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Historical Background, Author's Apology

Words to Know:

Take some time to look up any other words you are not familiar with.

Amiss – not in the right or expected way

Strait – a position of difficulty, perplexity, distress, or need

Loath – unwilling

Palliate – to make less severe or intense

Ad infinitum – without end

Inkling – hint, whisper, insinuation

Expostulate – to reason earnestly with someone in order to correct

Carpeth – to find fault in a disagreeable way

Commixes – to become mixed

Fowler – one who hunts wildfowl

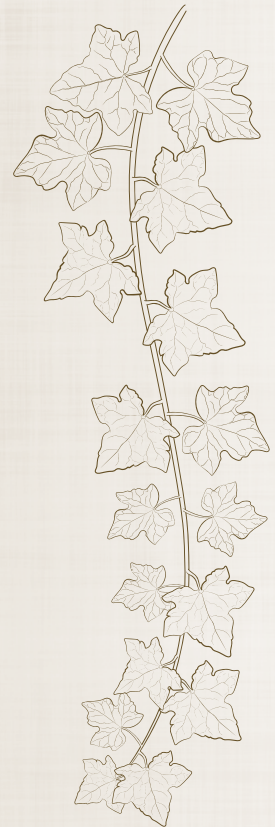
Feign – to pretend

Lustre – soft reflected light

Carper – one who finds fault in a disagreeable way

Chalketh – to mark, draw, or write

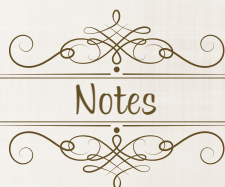
Amain – with might, with full force



Memory verses: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

We suggest writing memory verses on coil-bound index cards so that verse cards can be kept together and easily reviewed.

Historical Background



PILGRIM'S PROGRESS (FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1678) was written by John Bunyan while he was in a Bedford, England, jail. But why was an itinerant preacher who dearly loved the Word of God writing from a prison cell?

The story of John Bunyan and how he came to be imprisoned actually begins in A.D. 1324 with the birth of another baby boy named John—John Wycliffe. At that time, Catholicism was the dominant religion in most of Western Europe, including England where Wycliffe lived. Although the Catholic Church has its roots in the New Testament church, gradually over the years, it had accumulated teachings and practices that were contrary to what the Word of God teaches.

John Wycliffe studied theology, law, and philosophy at Oxford and eventually became a doctor of theology. He spent a great deal of time studying his Bible. He discovered that what he was learning from Scripture contradicted what the Catholic Church taught, and he set out calling the church back to the authority of God's Word. The "Morning Star of the Reformation," as Wycliffe is called, was responsible for producing the first handwritten version of the Bible in English, enabling thousands of people to know for themselves what God says in His Word. He and his "Bible men" (as their critics called them) preached the *true* gospel of Jesus Christ—that salvation comes through faith by the grace of God (apart from good works as the Church taught) and that the Bible alone (not the Church) was the final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

After Wycliffe's death in 1384, John Hus, one of Wycliffe's disciples, continued the call for church reformation from his home in Prague. Because of his teachings, Hus spent 73 days in confinement, was tried and then condemned to death as a heretic. When asked to recant his beliefs, he said, "In the truth of the gospel which I have written, taught and preached I will die today with gladness." As he was tied to the stake and the fire was kindled beneath him along with the very manuscripts of Wycliffe, Hus cried out, "In 100 years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed!" That was in 1415.

A little over 100 years later, John Hus' words came true in an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther. In 1517, after searching the Scriptures and realizing that salvation came by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, Luther posted 95 theses on the church door at Wittenberg, Germany. These statements listed 95 points on which

Luther believed that the Church had departed from the teaching of God’s Word. When told to recant his statements (which the pope declared “heretical”), Luther said, “Unless I am convinced by proofs from Scriptures or by plain and clear reasons and arguments, I can and will not retract, for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.” He was then forced into exile, during which time he translated the Bible into the common language of the German people. Luther died of natural causes in 1546.

During this time, reformation was continuing in other parts of the world as well. In England, the Roman Catholic Church’s blatant disregard for the authority of God’s Word can be summed up in this statement by a clergyman to William Tyndale: “We are better to be without God’s laws than the Pope’s.” Outraged, Tyndale replied, “I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life ere many years, I will cause the boy that drives the plow to know more of the scriptures than you!”

God *did* spare Tyndale’s life, which allowed him to translate the New Testament from Greek (Wycliffe had done his translation from the Latin Vulgate) into then-modern English. He used a moveable-type printing press that Johann Gutenberg had invented in the 1450s to print vast quantities of the newly translated Bible, distributing them to the English masses. His work later became the basis for the Authorized King James Version of 1611. Because of his beliefs, Tyndale was imprisoned for 500 days, tried for heresy, convicted and then strangled and burned at the stake in 1536.

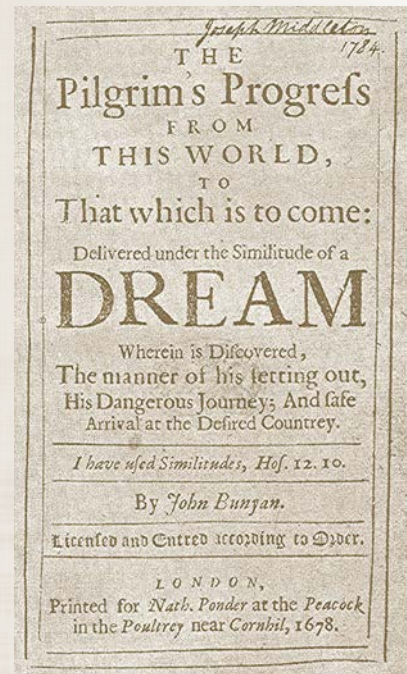
It was in 1536 that a young man named John Calvin arrived in Geneva, Switzerland, where the Reformation had already started under the direction of William Farel. Calvin had been forced to flee Paris a few years before after preaching a sermon calling the church to return to the true gospel. He provided organization to the Reformers’ thoughts and ideas and wrote the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Although there were differences between what the various Reformers taught, they all united around five main doctrines: *Sola Fide* (by faith alone), *Sola Gratia* (by grace alone), *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *Soli Deo Gloria* (glory to God alone), *Solus Christus* (by Christ alone).

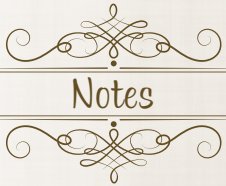
Of course, the radical reform that was sweeping through Europe did not leave governments untouched. Although there was much religious ferment going on everywhere, we’ll focus on the events in England leading up to John Bunyan’s time.

When Tyndale was martyred, his last words were, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes!” The king on the throne at that time was Henry VIII. He had broken with the Roman Catholic Church (he was upset that the pope would not grant him a divorce from Catherine of Aragon) and declared himself the head of the Church of England. Although he was influenced by the Reformers to some extent and instituted moderate reform in the church, he “remained, in his doctrine, a Roman Catholic to the end of his life.”¹

1 Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn, *From Puritanism to Nonconformity*, Evangelical Press of Wales, England, p. 12, 1962.



First edition title page



Notes



After Henry died, his son Edward VI (at the age of nine) ascended the throne. Although he was sympathetic to those who desired to reform the church and instituted legislation that supported the Reformers, Edward died when he was sixteen, in 1553.

He was followed by his older sister, Mary I, a staunch Catholic, who overturned the reforming work of her brother. The queen's persecution of the Reformers was merciless and earned her the nickname "Bloody Mary." Although many Protestants were put to death, some fled to the continent, where they came in contact with Reformation leaders such as Calvin, who continued to call for reform in church practices as well as doctrine.

After Mary died, her younger sister Elizabeth I took the throne. "Good Queen Bess," as she was called, endeavored to restore peace to her realm by attempting to build bridges between the various religious ideals. She reasserted England's independence from Rome with the Act of Supremacy in 1559 and attempted to bring order to the Church of England with the Act of Uniformity, also in 1559. This act required that every man assent to the *Book of Common Prayers* and attend church once a week or be fined. However, the prayer book contained teaching which the Puritans (a group which desired to reform the church completely from within) rejected as unbiblical. This led those who disagreed to leave the Anglican church (although a few Puritans decided to stay and continue to push for reform within the church). Those who followed a man named Robert Browne became known as Brownists or Separatists, while those who followed Thomas Cartwright were known as Presbyterians. Persecution of those not part of the established church increased throughout Elizabeth's reign.

After the death of Elizabeth in 1603, her cousin James I (then king of Scotland) ruled England and Scotland jointly for the next 22 years. The Puritans thought that James would be sympathetic to their ideas because he came from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. However, James was more concerned with power than truth; and although he convened a conference to discuss the Puritans' petitions, those attending the conference were leaders of the Anglican church who had strayed even farther from biblical teaching and opposed Puritan thought. You may have heard of the main product of this conference: the 1611 King James Bible (over 70% of which was based on Tyndale's translation).

Because life was becoming more unbearable for them, many left the country. In fact, it was in 1620 that the voyage of the *Mayflower* took place, bringing the Pilgrims to American soil. The Plymouth Colony was settled by the Pilgrims (or Separatists) in 1620. The Massachusetts Bay Colony (1628) was settled by the Puritans (or, as they called themselves, "Non-separating Congregationalists" since they did not consider themselves to have separated from the Church of England, although they separated themselves from its errors).

In 1625 James died and his son Charles I became king. Three years later, John Bunyan, the author of our story about Pilgrim, was born into this religious and political turmoil, which would only get worse.



John Bunyan

King Charles and Archbishop Laud worked to enforce Elizabeth's Act of Uniformity in various ways, forcing everyone to conform to the teachings of the church. Those of a "tender conscience" were grieved by these teachings and practices and refused to conform, facing severe persecution. Eventually, Charles I and the archbishop attempted to make the Scots also conform. But instead, the Scots rebelled and introduced the National Covenant.

The religious and political turmoil caused a divide between Parliament and the king and resulted in a war between those loyal to the king (known as "Royalists" or "Cavaliers") and those (called "Roundheads") who agreed with the changes Parliament wanted to make in the government and the Church of England. Oliver Cromwell, a vibrant Puritan, became the commander of the parliamentary army (of which Bunyan was a member from 1644–1647) and eventually led them to victory over the Cavaliers. Charles I was tried for treason in 1648 and executed in 1649.

Cromwell abolished the monarchy, and England became a commonwealth with Cromwell as the Lord Protector of the Realm. The Puritans experienced great religious freedom and tolerance during his leadership (1649–1658).

During this time John Bunyan married and began an intense spiritual struggle (lasting from 1648 to 1652), which is chronicled in *Grace*

Abounding to the Chief of Sinners and reflected in *Pilgrim's Progress* in various places. At some point in his ordeal, Bunyan encountered Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians, which encouraged him greatly that he was not alone in the struggles and temptations he was facing. Of Luther's commentary, Bunyan later wrote in *Grace Abounding*:

It also was so old that it was ready to fall piece from piece if I did but turn it over. Now I was pleased much that such an old book had fallen into my hands; the which, when I had but a little way perused, I found my condition, in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my heart. This made me marvel; for thus thought I, This man could not know anything of the state of Christians now, but must needs write and speak the experience of former days. ... I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians, excepting the Holy Bible, before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience.

John Gifford (after whom Evangelist, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, is modeled) also served as a spiritual mentor to Bunyan. In 1653, after finally being assured that he was indeed a child of God who had been chosen from before the foundation of the world and whose sins had been forgiven, Bunyan joined Gifford's independent congregation (which was not part of the state church) in Bedford, England. He also began preaching at various places around the countryside, drawing on his own experiences and knowledge of the Scriptures since he had no formal training.

He continued preaching until Cromwell died and the monarchy, under Charles II, was restored in April 1660. The king began at once to withdraw the religious freedom the country had experienced, and those who refused to conform to the king's decrees were incarcerated under the Elizabethan Act of Uniformity. The "Nonconformists" refused to use the *Book of Common Prayer* or to attend services at "state" churches, and instead used



The Moot Hall in Elstow, Bedfordshire, England



John Bunyan's tomb

the Bible to guide them and attended local gatherings of like-minded believers.

In November 1660, Bunyan was arrested for not conforming to the king's edicts and spent the next twelve years in jail. When he was questioned by a Mr. Cobb about whether or not he would "leave off" preaching, Bunyan responded by quoting the Morning Star of the Reformation, "Wycliffe saith that he which leaveth off preaching and learning of the Word of God for fear of excommunication of men, he is already excommunicated of God, and shall in the day of judgment be counted a traitor to Christ."²

During his imprisonment, he supported his family by making shoe laces and writing several books (among them *Profitable Meditations*, *Christian Behaviour*, *The Holy City* and *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*). He was released from jail because of a royal pardon in May 1672 and became pastor of the independent church at Bedford, which was meeting in a barn.

All of this finally brings us to 1677 when John Bunyan was once again jailed for preaching without license. He spent six months in a jail on a bridge over the River Ouse. It was here that Bunyan finished penning his most famous work, *Pilgrim's Progress*, which he originally wrote to entertain his children when they came to the one-room jail to visit him.

2 A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan, Minister of the Gospel at Bedford in November, 1660, by John Bunyan, MDCCLXV. Bunyan probably knew of Wycliffe through reading John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, which was one of the only two books Bunyan had with him while in jail—the other was the Bible.

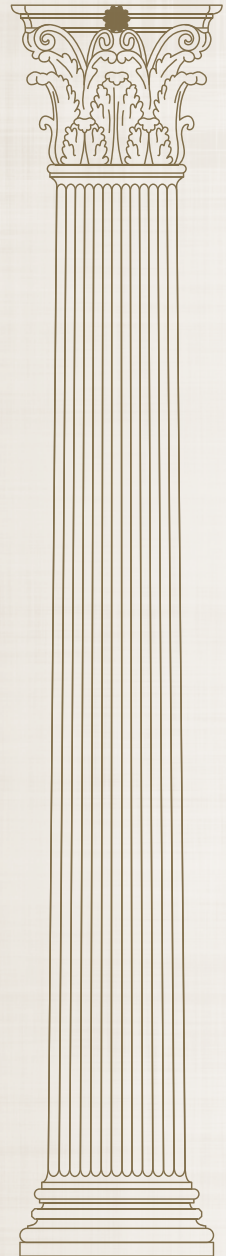
After being released from prison, John Bunyan spent his remaining years writing and preaching around the countryside. He died on September 3, 1688, from a cold he caught after being drenched in a heavy downpour while trying to reconcile a father and son. His tomb is in Bunhill Fields, outside of London, where he is buried with other Nonconformists.

Author's Apology³

When at the first I took my pen in hand
Thus for to write, I did not understand
That I at all should make a little book
In such a mode: nay, I had undertook
To make another; which, when almost done,
Before I was aware I this begun.

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 fly.
Nay, then, thought I, if that you breed so fast,
I'll put you by yourselves, lest you at last
Should prove *ad infinitum*, and eat out
The book that I already am about.
Well, so I did; but yet I did not think
To show to all the world my pen and ink
In such a mode; I only thought to make
I knew not what: nor did I undertake
Thereby to please my neighbor; no, not I;
I did it my own self to gratify.

Neither did I but vacant seasons spend
In this my scribble; nor did I intend
But to divert myself, in doing this,
From worsen thoughts, which make me do amiss.
Thus I set pen to paper with delight,
And quickly had my thoughts in black and white;
For having now my method by the end,
Still as I pull'd, it came; and so I penned
It down; until it came at last to be,
For length and breadth, the bigness which you see.



3 This section was written by John Bunyan to explain to his readership why he wrote it and to counter many of the criticisms he received about it.



Well, when I had thus put mine ends together
I show'd them others, that I might see whether
They would condemn them, or them justify:
And some said, let them live; some, let them die:
Some said, John, print it; others said, Not so:
Some said, It might do good; others said, No.

Now was I in a strait, and did not see
Which was the best thing to be done by me:
At last I thought, Since ye are thus divided,
I print it will; and so the case decided.

For, thought I, some I see would have it done,
Though others in that channel do not run:
To prove, then, who advised for the best,
Thus I thought fit to put it to the test.

I further thought, if now I did deny
Those that would have it, thus to gratify;
I did not know, but hinder them I might
Of that which would to them be great delight.
For those which were not for its coming forth,
I said to them, Offend you, I am loath;
Yet since your brethren pleased with it be,
Forbear to judge, till you do further see.

If that thou wilt not read, let it alone;
Some love the meat, some love to pick the bone.
Yea, that I might them better palliate,
I did too with them thus expostulate:

May I not write in such a style as this?
In such a method too, and yet not miss
My end—thy good? Why may it not be done?
Dark clouds bring waters, when the bright bring none.
Yea, dark or bright, if they their silver drops
Cause to descend, the earth, by yielding crops,
Gives praise to both, and carpeth not at either,
But treasures up the fruit they yield together;
Yea, so commixes both, that in their fruit
None can distinguish this from that; they suit
Her well when hungry; but if she be full,
She spews out both, and makes their blessing null.

You see the ways the fisherman doth take
To catch the fish; what engines doth he make!
Behold how he engageth all his wits;
Also his snares, lines, angles, hooks, and nets:

Yet fish there be, that neither hook nor line,
Nor snare, nor net, nor engine can make thine:
They must be groped for, and be tickled too,
Or they will not be catch'd, what'e'r you do.

How does the fowler seek to catch his game
By divers means! all which one cannot name.
His guns, his nets, his lime-twigs, light and bell:
He creeps, he goes, he stands; yea, who can tell
Of all his postures? yet there's none of these
Will make him master of what fowls he please.
Yea, he must pipe and whistle, to catch *this*;
Yet if he does so, *that* bird he will miss.
If that a pearl may in toad's head dwell,
And may be found too in an oyster-shell;
If things that promise nothing, do contain
What better is than gold; who will disdain,
That have an inkling of it, there to look,
That they may find it. Now my little book,
(Though void of all these paintings that may make
It with this or the other man to take,)
Is not without those things that do excel
What do in brave but empty notions dwell.

“Well, yet I am not fully satisfied
That this your book will stand, when soundly tried.”

Why, what's the matter? “It is dark.” What though?
“But it is feigned.” What of that? I trow
Some men by feigned words, as dark as mine,
Make truth to spangle, and its rays to shine.
“But they want solidness.” Speak, man, thy mind.
“They drown the weak; metaphors make us blind.”

Solidity, indeed, becomes the pen
Of him that writeth things divine to men:
But must I needs want solidness, because
By metaphors I speak? Were not God's laws,
His gospel laws, in olden time held forth
By types, shadows, and metaphors? Yet loth
Will any sober man be to find fault
With them, lest he be found for to assault
The highest wisdom! No, he rather stoops,
And seeks to find out what, by pins and loops,
By calves and sheep, by heifers, and by rams,
By birds and herbs, and by the blood of lambs,
God speaketh to him; and happy is he
That finds the light and grace that in them be.

But not too forward, therefore, to conclude
That I want solidness—that I am rude;
All things solid in show, not solid be;
All things in parable despise not we,
Lest things most hurtful lightly we receive,
And things that good are, of our souls bereave.



My dark and cloudy words they do but hold
The truth, as cabinets inclose the gold.

The prophets used much by metaphors
To set forth truth: yea, who so considers
Christ, his apostles too, shall plainly see,
That truths to this day in such mantles be.

Am I afraid to say, that holy writ,
Which for its style and phrase puts down all wit,
Is everywhere so full of all these things,
Dark figures, allegories? Yet there springs
From that same book, that lustre, and those rays
Of light, that turn our darkest nights to days.

Come, let my carper to his life now look,
And find there darker lines than in my book
He findeth any; yea, and let him know,
That in his best things there are worse lines too.

May we but stand before impartial men,
To his poor one I durst adventure ten,
That they will take my meaning in these lines
Far better than his lies in silver shrines.
Come, truth, although in swaddling-clothes, I find
Informs the judgment, rectifies the mind;
Pleases the understanding, makes the will
Submit, the memory too it doth fill
With what doth our imagination please;
Likewise it tends our troubles to appease.

Sound words, I know, Timothy is to use,
And old wives' fables he is to refuse;
But yet grave Paul him nowhere doth forbid
The use of parables, in which lay hid
That gold, those pearls, and precious stones that were
Worth digging for, and that with greatest care.

Let me add one word more. O man of God,
Art thou offended? Dost thou wish I had
Put forth my matter in another dress?
Or that I had in things been more express?
Three things let me propound; then I submit
To those that are my betters, as is fit.

1. I find not that I am denied the use
Of this my method, so I no abuse
Put on the words, things, readers, or be rude
In handling figure or similitude,
In application; but all that I may
Seek the advance of truth this or that way.
Denied, did I say? Nay, I have leave,
(Example too, and that from them that have

God better pleased, by their words or ways,
Than any man that breatheth now-a-days,)
Thus to express my mind, thus to declare
Things unto thee that excellentest are.

2. I find that men as high as trees will write
Dialogue-wise; yet no man doth them slight
For writing so. Indeed, if they abuse
Truth, cursed be they, and the craft they use
To that intent; but yet let truth be free
To make her sallies upon thee and me,
Which way it pleases God: for who knows how,
Better than he that taught us first to plough,
To guide our minds and pens for his designs?
And he makes base things usher in divine.

3. I find that holy writ, in many places,
Hath semblance with this method, where the cases
Do call for one thing to set forth another:
Use it I may then, and yet nothing smother
Truth's golden beams: nay, by this method may
Make it cast forth its rays as light as day.

And now, before I do put up my pen,
I'll show the profit of my book; and then
Commit both thee and it unto that hand
That pulls the strong down, and makes weak ones stand.

This book it chalketh out before thine eyes
The man that seeks the everlasting prize:
It shows you whence he comes, whither he goes,
What he leaves undone; also what he does:
It also shows you how he runs, and runs,
Till he unto the gate of glory comes.
It shows, too, who set out for life amain,
As if the lasting crown they would obtain;
Here also you may see the reason why
They lose their labor, and like fools do die.

This book will make a traveler 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 slothful active be;
The blind also delightful things to see.

Art thou for something rare and profitable?
Or would'st thou see a truth within a fable?
Art thou forgetful? Wouldest thou remember
From New-Year's day to the last of December?
Then read my fancies; they will stick like burs,
And may be, to the helpless, comforters.

This book is writ in such a dialect
As may the minds of listless men affect:
It seems a novelty, and yet contains
Nothing but sound and honest gospel strains.

Would'st thou divert thyself from melancholy?
Would'st thou be pleasant, yet be far from folly?
Would'st thou read riddles, and their explanation?
Or else be drowned in thy contemplation?
Dost thou love picking meat? Or would'st thou see
A man i' the clouds, and hear him speak to thee?
Would'st thou be in a dream, and yet not sleep?
Or would'st thou in a moment laugh and weep?
Would'st thou lose thyself and catch no harm,
And find thyself again without a charm?
Would'st read thyself, and read thou know'st not what,
And yet know whether thou art blest or not,
By reading the same lines? O then come hither,
And lay my book, thy head, and heart together.

Summary

