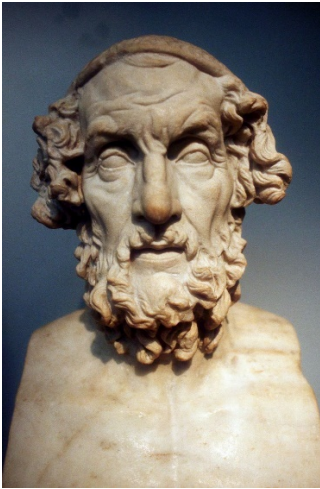


The Wrath of Achilles – Notes



Introduction



Homer

The story of Achilles is written down in the oldest book of western literature, the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* is an epic poem – meaning a grand, very long poem about gods and heroes. Homer wrote down the *Iliad* around 750 B.C. and it is the oldest written poem in any alphabet in western civilization – Greece had suffered several hundred years of a dark age – as in no writing – prior to this.

Originally the story of Achilles and the *Iliad* – which Homer himself did not invent – was told by word of mouth. Poets would learn long passages of verse by heart and recount the epic tale to a captivated audience

Some key features of Epic poetry that you must be aware of are similes and epithets. A simile is a comparison between two things using *like*, *than*, or *as* – usually to enhance an aspect of the first thing. E.G. Homer was **as** blind as a bat. (The key comparative word here being *as*). An Epithet is a phrase or adjective placed in front of someone's name – usually to enhance an aspect or quality in that person. E.G. the blind Homer. (The Poet Homer was in fact blind).

The following summaries of Book I, VI, XVI, XXII, and XXIV follow the story of Achilles and Hector culminating in their epic battle. Read them carefully as you read the same books in the *Iliad*. Some sample questions – a mix of short and long – have also been provided with each summary.

Iliad Book I



The poet invokes a muse to aid him in telling the story of the rage of Achilles, the greatest Greek hero to fight in the Trojan War. The narrative begins nine years after the start of the war, as the Achaeans sack a Trojan-allied town and capture two beautiful maidens, Chryseis and Briseis. Agamemnon, commander-in-chief of the Achaean army, takes Chryseis as his prize. Achilles, one of the Achaeans' most valuable warriors, claims Briseis. Chryseis's father, a man named Chryses who serves as a priest of the god Apollo, begs Agamemnon to return his daughter and offers to pay an enormous ransom. When Agamemnon refuses, Chryses prays to Apollo for help.

Apollo sends a plague upon the Greek camp, causing the death of many soldiers. After ten days of suffering, Achilles calls an assembly of the Achaean army and asks for a soothsayer to reveal the cause of the plague. Calchas, a powerful seer, stands up and offers his services. Though he fears retribution from Agamemnon, Calchas reveals the plague as a vengeful and strategic move by Chryses and Apollo. Agamemnon flies into a rage and says that he will return Chryseis only if Achilles gives him Briseis as compensation.

Agamemnon's demand humiliates and infuriates the proud Achilles. The men argue, and Achilles threatens to withdraw from battle and take his people, the Myrmidons, back home to Pythia. Agamemnon threatens to go to Achilles' tent in the army's camp and take Briseis himself. Achilles stands poised to draw his sword and kill the Achaean commander when the goddess Athena, sent by Hera, the queen of the gods, appears to him and checks his anger. Athena's guidance, along with a speech by the wise advisor Nestor, finally succeeds in preventing the duel.

That night, Agamemnon puts Chryseis on a ship back to her father and sends heralds to have Briseis escorted from Achilles' tent. Achilles prays to his mother, the sea-nymph Thetis, to ask Zeus, king of the gods, to punish the Achaeans. He relates to her the tale of his quarrel with Agamemnon, and she promises to take the matter up with Zeus—who owes

her a favour—as soon as he returns from a thirteen-day period of feasting with the Ethiopians. Meanwhile, the Achaean commander Odysseus is navigating the ship that Chryseis has boarded. When he lands, he returns the maiden and makes sacrifices to Apollo. Chryses, overjoyed to see his daughter, prays to the god to lift the plague from the Achaean camp. Apollo acknowledges his prayer, and Odysseus returns to his comrades.

But the end of the plague on the Achaeans only marks the beginning of worse suffering. Ever since his quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles has refused to participate in battle, and, after twelve days, Thetis makes her appeal to Zeus, as promised. Zeus is reluctant to help the Trojans, for his wife, Hera, favours the Greeks, but he finally agrees; he will make it so that the Trojans have more success in battle while Achilles is absent – forcing the Greeks to recognise that they have insulted his honour and that he is the best of the Greeks. Hera - who favours the Greeks – becomes livid when she discovers that Zeus is helping the Trojans, but her son Hephaestus persuades her not to plunge the gods into conflict over the mortals.

Sample Questions

- I. Why did Athene appear to Achilles in Book 1 of the Iliad?
- II. What part did Chryseis or Briseis play in the Iliad?
- III. In Book 1 of the Iliad, why is Calchas afraid to speak to the Assembly?
- IV. In which year of the Trojan War did the events of the Iliad take place?
- V. Who were the Myrmidons?
- VI. To whom was Menelaus married?
- VII. Who was Peleus?
- VIII. Who was Nestor?
- IX. Based on your reading of Book 1 of the Iliad, give an account of the disastrous quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon.
- X. Whom do you blame for the quarrel? Give reasons for your answer.

Book VI



With the gods absent, the Achaean forces again overwhelm the Trojans, who draw back toward the city. Menelaus considers accepting a ransom in return for the life of Adrestus, a Trojan he has subdued, but Agamemnon persuades him to kill the man outright. Nestor senses the Trojans weakening and urges the Achaeans not to bother stripping their fallen enemies of their weapons but to focus instead on killing as many as possible while they still have the upper hand. The Trojans anticipate downfall, and the soothsayer Helenus urges Hector to return to Troy to ask his mother, Queen Hecuba, along with her noblewomen, to pray for mercy at the temple of Athena. Hector follows Helenus's advice and gives his mother and the other women their instructions. He then visits his brother Paris, who has withdrawn from battle, claiming he is too grief-stricken to participate. Hector and Helen heap scorn on him for not fighting, and at last he arms himself and returns to battle. Hector also prepares to return but first visits his wife, Andromache, whom he finds nursing their son Astyanax by the walls of the city. As she cradles the child, she anxiously watches the struggle in the plain below. Andromache begs Hector not to go back, but he insists that he cannot escape his fate, whatever it may be. He kisses Astyanax, who, although initially frightened by the crest on Hector's helmet, greets his father happily. Hector then departs. Andromache, convinced that he will soon die, begins to mourn his death. Hector meets Paris on his way out of the city, and the brothers prepare to re-join the battle.

Sample Questions

- I. In Book 6 why was Astyanax frightened?
- II. Based on your reading of the Iliad, do you have sympathy for Andromache?
- III. Who is Hector's wife?
- IV. Who was Helenus?
- V. Why did Glaucus exchange his armour with Diomedes in Book 6 of the Iliad?
- VI. Based on your study of the Iliad, write about the role played by Hector. Do you admire Hector? Give reasons for your answer.

Book XVI



Patroclus goes to Achilles' tent and begs to be allowed to wear Achilles' armour if Achilles still refuses to re-join the battle himself. Achilles declines to fight but agrees to the exchange of armour, with the understanding that Patroclus will fight only long enough to save the ships. As Patroclus arms himself, the first ship goes up in flames. Achilles sends his Myrmidon soldiers, who have not been fighting during their commander's absence, out to accompany Patroclus. He then prays to Zeus that Patroclus may return with both himself and the ships unharmed. The poet reveals, however, that Zeus will grant only one of these prayers.

With the appearance of Patroclus in Achilles' armour the battle quickly turns, and the Trojans retreat from the Achaean ships. At first, the line holds together, but when Hector retreats, the rest of the Trojans become trapped in the trenches. Patroclus now slaughters every Trojan he encounters. Zeus considers saving his son Sarpedon, but Hera persuades him that the other gods would either look down upon him for it or try to save their own mortal offspring in turn. Zeus resigns himself to Sarpedon's mortality. Patroclus soon spears Sarpedon, and both sides fight over his armour. Hector returns briefly to the front in an attempt to retrieve the armour.

Zeus decides to kill Patroclus for slaying Sarpedon, but first he lets him rout the Trojans. Zeus then imbues Hector with a temporary cowardice, and Hector leads the retreat. Patroclus, disobeying Achilles, pursues the Trojans all the way to the gates of Troy. Homer explains that the city might have fallen at this moment had Apollo not intervened and driven Patroclus back from the gates. Apollo persuades Hector to charge Patroclus, but Patroclus kills Cebriones, the driver of Hector's chariot. Trojans and Achaeans fight for Cebriones' armor. Amid the chaos, Apollo sneaks up behind Patroclus and wounds him, and Hector easily finishes him off. Hector taunts the fallen man, but with his dying words Patroclus foretells Hector's own death.



Sample Questions

- I. Who is Sarpedon?
- II. Name one of the rivers at Troy.
- III. Why did Patroclus go to Achilles in tears in Book 16 of the Iliad?
- IV. Why did Hera not approve of Zeus' wish to rescue Sarpedon from battle?
- V. Which god prevents Patroclus from climbing the walls of Troy?
- VI. Briefly describe the events leading up to the death of Patroclus in Book 16 of the Iliad. In your opinion, was his death due to Destiny (Fate) or to his own pride, or to a combination of both of these? Give reasons for your answer.
- VII. Study Photograph 1 on Paper X which shows a scene from Book 16 of the Iliad. Explain what is happening.



Book XXII



Hector now stands as the only Trojan left outside Troy. Priam, overlooking the battlefield from the Trojan ramparts, begs him to come inside, but Hector, having given the overconfident order for the Trojans to camp outside their gates the night before, now feels too ashamed to join them in their retreat. When Achilles finally returns from chasing Apollo (disguised as Agenor), Hector confronts him. At first, the mighty Trojan considers trying to negotiate with Achilles, but he soon realizes the hopelessness of his cause and flees. He runs around the city three times, with Achilles at his heels. Zeus considers saving Hector, but Athena persuades him that the mortal's time has come. Zeus places Hector's and Achilles' respective fates on a golden scale, and, indeed, Hector's sinks to the ground.

During Hector's fourth circle around the city walls, Athena appears before him, disguised as his ally Deiphobus, and convinces him that together they can take Achilles. Hector stops running and turns to face his opponent. He and Achilles exchange spear throws, but neither scores a hit. Hector turns to Deiphobus to ask him for a lance; when he finds his friend gone, he realizes that the gods have betrayed him. In a desperate bid for glory, he charges Achilles. However, he still wears Achilles' old armor—stolen from Patroclus's dead body—and Achilles knows the armour's weak points intimately. With a perfectly timed thrust he puts his spear through Hector's throat. Near death, Hector pleads with Achilles to return his body to the Trojans for burial, but Achilles resolves to let the dogs and scavenger birds maul the Trojan hero.

The other Achaeans gather round and exultantly stab Hector's corpse. Achilles ties Hector's body to the back of his chariot and drags it through the dirt. Meanwhile, up above on the city's walls, King Priam and Queen Hecuba witness the devastation of their son's body and

wail with grief. Andromache hears them from her chamber and runs outside. When she sees her husband's corpse being dragged through the dirt, she too collapses and weeps.



Sample Questions

- I. Based on your reading of Book 22 of the Iliad, give an account of the death of Hector.
- II. Do you feel sympathy for Hector? Give reasons for your answer.
- III. What oath does Hector ask Achilles to swear when he faces him outside the walls of Troy?
- IV. What does Zeus put on his golden scales?

Book XXIV



Achilles continues mourning Patroclus and abusing Hector's body, dragging it around his dead companion's tomb. Apollo, meanwhile, protects Hector's corpse from damage and rot and staves off dogs and scavengers. Finally, on the twelfth day after Hector's death, Apollo persuades Zeus that Achilles must let Hector's body be ransomed. Zeus sends Thetis to bring the news to Achilles, while Iris goes to Priam to instruct him to initiate the ransom. Hecuba fears that Achilles will kill her husband, but Zeus reassures her by sending an eagle as a good omen.

Priam sets out with his driver, Idaeus, and a chariot full of treasure. Zeus sends Hermes, disguised as a benevolent Myrmidon soldier, to guide Priam through the Achaean camp. When the chariot arrives at Achilles' tent, Hermes reveals himself and then leaves Priam alone with Achilles. Priam tearfully supplicates Achilles, begging for Hector's body. He asks Achilles to think of his own father, Peleus, and the love between them. Achilles weeps for his father and for Patroclus. He accepts the ransom and agrees to give the corpse back.

That night, Priam sleeps in Achilles' tent, but Hermes comes to him in the middle of the night and rouses him, warning him that he must not sleep among the enemy. Priam and Idaeus wake, place Hector in their chariot, and slip out of the camp unnoticed. All of the women in Troy, from Andromache to Helen, cry out in grief when they first see Hector's body. For nine days the Trojans prepare Hector's funeral pyre—Achilles has given them a reprieve from battle. The Trojans light Hector's pyre on the tenth day.



Sample Questions

- I. Name the king of Troy.
- II. What sign did Zeus send to show that Priam would have a safe journey?
- III. In Book 24 of the Iliad how is Hermes disguised when he is sent to help Priam?
- IV. Describe two ways in which Hermes helps Priam in Book 24 of the Iliad.
- V. Explain why Achilles' Destiny made Thetis cry in Book 24 of the Iliad.
- VI. Why did Thetis feel it was an unlucky day when she gave birth to Achilles?