

Deucalion and Pyrrha (I.313-415)



Deucalion and Pyrrha ask Themis for help - Johann Postumus, 1542

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In the opening book of his *Metamorphoses* Ovid treats the creation of the world (I.1-88), the four ages (I.89-150) that end with the Iron Age, and the story of Lycaon (I.163-252), followed by an all-destroying flood (I.253-312).

Ovid then turns his focus to restoring humankind in the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha (I.313-415), which has parallels with various myths and stories found in other ancient literatures that tell of man's restoration after a flood. The most obvious parallel is to the creation of man and woman in the Bible and to their re-creation after the Flood. As survivors the couple does not repopulate the earth with their own children, although they are good and god-fearing people; instead they follow the divine oracle and throw behind their backs stones, which are turned into men and women, depending on who tossed the stone.

The fathers of Deucalion and Pyrrha are the Titans, respectively Prometheus (fore-thought) and Epimetheus (after-thought); these names explain why Deucalion is able to solve the prophecy and his wife and first cousin is fearful of offending her mother. According to some sources, the couple eventually have a child of their own, Hellen, who becomes the father of the Hellenic people, namely the Greeks. Hellen in turn is the father of three sons Achaeus, Aeolus, and Ion (some also add a fourth son, Dorus), who are the sources of the three major Hellenic tribes, the Achaeans, the Aeolians, and the Ionians (Dorus leading to the Dorians, the last of the Greek tribes to reach mainland Greece). Since there are no metamorphoses linked to these groups, Ovid focuses on the change of the stones into people.

Outline:

313-323 The surviving couple, good and noble people, sail to the top of Mt. Parnasus.

324-347 Jupiter ends the destruction and Triton's horn signals the retreat of the waters.

348-366 Deucalion asks his wife what they are to do as the only two humans left.

367-380 They approach the temple of Themis and ask for guidance.

381-389 Told to throw their mother's bones behind them, they worry about doing such a deed.

390-397 Deucalion convinces Pyrrha that the mother is Earth and the bones are rocks; reluctantly she agrees.

398-415 The rocks tossed by Deucalion are changed into men and Pyrrha's into women.