

CHRISTIAN GUIDES
TO THE CLASSICS



BUNYAN'S
THE
PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

LELAND RYKEN

Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress"

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Pilgrim's Progress: The Book at a Glance

Author. John Bunyan (1628–1688)

Nationality. English

Date of first publication. Part 1, 1678, under the title *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come, Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream*; part 2 published in 1684

Approximate number of pages. 250–300 or more (depending on size of pages and the presence or absence of illustrations and marginal notes)

Available editions. Multiple, including Barnes and Noble, Penguin Classics, Crossway (updated language and format, as well as original art), Oxford World Classics, Dover Thrift, Norton Critical Editions, Signet

Genres. Fictional narrative, allegorical narrative, dream vision, fantasy, realistic fiction, religious fiction, travel story, drama, adventure story, spiritual biography/autobiography, conversion narrative, drama, psychological narrative

Setting for the story. An imaginary realm that is too filled with symbols and archetypes to be simply identified with our known world, while at the same time having many of the qualities of our world

Main characters. Christian is the protagonist of part 1, and his wife, Christiana, is the protagonist of part 2. Once we move beyond those two, the number of characters explodes, but the following perhaps rise above the rest in prominence: Interpreter, who explains the truth of the Christian faith to Christian and his wife; Faithful, a sometime traveling companion of Christian who fled the City of Destruction shortly after Christian did; Hopeful, who becomes Christian's traveling companion on the last third of his pilgrimage (after Faithful is martyred); Great-heart, a soldier who serves as Christiana's guide and protector on her pilgrimage.

Plot summary. The story begins when the hero and narrator of the story resolves to flee his hometown called the City of Destruction. The main action for the remainder of part 1 is Christian's journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. This is obviously the story of the salvation of the human soul. Every character and place that Christian encounters is either an aid or an obstacle in his progress toward Heaven and his growth in the Christian life. The main action is Christian's perseverance in the face of adversity and temptations to be diverted from his journey to Heaven. Part 2 is likewise a quest story in which Christiana and her children travel the same journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial Gate. Christiana passes through most of the same places that her husband did and meets

many of the same people, but there are enough new elements to make it more than simply a rerun of earlier action.

Structure and unity. The main structural element is named in the title and is a central genre in Christian literature as far back as the medieval writers Chaucer and Dante. It is the pilgrimage—a journey to a sacred place. *Pilgrim's Progress* is thus built around the quest motif, but of a specifically spiritual nature. The quest, in turn, plants this story solidly in the literary convention of the travel story and journey motif. Both parts of *Pilgrim's Progress* trace the progress of the protagonist from the lost state to the heavenly state. Part of the genius of the story is its tremendous momentum forward toward a goal. As in any quest story, in the two halves we follow the respective protagonists as they encounter a series of obstacles (chiefly places and persons) that seek to thwart the pilgrims' progress in the Christian life "from this world to that which is to come."

Cultural context. As a late seventeenth-century figure, Bunyan lived at the end of the original Puritan movement. He is a leading spokesman for that movement, and he drew his strength spiritually and culturally from the past. But the historical moment in which Bunyan lived is more complex than this personal allegiance to the past. Bunyan lived through the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. As a belated Puritan, Bunyan would have been completely out of step with the impious spirit of the new age, and in fact he was imprisoned for more than twelve years by the new regime for preaching without a license. We should also note that whereas the early Puritans such as John Milton were thoroughly classical as well as Christian in their intellectual allegiance, Bunyan's interests are more narrowly biblical and pietistic.

Tips for reading. (1) The most important prerequisite for enjoying this book as literature is the ability to abandon oneself to the travel motif and the adventure genre. At this level, the book is like Homer's *Odyssey* or Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*—a continuous series of narrow escapes and threatening ordeals. (2) Equally, we need to relish the technique of allegory in which places and characters bear the names of abstract qualities. But the word *allegory* does not quite do justice to what is happening, so we need to add the concept of *symbolic reality*, which results when we enter a realm of the imagination in which the leading ingredient is a "forest" of symbols. (3) Putting the previous two points together, *Pilgrim's Progress* requires us to read at a physical level as the basis of everything else, but also to see that the two protagonists have undertaken a spiritual and psychological journey in addition to the physical journey. (4) The primacy of the spiritual governs everything that Bunyan does in the story and determines his storytelling techniques and choice of material.

The Author and His Faith

In his own day, John Bunyan was famous as both a preacher and a writer. He was of humble social standing and by his own estimate led a depraved life until his conversion in his early twenties. Viewed externally, Bunyan led a difficult life. He was poor from childhood. In his early teen years he followed his father's trade of itinerant tinker (mender of pots and pans). Bunyan's first wife died when he was thirty and left him to care for four children. Bunyan was intent on preaching outside of the authority of the Church of England and as a result found himself in and out of prison for much of his later life. Despite his chaotic external life, Bunyan was a prolific author. In fact, he published over thirty books, mainly doctrinal in nature. Bunyan also became something of a legend in his own time, partly because of his popularity as a preacher.

Several terms accurately describe Bunyan's religious beliefs and affiliations. As already noted, he belongs to the Puritan movement of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and during his later teen years Bunyan was a member of Cromwell's Parliamentary Army. The word *nonconformist* is equally accurate and calls attention to the thing that landed Bunyan in prison after the restoration of the monarchy, namely, his refusal to subscribe ("conform") to the worship practices and ecclesiastical authority of the Church of England. Yet another word that was applied to a person of Bunyan's convictions was *dissenting* (or *dissenter*), meaning that Bunyan dissented from many of the beliefs and practices of the Church of England.

But the picture is more complex than these terms suggest. Soon after his conversion, Bunyan began to attend and then preach at the local Baptist church in his lifelong hometown of Bedford. At one point, local Quakers helped to secure his release from prison. If Bunyan were living today, he would be labeled a Reformed [Calvinistic] Baptist. But Bunyan disliked sectarian controversies, so we are on safest ground if we call him an evangelical Protestant Christian. He accepted the Bible as the authority for religious belief and as God's Word for daily spiritual sustenance. The doctrinal emphases that flowed from this commitment to the Bible were those of Puritanism. The starting premise is that all people are sinful by nature and are eternally damned until they are saved from their lost state. Personal conversion through faith in the atonement of Jesus is the starting point for the new life. The great priority in life is to be holy in one's conduct, and the goal of life is to enter Heaven in the life hereafter. This doctrinal framework provides the main thrust of the pilgrim's progress in both parts of Bunyan's masterpiece.

Literary Features

Pilgrim's Progress is the most paradoxical of literary masterpieces. When it stood alongside the King James Bible in pious Protestant households, it was read for spiritual edification as the Bible was. Literary sophistication was not on the radar screen of such readers, though that does not mean that they were not responding to the literary qualities of the book. The long history of people reading *Pilgrim's Progress* as a book of religious edification can easily mislead us, however. No other book in this series of guides to the literary classics incorporates more literary genres and modes than *Pilgrim's Progress* does.

The list of literary genres runs like this: fictional narrative; allegorical narrative; spiritual autobiography/biography; conversion story; dream vision (action presented as though it occurred in a dream); travel story; character sketch; parabolic writing (in which the literal details are obvious *examples* of some moral or spiritual reality); psychological narrative (a story about the inner life of the mind and emotions); hero story.

To this we can add the related category of literary modes that cut across genre lines: fantasy (unlifelike places such as the Delectable Mountains and characters with names such as Talkative); realism (some of it so rooted in Bunyan's local Bedfordshire that *Pilgrim's Progress* ranks as regional writing); symbolic reality (which occurs when the world that we enter as we read is made up primarily of events, characters, and objects that are symbols of something beyond themselves); drama (inasmuch as most of the book consists of dialogue and speeches); adventure story.

An additional set of literary terms comes into play when we analyze the prose style of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Relevant concepts include the following: realistic and colloquial prose; biblical prose, and more specifically King James style; descriptive/pictorial prose; dramatic prose; Puritan prose. Finally, as we read we encounter the great archetypes of life and literature on virtually every page. Some of these provide overall shape to the story, including the following: quest story, and more specifically a story of pilgrimage; the pilgrim; the journey through a landscape that is simultaneously physical, psychological (representative of states of mind), and moral/spiritual (as the allegorical names of the places continually remind us); the ordeal, and trial-by-ordeal; testing and temptation.

The bottom line is that the book is so obviously one of religious experience aiming at edification that only by an effort do we start to look upon it as a work of the literary imagination. When we make that transition, the floodgates suddenly open in a literary direction.

Bunyan's Allegorical Characters

Characters with allegorical names appear on nearly every page of *Pilgrim's Progress* and are obviously central to Bunyan's design for his story. These allegorical characters are created by taking an adjective (such as *faithful*) or noun (such as *evangelist*), capitalizing it (Faithful, Evangelist), and thereby making it what literary scholars call a "personified abstraction." Usually this technique produces thin characters, but Bunyan's allegorical characters defy that tendency and are triumphs of the imagination.

To begin, Bunyan's technique of characterization has a rich literary history behind it. Going all the way back to the Greek writer Theophrastus and running through Chaucer's portraits in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* is a literary genre known as "the character" (which in modern times we call the "character sketch" or "portrait"). Such character sketches tend almost automatically to produce what some eras have called "humor characters," meaning that the characters are unified or dominated by a single ruling trait (such as laziness) or role (such as merchant or wife). In turn, that technique often results in satiric portraits (portraits that expose human vice or folly).

Bunyan totally avoids giving us visual descriptions of his characters, but by some sort of magic the very names of his characters, accompanied by their actions, achieve the same effect as a portrait. The moment Bunyan calls a character "Pliable," we know who the character is: the person who is readily influenced by whatever outside force is before him at the moment and who quickly changes his mind and behavior when subject to the influence of that outside force. The allegorical name takes the place of a portrait, with the name itself being enough to create the character in an instant.

But that is only the beginning of the Bunyan magic. Bunyan's allegorical characters are multidimensional in the sense that nearly all of them represent three things simultaneously. (1) They are personality types—individuals with a propensity toward the trait named in the allegorical name (such as being talkative). (2) They are social types—people who have a certain effect as they mingle socially (for example, an overly talkative person quickly becomes a social pest). (3) They embody moral and/or spiritual qualities or effects. Most authors would be content with the first two layers of characterization, but because Bunyan is writing about the spiritual life, his originality in the enterprise is to push on to the third level and prompt us to think about how personality traits and social types can help or hinder a person in living a godly life.

We need to note also the immense range of Bunyan's characters, which cover nearly all the people we know. We do not readily think of Bunyan when we name the great creators of fictional characters, but he belongs on the list.

Notes on Format

The first issue to be resolved is what to call Bunyan's masterpiece. The main title of the book when it was first printed was *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but the title is usually shortened to *Pilgrim's Progress*, and that is the title used in this guide.

The second question is how to divide the text. As originally published, *Pilgrim's Progress* contains only two divisions—part 1 dealing with Christian, and Part 2 dealing with Christiana and her children. The book is often published that way, but just as often editors divide the material into units with titles. Depending on the edition, these units are called "stages" (of the pilgrimage) or "sections" (of the book). Sometimes the units are simply given titles, without further designation of stages or sections. Study guides necessarily divide the text into smaller units in addition to the two main parts of the book. In all cases, however, there is no uniform system of division. Instead, editors and commentators divide the material as seems best to them.

The author of this guide has divided the text into manageable units that will maintain uniformity with other classics that appear in this series. He has labeled the units "chapters" and has given each chapter a descriptive title based on the content of the unit.

Additionally, there is the matter of updated and abridged editions of *Pilgrim's Progress*, as well as simplified versions for children. Because this reader's guide marches through the text in sequence, it can be used with virtually any edition of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Quotations used in this guide preserve the archaic (King James) language of the original text, but the commentary is completely applicable to editions with modernized spelling. The commentary can also be used with abridged editions, on the understanding that the commentary may cover parts of *Pilgrim's Progress* not included in an abridgement.

In the quoted passages from the text of *Pilgrim's Progress*, not only has the original language been retained but also the original punctuation. Both of these make the book seem old rather than modern, and that is both accurate and part of the appeal of the story.

PART 1, CHAPTER 1

From the City of Destruction to the Wicket-Gate

Plot Summary

The opening line of *Pilgrim's Progress* is one of the most famous opening lines in all of literature: "As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep: and, as I slept, I dreamed a dream." The rest of the opening paragraph completes our introduction to the overall framework for the book—a framework known as the "dream vision." We also note that at first the fictional framework is narrated in the first person. This is largely dropped when the first-person narrator proceeds to tell the story of the pilgrim named Christian from the third-person point of view, but occasionally we return to the narrator with such formulas as *then I saw in my dream*.

The mainspring of the opening episode is that the protagonist is reading a book and is greatly disturbed by what he reads. In his distress, "a man named Evangelist" comes toward him, who points to a distant gate and urges Christian to proceed to it for help. Christian follows this advice and flees from his hometown called the City of Destruction. On the way, Christian meets characters named Obstinate and Pliable, who try to dissuade him from going forward with his journey, and a character named Help, who advises Christian on how to extricate himself from a life-threatening Slough of Despond (a bog) on the outskirts of town. Other characters whom Christian needs to fend off are named Mr. Worldly Wiseman and Mr.

It is impossible to overpraise the opening paragraph of *Pilgrim's Progress*. It wins us immediately with its first-person intimacy and its homespun realism (a den, sleep, dream, a man clothed with rags, a burden on the back). But we also experience the appeal and even thrill of allegory or symbolism, as we sense that these humble images of everyday life carry a level of meaning beyond themselves—a level of meaning that Bunyan as author entrusted to us to figure out.

An additional thing that we can note right from the start is that the language continuously reminds us of the Bible, and specifically the King James Version of the Bible. In addition to a general stylistic indebtedness to the Bible, there is a continuous chain of allusions to the Bible.

Legality. Evangelist comes to Christian's aid and counteracts the bad advice of that villainous pair, finally encouraging Christian one more time to proceed to the gate that will provide escape from destruction.

Commentary

The complexity of *Pilgrim's Progress*, despite its surface simplicity, is visited on us from the very start. This complexity lies in the fact that every physical detail, including characters and places, has a symbolic meaning that we need to decipher. Anything approaching fullness of interpretation is beyond the scope of this guide, and this is in every way a good thing because it activates readers of Bunyan's book and of this guide to complete the task of interpretation on their own or in small groups.

The autobiographical opening paragraph illustrates the technique of allegory or symbolism. The den where the narrator falls asleep is the jail in which Bunyan was imprisoned for preaching without a license. The dream that he dreams is the imagined story that he is about to tell. The "man clothed with rags," named Christian, is Everyman and Everywoman in the lost state. The book that makes Christian tremble is the Bible, with its doctrine of sin, and the burden on his back symbolizes the guilt and consciousness of sin.

With the allegorical wheels now set in motion, we witness the response of anyone who comes under conviction of sin. The lost state is symbolized by Christian's hometown, which is called the City of Destruction, referring to the destiny of Hell that lies ahead for anyone in an unregenerate or lost state. Evangelist is the preacher or religious

The original edition of *Pilgrim's Progress* printed a few Bible references in the margins of the text, and once the practice had been established, editions have often carried several hundred biblical references in the margins. Today, most editions, both scholarly and "popular," follow that practice.

Pilgrim's Progress is not (as is sometimes claimed) the first English novel. It has too many unrealistic elements, including the allegorical names, to be a novel. But there is a pervasive thread of native English realism in the book, and these touches are "novelistic." One of these real-life features comes early in the story when Christian falls into the Slough of Despond. This threatening bog comes right from the outskirts of Bunyan's hometown of Bedford, England. Bedford is close to the swampy area of England known as the Fens, and additionally almost all rural towns in Bunyan's day had mud holes and swamps, as there were no cement or asphalt roads.

"Do you see yonder wicket-gate?" Evangelist asks Christian. What is a wicket-gate? Nearly every reader of *Pilgrim's Progress* encounters this image for the first time while reading Bunyan's book. We are on safest ground if we simply accept this as a quaint British way of saying *gate*. A wicket-gate might open either into a building or a field; perhaps Bunyan envisions the latter, because when Christian passes through the gate, a character named Good-will points out the castle of Beelzebub "a little distance from this gate." What matters most is that for Bunyan there is a distinct point of division between being in the lost state and in the state of salvation. The biblical subtext for this detail in *Pilgrim's Progress* is the passage in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus speaks of "the narrow gate" that "leads to life" (Matt. 7:13–14).

instructor who informs Christian regarding what he must do to avoid the coming destruction that awaits him in his lost condition. The gate that becomes the first goal in this quest story represents the entrance into the experience of forgiveness of sins.

As is true in the early pages of any story that we read, we are feeling our way in the first chapter, gradually getting a picture of the ground rules that will govern the story as a whole. The entrance of the characters Obstinate and Pliable are our first hint that Christian's spiritual progress as he journeys onward will be impeded by characters who, if listened to, will sidetrack Christian from reaching the goal of his quest. Literary critics call these "blocking characters," and in *Pilgrim's Progress* they are invested with subtle religious and moral meanings that require us to ponder them. Obstinate stubbornly refuses to acknowledge any need to leave the City of Destruction, and Pliable, although he initially accompanies Christian out of the town, at once loses commitment to the venture when he slips into the Slough of Despond at the end of town. One constant ingredient in the plot is thus characters who give Christian bad advice or in other ways try to hinder his spiritual progress.

With the introduction of the Slough of Despond into the story we meet a second motif that will pervade the story: physical places that symbolize a moral or spiritual reality, either positive or negative. The Slough of Despond symbolizes despair brought on by conviction of sin. The village called Morality symbolizes the attempt to gain salvation by good behavior toward one's fellow humans. The house of Legality is an extension of that mind-set. The gate toward which Christian aspires

is also symbolic, but of something good, namely, entrance into salvation.

In addition to bad advisers and symbolic places, the story will continuously feature a succession of good characters who are positive influences on Christian in his quest to reach Heaven. Evangelist is the repository of theological truth, and in the early pages he is a never-failing fountain of spiritual insight for the searching protagonist of the story. In this particular episode, the instructive mission of Evangelist is to counsel Christian against heeding the attitudes pressed on him by such characters as Legality and to teach him the theological truth about how to be saved from sin. The character named Help plays a minor role compared to that of Evangelist, but he imparts good sense to Christian about using the steps that the King (also called Lawgiver) built for people to avoid being dragged down by the bog of despair over their lost state.

For Reflection or Discussion

Part of the genius of *Pilgrim's Progress* is that it requires readers to analyze the symbolic level of the story and in particular to figure out the nuances of the theological truth that is embodied in the narrative details. It is no wonder that this book has been a favorite in discussion groups. The main contours of reflection and discussion will be the same for all the units of the book: what does this or that detail symbolize, and what does it teach us about the Christian life? Of course the specific answers to those questions will be related to the phase in which Christian finds himself on his journey to the Celestial City. In this introductory unit of the story, we need to probe what the

Bunyan's allegorical characters, whose names consist of personified nouns and adjectives, might initially seem to be thin characters, but this proves to be untrue. The complexity emerges when we analyze the spiritual realities named by these character types, and additionally how these realities constitute threats to one's spiritual life. In this unit we can profitably ponder how Pliable, Mr. Worldly Wiseman, and Mr. Legality can divert one from spiritual progress.

story portrays about the lost state. Then we need to proceed to the experiential level: what forms have these realities taken in our own lives and those of our acquaintances?

PART 1, CHAPTER 2

Through the Wicket-Gate and in the Interpreter's House

Plot Summary

Having escaped the traps represented by such bad counselors as Mr. Worldly Wiseman and Mr. Legality, Christian is put back on the right path by Evangelist. "In process of time" Christian stands before the longed-for wicket-gate and knocks. A character named Good-will opens the gate, and Christian enters. Christian gives a brief traveler's account of his journey up to this point, and Good-will assures him that despite his litany of failures along the way, Christian is not cast out from salvation. In a brief instruction scene, Good-will points out a narrow way on which Christian must proceed.

The first stop will be at "the house of the Interpreter." Christian follows the instruction, and after repeated knockings at the door of the designated house is admitted by Interpreter. On the wall of a room in the house hangs the picture of "a very grave person" holding a book. This "authorized . . . guide" is never explicitly named, but we understand that he represents the Christian minister. The host and guest enter a parlor, where Interpreter "calls for a man to sweep." Dust flies

everywhere. Then a maid sprinkles water to clear the air.

As the two move from one room to the next, they enter a room where they see "two lads" named Passion and Patience, and then a room where a fire burns against a wall that even water cannot quench. Behind the wall "a man with a vessel of oil in his hand" feeds the fire. Next Christian enters a beautiful palace with a heavily guarded door that he enters only after having been battered about. Once inside, Christian sees a man in an iron cage who despairs of ever leaving his miserable state. Entering a final room, Christian sees a man who trembles from fear after dreaming of the last judgment. The episode in Interpreter's house concludes with Christian resuming his journey.

Commentary

Because Bunyan was a man of minimal education, and because the style of the book is seemingly simple and straightforward, many people are lulled into thinking that *Pilgrim's Progress* will be an easy book to read. Any thought along these lines vanishes as we progress through chapter 2 of the story. Externally considered, chapter 2 is an interlude—a visit to a house between phases of journeying. Although the episode is relatively brief, it looks both backward and forward and is simultaneously an end to something and the beginning of something else. In short, it is a transition.

On the one hand, the passage through the wicket-gate is the goal of the first phase of the plot in which Christian progresses toward entry into a safe place. But the visit to the Interpreter's house ends by propelling Christian forward into the next phase of his journey.

At many points, *Pilgrim's Progress* shows the Puritan beliefs and temperament of its author. The high regard for the minister and for preaching that we find in this chapter is entirely in keeping with Puritan values. A scholar once called the preacher the hero of the Puritan movement.

The beating that Christian undergoes as he enters the palace is perplexing. While it may simply mean that the person pressing toward salvation meets persecution, it might also symbolize that a person must be divested of such things as "works righteousness" or reliance on the law (as opposed to grace). We should note that Bunyan teases us with the episode: he merely has Christian say, "I think verily I know the meaning of this," but does not disclose that meaning.

The conventions of allegorical narrative with a didactic ("teaching") purpose come into full view in this episode. The basic rule is that no matter how exciting the events are—so exciting that on a surface level we are reading an adventure story with surprises on nearly every page—nothing exists apart from an instructive purpose. One of the resulting conventions is that we need to settle down to reading many scenes of instruction in which someone imparts important information to the traveler. But the events do not happen only to the protagonist of the story; they happen to us, too, as the traveling companions of Christian. We, too, are dazzled by the endless succession of scenes and characters and bits of religious instruction that Christian encounters.

In reading *Pilgrim's Progress*, it is always important to analyze Bunyan's selectivity of details. The overall purpose of the book is to explain the nature of a Christian's experience, but why did Bunyan include the specific aspects of that experience that we find in his story? To call a house the "Interpreter's house" speaks volumes. The Puritans placed a very high priority on a person's grasp of Christian truth. That grasp requires us to interpret the Bible and theology accurately. It is no surprise that Bunyan highlights the importance of interpretation at this early phase of the pilgrim's progress in faith.

The commentary that appears in the margins for this chapter explains some of the specific details that appear in the visit to the house of the Interpreter. If we stand back from those details to get the big picture, something like the following emerges. Christian still bears the burden on his back (symbolic of sin and the lost state), and

when he asks Mr. Good-will if the latter can help relieve him of the burden, he is told that he must bear it until he comes "to the place of deliverance." This means that the information and warnings that make up Christian's experience in the house of the Interpreter all have to do with preparation for salvation.

So what does Christian learn before he loses his burden? He learns that the preaching of the Word by ministers of the gospel will be a trustworthy guide. He learns the lesson of the dusty room—that the heart of those who are not yet in Christ is corrupt and that the law cannot cleanse the heart (something that only the gospel can achieve). He learns that attaining the life beyond requires patience (as embodied in the episode of Passion and Patience), that good works will not get him into God's kingdom, that paralyzing despair over the possibility of receiving God's grace and fear of final judgment will lose a person Heaven.

For Reflection or Discussion

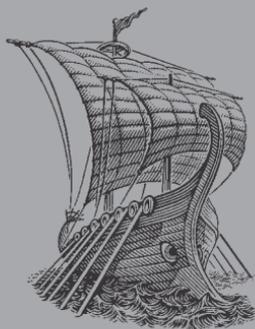
One avenue toward appreciating Bunyan's narrative skill is to ponder his inventiveness in imagining scenes and characters that (a) captivate us at a literal level and (b) correlate to spiritual realities. This level of analysis relates to the story as a story. Then we can analyze what the successive units of action express about the spiritual life and in particular the spiritual aspects of life before conversion. This, in turn, can be pursued down two pathways—what the Bible says that correlates with Bunyan's portrayal and how we experience these realities in our own lives.

The concluding moments in the Interpreter's House, involving "the iron cage of despair" and the man who fears the final judgment, have a long theological tradition behind them. According to this tradition, the worst of all sins is despair because it is a way of hardening oneself in refusal of repentance. To think oneself beyond the reach of God's grace is to doom oneself to Hell.

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LELAND RYKEN (PhD, University of Oregon) served as professor of English at Wheaton College for over 45 years and has authored or edited nearly 40 books.

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