

THE ILIAD
OF
HOMER

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BOOK ONE

Sing, goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus
and its devastation, which put pains thousandfold upon the Achaians,
hurled in their multitudes to the house of Hades strong souls
of heroes, but gave their bodies to be the delicate feasting
of dogs, of all birds, and the will of Zeus was accomplished 5
since that time when first there stood in division of conflict
Atreus' son the lord of men and brilliant Achilleus.

What god was it then set them together in bitter collision?
Zeus' son and Leto's, Apollo, who in anger at the king drove 10
the foul pestilence along the host, and the people perished,
since Atreus' son had dishonored Chryses, priest of Apollo,
when he came beside the fast ships of the Achaians to ransom
back his daughter, carrying gifts beyond count and holding
in his hands wound on a staff of gold the ribbons of Apollo
who strikes from afar, and supplicated all the Achaians, 15
but above all Atreus' two sons, the marshals of the people:
"Sons of Atreus and you other strong-greaved Achaians,
to you may the gods grant who have their homes on Olympos
Priam's city to be plundered and a fair homecoming thereafter,
but may you give me back my own daughter and take the ransom, 20
giving honor to Zeus' son who strikes from afar, Apollo."

Then all the rest of the Achaians cried out in favor
that the priest be respected and the shining ransom be taken;
yet this pleased not the heart of Atreus' son Agamemnon,
but harshly he drove him away with a strong order upon him: 25

“Never let me find you again, old sir, near our hollow
ships, neither lingering now nor coming again hereafter,
for fear your staff and the god’s ribbons help you no longer.
The girl I will not give back; sooner will old age come upon her
30 in my own house, in Argos, far from her own land, going
up and down by the loom and being in my bed as my companion.
So go now, do not make me angry; so you will be safer.”

So he spoke, and the old man in terror obeyed him
and went silently away beside the murmuring sea beach.

35 Over and over the old man prayed as he walked in solitude
to King Apollo, whom Leto of the lovely hair bore: “Hear me,
lord of the silver bow who set your power about Chryse
and Killa the sacrosanct, who are lord in strength over Tenedos,
Smintheus, if ever it pleased your heart that I built your temple,
40 if ever it pleased you that I burned all the rich thigh pieces
of bulls, of goats, then bring to pass this wish I pray for:
let your arrows make the Danaäns pay for my tears shed.”

So he spoke in prayer, and Phoibos Apollo heard him,
and strode down along the pinnacles of Olympos, angered
45 in his heart, carrying across his shoulders the bow and the hooded
quiver; and the shafts clashed on the shoulders of the god walking
angrily. He came as night comes down and knelt then
apart and opposite the ships and let go an arrow.

Terrible was the clash that rose from the bow of silver.

50 First he went after the mules and the circling hounds, then let go
a tearing arrow against the men themselves and struck them.
The corpse fires burned everywhere and did not stop burning.

Nine days up and down the host ranged the god’s arrows,
but on the tenth Achilles called the people to assembly;

55 a thing put into his mind by the goddess of the white arms, Hera,
who had pity upon the Danaäns when she saw them dying.
Now when they were all assembled in one place together,
Achilles of the swift feet stood up among them and spoke forth:
“Son of Atreus, I believe now that straggling backward
60 we must make our way home if we can even escape death,
if fighting now must crush the Achaians and the plague likewise.
No, come, let us ask some holy man, some prophet,

even an interpreter of dreams, since a dream also
comes from Zeus, who can tell why Phoibos Apollo is so angry,
if for the sake of some vow, some hecatomb he blames us,
if given the fragrant smoke of lambs, of he goats, somehow
65 he can be made willing to beat the bane aside from us.”

He spoke thus and sat down again, and among them stood up
Kalchas, Thestor’s son, far the best of the bird interpreters,
who knew all things that were, the things to come and the things past,
70 who guided into the land of Ilion the ships of the Achaians
through that seercraft of his own that Phoibos Apollo gave him.
He in kind intention toward all stood forth and addressed them:

“You have bidden me, Achilles beloved of Zeus, to explain to
you this anger of Apollo the lord who strikes from afar. Then
75 I will speak; yet make me a promise and swear before me
readily by word and work of your hands to defend me,
since I believe I shall make a man angry who holds great kingship
over the men of Argos, and all the Achaians obey him.

For a king when he is angry with a man beneath him is too strong,
80 and suppose even for the day itself he swallow down his anger,
he still keeps bitterness that remains until its fulfillment
deep in his chest. Speak forth then, tell me if you will protect me.”

Then in answer again spoke Achilles of the swift feet:

“Speak, interpreting whatever you know, and fear nothing.
85 In the name of Apollo beloved of Zeus to whom you, Kalchas,
make your prayers when you interpret the gods’ will to the Danaäns,
no man so long as I am alive above earth and see daylight
shall lay the weight of his hands on you beside the hollow ships,
not one of all the Danaäns, even if you mean Agamemnon,
90 who now claims to be far the greatest of all the Achaians.”

At this the blameless seer took courage again and spoke forth:
“No, it is not for the sake of some vow or hecatomb he blames us,
but for the sake of his priest whom Agamemnon dishonored
and would not give him back his daughter nor accept the ransom.
95 Therefore the archer sent griefs against us and will send them
still, nor sooner thrust back the shameful plague from the Danaäns
until we give the glancing-eyed girl back to her father
without price, without ransom, and lead also a blessed hecatomb
to Chryse; thus we might propitiate and persuade him.”
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