**FRIEND OF STRANGERS**

What Does the Bible Say About Strangers, Refugees, and Immigrants?

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# Preface

I remember when my wife Annica and I went down to the Wailing Wall on a warm summer evening in Jerusalem in 2009 to look for the first three stars in the night sky, marking the start of the Jewish Sabbath. Once there, unexpectedly, we were invited to the home of a Rabbi for a Shabbat meal. We walked through the streets and neighborhoods of the city before arriving at a house filled with happy people, and there was lots of food served there. There were so many people that they had set up outdoor furniture in the living room. We sat on white plastic chairs and sang Hebrew hymns, listened to the Bible, and praised the Lord together.

Amid all of this, the Rabbi stood up, and suddenly there was silence in the house. He raised a cup of wine and said something in Hebrew. Interesting, I thought, that looks familiar. Then a bowl of water was passed around for us to symbolically wash our hands in. After that, someone handed a long pan of freshly baked bread to the Rabbi, who said something in Hebrew before passing the bread around to everyone.

I recognize that, I thought! This Jewish ceremony is undeniably quite similar to the Lord’s Supper. There and then I understood the Jewish context of the Lord’s Supper. Since Christianity is born out of Judaism, we can learn a lot about our faith from the Jews. The Lord's Supper is not just a ceremony but a real feast with Jesus at the center. A meal where strangers like I was at the party, are welcomed and included into the people of God. Thanks to Jewish hospitality, I had an encounter with the Lord.

A day later I was sitting on a hotel roof talking to a Dutchman who wanted to be baptized in the Jordan River. The Arabic scents of the evening breeze mingled with the neon green lights of the Muslim minarets and the grotesque cacophony of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

As we chatted about everything between heaven and earth, I began to feel a vision being born in my heart. I began to see how the Lord would send unreached people from closed countries to Europe, and how a revival among them would lead to mission in return.

Ever since I visited Jerusalem, these two experiences of *integration* and *mission*, of welcoming strangers and reaching out with the Gospel to all peoples, have inspired me. I have wanted to gather all my thoughts on what the Bible says about strangers, get them down on paper, and share them. But it wasn't until I was diagnosed with cancer in the spring of 2021 that I finally sat down and started writing. The Lord can use our negative circumstances for something positive. But the more I've studied and written about what the Bible says about the refugee, the more of God’s love for the stranger I've seen all throughout Scripture. Now that I've finished writing this book, I feel like I could write at least one more book on the same topic. After all, almost every biblical person has been a stranger or a refugee at some point, even the Lord himself!

I know I'm not the best writer in the world, but my hope is that this book will inspire you to see in the Bible God's love for the stranger, and that this in turn will lead you to a joyful commitment to people in need.

# Creation

In the beginning, God created man as a migrant with the mission to multiply and fill the earth. But through man's sin, brother and fellow man were transformed into enemy and stranger.

# Created as a Migrant

In the beginning of the Bible, we read about how God created the world, how he brought order to the chaos and lit a light in the darkness. On the sixth day of Creation Week, God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings:

[[@Bible:gen 1:27]]"27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Ge 1:27)

To understand how man became a "stranger", we first need to go through what a human being is and what it means to be created in God's *image"*.

The Old Testament Hebrew text states that man was created into God's [[“tselem” >> HebrewStrongs: H6754]], a word that is usually translated into “image” or “statue”.[[1]](#endnote-2) The corresponding New Testament Greek word [[“eikon” >> GreekStrongs:G1504]] is also translated into “image” or “likeness”.[[2]](#endnote-3)

Just as a painting of a tree is the image of a real tree, so man is the image of God. The painted tree is not the tree, but an image of the tree. Man is not God, but an image of God. Just as one recognizes the real tree by seeing the painted tree, so one recognizes God by seeing man.

After creating Adam and Eve in his image, God goes on to bless all humanity and give us a threefold mission:

[[@Bible:gen 1:28]]"28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."" (Ge 1:28)

The first blessed mission is *"be fruitful"*. Of course, for humanity to increase, Adam and Eve must multiply and have children.

The second blessed mission is to *"fill the earth"*, i.e., to *migrate.* God wants Adam and Eve, and by extension all of humanity, to wander, to move, to discover, and to spread across the earth. Just as God's glory and presence fills the whole earth[[3]](#endnote-4), so does God want man to migrate and fill the whole earth with their presence. As we will see in chapter 3, God does not want humanity to stay in the same place and hide behind walls and borders.

The third blessed mission is to *"subdue it"*, i.e., to be God's representatives on earth and to take care[[4]](#endnote-5) of God's creation. Animals are also created by God, but because humans are created in God's image, humans are different from animals and become like God's co-rulers on earth. [[5]](#endnote-6)

All three of these missions are interrelated. To rule the whole earth, humans need to migrate. To fulfill the whole earth, man needs to multiply. So, migration is directly linked to the divine mandate to rule over creation, and one of the aspects of what it means to be a human being made in the image of God.

Just as sexual reproduction and man's rule over earth are divine gifts and missions that God blesses, so is migration a divine gift and a mission that He blesses. By fulfilling all three of these divine missions, human beings, being in the image of God, also become God's representatives on earth and participate in God's continued creation of a beautiful world.

Unfortunately, however, it didn't take long for Adam and Eve to fall into sin. Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and, consequently, were expelled from the Garden of Eden:

[[@Bible:gen 3:22-24]]"22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever-"23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. 24He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Ge 3:22-24)

# Am I My Brother's Keeper?

If we in the last chapter could see that we humans are created in the *image of God*, I want to show in this chapter that we are also created to be each other's *fellow human beings*. Since human beings were originally created by God, all human beings have a common origin and are fellow human beings with each other, and a sin against fellow human beings is a very serious sin. If Adam and Eve's sin was a sin against God, they did not listen to the Word of God and had to leave the *garden* as a consequence,[[6]](#endnote-7) then Cain's sin was a sin against his fellow man, he killed his brother,[[7]](#endnote-8) and had to leave the *field* as a consequence.[[8]](#endnote-9)

The story of Cain and Abel begins with each of them bringing an offering to the Lord from their respective work:

[[@Bible:gen 4:3-5]]"3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground,4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering,5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.” (Ge 4:3-5)

God accepted Abel's offering, but not Cain's. However, this is not because Abel's animal sacrifice was better than Cain's fruit sacrifice, but because Abel offered his sacrifice "in faith"[[9]](#endnote-10) , which Cain did not. God does not accept religious sacrifices without faith just because they are religious. On the other hand, God accepts sacrifices in faith, whether they are performed in a proper religious manner or not.

Cain's sacrifice of crops certainly looked more beautiful than Abel's sloppy and bloody animal fat. But God is not interested in an empty and contentless religion, however beautiful and glorious it may be. God wants to receive the faith and genuine worship of our hearts. The difference between Cain and Abel's sacrifice is the universal difference between the faith of the heart and empty religious rites. As Jesus said; it is better to worship God in spirit and truth[[10]](#endnote-11) in your private room,[[11]](#endnote-12) than to perform religious rites without faith in a beautiful church in a splendid robe.

Cain was jealous of his little brother when God accepted Abel's offering but not his. Cain could not accept that God considered Abel more righteous, and sin began to grow in his heart. But God did not reject Cain, but instead lovingly tries to speak to him. God warns Cain that the anger he still holds inside could quickly lead to violence if he does not repent:

[[@Bible:gen 4:6-7]]"6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."" (Ge 4:6-7)

But despite God's warning, Cain completed the sin that he had allowed to grow in his heart. Cain lures his little brother out into the field and kills him. This was neither an accident nor a spur of the moment, it was a planned and premeditated murder:

[[@Bible:gen 4:8-9]]"8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"" (Ge 4:8-9)

When God asks Cain where Abel is, he of course knew where Abel was, he didn't need directions. But by asking, God gives Cain a chance to repent and be forgiven for his sin.

Cain's answer reveals the selfishness and disinterest of a worldly man in his fellow man. Literally, Genesis 4:9 says, *"Am I my brother's shamar?"*

[[“Shamar” >> HebrewStrongs: H8104]] is a wonderful Hebrew word that can be translated as "take care of", "keep", "observe", "careful", "preserve", "guard", "guardian". The word is used, among other things, when God tells Adam to *"watch over” the* Garden of Eden.[[12]](#endnote-13) Or when God commands Abraham to *"keep" the* covenant[[13]](#endnote-14) and *"keep"* the way of the Lord.[[14]](#endnote-15) God makes a promise to the patriarch Jacob to *"watch over"* him wherever he goes,[[15]](#endnote-16) and Jacob in turn makes a promise to God that if God is the "shamar" of Jacob, then the Lord will be the God of Jacob.[[16]](#endnote-17)

So yes, implicitly Cain is supposed to be his brother's "shamar". God wants us humans to "take care" of each other. That we preserve each other, watch over each other, guard against dangers and protect each other. That we are each other's "fellow man" in simple terms. God expects that of us.

As I said, God knew the answer to his question, but he wanted to give Cain a chance to confess his sin. But as if Cain's murder wasn't enough, Cain hardens his heart further by lying to God in answer to the question. Once you start sinning, you are caught in its grip until you confess your sin and are helped by God to find a way out through forgiveness and restoration.

When Cain does not confess, God reveals Cain's sin and says that he hears Abel's blood crying out from the ground, the same ground in which Cain tragically grew his crops earlier:

[[@Bible:gen 4:10-16]]"10 And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. 11And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." 13Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." 15Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. 16Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden." (Ge 4:10-16)

God's punishment will be linked to the sin Cain committed, he killed Abel on his farmland, and he will therefore no longer be able to cultivate the land. The curse on Cain is an amplification of the curse on Adam when he sinned.[[17]](#endnote-18) While Adam would be allowed to work the land *"by the sweat of his brow"* and live *"of painful labor"*, Cain would not even be able to work the land at all. While Adam was driven from Eden, Cain would find no home at all on earth.

But Cain was more distressed by the punishment God was about to give him than by the harm he had done to his brother. Of course, it would have been better if Cain had been more despairing about his sin than about God's punishment, because then God would have been able to forgive him and restore him.

Cain's sin in its entirety consisted of carrying out empty religious acts without faith, becoming jealous of a true believer, which led to the murder of a fellow human being, and finally lying before God. This sin is called "the way of Cain" in Jude verse 11. Paul describes it as having a *"holding to the form of Godliness but denying its power".*[[18]](#endnote-19) Being religious without faith risks leading to jealousy and persecution of true believers.

But even though Cain's sin was very great, God did not want Cain to suffer the same terrible fate that Cain had inflicted on Abel. After all, God cares about Cain and gives him a promise that no one will be able to murder him.

In conclusion, we can see from the creation story that man's sin consisted in Adam and Eve not listening to God and Cain killing his brother and fellow man. God created us humans in his image and as fellow human beings, but in the fall we stopped caring about God and each other. As a response and contrast to this twofold original sin of humanity, the core summary of the Bible emerges: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself*.*"* [[19]](#endnote-20)

This book is mainly about the second part of man's sin, that is, hating your fellow man by transforming your brother into a stranger and enemy. In this book I will go through how God, through the history of Israel and the church, shows his heart for the stranger, makes reconciliation on the cross, and slowly but surely helps man to move from xenophobe to xenophile, to begin to love his enemy and through the power of the Holy Spirit transform a hated stranger into a beloved brother and sister in the Lord.

# Lest We Be Scattered

After Adam and Eve are displaced from the garden and Cain from the field, humanity begins to migrate and spread across the earth. But when they reach the land of Shinar, things come to a halt:

[[@Bible:gen 11:1-4]]"1 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered over the face of the whole earth."” (Ge 11:1-4)

In a strange and vain attempt to avoid obeying God's command to "fill the earth"[[20]](#endnote-21) , mankind tries to wall itself into a city and build a tall tower that reaches all the way to heaven.

Trying to build a tower that reaches up to heaven means that people tried to come up to God's level and become like God in their own strength. In the language of the Bible, "heaven" and "God" are often interchangeable words with the same meaning. To avoid misusing God's name, a pious Israelite might say "heaven" instead of "Yahweh". In the New Testament we see this in the parallel words "kingdom of God"[[21]](#endnote-22) and "kingdom of heaven".[[22]](#endnote-23)

It's almost comical that while man proudly thought he was beginning to build his tower to heaven, in God's eyes the tower is so small that God had to step down from heaven to even see it:

[[@Bible:gen 11:5-9]]"5 And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." 8So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.” (Ge 11:5-9)

To prevent people from continuing to try to make themselves God, God obscures their language, so that they can no longer speak to each other. Without a common language, it is undeniably difficult to communicate, cooperate and build a common city.

The city was named [[“Babel” >> HebrewStrongs: H894]], a word that means "confuse" or “blur”. Instead of being a monument to man's deification, the unfinished tower of Babel becomes a monument to mankind's foolish and failed attempts to stand up to its own Creator. The corruption of language becomes a constant reminder of man's pride in his God, a divine punishment that will only be resolved on the Day of Pentecost, of which I write in chapter 31.

As we have now seen in three chapters, God created man to migrate, to fill the earth and to care for his fellow man. But in the fall, man stopped obeying God, mistreated his fellow man and tried to shut himself up behind walls. In the following chapter we will see how God starts a long process that aims to save man by bringing him back into a good relationship with God and his fellow man again. This story of salvation begins with the patriarch Abraham, continues in Israel, and reaches its completion in Jesus.

# The Patriarchs

God calls Abraham to leave his homeland and live as a guest and stranger in the land of his future people. God promises Abraham that he will be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth.

# From Stranger to Guest

In many languages, the words "stranger", "guest" and "enemy" are the same word, for example the Latin "hostis", which means both "guest" and "enemy".

The Hebrew word we most often translate as "stranger" is [[“ger” >> HebrewStrongs: H1481]], which can also be translated as "refugee", "immigrant", "guest", "newcomer", “sojourner”, or "foreigner", depends on the reason why you are on the move. If you have fled war, you are a *refugee*; if you are a traveling salesman, you are a *stranger*; and if you are visiting a good friend, you are a *guest*.

In biblical times, hospitality was not just a valued attribute of certain good-hearted people, but an established code of conduct that could literally determine the life or death of both host and guest. Because of the hot and harsh climate of the Middle East, most permanent or temporary settlements were located near water sources. Without access to these, people on the move would risk death. In addition, because of the risk of robbers, travelers needed protection when they arrived at new settlements.

Traveling was not usually associated with luxury or pleasure as it is today, but rather with having to flee from war and hostilities, or having to search for food and water for survival. The unwritten code of hospitality ensured foreign travelers protection and access to food and water.

When a stranger came to visit, it was still unclear to both the native and the stranger, whether to regard each other as friend or foe. Since the native is generally the stronger party, it is incumbent upon him to extend a hand and offer hospitality to the stranger. When the stranger accepts the hospitality, he changes from potential enemy to protected guest. The secret to making peace is to extend a hand and offer hospitality instead of building a wall between yourself and the stranger. It is in the very *offer* of hospitality that the transition from potential enemy to protected guest takes place.

As the traveling stranger embraced hospitality, the stranger moved from being a potential enemy to becoming part of the community. Welcoming strangers was a pacifist way of protecting oneself against enemies by transforming the stranger into a guest. It is therefore no coincidence that the Hebrew word for "stranger" can also be translated as "guest".

From this background, we understand that it was no small thing for the patriarch Abraham to rely on God's care and protection when he responded to God's call to leave his country and live as a stranger in the land of Canaan.

Abraham and his wife Sarah originally came from the city of Ur of Chaldea, which is in present-day Iraq.[[23]](#endnote-24) Together with his father Terah, Abraham first migrates to the city of Haran.[[24]](#endnote-25) Once there, God gives Abraham the promise that has made Abraham one of the greatest role models in world history for trusting in the Lord and walking by faith:

[[@Bible:gen 12:1-3]]"1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Ge 12:1-3)

God's promise to Abraham includes that Abraham must leave his homeland and go to the land of Canaan that his descendants will eventually receive. God will create from Abraham a new people, Israel, who will eventually be a blessing to *"all the families of the earth"*. In the story of Abraham, we see that God's people are born as strangers.

Abraham begins his new life as a stranger in the land of Canaan. Then, when there is a shortage of food, he is forced to go to Egypt, thus becoming a form of economic migrant:

[[@Bible:gen 12:10]]"10 Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. " (Ge 12:10)

After a time in Egypt, Abraham returns to the land of Canaan and continues to live there as a stranger:

[[@Bible:gen 17:8]]"8 And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” (Ge 17:8)

In the land of Canaan, Abraham is welcomed by Melchizedek, priest and king of the city of Salem. Melchizedek shows his hospitality by offering Abraham *"bread and wine"*,[[25]](#endnote-26) an obvious model for the Lord's Supper, a meal that involves communion with both the Lord and those with whom one shares the Lord's Supper:

[[@Bible:gen 14:17-20]]"17 After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). 18And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)19 And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;20 and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.” (Ge 14:17-20)

The unwritten code of conduct included welcoming strangers by offering food, water and shelter.[[26]](#endnote-27) Sometimes this was combined symbolically by being set a table in front of your enemies, which then showed the guest's enemies that one was under the protection of the host.[[27]](#endnote-28) It was also not uncommon to wash the feet of your guests, a gesture that symbolized that one welcomed the stranger and did not see him as an enemy.

Just as a host was expected to show hospitality, a stranger was also expected to accept what was offered. Failure to show or receive hospitality was considered an insult and indicated hostile intent and betraying the person with whom one had eaten was among the worst things one could do.[[28]](#endnote-29)

There are many examples in the Bible of both hospitality[[29]](#endnote-30) and inhospitality.[[30]](#endnote-31) One example of hospitality is found when God visits Abraham:

[[@Bible:gen 18:1-8]]"1 And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. 2He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth3 and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. 4Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree,5 while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on-since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." 6And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes." 7And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. 8Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.” (Ge 18:1-8)

Abraham hurries to humbly receive his guests and offers water and bread. But according to hospitality tradition, one should serve more than what was offered, so even though Abraham offers only *"a little water"* and *"bread"*, he asks Sarah to bake bread from her finest flour and then runs off to fetch *"a tender and good calf"* to cook. With it he serves curds and milk. Abraham goes out of his way to make sure his guests have the best time possible! When his guests set off again, as their host, he makes sure to accompany them a little on the way.

Eating together symbolized acceptance, friendship, and a kind of affirmation of the host's promise to protect his guest. Thus, offering food to your guest is a way of welcoming the stranger, offering friendship, fellowship, and protection. [[31]](#endnote-32)

Later in the Bible, the strict food laws of the Law of Moses, in contrast to hospitality, became a way for God's people to separate themselves from the surrounding peoples of the land of Canaan.[[32]](#endnote-33) It is also no coincidence that when Israel worshiped and met God, it was through food offerings, a way for God and his people to celebrate their special relationship with each other by sharing a meal together. In the New Testament, food continues to be this connection between God, man and fellow human beings through the Lord's Supper and the heavenly feast of which the Lord's Supper is a foretaste (which you can read more about in chapter 21).[[33]](#endnote-34)

After many years as a stranger in the land of Canaan, Sarah eventually dies and Abraham turns to the Hittites to buy a cave in which to bury her:

[[@Bible:gen 23:4]]"4 "I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” (Ge 23:4)

After a few more years, Abraham also dies *"in a good old age, an old man and full of years"* and is buried in his cave together with Sarah.[[34]](#endnote-35)

# Strangers in the Promised Land

Like his father Abraham, Isaac continues to be a "stranger" in the land of Canaan.

[[@Bible:gen 26:1-3]]"1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. 2And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. 3Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.” (Ge 26:1-3)

When Isaac lives as a stranger in Gerar, God blesses him so much that he becomes so rich that the Philistines become jealous and force him out.[[35]](#endnote-36)

After Isaac's death, it is his son Jacob's turn to live as a stranger in the land of Canaan. But first Jacob is forced to flee his brother Esau[[36]](#endnote-37) and live as a guest and stranger with his relative Laban. After some time there, Jacob eventually wants to return to his *“own home and country”*[[37]](#endnote-38) and heads to the land of Canaan, where both his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham had lived as strangers.[[38]](#endnote-39)

Throughout their lives, the three great patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived as strangers in their own future land. What spiritual truths can we learn from this?

Well, in Hebrews we read that Abraham lived as a stranger in the land of promise *"by faith*":

[[@Bible:Heb 11:8-10]]"8 By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” (Heb 11:8-10)

When we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are saved[[39]](#endnote-40) and born again into the kingdom of God[[40]](#endnote-41) . We receive our citizenship in heaven,[[41]](#endnote-42) but at the same time live in the world as *"sojourners and exiles*"[[42]](#endnote-43) .

Just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob wandered in the land of promise and tasted the good of the land long before the promise was fully fulfilled, so we today can taste the good gifts of God's kingdom long before the kingdom of heaven has been fully established.

We know, for example, that in heaven there is no longer any death, mourning, crying, or pain.[[43]](#endnote-44) But already here and now we can taste this when we walk by the Spirit[[44]](#endnote-45) , forgive one another and pray for the sick.

Just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob longed for the Promised Land, we long for heaven. Just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had to live as strangers in the land of Canaan, we must live as strangers in the world. Although Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived in the land of Canaan, they never became Canaanites. Just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived as men of God side by side with idolatrous pagans, we too are to live holy lives despite being in a fallen and sinful world. Just as the promise was eventually fulfilled and Israel received its promised land, so God's promise to us will be fulfilled when God fully establishes his Kingdom of Heaven.

Until then, we Christians are strangers in the world with an urgent mission to invite as many as possible to the heavenly feast of the Kingdom of God.

# I Will Go With You

Joseph is born as the eleventh son of the patriarch Jacob[[45]](#endnote-46) and grows up as a spoiled brat.[[46]](#endnote-47) When Joseph's brothers see how their father loves him more than them, they begin to hate him[[47]](#endnote-48) and sell him as a slave to Egypt[[48]](#endnote-49) and trick Jacob into believing that Joseph had been eaten by a wild animal: [[49]](#endnote-50)

[[@Bible:gen 37:28]]"28 Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.” (Ge 37:28)

But despite his involuntary misfortune, Joseph, after a bit of trial and error,[[50]](#endnote-51) does quite well in Egypt. God was with Joseph and everything that he did the Lord made successful.[[51]](#endnote-52)

Joseph even does so well that Pharaoh makes him number two in the whole kingdom and puts him *"over all the land of Egypt"*.[[52]](#endnote-53) Compared to Sweden today, you could say that if Pharaoh was king, Joseph was prime minister.

God reveals to Joseph that there will be *"seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt"* and then *"seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt"*.[[53]](#endnote-54)

During the seven good years, Joseph collects *"all the food"* and stores them in the cities,[[54]](#endnote-55) so that they can be distributed during the seven years of famine.[[55]](#endnote-56)

But because the famine did not only affect Egypt, hungry people from all over the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain: [[56]](#endnote-57)

[[@Bible:gen 41:57]]"57 Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth. " (Ge 41:57)

Through God's guidance, Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy grain and after some drama, the family is reunited and settles in Egypt.[[57]](#endnote-58) But before Joseph's father Jacob leaves for Egypt, God speaks to him in a vision in the night:

[[@Bible:gen 46:3-4]]"3 Then he said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. 4I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes."” (Ge 46:3-4)

In times of need, God is with his people, even accompanying them on their migration, and promising to bring them back when the time is right. God arranges for Egypt to invite Israel as a welcome guest in their land.

In conclusion, we can see that Joseph began his life in Egypt as a slave and a stranger, but God raised him up to become the supreme political leader of his new country. Joseph was a "society builder" who used his gifts from God to work for the good of his new country. When there is a global famine, Joseph welcomes affected climate refugees from other countries to Egypt and provides them with food. In the midst of all the distress, alienation and flight, God is there to bless his people so that they can rebuild their new country as well as provide aid to their old one.

# Strangers in a Country That Is Not Theirs

After Jacob and his entire family settled in Egypt, the Israelites multiplied and became very numerous.[[58]](#endnote-59) But when a new king appears in Egypt, he forces the Israelites to work as slaves and makes life difficult for them,[[59]](#endnote-60) something God had told Abraham long before:

[[@Bible:gen 15:13]]"13 Then the Lord said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. " (Ge 15:13)

The Israelites who lived in Egypt were called "Hebrews" by the Egyptians. The term is believed to originate from Eber, a descendant of Abraham, the progenitor of the Israelites.[[60]](#endnote-61) "Hebrews" in this case means "sons of Eber"[[61]](#endnote-62) and is used as another word for "the people of Israel" in an ethnic sense.

The name "Eber" roughly means "on the other side" and comes from the Hebrew word [[”abar” >> HebrewStrongs: H5674]], which means "to pass" or "to cross", i.e. to go from one place to another. Given that Abraham left his homeland, crossed the Euphrates River[[62]](#endnote-63) and came to the land of Canaan, he and his descendants were Hebrews in the sense that they came "from across the river". The fact that Moses led the Israelites to cross the Red Sea when they fled from the Egyptians and that Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River does not make this connection to the word Hebrew any less appropriate.

In the Bible, the term "Hebrew" is used mainly in the context of distinguishing between natives and foreigners, for example when the Egyptians describe the Israelites,[[63]](#endnote-64) or when the Israelites describe themselves as foreigners in contrast to the Egyptians.[[64]](#endnote-65) The Old Testament stops using the word Hebrew (apart from calling the language of Israel "Hebrew") after the Israelites have settled in their new land and David has become king. In the New Testament, the term is used primarily to distinguish between native Hebrew-speaking Jews and foreign-born Greek-speaking Jews.[[65]](#endnote-66)

It seems that the more God blessed the Israelites, the more jealous and suspicious the Egyptians became. They began to see the Israelites as a threat and called them "Hebrews" in the sense of "strangers" from across the river. The Egyptians avoided mixing with Israelites and considered it an "abomination" to even eat with them.[[66]](#endnote-67)

# Israel

God rescues Israel from slavery and alienation in Egypt and allows them to live in the Promised Land. God wants Israel to love the stranger because God loves the stranger. In the Law of Moses, God instructs the native Israelites how to treat the stranger, the fatherless and the widow well within Israel and how to be a people of priests to the foreign peoples outside of Israel, even to the ends of the earth.

# Stranger in a Foreign Land

In Exodus chapter 2, we read how Moses the Israelite is rescued by Pharaoh's daughter and becomes her son.[[67]](#endnote-68) Moses grew up as a prince in Egypt, but knew that he was really an Israelite Hebrew:

[[@Bible:Ex 2:10-11]]"10 When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water." 11One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. " (Ex 2:10-11)

Perhaps Moses thought that one day he would use his influential position as the Pharaoh's grandson to save his people from Egyptian slavery? If so, in a way Moses was right, it was God's plan for Moses that God would save Israel through him, but unfortunately Moses jumped ahead of events and took matters into his own hands. It ends in disaster, he kills an Egyptian who had beaten up one of his countrymen, both the Israelites and the Egyptians get upset with him and he is forced to flee to the land of Midian: [[68]](#endnote-69)

[[@Bible:Ex 2:15]]"15 When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.” (Ex 2:15)

In the land of Midian, Moses must quickly find food, water, and shelter to survive in the harsh desert climate. He searches for a well and meets seven women there, whom he helps against some troublesome shepherds. If Moses' pathos of justice were met with skepticism by the Israelites, he is welcomed with open arms by the Midianites.

When the women's father Jethro, the priest of the land of Midian, hears about Moses the Egyptian, we see once again the culture of hospitality in the Middle East. Jethro invites Moses to his home and, by offering food, shows that Moses is welcome, protected and an accepted part of Jethro's community. When Moses responds to Jethro's hospitality by staying with him, he is allowed to marry Jethro's daughter Zipporah. Together they have a son whom Moses names "Gershom":[[69]](#endnote-70)

[[@Bible:Ex 2:22]]"22 She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."” (Ex 2:22)

As we saw in chapter 4, the Hebrew word "ger" can be translated as "stranger", "refugee", or "guest", depending on the context. So Moses begins his life by growing up as a prince in the Egyptian palace, becomes a *refugee* in the land of Midian, is welcomed as a *guest* by Jethro, but still experiences himself as a *stranger*. Moses' choice of name for his firstborn son reveals how deeply the mental journey affected him. Every time Moses called out to his son, he was reminded of his predicament.

In a way, Moses becomes a double refugee, since he had to leave both his homeland Egypt, and the Israelites, the people with whom he identified. Now he is forced to live as a stranger in a foreign land with a foreign religion.

Just as Israel lived as strangers in Egypt for 400 years, Moses will now live the next 40[[70]](#endnote-71) years of his life as a stranger in Midian. This humbling experience will be for Moses a necessary preparation for the call of God to Moses that will change the entire history of the world:

[[@Bible:Ex 3:7-10]]"7 Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings,8 and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."” (Ex 3:7-10)

Moses is sent by God back to the palace from which he fled. Moses must confront a pharaoh who wants to kill him and enslave his people. Moses hesitates at first but leaves when he has his brother with him.[[71]](#endnote-72)

But the Moses who returns to the palace he grew up in is a changed man. What did it do to Moses that he had to flee the palace and live as a stranger in another land? What did it do to him to have to leave a well-ordered life, a bright future, and endless resources, and live instead as a poor shepherd in a foreign land?

One thing we can see in Moses' life is that he was a leader both before and after the escape, but that something changed when he had to flee. Before the flight he was a high representative of the authorities, sent by himself and acting on his own behalf. After the flight he was a representative of the people, sent by God and acting on the Word of God.

Before his escape, he received the best academic leadership training at the Egyptian court from the best teachers the contemporary world had to offer. After the flight, he learned leadership in the desert from the sheep that went looking for water and grass in the land of Midian. Instead of leading and commanding from above as a state authority, Moses became the one who stood on the side of the oppressed and raised his voice for those who had no say in Egyptian society. With the flight, Moses went from being a secular leader of the Egyptians to becoming a spiritual leader of God's people.

But what would have happened if God had communicated his plan to Moses from the beginning? What if God had told Moses that he would go to Pharaoh and demand Israel's deliverance by turning a rod into a snake, turning the waters of the Nile into blood, or that all of Israel would walk dry through the Red Sea while Pharaoh's soldiers drown?

Probably Moses would never have agreed to such a calling because he did not have the patience and it was too strange and distant for a prince of Egypt to behave in such a way. Moses needed to step down from his lofty position and humble himself out in the desert. Moses needed to understand that it was *God* who would deliver Israel, not *Moses*.

All Bible stories serve as examples for us today where we can learn how to live our Christian life.[[72]](#endnote-73) From Moses we can learn that God has a plan for our lives, but that we should not take matters into our own hands, but instead patiently wait for God's right time. From Moses we can learn that being a refugee humbles us, brings us closer to God and teaches us to lead from the bottom up.

We can also learn to trust in God even if we don't always know exactly everything in his plan, because then we probably wouldn't have believed in God's plan for us anyway because it feels too distant. Sometimes God can lead us into a desert period on the run before we are ready to do God's will and not our own.

# God's Salvation

When the pressure on Israel becomes too great, God decides to rescue Israel from their alienation. When Moses returns to Egypt, he confronts Pharaoh and demands that the Israelites be released:

[[@Bible:Ex 5:1-2]]"1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'"2 But Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go."” (Ex 5:1-2)

After much back and forth, God finally forces Pharaoh to release the Israelites:

[[@Bible:Ex 12:31-32]]"31 Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. 32Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!"” (Ex 12:31-32)

When Pharaoh regrets his decision and rides out with his army to attack the Israelites, God saves Israel by letting them walk through the Red Sea on dry land:

[[@Bible:Ex 14:29-31]]"29 But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. 30Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.” (Ex 14:29-31)

The Jewish people still celebrate the memory of the exodus from Egypt today by eating a symbolically significant Passover meal during the festival of Pesach. The lamb of the Passover meal recalls the angel of death who, thanks to the blood of the lamb, passed by the homes of the Israelites and saved them from death. The unleavened bread recalls the speed of God's salvation. The Israelites did not have time to prepare the bread as usual but had to hurry. The saltwater recalls the tears the Israelites wept in their captivity, as well as the fact that they passed through the Red Sea. The bitter herbs recall the bitterness of slavery. A special fruit puree recalls the clay they used to make bricks from in their captivity in Egypt. The four cups of wine, with three parts water and one part wine, recall God's four promises to Israel that he would bring them out of Egypt, rescue, redeem and make them God's people. [[73]](#endnote-74)

It is no coincidence that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in connection with the Jewish Passover meal.[[74]](#endnote-75) On the other hand, the Lord’s Supper is not dependent on the Passover meal, which is celebrated only once a year, but can be celebrated at any time believers gather in Jesus' name.

The Passover meal includes a reminder to God's people that God remembers his covenant, that God saved Israel from Egyptian slavery, the blood of the lamb that gave salvation from death, and a call to continually celebrate the Passover meal.

The Lord's Supper includes a reminder to God's people that God has instituted a new covenant, that God saved his people from the bondage of sin, the blood of the Lamb that provides forgiveness of sins, and a call to continually celebrate the Lord's Supper.

But what does God's salvation of Israel have to do with strangers? Well, the fact that God rescued Israel from alienation in Egypt is repeatedly used by God as the very basic argument for Israel to treat strangers well:

[[@Bible:Ex 22:21-23]]"21 "You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. 22You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. 23If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry,” (Ex 22:21-23)

[[@Bible:Ex 23:9]]"9 "You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. " (Ex 23:9)

God's rescue of Israel out of the miserable situation in Egypt becomes a model for how God's people will in turn rescue vulnerable groups out of a miserable situation, such as strangers and refugees. By treating strangers well, Israel treats its fellow human beings in the same way as they themselves were treated by God when they were strangers in Egypt.

God is Israel's "savior," and since God wants his people to be like him, God naturally wants Israel to be the savior of vulnerable strangers as well.

Incidentally, it is no coincidence that when God is born as a man on earth, he takes the name [[“Jesus” >> GreekStrongs:G2424]] (which is a Greek variant of the Hebrew names [[“Joshua” >> HebrewStrongs: H3091]], [[“Yeshua” >> HebrewStrongs: H3442]] and Yehoshuah). The name is a contraction of the two Hebrew words "yeho", which is a word that comes from God's name [[”YHWH” / ”Yahweh” >> HebrewStrongs: H3068]], and [[“shua” >> HebrewStrongs: H3467]] which means "salvation" or "save us!". So all in all, Jesus' name becomes "God the savior", which is very consistent with Jesus being God who became man to save us.

# The Stranger Within Israel

After God rescues Israel from Egypt, they camp in the desert at Mount Sinai. Moses goes up the mountain and receives the commandments that God wants Israel to live by. A foundation of Israel's relationship with God is how they are to relate to the strangers *within* Israel and the foreign peoples *outside* Israel, according to the Law of Moses.

God tells Israel that if they listen to God and keep the covenant they are about to make, they will become God's own people whom he will transform into a holy priesthood:

[[@Bible:Ex 19:5-6]]"5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." (Ex 19:5-6)

God chose Israel for this, not because they were greater or better than all other nations, but because they were the fewest of all peoples.[[75]](#endnote-76) When the nations around saw how God blessed and protected little Israel, it would arouse a curious interest that would lead them to come to Israel to know God as well. If Israel kept God's covenant and lived according to God's will, God would make them *"a light for the nations".* Since the whole earth belongs to God, he is not content to save only Israel, but wants to extend his salvation to all peoples:

[[@Bible:Is 49:6]]"6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."” (Is 49:6)

God's covenant with Israel, in short, was to *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself*." [[76]](#endnote-77)

The first part of the summary, to *"love the Lord your God with all your heart,"* deals with Israel's relationship with God, i.e., listening to the Word of God, worshiping, sacrificing at the temple, etc. The second part of the summary, to love *"your neighbor as yourself"*, is about Israel's relationship with its fellow human beings.

For God's covenant with Israel is both vertical and horizontal, and involves not only Israel performing sacrifices and ceremonies in the temple in Jerusalem, but also loving her fellow human beings by, as we saw in the last chapter, "rescuing" people out of a vulnerable situation.

Jesus even begins his entire mission as Messiah by proclaiming that he has come to do exactly what Isaiah prophesied God's people would do, namely, to *"proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives and to the oppressed*"[[77]](#endnote-78) . That Jesus causes the blind to see, the lame to walk, the lepers to be cleansed, the deaf to hear, the dead to rise, and the poor to hear a message of joy, becomes for John the Baptist a proof that Jesus is the Messiah.[[78]](#endnote-79)

So when God makes a covenant with Israel, he instructs them to love not only God, but also their fellow man:

[[@Bible:Le 19:17-18]]"17 "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 18You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” (Le 19:17-18)

The word "neighbor" is a word that can also be translated as fellow human being, friend[[79]](#endnote-80) or companion,[[80]](#endnote-81) and primarily refers to a fellow Israelite who is in the same covenant with God. In a similar way, the word is used in the New Testament where a believer is described as a "neighbor".[[81]](#endnote-82)

But what makes the word "neighbor" so interesting in this context is that only a few verses later in the same chapter it is used synonymously with the word "stranger":

[[@Bible:Le 19:33-34]]"33 "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. 34You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” (Le 19:33-34)

For God, therefore, not only *natives are* our neighbors, but also *strangers,* and must therefore also be treated as *brothers*.

But, not only does God want Israel to treat strangers *well*, God also wants Israel to *love* the stranger, because God loves the stranger:

[[@Bible:Dt 10:18-19]]"18 He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. 19Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” (Dt 10:18-19)

If Israel is to be God's people, it is important that they reflect God's character. For example, God instructs Israel in the Law of Moses to *"be holy, for I am holy.*" [[82]](#endnote-83)

In the same way, we see in the above scripture that God wants Israel to love the stranger, because God loves the stranger.

But it is not only strangers whom God wants Israel to treat as fellow human beings, but also fatherless[[83]](#endnote-84) and widows[[84]](#endnote-85) . These three groups became like a collective term for socially and economically vulnerable people,[[85]](#endnote-86) much because they, along with the Levites[[86]](#endnote-87) , were not able to own land in Israel.

Without land of your own, or without a husband or father to work the land, survival becomes difficult, and God therefore wants Israel to take special financial responsibility by being generous[[87]](#endnote-88) to strangers, fatherless and widows:

[[@Bible:Dt 24:19-22]]"19 "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 21When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterwards. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. 22You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.” (Dt 24:19-22)

In addition to each person being generous with his own private abundance, tithes would be collected collectively so that those who had no land of their own could share in this social welfare:

[[@Bible:Dt 14:28-29]]"28 "At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. 29And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.” (Dt 14:28-29)

Notice that this law was accompanied by a promise of God's blessing. If Israel wanted to see a good harvest and a blessed economic abundance, they were to give a tenth of their produce to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. To make sure that the Israelites obeyed this commandment, they would solemnly pledge and publicly confess it at the time of tithing:

[[@Bible:Dt 26:12-15]]"12 "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled,13 then you shall say before the Lord your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me.' I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.14 I have not eaten of the tithe while I was mourning, or removed any of it while I was unclean, or offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the Lord my God. I have done according to all that you have commanded me. 15Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.'” (Dt 26:12-15)

In addition to a generous welfare system, Israel would also ensure that foreigners could participate in religious life in the same way as native Israelites:

[[@Bible:Nu 15:14-16]]"14 And if a stranger is sojourning with you, or anyone is living permanently among you, and he wishes to offer a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the Lord, he shall do as you do. 15For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a statute forever throughout your generations. You and the sojourner shall be alike before the Lord. 16One law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.” (Nu 15:14-16)

Foreigners had the same right to a day off, the Sabbath, as native Israelites,[[88]](#endnote-89) and if they wished, they could participate in the Jewish Passover celebrations, provided they circumcised themselves. [[89]](#endnote-90)

But foreigners had not only religious *rights, but* also *obligations*. If the foreigners failed to perform the religious sacrifice, they would receive the same punishment as the Israelites.[[90]](#endnote-91)

If, against all odds, Israel breaks the covenant by mistreating its fellow human beings, God warns them that he will then side with the weak and vulnerable and listen to their cries for help:

[[@Bible:Ex 22:21-24]]"21 "You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. 22You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. 23If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry,24 and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. " (Ex 22:21-24)

In sum, God instructs Israel through the Law of Moses to welcome strangers, refugees, and immigrants to their land as guests, to contribute financially to them out of her abundance, to include and integrate them into religious life and society by giving them both obligations and rights, and to treat them as themselves:

[[@Bible:Le 24:22]]"22 You shall have the same rule for the sojourner and for the native, for I am the Lord your God.” (Le 24:22)

If Israel treated foreigners in the above way, God would in turn bless Israel. From this I believe that we in today’s society also have much to learn.

After Moses on Mount Sinai makes clear to the Israelite people all of God's laws and instructions that are part of the covenant, Israel responds with one mouth, *"All* *that the LORD has spoken we will do*.*"*[[91]](#endnote-92) Israel thus promises to keep its part of the covenant by loving God with all its heart and its fellow man as itself.

If Israel keeps the covenant, God will let Israel conquer the land of Canaan and then bless them abundantly in their new homeland.[[92]](#endnote-93) But if, on the contrary, Israel breaks the covenant, God will curse Israel by driving them out of the land of Canaan.[[93]](#endnote-94)

In conclusion, we can see two things in particular about Israel's relationship with foreigners in the Old Covenant. First, that God wants to use Israel as a holy instrument that reaches out with the Word of God to foreign peoples *outside* ofIsrael, and second, that God wants Israel to welcome and include foreigners *within* Israel both in society and in the religious community.

In the rest of the book, I call these two approaches to strangers "integration"[[94]](#endnote-95) if it applies *inside* Israel or the church, and "mission" if it applies *outside* Israel or the church.

In the next two chapters, we will look at how integration in Israel is working in practice, and then in chapters 13 and 14 we will see how God intended Israel to missionary among the foreign peoples outside Israel's borders.

# Your People Are My People

In the last chapter, we reviewed the laws that go regulated how Israel should treat the stranger, the fatherless and the widow within its own borders. An example of how these laws can be put into practice can be found in the book of Ruth.

Due to a famine, Elimelech, an Israelite, and his wife Naomi leave their homeland of Israel with their two children and go to the neighboring country of Moab to live there as strangers:

[[@Bible:Ru 1:1-2]]"1 In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. 2The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.” (Ru 1:1-2)

In Moab, Elimelech dies, leaving Naomi alone with her two sons, who each marry a Moabite wife: Orpah and Ruth. After some time, Naomi's two sons also die, and she is left alone with her sons' wives. This was a very difficult situation for Naomi because in biblical times a single woman without either a husband or sons was not able to support herself.

Naomi then decides to return to her homeland of Israel and wants Orpah and Ruth to stay in Moab where they can remarry. Orpah stays in Moab but Ruth refuses to leave Naomi and says:

[[@Bible:Ru 1:16]]"16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” (Ru 1:16)

Ruth's confession echoes God's promise to Israel: *"I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God."*[[95]](#endnote-96)

By choosing God and his people, Ruth goes from being a Moabite stranger to becoming a citizen of God's kingdom, at least spiritually.

At first, Ruth was still considered a stranger in Israel. But as a stranger, she has the right, according to the Law of Moses, to pick leftover branches from Israelite fields.[[96]](#endnote-97) As we saw in the last chapter, it was part of God's covenant that the Israelites would give a portion of their harvest to the strangers:

[[@Bible:Le 19:9-10]]"9 "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. 10And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.” (Le 19:9-10)

To the Israelite who obeyed this command, God made a clear promise: *"the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."*[[97]](#endnote-98)

The generosity of the native Israelites in their abundance gave foreigners a chance to survive in the land.

[[@Bible:Ru 2:2-3]]"2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." 3So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. " (Ru 2:2-3)

Ruth, a stranger in a foreign country, seems to have decided not to get stuck in alienation or welfare dependency, but to actively try to become part of her new country and make a new and better life for herself. When Ruth takes advantage of the right of foreigners to pick leftover ears of grain, she meets Boas, who was a member of Elimelech's family. Eventually they marry and Ruth becomes the progenitor of both King David and Jesus Christ.[[98]](#endnote-99)

The book of Ruth is an educational illustration of how the Law of Moses instructions on how Israel should treat the stranger *within* Israel, integration, was supposed to work in practice. Similarly, the book of Jonah is an educational illustration of how Moses' law of how Israel was to treat the foreign peoples *outside* Israel, mission, was supposed to work in practice.

However, it should be added that although the Word of God commanded the Israelites to be generous to strangers, far from all were. Ruth had to look for someone who looked at her with "favor", which she finds in Boaz.

From Ruth we learn that even strangers can choose to believe in God and be a blessing to God's people. But if Boaz had not listened to the Word of God to be generous to strangers, Ruth the stranger would not have been a blessing to Israel and King David would never have been born.

A society friendly to strangers arises from the combination of natives welcoming refugees, being generous with their economic abundance, including strangers into the community, and strangers in turn using the natives' generosity as a springboard from alienation to becoming a blessing for their new community.[[99]](#endnote-100)

# The Stranger, the Widow and the Fatherless

In chapter 10, we reviewed how God instructed Israel to love the "stranger, the fatherless and the widow" as himself and to treat them generously, and in chapter 11, we saw how this integration work could work in practice. But unfortunately, a recurring criticism from the prophets was that Israel unfortunately did not treat these three vulnerable groups very well. In this chapter we will see how God therefore turns the tables and, on the contrary, allows a foreign widow with a fatherless boy to become a blessing for a fleeing Israelite.

During a time of Israelite apostasy, the prophet Elijah suddenly appears out of nowhere. Elijah prophesies that there will be a severe drought in Israel and is forced to flee for his life. God therefore sends Elijah to the brook Cherith to hide him there while working on Elijah's character:

[[@Bible: 1Ki 17:2-3]]"2 And the word of the Lord came to him:3 "Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. " (1Ki 17:2-3)

Although the exact location of the Cherith stream is not known, this story gives us a glimpse of what it can mean to flee for our lives and how God can use that situation to show care and help us grow deeper in our faith. Every morning and every evening, God provides Elijah with bread to eat and water to drink with the help of ravens.

The name [[“Cherith” >> HebrewStrongs: H3772]] means "to cut off" or "to chop", which could mean that God had the opportunity to shape and refine Elijah by working on his negative and destructive character traits.

Elijah had quickly become a well-known prophet in the land, and by hiding Elijah by a brook, God teaches Elijah the importance of being alone with God. Perhaps Elijah would have preferred to continue preaching to the people and telling them about God's plan for Israel, but at the brook Elijah learns that *working* for God must never be more important than *living* with God.

If we look at Elijah's stay at Cherith as a symbolic place where every believer can be alone with God, then the bread symbolizes the Bible and the water the Spirit. Every morning and every evening it is useful and good for every person who wants to serve God to be still in solitude and be filled with God's Word through the Bible and be filled with God's Spirit through prayer.

Moreover, in a time of *drought*, Elijah had to sit by a *stream of water*. In this way, God taught Elijah to depend on God for his provision.

It must have been a difficult test for Elijah to maintain his trust in God's providence as he watched the brook slowly but surely dry up. But Elijah persevered, trusting that God would eventually reveal something new when the time was right.

It is probably no coincidence that Jesus compares streams of water to the Holy Spirit. Anyone who wants to work for God needs to find their own hidden place where they can be alone with God and draw strength. God uses the time alone at the brook to teach Elijah even more about being a servant of God.

But even though God knew His plan for Elijah, He didn't tell him everything at once, but let Elijah know one thing at a time. Only when Elijah obeyed God and went to Cherith did he learn the next step.

Even today, God leads us step by step, letting us know one thing at a time. This can be very frustrating, but it leads us to depend on God and we must learn to trust in his care.

What would have happened if we had known God's whole plan in advance? Probably we would have backed out because we didn't feel we could handle something that big.

It is also often only in retrospect that we can see how wonderfully God has led us all along. It is often only when we look back on our lives that we realize that many of the difficulties we went through were actually good for us and made us grow in our faith and learn to trust in God more. But if we had known them beforehand, we might not have dared to go when God called.

When a person is persecuted in their own country and forced to flee, it can be difficult to see God's plan and care. But if you ask God to be with you in your flight, God can use the situation for something positive down the road. When Elijah, the man of God, flees Israel and comes to Zarephath in Sidon, we get another example of how God can use a flight for something positive:

[[@Bible:1Ki 17:8-9]]"8 Then the word of the Lord came to him,9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” (1Ki 17:8-9)

At just the right time, when it was time for Elijah to move on, God told Elijah to go to a Gentile widow in Sidon, an area north of Israel in present-day Lebanon.

Life was very difficult for widows in Biblical times. With children to support and care for, but without a husband to work and earn money, life was very tough. Add to that the fact that there was a drought, and most people understand that this widow was not even able to feed her own son, let alone Elijah:

[[@Bible:1Ki 17:12]]"12 And she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” (1Ki 17:12)

But in this way, God shows Elijah that God can use whomever he wants to do whatever he wants. We humans, who often look outwardly, would probably have passed this widow by and never given her a chance. But God, who saw her heart, knew that she may have nothing to offer, but that she was willing to serve God if only he would make it possible.

In the same way, we humans should be careful not to look only at appearances when judging whether a person is capable of doing this or that. Since power and blessing come from God, it makes no difference whatsoever whether we are humanly weak or strong. What matters is the attitude of our hearts and whether we are ready to serve God or not.

God blesses the widow in that when the prophet Elijah stays with her, God miraculously provides her with flour and oil to bake bread:

[[@Bible:1Ki 17:13-16]]"13 And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. 14For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.' "15 And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. 16The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.” (1Ki 17:13-16)

But, in the midst of all the miraculous blessings that the widow had received from God, she is struck by an unimaginable tragedy when her son dies of illness.

The death of the widow's son was a double tragedy that affected not only the boy but also, by extension, the widow, since he was her guarantee of support in her old age.

The widow blames herself and her own sin for her son's death and is angry with Elijah because she believes that he has somehow made God punish her for her sin.

It's easy to blame yourself and your own sin when you are struck by horrors. But not everything negative that happens to us is automatically a punishment from God, even though it may feel that way sometimes.

If it suddenly starts raining, does that mean it was God who sent the rain, or was it the Devil who sent the rain, or is it raining because it's autumn? Sometimes it's hard to know.

But Elijah is dismayed by the death of the widow's son and does the only thing he can do; cries out his despair to God! The dilemma that Elijah and the widow face is really the Theodicy problem: "How can a good God allow evil?" The answer to that question is not given, but a good instruction on how to deal with tragedy is; namely, to cry out in despair to God. Although God did not answer why the boy died, he did allow a miracle to happen by bringing him back to life:

[[@Bible:1Ki 17:22]]"22 And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. " (1Ki 17:22)

From the prophet Elijah we learn that God is with us and provides what we need when we flee for our lives, when we leave our homeland, when there is drought and famine.

We also learn that when Israel breaks the covenant with God the most, when they oppress the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, it is instead a foreign widow with a fatherless boy who takes care of God's prophet.

Finally, we also learn that God can turn a poor widow from a stranger into a great blessing. God can use anyone he wants for his purposes, and we should not count anyone out just because they don't seem to be able to contribute much on the surface. With the right attitude, all people can be used by God.

# The Stranger Outside of Israel

In previous chapters we have looked at how God instructed Israel how they, as God's people, were to treat strangers *within* Israel's borders, i.e., *integration*. In this chapter we will now look at how God wants Israel to relate to foreign people *outside* Israel's borders, i.e., *mission*. It all began when God chose Abraham to bless *all* thepeoples of the earth through him:

[[@Bible:gen 12:1-3]]"1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Ge 12:1-3)

As a continuation of this blessing, God chose Israel, who came to know God and His will through the Law of Moses. But God never intended that only Israel should know God, but that Israel should serve as a priesthood for the rest of the world:

[[@Bible:Ex 19:5-6]]"5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” (Ex 19:5-6)

If Israel lived according to God's will, the idea was that it would create a curiosity in the surrounding Gentile peoples and make them want to know God as well. In a pagan world, the Jewish faith would serve as a light in the darkness for the Gentile peoples around it:

[[@Bible:Is 49:6]]"6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."” (Is 49:6)

So, at the dedication of the first temple, King Solomon prays that God will listen not only to the prayers of the Jewish people, but also *"when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel"* comes to Jerusalem and prays in the temple, so that *"all the peoples of the earth" will* come to know God's name:

[[@Bible:1Ki 8:41-43]]"41 "Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake42 (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, 43hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.” (1Ki 8:41-43)

In response to Solomon's prayer, Isaiah prophesies that strangers will turn to the Lord and that the temple in Jerusalem will be called *"a house of prayer for all peoples":*

[[@Bible:Is 56:3-7]]"3 Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." 4For thus says the Lord: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant,5 I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. 6"And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant-7 these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."” (Is 56:3-7)

Furthermore, both Isaiah and Zechariah prophesy of a future in which *"all the nations"* will flock to Jerusalem to meet the God of Israel:

[[@Bible:Is 2:2-4]]"2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,3 and many peoples shall come, and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Is 2:2-4)

[[@Bible:Zec 8:23]]"23 Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'” (Zec 8:23)

In conclusion, we can see that even though God has chosen Israel as his beloved possession, this does not mean that God does notlove the other nations, but on the contrary that he wants to use Israel as *"a light for the nations"* and extend his salvation to all peoples *"to the end of the earth"*.[[100]](#endnote-101) By choosing Jerusalem as the place where God reveals himself and transforms the Israelites into *"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation",*[[101]](#endnote-102) the other nations can come to Israel and know God there.

# Preaching to the Enemy

In the last chapter, we reviewed how Israel was supposed to treat foreigners outside Israel's borders, and that God's plan was to transform the Israelites into *"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"*.[[102]](#endnote-103) The Lord wants to extend his salvation to all peoples *"to the end of the earth"* by using Israel as missionaries who preach the Word of God to other nations so that Israel will be *"a light for the nations".[[103]](#endnote-104)* In this chapter we will now see how this can be put into practice, albeit somewhat unintentionally:

[[@Bible:Jon 1:1-2]]"1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” (Jon 1:1-2)

The name "Jonah" means "dove" and his name fits well with his mission. God sends Jonah as a "dove of peace" to Israel's enemies, the warlike Assyrians in Nineveh.

The Assyrians had engaged in violence, plunder, prostitution, sorcery, and commercial exploitation. God had had enough and intended to send Jonah to proclaim the judgment of God on their capital city of Nineveh.

However, when God proclaims a judgment, it is rarely executed immediately. There is almost always time and opportunity for repentance.

For Jonah, therefore, God's call to preach judgment on Nineveh was very provocative. Jonah knew that the Lord is a merciful and forgiving God and does not want the Assyrians to be offered the opportunity to repent so that the Lord will forgive them. The Assyrians are Israel's enemies and Jonah wants God to *punish* the Assyrians, not *forgive* them.

Jonah therefore tries to go to Tarshish, as far away from Nineveh as was possible in Jonah's time. Tarshish was the westernmost city in the Levantine trade area, while Nineveh was the easternmost. But after a humbling sojourn in the belly of a fish, Jonah eventually arrives in Nineveh.

For Jonah the Israelite, going into the heart of the Assyrian enemy’s three-day capital of Nineveh was potentially as deadly as being inside the belly of a fish in the depths of the sea for three days.

But Jonah is bold and preaches (perhaps a little mischievously) that God will destroy Nineveh in forty days:

[[@Bible:Jon 3:4]]"4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"” (Jon 3:4)

Jonah hopes that God will now crush Israel's enemies, but God, who by nature is *"slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love"*,[[104]](#endnote-105) wants Jonah's preaching to lead the Assyrians to repent of their wickedness, which they do. The Assyrians in Nineveh begin to believe in God when they hear Jonah's sermon of judgment:

[[@Bible:Jon 3:5-9]]"5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. 6The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water,8 but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” (Jon 3:5-9)

By forsaking food and dressing in simple and poor clothes, the people of Nineveh show that they truly repent of their sin and ask God for forgiveness. Genuine repentance is always wholehearted and the repentant are ready to give up everything to come to terms with God. Simply saying that one repents without being prepared to radically change your life is not genuine repentance.

From the Assyrians we learn that true repentance begins with hearing the Word of God and responding by believing in God, repenting, crying out to God with all your might, ceasing to do evil, and hoping that God will forgive, which of course God does:

[[@Bible:Jon 3:10]]"10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. " (Jon 3:10)

When a murderer is convicted in court, he will receive his punishment even if he repents. When God saw how Nineveh repented, he refrained from the punishment that in the name of justice they should have received for the sins they committed. It is fortunate for us humans that God gives us *grace* instead of *justice* when we repent.

Because Jonah spent three days and three nights in the depths of the sea preaching repentance to the Gentiles, they repented and received God's grace and were spared God's judgment. In the same way, Jesus was dead for three days and three nights so that all who believe in Jesus and repent will have their sins forgiven and be saved from judgment. However, Jonah does not appreciate the grace of God upon the Assyrians:

[[@Bible:Jon 4:1-4]]"1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 2And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. 3Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"” (Jon 4:1-4)

Normally, a preacher would want the audience to listen, and the preacher would be happy when his message gets through, but Jonah is just the opposite. The second God stops being angry with Nineveh, Jonah becomes angry with God. Jonah didn't want the Assyrians to listen to his message and he gets angry when they do!

For Jonah knew that God is a merciful and gracious God, but he did not want Israel's enemies, the Assyrians, to know that.

Jonah himself had experienced God's mercy when Jonah repented inside the belly of the fish and God saved him from certain death. But now, when the Assyrians repent and are saved from certain death, Jonah does not want to grant them God's mercy and becomes so angry that he would rather die than live.

But God is trying to show the xenophobic Jonah that he is the God of *the whole world*, not just Israel. God also loves the foreign peoples outside Israel's borders and wants to use Israel as a light in their pagan darkness. If God shows Jonah that he has power over both the animals and the plants, surely, he can show his loving power over the foreign peoples as well?

When God's people do missionary work among foreign peoples, hostility is stopped, peoples repent and begin to believe in God, and peace between nations is established. That God chose Jonah for this mission shows us that God cares about even xenophobic people and wants to open their eyes to God's love for foreign peoples by forcing Jonah to face his enemies.

Did Jonah finally understand that God loves even his enemies? We'll never know because the book of Jonah is not primarily about Jonah, but about us who read it. Do you love your enemies? Are you prepared to show love to people from other countries? Are you prepared to forgive those who have wronged you? Are you prepared to preach the gospel in word and deed to strangers and enemies?

# Cave of Adullam

One of the Bible's great heroes, King David, had to flee on several occasions, and there are some interesting lessons to be learned from these events. We begin with David's escape to the cave of Adullam:

[[@Bible:1Sa 22:1-5]]"1 David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. 2And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.3 And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me." 4And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. 5Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.” (1Sa 22:1-5)

David had recently been anointed the future king of Israel, killed Goliath, became commander of the army of Israel, defeated the Philistines, married the king's daughter, and made a covenant with the king's son Jonathan. The future certainly looked good! But as David's success grew, King Saul became increasingly jealous of David and wanted to kill him. David went from being a celebrated hero to having to flee for his life and hide in a cave.

When David must flee, he heads to the cave of Adullam, an underground cave system of limestone that was probably located about a mile from Bethlehem, near the border with Philistine at the beginning of the mountains of Judea. The cave is on a hill with a long view of the landscape, perfect for spotting approaching enemies.

The word [[“Adullam” >> HebrewStrongs: H5724]] means "refuge". Perhaps David found these caves when he was herding sheep as a young boy and thought he could hide there if he ever found himself in danger. Now these caves come in handy!

An interesting detail is that when David went to the cave of Adullam, he had to pass the very place where he had defeated Goliath. Surely David was thinking about how quickly he had gone from being a celebrated hero to having to flee for his life.

While hiding in the Cave of Adullam, David wrote Psalm 142, which gives us a poignant insight into what it means to be a refugee:

[[@Bible:Ps 142:1-7]]"A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer. 1With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord. 2I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him. 3When my spirit faints within me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me. 4Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul. 5I cry to you, O Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." 6Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! 7Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.” (Ps 142:1-7)

When David found himself in a life-threatening and very vulnerable situation, he began his prayer by crying out to the Lord. David opens his heart to the Lord and tells of all his troubles, that his enemies are pursuing him and that there is no longer any refuge for him anywhere, but that he trusts *God* as his refuge. Finally, David asks God to deliver him from his enemies.

There is much to learn from David's prayer in a difficult situation. When you and I are surrounded by enemies and must flee or retreat, where do we go? We can learn from David that we can "hide" with the Lord and pray for his help and deliverance.

Just as we saw in chapter 12 how God worked on the character of the prophet Elijah when he hid at the brook Cherith, so it seems that God is working on the heart of David when he is on the run and hiding in the cave of Adullam. It is often when we find ourselves in difficult situations that we humble ourselves before the Lord and grow in our faith. Therefore, difficult situations are not necessarily negative, at least not for our spiritual well-being.

When David's family hears of the trouble David is in, they come to him. When David was little, his father and brothers didn't care much for him. So it must have been a very good feeling for David that now, when he is in trouble, his family comes to him. It's when life gets hard that you find out who your real friends are.

Maybe his family can't do much to save him from King Saul, but they can be by his side now that David is in a very difficult and vulnerable situation. In a similar way, you and I can be at the side of today's refugees and be their families, even if we often wish we could have done something more concrete to change the situation. But for those who have a caring family when they are alone on the run, caring can prevent them from falling into apathetic depression and instead gaining strength to think about the future.

But not only David's family came to him, but also *"everyone who was in distress"*. David must have been very surprised when different kinds of disgruntled people started coming to him. If David himself had been given 400 men to choose from, he might not have chosen these particular people, but now it seems that God sent them to him. These people were "in distress", they had their own problems and worries. They were "in debt", they had failed in life and had financial troubles. They were "bitter in soul", their lives were difficult, and they saw no way to have a better life unless they left it and followed David instead. Even today, people in trouble, with financial worries and dissatisfied with life, come to the church, and ask God to be their refuge and deliverance.

David becomes the leader of these 400 people. They came to David not when he was rich and celebrated, but when he was in the most difficult time of his life and remained loyal to him for the rest of his life.

David could certainly have turned these 400 into a band of robbers, but instead he turned them into brave heroes and warriors.[[105]](#endnote-106) In the same way, you and I can come to church and appeal to God for deliverance from a difficult situation. At first, we are in difficulty and discontent, but gradually God changes our situation and makes us heroes for the kingdom of God.

Anyone who wants to be a "hero of God" today and do great deeds for the Lord, needs to be as loyal to Jesus as David's heroes were to David. A hero of God needs to come to God when life is difficult, let God be your refuge and be transformed from a vulnerable refugee into a hero of God.

When God is going to do his great works on earth, he usually first calls a leader after his heart, anoints him with his Holy Spirit, and then makes him a leader for people who want to follow God.

But in the process of forming a leader after God's heart, one must sometimes pause the life of success to retreat to the cave of Adullam and spend time alone with the Lord.

# Ittai's Loyalty

King David had to flee for his life more than once. On one of these occasions, we meet an interesting person called Ittai:

[[@Bible:2Sa 15:13-23]]"13 And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom." 14Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword." 15And the king's servants said to the king, "Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my Lord the king decides." 16So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house. 17And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house. 18And all his servants passed by him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king. 19Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. 20You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you." 21But Ittai answered the king, "As the Lord lives, and as my Lord the king lives, wherever my Lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be." 22And David said to Ittai, "Go then, pass on." So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the little ones who were with him. 23And all the land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness.” (2Sa 15:13-23)

When King David's own son Absalom rebels, David leaves Jerusalem and flees into the wilderness because he does not want to expose his beloved city to Absalom's ravages. When David, who is getting old, pauses for a moment as his faithful entourage walks past him out of the city of Jerusalem, he sees Ittai. Ittai was a Philistine from Gath (the same city from which Goliath came) who joined King David the day before with the intention of enlisting with his 600-man army to serve the king of Israel.

David is surprised to see Ittai following David out into the desert since he arrived only the day before. David graciously urges Ittai to go back to Jerusalem and rather join Absalom since he has no quarrel with Ittai. Why willingly go out into the desert with a lost king when you can join Israel's new king?

But when David calls his son Absalom "king", Ittai boldly replies that it is *David* who is the king of Israel, not Absalom. Ittai has come to serve the real king, even if it costs him his life and health. Ittai intends to stand by David's side through good times as well as bad.

When David's own people deserted him, a stranger stood loyally by his side. Ittai was not ashamed of David, but openly declared to all that he would serve the king both in death and in life.

At these words, David lets Ittai accompany David in his flight. Ittai teaches us that we should never underestimate a stranger and that true loyalty can come from unexpected places and only shows itself when we can lose out. Such loyalty is worth more than gold and harder to find than precious stones.

# Raise Your Voice for the Mute

Centrally placed in the Bible we find an important word of God for leaders:

[[@Bible:Pr 31:8-9]]"8 Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. 9Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Pr 31:8-9)

These words of wisdom call on people in leadership positions to speak out publicly in support of socially vulnerable people who are unable to speak for themselves.

An important task for us Christians, then, is to give voice to those who have no voice, both in society and in the church. To speak for those who no one wants to listen to. To call attention to those whom society turns a blind eye to.

This is not something that only activists and relatives should be doing. This text is addressed directly to the King of Israel. Raising your voice for the weak in society is a task assigned to leaders. Or as Job put it:

[[@Bible:Job 29:16]]"16 I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know. " (Job 29:16)

The person at risk of deportation, the person who does not have the right to vote, the person who is sick, the person who has no contacts, that person has no chance in our society. But as Christians we have a responsibility to take up that person's cause and make the struggle our own.

What good is it if you only pray for a fellow human being without also being the answer to your prayer? When we combine prayer with holy work, it not only helps our fellow human beings, it also transforms us into a more righteous person and creates the community of love on which God's kingdom is based.

# Israel Violates the Covenant

Although Israel had received the Law of Moses with clear instructions on how to live as God's people, unfortunately it doesn’t take long before Israel begins to break the covenant with God. They break both the first half of the covenant, to love God with all their heart, by beginning to worship idols, and the second half of the covenant, to love their fellow man as themselves, by beginning to oppress the stranger.

God therefore sends his prophets to warn Israel. If they do not repent and stop mistreating strangers, fatherless and widows, God will drive Israel out of their homeland:

[[@Bible:Je 7:5-7]]"5 "For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another,6 if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other Gods to your own harm,7 then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.” (Je 7:5-7)

Under no circumstances could Israel believe that by performing their religious ceremonies in the temple they were safe in their homeland if at the same time they mistreated vulnerable people. For loving God with all your heart and loving your fellow man as oneself go together. You cannot have one without the other:

[[@Bible:Je 7:9-11]]"9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other Gods that you have not known,10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!'-only to go on doing all these abominations? 11Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.” (Je 7:9-11)

But despite the prophets' warnings, Israel does not repent, but continues to worship idols and oppress the stranger, the widow and the fatherless:

[[@Bible:Eze 22:7]]"7 Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. " (Eze 22:7)

As a consequence, God first allowed the Assyrians to defeat and remove the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC.[[106]](#endnote-107) Some time later, the same judgment befalls the southern kingdom of Judah, when the Babylonians take Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and take the Jewish people in captivity to Babylon: [[107]](#endnote-108)

[[@Bible:2Ki 25:8-11]]"8 In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month-that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon-Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9And he burned the house of the Lord and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. 10And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. 11And the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile.” (2Ki 25:8-11)

In 586 BC, Jerusalem, including the temple, is destroyed and the Jewish people are taken into captivity. The deportation of entire peoples by the great powers was a common military strategy at the time, in order to prevent future rebellions.

God warned Israel through His prophets[[108]](#endnote-109) that this would happen if Judah did not repent of its sins, but because they did not, God eventually allowed the Babylonians to carry the Jewish people away into captivity. [[109]](#endnote-110)

Once in Babylon, the Jewish people had to live in captivity for 70 years, before they were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple thanks to the Persian king Cyrus.[[110]](#endnote-111)

But while the Jewish people were in captivity in Babylon, God gave them this exhortation:

[[@Bible:Je 29:4-7]]"4 "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Je 29:4-7)

Losing both their homeland and their temple was, of course, a shock to the Jews who survived. Moreover, false prophets falsely prophesied that Judah would soon return to its homeland.[[111]](#endnote-112) But God had decided that the Jewish people would remain in Babylon for 70 years[[112]](#endnote-113) and therefore urges the Jews to continue to live as if they were at home even though they are strangers in another land, and to continue to pray even though the temple in Jerusalem is destroyed.

By presenting himself as *"the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel",* God shows that he has the capacity to both hear and answer the prayers of the Jews even if they are outside Israel and even if the temple of Jerusalem is destroyed.

Moreover, although God is the God of Israel, he is not only the God of the Jews, but of the whole world, even of the Babylonians. Even though the Babylonians have a different religion and are the hated enemies of the Jews, God loves them too. God therefore urges the Jewish people to pray for their enemies[[113]](#endnote-114) and to seek the welfare of the Babylonian society, because if Babylon does well, the Jewish people will also benefit.[[114]](#endnote-115)

If much of the Bible is about how God's people should treat strangers who come to Israel, this text is about how God's people themselves should behave in the event of being in a foreign nation: continue to believe in God, trust in his care. Continue to live and work for a good future. Work together with your former enemies and your new community. Love your enemies and be a blessing to the new land you find yourself in.

And, it should be added, if God's people *do not* continue to live their lives in their new land, *do not* pray for their new society, and *do not* work for peace and reconciliation with the Babylonians, then the Jewish people will *not* do well either. Behaving badly in their new land and hating the local people will lead to more enmity and will certainly not benefit the immigrant people.

An interesting detail that does not appear in the English translation of the Bible, is that where in Jeremiah 29:7 it says *"welfare"*, in the Hebrew text it says *"shalom"*:

[[@Bible:Je 29:7]]"7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Je 29:7)

[[“Shalom” >> HebrewStrongs: H7965]] is a wonderful Hebrew word that can be translated into both "peace" and "inner peace". In English, "peace" means the opposite of "war". But the biblical meaning of shalom implies not only the absence of enmity but also a positive state of prosperity and well-being.

So when God calls on the Jews to seek shalom with the Babylonians, he wants the Jews to refrain from hostilities against the Babylonians *and* actively work for peace and prosperity. A state of peace between Jews and Babylonians will be a blessing for both Jews and Babylonians. One could even translate verse 7 something like this: *"Seek peace with your enemies, for in that peace is your peace."*

Continuing this idea into the present, we can compare it to the idea that a Christian of today should not only passively refrain from xenophobia, but should also be actively xenophile (i.e., a friend of strangers). Making peace is more than just passively refraining from war, it also means actively working for peace.[[115]](#endnote-116)

Just as we saw in chapter 4 that it was in the *offering of* hospitality itself that the transition from potential enemy to protected guest took place, so the Jews were able to make peace with the Babylonians by actively seeking the good of their new community.

I think we all have a lot to learn from the multifaceted concept of *shalom.* To be at peace with someone is not only to passively refrain from doing something bad, but also to actively do something good.

If we continue to study the word shalom, or [[*”eirene”* >> GreekStrongs:G1515]] as it is called in Greek, it seems that the biblical teaching never ends. In the New Testament, the Old Testament view of "peace" as a state of well-being combined with the absence of hostility continues.[[116]](#endnote-117) The angels proclaim that God brings peace to earth with the birth of Jesus.[[117]](#endnote-118) God offers peace and reconciliation to Israel and humanity in Jesus,[[118]](#endnote-119) which is clearly demonstrated when Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey while the people sing *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*.[[119]](#endnote-120) This peace and reconciliation between God and man, and between people and people, was brought about by Jesus through his death on the cross.[[120]](#endnote-121) The disciples come with peace to the people they visit,[[121]](#endnote-122) Jesus greets people with peace.[[122]](#endnote-123) The apostles often begin their letters with the greeting *"Grace to you and peace* "*[[123]](#endnote-124)* and state that Jesus is our peace.[[124]](#endnote-125) Those who work to "make peace" are called by Jesus *"sons of God"*.[[125]](#endnote-126) And so on, and so on.

# But There Is a God in Heaven

One person who sought the good of his new community in Babylon was Daniel, one of the Jews who were carried away into captivity:

[[@Bible:Dan 1:3-8]]"3 Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility,4 youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. 5The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. 6Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. 7And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. " (Dan 1:3-8)

Daniel accepted to be educated in the Babylonian school and to get a new name but draws the line at "unclean food". Becoming part of the new Babylonian society was okay, but actively participating in a foreign religion was something Daniel was not going to put up with.

It is not clear exactly what was unclean with the Babylonian food, but it is known that the Babylonians often sacrificed both food and blood to their idols.[[126]](#endnote-127) It may also have been that the Babylonians did not distinguish between clean and unclean food as required by the Law of Moses,[[127]](#endnote-128) i.e., they ate both cow and pig for example.

A recurring lesson in the book of Daniel is to stand up for your faith in God even in a foreign land by contributing to the common good while refraining from evil. In a foreign land with a foreign religion, there are things that believers cannot do, but there are also things that they can actively contribute to. Daniel served the Babylonian king and was part of his court, but he did not participate in everything.

In the same way, a Christian today can also engage politically in his secular society by making his talents available to society and through them seeking the good of his society. But at the same time, like Daniel, draw the line at participation in outright wickedness. As a Christian politician, for example, one can be a great blessing to both natives and immigrants by enacting xenophilic laws. As we saw in chapter 10, there was a promise of blessing in return if Israel blessed the foreigners in their land. According to this biblical principle, our country will in turn be blessed if we bless foreigners by accepting refugees, contributing financially from our abundance, and including and integrating them into our society.[[128]](#endnote-129)

Back to Babylon. Daniel refrained from defiling himself with the Babylonian food and stuck to just eating vegetables and drinking water.[[129]](#endnote-130) God blesses the faith of Daniel and his friends and allows them to be more well-fed than all the others in the king's court.[[130]](#endnote-131) Not only that, but God also gives Daniel and his friends *"learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.*"[[131]](#endnote-132)

The Babylonian king is so impressed by Daniel and his friends that they are allowed to serve the king directly.[[132]](#endnote-133) So Daniel uses the good of his own Jewish background, i.e., his faith, to bless his new country of Babylon.

In the same way, a refugee or immigrant in our country should actively work for the good of our society by contributing the knowledge and experience he or she has brought with them from their home country. In this way, both the native and the immigrant benefit.

A concrete example of this can be found when Babylon's king Nebuchadnezzar dreams a dream that he wants to have interpreted by his wise men at court. When none of Babylon's wise men succeed in interpreting the dream, Nebuchadnezzar is so angry that he orders them all to be killed, including Daniel and his friends.[[133]](#endnote-134)

But Daniel prays to God and gets an answer to the secret of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, thus saving the lives of the wise men.[[134]](#endnote-135)

What is particularly interesting in this event is that Daniel takes the opportunity to testify before King Nebuchadnezzar when the opportunity arises. When Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel if he can really explain the dream, Daniel replies:

[[@Bible:Dan 2:27-28]]"27 Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked,28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.” (Dan 2:27-28a)

Daniel must have longed to testify to King Nebuchadnezzar about his faith in God but had no opportunity. But now he seizes the opportunity to tell him that there is a God in heaven. Nebuchadnezzar is so moved that he exclaims:

[[@Bible:Dan 2:47]]"47 The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of Gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."” (Dan 2:47)

As a result of Daniel's bold faith, King Nebuchadnezzar *"made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon"* and elevated him to *"chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon"*,[[135]](#endnote-136) something we will see in the next chapter will be a blessing for Joseph and Mary when the wise men from the East visit Jesus.[[136]](#endnote-137)

Daniel's pursuit of the good of his new Babylonian community, while maintaining his bold faith in the God of Israel and teaching the Bible to the Babylonian scholars, led a few generations later to a blessing in return for Joseph and Mary's family and enabled their escape to Egypt.

Living as a foreigner in a foreign country with a foreign religion can be dangerous. But when the opportunity arises, one should seize it and bear witness to God.

An important lesson from this is to stand up for your faith in God even in a foreign land by contributing to the common good but refraining from evil. In a foreign country with a foreign religion, there are things that believers cannot do, but there are also things to which they can actively contribute. Daniel served the Babylonian king and was part of his court, but he did not participate in everything.

A refugee of faith should actively work for the peace and prosperity of the new country, but at the same time must draw the line at outright wrongdoing. As believers, our primary loyalty is to God and God's kingdom, not to Babylon, Sweden, or any other country.

In previous chapters we have seen how God instructed Israel to treat the stranger *within* Israel's borders well by *"loving him as yourself"*,[[137]](#endnote-138) otherwise God will drive Israel out of their homeland,[[138]](#endnote-139) something that unfortunately also happens with the exile in Babylon.[[139]](#endnote-140) We have also seen how God wanted to extend his salvation to all the foreign peoples *outside the* borders of Israel *"to the end of the earth"* by transforming the Israelites into *"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*"*[[140]](#endnote-141)* and thus making Israel *"a light for the nations". [[141]](#endnote-142)*

In the next chapter, we will see how God sent his own Son to fulfill all that Israel failed to do. Jesus shows us how God's people are not only to treat strangers and gentiles well within Israel's borders but are to welcome and integrate them into God's people fully and equally. Then Jesus sends his disciples out as missionaries to preach the gospel even beyond the borders of Israel, to the farthest reaches of the earth. But not grudgingly and bitterly like the prophet Jonah, but filled with joy and the power of the Spirit.

# Jesus

God sends Jesus from his heavenly abode to live as a guest and stranger in the world. Jesus shows how to treat your fellow man and invites both Jews and foreigners to the heavenly feast. Through his death on the cross, Jesus breaks down the wall of separation between natives and strangers, Jews and Gentiles, and creates from these different peoples a new people.

# Flee to Egypt

When Jesus came to earth, it meant that he first left his heavenly dwelling[[142]](#endnote-143) to live in our world as a guest and stranger.[[143]](#endnote-144) As a newborn, Jesus is welcomed to earth by both Jews[[144]](#endnote-145) and Gentiles[[145]](#endnote-146), but is soon forced to flee to escape King Herod:

[[@Bible:Mt 2:13-15]]"13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."” (Mt 2:13-15)

At the time of Jesus' birth, nearly a million Jews lived in Alexandria, one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire. Located in the northern part of Israel's neighbor Egypt, it had often served as a natural refuge for Jewish refugees. [[146]](#endnote-147)

An interesting detail is that in the Greek text it says [[“magos” >> GreekStrongs:G3097]] where in English it says "the wise men". From "magos" we get the English word "magician". These Magos from the East were the most highly educated scientists from Iraq/Iran at the time. They were astronomers, historians, religious scholars, astrologers, etc., and acted as advisors to the king.

In the Old Testament, we see that the main character of the last chapter, the prophet Daniel, was appointed the foremost of these Magos when the Jewish people were living in captivity in Babylon.[[147]](#endnote-148) It is quite possible that Daniel taught the Magos the Bible and its prophecies about the coming Jewish Messiah. If so, Daniel probably instructed them that once the Messiah came, they should visit him and give him gifts, because he will not only be the king of the Jews, but of the whole world.

After the wise men hand over their gifts to Jesus, they return home to their country. An angel appears to Joseph and urges him to flee to Egypt because King Herod will try to assassinate Jesus, whom he sees as a rival to the throne.

It is almost ironic that foreign Gentiles come to worship Jesus, while the Jewish king behaves like an Egyptian pharaoh when he murders Hebrew boys.[[148]](#endnote-149)

Thanks to foreign aid, in the form of the very valuable gifts of the wise men,[[149]](#endnote-150) Joseph is able to flee with his family to the nearest neighboring country and stay there until the political situation in his home country has changed enough for him to return home with his family.

The word for "flee" used in the original Greek text is [[“pheugo” >> GreekStrongs:G5343]], from which the English word "refugee" is derived. The meaning of the word pheugo has not changed much in the last two thousand years. Its original meaning is "to run away", "to escape", "to flee". In other words, the same meaning as today.

The word is also used in the New Testament when Jesus urges his disciples to flee from persecution[[150]](#endnote-151) and to flee from Judea when they see *"the abomination of desolation*"[[151]](#endnote-152) . Paul uses the word when he urges Christians to flee from sexual immorality,[[152]](#endnote-153) love of money[[153]](#endnote-154) and idolatry.[[154]](#endnote-155) James uses the word when he says that the devil will flee from us when we submit to God.[[155]](#endnote-156)

But how well does Jesus' flight to Egypt fit with contemporary refugee policy? Would Jesus be considered a refugee today?

In the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951, the term “refugee” is defined as follows:

As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (The Refugee Convention, article 1.A.2)

When Jesus was in Egypt, he was outside the country of which he was a citizen. Now someone might object that both Judea and Egypt were part of the Roman Empire and therefore one and the same country. But that is not the whole truth. Jesus was not a "citizen"[[156]](#endnote-157) of Rome, but was a Jew from Galilee under the power of King Herod.

A possible comparison with today would be if a Polish citizen fled to Sweden to escape his country's police. Both Sweden and Poland are members of the European Union, but the police of one country do not have powers in the other.

The persecution from which Jesus and his family fled falls under both *"religion"* and *"membership of a particular social group"*. Herod wanted to murder Jesus because he was the Messiah,[[157]](#endnote-158) and Jesus belonged to the social group of *"male children in Bethlehem who were two years old or under"*.[[158]](#endnote-159)

Because Joseph and Mary felt a *"wellfounded fear of being persecuted"* by their own king, they could not, for obvious reasons, *"avail themselves of the protection of that country"*.

So yes, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Refugee Convention, Jesus was a refugee and if he had fled to our country, he should receive a residence permit.

In Hebrews it says that Jesus *"in every respect"* must *"be made like his brothers"*.[[159]](#endnote-160) Having gone through all kinds of suffering himself, Jesus can empathize with those who are going through similar suffering today. Jesus knows on a personal level what it means to have to flee his homeland and live as a refugee in a foreign land. Because Jesus was a refugee, he feels for refugees today.

# The Lord's Supper

As we saw in chapter 4, there was a long tradition of hospitality in Jewish society. Providing food and shelter to traveling strangers was an almost sacred duty that was at first an unwritten code of conduct but was, at least in part, articulated in the Law of Moses.

By offering food to a stranger, a potential enemy was transformed into a welcomed guest under the protection of the host. Caring for the stranger thus became a way of protecting oneself. By sharing a meal together, people showed acceptance, fellowship, and togetherness.

As part of this Middle Eastern culture of hospitality, the Jewish Shabbat meal developed into an occasion when many Jews opened their homes to their fellow Jews. Often, poor people were invited to eat and celebrate Shabbat with them. We see evidence of this tradition in the New Testament, for example when Jesus is invited to the homes of Pharisees on various occasions:[[160]](#endnote-161)

[[@Bible:Lk 14:1]]"1 One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. " (Lk 14:1)

But by the time of Jesus, the Jewish people had begun to move in a nationalistic direction. They were occupied by the Romans and were in a very tight and vulnerable position. In an effort to keep themselves pure and holy while awaiting God's salvation, some Jewish groups formulated rules that prevented them from associating with people who were considered "unclean". It was about these rules, "the Tradition of the Elders", that most of the quarrels between Jesus and the Pharisees centered.[[161]](#endnote-162)

The Tradition of the Elders was a set of oral rules on how to interpret and understand the written law of Moses. For example, the Law of Moses states that Israel must not work on the Sabbath, a commandment that is relatively easy to understand.[[162]](#endnote-163) But on the other hand, the Law of Moses does not define exactly what counts as *work*, which opens a lot of follow-up questions.

It also says that Israel *"are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean."*[[163]](#endnote-164) Even this commandment is relatively easy to want to follow but becomes more difficult in practice when one begins to think about what exactly is clean or unclean.

Because the Law of Moses does not always define exactly what certain commandments mean, the people used to come to Moses with their follow-up questions, and Moses then had the right to judge what was right and what was wrong. When Moses' workload became too great, this task was delegated to the leaders of the people.[[164]](#endnote-165) When the leaders answered the people's questions about how best to follow the Law of Moses, they were said to "sit on Moses’ seat".

These explanations of how to interpret and understand the Law of Moses were passed on orally and were called "The Oral Torah", "the Tradition of the Elders" and were eventually also written down in the Mishnah and Talmud.

The most zealous saw these additional oral rules as a kind of wall around the Law of Moses to minimize the risk of violating the Word of God. But Jesus often got into trouble with the Pharisees when he thought they were following these extra rules at the expense of the real rules, when they abrogated Scripture to follow their oral tradition.[[165]](#endnote-166)

The Pharisees were particularly strict about food rules. As many as 229 of the 341 rules of the Pharisees concerned mealtime fellowship in one way or another. The Pharisees saw the home's dinner table as a kind of substitute for the temple altar. Just as the priest had to sanctify himself before the service, the Pharisee had to sanctify himself before the meal. The food had to be properly prepared, and the guests had to be clean.[[166]](#endnote-167)

But even though the Law of Moses did not forbid associating with "gentiles", the Pharisees avoided associating and eating with them because they were considered unclean according to the Tradition of the Elders. The concept of "Gentile" has its background in the fact that the people of Israel were not allowed to associate with the seven nations living in the land of Canaan when Joshua invaded.[[167]](#endnote-168) The two terms "gentiles" (goyim in Hebrew) and "strangers" (gerim in Hebrew) are virtually synonymous.

When Jesus is invited to the home of a Pharisee on a Sabbath and sees how the Pharisees only invited friends and distinguished guests, he is outraged and criticizes the Pharisees for this and urges them to invite poor people who cannot be invited back:[[168]](#endnote-169)

[[@Bible:Lk 14:12-14]]"12 He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 13But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."” (Lk 14:12-14)

By trying to build a wall around the Law of Moses by excluding the Gentiles, sinners and poor from their meals, the Pharisees built a wall between themselves and the strangers whom God wanted to invite to the Lord's Supper.

But this unbiblical wall Jesus had no qualms about reaching over. Examples of this can be found when Jesus meets the Roman officer, a person who was considered unclean in a double sense because he was both a gentile and a symbol of the hated Roman occupying power:

[[@Bible:Mt 8:5-13]]"5 When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him,6 "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly." 7And he said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8But the centurion replied, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. 11I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,12 while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 13And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.” (Mt 8:5-13)

Jesus marvels at the Roman officer's great faith and alludes to the future heavenly feast[[169]](#endnote-170) when people from all corners of the earth, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages will participate.[[170]](#endnote-171) Jews in Jesus' day looked forward to this messianic feast when they, as God's chosen people, would celebrate and eat food with the patriarchs. But they did not expect that a Roman Gentile would also be able to join in!

Jesus then shocks his Jewish listeners by further claiming that those Jews who by their unbiblical ideals of purity exclude Gentiles from the kingdom of God will themselves be excluded from the kingdom!

In contrast to the Pharisees' exclusion of poor, outcast and marginalized groups from the Jewish Sabbath meal, Jesus reaches over the Pharisees' wall and invites all these outcast groups to the heavenly feast. He conversed with a foreign woman over a meal,[[171]](#endnote-172) he invited the Roman gentile to table with Abraham[[172]](#endnote-173) and he ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners.[[173]](#endnote-174)

Through these encounters, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that there is room at the Lord's table for both "Jews and Gentiles" (a concept that corresponds in many ways to the Old Testament "natives and strangers" of which we reviewed in chapter 10), both social outcasts and men of power, both pious Jewish women and foreign women. What Jesus did in practice, Paul would later put so beautifully in writing:[[174]](#endnote-175)

[[@Bible:Ga 3:28]]"28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Ga 3:28)

But Jesus' continuation of the Old Testament culture of hospitality as a concrete way of showing love to strangers and offering them fellowship aggravated both the Jewish religious establishment and the early Christians.

A common meal with foreigners would mean that Gentiles were accepted and welcomed into the Christian community without having to become Jews by circumcision, which was unthinkable for the first Christians, who were all Jews. It required a direct address from God before Jesus' closest disciple Peter could accept such a thing. [[175]](#endnote-176)

Through a vision, Peter learns that even Gentiles are welcome into the kingdom of God: *"What God has made clean, do not call common."*[[176]](#endnote-177) When the Roman officer Cornelius' servants come to Peter, he welcomes them and *"invited them in to be his guests"*.[[177]](#endnote-178) When he later accompanies them to Cornelius' home, he finally bursts out: *"Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."*[[178]](#endnote-179)

But even if Peter understood this in theory, the old ways were still there, and he sometimes found it difficult to live up to his new ideals:

[[@Bible:Ga 2:11-14]]"11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"” (Ga 2:11-14)

Among the first Christians, who were almost exclusively Jewish, it was long unclear whether Gentiles who came to believe in Jesus would have to be circumcised and become Jews to become part of God's people. Eventually, together with the Holy Spirit, they agreed not to require Gentiles to become Jews to be accepted as God's people:[[179]](#endnote-180)

[[@Bible:Ac 15:28-29]]"28 For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:29 that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” (Ac 15:28-29)

So welcoming strangers and foreigners into a community with both God and fellow human beings by eating together is a biblical tradition that dates back to Abraham. Not only that, but it is also a future tradition that has already begun with the Lord’s Supper.

When we celebrate communion, we eat a meal together as a sign of communion with God and with each other. We are reminded of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross so that we might become part of the people of God. But we are also reminded of Jesus' return when Jesus will once again *"drink of this fruit of the vine*"[[180]](#endnote-181) when people *"from east and west"* will *"recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven"*.[[181]](#endnote-182)

The Lord’s Supper, then, is not only a sad memory of Jesus' death, but also a foretaste of the great heavenly feast that awaits all believers when Jesus returns. Communion looks back as a memorial of Jesus' death that became life for us, while the meal also looks forward in longing for Jesus' return. As we partake in the bread and wine, we also partake in the death and resurrection of Jesus, while already here and now in faith we get a taste of the future heavenly feast[[182]](#endnote-183) when people from all tribes and peoples and languages will participate.[[183]](#endnote-184) The Lord’s Supper is thus a meal where people from all nations, social status and gender are united as brothers and sisters in faith in Jesus. The celebration of the Lord’s Supper thus becomes the concrete expression of the basic tenet of our faith "to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself".[[184]](#endnote-185) Communion is thus God's response to man's sin against God and his fellow man, which we read about in chapters 1 and 2.

But, in our modern age, we have unfortunately disconnected the *ceremonial commemoration of* Jesus' death and resurrection from the *meal* itself. The original Communion was not a ceremony inside a church building where people queued up to see a priest who handed out a wafer to be dipped in a cup of wine. No, the original Lord’s Supper was a *ceremony* in the context of a *meal*,[[185]](#endnote-186) something that is obviously evident in the very word "supper". The basic Greek text of the most common communion text reads "kyriakos deipnon", which simply means "the Lord's dinner" or "the Lord's meal" or "the Lord's supper":

[[@Bible:1Cor 11:20-22]]"20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.” (1Cor 11:20-22)

The background to this somewhat negative admonition by Paul is that the church in the Greek city of Corinth was behaving badly during the Lord's Supper. Since there were no church buildings in biblical times, the church would gather at the home of a church member with a large enough house to celebrate worship.

But in a wealthy Greco-Roman home, the fine dining room was relatively small, while the courtyard was much larger. Perhaps it was natural for the host of the house to invite the finer guests up to the fine dining room, while the other members of the church had to be content with eating the communion meal in the courtyard. Perhaps the rich Greeks kept to themselves in the dining room, while the poor Jews were left out in the courtyard?

The ethnic and social boundaries that existed in the society thus entered the church. Those who came to worship together as one people in Christ were divided and discriminated against. Such a division of the church when celebrating communion signaled the very opposite of the meaning of communion; that Christ by his death made Jew and Greek, slave and free, rich and poor, male and female, one in Christ.[[186]](#endnote-187)

The problem was not, therefore, the handling of the external forms of the Lord’s Supper was used, whether a wafer or a loaf of bread, whether wine or grape juice, but that the way in which the church celebrated the Lord’s Supper showed division rather than unity, which contradicts the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. The rich separated themselves from the poor, ate all the food and left the poor hungry, making the body of Christ divided in a ceremony that was supposed to show unity and togetherness.

If the Greek upper classes wanted to eat their fine dinners with each other, they could do so at some other time than the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Can we today risk handling the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy way? Yes, if we make the Lord’s Supper a marker to divide Christians rather than to unite Christians, if we focus on the forms of the Lord’s Supper at the expense of its meaning, or if we let the poor go hungry from the meal while we have full stomachs.

A proper celebration of communion is a meal where we lift up the bread and wine to remember the death and resurrection of Jesus and all that it meant for our salvation, a meal where everyone can eat their fill, whether we are native or immigrant, rich or poor. A meal where we manifest our spiritual unity despite our possible worldly differences, where we long together for the return of Jesus and have a foretaste in faith of the future heavenly feast where people from all nations and languages will participate.

Just as the patriarchs of old showed hospitality to strangers by inviting them to eat, so Jesus shows hospitality by inviting you and me to the heavenly meal. Just as the Israelites met God through food offerings in the temple, so we meet Jesus through the Lord’s Supper.

So welcoming strangers into the community by inviting them over for a meal is not only *nice*, but above all *sacred*. To reach out across ethnic, social and gender boundaries and invite outcast and marginalized people to the heavenly feast is to continue the work of Jesus and to realize the future kingdom of God already here and now on earth, one meal at a time.

# The Syrophoenician Woman

In his heavenly mission as the Messiah, Jesus sometimes declared that he was sent only to *"the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*.[[187]](#endnote-188) Since the Jews were God's chosen people, they would hear the gospel first, and then the disciples would go out to all the other nations and preach the gospel to them as well. [[188]](#endnote-189)

But even though Jesus did not proselytize directly among the Gentiles but primarily to the Jews, he sometimes met people from other lands and peoples. One of them is the Syrophoenician woman:

[[@Bible:Mk 7:24–30]] “24And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. 25But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. 26Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophoenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27And he said to her, “Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” 28But she answered him, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.” 29And he said to her, “For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.” 30And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.” (Mk 7:24–30)

Tyre was an important port city in what was then Phoenicia, now Lebanon, just north of Israel. For peace and quiet, Jesus sometimes withdrew to teach the disciples a little more undisturbed. Having failed to withdraw in the past, Jesus now ventures away from Jewish areas and stays among Gentiles in the hope that no one will recognize him. However, he is quickly recognized, which leads to a very interesting encounter with a Gentile woman.

By referring to her as *"a Gentile, a Syrophoenician"*, the author Mark makes it overly clear that she was a *Gentile*,[[189]](#endnote-190) i.e., a "non-Jew".

Although there is no prohibition in the Law of Moses against associating with Gentiles, as we saw in the last chapter, it was unusual for Jews in Jesus' time to associate with Gentiles because, according to the oral Jewish tradition called "the Tradition of the Elders", they were considered "unclean".

So when Jesus visits this Gentile area and talks to the Syrophoenician woman, he makes it abundantly clear that he is not submitting to the Pharisaic tradition of not associating with Gentiles. However, at first glance, one might get the impression that Jesus is dismissive of the Syrophoenician woman when she falls at his feet and asks for help. But it is just the opposite!

In his answer to the woman, the "children" symbolize *the Jews*, and the "dogs" the *Gentiles*. Among both Jews and Gentiles, "dog" was a very negative slur associated with stray wild dogs. Jesus, however, does not use the common word for dog but literally calls her "little puppy", in a much more positive sense. Of course, if a household has both children and puppies, they both get the food they need, even if they don't necessarily eat the same food or sit together at the dinner table. Jesus challenges the woman to see that although the Jews hear about Jesus first, the Gentiles also have access to Jesus. If she believes this, she will also receive what she asks for.

When the woman understands that the disciples are the "children" and that she is the "puppy", she understands that although the disciples have a right to the food, she has a right to the "crumbs". At that answer, Jesus gives her the miracle she asked for.

So Jesus is not hostile to Gentiles, but on the contrary inclusive. Given the Jews' special relationship with God as God's own people, they have the right to meet their Messiah first, but then all other peoples have the same opportunity. Once Jesus has fulfilled his mission by dying on the cross and rising again, he will send out his disciples to "all nations".[[190]](#endnote-191) But already here and now, Jesus is showing his Jewish disciples that the Gentiles also have the right to meet the Messiah.

# The Samaritan Woman

The Samarians were a mixed ethnic group that emerged after the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and its capital Samaria in 722 BC. The Assyrians expelled much of the Israelite population and allowed foreign peoples to settle in their cities. These new peoples mixed with the poor Israelites who remained and eventually became the "Samaritans".

[[@Bible:2Ki 17:5-6]]"5 Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. 6In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.” (2Ki 17:5-6)

[[@Bible:2Ki 17:24]]"24 And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the people of Israel. And they took possession of Samaria and lived in its cities.” (2Ki 17:24)

But it was not only ethnically that the Samaritans became a mixed people, also religiously. The Assyrian king ordered one of Israel's own priests to teach the Samaritans how to worship the God of Israel, but the various peoples who had moved in continued to worship their Gods as they had done before.[[191]](#endnote-192)

In 586 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah suffers much the same tragedy as Israel, and is taken captive to Babylon. Seventy years later, when the Jews are allowed to return to Judah and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, the Samaritans want to help.[[192]](#endnote-193) The Samaritans consider themselves part of God's people because they are descended from the Israelite tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Levi. The word "Samaritan" means "one who follows the Law".

But the Jews did not allow the Samaritans to participate in the building of the temple and since then there has been enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans.[[193]](#endnote-194) The hatred between these two peoples was so great that the Jews preferred to take a detour around Samaria when traveling between the two Jewish territories of Judea and Galilee. Jesus did not. In the Gospel of John, it says that he took the road *"through Samaria"* when he left Judea and went back to Galilee.[[194]](#endnote-195)

When Jesus, tired after his walk, stops at a well, he asks a Samaritan woman for water:

[[@Bible:Jn 4:7-9]]"7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8(For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.)9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)” (Jn 4:7-9)

By asking a Samaritan woman for water like a Jewish man, Jesus breaks at least three taboos. First, Jews and Samaritans did not talk to each other in principle; second, a Samaritan cup of water would be considered unclean for a Jew; and third, men and women did not talk to each other in public.

For a Jewish Rabbi, talking to a woman was considered a waste of time at best, and at worst, it could take the Rabbi's focus off the Law of Moses and ultimately lead to Hell. So when the disciples see Jesus talking to a woman, it is not surprising that they express astonishment:

[[@Bible:Jn 4:27]]"27 Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?"” (Jn 4:27)

Although this book is about strangers, it should be added that Jesus challenged not only prejudices about people from other countries, but also prejudices against women and socially marginalized people. By talking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus shows that he is not hindered by human prejudices in communicating spiritual truths.

When the Samaritan woman understands that Jesus is *"a prophet,"* she begins to discuss with him on which mountain God's people should rightly worship.[[195]](#endnote-196) The Jews had built their temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, and the Samaritans had built their temple in Samaria on Mount Gerizim.[[196]](#endnote-197) Jesus, however, does not interfere in that debate, but simply replies:

[[@Bible:Jn 4:21]]"21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.” (Jn 4:21)

Jesus' point is that now that the Messiah has come to earth, worship will no longer be based on a *place*, but on worshipping God *"in spirit and truth*".[[197]](#endnote-198)

[[@Bible:Jn 4:23-24]]"23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."” (Jn 4:23-24)

By gathering God's people in the name of Jesus, the Lord is in our midst[[198]](#endnote-199) and *we* thus become *"the temple of the living God".*[[199]](#endnote-200)

When the disciples return to Jesus, the Samaritan woman hastily leaves her water pot and goes back into the city, telling them she may have found the Messiah. The Samaritans believe in Jesus and invite him to stay with them, which of course Jesus gladly does.[[200]](#endnote-201)

By asking the Samaritan woman for water, Jesus reached across the hostile walls built up between Jews and Samaritans, men and women. Instead of arguing about exactly where to worship, Jesus broadens the perspective of spiritual truths. By accepting the Samaritans' hospitality, Jesus welcomes strangers into the kingdom of God.

# Love Your Brother

If in previous chapters we have seen how Jesus taught us to love strangers, foreigners and enemies, this chapter is about the importance of Christians also showing care for one another:

[[@Bible:Mt 25:31-40]]"31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'” (Mt 25:31-40)

When Jesus is alone with his disciples on the Mount of Olives, he teaches them about the future and what it will be like on Judgment Day when he returns.[[201]](#endnote-202)

Jesus explains to his disciples that he will then separate *"the sheep from the goats",* and let the sheep receive the kingdom of God. In biblical times, it was not uncommon for sheep and goats to mix during the day as they ate grass and grazed. But when evening came and it got a little colder, the shepherd had to separate them so that the goats, which don't tolerate the cold as well as the sheep, could get closer together to keep warm.

What separates the sheep from the goats, according to Jesus, is how they have treated *"the least of these my brothers",* i.e., Christian brothers and sisters in the faith. Just as when Jesus stopped Paul's persecution of Christians with the words, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"[[202]](#endnote-203)* Jesus identifies himself in this text with suffering Christians.

Anyone who persecutes Christians because they are *Christians* is persecuting Jesus himself, and anyone who helps Christians in need because they are Christians is helping Jesus himself. That is how strongly Jesus identifies himself with his Church.

Jesus makes a similar point in Matthew chapter 10, where he teaches his disciples that *"whoever receives you receives me"*,[[203]](#endnote-204) and that whoever gives *"one of these little ones"* a glass of water *"because he is a disciple"* will *"by no means lose his reward".* [[204]](#endnote-205)

Recurring in the Gospel of Matthew is that Jesus calls his disciples "brothers"[[205]](#endnote-206) or "these little ones".[[206]](#endnote-207)

So in the teaching about the sheep and the goats, it is clear that Jesus wants us as Christians to help each other when we are in need, precisely because we are Christian brothers and sisters. When we welcome a Christian "stranger" fleeing persecution in his or her home country, when we hide a Christian facing deportation to countries where Christians face the death penalty, when we open our home and church to a convert, then we have received, hidden, and welcomed Jesus himself.

But after reading this text, two follow-up questions arise for me: must one help refugees to become a sheep and enter the kingdom of God? And does this apply to *all* refugees or only to *Christian* refugees?

First, it is important to understand that Jesus does not in this text set out a number of requirements for *becoming* a sheep. Rather, Jesus describes the characteristics of those who *are* *already* a sheep.

As we can read in Romans, one becomes saved and a Christian by believing in Jesus and confessing him as Lord and Savior:

[[@Bible:Ro 10:9-13]]"9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Ro 10:9-13)

When you are saved, you are born again by the Holy Spirit who then allows God's character traits to slowly but surely grow in the believer's life.

Thus, one does not have to receive refugees, visit the sick and care for the poor to enter heaven, but it is a holy behavior that develops in the life of the believer and is a sign that one already belongs to the kingdom of God.

So the answer to the first question is no, you don't have to help refugees to *be a* Christian, you help refugees because you *are* aChristian.

The second question is a bit more complicated to answer. It is clear that in this particular text Jesus is talking about the importance of helping *Christian* brothers and sisters. However, although this biblical text is strictly speaking about the Christian brotherhood and the importance of helping each other when we are in need, Christian care is of course not limited to Christians only.

In this chapter I look at how Jesus calls us to love our Christian brothers and sisters, in the next chapter I look at how Jesus teaches us that strangers can be a blessing to us too, and in chapter 26 I look at how Jesus teaches us to not only love our neighbor, but even to love our enemy. So we are to love our brother, our neighbor and our enemy. So in a general sense, we Christians are to help all people; Christian refugees as well as strangers of other religions, and even enemies, not because *they* are Christians, but because *we* are Christians.

Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians about this dual care, i.e., that we should *"do good to everyone"* and *"and especially to those who are of the household of faith".[[207]](#endnote-208)* In other words, a Christian is to treat all people as he or she wants to be treated, both enemy and brother. In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus teaches about loving your enemy and here in Matthew chapter 25, Jesus speaks about loving your brother.

In a Christian community, this dual care manifests itself in different ways, for example by having a language café open to all, whether or not those who come are Christians, while at the same time more specifically helping, for example, converts at risk of deportation. The one does not exclude the other, but both are part of the love of humanity.

So the answer to the second question is that as a Christian you should help both Christian refugees and non-Christian refugees. We do not help refugees because *they* are Christians, but because *we* are Christians.

# Love Your Neighbor

As Jesus is teaching his disciples, a Jewish lawyer suddenly comes up to him and starts a conversation:

[[@Bible:Lk 10:25-28]]"25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" 27And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." 28And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."” (Lk 10:25-28)

A "lawyer" is an expert in the Old Testament Law of Moses and the Jewish religion. Just because the lawyer calls Jesus "Teacher", it is not necessarily a negative thing that he is "testing" Jesus. Rather, it may be that he was genuinely curious about whether Jesus could be the Messiah that the Old Testament testifies is to come. Moreover, discussing eternal life and the meaning of the Law of Moses was a common topic of conversation for legal scholars in Jesus' day.

But the lawyer's question about what he should "do"[[208]](#endnote-209) to receive eternal life reveals that he has not yet understood that eternal life is a gracious gift from God that is received through faith in Jesus.[[209]](#endnote-210) There is nothing we can "do" to earn eternal life.

How to have eternal life is not a secret knowledge that only Jesus can impart, it is written in the Old Testament. By asking a counter-question and asking the lawyer to tell him how he himself would answer that question, Jesus has the opportunity to explain to the lawyer from his own perspective and understanding.

If you boil down the whole message of the Old Testament, the bottom line is that you should love God with all your heart[[210]](#endnote-211) and your fellow man as yourself.[[211]](#endnote-212) This twofold love for God and fellow man becomes a kind of response to man's sin against God and fellow man, as we read in chapters 1 and 2.

Jesus replies to the lawyer that he has answered correctly, now he just needs to *live as* he himself has said to do.

Loving God with all your heart means believing in the Lord, following his commandments, and living a life of prayer, Bible reading, discipleship and love.

Loving our neighbor as ourselves means that we should take care of our fellow human beings in the same way we would take care of ourselves. Or, as Jesus put it in Matthew's Gospel, *"whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them".[[212]](#endnote-213)*

Jesus and the lawyer seem to agree that a believer should love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. But then the follow-up question arises:

[[@Bible:Lk 10:29]]"29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"” (Lk 10:29)

The Israelites often interpreted the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" as applying only to fellow Israelites, not to foreigners. The biblical passage on which this commandment is based states quite correctly:

[[@Bible:Le 19:17-18]]"17 "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 18You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” (Le 19:17-18)

One could therefore interpret the second commandment of love as applying only to love for neighbors of the same people. If it were not for the fact that only a few verses later in the same chapter, it says:

[[@Bible:Le 19:33-34]]"33 "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. 34You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” (Le 19:33-34)

In Jewish tradition, there was a belief that you should love your neighbor but hate your enemy.[[213]](#endnote-214) But Jesus is clear that you should not only love your own countrymen, you should also love your *enemies[[214]](#endnote-215)* and therefore everything in between.

The law-abiding man seems to assume that he is already following the first commandment to love God with all his heart. But by asking Jesus who his neighbor is, the lawyer reveals that he has not yet fully understood the first commandment. Loving God goes hand in hand with loving your fellow man:

[[@Bible:1Jn 4:20-21]]"20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.” (1Jn 4:20-21)

For a person who wants to justify his own actions when he sees that they do not correspond to the Bible, it is easy to change the meaning of the Word of God rather than change his actions. By trying to change the meaning of "your neighbor" and excluding those you don't want to love, you can fool yourself that you are living up to that commandment even though you hate your fellow man.

But Jesus doesn't get into this word-trickery, instead he challenges the lawyer's idea of who his neighbor is through an educational story about a Samaritan helping a Jew:

[[@Bible:Lk 10:30-37]]"30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."” (Lk 10:30-37)

The road between Jerusalem and Jericho was 27 km long and known to be a very dangerous place. It was called the "Road of Blood" because of all the murders and assaults that took place there.

Israelite priests were descendants of Aaron and performed religious sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. Levites were members of the Levitical tribe and assisted the priests at the temple. Both priests and Levites were thus religious people who could be expected to be more pious and merciful than ordinary people.

Why didn't the priest and the Levite stay to help the injured man? It is quite possible that when the priest and the Levite saw the battered man lying there on the road, they became afraid for their own lives. Perhaps they looked up at the high cliffs along the road and thought someone was lying in an ambush. When they saw the beaten man, they might have thought: "What will happen to *me* if I stop and help him?"

Both the Old and New Testaments are clear that religious sacrifice is meaningless unless one lives a life of mercy at the same time.[[215]](#endnote-216) Loving God through religious sacrifice and loving your fellow man through mercy go hand in hand.

Jesus shocks the lawyer by contrasting the two pious religious Jewish leaders with a *Samaritan*, i.e., a hated stranger.

The Samaritans were a mixed people who arose after the Assyrians had defeated the northern tribes of Israel in 722 BC. The Assyrians displaced the wealthy Israelites to other parts of the Middle East and moved other peoples into Israel instead. These new peoples mingled with the poor Israelites who remained and eventually became the Samaritans.

The Jews and the Samaritans were enemies and hated each other, both from a racist and a religious perspective. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be a half-pagan mixed race who worshiped God in the wrong way.

The apostles James and John seem to have had little sympathy for the Samaritans and wanted to call down fire and God's judgment on them.[[216]](#endnote-217) Jesus, on the other hand, showed great love for the Samaritans in this text and in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, which you can read about in chapter 23.[[217]](#endnote-218)

When the priest and the Levite passed by their battered compatriot, they did not even meet the narrow interpretation of loving their neighbor. But when the Samaritan walked past the man, he showed love and mercy to his enemy. Instead of thinking about what would happen to himself if he stopped and helped, the Good Samaritan thought about what would happen to the battered man if he did *not* stop and help him.

The Samaritan took off his own clothes and bandaged the beaten man. He used his own wine to cleanse the wounds and his own oil to ease the pain. He used his own donkey to help the man and he paid from his own money for the innkeeper to take care of him. Two denarii were the equivalent of two days' wages and was enough for two months' stay at the inn.

In post-biblical times, some churches started "hospices" based on this story. A hospice welcomed strangers who were traveling, but, like the Good Samaritan, it also cared for the sick. Over time, medical care became the more important part and hospices evolved into hospitals.

For many Jews in New Testament times, Samaritans were a hated people with no good in them. It must have been difficult for the Jewish lawyer to be told that he should go and do as a Samaritan. That the lawyer had a hard time taking this in is revealed by the fact that he can't even answer "Samaritan" to Jesus' question:

[[@Bible:Lk 10:36-37]]"36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."” (Lk 10:36-37)

Instead of thinking about who my fellow man is and trying to limit it to fellow countrymen, Jesus turns the tables and says that the question is not who myfellow man is, but how *I* can be a good fellow man.

Who is our brother, our neighbor, our fellow human being, is not limited to nationality, social status or gender. All people, from our compatriots to our enemies, are our fellow human beings.

Love is something that shows itself in action. You cannot worship God and offer sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem and at the same time pass by your brother in need. You can't go to church on Sunday and then act like a racist on Monday. You can't say you love God and at the same time show by your actions that you hate your brother.

As a bonus, Jesus imparts the important lesson that it is not only Jews who can be a blessing to other native Jews or to foreign-born strangers, but that strangers can also be a blessing to natives.

# Love Your Enemy

In the last chapter, we saw how a Jewish teacher of the law summarizes the entire Law of Moses with the core expression, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself*.*"*[[218]](#endnote-219) This is a very good summary of the whole Bible and the will of God for us humans. God wants us to love him with all our hearts through worship, prayer and reading the Bible. God wants us to love our fellow human beings by treating them as we want to be treated ourselves.[[219]](#endnote-220)

But Jesus takes the second part of this commandment a step further, and says that we should not only love our *neighbor* as ourselves, but also our *enemies*:

[[@Bible:Mt 5:43-44]]"43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” (Mt 5:43-44)

To really understand what Jesus means by loving your enemies, it might be worth reviewing the three examples Jesus gives in the previous verses. The first example Jesus brings up is if someone hits you:

[[@Bible:Mt 5:38-39]]"38 "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Mt 5:38-39)

I have a penchant for detail and respond immediately to one of the words in this verse: *"if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek to him also.* "

Since the vast majority of people are right-handed, they are normally struck on the *left* cheek, so why does Jesus specifically mention the *right*?

Well, in Jesus' day it was not uncommon to show authority and superiority by hitting someone with the back of the hand. A Roman might strike a Jew in this way, a master his slave, a husband his wife.[[220]](#endnote-221) But if the person who is struck on the right cheek then responds by turning up the left cheek instead, it shows that he refuses to accept the oppression he is subjected to, and if he is to be struck, he wants to be struck as an equal.

The one who strikes is then faced with a dilemma; either punch a peer on the left cheek or stop punching and thus indirectly show that he no longer has any authority.

By turning the other cheek, the one who is beaten thus shows that violence cannot defeat the one who is no longer afraid of *"those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul".*[[221]](#endnote-222) By not fighting back, the victim disarms his opponent and stops the spiral of violence and revenge that has been going on since time immemorial.

The only way to end violence is for someone to choose not to fight back and instead offer a path to reconciliation. This is exactly what Jesus did on the cross, thus winning a victory over the Devil. When we understand that death cannot separate us from Christ and are no longer afraid to die,[[222]](#endnote-223) then the perpetrators of violence no longer have any power over us.[[223]](#endnote-224)

The second example Jesus gives is:

[[@Bible:Mt 5:40]]"40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.” (Mt 5:40)

By giving your opponent all your clothes when he demands your tunic, a situation will arise where you are standing naked next to a person who has all your clothes in his hand, which in a Middle Eastern culture would mean great shame for the person who caused you this.[[224]](#endnote-225)

By stripping naked, you strip your opponent of his power over you. Anyone who sees this will regard your opponent as an unjust aggressor. So by not just being passive, you have exposed the unjust behavior of the person who tries to abuse you and offered him an opportunity to realize his stupidity and give you back your clothes.

The third example Jesus tells us about is:

[[@Bible:Mt 5:41]]"41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” (Mt 5:41)

A Roman soldier was allowed by Roman law to require a Jewish man to carry his equipment for one mile, but no more. Anyone could be forced to carry out tasks for the Romans, as we see, for example, when Simon of Cyrene was forced to carry Jesus' cross.[[225]](#endnote-226)

By not only walking a mile, but walking a second mile, the Roman soldier's unjust demands are exposed, and he is put in a situation where he must stop his aggression or commit a Roman crime with cruel punishment. The Roman soldier must now unexpectedly appeal to the Jewish man to carry his own equipment. Thus, through non-violence, the initiative has been won and the soldier has been offered a chance for reconciliation.

These three examples of loving your enemy are "pacifism" in the true sense of the word. Many people confuse "pacifist" with "passivist", but in fact the word "pacifist" is composed of the two Latin words "pax" and "facere", and literally means "peacemaker". In the Latin translation of the Bible, the word appears in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount:

[[@Bible:Mt 5:9]]"9 "Blessed are the peacemakers [pacifici], for they shall be called sons of God. " (Mt 5:9)[[226]](#endnote-227)

To be a pacifist following Jesus is therefore more than just passively *renouncing violence*, it is also actively *creating peace*.

My proposed definition of Christian pacifism is something like this: "Following in the footsteps of Jesus[[227]](#endnote-228) by refraining from revenge[[228]](#endnote-229) or paying back evil with evil[[229]](#endnote-230) and instead defeating evil with good[[230]](#endnote-231) by loving your enemy[[231]](#endnote-232) and making peace[[232]](#endnote-233) by offering reconciliation, bringing people together and working against unjust living conditions and power structures[[233]](#endnote-234) .

Christian pacifism was the generally accepted Christian position for the first 300 years and has since been represented mainly among revivalist groups, such as Franciscans, Waldenses, Anabaptists, Quakers and Pentecostals.

As we saw in chapter 18, the English word "peace" is translated as "shalom" in Hebrew and "eirene" in Greek. If the English word for peace is mostly the opposite of the word "war," the words shalom and eirene contain a broader meaning in that they signify *both* theabsence of hostility *and* a positive state of prosperity and well-being.

When God urges the Jews to seek shalom with the Babylonians, he wants the Jews not only to passively refrain from war against the Babylonians, but also to actively work for the peace and prosperity of their new society.

Jesus' approach to peacemaking is also strikingly reminiscent of the culture of hospitality we read about in chapter 4, which was about transforming a potential enemy into a welcomed guest by offering hospitality.

Now we have seen in three chapters how Jesus shows us that the commandment to love our fellow man means that we should love not only our *brother*, but also our *neighbor* and even our *enemy*. We are not to discriminate between people but to show love to all people, regardless of ethnicity, social status or gender. In the next chapter we will look at how Jesus, through his death on the cross, breaks down the dividing wall between people.

# The Dividing Wall

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, he was welcomed into the city like a king! The people spread their cloaks on the road and shouted:

[[@Bible:Mk 11:9-11]]"9 And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 10Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" 11And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.” (Mk 11:9-11)

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem contains much symbolism.

The expression "hosanna" is a combination of the two Hebrew words "save" and "I/we pray" and was associated with a prayer and longing for the Messiah to come and save the people of Israel.[[234]](#endnote-235) At the time of Jesus, there was a great expectation among the Jewish people that there would come a Messiah, a new warrior-king like David, who would drive the Romans out of the Holy Land and re-establish Israel as a powerful nation with Jerusalem as its capital. On another occasion, the people tried to make Jesus the new king of Israel by force in order to free the Jewish people from the Romans. [[235]](#endnote-236)

The word "salem" in "Jerusalem" comes from the Hebrew word [[“shalom” >> HebrewStrongs: H7965]], which means "peace" in English. Zechariah had prophesied long before Jesus that the King of Jerusalem would one day ride into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, eradicate strife and speak peace to the nations.[[236]](#endnote-237) In biblical times, when a king wanted to signal whether he was coming with war or peace, he could either ride toward a city on a war horse or a peaceful donkey. So when Jesus rides into the city of peace on a peaceful donkey, accompanied by "Hosanna", the symbolism is almost overwhelming; Jesus is signaling that he is coming as a king to the city of peace and offering peace.

After Jesus rides into Jerusalem in this spectacular way, he goes to the temple. In Jesus' time, the temple was divided into several sections: at the very center was the "Most Holy Place", where only the high priest was allowed to go once a year.[[237]](#endnote-238) Outside this was the "Holy Place", and then a number of "courts" for the priests, the men, the women, and finally the Gentiles, i.e., strangers from other countries. Between the courtyard of the Gentiles and everything else there was a dividing wall with the text:

"No foreigner is allowed in the courtyard and within the wall surrounding the temple. Whoever enters will invite death for himself!"

This wall separated the Jews from the Gentiles inside the temple area. Jesus sees what's going on, inspects it and then leaves. The next day, Jesus comes back to the temple, and this happens:

[[@Bible:Mk 11:15-17]]"15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers.” (Mk 11:15-17)

The court of the Gentiles, the place where "all nations", i.e., Gentiles and foreigners, according to Solomon's prayer[[238]](#endnote-239) at the dedication of the temple would meet God, had unfortunately been turned into a messy marketplace. Jesus is so upset by this that he overturned tables and chairs and drove out those who were selling and buying in the temple with a whip.[[239]](#endnote-240)

The Jews had failed to provide a place of prayer for the Gentiles in the temple, a mission you can read more about in chapter 13. The Gentiles were not allowed to go inside the temple and outside the dividing wall it was a marketplace. After this incident, the chief priests and scribes start trying to find a way to clear Jesus out of the way,[[240]](#endnote-241) and not long after this Jesus dies on the cross.

Jesus did not come to Jerusalem in the way the people wanted, as a warrior king who would start a war between the Jews and the Romans. Jesus came not to fight back, but to make peace. He turned the other cheek and, by his death on the cross, offered a path to reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles. In Ephesians, Paul writes that Jesus, through his death on the cross, has torn down that dividing wall:

[[@Bible:Eph 2:11-19]]"11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, thus making peace,16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,” (Eph 2:11-19)

The word "Gentile" comes from the Hebrew word [[“goyim” >> HebrewStrongs: H1471]] and the Greek word [[“ethnos” >> GreekStrongs:G1484]]. Depending on the context, goyim and ethnos are translated as "Gentiles" or "nations".

When it is clear that the text refers to "non-Israelites", then goyim/ethnos is translated as "Gentiles", as in Paul's titling of himself as the apostle of the Gentiles [ethnos][[241]](#endnote-242) as opposed to Peter who was the apostle of the Jews.

When it is clear that the text refers to both Jews and Gentiles, goyim/ethnos is translated as "all nations", for example in Jesus' words that the gospel will *be "proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations [ethnos]*"[[242]](#endnote-243) .

In Galatians 3:8, ethnos is used for both of these meanings: *"And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles [ethnos] by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations [ethnos] be blessed."*

But being a goyim/ethnos does not always mean simply that one is not a Jew in an ethnic sense, i.e., a "foreigner" or "alien", but can also mean that one is outside God's covenant with Israel. But since God's covenant with Israel was with an ethnic people, these meanings are naturally interrelated and intertwined. In other words, "Gentile" and "stranger" are basically synonymous terms.

Before the cross, a Gentile who wanted to become part of God's people had to be circumcised and start following the Law of Moses. But with the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Gentiles were given an opportunity to become an equal part of the people of God through faith in Jesus, not through circumcision and the Law.

Although the Law itself is righteous and good, the death and resurrection of Jesus has rendered it comparatively ineffective and powerless. The Law, with its commandments and statutes, is not capable of regenerating a person in the way that faith in Jesus does.

Through Jesus' death on the cross, man's relationship with God is reconciled. But not only with God, also with each other. Through Jesus' death on the cross, the walls that we humans have built between us and God, between each other, between native and stranger, between Jew and Greek, between slave and free, between man and woman, are torn down.

With the death and resurrection of Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles are offered the possibility of a whole new life in the power of the Spirit through faith in Jesus. In believing in Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles have access to the "Most Holy Place", an opportunity for direct contact and relationship with the Lord.

These two groups, Jews and Gentiles, are not only supposed to live in peace with each other, but are supposed to form a new people, the "Church". In society we may be seen as Swedes, Americans, immigrants, Jews, Gentiles and foreigners, etc. But in the church, we are no longer to separate each other by these dividing lines, but now we are a united people, we are brother and sister in the Lord. The uniting of Jews and Gentiles, natives and foreigners, Swedes and immigrants, in a new loving community, is thus part of God's plan of salvation for humanity.

When society proclaims divisions and boundaries between peoples, the church should act as a light in the darkness and do just the opposite, preaching peace and reconciliation between peoples and nations. In contrast to a society that makes laws separating Swedes and immigrants, the church should work for reconciliation, integration, friendship and inclusion. In other words, the demolition of that wall is a work in progress in which we must all participate, brick by brick.

# The Church

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, are transformed into beloved brothers and sisters in the Church. God wants the Church to love the stranger because Jesus was also a stranger. The Church is commissioned by the power of the Holy Spirit to go out into all the world and invite all peoples to the heavenly feast.

# Neither Jew nor Greek

Both Israel and the Church have been given the dual mission of "integration[[243]](#endnote-244) and mission".

In the Old Testament, integration was about Israel treating foreigners as natives within its borders, according to the Law of Moses. In the New Testament, integration is about the Holy Spirit bringing native and foreigner, or "Jew and Greek" as it is called in the New Testament, together as beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. We also see that the three vulnerable groups of the Old Testament, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, are represented in the New Testament by the Greek, the slave and the woman.

Just as God wanted to use Israel as a holy instrument to reach the other foreign peoples *outside* Israel with the Word of God to the ends of the earth, so God sends the church to all nations to testify about Jesus to the ends of the earth.

The twofold mission given to both Israel and the Church is thus to treat the stranger within us as ourselves, i.e., *integration*, and to reach out with the gospel to the stranger outside of us, i.e., *mission*.

In this chapter, we will first look at how the Lord wants Jews and Gentiles *within* the church to be integrated into something new with the help of the Holy Spirit. Then in chapter 31 we will look at how the Lord baptizes the disciples in the Spirit which creates a missionary zeal to *go out* into all the world and invite all nations to the heavenly feast.

When you are saved, you are included in the people of God on equal terms, regardless of whether you are a Jew or a Gentile (or "Jew or Greek", which is a synonymous term). God has made both peoples into something new. If the people of God were previously defined by being born a Jew, they are now defined by being born again by the Spirit through faith in Jesus, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile.

This is a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to be a blessing to "all nations" as we read in chapter 4.[[244]](#endnote-245) As a united and new people, Jews and Greeks together can praise God *"with one voice"*.[[245]](#endnote-246)

As a consequence of both Jews and Gentiles being saved on the same terms, namely by believing in Jesus as Lord, the old order is gone. Should we, against all odds, still distinguish between Jew and Gentile in the church, we rebuild the walls that Jesus tore down and reinforce the old enmity that Jesus died to remove.

But by inviting new people, strangers, into the kingdom of God, we participate in God's creative joy and tear down that dividing wall one brick at a time.

In the Old Testament, we saw that God had a special love for the three groups "the stranger, the widow and the fatherless".[[246]](#endnote-247) In the New Testament, "the Gentile, the slave and the woman" correspond to these vulnerable groups. But in the New Testament, it is no longer just a matter of caring for the vulnerable groups, but of bringing them together and integrating them into something new:

[[@Bible:Ga 3:26-29]]"26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Ga 3:26-29)

[[@Bible:Col 3:11]]"11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.” (Col 3:11)

In the church, everyone who believes in Jesus is *"a new creation"*, whether they are Jew or Greek.[[247]](#endnote-248) But not only that, just as ethnicity or skin color is not supposed to matter, neither is social status or gender. In the church, we are no longer Jew or Greek, native or foreigner, but brother and sister in the family of God.

In the above Scripture, Paul opposes hostile nationalism, unjust living conditions and patriarchal power structures. Of course, being proud and happy about your nationality, work or gender is not wrong in itself, but if we define ourselves by this at the expense of others, we build dividing walls against other people and create injustice and oppression which inevitably become a breeding ground for conflict. Our mission as peacemakers is to proclaim that the hostile walls that exist between peoples and nations, groups and communities, are torn down in Christ.[[248]](#endnote-249) Everyone who believes in Jesus belongs together and is part of the family of God, no matter what race we come from or what our job is. The oppressive structures that have existed among us in the past need to be voluntarily replaced by a loving community where we look at each other as brothers and sisters.[[249]](#endnote-250) The animosity between us is gone because we now belong together. Sure, we can sometimes quarrel like siblings, but we must not fight like enemies.

Since the vast majority of wars start because of nationalism, class division, injustice or poverty, it is therefore our task as peacemakers to among us Christians stop having our primary identity in our nationality, in our work, our authority or in our wealth, but instead to have our identity in Christ.[[250]](#endnote-251) By spreading the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth, God's love affects individuals, leading to the reconciliation of people with people and the increase of love between people. By proclaiming to the world that God loves us regardless of our nationality or our wealth, and by working to reduce oppression and injustice in the world, and thus the breeding ground for war, we can bring peace and reconciliation to our earth.

## Heavenly Citizens

Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus are thus *together* thepeople of God, the Church. Believing Greeks, Gentiles, Swedes and immigrants are thus members of the family of God:

[[@Bible:Eph 2:19]]"19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,” (Eph 2:19)

The first word I want to highlight in the above verse is "citizen". In New Testament times, one could become a citizen of a *city* or a *kingdom*. For example, Paul was a citizen of Rome[[251]](#endnote-252) and of the Greek city of Tarsus.[[252]](#endnote-253)

A Roman citizenship could be obtained either by birth, by retirement from the army, by being freed as a slave by your master or by buying it. Being a citizen meant rights, benefits, privileges, travel pass, voting rights and opportunities for influence. For example, a Roman citizen was entitled to a fair trial and could not be flogged in any way[[253]](#endnote-254) or crucified without the express permission of the emperor. A Roman citizen also had the right to *"appeal to Caesar"* and thus have his case heard in Rome.[[254]](#endnote-255)

In his letter to the church in Philippi, Paul writes:

[[@Bible:Php 3:20]]"20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ," (Php 3:20)

Just as a citizen of the city of Ephesus could at the same time be a citizen of Rome, a city he might not even have visited, so a Swedish citizen can at the same time be a citizen of the kingdom of God. We live in our country and obey the laws of the land and participate in society, but at the same time we know that our primary citizenship is in heaven, our capital is the heavenly Jerusalem,[[255]](#endnote-256) we live here in the world as sojourners and exiles[[256]](#endnote-257) and if the laws of our country clash with the laws of God, we obey God more than men.[[257]](#endnote-258)

Just as a Swedish citizen living in Russia naturally obeys and respects Russian law, but at the same time does not fully identify himself as a Russian or participate in the Russian armed forces, so a Christian is a guest and stranger in Sweden, obeys and respects the laws of the country, but refrains from participating in the Swedish armed forces, for example.

Just as Jesus left his heavenly abode and came to our world as a stranger, so too we become strangers to the world when we receive our heavenly citizenship.

We who before had nothing in common are now one in Christ. We who were previously defined by what set us apart, we were different peoples, Jews, Greeks, Swedes and immigrants, we are now one new people; the people of God.[[258]](#endnote-259) Of course we are still happy about our origin, our language and our culture, but our primary identity is now in Christ, not in our nation.

The second word I want to study from the above Bible passage Ephesians 2:19, is the Greek word [[“oikeios” >> GreekStrongs:G3609]], translated in the Bible as "household". The word was often used to describe a larger household with a master, children, slaves, parents, grandparents, employees, etc. In such a household, people worked and ate together, but there were still clear differences, for example between the children and the slaves.

Paul declares that even Gentiles, not just Jews, are now "citizens" of God's household. Gentiles are no longer to be regarded as "guests" and "strangers" in the church. If in the past there were differences in a household between the children of the Lord and his slaves, Jews and Gentiles are now "brothers and sisters" in God's family and have the same rights as God's children. In the church, Jews are not the "A team" and Gentiles the "B team", but both groups have exactly the same rights and opportunities.

## The New Creation

This new community, the Church, is "a new creation" and a foretaste of heaven. In a sense, it could be said that the kingdom of Heaven has already come to the "old creation" with the coming of Jesus to earth:

[[@Bible:2Cor 5:17]]"17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2Cor 5:17)

In the kingdom of Heaven, God's will prevails and there is no sorrow, no pain and no death,[[259]](#endnote-260) but the World is under the power of the Devil[[260]](#endnote-261) and therefore sin, violence, sickness, evil and death flourish here. The Lord is not satisfied with this and will on the day of the Lord judge the sin in the world and stop the evil that is going on.[[261]](#endnote-262)

But who among us can say that we have never sinned? Who among us will go free on the day of judgment? We have all sinned and share in the guilt of the world.

Fortunately, God wants to save us from judgment and forgive us for our sins.[[262]](#endnote-263) This is precisely why God was born as a man in a world full of sin and evil and took our sins upon himself and died on the cross of Calvary so that we who believe in Jesus and confess him as our Lord may have our sins forgiven and be born again into the kingdom of God.[[263]](#endnote-264) Thanks to Jesus' death, we receive eternal life and now have our citizenship in the kingdom of Heaven.[[264]](#endnote-265)

With the first coming of Jesus into the world, the kingdom of God has already come into the world[[265]](#endnote-266) and until Jesus' return we live as exiles[[266]](#endnote-267) and sojourners[[267]](#endnote-268) in the kingdom of the World. We live in the world but do not belong to the world.[[268]](#endnote-269) While we pray to our Father that his kingdom will come even more into the world, that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven,[[269]](#endnote-270) we are also actively working to spread the kingdom of God in the world to the ends of the earth.[[270]](#endnote-271) We carry out this mission by witnessing to Jesus, loving our fellow human beings and allowing the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the kingdom of God through healings, miracles, inner divine peace and so on.

In a way, you could say that the old creation and the new creation overlap. We are born again into the kingdom of God but remain in the World. Although the characteristics of the old creation remain, the new kingdom of heaven has begun to come into our world. We still get sick and sin, but at the same time we can be healed and forgiven. We know that one day we will die, but at the same time we believe in the resurrection. It is this new kingdom that we proclaim and try to realize as best as we can in the Church. In doing so, the Church becomes a light in the darkness of society.

## Influencing Society

So when we are saved, we become a new creation and begin to live according to the principles of the kingdom of God within our community in the church. But an important question to ask is to what extent do these new principles apply only in the church, or should they also affect society at large?

On the one hand, we cannot force non-Christians to live like Christians. But on the other hand, we Christians are also part of society and cannot live one way in the church and another in society. Moreover, our prayer is that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven, and therefore we naturally want the whole world to start living according to the will of God. This means that we will inevitably have an impact on secular society, either indirectly by building the church or directly by helping to build society.

Examples of community builders are found in Joseph in chapter 6 and Daniel in chapter 19. Examples of *indirect* transformation of society are found in the theology of the Church builder Paul.

Let me exemplify this with slavery. Because even though Paul in Galatians explicitly writes that in the church there should no longer be a distinction between *"slave or free"*,[[271]](#endnote-272) he writes in 1 Corinthians that *"each one should remain in the condition in which he was called"*, i.e., not fight to be free from his slavery.[[272]](#endnote-273) How does that make sense? Well, we see it in Paul's letter to his friend the slave owner Philemon, whose slave Onesimus had escaped to Paul and become a Christian.

Paul is careful not to force Philemon to release Onesimus, even if he could,[[273]](#endnote-274) but wants Philemon to *"for love's sake*"[[274]](#endnote-275) release Onesimus because he has now become *"a beloved brother*"[[275]](#endnote-276) to Philemon. According to tradition, Onesimus was released by Philemon and later became Timothy's successor as leader of the church in Ephesus.

Paul does not explicitly oppose slavery as a social institution, but makes slavery impossible in practice, at least in the church. For how can a Christian slave owner own a beloved brother as a slave? By tearing down the walls between slaves and free within the church, they are also indirectly torn down outside the church as more and more people become part of the church.

Had Paul preached the immediate end of slavery, both in the church and in society, such a message, in a society with as much oppression of women and slavery as existed in New Testament times, would risk creating a social revolution like no other. We must remember that up to 20% of the population of the Roman Empire was made up of slaves. With such a teaching, there is an obvious risk that wealthy, non-Christian men in power will do everything they can to prevent this social change by forbidding their wives and slaves to become Christians and persecuting those who have already become Christians.

Therefore, in love for your non-Christian fellow human beings, it may often be necessary not to take advantage of your own Christian freedom in the church out in society, but instead to continue to live in the social class one was in when one became a Christian.[[276]](#endnote-277) In this way, one is more likely to focus on spreading the message of salvation and thus indirectly bring about the social change that the gospel will inevitably bring about sooner or later.

In other words, it is more important that as many people as possible hear the message of Jesus than that each individual should personally benefit from the freedom Jesus has given through salvation. With this in mind, Paul sometimes gives a number of instructions to different social groups, such as slaves,[[277]](#endnote-278) but not in order to preserve slavery and other oppressive power structures, but to make it easier to spread the gospel.

It is thus a delicate balance between, on the one hand, making use of the Christian freedom that all the saved possess and, on the other hand, the risk that Christian freedom leads to a social revolution that means that salvation in Jesus can no longer be proclaimed.

So we see from Paul the Church Builder that we can change society indirectly by spreading the message of Jesus and allowing the Holy Spirit to transform sinners into saints in the church. The more people who become Christians, the greater the impact on society at large.

If we want to reduce racism and xenophobia in society, we need to actively work on integration in our churches and mission in the world. This, combined with also influencing society with biblical values as Joseph and Daniel did, should be the Christian way to change our world for the better. First of all by building the church, but also by seeking the good of our society by engaging politically within certain limits.

## Salt of the Earth and Light of the World

Also Jesus has something to teach us about how we as Christians can help to influence society for the better:

[[@Bible:Mt 5:13-16]]"13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. 14"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Mt 5:13-16)

First, Jesus teaches us that we are "salt". Nowadays, salt is mainly used for seasoning. Food can be transformed from completely tasteless to wonderfully delicious with just a little salt, but salt that loses its saltiness becomes meaningless and useless. God's people are the salt of the earth and should add flavor to a lifeless world by spreading the Gospel of Jesus.

But salt also has a preserving and conserving effect. The people of God are the salt of the earth and should ensure that the world does not rot in sin by, for example, working for a fairer world, engaging politically, making more compassionate and xenophile laws, and being present in all kinds of workplaces. If a Christian is in a particular place, there is a great opportunity to improve that environment by spreading love and thus ensuring that sin does not take over too much.

Secondly, the church is a "light" in a dark society. By treating each other well within the church, the outside community will see this and be positively influenced in a more compassionate and xenophile direction. By setting a good example in terms of, for example, integration, the church will be seen in the community and shine as a light in a xenophobic society.

# Integration in the First Church

The first church in Jerusalem had quickly grown to several thousand members.[[278]](#endnote-279) Many of the newcomers were Greek-speaking Jews from the Jewish Diaspora who had come to Jerusalem primarily to celebrate Passover, but then stayed after they were saved and baptized. To make sure that all these thousands of new believers from other countries had food for the day, they shared all their possessions together[[279]](#endnote-280) and distributed food to all who needed it. But with the rapid growth came new problems:

[[@Bible:Ac 6:1]]"1 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. " (Ac 6:1)

Until this moment, the first church had held together despite strong external pressure. They had been persecuted, brought before the Council and flogged, but they had remained as *"one heart and soul".[[280]](#endnote-281)* But now the honeymoon seems to be over and the first internal divisions are beginning within the church. If the Devil fails to stop the church from spreading the gospel through external persecution, he will instead try to weaken the church through internal divisions.

For some reason, the Greek-speaking Jews felt that their widows did not receive the same treatment as the native Jews. Exactly what had happened is not clear, but with such a rapidly growing church of several thousand members, it is not surprising if there is an organizational mistake somewhere.

Distributing food to widows and orphans was part of the Jewish tradition, normally carried out by the priests in the temple. It was part of the Jewish tradition of taking special care of society's vulnerable groups that I wrote about in chapter 10.

For some reason, Christians seem to feel that they also needed to take care of their church members. In the same way, we as a church today should help socially vulnerable people, especially members of our own church but also in society at large. Even if it is really the responsibility of the municipality, we need to help if the municipality is not enough or if someone falls through the cracks. For example, if the municipality does not provide good enough language training, the church can help by setting up a language café. As Paul writes to the church in Corinth, it is the lack of language that makes us strangers to one another.[[281]](#endnote-282)

If you transfer the message of the text to today, you can compare it with Swedes and immigrants. In theory, we all agree that it shouldn't matter if you're Jewish or Greek, Swedish or immigrant, but the more you live together, the clearer the differences become. To overcome this, we need to listen to complaints and actively work on integration.

It was good of the Greek-speaking Jews to bring the problem to the attention of the church leaders. However, one should of course avoid "complaining" and instead go to the leaders directly and point out the problem and try to find a solution.

In the same way, it is quite natural today that from time to time unintentional organizational mistakes occur in the work of the church. By pointing out the problem to the leaders, solutions can be found. Complaining risks creating more division and resentment.

The problem was unintentional and not the result of misconduct. As a church leader, it is impossible to anticipate every possible problem or change, but once a problem arises, it must be dealt with, and the necessary changes made. You don't always get to choose which problems and situations you will meet, but once you face them, you have to deal with them. So now that the apostles and disciples see the problem, they realize that they need to reorganize the food distribution:

[[@Bible:Ac 6:2-7]]"2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. 7And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” (Ac 6:2-7)

The apostles could have dealt with the complaints by ignoring the Greek-speaking Jews. Or they could have split into two churches, one Hebrew-speaking and one Greek-speaking. But they didn't. Instead, the apostles' solution was to include more leaders in the ministry. If they themselves had undertaken to distribute the food to the widows, they would have neglected the specific calling they themselves had received from Jesus. But by recognizing the problem and appointing new leaders to do just that, they resolved the situation in the best possible way.

It is worth noting that all seven new leaders elected have Greek names. They were most likely some of the Greek-speaking Jews who had complained that their widows were being overlooked. It was very wise of the apostles to appoint Greek-speaking Jews to this leadership. Those who saw the problem also had to be part of the solution.

In a church, the pastor is not supposed to do everything. Rather, church leaders are supposed to *"equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ".*[[282]](#endnote-283) That is, church leaders are to help church members find and grow into a role in the church that suits them, so that they too can participate in building up the kingdom of God from the gifts and skills with which they have been given.

It is my experience as a church leader that those who see a need do so because God has placed that task on their hearts and is calling them to enter into that ministry. So when someone complains about something in the church, a good leader should turn that person's complaint into trying to help that person into ministry and become part of the solution to the problem they see themselves.

It is not in the text, but the ministry of the seven new leaders is described in other parts of the Bible as "deacons" or "church servants".[[283]](#endnote-284) These seven church servants were to be filled with *"the Spirit and of wisdom"*, i.e., they were to be both spiritual and good at their work. Having only one or the other will not be good, but the combination makes a great deacon! Although church work is practical, it is important to have a good spiritual character when entering into service for God.

Such a practical and seemingly simple and unglamorous task as distributing food to widows was a spiritual task that needed prayer and the laying on of the hands of the Apostles. Making coffee, serving food, teaching Swedish and appealing unjust government decisions is a similar spiritual service today that also needs prayer and spiritual wisdom.

If the Devil's strategy was to divide the church and distract the apostles from the Word and the ministry of prayer, he failed miserably. Instead of distracted apostles and a divided church, the result was a better integrated church, wise leaders, new church servants and continued successful growth.

Applying these principles to today, we can learn in particular that we should work to keep the church together despite different language groups, and appoint church leaders from all groups in the church. When Spirit-filled leaders from other countries and languages are included in the church leadership, it becomes easier to integrate and hold the whole congregation together.

# The Xenophile Church Leader

In the New Testament, [[“xenos” >> GreekStrongs:G3581]] and [[“paroikos” >> GreekStrongs:G3941]] are the Greek equivalents of the Hebrew [[“ger” >> HebrewStrongs: H1481]]. Paroikos occurs only four times in the New Testament,[[284]](#endnote-285) while xenos is more common.

Both paroikos and xenos are used in the New Testament to describe "foreigners", who can be invited guests, strangers, immigrants or refugees. What they have in common, however, is that they are people from another country who speak another language.

For example, the Jewish high priests buy a *"burial place for strangers [xenos]*"[[285]](#endnote-286) for the thirty silver coins that Judas returned to them after he betrayed Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus describes himself as a "xenos":

[[@Bible:Mt 25:35]]"35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger [xenos] and you welcomed me," (Mt 25:35)

In Ephesians, Paul uses paroikos and xenos almost synonymously in the same verse:

[[@Bible:Eph 2:19]]"19 So then you are no longer strangers [xenos] and aliens [paroikos], but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God," (Eph 2:19)

In modern English, xenos may be most associated with the word "xenophobia", which is a word composed of the two words "xenos", meaning "stranger", and "phobos", meaning "fear".

Anyone who feels an unfound fear or hatred towards strangers and foreigners could be defined as "xenophobic". But the person who instead shows hospitality and welcomes refugees and strangers is described in the Bible as the opposite, a "philoxenos", which is a combination of the two Greek words "filia" and "xenos". Filia means "love" in the sense of the strong love or fellowship one may feel based on common interests, for example in a family, church or football club. The related word "filadelfia" means "brotherly love" and is a common name for contemporary Pentecostal churches. An interesting curiosity is that Philadelphia was a Greek city located in a fertile valley in present-day Turkey and was known for producing *bread* and *wine,* thetwo ingredients of the Lord’s Supper.

A common translation of philoxenos is "hospitable", but personally I would rather translate philoxenos as "xenophile" or “friend of strangers”. The direct opposite of being xenophobic is being a friend of strangers, in my opinion.

According to Paul, being philoxenos is a requirement for being a church leader:[[286]](#endnote-287)

[[@Bible:1Ti 3:2-3]]"2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable [philoxenos], able to teach,3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. " (1Ti 3:2-3)

According to Paul, it is just as important for a pastor to be a friend of strangers as it is that he refrains from drinking, fighting and fiddling with money. To be really clear, Paul repeats the same instruction in another of his letters:

[[@Bible:Tt 1:7-9]]"7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,8 but hospitable [philoxenos], a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 9He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. " (Tt 1:7-9)

For a pastor, it is as important to be xenophile as it is to teach sound biblical teaching and rebuke false teachers. We live in a time when we church leaders need to raise our voices for the mute and voiceless. We pastors have a responsibility to preach the xenophilia of the Bible and oppose the xenophobia of society.

But it's not just church leaders who should be a friend of strangers. Repeatedly, all Christians in general are urged to be hospitable and eagerly xenophile:

[[@Bible:Ro 12:13]]"13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality [philoxenos]. " (Ro 12:13)

[[@Bible:Heb 13:2]]"2 Do not neglect to show hospitality [philoxenos] to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. " (Heb 13:2)

These general exhortations to all Christians to be friend of strangers should be seen, first, in the context of the Jewish tradition of traveling preachers. For example, Jesus was received by Martha and her siblings Mary and Lazarus,[[287]](#endnote-288) and by Simon the leper.[[288]](#endnote-289) When Jesus sent out his disciples to preach, he expected them to be received in the homes of hospitable people as well.[[289]](#endnote-290) In his third letter, John writes that the church *"ought to"* support *"strangers*," in the sense of traveling preachers.[[290]](#endnote-291) There is also an obvious link in the New Testament between welcoming strangers, traveling preachers and baptism.[[291]](#endnote-292)

Secondly, the apostles' call for general xenophilia was a prerequisite for the functioning of the first Christian community. The first Christians were a mixture of both Jews and Gentiles, and from being enemies, these different groups and peoples would suddenly unite and become one in Christ.[[292]](#endnote-293) Being constantly reminded to be a friend of strangers and to show love to all fellow human beings, whether Jews or Greeks, was a prerequisite for integration to work.

Jews and Gentiles living under the same roof, celebrating communion together and seeing each other as brothers and sisters was a stark contrast to Pharisaic Judaism. Although the Old Testament is full of calls for hospitality and xenophilia, the Pharisees were very careful not to defile themselves by associating with Gentiles and eating with them.

Finally, I would like to highlight a very interesting biblical passage from my Pentecostal perspective:

[[@Bible:1 Pe 4:9-10]]"9 Show hospitality [philoxenos] to one another without grumbling. 10As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:" (1 Pe 4:9-10)

As a xenophile Pentecostal pastor, I find it hard to get past the possibility that Peter in the above Scripture actually describes xenophilia as a spiritual gift of grace, but I'll leave that up to you as a reader to judge.

If so, it falls under the general biblical principle that all Christians can serve in all spiritual gifts in general, but that some may serve in a gift more specifically. For example, all Christians can pray for the sick in general, but some receive the gift of healing more specifically. All Christians should be a friend of strangers in general, but perhaps some receive the gift of xenophilia more specifically?

# Pentecost

If in the Old Testament God's people were given laws and rules that would teach them to love the stranger as a fellow human being, in the New Testament God's people are given the Spirit of God who transforms the stranger by his power into a brother and sister in Christ.

Since man fails to fulfill the *"righteous requirements of the law*" himself*[[293]](#endnote-294)* to *"love your neighbor as yourself"*,[[294]](#endnote-295) God fills us with his Spirit so that he can do it *through* us instead.

It is impossible to love the stranger as a fellow human being just because it is legislated to do so; one needs a transformed heart to love your fellow human being as oneself. The Law of Moses was good,[[295]](#endnote-296) but because it was written on tablets of stone, the people of God failed to fulfill the Law. But Jeremiah prophesied that in the new covenant the Lord would instead write the law in the *"hearts"* ofGod's people:

[[@Bible:Je 31:31-34]]"31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah,32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."” (Je 31:31-34)

Ezekiel also prophesied in a similar way:

[[@Bible:Eze 36:26-27]]"26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Eze 36:26-27)

What God's people failed to fulfill in the old covenant based on the Law of Moses, the Holy Spirit fulfills for the people of God in the new covenant based on faith in Jesus. Israel failed to love the stranger in the way the Law required because their mission was based on the Law of Moses, while the mission of the church is based on the work of the Spirit. Now, when God's law is written by the Spirit of God in our hearts, the people of God can fulfill the will of the Lord by the power of the Spirit.[[296]](#endnote-297)

God's giving of his Holy Spirit to the whole church, each and every one, is thus a prerequisite for all peoples, both Jews and Gentiles, natives and foreigners, to be united into a new people in faith in Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to please God, but with the Holy Spirit nothing is impossible. The giving of the Spirit to both Jews and Gentiles is therefore a sign that the new covenant has begun. The more filled with the Holy Spirit we become, the more of a beloved sibling we see in the stranger.

This fulfillment of the Spirit came to the disciples on the day of Pentecost and led to the disciples speaking foreign languages and receiving the power of the Spirit to become Jesus' witnesses all over the world:

[[@Bible:Ac 2:1-12]]"1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians-we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." 12And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"” (Ac 2:1-12)

In biblical times, Pentecost was one of the three great pilgrimages when all Jewish men went up to Jerusalem. Pentecost was called the "Feast of Weeks" because the feast took place 7 weeks (50 days) after Passover. The English word for the feast, "Pentecost", comes from the Greek word [[“pentekoste” >> GreekStrongs:G4005]] which means "50".

Pentecost was also called the "Harvest Festival", because on Pentecost the first harvest was celebrated.[[297]](#endnote-298) From a Christian perspective, this is interesting because on the day of Pentecost, *"about three thousand*"[[298]](#endnote-299) people were saved, thus becoming "the first harvest". According to Paul, we have received the Spirit as the *"firstfruits"* and just as the first harvest was a foretaste for the farmer of what is to come, so the Spirit is a foretaste of what we will fully receive in due course.[[299]](#endnote-300)

Pentecost, according to Jewish tradition, was also called "the Birthday of the Law" and was celebrated to commemorate Moses receiving the Law from God on Mount Sinai.[[300]](#endnote-301) There are many parables and parallels between the people of God receiving the Law at Sinai on Old Testament Pentecost, and the people of God receiving the Spirit in Jerusalem on New Testament Pentecost. According to Isaiah, God's teaching is to start from Jerusalem and the Lord himself is to teach us his ways.[[301]](#endnote-302) The Lord teaches through his Word, but also through the Spirit.

When Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai, all of Mount Sinai was *"wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire"*.[[302]](#endnote-303) On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit comes *“like a mighty rushing wind”* and with *“tongues as of fire”*. Incidentally, it is no coincidence that the Spirit came in the context of a "storm" since "spirit" in both Hebrew ([[ruach >> HebrewStrongs: H7307]])[[303]](#endnote-304) and Greek ([[pneuma >> GreekStrongs:G4151]]) is the same word as "wind".

At Sinai, the Law was written with God's finger on tablets of stone,[[304]](#endnote-305) while on the day of Pentecost, the Law was written in the heart by the Spirit coming to each one. [[305]](#endnote-306)

At Sinai, the people were not allowed to come too close to God,[[306]](#endnote-307) but on the day of Pentecost, the Lord comes close to man. At Sinai, the Law was given to the people as a whole and was communicated to the people through priests. On Pentecost, the Spirit was given to all and opened up the possibility for each and every person to have their own personal relationship with the Lord and the Word of God without a "priest" or "mediator" standing in between. The Holy Spirit teaches us and reminds us of all that Jesus has said.[[307]](#endnote-308)

And finally, at Sinai *"about three thousand men"* died,[[308]](#endnote-309) on the day of Pentecost *"about three thousand souls"* were saved. [[309]](#endnote-310)

But what does Pentecost and the giving of the Spirit have to do with strangers, as this book is about? To understand this, we need to compare the Day of Pentecost with the story of the Tower of Babel that I wrote about in chapter 3. Just as at the beginning of creation God scattered man by giving them new languages at the Tower of Babel, so at the beginning of the new creation God sends out the disciples by giving them new languages on the Day of Pentecost.

But if the confusion of languages at Babel led to the division of people into different peoples, the miracle of language on Pentecost leads to its opposite, namely the uniting of different peoples into a new community. It is remarkable how strong the fellowship of the Spirit can be felt with people from other countries when we pray and speak in tongues together. Personally, I think that is the kind of spiritual unity among us Christians that Jesus prayed for in his High Priestly Prayer.[[310]](#endnote-311) A unity in the Spirit that arises when believers from all nations, peoples and languages gather in the name of Jesus, and thus become the New Covenant equivalent of the *"house of prayer for all peoples"* that the temple in Jerusalem was intended to be.[[311]](#endnote-312)

Pentecost is, through the language-miracle, a fulfillment of God's promise that there will come a time when *"all the nations*"[[312]](#endnote-313) will flock to Jerusalem to meet God.[[313]](#endnote-314) The fact that the disciples begin to speak foreign languages marks the fact that the Gospel is for all peoples, not just the Jewish one, and that from now on the mission is outward-looking. A foreigner who gets saved does not have to move to Israel, get circumcised and start speaking Hebrew. On the contrary, it was the Jewish disciples who began to speak foreign languages and who were commissioned to go out to all the world and to all nations and to all languages.

Just as God used the confusion of languages at Babel to cause people to migrate and fill the earth, so the Lord uses the Pentecostal language miracle to empower the born-again disciples to spread the gospel throughout the earth.

## Live on All the Face of the Earth

To further explore this, I thought we would look at a sermon Paul preached in Athens, Greece, on one of his missionary journeys:

[[@Bible:Ac 17:26-27]]"26 And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,27 that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way towards him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,” (Ac 17:26-27)

The first point from these verses is that God created all human beings from Adam and Eve and allowed their descendants to populate the earth.[[314]](#endnote-315) This idea of a common origin for humanity may be obvious to us with a biblical worldview, but is challenging to Greek thinking. They saw themselves as superior and all other peoples and civilizations as barbaric. But since God created all human beings from a single human being, we have a common origin, belong together and there is thus no room for xenophobia or philosophical ideas of a "master race".

The second point Paul makes is that God's mission to humanity to populate the earth is not a chaotic process. The Lord has not left humanity to its fate, but is in control, allowing peoples and nations both to arise and to perish. Ancient empires like Assyria, Mesopotamia, Babylon and the Roman Empire have both come and gone. The Lord has held his hand over the Jewish people and saved them time and time again. Even today the world is changing and empires come and go, but the Lord's control remains. God has the power to bring down kingdoms that are complacent, such as the Roman Empire, and he also has the power to preserve and save nations that are in danger of destruction, such as Israel.

Therefore, when there are cataclysmic global events where countries are going under and refugees are being scattered around the world, Christians should see that God is in control of the situation and that it will lead to more people seeking God. If the *"allotted period"* of a kingdom is over and its borders are being eroded, then as generous fellow human beings we should demonstrate the principle of hospitality and help the people who are forced to flee. If a country we have not been able to reach with the Gospel suffers an internal crisis and its inhabitants flee to Europe, the opportunity arises for these unreached people to finally hear about Jesus. Or conversely, if a country closed to both foreigners and the Gospel suddenly opens up, then we should put on the shoes of willingness and go there as eager messengers of joy. As Christians, we should not rejoice and welcome the fact that a country is going through a crisis and that people are fleeing their country, but we should welcome its refugees, help them in the best way we can and give them the Gospel in word and deed.

An example of a people that has been forced to flee because of the destruction of its kingdom is the Jewish people. God called Abraham out of Ur. He led the patriarchs into Egypt. He rescued Israel out of Egypt. He led Joshua into the land of Canaan. He forced the Jewish people into exile in Babylon. He brought them back. And so on. In the midst of all these chaotic transformations, God has still been in control. Because of wars and crises, the Jews have been forced to flee Israel on numerous occasions. They have been welcomed into many countries, but have also faced many closed borders. In the countries to which the Jews have been welcomed, they have been able to develop a diaspora community that has enabled them to survive and stick together as a people even into our time. Moreover, in all of these countries to which they have been welcomed, they have been able to become a blessing to the native population.

Paul's third point is that God allows kingdoms to flourish so that they can seek God and find him. The God of Israel is not only the God of *Israel*, but of the whole *world*. The Greeks should be at least indirectly aware of this, Paul argues, because it is possible to seek God even if you have never heard of Jesus. Partly because God has *“put eternity into man’s heart”*,[[315]](#endnote-316) but also because it is possible to see and understand in creation itself that God has created the world,[[316]](#endnote-317) because God has left his fingerprints and testimony in his creation.[[317]](#endnote-318)

The bottom line of Paul's argument is that the Lord wants all peoples, Jews and Greeks alike, to come together as humanity to believe in him as a universal God for all peoples.

## The Second Day of Pentecost

A modern expression of the Spirit's work took place at the start of the Pentecostal revival in 1906 on Azusa Street in Los Angeles. The African-American slave son William J. Seymour longs to see a fulfillment of God's promises of the outpouring of the Spirit. When he preaches about this at a prayer meeting based on the book of Acts, the Spirit falls on the congregation and the global Pentecostal revival begins. In the first Pentecostal church, men and women, black and white, old and young, rich and poor, were baptized in the Spirit and began to speak in tongues. Despite a segregated and racist United States, it was quickly observed that *"the color line was washed away in the blood."*

Normally, tongues is a gift of the Holy Spirit that serves as a "prayer language" that you can use to pray in the spirit to the Lord in words that you do not understand.[[318]](#endnote-319) This language of prayer is usually not an existing language but a "spiritual language" that only God understands, but on certain special occasions we may be supernaturally given the opportunity to pray in an existing language that we have never learned.

Because tongues were so unusual at this time, the newly spirit-baptized Pentecostals on Azusa Street thought that, like at the first Pentecost, they could now speak real languages. They figured that since God had baptized them in the Spirit, the second Pentecost had come and with it the End Times had begun. Once the message of salvation had reached all the nations, it was time for the Second Coming of Jesus when the church would be caught up into the sky to meet Jesus. Only 14 weeks after the revival started, missionaries were sent out at a furious pace. Within two years, missionaries from Azusa Street had reached over fifty countries.

One of these missionaries was the Swede Andrew Johnson, or Anders Johansson as his real Swedish name was. When he was baptized, he believed he had been given seven different tongues, one of which was Arabic, and even claimed to be able to *write* in Syriac and Armenian tongues. Andrew traveled by boat across the Atlantic to Palestine with some other missionaries. They thought they would use their new languages to do missionary work among the Arabs of the Middle East.

One of these missionaries was Lucy Leatherman. She had been given Turkish as a spiritual language, which was actually confirmed when she tried to speak in tongues as she walked past a man wearing a Turkish fez in the street. He stopped and asked in amazement what college she had attended because she spoke such perfect Turkish.

However, the missionary journey was interrupted in Naples before the missionaries reached Jerusalem. Another of the missionaries, Lucy Condit, had tried to speak in tongues to some Moors in Gibraltar, thinking she had been given Arabic as a language. When she found out that they did not understand her, she felt betrayed and decided to take the first ship home to warn her comrades in Los Angeles who were preparing to go out as missionaries. Both Lucy Leatherman and Lucy Condit cut short their missionary journey and went home to the United States, while Andrew made his way back to Sweden. Andrew saw himself as a "Pentecostal missionary" in Sweden and wrote missionary letters to Azusa Street in Los Angeles. He witnessed, preached and prayed for a Pentecostal revival over Sweden.

So being baptized with the Spirit is not just about receiving the gift of tongues, but above all it creates a zeal for mission and a heart for vulnerable people. Or, as Jesus said, it gives you the "power" to cross borders, to go to Samaria, hated by the Jews, and even to the ends of the earth:

[[@Bible:Ac 1:8]]"8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Ac 1:8)

Loving the stranger outside the church through missionary work and loving the stranger inside the church through integration work is, from beginning to end, a work of the Holy Spirit. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we see Jesus in our fellow man.

While it undeniably got a little crazy with the gift of tongues at the beginning of the Pentecostal revival, the outpouring of the Spirit on Azusa Street led to just that; integration in the church and a missionary zeal that spread the gospel throughout the world. Since the beginning of the Pentecostal revival over a hundred years ago, integration and mission have been a natural part of the Pentecostal DNA.

# To All Nations

In both the Old and New Testaments, we can consistently see that God wants his people to love the stranger *within* Israel and the church, i.e., integration, and to reach out with the Word of God to all the foreign peoples *outside* Israel and the church, i.e., mission. Here now follows the common thread from the call of Abraham to the throne of the Lamb. As we saw in chapter 4, God chose Abraham to bless all the peoples of the earth through him:

[[@Bible:gen 12:1-3]]"1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Ge 12:1-3)

As a continuation of this blessing, God chose Israel, who came to know the Lord and His will through the Law of Moses. But God never intended that only Israel should know the Lord, but rather that Israel should be a priesthood for the rest of the world:

[[@Bible:Ex 19:5-6]]"5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” (Ex 19:5-6)

If Israel lived according to the will of God, it would create curiosity among the surrounding Gentiles and make them want to know the Lord as well. In a pagan world, the Jewish faith would thus serve as a light in the darkness for the Gentile peoples around it:

[[@Bible:Is 49:6]]"6 he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."” (Is 49:6)

At the dedication of the first temple, King Solomon asks that the Lord listen not only to the prayers of the Jewish people, but also *"when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel"* comes to Jerusalem and prays in the temple, so that *"all the peoples of the earth" will* know the name of God:

[[@Bible:1Ki 8:41-43]]"41 "Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake42 (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, 43hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.” (1Ki 8:41-43)

An example of this is the Ethiopian Eunuch:

[[@Bible:Ac 8:27-28]]"27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. " (Ac 8:27-28)

The prophets prophesied of a future when *"all the nations"* would come to Jerusalem to meet the God of Israel:

[[@Bible:Is 2:2-4]]"2 It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,3 and many peoples shall come, and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. 4He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Is 2:2-4)

[[@Bible:Zec 8:23]]"23 Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'” (Zec 8:23)

In the temple of Jerusalem, therefore, there was a special place for this purpose called "the court of the Gentiles". When Jesus comes to Jerusalem to inspect his temple and sees that the Jews had turned that place into a messy marketplace, he gets so upset that he overturns tables and chairs and drives out those who were selling and buying in the temple with a whip: [[319]](#endnote-320)

[[@Bible:Mk 11:15-17]]"15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers.” (Mk 11:15-17)

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. It is Jesus who *is* the blessing that would be given to *"all the families of the earth"*. Jesus' death on the cross is the turning point of the Bible and of the whole history of the world. If the whole direction of the Old Testament has been towards the death of Jesus in Jerusalem, now the mission is changing direction. If the idea of mission in the Old Testament was that people from every nation, tribe and language would come to Jerusalem and meet God in the temple, Jesus is changing the direction of that mission. Instead of all peoples coming from the ends of the earth *to* Jerusalem, Jesus sends his disciples out *from* Jerusalem to all nations to the ends of the earth:

[[@Bible:Mt 28:18-20]]"18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."” (Mt 28:18-20)

[[@Bible:Ac 1:8]]"8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Ac 1:8)

God's mission is no longer to bring the nations to *Jerusalem*, but to *Jesus*. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus explains that in the future a *place*, Jerusalem, will not be the starting point for worship, but that God will be worshiped *"in spirit and truth"*.[[320]](#endnote-321) By gathering in Jesus' name, God is in our midst[[321]](#endnote-322) and we become, as a community of believers, *"the temple of the living God".*[[322]](#endnote-323)

So now it is no longer necessary to become a Jew and move to Jerusalem in order to become part of the people of God, but what matters is whether you believe in Jesus or not, no matter where you live or what people you belong to. So when Jesus sends out his disciples to do missionary work, the mission is to witness about Jesus to the ends of the earth. Anyone who starts to believe in Jesus as a result is baptized and made a disciple. In this way, the whole earth is filled with disciples of all peoples, tribes, nations, countries and languages.

Only when this mission is completed, and people from all nations have heard about Jesus, will the end come:

[[@Bible:Mt 24:14]]"14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Mt 24:14)

In the conclusion of the Bible, we can see that this mission will succeed. In Heaven, people from all the nations of the earth will gather before the throne and worship our Lord together:

[[@Bible:Re 7:9-10]]"9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"” (Re 7:9-10)

# Summary

In the beginning of creation, we can see how God created man as a migrant with the mission to multiply and fill the earth. But the Bible is also the story of *the fellow man*, how in the fall man became xenophobic and began to treat his brother and fellow man as an enemy and stranger.

God calls Abraham to leave his homeland and live as a sojourner and stranger in the land of his future people. The Lord promises Abraham that he will be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth.

God rescues Israel from slavery and alienation in Egypt and allows them to live in the Promised Land. God gives Israel the twofold mission of treating the stranger *within* Israel's borders as his beloved fellow human being (integration), and *outside* Israel's borders to be a kingdom of priests and a light in the darkness for the foreign Gentile peoples to the ends of the earth (mission).

God sends Jesus from his heavenly abode to live as a guest and stranger in the world. Jesus shows how to treat his fellow man and invites both Jews and foreigners to the heavenly feast. Through his death on the cross, Jesus breaks down the wall of separation between natives and strangers, Jews and Gentiles, and creates from these different peoples a new people.

Jesus then gives the church the twofold mission of integrating within the church the native and the foreign, Jew and Gentile, Swede and immigrant, into beloved brothers and sisters in the family of God, and of going out as missionaries into all the world, preaching the gospel to all the foreign peoples to the ends of the earth.

At the end of time, people from all peoples and tribes and countries and languages of the earth will gather before the throne and worship our Lord together.

# Epilogue

Salvation is from the Jews, Jesus said.[[323]](#endnote-324) I remember when, as a Swedish foreigner, I sat as a welcomed guest in the home of the Jewish Rabbi, eating good food accompanied by the Bible and loud songs of praise. I think we have a lot to learn from this Jewish tradition.

Because nothing turns a stranger into a guest like being treated to good food. It creates joy, community and peace. Before you know whether a stranger is a friend or foe, you need to reach over the wall and offer food. Then the potential enemy is transformed into a friend and guest.

I believe that the key to successful integration is to learn from the Jews' Shabbat celebrations and reclaim the Lord’s Supper as a festive meal.

In Sweden, I would say that we have lost half the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. Through the ceremonial part of the Lord’s Supper, the taking of bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus, we are reconciled with God. Through the food of the Lord’s Supper, we are reconciled with each other. By not eating together, we therefore risk missing half the point of the Lord’s Supper. When we offer each other food while putting Jesus at the center, we combine the Bible's command to love God with all our hearts and our fellow human beings as ourselves. This can for example be done by inviting each other to Sunday dinners, having potlucks in church or making the church coffee part of the Lord’s Supper.

To conclude this study on what the Bible says about strangers and refugees, I would like to send a few short summary messages:

## To Society

If a society wants to be xenophile, we can learn from the Bible that we should welcome refugees and immigrants as guests, contribute financially to them out of our abundance, give aid to their old homeland and integrate newcomers into society by giving both obligations and rights.

## To the Church

If a church wants to be xenophile, it first needs to start identifying itself with strangers. It is almost difficult to find a person in the Bible who has not at some time been a stranger or a refugee. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Israel, David, Elijah, Daniel, Jesus, just to name a few. The painful experience of alienation is a breeding ground for lovingly treating other strangers as you would like to be treated yourself, Christian refugees as well as refugees from other religions.

A xenophile church also needs to actively work to bring peace to the community by reaching beyond the prejudicial and xenophobic walls that people have built up and inviting strangers into the kingdom of God by offering food and celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Above all, it is by including new people both in religious life and in church leadership that successful integration of *both* Swedes and immigrants can lead to a xenophile change in the church as well as in society at large.

## To the Stranger

Those who have come to our country as refugees need to actively seek the good of their church and their new community by making their gifts and talents available, working actively to get out of exclusion and welfare dependency, and taking the opportunity to testify of Jesus when the opportunity arises. In the church, one is no longer a stranger but should actively work to integrate both oneself and all other members into the family of God.

Together with the other members of the church, you should work to spread the gospel back to your home country in one way or another.

## To the Church Leader

Anyone who wants to become a leader in the church needs to be a friend of strangers as a starting point and work to include and integrate all members of the church. The church leader should stand on the side of the weak, raise his/her voice for refugees and defend the rights of vulnerable people.

As a leader, you can expect to have to withdraw into solitude from time to time for various reasons and seek refuge with the Lord. Time spent in solitude with the Lord refines the character of the leader, teaches the church leader to look at fellow human beings from God's perspective and to learn to trust in God as his or her personal refuge.

In conclusion, I would like to urge you who have read this book: invite strangers to dinner! Because by welcoming refugees as guests, we are spreading God's love for the stranger to the very ends of the earth, a joyful work we probably have to do for all eternity, because the earth has no borders, God created it round!

1. #### Created as a Migrant

 Ge 1:27, 2Ch 23:17, Da 2:31 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Ro 8:29 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Is 6:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Ge 2:15, Pr 12:10, Pr 27:23 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Ps 115:16

#### Am I My Brother's Keeper?

 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Ge 3:6 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. In both the Old and New Testaments, the word "brother", in Hebrew "ach" and in Greek "adelphos", is used to describe a male sibling or a male relative . In a broader sense, the word can also mean a friend , a peer or a member of the religious community . So although the Bible often uses the masculine term "brother", we understand that the meaning is the more neutral "fellow human being" or "sibling". [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Ge 4:8–9 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Heb 11:4 [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. Jn 4:23 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Mt 6:6 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Ge 2:15 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Ge 17:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Ge 18:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Ge 28:15 [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Ge 28:20–21 [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Ge 3:17–19 [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. 2Ti 3:5 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. Lk 10:27

***Lest We Be Scattered*** [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. Ge 1:28 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. Mk 1:15 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. Mt 4:17

***From Stranger to Guest*** [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. Ge 11:24–30 [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. Ge 11:31 [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. Ge 14:17–20 [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. Job 31:32 [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. Ps 23:5 [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
28. Ps 41:10, Jn 13:18 [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
29. Ge 24, Ex 2:16–25, Jdg 13:15, 1Sa 25:18, 1Ki 17:8–24, 2Ki 4:8–37, Job 31:32, Ac 10:23, Ac 28:7 [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
30. Ge 19, Ge 43:31–32, Jdg 19:22–30, Dt 23:3–6, 1Sa 25 [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
31. Ge 14:18, Ge 26:28–30, Ge 31:44–54, Ex 18:12,
Jos 9:12–15, 2Sa 3:20 [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
32. Le 11:1–47, Dt 14:3–21 [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
33. Is 25:6–8, Mt 26:26–30 [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
34. Ge 25:7–10

***Strangers in the Promised Land*** [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
35. Ge 26:12–17 [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
36. Ge 27:43 [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
37. Ge 30:25 [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
38. Ge 37:1 [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
39. Ro 10:9–10 [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
40. Jn 3:3–8 [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
41. Php 3:20 [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
42. 1Pe 2:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
43. Re 21:4 [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
44. Ga 5:16

***I Will Go With You*** [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
45. Ge 30:22–24 [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
46. Ge 37:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
47. Ge 37:4 [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
48. Ge 37:28 [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
49. Ge 37:31–33 [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
50. Ge 39:20 [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
51. Ge 39:1–6 [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
52. Ge 41:40–41 [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
53. Ge 41:29–30 [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
54. Ge 41:47–48 [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
55. Ge 41:56 [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
56. Ge 41:57 [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
57. Ge 46:5–7

***Strangers in a Country That Is Not Theirs*** [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
58. Ex 1:1–7 [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
59. Ex 1:8–14 [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
60. Ge 10:24 [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
61. Ge 10:24 [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
62. Jos 24:2–3 [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
63. Ge 39:14–17 [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
64. Ge 40:15, Ge 43:32, Ex 1:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
65. Ac 6:1, 2Co 11:22, Php 3:5 [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
66. Ge 43:32

***Stranger in a Foreign Land*** [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
67. Ex 2:5–10 [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
68. Ex 2:11–15, Ac 7:29 [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
69. Probably Gershom became the progenitor of the Levitical house of the Gershonites (Nu 3:21–26). [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
70. Ac 7:30 [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
71. Ex 4:13–17 [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
72. 1Co 10:11

***God's Salvation*** [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
73. Ex 6:6–7:1 [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
74. Mt 26:17–29

***The Stranger Within Israel*** [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
75. Dt 7:7–8 [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
76. Lk 10:27 [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
77. Lk 4:18–19, Isa 58:6–7, Isa 61:1–3 [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
78. Mt 11:4–6 [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
79. 2Sam 13:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
80. Ex 2:13 [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
81. Jas 4:12 [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
82. Le 11:44 [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
83. "Fatherless", (yatom), means to be an orphan, but can also be translated as "lonely". [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
84. "Widow", (almana), refers to a woman whose husband has died and thus no longer has someone to support her. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
85. Dt 10:18, Dt 14:29, Dt 16:11–14, Dt 24:17–21, Dt 26:12–13, Dt 27:19, Ps 146:9, Je 7:5–7, Je 22:3, Zec 7:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
86. The Levites were descendants of Levi, one of the 12 tribes of Israel, and served together with the priests in the temple. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
87. Le 19:9–10, Le 23:22 [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
88. Ex 20:8–10 [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
89. Ex 12:48–49 [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
90. Le 17:8–16 [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
91. Ex 19:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
92. Dt 4:1–8 [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
93. Le 26:33 [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
94. The word "integration" is defined as "the joining or bringing together of separate parts into a larger whole".

***Your People Are My People*** [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
95. Ex 6:7 [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
96. Dt 24:19–21 [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
97. Dt 24:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
98. Ru 4:17 [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
99. Dt 24:19

***The Stranger Outside of Israel*** [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
100. Isa 49:6 [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
101. Ex 19:5–6

***Preaching to the Enemy*** [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
102. Ex 19:5–6 [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
103. Isa 49:6 [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
104. Ex 34:6–7, Jon 4:2

***Cave of Adullam*** [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
105. 2Sam 23:8–39

***Israel Violates the Covenant*** [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
106. 2Ki 17:5–6, 24 [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
107. 2Ki 23:26–27, 2Ki 24:2–4 [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
108. Je 21:1–10 [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
109. 2Ki 23:26–27, 2Ki 24:2–4 [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
110. Ezr 1:1–4 [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
111. Je 28:2–4 [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
112. Je 29:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
113. Mt 5:44 [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
114. 1Ti 2:1–2 [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
115. See Chapter 26 for more on peacemaking. [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
116. Ac 12:20, Mt 10:34 [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
117. Lk 2:14 [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
118. Ac 10:36 [↑](#endnote-ref-119)
119. Lk 19:38 [↑](#endnote-ref-120)
120. Col 1:20 [↑](#endnote-ref-121)
121. Mt 10:13 [↑](#endnote-ref-122)
122. Mk 5:34, Lk 7:50, Lk 24:36 [↑](#endnote-ref-123)
123. 1Th 1:1, 1Pe 1:2 [↑](#endnote-ref-124)
124. Eph 2:14 [↑](#endnote-ref-125)
125. Mt 5:9

***But There Is a God in Heaven*** [↑](#endnote-ref-126)
126. Le 3:17 [↑](#endnote-ref-127)
127. Le 11:1–47 [↑](#endnote-ref-128)
128. Dt 14:28–29 [↑](#endnote-ref-129)
129. Dan 1:12 [↑](#endnote-ref-130)
130. Dan 1:15 [↑](#endnote-ref-131)
131. Dan 1:17 [↑](#endnote-ref-132)
132. Dan 1:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-133)
133. Dan 2:1–13 [↑](#endnote-ref-134)
134. Dan 2:14–49 [↑](#endnote-ref-135)
135. Dan 2:48 [↑](#endnote-ref-136)
136. Mt 2:1 [↑](#endnote-ref-137)
137. Le 19:33–34 [↑](#endnote-ref-138)
138. Je 7:5–7 [↑](#endnote-ref-139)
139. 2Ki 25:8–11 [↑](#endnote-ref-140)
140. Ex 19:5–6 [↑](#endnote-ref-141)
141. Isa 49:6

***Flee to Egypt*** [↑](#endnote-ref-142)
142. Php 2:6–7 [↑](#endnote-ref-143)
143. Jn 1:10, Mt 8:20 [↑](#endnote-ref-144)
144. Lk 2:8–20 [↑](#endnote-ref-145)
145. Mt 2:1–12 [↑](#endnote-ref-146)
146. 1Ki 11:40, 2Ki 25:26, Je 26:21 [↑](#endnote-ref-147)
147. Dan 5:11–12 [↑](#endnote-ref-148)
148. Ex 1:16–22, Mt 2:16 [↑](#endnote-ref-149)
149. Mt 2:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-150)
150. Mt 10:23 [↑](#endnote-ref-151)
151. Mt 24:15–16, Mk 13:14, Lk 21:21 [↑](#endnote-ref-152)
152. 1Co 6:18 [↑](#endnote-ref-153)
153. 1Ti 6:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-154)
154. 1Co 10:14 [↑](#endnote-ref-155)
155. Jas 4:7 [↑](#endnote-ref-156)
156. See Chapter 29 for more on the concept of "citizenship". [↑](#endnote-ref-157)
157. Mt 2:1–8 [↑](#endnote-ref-158)
158. Mt 2:16 [↑](#endnote-ref-159)
159. Heb 2:17

***The Lord's Supper*** [↑](#endnote-ref-160)
160. Lk 11:37–54 [↑](#endnote-ref-161)
161. Mk 7:1–23 [↑](#endnote-ref-162)
162. Ex 31:14 [↑](#endnote-ref-163)
163. Le 10:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-164)
164. Ex 18:13–27 [↑](#endnote-ref-165)
165. Mk 7:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-166)
166. Mk 7:2–4, Ex 30:19–21 [↑](#endnote-ref-167)
167. Ex 23:28–33 [↑](#endnote-ref-168)
168. Lk 14:1–24 [↑](#endnote-ref-169)
169. Isa 25:6–9 [↑](#endnote-ref-170)
170. Re 7:9, Ps 107:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-171)
171. Jn 4:1–42, Mk 7:24–30 [↑](#endnote-ref-172)
172. Mt 8:5–13 [↑](#endnote-ref-173)
173. Lk 7:34 [↑](#endnote-ref-174)
174. Ga 3:28 [↑](#endnote-ref-175)
175. Ac 10:9–23 [↑](#endnote-ref-176)
176. Ac 10:15 [↑](#endnote-ref-177)
177. Ac 10:23 [↑](#endnote-ref-178)
178. Ac 10:34–35 [↑](#endnote-ref-179)
179. Ac 15:1–29 [↑](#endnote-ref-180)
180. Mt 26:29 [↑](#endnote-ref-181)
181. Mt 8:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-182)
182. Isa 25:6–9 [↑](#endnote-ref-183)
183. Re 7:9 [↑](#endnote-ref-184)
184. Lk 10:25–28 [↑](#endnote-ref-185)
185. Mt 26:26–30, Mk 14:22–25, Lk 22:19 – 20, Ac 2:42–47 [↑](#endnote-ref-186)
186. Ga 3:26–28

***The Syrophoenician Woman*** [↑](#endnote-ref-187)
187. Mt 15:24 [↑](#endnote-ref-188)
188. Ac 13:46, Ro 1:16 [↑](#endnote-ref-189)
189. See chapter 27 for more on the concept of "Gentile" [↑](#endnote-ref-190)
190. Mt 28:18–20

***The Samaritan Woman*** [↑](#endnote-ref-191)
191. 2Ki 17:27–33 [↑](#endnote-ref-192)
192. Ezr 4:1–2 [↑](#endnote-ref-193)
193. Ezr 4:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-194)
194. Jn 4:4 [↑](#endnote-ref-195)
195. Jn 4:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-196)
196. Dt 12:5, Dt 11:29 [↑](#endnote-ref-197)
197. Jn 4:20–24 [↑](#endnote-ref-198)
198. Mt 18:20 [↑](#endnote-ref-199)
199. 2Co 6:16 [↑](#endnote-ref-200)
200. Jn 4:39–42

***Love Your Brother*** [↑](#endnote-ref-201)
201. Mt 24:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-202)
202. Ac 9:4 [↑](#endnote-ref-203)
203. Mt 10:40 [↑](#endnote-ref-204)
204. Mt 10:42 [↑](#endnote-ref-205)
205. Mt 12:48–50, Mt 23:8, Mt 28:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-206)
206. Mt 10:42, Mt 18:6–14, Mt 25:40–45 [↑](#endnote-ref-207)
207. Ga 6:10

***Love Your Neighbor*** [↑](#endnote-ref-208)
208. Lk 3:10–14, Lk 18:18, Ac 2:37, Ac 13:46–48, Ac 16:30 [↑](#endnote-ref-209)
209. Jn 3:16 [↑](#endnote-ref-210)
210. Dt 6:5 [↑](#endnote-ref-211)
211. Le 19:18 [↑](#endnote-ref-212)
212. Mt 7:12 [↑](#endnote-ref-213)
213. Mt 5:43 [↑](#endnote-ref-214)
214. Mt 5:44 [↑](#endnote-ref-215)
215. Ho 6:6, Mt 9:13 [↑](#endnote-ref-216)
216. Lk 9:51–56 [↑](#endnote-ref-217)
217. Jn 4

***Love Your Enemy*** [↑](#endnote-ref-218)
218. Lk 10:27 [↑](#endnote-ref-219)
219. Mt 7:12 [↑](#endnote-ref-220)
220. A reverse echo of Paul's vision: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Ga 3:28) [↑](#endnote-ref-221)
221. Mt 10:28 [↑](#endnote-ref-222)
222. Ro 8:35–39 [↑](#endnote-ref-223)
223. Jn 14:30 [↑](#endnote-ref-224)
224. Ge 9:20–27 [↑](#endnote-ref-225)
225. Mk 15:21 [↑](#endnote-ref-226)
226. *"Beati pacifici quoniam filii Dei vocabuntur."* (Mt 5:9 – Latin Vulgate) [↑](#endnote-ref-227)
227. 1Pe 2:21 [↑](#endnote-ref-228)
228. Ro 12:18–19 [↑](#endnote-ref-229)
229. Ro 12:17 [↑](#endnote-ref-230)
230. Ro 12:21 [↑](#endnote-ref-231)
231. Mt 5:44 [↑](#endnote-ref-232)
232. Mt 5:9 [↑](#endnote-ref-233)
233. Ga 3:26–29

***The Dividing Wall*** [↑](#endnote-ref-234)
234. Ps 118:25 [↑](#endnote-ref-235)
235. Jn 6:14–15 [↑](#endnote-ref-236)
236. Zec 9:9–10 [↑](#endnote-ref-237)
237. Le 16 [↑](#endnote-ref-238)
238. 1Ki 8:41–43 [↑](#endnote-ref-239)
239. Jn 2:13–17 [↑](#endnote-ref-240)
240. Mk 11:18 [↑](#endnote-ref-241)
241. Ga 2:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-242)
242. Mt 24:14

***Neither Jew nor Greek*** [↑](#endnote-ref-243)
243. The word "integration" is defined as "the joining or bringing together of separate parts into a larger whole". [↑](#endnote-ref-244)
244. Ge 12:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-245)
245. Ro 15:6 [↑](#endnote-ref-246)
246. Dt 10:18, Dt 14:29, Dt 16:11–14, Dt 24:17–21, Dt 26:12–13, Dt 27:19, Ps 146:9, Je 7:5–7, Je 22:3, Zec 7:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-247)
247. Ga 6:15 [↑](#endnote-ref-248)
248. Eph 2:14–19 [↑](#endnote-ref-249)
249. Phm 8–16 [↑](#endnote-ref-250)
250. Ga 3:26–29 [↑](#endnote-ref-251)
251. Ac 22:25–29 [↑](#endnote-ref-252)
252. Ac 21:39 [↑](#endnote-ref-253)
253. Ac 16:37, Ac 22:25 [↑](#endnote-ref-254)
254. Ac 25:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-255)
255. Ga 4:26 [↑](#endnote-ref-256)
256. 1Pe 2:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-257)
257. Ac 5:29 [↑](#endnote-ref-258)
258. 1Pe 2:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-259)
259. Re 21:3–5 [↑](#endnote-ref-260)
260. 1Jn 5:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-261)
261. 2Pe 3:7 [↑](#endnote-ref-262)
262. Jn 3:16 [↑](#endnote-ref-263)
263. Jn 3:3–7 [↑](#endnote-ref-264)
264. Php 3:20 [↑](#endnote-ref-265)
265. Mk 1:15 [↑](#endnote-ref-266)
266. 1Pe 1:1 [↑](#endnote-ref-267)
267. 1Pe 2:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-268)
268. Jn 15:19 [↑](#endnote-ref-269)
269. Mt 6:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-270)
270. Ac 1:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-271)
271. Ga 3:28 [↑](#endnote-ref-272)
272. 1Co 7:20–24 [↑](#endnote-ref-273)
273. Phm 8 [↑](#endnote-ref-274)
274. Phm 9 [↑](#endnote-ref-275)
275. Phm 16 [↑](#endnote-ref-276)
276. 1Co 7:20–24 [↑](#endnote-ref-277)
277. Eph 6:5, Tt 2:9–10, 1Ti 6:1

***Integration in the First Church*** [↑](#endnote-ref-278)
278. Ac 4:4 [↑](#endnote-ref-279)
279. Ac 4:32 [↑](#endnote-ref-280)
280. Ac 4:32 [↑](#endnote-ref-281)
281. 1Co 14:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-282)
282. Eph 4:12 [↑](#endnote-ref-283)
283. 1Ti 3:8–13

***The Xenophile Church Leader*** [↑](#endnote-ref-284)
284. Ac 7:6, Ac 7:29, Eph 2:19, 1Pe 2:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-285)
285. Mt 27:7 [↑](#endnote-ref-286)
286. 1Ti 3:2, Tt 1:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-287)
287. Lk 10:38 [↑](#endnote-ref-288)
288. Mt 26:6 [↑](#endnote-ref-289)
289. Lk 9:1–6 [↑](#endnote-ref-290)
290. 3Jn 5–8 [↑](#endnote-ref-291)
291. Ac 10, Ac 16:15, 33 [↑](#endnote-ref-292)
292. Ga 3:28

***Pentecost*** [↑](#endnote-ref-293)
293. Ro 8:4 [↑](#endnote-ref-294)
294. Ga 5:14 [↑](#endnote-ref-295)
295. 1Ti 1:8 [↑](#endnote-ref-296)
296. 2Co 3:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-297)
297. Le 23:15–22 [↑](#endnote-ref-298)
298. Ac 2:41 [↑](#endnote-ref-299)
299. Ro 8:23 [↑](#endnote-ref-300)
300. Ex 19–20 [↑](#endnote-ref-301)
301. Isa 2:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-302)
302. Ex 19:16–18 [↑](#endnote-ref-303)
303. Ge 1:2 [↑](#endnote-ref-304)
304. Ex 31:18 [↑](#endnote-ref-305)
305. 2Co 3:3 [↑](#endnote-ref-306)
306. Ex 19:21 [↑](#endnote-ref-307)
307. Jn 14:26 [↑](#endnote-ref-308)
308. Ex 32:28 [↑](#endnote-ref-309)
309. Ac 2:41 [↑](#endnote-ref-310)
310. Jn 17 [↑](#endnote-ref-311)
311. Isa 56:3–7 [↑](#endnote-ref-312)
312. Isa 2:2–3 [↑](#endnote-ref-313)
313. Zec 8:23 [↑](#endnote-ref-314)
314. Ge 1:28 [↑](#endnote-ref-315)
315. Ecclesiastes 3:11 [↑](#endnote-ref-316)
316. Ro 1:18–20 [↑](#endnote-ref-317)
317. Ac 14:17 [↑](#endnote-ref-318)
318. 1Co 14:2, 14

***To All Nations*** [↑](#endnote-ref-319)
319. Jn 2:13–17 [↑](#endnote-ref-320)
320. Jn 4:20–24 [↑](#endnote-ref-321)
321. Mt 18:20 [↑](#endnote-ref-322)
322. 2Co 6:16

***Epilogue*** [↑](#endnote-ref-323)
323. Jn 4:22 [↑](#endnote-ref-324)