

Strangers and Pilgrims

As Sojourners We Plant No Roots in This World

We read in Hebrews 11:13-16 a remarkable statement regarding the patriarchs of Biblical history:

“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 conferred that they were *strangers* and *pilgrims* on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly country: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city”

Who were “these all?” None other than Able, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets, heroes of the faith through whom the Eternal worked marvelous wonders in ages past. These people confessed that they were “strangers” and “pilgrims” on the earth. What do these words mean?

stranger = *xenos*, “strange, foreign, alien.”

pilgrim = *parapidemos*, “residing in a country not one’s own away from one’s own people; a sojourner or stranger.”

We see this same concept declared by Abraham when he met with the sons of Heth: “I am a *stranger* [*ger*, “a guest or foreigner”] and a *sojourner* [*towshab*, “a dweller, as distinguished from a native citizen, a lodger or resident alien”] with you; give me a possession of a buryingplace with you ... “ (Genesis 23:4). Jacob, during his meeting with Pharaoh in Genesis 47:9, considered his life and that of his fathers on earth as a *pilgrimage* [*maguwr*, “a lodging, a temporary abode”]. David did likewise in I Chronicles 29:15 and Psalm 39:12, using the same Hebrew



Abraham, the father of the faithful, is a wonderful example of how we must live as pilgrims and sojourners on the earth, being in the world but not of the world.

words as did Jacob. So did Peter, when addressing the ecclesia in I Peter 1:17, admonish them to “... pass the time of your *sojourning* here in fear.” The Greek word for *sojourning* is *paroikia*, “a sojourning.” Then Peter addressed the brethren as *strangers* [*paroikos*, “alien residents”] and *pilgrims* [*parapidemos*, “a resident foreigner”] in I Peter 2:11.

We in God’s ecclesia today follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, a Stranger and Pilgrim like the patriarchs and disciples. Jesus made clear that He would be here on earth as a flesh and blood resident only temporarily.

“I came forth from the Father, and I am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (John 16:28).

“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come

from God, and went to God...” (John 13:3).

“Truly, truly, I say unto you, He that believes on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father” (John 14:12; see also John 14:28; 16:10, 16; 20:17).

Not only was Jesus to return to His Father in heaven who had sent Him, but Jesus clearly stated that He had no permanent residence on the earth: “And Jesus said unto him, ‘The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head’” (Matthew 8:20; also in Luke 9:58). He appeared on earth only as the Father had directed Him, to live a sinless life, heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, preach the good news of the coming government of God, undo the works of Satan, and ultimately be crucified for the sins of mankind so the saints might inherit eternal life.

Then ... What to Do With Our Time

A pilgrim and stranger walks through a land that is strange to him. He has no real part in its culture, does not feel comfortable with its morays and standards, and does not plant roots into the society in which he sojourns. Because he does not conform to this land he can be subjected to ridicule or marginalization — which was certainly the case for Jesus — but even Abraham, a man rich with this world’s goods, fled the home of his father in Mesopotamia because he refused to worship the idols of that nation. Indeed, how is it possible for a servant of the one true God to coexist with any society on earth in which he might find himself, for the god of that culture is Satan the devil (II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2), and ...

“Be you not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion has light with darkness?” (II Corinthians 6:14).

The major question for the brethren in this “present evil world — as Galatians 1:4 puts it — is what

to do during this sojourn which we have here on the earth, in the situation we find ourselves once we are called out of it. Paul directly addresses this very issue in two places.

“Where he says, Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, *redeeming the time*, because the days are evil. Wherefore be you not unwise, but understanding what the will of Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the spirit” (Ephesians 5:14-18).

redeeming = *exagorazo*, “to buy out, especially in purchasing a slave with a view to his freedom; when coupled with *time* = *kairos*, “a time in which something is seasonable; making the most of every opportunity, turning each to the best advantage since none can be recalled if missed.”

“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, *redeeming the time*. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:5-6).

We are to make the most of every opportunity, since once that opportunity is missed it cannot be recalled. Several major points are put forward by Paul here, so let us take a look at them as put forward in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 4.

1. Be alert. One characteristic of our Creator that we must emulate is to always be alert and awake; He never sleeps (Psalm 121:3). This does not mean we should not physically rest as needed — if we don’t we soon become psychotic — but we must be alert to our responsibilities as God’s elect.

“Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but *alive* unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11).

alive = *zao*, “to live, literally or figuratively.”

“Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” (Romans 6:13).

Paul indicated in Ephesians 5:13 that once you awake from sleep (darkness or evil, lack of truth, etc.; Matthew 6:23; Luke 11:34; Ephesians 6:12) you will be given *light* [*epiphauo*, “to illuminate, figuratively”], which in verse 8 refers to our walk or conduct in Christ, keeping His commands and laws. This understanding is common knowledge to us in the ecclesia, but it is so easy to become lazy and satisfied, to let down and allow complacency to take hold and wipe out a person’s spiritual vitality. This is especially important for sojourners, since the lure of society’s evils can quickly suck one into its darkened vortex and put one to sleep. The battle is a daily one of overcoming the inherent tendency of the flesh to serve the self (Jeremiah 17:9).

“I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20)

2. Be wise. Scripture is replete with admonitions to be wise, not foolish. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are especially replete with encouragement to follow wisdom. The Hebrew word *chakam* is translated *wisdom* in most instances in these books, meaning “wise, skillful, practical,” such as the following:

“Whoso keeps the commandment shall feel no evil thing, and a *wise* man’s heart discerns both time and judgment” (Ecclesiastes 8:5).

“A *wise* man will hear, and will increase



As God’s people we are virgins, untainted any more by the world’s sin, having been washed clean. Let us be like the five wise virgins who are filled with the spirit of God continually, and do not run out of oil before the marriage supper arrives.

learning, and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels, to understand a proverb, and the interpretation, the words of the wise, and their dark sayings (Proverbs 1:5).

“A *wise* man is strong, yes, a man of knowledge increases strength. For by wise counsel you shall make war, and in a multitude of counsellors there is safety” (Proverbs 24:5).

New Testament scriptures also vaunt the practice of wisdom, using primarily two Greek words;

(1) *wisdom* = *sophos*, “wise, skilled, expert.”

(2) *wisdom* = *phronimos*, “prudent, sensible, practically wise.”

“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be you therefore *wise* [*phronimos*] as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were *wise* [*phronimos*], and five were foolish” (Matthew

25:1-2).

“Because the foolishness of God is *wiser* [*sophos*] than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than man. For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many *wise* [*sophos*] men of the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the *wise* [*sophos*], and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (I Corinthians 1:25-27).

We must walk circumspectly among all people, in particular among those who are in the world and do not care for the things of God.

“Wherefore He says, Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. See that you walk *circumspectly*, not as fools, but as wise ...” (Ephesians 5:14-15).

circumspectly = *akribos*, “accuracy which is the outcome of carefulness.”

We must be careful to avoid foolishness that would spoil our perfect name. Wisdom ought to be what others see in us, the wisdom of the Creator reflected in us, His creations made in His express image.

3. Understand God’s will for you. Such a statement may seem trite to us, since it is so obvious that we must perform the Father’s will, even as Jesus Christ did, in whose footsteps we follow (I John 2:6; I Peter 2:21). Notice what Jesus said concerning doing the

will of the Father.

“Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Truly, truly I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for what things He does, these also does the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

“But I have greater witness than that of John, for the works which the Father has given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me” (John 5:36).

We must continually search out the mind and character of Christ, and then live that very life within us. It is the nature of love, joy, peace, patience, kind-



ness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and humility (Galatians 5:21-22), of doing to others as you would want others to do to you (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31). It is practicing the ethics outlined in the Sermon on the Mount — humility, mourning for today’s world, meekness, mercy, purity, peace-making,

hungering for righteousness (Matthew 5:2-9) — and washing the feet of the brethren (John 13:5-17). It is turning the world upside-down ... the least being the greatest (Luke 9:48; Matthew 23:11-12).

4. Be filled with God’s spirit. Those who have repented of their sins, been baptized, and have had hands laid on them have received the gift of the holy spirit (Hebrews 6:1-2; Acts 2:38), and without that spirit it is impossible to please God (Romans 8:5-11). The spirit is capable of performing incredible tasks, from creation of matter and the living creatures we

see around us, to performing the tasks the Eternal has in store for us, as that very spirit motivated Christ:

“The spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised ...” (Luke 4:18).

That spirit should motivate everything that we do, say, and think, since we are His workmanship, created to do good works (Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 1:10) in the very image of Elohim (Genesis 1:27). It is the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind (II Timothy 1:7), the power that sets us free from the shackles of this world that wishes to subjugate us to the god of this world, but frees up our will to endure the hardships that accompany our being sojourners and pilgrims on the earth.

5. Be careful what you say. A person is known by what he says, and we as God’s people must be especially careful about what comes out of our mouths. The carnal mind, when controlling the tongue, is characterized as being at “... enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). James paints a vivid picture of the perils of the tongue.

“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is a unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. (James 3:5-9).



The tongue has been termed an untamable member of the body, so realize this and be careful to think before you speak, and be sparing of harsh words; you may have to eat them!

Jesus Christ made clear that your words will either justify or condemn you, in Matthew 12:34-37.

“Brood of vipers! How can you being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Many Proverbs and other scriptures deal with speaking, a few of which are given below.

Proverbs 10:19. “In the multitude of words there is no shortage of sin, but he that refrains his lips is wise”

Proverbs 15:1. “A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.”

Proverbs 16:24. “Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.”

Proverbs 17:27. “He that has knowledge spares his words”

Our Hope That Never Dies

Proverbs 18:8. “The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”

Proverbs 25:11 “” A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”

Ecclesiastes 5:2-3.”Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter anything before God, for God is in heaven and you are upon the earth; therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes through the multitude of business, and a fool’s voice is known by a multitude of words.”

We, as sojourners on the earth, need to always be ready to answer others concerning the hope we have in a hopeless world. See what Peter says in I Peter 3:15.

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

6. Seek a better country. Hebrews 11:13-16 shows that the patriarchs “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” and they were seeking a heavenly nation They readily admitted to not being able to plant roots in this present evil world, but committed their hopes to the coming age and its Edenic perfection, which all of them had been introduced to by the Eternal.

We likewise, as strangers and pilgrims in this world, look for the return of Jesus Christ to resurrect all of the elect, and then return on white horses to defeat the beast and false prophet (I Corinthians 15:51-52; I Thessalonians 4:14-17; Revelation 19). His government will be headquartered in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:4), and thence will begin the millennial reign of Christ and the saints on the earth, making it an Eden once again and putting down the works of Satan, who for that entire 1,000 years will be shut up in the abyss (Revelation 20:1-3).

As strangers, pilgrims, and sojourners on the earth, unable to put down roots in this civilization because we are not a part of it — in it but not of it — our lives are continual living sacrifices to the heavenly Father who made us. We live in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, who is the model for our own character as we share our spiritual gifts with our brethren.

We have at our fingertips the spiritual tools to overcome our inherent selfish nature, and the pulls of Satan in this world. Let us hear the sum of these words from a few of the prophets and patriarchs.

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

“He has shown you , O Man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? “ (Micah 6:8).

“Learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17).

“Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother, and



The coming age of “heaven on earth” will be awesome beyond our imagination, free of predation and competition, and filled with lovingkindness. Our every effort to be there is worthwhile!

oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor, and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart” (Zechariah 7:9-10).

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).