

## No Continuing City

Hebrews chapter 11 lists many faithful individuals, who separated themselves from the corruption that is in the world through lust, and looked beyond the present day of distress to the Glory beyond. Hence, we read of Abraham:

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:9-10).

He, and others, “desired a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city ...” (Heb. 11:16). And we likewise, must live out the same spirit in our lives:

“Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come” (Heb. 13:13-4).

The language of Hebrews chapter 11 is that in this spirit, the faithful “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13). This alludes to the spirit of David, who though he were one of the greatest kings who ever lived saw himself as being but a stranger and pilgrim:

“ ... for ***we are strangers before thee, and sojourners***, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding” (1 Chron. 29:15).

And again:

“Hear my prayer, O Yahweh, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for ***I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner***, as all my fathers were” (Psa. 39:12).

If the great King David who dwelt in a palace in Jerusalem could say that he was a “stranger” and a “sojourner”, how much more must we do likewise! Peter exhorts the believers to “pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:” (1 Pet. 1:17). Like the Patriarchs of old, we are not settled into the world and all its pernicious ways: rather our hearts lie in kingdom to come, when we will inherit life with David.

By contrast, the prayer of David was:

“... deliver my soul from the wicked ... from men of the world, ***which have their portion in this life*** ... as for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness” (Psa. 17:14-16).

Here we have two categories of men: those who have their portion in this life, and those who live for the prospect of future blessing. David would only be “satisfied” when in the future, he will “behold” the face of God, when he will “awake” from the sleep of death, with the Divine “likeness”. And this is our hope also: “we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jno. 3:2). The Pharisees in the days when the Lord walked upon the earth already had their reward. They were desirous of the praise of men: “they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward” (Mat. 6:2, 5). They had their portion in this life, and so perished without hope.

The overriding concern of the believer in Christ, is to attain to that coming kingdom which the Lord will establish when he comes again. There are two aspects to this: "... seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Mat. 6:33). There are those who desire the kingdom in order to inherit the material blessings of that time – and there is nothing wrong with that *per se*. But our main concern, is to want the kingdom because it is only then that righteousness shall be performed upon the earth. As we read in Messiah's model prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name. **Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth**, as it is in heaven ..." (Mat 6:9-10). We seek the presence of the Father's Righteousness, as well as the physical blessings – for indeed, latter cannot precede the former.

Being that we look for better days to come, our focus in life is upon the eternal principles of God, and not the present day of sorrow and tribulation:

"... for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

And if the Apostle Paul, who endured much for Christ's sake could describe his sufferings as "our light affliction" – how much more can we, who have not resisted unto blood (Heb. 12:4), do likewise!

But there are those who are lovers of this world's goods. These are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:4). The example of Moses is relevant here: of him it is written:

"by faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter: Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach for Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Heb. 11:24-26).

And here, the word rendered "has respect" is literally to "look away" – in other words, Moses made a conscious decision not to look upon, or set his heart upon the pleasures of this life: he looked away to something better that is yet to come. His desire was not in the trappings of life as an Egyptian prince: rather, he suffered affliction in the wilderness for most of his life, for Christ's sake. There was no doubt in his mind as to the future Prophet like unto him: it is written that "the desire of the righteous shall be granted" (Prov. 10:24) – and so it will be with Moses, and those of like precious faith.

The commandment is to separate ourselves from men of the world, and be wholeheartedly devoted to the things of the Truth:

"wherefore **come out from among them, and be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and **touch not the unclean thing**; and I will receive you, and be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

This is the Father's commandment, which although difficult to discharge, is important not to neglect. Numbers chapter 16 shows how that there was rebellion and apostasy in Israel. Korah, Dathan and Abiram together challenged the authority of Moses, and established a competing system of worship amongst the people. But what was to be done? "Yahweh spake unto Moses, and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment" (Num. 16:21). Following which, Moses made intercession for the people, and it was ordained that those who separated themselves from the Apostasy would be spared:

“And he [i.e. Moses] spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and ***touch nothing of theirs***, lest ye be consumed in all their sins” (Num. 16:26).

Notice the allusions in 2 Corinthians 6, cited above: “... touch not the unclean thing ...”. There is also an allusion in 2 Timothy 2: in the circumstances of Korah, it was said that:

“Even tomorrow, Yahweh will ***shew who are his***, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him” (Num. 16:5).

Compare this with the words of Paul to Timothy:

“... Nevertheless, the salvation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth ***them that are his***. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ ***depart from iniquity***” (2 Tim. 2:19).

Just as the camp had to separate themselves from the apostasy instigated by Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their adherents, even so today those who name the name the name of Christ must do likewise.

Returning to the example of Abraham, Hebrews 11 describes various illustrations of his faith:

“by faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise ...” (Heb. 11:9).

This is of great interest: when we think of the things that characterize the faith of Abraham, we immediately think of his offering up of Isaac, or his departure from Ur of the Chaldees, not knowing he was going. But here, a hallmark of his faith, was the fact that he lived in tents. By his actions, he demonstrated how that he was a stranger and sojourner, having not permanent dwelling place. Contrast this to first work of building, back in Genesis chapter 11:

“... they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime they had for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:3-4).

Here we have the first building works, and the construction of the first city. It was designed for men to “make a name” for themselves, and to make them united, lest they be scattered. What a contrast this is to the high tower, which is the Name of Yahweh:

“the Name of Yahweh is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Prov. 18:10).

There is also the construction of a city in the Divine Scheme of things, again for the elevation of His Name, and not that of man:

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ... and the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones ...” (Rev. 21:2, 19, but see whole chapter).

This is the city that hath foundations, that Abraham and others looked for. We must set our affections on things above (Col. 3:2), when it will be “as the days of heaven upon the earth” (Deut. 11:21). We desire to dwell in that new city to come, whose builder and maker is Yahweh, and all things will redound to the glorification and praise of His Name.

It logically follows then, that as we live for the future, and not the present, we have no love for the things of this world:

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” (1 Jno. 2:15-17).

All the underlying principles upon which the world operates, are nothing more than natural desire, or lusts. We must “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul,” (1 Pet. 2:11), and look towards the coming of Messiah to set up the heavenly city of Jerusalem upon the earth. We must look to that day as those who love the appearing of Messiah – indeed this was the hope and anticipation of Paul:

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

The Lord will come: “unto them that look for him .. without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28): we must ensure that when this day comes, we will be found loving, desiring, and looking for his appearing in the glory of his Father.

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