

The portrayal of god's test

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



John Milton once wrote that all of his writings were moved "solely by a sense of duty" to God which propelled him to continue writing despite the fact that for part of his life he struggled with his relationship with the Church of England and the English monarchy. Milton likely viewed his struggles, however, as tests from God which he had to overcome in order to carry out God's will. Throughout his works, Milton often wrote about God's trials and tests for men, which were intended to reveal the truth about their faith and devotion. The characters in Milton's poetry and prose would either overcome their obstacles and be rewarded or fail in their struggles and be punished for their lack of obedience to their creator. Indeed, Milton uses the characterization of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, and the characterization of Lord General Fairfax and Lord General Cromwell in *Sonnets XV and XVI*, to reveal the message that God rewards those who act in devotion to Him and punishes those who ignore His will and fall to temptation.

In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve are troubled by the idea that their free will may lead them to defy God and disobey his orders. When Eve has an unsettling dream about eating from the Tree of Knowledge even though God has forbidden that she do so, Adam is nervous and attempts to calm Eve by telling her, "in the Soul/ Are many lesser Faculties that serve/ Reason as chief"(V ll. 100-103). Eve has the ability to deny temptation and choose to follow God because He gave her that characteristic when he created her. She therefore cannot blame God for not having a choice if she gives in to temptation and goes against God's orders. Adam, however, is afraid that Eve may choose to defy God because she is not as devoted to their creator as he is: moreover, he fears that they may experience God's wrath for her

betrayal. When Eve meets Satan and realizes that in order to gain knowledge she must eat from the forbidden tree, at first she tries to follow God's orders and states, " of this Tree we may not taste nor touch;/ God so Commanded, and left that Command/ Sole Daughter of his voice; the rest, we live/ Law to ourselves, our Reason is our law"(IX ll. 651-654). Eve knows that Adam wants her to strictly follow God's orders and resist temptation, which is why Eve initially refuses to eat the fruit. She fears the punishment that may ensue if she is disobedient, but eventually she cannot resist the temptation. She uses the free will that was given to her by God to disobey Him.

While Eve deceives God in full understanding of what she has done, Adam follows her not because he longs to gain knowledge but because he does not want God to separate them when their sin is realized. Therefore when Eve gives " him of that fair enticing Fruit/ With liberal hand: he scrupl'd not to eat/ Against his better knowledge, not deciev'd,/ But fondly overcome with female charm."(IX ll. 996-999), Adam eats it and waits for the punishment he is sure will result from these acts of betrayal. Adam and Eve have both been given the ability to choose the right path and obey their creator, yet they have each decided prospectively that knowledge and love are more important to them than God's commands. For their punishment, God sends the Son to Paradise: there, the Son tells Eve first that her husband will now rule over her and that she will have to endure painful childbirth. To Adam, the Son says " For dust thou art, shalt to dust return"(X I. 209). Adam and Eve thus become mortal and are compelled to live on earth, where they are condemned to eventually die. They could have lived in Paradise if they had

followed God's orders, but for their disobedience they must suffer the hardships toil and hardship.

Adam and Eve are the original examples of how God tests humans and punishes them if they fail to obey his commands. In Sonnets XV and XVI, Fairfax and Cromwell are also tested by God in their great battles during the civil war in England. According to Milton, for Fairfax, " a nobler task awaits thy hand;/ For what can War, but endless war still breed,/ Til Truth and Right from violence be freed"(ll. 9-11). Fairfax has been sent by God to end the war by doing God's will. He is rewarded by God with victory after he has proven himself to be a hero who, from Milton's perspective, is acting out of religious devotion. Milton also uses the example of Lord General Cromwell to reveal how God tests man. He states that Cromwell, " through a cloud/ Not of war only, but detractions rude,/ Guided by faith and matchless Fortitude,/ To peace and truth thy glorious way hast plough'd"(ll. 1-4). The cloud represents the hardships (or the test) that God planned for Cromwell so that he could prove that he was worthy of doing God's will on earth. Somewhat like Fairfax, Cromwell is rewarded with victory after he is able to overcome his difficulties.

In his portrayal of Cromwell and Fairfax, Milton reveals his belief that God has given His approval to these men to fight under His name and has paved the road to victory for them because they are worthy of that honor. Unlike Adam and Eve, Lord Cromwell and Lord Fairfax were tested and then rewarded for their faith in God and their determination to serve him on earth. Adam and Eve, as the perpetrators of the original sin, did not have the

knowledge of their own trials to help them in their struggles, which made their test somewhat more difficult. However, their story and the other stories of the Bible provided Fairfax and Cromwell with the background knowledge they needed to overcome their moral obstacles and be rewarded by God. Milton uses each of these characters to represent what one should and should not do when faced with a test from God. While temptation may seem like the easiest way to achieve immediate pleasure, Milton assures us that the real reward comes only from faith and devotion.