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# *The Pilgrim's Progress*

by

**John Bunyan**

**1678**



MonkeyNotes Study Guide Edited by Diane Sauder

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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

The setting of this story is an unusual one, since the premise of the text is that everything takes place in a dream the author has while resting under a tree. The setting inside the dream is a unique world consisting of the City of Destruction and its surrounding landscape, and the Celestial City, where God resides. The entire text of both parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress* takes place on the road from the City of.....

### CHARACTER LIST

#### PART I Characters

**Christian** - an ordinary sinner from the City of Destruction who journeys toward the Celestial City in search of salvation.

**Evangelist** - a prophet/preacher who is eager to help those who have decided to seek salvation.

**Obstinate and Pliable** - neighbors of Christian. They try to discourage him from making the journey to the Celestial City.

**Mr. Worldly Wiseman** - a contented gentleman who lives a comfortable life. He tempts Christian by encouraging him to settle in Morality rather than seek the more difficult path to the Celestial City. His argument is practical and compelling, but is not what God wants from Christian.

**Good-will** - he saves Christian from the arrows of Beelzebub and pulls him through the Wicket Gate.

**Interpreter** - a holy man who shows Christian several wonders that await all pilgrims seeking the Celestial City.

**Simple, Sloth and Presumption** - three pilgrims who have failed on their journey.

**Formalist and Hypocrisy** - pilgrims who try a short cut and die for their offense.

**Porter** - a watchman of the house where Christian finds rest.

**Apollyon** - a foul fiend that Christian fights with in the Valley of Humiliation.

**Faithful** - a friend and companion to Christian on the road to the Celestial City.

**Mr. Talkative** - a talkative fool who latches on to Christian and Faithful. When he.....

Many additional characters are outlined in the complete study guide.

### CONFLICT

**Protagonist** - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. In Part I, the protagonist is Christian. He is an ordinary pilgrim who has decided to seek salvation by making a journey to the Celestial City, where God dwells. Christian is imperfect, as all sinners are. He fails many times by taking wrong paths, forgetting his ways, and following poor advice. But through it all, his belief in the Lord and his conviction about the presence of the Celestial City does not deteriorate. He .....

**Antagonists** - The antagonist of a story is the person or force that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. The antagonist does not always have to be a single character or even a character at all. There are several antagonistic characters in both the parts of the book, all of whom have the.....

**Climax** - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. Both Parts I and II are based on a series of climactic moments that are quickly followed by moments of peace. Still, Part I has a final climax that occurs in the Dark River, where Christian suffers from a .....

**Outcome** - The outcome for Christian is that he is carried by Hopeful's faith. The two enter the gates of the Celestial City and are surrounded by the glory they have earned. The outcome for Christiana is....

## **SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)**

Both parts of the work are built on the premise that the author has had a dream that he is now relating. In Part I, the dream is of a man named Christian who lives in the City of Destruction. Christian has a great burden on his back. Evangelist advises Christian to seek his salvation in God, telling him that if he journeys to the Celestial City, he will know a glory greater than any he has ever had. Christian resolves to make this trip, despite the fact that his family and neighbors discourage him.

Forsaking all that is dear to him, he sets out for the Wicket Gate, where the journey really begins. On the way, two neighbors named Pliable and Obstinate seek to discourage him. Christian is resolute. Then he encounters the Slough of Despond, where he nearly flounders. Moving on, he is almost persuaded to settle for the village of Morality. Mr. Worldly Wiseman nearly convinces Christian that easy Morality is just as good as hard-earned salvation. But Christian turns away. Finally, he arrives at the Wicket Gate, where he is told to follow the straight and narrow, albeit difficult path to the Celestial City.

Christian meets the Interpreter, a man who shows him many visions and explains their meanings to him. After that, he comes to a Cross and Sepulchre, where his burden is miraculously lifted. He is given papers and armor and told to continue on the path till he reaches the Celestial City.

Just beyond the Cross is Difficulty Hill. Christian meets Formalist and Hypocrisy, two men who are prone to taking shortcuts. Christian tells them salvation is not attained by short cuts. They do not listen, and eventually perish. Christian becomes weary and falls asleep, only to woken by an admonishing voice. When he.....

## **THEMES**

### **Major Theme**

The major theme in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is the cost of salvation. As Christian's journey proves, the road to Heaven is not easy, the cost is great, and the true Christian must be willing to pay the cost no matter what. Man is full of sin, but this does not keep him from attaining glory. Christian is an.....

### **Minor Themes**

Along with this main theme, Bunyan toys with a host of minor themes, almost all of them related to religion. The importance of suffering, the debate between Grace and Works, and the perseverance of the Christian in the face of grave suffering are essential elements of the Christian allegory. Bunyan also.....

## **MOOD**

The mood of the entire book is highbrow and somber. Since the book is a religious allegory on the journey of man to the gates of heaven, each incident has been described with the gravity and seriousness of a life-or-death matter. The obstacles that the pilgrims face are awesome and traumatic, and they proceed in.....

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY**

### **JOHN BUNYAN**

John Bunyan was born in Elstow, England, within a mile of Bedford, sometime in the fall of 1628. He had very little formal education and at an early age was set to work at his father's workshop learning to become a tinker.

At the age of sixteen, he became a soldier in the army and served in the forefront during the English Civil War.

As a child, Bunyan was sensitive and suffered from terrifying dreams. He was tormented by devils and spirits in his dreams, and thought constantly about the possibility of going to Hell. These dreams and his vivid imagination have truly been a source of inspiration for him in his writings.

In 1647, at the age of nineteen, Bunyan married Margaret Bentley at Elstow Church. Her influence over him finally convinced him to attend church regularly and he began to read the Bible. Bunyan made a complete surrender to Christ, and was converted to the Baptist Church of Bedford. Bunyan's Christian faith and knowledge of the scriptures increased steadily. Though his preaching activities increased, he continued his work as a brazier. He started preaching not only at Bedford, but also in the .....

## **HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

In order to understand the spirit of religion in the time *The Pilgrim's Progress* was written, one must understand the Church of England and its rise to influence. In the early sixteenth century, Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic Church and set up his own church, the Church of England, for which he was the commander-in-chief. He supplanted the Pope as the chief religious authority, and mandated that all English citizens belong to his church, pay him tithes, and worship only in that church.

After some time, the English populace grew annoyed with Henry VIII and his successors, seeing the many ways in which religious ideals had become corrupt and distilled. A great deal of these dissenters began to call for a restoration of purity in the church. When they studied the Scriptures, they became confused, seeing the nonconformity of the present church in relation to the Scripture. They felt that the.....

## **SECTION SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS**

### **PART I**

#### **“CHRISTIAN MAKES HIS WAY TOWARD THE WICKET GATE”**

##### **Summary**

The author, John Bunyan, begins his allegory by relating a dream he has had in which a man stands reading a book. The man is in tattered clothes with a burden on his back, trembling and crying aloud, “What shall I do?” His wife and children, not understanding what is troubling him, ask the reason for his despair and he tells them he is burdened by something that will eventually destroy them all. Soon, the man's family and friends become annoyed with him, telling him first that he is sick, then that he is crazy. The man, named Christian, is quite alone in his despair.

One day he meets a man named Evangelist, who comforts him somewhat by telling him if he can follow the Light to the Wicket Gate, he will know what to do to ease his despair. Christian sets out for the Wicket Gate, relieved, until his family tries to stop him. He shrugs them off and runs toward the Light crying, “Life! Eternal Life!” Two men, named Pliable and Obstinate, join Christian on his journey with the intention of stopping him. Christian tries to convince them to join him. Obstinate gives up on Christian and returns to the village. Pliable decides to follow Christian in his quest. Together, the two head for the Light and the Wicket Gate, talking excitedly about the great things that await them.

On the way, Pliable and Christian fall into a pit called the Slough of Despond. It is a swamp full of slime and mud, and the two struggle to get free of it. Pliable is totally discouraged by this event, deciding that Christian's expectations are not worth the troubles they have encountered. He gives up and leaves Christian alone to head to the Wicket Gate. Back in the village, Pliable is the butt of many jokes for falling prey to Christian's “foolish” ideas. Christian, meanwhile, struggles to get across the Slough alone when a man named Help comes and assists.

Christian soon meets a gentleman named Mr. Worldly Wiseman. Mr. Wiseman persuades Christian to lighten his burden by going to live in a village called Morality. Morality is a good place, safe and honest, and there Christian can live a good life. A man named Legality lives in Morality, and Mr. Worldly Wiseman promises that Legality can help Christian forget his burdens. Christian is about to give in when he sees Evangelist in the distance. Evangelist chastises Christian for being so easily deterred from his goals. He tells Christian that Morality is not bad, necessarily; but it is not the Celestial City. He tells Christian that unless he gets to the Wicket Gate and goes inside the Celestial City, he will never get rid of his burdens. Christian begs for forgiveness and sets off anew for the Wicket Gate and the Light.

## Notes

In this first section of the work, the author John Bunyan speaks directly to his readership and informs them that the story to be told is from a dream. In this very brief introduction, he at once commands attention from his readers and credibility for his story. He does this by revealing two things: the story is his dream, and he wants to share his dream with others. It is not a story he once heard, or a legend he wants to repeat. In such a way, he offers the reader incentive for listening and reveals his own interest in narrating this dream. Having quickly established himself as the author and as the dreamer, Bunyan then plunges into the dream and focuses his attention on its main character, a poor man seeking knowledge and salvation in the form of relief from his burdens. The man reads a book, which is the Bible. His burden, a visible load on his back, represents his sins and misdeeds. From the beginning, the symbolism that will characterize *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a great allegory is apparent.

Some common themes of the Christian religion are taken up in this first section, not the least of which is the name of the Pilgrim: Christian. In keeping with Christian themes, Christian, the Pilgrim, makes his decision to seek salvation at any cost. In light of the objections of his wife and children to his quest, Christian abandons them and leaves on his own. Followers of Christ are urged to give up everything and follow him. Everything includes wealth, position, even family. Salvation must be the primary goal of the sinner; nothing should come between a man and God—even family. Historians are able to pinpoint similar moments in the author's life that probably influenced his "dream." Once, before he was first jailed, John Bunyan was told he would not be imprisoned if he would give up his preaching. Despite the fact that he had a wife and children who needed him desperately, Bunyan refused to quit preaching and consequently spent twelve years in prison, leaving his family destitute. The author made the choice to forsake family for his own salvation, and the Pilgrim in his dream does the same. This is a repeated theme in the work.

Sacrificing his family is only the first of many obstacles Christian encounters. A second is the loss of other companionship. Pliable and Obstinate are themselves types of sinners who try to dissuade Christian from his quest. Christian tries to persuade them of the need for salvation, hoping they will accompany him on his journey so he will not be alone. But Obstinate refuses to recognize the need for salvation; he leaves immediately after recognizing that Christian is resolute. Pliable, on the other hand, is fickle and easily influenced. He is won over to the cause of salvation, but is just as easily won over to some other cause at a moment's notice. His desertion of the Pilgrim in the Slough of Despond is evidence of this. Pliable, unable to sustain his interest in salvation because the cost is too high, leaves. The encounters with these two men represent both internal and external forces of resistance and doubt, and leave Christian somewhat confused and alone.

The Slough of Despond is a self-titled pitfall in the quest for salvation. It represents those situations that cause any seeker to despair of ever reaching his goal. Pliable capitulates to despair. Christian, at his lowest moment in the Slough of Despond, receives unexpected aid from Help.

Christian's meeting with Mr. Worldly Wise is interesting because of its ambiguity. Mr. Worldly Wise is not a villain or even a bad character. In fact, he is a good solid man with advice and friendliness. He thinks the

village of Morality will be a good place for Christian, since he can bring his family and live in relative comfort. But Christian is not supposed to settle for good; he is to aim for the best. His moment of weakness is a sin because he nearly gives up the goal the Evangelist has given him. Morality, while comfortable, will never completely ease him of his burdens in the way that the Celestial City will.

The mentioned character Legality represents people who obscure the truth of Christianity in mere obedience to laws. The Evangelist encourages Christian to see comfort in heartfelt ideas, not blind obedience to arbitrary laws.

## **“Christian meets the Interpreter”**

### **Summary**

Good-will opens the gate for Christian and ushers him in quickly, warning him that a man named Beezleubub lives across the way and tries to kill anyone who knocks at the door. Inside, Good-will asks Christian about his journey and shows him a long narrow road. He tells Christian all he needs to do is stay on this very straight, very narrow path and he will find relief from his burdens. He then tells Christian about a man named Interpreter whom he will meet. Interpreter will tell him many great things.

In the Interpreter's home, Christian is led into a room and shown a picture of a man. The man looks very somber, very pious, and very dedicated. The Interpreter tells Christian to study this face; it is the face of a true preacher, and Christian will need to know it well to distinguish between genuine piety and self-righteous imposters. The Interpreter takes Christian into a room filled with dust and orders a man to sweep the room. The clouds of dust cause Christian to choke and cough. Then a young woman comes in and sprinkles water in the dusty room, cleaning it completely of its filth. The Interpreter tells Christian that this room represents the human heart full of sin. The sweeper removes the corruption and the lady with the water acts as the Gospel, cleaning the heart and making it livable.

The Interpreter also takes him to two children named Passion and Patience. The Interpreter explains that Passion signifies the men of this world, who live for the instant gratification of their hearts and are able to keep nothing lasting because of their fiery impetuosity. Patience, however, has more wisdom. He retains what he has and lives for a future reward, in heaven. Christian is next led to a place where a fire burns against a wall and a man tries in vain to put the fire out. On the other side of the wall, another man adds oil to the flames, keeping the fire burning. He is Christ, saving the souls of the people. The Devil, with his bucket of water, can never extinguish the flames of Christ's passion.

Christian is led to the gates of a beautiful palace, where crowds of people clamor to enter. Armed guards keep them out. The Interpreter tells Christian that the gates lead to eternal glory, but that Satan has posted guards to scare people away.

Christian thinks he should be on his way, but the Interpreter has two more things to show him. The first is a man in the iron cage of Despair. The prisoner tells Christian that he was once a Christian as well, heading for the Celestial City. But he slid backward into sin and renounced his Christianity. He can never again be saved, and must always suffer in his chains. The second thing the Interpreter shows Christian is a man terrified that Judgement Day has come. The man has an unclear conscience.

Having shown Christian these visions and explained them, the Interpreter asks if Christian understands. He tells Christian he must always remember that which he has seen. The Interpreter then advises Christian to continue his journey toward the Celestial City.

### **Notes**

Once Christian makes his way to the gates, he concentrates on listening to the stories of the Interpreter. He

learns a great deal, especially when the Interpreter begins to use visions and characters to teach Christian lessons. Passion and Patience are allegorical examples of the two kinds of men there are: those who live for the present and those who live for eternity. The Interpreter advises Christian to be a man of Patience.

Later, the Interpreter shows Christian the gates of heaven, through which many long to pass. The armed guards are there to make entry difficult, if not impossible. A man in the crowd forces his way in, ignoring all obstacles. The Interpreter does not need to explain; Christian understands that he must choose his fate and defend himself well so that he can pass through the armed guards and find relief. It will not be easy, so he must be strong. The visions that follow this scene are examples of the things Christian wants to avoid. One is the unforgivable offence of denouncing God. The other is the painfully uncomfortable situation of having an unclear conscience. In short, the lessons are to be faithful and to be free from guilt. The two men Christian observes and speaks with are examples of the kind of man he does not want to become. In short, this entire section is a lesson in observation and interpretation. Christian must watch, learn, and remember.

John Bunyan keeps referring back to himself and the fact that this narrative is a dream. In this way, the reader is continuously made aware of the author's presence.....

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Christian** - Christian, the protagonist of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is described in the beginning as a man "clothed with rags, standing in a certain place...a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back." He is an ordinary man who has become repentant for his sins. He sets out for the Celestial City against the advice of all his friends and even his wife and children. Salvation becomes the most important goal of his life, one for which he abandons his family. This show of strength reveals him to be dedicated to his goal.

On his journey, Christian reveals his humanity. He listens with care to the advice of Evangelist and the Interpreter. Still, he is nearly waylaid by Mr. Worldly Wiseman by the allure of Morality, where he can enjoy his family without sacrifice. Many times on the journey he makes mistakes; he takes shortcuts, he falls asleep, he forgets advice. But his commitment to the end-goal is unwavering. This is why he is admitted to heaven: though imperfect, he has been faithful and dedicated.

Christian makes friends easily. In the beginning, he is delighted to have Pliable as a .....

**Faithful** - Faithful is a Christian martyr. He is executed for his beliefs, and is carried to heaven in much pomp and glory. Before his death, Faithful and Christian each long to be the one chosen as a martyr—so much is the glory for such a fate. Faithful's death is a portrait in sacrifice. Just as Christian is willing to pay the price of his salvation, so too is Faithful. When the overriding lesson of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is that one.....

**Hopeful** - Hopeful is the other friend which Christian makes in his long journey to the Celestial City. Hopeful meets Christian after the death of Faithful. He is introduced with the phrase "one died to bear testimony to the truth, and another crises out of his aches". Hopeful is a refugee from the sufferings of Vanity.....

**Giant Despair** - Giant Despair is the owner of Doubting Castle. Christian and Hopeful come across him when they cross his grounds on their journey. Giant Despair takes them with him into his castle and.....

**Ignorance** - Ignorance is an interesting character who presents the reader with a dilemma. He is a good-hearted boy with the best of intentions. He sees himself as obedient and interested in salvation. He even makes it past all the obstacles to the gates of Heaven. But his one failing is that he has not fed his faith with.....

**Christiana** - Just as the second work pales in comparison to the first, so, too, does the pilgrim Christiana pale in comparison to Christian. She faces most of the difficulties and hazards that Christian faced in his journey. However, it is clear from the onset that her journey is not as hazardous or dangerous as Christian's. She crosses the obstacles with relative ease, and even has a protector in the person of .....

## **PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS**

Structurally, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a set of two long narratives, written separately but titled the same. For the purposes of this guide, the two works have been denoted Part I and Part II; it is possible to discuss them individually as well. The first book is a narration by the author of a dream he has supposedly had. The author intrudes occasionally to remind the reader of the supposed truth of this dream. It has no imposed parts or chapters, but for the purposes of discussion is broken down into natural segments of action. It chronicles Christian's flight from the City of Destruction and his subsequent journey toward the .....

## **THEMES - THEMES ANALYSIS**

As a religious allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress* expresses a major theme relating to spiritual salvation for mankind. After all, it is born out of John Bunyan's puritanical zeal to reform the souls of so-called Christians and to teach, as simply as possible, the true tenets of the Christian faith. As such, it is structured around a man's journey from earth (the City of Destruction) to heaven (the Celestial City). The man, Christian, is an ordinary everyman; he has a home, a wife, children, even friends. But he also has a burden, which is sin, that he carries with him everywhere. From a book (the Bible) he learns that he can be freed from.....

## **THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS AS RELIGIOUS ALLEGORY**

*The Pilgrim's Progress* is a specific type of literature known as *religious allegory*. Allegory is a form of writing that presents images and ideas through symbolism. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, theology is presented in simple terms as a man travels toward heaven. In the process of making Christian and others stand for certain ideas and ideals, Bunyan has stripped away particularities and instead painted broad portraits of .....

## **STUDY QUESTIONS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS**

1. Explain the various elements of allegory in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
2. Discuss at least three characters other than the pilgrims themselves in terms of their names and personalities (example: Mr. Worldly Wiseman is a practical humanist who settles for easy morality rather than hard won spirituality.)
3. Describe the duel between Christian and Apollyon. Why doesn't Christiana face Apollyon?.....

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