

Pilgrimage and the Church Today

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Introduction

Christian literature, whether devotional or scholarly, frequently makes reference to a pilgrimage motif. The idea of pilgrimage itself, however, is increasingly remote in western man's thought: The modern concept is a vague amalgam of *Pilgrim Fathers*, *Canterbury Tales*, and *Pilgrim's Progress*.¹ Consequently, allusions to pilgrimage lack precision.

This chapter is an attempt to clarify and explore the pilgrimage motif of the Scriptures, and to show its implications for the church today. We shall argue that (1) the pilgrimage motif, beginning with Abraham, is firmly based in Scripture; (2) the book of Hebrews elaborates and illuminates this motif; (3) aspects of Adventist doctrine make contributions to the understanding of pilgrimage; and (4) the pilgrimage motif has important implications for the church today.

We will develop the chapter in the following stages: (1) an overview of the biblical data apart from Hebrews relevant to pilgrimage, (2) consideration of the textual data of Hebrews that bear on the motif, (3) special features of the motif in Hebrews, (4) implications of the motif for the church today, and (5) Ellen White's allusions to pilgrimage.

¹ Other factors such as ideas from eastern religions may, of course, also be part of the generalized picture. We are not attempting a thoroughgoing analysis. Our point of the inexactness of pilgrimage in modern thought is shown by the wide-ranging definitions listed for the term in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, MA, 1967): "a journey of a pilgrim; esp.: one to a shrine or a sacred place, . . . act of making such a journey . . . a trip taken to visit a place of historic or sentimental interest or to participate in a specific event or for a definite purpose. . . . the course of life on earth . . . a part of the life course of an individual . . . a search for mental and spiritual values."

The Pilgrim Motif

While we have yet to define “pilgrimage” precisely—this being one of the purposes of the chapter—it is clear from even the vague concept of pilgrimage as commonly employed that the aspect of *movement* or *journey* is involved. Our investigation of the biblical data begins with this minimum criterion.

The Old Testament

Abraham. The preeminent wanderer of the OT is Abram, who left Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan (Gen 11:31). Why did he leave? Because the Lord said to him: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Gen 12:1, NIV).

Abram arrived in Canaan, but he remained a wanderer. He went down to Egypt and returned to Canaan; he moved from place to place, never settled. When Sarah died Abram, now called Abraham, had to buy a plot of ground from the Hittites in order to bury her (Gen 23:1-20).

As we reflect on the biblical account of Abraham and his journeyings, the following aspects emerge in the life of this pilgrim figure.

1. *Separation.* Abraham’s wanderings commenced with a leaving, a cutting of the ties of security, home, and comfort. He left a center of civilization and commerce; he left culture and friends; he left roots and relatives. And for what? An unknown land, an unknown destination.

2. *Wandering.* After Abraham left Ur, he never again had a permanent home. He remained on the move; he lived the life of a wanderer. His household grew in number, until he could raise a small army (Gen 14:14); his flocks and herds multiplied until he became wealthy (13:2); but he remained a wanderer.

So we note his journeyings:

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| — Ur to Haran (11:31) | — back to the Negev (13:1) |
| — Haran to Canaan (12:5) | — to Bethel (13:3) |
| — to Schechem (12:6) | — to Hebron (13:18) |
| — to Bethel (12:8) | — to Kadesh and Shur (20:1) |
| — to the Negev (12:9) | — to Gerar (20:1) |
| — to Egypt (12:10) | — to Hebron (23:1) |

3. *Seeking a place.* “Go to the land I will show you,” God had said to Abram while he still dwelt in Ur. Later, when he separated from Lot, the Lord said, “Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever” (Gen 13:14, 15, NIV).

Still later, the Lord told him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur

of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it” (15:7, NIV); and “The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God” (17:8, NIV).

Thus, Abraham the wanderer remained Abraham the seeker. He lived by faith, trusting that the Lord would keep His promise.

The occasion of Sarah’s death shows this aspect dramatically. Although Abraham had left prosperous Ur for a land the Lord would show him, although he was now wealthy and influential, he did not even own a burial plot for his wife! He had to purchase one from the Hittites (23:1-20).

4. *Hardship.* Heeding the call of the Lord for the pilgrim life meant for Abraham a life of many hardships. Apart from his continually being on the move, he suffered disappointments—drought in the Promised Land (12:10), conflict with his nephew (13:5-12), and above all lack of an heir (15:2-3). He came into misunderstanding with Pharaoh and his officials (12:10-20), and later with Abimelech and the Philistines (20:1-17). He found himself in armed conflict when Lot was carried away captive (14:1-6). And Abraham endured strife in his own household, in the bitter rivalry between Sarah and Hagar, and between Ishmael and Isaac (16:1-15; 21:8-20).

Abraham’s greatest test came in the strange call of the Lord to take Isaac—his only son, his promised son—and to sacrifice him on Mount Moriah. A lifetime of wandering—for this! We can but dimly sense the struggles of the aged pilgrim as he once again went forward at the command of God (22:1-19).

We conclude that the life of Abraham provides us with a paradigm for the biblical motif of pilgrimage.

The patriarchs. Abraham’s descendants up to the removal to Egypt—Isaac, Jacob and Esau, the twelve sons of Jacob—likewise remained wanderers. Shepherds, they moved back and forth over the land, God blessing and multiplying them through times of drought or plenty. They too endured drought and famine, conflict with other peoples, and conflict among themselves.

As we analyze the chapters that deal with the patriarchs, Genesis 25-50, we do not find the separation/leaving aspect. However, the other three points from the Abraham paradigm of pilgrimage are clearly present: wandering, seeking a home, and hardship.

Israel and the Exodus. The next great moment of journeying in the OT is of a people—Israel at the Exodus. Fleeing Egypt’s bondage, the 12 tribes wandered in the wilderness, sustained 40 years by manna and water from the rock. Under the leadership of Joshua they invaded Canaan, dispossessed the inhabitants, and settled down.

Four entire books of Scripture—Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—focus on the period of Israel’s journeyings. Obviously, we cannot explore these accounts in detail. Our concern is, Do we find again the profile of pilgrimage that emerged in the Abrahamic account?

Indeed! The same four aspects noted above emerge with clarity:

1. *Separation.* The Hebrew tribes left Egypt in spectacular fashion. They cut themselves off from hundreds of years of settled existence, cut themselves off from comfort and culture, cut themselves off for years of wandering in the desert. Ever after, that cutting off—the Exodus—would burn in Israel’s corporate memory.

2. *Wandering.* Because of their unbelief, Yahweh could not immediately lead the Hebrews into the Promised Land. For 40 years they wandered, led by the pillar of cloud and fire, until an entire generation passed from the scene.

3. *Seeking a home.* Canaan, land of milk and honey, was their goal. Though at times they were tempted to turn back to Egypt, they had set out for Canaan, and to Canaan they journeyed in hope.

4. *Hardship.* Heat and cold, hunger and thirst, attacks from without and within, rebellion and discord, they struggled along the way to the Promised Land. But they had a great leader—Moses—and a greater Leader—Yahweh.

With these climactic events the wandering motif of the OT ceases. We find individuals or groups journeying to religious centers such as Shiloh, when the ark of the covenant was located there (1 Sam 1:3; 3:3; 4:4), or to Bethel (Judg 20:26, 27).

With the establishment of the sanctuary in Jerusalem, all adult males were expected to make three trips every year for the major festivals (Exod 23:17; 34:23). Some of the Psalms probably preserve songs of the people as they made their way to Jerusalem or arrived at the city (for example, Ps 84:120-139).

Such practices, however, readily degenerated into religious formalism. Prophetic voices arose denouncing reliance on these externals without lives of justice, compassion, and heart religion.²

The New Testament

The NT records the annual visit to Jerusalem by Jesus’ family and friends (Luke 2:41). It also mentions Jesus’ attendance at the festivals during His ministry.³ Such journeyings, however, are quite different from the Abraham paradigm of leaving home and traveling toward a goal, with no return to the

2 E.g., Isa 1:12, 13; Jer 7:2-15; Amos 4:4-5; 5:5-6, 21.

3 John 2:13; 5:1; 7:2, 14; 13:1.

starting place. They do not fall within the purview of pilgrimage.

Taken as a whole, the NT does not exhibit the movement or journeying aspect that is so prominent in the OT. Paul the apostle is always on the move, but his travels are for missionary purposes, as are those of the other apostles. They are not to be construed as pilgrimage.

Although we do not find literal journeyings toward a goal, the entire NT exhibits the motif of pilgrimage. The whole course of life on this earth is caught up in the Abrahamic model: The followers of Christ live their lives with their eyes set on the ultimate goal, heavenly Canaan. They follow in the path of the One who has gone on before, Jesus the great pilgrim. In His incarnation He passed through this world; now He says of His people, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14, KJV).

For this reason eschatological hope dominates the thought of NT Christians. This present world with all its glories will soon pass away; this little life will quickly run its course. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor 4:17-18, NIV). Followers of Christ look for a new heaven and a new earth, in which righteousness will reign (2 Pet 3:13).

That home, that ultimate goal of the pilgrim, will not be attained by any human journey (except as the whole course of life is a journey) or human planning and effort. The Lord Himself will bring it about, descending in glory to this earth to usher in God's new world order, raising the faithful who sleep in Him, burning up the works of evil, and taking with Him those loyal ones who are alive.⁴

So the final vision of the NT is the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21). God has made all things new; He has banished sickness and pain; He has wiped away every tear; He has cleansed all defilement; He has made His dwelling with His people. Home at last! His people, so long strangers and pilgrims, will be with Him—in person—forever.

While these ideas, sketched in the OT, pervade the entire NT, one book of that corpus, Hebrews, stands out for its emphasis on the journeying theme. This book has been the chief source of Christian reflection about pilgrimage. To it we now turn for a detailed study in an endeavor to understand better the pilgrimage motif of the Scriptures.

⁴ John 14:1-3; 1 Thess 4:16-18; 2 Pet 3:10-13.

Hebrews: The Textual Data⁵

The data of Hebrews which *prima facie* relate to the idea of pilgrimage are located in the exhortations (parentheses)⁶ of the document. The following are the salient points in concise form.

Hebrews 3-4⁷

The sustained exhortation of 3:6b-4:11 is of obvious significance. Here, the leading motif of "rest" (*katapausis*) is set against the backdrop of the wilderness generation of the children of Israel, "who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses. . . . who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness" (3:16-17, RSV). We should note, however, that at best we have no more than an *implied* pilgrimage motif: There is no actual reference to the people of Israel as wanderers, nor to the Christians (chap. 4) in such terms.

On the other hand, the tone of the entire passage is one of waiting, expectancy, first in terms of Israel (chap. 3), then with the Hebrew Christians in view (chap. 4). So we hear the "if" (*ean, eanper*) of 3:6 and 3:14, the fact of a "rest" remaining (4:1, 9), the fear that some of the Christians may fail to gain it (4:1) and the necessity of striving to enter it (4:11).

Thus, while not one specific term which directly bears on the idea of pilgrimage is to be located in the passage, the setting and overall thrust of the passage (the implied wanderings of Israel, the goal set but not yet realized) support the idea of *movement toward a goal*.

Hebrews 11⁸

The final verses summarize the chapter succinctly: "And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect" (11:39-40, RSV). The key expression here is "did not receive what

5 Much of the material in this chapter relative to the book of Hebrews is drawn from my article, "The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews" *JBL* 97/2 (1978): 239-51.

6 That Hebrews evinces a laminated composition in which theology and parentheses alternate is a commonplace among interpreters of the document, e.g., John H. Davies (*A Letter to Hebrews* [Cambridge, 1967], 15) sets out the material of the pamphlet in parallel columns labeled "Doctrine" and "Exhortation." Whereas the theological sections argue the person and work of Christ, the parentheses in part describe the people of God in terms of wandering or journeying.

7 The first parenthesis, 2:1-4, does not contain material relating to journeying and hence to pilgrimage.

8 The third parenthesis, 5:11-6:19, does not appear to suggest a pilgrimage idea. At the most we might discern possible suggestions of it in the argument concerning "the promises" (*epaggelia*) in 6:11-18. Likewise the parenthesis of 10:19-39 is only of remote significance to pilgrimage in its call for endurance (vss. 23, 35-39).

was promised.” Note how that idea has been sounded throughout the chapter:

Abraham “sojourned . . . as in a foreign land . . . heirs [Issac and Jacob] . . . of the same promise. . . he looked forward to the city . . .” (vss. 8-12, RSV).

The patriarchs “died . . . not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, . . . strangers and exiles on the earth. . . seeking a homeland. . . desire a better country, . . . a heavenly one. . . he [God] has prepared for them a city” (vss. 13-16, RSV).

Joseph looked to the future: “the exodus . . . his burial” (vs. 22, RSV).

Moses “looked to the reward” (vss. 23-28, RSV).

The worthies “went about . . . wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (vss. 32-38, RSV).

The thrust of Hebrews 11 seems clear: God’s people throughout the OT looked beyond the present life to a heavenly reward. They sighted the better country, the city of God, but did not attain to it. This world was not their true home; here they were merely sojourners and foreigners, passing through, as it were, on the way to a heavenly goal, and the world treated them harshly. Thus, faith (*pistis*) throughout this chapter denotes more than mere belief and trust in the unseen; it suggests rather a marked element of *faithfulness* deriving from belief and trust.

It is obvious that the ideas implied and inchoate in 3:6b–4:11 reach explicit expression in chapter 11. We note specifically the motifs of wandering, sighting the goal but not attaining it, and disavowal of a worldly goal.

We here meet much terminology that bears on the discussion of pilgrimage: *paroikeō* (vs. 9, “to inhabit, live as a stranger”); *allogrios* (vs. 9, “strange, alien, hostile, enemy”—even though it was the “land of promise”!); *ekdechomai* (vs. 10, “to expect, wait”); *porrothen* (vs. 13, “from a distance”); *xenos* (vs. 13, “stranger, alien”); *parepidēmos* (vs. 13, “exile, strange”); *patris* (vs. 14, “homeland, fatherland”); *kreittōn* (vs. 16, “better”); *polis* (vs. 16, “city”); *misthapodosia* (vs. 26, “pay, wages, reward”); *perierchomai* (vs. 37, “go around, go from place to place”); *planaō* (vs. 38, “to wander”); and *epaggelia* (vss. 13, 39, “promise”).

Hebrews 12

This chapter does not appear to contain data that either directly or indirectly relates to the issue of pilgrimage. At the most we might consider two possible allusions: (1) “You have come to Mount Zion” (RSV) rather than the earthly Sinai (vss. 18-24, 26)—clearly a reference to the wilderness experience of Israel and so to chapter 3; and (2) again the note of possible failure is

heard—"run with perseverance" (vs. 1, RSV), "don't grow weary or faint-hearted" (vs. 3, RSV), beware of the "root of bitterness" (vs. 15, RSV) or irreligion (vss. 16-17, RSV), "do not refuse him who is speaking" (vs. 25, RSV).

The force of this material, however, does not seem to be as immediately significant as that of 3:6b-4:11. Whereas there the background was the implied wandering of Israel, here it is Israel *at* Sinai.

Hebrews 13

Two ideas here tie in with the content of chapter 11: (1) "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (vs. 14, RSV), exactly paralleling 11:13-16; and (2) ill-treatment of God's people "outside the gate" (vss. 12, 13), signifying the "foreignness" of the Christians in the world and their hardships at the hands of the world.⁹

It is apparent, therefore, that Hebrews contains considerable data relative to *movement* and *expectation*. The questions still remain, however: Are these data constitutive of pilgrimage? And do they comport with the Abraham paradigm?

Summarization of Hebrews Emphasis

Separation. The idea of having left home (separation) is strong in Hebrews. The people of God do not dwell on "that land from which they had gone out" (11:15, RSV); they have been "washed" (6:2; 10:22); they *were* "enlightened" (6:4); they endured a "hard struggle" after joining the community (10:32). In Hebrews, there is a heavy line drawn between the people of God and "the world": The former have separated, never to return as they seek "a better country" (11:16).¹⁰

Journeying. As we have seen, the wandering or journeying theme is strong in the book of Hebrews. Whether OT or NT, God's people look beyond the present to the heavenly reward. They aspire toward heaven, which is their true home. So they live by faith, trusting that God will fulfill His promise.

Hebrews 11:13-16 summarizes this *attitude* of wandering: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been

⁹ Contra H. Koester, "Outside the Camp: Hebrews 13:9-14," *HTR* 55 (1962): 299-315.

¹⁰ That is, being the people of God entails a *cultic* separation, as Käsemann (*Das wandernde Gottesvolk*, 27-32) has seen.

thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (NIV).

Seeking a home. Their journeyings are not aimless wanderings: They have their eyes fixed on “the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (11:10, RSV). This is the “real” city, for it is invisible. It *is*, so it is therefore “to come” (11:16; 13:14). It is not merely a city: it is *God’s* city. It is the place of the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus Christ is high priest at the right hand of the Majesty on high and where countless angels assemble in festal gathering.¹¹

The Christians’ journeying signifies a dissatisfaction with what is “home” to others, pointing to a translation of values in which the “real”—the supreme value—is to be found only beyond this world. The Christian pilgrims seek to attain to the real world where all is sacred. No matter that already they have been purified by the blood of Christ and already participate proleptically in the cultus of heaven—only by arrival at the sacred place *par excellence* will they find “rest.”¹² That rest finds its high point in the ultimate blessing—the beatific vision (cf. 12:14, “see the Lord”).

Hardship. But the way is difficult. There are perils, both physical and spiritual. Sin beckons with its deceitful pleasures to erode faith and faithfulness. The way at times is a struggle; even martyrdom may mark its ascent.¹³ One may grow weary, be led astray by false teachings, or gradually fall back from the group in its onward progress. Or, worse still, he may decide that the pilgrim way is not for him and by a deliberate act of rejection sever his connection with the band of wanderers.¹⁴ This difficulty of the way is not to cause surprise, indeed, it is characteristic of the way.

This understanding of Hebrews in terms of pilgrimage enables us to appreciate better what is possibly the most arresting passage in the letter, namely, 12:18-29. The description here is bounced off the story of Israel standing before God at the foot of Mount Sinai as recorded in Exodus 19. Instead of Sinai, Christians have come to Mount Zion; instead of the voice from heaven, it is the blood of Jesus that speaks; instead of a group of tribes, they are part of a vast throng that includes angels and perfected heroes of old

¹¹ Heb 11:10, 16; 13:14; 1:3; 10:12; 12:22.

¹² That is, the journeying of Hebrews is not merely religious wandering—it is directed toward a heavenly goal.

¹³ Heb 3:12-18; 5:11-6:12; 10:23-26; 12:4.

¹⁴ The dire warnings of 6:4-6; 10:26-31; and 12:15-17 obviously have this possibility in view.

worshiping in the “real” world. Thus, we begin to grasp the religious force of Hebrews 12:18-29; we see a cultic people, purged by the blood of Jesus, on the way to the city, now experiencing proleptically the joys of worship amid the cultus of heaven.

In the book of Hebrews, therefore, we find the same four elements of the Abrahamic paradigm. These elements, however, have been transposed from an OT setting and applied to Christians.

Special Features of the Motif in Hebrews

Our investigation so far raises a question: Granted that the pilgrimage motif in Hebrews displays close parallels with the Abrahamic paradigm, does it manifest individual features?

The pilgrimage motif in Hebrews displays features other than those in the Abrahamic paradigm. In at least three significant points—the figure of Jesus, the nature of the goal, and the concern with an event in the past—Hebrews cuts its own path.

The shadow of Jesus looms large over the Hebrew pilgrims. He is the *archēgos*, the pioneer or pathfinder (2:10; 12:2) and the *prodromos*, the forerunner (6:20).¹⁵ As Moses led the people of God under the old covenant (3:1-6a), Jesus is leader of the new people of God. In some measure at least the followers of Jesus recapitulate His experiences: He is their “brother” in suffering and test (2:10-13), He has run the race before them and attained the prize (12:1, 2), He has endured hostility before the Christians ever faced persecution (12:3-13).

The sacred place that is the goal of the pilgrims in Hebrews is of a different order from earthly Canaan. It is not realized on this earth. The time-continuum of Hebrews is crossed by a vertical, earthly-heavenly mode.¹⁶ The “real” city which is “to come” (13:14) already is, because it belongs to the realm of the invisible, not made with hands, whose builder and maker is God (11:10; 8:1-5; 9:11).¹⁷

15 Käsemann (Das wandernde Gottesvolk, 58-116) and Ph. Vielhauer (“Rezension von O. Michel [Hebraerbrief 1949],” *VF* [1951-52], 213-19), have emphasized the “pioneer” (*archēgos*) Christology. More recently, however, O. Hofius (*Katapausis. Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebraerbrief* [Tübingen: Mohr, 1970], argues for Jewish-apocalyptic, rather than gnostic, *religionsgeschichtliche* contours.

16 That Hebrews combines two modes of thought—a linear emphasis on the contrast between past, present, and future and a vertical emphasis on the contrast between earthly and heavenly, visible and invisible—is well recognized.

17 The manner in which Hebrews combines both linear and vertical modes is shown at 10:1—the law “has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities” (RSV). Likewise,

The pilgrims of Hebrews do not merely look forward to the attainment of the sacred place. Their self-understanding is also shaped by a superlative event in the past. Prior to their own point of separation lies the attainment of Jesus. His death broke down the barriers between man and God, enabled full access, accomplished decisive purification of the uneasy "conscience."¹⁸ Thus, a leading idea of Hebrews is "once for all," signifying the *completeness* of the blood of Christ to deal with man's problem of sin.¹⁹ This event out of the past colors the present. Even now the Hebrew Christians "have such a high priest" (8:1-2), even now they "may draw near to the throne of grace" (4:14-16), even now they have "come" to the New Jerusalem (12:18-24). So their pursuit of the goal, while a highly charged motivation, is modified by religious benefits already realized.

Thus, while the pilgrimage motif of Hebrews conforms to the Abrahamic pattern, it bears its own characteristic stamp.

In Hebrews, then, Christians are viewed as a *cultic community on the move*. Each of the two parts of the picture is vital—a cultic community and movement toward the sacred place.

It is because Hebrews sees Christians as a cultic community that the "separation" idea is so strong in the document. Christians are "holy," "sanctified," "perfected," "purified."²⁰ They *are* God's people, even now. It is out of such a self-view that the dire warnings of 6:4-6; 10:26-31; and 12:15-17 become understandable. Because they are a cultic community, they are *now* "clean," *now* have access to God, *now* have their consciences purged, *now* have Jesus as high priest. The time frame is past-present: The work of Jesus on Calvary has placed them in full communion with God.

But they are also on the march. The pilgrim community (*each* pilgrim group) is not content merely to separate from home. It sets out on a journey with a definite goal. Although already consecrated and separated, it seeks the center of the universe, the very (actually realized) presence of God. And so do the people of God set out in Hebrews. They are on the move. The way is long, beset with hazards; the possibility of failure is real.

All Christians who take the Bible seriously will appreciate and share these ideas of pilgrimage. However, for Seventh-day Adventists the study of He-

throughout chap. 11 faith is directed toward both the invisible and the future.

18 "Conscience" (*sunidēsis*) does not connote a moral arbiter but rather "consciousness," as in the remembering of sins (C.A. Pierce, *Conscience in the New Testament* [SBT 15; London: SCM, 1955], 99-102).

19 Heb. 6:4; 9:7, 26, 27, 28; 10:2; 12:26, 27 (*hapax*); and 7:27; 9:12; 10:10 (*ephapax*).

20 Heb. 3:1; 13:24; 2:11; 9:13-14; 10:10, 14, 29; 13:12; 5:14; 7:19; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23; 7:11; 12:2; 1:3; 9:14, 22, 23; 10:2—all cultic terms.

brews reaches further. Our long-standing interest in this book highlights four areas that sharpen the biblical motif of pilgrimage: the Sabbath, Christ's high priestly ministry, the Second Coming, and the resurrection.

The Sabbath

In Hebrews 3:7-4:11, the apostolic author plays on the word "rest" (*katapausis*), applying it first to the earthly Canaan, goal of the wandering tribes of Israel, but then giving it a heightened meaning. He argues that the promise of entering God's rest still stands (4:1), extending beyond Joshua's day (4:8) and even David's (4:7). He ties that rest to the Creation account of God's cessation from work (4:3, 4) and then, at the climax of his reasoning declares, "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God" (4:9, NIV).

As we examine carefully the development of the argument in 3:7-4:11, we notice how present and future interact. The whole setting is one of journeying, movement *toward* a goal—with warnings of failing to attain it; yet those who believe already enter "rest." Any exegesis of the passage (and that cannot be our concern here) must allow for this interplay of the "already" with the "not yet."

In this connection the Sabbath enters the argument in a key role. Obviously, the author places the Sabbath in a highly favorable light: The Sabbath is illustration and foretaste of our eternal rest in Christ. *Already*, we have a Sabbath rest; *already*, we share the quality of our eternal home. But the full realization is not yet; only when we see Him face to face, only in the heavenly Canaan will we reach our final home.

That is, we are still pilgrims; but pilgrims who via the Sabbath taste the glories of our eternal rest in Christ.

Christ's High Priestly Ministry

In Hebrews we find two great models of the work of Christ. He is the "pioneer" (*archēgos*, 2:10; 12:2), and He is the "forerunner" (*prodromos*, 6:20); but He is also our heavenly high priest (*archiereus*).²¹

We have seen how the "pioneer"/"forerunner" model fits closely with the pilgrimage theme; what of the high priestly model? In fact, the two models blend. The living Christ, He who ran the race before us, presently ministers to assist His people. The Christian pilgrim does not struggle on alone: He has an Elder Brother (2:11) who ever lives to make intercession on his behalf (7:25),

²¹ Heb 2:17, 18; 3:1; 4:14-16; 8:1, 2; 9:24-26; 10:11-18.

who sympathizes with His weakness and sends forth timely help from the throne of grace (2:18; 4:16).

The doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary is enormously encouraging for God's people today. It teaches that heaven is a *welcome* place (Jesus has opened access to us!) and also an *active* place. He who ran and won His race ensures our victory also.

The Second Coming

The book of Hebrews, so strong in developing the pilgrimage motif and the heavenly work of Christ, also points to "*the Day*" (10:25)—the day of the Lord that will usher Christian pilgrims into their eternal rest.

Indeed, Christ's *past* work (Calvary) and His *present* work (intercession) guarantees that coming. "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him" (Heb 9:27, 28, NIV).

Though the way may seem long for the Christian pilgrim, "in just a very little while, 'He who is coming will come and will not delay' " (10:37, NIV). He who once shook the earth at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai will once again shake it—and not only the earth but the heavens also (12:26, 27).

The Resurrection

In contrast to most Christians, Adventists do not believe that believers go to heaven when they die. We believe that only when Jesus returns will *all* His followers, together, enter their eternal home. And this idea finds strong support in Hebrews.

The eleventh chapter lists examples of God's pilgrim people and concludes thus: "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (Heb 11:39-40, NIV). Thus, the pilgrim doesn't reach the goal by dying. "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth" (Heb 11:13, NIV). All pilgrims, the church, reach it together by Christ's return.

Thus, pilgrimage in Hebrews is woven into the theological thread of the book, conforming to the four aspects of the Abrahamic paradigm but elaborating them and going beyond in a specifically Christian construction; further, Adventist understanding of Scripture informs and heightens the pilgrimage motif.

Implications for the Church Today

Ever since sin's entrance cut off humanity from the Source of life and love, ever since the shadow fell across the face of our existence, God's true people have been pilgrims. They have realized that this world, despite its many beauties, is not their ultimate goal. They have sensed the temporality, incompleteness and brokenness of this life and have, by God's grace, sought for the "better country—a heavenly one" (Heb 11:15, NIV) that the Lord has for His people.

The church needs to hear again the call to pilgrimage. The world is too much with us: our materialistic, secular age bombards us with the message that this life is all that matters and that man is the end of all.

Materialism

The church betrays her calling if she becomes caught up in material goals, or political machinations to achieve her ends. For her the process is as important as the result.

Separation From the World

Between the followers of Christ and those who do not profess Him is fixed a great gulf—in values, attitudes, and purposes. Inevitably this gulf affects lifestyle.

Movement

The pilgrim church is a movement, not another denomination. She innovates, takes risks, upsets the *status quo*; she is prophetic as well as priestly; she is led by the Spirit into all truth and also into new adventures in the cause of her Master.

The Long View

The pilgrim church looks beyond this little life, so frail and transient. She isn't seduced by secular thinking, for she sees God and eternity.

Faithfulness

The church in pilgrimage is faithful to God's commandments. She is marked by fidelity to God's will, no matter how demanding or even foolish that might appear to the nonbeliever.

Growth

The church as pilgrim community also suggests growth in spiritual understanding. Truth, mediated through the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, is like a light in a dark place, shining more and more unto the perfect day. God calls us to keep moving, growing in light as we strive toward the Light.

Two questions, then, confront us with special acuteness. “Are you aware of *who* you are?” we hear the Scriptures asking. They challenge us to sense anew the meaning of a pilgrim community as one *separated*, one that has taken its leave and set out on the journey to the heavenly city, never to turn back, never to return.

They call us to see that we are a cultic community, that is, one consecrated to God, one for whom God is to be first and last and best in all things. Reminding us of our privileges, of the surpassing worth of our Lord in His person, death, and ministry, they warn us lest we fall along the way.

For that is their second question: “Do you know that you have an *eternal destiny*—not only who you are, but where you are going?” They want to assure us that “the best is yet to be,” that beyond our space-time continuum lies the invisible, eternal order. That is the ultimate reality; that is to be our goal.

We are a cultic community but not a static one. As a people we are on the move—or should be. Pilgrims, we journey toward the most sacred place in the universe, the presence of God Himself. So we must keep on. Faithful endurance will win the promised goal.

So, for all its present blessings, in our current life the gospel comes to us as promise. And it has ever been thus, the Scriptures would tell us. The great men and women of old, they say, “though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (11:39-40, RSV).

Allusions to Pilgrimage in Ellen White’s Writings

Ellen G. White frequently reflects the ideas of this study in her writings. The following examples are typical:

We are travelers, pilgrims and strangers, on earth. Let us not spend our means in gratifying desires that God bids us repress. Let us rather set a right example before our associates. Let us fitly represent our faith by restricting

our wants. Let the churches arise as one, and work earnestly as those who are walking in the full light of truth for these last days. Let your influence impress souls with the sacredness of God's requirements.²²

The Christian pilgrim does not yield to his desire to rest. He moves steadily forward, saying: "The night is far spent, the day is at hand." This is his motto: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after. . . . I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" Philippians 3:12-14.²³

Bear in mind that our life in this world is but a pilgrimage, that heaven is the home to which we are going. Have faith in God. If my words have wounded and bruised your soul, I am sorry; I am wounded and bruised also. Our work, a strange work, a great work, given us by God, links our heart and soul together. You dare not throw off your armor. You must wear it till the end. When the Lord releases you, it will be time for you to lay your armor at His feet. You have enlisted in His army to serve till the close of the battle, and you would not disgrace yourself and dishonor God by deserting.²⁴

Many are unable to make definite plans for the future. Their life is unsettled. They can not discern the outcome of affairs, and this often fills them with anxiety and unrest. Let us remember that the life of God's children in this world is a pilgrim life. We have not wisdom to plan our own lives. It is not for us to shape our future. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."²⁵

Money is not ours; houses and grounds, pictures and furniture, garments and luxuries, do not belong to us. We are pilgrims, we are strangers. We have only a grant of those things that are necessary for health and life. . . . Our temporal blessings are given us in trust, to prove whether we can be entrusted with eternal riches. If we endure the proving of God, then we shall receive that purchased possession which is to be our own—glory, honor, and immortality.²⁶

We have no home here; we are only pilgrims and strangers, passing to a better country, even a heavenly. Place your mind upon these things, and while you are doing this, Christ will be right by your side. May God help us to win the precious boon of eternal life.²⁷

22 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* 6 (Mountain View, CA, 1900): 452.

23 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* 8 (Mountain View, CA 1904):18.

24 *Ibid.*, 175.

25 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA, 1905), 478-79.

26 Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN, 1952), 367.

27 Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA, 1915), 293-94.

In the Bible the inheritance of the saved is called "a country." . . . There the heavenly Shepherd leads His flock to fountains of living waters. The tree of life yields its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the service of the nations. There are ever-flowing streams, clear as crystal, and beside them waving trees cast their shadows upon the paths prepared for the ransomed of the Lord. There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God's people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home.²⁸

²⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA, 1888, rev. ed. 1911), 675.