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Parzival: A Knightly Epic

Wolfram von Eschenbach · *early 13th century* · *Jessie L. Weston*

If unfaith in the heart find dwelling, then the soul it shall reap but woe: Weston's 1894 verse of Wolfram's Parzival opens in that key and then follows a boy who becomes a knight, fails a question, and after long wandering learns to ask it. The hosted English joins both volumes, Books I–XVI.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is the question a knight should have asked, and can a soul that has reaped woe from unfaith still come to the Grail?

"If unfaith in the heart find dwelling, then the soul it shall reap but woe;"

Book I, the opening of Weston's verse

The hosted text is Jessie L. Weston's 1894 English, PG #47297 and #47298 joined, complete through Book XVI and a FINIS. The first books treat Gahmuret, Parzival's father; the later books are the boy's knighthood, the silent visit to the Grail king, years of wandering, and a return. Quote Weston, including the older spellings (woe, thro', Chrêtien in the notes). This is not Chrétien's unfinished Perceval (the site's Chrétien volume does not include it). It is a long Christian grail-romance of sin, pity, and a late asking. For older students.

KEY CHARACTERS

Parzival
The boy who is knighted, fails to ask, wanders, and returns.

Gahmuret and Herzeloyde
The father of the opening books, and the mother who would hide knighthood from her son.

the Grail king, and Cundrie
The wounded lord of the first visit, and the messenger who names the failure.

Gawain
The other knight, whose adventures run beside Parzival's in the long middle.

IF UNFAITH FIND DWELLING

> *"If unfaith in the heart find dwelling, then the soul it shall reap but woe;"*
>
> Book I

Grades 10–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Unfaith, and a Father

BOOKS I–II

Weston opens with unfaith and the soul's woe, then tells of Gahmuret before the boy Parzival is fully on the stage.

- The opening couplet is exact in this verse.
- The father's story is not a delay; it is the first book of the epic as Wolfram made it.
- The two Gutenberg volumes are joined in this file; do not stop at Book IX.

> *"If unfaith in the heart find dwelling, then the soul it shall reap but woe;"*
>
> Book I

02

A Boy, and a Knighting

THE EARLY BOOKS OF PARZIVAL'S YOUTH

A sheltered boy meets the world, is knighted, and takes a wife. Innocence here is real and already dangerous.

- Herzeloyde's hiding of knighthood is the first moral knot.
- The tone can be comic and grave in the same adventure.
- Weston's verse has a marked rhythm; quote complete lines.

03

A Question Not Asked

THE GRAIL CASTLE, THE FIRST VISIT

Parzival sees the wounded king and the Grail procession, and does not ask the question pity required. The failure is the poem's center.

- Do not treat the silence as a mere riddle-mistake; it is a failure of compassion.
- The Grail in this poem has a distinct, Christian courtly form; do not import a later opera whole.
- Shame and wandering will be the next education.

04

Years of Wandering

THE MIDDLE BOOKS, INCLUDING VOLUME II

Cundrie's rebuke, a long road, Gawain's adventures running alongside, and a slow learning of what was missed.

- Volume II is in this hosted file (Books X–XVI).
- Gawain's plot is part of the design, not a simple interruption.
- The poem is long; a first reading may need a guide through the double structure.

05

A Late Asking, and FINIS

THE CLOSE

The question is at last asked, and the epic comes to its end in this English, marked FINIS. The hosted text is complete.

- The two PG volumes (#47297, #47298) are joined here.
- Weston's notes and excursus at the end are not the poem; quote the verse.
- A complete Christian grail-epic in 1894 English, for older students; not Chrétien's unfinished Perceval, and not Wagner.

Faith and Unfaith | A Question of Pity | Knighthood | Wandering | The Grail

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. The hosted text is Jessie L. Weston's 1894 English (Project Gutenberg #47297 and #47298 joined), complete through Book XVI and a FINIS. The opening is exact: "If unfaith in the heart find dwelling, then the soul it shall reap but woe;" Quote Weston, including older spellings (thro', woe). Notes and an excursus at the end are not the poem.
2. This is Wolfram's complete Parzival, not Chrétien's unfinished Perceval (the site's Chrétien volume does not include Perceval). It is also not Wagner. A long Christian grail-romance of a failed question and a late asking, for older students.
3. Do not stop at the end of Volume I (Books I–IX); Volume II is part of this hosted file.

Quotations are verbatim from the Jessie L. Weston, Project Gutenberg #47297 and #47298, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/wolfram-parzival/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.