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JOHN MILTON

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PARADISE LOST

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PARADISE LOST

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READING SCHEDULE

This volume should take you a grand total of ten days. Here's the official schedule:

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JOHN MILTON
1608-1674

John Milton was not merely a poet. He was also an academic, a philosopher, and a politician. He lived during, and had significant influence throughout, that extremely turbulent period of British history, the English Civil War. As a young man he had been a student at King's College Cambridge, where he was known as "the lady of Christ's" because of his delicate and affected manner and his long hair. He appears to have been suspended from Cambridge for a term due to disagreements with his tutor, but he eventually returned and graduated with honors. He later went on to become a civil servant under Oliver Cromwell during the Inter-Regnum period in England, and in some of his writings explicitly defended the execution of King Charles 1. Later, when the monarchy was restored, Milton was ostracized and exiled from public service. He eventually went blind, and it during in this period that he produced most of his poetry, of which *Paradise Lost* is the most famous.

Paradise Lost is the story of the Fall of Man. It encompasses the fall of Satan from Heaven, the creation of the world, the temptation, the actual fall, and foretelling of the coming of the Messiah. In the story, Milton has some scenes in Hell, some in Heaven, and some on earth. Satan is a character, Beelzebub, Michael, Raphael, and Gabriel are characters. God the Father is a character, the Son is a character, and Adam and Eve are characters. This is problematic in various ways. Milton fills in all kinds of details and adds many things into the story which aren't found in the Scriptures at all - and especially when he has these things coming out of the mouth of God the Father in the throneroom of heaven you start to get the feeling that you should hold the book at arm's length in case it gets struck by lightning. There is a difference between re-telling a story from the Bible, and lavishly embellishing a Biblical story, complete with new and original lines written for God himself to deliver. The question of whether this was a lawful story to have written should always be at the

back of your minds as you read.

Before launching *Paradise Lost*, there are a few things to have firmly in mind. The first is that everyone needs to have read *Paradise Lost* at least once. It's rightfully considered to be one of the greatest works of literature in the English language, and there's no doubt that this is *the* English epic poem. Some of the poetry is absolutely stunningly beautiful, and some of his images are incredibly striking, interesting, and insightful.

The second thing to keep in mind is that Milton was, indisputably, a heretic. He eventually denied the Trinity and believed that the Son was inferior to the Father, a heresy called Arianism. He also denied the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as you'll notice in his account of creation. Even though he fully embraced his heretical views after he wrote this poem, it is clear throughout *Paradise Lost* that he was already definitely moving in that direction. I say this with some amount of trepidation, because I'm afraid that I'm actually disagreeing with C.S. Lewis on this point -which always gives the sensation of being on dangerously thin ice.

Lewis was a huge fan of *Paradise Lost*, and hopefully as you read it you will notice things that obviously influenced him in his writing in the Narnia books. He wrote a small booklet called *Preface to Paradise Lost* in which, among other things, he argues that Milton's heresy was not on display in this poem. He also believes that Satan was not in fact the hero of the poem (a view that was held by the 18th and 19th century Romantic poets). Both of these things are questions that you should be paying close attention to as you read, and you should be forming your own opinion.

So here are some questions to keep in mind as you start. First of all, how does Milton treat Satan? What kind of character is he? What role is he filling in the story? How does Milton treat the Son? What kind of character is he? What role is he filling in the story? How does that line up Scripture? How does the Son compare as a character to Satan? How does Milton treat the Father? Is that lawful?

There are two kinds of epic poems, and in *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Lewis explains them in a helpful way. He calls them **Primary Epic** and

Secondary Epic. Primary Epic tends to treat a subject that is smaller in scope and has less of an impact on history. Secondary Epic treats a subject much more vast and sweeping in its scope and its effects. So, for instance, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are Primary Epics. If Achilles and Agamemnon had never had gotten into a spat about their concubines, history would have probably remained largely unchanged. Patroklos and a number of other Greeks wouldn't have died so young - but that's about all. If Odysseus had gotten eaten by the Cyclops and never made it home to Ithaka, we would probably not notice the difference. Penelope would have had to marry one of the nasty suitors, and life would have gone on. The *Aeneid* on the other hand, is a Secondary Epic. If Aeneas had shipwrecked, he would never have made it to Italy and never founded Rome. And if Rome had never been founded, all of Western history would have been different. Do you see the difference between those two kinds of stories?

In English lit we have the same distinction. *Beowulf* is a Primary Epic. If Beowulf had gotten eaten by Grendel, it would have been a bummer. But history would have been relatively unaffected. Heorot would have been destroyed a bit sooner. But in *Paradise Lost*, Milton is giving us the ultimate Secondary Epic - not just for English, but for all of story-telling. If Adam had never eaten the fruit from the tree of knowledge . . . well that's something that affects every single aspect of human history. Milton was intending to write the ultimate epic story, and to do it in the tradition of Virgil. He borrows many of the features from classical epics, and you should be on the lookout for vast amounts of classical allusions, as well as classical story-telling techniques. He has the poem divided into twelve books (like the *Aeneid*), he invokes the Muse like every classical poet, he frequently uses epic similes, and infuses a great deal of classical mythology into his story. He accomplished quite a fusion between a Biblical story and classical mythology, some of which is impressive, and some of which is alarming.

It is clear that Milton himself is under the impression that he is writing an earth-shaking story, and that adds a very grandiose flavor to his

poem. It is huge, it is dramatic, it is sweeping, it is all superlatives. Milton intended to make a name for himself with this poem, and he certainly did so.

As you read *Paradise Lost*, the most important thing to do is maintain the ability to make distinctions. Be able to accept something as lovely poetry while understanding it to be terrible theology. Be able to appreciate a beautiful image without swallowing all the problematic content. Be able to reject the heresy without dismissing the poetic ability. In short, read this cautiously, read it carefully, and read it maturely. Pay close attention to what Milton is doing, and when you are finished, you should be able to articulate an informed opinion about what was worthwhile in the poem and what was inexcusable.

THE FIRST BOOK

The Argument:

This first Book proposes, first in brief, the whole Subject, Mans disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was plac't: Then touches the prime cause of his fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the Serpent; who revolting from God, and drawing to his side many Legions of Angels, was by the command of God driven out of Heaven with all his Crew into the great Deep. Which action past over, the Poem hasts into the midst of things, presenting Satan with his Angels now fallen into Hell, describ'd here, not in the Center (for Heaven and Earth may be suppos'd as yet not made, certainly not yet accurst) but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest call'd Chaos: Here Satan with his Angels lying on the burning Lake, thunder-struck and astonisht, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in Order and Dignity lay by him; they confer of thir miserable fall. Satan awakens all his Legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; They rise, thir Numbers, array of Battel, thir chief Leaders nam'd, according to the Idols known afterwards in Canaan and the Countries adjoyning. To these Satan directs his Speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining Heaven, but tells them lastly of a new World and new kind of Creature to be created, according to an ancient Prophesie or report in Heaven; for that Angels were long before this visible Creation, was the opinion of many ancient

Because Milton is self-consciously writing an epic poem in the style of the ancients, he opens with an invocation of the Muse. In this case, however, he is invoking the Holy Spirit. Notice what he asks for - he is asking the Holy Spirit to inspire and speak through him - to tell the story as it truly happened. Milton also mentions that he is undertaking something much more vast and daring than anyone has ever done before in prose or in rhyme. Do you think he's just being poetic here? Or do you think he's actually convinced that he's inspired by the Holy Spirit and this is an accurate version of the story?

Fathers. To find out the truth of this Prophesie, and what to determin thereon he refers to a full Council. What his Associates thence attempt. Pandemonium the Palace of Satan rises, suddenly built out of the Deep: The infernal Peers there sit in Council.

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing, Heavenly Muse, that, on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed
In the beginning how the heavens and earth
Rose out of Chaos: or, if Sion hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
Fast by the oracle of God, I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss,
And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That, to the height of this great argument,
I may assert Eternal Providence,

10

20

And justify the ways of God to men.

30 Say first for Heaven hides nothing from thy view,
Nor the deep tract of Hell say first what cause
Moved our grand parents, in that happy state,
Favoured of Heaven so highly, to fall off
From their Creator, and transgress his will
For one restraint, lords of the World besides.
Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?

Th' infernal Serpent; he it was whose guile,
Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived
The mother of mankind, what time his pride
Had cast him out from Heaven, with all his host
Of rebel Angels, by whose aid, aspiring
To set himself in glory above his peers,
40 He trusted to have equalled the Most High,
If he opposed, and with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarchy of God,
Raised impious war in Heaven and battle proud,
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
Hurled headlong flaming from th' ethereal sky,
With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamant chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to arms.

50 Nine times the space that measures day and night
To mortal men, he, with his horrid crew,
Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf,
Confounded, though immortal. But his doom
Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him: round he throws his baleful eyes,
That witnessed huge affliction and dismay,

He also tells us his intention: to justify the ways of God to men. No matter how you look at it, that's a bit conceited.

He is going to tell us of the fall of man. Because the fall was through the Serpent, Milton is going to begin his story with the Serpent and his fall from heaven.

After a war in heaven, the Serpent was hurled down to the very bottom of the universe, into the Lake of Fire - and that is where our story opens.

Nine days the Serpent and his army lay chained in the fire.

Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate.
At once, as far as Angels ken, he views
The dismal situation waste and wild. 60
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,
As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames
No light; but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all, but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsumed.
Such place Eternal Justice has prepared 70
For those rebellious; here their prison ordained
In utter darkness, and their portion set,
As far removed from God and light of Heaven
As from the centre thrice to th' utmost pole.
Oh how unlike the place from whence they fell!
There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelmed
With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,
He soon discerns; and, weltering by his side,
One next himself in power, and next in crime,
Long after known in Palestine, and named 80
Beelzebub. To whom th' Arch-Enemy,
And thence in Heaven called Satan, with bold words
Breaking the horrid silence, thus began:
"If thou beest he but O how fallen! how changed
From him who, in the happy realms of light
Clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine
Myriads, though bright! if he whom mutual league,
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
And hazard in the glorious enterprise

*These flames give
no light - they are
in the darkness of
fire.*

*Beelzebub (the
Lord of the Flies)
is second in
command - and
here we learn that
the Serpent's name
is Satan.*

*Satan isn't sure
he recognizes
Beelzebub - he's
very changed since
his fall.*

90 Joined with me once, now misery hath joined
 In equal ruin; into what pit thou seest
 From what height fallen: so much the stronger proved
 He with his thunder; and till then who knew
 The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those,
 Nor what the potent Victor in his rage
 Can else inflict, do I repent, or change,
 Though changed in outward lustre, that fixed mind,
 And high disdain from sense of injured merit,
 That with the Mightiest raised me to contend,
100 And to the fierce contentions brought along
 Innumerable force of Spirits armed,
 That durst dislike his reign, and, me preferring,
 His utmost power with adverse power opposed
 In dubious battle on the plains of Heaven,
 And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?
 All is not lost the unconquerable will,
 And study of revenge, immortal hate,
 And courage never to submit or yield:
 And what is else not to be overcome?
110 That glory never shall his wrath or might
 Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace
 With suppliant knee, and deify his power
 Who, from the terror of this arm, so late
 Doubted his empire that were low indeed;
 That were an ignominy and shame beneath
 This downfall; since, by fate, the strength of Gods,
 And this empyreal sybstance, cannot fail;
 Since, through experience of this great event,
 In arms not worse, in foresight much advanced,
120 We may with more successful hope resolve
 To wage by force or guile eternal war,

*Satan, although
conquered, still
refuses to submit.*

*He's determined
still to fight
Heaven - either by
force or guile.*

Irreconcilable to our grand Foe,
Who now triumphs, and in th' excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heaven."

So spake th' apostate Angel, though in pain,
Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair;
And him thus answered soon his bold compeer:

"O Prince, O Chief of many throned Powers

That led th' embattled Seraphim to war
Under thy conduct, and, in dreadful deeds
Fearless, endangered Heaven's perpetual King,
And put to proof his high supremacy,
Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate,

130

Too well I see and rue the dire event
That, with sad overthrow and foul defeat,
Hath lost us Heaven, and all this mighty host
In horrible destruction laid thus low,
As far as Gods and heavenly Essences
Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains
Invincible, and vigour soon returns,
Though all our glory extinct, and happy state
Here swallowed up in endless misery.

140

*Beelzebub is
convinced that
God is almighty
- otherwise He
could never have
conquered them.*

But what if he our Conqueror (whom I now
Of force believe almighty, since no less
Than such could have o'erpowered such force as ours)
Have left us this our spirit and strength entire,

Strongly to suffer and support our pains,
That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,
Or do him mightier service as his thralls
By right of war, whate'er his business be,
Here in the heart of Hell to work in fire,
Or do his errands in the gloomy Deep?

150

What can it the avail though yet we feel

Strength undiminished, or eternal being
To undergo eternal punishment?”

Whereto with speedy words th' Arch-Fiend replied:

“Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,
Doing or suffering: but of this be sure
To do aught good never will be our task,
160 But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being the contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labour must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil;
Which oftentimes may succeed so as perhaps
Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
His inmost counsels from their destined aim.

170 But see! the angry Victor hath recalled
His ministers of vengeance and pursuit
Back to the gates of Heaven: the sulphurous hail,
Shot after us in storm, o'erblown hath laid
The fiery surge that from the precipice
Of Heaven received us falling; and the thunder,
Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage,
Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now
To bellow through the vast and boundless Deep.
Let us not slip th' occasion, whether scorn
Or satiate fury yield it from our Foe.

180 Seest thou yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild,
The seat of desolation, void of light,
Save what the glimmering of these livid flames
Casts pale and dreadful? Thither let us tend
From off the tossing of these fiery waves;
There rest, if any rest can harbour there;

*If God seeks to
bring good out of
their evil, Satan
is determined to
resist at all costs.*

*Satan suggests they
get out of the Lake
of Fire, make their
way to the land,
and have a council
of war.*

And, re-assembling our afflicted powers,
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our enemy, our own loss how repair,
How overcome this dire calamity,
What reinforcement we may gain from hope, 190
If not, what resolution from despair.”

*Milton
intentionally
wants us to think
of these fallen
angels like the
Titans after they
rebelled against
Jove and were cast
down.*

Thus Satan, talking to his nearest mate,
With head uplift above the wave, and eyes
That sparkling blazed; his other parts besides
Prone on the flood, extended long and large,
Lay floating many a rood, in bulk as huge
As whom the fables name of monstrous size,
Titanian or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,
Briareos or Typhon, whom the den 200

By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea-beast
Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim th' ocean-stream.
Him, haply slumbering on the Norway foam,
The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,
Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixed anchor in his scaly rind,
Moors by his side under the lee, while night
Invests the sea, and wished morn delays.
So stretched out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay, 210

Chained on the burning lake; nor ever thence
Had risen, or heaved his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,
That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others, and enraged might see
How all his malice served but to bring forth

Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy, shewn
On Man by him seduced, but on himself
220 Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance poured.
Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
His mighty stature; on each hand the flames
Driven backward slope their pointing spires, and rolled
In billows, leave i' th' midst a horrid vale.
Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air,
That felt unusual weight; till on dry land
He lights if it were land that ever burned
With solid, as the lake with liquid fire,
230 And such appeared in hue as when the force
Of subterranean wind transports a hill
Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side
Of thundering Etna, whose combustible
And fuelled entrails, thence conceiving fire,
Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
And leave a singed bottom all involved
With stench and smoke. Such resting found the sole
Of unblest feet. Him followed his next mate;
Both glorying to have scaped the Stygian flood
240 As gods, and by their own recovered strength,
Not by the sufferance of supernal Power.
"Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"
Said then the lost Archangel, "this the seat
That we must change for Heaven? this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is sovereign can dispose and bid
What shall be right: farthest from him is best
Whom reason hath equalled, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields,

*Satan leaves the
fire and flies to
the land. Even the
land burns.*

Beelzebub follows.

*Satan here isn't
just accepting Hell
- he's embracing it.*

Where joy for ever dwells! Hail, horrors! hail, 250
 Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
 Receive thy new possessor one who brings
 A mind not to be changed by place or time.
 The mind is its own place, and in itself
 Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
 What matter where, if I be still the same,
 And what I should be, all but less than he
 Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
 We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
 Here for his envy, will not drive us hence: 260
 Here we may reign secure; and, in my choice,
 To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
 Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.
 But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,
 Th' associates and co-partners of our loss,
 Lie thus astonished on th' oblivious pool,
 And call them not to share with us their part
 In this unhappy mansion, or once more
 With rallied arms to try what may be yet
 Regained in Heaven, or what more lost in Hell?" 270
 So Satan spake; and him Beelzebub
 Thus answered: "Leader of those armies bright
 Which, but th' Omnipotent, none could have foiled!
 If once they hear that voice, their liveliest pledge
 Of hope in fears and dangers heard so oft
 In worst extremes, and on the perilous edge
 Of battle, when it raged, in all assaults
 Their surest signal they will soon resume
 New courage and revive, though now they lie
 Grovelling and prostrate on yon lake of fire, 280
 As we erewhile, astounded and amazed;

*He's determined
 that this Hell shall
 be his Heaven.*

*"Better to reign
 in Hell than serve
 in Heaven" is an
 important line.
 This sums up
 Satan's attitude,
 but it is also a
 reversal of what
 Achilles said
 when Odysseus
 met him in Hades,
 "I would rather be
 a slave on earth
 than rule in Hell."*

*Beelzebub
 recommends they
 try to rally the
 other fallen troops.*

No wonder, fallen such a pernicious height!”

He scare had ceased when the superior Fiend
Was moving toward the shore; his ponderous shield,
Ethereal temper, massy, large, and round,
Behind him cast. The broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb
Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views
At evening, from the top of Fesole,
290 Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,
Rivers, or mountains, in her spotty globe.
His spear to equal which the tallest pine
Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast
Of some great ammiral, were but a wand
He walked with, to support uneasy steps
Over the burning marl, not like those steps
On Heaven's azure; and the torrid clime
Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with fire.
Nathless he so endured, till on the beach
300 Of that inflamed sea he stood, and called
His legions Angel Forms, who lay entranced
Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks
In Vallombrosa, where th' Etrurian shades
High over-arched embower; or scattered sedge
Afloat, when with fierce winds Orion armed
Hath vexed the Red-Sea coast, whose waves o'erthrew
Busiris and his Memphian chivalry,
While with perfidious hatred they pursued
The sojourners of Goshen, who beheld
310 From the safe shore their floating carcasses
And broken chariot-wheels. So thick bestrown,
Abject and lost, lay these, covering the flood,
Under amazement of their hideous change.

The fallen spirits are as thick in the Lake of Fire as fallen autumn leaves. Milton gives us a major epic simile here.