John Bunyan's 17th-century book The Pilgrim's Progress is classic literature's most famous Christian allegory. Bunyan grew up in a village outside Bedford, England, the son of a tinker (or brazier -- a mender of metal household utensils). Initially he followed his father's trade, but in the late 1640s a spiritual awakening caused Bunyan to give up his "ungodly" ways and become a devoted student of biblical scripture. By the end of the 1650s he was a popular preacher and prolific writer who used plain language to spell out a theology in the tradition of Martin Luther and John Calvin. He was a prominent member of a nonconformist Baptist church in Bedford until his refusal to give up preaching without a license led to his imprisonment in 1660.
He spent the next twelve years in jail, preaching to inmates and writing sermons, poems, essays and books. After his release he published the first of several editions of The Pilgrim's Progress (1678), an allegory in which a character named Christian encounters various perils on his way to Heaven. An entertaining read and Protestant teaching tool, the book became a standard of English literature and one of the most reprinted religious texts in the world. Although his exact birthdate is unknown, Bunyan was christened 30 November 1628...

The charm of this work, lies in the interest of a story in which the intense imagination of the writer makes characters, incidents, and scenes come alive as things which are actually known to the common person. This story has a special tenderness and touches of quaint humour which bursts into a heart-moving eloquence, in its pure, idiomatic English.

The poet Macaulay has said, "Every reader knows the straight and narrow path as well as he knows a road on which he has been backwards and forwards a hundred times," and he adds that "In England during the latter half of the seventeenth century there were only two minds which possessed the imaginative faculty in a very eminent degree. One of these minds produced the Paradise Lost, the other The Pilgrim's Progress."

Some notable quotations from The Pilgrim’s Progress

*Dark as pitch
Vanity Fair
Saint abroad, and a devil at home
Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven.*
*One leak will sink a ship, and one sin will destroy a sinner.
As I walked through the wilderness of this world...*  
*He that is down needs fear no fall; he that is low, no pride.*

Hymn:

*He who would valiant be,*  
*Let him come hither;*  
*One here will constant be,*  
*Come wind, come weather*  
*There’s no discouragement*  
*Shall make him once relent*  
*His first avow’d intent*  
*To be a pilgrim...*

----------
Modern use of the title “Evangelist” may lead us to misunderstand Bunyan’s intention. He does not have in mind a specialist, itinerant preacher who, with the allurement of popular entertainment and a light-hearted style calls for “decisions for Christ” that are signified by “walking forward” or “raising a hand” or “signing a card”. Rather he portrays a faithful man of God, an earnest pastor who fulfills his calling as a gospel minister. (www.bunyanministries.org)

As Christian tries to flee the City of Destruction, neighbors mock, threaten, and try to stop him. Two of his neighbours, Obstinate and Pliable set out to discourage him from making his journey to the Celestial City, but Christian is resolute. Obstinate thinks Christian to be a "misled, fantastical fellow" as Pliable begins to consider going with Christian. After Obstinate finds arguing futile, he decides to head back home while Christian eventually convinces Pliable to accompany him on his pilgrimage.

Obstinate and Pliable, of course, have their abodes right within our own hearts, for they are part and parcel of our nature. Obstinate will always rebel against the Word of God "Away with your book", he'll say; and Pliable will always refuse "the cost of discipleship" and whine us homeward when the road is treacherous. It was at the Slough of Despond that Pilgrim and Pliable parted company. As long as there was plenty of talk about "an endless kingdom and crowns of gold and everlasting life and garments that will shine like the sun", Pliable was quite happy, but the Slough of Despond was something that he had failed to reckon with.

**The Slough of Despond** - 'The Mire of Discouragement'

'Slough' - A depression, mire or hollow, usually filled with deep mud; a stagnant swamp, marsh, bog, or pond - pronounced as in 'slow' or as in 'slew' depending on location, but not as in 'tough' where it would mean to shed skin etc.

'Despond' - To become disheartened or discouraged; extreme depression – evident in the more usual modern term signifying dejection… Despondent.
An interesting aside is that the syllable "ough" can be pronounced many ways in the English language due to multiple influences from Germanic, Celtic, Roman, Saxon and Norman roots, e.g.
1. awe: thought, bought, fought, brought, ought, sought, wrought, nought (alt for naught)
2. uff: enough, rough, tough, slough
3. ooh: slough, through
4. oh: though, although, dough, doughnut, furlough, slough, thorough (alt)
5. off: cough, trough
6. ow: bough, plough (plow in US)
7. ou: drought, doughty
8. uh: Scarborough, borough, thorough (alt), thoroughbred
9. up: hiccough (alt for hiccup)
10. ock: lough (Irish for Loch)

Roughly dressed, dough-faced, thoughtful ploughman John Gough strode through the streets of Scarborough after falling into a slough on the Coughlin road near the lough; parched due to the drought he coughed, hiccoughed and then washed up in a trough.

Wicket-Gate – A gate within a garden wall or fence, possibly split into upper and lower halves like a stable door - the entrance to the road that leads the way to the Celestial City; over the portal is the inscription "KNOCK, AND IT SHALL BE OPENED UNTO YOU."

Luke.11
[9] And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

John.14
[6] Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.
Pliable asks three questions of the endless kingdom...

1) Tell me what the things are, and how to be enjoyed. Where are we going?
Christian replies…
There is an endless kingdom to be inhabited and everlasting life to be given us.
There are crowns of glory and garments that will make us shine like the sun.
There shall be no more crying or sorrow.

John.10
[28] And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

2Tim.4
[8] Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Rev.7
[16] They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.
[17] For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

2) And what company shall we have there?
Christian replies…
There will be all manner of creatures present.
There will also be all those that have gone before us…

Isa.6
[1] …I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.
[2] Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

1Thes.4
[16] For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
[17] Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Rev.4
[4] And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

Rev.5
[11] And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;
3) How shall we get to be sharers thereof?
Christian replies…
If you be willing to have it, the Lord will bestow it upon you freely

Isa.55
[3] Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

John.6
[35] And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

John.7
[37] In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

Rev.21
[6] And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

Rev.22
[17] And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Pliable says, ‘Then let’s get cracking!’ To which Christian responds, ‘Hang on a minute! I’m carrying a terrible burden and I can’t go so fast’. Pliable is totally unaware of any burden he himself carries. And so together they fall into the slough. Not long after, Pliable says he's had enough, and clambers out from the nearest side, i.e. the side where he fell in. Christian, however, does not lose focus and resolves to push through the mire still aiming for the Wicket Gate.

Pliable loses his hat!
Eventually Help fished him out and wondered why Christian hadn't use the steps (stepping stones laid under direction of the Lawgiver). Christian answered that Fear, who had been following him so hard, had gripped him so that he couldn't see the way clearly, and he fell in to the mire. This shows that Christian, although well resolved and tougher than Pliable, was still accompanied by the fear of making his decision to leave all that he knew. As Help puts it, “the fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place; and this is the reason of the badness of the ground”.

On his way to the Wicket Gate, Christian is diverted by Mr. Worldly Wiseman into seeking deliverance from his burden through the Law (supposedly with the help of a Mr. Legality and his son Civility in the village of Morality) rather than through Christ, allegorically by way of the Wicket Gate. Evangelist meets the wayward Christian where he has stopped before a life-threatening mountain, Mount Sinai, on the way to Legality's home. Evangelist shows Christian that he had sinned by turning out of his way, but he assures him that he will be welcomed at the Wicket Gate if he should turn around and go there, which Christian does.

One of the greatest things to be noted here is that not all wisdom is from above. What sounds so logical and practical, so civil and moral, is deadly counsel when it leads us away from the way of the Cross.

Here is a very real enemy in every age. He "dwelt in the town of Carnal Policy" our author tells us, i.e. he was one of those citizens who could only look at things in so far as they affected his natural life. Spiritual things have no place in his philosophy, and when he meets the burdened Pilgrim he proceeds along entirely worldly lines of thought and advice. "Who bid thee go this way to be rid of thy burden?" he asks Pilgrim. "Evangelist", Pilgrim tells him. "I beshrew (condemn) him for his counsel", he tells our friend. "How camest thou by thy burden at first?" he asks again; "By reading this book in my hand," Pilgrim confesses, pointing to the precious Word of God. "I thought so", smirks Worldly Wise. And will you just notice how Bunyan will remind us again and again how so much revolves around that "Book" that Pilgrim has in his hands?
After having demoralised the burdened Pilgrim, the Worldly Wiseman next brings forth his own brand of salvation. Worldly Wiseman points Pilgrim to a village called Morality, to "a gentleman whose name is Legality". In other words, away from the Wicket Gate, away from the narrow way that leadeth unto life, away from the Cross of Christ. Look to your works, and to your own efforts to observe the legal things of religion, and act as moral as you can, and God will have to save you for your goodness. This is the redemption of the Worldly Wise, but it is not God's redemption, and soon poor, burdened Pilgrim was going to find that out.

One thing Worldly Wise had not told him was that between him and the Village of Morality there lay a mountain called Sinai – i.e. The Law of God – the Ten Commandments. And soon this mountain began to erupt like a volcano and pour out God's condemnation against Pilgrim's sin, for Pilgrim knew he could never keep the whole law of God.

How thankful he is when Evangelist appears on the scent again with the same old message of salvation only through Christ alone, and he is pointed afresh to the cross.

That way there be dragons!
As Christian turns toward the hill that leads to Morality, Mr. Worldly Wiseman mysteriously disappears! Christian becomes afraid as the hill towers over him close to the path. Also his burden seems to be getting heavier! Not just because he has added more sins to the weight, but because close proximity to the hill increases his sense of sin. The hill represents God’s Law as given to Moses on Mt. Sinai - the demands of God’s righteousness that call for total, perfect and everlasting obedience.

Evangelist turns up and Christian hangs his head low.

After Evangelist came to his rescue, Christian learned that in following the advice of Mr. Worldly Wiseman he sinned. But it wasn’t a single sin, it was three!

Firstly he lost his faith in his goal, the Cross  
Secondly, he turned away from his path  
Thirdly he took the wrong path.

Evangelist attributes these sins to Mr. Wordily Wiseman, but remember this story is an allegory and the sins are part of our own weaknesses.

I couldn’t help but be reminded of an episode of Star Trek I watched many years ago. Cpt. Kirk was trying to reason with an advanced computer that had taken control of his ship because it felt it was superior to humans and could do no wrong. It did make a mistake however (I forget what). Kirk told it in no uncertain terms that it had made three logical errors. First, it made the mistake, second it didn’t recognise that it had made a mistake. And third it didn’t rectify or make amends for its mistake. Whereupon the computer went into self-destruct mode and was promptly beamed into deep space before it exploded!

When Christian recognised he had made three errors he too prepared for death. But he was promised that he would be forgiven, and warned not to stray again. Just get back on the path and head for the gate.
Note that when he gets there he repeatedly knocks, showing that doubts still lingered concerning his acceptance after his recent departure into sin.

He is welcomed by the Gate Keeper (identified in PGII as ‘the one who spilled blood to wash you in’) The Gate Keeper mood is ‘grave’ reflecting that Jesus takes no pleasure being in a place of sin, although he was ready and willing to open the door for a sinner.

Christian is forcibly drawn across the threshold as Beelzebub lies in wait

**Jer.31**

[3] The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

The Gate Keeper gets the whole story retold and then points out that the way ahead is straight and narrow, but that it is accompanied by wide and crooked paths that he must not stray on to. Christian is directed to the house of the Interpreter who is a comforter and teacher (the Holy Spirit) and who will show him great things.
Class 4

Chrisitan’s passage through the Wicket Gate represents the point at which his conversion to Christianity, i.e. ‘his following of Christ’, is beyond question. That does not mean that he is relieved of his burden yet. He still has much to learn and to prove. Bunyan also mentioned the gate in other writings saying it was to be understood mystically, not carnally. It is not the entrance to heaven, but the door to the path leading to heaven. “It is wide enough for all them that are truly gracious and sincere lovers of Jesus Christ, but so straight, as that not one of the other can be any means enter in.” In other words the Wicket Gate is Jesus Christ… the only way.

John.14
[6] Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

At this point Christian does not have much understanding of Christ or the Gospel. He simply is aware of his misery under the burden he carries, as he responds to Jesus’ invitation…

John.7
[37] ...Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

Our pilgrim is asked to recount the story so far, and is given GoodWill’s interpretation of it in return. One notable addition to the tale is that Christian now feels no different from Pliable, in that he too diverted from the path. Christian was saved by God’s Grace, mediated through Evangelist, and as we read on we shall see it won’t be the last time either.

So what now? GoodWill points Christian on, showing him the narrow but straight path ahead that leads in due course to his next stop – The House of The Interpreter.
Christian has come to the House of the Interpreter to see wonderful and excellent things. He has come to be amazed through understanding. This is the unveiling of the glory of the Gospel, also by which the nature of the world is thrown in to sharp relief and revealed as the shameful place we have made it.

However, God does not reveal the truth of his kingdom to just anyone! Only to a genuine pilgrim…

1Cor.2
[14] But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Only after Christian’s story has been examined is a candle lit. This depicts comprehension of the Word as delivered by the Holy Spirit. The revelation of the meaning of the Bible. Someone who reads the book without interpretation by the Holy Spirit will not gain understanding of the true meaning.

He is first shown the man to be his guide. This has been described by some commentators as the apostle Paul and by others of an idealised Puritan preacher (perhaps modeled on John Gifford, who was Bunyan’s pastor and mentor in Bedford).

The man begets children, works with them as they grow and nourishes them – a reference to his preaching to, and conversion of, newcomers to Christ.

The scene changes to a filthy room. Interpreter commands it be cleaned, first by broom and secondly by a good wash down. The first method only serves to choke Christian as the dust flies all over the place. But the second is more effective, easily swept and cleansed.

Once again Bunyan is making a comparative statement of the ways to reach God’s kingdom. Strict obedience to the Law (of Moses) is nigh impossible for us, for although it reveals and condemns sin, it cannot purge it. The path of righteousness, however, will lead to heaven through forgiveness, through the vanquishing of sin by Christ’s blood. This is rather good news for us all, hence the term Gospel.
The scene moves again to a smaller room where two lads sit on chairs. They have been given a promise of wonderful things if they would only wait. But one is fidgety and requests his rewards now!

So he is given them, he delights and revels in the treasures. But before long all are wasted away and he is destitute. Passion wasn’t nice to the other boy, Patience, when he had his riches, but the latter had a “superior wisdom”.

Another nice bit of logic comes into the story here. Patience is willing to wait because he was told he would receive the best things if he did so. But more crucially, he knows that there will be no end to his rewards. Whoever receives first must relinquish to who is next. Whoever receives last must relinquish to no-one. Although Passion scorned Patience when he had his treasures, it was Patience who had the last laugh. The final runner of the relay race gets to keep the baton!

Assault on faith. Christian is now led to a room with a fire blazing by the wall. There is a mystery here for although someone is in the room trying to extinguish the flame with water, it not only remains but actually intensifies. The mystery is explained when Christian is shown another person secretly feeding the fire with oil from behind the wall. What does this image suggest?

The fire is the faith that blazes in a believers heart. The water is scorn and ridicule poured on by the devil in much the same way as Passion laughed at Patience in the earlier image. But the secret is that Jesus is constantly administering to us his Grace, which no only holds back the devil but allows us to grow spiritually in our hearts.
Christian is now led a little way out of the house to observe a palace set with high walls and a gate much like that of a castle. He notices several groups of people: a group on the palace walls finely dressed and walking freely; a group outside milling around wanting to go in; and a group of fierce amoured men preventing passage through the gate. There was also a clerk of some kind sat at a table outside the gate recording the names of those who were ‘determined to enter’ and as he watched a particular individual battled through the siege and was welcomed by those in the palace, especially by three watching from the top!

This scene is a glimpse of Christian’s own destination, the Celestial City, and thus serves as a personal motivator for him.

Bunyan wrote in “The Heavenly Footman”… “they that will have heaven, they must not stick at any difficulties they meet with: but press, crowd, and thrust through all that may stand between heaven and their souls. So run!”

The folks gathered around the palace lack the courage to enter. Such was the case of Pliable who quickly gave up the quest when the going got tough.

But what is the point of the desk clerk? Bunyan says he records the names of all those who are determined to enter. It seems that his purpose is to witness the struggle rather than simply record those who succeed. Otherwise he would have been positioned on the threshold behind the unholy mob. The mob represents a kind of selection process which is given approval as it fits in with God’s purpose rather than being a simple interference by the devil and his minions. The words of the hymn nicely paint this picture…

He who would valiant be, Let him come hither; One here will constant be, Come wind, come weather, There’s no discouragement, Shall make him once relent, His first avowed intent, To be a pilgrim...
Note that in this scene Christian needed no help in interpreting what he saw. He clearly recognised his own struggle and identified with the determined pilgrim. However, in the next scene Christian once again needs the Interpreter’s help.

In a room with little light was a cage. In the cage was a man. He sat looking at the ground, his hands held tightly together. But it was his manner that struck Christian. Instead of raving about demanding to be released, the man was desperately saddened. As if to break his heart. This imprisonment was brought about by the man’s own actions, and Christian wanted to know more.

The narrative clearly describes what is going on. This man too was on course for the Celestial City. He was so sure he was on the right path that he became neglectful. He allowed his lusts freedom. Eventually he committed some pretty major sins such as spitefully opposing the Spirit of Grace and regarding Christ’s blood as unholy. He had joined the devils side. God became angry. The man’s heart had hardened so much he was unable to repent, and was consequently unable to receive forgiveness. He has hope no longer and has committed himself to eternal misery.

Clearly this image is a warning to all those who continue the pilgrim’s journey. Also, the ability to ask for repentance is a gift bestowed by God’s grace. The Spirit had abandoned this man so that he was beyond all hope and now had nothing more to look forward to than Judgment Day and his eventual damnation.
Speaking of that momentous day, Christian is now shown his last image by the Interpreter. It is known as the Dream of the Unprepared Man and is, therefore, a dream within a dream.

This man dreams he has witnessed the calling up for judgment of all souls; pretty much as described in Revelation and elsewhere with Christ sat on a cloud reading off names from a scroll. There are those who are glad to finally see the Lord, whom they had previously only beheld through their faith. And there are those that try to hide or look away in shame.

But what strikes the man in his dream, and hits him so hard that he awakes trembling, is that he is not just a bystander. In fact by three things he is personally affected by the events. Firstly, the cavernous pit of hell opens up right beside him – too close for comfort! Secondly, some people very close to him were plucked up and carried to heaven whereas he was left behind! Last and certainly not least, that Jesus has his eye on the man all the time.

This dream is reminiscent of Scrooge and the ‘Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.’ Although the man awakes clearly terrified, there is still hope for him if he can pull himself together. Yet another warning to Christian not to stray off the path that lie ahead!

By this visit to the House of the Interpreter Christian has been given advice and preparation for the next stage of his journey…
He has been shown the qualities to look out for when accepting help from a guide.
He has been shown that the Law is not enough for salvation – only Christ’s blood can wash away his sins.
He has been encouraged to be patient, and to turn away from the distractions of this world.
He has been shown that while the devil will attack him, Christ will constantly administer his grace.
He has been shown he needs to be valiant, to have courage, with certain knowledge that he will be rewarded.

Finally he was given two warnings…
He has been shown that if you drop your guard you can stray so far that God cannot help you.
He has been reminded that Judgement Day cannot be avoided and he better make progress while he can.

While all this seems gloomy, sad and grave as Bunyan constantly emphasises, our friend Christian is about to receive an almighty gift when he gets back on the road. To find out what read on…

…and he gets to grow a beard too!
As Christian continues, he finds the path walled on both sides. We know he’s not going to be permanently enclosed because he’s been told that the path will meet broad and tempting roads to steer clear of. Perhaps this is a sign of the security he is enjoying after having been so recently filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit (the Interpreter). Perhaps it shows God’s protection for new believers as they begin their journey, similar to the way that the GateKeeper pulled him in to safety. Bunyan names this wall ‘Salvation’.

He follows the path to a sight that fills him with wonder and joy. The Cross set atop a small hill, with a tomb or sepulcher at the base of the hill. As he begins to climb, the burden on his back is loosened, falls away and disappears into the mouth of the tomb never to be seen again. The total disappearance of the burden shows a once-and-for-all atonement of his sins.

Later in the story he will say that he saw ‘One bleeding upon a tree’ and it was the very sight of Him that made the burden fall off his back. This is the subject of some deliberation among commentators. If he saw the Cross with Jesus upon it, then technically he was looking not at a cross but at an image of Jesus’ death, i.e. a crucifix. Such an image is a favoured symbol among Roman Catholics. John Bunyan may have had his reservations about the early Anglican church but he was certainly not adherent to Catholicism. His Baptist church was one step further removed from the Roman church.

However, it is important to not get too ‘Sloughed’-down in detail here. The point is that Christian looks and looks upon the cross. This steadfast gazing is his Faith. All that he had read about in his book related to the scene in front of him. He gazed upon it with a passion and an intensity that eventually the “springs within his head sent the waters down his cheeks”.

There are two ways to interpret this expression…
1. An emotional flood of tears
2. A reference to the Living Water of John 4:

   [13] Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:
   [14] But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

As he was crying three angels came to him to explain and re-equip him for the journey ahead.
   The first calmly declares his sins have been forgiven.
   The second reclothes him and casts off his old stuff.
   The third sets a mark upon Christian’s forehead and gives him a scroll to take to the Celestial City. This is a communication from heaven that God is at peace with him. His guilt and condemnation have been removed because of the price paid at the cross. His new robes of righteousness have replaced his old rags of unrighteousness. The mark he bears preserves him from divine judgement. And the scroll is assurance that once he reaches the Celestial City he will be accepted into heaven.

Isa.61
[10] I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Isa.64
[6] But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.
Christian takes off singing and leaping for joy, descends the hill and in pretty short order comes across three dozy characters asleep with chains on their legs – Simple, Sloth and Presumption. He wakes them and rather naively offers to help them with their burdens. Remember, he has only just been relieved of his own, so he is a very energetic but inexperienced young pilgrim. Their responses completely baffle him – “I see no danger”, “Just a bit more sleep”, and my favourite expression of the book so far… “Every tub must stand upon his own bottom”… whatever that’s supposed to mean!

The three represent three affictions of the spirit – ignorance, lethargy and haughtiness.

But he doesn’t need to ponder them for long before two other characters (Formalist and Hypocrisy) come along having taken a short-cut to the path, circumventing the Wicket Gate and the House of the Interpreter. Christian has no trouble understanding these two at all, and launches a strongly worded attack accusing them of being equivalent to thieves. “To this they made him but little answer; only they bid him look to himself”.

Formalist and Hypocrisy seem to have everything about them going wrong. They are proud of where they come from (the land of Vain Glory). They seek Mt. Zion simply to receive praise rather than to give praise. Their entry to the path is hardly legitimate. Of course, they believed it was based on the premise of Custom, as people from their home had been doing it this way for well over a thousand years. They couldn’t resist chiding Christian over his clothes, saying they were charity from neighbours to hide his nakedness. This lit Christian’s fire for once again he launches into a scathing criticism of their reprehensible unpreparedness by way of showing what he had been through and by what he had been given.

Battle over they walk along the path, kind of together but with Christian in the lead – still muttering to himself as they giggle behind his back.
Christian carries on walking the ‘straight and narrow’ occasionally reassuring himself by checking on his scroll that he keeps close to his chest. Before long the path meets its first junction at the foot of a hill. Although the way goes straight ahead at a steep gradient, there are alternatives that go to the left (Danger) and to the right (Destruction). That’s convenient for the storyline, for Christian resolutely attacks the Difficult way up the hill, while Formalist and Hypocrisy each take one of the alternatives, postulating that they will all meet up on the other side. This choice is driven by willingness to put up with a little discomfort. Of course had they been through the teaching of the Interpreter and the Gate Keeper they would have known not to have strayed. So, not wishing to relinquish their current comfort level, the two imposters ended up doomed a short while later as they met impenetrable forest or inhospitable open spaces. It was a good job Christian didn’t get friendly with those two or they might have led him to his doom also.

God’s grace is evident in a spring at the foot of the hill, for the pilgrims to refresh themselves before the task in front of them. Only Christian was thirsty for this grace. Being strengthened he bounds up the hill, then walking, then crawling until he reaches a place of rest that the Lord had prepared, about half way up. But, instead of merely resting and enjoying the view, our friend gets a little complacent, starts admiring his new cloak and decides to have a nap. Time flies by and before he knows it the day is drawing on. Christian needs to find a place for the night and he still hasn’t completed the hill. So he quickly rushes off to the summit, completely ignorant that he’s left his beloved scroll behind.

At the top of the hill Christian meets Timorous and Mistrust who are hightailing-it back down the path. Panicking, they tell of two lions loose up ahead. Cool-thinking Christian reasons that although danger may lay ahead, so too does the promise of eternal life. Moreover, to return toward the City of Destruction would only lead to judgement by fire and brimstone. So he reaches for the scroll to reassure himself once more and discovers his own sense of panic when he discovers its absence. Steps need to be retraced to recover the scroll, just as he had to after his encounter with Mr. Worldly Wiseman. Eventually though, he resumes his pilgrimage and seeks out the beasts of which Timorous and Mistrust spoke.

Spot the artist’s error!
By feeling for the scroll and not finding it, Bunyan is making an allegory with the bouts of depression, uncertainty and attacks by the devil that all sinners who turn to Christ must endure. The image of the armoured man fighting to get into the palace comes to mind. Christian knows he’s in a fix, and what he must to do rectify the problem. He’s not a quitter and in fairly short order asks God for forgiveness and gets back on track. He has a price to pay, however. For now he must follow the path to those lions in the dark!

Christian is heading for the Palace Beautiful, to rest. Perhaps this is an allegory for the Church where he can receive good company and fellowship, in addition to board and lodging for the night. But as he approaches he sees the lions on either side of the path, which to Christian seems even more narrow than before.

As was the case at the Wicket Gate, a porter or gate-keeper called Watchful is there to help those who get as far as the lions. For unbeknown to Christian the lions are tethered. All he needs to do is focus on the Palace and walk right down the centre of the path – a simple test of faith. The lions ‘roared and snarled’ but were unable to harm him.

Christian then willingly succumbs to what seems like a grueling interview process. First he must identify himself to Watchful and summarise his purpose, then one of the gals of the house will come to ask more, finally he will be admitted to come and tell all to the rest of the family. Talk about singing for your supper!

This is perhaps a reflection of the mode of admission to the Baptist church of Bunyan’s day. Sincerity of heart and passion for Jesus Christ had to be shown, and this required several meetings with the church minister and elders before admission was granted. Bunyan names the interviewers as Discretion, Prudence, Piety and Charity (Love) showing tender sympathy and yet caution in accepting strangers into their midst.

As he recounts his tale, the image develops of the ‘fellowship supper’, an allegory representing our repentance and forgiveness as we prepare to share in the feast at the Lord’s table.
Class 8

Christian, having recounted his tale, is taken to the top of the palace to see the Delectable Mountains, an encouragement for him as they are close to the Celestial City. Then one morning, he is led by Discretion, Prudence, Piety and Charity down the hill to continue his journey. He is now in the Valley of Humiliation which will lead him into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Those names don’t exactly instill confidence in our friend, but the ladies have suited him in armour and the gate Porter told him to look out for Faithful, another pilgrim who was headed that way. He doesn’t have to go far before he finds need for his suit and weaponry.

As Bunyan puts it, Christian meets a “very foul fiend”, an “exceedingly hideous monster” – Apollyon. The name comes from Revelation where he is the king over a plague of stinging, locust like warriors who descend upon mankind in the end times. The best translation to English would be ‘the Destroyer’ The shared Greek and Roman Apollo was god of many things including Light, the Sun, Truth, Prophecy, Archery, the Arts, and Medicine. However, his effect on Healing is probably the connection to Apollyon for Apollo was believed to have the power to bring ill-health and deadly plague as well as the ability to cure.

Cunningly, the ladies of the palace omitted placing armour on Christian’s back. So he would be vulnerable if he turned tail and fled. Interestingly, when his family follow his footsteps in Book2, they find a very pleasant valley in this spot. Apparently Bunyan is saying that Christian brought this upon himself through a level of humility that is somewhat lacking in his pilgrimage compared with theirs.

Apollyon sneers at Christian and speaks to him disdainfully reminding him that Apollyon is a prince and Christian’s boss, because of where he came from. Christian replies that his wages were death, and he is leaving to seek better employment! Apollyon offers Christian better terms but the latter replies that he has given his loyalty to the King of Princes and cannot betray him. Apollyon says ‘well you have betrayed me already!’ . Christian replies ‘That’s different! I was young and foolish to have followed you, besides my new King absolves me of responsibilities to you and forgives my error’. Apollyon starts to steam a little at this point.
Apollyon tries another tack saying Christian will come to a sticky end if he stays on the path because he will transgress against Apollyon. But if he switches allegiance Apollyon will rescue him (the devil looks after his own). ‘The sticky end, as you put it’ says Christian ‘is my Lord’s way of testing a pilgrim’s love and loyalty. The Lord’s followers will have their reward when he comes in glory along with the angels’.

‘But you have already been unfaithful’ says his opponent. ‘Like when?’ says Christian. ‘Like the Slough of Despond, the deviation of Mr. Worldly Wiseman, the loss of you precious scroll, your fear of the lions, and your inward desire of glory’.
‘Fair enough’, admitted our friend. ‘But those things were done under your influence – I have repented and received a full pardon’.

Now Apollyon gets really mad and starts flinging out darts. Christian has his shield so defends himself quite well. But as the battle progresses Christian starts to loose ground and takes on some wounds. Apollyon presses his advantages and succeeds in knocking Christian down and separating him from his sword.

As Apollyon lifts up to deal the fatal blow Christian nimbly grabs the sword and buries it into Apollyon’s breast. The beast flees never to be seen again.

It was God who intervened at that last moment to see off Apollyon. For throughout the battle Christian had spoken declaring his faith in the Lord.

“when I fall, I shall yet arise – for we are more than conquerors through him who loves us.”

Christian gets upon his knees and gives thanks for his deliverance. By some mysterious hand he was given some leaves from the Tree of Life to heal his wounds. He rested, took strength from his packed lunch, picked up his sword and continued on his way. But there were no more fiends to have to deal with.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death familiar from Psalm 23 is referred here by Bunyan as being from the book of Jeremiah. In Chapter 2 of we have the verse...

[6] ...Where is the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt?

Key to the verse is the expression ‘that led us’, for no-one can pass without the Lord as guide.

Christian meets another two ex-pilgrims heading backward, like Timorous and Mistrust. They are called the ‘children of those who had earlier delivered a report of the Good land’. This is a reference to spies that Moses sent out to reconnoiter the Promised land ahead of the Israelites. On that occasion they came back talking of milk and honey. But, when urged to lead the people and take the land, the spies then changed their tune, talking fearfully of the inhabitants and desolation, (see Numbers 13). Similarly these two talk of darkness, creatures, howling and unspeakable misery.

Christian resolutely moves on, the Ditch to one side, the Quagmire to the other, and so dark he knows not where his foot will fall. He passes the gates of Hell. He hears demons approaching him and even hears the sounds of their whispering into his ear great blasphemies. Christian is very confused to the point he believes
himself the source of those blasphemies. He gives up his trust in the sword and turns to All-Prayer to sustain
him. At this the demons move away. He hears someone reciting verses from Psalm 23 and is uplifted.

Gradually dawn breaks and he sees clearly the valley he has passed through and how blessed by grace he has
been. In the light he also see the way ahead, which is far from pleasant – full of traps and snares which if it
were dark and he had lived a thousand times he believes all his lives would have been lost.

He approaches carnage – the product of two giants who lived in a nearby cave. However Christian gets a free
ticket through the area because the giant Pagan is now dead and has been for sometime. The other one, Pope,
is past it and can do little more than grin at passing pilgrims and bite his nails.

In Bunyan’s time not many years had passed since Queen Mary (a catholic) had Protestants massacred in
London and Oxford. Bunyan is quite happy to regard Catholicism as bed-fellows with Paganism, which
incidentally at that time would have included followers of the prophet Mohammed. Bunyan was wrong to
conclude that paganism was on the retreat.

Christian has made it through the valley. He climbs a small hill and sees Faithful in the distance.
At last he has a companion and rushes to catch him up!

Throughout this class is has been a lot of fun to research the illustrations that have been drawn over the years
to depict Christian’s journey. However, it is interesting to note that I have had no luck whatsoever in finding
an image of that dreadful valley, where even painters and wood-carvers fear to tread!

However, a photographer in the Crimea was moved to capture the following image after the massacre of the
Charge of the Light Brigade reminded him so vividly of that desolate place in Bunyan’s story.

With that parting note I thank all of you Faithful companions for taking this journey with me.

Happy reading!

David Fisher 3-8-2008

‘Valley of the shadow of
death’; Roger Fenton;
Crimea; Oct 25th, 1854