

Lecture Series on Homer's *Iliad*: Lecture 2

By Dr. Pooja Agarwal

Department of English and Modern European
and Other Foreign Languages
(School of Languages)

Book 4

In the meantime, the gods take part in their own personal duels. Zeus asserts that Menelaus has been victorious in the duel, saying that the war ought to end as agreed by the mortals. However, Hera has invested a great deal in the Achaean cause, and she desires nothing less than Troy's entire destruction. Ultimately, Zeus gives in and causes Athena to depart to the battlefield to encourage the fighting to restart. Athena disguises herself as a Trojan soldier, and she encourages Pandarus, the archer, to aim at Menelaus. While Pandarus fires, Athena, who only desires to create a pretext for fighting for the Achaeans, slightly changes the direction of the arrow so that Menelaus is only wounded.

Agamemnon gathers the Achaean forces. He meets people such as Odysseus, Nestor, and Diomedes, and he pushes them to attacking their pride and discussing the impressive deeds of their fathers. Battle ensues, and there is much bloodshed. The major characters are not killed or injured, but Great Ajax and Odysseus slay several minor Trojan figures. The gods become part of the action, and Athena assists the Achaeans. Apollo lends his support to the Trojans. Efforts to establish a truce have suffered complete failure.

Book 5

Pandarus wounds Diomedes, the Achaean hero, as the battle rages. Diomedes offers prayers to Athena, asking for revenge, and the goddess gives him extraordinary strength and the superhuman power to discern gods present on the battlefield. However, she warns him to refrain from challenging any of them, with the exception of Aphrodite. Diomedes kills every Trojan he meets, fighting in an extraordinary way. He slays the overconfident Pandarus. He also wounds Aeneas, a Trojan hero mentioned in the Aeneid by Virgil. Aphrodite tries to help her son, Aeneas, but Diomedes cuts her wrist, causing her to return to Mount Olympus. Dione, Aphrodite's mother, heals her. Zeus says that Aphrodite should not take part in warfare again. With Aphrodite gone, Apollo tries to tend to Aeneas, but Diomedes attacks him, too.

This aggressive action constitutes a breach of the agreement Diomedes has with Athena. Athena has limited Diomedes to challenging no god but Aphrodite. Apollo gives Diomedes a stern warning. He pushes him aside and then removes Aeneas from the field. Apollo leaves a replica of Aeneas's body on the battlefield, hoping that it will affect his comrades. Additionally, he rouses the god of war, Ares, to fight with the Trojans.

With the gods' assistance, the Trojans start being able to enjoy the upper hand in battle. Ares and Hector are too much for Achaeans to handle. Even Diomedes is frightened by the sight of a god and hero fighting side by side. Sarpedon, a Trojan, kills Tlepolemus, an Achaean.

Odysseus kills entire lines of Trojans in response to this. Hector then kills more Greeks. Athena and Hera appeal to Zeus, and he provides permission to intervene on the Achaeans' behalf. Hera rallies the remainder of the Achaean troops, and Athena provides Diomedes with encouragement. She takes back her earlier instruction to refrain from attacking any god except Aphrodite, and she even gets into the chariot to challenge Ares. She charges at Ares with the chariot. A tremendous collision occurs, and Ares is wounded by Diomedes. Ares promptly departs to Mount Olympus and offers his complaints to Zeus. Zeus says that Ares deserved to be injured. Hera and Athena also leave the scene of the battle.