AESCHYLUS
PROMETHEUS BOUND

Translated by
Ian Johnston
Vancouver Island University
Nanaimo, BC
Canada
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TRANSLATOR’S NOTE
In the following text, the numbers without brackets refer to the English text, and those in square brackets refer to the Greek text. Indented partial lines are included with the line above in the reckoning. All endnotes (indicated by asterisks in the text) have been provided by the translator (often with the help of F. A. Paley’s commentary on the play).

BACKGROUND NOTE
Aeschylus (c.525 BC to c.456 BC) was one of the three great Greek tragic dramatists whose works have survived. Of his many plays, seven still remain. Aeschylus may have fought against the Persians at Marathon (490 BC), and he did so again at Salamis (480 BC). According to tradition, he died from being hit with a tortoise dropped by an eagle. After his death, the Athenians, as a mark of respect, permitted his works to be restaged in their annual competitions.

Prometheus Bound was apparently the first play in a trilogy (the other two plays, now lost except for some fragments, were Prometheus Unbound and Prometheus the Fire-Bringer). Although a number of modern scholars have questioned whether Aeschylus was truly the author of the play, it has always been included among his works.

In Greek mythology, Prometheus was a Titan, a descendant of the original gods, Gaia and Ouranos (Earth and Heaven). The Titans were defeated in a battle with Zeus, who fought against his own father, Cronos, imprisoned him deep in the earth, and became the new ruling power in heaven. Although he was a Titan, Prometheus assisted Zeus in this conflict, but later offended him by stealing fire from heaven and giving it to human beings, for whom he had a special affection. Aeschylus’ play begins after Zeus has assumed control of heaven and learned about the theft.
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

POWER: divine agent of Zeus.
FORCE: divine agent of Zeus.
HEPHAESTUS: divine son of Zeus, the artisan god.
PROMETHEUS: a Titan.
CHORUS: daughters of Oceanus.
OCEANUS: a god of the sea.
IO: daughter of Inachus.
HERMES: divine son of Zeus.

[In a remote mountainous region of Scythia. HEPHAESTUS enters with POWER and FORCE dragging PROMETHEUS with them in chains.]

POWER
We have just reached the land of Scythia, at the most distant limits of the world, remote and inaccessible. Hephaestus, now it is your duty to carry out those orders you received from Father Zeus—to nail this troublemaker firmly down against these high, steep cliffs, shackling him in adamantine chains that will not break.* For he in secret stole your pride and joy and handed it to men—the sacred fire which fosters all the arts. For such a crime, he must pay retribution to the gods, so he will learn to bear the rule of Zeus and end that love he has for humankind.

HEPHAESTUS
Power and Force, where you two are concerned, what Zeus commanded us has now been done. There are no further obstacles to face. I am not bold enough to use sheer force against a kindred god and nail him down here on this freezing rock. But nonetheless, I must steel myself to finish off our work, for it is dangerous to disregard the words of Father Zeus.

[HEPHAESTUS addresses PROMETHEUS]
High-minded son of our wise counsellor, goddess Themis, against my will and yours, I must bind you with chains of brass which no one can remove on this cliff face, far from all mortal men, where you will never hear a human voice or glimpse a human shape and sun’s hot rays will scorch and age your youthful flesh.* For you,
the sparkling stars high in the sky at night
will hide those rays and offer some relief.
Then, in the morning, once again the sun
will melt the frost. This never-ending burden
of your present agony will wear you down,
for the one who is to rescue you someday
is not yet even born. This is your reward
for acting as a friend to human beings.
Though you are a god, you were not deterred
by any fear of angering the gods.
You gave men honours they did not deserve,
possessions they were not entitled to.
Because of that, you will remain on guard,
here on this joyless rock, standing upright
with your legs straight, and you will never sleep.
You will often scream in pain and sorrow,
for Zeus’ heart is pitilessly harsh,
and everyone whose ruling power is new
is cruel and ruthless.

POW
Come on. Why wait
and mope around like this so uselessly?
Why do you not despise this deity
who is so hateful to the other gods?
He gave your special gift to mortal men.

HEPHAESTUS
We are comrades—we share strong common bonds.∗

POW
That may be true, but can you disobey
your father’s words? Do you not fear him more?

HEPHAESTUS
Ah yes! You always lack a sense of pity
and are so full of cruel self-confidence.

POW
There is no point in wailing a lament
for this one here. You should stop wasting time
on things that bring no benefits to you.

HEPHAESTUS
How much I hate the special work I do!

POW
Why hate it? It’s clear enough your artistry
had nothing at all to do with causing
what we are facing here.

HEPHAESTUS
That may be true,
but still I wish my lot as artisan
had gone to someone else.
Well, every task is burdensome, except to rule the gods. No one is truly free except for Zeus. [50]

HEPHAESTUS
I know. This work is proof enough of that. I cannot deny it. 70

POWER
Then hurry up and get these chains around him, just in case Zeus sees you stalling.

HEPHAESTUS
All right. These shackles here are ready. Take a look.

[Hephaestus starts chaining Prometheus’ arm to the cliff]

POWER
Bind his hands. Use some heavy hammer blows and rivet him against the rock.

HEPHAESTUS
There! This part is finished. It looks all right.

POWER
Strike harder. Make sure he is securely fixed, with nothing slack. He is an expert at devising ways to wriggle out of hopeless situations. 80

HEPHAESTUS
Well, this arm, at least, is firmly nailed here. No one will get this out. [60]

POWER
Now drive a spike in here as well—make sure it won’t come loose. No matter how intelligent he is, he has to learn he is nothing but a fool compared to Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS
No one could justly fault this work I do, except for him.

POWER
Now smash the blunt tip of this adamantine wedge straight through his chest—use all your force.

HEPHAESTUS
Alas!
O Prometheus, this suffering of yours—
how it makes me weep!*

POWER

Why are you so slow
and sighing over Zeus’ enemy?
Be careful, or soon you may be groaning
for yourself.

HEPHAESTUS

This sight is difficult to watch,
as you can see.

POWER

I see this criminal
is getting just what he deserves. Come on,
wrap these chains around his ribs.

HEPHAESTUS

Look, I know
I have to carry out this work, so stop
ordering me about so much.

POWER

Hold on—
I’ll give you orders as often as I please
and keep on badgering you. Move down,
and use your strength to fix his legs in place.

HEPHAESTUS

Our work is done. That did not take too long.

POWER

Hit the fetters really hard—those ones there,
around his feet. The one who’s watching us,
inspecting what we do, can be vicious.

HEPHAESTUS

The words you speak well match the way you look.

POWER

Well, your soft heart can sympathize with him,
but do not criticize my stubborn will
and my harsh temper.

HEPHAESTUS

We should be going.
His limbs are all securely fixed in place.

[Exit Hephaestus]

POWER [to Prometheus]

Now you can flaunt your arrogance up here,
by stealing honours given to the gods
and offering them to creatures of a day.
Are mortal beings strong enough to ease
the burden of your pain? The gods were wrong
to give that name ‘Prometheus’ to you, 'someone who thinks ahead,' for now you need a real Prometheus to help you out and find a way to free you from these chains.*

[Exit Power and Force]

PROMETHEUS

O you heavenly skies and swift-winged winds, you river springs, you countless smiling waves on ocean seas, and Earth, you mother of all, and you as well, the all-seeing circle of the celestial sun—I summon you to see what I, a god, am suffering at the hands of gods. Look here and witness how I am being worn down with torments which I will undergo for countless years. This is the kind of shameful punishment the new ruler of the gods imposed on me. Alas! Alas! I groan under the pain of present torments and those yet to come. Who will deliver me from such harsh pain? From what part of the sky will he appear? And yet, why talk like this? For I possess a detailed knowledge of what lies in store before it happens—none of my tortures will come as a surprise. I must endure, as best I can, the fate I have been given, for I know well that no one can prevail against the strength of harsh Necessity. And yet it is not possible for me to speak or not to speak about my fate.* I have been compelled to bear the yoke of punishment because I gave a gift to mortal beings—I searched out and stole the source of fire concealed in fennel stalks, and that taught men the use of all the arts and gave them ways to make amazing things. Now chained and nailed beneath the open sky, I am paying the price for what I did. But wait! What noise and what invisible scent is drifting over me? Is it divine or human or both of these? Has someone travelled to the very edges of the world to watch my suffering. What do they want?

[Prometheus shouts out to whoever is watching him]

Here I am, an ill-fated god! You see an enemy of Zeus shackled in chains, hated by all those gods who spend their time in Zeus’ court! They think my love for men is too excessive!
What is that sound I hear?
The whirling noise of birds nearby—the air
is rustling with their lightly beating wings!
Whatever comes too close alarms me.

[Enter the Chorus of nymphs, daughters of Oceanus, in a winged chariot, which hovers beside Prometheus].

**CHORUS**
You need not fear us. We are your friends.
The rapid beating of these eager wings
has borne our company to this sheer cliff.
We worked to get our father to agree,
and he did so, although that was not easy.
The swiftly moving breezes bore me on,
for the echoing clang of hammer blows
pierced right into the corners of our cave
and beat away my bashful modesty.
And so, without tying any sandals on,
I rushed here in this chariot with wings.

**PROMETHEUS**
Aaaaii! Alas! O you daughters
born from fertile Tethys, children
of your father Oceanus, whose current
circles the entire world and never rests,
look at me! See how I am chained here,
nailed on this cliff above a deep ravine,
where I maintain my dreary watch.

**CHORUS**
I see that, Prometheus, and a cloud
of tears and terror moves across my eyes
to observe your body being worn away
in these outrageous adamantine chains.
New gods now rule on Mount Olympus,
and, like a tyrant, Zeus is governing
with new-fangled laws, overpowering
those gods who were so strong before.

**PROMETHEUS**
If only he had thrown me underground,
down there in Hades, which receives the dead,
in Tartaros, through which no one can pass,
and cruelly bound me there in fetters
no one could break, so that none of the gods
or anyone else could gloat at my distress.
But now the blowing winds toy with me here,
and the pain I feel delights my enemies.

**CHORUS**
What god is so hard hearted he would find
this scene enjoyable? Who would not feel
compassion for these sufferings of yours,
apart from Zeus, who, in his angry mood, has set his rigid mind inflexibly on conquering the race of Ouranos. And he will never stop until his heart is fully satisfied or someone else overthrows his power by trickery, hard as that may be, and rules instead.

PROMETHEUS
Yes, and even though I am being tortured, bound in these strong chains, the day is coming when that ruler of those sacred beings will truly need me to reveal to him a new intrigue by which he will be stripped of all his honours and his sceptre, too. He will not charm that secret out of me with sweet honeyed phrases of persuasion, nor, for all his savage threats, will I ever cringe down in front of him and let him know the answer—no!—not until he frees me from these cruel shackles and is willing to pay me compensation for his crime!

CHORUS
With that audacious confidence of yours, you do not cower before these bitter pains, but you allow your tongue to speak too freely. A piercing fear knifes through my heart, my dread about your fate, how you must steer your ship to find safe haven and see an end to all your troubles. For the son of Cronos has a heart that is inflexible—his character will not be moved by prayer.

PROMETHEUS
Yes, I know. Zeus is a harsh god and holds the reins of justice in his hands. But nonetheless, I can see the day approaching when his mind will soften, once that secret I described has led to his collapse. Then he will abate his stubborn rage and enter eagerly into a bond of friendship with me. By then I will be eager for that, too.

CHORUS
Tell us the whole story of what happened. How did Zeus have you seized and on what charge? Why does he so shamefully abuse you in this painful way? Give us the details, unless you would be harmed by telling us.
PROMETHEUS

I find these matters truly unbearable
to talk about, but remaining silent
pains me, too. The events that led to this
are all so miserably unfortunate.
When the powers in heaven got angry,
they started quarrelling amongst themselves.
Some wanted to hurl Cronos from his throne,
so Zeus could rule instead, but then others
wanted the reverse—to ensure that Zeus
would never rule the gods. I tried my best
to give them good advice, but I could not
convince the Titans, offspring of the Earth
and Heaven, who, despising trickery,
insisted stubbornly they would prevail
without much effort, by using force.
Both mother Themis and the goddess Earth
(who has a single form but many names)
had often uttered prophecies to me
about how Fate would make events unfold,
how those who would seize power and control
would need, not brutal might and violence,
but sly deception. I went through all this,
but they were not concerned—they thought
everything I said a waste of time.
So then, when I considered what to do,
the wisest course of action seemed to be
to join my mother and take Zeus’ side.
I did so eagerly, and he was keen
to have me with him. Thanks to my advice,
the gloomy pit of Tartarus now hides
old Cronos and his allies.* I helped Zeus,
that tyrant of the gods—now he repays me
with this foul torment. It is a sickness
which somehow comes with every tyranny
to place no trust in friends.

But you asked
why Zeus is torturing me like this.
I will explain. As soon as he was seated
on his father’s throne, he quickly set about
assigning gods their various honours
and organizing how he meant to rule.
But for those sad wretched human beings,
he showed no concern at all. He wanted
to wipe out the entire race and grow
a new one in its place. None of the gods
objected to his plan except for me.
I was the only one who had the courage.
So I saved those creatures from destruction
and a trip to Hades. And that is why
I have been shackled here and have to bear such agonizing pain, so pitiful to see.
I set compassion for the human race above the way I felt about myself, so now I am unworthy of compassion. This is how he seeks to discipline me, without a shred of mercy—the spectacle disgraces Zeus’ name.

CHORUS
But anyone who shows no pity for your agonies, Prometheus, has a heart of iron and is made out of rock. As for myself, I had no wish to see them, and now I have, my heart is full of grief.

PROMETHEUS
Yes, to my friends I make a most distressing sight.

CHORUS
Was there more? Or were you guilty of just one offence?

PROMETHEUS
I stopped men thinking of their future deaths.

CHORUS
What cure for this disease did you discover?

PROMETHEUS
Inside their hearts I put blind hope.

CHORUS
With that you gave great benefits to humankind.

PROMETHEUS
And in addition to hope, I gave them fire.

CHORUS
You did that for those creatures of a day? Do they have fire now?

PROMETHEUS
They do. And with it they will soon master many arts.

CHORUS
So Zeus charged you with this . . .

PROMETHEUS [interrupting]
. . . and he torments me and gives me no relief from suffering!
CHORUS
And has no time been set when your ordeal
comes to an end?

PROMETHEUS
No. None at all, except when it seems suitable to Zeus.

CHORUS
How will he ever think it suitable?
What hope is there in that? Do you not see
where you went wrong? But I do not enjoy
discussing those mistakes you made, and you
must find it painful. Let us leave that point,
so in this anguish you find some release.

PROMETHEUS
It is easy for someone whose foot remains
unsnared by suffering to give advice
and criticize another in distress.
I was well aware of all these matters,
and those mistakes I made quite willingly—
I freely chose to do the things I did.
I will not deny that. By offering help
to mortal beings I brought on myself
this suffering. But still, I did not think
I would receive this kind of punishment,
wasting away on these high rocky cliffs,
fixed on this remote and desolate crag.
But do not mourn the troubles I now face.
Step down from your chariot and listen
to those misfortunes I must still confront,
so you will learn the details of my story
from start to finish. Accept my offer.
Agree to hear me out, and share with me
the pain I feel right now. For misery,
shifting around from place to place, settles
on different people at different times.

CHORUS [leaving the chariot]
Your request does not fall on deaf ears,
Prometheus. My lightly stepping foot
has moved down from the swift-winged chariot
and sacred air, the pathway of the birds,
to walk along this rugged rock towards you.
I want to hear your tale, a full account
of all your suffering.

[Enter OCEANUS on a flying monster]

OCEANUS
I have now reached
the end of my long journey, travelling
to visit you, Prometheus, on the wings
of this swift beast, and using my own mind
instead of any reins to guide it here.
You know I feel great sympathy for you
and for your suffering. It seems to me
our ties of kinship make me feel that way.
But even if there were no family bonds,
no one wins more respect from me than you.
You will soon realize I speak the truth
and do not simply prattle empty words.
So come, show me how I can be of help,
for you will never say you have a friend
more loyal to you than Oceanus.

PROMETHEUS
What is this? What am I looking at?
Have you, too, travelled here to gaze upon
my agonies? How were you brave enough
to leave that flowing stream which shares your name
and those rock arches of the cave you made,
to journey to this land, the womb of iron?*
Or have you come to see how I am doing,
to sympathize with me in my distress?
Behold this spectacle—a friend of Zeus,
who helped him win his way to sovereignty!
See how his torments weigh me down!

OCEANUS
I see that,
Prometheus, and although you do possess
a subtle mind, I would like to offer you
some good advice. You have to understand
your character and adopt new habits.
For even gods have a new ruler now.
If you keep hurling out offensive words,
with such insulting and abusive language,
Zeus may well hear you, even though his throne
is far away, high in the heavenly sky,
and then this present heap of anguished pain
will seem mere childish play. Instead of that,
you poor suffering creature, set aside
this angry mood of yours and seek relief
from all this misery. These words of mine
may seem to you perhaps too old and trite,
but this is what you get, Prometheus,
for having such a proud and boastful tongue.
You show no modesty in what you say
and will not bow down before misfortune,
for you prefer to add more punishments
to those you have already. You should hear me
as your teacher and stop this kicking out
against the whip. You know our present king,
who rules all by himself and has no one
he must answer to, is harsh. I will go
and, if I can, attempt to ease your pain.
You must stay quiet—do not keep shouting
such intemperate things. Do you not know,
with all that shrewd intelligence of yours,
your thoughtless tongue can get you punished?

PROMETHEUS
I am happy things turned out so well for you.
You had the courage to support my cause,
but you escaped all blame.* Now let me be,
and do not make my suffering your concern.
Whatever you may say will be in vain—
persuading Zeus is not an easy task.
You should take care this journey you have made
does not get you in trouble.

OCEANUS
Your nature
makes you far better at giving good advice
to neighbours rather than yourself. I judge
by looking at the facts, not by listening
to what others say. You should not deter
a person who is eager to help out.
For I am sure—yes, I am confident—
there is one gift which Zeus will offer me,
and he will free you from this suffering.

PROMETHEUS
You have my thanks—and I will not forget.
There is in you no lack of willingness
to offer aid. But spare yourself the trouble,
which will be useless and no help to me,
if, in fact, you want to make the effort.
Just keep quiet, and do not interfere.
I may be miserable, but my distress
does not make me desire to see such pain
imposed on everyone—no, not at all.
What my brother Atlas has to suffer
hurts my heart. In some region to the west
he has to stand, bearing on his shoulders
the pillar of earth and heaven, a load
even his arms find difficult to carry.*
And I feel pity when I contemplate
the creature living in Cilician caves,
that fearful monster with a hundred heads,
born from the earth, impetuous Typhon,
curbed by Zeus' force.* He held out against
the might of all the gods. His hideous jaws
produced a terrifying hiss, and his eyes
flashed a ferocious stare, as if his strength
could utterly destroy the rule of Zeus.
But Zeus’ thunderbolt, which never sleeps, that swooping, fire-breathing lightning stroke, came down and drove the arrogant boasting right out of him. Struck to his very heart, he was reduced to ash, and all his might was blasted away by rolls of thunder. Now his helpless and immobile body lies close beside a narrow ocean strait, pinned down beneath the roots of Aetna, while on that mountain, at the very top, Hephaestus sits and forges red-hot iron. But one day that mountain peak will blow out rivers of fire, whose savage jaws devour the level fruitful fields of Sicily.

Though Typhon may have been burned down to ash by Zeus’ lightning bolt, his seething rage will then erupt and shoot out molten arrows, belching horrifying streams of liquid fire. But you are not without experience and have no need of me to teach you this. So save yourself the way you think is best, and I will bear whatever I must face, until the rage in Zeus’ heart subsides.

OCEANUS
Surely you realize, Prometheus, that in the case of a disordered mood words act as healers.

PROMETHEUS
Yes, but only if one uses them at the appropriate time to soften up the heart and does not try to calm its swollen rage too forcefully.

OCEANUS
What dangers do you see if someone blends his courage and his eagerness to act? Tell me that.

PROMETHEUS
Simple stupidity and wasted effort.

OCEANUS
Well, let me fall ill from this disease, for someone truly wise profits most when he is thought a fool.

PROMETHEUS
But they will think that I made the mistake.
OCEANUS
Those words of yours are clearly telling me
to go back home.

PROMETHEUS
Yes, in case concern for me
gets you in serious trouble. [390]

OCEANUS
You mean with Zeus,
now seated on his new all-powerful throne?

PROMETHEUS
Take care, in case one day that heart of his
vents its rage on you. 490

OCEANUS
What you are suffering,
Prometheus, will teach me that.

PROMETHEUS
Then go.
Be on your way. Keep to your present plans.

OCEANUS
These words of yours are telling me to leave,
and I am eager to depart. The wings
on this four-footed beast will brush the air
and make our pathway smooth. He will rejoice
to rest his limbs back in his stall at home.

[Exit OCEANUS]

CHORUS
I groan for your accursed fate,
Prometheus, and floods of tears
are streaming from my weeping eyes
and moisture wets my tender cheeks.
For Zeus, who rules by his own laws,
has set your wretched destiny and shows
towards the gods of earlier days
an overweening sense of power.

Now every region cries in one lament.
They mourn the lost magnificence,
so honoured long ago, the glorious fame
you and your brothers once possessed.
And all those mortal beings who live
in sacred Asia sense your pain,
those agonies all men find pitiful . . .

. . . including those young girls who dwell
in Colchis and have no fear of war,
and Scythian hordes who occupy
the furthest regions of the world
along the shores of lake Maeotis . . .
... and in Arabian lands the warlike tribes
from those high rocky fortress towns
in regions near the Caucasus,
a horde of warriors who scream
to heft their lethal sharpened spears.*

Only once before have I beheld
another Titan god in such distress
bound up in adamantine chains—
great Atlas, whose enormous strength
was unsurpassed and who now groans
to bear the vault of heaven on his back. 530

The sea waves, as they fall, cry out,
the ocean depths lament, while down below
the deep black pits of Hades growl,
and limpid flowing rivers moan,
to see the dreadful pain you undergo.

PROMETHEUS

You must not think it is my stubbornness
that keeps me quiet, or a sense of pride,
for bitter thoughts keep gnawing at my heart
to see how foully I am being abused.
And yet who else but I assigned clear rights
and privileges to these new deities?*
But I make no complaint about such things,
for if I spoke, I would be telling you
what you already know. So listen now
to all the miseries of mortal men—
how they were simple fools in earlier days,
until I gave them sense and intellect.
I will not speak of them to criticize,
but in a spirit of goodwill to show
I did them many favours.

First of all,
they noticed things, but did not really see
and listened, too, but did not really hear.
They spent their lives confusing everything,
like random shapes in dreams. They knew nothing
of brick-built houses turned towards the sun
or making things with wood. Instead, they dug
their dwelling places underneath the earth,
like airy ants in cracks of sunless caves.
They had no signs on which they could rely
to show when winter came or flowery spring
or fruitful summer. Everything they did
betrayed their total lack of understanding,
until I taught them all about the stars
and pointed out the way they rise and set,
which is not something easy to discern.
Then I invented arithmetic for them, the most ingenious acquired skill, and joining letters to write down words, so they could store all things in Memory, the working mother of the Muses' arts.

I was the first to set wild animals beneath the yoke, and I made them submit to collars and to packs, so mortal men would find relief from bearing heavy loads. I took horses trained to obey the reins and harnessed them to chariots, a sign of luxurious wealth and opulence. And I was the one who designed their ships, those mariners' vessels which sail on wings across the open sea.

Yes, those are the things which I produced for mortal men, and yet, as I now suffer here, I cannot find a way to free myself from this distress.

CHORUS
You have had to bear appalling pain. You lost your wits and now are at a loss. Like some bad doctor who has fallen ill, you are now desperate and cannot find the medicine to cure your own disease.

PROMETHEUS
Just listen to what else I have to say, and you will be astonished even more by the ideas and skills I came up with. The greatest one was this: if anyone was sick, they had no remedies at all, no healing potions, food, or liniments. Without such things, they simply withered up. But then I showed them how to mix mild cures, which they now use to fight off all disease. I set up many forms of prophecy and was the first to organize their dreams, to say which ones were fated to come true. I taught them about omens—vocal sounds hard to understand, as well as random signs encountered on the road. The flights of birds with crooked talons I classified for them—both those which by their nature are auspicious and those whose prophecies are ominous—observing each bird's different way of life, its enemies, its friends, and its companions, as well as the smooth texture of its entrails, what colour the gall bladder ought to have to please the gods, and the best symmetry.
for speckled lobes on livers.* I roasted
thigh bones wrapped in fat and massive cuts of meat
and showed those mortal beings the right way
to read the omens which are hard to trace.
I opened up their eyes to fiery symbols
which previously they could not understand.
Yes, I did all that. And then I helped them
with what lay hidden in the earth—copper,
iron, silver, gold. Who could ever claim
he had discovered these before I did? 620
No one. I am quite confident of that,
unless he wished to waste his time in chat.
To sum up everything in one brief word,
know this—all the artistic skills men have
come from Prometheus.

CHORUS
But you should not
be giving help like that to human beings
beyond the proper limits, ignoring
your own troubles, for I have every hope
you will be liberated from these chains
and be as powerful as Zeus himself. 630

PROMETHEUS
It is not destined that almighty Fate
will ever end these matters in that way.
I will lose these chains, but only after
I have been left twisting here in agony,
bowed down by countless pains. Artistic skill
has far less strength than sheer Necessity.

CHORUS
Then who is the one who steers Necessity?

PROMETHEUS
The three-formed Fates and unforgetting Furies.*

CHORUS
Are they more powerful than Zeus?

PROMETHEUS
Well, Zeus
will not at any rate escape his destiny. 640

CHORUS
But what has destiny foretold for Zeus,
except to rule eternally?

PROMETHEUS
That point
you must not know quite yet. Do not pursue it. [520]

CHORUS
It is some holy secret you conceal.
PROMETHEUS
Think of something else. It is not yet time
to talk of this. The matter must remain
completely hidden, for if I can keep
the secret safe, then I shall be released
from torment and lose these shameful fetters.

CHORUS
May Zeus, who governs everything,
ever direct his power at me
and fight against my purposes.
And may I never ease my efforts  
[530]
to approach the gods with offerings
of oxen slain in sacrifice
beside my father’s restless stream,
the ceaseless flow of Oceanus.
May I not speak a profane word.
Instead let this resolve remain
and never melt away from me.  660

It is sweet to spend a lengthy life
with hope about what lies in store,
feeding one’s heart with happy thoughts.
But when I look at you, Prometheus,
tormented by these countless pains,
I shiver in fear—with your self-will
you show no reverence for Zeus
and honour mortal beings too much.

Come, my friend, those gifts you gave—
what gifts did you get in return?  670
Tell me how they could offer help?
What can such creatures of a day provide?
Do you not see how weak they are,
the impotent and dream-like state,
in which the sightless human race
is bound, with chains around their feet?  [550]
Whatever mortal beings decide to do,
they cannot overstep what Zeus has planned.

I learned these things, Prometheus,
by watching your destructive fate.  680
The song which now steals over me
is different from that nuptial chant
I sang around your couch and bath
to celebrate your wedding day,
when with your dowry gifts you won
Hesione, my sister, as your wife,
and led her to your bridal bed.  [560]

[Enter IO]

IO
What land is this? What race of living beings?
Who shall I say I see here bound in chains,
exposed and suffering on these cold rocks?
What crime has led to such a punishment
and your destruction? Tell me where I am.
Where has my wretched wandering brought me?
To what part of the world?

[Io is suddenly in great pain]

Aaaaiii! The pain!!!
That gadfly stings me once again, the ghost
of earth-born Argus! Get him away from me,
O Earth, that herdsman with a thousand eyes—
the very sight of him fills me with terror!
Those crafty eyes of his keep following me.
Though dead, he is not hidden underground,
but moves out from the shades beneath the earth
and hunts me down and, in my wretched state,
drives me to wander without nourishment
along the sandy shore beside the sea.
A pipe made out of reeds and wax sings out
a clear relaxing strain.* Alas for me!
Where is this path of roaming far and wide
now leading me. What did I ever do,
O son of Cronos, how did I go wrong,
that you should yoke me to such agonies . . .

[Io reacts to another attack]

Aaaaiii!! . . . and by oppressing me like this,
setting a fearful stinging fly to chase
a helpless girl, drive me to this madness?
Burn me with fire, or bury me in earth,
or feed me to the monsters of the sea.
Do not refuse these prayers of mine, my lord!
I have had my fill of all this wandering,
this roaming far and wide—and all this pain!
I do not know how to escape the pain!
Do you not hear the ox-horned maiden call?

PROMETHEUS
How could I not hear that young girl’s voice,
the child of Inachus, in a frantic state
from the gadfly’s sting? She fires Zeus' heart
with sexual lust, and now, worn down
by Hera’s hate, is forced to roam around
on paths that never end.

IO
Why do you shout
my father’s name? Tell this unhappy girl
just who you are, you wretched sufferer,
and how, in my distress, you call to me,
knowing who I am and naming my disease,
the heaven-sent sickness which consumes me
as it whips my skin with maddening stings . . .

[Io is attacked again by the gadfly. She moves spasmodically as she wrestles with the pain]

. . . Aaiii! . . . I have come rushing here, wracked
with driving pangs of hunger, overwhelmed
by Hera’s plans for her revenge. Of those
who are in misery . . . Aaaaiii! . . . which ones
go through the sufferings I face? Give me
some clear sign how much more agony
I have to bear! Is there no remedy?
Tell me the medicines for this disease,
if you know any. Say something to me!
Speak to a wretched wandering young girl!

PROMETHEUS
I will clarify for you all those things
you wish to know—not by weaving riddles,
but by using simple speech. For with friends
our mouths should tell the truth quite openly.
You are looking at the one who offered men
the gift of fire. I am Prometheus.

IO
O you who have shown to mortal beings
so many benefits they all can share,
poor suffering Prometheus! What act
has led you to be punished in this way?

PROMETHEUS
I have just finished mourning my own pain.

IO
Will you not grant this favour to me, then?

PROMETHEUS
Ask what you wish to know. For you will learn
the details of it all from me.

IO
Tell me
who chained you here against this rocky cleft.

PROMETHEUS
The will of Zeus and Hephaestus’ hands.

IO
For what offence are you being punished?

PROMETHEUS
I have said enough. I will not tell you
any more than that.

IO
But I need more.
At least inform me when my wandering ends. How long will I be in this wretched state?

PROMETHEUS
For you it would be better not to know than to have me answer.

IO
I’m begging you—
do not conceal from me what I must bear.

PROMETHEUS
It is not that I begrudge that gift to you.

IO
Then why do you appear so hesitant to tell me everything?

PROMETHEUS
I am not unwilling, but I do not wish to break your spirit.

IO
Do not be more concerned for how I feel than I wish you to be.

PROMETHEUS
Since you insist,
I am obliged to speak. So listen to me.

CHORUS
No, not yet. Give us a share in this, as well, so we may be content with what you say. We should first learn how she became diseased. So let the girl herself explain to us the things that led to her destructive fate. Then you can teach her what still lies in store.

PROMETHEUS
Well then, Io, it is now up to you to grace them with this favour—above all, because they are your father’s sisters. And whenever one is likely to draw tears from those who listen, it is well worthwhile to weep aloud, lamenting one’s own fate.

IO
I do not know how I could now refuse you. From the plain tale I tell you will find out all things you wish to know, although to talk about the brutal storm sent by the gods, the cruel transformation of my shape, and where the trouble came from, as it swept down on a miserable wretch like me—that makes me feel ashamed.
During the night visions were always strolling through my rooms calling me with smooth, seductive words:

“You are a very fortunate young girl,
so why remain a virgin all this time,
when you could have the finest match of all?
For Zeus, smitten by the shaft of passion,
now burns for you and wishes to make love.
My child, do not reject the bed of Zeus,
but go to Lerna’s fertile meadowlands,
to your father’s flocks and stalls of oxen,
so Zeus’ eyes can ease his fierce desire.”

Visions like that upset me every night,
till I got brave enough to tell my father about what I was seeing in my dreams.
He sent many messengers to Delphi and Dodona, to see if he could learn what he might do or say to please the gods.
But his men all came back bringing reports of cryptic and confusing oracles, with wording difficult to comprehend.
Inachus at last received a clear response, a simple order which he must obey—to drive me from my home and native land, to turn me out and force me into exile, roaming the remotest regions of the earth—and if he was unwilling, Zeus would send a flaming thunderbolt which would destroy his entire race, not leaving one alive.
So he obeyed Apollo’s oracles by forcing me away against my will and denying me entry to his home.
He did not want to do it but was forced by the controlling power of Zeus.
Immediately my mind and shape were changed.
My head acquired these horns, as you can see, and a vicious fly began tormenting me with such ferocious stings I ran away, madly bounding off to the flowing stream of sweet Cherchneia and then to Lerna’s springs.
But the herdsman Argus, a child of Earth, whose rage is violent, came after me, with all those close-packed eyes of his, searching for my tracks. But an unexpected fate which no one could foresee robbed him of his life.
And now, tormented by this stinging gadfly, a scourge from god, I am being driven from place to place.
So now you understand the story of what I have had to suffer. If you can talk about my future troubles, then let me know. But do not pity me and speak false words of reassurance, for, in my view, to use deceitful speech is the most shameful sickness of them all.

CHORUS
Alas, alas! Tell me no more! Alas!
I never, never thought my ears would hear a story strange as this or suffering so hard to contemplate and terrible to bear, the outrage and the horror of that two-edged goad would pierce me to my soul. Alas! O Fate, Fate, how I shake with fear to see what has been done to Io.

PROMETHEUS
These cries and fears of yours are premature. Wait until you learn what lies in store for her.

CHORUS
Then speak, and tell us everything. The sick find solace when they clearly understand the pain they have to face before it comes.

PROMETHEUS
What you desired to learn about before you now have readily obtained from me, for you were eager first of all to hear Io herself tell you what she suffered. Now listen to what she has yet to face, the ordeals this girl must still experience at Hera's hands. You, too, child of Inachus, set what I have to say inside your heart, so you will find out how your roaming ends.

First, turn from here towards the rising sun, then move across those lands as yet unploughed, and you will reach the Scythian nomads, who live in wicker dwellings which they raise on strong-wheeled wagons. These men possess far-shooting bows, so stay away from them. Keep moving on along the rocky shoreline beside the roaring sea, and pass their lands. The Chalybes, men who work with iron, live to your left.* You must beware of them, for they are wild and are not kind to strangers. Then you will reach the river Hubristes, correctly named for its great turbulence. Do not cross it, for that is dangerous,
until you reach the Caucasus itself, the very highest of the mountains there, where the power of that flowing river comes gushing from the slopes. Then cross those peaks, which stretch up to the stars, and take the path going south, until you reach the Amazons, a tribe which hates all men. In days to come, they will found settlements in Themiscyra, beside the Thermopaeon, where the jagged rocks of Salmydessus face the sea and offer sailors and their ships a savage welcome. They will be pleased to guide you on your way. Next, you will reach the Cimmerian isthmus, beside the narrow entrance to a lake. You must be resolute and leave this place and at Maeotis move across the stream, a trip that will win you eternal fame among all mortal men, for they will name that place the Bosporus in praise of you.* Once you leave behind the plains of Europe you will arrive in Asian lands.

And now, does it not strike you that this tyrant god is violent in everything he does? Because this maiden was a mortal being and he was eager to have sex with her, he threw her out to wander the whole world. Young girl, the one you found to seek your hand is vicious. As for the story you just heard, you should know this—I am not even past the opening prelude.

IO

O no, no, no! Alas!

PROMETHEUS
Are you crying and moaning once again? How will you act once you have learned from me the agonies that still remain?

CHORUS
You mean you have still more to say about her woes?

PROMETHEUS
I do—a wintry sea of dreadful pain.

IO

What point is there for me in living then? Why do I not hurl myself this instant from these rough rocks, fall to the plain below, and put an end to all my misery?
I would prefer to die once and for all, than suffer such afflictions every day. [750]

PROMETHEUS
Then you would find it difficult to face the torments I endure, for I am one who cannot die, and death would offer me relief from pain. But now no end is set to tortures I must bear, until the day when Zeus is toppled from his tyrant’s throne. 930

IO
What’s that? Will Zeus’ power be overthrown?

PROMETHEUS
It seems to me that if that came about you would be pleased.

IO
Why not? Because of him I suffer horribly.

PROMETHEUS
Then rest assured—these things are true. [760]

IO
But who will strip away his tyrant’s sceptre?

PROMETHEUS
He will do that himself with all those brainless purposes of his.

IO
But how? If it will do no harm, tell me.

PROMETHEUS
He will get married—a match he will regret.

IO
To someone mortal or divine? Tell me—if that is something you may talk about. 940

PROMETHEUS
Why ask me that? I cannot speak of it.

IO
His wife will force him from his throne?

PROMETHEUS
She will. For she will bear a child whose power is greater than his father’s.

IO
Is there some way Zeus can avert this fate?
PROMETHEUS No, none at all— except through me, once I lose these chains. [770]

IO Who will free you if Zeus does not consent?

PROMETHEUS One of your grandchildren. So Fate decrees. 950

IO What are you saying? Will a child of mine bring your afflictions to an end?

PROMETHEUS He will— when thirteen generations have gone by.

IO I find it difficult to understand what you foresee.

PROMETHEUS You should not seek to know the details of the pain you still must bear. 960

IO Do not say you will do me a favour and then withdraw it.

PROMETHEUS I will offer you two possibilities, and you may choose.

IO What are they? Tell me what the choices are. Then let me pick which one.

PROMETHEUS All right, I will. Choose whether I should clarify for you the ordeals you still must face in days to come, or else reveal the one who will release me. [780]

CHORUS Do her a favour by disclosing one and me by telling us about the other. Do not refuse to tell us all the story. Describe her future wanderings to her, and speak to me of who will set you free. I long to hear that.

PROMETHEUS Well, since you insist, I will not refuse to tell you everything you wish to know. First, Io, I will speak about the grievous wandering you face. 970
Inscribe this on the tablets of your mind, deep in your memory.

Once you have crossed the stream that separates two continents, [select the route that] leads towards the east, the flaming pathway of the rising son, [and you will come, at first, to northern lands where cold winds blow, and here you must beware of gusting storms, in case a winter blast surprises you and snatches you away.]*

Then cross the roaring sea until you reach the Gorgons' plains of Cisthene, the home of Phorcys' daughters, three ancient women shaped like swans, who possess a single eye and just one tooth to share among themselves. Rays from the sun do not look down on them, nor does the moon at night. Beside them live their sisters, three snake-haired, winged Gorgons, whom human beings despise. No mortal man can gaze at them and still continue breathing.*

I tell you this to warn you to take care. Now hear about another fearful sight.

Keep watching out for gryphons, hounds of Zeus, who have sharp beaks and never bark out loud, and for that one-eyed Arimaspian horde on horseback, who live beside the flow of Pluto's gold-rich stream.* Do not go near them. And later you will reach a distant land of people with dark skins who live beside the fountains of the sun, where you will find the river Aethiop.* Follow its banks, until you move down to the cataract where from the Bybline mountains the sweet Nile sends out his sacred flow. He will guide you on your journey to the three-cornered land of Nilotis, where destiny proclaims you, Io, and your children will set up a distant settlement.

If any of this remains obscure and hard to understand, question me again, and I will tell you. For I have more spare time than I desire.

CHORUS

If you have left out any incidents or can say more about what lies ahead in Io’s cruel journeying, go on. But if that story has now reached an end, then favour us, in turn, with what we asked, if you by chance remember our request.
PROMETHEUS

Io has now heard about her travels,
a full account up to the very end.  
But so she learns that what she heard from me
was no mere empty tale, I will go through
the troubles she endured before she came here,
and thus provide a certain guarantee
of what I have just said. I will omit
most of the details and describe for you
the final stages of your journey here.

Once you came to the Molossian plains
and the steep mountain ridge beside Dodona,
the home of the prophetic oracle
of Thesprotian Zeus, that miracle
which defies belief, the talking oak trees,
clearly and quite unambiguously
saluted you as one who would become
a celebrated bride of Zeus.* Is this
a memory that gives you some delight?
From there, chased by the gadfly’s sting, you rushed
along the path beside the sea and reached
the mighty gulf of Rhea and from there
were driven back by storms. And you should know
an inner region of that sea will now,
in days to come, be called Ionian,*
a name to make all mortal men recall
how Io moved across it.*

These details
are tokens of how much I understand—
they show how my intelligence can see
more things than what has been revealed.

The rest
I will describe for you and her to share,
pursuing the same track I traced before.
On the very edges of the mainland,
where at its mouth the Nile deposits soil,
there is a city—Canopus. There Zeus
will finally restore you to your senses
by merely stroking and caressing you
with his non-threatening hand. After that,
you will give birth to dark-skinned Epaphus,
named from the way he was conceived by Zeus,
and he will harvest all the fruit that grows
in regions watered by the flowing Nile.*

Five generations after Epaphus,
fifty young girls will return to Argos,
not of their own free will, but to escape
a marriage with their cousins, while the men,
with passionate hearts, race after them,
like hawks in close pursuit of doves, seeking
marriages they should not rightfully pursue. 
* But the gods will not allow them to enjoy
the young girls’ bodies. They will be buried
in Pelasgian earth, for their new brides
keeping watch at night, will overpower
and, in a daring murder, kill them all,
and each young bride will take her husband’s life,
bathing a two-edged sword in her man’s blood.
I hope my enemies find love like that!
But passion will bewitch one of those wives
to spare her husband’s life, and her resolve
will fade. She will prefer to hear herself
proclaimed a coward than the alternative,
a murderess. And she will then give birth
in Argos to a royal line.

To describe
all these events in detail would require
a lengthy story. However, from her seed
a bold man will be born, who will become
a famous archer, and he is the one
who will deliver me from these afflictions.
My primeval Titan mother, Themis,
revealed this prophecy to me in full,
but to describe how and when it happens
would take up too much time. And learning that
would bring no benefit to you at all.

IO
Alas, alas for me! These spasms of pain,
these agonizing fits which drive me mad
are turning me to fire. That gadfly’s string—
not forged in any flame—is piercing me.
My fearful heart is beating in my chest,
my eyes are rolling in a frantic whirl,
and raging blasts of sheer insanity
are sweeping me away. This tongue of mine
is now beyond control—delirious words
beat aimlessly against the surging flood
of my abhorred destruction.

[Exit IO]

CHORUS
That wise man was truly wise who first
devised that saying in his mind and then
whose tongue expressed the words aloud—
the finest marriages by far are those
when both the parties have an equal rank.
The poor should never yearn to match themselves
with those whose wealth has made them indolent
or those who always praise their noble birth.
O you Fates, may you never, never see me going as Zeus' partner to his bed, and may I never be the wedded bride of anyone from heaven. I shake with fear to look on this unmarried girl, young Io, so devastated by the cruel journey, her punishment from goddess Hera. For me, when a married couple stands on equal footing, there is no cause to fear and I am not afraid. So may the love of mightier gods never cast on me that glance which no one can withstand. That is a battle where there is no fight, where what cannot be done is possible. I do not know what would become of me, for I can see no way I could escape the skilled resourcefulness of Zeus.

PROMETHEUS
And yet Zeus, for all his obdurate heart, will be brought down, when he prepares a match which will remove him from his tyrant's throne and hurl him into deep obscurity. And then the curse his father, Cronos, spoke, the one he uttered when he was deposed and lost his ancient throne, will all come true. None of the gods can clearly offer him a certain way to stave off this defeat, except for me. I know what is involved and how to save him. So for the moment let him sit full of confidence, trusting the rumbling he can make high in the sky and waving in his hands that lightning bolt which breathes out fire. None of these will help. They will not stop him falling in disgrace, a setback he cannot withstand. For now he is himself preparing the very one who will oppose him, someone marvellous and irresistible, who will produce a fiercer fire than Zeus' lightning flash, and a roar to drown out Zeus' thunder. Poseidon's trident he will split apart, the spear which whips the sea and shakes the earth. And when Zeus stumbles on this evil fate, he will find out how great the difference is between a sovereign king and abject slave.

CHORUS
You keep maligning Zeus because these things fit in with your desires.
PROMETHEUS  They may be what I want, but they will come to pass.

CHORUS  So must we then expect someone to lord it over Zeus? [930]

PROMETHEUS  Yes. His neck will be weighed down with chains more onerous than mine.

CHORUS  Why are you not afraid to shout out taunts like this?

PROMETHEUS  Why should I fear when I am destined not to die? 1160

CHORUS  But Zeus could load you with afflictions worse than these.

PROMETHEUS  Then let him do it. I am quite prepared for anything he may inflict.

CHORUS  But it is wise to pay due homage to Necessity.

PROMETHEUS  Well then, pay homage. Bow your heads in awe. Flatter the one who has the power to rule, at least for now. But as for me, I think of Zeus as less than nothing. Let him act however he wants and reign for a brief while. 1170
He will not rule the gods for very long. [940]
But wait! I see the messenger of Zeus, a servant of our brand new tyrant lord. No doubt he has come here to give us news.

[Enter Hermes]

HERMES  You devious, hot-tempered schemer, who sinned against the gods by giving their honours to creatures of a day, you thief of fire, I am here to speak to you. Father Zeus is ordering you to make known this marriage you keep boasting of and to provide the name of who will bring on Zeus' fall from power. Do not speak in enigmatic riddles, but set down clearly each and every fact. 1180 And do not make me come a second time,
Prometheus. What you are doing here,
as you well know, will not make Zeus relent.

PROMETHEUS
You speech is crammed with pride and arrogance,
quite fitting for a servant of the gods.
You all are young—so is your ruling power—
and you believe the fortress where you live
lies far beyond all grief. But I have seen
two tyrant rulers cast out from that place,
and I will see a third, the present king,
abruptly tossed from there in great disgrace.*
Do you think I am afraid and cower down
before you upstart gods? The way I feel
is far removed from any sense of fear.
So you should hurry back the way you came,
for you will not learn anything at all
in answer to what you demand of me. 1200

HERMES
But earlier with this wilfulness of yours
you brought these torments on yourself.

PROMETHEUS
Know this—
I would not trade these harsh conditions of mine
for the life you lead as Zeus' slave.

HERMES
I suppose
you find it preferable to serve this rock
than be a trusted messenger of Father Zeus.

PROMETHEUS
Insolence like yours deserves such insults.  [970]

HERMES
It sounds as if you find your present state
a source of pleasure.

PROMETHEUS
Of pleasure? How I wish
I could see my foes enjoying themselves
the way I do. And I count you among them. 1210

HERMES
You think I am to blame for your misfortune?

PROMETHEUS
To put it bluntly—I hate all the gods
who received my help and then abused me,
perverting justice.

HERMES
From the words you speak
I see your madness is no mild disease.
PROMETHEUS
I may well be insane, if madness means
one hates one’s enemies.

HERMES
If you were well,
you would be unendurable.

PROMETHEUS
Alas for me!

HERMES
Alas? That word is one Zeus does not recognize.

PROMETHEUS
But time grows old
and teaches everything.

HERMES
That well may be,
and yet you have not learned to demonstrate
a sense self-control in how you think.

PROMETHEUS
If I had that, I would not talk to you—
to such a subservient slave.

HERMES
So then
it seems, as far as what my father wants,
you will say nothing.

PROMETHEUS
Well, obviously
I owe him and should repay the favour.

HERMES
You taunt me now, as if I were a child.

PROMETHEUS
Well, are you not a child, or even stupider,
if you think you will learn anything from me?
There is no torture, no form of punishment,
that Zeus can use to force my mouth to speak
before these vicious chains are taken off.
So let him throw his fiery lightning bolt,
and with his white-winged snow and thunderclaps
and earthquakes underground shake everything,
and hurl the world into complete disorder—
for none of that will force me to submit
or even name the one who Fate decrees
will cast him from his sovereignty.

HERMES
But now
you should consider if this stance of yours
will help your cause.

PROMETHEUS
What I am doing now
has been foretold, determined long ago.

HERMES
You self-willed fool, for once you should submit,
given the present torments facing you.
Let your mind be ruled by what is right.  [1000]

PROMETHEUS
It is pointless to pester me this way—
as if you were advising ocean waves.
For you should never entertain the thought
that I will be afraid of Zeus' schemes,
turn into a woman, and raise my hands,
the way that supplicating females do,
and beg an enemy I hate so much
to free me from these chains. To act like that
is far beneath me.  1240

HERMES
Well, it seems to me
if I keep talking to you at great length
my words will all be wasted—my appeals
do not improve your mood or calm you down.
Like a young colt newly yoked, you bite the bit
and use your strength to fight against the reins.
But the vehement resistance you display
rests on a feeble scheme, for on its own
mere stubbornness in those with foolish minds
is less than useless. If these words of mine
do not convince you, think about the storm,
the triple wave of torment which will fall
and you cannot escape. First, Father Zeus
will rip this mountain crag with thunder claps
and bolts of flaming lightning, burying
your body in the rock, and yet this cleft
will hold you in its arms. When you have spent
a long time underground, you will return
into the light, and Zeus' winged hound,
his ravenous eagle, will cruelly rip
your mutilated body into shreds
and, like an uninvited banqueter,
will feast upon your liver all day long,
until its chewing turns the organ black.  1260
Do not expect your suffering to end
until some god appears who will take on
your troubles and be willing to descend
to sunless Hades and the deep black pit
of Tartarus. And so you should think hard.  [1020]
What I have said is no fictitious boast,
but plain and simple truth. For Zeus’ mouth
does not know how to utter something false.
No. Everything he says will be fulfilled.
Look around you and reflect. And never think
self-will is preferable to prudent thought.

CHORUS
To us it seems that what Hermes has said
is not unreasonable. His orders
tell you to set aside your stubbornness
and seek out wise advice. Do what he says.
It is dishonourable for someone wise
to persevere in doing something wrong.

PROMETHEUS
Well, I already know about the news
this fellow has announced with so much fuss.
There is no shame in painful suffering
inflicted by one enemy on another.
So let him hurl his twin-forked lightning bolts
down on my head, convulse the air with thunder
and frantic gusts of howling wind, and shake
the earth with hurricanes until they shift
the very roots of its foundations. Let him
make the wildly surging sea waves mingle
with the pathways of the heavenly stars,
then lift my body up and fling it down
to pitch black Tartarus, into the whirl
of harsh Necessity. Let him do all that—
he cannot make me die.

HERMES [to the Chorus]
Ideas like these,
expressed the way he does, are what we hear
from those who are quite mad. This prayer of his—
how is that not delusion? When does it stop,
this senseless raving? Well, in any case,
you who sympathize with his afflictions
should move off with all speed to somewhere else,
in case the roaring force of Zeus’ thunder
affects your minds and drives you all insane.

CHORUS
You will have give me different advice
and try to urge me in some other way
in order to convince me. For I believe
your stream of words is unendurable.
How can you order me to act so badly?
I wish to share with him whatever pain
Fate has in store, for I have learned to hate
those who betray—of all the sicknesses
that is most despicable to me.
HERMES
   As you wish—but remember what I said.  
   Do not blame your luck when you are trapped  
in Ruin's nets, and never claim that Zeus  
flung you into torments without warning.  
No—you can blame yourselves. For now you know  
by your own folly you will be caught up  
in Ruin's web, not by a secret ruse  
or unexpectedly. And from that net  
there will be no escape.  

[Exit Hermes]

PROMETHEUS
   And now things are already being transformed  
from words to deeds—the earth is shuddering,  
the roaring thunder from beneath the sea  
is rumbling past me, while bolts of lightning  
flash their twisting fire, whirlwinds toss the dust,  
and blasting winds rush out to launch a war  
of howling storms, one against another.  
The sky is now confounded with the sea.  
This turmoil is quite clearly aimed at me  
and comes from Zeus to make me feel afraid.  
O sacred mother Earth and heavenly Sky,  
who rolls around the light that all things share,  
you see these unjust wrongs I must endure!*
NOTES

*All choral speeches and chants are assigned to the character named CHORUS. However, depending on the context, some of these will be spoken by the Chorus Leader, some by the full Chorus, and some by selected members of the Chorus. [Back to text]

*Since Hephaestus is god of the forge and the craftsman god (especially with metals), it is part of his work to make sure that the chains and rivets holding Prometheus to the rock are securely fixed. Hephaestus was a son of Zeus and one of the new Olympian gods, who supplanted the Titans. [Back to text]

*Themis, a Titan, was goddess of order, law, traditions, and divine justice. In other accounts, Prometheus is the son of Clymene. [Back to text]

*The common bond they share is not a particularly close family link. Prometheus was a Titan and Hephaestus was a son of Zeus. The words may perhaps refer to the fact that both Hephaestus and Prometheus were well known for their inventive minds and thus perhaps shared an appreciation for each other’s characters and talents. [Back to text]

*As a Titan, Prometheus is immortal. Hence, the metal piercing his chest will not kill him. [Back to text]

*The name Prometheus is a combination of two words which, when put together, mean forethought. [Back to text]

*This thought would seem to mean that Prometheus cannot help protesting what has happened to him because it is inherently unjust, while at the same time he cannot speak because there is no point in protesting against Necessity—he knows that his words will have no effect on what he is fated to suffer. [Back to text]

*The Chorus remains in the chariot until asked to alight by Prometheus at line 341 below. [Back to text]

*Oceanus and Tethys, who are brother and sister, are children of the original gods Gaia and Ouranos. They are both gods of the sea. [Back to text]

*The ‘plot’ mentioned here and later was the secret knowledge Prometheus had of the prophecy that the nymph Thetis would give birth to a son greater than his father. Zeus was ignorant of this secret and would put his rule in danger by pursuing a sexual liaison with Thetis. [Back to text]

*Since Cronos and the Titans were immortals, they could not be killed. Tartarus was the deepest pit in the Underworld. [Back to text]

*The Ocean, a river flowing around the world, has the same name as Oceanus, who lives in a cave in the sea. Scythia was famous for its rich iron deposits. [Back to text]

*These lines strongly suggest that Oceanus supported Prometheus in his desire to save mankind and that Prometheus was not acting entirely alone. [Back to text]

*Paley notes that Aeschylus has here combined two visions of Atlas, one which has him looking after the pillars which separate heaven and earth and one which has Atlas himself holding heaven apart from earth. In either case, Atlas was suffering punishment for fighting against Zeus. [Back to text]

*Aeschylus places Typhon here in Cilicia, a region of Asia Minor and, a few lines further on, under Mount Aetna in Sicily. The anger of this monster buried underground evidently led people to locate him in areas of high volcanic activity and frequent earthquakes. There was a major eruption of Aetna in 479 BC. [Back to text]
*The word designating Arabian lands has been challenged, since the region in question (near the Caucasus) is nowhere near Arabia, as the Greeks knew very well. [Back to text]

*Prometheus is presumably referring here to advice he gave Zeus about how to assign each god his or her appropriate privileges (since he never had sufficient power to organize the gods, as he is claiming here, all on his own), although he may also simply be overstating his own case. [Back to text]

*The nine Muses, the patron deities of the arts and sciences, were the daughters of Mnemosyne, goddess of memory. [Back to text]

*The prophetic significance of large birds of prey, especially eagles, depended upon where they appeared in the sky, the pattern of their flight, and the condition of their entrails. The appearance of the bird's liver was important—a missing or deformed lobe was a very inauspicious omen. [Back to text]

*Traditionally there were three Fates (Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos) and three Furies (Alecto, Tissipphone, and Megaera), although the number does vary. The Fates determined the length of one's life in advance, and the Furies were the goddesses of revenge, especially blood revenge within the family. The relationship between the Olympian gods and Fate was often very ambiguous, as it is here, for Prometheus does not answer directly the Chorus' question about who finally has the most power. [Back to text]

*Io was a nymph, daughter of the river god Inachus. Zeus had sexual designs on her, but had to transform her into a heifer, in order to conceal the girl from his wife, Hera. Hera was suspicious of the cow and made Zeus give it to her as a gift. She then set the monster Argus, who had hundreds of eyes, could see in all directions, and was always watchful, to act as a herdsman and guard Io. However, Hermes, acting on instructions from Zeus, killed Argus by lulling all the eyes to sleep at once. Hera punished Io by sending a stinging gadfly to torment the transformed girl, as she wandered around the world. At this point in her story Io has been transformed. It is not clear how she would have been presented on stage as a heifer, although line 828 below indicates that she has visible horns (unless her torment is all a hallucination). [Back to text]

*This rather odd detail may refer to the shepherd's pipe with which Hermes lulled Argus to sleep, just before he killed him. It is not clear whether Io is hallucinating the sound or whether the ghost of Argus (which may or may not appear) is accompanied by music. [Back to text]

*Inachus, the father of Io, was a son of Oceanus, the father of the Chorus members. [Back to text]

*These directions indicate that Io is to wander eastward along the northern shore of the Euxine Sea (the Black Sea). [Back to text]

*The word Bosporus means the passing of the cow. The two major crossing points between Europe and Asia Minor were the Hellespont, at the western end of the river flowing out of the Black Sea (near Troy), and the Bosporus at the eastern end. Io will have moved back along the northern shore of the Black Sea and across the river, thus leaving Europe and entering Asia Minor. Aeschylus' geography in these descriptions of Io's route is not particularly reliable and in places appears confused. [Back to text]

*The stream separating the continents is the Bosporus. Prometheus resumes the narrative he ended at line 904 above. Some editors believe that part of the Greek is missing here. The passage between square bracket is a translation of Paley's suggested interpolation, which, he notes, comes from a passage which Galen quotes, stating that it is part of Prometheus Bound. The geography of Io's wandering is somewhat confused in this passage, but it seems to indicate that she will be going east, and then north and west. [Back to text]
*Phorcys was a god of the sea and the father of many monsters. The three daughters who shared a single eye were called the Graiae. The Gorgons were so terrible to look at they turned human beings to stone. Two of them were immortal, but the third, Medusa, was slain by Perseus, who used her severed head to kill his enemies. [Back to text]

*The gryphons were fabulous creatures with the bodies of lions and the heads and wings of eagles. The Arimaspians were a one-eyed race who lived far to the north in Scythia. [Back to text]

*Paley suggests as one possible route for Io’s journey a trip from Scythia in the north to Spain (known for its gold-bearing rivers), from there across the narrow strait in southern Spain to north Africa, and onto Egypt. His suggestion is, however, tentative, for Aeschylus’ geographical details are still very confusing. [Back to text]

*The rustling sounds made by the branches of the oak trees at Zeus’ oracle in Dodona were interpreted by priestesses as prophetic utterances. The Thesprotians were the group who first controlled the oracle. The details here place this stage of Io’s roaming in north-western Greece. [Back to text]

*The Ionian Sea is that part of the Mediterranean between the west coast of mainland Greece and southern Italy. These details suggest that after leaving Dodona and moving out into the Adriatic, Io turned back in her journey westward and was on her way back east when she met Prometheus. [Back to text]

*Epaphus come from the Greek word meaning touch. Zeus’ miraculous stroking of Io restored her mind and made her pregnant. [Back to text]

*The girls are the daughters of Danaus (the Danaïds), who were to marry the fifty sons of Aegyptus, the brother of Danaus and king of Egypt. The marriages were incestuous. Hence, the flight to Argos. Danaus, who had left with his daughters, agreed to the marriages only when the fifty sons threatened the citizens of Argos. [Back to text]

*Poseidon, brother of Zeus, was god of the sea. He was also responsible for earthquakes. [Back to text]

*The two deposed gods are Ouranos, an original god, and his son Cronos, who overthrew his father and was, in turn, overthrown by his son Zeus. [Back to text]

*It is not clear whether there is some final stage direction. Some editors have suggested that Prometheus now sinks down into the earth, as Hermes has indicated earlier (line 1259 ff. above). It is equally unclear what happens to the Chorus, who have vowed to stay with Prometheus. [Back to text]