

The Pilgrim's Progress (full title, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come, Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream*) was written by John Bunyan (1628–1688)

- Since its publication has encouraged countless believers in their walk with God.
 - From a purely literary viewpoint, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is without a doubt the greatest allegory ever written.
 - "A hybrid of religious allegory, the early novel, the moral dialogue, the romance, the folk story, the picaresque novel, the epic, the dream-vision, and the fairy tale" (Lynn Veach Sadler, *John Bunyan*, Twayne Publishers, 1979).
 - The world over, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is one of the most widely read books in history and has been translated into over 200 languages.
 - The publication of *The Pilgrim's Progress* represented a pivotal event in the history of literature.
 - The lengthy prose allegory was unique in its time, and it helped lead to the creation of an entirely new genre, the novel.
 - Three formulaic elements of the novel are present in Bunyan's masterpiece:
 - One main character (the protagonist), whose exploits are followed throughout
 - A secondary character who assists the protagonist
 - A journey with a beginning, middle, and end.
 - The novel is the most popular form of literature today, and all novels contain those three elements from *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
 - But there is much more to *The Pilgrim's Progress* than literary excellence.
 - An unforgettable and universal picture of the Christian life, from the time of the soul's first awakening to the truth of the gospel to the entrance into heaven. Readers find that, no matter where they are in the Christian journey, they will see themselves in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
 - Repeated readings reveal additional treasures.
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- Charles Spurgeon loved the book and quoted it often: "Next to the Bible, the book I value most is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. I believe I have read it through at least a hundred times. It is a volume of which I never seem to tire; and the secret of its freshness is that it is so largely compiled from the Scriptures" (from the preface of *Pictures from Pilgrim's Progress: A Commentary on Portions of John Bunyan's Immortal Allegory*).

Biography:

- John Bunyan was a Reformed Baptist and Puritan who lived in Bedford, England.
 - Tinker by trade and part of the working poor.
 - Three years after his conversion in 1653, Bunyan began to preach at the Bedford Meeting House.
 - The problem was that Bunyan was not a state-sanctioned preacher—he had no government license to preach, and he refused to follow the king's requirement to use the Book of Common Prayer in his services.
 - Bunyan was jailed in 1660, and it was in jail that he began writing *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
 - All total, Bunyan spent more than 12 years in jail.
 - He published *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678 and followed it with Part Two in 1684.
 - John Bunyan wrote over 30 books, including *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, an autobiography; *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*; and *The Holy War*, as well as many tracts and sermons.
 - Bunyan died in 1688.
 - As an allegory, the characters and events in *The Pilgrim's Progress* are symbolic of spiritual truths.
 - Part One tells the story of Christian, a man living in the City of Destruction and bearing a great burden, symbolic of conviction of sin.
 - He knows he must escape the City of Destruction, but he knows not where to go until he meets Evangelist, who points him in the right direction. As Christian comes to the cross, the burden falls off his back on its own accord, rolls
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down a hill, and disappears into a tomb. Three Shining Ones give Christian gifts to aid him on his journey to the Celestial City.

- Along the way, Christian visits many places (e.g., the Interpreter's House, the Palace Beautiful, the Delectable Mountains, the Valley of Humiliation); he meets many people (e.g., Faithful, Hopeful, Mr. Worldly Wise-man, Obstinate, Atheist, Money-love, By-ends, Mistrust, Formalist, Sloth, Discretion, Charity, Lord Hate-good, Talkative, Ignorance); and he encounters many dangers (e.g., the Slough of Despond, Vanity Fair, the Hill Difficulty, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Apollyon, the Giant Despair, the Flatterer, the Enchanted Ground).
 - Christian experiences times of mortal danger, refreshment, and blessing. At the end of his journey, he crosses a River, symbolic of physical death, and is welcomed into the Celestial City with great fanfare.
 - Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress* follows the story of Christian's wife, Christiana, and their four sons as they, too, leave the City of Destruction and set out on pilgrimage to reach the Celestial City.
 - A few characters from Part One return, but there are many new characters introduced: Mercy, Great-heart, Feeble-mind, Much-afraid, Sagacity, Reliever, Mrs. Bat's-eyes, Mr. Brisk, Giant Maul, Giant Slaygood, Mr. Skill, Honest, Contrite, Self-will, Valiant-for-truth, Heedless, Tell-truth, etc. Faithfully following the promises of God, Christiana also arrives safely at the Celestial City.
 - Throughout both Part One and Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan presents profound truths and illustrates them in memorable ways.
 - The journey from the certainty of eternal destruction to a condition of spiritual blessedness is one that all believers can relate to. The characters Christian meets are easily identifiable both as social types and spiritual and psychological realities. The book is also full of songs (see [Ephesians 5:19](#)) and poetry, including eleven poems of celebration, five of warning, and one elegy.
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- Most notably, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is replete with Scripture.
 - It quotes and alludes to the Bible through and through. No doubt this infusion with Scripture is the reason *The Pilgrim's Progress* has so much staying power and has impacted millions of believers in the past 300 years. The very concept of a Christian as a "pilgrim" or sojourner in this world comes from 1 Peter 2:11 (KJV).
 - Spurgeon comments on Bunyan's knowledge and use of the Bible: "Read anything of [Bunyan's], and you will see that it is almost like the reading the Bible itself. He had read it till his very soul was saturated with Scripture; and, though his writings are charmingly full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his *Pilgrim's Progress*—that sweetest of all prose poems—without continually making us feel and say, 'Why, this man is a living Bible! Prick him anywhere—his blood is Bimeline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his very soul is full of the Word of God. I commend his example to you, beloved'" ("Charles Spurgeon as a Literary Man" in *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon, Compiled from His Letters, Diaries, and Records by His Wife and Private Secretary*, vol. 4, 1878–1892, Curtis & Jennings, 1900, p. 268).
- Most world-class literary masterpieces are produced by the literary elite, that is, well-educated "men of letters" of high social standing and some influence. In such elite company, *The Pilgrim's Progress* stands out. No one from Bunyan's social status (uneducated, working-class poor) has ever written a book the caliber of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The hand of God has been upon this book, and Bunyan's masterpiece continues to bless millions more pilgrims in their journey.

Adapted from <https://www.gotquestions.org/The-Pilgrims-Progress.html>