

International Conversation Café

Bible Topic: What is a Pilgrimage?

A pilgrimage is when a person travels to a destination of religious significance, such as a temple, church, or birthplace of an important individual associated with a religion. The purpose is to encounter God where he has revealed himself in the past in order to strengthen one's faith. For example, Buddhists go to Bodh Gaya, where the place of Buddha's enlightenment is said to have happened. Hindus go to Kumbh Mela, where pilgrims gather to bathe in a sacred or holy river. Both Hindus and Buddhists have many holy sites. The main pilgrimage for Muslims is to Mecca where they walk around the Ka'aba, a cube-like building which is holy to the Muslim faith. People who go on such trips are called, "pilgrims."

What is your experience with pilgrimage?

Judaism had a regular schedule of pilgrimages throughout the year. There were three festivals where they were to come to Jerusalem. The first festival was Passover, celebrated in early spring. Passover celebrates Israel being delivered from slavery in Egypt. Shavuot, or Pentecost, is celebrated seven weeks after Passover recognizing the late spring harvest. Sukkot, or booths, is celebrated in mid-autumn and is a harvest festival and a time to remember the wanderings of Israel for 40 years in the desert. When the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., Jews continued to celebrate these festivals in their synagogues. Some make pilgrimages to the Western Wall in Jerusalem which is the remnant wall of the Temple.

In the Bible, there are 15 Psalms called, Songs of Ascent, that pilgrims would sing on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The road to Jerusalem was uphill, hence the word ascent is used to indicate they were sung while walking up to the city or up the steps to the temple. These Songs are found in Psalm 120- 134. Here is an example.

Psalm 121

A song for those who go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

¹ I look up to the mountains.

Where does my help come from?

² My help comes from the Lord.

He is the Maker of heaven and earth.

³ He won't let your foot slip.

He who watches over you won't get tired.

⁴ In fact, he who watches over Israel

won't get tired or go to sleep.

⁵ The Lord watches over you.

The Lord is like a shade tree at your right hand.

⁶ The sun won't harm you during the day.

The moon won't harm you during the night.

⁷ The Lord will keep you from every kind of harm.

He will watch over your life.

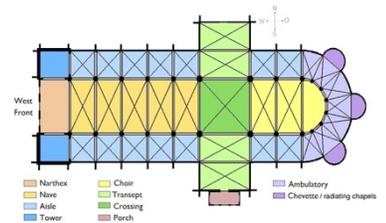
⁸ The Lord will watch over your life no matter where you go,
both now and forever.

Summarize the main thoughts of this Psalm.

Why do you think this was an appropriate song for a pilgrimage?

Do Christians go on pilgrimages?

Christians have a long history of pilgrimage dating back to Origen in the third century. Typically, the destination of early pilgrimages were locations connected with the ministry of Jesus. As time went on, Christians began to make pilgrimages to places associated with the Apostles and Christian martyrs. Rome was a common destination in the Middle Ages. When great cathedrals were built in Europe, many of them claimed to have relics which attracted the interest of 12th century Christians. Relics were physical items connected to a saint such as a bone, cloth worn by the saint, or a piece of wood from the cross. The reasons people went on these arduous pilgrimages are varied. Some went to purify their souls. Others hoped for a healing miracle. Others went for the excitement of travel. One of the most famous destinations for European pilgrims was Santiago de Compostela in Spain which claimed to have the bones of Saint James. Thousands of pilgrims still visit this site today.



Churches from the time of Constantine, around 330 A.D., adopted the Roman basilica plan as their place of worship. The altar was on the opposite side of the entrance and when the clergy and congregants walked toward the front, their walk resembled a pilgrimage.

Would you like to go on a pilgrimage and why?

Where would you go and with whom?

There is a sense of a Christian being on a journey or pilgrimage through life heading toward their heavenly home. "Negro Spirituals," songs which were written by African Americans during the time of slavery, saw themselves as pilgrims, people who are on a journey to heaven.

I Don't Feel No-ways Tired

Oh, I'm seeking for a city, Hallelujah,
For a city in to the Heaven, Hallelujah,
Oh, the brethren travel with me, Hallelujah,
say will you go 'long with me, Hallelujah.

We will travel on together, Hallelujah,
Gwine to pull down Satan's kingdom, Hallelujah,
gwine to build up the walls o' Zion, Hallelujah.

Chorus

Lord, I don't feel no ways tired children
Oh, glory Hallelujah!
For I hope to shout glory when this world is on fire,
Children Oh! glory Hallelujah.

Describe the perspective of the songwriter.

Do you look at your life as a journey to heaven? Explain

