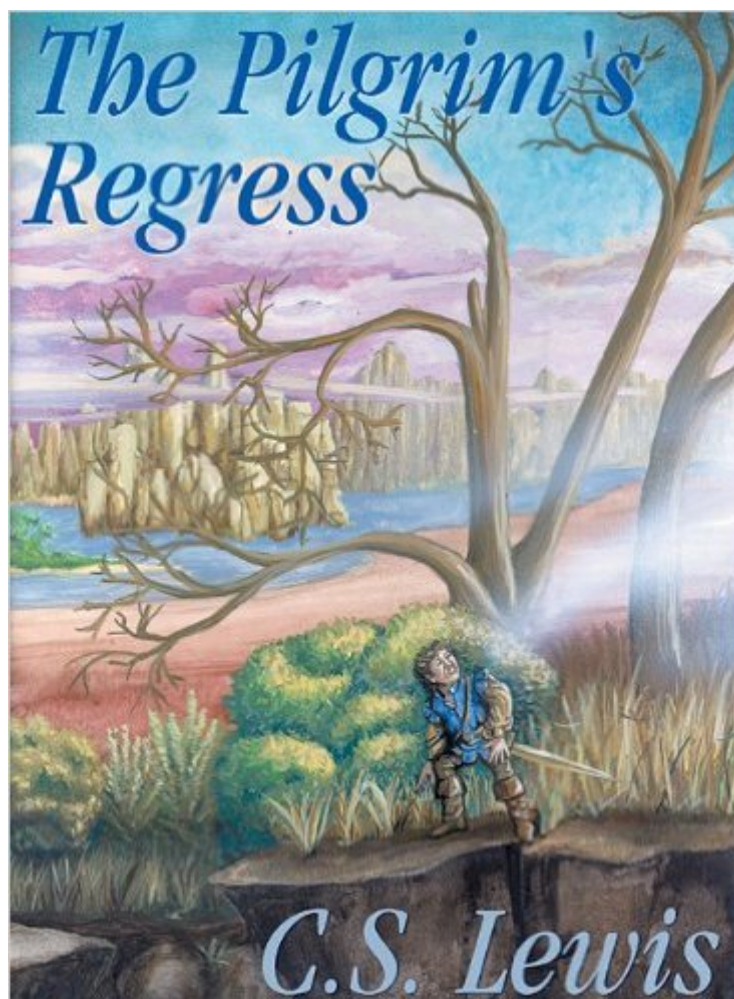


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# Pilgrim's Regress



## Synopsis

In this novel written within a year of his conversion, Lewis characterizes the various theological and temperamental leanings of different parts of the Church. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I have read almost everything C.S. Lewis wrote, including letters to the editor, all three space novels, *Till We Have Faces*, and many others. One thing I really enjoy is seeing how bits from one work will spill over into others, and how each writing reflects on his life. I have read the *Pilgrim's Regress* now 4 times, and every time I see more in it. And not just about Lewis: about the development of thought up through the years between the wars. Overall, this is a book that is well worth reading. It gives the best explanation I've seen (better than *Surprised by Joy*, IMO) of his idea of Joy, and of the "Island" (image from *Regress*) that drove him to finally find Christ. Passages from the "Heaven" chapter of *The Problem of Pain* are close, but I thought in *Regress* he uses the allegory of the Island most effectively to explain his concept of longing and Joy. At first, I must admit, *Regress* is difficult to understand for somebody without much background in fiction or allegory such as myself, and without much background in the philosophical movements of pre-war Europe. There are, however, two things in the book that are very helpful: (1) the afterword where Lewis explains his background; and (2) the explanatory headings on the tops of the pages that track the allegory. Lewis said he wasn't sure this was a good idea of his, but I don't agree. Now, even not being a student of allegory, I would not read the headings first, or even primarily (as a kind of Cliff's Notes of the book).

Read that way, they detract from the book. Rather, I read the whole book through the first time without the headings; only then, after I finished a section, going back and reading the headings on that section. Kind of like reading the Cliff's Notes along with the book itself; very useful, but hardly anybody does it.

While I wouldn't put it quite at the top of my list of Lewis' works, this guided stroll through Lewis' psyche on its dialectic course towards Christ is a pleasant and enlightening journey, full of off-beat humor and insight. Starting from Puritanica (what modern readers might call Fundie-town) and the dread of a black pit with snakes and scorpions for those who do not obey "The Landlord," the hero sets out in the other direction in search of an island paradise. Along the way, he meets a diverse and amusingly described panoply of personalized tempters. Some of these characters are a bit hard to finger, but many still survive as philosophical specimens. Lewis has fun showing cultural Christians, Marxists, and bohemian artists in a Medieval landscape, alongside dragons and giants. Reminiscent less of Bunyan than of *Journey to the West* at times, Lewis engages a self-deprecating and even slapstick humor to point to serious lessons. But to me, the most poignant scene in the book was a more serious dialogue of riddles between Lady Reason and a Giant whose glance revealed the sub-human underpinnings of soul, revealing horrors in every person. I understood that scene very well. The giant of reductionistic science still walks the land and holds many captive, and may have held me had Lady Reason not come to my rescue, too, with Lewis' help. Reason defeated the monster with a few quick jabs, which go to the heart of the matter, but if you don't like allegory, Lewis develops his arguments more fully elsewhere. Those who would like to see the story of those years in prose, should read *Surprised By Joy*. (*Pilgrim's Regress* is not meant to be entirely autobiographical, I don't think.) For a didactic version of the confrontation with the giant, see *Abolition of Man*; if you want it in fairy-tale form, read Puddleglum's brilliant speech in *The Silver Chair*. Lewis was nothing if not a versatile writer.

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C. S. Lewis says more with one letter than some people say their entire lives! This book requires two pre-requisites: "*Pilgrim's Progress*" by Bunyan, and "*Surprised by Joy*," by Lewis. You will be lost without this background. It also helps to be a genius, but I don't believe I can be of much help in that area. This is an allegory of Lewis' eventual conversion to Anglican Christianity. It presents Lewis's own story in the story of a young boy John and his struggles with religion, and how he wanders here and there trying to find God and what He is about. The chapters are usually short, but

in typical Lewis fashion, he packs a lot of thought in a small sentence. And the surprising thing is that he is so readable. There is no academic or philosophical mumbo-jumbo. It is all to rare straight talk! This book is not just a journey to Christianity and to Christ, but also a vary biting commentary on the worldly and secular philosophies current in the world. Pay close attention, and see how many of the pundits and professors you see pasted in the story! This is Lewis's first book, and it his his "Q" document--the source for much of his corpulent corpus of writing. It is is a good overview to Clivian thought!

C. S. Lewis is best known for his story telling and his apologeticism of Christianity. He is truly in his element when he combines the two in the form of allegory. The Pilgrim's Regress is a fine example of this and is notably cleaner in its approach than later allegories such as The Chronicles of Narnia and his science fiction trilogy. Where his science fiction gets weighted down by details and lofty text, The Pilgrim's Regress allows one's imagination to supply the details and uses simple substitution instance as language, thus more direct. The Pilgrim's Regress is also written in such a manner as to hold the interest of young and old readers alike. While some of the language and terminology may be foreign to young children, of junior high school age through adulthood will find it an absorbing and provocative read. Lewis does not take the model's (the Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan) overly optomistic or Pollyannish approach, but details in the form of myth the doubts and searching of a soul toward enlightenment. Although similar to Bunyan's work as an allegory, Lewis layers the meanings of the symbology in the book to a truly artistic form. Why, even the names of the chapters invite reflection. For example, two of the chapters are identically titled as Leah For Rachel, and yet no explanation is given for these names (which are not characters in the book) or the meaning. The meaning only becomes clear after reflecting on the premise of the biblical charachters of Leah and Rachel. Not knowing the bible story, however, would not spoil the reading of this tale. This type of layering on top of the basic allegorical plot line allows the book to be read and re-read with new insights each time. That can truly grow old with this book is, in my opinion, the hallmark of any classic. Enjoy it for the story, enjoy it for the insights and enjoy it for its timelessness. One would truly be better for the experience.

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