

The Surprising Hebrews 11 Reason Christians Can Be Grateful This Thanksgiving

Twice in the New Testament believers are referred to as “pilgrims.” The apostle Peter addressed his readers, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11, NKJV), warning them to avoid carnal cravings which would hinder their spiritual progress.

The author of Hebrews also used this term to describe Old Testament Patriarchs: “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. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland” (Heb. 11:13).

By definition, a pilgrim is “A person who journeys, especially a long distance, to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion.” A pilgrim is also “a traveler, a wanderer, a wayfarer, one who stays in a place only temporarily, but who normally has a set destination.”

If we are indeed pilgrims, then our motto should be: “Just passing through.” In other words, don’t get too attached to the things of this world, because this is just our temporary home. Life is a journey, and earth is not our final destination. We, like Father Abraham, are looking for our permanent, eternal home—“For he waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10).

Like fish out of water, pilgrims are misfits. We don’t blend in with the trends and fads of this present world. We don’t fit the mold of the world because we are not of this world.

Everything a true Christian believes runs contrary to the carnal mindset. C.S. Lewis reasoned, "If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world." A pilgrim's perspective enables us to see the temporary nature of earthly things and the permanent nature of heavenly things.

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The Pilgrims of 1620 fame were a group of separatists who "separated" from the Church of England due to its corruption. Fleeing persecution, they relocated from England to Holland, where their congregation grew to a few hundred members under the leadership of Rev. John Robinson. As their children grew up, they were lured by the loose Dutch lifestyle. Wanting a fresh start free from religious persecution, they made plans to sail to the New World on a quest to worship God and live as they saw fit based on the Bible.

Originally, they set sail on two ships: the *Speedwell* and the *Mayflower*. Three days into the journey, the *Speedwell* proved to be unseaworthy and, as some sources suggest, may have been sabotaged by the captain. Consequently, 102 pilgrims, plus crew members, were crammed aboard the overcrowded *Mayflower*. Imagine a 66-day voyage on rough seas with that many people in roughly the space of a volleyball court. Seasickness was common among these landlubbers who were mostly farmers, merchants and craftsmen. The crew members harassed them for their nausea and singing, and gave them the derisive nickname "psalm-singing puke stockings." The meanest, most vocal sailor, who said he couldn't wait to make them all fish food, suddenly became ill, mysteriously died and was buried at sea. Was that a coincidence or providence?

Their original charter was for the land of Virginia. Storms and navigational errors blew the *Mayflower* hundreds of miles

off course. Most of the coastline was inhabited by hostile natives. A few years before, a plague wiped out an entire tribe of Patuxets. Other tribes were wary of the region fearing it was cursed by the gods. When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, it was one of the few safe places to land on the entire Eastern Seaboard. Again, was that coincidence or providence?

During the first brutal winter, 47 of the 102 Pilgrims died due to exposure, disease and hunger. One author noted, "The Pilgrims made seven times more graves than huts. No Americans have been more impoverished than those—who, nevertheless, set aside a day of thanksgiving." Legend has it that their rations dwindled to five kernels of corn per person per day. They might have all starved to death if it wasn't for two God-sent Indians. In the spring, Samoset showed up speaking clear English and brought another friend, Squanto, who Governor William Bradford called, "A special instrument sent from God for their good" These Indians taught the settlers how to grow and fertilize crops, hunt, fish and decipher poisonous from edible plants. Squanto further assisted the Pilgrims as a guide and interpreter to help negotiate peace with the Wampanoag Tribe.

After the plentiful harvest of 1621, Governor Bradford declared a 3-day feast of Thanksgiving. Chief Massasoit and about 90 warriors brought venison, wild turkeys, hoecakes, cornmeal and maple syrup pudding and an Indian delicacy—popcorn. The Pilgrims pitched in vegetables from their gardens. Between meals they had shooting contests, foot races, wrestling and other activities. It is speculated that before gorging themselves on the sumptuous feast, the Pilgrims placed five kernels of corn on their plates as a vivid reminder of how God brought them back from the brink of starvation.

The Continental Congress appointed the first national Thanksgiving Day in 1777. Then, in 1864, President Abraham

Lincoln designated the last Thursday of November as the annual holiday. But Thanksgiving should be more than a holiday observed once a year, it should be a lifestyle observed every day—"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18, MEV).

This holiday season may we realize just how blessed we are in America compared to most of the world. Let us pause and remember the true source of our blessings. Let us develop and maintain a genuine attitude of gratitude and learn to be grateful for what we *have* before time forces us to be grateful for what we *had*.

By the way, the first baby born on the *Mayflower* while it was still anchored in Cape Cod was named Peregrine White, meaning "pilgrim or one who has made a journey." Let us never forget that we too are pilgrims on a journey—a journey beyond this temporary, natural world to an eternal, spiritual world. "But they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them"(Heb. 11:16). {eoa}

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Note: Historical material was gleaned from The Light and the Glory by Peter Marshall and David Manuel. Ben Godwin is the author of four books and pastors the Goodsprings Full Gospel Church. This article is an excerpt from Ben's book A Pilgrim's Perspective. To read more articles, visit his website at and take advantage of his 4-book bundle for \$.