

PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA

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G R E E C E



In the Days Before Time, it is said that the gods and goddesses quarreled a great deal. Zeus, the king of them all, along with many other deities argued that all heavenly powers should be kept for the gods and goddesses alone. Other deities, like Prometheus, argued that some of these powers should be shared with humans so that they could better their lives. ☆

In sadness, Prometheus watched men and women crawling about the Earth, with no way to keep warm in winter's blast, no way to make tools. "It is fire they need," thought Prometheus, "fire, until now the possession of Zeus alone. But I shall bring fire from the heavens to Earth, though Zeus forbids it."

To carry out his plan, Prometheus had to be stealthy. With a single branch of wood, he lit a fire from the

flaming wheels of the chariot that carried the sun across the skies. Prometheus carried this flaming torch to Earth and thus delivered fire to humans.

With Prometheus's gift, human life underwent a remarkable change. Now humans could cook their food or smoke and preserve it for later use. With the warmth of fire, people could survive the bitterest winters. With the heat of fire, humans could smelt metals and turn them into tools to use for agriculture. With fire, people could also form metals into art objects and make coins to use in commerce with distant groups of humans. All human life became better as a result of Prometheus's daring deed.

☆ But Zeus was furious at what Prometheus had done and racked his mind for a way to punish this upstart and return humans to a life of hardship.

Finally, Zeus hit upon a solution. In concert with the other gods and goddesses, he made a woman who was exemplary in every way, and he named her Pandora. She was designed to appeal to Prometheus, for she had beauty, wisdom, and wit. Zeus gave this lovely woman an exquisite lidded jar and sent her to Earth.

"Prometheus," announced Zeus, "Pandora is the perfect wife for you, for she has all the qualities you admire."

Now, Prometheus was too wise not to suspect a gift from Zeus, and so he suggested to his brother Epimetheus that he marry Pandora instead. Epimetheus was more than willing, and he and Pandora were wed.

"But what is it that you carry in that lidded jar?" asked Epimetheus of his bride.

"I don't know," said Pandora. "I know only that Zeus told me never to open it."

What more could one say to arouse curiosity? One night, when Pandora was sleeping, Epimetheus quietly removed the jar's lid. Immediately the room, and all the World, was filled with a furious buzzing and humming and stinging. Dreadful things were released from the jar: war and sickness and despair and anger; suspicion and hunger and feuds and doubt. These torments went flying over the world of humans, changing their peaceful life into discord.

☆ But unbeknownst to Zeus, Athena had put something into the jar that could help to allay all these



miseries, and this thing was Hope.

★ And Hope flew out all over the world to serve as a balance to the woes that had escaped from Pandora's jar.

Zeus's anger at Prometheus was not allayed. After all, this young god had not only dared to argue with him but had also defied him and stolen fire from him. He had given a gift to humans that Zeus never intended them to have.

To punish Prometheus for his rebellion, Zeus hit upon a terrible revenge. He ordered some of the minor gods to capture Prometheus and chain him with unbreakable links to the top of Mount Caucasus. "There among the rocks and wind you shall stay until

the end of time," thundered Zeus. "And to add to your miseries, I shall send my eagle to pluck away at your eyes and your body for eternity. You will never be released until you beg my forgiveness and swear to me your eternal allegiance and obedience."

Prometheus laughed bitterly. "That I shall never do, Mighty Zeus," he said defiantly. And so he remained chained and tortured for many centuries, some say for thirty thousand years. But never in all this time was Prometheus forgotten by humans. Indeed, he was honored by them for the gift of fire, and many gifts and prayers were offered to him.

In time, Zeus, worried that Prometheus was so loved by humans, and understanding that he would never relent, decided to free him. But who could break the unbreakable chains? There was only one being strong enough, and that was Hercules. And so it was this mighty giant who broke Prometheus's bonds and slew the eagle who had caused him such agony. The young god strode down from the mountaintop, as strong and defiant as he had ever been and went about the world of humans to find still more ways to help them. ♦