



Strangers and Pilgrims – Rev. Zippro

Hebrews 11:13 ...and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Introduction

Hebrews 11 is an impressive chapter in the NT. Hebrews 11 is about lives of the saints in the Old Testament. The stories of their lives is not just interesting to read, but their lives are examples for the believers in the NT dispensation

The lives of these saints can be summarized in 2 words: by faith!

By faith ! (Justus ex fide vivit, Martin Luther!)

That was the secret of their lives: they lived by faith in God. They lived by faith in the promises of God. They lived in this world and fulfilled their task but this present state was not their final destination. All of them were strangers on earth and were seeking a heavenly kingdom.

What is said about the saints in the Old Testament can also be said about the saints in the New Testament. In essence they have the same faith, the same love and the same hope. There is no contrast between Old and New, but there is unity..!

Hebrews 11 helps us to understand our Christian identity. Our place and position in this world. What is our calling? How should we live and behave? And last but not least: what is the relation to our neighbor?

Tru Christians can come from various parts of Europe and this world, but one thing they have in common: they are strangers and pilgrims.

This topic has 3 parts:

1. What does the Bible say?
2. Voices from history of church
3. Our calling as christian



Old Testament

From the very beginning of the generation of Adam and Seth there were true children of God. And Hebrews 11 says: they lived by faith!

By faith Henoch walked with God. God took him away. He also had his earthly life: he begat sons and daughters.

By faith Noah was a stranger in the first world. He prepared the ark, because he was not of the world. He knew this world would end in destruction and hoped for a new world.

Patriarchs

By faith Abram and all the patriarchs were strangers and pilgrims.

In Hebrew the important word: GUR or GER

First time in Genesis 12:10 ...And Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there.

The word GUR is translated differently:

1. sometimes as 'stranger'
2. sometimes as 'the country where they sojourn' (Gen. 12:10, Ezekiel 20:38; Isaiah 23:7)
3. sometimes as 'pilgrimage' (Gen.47:9)

We have in Dutch Statenvertaling the word: 'vreemdelingschap'.

Difficult to translate: literally stranger-ship..,

Mind the difference with Lot, who was too much involved in the live of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. God had to draw him with power from that city.

The land where they lived was not their own. It was the land of promise. The land wherein they lived as strangers (God says to Jacob in Gen.28:4).

Many times we read in Genesis 17:8;28:4; 36:7; 37:1 ..the land wherein thou art a stranger..

Jacob in Bethel. The wonderful dream in which God reveals himself. He sees a ladder. Heaven and earth are connected! A meeting with God from heaven !

Jacob is a stranger: fleeing to a strange country, and yet God from heaven meets him.



When Jacob is old, he must travel to Egypt, and standing before Pharaoh Genesis 47:9 And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

Moses

By faith Moses was a stranger in Egypt. He refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter. Says no to all the treasures and beauty of the Egyptians !

When he receives his first son in Egypt, then he calls his name Gershom and says in Exodus 2:22 ...I have been a stranger in a strange land.

Israel

The Israelites were strangers in Egypt. They lived in a house of bondage, as slaves to work hard for Pharaoh. Read Deuteronomy 26:5.

But God delivered them out of the house of bondage and led them through the wilderness to the promised land. They were pilgrims.

In the law God reminds his people time and again, that they should not forget that they were once strangers.

We read in Exodus 22:21 Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Strangers are to be treated fair and friendly. No oppression. And fair treatment. The same protection (Deut.24:17). God Himself preserves them (Psalm 146:9)

Important for our attitude: if you realize what it is to be a stranger and pilgrim yourself, then you can not look down on other strangers!

Also for the refugee problem of today.

This teaches us, we have to love and have compassion with those who must flee from their lands, family and homes for life's sake.



Ruth

As a stranger Ruth comes from Moab in Israel with her mother in law, Naomi. The way she conducts herself is an example for strangers.

Ruth is very diligent, hardworking and faithful. Not lazy, but industrious. Also humble and low self esteem. She knows, but also acts as a stranger. She flees for refuge to the God of Israel.

Psalms

The poet of Psalm 119 says in verse 19 I am a stranger in the earth; hide not thy commandments from me.

And we read in verse 54 Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

Daniel

Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were strangers in Babylon.

Not sought nor chosen for Babylon themselves.. That is different..

But they were brought to Babylon. Taken captive by Ne-bu-chad-nezar, the mighty king of Babylon, in the third year of Je-ho-jakim...From Jerusalem to that far and strange country with a strange culture and a strange language.

They were IN Babel, but they were not OF Babel.

Daniel and his friends did not live as monks. They did not retire themselves from public life. On the contrary: they occupied important places.

Why not OF Babel? Because they came from Judah?

No, because they were true children of God. They had become strangers here below. They were seeking the things of heaven and not of this earth.

What was their secret? That was the fear of the Lord in their heart..

But true saving faith is always proved and tested...

It was the satanic purpose of Ne-bu-chad-nezar to indoctrinate them. They had to be as it were 'Babylonized'. To be conformed to the customs of Babylon.

Actually, they were strangers in a double sense. They were not only strangers, because they were taken captive and they came from another land, but they really feared the Lord and were seekers of that Kingdom of God.



New Testament

One of the Greek words for stranger is xenos.

Gospel

The Lord Jesus Himself is the Great Stranger and Pilgrim in this world.

This world was not his home. He came from above to live as a Stranger in the midst of a hostile world.

Living in Nazareth he was despised and rejected John 1: 46 ...Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?

To a man who wanted to follow him, he complained Matthew 8:20 And Jesus saith to him: The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

Standing before Pilate the great Stranger and Pilgrim confesses John 18:36 My kingdom is not of this world....

Disciples

The true disciples of Jesus are strangers and pilgrims here below. They are called by Jesus and now this world is not their home anymore.

In the Sermon on the Mount we read of the calling of the disciples to be as salt and a candle shining into this dark world.

The well known words from the Intercessory prayer of Christ in John 17. Christ is praying for his disciples who are still in the world...

12 While I was with them IN the world, I kept them in thy Name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition, that the scriptures might be fulfilled.

13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

14 I have given them thy Word; and the world has hated them, because they are not OF the world, even as I am not OF the world.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them OUT of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

16 They are not OF the world, even as I am not OF the world.

Jesus goes back to the Father in heaven, and his disciples remain on earth. They are still in this world....

His disciples are IN the world, but they are not OF the world.

They do not belong to this world, but they belong to Christ. That makes them different than other people in this world.

Jesus will leave them, but He will be praying for them, that they may stand firm in this world.'



Epistles of Paul

The apostles wrote their epistles to churches of people, who are called saints. These saints were called by grace, truly converted people.

Two words are important: church and saints.

The Greek word for church = ec-clesia= called out....

Called out of what? Called out of this world.

They are called saints. Why called a saint? Not because they were sinless in themselves, but because God had sanctified them by his Spirit.

But even they..... had to be reminded of that calling constantly... They are called to live in a different way than the people surrounding them.

Epistle to the Romans

The Christians in Rome were living in a Roman society which was very hostile against Christianity.

They were living a separate and holy life.

And yet Paul extends a serious warning to them in Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...

Epistle to the Corinthians

The Corinthians had lived a sinful life. Even a saying went 'to live a Corinthian life'.

But God had drawn them and read what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6, 10

and then in verse 11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

And yet they have to go through this world and cannot completely separate themselves from this sinful world when he says 1 Corinthians 5,9 and 10 I wrote unto you in an apostle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world.

In the midst of discourse about marriage Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7,31 And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

Ephesian and Philippians

Also in epistle to Ephesians 4,20 But ye have not so learned Christ. The saints are to be called to live a holy life in the service of the Lord. They are exhorted not to walk as other Gentiles in the vanity of their mind.

Paul writes to the Philippians 3:20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior...

The Greek word is politeia which means citizenship.

Christians have a double citizenship:

1. citizen of the country of birth
2. citizen of heaven.



Hebrews

In the epistle to the Hebrews there is a sharp distinction between the early life and the life to come. We come to the words in Hebrews 11:13 ...and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

When we look into the original languages, in the Greek text we find the following words:

- for strangers: xenoï
- for pilgrims: par-epidemoi

The text doesn't say: they were strangers or they were regarded as strangers. But they confessed. Through word and lifestyle, conversation.

Strangers and pilgrims

The life of a Christian should be focused on heaven Hebrews 13:14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

General epistles

The apostle James writes to the twelve tribes who are scattered abroad.

These are strangers in the diaspora.

James warns them further on in his epistle James 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

1 Peter

Of great importance is also the epistle of Peter

Peter begins his first epistle Peter, and apostle of Jesus Christ to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bythynia.....

Strangers in this world...

But they were happy strangers, because they were born again to a living hope by the seed of the living Word. The Lord kept His heritage for them in heaven. What a rich future stored for these strangers here below..

At the same time Peter must constantly remind them of their high calling...

In first chapter verse 15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.

In second chapter Peter writing verse 9 But ye are called a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light



Then comes an exhortation verse 11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul verse 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles...

Also apostle John warns not live to live as the world and warns 1 John 2,15 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.

Also keeping distance from people who bring strange doctrine 2 John verse 10 If someone comes to you....

Book of Revelation

The message comes to Christian who are in persecution.

Christians have 2 marks

1. they keep the commandments of God
2. and the faith in Jesus

History of church: a rich heritage

The early Christians fully realized they were pilgrims and strangers

There is an anonymous letter written to one Diognetus around 150 AD. It is a clear testimony regarding the lives of Christians in this world.

Christians are strangers in a strange land. And yet their lives are examples of hard working, loving people, who care for their neighbours and have compassion for strangers.

Puritans

The first Puritans lived in England of the 16th and 17th century. The Anglican church was separated from the Roman Catholic church. The Bible was translated and appointed to be read in churches, the Reformed faith was accepted, but still in liturgy there was much that reminded of the Roman Catholic traditions.

The Puritans wanted to purify the church. They wanted to live a holy and separate life from the world. Especially the strict observance of the Christian Sabbath was their primary concern.

Many of the Puritans seceded from the Anglican church. They suffered a lot of persecutions and were forced to leave the country and fled to Holland. In Holland was much more tolerance and religious freedom in those days. However, also Holland was regarded much too lenient and formed a danger for preserving their beliefs.

Finally they decided to go to America. And under the leadership of Willam Bradford and John Carver the left for the New World. They were ready to suffer hardships



In 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers crossed the ocean to an unknown continent. They arrived in Plymouth and set up a colony. Bradford wrote a book titled 'Of Plymouth Plantation' and he explicitly refers to Hebrews 11: 13 ...and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Pilgrims' Progress

John Bunyan was one of the Puritans who stayed in old England. For more than 15 years he was imprisoned. As a stranger and pilgrim he wrote his famous book Pilgrims Progress.

We read about Christian and Faithful visiting the Vanity Fair in the Town Vanity. They are looked upon as strangers..

'...the way to the Celestial City lies just through this Town, where this lusty Fair is kept; and he that will go to the City, and yet not go through this Town, must needs go out of the World. The Prince of Princes Himself, when here, went through this Town to his own Country.....

.....but behold, even as (these Pilgrims) entered into the Fair, all the people in the Fair were moved, and the Town itself as it were in a Hubbub about them; and that for several reasons: For, First, The Pilgrims were clothed with such kind of Raiment, as was diverse from the Raiment of any that traded in that fair. The people of the fair made a great gazing upon them: some said they were Fools, some they were Bedlams, and some they were Outlandish men.

Secondly, And as they wondered at their Apparel, so they did likewise at their Speech; for few could understand what they said; they naturally spoke the Language of Canaan; But they that kept the fair...

Thirdly, But that which did not a little amuse the Merchandizers, was that these Pilgrims set very light by all their Wares, they cared not so much as to look upon them: and if they called upon them to buy, they would put their fingers in their ears, and cry Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;; and look upwards, signifying that their Trade and Traffic was in Heaven...

The right balance

In the history of the church we find two extremes regarding our position and calling as Christians.

We have to find a balance somewhere... We can go too far on each side...

In general there are 2 extremes:

We can lay too much emphasis on IN the world: we are called to be engaged in worldly affairs. We want to participate in all the business. Our mission is here and below in this world.

In political world we must raise our voice and stand up for justice and peace. As much as we can socializing and not withdrawing ourselves from the things of this world.

Danger: we are getting too much involved. The worldconformity is having upper hand. The church is getting too worldly. There is no difference anymore between church and world. In stead of Christianizing the world, the world is converting the church. The church has no message anymore for this world, because there is no distance, no separation.

Examples: the Christian Reformed Churches.



The other extreme is laying too much emphasis on the other part 'not of this world'. There is world avoidance. There is no contact with or openness to this world. There is no interest in what is going on in the sinful world around us. We want nothing to do with the world outside of us.

Everything outside of our church is sinful and worldly. Also includes: against military service. Against any form of assurance, social security.

Danger: the church has forgotten to be a salting salt and a lighting light. When we keep the windows of the church closed it is getting smelly and musty inside.

Examples in history: the Anabaptists in 16th century.

Amish people today (although different orders, but most of them strict). No use of electricity, no computer, no automobiles..

John Calvin shows us the way out here. On the one hand he clearly speaks of the pilgrimage of a Christian. He must meditate on eternal life.

On the other hand we are called to use our talents in this world. We have to shine as lights into this dark and evil world. We have our earthly calling.

Strangers and Pilgrims

We have seen some of the lives of Gods children in Old and New Testament. We heard some voices from our rich heritage in history and we tried to find a balance.

But now: how about us? Are we strangers and pilgrims? How do we live? Do we live for ourselves? Do we seek this world? Do we really want to live before God?

By nature we are strangers of God and grace and our hearts are full of sin.

The Poem of Robert Murray McCheyne

I once was a stranger to grace and to God
I knew not my danger and felt not my load
Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree
Jehovah Tsidkenu was nothing to me.

But also by free and sovereign grace
When free grace awoke me, by light from on high

....

Jehovah Tsidkenu is all things to me.

When the Lord comes in your life, then you become a stranger in this world.



The calling of Christians

What is the calling of a Christian in this world?

God has placed us in this world. He has granted us talents and gifts.

We are called to use the talents given to us.

In our youth we get Christian education...

After leaving our Christians homes and schools young people study further or go into the workforce, but we all want to find a good job... We want to find a partner, we want to get married, we need a house, we want to build our own families.

Especially in the Universities of today they will meet people and opinions that are not the same as we were used to in our protected environment at home.

The values that we cherish we have to defend. We need to know why we believe what we believe. We also will have to study theories that go against Biblical principles.

Like Moses, Daniel in Babel and Paul, they also had studied all kind of worldly subjects.

Non-Christian society

We are living in a society which becomes more and more non-christian.

Even anti-christian.

There is a growing gap and discrepancy between the Christian environment in which we grew up and the world around us!

Today's culture more and more a non-christian culture.. More and more Christians come under attack.

Many values that were common in the past, are not so self-evident anymore..

I realize that the European society is even more as Babylon then the American society. Maybe that can be one of the points of discussion.

But also the last years we have seen rapid changes, under the Obama administration modern way of thinking and living are more and more accepted.



Gay rights and gay marriage are accepted....

It is also a challenge to live as Christians in modern society.

And yet we cannot live the same way as the people of the world.

Christians are to be strangers and pilgrims here on earth....

We all are baptized and have a mark on our forehead.

The Form of Baptism says '.....therefore are we by God through baptism, admonished of, and obliged unto new obedience.....that we:

1. forsake the world
2. crucify our old nature
3. walk in a new and holy life'

We are IN this world, but not OF this world.

We may have our own institutions, christian homes, school and church

We treasure them.. and hope to continue them

But we still have our calling in this world !

Many questions

I realize there are still a lot of question.

I realize there is a wide field of practical issues here;

- can we work in a hospital where abortion takes place?
- Can you go to that party where there is dancing?
- How far can we go with modern media?
- Should we use open or filtered internet?
- Social media: hyves and facebook, twitter
- Do we have to wear clothes
- Can you be a member of a sports society

In practice we may consider how far can we go with Babylon?

Christians need one another.

Christians are not only individuals that go their own way...

We need one another!

Do we support each other?

Do others around us force us to go along with the world?

Do we feel pressure if we say that we don't listen to rock music, etc...

ANOTHER point: peer pressure

Because we have different views on different subjects it weakens us.



The 3 friends in Babylon had the same faith, but also the same views and opinions
That made them strong.
We need one another!

Finally
Strangers and pilgrims
I hear somebody say: I cannot say that...
I am in this world, but I am not sure whether I am not OF the world
Do I belong to the Lord?
Can I say that?

Stranger in this world
Stranger in the church
Stranger in my own family
Stranger of my own heart?

Pray for his grace and conversion
That it may be our prayer: Lord, may I be such a stranger..

May we become real true strangers on this earth..
We cannot fulfill our calling by our own strength.
Only through the work and grace of the Lord Jesus, the great Stranger and Pilgrim!

Jesus prays in John 17,11Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given
me, that they may be one, as we are.

One day strangers will come home
There they will be forever with the Lord.