

Characteristics Of Pilgrims

Introduction. A "pilgrimage" is a journey or search of moral or spiritual significance. "Pilgrim" was the name given to members of a small group of English colonists who set up Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts in 1620. These people made the choice to migrate from their native land of England to America in search of religious freedom.

The Bible speaks of pilgrims too. In Hebrews 11, the characteristics of a pilgrim are mentioned in relation to several great heroes of faith. If we cannot find ourselves in the midst of these characteristics, then we may not be on a "pilgrimage" at all. If the way we live does not reflect the attributes of these people, then some soul-searching and repentance needs to take place.

I. ***They Obeyed The Call (Hebrews 11:8)***

- A. In the region of Mesopotamia, at Ur of the Chaldees, the call first came to Abraham (Genesis 11:31; Acts 7:2-3); and to that call there was an immediate response. The participle "called" is in the present tense, suggesting that no sooner was the call given than it was obeyed. Abraham obeyed the call while it was still sounding in his ears.
- B. Abraham tore himself loose from his country, family and friends, venturing out on the call of God. That he went out not knowing his destination underscores the magnitude of his trust. His faith was tested by the unknown (cf. Hebrews 11:1).
- C. All of the great people of the Bible obeyed: Noah (Genesis 6:22), Moses (Exodus 40:16), Joshua (Joshua 11:15), Josiah (2 Kings 23:25), and Christ (Hebrews 5:8).

II. ***They Never Settled Down (Hebrews 11:9)***

- A. When Abraham reached Canaan, he did not possess it. For the rest of his life, though in promise it was his, he lived in the country like a foreigner (Genesis 12:1-3).
- B. At the time of his death, his only possession in the land was the plot of ground that held the bones of his wife (Genesis 23:3-20; 25:7-10).
- C. Sometimes we treat this world like it is the only friend we have. It should not be that way (John 7:7; Titus 2:12). We sing "This World Is Not My Home" and we should mean it.

III. ***They Looked For A Heavenly City (Hebrews 11:10)***

- A. There were many cities in Canaan; but Abraham, living with the conviction of what is unseen, waited for the eternal city. This city, contrasted with tents, possesses an immovable foundation (Revelation

21:14, 19-20). Altogether unlike this life (Hebrews 13:14), it is a permanent city. Abraham inwardly and eagerly longed for this city.

- B. It is the city of the faithful. Jesus described it as a good place for treasures (Matthew 6:20). John described it as a place that reflected the glory of God, and as a place for all who believe and are obedient (Revelation 21:22-27; 22:14).

IV. ***They Acknowledged Their Faith (Hebrews 11:13)***

- A. Psalm 116:15 echoes the thought of how precious in the sight of God is the death of the righteous (Revelation 14:13). In faith they passed the test, even though they had not seen the actual fulfillment of God's promises (Romans 4:3, 9, 13).
- B. On the other hand, through the eye of faith they had seen God's promise to bless the world through them develop. A pure heart is essential to this kind of vision (Matthew 5:8; cf. Isaiah 33:14-17; Hebrews 11:27).
- C. They believed in God. They confessed that they were strangers on this earth and were destined for heaven (Genesis 23:4; 47:9). Romans 10:9-10 states that confession of Jesus Christ results in our salvation, and the gospel of John ties belief to eternal life (3:15, 36; 5:24; 11:25; 12:46; 20:31).

V. ***They Never Turned Back (Hebrews 11:15)***

- A. At any time during their lives they could have returned to Mesopotamia. They preferred Canaan, with all its inconveniences and hardships, rather than return to their native land.
- B. A Christian's affections are now fixed on higher and nobler pursuits (Colossians 3:2), and he chooses not to return to carnality again, but to live as a stranger and sojourner on the earth. There is nothing more voluntary than religion (Matthew 7:7; Revelation 22:17).
- C. True religion takes true resolve. How many people do you know or remember falling from the faith? I bet the number is surprising. All of us hate to hear of the tragedy of someone falling back into the world (2 Peter 2:20-22).

VI. ***They Longed For A Better Land (Hebrews 11:16)***

- A. This city, God's own city (Hebrews 11:10), was the goal of their quest -- the only real city they ever knew, the home of their heart's desire. Though they were away from it, they looked in its direction and were homesick for it.
- B. The news is so depressing now. All we seem to hear is how this country is disintegrating. I want a better place to live (cf. Revelation 22:1-5). This country is okay, but I do not want to stay here long.

Conclusion. These people were different. They thought differently, acted differently, and they spoke differently than the world. I must be like them.

I want to go to heaven. I want to live the life of a pilgrim. Heaven means more to me than anything, and I hope it means the same to you. But please consider God's word when it reveals to us that those who are not members of the Lord's body cannot enter into that better city. Also, those who fall away and stop serving the Lord do not have a part in the heavenly city.

We beg you to echo the sentiments of Balaam when he said, "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Numbers 23:10).