

## Great Book Discussion Questions – *Paradise Lost*

In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton attempts to “justify the ways of God to man.” *Paradise Lost* is one of two epic poems written in the English language, the other being Spencer’s *Faerie Queen*. The poem portrays the rebellion of the dark angels in heaven, Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve, and their subsequent fall from grace.

Milton’s conception of the battle of the angels and the temptation of Adam and Eve is based, to a certain extent, on *Genesis* and other texts from the *Bible*. Despite these Biblical sources, much of what Milton writes about is not explicitly stated in the *Bible*, but is Milton’s own creation. Milton’s themes include an exploration of pride (Satan, and to a lesser extent, Adam and Eve); the problem of evil in the world, and the origin of decay and death as a result of man’s fall from grace.

1. Satan’s sin is often said to be that of pride. What support for this statement can you find in the text?
2. If Satan’s primary sin is pride, is the sin of Eve (wanting to be godlike in knowledge) one of pride or of excessive vanity? Is there a difference between these two sins?
3. Adam freely accepts Eve’s fate out of love for her, fearing that another mate would not be found for him. Is Adam’s acceptance of the fall, based on love for Eve believable? Cite evidence from the text for your views.
4. Rafael admonishes Adam to be concerned with worldly things, to be “lowly wise” (P.L., VIII, 173), and not be concerned with things that are too advanced for his understanding. Is this good advice, and did Adam follow Rafael’s warning?
5. Satan, in disobeying God, brings sin into existence (in P.L., book II; Satan meets his offspring, sin). Throughout the poem, Milton writes about obedience to God, and disobedience, which is sin. Is Milton’s conception of sin (that is, sin is disobedience to God) and evil too simplistic? In other words, is disobedience to God the origin of evil?
6. When Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the tree of good and evil, they attain knowledge. What type of knowledge do they attain? Is the attainment of knowledge worth the forfeit of paradise? Is Milton making a comment on the attainment of knowledge for its own sake? What, in Milton’s opinion, is the proper pursuit of knowledge?
7. At the end of book IX, Adam and Eve are bickering over each other’s culpability for the fall. At line 1189, Milton writes “. . . but neither self-condemning,” which implies that neither has accepted responsibility for his/her actions. Prior to this, both Adam and Eve appear accountable for what they do. Is this lack of culpability the result of the fall, and does Milton offer hope that anything will change for humans?