Book I:

Book I of [Paradise Lost](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost) begins with Milton describing what he intends to undertake with his epic: the story of Man's first disobedience and the "loss of Eden," subjects which have been "unattempted yet in prose or rhyme." His main objective, however, is to "justify the ways of [God](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "god) to men."

The poem then shifts to focus on the character of [Satan](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "satan) who has just fallen from heaven. The scene opens in a fiery, yet dark, lake of hell. Satan, dazed, seems to be coming to consciousness after his fall and finds himself chained to the lake.

He lifts his head to see his second in command, [Beelzebub](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "beelzebub), the [Lord of the Flies](https://www.gradesaver.com/lord-of-the-flies), who has been transformed from a beautiful archangel into a horrid fallen angel. Satan gets his bearings and, in a speech to Beelzebub, realizes what has just happened: Satan, presuming that he was equal to God, had declared war on the creator. Many angels had joined Satan, and the cosmic battle had shaken God's throne.

Satan and his cohorts had lost and been cast "nine times the space that measures day and night" to hell. Still, Satan tells Beelzebub that all is not lost. He will never bow down to God and now, knowing more of the extent of God's might, the rebel angels might better know how to continue to fight him in an eternal war.

Beelzebub questions why they themselves still exist. What plan did God have for them since he did not kill them completely, but left them their souls and spirits intact to feel pain in hell?

Satan replies that God indeed wanted to punish them by forcing them to languish in hell for eternity. But, he says, that means that they don't ever have to obey God again. In fact, Satan says, they must work to instill evil in all good things so as to always anger God.

Satan and Beelzebub gather their strength and fly off the fiery lake to firmer, though still fiery, ground. They look around at the dark wasteland that is hell, but Satan remains proud. "Better to reign in hell, then serve in heaven."

They see their army lying confused and vanquished in the fiery lake. Satan calls to them and they respond immediately. Satan gathers his closest twelve around him .

Music plays and banners fly as the army of rebel angels comes to attention, tormented and defeated but faithful to their general

They could not have known the extent of God's might, Satan tells them, but now they do know and can now examine how best to beat him. Satan has heard of a new kind of creation that God intends on making, called man. They will continue the war against heaven, but the battlefield will be within the world of mankind.

The army bangs their shields with their swords in loud agreement. The rebel angels then construct a Temple, a throne room, for their general and for their government, greater in grandeur than the pyramids or the Tower of Babylon.

All the millions of rebel angels then gather in the Temple for a great council, shrinking themselves and become dwarves in order to fit.

Book II:

Satan has drawn all the fallen angels into a large counsel in his Temple, perched on a volcano top. He addresses them to give them courage. After all, he says, they need not fear ever falling again. He asks for suggestion on how best to continue battling heaven.

[Moloch](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list#moloch) stands up and suggests open warfare on the battlefield. They have nothing to lose, he says, there is no hell worse than this that God can send them if defeated. Even if God kills them, surely this would be better than living in hell forever. Finally, he says, even if they are defeated, "... if not victory is yet revenge."

[Belial](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list#belial) stands and disagrees. Even if God could kill them, he said, he never would. And there just might be worse hells than where they are now. It is a useless action anyway, he says, because God sees everything and would know exactly what they are doing. Belial suggests that they stay in hell and hope that God either relents on the punishment, or that they will, over time, grow used to the obnoxious fumes and pain.

Mammon stands up and says that neither idea is really acceptable. Open warfare would be an exercise in futility and, even if they were allowed back in heaven, is that a place where they want to spend eternity serving? It is better to live in hell where God's light never interferes. Mammon suggest no war at all, just build a kingdom where they are, and maybe someday they will have a kingdom that will be equal to heaven's .

The crowd cheers at Mammon's speech.

Beelzebub stands and tells the crowd that this will not do either. There is no place where God does not reign, he reigns even here in hell though his presence is not seen as easily. So it is silly, he says, to talk about war and peace when they will be eternally opposed to God and his kingdom, whether they like it or not. "War hath determined us."

Beelzebub then tells them of a new race that God has created called "Man." Man is not as powerful as the angels, but he is God's chosen favorite among creations. Beelzebub suggests that they seek revenge against God by seducing Man to their side.

All of the fallen angels agree unanimously to this decision. Satan asks for a volunteer to find out more about this creation, but none volunteer. They are all afraid of the chasm, called chaos, that lies between hell and the island of earth. Satan then says that he himself will go.

Hell is described. It has a geography like earth, with rivers and mountains, but "where all life dies, death lives and nature breeds, perverts, all monstrous, and all prodigious things." Hell is all the worst of nature: natural disasters, violent streams and volcanoes, unfriendly seas, darkness.

Satan flies to the gates of hell where he meets two beings guarding the gate. One is [Sin](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "sin), half woman, half serpent with group of hell hounds howling around her. The other is [Death](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "death), a large black shape that stands in front of Satan, blocking his path. Satan knocks him down by throwing pestilence and war at him.

Sin scolds Satan, and tells him that she is his daughter, born in heaven when Satan first thought of rebelling. Later, they were lovers in heaven and she and Satan produced Death, their son. (As an aside, Death raped Sin and produced the hell hounds which surround her forever.)

Satan tells them he is trying to get out of hell to find earth. If he finds it, and there is a race called man, then the three of them can rule it together and Death's hunger will never be satiated.

Sin opens the gates of hell, which now can never be shut, and they gaze at the abyss of Night and Chaos.

Satan flies for a time in the darkness and then comes to the throne of Chaos and his consort, Night. Satan tells him he is only passing through, trying to find earth.

Chaos tells him the way to earth, which is connected to heaven by a golden chain.

Book III:

God sees Satan heading toward the world and points him out to his Son, sitting on his right hand. He tells his son how Satan is going to tempt man and how man is then going to fall.

"Ingrate," God says of man. "He had of me all he could have; I made him just and right, sufficient to have stood, though free to fall."

Even though God knows man will fall, as opposed to Satan, man will still have the chance to gain God's grace, since he was led to evil by Satan. Satan, on the other hand, freely choose evil without any temptations. God says, then, that there will be a chance for God's grace for mankind, but that mankind will always be cursed with Death.

His Son, of course, offers to die for man, "I for his sake will leave Thy bosom," he says. And then the Son will come back and conquer death himself.

God then agrees, and tells of how his Son will be born to a virgin and die so that God's favorite creation, man, will live. God then makes him the king of man, son of both man and God. God tells the angels in heaven to bow to him.

The scene switches back to Satan who has arrived in the Limbo of Vanity and the Paradise of Fools, the place where all men and nature go who have vain hopes of achieving heaven while on earth by pursuing riches or superstitions. The Limbo of Vanity, in fact, will soon be filled with "hoods and habits... relics, beads, indulgences, dispenses, pardons, bulls." Here Satan paces on semi solid land.

Satan sees also the Gate to Heaven and the stairway to the gate. As well, there is a large passageway, though it will soon be made smaller, that brings angels down to God's creatures on earth.

Satan flies up to the sun where he can see all of creation. He spies Uriel, one of God's angels, guarding the earth. Satan turns himself into a cute little cherub and asks Uriel where this new creature of God's is so that he may go and admire it

Uriel is impressed that an angel would want to leave heaven to check out God's creation, and he directs Satan to man's home in Paradise.

Book IV:

[Satan](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list#satan) lands on Mt. Niphates and has some moments of doubt. The light from the sun reminds him of the light and grace he had in heaven. He questions whether he would have fallen or not if he had been created by [God](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "god) with less pride in the first place. Being created from the beginning with a nature that would lead to his fall makes him hate God all the more.

"Farewell hope," he says, "And with hope farewell fear." and he goes to corrupt mankind.

He comes to the Garden of Eden and finds it protected all around by a high wall of trees and plants. Satan jumps over it, literally like a thief in the night.

Paradise is described as a natural wonderland.

Satan spots [Adam](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "adam) and [Eve](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "eve) who "in naked majesty seemed lords of all." All the animals are playing peacefully around them or lying lazily beside them.

Satan is struck wordless. He finds them beautiful, but he is compelled to do what, if he were not damned, he would abhor.

Adam and Eve are conversing about their life. Theirs is one of continuous and sensuous joy, the only thing they cannot do is eat from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Eve recollects the moment when she was first created. The first thing she did was walk to a lake where she saw her reflection and a voice told her who she was looking at. Then she meets Adam who, she notices, wasn't exactly as beautiful as her own reflection.

The sight of Adam and Eve crushes Satan. He mourns his own loss in hell, fierce desire unfulfilled in joy and love.

Uriel tells [Gabriel](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "gabriel) that he was fooled by Satan and now Satan is somewhere in the Garden. Gabriel tells Uriel that he will find Satan before morning.

Adam and Even talk about the stars, say a prayer, and then go to sleep.

Gabriel hunts and finds Satan. Satan explains that he wanted to escape the pain of hell and so came to paradise. Gabriel does not believe him and tells him to go back to hell or he will personally drag him there.

Satan, angry, prepares to fight. Gabriel tells him to look up at the stars to see "how he is weighted." In the stars, it is clear that Satan will be trampled by Gabriel, so Satan leaves on his own accord.

Book V:

It is morning in Paradise. Adam wakes Eve. Eve tells Adam of the dream she had in which a voice called her to the Tree of Knowledge. The voice appeared as an angel and told her that she should taste the tree's fruit for it will make her a goddess. Eve took the fruit and flew up to heaven like a goddess.

Adam, of course, is disturbed by the dream. He comforts Eve and they go to work, singing the praises of God. They tend to the garden, but it is pleasant work and nature works with them.

God calls Raphael and talks to him about Satan. God sends the angel to warn Adam. Adam sees Raphael coming and tells Eve to prepare a meal for the heavenly guest. They sit down to eat. Raphael reminds Adam that he has free will and warns him of Satan's intentions to corrupt God's creation.

Raphael gives some history on Satan: Satan first turned when God begot his Son and announced to all heaven that the angels must worship him. All the angels do worship the Son, but later that night Satan speaks to his second in command and tells him to gather their forces in the northern hill Satan convinces one half of the angels in heaven to join him because of his great leadership as an angel.

God, of course, sees what Satan is up to and discusses it with his Son. The Son agrees to defeat Satan.

Satan erects a temple on a northern hill that replicates God's own temple. There, Satan addresses the angels that followed him and incites them to rebellion.

Only [Abdiel](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "abdiel) stands up in the crowd and objects, but none of the others join him. He leaves proudly and is allowed to fly back to heaven.

Book VI:

Abdiel is welcomed back into heaven and praised for his courage. God then sends Michael and Gabriel with his army to defeat Satan's army.

The battle ensues with a tremendous din. Soon, Satan and Michael find themselves face to face. They duel by sword. Michael swings his sword, cuts through Satan's own, and cuts Satan's right side. Satan feels pain for the first time.

Satan's angels run to defend him and carry him back to his chariot. Satan soon heals, but his pride is hurt. He is supposed to be equal to God and but here he gets knocked down by a simple archangel.

Satan and his forces find themselves beaten back for the time being. Night falls in heaven and Satan retreats and calls a war council. There, he turns the defeat into victory. If God was infallible, he says, why were the fallen angels able to survive a whole day and then allowed to retreat. Why weren't they entirely squashed? If they could battle God for "...one day, why not eternal days?"

Satan suggest they return to battle the next day with more powerful weapons that they could construct using heaven's natural resources, i.e. gunpowder and cannons.

The next day, Satan's forces surprise God's army by using the cannons, and thousands of good angels are knocked down. But the good angels soon run to the surrounding nature of heaven and start throwing the actual hills back at Satan's army. All of heaven is engulfed in confusion: the hills are being uprooted on both sides and thrown across the battlefield.

On the third day of battle, God sends in his Son. The Son tells God's army to relax and he rides forward in his spectacular chariot to face Satan's army alone. As he rides, the hills assume their natural positions and heaven starts to look normal again.

The Son charges after them with lightning bolts. Satan's army turns and runs away in horror. A breach opens in the wall of heaven and the whole of Satan's army falls through and cascades down to hell.

Book VII:

[Adam](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list#adam) asks [Raphael](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "raphael) about how he, man, came to be, how the earth was created, and why?

Raphael tells him that after [Satan](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "satan)'s fall, [God](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "god) saw that heaven had lost half its population. Not wanting Satan to claim even that victory, God decides to populate heaven with a creature who, given free will, would earn their way into his glory.

God then creates darkness and light, the universe, earth and ocean, and plants and animals (in the same order as the Genesis story of the Hebrew Bible) in seven days.

Book VIII:

Adam asks Raphael about the heavens. In the meantime, Eve goes to take care of her garden. Raphael talks about heaven a bit, and even mentions creatures living on other planets, but ends by saying that Adam and Eve should not get too curious about other worlds or how heaven functions. Such questions and curiosity may lead them astray of their function on earth.

Adam then tells Raphael what he remembers about when he was created. (Raphael was guarding hell while Adam was being created so missed the whole thing.) Adam remembers only waking up in a beautiful place and wondering about his own existence. He has a dream and God answers him that it was he, God, that created him. God warns him not to eat from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God tells Adam that all the rest of creation is his to own and name.

Adam tells God that he would like a companion, a mate. Adam notes that all the other animals were given consorts or mates.

God tells him that he, God, is alone and is doing fine. God finally relents, however, and tells Adam that he planned a mate for him all along.

Adam is put to sleep and God takes a rib from his side. From it, God forms a woman, the most beautiful to Adam of all God's creatures.

Adam and Raphael have a discussion about love: how love must be pure, not a carnal or a passionate love. Carnal love is what the beasts enjoy and God gave Adam a woman, not a beast, so he should practice a higher love.

Book IX:

Twilight falls on the Garden of Eden. Then darkness. Satan slips into the garden in the form of mist. He then hides himself in the snake.

While going though Eden, Satan again laments his loss of heaven when he sees how beautiful a creation paradise is. "Revenge, at first though sweet, bitter ere long back on itself recoils.""

Morning comes and Adam and Eve go out to tend the garden of Eden. Eve suggests they split up and divide the work to get more of it done. Adam doesn't think this is a good idea, but relents when Eve implies that he doesn't trust her.

Satan, of course, finds Eve alone and, for a moment overcome by her beauty, finds himself "stupidly good."

In the form of a serpent, then, Satan flatters her, telling her how beautiful she is. Eve is amazed that the serpent knows how to speak and asks how this is possible. Satan replies that it is because he ate from a tree in the garden. He brings her to the Tree of Knowledge to show her.

Eve, at first, says she cannot eat from the tree, but Satan tells her that God doesn't want her to eat because knowledge of good and evil will make her equal to a god.

Eve takes an apple and devours it. She then decides, because of her love, to involve Adam. They meet in front of the tree.

Adam is upset, but decides he cannot live without Eve, so he takes the apple as well. When he eats the apple, the two are seized with lust, and Adam leads Eve back to the bank where they first lay together.

They sleep and arise, "destitute and bare of all their virtue." They realize for the first time that they are naked. Adam sews together fig leaves to cover themselves.

Adam blames Eve for their torment. Eve blames Adam for letting her work in the garden alone. Adam blames Eve for being angry about that, and they spend the afternoon blaming on another.

Book X:

[God](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list#god) tells the angels that guarded the Garden of Eden that there was nothing they could do about stopping [Satan](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "satan) and the mankind from making their decision. In a sense, he says, this was destined to happen. He then sends his Son to judge [Adam](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "adam) and [Eve](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "eve).

The son calls to Adam and Eve, who are hiding in the bushes. They emerge, but instead of praising him, the cringe in guilt. Adam says that he heard the Son calling, but was ashamed that he was naked. Adam amidst to eating the fruit, but blames Eve ,the partner that God had made for him.

Eve admits as well, but blames the snake. The Son judges the snake: and makes him an animal who will grovel on his stomach and eat dust.

The Son judges Eve. She will now have pain in childbirth and must be submissive to her husband.

The Son judges Adam. He will have difficulty with the earth in getting food to grow. And death will be at the end for both of them. The Son then gives them both clothes made from animal skins.

[Sin](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list#sin), at the gates of hell, is inspired by Satan's success on creation and talks with her son [Death](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "death). The two of them build a bridge from hell to earth so that mankind can more easily be brought to hell and Sin, Death, and Satan can more easily invade earth.

Satan returns to hell and sends Sin and Death to reign on earth.

His fallen angles gather around him in his temple to hear of his success. He tells them what he did. They do not cheer however, as he expected. Instead they hiss. Satan feels himself be turned into a giant snake, and he himself hisses with them.

All of the fallen angels then turn into snakes, scorpions, and monsters. They gather around a tree of fruit, resembling the Tree of Knowledge. They taste the fruit, but it tastes like ashes.

In the meantime, Sin and Death are on earth. death starts to work on nature, starting with plants and moving up to animals. Sin, of course, will concentrate on mankind.

God changes the laws of nature so that they will not always provide light and order. Most significantly, God sends the angels to tip the axis of the earth so that now it will have seasons. Now man will be fighting against nature instead of working with it.

Adam laments the transformation. He repels Eve. Eve, despondent, contemplates suicide. Adam turns softer, and tells her that their condition and judgment could have been much worse. They are not, after all, dead and they are still together.

The two then pray to God, asking for forgiveness, and begin to, once again, praise him.

Chapter XI:

The Son hears the prayers for forgiveness from Adam and Eve and presents them to God, asking if the pleas for forgiveness aren't somehow sweeter now that mankind knows the difference between good and evil.

God agrees and decides to lighten his judgment of the two. But, he says, mankind must be forbidden to live in Paradise. God calls a council to proclaim his decisions, and tells the archangel [Michael](https://www.gradesaver.com/paradise-lost/study-guide/character-list" \l "michael) to go down to Paradise with a squadron of Cherubim to evict Adam and Eve.

Adam and Eve wake and Adam says that perhaps all is not lost. They then see Michael coming down from heaven and grow afraid.

Michael approaches Adam and tells him that he and Eve must leave Eden. Adam laments their loss of Eden, but mostly because he will be far from God. Michael replies that God is everywhere, even outside of Eden.

Michael then brings Adam to a hill to show him what will happen to him and his offspring up until the flood. He shows Adam how all his offspring will be corrupted by Adam's sin and demonstrates by telling him about the story of Cain and Abel and the introduction of violence into mankind. Michael tells him of the other ways man will die: fire, flood, famine, bad food and drink, and a long litany of diseases.

Adam asks how man can avoid these horrible deaths. Michael replies "by temperance taught, " "the rule of not too much" and then man might die a peaceful death.

Michael continues and narrates the stories of the sons of Cain, the prophet Enoch, and Noah and the Flood.

Book XII:

Michael continues to relate the story of man (basically covering the whole of the Hebrew Bible). He relates the story of the tyrant Nimrod and his desire to be greater than all men and even God by constructing the Tower of Babel. He tells the story of how God chose one nation, Israel, to be his chosen people and described the line from Abraham, to Joshua, through Joseph, Moses, and Joshua, who finally brought them into the promised land. He described the kingdom of David, the Temple of Solomon, and the Hebrew people's Babylonian exile and captivity.

Finally, Michael tells of the anointed Messiah who will finally conquer death and right Adam's wrong. The Son will then ascend to heaven which will be possible for all men who follow God's law.

Adam rejoices in the fact that the Son of God will be born of his seed, but how will the Son conquer Death?

"Thy punishment he shall endure by coming in the flesh to a reproachful life and a cursed death," replies Michael.

Michael finishes by telling Adam to add deed to the knowledge which he has been given, add virtue, patience, temperance and love. "Then wilt thou not be loath to leave this Paradise, but shalt possess a paradise within thee, happier far."

Michael then holds both Adam's and Eve's hands and leads them out of Paradise.