

# John Bunyan

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**John Bunyan**  
(November 28, 1628 – August 31, 1688), a Christian writer and preacher, was born at Harrowden (one mile south-east



John Bunyan.

of Bedford), in the Parish of Elstow, England. He wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*, arguably the most famous published Christian allegory.

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## Life



Part of a series on

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Cooperative Baptist Fellowship  
National Baptist Convention  
Southern Baptist Convention  
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Bunyan had very little schooling (about 2-4 years). He followed his father in the Tarish Tinker's trade, and served in the parliamentary army at Newport Pagnell

(1644 - 1647); in 1649 he married a pious young woman, whose only dowry appears to have been two books, Arthur Dent's *Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety*, by which he was influenced towards a religious life. He lived in Elstow till 1655 (when his wife died) and then moved to Bedford. He married again in 1659.

In his autobiographical book, *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan describes himself as having led an abandoned life in his youth; but there appears to be no evidence that he was, outwardly at any rate, worse than the average of his neighbours: the only serious fault which he specifies is profanity, others being dancing and bell-ringing. The overwhelming power of his imagination led him to contemplate acts of impiety and profanity, and to a vivid realisation of the dangers these involved. In particular he was harassed by a curiosity in regard to the "unpardonable sin," and a prepossession that

he had already committed it. He continually heard voices urging him to "sell Christ," and was tortured by fearful visions. After severe spiritual conflicts he triumphed over this condition, which might nowadays be treated as a semi-psychotic mental illness. He became an enthusiastic and assured believer and was received into the Baptist church in Bedford by immersion in the River Great Ouse in 1653. In 1655 he became a deacon and began preaching, with marked success from the start.

Bunyan fiercely disagreed with the teachings of the Quakers and took part in written debates during the years 1656-1657 with some of its leaders. First Bunyan published *Some Gospel Truths Opened* in which he attacked Quaker beliefs. The Quaker Edward Burrough responded with *The True Faith of the Gospel of Peace*. Bunyan countered Burrough's pamphlet with *A Vindication of Some Gospel Truths Opened*, which Burrough answered with

*Truth (the Strongest of All) Witnessed Forth.*  
Later the Quaker leader George Fox entered the verbal fray by publishing a refutation of Bunyan's essay in his *The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded*.

In 1658 Bunyan was indicted for preaching without a licence. He continued, however, and did not suffer imprisonment till November 1660, when he was taken to the county gaol in Silver Street, Bedford. There he was confined at first for three months, but on his refusing to conform or to desist from preaching, his confinement was extended for a period of nearly 12 years (with the exception of a few weeks in 1666). It was during this time that he completed his allegorical novel: *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He was released in January 1672, when Charles II issued the Declaration of Religious Indulgence.

In that month he became pastor of the Bedford church. In March 1675, he was

again imprisoned for preaching (because Charles II withdrew the Declaration of Religious Indulgence), this time in the Bedford town jail on the stone bridge over the Ouse. (The original warrant, discovered in 1887, is published in facsimile by Rush and Warwick, London). In six months he was free and as a result of his popularity he was not again arrested.

On his way to London he caught a severe cold, and died as a result of a fever at the house of a friend at Snow Hill on August 31, 1688. His grave lies in the cemetery at Bunhill Fields in London.

## ***The Pilgrim's Progress***

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Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* in two parts, the first of which was published in London in 1678 and the second in 1684. He had begun the work in his first period of



Bunyan in prison

imprisonment, and probably finished it during the second. The earliest edition in which the two parts combined in one volume came in 1728. A third part falsely attributed to Bunyan appeared in 1693, and was reprinted as late as 1852. Its full title is *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*.

*The Pilgrim's Progress* is arguably one of the most widely-known allegories ever written, and has been extensively translated into other languages. Protestant missionaries



commonly translated it as the first thing after the Bible.

Two other successful works of Bunyan's are less well-known: *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), an imaginary biography, and *The Holy War* (1682), an allegory. A third book which reveals Bunyan's inner life and his preparation for his appointed work is *Grace Abounding to the chief of sinners* (1666). It is very prolix and, being all about Bunyan himself, would seem intolerably egotistical except that his motive in writing it was plainly to exalt the Christian concept of grace and to comfort those passing through experiences like his own.

The above works have appeared in numerous editions, and are accessible to all. There are several noteworthy collections of editions of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, e.g., in the British Museum and in the New York Public Library, collected by the late James Lenox.

Bunyan became a popular preacher as well as a prolific author, though most of his works consist of expanded sermons. In theology he was a Puritan, but there was nothing gloomy about him. The portrait his friend Robert White drew, which has often been reproduced, shows the attractiveness of his true character. He was tall, had reddish hair, prominent nose, a rather large mouth, and sparkling eyes.

He was no scholar, except of the English Bible, but he knew scripture thoroughly. He was also influenced by Martin Luther's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, in the translation of 1575.

Some time before his final release from prison Bunyan became involved in a controversy with Kiffin, Danvers, Deune, Paul, and others. In 1673 he published his *Differences in Judgement about Water-Baptism no Bar to Communion*, in which he

took the ground that "the Church of Christ hath not warrant to keep out of the communion the Christian that is discovered to be a visible saint of the word, the Christian that walketh according to his own light with God." While he owned "water baptism to be God's ordinance," he refused to make "an idol of it," as he thought those did who made the lack of it a ground for disfellowshipping those recognized as genuine Christians.

Kiffin and Paul published a response in *Serious Reflections* (London, 1673), in which they argued in favor of the restriction of the Lord's Supper to baptized believers, and received the approval of Henry Danvers in his *Treatise of Baptism* (London, 1673 or 1674). The controversy resulted in the Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists leaving the question of communion with the unbaptized open. Bunyan's church admitted pedobaptists to fellowship and finally became pedobaptist (Congregationalist).

Bunyan has the distinction of having written, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, probably the most widely read book in the English language, and one which has been translated into more tongues than any book except the Bible. The charm of the work, which gives it wide appeal, lies in the interest of a story in which the intense imagination of the writer makes characters, incidents, and scenes alike live in that of his readers as things actually known and remembered by themselves, in its touches of tenderness and quaint humour, its bursts of heart-moving eloquence, and its pure, idiomatic English. 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*." Bunyan wrote about 60 books and tracts, of which *The Holy War* ranks next to *The Pilgrim's Progress* in popularity, while *Grace Abounding* is one of the most interesting pieces of biography in existence.

A passage from Part Two of *The Pilgrim's Progress* beginning "Who would true Valour see" has been used in the hymn "To be a Pilgrim".

## Works

- *A Discourse Upon the Pharisee and the Publican*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7782
- *A Few Sighs from Hell, or the Groans of a Damned Soul*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7270
- *Christ a Complete Saviour (The Intercession of Christ And Who Are Privileged in It)*, reprinted by Diggory

Press, ISBN 978-184685-6709

- *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7744
- *Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7775
- *No Way to Heaven But By Jesus Christ*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7805
- *Of Antichrist and His Ruin*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7294
- *Praying with the Spirit and with Understanding too*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-6389
- *Saved by Grace*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7799
- *Seasonal Counsel or Suffering Saints in the Furnace - Advice to Persecuted Christians in Their Trials & Tribulations*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7331
- *The Doom and Downfall of the Fruitless Professor (Or The Barren*

*Fig Tree*), preprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7324

- *The End of the World, The Resurrection of the Dead and Eternal Judgment*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7362
- *The Fear of God - What it is, and what it is not*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7751
- *The Greatness of the Soul and Unspeakableness of its Loss Thereof*, ISBN 978-184685-7348
- *The Heavenly Footman*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7287
- *The Holy City or the New Jerusalem*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7768
- *The Holy War - The Losing and Taking Again of the Town of Mansoul (The Holy War Made by Shaddai upon Diabolus, for the Regaining of the World)*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7836
- *The Life and Death of Mr Badman*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN

978-184685-735X

- *The Pilgrim's Progress*
- *The Saint's Knowledge of Christ's Love, or The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-6693
- *The Strait Gate, Great Difficulty of Going to Heaven*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-6716
- *The Water of Life or The Richness and Glory of the Gospel*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7317
- *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7300
- *Walking so as to Please God*, reprinted by Diggory Press, ISBN 978-184685-7249

## References

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William (1910). *A Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature*. London, J.M. Dent & sons; New York, E.P. Dutton.

## See also

- English Dissenters
- To be a pilgrim - Hymn from The Pilgrim's Progress

## External links

- Works by John Bunyan at Project Gutenberg
- *The Pilgrim's Progress* on Wikisource
- Writings of Bunyan at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library.
- John Bunyan Online Online Bunyan Archive.
- Acacia John Bunyan Online Library
- John Bunyan works
- John Bunyan Museum
- Free audiobook of *The Pilgrim's*

*Progress* from LibriVox

- *Pilgrim's Progress* condensed, illustrated
- *The Heavenly Footman* by Bunyan
- The Pilgrims Podcast A podcast of Bunyan's works.

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