankind, and he did not give up. But he turned away, and left Zeus and the rest of the gods forever.

As he was walking by the seashore he found a reed, or, as some say, a tall stalk of fennel, growing. He broke it off and then saw that its hollow center was filled with a dry, soft substance which would burn slowly and stay alight for a long time. He carried the stalk with him as he began a long journey to the place where the sun lived in the far east.

"Mankind shall have fire, despite that tyrant who sits on the mountain top," he said to himself.

He reached the home of the morning sun just as the glowing, golden globe was rising from the earth and beginning his daily journey through the sky. Prometheus touched the end of the long reed to the flames, and the dry substance within it caught on fire and burned slowly. Prometheus hurried back to his own land, carrying with him the precious spark hidden in the hollow center of the plant.

When he reached home, he called some of the shivering people from their caves and built a fire for them, and showed them how to warm themselves by it, and how to build other fires from the coals. Soon there was a cheerful blaze in every home in the land, and men and women gathered round the fire and were warm and happy, and thankful to Prometheus for the wonderful gift which he had brought to them from the sun.



It was not long until the people learned to cook their food and therefore to eat like men instead of like wild beasts. They began immediately to forget their wild and savage habits, and, instead of lurking in the dark places of the world, they came out into the open air and the bright sunlight, and were happy.

After that, Prometheus taught them, little by little, a thousand things. He showed them how to build houses of wood and stone, and how to tame sheep and cattle and make them useful, and how to plow and sow and reap to grow good food, and how to protect themselves from the storms of winter and the wild beasts. Then he showed them how to dig in the earth for copper and iron, and how to melt the ore, and how to hammer it into shape and make tools and weapons from it. When he saw how happy the world was becoming he thought:

"We shall a new Golden Age, even better and brighter than the old one!"



Prometheus Brings Fire To Mankind
By Heinrich Friedrich Fuger c. 1817