

Lecture Series on Homer's *Iliad*: Lecture 9

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Book 23

Achilles and the Myrmidons continue to mourn for the death of Patroclus at the Achaean camp. Achilles starts to eat again, but he continues to refuse to wash until Patroclus has been buried. His dead friend comes to him in a dream that night. He asks Achilles to carry out his funeral quickly so that his soul is able to go to the land of the dead. The following day, Achilles holds a ceremony in which the twelve Trojan captives are sacrificed. He then asks for the assistance of the wind and lights the funeral pyre for Patroclus. Patroclus's bones are buried the next day. After that, Achilles calls for a series of competitions to honor Patroclus. There are wonderful prizes offered, and both the commanders and soldiers take part. There is archery, wrestling, boxing, and a chariot race.

Diomedes wins the chariot race with assistance from Athena. After this, Achilles thinks about taking the prize from the man who wins second place, Antilochus, to provide as consolation to the man who finishes last. This is because Athena has robbed him of his victory in order to benefit Diomedes. However, Antilochus becomes very angry at the prospect of his prize being stripped from him. Menelaus enters the argument, saying that Antilochus behaved badly in the race. The men are able to reconcile with each other after a bit of quarrelling.

Book 24

Achilles continues in his mourning of Patroclus and abuse of the body of Hector. He drags Hector's body around the tomb of his dead companion. Meanwhile, Apollo protects Hector's corpse from rot and damage. He also wards off scavengers and dogs. Twelve days after the death of Hector, Apollo encourages Zeus to think that Achilles is obliged to allow the ransoming of Hector's body. Thetis is sent by Zeus to deliver the news to Achilles, and Iris sets off to Priam to tell him to start the ransom. Hecuba anticipates that her husband will be cut down by Achilles, but Zeus sends an eagle as a favorable omen. Priam begins his journey with Idaeus, his driver, and a treasure-filled carriage. Hermes is disguised as a kind Myrmidon soldier.

Zeus sends her to give Priam guidance through the camp of the Achaeans. After the chariot finds its way to Achilles' tent, Hermes is revealed and he soon leaves Priam and Achilles alone together. Priam is tearful and asks Achilles for Hector's body. He asks that Achilles remember his own father, Peleus, as well as the love that they shared. Achilles weeps in memory of his father, as well as for Patroclus. He takes the ransom and gives his word that the body will be returned. Priam spends that night in Achilles' tent. Hermes arrives in the middle of the night and wakes him up, giving him warning that he should not sleep with the enemy. Idaeus and Priam wake, and they put Hector in their chariot. They go unnoticed as they depart from the camp. All of Troy's women, including Helen and Andromache, show their grief when they see Hector's corpse. The Trojans take nine days to prepare for Hector's funeral pyre. They have been given a break from the battle by Achilles. On the tenth day, the funeral pyre is lit.