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## The Main Topic of Vengeance, Fairness and Fate as Described By Iliad in the Poem, Homer

Revenge, justice, and destiny are three major themes intertwined in the Iliad. The book opens with the rage of Achilles in response to his dishonor, then immediately switches to an incident that occurred previously where a priest of the son of Zeus (Apollo) suffered a similar loss. The situation of the Greek camp when Apollo strikes it with plague after the dishonor of Chryses is the same as when Zeus decides to destroy the Greeks as punishment for the taking of Briseis from Achilles. However, the difference is that while Apollo has the option to immediately mete out deserving punishment – Zeus cannot, as he is in a higher position in the universe and needs to make judgments and decisions regarding fate before taking action. Zeus is the guider of destiny who makes sure everyone gets their right portion. Achilles' early death and honor are his fate. Thus, Zeus is the only god he can appeal to for justice.

Homer begins the poem with the stark images of the cost of war, the death and destruction that had to occur by the will of Zeus in order for Achilles' honor to be restored to him. The Greeks viewed death with distaste, as there was no honor in flitting aimlessly back and forth in a state of nothingness forever in Hades' underworld. Thus Achilles' fate of dying early while at the same time being honored is somewhat contradictory and the reason why his dishonor goes against the natural order.

In the last line, Thetis says "Grant my son the honor he deserves." Zeus is the only one who can grant Achilles his honor and punish the Greeks instead of any other god since Achilles is closest to him and since this will set into motion Achilles' fate. In the case of war, there is no arbiter that will grant Achilles the justice he deserves, so he must go to Zeus in order to regain it. Although Thetis refers to it as a "personal affront," she asks Zeus specifically to grant justice to him, knowing that it will involve the Greeks in the process and cause their destruction. This is further supported by the lines 255-257 where Achilles clearly shows that he is aware of what will happen to the Greeks if he withdraws from the war. Still, he pleads with Thetis to appeal to the highest court of justice – Zeus – who is also aware of what needs to be done in order to restore his honor and at the same time reset the natural order of the universe. Achilles' fate is his early death and honor; both are mentioned in the same line (535) by Thetis. Chryses' dishonor had nothing to do with his fate which is why he invokes Apollo instead of Zeus.

Both Thetis and Chryses are on close terms with the gods and this has an impact on the justice that is exacted. While Chryses is simply a mortal priest, Thetis is a goddess herself - lines 532-533 show her high position among the gods -and can therefore appeal to the higher court

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of justice for her son. Thus the punishment that begins raining down upon the Greeks in the situation of Achilles' dishonor is far greater, for two reasons. One, Achilles is half immortal himself and a beloved of Zeus. Second, his dishonor is needed to set in motion the chain of events that are the fate of the Greeks and Trojans. In line 368, it is mentioned that Zeus was the one supposed to grant him his honor. Since Achilles' honor is tied with his early death and both are to be his fate – and Zeus alone can be appealed to in matters as high as fate – it makes sense that Thetis calls upon him to restore Achilles' honor and fix the great rip in fate that has occurred. The same cannot be said of the priest Chryses, who isn't given as much importance although arguably, he is closer to the gods. Thus he can only appeal to the god that he is the priest of. Still, both of these angers serve the purpose of aligning with the natural cosmic forces and fulfilling the purposes of Zeus in bringing about the destruction of the Greeks.

Chryses' anger at the loss of his daughter is necessary for the rest of the events to take place. In essence, there needed to take place dishonor and restoration of honor before the true dishonor of the greatest Greek warrior took place. The priest only had access to Apollo, a less powerful court of justice when compared to Zeus. Yet retribution was exacted far swifter than for Achilles, leading one to believe that perhaps Zeus could have restored Achilles honor faster if it weren't for the fact that it would go against fate. Thus, Achilles dishonor was part of a larger chain of events that needed to occur before his honor was restored to him. It was tied in with his fate while Chryses' wasn't – rather Chryses' loss of his daughter was a terrible mistake that was fixed when the lesson was learnt.

### **Rage:**

Sing, Goddess, Achilles rage, black and murderous that cost the Greeks

Incalculable pain, pitched countless souls

Of heroes into Hades' dark,

And left their bodies to rot as feasts

For dogs and birds, as Zeus's will was done .

Begin with the clash between Agamemnon and-

The Greek warlord – and godlike Achilles

Which of the immortals set these two

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At each other's throats?

Apollo, Zeus' son and Leto's, offended

By the warlord. Agamemnon had dishonored

Chryses, Apollo's priest, so the god

Struck the Greek camp with plague,

And the soldiers were dying of it. (1. 1-15)

Father Zeus, if I have ever helped you

In word or deed among the immortals,

Grant me this prayer:

Honor my son doomed to die young

And yet dishonored by King Agamemnon

Who stole his prize, a personal affront.

Do justice by him, Lord of Olympus.

Give the Trojans the upper hand until the Greeks

Grant my son the honor he deserves. (1. 532-542)

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