

# Rev. 12:6. Strangership and Pilgrimage

by Horatius Bonar

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*The sermon emphasizes the Christian's identity as a stranger and pilgrim, urging believers to focus on their heavenly calling amidst worldly distractions.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1, Exodus 16:1, 1 Chronicles 29:15, Psalm 39:12, Micah 2:10, Acts 14:22, Hebrews 11:10, Hebrews 11:16, 1 Peter 2:11, Revelation 12:6

**Topics:** "Strangers And Pilgrims", "Faith and Perseverance"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the Christian's identity as a stranger and pilgrim in this world, drawing parallels between the journey of the Church and the experiences of biblical figures like Abraham and Paul. He warns against the dangers of becoming too comfortable in worldly pursuits, which can lead to spiritual complacency and a loss of focus on the heavenly calling. Bonar illustrates that while earthly comforts may provide temporary relief, they can distract believers from their true purpose and destination. He encourages Christians to embrace their journey through life with faith, patience, and a readiness to endure hardships, always looking forward to the eternal city of God. Ultimately, Bonar calls for a life of holiness and separation from worldly influences, urging believers to follow the footsteps of the faithful who have gone before them.

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## Transcript

"The woman fled into the wilderness!"--Revelation 12:6.

"Stranger and pilgrims."--1 Peter 2:2.

"They took their journey from Elim."--Exodus 16:1.

The woman fled into the wilderness! Well would it have been with her had she continued there. But she came forth into earth's cities, and dwelt in its palaces, and put on its gay apparel, and said, 'I am a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.' In unbelief and forgetfulness of her true character, she sought to reign where she should have remained a stranger, and put on purple robes when she should have worn only sackcloth (1 Corinthians 4:8).

'The earth helped the woman,' no doubt; and in so doing saved her from unceasing persecution, giving her some respite. Christianity became fashionable; and the immense number of mere professors of that faith, while really a source of internal weakness, was yet a source of external strength and protection. It was

earthly protection, no doubt, and on that account perilous; yet it was just the protection which God Himself had given to the Jewish Church in Babylon, in Shushan, and in Egypt. The flood of persecution was sweeping the Church away, when 'the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.' This cessation of persecution, this earthly help, became a snare. The woman said, 'I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing.' She forgot her heavenly calling, her future kingdom, her incorruptible inheritance, her unearthly hope, and became part of the world which had helped her. Civilization, science, literature, intellectual enlightenment, became her gods. She set them between her and the cross, between her and the glory. Influence, power, wealth, knowledge apart from God and His Christ, were sought after and obtained. The Church wooed the world, and the world wooed the Church; compromises were agreed upon; the world ceased to persecute, and the Church ceased to 'condemn the world.'

Yet God is ever calling His own out of this mingled mass, and bidding them walk alone. We are not simply to leave the world, but to 'go forth outside the camp,' bearing Christ's reproach; and oftentimes that reproach comes sharper from the lips of so-called Christians, than from a pleasure-loving world.

Abel was a stranger upon earth--so are all God's Abels still. Enoch was a stranger--yet he was partaker of the heavenly calling. Abraham was a stranger--yet he was one of the seekers of the better, even the heavenly country (Hebrews 11:16), looking for the New Jerusalem, the Church's special home (Hebrews 11:10). David confesses himself a pilgrim--'We are strangers before You, and sojourners, as were all our fathers' (1 Chronicles 29:15; Psalm 39:12).

'Leave of your country,' said God to Abraham (Genesis 12:1). 'Arise and depart,' were the prophet's words to Israel (Micah 2:10). 'Let us go forth,' said Paul (Hebrews 13:13). 'Stranger and pilgrim' is descriptive of a believing man (1 Peter 2:2). 'In journeyings often,' said Paul of himself (2 Corinthians 11:26). Again and again is it said of Israel, 'They took their journey' from such and such places.

Strangers and pilgrims! Yes! For this world is not our rest or our home! We are wayfaring men, tarrying but a night. We are sojourners, as were all our fathers; and we pass the time of our sojourning here in fear; not looking back, but up and on; with girded loins and staff in hand hastening to the heavenly city. What have we to do with Egypt's treasures, or Babylon's glory; with Corinth's lusts, or Rome's magnificence; with Athenian philosophy, or Ephesian magic--with worldly wantonness or luxury? We see what eye has not seen--we hear what ear has not heard--and we pass by these earthly beauties and pleasures! They perish with the using! The fashion of this world passes away!

These are memorable words of Paul--'In journeyings often.' Such is a brief but true picture of a Christian man's life. Rooted, yet unrooted; settled, yet unsettled; at rest, yet ever moving; anchored, yet hurried along with storms; unburdened, yet burdened; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

Such was the life of Abraham and the patriarchs; such the life of Moses; such the life of Israel in their desert-wanderings. Here have we no continuing city--not even a continuing tent. No certain dwelling-place; no rest--sure of a dwelling somewhere, yet not sure of it anywhere. Patriarchal life was made up of comings and departings, of greetings and farewells. Men were then 'strangers and pilgrims on the earth.' They were like seamen, the greater part of whose time was spent in pulling up and letting go the anchor, in spreading and taking in their sails. Their life was the remotest possible from that of the hermit on the one hand, or the bustling merchant on the other. They seemed hardly to touch the soil over which they passed, or to have any firm connection with the things seen and temporal.

Paul's history was in many respects a repetition of Israel's, and even more a repetition of the Master's, who was, above all others, 'in journeyings often;' whose ministry was a continual moving to and fro, having no place to lay His head; to whom even Bethany was only a single night's resting-place from which He must depart on the morrow. From the day that the Lord shone upon Paul on his way to Damascus, his life was that of Israel in the desert, only with more of conflict, and weariness, and sorrow, and labor. He had his Ethams, his Succoths, his Marahs, his Elims, his Rephidims, his Kadeshes--with many an intervening resting-place--certain of nothing but that the pillar-cloud was above him, that his bread would be given him, and his water would be sure--that there was no condemnation for him, and that all things would work together for his good!

Many and pleasant resting-places had Paul, like his Master at Jacob's well, enjoying shade and provision of which the world knew nothing--but the intervals between were long and wearisome. At Corinth, at Antioch, at Troas, he rested once and again, enjoying sweet fellowship with the brethren; but he had scarcely begun to enjoy this, when he was called away. The pillar-cloud rose, and he was constrained to move. Each movement, each stage, was the encountering of a new storm of the desert, or the endurance of more scorching heat. Gladly would he have remained at such places, in the bosom of churches he had planted; but the Spirit allowed him not, leading him on from place to place--to bonds and imprisonment--to labors and stripes--to beating and stoning--to shipwreck and peril by sea and land--to weariness and painfulness--to hunger and thirst--to fastings and cold, and nakedness. He was a stranger and pilgrim on the earth--through much tribulation entering the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

Of Israel we read that 'they came to Elim' (Exodus 15:27), where were the wells and palms; and then that they 'took their journey from Elim' (Exodus 16:1), into the wilderness, where there was neither bread nor water.

They had left Egypt, the land of worldly plenty, where they walked by sight, not by faith--and they had come into a land where sight was nothing, and where faith must be all. The closing waters of the Red Sea, while they cut Israel off from their enemies--cut them off from the land of plenty--and shut them into one of dearth and desolation. They were now alone with God! For good or for evil, they had now to deal with Him alone--and that face to face, in a desert land, where earthly supplies were unknown. If He were against them--who could be for them? If He were for them--who could be against them?

Their arrival at MARAH tested them. Is their life to be by faith or by sight? Is earth or heaven to be their recognized storehouse of blessing--their fountainhead of abundance? This was their first real taste of the true wilderness life and walk. It began with the bitter--and it ended with the sweet. The first taste of the waters was distasteful--the second most pleasant. The bitterness was of earth--the sweetness was of heaven.

Yet at Marah the comfort was of a mingled kind. It was not their faith that had turned the bitterness into sweetness--and this was humbling and sad. God had met their murmurings with His own free love--their distrust of Him with overflowing bounty--and, if we may so say, had answered them according to their unbelief, not their faith. He had, in wondrous grace, reversed His own rule of action, and had done the miracle because of their unbelief--not their faith! Yet even the outward blessing Marah was not a full one. It sufficed for the moment, but it was incomplete. There was water, but no shade; wells, but no palms. The water had issued from their unbelief, not their faith; and God marked His displeasure by making them drink it on the unshaded burning sands.

There was little then to bind them to this shadeless spot, saddened with the recollection of their own unbelief, though in a measure sweetened by the gracious dealings of Him whose love passes knowledge. Their journey from Marah would not be an unwilling one, and their arrival at ELIM would be most grateful--for Elim contained all that such sojourners required. Sweet spot! Close girdled with low hills; the higher peaks of the desert not far off; covered with desert shrubs, tall or stunted; wells bubbling over, and losing themselves in the desert sand; a tiny stream finding its way through the sandy hollow to the Red Sea; and clustering palms (now, in our day quite a forest) stretching their shades over the smiling valley in all directions!

Israel might say--Here let us abide. If we are to have a home in the desert, let it be here. They would say, 'This is our rest;' but God said, 'This is not your rest.' So they left the shade and the cool waters--'they journeyed from Elim.' The journey to Elim was pleasant; the stay at Elim was still more so. The journey from Elim must have been sad and dreary--behind them the refreshing verdure; before and around the hot wind of the desert, and with no resting-place in view. But such was the will of Him who was leading them on--such was the silent beckoning of the pillar-cloud. They must not stay--though they would have gladly stayed. It is not to softness, and luxury, and ease that they are called, but to hardness and trial--and a life of faith on an unseen God and a yet distant 'Canaan'!

So it is with us. We are 'in journeyings often.' Egypt is left behind forever--the blood has been sprinkled, and we have found protection and deliverance from the destroying angel--the march has been begun--the Red Sea is crossed--we have sung the song of Moses--we have entered on the desert--we are pressing toward 'Jerusalem'! Our desert life is the life of discipline, and faith, and hope. We come to Elim, and rest for a few pleasant days beneath its palms. But Elim is not Jerusalem, and we must leave it. Oppressive words these, 'They journeyed from Elim!' And yet, since Elim is not 'Jerusalem', our hope still shines in front of us. It is not on Canaan that we turn our backs; it is not Jerusalem that we are called to leave; for that city once entered, is entered forever. From it we go out no more.

But here "in the wilderness," we have our changes--our risings and our fallings--our rejoicings and our sorrowings--our movings and our restings--our sickenings and our healings--our partings and our meetings--often coming close together, like Marah and Elim in the same desert, and within a day of each other. We are 'in journeyings often!' Ours is a continual tent-life--this wilderness world is not our rest! Often we wish it were our rest, we get so tired of these unceasing movements--but it must not be so. We could not be trusted with ease, and comfort, and painless, prosperous days. We would forget ourselves--and forget our inheritance. Every change or sorrow says to us--"Onward, upward! Elim is pleasant, with its wells and palms, but it is not Canaan--it is not Jerusalem. It is only a brief resting-place; a rest to recruit and fit you for your further journey. You must leave it on the morrow!"

Yet the pillar-cloud is here, for shade, for protection, or guidance. It will not mislead. You shall just have as long at Elim as is for your good--and not a minute longer! Therefore gird up your loins; be ever in readiness either for resting or journeying--for the battle, or the march, or the triumph. Let patience have her perfect work; let faith keep her hold of the unseen; let hope burn brighter and fuller as the journeyings are drawing to their close--and as we near the gates of the glorious city--and the banks of the river of life--and the palms of the paradise of God!

Be holy. Be separate from the world. Abstain from fleshly lusts. Lay aside all filthiness. Walk soberly. Beware of earth's folly and idle laughter. Set your affection on things above. Be prepared for suffering. Endure hardness. Take up your cross daily and bear it aloft--and be not ashamed of it. The footsteps of

the old pilgrims are still visible on the sands of time. Follow them! Their voice is still heard, and their hand still waves, beckoning you to follow. Until you find a nobler faith than Abraham's, a better book than the Bible, a truer creed than Paul's--believe what they believed. For these things are not yet obsolete. Centuries do not alter truth. Time and science have not yet leveled the eternal hills. The cross still stands erect amid the ruins of ages--the blood of Jesus still purges the conscience--and the believing man is still a stranger here in this world!

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