

Strangership and Citizenship

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(R. L. Allan)

Strangership and *citizenship*, as I may express it, have been, each of them, again and again, the character of the standing of the people of God in this world. But each of them, in its season, was, to be; simply because of God's own relationship to the world at the time. For it is not law or commandment only which makes a thing right or wrong: consistency with God is the highest rule of righteousness and holiness. The call of God is not only from Him, but to Him. He calls, not simply as One that has authority and looks for, obedience, but as One that seeks for fellowship and consistency with Himself, in the place where He is, when He calls.

Adam, at his creation, was a citizen in the earth, because God had a place in the earth. The works of His hands had been His delight and His glory. He found a place of rest in the Garden of Eden.* He could walk there; and, on account of all this, Adam's citizenship in the earth, and enjoyment of Eden as his home, was holy; it put Adam where God already was, and that is the holiness of every position.

*See Note on p. 128.

Sin, however, quickly defiled the earth, and God was thereby estranged from it. If Adam preserve his holiness, he must become a stranger with God in the world; and so he does. By listening to the story of the bruised and bruising seed of the woman (that is, the gospel of a crucified and risen victorious Christ), Adam is redeemed; and, as a sinner saved, he returns to God from the covert and distance where guilt had put him; *but after that he is never seen as seeking citizenship in the earth outside the Garden of Eden*. We do not find him with Cain and his family, and his worldly progeny, in the city Enoch, in the midst of its traffic and pleasures, but with Seth and that household who call upon the name of the Lord, and have no memorial in the earth but their sepulchre. For the Lord God had now no works of His hands to be His delight and glory, as once He had.

He had soon to repent that He had made man on the earth; and being a stranger in the world His hands had made, Adam is a stranger with Him; and this was again his holiness.

In the progress of the divine ways, however, judgment enters. The earth continues in its corruption for an age, and violence fills it, till God removes it by the waters of the flood, and through that judgment renews it. He then takes a place and a kingdom in it again. His fresh and pure handiwork had given Him a place in the earth at the beginning; and now, in the day of Noah, His cleansing judgments give Him a place in it a second time; and then man, elect man, at once becomes a citizen here again: Noah is made such. He is called of God to be such. He is commanded to replenish the earth (as Adam, at the beginning, had been); to order and govern it; to exercise his religious services and maintain his testimony to God in it, Government is his, and that too in company with priesthood. And this was holiness in Noah. God owned the earth as the scene of His presence again, and Noah had to use it, to order it, and to enjoy it, not only under Him, but with Him. Citizenship in it was consistency with God, and thus it was Noah's holiness.

But the apostacy after the flood — the apostacy of Gen. 11 — estranges the Lord from the earth again. It must be so, except He judge it, and purge it by judgment: for God cannot own a defiled thing left in its defilement. He can make a defiled thing His, by purifying; but if He leave it in its pollution,

He must leave it Himself.

The Lord does not judge this post-diluvian apostacy as He had the former. He scatters the people, and confounds their language. But He does not clear the earth of them. He rather spreads them all abroad, so as not to leave one single clean, undefiled, separated place for Himself in it. He cannot but be a stranger in such a condition of things. And He is a stranger; and as a stranger in the earth, He calls to Abraham from heaven. It was the voice of "the God of glory" that addressed itself to Abraham. The call was from heaven and *to* heaven; and it made Abraham a stranger with God in this world; and it bespeaks its heavenly character very earnestly, for Abraham, in obedience to it, has to come away from country, kindred, and father's house; and that, too, to a land that was only to be *shown* to him, but not *given*. He was to be a stranger in the place he was to reach, as well as to the place he left and lost. All this strongly marks the heavenliness of this call of the God of glory, and the strangership of the elect ones in the earth. It separated Abraham from what flesh and earth had for him — from what was humanly right, but what at present could not mark *Divine* holiness; for God had been estranged from the earth.

And thus it continues with Isaac and Jacob. Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob alike *dwell in tents*. This is their memorial, and this is the symbol of strangership in the earth. Isaac and Jacob, in their generations, *continue* to be strangers, as Abraham had been *called* to be one, because a state of unjudged corruption continues: and such a state, as we have said, makes the blessed God Himself a stranger. The earth must be clean, either in its original order and state as the Garden of Eden was, or it must be made clean by judgment, as in the time of Noah, or God cannot find a dwelling in it.* He may visit it with blessing for His elect; but He cannot take up with it as His dwelling-place.

The earth, however, in due time, is again to tell of God, and His presence here. The children of Abraham, no longer a family merely, as in the generations of Isaac, and Jacob, but grown into a nation, numerous as the stars of heaven and many as the sands upon the sea-shore, shall have a land prepared for them, a clean land, where God Himself will dwell again. Accordingly, Canaan is got ready for Jehovah, the Lord, and Israel, His people. The sword of Joshua clears it, and ordinances of holiness sanctify all that is in it. It is but a narrow place, a spot like the Garden of Eden, in the midst of a surrounding creation. But it is chosen, and the Lord God can dwell there. The God of glory is not again calling from heaven as in the day of Abraham, but seats Himself in His sanctuary in the land of Israel. And there He sets His people in the midst of all that, out of which He had called Abraham Family, national, human, earthly associations are all to be there, and enjoyed there; home, country, kindred, and father's house — the very scenes and relationships from which their fathers had been separated. The cloudy pillar, as I may say, where the glory dwelt, took them right back to all the old things from which the same glory had, of old, withdrawn the patriarchs; so strongly are the divers mysteries of strangership and citizenship, in their several seasons, marked under the pleasure and under the sealing of the will of God. But we have to go beyond this.

The nation of Israel was no more true to Canaan than Adam had been true to the Garden, or Noah (and those who came after him) to the new world — the world after the flood. The earth was again corrupted under the inhabitants thereof.

The story of the Lord's long-suffering with Israel during their years of decline and backsliding, and of the many ways which His hand and His Spirit took with them, is spread before us in a great part of the Old Scriptures; and a fruitful page it is, reading out lessons of God and lessons of man, for our learning. But we are not to trace it here. But on reaching the end of it we see the nation — that is Israel. the children of Abraham — filling up their full measure, and casting out the Heir of the Vineyard from

His own inheritance.

The Gentiles took their part in this: the Gentiles, with Pilate, the Jews, with Herod, were alike in this deed. (See Acts 4: 27) Nay, the world was the guilty one. The world, that was made by Him, knew Him not. It saw and hated both Christ and His Father. If He had not done the work He did, and spoken the words He did, they had not had sin; but now their sin was full. And forth from this state — this condition of perfected and universal apostacy, the God of glory has now again called *from* heaven and *to* heaven; and the Church is that elect one who, like Abraham of old, has heard the call and come out from the world — from the Gentiles and the Jews.

This gives the Church strangership in the world, all through this age; and that too on the highest of all reasons and sanctions. For now it is not merely that the earth has been soiled, and thus made unfit for the sole of the foot of the God of glory, but, in rebellion, Israel has refused her Lord; and in infidel,, atheistic blindness of heart the world has disowned its Maker. God has been *personally* here, in the Son of Man, and personally He has been disowned and rejected.

This exceedeth; but nothing can this exceed. Jesus is with the Father, and the Church is the honoured witness and companion of His poverty and humiliation in the world, during this age of His rejection and absence.

But, being separated from the world, the saints are surely separated from its judgments; and being separated to Christ, they are separated to His glories; they will, therefore, appear with Him in the day of His glories. He is to break the enemy like a potter's vessel; the saints are to do the same. (Ps. 2: 9; Rev. 2: 27) He is there to take His throne of peaceful glory, and of universal dominion; and they are then to sit on their thrones, in the same times of "the regeneration," and have their several authorities over the cities of the kingdom. (Matt. 20: 28)

And for these ends they will have risen and met Him. For as they are to come back with Him to the earth, in the day of His power, in judgment, so must they have gone before, to be with Him in the heavens. Is it too much to say this? We *meet* Him as He comes from heaven to the air; we are *with Him* when He returns, to the earth. (1 Thess. 4)

Our attitude is, therefore, defined for us, and very simple it is. We are the present companions of a rejected, absent, unworldly Christ. We recognize the world around us (which has seen and hated both Him and His Father, as the Lord Himself says) as morally incurable, awaiting the judgment of His coming day. We look to meet Him in the air, when the hour of His good pleasure to that end shall come; and when that is to be we know not. And we reckon upon returning with Him, first to the execution of judgment, and then to the sharing with Him, in manifestation, the glory of His dominion in the world to come, or the millennial age.

These things form and define the proper attitude of the saints of this dispensation. It is easy to apprehend this; but to realize it we need simple, energetic faith in the power of the Holy Ghost — the faith that cherishes single-heartedness to Christ, and the love for Himself which ever keeps a welcome for Him in the heart.

*NOTE. — The Editor thinks it due to truth here to explain, that Scripture intimates no dwelling or resting of God on earth till after redemption, whether in type or in reality. Hence Exodus, not Genesis, first speaks of a dwelling of God with man.