

THE AGES OF MAN

Zeus, Lord of Mount Olympus, was the father of the Deathless Gods, as well as the father of human beings. The first generation of mortals to inhabit the grain-giving earth was known as the race of gold. These mortals were pure in heart and in deed. They respected both their fellow human beings and the deathless gods, and the immortals loved them in return. Because they treated one another justly, they needed neither written laws nor courts nor punishments. They lived carefree and easy lives, in freedom, safety, and peace. Since fear, grief, and hard labor never touched their lives, the passing years did not ravage their appearance or weaken their strength. Old age earned them respect and gratitude.

The weather treated the golden race kindly, providing the warmth, beauty, and sustenance of an eternal spring. Mortals did not have to work to house or to clothe themselves. Flowing nectar and milk formed their rivers, and the leaves of dwarf oak trees dripped honey. They feasted by gathering the wild grains and fruits that grew abundantly about them, and they shepherded their flocks of cattle and sheep in lush green pastures. They had the time and the desire to enjoy the wildflowers that radiantly blossomed in the sunshine and the stars that shone in the night sky.

The mortals of the race of gold had no wish to possess more than they already had. They were neither acquisitive nor aggressive. These people did not fashion boats in order to discover what lay beyond the borders of their own land. They did not threaten other human beings, and in return, no one threatened them. They had no need to build defensive walls around their towns nor to possess weapons. They had no armies, and they never heard the sound of a trumpet calling them to battle.

They died as peacefully as they had lived; death came in the form of a gentle sleep. After their bodies became part of the earth, their spirits roamed across the land, hidden by the mists. They protected the living from danger and taught them how to lead a just life.

When the first generation had passed away, Zeus created a second generation of mortals. They were the race of silver, and they were far less virtuous than the race of gold. Although their bodies matured with the passage of time, the silver race remained

juvenile in spirit. For one hundred years each child stayed at home with his or her mother, isolated from the companionship and instruction of other human beings. During this time, these mortals devoted their lives solely to the pursuit of childish pleasures.

As a result, the lives of adults in the silver race were short and unhappy. They never learned to treat one another with kindness and consideration, and their selfish behavior created injustice and war. They did not respect the deathless gods and made no effort to please them.

Because the silver race honored neither gods nor mortals, Zeus became angry with them. The Father of Gods and Mortals changed the weather from eternal spring to a year of four seasons, which ranged from the icy cold of winter to the blistering heat of summer. Caves and sheltered forest areas no longer provided sufficient protection from the weather, so the silver race built the first houses.

Food was now less plentiful. The people began to yoke oxen in pairs and drive them across their fields, toiling each day during the growing season, first to plant seeds of corn and later to reap the mature ears. Zeus brought their life on the earth to an early end, and when their bodies became part of the earth, their spirits entered the Underworld.

Then Zeus, the Father of Gods and Mortals, created a third generation of mortals, which became known as the race of bronze because their weapons and tools were made of bronze. These mortals were far inferior to the silver race because they were so cruel. They loved Ares, the God of War, above all the other gods, and they lived by the sword. Their brute strength made them powerful, but their hearts were as unresponsive as the hardest rock.

Despite their strength and power, members of the bronze race died young. They brought black Death upon themselves through endless violence and war. When their bodies became part of the earth, their shades descended into the dark, dismal Underworld, and they left behind nothing of worth to give them a good name.

Next, Zeus created a fourth generation of mortals, which became known as the race of heroes. These human beings were more noble and virtuous than the members of the silver or the bronze race. Some of them died in the war against Troy and in other wars, but Zeus placed those who survived upon the islands of the blessed at the ends

of the earth. There, the heroes still live along the shore of Oceanus in a land that bears a harvest of honey-sweet fruit three times a year. Grief can no longer touch them; only the honor and glory they earned during their ordinary lifetimes survive. They are ruled by Cronus, whom Zeus freed from his bondage in Tartarus for this purpose.

The fifth generation of mortals that Zeus placed upon the grain-giving earth is our own, the race of iron. Now each day is filled with work and with grief, and each night many mortals die. The worst crimes in the history of humanity now occur throughout the world, and yet no mortal feels shame. Justice and faith have left the world; treason and fraud, violence and greed have replaced them.

The people of the iron race do not think of others' needs nor share the bounty of the earth. Instead, we have divided up the earth's surface into a multitude of private properties, and we keep as much as we can for ourselves. We feel that the earth has not provided enough wealth in the grains she gives, so we have built ships and sailed into the unknown in order to acquire more wealth.

We have torn into the grain-giving earth, searching for the riches she has hidden within her. We have found her secret treasure and have become powerful and wealthy from her deposits of iron and gold. The value of these metals has led to war, and mortal hands have become bloody as they greedily tried to grasp the golden treasures of victory.

If we do not change our ways, our behavior will destroy us. When the time comes that host and guest no longer act hospitably; when friend argues with friend and brothers are enemies; when children and their parents cannot agree with each other; when grown children forget what their parents have done for them and instead treat them with disrespect and dishonor, criticizing them and complaining bitterly because they have grown old and weak; when people who keep their word or are just or virtuous receive less respect than those who use their strength for violent and evil purposes; when those who are evil hurt those who are honorable, then Zeus will destroy our iron race, for we will have shown the Father of Gods and Mortals that we are unfit to inhabit the earth that sustains us.