

**Hesiod's description of the ages of mankind at *Works and Days* 109-201 excerpted from Hines, Daryl, trans. *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.**

First, the immortals who dwell high up on the top of Olympus  
Fashioned the firstborn race of articulate men, which was **golden**,  
And it is said that they lived when Cronus was ruling in heaven.  
Godlike, they lived like gods, and their hearts were entirely carefree,  
Distant strangers to labor and suffering; neither did wretched  
Age overtake them; instead, their members intact and unchanged, they  
Took much pleasure in banquets and parties, apart from all evils  
Till they died as if sleep overcame them. And everything worthwhile  
Came to their hand, as the grain-growing earth bore fruit without tilling,  
Plenty of good food crops unbegrudged; so they lived at their pleasure,  
Peacefully minding their own business, amid numerous good things.  
Wealthy in flocks were they and beloved of the blessed immortals.  
After this whole first gold generation was finally buried,  
Even today they are called pure spirits inhabiting earth and  
Noble protectors of mankind, warding off evils from mortals,  
Givers of wealth, which royal prerogative still is their business.

Afterward, those that inhabit Olympus fashioned a second,  
**Silver** race, which was very inferior, worse than the first one,  
For they did neither in growth nor intellect equal the golden.  
Children were then brought up by their diligent mothers a hundred  
Years and engaged in sheer infantile child's play there in their own homes.  
But when maturing at last they came to the measure of manhood  
They lived only the tiniest time, and moreover they suffered  
Much in their folly; they could not keep themselves back from their wicked  
Violence on one another; nor were they willing to serve the immortals  
Or make sacrifice using the Blessed Ones' sacrosanct altars,  
As it is lawful for humans to do and according to custom.  
Thereupon, Zeus, son of Cronus, suppressed them all in his anger,  
Seeing they did not worship the gods who inhabit Olympus.  
And when this generation of silver in turn was interred  
Under the earth, they were termed blessed spirits although they were mortal,  
Second in time, yet everywhere honor is also their portion.

Zeus manufactured a new third race of articulate mankind,  
But this **bronze** generation in no way equaled the silver,  
For they were offspring of ash trees, mighty and frightful, and Ares'  
Noisy employment concerned them and violent deeds. They ate no  
Bread and appeared tough-minded as adamant, wholly unpolished;  
All too great was their strength and their hands were invincible, growing  
Out of their mighty shoulders to hang at the end of their stout limbs.  
Bronze was their armor and brazen their arms, brass-bound were their

dwellings;

Bronze were the tools which they worked with, as iron had not been invented.  
Dying by each other's hands, they went down to the underworld's cold rot,  
Leaving no names to posterity. Black death took them despite their  
Physical strength, and they quit altogether the luminous sunlight.  
But when this bronze generation, however, was finally buried,  
Zeus, son of Cronus, created a whole new fourth generation  
Here on the fertile earth who were better and fonder of justice;  
This was a godlike race of **heroical** men who were known as  
Demigods, last generation before our own on the broad earth.  
Horrible war with its frightening war cries wholly destroyed them,  
Some who fought in the kingdom of Cadmus below seven-gated  
Thebes where they strove in vain with each other for Oedipus's rich flocks,  
Others transported across the immense deep gulf of the sea on  
Shipboard to Troy after well-coiffed Helen, the fairest of women.  
Some of them there death's ending completely enveloped in darkness.  
Others, however, the son of Cronus decided to grant a  
Dwelling place far from men at the furthestmost ends of the earth, and  
There they continue to live, their consciousness perfectly carefree,  
There in the Isles of the Blessed, beside deep-eddying Ocean,  
[Distant from the immortals; and Cronus was king of that kingdom  
After the father of gods and of men freed him from his bondage;  
Now from those heroes he gets high honor as is most befitting.]  
Fortunate heroes! Their plowlands are so fertile they yield a  
Crop more delicious than honey that flourishes three times yearly.  
Zeus then created a fifth and last generation of mankind  
Such as to this day also inhabit the bountiful green earth.  
How I would wish to have never been one of this fifth generation!  
Whether I'd died in the past or came to be born in the future.  
Truly of **iron** is this generation, and never by day will  
They intermit hard labor and woe; in the night they will also  
Suffer distress, for the gods will give them unbearable troubles.  
Nevertheless, there will always be good mixed in with the evil.  
Zeus will destroy this race of articulate mankind, however,  
When they have come to exhibit at birth gray hairs at their temples  
And when fathers will differ from children and children from fathers,  
Guests with their hosts will differ and comrades will differ with comrades.  
And no more will a brother, as previously, be beloved.  
When they grow old, people will show no respect to their elders;  
Harshly upbraiding them, they use words that are horribly cruel,  
Wretches who don't acknowledge the face of the gods and who will not  
Pay back ever the cost of their upbringing to their old parents,  
Thinking that might means right; and they devastate each other's cities.  
There will be nothing like gratitude for oath-keepers and just men,  
Nor for the good man; rather, they'll only respect evildoers,  
Monsters of violence. Might will be right, all shame will be lost and

All inhibition. The wicked will try to ruin the good man,  
Shamelessly uttering falsehoods, wickedly bearing false witness.  
Noisy, discordant Envy, malicious, delighting in mischief,  
Hateful-faced will accompany all us unfortunate humans.  
Self-respect and upright Indignation will go on their way to Olympus,  
Quitting the broadly trod earth and concealing their beautiful forms in  
Mantles of white, preferring the company of the immortals,  
Wholly abandoning mankind, leaving them sorrow and grievous  
Pain for the human condition, till there's no ward against evil.