

# Prometheus

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In Greek mythology, **Prometheus**, *or* *Prometheas*' (Ancient Greek, *Προμηθεύς*, "forethought") is the Titan chiefly honored for stealing fire from the gods in the stalk of a fennel plant and giving it to mortals for their use.

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## Worship

As a god of fire, burning, and craft, Prometheus had a small shrine in the Keramikon, or potter's quarter, of Athens, not far from Plato's Academy.

## Myth

Prometheus was a son of Iapetus by Clymene (one of the Oceanids). He was a brother of Atlas, Menoetius, and Epimetheus. He surpassed all in cunning and deceit. He held no awe for the gods, and he ridiculed Zeus, though he fought alongside the gods against the other Titans. Prometheus was the creator of man. When he and Epimetheus ("hind-" or "after-thought") set out to make creatures to populate the earth under the orders of Zeus, Epimetheus went with quantity and made many creatures, endowing them with many gifts that were allotted to the brother for that purpose (fur, claws, wings, and fins were some of these gifts). While his brother was making creatures, Prometheus was carefully crafting a creature after the shape of the gods. It was a human. However, Prometheus took so long in crafting his masterpiece that when he was finished, Epimetheus had already used up all the gifts from Zeus. Prometheus was sorry for his creations, and watched as they shivered in the cold winter nights. He decided to steal fire from the gods after Zeus disagreed with his idea of helping the humans. He climbed Olympus and stole fire from the chariot of Helios (or, in later mythology, Apollo). He carried the fire back in the stalk of a fennel plant, which burns slowly and so was appropriate for this task. Thus mankind was warm. To appease Zeus, Prometheus told the humans to burn offerings to the gods. He killed a great bull for this purpose. When the gods smelled the offerings, Prometheus decided to play a trick on the gods. The meat he hid beneath a layer of bone and sinew, whilst the bones he disguised with delicious-looking fat. He then offered Zeus his choice of "meat" for the gods to eat. Zeus picked the plate of bones, and Prometheus took the plate of meat for himself and the mortals. To punish Prometheus for this hubris (and all of mankind in the process), Zeus took fire away from the earth.

To get revenge on Prometheus for his continued offenses, Zeus had Hephaestus (Vulcan) make a woman made of clay named Pandora. Zeus brought her to life and sent her to Prometheus, along with a jar with all the valuable presents she had received from the gods in it. Prometheus was suspicious and would have nothing to do with Pandora, claiming that she was foolish (lacking foresight), and she was sent on to Epimetheus, who married her.

Zeus was further enraged by Prometheus's escape and had Prometheus carried to Mount Caucasus, where an eagle by the name of Ethon (offspring of the monsters Typhon and Echidna) would eat out his liver; it would grow back each day and the eagle would eat it again. This punishment was to last 30,000 years. About 12 generations later, Heracles (known as

### Greek deities series

Primordial deities  
Olympians  
Aquatic deities  
Chthonic deities  
Personified concepts  
Other deities

### Titans

*The Twelve Titans:*  
Oceanus and Tethys,  
Hyperion and Theia,  
Coeus and Phoebe,  
Cronus and Rhea,  
Mnemosyne, Themis,  
Crius, Iapetus

*Sons of Iapetus:*  
Atlas, **Prometheus**,  
Epimetheus, Menoetius

Hercules in Roman mythology), passing by on his way to find the apples of the Hesperides as part of the Twelve Labours, freed Prometheus, in a bargain he had agreed with Zeus in exchange for Chiron's immortality, by shooting the eagle with an arrow. Zeus did not mind this time that Prometheus had again evaded his punishment, as the act brought more glory to Heracles, who was Zeus's son. Prometheus was invited to return to Olympus, though he still had to carry with him the rock that he was chained to.

As the introducer of fire and inventor of sacrifice he is seen as the patron of human civilization. Uncertain sources claim he was worshipped in ancient Rome as well along with other gods.

He was the father of Deucalion with Clymene.

## Promethean myth in culture

The cloned horse Prometea, and Prometheus, a moon of Saturn, are named after this Titan, as is the asteroid 1809 Prometheus. The story of Prometheus has inspired many authors through the ages, and the Romantics saw Prometheus as a prototype of the natural daemon or genius.

- *Prometheus* – a natural satellite of the planet Saturn
- *Prometheus Bound* – Aeschylus, 525-456 BC, a play
- *Prometheus Being Chained by Vulcan* – Dirck van Baburen, 1623, a painting
- *Prometheus* – Ludwig van Beethoven, *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus*, op. 43
- *Prometheus* – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a poem
- *Prometheus* – Lord Byron, a poem
- *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* – Mary Shelley, 1818, a novel
- *Prometheus Unbound* – Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1819, a play with poetic dialogue
- *Prometheus* – Thomas Kibble Hervey, 1832, a poem
- *Prometheus* – Franz Liszt, Symphonic Poem No. 5
- *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* – Alexander Scriabin, 1910, an orchestral poem
- *Prometheus* – Carl Orff, 1968, an opera
- *Prometheus* a DC Comics villain of the Justice League of America
- *Prometheus Books* – a secular humanist publishing house founded in 1969 by Paul Kurtz
- *Prometheus* – Luigi Nono, 1992, the "Prometeo" Suite
- *Prometheus* – Tony Harrison, 1998, a feature film with poetic dialogue linking the myth to industrial decline
- *Prometheus on his Crag* – Ted Hughes, 1979, a series of poems reflecting on the Prometheus myth
- *Promethea* – Alan Moore & J.H. Williams III, 1998, a comic series
- *Prometheus: The Discipline of Fire & Demise* – Emperor, 2001, a black metal concept album
- "Prometheus Unbound" Stargate SG-1 Season 8
- "Prometheus & Bob" stop-motion animation short on the TV show, KaBlam!
- *Prometheus Rising* – Robert Anton Wilson, 1983, a psychology guide book
- Prometheus – name adopted by Equality 7-2521 in Ayn Rand's novella Anthem



Sculpture of Prometheus in front of the GE Building at the Rockefeller Center (New York City, New York, USA).

Prometheus and, his brother, Epimetheus have been employed as 'archetypes' for introversion and extraversion by Carl G. Jung. [See: "The Type Type Problem in Poetry," found in his Psychological Types, Vol. 6 of the Collected Works, 166-288.]

Prometheus is extensively parodied in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series. This is mainly through the fondly remembered Fingers-Mazda, commonly labeled the world's first thief (although he was actually only the first human thief) who stole fire from the gods but was unable to fence it because it was too hot, but also through the Troll folk hero and demigod Monolith, who stole the secret of rock from the gods long before the appearance of Mazda. Apparently the secret of rock is that if you pick one up you can hit someone with it, a fact jealously guarded by the gods. In *The Last Hero*, Cohen the Barbarian attempts to finish what the thief started by 'returning fire to the gods', that is, destroying them.

In *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, the main character, Walter Lee Younger, is called "Prometheus" by his sister's suitor, George Murchison. The title is an insult, perhaps George's way of telling Walter that his ego, evidenced by his belief that he will be a successful businessman, is unwarranted. George also knows that Walter will never comprehend the allusion, which is an insult toward Walter in its own right.

Rockefeller Center in New York City is a virtual shrine to Prometheus. His golden statue stands at the head of the central fountain, with lines from Aeschylus inscribed below.

John Yossarian in Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* is a Promethean character. This is symbolized by the liver complaint that keeps him in the hospital, as well as by the American military (the eagle) that tries to have him killed.

NASA's nuclear power and propulsion technology development program for the exploration of the outer planets is called Project Prometheus.

In the anime series *Macross* (adapted outside Japan as the first part of *Robotech*), Prometheus is the name given to one of the aircraft carriers that make up the arms of the SDF-1 *Macross*.

In the *City of Heroes* comic, Prometheus is discovered to be the real living god who sacrificed himself to grant humanity fire. The *Freedom Phalanx* go before him to request his aid in granting their powers back, but Prometheus has grown bitter to humanity for forgetting him and dismissing him as a myth. On top of this, he sees *The Statesman* as a reincarnation of Zeus, and despises him more than anything else in the world. Thanks to Manticore's plan, Prometheus relents and gives them his fire to return all superheroes' powers.

In the science fiction series, *Stargate SG-1*, the USAF vessel X/BC-303 was given the trivial name of Prometheus. Though this was suggested against by a character because the name unfittingly refers to a Greek tragedy. It is also notable that the episode in which Prometheus was destroyed was entitled "Ethon".

In the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* science fiction series, Prometheus is the name of the cargo ship that is the hub of the black market

In another science fiction series, *Star Trek*, Starfleet operates a secret, experimental, highly advanced starship named the U.S.S. Prometheus.

In Garth Nix's series of novels (*The Keys to The Kingdom*) 'The Old One' is very similar to Prometheus. He is punished for 'interfering with the secondary realms' by being chained to a rock and having his eyes gouged out each day only for them to grow back by next morning. One of the characters mentions that the punishment had changed, and he used to have his liver eaten by an eagle!

In Mark Jasobson's novel *Gojiro* Joseph Prometheus Brooks is the inventor of the A-bomb.

In the *Battletech* universe, primarily the *MechWarrior*/*MechAssault* video games, one of the Assault-Class mechs is called the Prometheus mech.

There is a brand of Interactive Whiteboards called "Promethean"

In Warhammer 40,000 The fuel for Flamer weapons is called "Promethium"

In the cartoon show on Nickelodeon, "Kablam!", a short was entitled "The Prometheus and Bob Show".

Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein' was subtitled, 'the modern Prometheus'

In 'Two Gentlemen of Verona', one of Shakespeare's first plays, Prometheus is a main character. He was named this due to his two-sided, inconstant nature in the choice between two women

## External links

Prometheus - A poem by Byron [1] (<http://englishhistory.net/byron/poems/prometheus.html>)

Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prometheus>"

Categories: Greek gods | Fire gods | Titans | Wisdom gods

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