

THE ILIAD

Homer



Edited by Ben Quine
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FROM THE WORLD VIEW LIBRARY
Edited by Ben Quine

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A few words about the format of this book: the main body of each page presents the original text unaltered in a clear, easy to read format, while the outside margins contain summary headings, definitions, and other helps. Since most of the words in the English language have had multiple definitions over time — and often multiple simultaneously, the definitions given in the margins attempt to capture as closely as possible the meaning intended by the author in the given context. Use these notes as a beginning to your study of this book.

Every great work of art will communicate not just beauty but also ideas about the world we live in. And so, we encourage you to think carefully and ask questions while reading: What ideas are presented in this work? What do the characters and situations say about the nature of man and the universe? Is there a God, according to the text? If so, what is He like? And what happens to man after death?

It is our desire to help bring this classic literature to life, and we hope that the World View Library will lead you to a deeper understanding of the living God and His creation.

BEN QUINE
AUGUST 2007

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BOOK I

Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades, and many a hero did it yield a prey to dogs and vultures, for so were the counsels of Zeus fulfilled from the day on which the son of Atreus, king of men, and great Achilles, first fell out with one another.

And which of the gods was it that set them on to quarrel? It was the son of Zeus and Leto; for he was angry with the king and sent a pestilence upon the host to plague the people, because the son of Atreus had dishonoured Chryses his priest. Now Chryses had come to the ships of the Achaeans to free his daughter, and had brought with him a great ransom: moreover he bore in his hand the sceptre of Apollo wreathed with a suppliant's wreath, and he besought the Achaeans, but most of all the two sons of Atreus, who were their chiefs.

"Sons of Atreus," he cried, "and all other Achaeans, may the gods who dwell in Olympus grant you to sack the city of Priam, and to reach your homes in safety; but free my daughter, and accept a ransom for her, in reverence to Apollo, son of Zeus."

On this the rest of the Achaeans with one voice were for respecting the priest and taking the ransom that he offered; but not so Agamemnon, who spoke fiercely to him and sent him roughly away. "Old man," said he, "let me not find you tarrying about our ships, nor yet coming hereafter. Your sceptre of the god and your wreath shall profit you nothing. I will not free her. She shall grow old in my house at Argos far from her

THE QUARREL BETWEEN
AGAMEMNON AND
ACHILLES

O goddess: *The Muses (though they are often referred to in singular), who were daughters of Zeus, were believed to inspire music, dance and poetry. The *Odyssey* similarly begins by invoking the Muse.*

the anger: (or wrath) of Achilles is a theme of the *Iliad*

Zeus: god of thunder and lightning. Butler used the Roman names for the gods, but their Greek names have been used here.

son of Zeus and Leto: Apollo, god of music, archery, prophecy, medicine and plague. Leto, a goddess, was one of Zeus' first wives and also the mother of Artemis

Chryses: priest of Apollo
suppliant: one who begs, a humble petitioner (OEDs)

Achaeans, or Daanians, or Argives: the Greeks

Atreus: father of

Agamemnon, leader of the Greek armies, and Menelaus

Priam: king of Troy

The Iliad begins in the middle of the action of the Trojan War (around 1200 BC). This dramatic technique adds color to the tale since most of the story, including the causes of the war and the characters, would have been very well known to its original audience.

The Iliad draws back the curtain to make the spiritual world visible. The Iliadic gods are inseparable from the story, among its main characters, and ultimately responsible for most of the action.

heard his prayer: *see also:*

1.208-9

16.258-9 & 550

23.783

24.322-3

pyre: funeral pile for burning the dead

Hera: wife and sister of Zeus; queen of heaven, and goddess of marriage and childbirth

deem: think or judge

turn roving home:

Agamemnon later proposes the same: 9.19-26 and 14.71-82

hecatomb: a large offering to a god. *See note on pg. 23*

own home, busying herself with her loom and visiting my couch; so go, and do not provoke me or it shall be the worse for you.”

The old man feared him and obeyed. Not a word he spoke, but went by the shore of the sounding sea and prayed apart to King Apollo whom lovely Leto had borne. “Hear me,” he cried, “O god of the silver bow, that protectest Chryse and holy Cilla and rulest Tenedos with thy might, hear me oh thou of Sminthe. If I have ever decked your temple with garlands, or burned your thigh-bones in fat of bulls or goats, grant my prayer, and let your arrows avenge these my tears upon the Danaans.”

Thus did he pray, and Apollo heard his prayer. He came down furious from the summits of Olympus, with his bow and his quiver upon his shoulder, and the arrows rattled on his back with the rage that trembled within him. He sat himself down away from the ships with a face as dark as night, and his silver bow rang death as he shot his arrow in the midst of them. First he smote their mules and their hounds, but presently he aimed his shafts at the people themselves, and all day long the pyres of the dead were burning.

For nine whole days he shot his arrows among the people, but upon the tenth day Achilles called them in assembly—moved thereto by Hera, who saw the Achaeans in their death-throes and had compassion upon them. Then, when they were got together, he rose and spoke among them.

“Son of Atreus,” said he, “I deem that we should now turn roving home if we would escape destruction, for we are being cut down by war and pestilence at once. Let us ask some priest or prophet, or some reader of dreams (for dreams, too, are of Zeus) who can tell us why Phoebus Apollo is so angry, and say whether it is for some vow that we have broken, or hecatomb that we

have not offered, and whether he will accept the savour of lambs and goats without blemish, so as to take away the plague from us.”

With these words he sat down, and Calchas son of Thestor, wisest of augurs, who knew things past present and to come, rose to speak. He it was who had guided the Achaeans with their fleet to Ilius, through the prophesyings with which Phoebus Apollo had inspired him. With all sincerity and goodwill he addressed them thus:—

“Achilles, loved of heaven, you bid me tell you about the anger of King Apollo, I will therefore do so; but consider first and swear that you will stand by me heartily in word and deed, for I know that I shall offend one who rules the Argives with might, to whom all the Achaeans are in subjection. A plain man cannot stand against the anger of a king, who if he swallow his displeasure now, will yet nurse revenge till he has wreaked it. Consider, therefore, whether or no you will protect me.”

And Achilles answered, “Fear not, but speak as it is borne in upon you from heaven, for by Apollo, Calchas, to whom you pray, and whose oracles you reveal to us, not a Danaan at our ships shall lay his hand upon you, while I yet live to look upon the face of the earth—no, not though you name Agamemnon himself, who is by far the foremost of the Achaeans.”

Thereon the seer spoke boldly. “The god,” he said, “is angry neither about vow nor hecatomb, but for his priest’s sake, whom Agamemnon has dishonoured, in that he would not free his daughter nor take a ransom for her; therefore has he sent these evils upon us, and will yet send others. He will not deliver the Danaans from this pestilence till Agamemnon has restored the girl without fee or ransom to her father, and has sent

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Ilius: another name for Troy, so “The Iliad” is the story of Troy

Achilles: the greatest of the Greek warriors

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present, let us draw a ship into the sea, and find a crew for her expressly; let us put a hecatomb on board, and let us send Chryseis also; further, let some chief man among us be in command, either Aias, or Idomeneus, or yourself, son of Peleus, mighty warrior that you are, that we may offer sacrifice and appease the anger of the god.”

Achilles scowled at him and answered, “You are steeped in insolence and lust of gain. With what heart can any of the Achaeans do your bidding, either on foray or in open fighting? I came not warring here for any ill the Trojans had done me. I have no quarrel with them. They have not raided my cattle nor my horses, nor cut down my harvests on the rich plains of Phthia; for between me and them there is a great space, both mountain and sounding sea. We have followed you, Sir Insolence! for your pleasure, not ours—to gain satisfaction from the Trojans for your shameless self and for Menelaus. You forget this, and threaten to rob me of the prize for which I have toiled, and which the sons of the Achaeans have given me. Never when the Achaeans sack any rich city of the Trojans do I receive so good a prize as you do, though it is my hands that do the better part of the fighting. When the sharing comes, your share is far the largest, and I, forsooth, must go back to my ships, take what I can get and be thankful, when my labour of fighting is done. Now, therefore, I shall go back to Phthia; it will be much better for me to return home with my ships, for I will not stay here dishonoured to gather gold and substance for you.”

And Agamemnon answered, “Fly if you will, I shall make you no prayers to stay you. I have others here who will do me honour, and above all Zeus, the lord of counsel. There is no king here so hateful to me as you are, for you are ever quarrelsome and ill-affected. What though you be brave? Was it not heaven that made you

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Steeped: soaked, saturated

The Greeks have come to fight Troy largely over the abduction of Helen, who was considered the most beautiful woman on earth. Menelaus, Helen’s husband, was also the brother of Agamemnon, the most influential and powerful of the Greeks. Together, they summoned the Greek armies to war to regain Helen and seek revenge. Achilles argues that for Agamemnon to take Briseis is an equal outrage to the abduction of Helen.

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toiled: laboured severely, worked continuously or with great difficulty

After a victory, it was common practice to distribute plunder by awarding prizes to the greatest warriors. Since greater prizes led to greater honor, prizes quickly became one of the main motivations for fighting.

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The characters of the Iliad strive primarily for glory and honor. Glory is what is spoken about one: one's reputation or fame (especially after death). Honor is the reward given for heroic actions (especially materially). Agamemnon has threatened to ruin Achilles' reputation (glory) by taking away his war prize (honor), so he has essentially taken away Achilles' reason for fighting.

Vandiver

loth: averse, unwilling

ACHILLES SENDS HIS MOTHER THETIS TO ASK ZEUS TO HELP THE TROJANS

hard by: near to

forthwith: immediately

Achilles' parents: The unusual marriage of Thetis (a sea-goddess) to Peles (a mortal) was arranged by Zeus (18.415-422) and resulted in Achilles' favor among the gods. But their relationship is at this point apparently strained or ended as they do not interact in the Iliad.

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and his ships, and ill-pleased he was when he beheld them. They stood fearfully and reverently before him, and never a word did they speak, but he knew them and said, "Welcome, heralds, messengers of gods and men; draw near; my quarrel is not with you but with Agamemnon who has sent you for the girl Briseis. Therefore, Patroclus, bring her and give her to them, but let them be witnesses by the blessed gods, by mortal men, and by the fierceness of Agamemnon's anger, that if ever again there be need of me to save the people from ruin, they shall seek and they shall not find. Agamemnon is mad with rage and knows not how to look before and after that the Achaeans may fight by their ships in safety."

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Patroclus did as his dear comrade had bidden him. He brought Briseis from the tent and gave her over to the heralds, who took her with them to the ships of the Achaeans—and the woman was loth to go. Then Achilles went all alone by the side of the hoar sea, weeping and looking out upon the boundless waste of waters. He raised his hands in prayer to his immortal mother, "Mother," he cried, "you bore me doomed to live but for a little season; surely Zeus, who thunders from Olympus, might have made that little glorious. It is not so. Agamemnon, son of Atreus, has done me dishonour, and has robbed me of my prize by force."

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As he spoke he wept aloud, and his mother heard him where she was sitting in the depths of the sea hard by the old man her father. Forthwith she rose as it were a grey mist out of the waves, sat down before him as he stood weeping, caressed him with her hand, and said, "My son, why are you weeping? What is it that grieves you? Keep it not from me, but tell me, that we may know it together."

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Achilles drew a deep sigh and said, "You know it; why tell you what you know well already? We went to

so give him fair words, and he will then soon be in a good humour with us."

As he spoke, he took a double cup of nectar, and placed it in his mother's hand. "Cheer up, my dear mother," said he, "and make the best of it. I love you dearly, and should be very sorry to see you get a thrashing; however grieved I might be, I could not help, for there is no standing against Zeus. Once before when I was trying to help you, he caught me by the foot and flung me from the heavenly threshold. All day long from morn till eve, was I falling, till at sunset I came to ground in the island of Lemnos, and there I lay, with very little life left in me, till the Sintians came and tended me."

Hera smiled at this, and as she smiled she took the cup from her son's hands. Then Hephaestus drew sweet nectar from the mixing-bowl, and served it round among the gods, going from left to right; and the blessed gods laughed out a loud applause as they saw him bustling about the heavenly mansion.

Thus through the livelong day to the going down of the sun they feasted, and every one had his full share, so that all were satisfied. Apollo struck his lyre, and the Muses lifted up their sweet voices, calling and answering one another. But when the sun's glorious light had faded, they went home to bed, each in his own abode, which lame Hephaestus with his consummate skill had fashioned for them. So Zeus, the Olympian Lord of Thunder, hied him to the bed in which he always slept; and when he had got on to it he went to sleep, with Hera of the golden throne by his side.

the strongest: "The Iliad centers upon telling us that the highest good is victory, explicitly in war. Implicitly in art and thought: indeed in every human endeavor. Homer teaches 'Agon,' the contest for the foremost place, a teaching we ourselves honor more readily in politics or in sport or in business or in law, than we do in the arts and in the other realms of the intellect and the spirit."

Bloom notes 5

double cup: double-handed wine cup (Fitzgerald)

consummate: highest, utmost, supreme (OEDs)

"The gods of Homer, in both the Iliad and the Odyssey, are extremely anthropomorphic in many ways. They are conceived of as being human like in shape, in appearance, in emotions, in activities, in just about every imaginable way. This is not the only way to conceive of gods. There have been cultures who's gods have not been anthropomorphic. And yet they are human-like creatures who cannot grow old and cannot die, whereas humans by definition must grow old and must die."

Vandiver