

# The Iliad

## Book Nine Peace Offerings to Achilles

*[The Argives in despair; Agamemnon proposes they go home; Diomedes responds, rebuking Agamemnon; Nestor proposes a reconciliation with Achilles; Agamemnon agrees, outlines his offer; Phoenix, Odysseus, and Ajax go to Achilles with the offer; he welcomes them with a meal; Odysseus outlines Agamemnon's offer; Achilles refuses; Phoenix urges Achilles to accept, tells the story of Meleager; Achilles refuses Phoenix; Ajax speaks last; Achilles makes a slight concession; the envoys return with Achilles' answer; Achaeans retire for the night.]*

Meanwhile, as the Trojans maintained their careful watch,  
Panic, chilling Fear's dread comrade, gripped Achaeans,  
their best men suffering unendurable anguish.  
Just like those times two winds blow in from Thrace—  
North Wind and West Wind suddenly spring up  
and lash the fish-filled seas—black waves at once rise up,  
then fling seaweed in piles along the shoreline—  
so spirits in Achaean chests were now cast down.  
Atreus' son, heart overwhelmed with painful sorrow,  
[10] went to give out orders for clear-voiced heralds  
to summon all the warriors to assembly,  
calling them one by one, not with a general shout.  
He himself, with his heralds, carried out the task.  
The counsellors sat heart sick. Agamemnon stood,  
his face shedding tears like a black water spring  
whose dark stream flows down a sheer rock precipice.  
With a sigh, Agamemnon addressed the Argives:

“My friends, leaders, Argive counsellors,  
Zeus, son of Cronos, has snared me badly  
[20] in grievous folly. Deceptive god,  
he promised me—he nodded his assent—  
that I'd lay waste to well-built Ilion,  
before I went back home. Now he tricks me  
He's devised a cruel deceit for me,

telling me to return to Argos in disgrace,  
after the deaths of so many warriors.  
That's what now delights all-powerful Zeus,  
who has hurled down so many lofty towns,  
and who'll still demolish many more—  
[30] such is his power, irresistible.  
But come, let's all follow what I propose—  
let's sail back to our dear native land.  
For we're never going to capture Troy.”

He finished. All those there stayed silent, stunned.  
Achaean's sons just sat there, speechless with grief.  
At last Diomedes, skilled in battle cries, spoke out:

“Son of Atreus, I'll be the first to challenge  
your foolishness, as is my right, my lord,  
in our assembly. So don't be angry.  
[40] First of all, you slighted my bravery  
in front of all Danaans, when you claimed  
I was no soldier, an unwarlike man.  
Achaeans, young and old, all know this.  
The son of crooked-minded Cronos gave you  
a two-edged gift—he gave you honour  
to govern all men with your sceptre,  
but he didn't give the strongest power,  
courage. My misguided king, do you think  
Achaean's sons are really fearful cowards,  
[50] as you state? If your heart wishes to go home,  
then go. The road lies there in front of you.  
The many ships which sailed here with you  
from Mycenae stand ready by the sea.  
But the rest of the long-haired Achaeans  
will stay here, until we demolish Troy.  
If they flee back to their dear native land  
in their ships, too, then Sthenelus and I  
will fight on to our goal, to take Ilion.  
For the gods were with us when we came.”

[60] With a roar, all Achaea's sons endorsed his words,  
pleased with the speech made by horse-taming Diomedes.  
Then horseman Nestor, standing up before them, said:

“Son of Tydeus, you're excellent in battle  
and the best Achaean of your age in council.  
No Achaean will fault what you've just said  
or oppose it. But your speech is incomplete.  
You are still young—you might well be my son,  
my youngest born. Still, you spoke sensibly,  
in what you said to the Achaean king.

[70] For you spoke justly and kept to the point.  
But come, I can claim to be your senior,  
so I shall explain this matter fully.  
Let no one take issue now with what I say,  
not even mighty Agamemnon.  
Any man who's keen on civil war  
is an evil outlaw, without a heart,  
without a home. So for the time being,  
now that night has come, let's do what we must.  
Let's get dinner ready, something to eat.

[80] And let's have sentries camp beside that trench  
we dug outside the wall. I'm saying young men  
should do this. Then, issue your instructions,  
son of Atreus, for you are chief king here.  
Prepare a meal for senior counsellors—  
that's the right and proper thing to do.  
You've got lots of wine stockpiled in your huts,  
which Achaea's sons bring here every day  
over the wide sea from Thrace—you've got  
all you need to show such hospitality,

[90] for you are ruler over many men.  
Once many people have assembled there,  
you should follow whoever offers you  
the best advice. All we Achaeans need  
good practical advice, especially now,

when enemies are burning many fires  
right beside our ships. Who finds that pleasant?  
This night saves our army or destroys it.”

Nestor spoke. Those present listened carefully,  
then followed what he’d said. Armed sentinels went out,  
[100] led by Thrasymedes, Nestor’s son, his people’s shepherd,  
with Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, strong fighters,  
and Meriones, Aphareus, and Deïpyrus,  
along with noble Lycomedes, Creion’s son.  
These seven were captains of the sentinels.  
A hundred young men, all armed with their long spears,  
went with each of them. They marched off and took positions  
half way between the ditch and wall. Then the men lit fires  
and prepared their meals. Atreus’ son led his advisors  
to his hut and gave all of them a generous meal.  
[110] They ate the food prepared and set before them,  
and each man ate and drank to his full heart’s content.  
Old Nestor, whose previous advice had seemed the best,  
was the first to begin explaining what he thought.  
Keeping in mind their common good, he spoke out:

“Mighty son of Atreus, Agamemnon,  
king of men, I’ll begin and end my speech  
with you, for you are lord of many men.  
Zeus gave you sceptre and laws to rule them.  
Thus, you, above all, should speak and listen,  
[120] then act upon what other men may say,  
if their spirit prompts them to speak well.  
You’ll get the credit for what they begin.  
So I’ll say what seems to me the best advice.  
No one else has set out a better scheme  
than the one which I’ve been mulling over  
a long time now, ever since you, my lord,  
made Achilles angry by taking back  
that young girl Briseis from his hut,  
against my judgment. Repeatedly,

[130] I urged you not to do it. But then you,  
surrendering to your arrogant spirit,  
shamed our strongest man, honoured by the gods.  
You still have that prize you took. So now let's think  
how we may make amends, win him back with gifts  
and gracious speeches, and be friends once more."

Agamemnon, king of men, then answered Nestor:

"Old man, you expose my folly justly.  
I was deluded. I don't deny that.  
The man whom Zeus loves in his heart is worth  
[140] whole armies. And this man Zeus now honours  
by destroying an army of Achaeans.  
Since my delusion made me follow  
my mistaken feelings, I'm now willing  
to make amends, to give in recompense  
immense treasures. I'll list these rich gifts  
in presence of you all—seven tripods  
which fire has not yet touched, ten gold talents,  
twenty shining cauldrons, twelve strong horse  
whose speed has triumphed and earned them prizes.  
[150] A man who has as much as I have won  
from racing these sure-footed animals  
would not be poor, or lack possessions,  
or need precious gold. And then I'll give him  
seven women of Lesbos, skilled in crafts,  
whom I chose for myself when he captured  
well-built Lesbos. They surpass all women  
for their beauty. These I shall present to him.  
With them the one I seized from him, Briseis,  
daughter of Briseus. I'll solemnly swear  
[160] I never once went up into her bed  
or had sex with her, as is men's custom,  
where men and women are concerned.  
All these things he will receive immediately.  
If gods grant we destroy Priam's great city,

when we Achaeans allocate the spoils,  
let him come and load his ship with gold,  
with bronze, as much as he desires. He may choose  
twenty Trojan women for himself,  
the loveliest after Argive Helen.

[170] If we get back to the rich land of Argos,  
he can then become my son-in-law.  
I'll honour him just as I do Orestes,  
my son, whom I dearly love. He's being raised  
in great prosperity. In my well-built home,  
I have three daughters—Chrysothemis,  
Iphianessa and Laodice.  
He can take whichever one he chooses  
back home as his wife to Peleus' house  
and pay no bridal gift. I'll give much more

[180] to bring about our reconciliation,  
a dowry bigger than any man so far  
has ever handed over with his daughter.  
I'll give him seven populous cities,  
Cardamyle, Enope, grassy Hire,  
holy Pherae, fertile Antheia,  
lovely Aepea, and vine-rich Pedasus,  
all near the sea, beside sandy Pylos.  
People living in these places own a lot,  
many sheep and cattle. They will honour him

[190] and give him gifts, as if he were a god.  
Under his laws and sceptre they'll do well.  
I shall give all this if he will abate  
his anger. Let him concede. Only Hades  
is totally relentless and unyielding.  
That's why of all the gods, he's the one  
men hate the most. And let him acknowledge  
my authority, for I'm the greater king.  
In age I can claim to be his senior."

Geranian horseman Nestor then said in reply:

- [200] “Mighty son of Atreus, Agamemnon,  
king of men, the gifts you’re offering  
to lord Achilles can’t be criticized.  
But come, let’s send out hand-picked men  
to go with all speed to Achilles’ hut,  
Peleus’ son. And may those I select  
agree to do it. First, let Phoenix,  
whom Zeus loves, be leader, then great Ajax,  
and lord Odysseus. Let herald Odios  
accompany them, along with Eurybates.
- [210] Bring some water for our hands. Let’s observe  
a holy silence, so we may pray to Zeus,  
son of Cronos, to take pity on us.”

- Nestor spoke. All present approved of what he’d said.  
Attendants then poured water on their hands.  
Young men filled mixing bowls with wine up to the brim  
and passed them round. With every cup they made libations.  
Once they’d made offerings and drunk their fill of wine,  
they left the hut of Agamemnon, son of Atreus.  
Geranian horseman Nestor, looking at each man,
- [220] especially at Odysseus, kept encouraging them  
to persuade Achilles, Peleus’ excellent son.

- Along the shore of the tumbling, crashing sea,  
the envoys made their way, offering up their prayers  
to world-circling Earthshaker Poseidon to help them  
more easily convince the great heart of Achilles.  
They came to the ships and huts of the Myrmidons.  
There they found Achilles. He was easing his spirit  
with a tuneful finely decorated lyre.  
It had a silver cross-piece. He’d seized it as a prize
- [230] when he’d destroyed the city of Eëtion.  
With the lyre he was bringing pleasure to his heart,  
singing about the celebrated deeds of men.  
Patroclus, his sole companion, sat there facing him,  
waiting in silence until Achilles finished singing.

The envoys approached, lord Odysseus in the lead.  
They stood in front of him. In astonishment,  
Achilles got up off his chair and stood up quickly,  
still holding the lyre. Patroclus did the same,  
standing up as soon as he saw the embassy.  
Swift-footed Achilles greeted them and said:

[240] “Welcome.  
My dear friends have come. I must be needed.  
Among Achaeans you’re the men I love the most,  
even in my anger.”

With these words,  
lord Achilles conducted them inside his hut  
and seated them on chairs covered with purple rugs.  
Moving up close to Patroclus, Achilles said:

“Son of Menoetius, set out for us  
a larger wine bowl, and mix stronger wine.  
Prepare a cup for everyone. These men,  
[250] my closest friends, are under my own roof.”

Achilles spoke. Patroclus obeyed his dear companion.  
Then in the firelight he set down a large chopping block,  
placed on it slabs of mutton, goat, and the chine  
of a plump hog, swimming in fat. Achilles carved,  
while Automedon held the meat. He sliced up  
small pieces, then got them ready on the spits.  
The son of Menoetius, godlike man, stoked the fire,  
a huge one. Once the blaze died down and flames subsided,  
Patroclus spread the glowing embers, laid the spits  
[260] lengthwise on top, setting them in place on stones  
and sprinkling on the sacred salt. When the meat was cooked,  
he laid it out on platters. Patroclus took the bread,  
then passed it in fine baskets round the table.  
Achilles served the meat and sat down by the wall,  
directly opposite godlike Odysseus.



Achilles told Patroclus, his companion,  
to sacrifice to all the gods. Patroclus threw the offerings  
into the fire. Then each man helped himself,  
eating the food prepared and set before him.  
[270] They all ate and drank to their full heart's content.  
Then Ajax gave a nod to Phoenix. Seeing that,  
lord Odysseus filled up his cup with wine  
and proposed a toast:

“Good health, Achilles.  
We have not had to go without our share  
of feasts, either in Agamemnon's hut,  
Atreus' son, or here, for you've prepared  
a richly satisfying meal. But now  
our business is not pleasant banqueting.  
For we are staring at a great disaster.  
[280] And, my lord, we are afraid, in a quandary,  
whether we can save our well-decked ships,  
or whether they will be destroyed, unless  
you put on your warlike power once again.  
For haughty Trojans and their famous allies  
have camped close to the ships and barricade  
and lit many fires throughout their army.  
They claim nothing can prevent them now  
from attacking our black ships. And Zeus,  
son of Cronos, has sent them his signal,  
[290] on their right a lightning flash. Hector,  
exulting hugely in his power,  
in a terrifying manic frenzy,  
puts his faith in Zeus, fears neither man nor god.  
A killing passion now possesses him.  
He prays for holy dawn to come quickly,  
vowing he'll hack apart the high sterns  
of our ships, burn them in destructive fire,  
and by those very ships kill the Achaeans  
driven out in desperation by the smoke.  
[300] I have a dreadful fear deep in my heart

that the gods will make good all his boasting,  
seal our fate, to perish here in Troy,  
far away from Argos, where horses breed.  
So rouse yourself, late though it may be,  
if you've a mind to save Achaeans  
from their suffering at this Trojan onslaught.  
If not, you'll suffer future agonies.  
You won't find any cure for such despair.  
Before that happens, you should think about  
[310] how to help Argives at this evil hour.  
My friend, that day your father, Peleus,  
sent you off, away from Phthia,  
to join Agamemnon, didn't he say this,

'My son, Athena and Hera will give you  
power, if they so wish, but you must check  
that overbearing spirit in your chest.  
It's better to show good will, to give up  
malicious quarrelling. Then Achaeans,  
young and old, will respect you all the more'?

[320] That's what your old father said, advice  
which you've forgotten. So even now  
you should stop, cease this heart-corroding rage.  
For if you will mitigate your anger,  
Agamemnon will give you worthy gifts.  
If you will hear the list, then I'll repeat  
what Agamemnon has promised to you.  
All gifts are in his huts—seven tripods  
which fire has not yet touched, ten gold talents,  
twenty shining cauldrons, twelve strong horses  
[330] whose speed has triumphed, earned them prizes—  
a man who's won as much as Agamemnon  
from racing these sure-footed animals  
would not be poor or lack possessions  
or precious gold. Then he will add to this  
seven women of Lesbos, skilled in crafts,

whom he chose for himself when you captured  
well-built Lesbos. They surpass all women  
for their beauty. These he will present to you,  
with them the one he seized from you, Briseis,  
[340] daughter of Briseus. He'll solemnly swear  
he never once went up into her bed  
or had sex with her, as is men's custom,  
where men and women are concerned.  
All these things you will receive immediately.  
If gods grant that we destroy Priam's great city,  
when we Achaeans allocate the spoils,  
you may come and load your ship with gold,  
with bronze, as much as you desire. You may choose  
twenty Trojan women for yourself,  
[350] the loveliest after Argive Helen.  
If we get back to the rich land of Argos,  
you can then become his son-in-law.  
He'll honour you just as he does Orestes,  
his son, whom he dearly loves. He's being raised  
in great prosperity. In his well-built home  
he has three daughters—Chrysothemis,  
Iphianessa, and Laodice.  
You can take whichever one you choose  
back home as your wife to Peleus' house  
[360] and pay no bridal gift. He'll give much more  
to bring about your reconciliation,  
a dowry bigger than any man so far  
has ever handed over with his daughter.  
He'll give you seven populous cities,  
Cardamyle, Enope, grassy Hire,  
holy Pherae, fertile Antheia,  
lovely Aepea, and vine-rich Pedasus,  
all near the sea, beside sandy Pylos.  
People living in these places possess  
[370] many sheep and cattle and will honour you  
and give you gifts, as if you were a god.  
Under your laws and sceptre they'll do well.

He will give all this, if you will abate  
your anger. But if your heart still resents  
Atreus' son and his gifts, then take pity  
on all Achaeans, our exhausted soldiers.  
They will pay you honours like a god.  
Among them you'll earn enormous glory,  
for now you might kill Hector, who may well  
[380] approach you—he's so obsessed with slaughter,  
he thinks there's not a warrior his equal  
among Danaans brought here in our ships."

Swift-footed Achilles then answered Odysseus:

"Divinely born son of Laertes,  
resourceful Odysseus. I must be blunt  
about what I think, where all this will lead,  
so you do not sit there and, one by one,  
try to entice me with sweet promises.  
I hate like the gates of Hell any man  
[390] who says one thing while thinking something else  
which stays hidden in his mind. So I'll declare  
what, in my view, it's best for me to say—  
I don't believe that Agamemnon,  
Atreus' son, or any other Argive  
will persuade me, for no thanks are given  
to the man who always fights without rest  
against the enemy. Whether one fights  
or stays behind, the shares are still the same  
Coward and brave man both get equal honour.  
[400] Death treats idle and active men alike.  
I've won nothing for all I've suffered,  
battling on, pain in my heart, with my life  
always under threat. Just as a bird  
takes scraps of food, whatever she can find,  
to her fledglings, but herself eats little,  
so have I lain without sleep many nights,  
persevered through bloody days of fighting,

- in battling men in wars about their wives.  
With ships, I've seized twelve towns and killed their men.
- [410] On land, in the area of fertile Troy,  
I claim eleven more. From all these  
I took fine treasure, lots of it, brought it  
to Agamemnon, Atreus' son—I gave it  
all to him. He stayed back, at the swift ships.  
He shared very little of what he got,  
keeping most of it for his own use.  
He gave prizes to the best of men, the kings,  
and they hung on to them. From me alone  
he stole away a prize, a woman I love.
- [420] Let him have his pleasure in bed with her.  
Why must Argives fight against the Trojans?  
Why did Atreus' son collect an army  
and lead it here if not for fair-haired Helen?  
Are Atreus' sons the only mortal men  
who love their wives? Every good and prudent man  
loves his wife and cares for her, as my heart  
loved that girl, though captured with my spear.  
Since he's taken my prize out of my hands  
and cheated me, let him not try to take
- [430] another thing from me. I know him too well.  
He'll never persuade me to agree.  
But, Odysseus, let him rely on you  
and other kings as well to save his ships  
from fiery destruction. He has done much  
without me already. He's built a wall,  
constructed a large wide ditch around it,  
and fixed stakes inside. But for all these things,  
he's not been able to check the power  
of man-killing Hector. When I fought
- [440] beside Achaeans, Hector wasn't eager  
to push the battle far from his own walls.  
He came out only to the Scaean Gates  
and to the oak tree. Once he met me there  
alone. He barely got away from my attack.

But now I don't want to fight lord Hector.  
Tomorrow I'll make holy sacrifice  
to Zeus, to all the gods, and load my ships,  
once I've dragged them down into the sea.  
You'll see, if you wish, if you're interested,  
[450] tomorrow my ships will be sailing off,  
on the fish-filled Hellespont, men rowing  
with great eagerness. And if Poseidon,  
famous Earthshaker, gives us fair sailing,  
in three days I'll reach fertile Phthia.  
There I own many things I left behind  
when I made this disastrous trip to Troy.  
I'll take back from here more gold, red bronze,  
fair women, and grey iron—all I captured.  
But mighty Agamemnon, Atreus' son,  
[460] in his arrogance, seized back from me  
the prize which he awarded. Tell him that.  
Repeat in public everything I say,  
so other Achaeans will grow angry,  
if he, still clothed in shamelessness, hopes  
at any time to deceive some Argive.  
Cur that he is, he doesn't dare confront me  
face to face. I'll discuss no plans with him,  
no actions. He cheated me, betrayed me.  
His words will cheat no more. To hell with him!  
[470] Let him march to his death by his own road,  
for Counsellor Zeus has stolen his wits.  
I hate his gifts. And he's not worth a damn.  
Not even if he gave me ten times, no,  
twenty times more than all he owns right now,  
or will possess in future, not even  
all the wealth amassed in Orchomenus,  
or Egyptian Thebes, where huge treasures sit  
piled up in houses—that city of gates,  
one hundred of them, through each can ride  
[480] two hundred men, horses and chariots  
all together—not even if he gave me

gifts as numerous as grains of sand  
beside the sea or particles of dust,  
not for all that would Agamemnon win  
my heart, not until he satisfies me  
in full for all my heartfelt bitter pain.  
I'll never take as wife any daughter  
of Agamemnon, son of Atreus,  
not even if her beauty rivals that  
[490] of golden Aphrodite, or her skill  
in crafts equals bright-eyed Athena's.  
I will not marry her. Let him select  
another Achaean, someone like himself,  
a more prestigious king than me. For me,  
if the gods keep me safe and I get home,  
Peleus himself will find me a wife.  
There are plenty of Achaean women  
in Hellas and in Phthia—daughters of lords,  
men who govern cities. From them I'll choose  
[500] the one I want to make my cherished wife.  
My heart has often felt a strong desire  
to take a woman there as my own wife,  
someone suitable for marriage, to enjoy  
the riches which old Peleus has acquired.  
Life is worth more to me than all the wealth  
they say was stored in well-built Ilion  
some time ago, when they were still at peace,  
before the sons of Achaea came here,  
more than all the treasures of the archer,  
[510] Phoebus Apollo, stacked on the stone floor  
in rocky Pytho. Men can steal cattle,  
fat sheep, get tripods, herds of sorrel horses.  
But no man gets his life back, not by theft  
or plunder, once it has flown out from him,  
passed beyond the barrier of his teeth.  
My goddess mother, silver-footed Thetis,  
has said two fates may bring about my death.  
If I remain here, continuing the fight

against the Trojans' city, that means  
[520] I won't be going home, but my glory  
will never die. But if I go back home,  
my fame will die, although my life will last  
a long time—death will not end it quickly.  
And so I encourage all the rest of you  
to sail back home. You'll not attain your goal,  
steep Ilion, because far-seeing Zeus  
shields that city with his hand. Its people  
have confidence in that. Thus, you should go.  
Report this message to Achaean leaders—  
[530] that's the privilege of senior men—  
their minds must come up with some better plan  
to save the Achaean fleet and army  
beside the hollow ships. The one they've got  
won't work, since anger still keeps me away.  
Let Phoenix stay here with me, sleep here,  
so tomorrow he may join our voyage  
to his dear native land, if that's his wish.  
For I will not take him back by force.”

Achilles spoke. Astounded by his speech, they all sat there,  
[540] in silence, stunned by the sheer force of his refusal.  
After a pause, old horseman Phoenix spoke:

“Glorious Achilles, if your mind  
is really set on going back, if you  
are totally unwilling to protect  
our swift ships from destructive fire,  
because that anger has consumed your heart,  
how can I remain here, dear lad, alone,  
away from you? Old horseman Peleus  
sent me with you, on that day he shipped you  
[550] from Phthia to join Agamemnon.  
You were young, knowing nothing about war,  
which levels men, or about public debates,  
where men acquire distinction. So Peleus



sent me to teach you all these things,  
so you could speak and carry out great actions.  
Given all this, dear lad, how can I wish  
to be alone and separated from you?  
No, not even if god himself promised  
to cast off my old age, to make me young,  
[560] the man I was when I first left Hellas,  
land of beautiful women, running off  
from my angry father, Amyntor,  
Ormenus' son. He was incensed with me  
about his fair-haired mistress. He loved her,  
thus dishonouring his wife, my mother,  
who begged me constantly—on her knees—  
to have sex with that mistress, so she'd hate  
my father. I obeyed, did what she asked.  
My father soon found out what I had done—  
[570] he cursed me many times repeatedly,  
praying to dread Furies that no dear son  
born from me would ever sit upon his knees.  
The gods made sure his curses took effect,  
underworld Zeus and dread Persephone.  
I planned to murder him with my sharp bronze.  
Some god checked my anger, putting in my heart  
what men would say, their great contempt—  
how among all Achaeans I'd be called  
the man who'd slaughtered his own father.  
[580] My heart no longer felt the slightest wish  
to stay in my father's house with him so angry.  
My friends and relatives who lived around me  
begged me repeatedly to stay right there.  
And then they butchered many well-fed sheep,  
shuffling cattle with crumpled horns, and laid out  
many hogs, swimming in fat, to be singed  
in Hephaestus' flames. They drank many jugs  
of the old man's wine. For nine nights,  
they kept watch over me throughout the night,  
[590] taking turns as guards. Fires always burned,

one underneath the enclosed portico,  
another in the hallway right outside  
my bedroom doors. Ten nights later, as night fell,  
I broke through the tight-closed bedroom doors,  
went out, and jumped with ease across the wall  
around the outer court, without being seen  
by men and women checking up on me.  
I ran away through all of spacious Hellas,  
then came a suppliant to fertile Phthia,  
[600] where flocks are bred, to king Peleus.  
He received me hospitably, loved me,  
as a father dearly loves his only son,  
heir to all his goods. He made me wealthy,  
assigning me to govern many people.  
I lived in the borderlands of Phthia,  
reigning as king over the Dolopes.  
And I was the one, godlike Achilles,  
who raised you up to be the man you are.  
You would refuse to attend a banquet  
[610] with anyone or eat in your own home,  
unless I set you on my knees, fed you,  
cut the meat, and held the wine cup for you.  
Often you soaked the tunic on my chest,  
slobbering your wine, a helpless baby.  
I've gone through a lot for you, worked hard,  
bearing in mind that gods had taken care  
I'd never have some children of my own.  
Godlike Achilles, I made you my son,  
so that if I ever met disaster,  
[620] you'd protect me. So, Achilles, subdue  
your giant passion. It's not right for you  
to have an unyielding heart. Gods themselves  
are flexible, and they have more honour  
than we possess, more power, too. Men pray  
when they go wrong or make mistakes,  
propitiating gods with offerings,  
gentle prayers, libations, and sacrifice.

Prayers are the daughters of almighty Zeus.  
Lame, wrinkled, cross-eyed, they try to follow  
[630] behind Folly, who, because she's strong and quick,  
runs far in front of them, appearing  
all over the world, bringing harm to men.  
Far behind, Prayers carry on their healing.  
If a man honours these daughters of Zeus  
as they come near, they will help him greatly,  
paying attention to him as he prays.  
If someone spurns them, rudely rejecting them,  
they go to Zeus, son of Cronos, begging  
for Folly to pursue that man, who then  
[640] harms himself and suffers punishment.  
For that reason, Achilles, you should give  
Zeus' daughters your respect. They have changed  
the minds of other men, even great ones.  
If Agamemnon were not bringing gifts—  
and naming more to come—but persisting,  
inflexibly angry, I wouldn't tell you  
to cast aside your rage and help the Argives,  
no matter how painful their distress.  
But he's giving plenty now, more later.  
[650] He has sent out his greatest warriors,  
selected from the whole Achaean army,  
your finest friends among the Argives.  
Don't show contempt for what they have to say  
or insult their coming here. Up to now,  
your resentment has been justified.  
But we learn this from previous actions  
of heroic men—when furious anger  
came over some of them, they were swayed  
by gifts and by persuasive speeches.  
[660] I recall an old tale from long ago.  
Since you are all my friends, I'll tell it.  
The Curetes and staunch Aetolians  
were fighting and killing one another,  
around Calydon, with the Aetolians

- defending Calydon and the Curetes  
eager to destroy the place in war.  
Golden-throned Artemis had driven them to fight,  
in her rage that Oeneus hadn't given her  
a harvest-offering, first fruits of his orchard.
- [670] Other gods had received their sacrifices,  
but he'd failed to offer anything to her,  
a daughter of great Zeus. He forgot, or else  
grew careless, a lapse within his foolish heart.  
The archer goddess, in her rage, incited  
a savage white-tusked wild boar against him.  
This beast from the gods reached Oeneus' orchard  
and was causing serious damage there,  
knocking tall plants to the ground, entire trees,  
including roots and flowering apples.
- [680] Meleager, Oeneus' son, killed the beast.  
First he gathered huntsmen and hunting dogs  
from many cities, for a small group  
could not subdue such an enormous boar.  
It had killed many men and sent them off  
to their funeral pyres in agony.  
Artemis began a war about this beast,  
that battle between the Curetes  
and the Aetolians, courageous men  
fighting for the boar's head and bristly hide.
- [690] So long as war-loving Meleager  
was in the fight, the Curetes did not do well.  
For all their numbers, they could not hold  
their ground outside the city walls.  
But then anger swept through Meleager,  
just as it forcibly swells up in chests  
of other men, including wise ones, too.  
His heart was angry with his dear mother,  
Althea. So he stayed home with his wife,  
Cleopatra, the attractive daughter
- [700] of the lady with the lovely ankles,  
Maripessa, daughter of Euenus

and Ides, strongest of all men then alive.  
He was the one who took his bow to make  
a stand against a god, Phoebus Apollo,  
fighting for the girl with lovely ankles.  
Cleopatra's father and noble mother  
at home called her by the name Alcyone.  
Her mother shared the same fate as that bird,  
the mournful halcyon, for she cried  
[710] when Apollo, the far shooter, seized her.  
Beside this Cleopatra Meleager lay,  
brooding on the rage that pained his heart,  
infuriated by his mother's curses.  
In her grief over her brothers' killing,  
she prayed to the gods, beating fertile earth  
with her hands over and over, kneeling down,  
her breasts wet from crying, begging Hades  
and fearful Persephone to kill her son.\*  
The night-walking Furies, with their stone hearts,  
[720] listened to her prayers from Erebus.  
Then around the gates of Calydon  
the battle din grew loud, war's turmoil.  
The gates were being demolished. The old men  
of the Aetolians begged Meleager  
to come to their assistance. They sent  
their gods' most important holy priests.  
They promised him great gifts, telling him  
he could take for himself, from anywhere  
on the richest plain of lovely Calydon  
[730] fifty acres of the finest farm land,  
half for a vineyard and half for farming,  
open fields for ploughing. Oeneus,  
the old horseman, kept imploring him,  
standing at the threshold of his high room,  
beating on the firmly bolted doors,  
begging his son. His sisters and his mother  
often entreated him. But he refused.  
His companions, those most faithful to him,

his closest friends of all, added their prayers.  
[740] But they could not overcome those passions  
in his chest, not until his own room  
was under fierce attack, once the Curetes  
had scaled the tower and begun to burn  
that great city. Then his lovely wife,  
in her grief, implored Meleager,  
telling him the evils which can overtake  
men whose town is violently seized—  
how men are butchered and the city burned,  
with women and children seized by strangers.  
[750] Once he'd heard of these disasters, his heart stirred.  
He went outside, put his shining armour  
around his body—and thus averted  
a disastrous day for the Aetolians,  
by following his heart. But the Aetolians  
did not give him the many splendid gifts,  
although he'd saved them from catastrophe.  
My friend, don't think like Meleager.  
Don't let some god make you choose that way.  
Once the ships catch fire, it will be harder  
[760] to defend them. So accept the gifts.  
Achaeans are honouring you like a god.  
If you return to man-killing battle  
without the gifts, you'll never get such honour,  
even though you may push the conflict back."

Swift-footed Achilles then said in reply:

"Phoenix, dear old father, noble lord,  
I don't need such honours, for I possess  
honour in the will of Zeus. That will keep  
me here beside my own hollow ships,  
[770] so long as there is breath within my body,  
strength in my limbs. But I'll say this to you—  
bear it in mind—do not confuse my heart  
with these laments, these speeches of distress,

all serving that heroic son of Atreus.  
You should not love him, in case I hate you,  
who are now my friend. You would be noble  
to join with me, and so injure the man  
who injures me. Be equal king with me.  
Take half my honours. These men report back.  
[780] You stay here. Sleep in your soft bed. At dawn,  
we shall consider whether to go back  
to our own land, or whether to remain.”

Achilles spoke. His eyebrows gave a silent signal  
to Patroclus to set a firm bed out for Phoenix,  
so the others would quickly think of leaving.  
But Ajax, godlike son of Telamon, spoke up:

“Noble son of Laertes, resourceful Odysseus,  
let’s be off. I don’t think we’ll bring this talk  
to a successful end, not on this trip.  
[790] We must report this news, though it’s not good,  
to the Danaans waiting to receive it.  
For Achilles has turned his great spirit  
into something savage in his chest.  
He’s cruel and doesn’t care for friendship  
of his comrades, how we honoured him  
above all others there beside the ships.  
He has no pity. Any man accepts  
reparations for a murdered son or brother.  
The man who killed them pays a large amount  
[800] to stay there in his own community.  
The other man’s angry heart and spirit  
are checked, once he takes the compensation.  
But with you, gods have put inside your chest  
unchanging evil passions, and all this  
over a single girl. Now we are offering  
seven of the best we have and much more.  
You should turn your passion into kindness,  
the hospitality of your own house.

For we are guests here under your own roof,  
[810] chosen from the Argive host. We believe  
that we, of all Achaeans, are the ones  
most dear to you, your closest friends,  
far more so than all the others.”

Swift-footed Achilles then said in reply:

“Ajax, noble son of Telamon, your people’s leader,  
everything you say matches what I feel.  
But my heart chokes with rage when I recall  
how that son of Atreus behaved towards me  
with contempt, as if he were dishonouring  
[820] some vagrant. But you’d better go, take back  
this message—I shall not concern myself  
with bloody war until lord Hector,  
murderous son of Priam, comes against  
the huts and sea ships of the Myrmidons,  
killing Achaean soldiers as he goes,  
until he starts to burn our ships with fire.  
I think that Hector will be held in check  
around my hut, around my own black ship,  
for all his eagerness to battle on.”

[830] So Achilles spoke. The men each took a goblet  
with two handles, gave offerings, and went back to the ships,  
with Odysseus in the lead. Patroclus ordered  
his companions and the women slaves to set up  
a sturdy bed without delay for Phoenix.  
They obeyed his orders and prepared a bed,  
with sheepskin fleece and rug and fine linen sheets.  
The old man lay down, to stay till morning.  
Achilles slept in a corner of the well-built hut.  
Beside him lay a woman he’d seized from Lesbos,  
[840] fair Diomedes, one of Phorbas’ daughters.  
Patroclus slept opposite Achilles. Beside him  
lay lovely Iphigenia, whom Achilles gave him



after capturing steep Scyros, Enyeus' city.

The others reached the huts of Atreus' son.

Achaea's sons stood up and welcomed them with toasts  
in golden cups, one after another, asking questions.

The first to speak was Agamemnon, king of men:

“So come, tell me, famous Odysseus,  
great glory of Achaeans, does he wish  
[850] to protect our ships from all-destroying fire,  
or does he refuse, his mighty spirit  
still gripped with anger.”

Lord Odysseus,  
who had endured much, replied:

“King of men,  
mighty Agamemnon, son of Atreus,  
that man's unwilling to let go his rage.  
He's full of anger, more so now than ever.  
He despises you, your gifts, and tells you  
to sort out for yourself with the Argives  
how you may save Achaean ships and men.  
[860] As for him, he made this threat—at first light  
of dawn, he'll drag his trim balanced ships  
down to the sea. He said he would encourage  
others to sail home, for you'll not attain  
your goal of lofty Ilion, since Zeus,  
whose gaze ranges far and wide, holds his hand  
over Troy, whose people now have confidence.  
That's what he said. The others who went with me  
will confirm this for you—Ajax and two heralds,  
both prudent men. Old Phoenix stayed there,  
[870] to go to sleep, as Achilles told him,  
so that he may go away with him  
in his ships back to their dear native land,  
if he wants, for he won't take him by force.”

Odysseus spoke. They all were silent and disheartened,  
especially by the force with which Achilles had refused.  
Achaëa's sons sat a long time speechless, troubled.  
At last, Diomedes, skilled in war cries, spoke:

“Mighty Agamemnon, king of men,  
you should not have begged noble Peleus' son,  
[880] offering countless gifts. At the best of times,  
he's a proud man. Now you've encouraged him  
to be prouder still. Let's leave him alone,  
whether he goes or stays. For he'll fight  
when the spirit in his chest moves him,  
or when god drives him to it. But come on,  
let's all follow what I now propose.  
We've had our fill of food and wine. So now,  
you should get some sleep, for strength and stamina.  
When fair rosy-fingered Dawn appears,  
[890] you should range your army—men and horses—  
before the ships, then rouse their spirits,  
with you fighting at the front in person.”

All the kings applauded horse-taming Diomedes.  
They poured libations. Then each man went to his hut,  
where he lay down and stretched out to take the gift of sleep.