

The flaws of  
prometheus and the  
wrath of zeus: major  
figures in hesiod's  
theogony...



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BUSTER**

Zeus is certainly not a person to trifle with, especially when it comes to his sacred fire. The punishments dealt out by Zeus are probably anything but fair but are all very metaphorical and symbolic if the reader reads between the lines. Prometheus, creator of man and thief of fire, is punished by having his liver eaten by an eagle every day until the end of time. In *The Story of Prometheus* translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, the reader sees that hot-headed Zeus' reactions to Prometheus' practical jokes symbolize the severity of the ancient Greek government, the intolerance of disobedience and overconfidence, and the fear of the wrath of the gods' power in ancient Greek culture. Should the reader delve deeper into the history of ancient Greece and its culture, he should discover a great deal about Zeus' relationship with Prometheus.

Zeus' drastic punishment for Prometheus in reaction to the theft of the sacred fire signifies the severity of the ancient Greek government in several ways. To punish Prometheus, Zeus "he 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 each day." ("The Story of Prometheus," 11. 507-543) This punishment is extremely significant as it represents Zeus taking fire from Prometheus. The imagery portrayed in this line is quite vivid and The eagle - Zeus - comes back day after day to consume Prometheus' liver - most commonly thought of as the human fire because it controls blood and temperature in the body. When Hesiod writes the word "devoured," he implies that Prometheus' liver is being ripped out, as "devoured" is a more violent-sounding word. The descriptive value

placed on the bonds, or “cruel chains” is immensely related to how the Greek government has a firm, everlasting, “inextricable” hold on Greece’s people. Inextricable also shows how serious Zeus is about his punishment, for if he were to be lighter in punishing Prometheus, he could have simply made the bonds destructible so that Prometheus could one day be set free.

Pandora is one of Zeus’ more extravagant punishments, “For from her is the race of woman and female kind: of her is the deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble, no helpmeets in hateful poverty, but only in wealth.” (“The Story of Prometheus,” 11. 561-584) Just as Zeus curses the Greeks with Pandora after they were given fire, the Greek government would compromise something good for something bad. Zeus feels that because the humans have been given fire, they need to learn that not everything will go well for them. Because of this, he creates Pandora and her box. In the box, Zeus places greed, disease, pain, misery, and negativities of all sorts. However, he also places hope at the bottom of the jar, symbolizing Prometheus, man’s only hope for is was he that had always defended mankind. Zeus’ impatience with Prometheus represents how disobedience and over confidence were not tolerated in ancient Greek culture. Prometheus often was blinded in his decisions by his compellment to play practical jokes and amuse himself. Compelled by his ambition and his amusement in wiles, Prometheus attempts to trick Zeus, “...even then Prometheus was forward to cut up a great ox and see 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." (" The Story of Prometheus," 11. 507-543) Zeus is all knowing and knows that Prometheus is trying to trick him, despite his evident powers.

Everyone knows of Zeus' omniscience. In the act of hubris - overconfidence in oneself - Prometheus thinks he can outwit Zeus and in doing so becomes overly confident in himself. This deeply enrages Zeus. Ancient Greek government considered hubris a punishable crime just as the gods did. The ancient Greek government punishes hubris and does not tolerate hubris and disobedience because they are following the myths such as " The Story of Prometheus" where it is deemed unacceptable by the gods. Because the gods were the " role models" of the ancient Greeks, it is expectable that they would take after Zeus and his rage. The ancient Greeks fear the wrath of the gods - especially Zeus - for quite a few valid reasons. Taking his anger out on the ancient Greek people, "...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..." (" The Story of Prometheus," 11. 561-584) Zeus' vexation against humanity causes several outrages and negative forthcomings rationalizing why men fear the gods' wrath. Pandora brings with her illness, hatred, theft, and a manner of other negative consequences. The ancient Greeks quickly learn that the gods were not to be messed with and would sooner punish them than reward them. In the ancient Greek civilization, gods were revered and feared for their power. Zeus' epithets - all-knowing, wise, and pansophical - display his omniscience. The ancient Greek government constantly relates itself to the dozens of myths.

In Hesiod's writing, Prometheus' tricks constantly irritate Zeus, driving him to deal out underhand punishments. Government in ancient Greece can be characterized as severe, intolerant, and god-fearing especially because of Zeus' punishment for Prometheus in this myth. Considering Zeus' behaviors and temperament-based actions, it is possible that the reader and the people of ancient Greece should not have made Zeus king of the gods. However, if the Greeks were creating Zeus to answer their questions, it proves that Zeus isn't a god - it proves that he's only human.