



A Pilgrim's Perspective

By Ben Godwin

Twice in the Bible believers are referred to as *pilgrims* (1 Pt. 2:11, Heb. 11:13). By definition, a pilgrim is “one who journeys to a sacred place as an act of devotion.” A pilgrim is also “a traveler, wanderer, or wayfarer. One who stays in a place only temporarily and has a set destination.”

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (Hebrews 11:13)

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 destination. We, like Father Abraham, are looking “*For a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*” (Hebrews 11:10)

The pilgrims of 1620 fame were a group of separatists who “separated” from the Church of England due to its corruption and formalism. Fleeing persecution, they relocated from England to Holland where their congregation grew to a few hundred members under the leadership of John Robinson. As their children grew up, they were lured by the loose Dutch lifestyle. Wanting a fresh start free from religious persecution and government intrusion, 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 psalm singing. 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. 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 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, and wrestling. It is speculated that, before gorging themselves on the feast, the Pilgrims placed five kernels of corn on their plates as a vivid reminder of how God brought them 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 just a holiday observed once a year, it should be a lifestyle observed every day. 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 source of our blessings. Let us develop and maintain a genuine attitude of gratitude. By the way, the first baby born on the *Mayflower* was named Peregrine, meaning "One who has made a journey." Let us never forget that we too are pilgrims on a journey—a journey beyond this earth to heaven.

Note: Historical material in this article was gleaned from *The Light and the Glory*.

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