

Lecture Series on Homer's *Iliad*: Lecture 5

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Book 12

We find it is fated that the Achaean fortifications are destined for destruction by the gods. For now they continue to hold, though, and the Trojan chariots are blocked by the trench that is in front of them. Hector isn't intimidated. He follows the advice of Polydamas, the young commander, to order his men to leave their chariots and attack the ramparts. While the Trojans get ready to traverse the trenches, an eagle appears flying in the sky to the left of the Trojan lines. It drops something into the midst of the soldiers. It is a serpent. This is interpreted by Polydamas as a sign that the charge will be a failure. However, Hector will not agree to retreat. The ramparts are now charged by the Trojans Sarpedon and Glaucus. Helped by the Great Ajax and Teucer, Menestheus struggles to restrain them. The first breach is made by Sarpedon. Hector follows this by using a boulder to break one of the gates. The Achaeans are terrified and move back against their ships as the Trojans come through the fortifications.

Book 13

Zeus is pleased with the progress of the war, and he leaves the battlefield. Poseidon wants to assist the Achaeans. He realizes that Zeus has left, and he goes to see Great Ajax and Little Ajax while in the form of Calchas. He helps them feel more confident in their ability to hold back the Trojan assault. Additionally, he encourages the remainder of the Achaeans, who have gone to the sides of the ships in tears. They feel encouraged and more positive about the situation, and the Achaeans again make their stand against the Trojans. The Great Ajax and the Little Ajax (the two are referred to as the Aeantes, as this is the plural of Ajax) are able to push Hector back. Hector aims his lance at Teucer and throws it, but Teucer moves out of the weapon's way. Poseidon's grandson, Amphimachus, is hit and killed instead. Poseidon desires vengeance, and he gives Idomeneus great power. Meriones is then joined by Idomeneus in leading the forces in charging the Trojans.

This is at the left wing of the Achaeans. Numerous Trojan soldiers are cut down by Idomeneus, who is eager to kill Deiphobus, a warrior. He makes a point of taunting this Trojan. Deiphobus summons Aeneas and other comrades for help. There is then an extended skirmish. Menelaus kills several Trojans, and Deiphobus is wounded.

Hector keeps up his assault on the right. However, the Trojans who are with him no longer have the energy they need as a result of having been terribly battered by the Great Ajax and the Little Ajax. Some of these men have gone back to the fortifications' Trojan side. Those who have chosen to remain and fight are scattered on the battlefield. Polydamas encourages Hector to re-organize his forces. Hector goes to get Paris and attempts to bring his comrades together from the line's left end. Unfortunately, he discovers them all to be dead or wounded. Hector is insulted by Great Ajax. On Ajax's right, an eagle appears. For the Achaeans, this is a good omen.

Book 14

Leaving Machaon, who is wounded, in his tent. He leaves to go out by the ships to meet the other wounded commanders of the Achaean forces. The men look over the battlefield and recognize that their losses have been terrible. Agamemnon suggests that they give up and set sail, heading for home. Odysseus turns on him and says that the idea is disgraceful as well as cowardly. Diomedes encourages them to rally their troops. As they start to make their way to the line, Agamemnon is encouraged by Poseidon. Poseidon helps to strengthen the Achaean army.

Zeus is on Mount Ida, and Hera sees him. The god is overlooking Troy. Hera thinks up a plan to distract Zeus, so that he will be able to assist the Achaeans while he isn't looking. She goes to see Aphrodite and tricks her into providing a breastband that is enchanted and woven with all the powers of Love and Longing.

This breastband is intended to be able to drive even the sanest men mad. She then sets off to see the embodiment of Sleep. She promises to allow him to marry one of her daughters, and she persuades him to make Zeus go to sleep. Sleep accompanies her to the top of Mount Ida. He disguises himself as a bird, and he hides himself in a tree. Hera is seen by Zeus. Sleep makes Zeus seized by passion, and the god makes love to Hera and then falls asleep. Hera tells Poseidon that he is now able to bring the Achaeans to victory without Zeus's interference. After they are regrouped by Poseidon, the Achaeans charge the Trojans. In the battle that ensues, Great Ajax uses a boulder as a weapon to knock down Hector to the ground. As a result, the Trojans are forced to carry Hector back to Troy. Now that Hector is gone, the Achaeans are able to defeat their enemies. There are many Trojan deaths, and the remainder of their forces return to the city.