Pride is one of the main themes in John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost*. It is Satan’s pride that brings about his downfall, and pride that contributes to Adam and Eve’s disobedience and fall. Milton’s account reveals parallels between the Fall of Satan and the Fall of Man and gives reasons for their differing outcomes.

Just as the Bible teaches, Milton’s epic poem shows that sin originated not in the Garden, but in Heaven with Satan’s pride. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan’s pride starts a downward spiral into greater sin. As Milton explains the subject of his epic in Book I, he asks a rhetorical question regarding the disobedience of Adam and Eve: “Who first seduc’d them to that foul revolt?” The answer given describes the sins that Satan committed in the process:

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Th’ infernal Serpent; hee it was, whose guile
Stirred up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv’d
The Mother of Mankind; what time his Pride
Had cast him out from Heav’n, with all his Host
Of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in Glory above his Peers.
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Satan’s pride leads him to envy and ambition, followed by idolatry, rebellion, hatred, boasting, revenge, deceit, and seduction. Inevitably his pride brings about his degradation, his misery, and ultimately his destruction.

First, Satan’s pride grows into discontentment and ambition, in spite of God’s goodness. Satan admits that it was his own fault that he was cast out of heaven, by stating, “[God] deserved no such return / From me…nor was his service hard.” He is a pathetic picture of a spoiled child; he was not injured, insulted, or slighted in any way (Lewis). He admits that he had no reason to rebel; he was ungrateful for God’s goodness, and he was not content in his high position.

In addition to desiring equality with God, he becomes jealous of the honor bestowed on Christ. Satan is also jealous of Man, God’s “new favorite…this man of clay.” He envies the love they share and the beautiful world that he can never enjoy. So Satan sets out to stir up ambition and envy in Eve by suggesting to her that she can be elevated to God’s level. Since Satan is condemned to a state of eternal misery, his only source of pleasure is to bring misery upon others. By leading Adam and Eve into sin, he will succeed in bringing misery and condemnation upon them and all mankind.

Furthermore, Satan defiantly leads others into rebellion and idolatry, boasting of his ability to defeat God. During their counsel session (Bk. II), Satan and his friends refer to God with such epic epithets as “Heav’n’s matchless King,” “King of Heaven,” “Almighty Victor,” and “our envied Sovran,” acknowledging God’s power and sovereignty. Yet Satan is determined to challenge God’s authority. He begins his rebellion by inciting other angels to join him, seducing them with promises that he is unable to fulfill. Although he views God as a tyrant, it seems that Satan is not opposed to a system of hierarchy, as long as he is at the top (Lewis).
Satan’s hatred drives him to revenge and deceit. First, he uses deceit to convince the fallen angels to support him by addressing his cohorts with an arrogant air of assurance. Although in reality Satan took one-third of the angels with him, he often exaggerates the amount, such as “more than half,” “well nigh half,” or “Innumerable force of Spirits,” and he boasts that he “emptied Heav’n.” Next, he uses guile in order to escape Hell and tricks Uriel into telling him where Adam and Eve can be found (Bk. III). Satan approaches Eve in the form of a serpent, purposely chosen for being subtle, crafty, and an “Imp of fraud.” He uses disguises, hypocrisy, and lies in order to achieve his purpose. Ironically, as a result of his pride and hatred, Satan is reduced to nothing more than a caricature, and he and his followers are degraded to the point of ridicule in Book X (Waldock).

Like Satan, Eve’s downfall begins with pride and transpires from there. Satan knows that all sin begins first in the heart, and since pride was the result of his own downfall, it is logical that he would use the same tool to corrupt Eve. Satan plants seeds of discontentment in Eve in order to produce envy and ultimately rebellion. Satan knows that thoughts precede actions, so he begins working in Eve’s heart. He deviously approaches the sleeping Eve and whispers to her “discontented thoughts, / Vain hopes, vain aims, inordinate desires / Blown up with high conceits ingend’ring pride.” In a dream, he suggests to her that she could be happier than she is and that she is worthy of godhood. When he meets her (Bk. IX), he begins by using flattery, then he subtly plants the idea in her mind of being a goddess by addressing her with epithets such as “sovan Mistress”, “universal Dame”, “Empress”, and “Queen of this Universe”. Finally, he suggests that God is purposely trying to keep them ignorant, causing her to doubt His goodness. Before long, her pride has developed into envy, ambition, and idolatry. While the Bible does not describe the actions and methods of Satan in this detail, Milton’s Satan character in *Paradise Lost* does seem consistent with Satan’s rebellious and non-repentant nature as seen in the Bible.

Eve falls into rebellion and idolatry, followed by Adam, just as Satan hopes. We see that Satan’s vengeful goal is to cause man to rebel against God’s rule and authority, and indeed that is what happened in the Garden. When Eve is informed that she can know everything, she is eager to achieve this new level of awareness, but her aspirations quickly turn into more than simply a desire for knowledge. In Book IX, which gives the account of Eve’s taking of the forbidden fruit, she addresses the tree as “Sovran, virtuous, precious of all Trees,” and she actually bows down to the tree in worship for the power she receives from it. Satan has caused Eve to rebel against God’s authority. She also expresses her desire to be equal with God in knowledge, as well as to be equal or even superior to Adam. In the end, the fruit of Eve’s misguided ambition is idolatry.

In *Paradise Lost*, the transition from innocence to sin occurs so gradually in both Adam and Eve that it is difficult to determine exactly when it happens. For Adam, the transition may occur when he admits to the angel Raphael his passion for Eve. Raphael, seeing the potential for idolatry, warns Adam to keep his love for God always above his love for anything else, including Eve (Bk. VIII). Although Eve is the first to disobey God’s command, Adam is not exempt from blame. God set Adam over Eve and gave him more dignity as her lord and head. However, Adam abdicates his rule over her. More than mere disobedience, both are guilty of breaking the hierarchy God had ordained; both reject the position God intended for him or her. Additionally, in choosing to follow Eve, Adam places his love for Eve above his love for God, thus
committing rebellion and idolatry. Ultimately God holds him responsible for the introduction of sin into the world.

One of the main premises in *Paradise Lost* is that a creature is only happy as long as he is obedient to God. When Adam and Eve disobey God, it brings misery upon them and consequently all humanity. We see how their individual disobedience to God immediately affects their relationship with one another by introducing anger, hate, mistrust, suspicion, and discord into their relationship. Later, Adam realizes the secret to true happiness and liberty and says,

Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best,
And love with fear the only God, to walk
As in his presence, ever to observe
His providence, and on him sole depend (Bk. XII).

In the end, Satan’s rebellion results in eternal alienation from God, while Adam and Eve are restored in their relationship with him. After his fall, Satan is briefly touched with sadness and remorse because of what he lost and must now suffer. He even almost regrets corrupting Adam and Eve, but his hate reminds him of his original intent. But Satan’s regret and apparent remorse at his fallen state are not equated with repentance. To Satan, repenting to God would be more shameful than losing to Him. In Book IV, Satan makes his decision when he says, “So farewell Hope… Farewell Remorse; all Good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my Good.” Satan refuses to repent, willfully choosing instead to continue in his rebellion. Without humility, repentance cannot occur. (But we must remember that even humility comes from God!)

One key to restoration with God is humility. Contrary to Satan, Adam and Eve do show true repentance by confessing their sin, asking forgiveness, and submitting to God’s judgment of them. At first, Adam and Eve begin by blaming one another, “but neither self-condemning.” But both arrive at a sense of shame for what they have done, and after forgiving one another and accepting God’s punishment as just, Adam and Eve acknowledge God’s goodness to them. Most importantly, they are assured that they will continue to have a relationship with Him and that He will hear them when they pray. Book X ends with the penitent sinners bowing before God with “hearts contrite…sorrow unfeign’d, and humiliation meek.” They still must suffer the consequences of their sin and are removed from Paradise, but God has not forsaken them. His Son will take their punishment, redeem mankind, and defeat His enemies: Satan, Sin, and Death.

Although the sins of Satan and those of Adam and Eve have the same root causes and the same potential end, God is ultimately the one who determines the outcome. Milton shows God to be sovereign over every aspect of His creation, including Satan’s rebellion and Adam and Eve’s disobedience. God allows Satan to rise up from the fiery Pit, to enter Earth, and to bring about Adam and Eve’s fall. God is not taken unaware, and He is powerful enough to stop Satan if He so chooses. He knows that man will disobey His law by his own will, even though He “made him just and right.” He states in Book III, before Adam and Eve have yet sinned, that He will deal differently with Satan than with them, and He explains the reason: “In Mercy and Justice both, / Through Heav’n and Earth, so shall my glory excel.” It is apparent that God uses Satan (and all those who rebel against Him) as an opportunity to demonstrate His justice. Although Adam and Eve start out on the same path to destruction as Satan, they do not end up in the same damnable
Undoubtedly, if He had left Adam and Eve on their own, they would have continued in the same way as Satan did. But when Adam and Eve rebelled, God chose to extend His love and mercy to them. Milton’s poem incorporates the truth of God’s sovereignty in salvation, as the Father explains His plan:

Man shall not quite be lost, but sav’d who will;
Yet not of will in him, but grace in me…
Some I have chosen of peculiar grace,
Elect above the rest; so is my will…
for I will clear their senses dark…and soften stony hearts
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.

In *Paradise Lost*, as in the Bible, it is God who softens hard hearts: “Prevenient Grace descending had remov’d / The stony from thir hearts, and made new flesh / Regenerate grow instead” (Bk. XII; see also Ezekiel 11:19), and it is God who grants repentance (see II Timothy 2:25). However, it must not be forgotten that God’s mercy did not come to man without cost -- His Son would give His life to pay man’s debt for sin.

God still chooses to show His mercy upon those who will repent and obey Him. Any one of us, left to ourselves, would go the way of Satan. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ!” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

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