Works and Days

HESIOD

c. 700 BC

Works and Days

Ἔργα καὶ Ἡμέραι

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



FORAGE
forage.com

Works and Days · Hesiod (c. 700 BC)

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, October 2026. forage.com/hesiod/works-and-days

Greek text: Hugh G. Evelyn-White (1884–1924, ed.), *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homerica* (Loeb Classical Library; London: Heinemann, and New York: Macmillan, 1914), via the Perseus Digital Library (github.com/PerseusDL/canonical-greekLit) (canonical-greekLit, tlg0020.tlg002.perseus-grc2), CC BY-SA 4.0. Square brackets mark lines the editor considers not genuine; in lines 169a–d, which survive only on a damaged papyrus, they mark the letters the editor restored. The editor omits line 310 and prints some lines out of numerical order (169 after 173, 361–362, 768–769). English: translated from the Greek with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are line numbers.

The original text is in the public domain. This translation is free to share and adapt under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International license (CC BY-SA 4.0): creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0

Set in Source Serif 4.

CONTENTS

Introduction vii

Works and Days 1

Hymn to Zeus 1
The two Strifes 1
Prometheus and Pandora 2
The Five Ages 4
The hawk and the nightingale 7
Justice 8
Work 10
The farmer's year 12
Sailing 18
Sayings for life 20
The days 22

INTRODUCTION

Hesiod's brother Perses has taken more than his share of their inheritance, with the help of bribed local lords, and now he is out of money. *Works and Days* is Hesiod's answer: a poem that tells him, and the lords, to give up grabbing and lawsuits and to live by justice and hard work.

To make his case Hesiod tells the stories of Prometheus and of Pandora, the first woman, who opens the jar of evils so that only Hope stays inside; the five ages of humankind, from the golden race to our own race of iron; and the fable of the hawk and the nightingale. Then the poem turns practical: a farmer's year of plowing, sowing, pruning and harvest, timed by the rising of the Pleiades and the cries of cranes; when to go to sea, and when not to; rules for marriage, friendship and daily conduct; and a closing calendar of lucky and unlucky days.

Written around 700 BC by a farmer-poet whose father had left Cyme in Asia Minor for the village of Ascra in Boeotia ("bad in winter, harsh in summer, never good"), it is the first Greek poem in which the poet speaks of his own life, and the ancestor of Virgil's *Georgics*. The translation here is in prose, passage by passage beside the Greek.

Works and Days

Advice to Hesiod's brother Perses on justice and work: the myths of Pandora and the Five Ages, the farmer's year, sailing, and lucky days.

HYMN TO ZEUS

The Muses are called on to sing of Zeus, who raises up and brings low.

[1] Muses from Pieria, who give glory through song, come here and tell of Zeus, singing the praises of your father. Through him mortal men are unremarked or talked about, famous or unknown, as great Zeus wills. Easily he makes a man strong, and easily he brings the strong man low; easily he diminishes the conspicuous and raises up the obscure; easily he straightens the crooked and withers the proud: Zeus who thunders on high, who dwells in the loftiest halls. Hear me, you who see and listen, and keep judgments straight with justice yourself; and I, Perses, will tell you the truth.[1]

THE TWO STRIFES

A bad Strife breeds war, a good one spurs people to work; Perses should stop grabbing and suing.

[11] So there was not just one kind of Strife after all. On earth there are two. One a man would praise once he understood her; the other deserves blame; and their natures are wholly apart. One fosters evil war and conflict, the cruel one. No mortal loves her,

1 Perses: Hesiod's brother. After their father's estate was divided, Perses took more than his share and brought the dispute before the local lords (35–39).

but under compulsion, by the will of the immortals, men pay honor to oppressive Strife. The other, dark Night bore first, and the high-throned son of Cronus, who lives in the aether, set her in the roots of the earth and made her far better for men. She rouses even the shiftless man to work all the same. [21] A man who lacks work looks at another, a rich man who hurries to plow and plant and set his house in order, and neighbor envies neighbor as he hurries after wealth. This Strife is good for mortals. Potter resents potter, and carpenter carpenter; beggar envies beggar, and singer singer. Perses, lay this up in your heart, and don't let the Strife who delights in harm hold your heart back from work while you peer at quarrels and hang about listening in the assembly.

[30] A man has little time for quarrels and assemblies if he doesn't have a year's livelihood laid up indoors in good season, what the earth bears, Demeter's grain. When you've had your fill of that, then you might push quarrels and contention over other men's property. But you won't get a second chance to act like this. No, let's settle our dispute here and now with straight judgments, which come from Zeus and are the best. We had already divided our inheritance, but you grabbed and carried off the larger part, paying great court to the bribe-devouring lords who are so eager to judge this case. Fools! They don't know how much more the half is than the whole, or what great benefit there is in mallow and asphodel.[2]

PROMETHEUS AND PANDORA

Zeus hides the means of life; Prometheus steals fire; Pandora, the first woman, opens the jar of evils.

[42] For the gods keep men's livelihood hidden. Otherwise you could easily work enough in a single day to keep you for a year, even doing nothing. You'd soon hang your steering oar up over the smoke, and the work of oxen and hard-working mules would

2 Lords: the local nobles who judged disputes in their communities; Hesiod's "kings" (basilēes) were not monarchs.

be done for. But Zeus hid it, angry in his heart because Prometheus of the crooked counsel had tricked him. That is why he devised grievous cares for men. He hid fire. But the good son of Iapetus stole it back for men from Zeus, wise in counsel, in a hollow fennel stalk, slipping it past Zeus who delights in the thunderbolt. Then Zeus the cloud-gatherer spoke to him in anger:[3]

54 "Son of Iapetus, you whose cunning surpasses everyone's, you're pleased that you've stolen fire and outwitted me—a great affliction for you yourself and for men to come. To them, in return for fire, I will give an evil that all of them will delight in at heart, embracing their own evil." So he spoke, and the father of men and gods laughed out loud. He ordered famous Hephaestus to mix earth with water as quickly as he could, to put a human voice and strength in it, and to make it like the immortal goddesses in face, the lovely, beautiful form of a maiden; and Athena to teach her crafts, to weave the intricate web; and golden Aphrodite to pour grace about her head, and painful desire, and cares that wear out the limbs; and he commanded Hermes, the guide, Argeïphontes, to put in her the mind of a dog and a thieving character.[4]

69 So he spoke, and they obeyed lord Zeus, son of Cronus. At once the famous lame god molded from earth the likeness of a modest maiden, by the plans of the son of Cronus. Gray-eyed Athena girded and adorned her; the divine Graces and queenly Persuasion put golden necklaces about her skin; and the lovely-haired Seasons crowned her all around with spring flowers. [Pallas Athena fitted every adornment to her body.] And in her breast the guide Argeïphontes put lies, wheedling words and a thieving character [—he fashioned them by the will of deep-thundering Zeus—and a voice] the herald of the gods set in her; and he named this woman Pandora, because all who have their

3 Over the smoke: ships' gear was stored above the hearth when not in use; here it would be put away for good.

4 Argeïphontes: an epithet of Hermes of uncertain meaning, traditionally taken as "slayer of Argus."

homes on Olympus gave her a gift: a bane to men who eat bread.[5]

83 When he had finished this sheer, inescapable trap, the father sent famous Argeïphontes, the swift messenger of the gods, to Epimetheus, bringing the gift. And Epimetheus didn't stop to think how Prometheus had told him never to accept a gift from Olympian Zeus, but to send it back, in case some evil should come to mortals. He accepted it, and only when he had the evil did he realize. Before this, the tribes of men lived on the earth apart from evils, without harsh toil and the painful diseases that bring the Death-Spirits upon men. [For in misery mortals grow old quickly.][6] 94 But the woman took the great lid off the jar with her hands and scattered its contents, and devised grievous cares for men. Only Hope remained there inside, in her unbreakable home under the lip of the jar, and did not fly out of doors; for before that the woman put the lid back on the jar [by the will of Zeus the cloud-gatherer, who holds the aegis]. But countless other miseries roam among men. The land is full of evils, and full is the sea. Diseases come upon men by day, and others by night, roaming of their own accord, bringing evils to mortals in silence, since Zeus the wise counselor took away their voice. So there is no way at all to escape the mind of Zeus.

THE FIVE AGES

The races of gold, silver and bronze, the heroes, and the present race of iron.

106 If you like, I'll sum up another story for you, well and skillfully; and you, take it to heart: how gods and mortal men came from the same origin. First of all, the immortals who have their homes on Olympus made a golden race of mortal men. They lived in the time of Cronus, when he was king in heaven. They lived like gods, with hearts free from care, apart from toil and

5 Pandora: Hesiod explains the name as "all-gifts."
6 Epimetheus: Prometheus' brother; the names suggest "Afterthought" and "Forethought."

misery and without them. Wretched old age did not come upon them; always the same in hands and feet, they enjoyed themselves at feasts, beyond the reach of all evils. They died as if overcome by sleep. All good things were theirs. The grain-giving soil bore its fruit of itself, abundant and unstinting, and they, contented and at ease, lived off their fields with many good things,

120 rich in flocks, dear to the blessed gods. But ever since the earth covered up this race—they are called pure spirits who dwell on the earth, noble, warders-off of evil, guardians of mortal men, [who watch over judgments and cruel deeds,] [clothed in mist, roaming everywhere over the land,] givers of wealth; this royal privilege they received—the immortals who have their homes on Olympus made a second race after it, far worse, of silver, like the golden race neither in body nor in mind.

130 Instead, for a hundred years a child was raised by his devoted mother, playing at home, a great baby. But when they grew up and reached the full measure of youth, they lived only a short time, suffering pains through their foolishness. For they couldn't keep reckless outrage from one another, and they would not serve the immortals or sacrifice on the holy altars of the blessed gods, as is right for men according to their ways. Then Zeus son of Cronus put them away in anger, because they did not give honor to the blessed gods who hold Olympus.

140 But ever since the earth covered up this race too—mortals call them the blessed ones under the earth, second in rank, but honor attends them as well—Zeus the father made another race of mortal men, the third, of bronze, not at all like the silver one, made from ash trees, terrible and mighty. They cared for the grievous works of Ares and for acts of outrage. They ate no grain, but had stout hearts of adamant, unapproachable. Great was their strength, and invincible arms grew from their shoulders on their sturdy limbs. Their armor was bronze, their houses bronze, and they worked with bronze; there was no

black iron.[7] 152 And these, laid low by their own hands, went down nameless to the dank house of chill Hades. Black death seized them, fearsome though they were, and they left the bright light of the sun. But ever since the earth covered up this race too, Zeus son of Cronus made yet another, the fourth, on the much-nourishing earth, more just and better: the godlike race of heroes, who are called demigods, the generation before ours on the boundless earth. Evil war and dread battle destroyed them, some under seven-gated Thebes, in the land of Cadmus, as they fought for the flocks of Oedipus; others it led in ships over the great gulf of the sea to Troy, for the sake of lovely-haired Helen.[8]

166 There the end of death enfolded some of them. But to others Zeus son of Cronus, the father, granted a livelihood and a dwelling apart from men, and settled them at the ends of the earth. And they live with hearts free from care in the Islands of the Blessed beside deep-eddying Ocean, prosperous heroes, for whom the grain-giving soil bears honey-sweet fruit, flourishing three times a year, far from the immortals; Cronus is king over them. [For the father of men and gods released him from his bonds.] [And honor and glory attend these last ones alike.] [Then wide-seeing Zeus made yet another race, the fifth,] [of men who live on the much-nourishing earth.][9]

174 I wish I were no longer among the fifth men, but had either died before or been born after. For now it is truly a race of iron. Never by day do they rest from toil and misery, nor by night from wasting away, and the gods will give them harsh troubles. Still, even for them good things will be mixed with evils. But Zeus will destroy this race of mortal men too, when they are born gray at the temples. Father will not be of one mind with children, nor children with father, nor guest with host, nor comrade with comrade, nor will brother be dear to brother as before. Soon they will dishonor their parents as they grow old,

7 From ash trees: or "from the Meliae," the ash-tree nymphs; ash wood was used for spear shafts.
8 Thebes: the war of the Seven against Thebes, fought between the sons of Oedipus over his inheritance.
9 Lines 169a–d survive only on papyrus, and parts of them are restored.

and find fault with them, speaking with harsh words, cruel men, knowing nothing of the gods' vengeance. Nor would they repay their aged parents for their upbringing—men whose justice is in their fists. One will sack another's city. [190] There will be no thanks for the man who keeps his oath, nor for the just man nor the good; rather, men will praise the doer of evil and outrage. Justice will be in their fists, and shame will not exist. The bad man will harm the better, speaking with crooked words, and he will swear an oath on top of it. Envy, loud-mouthed, delighting in harm, with a hateful face, will accompany all wretched men. And then, from the wide-wayed earth to Olympus, covering their beautiful skin with white robes, Shame and Nemesis will go to join the tribe of the immortals, forsaking men; and grievous pains will be left for mortal men, and there will be no defense against evil.[10]

THE HAWK AND THE NIGHTINGALE

A fable for the lords: a hawk tells the nightingale in his talons that resisting the stronger is folly.

[202] And now I'll tell a fable for the lords, sensible as they themselves are. This is what the hawk said to the nightingale with the speckled throat, as he carried her high up in the clouds, gripped in his talons. She, pierced by the curved talons, was crying pitifully, and he spoke to her masterfully: "You poor fool, why are you shrieking? Someone far stronger has you now. You'll go wherever I take you, singer though you are. I'll make my dinner of you if I want, or let you go. He's a fool who tries to set himself against the stronger: he is robbed of victory and suffers pain on top of disgrace." So spoke the swift-flying hawk, the long-winged bird.

10 Nemesis: Retribution, the indignation roused by wrongdoing.

JUSTICE

Justice and outrage; the just city and the wicked one; warnings to the bribe-devouring lords.

213 But you, Perses, listen to justice, and don't foster outrage. Outrage is bad for a poor man; not even a noble man can bear it easily, but he is weighed down by it when he meets with ruin. The road that leads the other way, toward just dealings, is the better one to take. Justice wins out over Outrage when she comes to the end: a fool learns by suffering. For Oath runs at once alongside crooked judgments. There is an uproar when Justice is dragged wherever bribe-devouring men lead her, and they decide cases with crooked judgments. She follows, weeping, through the city and the haunts of the people, clothed in mist, bringing evil to the men who have driven her out and not dealt her out straight. 225 But those who give straight judgments to strangers and citizens alike, and don't swerve at all from what is just—their city flourishes, and the people blossom in it. Peace, nurse of children, is over the land, and wide-seeing Zeus never ordains painful war for them. Famine never attends men of straight justice, nor ruin; amid feasts they tend the work they care for. For them the earth bears plenty of livelihood. On the mountains the oak bears acorns at its top and bees in its middle; their woolly sheep are weighed down with fleeces; women bear children who resemble their parents. They flourish with good things continually, and they don't go off on ships: the grain-giving soil bears them fruit.

238 But for those who care for evil outrage and cruel deeds, wide-seeing Zeus son of Cronus ordains justice. Often even a whole city suffers for one bad man who sins and contrives reckless deeds. On them the son of Cronus brings great affliction from heaven, famine and plague together, and the people waste away. Women don't bear children, and households dwindle, by the devising of Olympian Zeus. At other times the son of Cronus destroys their broad army, or their wall, or takes their ships at

sea. You lords, consider this justice yourselves too. For the immortals are close at hand among men, and they take note of all who grind one another down with crooked judgments, with no regard for the gods' vengeance.

252 For on the much-nourishing earth there are thirty thousand immortals, Zeus's guardians of mortal men, who watch over judgments and cruel deeds, clothed in mist, roaming everywhere over the land. And there is the maiden Justice, born of Zeus, glorious and revered among the gods who hold Olympus. Whenever anyone harms her with crooked abuse, she at once sits down beside her father Zeus, son of Cronus, and proclaims the unjust mind of men, so that the people may pay for the recklessness of lords who with baneful intent bend judgments aside, speaking crookedly. Guard against this, you bribe-devouring lords: give straight judgments, and forget crooked judgments altogether.

265 The man who makes trouble for another makes trouble for himself, and bad counsel is worst for the counselor. The eye of Zeus, which sees all and notices all, looks on these things too, if it wants, and does not fail to see what kind of justice this is that the city keeps within it. As things stand, I wouldn't want to be just among men myself, nor would I want my son to be, since it's a bad thing to be a just man if the more unjust one will have the better of justice. But I don't yet expect Zeus, wise in counsel, to bring that about.

274 Perses, put these things in your mind: listen to justice, and forget force entirely. For this is the law the son of Cronus laid down for men. Fish and beasts and winged birds eat one another, since there is no justice among them; but to men he gave justice, which is far the best. If someone knows what is just and is willing to say it, wide-seeing Zeus gives him prosperity. But whoever willingly swears a false oath in testimony and lies, and in harming justice is struck with incurable folly, leaves a dimmer line behind him; while the line of a man true to his oath is better hereafter.

WORK

The steep road to excellence; work brings wealth and the gods' favor; duties to gods, neighbors and kin.

286 I mean you well, and I'll tell you, you great fool, Perses. Badness you can have in droves, and easily: the road is smooth, and she lives very near. But in front of excellence the immortal gods have set sweat. Long and steep is the path to her, and rough at first; but when you reach the top, then it is easy, hard though it was. That man is best of all who thinks everything through for himself, considering what will be better later and in the end. Good too is he who heeds someone who speaks well. But whoever neither thinks for himself nor takes to heart what he hears from another—that man is useless.

298 But you, always remembering my instruction, work, Perses, child of a godly stock, so that Famine may hate you and revered Demeter of the fine garland may love you and fill your barn with livelihood. For Famine is the idle man's constant companion. Gods and men are indignant at whoever lives idle, like in temper to the stingless drones, who idly eat up the bees' labor, feeding on it. Make it your pleasure to set your work in order in due measure, so that your barns may be full of livelihood in its season. From work men grow rich in flocks and wealthy, and by working they are much dearer to the immortals.
311 Work is no disgrace; idleness is the disgrace. If you work, the idle man will soon envy you as you grow rich: excellence and glory follow wealth. Whatever your lot, working is better, if you turn your foolish mind from other men's property to work and attend to your livelihood, as I tell you. It's no good kind of shame that keeps company with a needy man—shame, which both greatly harms men and helps them. Shame goes with poverty, confidence with prosperity. Wealth is not for grabbing: god-given is far better.

321 For if someone seizes great prosperity by force, with his hands, or plunders it with his tongue, as often happens when

gain deceives men's minds and shamelessness hounds out shame, the gods easily bring him low and diminish that man's household, and prosperity attends him only a short time. It's the same with one who wrongs a suppliant or a guest; and one who goes up into his brother's bed to lie in secret with his wife, doing what is not fitting; and one who in his folly sins against someone's orphaned children; and one who quarrels with his old father on the bitter threshold of old age, attacking him with harsh words. With that man Zeus himself is angry, and in the end he lays a harsh requital on him for his unjust deeds. [335] But keep your foolish mind entirely away from such things. As far as you can, sacrifice to the immortal gods in purity and cleanness, and burn shining thigh-pieces; at other times propitiate them with libations and incense, both when you go to bed and when the holy light comes, so that they may have a gracious heart and spirit toward you, and you may buy other men's land, and not someone else yours. Invite your friend to a feast, and leave your enemy alone. Above all invite the one who lives near you. For if some trouble comes up on your place, neighbors come ungirded; kinsmen stop to put on their belts.[11]

[346] A bad neighbor is as great a bane as a good one is a blessing. He who has a good neighbor has a share of honor. Not even an ox would be lost, if it weren't for a bad neighbor. Take good measure from your neighbor, and pay back good measure, with the same measure, or better if you can, so that when you're in need later on you may find him reliable. Don't make bad gains: bad gains are as good as ruin. Love the one who loves you, and stand by the one who stands by you. Give to one who gives, and don't give to one who doesn't. People give to a giver; nobody gives to one who never gives. Give is good, Grab is bad: she brings death.

[357] For the man who gives willingly, even if he gives a lot, is glad of his gift and takes pleasure in his heart; but whoever takes for himself, trusting in shamelessness, even if it is some-

11 Ungirded: that is, at once, just as they are, while relatives living farther off take time to get ready.

thing small, it freezes the heart. Whoever adds to what he has will ward off burning hunger: if you put even a little on a little and do it often, that too would soon become a lot. What is stored away in the house doesn't trouble a man. It's better for things to be at home, since what's out of doors is at risk. It's good to take from what's at hand, and a pain to the heart to want what's absent: think about this, I tell you. When the jar is just opened or nearly done, take your fill; in the middle, be sparing. Sparing at the bottom is a poor thing.

370 Let the wage promised to a friend be sufficient. Even with your brother, smile—and get a witness. Trust and mistrust alike have ruined men. Don't let a woman who flaunts her backside fool your mind, coaxing and wheedling while she pokes around your barn. Whoever trusts a woman trusts thieves. Let there be an only son to feed his father's house, for that's how wealth grows in the halls; and if you leave a second son behind, may you die old. Yet Zeus can easily provide boundless prosperity to more. More people mean more work done, and greater increase. If your heart in your breast desires wealth, do this: work, and work upon work.

THE FARMER'S YEAR

Plowing, sowing, winter, the vintage, harvest and threshing, timed by the stars and the birds.

383 When the Pleiades, born of Atlas, are rising, begin the harvest, and begin the plowing when they are setting. They are hidden for forty nights and days, and then, as the year comes round, they appear again when you first sharpen your iron. This is the rule of the plains, both for those who live near the sea and for those who live in wooded glens far from the surging sea, a rich country: sow stripped, plow stripped, and reap stripped, if you want to bring in all Demeter's works in their season, so that each may grow in its season, and you don't go short later on and

cower at other men's doors and get nothing done.[12] 396 That's how you came to me just now. But I won't give you anything more, or measure out any more. Work, you fool, Perses, at the work the gods have marked out for men, so that you don't some day, with your wife and children, in anguish of heart, go looking for a living among your neighbors while they pay you no attention. Two or three times you may get something; but if you keep pestering them, you'll get nothing done, and all your talk will be in vain: your wide range of words will be no use. No, I tell you to think about how to pay off your debts and keep hunger away.

405 First of all, get a house, a woman, and an ox for the plow. The woman should be bought, not married, so she can follow the oxen too. Get all the gear in the house in good order, so that you don't ask another man and he refuses, and you go without, and the season slips past and your work comes to little. Don't put things off until tomorrow and the day after. A man who works to no purpose doesn't fill his barn, and neither does a man who puts things off. Diligence makes work prosper; the man who puts off his work is forever wrestling with ruin.

414 When the force of the sharp sun eases off from its sweltering heat, and mighty Zeus sends the autumn rains, a mortal's body moves much more lightly. Then the star Sirius passes only briefly by day over the heads of men born to doom, and takes a larger share of the night. That is when wood cut with iron is least eaten by worms: it sheds its leaves to the ground and stops sprouting. So then, mindful of the season's work, cut your timber. Cut a mortar three feet across, a pestle three cubits long, and an axle seven feet long; that's just right. If you make it eight feet, you could cut a mallet from it as well. For a wagon ten palms wide, cut a wheel-rim section three spans long. 427 Cut many curved timbers. When you find a plow-tree, bring it home; look for it on the mountain or in the field. It should be holm-oak, because that is the strongest for oxen to plow with, once Athena's servant has fixed it in the share-beam, fastened it with

12 The Pleiades rise at dawn in May, at harvest time, and set at dawn in early November, when plowing begins.

pegs, and fitted it to the pole. Make two plows and keep them, working on them at home, a one-piece plow and a jointed plow. That's much better: if you break one, you can put the other on the oxen. Poles of laurel or elm are the most free from worm; make the share-beam of oak and the plow-tree of holm-oak. Get two oxen, males, nine years old. Their strength is not feeble, and they are in the full measure of their prime, the best for work. They won't fight in the furrow, break the plow, and leave the work there undone.[13] 441 Behind them let a vigorous man of forty follow, one who has dined on a loaf of four quarters and eight portions. He will mind his work and drive a straight furrow, no longer looking around after his age-mates but keeping his mind on the job. No younger man is better than he is at scattering the seed and not sowing twice over; a younger man has his head turned by his age-mates. Take note when you hear the voice of the crane calling from high in the clouds, as it does every year. It brings the signal for plowing and shows the season of rainy winter, and it bites the heart of the man who has no oxen. That's the time to feed up your crooked-horned oxen indoors. It's easy to say, "Give me a pair of oxen and a wagon." It's just as easy to refuse: "My oxen have work to do."

455 A man rich in fancies says he'll build himself a wagon. The fool, he doesn't even know there are a hundred timbers in a wagon. Take care to lay them up at home beforehand. As soon as plowing time first shows itself to mortals, set to it, your slaves and you alike, plowing dry soil and wet in the plowing season. Hurry from early morning, so your fields will be full. Turn the soil in spring; fallow plowed again in summer won't disappoint you. Sow your fallow while the soil is still light. Fallow land keeps off curses and keeps children content.

465 Pray to Zeus of the earth and to holy Demeter that Demeter's sacred grain may grow full and heavy. Do this when you first begin plowing, when you grip the end of the handle and bring the goad down on the backs of the oxen as they pull the pole-pin by the yoke-straps. A little behind, let a young slave

13 "Athena's servant" is the carpenter; Athena was the patron of craftsmen.

with a mattock make trouble for the birds by covering up the seed. Good management is best for mortal men, bad management worst. That way your ears of grain will nod to the ground with ripeness, if the Olympian himself grants a good outcome later, and you'll sweep the cobwebs out of your jars. And I expect you'll be glad as you draw on the living stored up inside. You'll reach gray spring well supplied and won't look to others; it's another man who will be in need of you.

479 But if you plow the bright earth at the solstice, you'll reap sitting down, clutching a scanty crop in your hand and binding the sheaves crosswise, covered in dust and not at all happy. You'll carry it home in a basket, and few will admire you. Yet the mind of Zeus who holds the aegis changes from one time to another, and it is hard for mortal men to fathom. If you plow late, this may be your remedy. When the cuckoo first calls "cuckoo" in the leaves of the oak and delights mortals over the boundless earth, may Zeus rain on the third day and not let up, so that the water neither rises above an ox's hoof nor falls short of it. Then the late plower may match the early one. Keep all this well in mind, and don't let gray spring catch you unawares as it comes, or the seasonal rain.

493 Walk past the smith's bench and the warm lounging-place in the winter season, when the cold keeps a man from work. That is when a man who isn't lazy can do much to build up his household. Otherwise the helplessness of a bad winter may catch you along with poverty, and you'll be rubbing a swollen foot with a thin hand. The idle man, waiting on empty hope and lacking a living, turns many bad thoughts over in his heart. It's no good hope that keeps company with a needy man, sitting in the lounging-place without enough to live on. While it's still midsummer, tell your slaves: "It won't always be summer. Build your shelters."

504 The month of Lenaion, bad days, every one of them cold enough to flay an ox: avoid it, and the frosts that are cruel on the earth when Boreas, the North Wind, blows. He comes blowing across horse-rearing Thrace over the wide sea and stirs it up,

and earth and forest roar. He falls on many high-leaved oaks and thick firs in the mountain glens and brings them down to the earth that feeds many, and then the whole vast forest cries out. The wild beasts shudder and put their tails between their legs, even those whose hide is covered with fur. Cold as he is, he blows right through them too, shaggy-chested though they are.[14] 515 He goes right through an ox's hide, and it doesn't stop him. He blows through the long-haired goat. But sheep he doesn't blow through at all: their fleece is thick all year, and the force of the North Wind can't get through. He bends the old man round as a wheel. But he doesn't blow through the soft-skinned girl who stays indoors with her dear mother, not yet knowing the works of golden Aphrodite. She washes her tender skin well, rubs herself with olive oil, and lies down in an inner room of the house on a winter's day, when the Boneless One gnaws his own foot in his fireless house, his miserable haunts. The sun doesn't show him any pasture to set out for, but wheels over the land and city of dark-skinned people, and is slower to shine on all the Greeks.[15] 529 Then the horned and hornless creatures that sleep in the woods flee through the thickets of the glens, their teeth chattering miserably. All of them have one thing on their minds: they look for shelter, for dense hiding places and hollows in the rock. Then, like the three-footed mortal whose back is broken and whose head looks down at the ground, like him they wander about, trying to escape the white snow. Then put on protection for your body, as I tell you: a soft cloak and a tunic down to the feet. Weave plenty of weft on a scanty warp, and wrap yourself in it, so that your hair stays still and doesn't bristle up on end all over your body. On your feet tie snug boots made from the hide of a slaughtered ox, lining them inside with felt.[16]

543 When the cold season comes, stitch together the skins of firstling kids with ox-sinew, to throw over your back as a shelter from the rain. On your head wear a well-made felt cap, so your

14 Lenaion was a winter month, roughly January–February.
15 The Boneless One is the octopus, believed to eat its own tentacles in winter.
16 The three-footed mortal is an old man walking with a stick.

ears don't get wet. For the dawn is cold when the North Wind has come down, and at dawn a wheat-bearing mist stretches over the earth from the starry sky, across the fields of the blessed. It draws its water from the ever-flowing rivers, rises high above the earth on a gust of wind, and sometimes turns to rain toward evening, sometimes to wind, when Thracian Boreas drives the thick clouds along. Get your work done before he comes and go home, so that a dark cloud from the sky doesn't wrap around you, drench your skin, and soak your clothes. 557 Steer clear of it: this is the hardest month, wintry, hard on the flocks, hard on men. At that time give your oxen half their feed, but give a man more of his rations, because the long nights help out. Keep to this until the year is done, and balance nights against days, until the earth, mother of all, once more brings forth her mingled fruits. When Zeus has completed sixty winter days after the solstice, the star Arcturus leaves the holy stream of Ocean and rises for the first time, shining brightly at dusk. After him the daughter of Pandion, the swallow, crying at dawn, comes up into the light for men, just as spring begins. Prune your vines before she comes; that's better.[17]

571 But when the House-Carrier climbs from the ground up the plants, fleeing the Pleiades, it's no longer time to dig the vines. Sharpen your sickles and rouse your slaves. Avoid shady seats and sleeping until dawn at harvest time, when the sun parches the skin. Then hurry and bring the crop home, getting up at first light, so you'll have enough to live on. Dawn takes a third share of the work. Dawn puts you ahead on the road, and puts you ahead in your work: dawn, who at her appearing sets many men on their way and puts the yoke on many oxen.[18]

582 When the golden thistle blooms, and the chirping cicada sits in a tree and pours down its shrill song thick and fast from under its wings, in the season of exhausting summer, then goats are fattest and wine is best, women are most lustful and men are

17 The swallow was said to be Procne, daughter of the Athenian king Pandion, turned into a bird.

18 The House-Carrier is the snail.

weakest, since Sirius parches their heads and knees and their skin is dried out by the heat. Then at last let there be shade under a rock and Bibline wine, a milk-cake and the milk of goats that are drying off, the meat of a forest-grazing heifer that has not yet calved, and of firstling kids. Drink the bright wine as you sit in the shade, your heart sated with food, turning your face toward the fresh West Wind. From an ever-flowing spring that runs away unmuddied, pour three measures of water, and add a fourth of wine.

597 Urge your slaves to thresh Demeter's sacred grain as soon as mighty Orion first appears, in a breezy spot on a well-rounded threshing floor. Measure it and store it carefully in jars. When you have laid up all your livelihood, ready and in order inside the house, I tell you to take on a laborer who has no household and to look for a hired woman with no children; a hired woman with a child at the breast is trouble. Keep a sharp-toothed dog, and don't skimp on its food, or the Day-Sleeper may make off with your goods. Bring in fodder and litter, so you'll have a year's supply for your oxen and mules. After that, let your slaves rest their knees, and unyoke your pair of oxen.[19]

609 When Orion and Sirius come into mid-heaven, and rosy-fingered Dawn sees Arcturus, then, Perses, pick all your grapes and bring them home. Expose them to the sun for ten days and ten nights, cover them in shade for five, and on the sixth draw off into jars the gifts of Dionysus who brings much joy. But when the Pleiades and the Hyades and mighty Orion set, then remember to plow in season, and the year will go properly into the ground.

SAILING

When and how to go to sea, though Hesiod himself has crossed only once, to Euboea.

618 If a longing for stormy seafaring takes hold of you: when the Pleiades, fleeing the mighty strength of Orion, fall into the misty

19 The Day-Sleeper is the thief, who sleeps by day and prowls by night.

sea, then blasts of every kind of wind rage. Then don't keep your ships on the wine-dark sea any longer, but remember to work the land, as I tell you. Haul your ship up on dry land and pack stones all around it, so they can hold off the force of the winds that blow wet, and pull out the bilge plug so Zeus's rain doesn't rot it. Put all the tackle away in good order in your house, neatly stowing the wings of your seafaring ship, and hang the well-made steering oar above the smoke. 630 Wait yourself for the right season for sailing, until it comes. Then drag your swift ship down to the sea and stow a suitable cargo in it, so you can bring a profit home. That's what my father and yours used to do, you great fool, Perses: he sailed in ships, for lack of a decent living. He came here too once, crossing a great stretch of sea, leaving Aeolian Cyme in a black ship. He wasn't fleeing abundance, or wealth and prosperity, but wretched poverty, which Zeus gives to men. He settled near Helicon in a miserable village, Ascra: bad in winter, harsh in summer, never good.[20]

641 But you, Perses, remember to do all your work in its season, and seafaring above all. Praise a small ship, but put your cargo in a big one. The bigger the cargo, the bigger the profit piled on profit, if the winds hold back their evil blasts. When you turn your foolish heart to trade and want to escape debt and joyless hunger, I will show you the measures of the loud-roaring sea, though I'm no expert in seafaring or in ships. I have never yet sailed the wide sea in a ship, except to Euboea from Aulis, where once the Achaeans waited out a long winter, when they had gathered a great army from holy Hellas for Troy, land of beautiful women.

654 There I crossed over to Chalcis for the games of warlike Amphidamas. The sons of that great-hearted man had announced and set up many prizes, and there, I can tell you, I won with a song and carried off a tripod with handles. I dedicated it to the Muses of Helicon, where they first set me on the path of clear-voiced song. That's all the experience I have of

20 Cyme was a Greek city on the coast of Asia Minor; Ascra, Hesiod's village, lay in Boeotia below Mount Helicon.

many-pegged ships. Even so I will tell you the mind of Zeus who holds the aegis, for the Muses taught me to sing a wondrous song. For fifty days after the solstice, when the season of exhausting summer has come to its end, sailing is in season for mortals. You won't wreck your ship, and the sea won't destroy your men, unless Poseidon the Earth-shaker has set his heart on it, or Zeus, king of the immortals, wants to destroy them; for with them lies the outcome of good and bad alike.[21]

670 At that time the breezes are steady and the sea is harmless. Then, untroubled and trusting the winds, drag your swift ship into the sea and put all your cargo aboard. But hurry to come back home as fast as you can. Don't wait for the new wine and the autumn rain, the coming of winter and the terrible blasts of the South Wind, which stirs up the sea when it comes with Zeus's heavy autumn rain, and makes the sea rough. There is another sailing season for men, in spring. When the leaves first appear at the tip of the fig-branch, as big as the footprint a crow leaves when it steps, then the sea can be sailed.

682 That is the spring sailing. I don't recommend it; it doesn't please my heart. It's a snatched chance; you'd have a hard time escaping disaster. Yet men do even this, in the ignorance of their minds, for money is the very soul of wretched mortals. It is a terrible thing to die among the waves. I urge you to think over all these things, as I tell you. Don't put your whole livelihood in hollow ships; leave the greater part behind and ship the smaller. It is terrible to meet disaster among the waves of the sea, and terrible too if you load an enormous weight on your wagon, break the axle, and the cargo is lost. Keep within measure; the right proportion is best in all things.

SAYINGS FOR LIFE

Marriage, friends and guests, and the taboos of daily life.

695 Bring a wife into your house at the right age, when you are not far short of thirty and not far past it: that is the right time for

marriage. Let the woman be four years past puberty, and marry in the fifth. Marry a virgin, so you can teach her good ways. Above all, marry one who lives near you, after looking carefully all around, so that your marriage isn't a joke to the neighbors. For a man wins nothing better than a good wife, and nothing worse than a bad one, a dinner-snatcher, who roasts her man without a torch, however strong he is, and hands him over to a raw old age. Take good care to guard against the vengeance of the blessed immortals. Don't treat a friend as equal to a brother; but if you do, don't be the first to do him wrong.

709 Don't lie for the pleasure of talking. If he starts it, by saying something offensive or doing it, remember to pay him back twice over. But if he leads you back to friendship and is willing to make amends, accept it. A worthless man makes one friend now, another later; don't let your looks belie your mind. Don't be known as a host of many guests, or of none, or as a companion of bad men or a reviler of good ones. Never bring yourself to reproach a man for destructive, heart-wasting poverty, the gift of the blessed gods who live forever. The best treasure among men is a sparing tongue, and the greatest charm is in one that keeps to measure. If you speak ill, you may soon hear worse yourself.

722 Don't be surly at a feast with many guests where everyone shares the cost: the pleasure is greatest, the expense smallest. Never pour a libation of bright wine to Zeus at dawn with unwashed hands, or to the other immortals; they don't listen, but spit back your prayers. Don't urinate standing upright facing the sun, nor, remember, after it has set, until it rises again. Don't urinate as you walk, either on the road or off it, and don't uncover yourself; the nights belong to the blessed gods. The godly man, who knows what is sensible, does it squatting, or goes up to the wall of a well-fenced courtyard. Don't expose your genitals, stained with semen, near the hearth inside the house;

21 Amphidamas was a nobleman of Chalcis in Euboea; his sons held funeral games in his honor.

avoid that. Don't beget children when you have come home from an ill-omened funeral, but from a feast of the immortals.

737 Never cross the fair-flowing water of ever-flowing rivers on foot until you have prayed, looking into the beautiful stream, and washed your hands in the lovely clear water. Whoever crosses a river with his badness and his hands unwashed, the gods are angry with him and give him pains afterward. At a flourishing feast of the gods, don't cut the dry from the green off the five-branched with gleaming iron. Never set the ladle on top of the mixing bowl while people are drinking; a deadly fate is fixed on that. When you build a house, don't leave it unfinished, or a cawing crow may settle on it and croak. Don't take food out of pots that haven't been consecrated and eat it, and don't wash with water from them; there's a penalty for that too.[22]

750 Don't sit a boy twelve days old on things that must not be moved—it isn't good, since it makes a man unmanly—nor a boy twelve months old; this comes to the same. A man shouldn't wash his skin clean in a woman's bathwater; for a time there is a grievous penalty for that too. If you come upon a burning sacrifice, don't mock the mysteries; the god resents that too. Never urinate in the mouths of rivers that flow into the sea, or into springs; avoid that strictly. Don't defecate in them either; that's not good. Do as I say, and avoid the dreadful talk of mortals. For talk is a bad thing: light to pick up, very easily, but hard to carry and difficult to put down. No talk that many people spread ever dies away entirely; she too is a kind of god.

THE DAYS

Lucky and unlucky days of the month.

765 Watch the days that come from Zeus with care, as is proper, and point them out to your slaves. The thirtieth of the month is best for inspecting the work and sharing out rations. These are the days that come from Zeus the wise counselor, when people discern the truth and keep them. First, the first day of the

22 The five-branched is the hand: don't trim your nails at a feast.

month, the fourth, and the seventh are holy days; on the seventh Leto bore Apollo of the golden sword. The eighth and the ninth are two days of the waxing month especially good for getting mortal work done. The eleventh and the twelfth are both good, for shearing sheep and for reaping the cheering crops, but the twelfth is much better than the eleventh. On it the spider, floating through the air, spins its threads in the full day, when the Wise One gathers its heap. On it a woman should set up her loom and get her work started.[23]

780 In the waxing month, avoid the thirteenth for beginning your sowing; but it is best for setting out plants. The middle sixth is very unfavorable for plants, but good for the birth of a boy. For a girl it is not favorable, either to be born or to be married. Nor is the first sixth suitable for the birth of a girl; but it is a kindly day for gelding kids and rams and for fencing a sheepfold. It's good for the birth of a boy, but he will be fond of speaking taunts and lies, wheedling words and secret whispers. On the eighth of the month geld the boar and the loud-bellowing bull, and on the twelfth the hard-working mules.

792 On the great twentieth, in the full day, a wise man should be born; he will be very shrewd. The tenth is good for the birth of a boy, and the middle fourth for a girl. On that day tame your sheep and your shambling, crooked-horned oxen, your sharp-toothed dog and your hard-working mules, by putting your hand on them. Take care in your heart to avoid the heart-eating griefs of the fourth of the waning and of the waxing month; it is a very fateful day. On the fourth of the month bring your wife home, after reading the omens of the birds that are best for this business.

802 Avoid fifths, since they are harsh and dreadful. On a fifth, they say, the Furies attended the birth of Oath, whom Strife bore to be a bane to perjurers. On the middle seventh, look very carefully and throw Demeter's sacred grain on a well-rounded threshing floor, and let the woodcutter cut timbers for the bedroom and plenty of ship timbers, the kind that are fit for ships.

23 The Wise One is the ant.

On the fourth, begin building slender ships. The middle ninth is a better day toward evening. The first ninth is entirely harmless for mortals. It is good for planting and for being born, for a man and a woman alike, and it is never an altogether bad day.

814 Few, again, know that the thrice-ninth of the month is best for broaching a jar and for putting the yoke on the necks of oxen, mules, and swift-footed horses, and for drawing a swift ship with many oar-benches down to the wine-dark sea; few name it truly. On the fourth open a jar. The middle fourth is holy above all. Few, again, know that the day after the twentieth is best at daybreak; toward evening it is worse. These days are a great boon to those on earth. The others fall in between: harmless, bringing nothing. One man praises one day, another another, but few know. Sometimes a day is a stepmother, sometimes a mother. Happy and prosperous in these is the man who knows all this and does his work blameless before the immortals, reading the birds and avoiding transgressions.