

## HYMN III

At the summit of Paradise stands the Tree of Life, whose glory is so great that it cannot be approached; indeed, for Adam and Eve any approach to it was effectively hedged off by the Tree of Knowledge, lower down the mountain, whose fruit they had been forbidden to eat. The serpent, however, manages to persuade them to disobey the divine commandment and to eat the forbidden fruit. This act of disobedience opens Adam's eye both to the higher state of glory which God had destined for Eve and him if only they had kept the commandment, and to the shame that failure to keep it had brought upon them. The consequence of their action is a judgment which is in fact self-imposed.

Ephrem here follows a tradition known from a number of early Christian writers that Adam and Eve had been created in an intermediate state; whether or not they would be raised to a higher state God leaves to the outcome of the exercise of their free will. This is a theme developed at greater length in the *Commentary on Genesis II:14-23*.

The Tree of Knowledge can be understood as playing the same role as the sanctuary veil: only those authorized to do so may penetrate inside it; Adam, like king Uzziah (2 Chron. 26), presumptuously tried to enter—with disastrous results.

1. As for that part of the Garden, my beloved,  
     which is situated so gloriously  
     at the summit of that height  
     where dwells the Glory,  
     not even its symbol  
     can be depicted in man's thought;  
     for what mind  
     has the sensitivity  
     to gaze upon it,  
     or the faculties to explore it,  
     or the capacity to attain to that Garden  
     whose riches are beyond comprehension.

*The Hymns on Paradise*

RESPONSE: Praise to Your Justice that crowns the victorious.

2. Perhaps that blessed tree,  
     the Tree of Life,  
     is, by its rays,  
     the sun of Paradise;  
     its leaves glisten,  
     and on them are impressed  
     the spiritual graces  
     of that Garden.  
     In the breezes the other trees  
     bow down as if in worship  
     before that sovereign  
     and leader of the trees.
3. In the very midst He planted  
     the Tree of Knowledge,<sup>1</sup>  
     endowing it with awe,  
     hedging it in with dread,  
     so that it might straightway serve  
     as a boundary to the inner region of Paradise.  
     Two things did Adam hear  
     in that single decree:  
     that they should not eat of it<sup>2</sup>  
     and that, by shrinking from it,  
     they should perceive that it was not lawful  
     to penetrate further, beyond that Tree.<sup>3</sup>
4. The serpent could not  
     enter Paradise,  
     for neither animal  
     nor bird

<sup>1</sup>Gen. 2:9.

<sup>2</sup>Gen. 2:17.

<sup>3</sup>Gen. 3:7.

- was permitted to approach  
the outer region of Paradise,  
and Adam had to go out  
to meet them;  
so the serpent cunningly learned,  
through questioning Eve,  
the character of Paradise,  
what it was and how it was ordered.
5. When the accursed one learned  
how the glory of that inner Tabernacle,  
as if in a sanctuary,  
was hidden from them,  
and that the Tree of Knowledge,  
clothed with an injunction,  
served as the veil  
for the sanctuary,  
he realized that its fruit  
was the key of justice  
that would open the eyes of the bold  
—and cause them great remorse.
6. Their eyes were open\*—  
though at the same time they were still closed  
so as not to see the Glory  
or their own low estate,  
so as not to see the Glory  
of that inner Tabernacle,  
nor to see the nakedness  
of their own bodies.  
These two kinds of knowledge  
God hid in the Tree,  
placing it as a judge  
between the two parties.

7. But when Adam boldly ran  
and ate of its fruit  
this double knowledge  
straightway flew toward him,  
tore away and removed  
both veils from his eyes:  
he beheld the Glory of the Holy of Holies  
and trembled;  
he beheld, too, his own shame and blushed,  
groaning and lamenting  
because the twofold knowledge he had gained  
had proved for him a torment.
8. Whoever has eaten  
of that fruit  
either sees and is filled with delight,  
or he sees and groans out.  
The serpent incited them to eat in sin  
so that they might lament;  
having seen the blessed state,  
they could not taste of it—  
like that hero of old\*  
whose torment was doubled  
because in his hunger he could not taste  
the delights which he beheld.
9. For God had not allowed him  
to see his naked state,  
so that, should he spurn the commandment,  
his ignominy might be shown him.  
Nor did He show him the Holy of Holies,  
in order that, if he kept the command,  
he might set eyes upon it  
and rejoice.  
These two things did God conceal,  
as the two recompenses,

so that Adam might receive, by means of his contest,  
a crown that befitted his actions.

10. God established the Tree as judge,  
so that if Adam should eat from it,  
it might show him that rank  
which he had lost through his pride,  
and show him, as well, that low estate  
he had acquired, to his torment:  
Whereas, if he should overcome and conquer,  
it would robe him in glory  
and reveal to him also  
the nature of shame,  
so that he might acquire, in his good health,  
an understanding of sickness.
11. A man, indeed, who has acquired  
good health in himself,  
and is aware in his mind  
of what sickness is,  
has gained something beneficial  
and he knows something profitable;  
but a man who lies  
in sickness,  
and knows in his mind  
what is good health,  
is vexed by his sickness  
and tormented in his mind.
12. Had Adam conquered,\*  
he would have acquired  
glory upon his limbs,  
and discernment of what suffering is,  
so that he might be radiant in his limbs  
and grow in his discernment.  
But the serpent reversed all this

and made him taste  
abasement in reality,  
and glory in recollection only,  
so that he might feel shame at what he had found  
and weep at what he had lost.

13. The Tree was to him  
like a gate;  
its fruit was the veil  
covering that hidden Tabernacle.  
Adam snatched the fruit,  
casting aside the commandment.  
When he beheld that Glory  
within,  
shining forth with its rays,  
he fled outside;  
he ran off and took refuge  
among the modest fig trees.
14. In the midst of Paradise God had planted  
the Tree of Knowledge  
to separate off, above and below,  
sanctuary from Holy of Holies.  
Adam made bold to touch,  
and was smitten like Uzziah:\*<sup>4</sup>  
the king became leprous,  
Adam was stripped.  
Being struck like Uzziah,  
he hastened to leave:  
both kings\* fled and hid,  
in shame of their bodies.
15. Even though all the trees  
of Paradise

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\*2 Chron. 26:16.

are clothed each in its own glory,  
 yet each veils itself at the Glory;  
 the Seraphs with their wings,  
 the trees with their branches,  
 all cover their faces so as not to behold  
 their Lord.

They all blushed at Adam  
 who was suddenly found naked;  
 the serpent had stolen his garments,  
 for which it was deprived of its feet.\*

16. God did not permit  
 Adam to enter  
 that innermost Tabernacle;  
 this was withheld,  
 so that first he might prove pleasing  
 in his service of that outer Tabernacle;  
 like a priest  
 with fragrant incense,  
 Adam's keeping of the commandment  
 was to be his censer;  
 then he might enter before the Hidden One  
 into that hidden Tabernacle.
17. The symbol of Paradise  
 was depicted by Moses  
 who made the two sanctuaries,  
 the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies;  
 into the outer one  
 entrance was permitted,  
 but into the inner,  
 only once a year.<sup>5</sup>  
 So too with Paradise,  
 God closed off the inner part,  
 but He opened up the outer,  
 wherein Adam might graze.

<sup>5</sup>Lev. 16; Heb. 9:7.

## HYMN IV

Before the Fall, the Tree of Knowledge, with the commandment not to eat of it, had served as a boundary between Adam and God's glory; after the Fall, however, Adam is kept at a much greater distance, being henceforth prevented from entering Paradise at all by the "inviolable boundary" of the cherub's sharp sword (Genesis 3:24). Paradise now abhors Adam just as the Jewish Law abhorred the ritually unclean leper, keeping him outside the Israelite camp, but, just as the Law made provision for the leper's re-entry into Israelite society, so too Christ the High Priest provides for the restoration of Adam/humanity to Paradise.

1. The Just One saw how Adam had become audacious  
 because He had been lenient,  
 and He knew that he would overstep again  
 if He continued thus;  
 Adam had trampled down  
 that gentle and pleasant boundary,  
 so instead God made for him  
 a boundary guarded by force.  
 The mere words of the commandment  
 had been the boundary to the Tree,  
 but now the cherub and the sharp sword  
 provided the fence to Paradise.<sup>1</sup>

RESPONSE: Deem me worthy that through Your grace  
 we may enter Your Paradise.

2. Adam in all his filth  
 sought to enter  
 that Holy of Holies  
 which loves only those who resemble it;

<sup>1</sup>Gen. 3:24.