

# Rev. 14:3. the Church Dwelling Alone

by Horatius Bonar

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*The Church is called to dwell alone, separate from the world, and to find its help, riches, wisdom, pleasures, and society in God.*

**Scripture:** Numbers 23:9, Deuteronomy 33:28, Psalm 1:1, Ecclesiastes 4:10, 2 Corinthians 6:17, Hebrews 7:26, James 1:27, Jude 1:1, Revelation 14:3-4

**Topics:** "Identity in Christ", "Separation"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the Church's unique position in the world, drawing parallels between Israel's separation and the Church's calling to dwell alone. He explains that the Church is redeemed from the earth and from among men to live a life distinct from worldly influences, relying solely on God for help, riches, wisdom, pleasures, and society. Bonar highlights that true joy and fulfillment come from a relationship with God rather than from the world's offerings. He urges believers to embrace their identity as a separate people, finding strength and security in their divine calling. The message encourages Christians to resist worldly temptations and to dwell in the presence of God.

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## Transcript

"Redeemed from the earth."--Revelation 14:3.

"Redeemed from among men."--Revelation 14:4.

"The people shall dwell alone."--Numbers 23:9.

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."--2 Cor. 6:17

Let me call attention to these four tests, as making up the different parts of one great truth concerning the Church's true position in this present evil world, her 'unearthly' calling and 'unearthly' walk. She is the 'redeemed one;' redeemed from the earth; redeemed from among men, or literally 'from men.' She comes out and is separate; she dwells alone; 'separate from sinners' (Psalm 1:1; Hebrews 7:26).

She is 'redeemed from the earth' that she may dwell alone. She is 'redeemed from men' that she may dwell alone. She comes out and is 'separate' that she may dwell alone. For she is not of the world, even as He who redeemed her is not of the world. She is 'sanctified in God the Father' (Jude 1). She is a stranger in strange land. Her calling is heavenly; and her affections are set on things above. Her 'citizenship' is in

heaven and she sits loose from all below--riches, pleasures, honors, vanities! 'Unspotted from the world' is her designation. (James 1:27)

I wish to bring out all this specially in connection with the third of the above texts, concerning Israel's dwelling alone.

'Israel shall dwell in safety alone' (Deuteronomy 33:28). 'Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations' (Numbers 23:9).

These were true sayings, though one of them comes from the lips of a false prophet. In them we seem to have a contradiction of the divine word, 'It is not good for man to be alone.' Yet is so only in appearance. These two 'alones' are very different--the 'alone' of Adam and the 'alone' of Israel; the persons are different, the circumstances are different, the words are different; that which was not good for the one was good for the other.

It looks also like an exception to the proverb, 'Two are better than one--for if they fall, the one will life up his fellow--but woe to him who is alone when he falls' (Ecclesiastes 4:10). But it is not really so; for everything in such a case depends on the friendliness of one's companion. Better to be alone when falling, than to be with an enemy.

Up until Abraham's day the 'godly seed', the 'saints of the Most High,' had not been alone (except in heart and feeling); but were scattered everywhere; hidden and mixed. Hence before the flood the sons of God intermarried with the daughters of men. But when He called Abraham, He unfolded His purpose of separation from the rest of men. Then He carried out His condemnation of this present evil world, which in and by Noah He had already proclaimed. He appeared unto Abraham as the God of glory; and in that character He called him 'out' of Chaldea and its idolatry. He called him out to be 'separate' and to 'dwell alone'--no, to dwell in 'tents'--temporary dwellings. It was not the removal from one nation to another, or one land to another, that we see in Abraham, but the call to 'dwell alone'--the manifestation of God's purpose to this end.

Abraham dwelt alone. So did Isaac. So did Jacob. So also did Moses at last; though for a time he was drawn into the world, not out of it. Yet afterwards he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. First drawn out of the water, then out of Pharaoh's house. Egypt soon cast him out, and he 'dwelt alone' and 'separate' in the land of Midian--as a stranger and a sojourner. All his later life was of the same separated kind. He was a true Nazarite, set apart from the world to God.

So was it with Israel. Even 'in Egypt' there was little affinity or sympathy between them and the Egyptians; and the more that their 'hope' came out and brightened--the fellowship became less--and the antagonism the more decided. In 'the desert' they were separate--they 'dwelt alone'--with no society but that of God. When they entered Canaan, they did it to dwell alone. Even there they were not numbered among the nations. They were in the midst of all that was incongruous and hostile; and all things seemed meant to keep them separate, to make them feel their separation. Their place, their character, the calling, their testimony, all corresponded with each other.

First there was round them a wall or barricade of enemies--the Phoenicians on the north, the Philistines on the west, the Edomites on the south, the Moabites and Ammonites on the east. Then there was an outer belt of deserts, and mountains, and seas, accomplishing a double separation; and beyond these there

was an interminable stretch of hostile territory--the vast nations of heathenism spreading wide over the world, all of them hostile to Israel.

Truly Israel was separate and dwelt alone. They were not numbered among the nations. The Gentiles never spoke of them but with contempt. To a Greek or Roman, a Jew was the name for all that was weak, morose, foolish, and ignorant. The great worldly streams swept by the tribes and around them, but the Israelites remained alone--unaffected by these mighty motions of earth's kingdoms--until at last their sins drew them into the currents, and they no longer dwelt alone.

But for ages they did dwell alone. They had all things of their own--borrowing from none, dependent on none. With their own self-sustaining land, their own religion, their own city, their own temple, their own God, they dwelt alone. Their internal resources were enough. They needed not to go down to Egypt for help; and what could Babylon and its idols, or Greece and her gods, do for them? They needed nothing from the world. Jehovah was their God, their all; and with His fullness for their inheritance, they could afford to 'dwell alone.'

What was Babylon, or Assyria, or Egypt, to Israel? An enemy, or it might be a tempter--but certainly not an ally or a friend. A distant peace might be between them; but as for fellowship, or brotherhood, or sympathy--that could not be!

What is the world to the Church, or to any single saint? Just what Babylon or Egypt was to Israel. No more. She dwells alone. We know that we are of God--and that the whole world lies in wickedness!

Israel was 'separate' and dwelt alone. This was her position, her portion--such as was appointed her by the purpose of God. The Church is to dwell alone, like Israel. Let us set both these together, illustrating the one by the other.

1. Israel did not need the world's HELP. The nations were stronger than she, but she did not require their strength to lean upon. Their strength was their weakness; her weakness was her strength. They would have helped her, but she would not be helped; and when at last she did accept their aid--it was her ruin! Her help was in Jehovah. Her security was in His favor. With Him upon her side, what was the array of the whole world against her? Her pious kings, such as Asa and Hezekiah, felt this--they prayed and acted accordingly.

Neither does the Church need the help of the world. The less of the world there is in her projects, her enterprises, her hopes, the better. Never has she prospered when she departed to an 'arm of flesh', or to the strength of human greatness, or to the influence of the world's smile. For the world cannot really help one who is not of this world, who has nothing in common with her joys, or cares, or ambitions. And never has the world helped the Church without exacting a favor in return--insisting on or tacitly giving it to be understood that she expects some compromise, some relaxation of her testimony, less of strictness and spirituality--more of congenial fellowship and participation in her pleasures, if not her lusts and sins!

The Church's help is neither in the world--nor in the god of this world. Her help is in the Lord who made heaven and earth. With this divine help she is able to undertake any enterprise, to encounter any foe. Let her lean on His arm alone. It is on this arm that faith leans; it is this arm that unbelief flings from it--to take hold of one more visible, more sensible, more congenial to flesh and blood.

II. Israel did not need the world's RICHES. The world was rich--rich in its own way, and according to its own standard. Israel might have had a share in that wealth. But God had said, It is not for you. You need it not. I have given you a land flowing with milk and honey, abundance of corn and wine. What more do you need? Be content. Be strangers with Me and sojourners--as all your fathers were. When you need the gold of earth, you shall have it. You needed it once when you were leaving Egypt, and you got it without toil. You needed it when you were building a temple for me in my city, and you got it. But seek it not. When required, it will come to you.

Israel! the world's gold is not for you! Church of the living God, your richest are not of earth--your treasure is in heaven. Labor not to be rich! Covet not luxury, and ease, and splendor! Grudge not to be poor. The cross of 'poverty', which your Master bore--you be satisfied to bear also. In the early Church it was so. 'Not many rich, not many noble,' were called. God chose the poor to confound the riches and greatness of earth. Poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing all things. Your riches are God's; they are the unsearchable riches of Christ; they are divine and everlasting. They take not to themselves wings and flee away. You shall have enough before long--when the Lord comes. Meanwhile, be rich in faith, rich in love, rich in all good works!

III. Israel did not need the world's WISDOM. Egypt had learning, Babylon had wisdom, Greece had philosophy. It is easy to see how Israel might covet these; for these have always been--even more than gold--objects of highest ambition of man. But with these Israel was not to meddle. When she tried to do so, she failed. Earth's wisdom would not suit her. The cup of Chaldean magic was not for her. The cloak of Athenian philosophy did not fit a Jew.

Beside, she had wisdom of her own; wisdom of heavenly origin; not the wisdom of 'conjecture or speculation'--but of certainty, of absolute truth--wisdom which could alone fill and satisfy--wisdom which could gladden and illuminate. In a small volume, no doubt, was that wisdom contained. To the secrets of science it did not extend; of man's goodness or greatness it spoke little; to earthly glory or fame it did not point the way. But it was full of God and the things of God; full of infinite and perfect truth; full of all that could fill, and purify, and ennoble the human soul. One page of it was worth all that Gentile sages could boast of. Israel surely did not need to go to Chaldea or Egypt for wisdom and learning. She had all she needed within herself. She might dwell alone and enjoy it all. Happy Israel! Saved from a thousand doubts, and uncertainties, and vain reasonings, which vex, and fret, and shrivel up the soul! Happy Israel! Led at once God into the green pastures of eternal wisdom, and made to like down beside its quiet waters!

Church of God, all Israel's wisdom--more than all Israel's wisdom--is yours! You have now the fullness of Him in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; Him in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Rest there. If other wisdom crosses your path, take it, if you are sure that it is truth. But let it be subordinate to the wisdom of Scripture. Place nothing side by side with the wisdom of Christ. Above all, beware of entangling yourself in the perplexities and sophistries of the day, thus rushing into the very thickets from which God, by giving you such a certain revelation, has sought to keep you back.

What! Do you covet 'doubt', when 'faith' is before you? Do you covet 'speculation', when revealed 'certainty' is presented to you? Do you prefer the 'vexed and boiling whirlpool' to the quiet haven or more quiet lake? Be on your guard against the wiles of the devil in these last days. Should not a people seek unto their God? Is His wisdom not the surest, safest, best? Oh, dwell alone! Enter your chamber--shut your door behind you! Learn of God. Fear not the taunt of the world--that you are not abreast of the

age--nor imbued with its spirit. Retire to God. Let the world's Babel-sounds of boasted wisdom pass around you, or over you--unheeded. In patience possess your souls. Get your wisdom in communion with God--and in the study of His book.

IV. Israel did not need the world's PLEASURES. And why? Was a Stoic? No! She was happy without the world's pleasures. She had her God to make her happy! Her Sabbaths were happiness. Her feasts were happiness. Her ways were ways of pleasantness--and all her paths were peace. Happy were you, O Israel! Who was like unto you--a people saved by the Lord? How goodly were your tents, O Jacob, and your tabernacles, O Israel! She was the specimen of a happy nation, a prosperous nation--yet dwelling alone--indebted to no nation round for her gladness; indebted to God alone. All other joy was poor and transient when compared to hers. What could Phoenicia, or Philistia, or Syria, or Egypt, give her of true happiness?

So and even more with the Church. The joy unspeakable is hers; the peace that passes all understanding is hers. She does not need to borrow from the world. She is not so poor as to be indebted to any man. She has all and abounds. O child of God, is not the joy of God enough for you? Do you require the pleasures of sin, the gaieties of the ballroom, the excitement of the theater, the music of the opera, the frivolities of the world's card-table, the stolen pleasures of the dance, to make up for deficiencies in what God has given you? If He has not given enough, go tell Him, and He will give you more. But do not go to His enemies to borrow! Do not go to Endor, or Ekron, or Egypt--to the world's haunts of vanity, where the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life are cherished! Dwell alone with God, and His Christ, and His Israel. Let these joys suffice. They have proved enough for prophets and apostles; enough for angel and archangel--they may well be enough for you.

V. Israel did not need the world's SOCIETY. Israel knew what this meant--'It is not solitude to be alone.' The society of Gentile idolaters she was commanded not to seek. It would profit her nothing. It would bring neither joy nor strength. It would only weaken and corrupt. 'Evil communications corrupt good manners.' The twelve tribes were society to themselves; and, within the circle of Palestine, Israel found all that was congenial, and elevated, and blessed. For companionship she did not need to go beyond her own narrow bounds. Within these her fellowships lay.

Christian, be separate--dwell alone! Do not seek the society of the world. Don't you know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? If you have any sympathies with that world--if it contains attractions for you--if God and the things of God are not enough for you--there is something wrong! Do not love the world! Do not seek its friendship. Seek the things above. Beware of the fascinations of worldly company, the spells which gaiety throws over the young. Stand your ground. Be not whirled away into the tossing current of gay society on any pretext whatever!

Church of the living God, be separate--dwell alone! That is your security, your strength, your influence. Let the world see that you are not of it; that you do not need it. It needs you--but you do not need it. And you will serve it best by dwelling alone. Not by coldness, sourness, distance; but by love, congeniality, gentleness, patience, by all acts of benevolence and words of peace. These are things which are only to be found by 'dwelling alone.'

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