Al-Islam.org
Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project
Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)

Pilgrimage

Ali (1988:118a-121a) gives detailed descriptions of Islamic pilgrimage. It takes place in the twelfth month of the lunar calendar and consists of a journey to Mecca and rites there culminating in a rite of sacrifice and shaving the head. It includes circumambulation of the *Kaaba* or house of God and a prayer of two units at the beginning, middle and end of the pilgrimage event.

The final subject of Jesus' address on the mount in Matthew six appears to be pilgrimage. The place of pilgrimage was a subject of controversy in Jesus' time. The Jews claimed Jerusalem, the Samaritans the mount of Jacob as the place of pilgrimage.

Jesus said to a Samaritan woman, `Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.' John 4:21-23.

Besides pointing out that salvation, that is he himself, came from among the Jews, Jesus notes something about the place of pilgrimage. Firstly, he notes that there will be a time when it will be neither in Jerusalem nor in the mountain of the Samaritans. Secondly, he points out that it will be in a place where those who truly worship God will come.

The place of pilgrimage is mentioned in Deuteronomy twelve along with some indications of what is included in its festival. The place is `the place which the Lord your God shall choose', (verses 5, 11, 14, 18, and 21). The pilgrimage event is largely a time of sacrifice. The Bible even states, however, that if the place of pilgrimage is too far away, the sacrifice may be performed at home (Deuteronomy 12:21).

The law, or books of Moses, does not state when the time of pilgrimage is. In fact, the Bible as we have it does not give the specific date of the pilgrimage. It seems to assume that people know it. There is a way of finding the approximate date, however.

If we look at the order of the book of Psalms in the Bible, we find that the book is divided into five parts. The first four parts end with a special formula, amen, so we know there is a break there. The fifth part,

Psalms 107-150, is really made up of a series of collections. The first collection is Psalms 107-118, and this is appropriate for use in the first of the annual festivals mentioned in the Torah (Leviticus 23:5-14), Passover and Unleavened Bread, which comes in the seventh month (or the first Torah month).

Psalm 119 is really a collection of Psalms in itself and is appropriate for the second festival mentioned (Leviticus 23:15-22), Pentecost, which comes in the ninth month and is a memorial of the giving of the Torah or law to Moses. This festival has been retained as Ramadhan in Islamic tradition. The third collection is .Psalms 120-134.

Each one of these Psalms bears the title in Hebrew, `A Song of Pilgrimage'. But if we look at the list in Leviticus, this festival is missing. The next festival in the list is Trumpets and Atonement (Leviticus 23:23-32), and this fits the next collection of Psalms, that is, Psalms 135-145. This festival comes during the first ten days of the first month (the seventh Torah month), and has been preserved as the Ashura of Muharrem in Islamic tradition.

The final group of Psalms is Psalms 146-150. Each of these Psalms has the title `Hallelujah', and is appropriate to the last festival, the feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23:33-37. This is a feast of thanksgiving in the third quarter of the first month.

The structure of the book of Psalms thus reveals that there is a festival of pilgrimage sometime after the ninth month and sometime before the first month. A year-end pilgrimage and sacrifice at the house of God is thus clearly a Bible practice from ancient times. This is apparently the pilgrimage to which Jesus was referring in Matthew six.

Although not all of the many details of Islamic pilgrimage appear in the Bible, the primary features do occur. The timing of the pilgrimage is the same for the Bible and in Islam. The features of sacrifice, prayer and circumambulation are primary in both the Bible and Islam. The only contrasting detail is the place of pilgrimage, which is Mecca in Islam. But the place of pilgrimage in the Bible was moveable at an early stage, and was prophesied by Jesus himself to be someday moved from Jerusalem to another place. In sum, Islamic pilgrimage is basically the same as that of the Bible.

Source URL: https://www.al-islam.org/islam-bible-thomas-mcelwain/pilgrimage#comment-0