

The Works and Days of Hesiod

Lines 618-694 – Sailing and Trading – Times and Measures

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"Let him hear the advice of Hesiod. . . . The advice of Hesiod is good." —Aristotle

"Lampon . . . greatly honors the sayings of Hesiod, the one he declares and recommends to his sons."
—Pindar

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Reading 11

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This reading comes from the Cave's
The Best of Hesiod's Theogony & Works and Days
(where it appears as chapter eleven of the *Works and Days*).

BUT IF LONGING for rough and stormy sailing seizes you when the Pleiades [620] plunge into the misty sea to escape Orion's mighty strength, and winds of every kind rage, then at that time men should not maintain ships on the wine-faced sea. Rather, remember to work the earth as I have encouraged you.

Haul your ship up onto the land and surround it with stones to restrain the mighty winds that blow with moisture. Draw out the plug so that the rain of Zeus will not cause the ship to rot. Put away all the tackle and fittings in your house, and stow well and

in good order the sea-faring ship's wings, and hang up the well-crafted rudder above the smoke of the hearth.

[630] As for you, you yourself should wait for the sailing season to arrive. Then drag your swift ship down to the sea and stow a cargo that fits well within it so that you may carry off a profit to your house.

You may do this, Perses, you great fool, even as our father used to sail the sea in ships because he was in need of the noble and good things it takes to live. At one point he came to this very place, making his way over a great stretch of sea. He left behind

Aeolian Kyme in a black ship. He wasn't fleeing riches or wealth or happiness. No, he was fleeing wretched poverty that Zeus gives to men. And he settled near Helikon in a miserable village called [640] Ascra, which is miserable in winter and painful in summer. It is never good.

But you, Perses, remember every sort of work at the right time—especially sailing. Admire a small boat, but put your cargo in a large one, for when the cargo is large you will then make a larger profit, if, that is, the winds keep back their harmful blasts.

When you plan to turn your witless spirit to trade to escape from debt and joyless hunger, I will show you the measures of the loud-roaring sea—I who have no skill in sea-faring nor in ships.

[650] For I have never yet sailed by ship over the broad sea except when I went to Euboea from Aulis, where the Achaeans once stayed through the winter gathering together a great army from holy Greece to go to Troy, land of beautiful women. From there I crossed over to Chalcis and to the games of battle-minded Amphidamas, where the sons of the greathearted man announced and set out the prizes ahead of time. And there I say that I was victorious with a hymn, and I carried off a tripod with earlike handles. I dedicated it to the Helikonian Muses in the place where they first set me walking along the path of clear song. [660] This is all the experience I have of well-riveted ships. Nevertheless, I will proclaim the nature of aegis-bearing Zeus' mind, for the Muses have taught me to sing an unspeakable hymn.

The right time for men to go sailing is the fifty days after the turning of the sun, the solstice, when summer has come to an end, the busiest, hardest time of the year. Then you will neither wreck your ship nor will

the sea wipe out your men, unless Poseidon, the Earth-shaker, wills it, or Zeus, king of the immortals, wishes to destroy them—for the completion of things is in them, both fortunate and unfortunate things alike. [670] At that time the winds are steady, and the sea is harmless. Then trust in the winds without care and drag your swift ship down to the sea and stow all your cargo onboard. But press on to return back home quickly again, and do not wait until the new wine and autumn rain and the oncoming winter storms with the terrible blasts of Notos, the South Wind, that accompany the heavy autumn rains of Zeus and stir up the sea, making the sea hard to deal with.

Spring is another time for human beings to go sailing.

679-682 Hesiod points to the size of fig-tree leaves as a sign of when to go.

683-694 This is the spring sailing. For my part, I do not praise it, for it is not agreeable to my spirit. It is hazardous, a stolen time when you will escape misfortune with difficulty. But now human beings do this in the ignorance of their minds since for wretched mortals life amounts to what one needs. Even so, it is terrible to die among the waves.

As I say these things, I advise you to consider them in your spirit. Do not put all of what it takes to live into hollow ships. [690] Rather, leave the greater part behind and put the lesser part onboard. For it is terrible to encounter disaster among the waves of the sea, just as it is terrible if you put too great a load on your cart and break the axle.

Keep watch over the measure. Due measure is the best in all things.

So ends Reading 11, "Sailing and Trading – Times and Measures." **See you in Reading 12, "Relations with Others – Wife, Friends & Brothers."**



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