

RUSSELL SANDERS
6-29-2021
HISTORICAL PERSECUTION OF BELIEVERS
LESSON 20
JOHN BUNYAN

John Bunyan (1628-1688) of England is best remembered as the author of the book Pilgrim's Progress. The book is an allegory that reflects Bunyan's own personal journey of faith.

As a youngster he grew up in the formal religious environment of the official state owned and governed Church of England. He struggled with his sins of dancing and playing the outdoor game of tipcat on Sunday (prohibited by the church.)

As a young married man in his twenties, his traveling occupation as a tinker led him to a place where he overheard some women talking about faith and the need for personal salvation through Christ. This pricked his heart because God had previously spoken clearly to him, saying "Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to heaven? Or have thy sins, and go to hell?" This led him to a salvation experience in his mid-twenties.

This identified him as a Puritan, an informal movement of believers who sought to rid the Church of England of its similarities to the Catholic Church and its practices.

Bunyan began preaching on the streets and to any group that would invite him. Many of the groups identified as Baptists or Congregationalists. He became incensed with the persecutions the government and its church did to the Baptists.

His first book, Gospel Truths Opened, stirred controversy between two religious groups: the Ranters and the Quakers. During this time of the 1650's he had considerable freedom to preach. This all changed when the Stuart dynasty assumed England's throne in 1660.

It was against the law for anyone to preach or to serve in any ministry capacity (Elder, Deacon, Pastor, etc.) unless officially ordained by the Church of England. This caused him to be arrested and imprisoned for preaching without a license.

During his imprisonment from 1660 to 1672 he wrote a spiritual autobiography, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, and began The Pilgrim's Progress. He was put in prison a second time for six months in 1675 where he completed the manuscript for Pilgrim's Progress which was first published in 1678.

Every character, place, or event in that fictional allegory were a representation of himself and his spiritual journey. It became so popular that for the next hundred or more years, most believers had only two books to help them in their spiritual life: the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress.

Bunyan was again put in prison a third time before passing away at age 59. Prison in those days was very bad as people struggled to survive in them. They were not like our prison “hotels” of today with air conditioning, television, three meals a day, etc. Bunyan endured many years of it, but his *Pilgrim’s Progress* is perhaps the greatest or at least the most important literary work next to the Bible of all time. It is still in print today nearly 350 years later and he is the best-remembered of the Puritans who had an impact on the formation of America as did the Quakers.