

Pilgrims

There is an Aboriginal proverb that authors and dignitaries have quoted for various reasons. Queen Elizabeth II used the quote in a 2011 speech to the Australian people. The proverb is, "We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home." It is similar to sayings found in many different cultures. Without getting into the various philosophies and interpretations in meaning, let us ask, "What does the Bible say?"

Genesis 17:8 records a promise God made to Abraham, who would be a wanderer in a land he would never own. God referred to Abraham as a "stranger" KJV, a "sojourner" NASV, a "foreigner" CEV, and an "alien" EHV. The various ways different translations describe the way Abraham is commanded to live in a land that belongs to people who do not live and worship like Abraham did, shows the extent of the isolation him endured while waiting for the promises of a family, a great nation, and a promised land. His only firm possession was the unshakable faith that what God said would become a reality. God's promise was better than the land and people all around him.

From Abraham's day until today, there has been a continuous recognition that the people who want to follow God are a small group within the World's societies. God's children are an assembly linked not by human characteristics but by the Spirit of God that joins us by faith in God and His Son. Peter calls us a chosen race (ESV) or chosen generation (NKJV). Regardless of the word used, Peter refers to the fact that we are separate people dedicated to the worship and discipleship of God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Ultimately, we are to consider ourselves to be strangers in the land where we live as we travel to our home in Heaven.

Notice how Peter addresses this letter. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen" (1 Peter 1:1). Later in the letter, Peter advises on how to live in the world but not be part of it. "Beloved, I urge you **as aliens and strangers** to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. **Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles**, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may, because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:11-12).

We sing "This World is Not My Home," acknowledging that we are passing through the evils here toward a better Home prepared for us in Heaven. From the early 1800s, many people weighed down in various sorrows sang "I Am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger," lamenting their condition but recognizing the promise of a better life ahead, and primarily the promise of life after death. Song number 673 in our Song Book, "Here We Are But Straying Pilgrims," provides a sample of the sensations felt in this life and the hope that urges the faithful to continue the journey in this foreign land.

The first verse expresses the recognition that we are but straying pilgrims, and the path we follow is often dim in this strange land. But we are cheered as we sing of a shining eternal home just over the great river separating us from our home. The second verse speaks of the weariness of pressing through the obstacles in our way and the storm that darkens our sight. But our hearts cannot be overcome and sing of the shining home that will give us rest. The third verse mentions fear of the tempter, the accuser that would convict us of sin. But we need not fear Satan because our defender, the Lamb of God who died for us, has already defeated the evil that would destroy us. The Lord has

assured us that we may know that that shining home will be ours when we leave this strange land. The chorus continues: "Yonder over the rolling river, where the shining mansions rise, soon will be our home forever, and the smile of the blessed giver, gladdens all our longing eyes."

Peter advises all who are obedient children of God to refrain from conforming to the temptations and sins of this existence. We are to be like the Holy One, who calls us to join Him in His eternal home. "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth, knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:14-19).

Where is your home? What is your destination?