

Study Guide

Book III (742 ll.): Milton's invocation to light builds on the first glimmers seen by Satan on escaping from Chaos into the created world. How can the blind poet find language for evoking the sacredness of light? How does he petition his Muse? Was the darkness easier for him to describe? What relation is there between light and warmth for him? How does he make of his blindness a kind of *felix culpa* instead of whining? How does the night provide him with matter for poetry? Who are his prototypes for inspired poet-prophets? Examples from nature, the nightingale? The seasons? Never a sight of the "human face divine." Transfer vision from external to invisible! ☞ God's-eye view of the world, with the Son at his right hand (cp. Satan and Death). Distant view of "our two first parents" in the garden. Notices Satan and foretells his triumph over man. ☞ God describes Satan's motives: rage, revenge, destruction, perversion. Sadly acknowledges Satan's victory: "and shall pervert." The blame game. "Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." Freedom is paramount in God's scheme. Like Satan, Adam will fall. Without freedom, reason could not exist: "Reason also is choice." People will blame anything other themselves, e.g. God, fate, predestination, etc. God's foreknowledge "had no influence on their fault, / Which had no less prov'd certain unforeknown." "I form'd them free, and free they must remain, / Till they enthrall themselves." ☞ "Ambrosial fragrance" associates with God's words. Synaesthesia. Love and Grace shine forth visibly in the Son's compassionate face. ☞ The Son speaks: Grace is the final end of creation. Satan's perversion won't be final. To be is to be vulnerable. But where sin arises, Grace abounds. ☞ God reinforces these views, "Man shall not quite be lost." Soteriology: the theology of salvation. Doctrine of special grace, the way to respond to warnings for the rest. Prayer, repentance, obedience. Conscience as God's Umpire within, guide for the journey of life. But there are no guarantees, and the stakes are ultimate. Disobedience brings death, and death will be incumbent on all after Adam. "He with his whole posterity must die, / Die hee or Justice must." The only escape depends on a substitute sacrifice, an atonement. God solicits the Heav'nly Powers for a solution to this plight. Will any of the just choose to die for the unjust? ☞ Silence, comparable to that in Hell after Beëlzebub's invitation. Man's fate hangs in the balance. ☞ "Man shall find grace." The human paradox requires a sacrifice. "Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life / I offer. . . Account mee man." The Son knows what this entails, "the loathsome grave" that will not be his final destination. By death shall death be overcome. The final battle. ☞ Silence after speech becomes itself eloquent. Admiration among host. ☞ God praises the creative works of the Son and magnifies praise of his sacrifice. God forecasts the incarnation, the Word made flesh. "Be thou in Adam's room / The Head of all mankind, though Adam's Son." Typology. "So Heav'nly love shall outdo Hellish hate." In this action the Son has claimed by merit what was his by birthright. Humiliation becomes exaltation. God projects the final judgment, the closing of Hell, the burning of the World and the rise of a "New Heav'n and Earth" when "God shall be All in All." ☞ Chorus of angels, casting down their crowns in adoration of the Son, crowns inwoven with amaranthus, the flower that never fades and blooms beside the Tree of Life. Flowers, gems, and celestial harmonies. ☞ Milton joins the chorus, "Thee Father first they sung." Attributes blaze of light to God (cp. opening invocation of this book). Describes Son as the visible attributes of the Father, "Whom else no Creature can behold." The Son is a powerful warrior but also a tender lover. Milton embraces this praise as his theme, "never shall my Harp thy praise / Forget, nor from thy Father's praise disjoin." ☞ "Meanwhile" shifts the scene from Heav'n to the brink of Chaos where we left Satan in his journey. The end of the tunnel. Satan as a vulture planning his kill. But this is the vestibule, the Limbo of Vanity (cp. Dante, *Inferno* IV), the "Paradise of Fools." Catalogue of inhabitants, "Embryos and Idiots, Eremites and Friars." Buffeted by wind. Satan wanders until he glimpses light and pursues it to the Gate of Heav'n. Angels ascending and descending like Jacob's ladder. Satan steps onto staircase and gazes down like a scout reconnoitering the game for his kill. His chief emotion: envy. Leaps down into space, passing distant stars that might be "other Worlds." His goal: the Sun. Milton sings praise of the Sun, its warmth and virtue. Satan lands like a sunspot that had first been observed by Galileo in 1609. The radiance incorporates all precious jewels, the stones (incl. Philosopher's Stone), and rivers of gold. Satan gradually discerns Uriel, one of seven archangels (Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, the other three are disputed). Why is Satan "glad"?