What is Pilgrim’s Progress?

The Pilgrim’s Progress is the story of a man who is seeking to find his way to heaven. It represents the Christian life as a journey, a quest for salvation.
And thus it was: I writing of the Way
And Race of Saints, in this our Gospel-Day,
Fell suddenly into an Allegory
About their Journey, and the way to Glory,
In more than twenty things, which I set down;
This done, I twenty more had in my Crown,
And they again began to multiply,
Like sparks that from the coals of Fire do flie.
This Book it chalketh out before thine eyes,
The man that seeks the everlasting Prize:
It shews you whence he comes, whither he goes,
What he leaves undone; also what he does:
It also shews you how he runs, and runs,
Till he unto the Gate of Glory comes.
Bunyan’s Explanation

This Book will make a Travailer of thee,
If by its Counsel thou wilt ruled be;
It will direct thee to the Holy Land,
If thou wilt its Directions understand:
Yea, it will make the sloathful, active be;
The Blind also, delightful things to see.
HOW THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS REPRESENTED
The Christian Life

• **It is represented as a race:** “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win” (I Cor. 9:24).

• **It is represented as a battle:** “Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier” (II Tim. 2:3-4).
The Christian Life

• **It is represented as an *athletic competition*: “And also, if any one competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules” (II Tim. 2:5).

• **It is represented as a *rest*: “Therefore, let us fear lest, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it” (Heb. 4:1).
Bunyan’s Emphasis

For John Bunyan, the Christian life is represented as a journey.
“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow-heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”
Bunyan’s Book

• It is not a P.D. James whodunit.
• There is no surprise ending to give away.
• It is not a parable.
• It is not a riddle to solve.
• It is a delightful story with didactic intentions.
YOUR OWN JOURNEY
As you set off on your own journey to read *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, you will soon discover that Bunyan’s book is simply a portal through which you have entered into a world full of adventure, one that is filled with hobgoblins and dragons, giants and lions, castles and courtrooms, faithful friends and diabolical enemies, along with fierce battles and peaceful rest. With every turn of the page, you will encounter intriguing and colorful
characters, imaginative places, and engaging drama punctuated with some of the most enlightening and life-transforming dialogue ever penned.
THE POWER OF STORY
The Power of Story

• Compelling stories make for good reading, even when the deeper significance is ignored or unseen.
• Beauty and goodness in art have the capacity to touch the human spirit apart from explanations or rational thought.
• Stories are able to carry moral weight.
• Stories may be used to bring about personal transformation.
Questions for Reflection

• What if Bunyan wanted us to see more?
• What if every metaphor he employed could take us to untold depths in our quest for the truly spiritual life?
• What if his allegory could actually bring us face to face with the living God so that we could be “called in, welcomed, received, and acknowledged by God” (C.S. Lewis)?
“My dark and cloudy words they do but hold
The Truth, as Cabinets inclose the Gold.”
• Cabinets crafted by skilled furniture-makers are works of art in themselves, but when filled with gold become secondary, irrespective of their magnificence.

• Bunyan’s purpose is not to denigrate the beauty and craftsmanship of the cabinet, but to direct our attention to the greater value of the nuggets within.
Bunyan & Cabinets

• Bunyan wants us to fling open the doors of the cabinet and go for the gold.
• He is inviting us into this deeper significance, unveiling truth after truth from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City.
• As we pass from one metaphor to another, page after page, we can almost hear Bunyan whispering in our ears: “Do you see this truth? See? And...look...another. Do you see that one?”
THE PRIMARY GOAL OF READING
The Primary Goal of Reading

• To receive from the book what the author intended.
• True communication between writer and reader takes place when the content has been understood as the author conceived and wrote it.
• A careful reader approaches literature with a discerning eye, evaluating and categorizing
The Primary Goal of Reading

language, style, coherence, atmosphere, character, form, point of view, and many other literary devices, in order to read the piece for what it is (and not as something else).

• *The Pilgrim’s Progress* deserves to be read with this kind of care, lest the moral and spiritual lessons presented by Bunyan be overlooked.
THE VISION OF JOHN BUNYAN
“There are books which, while didactic in intention, are read with delight by people who do not want their teaching and may not believe that they have anything to teach – works like Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* or Burton’s *Anatomy*. This is the class to which *The Pilgrim’s Progress* belongs. Most of it has been read or re-read by those who were indifferent or hostile to its theology, and even by children who perhaps were hardly aware of it” (C.S. Lewis).
Reducing the Risk of Misreading

• We must comprehend the literary vehicle he used to convey his message.

• Understanding his method and style of writing will greatly enhance our reading experience, enrich our lives, and provide us with clear directions to heaven.
What Kind of Book is It?

“The first qualification for judging any piece of workmanship from a corkscrew to a cathedral is to know what it is – what it was intended to do and how it is meant to be used.”

- C.S. Lewis
What is It?

The Pilgrim’s Progress is an allegory.
Bunyan’s Apology

• Bunyan used various words – metaphors, types, shadows, parables, dark and cloudy words, dark figures, truth in swaddling-clouts, matter in another dress, figure, and similitude – to convey that he was using a literary device in order to “make truth to spangle, and its rayes to shine.”
Bunyan’s Apology

• Bunyan was confident that his allegory would interest, entertain, and thus instruct in the way to heaven.
• Learning more about Bunyan’s use of allegory will enable us to uncover the rich, spiritual insights that God entrusted to him.