

# A Heart Set on Pilgrimage

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**Hebrews 11:8-16 (NKJV) “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; <sup>10</sup> for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. <sup>11</sup> By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. <sup>12</sup> Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. <sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. <sup>15</sup> And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”**

**Psalm 84:5 (NKJV) “Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage.”**

Did you know that your life in God is compared to a pilgrimage? For most of us in the United States, we think of pilgrims as the early Puritan settlers who wore black hats with silver buckles. Like the saints in the Bible, these early settlers were looking for a new homeland. However, these settlers were not the first pilgrims. They were following in the steps of many others in the Bible whose lives were characterized by spiritual pilgrimage.

In Hebrews 11 we are told that Abraham and Isaac dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country. God had promised Abraham this land. It was his by virtue of promise and yet he did not own it. He lived in the Promise land as a stranger and pilgrim. Abraham's son Isaac also lived in the land as a pilgrim. When Isaac's son Jacob went to Egypt he said to Pharaoh, *“The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.”* So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and

*went out from before Pharaoh.”* (Genesis 47:9-10 NKJV) Abraham, Isaac and Jacob called themselves pilgrims on this earth as a testimony that they looked for a better, that is, a heavenly country and for a city whose Builder and Maker is God.

God established a pattern of pilgrimage for His people Israel. He established three festival pilgrimages to be kept each year—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. No matter where they lived, Jerusalem was their spiritual mother. The temple of God unified Israel at one time and one place for national worship. These pilgrimages were like spiritual homecomings. The pilgrim travel itself prepared them for their worship of God at His temple.

There are fifteen psalms that collectively are called the “Song of Ascents” (Psalm 120-134). The Hebrew pilgrims often used these Psalms to prepare their heart on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Although some lived at great distances, they did not see the journey as a burden. For them, the preparation was just as important as the destination.

Pilgrims often traveled together for the purpose of security and companionship. The journey produced family and social bonding as men and their families traveled, camped, ate, laughed, prayed, shared, and fellowshiped together. As they passed through cities and villages other families might join their company. By the time the group arrived at Jerusalem it could be a very large company indeed. As they arrived they would often be welcomed by other family and friends who had arrived before them. It was indeed a time of great reunion and celebration! In the same way, we as believers will one day end our earthly pilgrimage and join a great reunion of loved ones in the New Jerusalem!

The time involved with travel was difficult but each step closer filled them with greater expectation for the time of worship to come. The time involved in travel also helped them prepare their hearts to worship the Lord when they finally arrived. So it is in our earthly lives today. Our pilgrimage in this life helps prepare us to meet our Lord and Savior when we finally see Him.

Pilgrims were, in essence, a traveling community that identified with the wilderness wanderings of their forefathers on the way to the Promise Land. The Sons of Korah recounted their pilgrim experience in Psalm 42:4 (NKJV) *“When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.”* As part of a committed Jewish family, Jesus and His kin folks were regularly involved in such pilgrimages. In Luke 2:41-50 we find such an account when Jesus was only twelve years old.

The status of our lives as God's people is best characterized by pilgrimage. Why? The Bible teaches us that this world is not our home. Like those ancient pilgrims, we are simply passing through. There are beautiful places along the way where we might be tempted to settle. But settling is not the purpose of our pilgrimage. It is unwise to collect treasures of this world along the way. We must travel light. While we can enjoy the scenery and experiences along the way, our heart should long for the New Jerusalem. No matter where we live, we look for the day when we will not need to live in the land where we dwell as a stranger. We know that our eternal citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

Unfortunately, many nominal Christians live as citizens of this world while passing through as tourists at church on Sunday. The opposite is true of genuine believers. True believers consider themselves citizens of a heavenly country and pilgrims in this world. They are traveling to a heavenly city prepared for them in a heavenly country. It is a city which has foundations. It is a city whose Builder and Maker is God. It is a city called "The Heavenly Jerusalem" and "The New Jerusalem". As they pass through this life, they eagerly invite others to join them on this pilgrimage to see and worship their Lord!

Are you a pilgrim or a Sunday tourist? Are you living like a citizen of this world or like a citizen of heaven? Is your heart set on settling or seeking? Are you grasping a future on this planet or are you seeking the world to come? Are you leaving treasures of this life behind to seek a heavenly country and a heavenly city? The pilgrimage of faith is underway. Will you join the company of the redeemed? Remember: Blessed is the man whose heart is set on pilgrimage.