



## [Virgil, Georgics I.498-514](#)

Prayer for the young Caesar to help a struggling world

**Name of the author:** Virgil

**Date:** 29 BCE to 25 BCE

**Place:** Naples

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Literary genre:** Poetry

**Title of work:** Georgics

**Reference:**

I.498-514

### **Commentary:**

Immediately prior to this passage of the first *Georgic* Virgil has lamented the great suffering that Rome has witnessed since the death of Julius Caesar, with civil war abounding (I.469-492). The cosmic upset that Caesar's demise has caused is articulated through the sun itself being said to have pity on Rome (I.466-468). Virgil now calls upon the gods to enable the young Octavian to put things right, and bring order and peace back to a chaotic world. Octavian is not directly addressed himself here, but rather the subject of a prayer to Rome's divine ancestors. Christopher Nappa emphasises that the didactic purpose of the poem stretches to both the farmers working the land (the setting of the *Georgics* more generally) and Caesar Octavian as the new head of state, who himself has much to learn (Christopher Nappa, *Reading After Actium*, p. 64). Virgil's words serve as a warning to the young leader about the difficult situation he must now take charge of in the wake of civil war, illustrated through the image of a deadly wayward chariot at the end of the passage. The warning seems clear – Rome too will be in constant danger of slipping off track, and Octavian, now in the metaphorical driving seat, must ensure it runs a smooth course. A comparison might be drawn here with Horace's image of Rome as a ship weathered by storms and constantly in danger (Horace, *Odes* I.14). Indeed, the Christian Church will later use the very same allusion, understanding the Church as piloted by Christ and kept on course by the "rudders" of the Old and New Testaments (see Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist* 59).

The formulation of Virgil's plea to the gods suggests that he views them as somewhat reluctant to allow Octavian to carry out the job the world needs him to: *hunc saltem everso iuvenem succurrere saeclo ne prohibete!* ("stay not this young prince from aiding a world upturn!") (I.500-501). Perhaps this is Virgil's way of recognising that the gods wish for Octavian to join them in the heavenly realm sooner rather than later, and thus a warning to him that powerful men (such as Julius Caesar) are at risk of meeting an untimely end due to their eagerness to pursue power and fame. The poet suggests that the gods are concerned with the potential for Octavian to become side-tracked with worldly triumphs (I.503-5040); the danger of hubris was always present for a Roman leader who indulged in his triumphs, and Virgil here wishes for Octavian to avoid this pitfall, instead shifting the focus of his achievements to those more beneficial to humanity (see Christopher Nappa, *Reading After Actium*, p. 64). The agricultural theme of the *Georgics* here becomes intertwined with the political sphere, as the plough and pruning-hooks are replaced with the sword (I.506-507) – war brings chaos not just on the battlefield, but has repercussions on all aspects of life. Octavian, then, must remain wise to this and maintain peace and stability. The mention of "impious" Mars and treaties being broken in I.510-511 highlights the distortion of *pietas* that civil war brings – morality is completely upturned, and it is Octavian's calling to restore the balance.

Keywords in the original language:

- [bellum](#)
- [honor](#)



- [lex](#)
- [triumphus](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [Augustus](#)
- [Germans](#)
- [hubris](#)
- [Parthians](#)
- [peace](#)
- [savior](#)
- [suffering](#)
- [war](#)

**Bibliographical references:** Nappa, Christopher, [Reading After Actium: Vergil's Georgics, Octavian, and Rome](#) (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005)

**Realized by:**

[Kimberley Fowler](#)



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