

Philip N. Richardson

*No Longer Strangers and Aliens, but Fellow Citizens:
Ephesians 2:12, 19 in conversation with Hellenistic
Philosophy*

Abstract:

This essay compares Paul's use of aliens, strangers, and citizens language in Eph 2:12, 19 in the wider context of the epistle with its figurative use in select Hellenistic philosophical writers. Whereas philosophers view all, or at least the virtuous, as citizens of the universe, Ephesians sees all as alienated from God, unless reconciled by Christ. Philosophy called the virtuous to live in accord with its path, disdaining the body. For Ephesians, Christ's new humanity in Christ can live God's way in the body by the mystery revealed and empowered by the Spirit.

Key Words: Ephesians, citizens, aliens, Hellenistic philosophy, figurative language

Philip N. Richardson (prichardson@onemissionsociety.org), a 2016 graduate, is the Director of Theological Education for One Mission Society (OMS) in Greenwood, Indiana. His dissertation was published as *Temple of the Living God: The Influence of Hellenistic Philosophy on Paul's Figurative Temple Language Applied to the Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018).



Introduction

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul¹ reminds them that they were at one time without Christ, alienated (*ἀπαλλοτριώω*) from the citizenship (*πολιτεία*)² of Israel and strangers (*ξένος*) to the covenants of promise (Eph 2:12). He uses similar language in Eph 2:19, relegating to the past their status as strangers (*ξένος*) and resident aliens (*πάροικος*) in contrast to their current state as citizens together with (*συμπολίτης*) the saints (probably meaning believers throughout the ages),³ and therefore members of the household of God. In Eph 2:11–22, Paul is clearly speaking of horizontal reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles in Christ, and using language which draws on his Old Testament context, speaking of circumcision and uncircumcision, Israel, covenants of promise, the law of commandments in ordinances, saints and a holy temple, which is the dwelling place of God's Spirit. At the same time, it is clear that his audience consists largely of Gentiles. He addresses them directly as formerly “you Gentiles in the flesh” (*ὁμῆς τὰ ἔθνη ἐν σαρκί*; 2:11)—a phrase that is fronted in Greek for emphasis—and also speaks to them as Gentiles in the second person in Eph 3:1. He exhorts them not to walk (behave) any longer as the Gentiles do (4:17), implying that this was their former (non-Jewish) lifestyle, as well as speaking of his apostleship to the Gentiles (3:6, 8). The plentiful use of Jewish terms, allusions to or citations from the OT and Paul's reference to Gentiles in the third person (3:6, 8) would suggest at least some Jewish Christians among the audience. However, for the reasons given above, the consensus among commentators is that Gentiles make up a high proportion of the readership.⁴

Such Gentiles would have been well aware of the status that resident aliens and citizens held in Greco-Roman society. The criteria for Roman citizenship developed over time, and citizenship could be acquired, as well as inherited.⁵ At the time of the first century, as Adela Yarbro Collins writes, “the most important criterion for defining insiders and outsiders was still citizenship” and citizens were the ultimate insiders (Yarbro Collins 1985: 188). Resident aliens were most definitely outsiders, though on a spectrum from “rank outsiders” to those close to becoming insiders (Yarbro Collins 1985: 190–91). Benjamin H. Dunning has explored the *topoi* of resident aliens and citizens and claims, “the category of the alien is a relational and even parasitic one, an outsider term dependent for its meaning(s) on a corresponding insider term—in this case, the citizen.” (Dunning 2009: 26) *Roman* citizenship became the “apogee of status across

the Mediterranean world.” (2009: 28; his italics). Gentile readers among the Pauline communities would have had some awareness of the status of aliens and citizens under Roman law,⁶ and Carmen Bernabé Ubieta has already examined Eph 2:12, 19 in reference to the status of foreigners and resident aliens in the first century.⁷

However, Paul’s figurative use of “aliens” and “citizens” language has yet to be explored in depth. When Paul’s readers did live as “Gentiles in the flesh” they would have been exposed to a variety of philosophical, religious, and cultural influences. To better understand the way such a readership might have responded to Paul’s figurative language, it is helpful to reconstruct the way an audience might have heard the text from the available data.⁸ In particular, philosophy provided a theological and moral worldview for such people, and although we have no idea what specific works Paul’s audience had or had not read, Hellenistic philosophy’s influence was pervasive and its ideas trickled down to influence even those who had not studied them (Richardson, 2018: 4–6, 43–46).

In the essay that follows, I shall seek to survey figurative references to all language referring to aliens, strangers, and citizens in the major Hellenistic philosophical writers, whether in Greek or Latin, and especially those closest to the period in which Paul wrote. One of these writers, Philo of Alexandria, is Jewish, but is also writing to a Diaspora audience, and is drawing heavily on Middle Platonic thought, while writing to a Hellenistic readership. Given the relative scarcity of sources and the significant witness of Philo to Middle Platonism, his works justify inclusion, as do others writing later than the likely date of Ephesians, whose ideas are in continuity with first century sources.⁹ More writers were consulted than those drawn upon here¹⁰ but the authors cited were the only ones to provide evidence for philosophical speculation on figurative alien and citizenship language. Given the limits of the data and the focus on figurative language, I shall not attempt to distinguish between the respective statuses of “ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι” (Eph 2:19).¹¹ However, Plutarch, Philo, and Cicero’s works provide evidence for the treatment of aliens, strangers, and citizens in this period, so while examining their writings, I shall briefly narrate their observations of the status of each category. Once my findings from the philosophical works have been examined and summarized, I shall return to Ephesians to compare what has been discovered within philosophy to the place of aliens and citizens in Eph 2:12, 19 and its wider context in the epistle.

Hellenistic philosophy: Greek writers

Epictetus

Epictetus opines that all humanity are citizens of Zeus (*Diatr.* 3.24.19), which means that they are citizens of the universe (*Diatr.* 1.9.1–2, 6; 2.10.3; 2.15.11; cf. 1.12.8), and “to reach out for the impossible is slavish and foolish; it is acting like a stranger in the universe, one who is fighting against God with the only weapons at his command, his own judgements.” (*Diatr.* 3.24.22).¹² Yet Epictetus cites, with approval, Homer’s sentiment that in another sense, all are strangers and beggars before God (*Diatr.* 3.11.4).

Marcus Aurelius

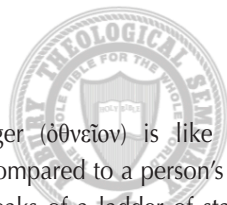
Marcus frequently compares the universe to a city or state of which humanity are citizens (e.g., *Med.* 2.16; 3.11; 4.3–4; 10.6, 15; 12.36), viewing the universe as the archetypal city (2.16); even speaking of the possibility of fitting oneself to exist in harmony with God and people as their fellow-citizens (συμπολιτεύομαι in *Med.* 10.1). Yet at the same time life is conceived as “a pilgrim’s sojourn (“ξένου ἐπιδημία”), in which the only true guide is philosophy; this consists in “keeping the divine ‘genius’ (δαίμων) within pure” (*Med.* 2.17).

Musonius Rufus

When consoling a person in exile, Musonius exclaims, “is not the universe the common fatherland of all men, as Socrates held?” (*frag.* 9.68.15–16). Thus, what some call exile is only banishment from a certain city, not from one’s true fatherland. Rather, such a one, “considers himself a citizen of the city of God which is made up of men and gods” (*frag.* 9.68.21–22).

Plutarch

Firstly, a stranger (ἄλλοτριοῦ) is like an “extraneous member” (ἀλλότριος) of the body compared to a person’s own flesh and blood (*Frat. amor.* 479C). Plutarch speaks of a ladder of status in which citizens rank under the rich and powerful but above their fellows in society (*Tranq. an.* 470B). He cites ancient laws forbidding the begetting of children by foreign women (αλλοδαπός) and even the punishment of death for those who settle among foreigners (μέτοικος) (*Ag. Cleom.* 800.2). Plutarch speaks



of the shame of Chalcedon women (*Quaest. graec.*302F) who, owing to the absence of male citizens, were forced to consort with “freedmen” and “resident aliens” (μέτοικος), and the wicked Sulpicius— of whose shameless and evil deeds— none were greater than selling Roman citizenship to freedmen and aliens at a public sale (*Sull.* 456.1–2). We hear reports of resident aliens being made citizens *en masse* (*Arat.* 1044.2–3) but also strict criteria applied to worthy candidates only (*Sol.* 91.2–92.2); exemplified by Lycurgus, who did not admit all foreigners to citizenship indiscriminately but selectively, based on their manner of life (*Ag. Cleom.* 799.X.2–4). Sertorius expressed his preference to live in Rome as her most lowly citizen rather than in exile, even if there he should be called “supreme ruler of all the rest of the world together.” (*Sert.* 580.5) Citizenship entailed duty to one’s fellow-citizens (e.g., *Comp. Ages. Pomp.* 663.4–5), and Marcus Cato declared that citizens should never accept praise for themselves unless it was of benefit to the commonwealth (*Cat. Maj.* 347.5). Even though citizenship provided status, it was possible for someone to turn it down on principle, as Xenocrates was reported as doing (*Phoc.* 755.4).

In *On Listening to Lectures* (*Rect. rat. aud.* 37F), Plutarch uses the language of strangers and aliens figuratively when comparing the different categories of newly naturalized citizens (πολιτεία) to students of philosophy. Those who have been reared in philosophy are like resident aliens (μέτοικος) who have grown up with such instruction and reasoning. Those who have no contentment in philosophy and find fault with it are like those born as aliens (ἄλλοδαπός) or strangers (ξένος). Plutarch’s writings witness to the development of philosophical thought related to this topic, citing the eclectic fifth century BCE philosopher, Empedocles, who calls himself, “a wanderer and exile from heaven” (*Exil.* 607D). Plutarch affirms this idea, agreeing that “all of us ... are sojourners (μετανάστης) here and strangers (ξένος) and exiles.” The soul existed long before the body was formed and lives as “an exile and wanderer” (*Exil.* 607D) from its true home, having left “Heaven and the Moon for earth and life on earth” (*Exil.* 607E). Indeed, the Stoics considered the universe to be a city, in which the stars are citizens (*Stoic. rep.* 1076–77F.34; although Plutarch is disputing their claims here, as does Cicero, giving voice to the critique of the Academics in *Nat. d.* 3.15.39). Zeno of Citium (c. 333–261 BCE), the founder of the Stoic school in Athens, held that, according to Plutarch, “we should consider all men to be of one community and one polity” (*Alex. fort.* 329B) and Plutarch adds

that Zeno urged all people to consider the whole inhabited earth to be their fatherland (πατρίς); not distinguishing between Grecian (native) and foreigner on the basis of ethnicity or culture but rather dividing the world into the wicked and the virtuous: the person of virtue being figuratively a “Grecian” and a wicked person a *foreigner* – ἀλλόφρων in one place, βαρβαρικός in another (*Alex. fort.* 329AB). Indeed, it is a fool who uses the term “exile” as one of reproach, rather than recognizing that good men can be poor, or foreigners, or exiles (*Exil.* 607A). In this spirit, Cimon did not distinguish between citizens and strangers in his generosity to all (*Cim.* 484.1; 485.6) and Plutarch, in his imagined discourse at the dinner of the seven wise men, has Periander praising states and rulers who even put the affairs of strangers before their own citizens (*Sept. sap. conv.* 151F).

Plutarch’s most significant work related to this topic, *On Exile* draws the conclusion then that there is no such thing as a native land by nature (*Exil.* 600E), just as Socrates was reported as saying that he was neither Athenian or Greek but a “Cosmian” (*Exil.* 600F), and in this world “no one is either exile (φυγάς) or foreigner (ξένος) or alien (ἀλλοδαπός)” (*Exil.* 601A); rather all are fellow citizens (*Exil.* 601B). He agrees with Plato that the place an “exile” chooses for themselves will then become in time their native land (*Exil.* 602C). Once such a person settles in this land and makes a livelihood for themselves, they cannot be an alien (*Exil.* 601EF). The person the world may consider merely an exile is actually at great advantage to one who limits their allegiance to a single city, making themselves “a stranger (ξένος) and an alien (ἀλλότριος) to all the rest” (*Exil.* 602B).

Philo of Alexandria

Firstly, Philo sheds light on the relationship between aliens and citizens in the first century, at least from a diaspora Jewish perspective. The immigrant or sojourner (μέτοικος) would not be expected to be as wealthy as a native or an original inhabitant. Such was not the case with Abraham, whose abundance of wealth far surpassed that expected from such a sojourner (*Abr.* 209, 252). Yet, when Abraham sought to rescue his nephew Lot, he lacked for allies against such mighty forces, as would be common for a stranger (ξένος) and immigrant (μέτοικος) (*Abr.* 231). Philo comments on the plight of Moses and his ancestors who had migrated (μετανίστημι) to Egypt because of famine (*Mos.* 1.5). He describes the Jews as strangers (ξένος) who should be regarded as suppliants and settlers (μέτοικος) seeking asylum and, “near to being citizens (πολίτης) because they differ little from

the original inhabitants (αὐτόχθων).” (*Mos.* 1.34–35) When Pharaoh made slaves of the Israelites, “who were not only free but guests (ξένος), suppliants and settlers (μέτοικος), he showed no shame or fear of the God of liberty and hospitality (ἐφέστιος) and of justice to guests (ξένιον) and suppliants, who watches over such as these.” (*Mos.* 1.36; cf. Dio Chrysostom who speaks of Zeus as “God of Hospitality” (*1 Regn.* 40–41; *Dei cogn.* 75–76)). In reality, immigrants (ξένος) are treated differently than citizens (πολίτης) (*Post.* 109). When speaking figuratively about knowledge, wisdom, and virtue, Philo elucidates fine distinctions made between the sojourner (πάροικος) who finds themselves in a liminal position—in some respects on a par with citizens (ἄστος and πολίτης), and yet in other respects, no better than foreigners (both ξένος and ἀλλοδαπός are used; *Congr.* 22–23).

A recurring theme in Philo is that the good person is more than just a citizen of their country but belongs to the whole world, and that the good and wise are only sojourners on earth. Firstly, Philo avers that the good person possesses nothing of this earthly life but, as one who has received the whole world as their share or portion, is considered a “world citizen (κοσμοπολίτης);” (*Mos.* 1.157; a phrase also used by Diog. Laert. 6.2.63). This person of virtue is obedient to the law and thus finds themselves in harmony with nature (*Opif.* 3), just as Adam, the prime exemplar, who was the first world citizen, counted the world his country, and took the ordinance of nature as its constitution (πολιτεία), which was the law to him (*Opif.* 142–43). Moses, following in Adam’s footsteps, took the world for his township (ἄστυ) and country (πατρίς) (*Conf.* 106). Such world citizens are disciples of wisdom who recognize the world as their city, a universal commonwealth (πολίτευμα) where virtue holds sway (*Spec.* 2.45; cf. *Migr.* 59). Thus, the virtuous person can declare “Every land is my native country” (“πᾶσα γῆ μοι πατρίς”) (*Prob.* 145). Another biblical model of virtue was Noah, described as an immigrant (μέτοικος) who—unlike others who found themselves in such vulnerable circumstances—refused to conform to the wicked customs of the native inhabitants (*Mos.* 2.58). Yet, appropriating this image slightly differently, those who honor a life of virtue will be ranked as native-born (αὐτόχθων), rather than merely as settlers in the land by God (μέτοικος; *Spec.* 2.170).

Philo sometimes uses such language figuratively, as in his meditation on Jacob’s blessing of Japhet. In *Sobr.* 59–69 he draws on the Stoic doctrine of the indifference of bodily and external advantages, which he contrasts with his assertion that moral beauty is the only good.

He should dwell (κατοικέω) in the houses of the soul who recognizes this truth and only sojourn (παροικέω) in the houses of others whose values focus on external things (*Sobr.* 68). Likewise, the good and wise are those who recognize that they are only sojourners on earth. Those who embrace wickedness settle down and dwell with sin, whereas the wise recognize the earth as foreign soil (ξένος), counting themselves as “strangers (ὄθνεϊος) and outlanders (ἄλλοδαπός)” and their stay in this world as only passing through (παρεπιδημέω) (*Conf.* 76). The wise are not like colonists looking for a new home, but like travelers from heaven who have come to earth merely to see and learn (*Conf.* 77; compare this with *Somn.* 1.137 where “imperishable and immortal souls equal in number to the stars” are described as citizens of the air). The wise person is only a pilgrim (μέτοικος) who is on a journey from “the camp of mortality and confusion to the divine life of peace” (*Ebr.* 100).

It is the heavenly country (οὐράνιος) which is their native land (πατρίς), where they truly live as citizens (πολιτεύομαι). Their earthly dwelling is a foreign country (ξένος) to them, they sojourn there (παροικέω) for a time, but they yearn to return to their heavenly mother city (μητρόπολις) (*Conf.* 78). Such was Abraham, who declared himself to be a sojourner and stranger (“πάροικος καὶ παρεπίδημός”), once he had died to a life of death and conceit (*Conf.* 79), thus connecting sojourning in this world with virtue. Proselytes to a new and godly commonwealth (πολιτεία) are those who spurn falsehood and embrace truth in purity (*Spec.* 1.51). Philo elaborates further, by declaring God himself to be the only citizen, whereas “all created being is a sojourner (πάροικος) and alien (ἐπίλutos).” It is a sufficient gift to wise people to accept the rank of “aliens (ἐπίλutos) and sojourners (πάροικος).” The foolish person is in an even more precarious state, being nothing more than an exile (φυγός) (*Cher.* 121). Such a person’s reason is enslaved by pleasure, making them an exile rather than a true citizen (*Opif.* 165). By contrast, all of us come into this world as if entering a foreign (ξένος) city (*Cher.* 120).

The wise person of virtue, who recognizes that they are only sojourning on earth, is like Jacob, who knew that his soul was only sojourning in the body (*Conf.* 80). This bodily existence should be perceived as a foreign land; the true fatherland (πατρίς) is the virtues perceptible through the mind (*Conf.* 81). Jacob is also described as one who sojourns (using πάροικος) in the foreign land (ξένος) of the senses (which Haran in Gen 28:10 signifies), but as a lover of virtue, has his

mind always set on returning to his true home; described variously using words such as αἴσθησις (perception), νόησις (intelligence or understanding), νοῦς (mind) and νοητός (intellectual or perceptible to the mind) in *Somn.* 1.43–46. Jacob is a citizen (πολίτης) whose dwelling is virtue (*Leg.* 3.2). Philo interprets the Lord’s words to Abram in Gen 15:13 to mean that God does not grant to the lover of virtue (φιλάρετος) the ability to dwell in his body as if in his homeland (or household: οἰκεῖος), “but only permits him to sojourn there (παροικέω), as in a foreign country (ἀλλοδαπός).” The fool seeks to dwell in the body, but the wise know that they are only sojourners (πάροικος) in the body; a foreign land (*Her.* 267; cf. also *Somn.* 1.180–81). Joseph’s brothers assured Pharaoh that they had come to sojourn in the land (Gen 47:4), which Philo expounds as a wise person’s recognition that heaven is their homeland (πατρίς), while earth is a foreign (ξένος) country. Wisdom is their true dwelling place, but their body is foreign to them (here ὀθνεῖος) in which they propose to sojourn (παρεπιδημέω) (*Agr.* 64–65). The mind of the virtuous person “is a sojourner in its corporeal place rather than an inhabitant (“πάροικος ἐν τῷ σωματικῷ τόπῳ μᾶλλον ἢ κάτοικος”).” Its fatherland is “the ether and the heaven” whereas, “its temporary abode is the earth and the earthly body, in which it is said to sojourn” (QG3.45). Logos itself is like one indigenous (αὐτόχθων) to the fatherland (πατρίς); a citizen (ἄστός) of God’s own knowledge. To others, it is like a place of refuge (thinking of cities of refuge in the Old Testament, and interpreting Gen 16:6–12), a land which is strange (ὀθνεῖος) and alien (ξένος; *Fug.* 76).

Moses, likewise, saw his body not only as a foreign land (ξένος)—as an “immigrant settler” (μέτοικος) would—but was obligated to alienate himself (using ἀλλοτριώσις) from it (*Conf.* 82). In fact, people carry about cities which are established in their souls, and true citizenship resides in these commonwealths (πολίτευμα), whether good or bad (*Conf.* 107–09). The Therapeutae, who contemplate nature and dwell in the soul alone, as citizens of both heaven and the world, are presented to the Father and Maker of all by virtue (*Contempl.* 90).

Hellenistic philosophy: Latin writers

NOT TO BE USED WITHOUT COPYRIGHT PERMISSION
Seneca OF ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Seneca expresses the view, in common with Musonius and Plutarch (following Socrates), that “Inside the world there can be found no place of exile; for nothing that is inside the world is foreign to mankind” (*Helv.* 8.5);

the wise person recognizes that every place is their country (*Helv.* 9.1; also expressed in *Ep.* 28.4). Thus, there are two commonwealths— that to which a person owes their citizenship “by the accident of birth” and a far grander one, “a vast and truly common state, which embraces alike gods and men, in which we look neither to this corner of earth nor to that, but measure the bounds of our citizenship by the path of the sun” (*De otio.* 4.1). With this perspective, our momentary dwelling in the body on earth is like a sojourn at an inn (*Marc.* 21.1; *Ep.* 120.14–15).

Cicero

Cicero’s writings, like Plutarch and Philo, provide evidence for the common perspectives held on the relationship between aliens and citizens. Foreigners certainly should not hold the same rights and privileges as citizens (*Off.* 3.11.47) nor meddle in the politics of the country where they reside as alien (*Off.* 1.34.125). There must be clear distinctions between one’s fellow citizens or countrymen and foreigners (*peregrinus*) and strangers (*alienus*) (*Amic.* 5.19; cf. *Off.* 1.42.150), without which anarchy would ensue (*Resp.* 1.43.67). Yet, while foreigners may not enjoy the same rights as citizens, the rights they do have should be respected, and to do otherwise “would destroy the universal brotherhood of man” (*Off.* 3.6.28) and “to debar foreigners (*peregrinus*) from enjoying the advantages of the city is altogether contrary to the laws of humanity” (*Off.* 3.11.47). Honorable people take care to do nothing unpleasant, even to treat “the greatest strangers” (“*alienissimus*”) as members of one commonwealth consisting of people and gods (*Quinct.* 16.51).

Cicero also speaks of what it means to be a true citizen of the universe. While not agreeing with Xenocrates, he correctly cites his view that the wise alone are kings and citizens of the world, and that a true foreigner (*peregrinus*) is someone lacking wisdom (*Acad.* 2.44.136), just as the Stoics hold all wise men to be friends (*Nat. d.* 1.44.121–22). Cicero also gives voice to the beliefs of Stoics (like Seneca) that the gods are, “united together in a sort of social community or fellowship, ruling the one world as a united commonwealth (*res publica*) or state (*urbs*).” (*Nat. d.* 1.44.121–22). Further, “this whole universe . . . [is] . . . one commonwealth (“*una civitas communis*”) of which both gods and men are members” (*Quinct.* 16.51). Like Plutarch and Musonius, Cicero acknowledges Socrates’ claim to be a native (*incola*) and citizen (*civis*) of the whole world (*Tusc.* 5.37.108), a

property he attributes to the mind (*Leg.* 1.23.62). In a speech in his defense, Cicero credits Milo with the conviction that there is no such thing as exile (following Socrates and Zeno, cited by Musonius, Plutarch and Seneca), except where there is no room for virtue (*Mil.* 37.101).

In agreement with Plutarch, Philo, and Seneca, Cicero describes existence on earth as a sojourn (*Sen.* 23.84; *Tusc.* 1.19.45). One day the soul will end its sojourn by being released from the shackles of the body, although those who have been defined by these chains will advance more slowly on their heavenly journey (*Tusc.* 1.31.76).

Summary

If we draw together some of our findings from across the spectrum of Greek and Roman writers, a number of commonalities emerge. Firstly, the universe is understood as one city or state (Plutarch, Cicero, Marcus, and Musonius), or fatherland (Musonius), or a commonwealth to which all belong (Plutarch, Philo, and Seneca). Some see the gods themselves as part of that united commonwealth (Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus). Philo and Dio Chrysostom each speak of the God of hospitality (although it must be acknowledged that Philo is indebted here to his Jewish faith, while Dio may be drawing on this common understanding of Zeus). Philo speaks of God as the only true citizen of the universe. Secondly, in relation to figurative or spiritual language, all the writers examined cite the claim of Socrates, that all are citizens of the universe and therefore there is no such thing as a true exile on earth (though Epictetus recognizes that people are also like strangers on earth in comparison to God). Having said that, Plutarch, Philo, Seneca, and Cicero count the virtuous person alone as a true citizen of earth, classing the wicked as merely foreigners. Both Middle Platonists like Plutarch and Philo, Stoics like Seneca and Marcus, and Skeptics like Cicero speak of life on earth as just a sojourn, since while the soul is in the body, it wanders from its true heavenly home. The one true guide through this wandering on earth is philosophy (Plutarch and Marcus). Turning briefly to the political realities of the day, many of the writers surveyed attest to the second-class status of the alien and the privileged position of the citizen, although Cicero affirms the common humanity of citizens and aliens and Plutarch speaks of situations in which worthy aliens might ascend to citizen status.

Ephesians

How might Paul's words in the wider context of Ephesians have spoken to those influenced by such ideas? Firstly, whereas the philosophers see the universe as one commonwealth of which all are members, Ephesians also has a comprehensive view of the universe. However, although it lays great stress on God working all things according to the counsel of his will, especially his plan of salvation (Eph 1:11 and more generally 1:3–14), the summing up of all things is still future in “the fullness of the times” and it is to take place specifically in Christ (1:10), who already rules over all things (1:20–22) with God (4:6) and fills all things (1:23; 4:10), a fullness potentially realized specifically in the church (1:23a; 3:19).

Secondly, whereas the philosophers speak of people as citizens of the universe, and assume the possibility of living in harmony with God by one's orientation of life (e.g., Marcus, Musonius, and Cicero), Ephesians speaks of its readers as those who were by nature in a state of alienation from God (χωρίς Χριστοῦ and ἀπαλλοτριώω without Christ; 2:12, 19). This alienation is described as death in trespasses and sins (2:1, and by implication, 5:14), and walking not in the ways of God and his Spirit, but the reverse: living under the rule of the evil spirit (2:2). To use a different image, it consisted of a darkened understanding and estrangement from the very life of God (4:18). Paul goes further, to describe their previous state as not only living in darkness but actually *being* darkness (5:8; cf. the polarities described between light and darkness in 5:8–13). Several times Paul uses the particle ποτέ (once, formerly) in juxtaposition with the adverb νῦν or νυνί (now) to contrast the former pitiful state of their readers without Christ with their present one in him (2:2, 3, 11, 13; 5:8).

Instead, only those in Christ enjoy a new type of humanity which corresponds to this transformation in God's eyes from alien to citizen (“in Christ” or “in him” language is prevalent in Ephesians).¹³ Christ has made something new by creating (κτίζω) one new humanity in himself out of the two groups that previously existed in enmity with each other (2:15).¹⁴ They are what has been made by God, created (κτίζω) again in Christ Jesus (2:10). Reconciliation to God and one another (ἀποκαταλλάσσω in 2:16; cf. also the plentiful references to εἰρήνη in e.g., 2:14, 15, 17; 4:3; 6:15) takes the place of alienation, rooted in a unity (ἐνότης) in the Spirit (4:3) with the potential to grow into the unity of the faith (4:13). Ephesians stresses the oneness that this new humanity shares (e.g., 4:4–6), which will one day be “summed up” (ἀνακεφαλαίωω) in a cosmic unity (1:10). Even now, the very existence

of a unified church consisting of previously alienated parties is a witness of God's wisdom to the spiritual powers (3:8–10).¹⁵ This unity among the new humanity and in its relationship to Christ is frequently emphasized by the conjoining of verbs and nouns with the prefix *συν-* meaning “together with,” such as *συγκληρονόμος*, *σύσσωμος* and *συμμέτοχος* (a commonality brought out by Max Turner in his translation “co-heirs, co-body members . . . co-sharers” (Turner 1995: 145) in 3:6, and significantly for our purposes, *συμπολίτης* in 2:19. These fellow citizens are saints of a new temple, a people called to holiness (e.g., 1:4; 4:19; 5:3, 5, 26–27). This new temple is being joined together (*συναρμολογέω*) and built together (*συνοικοδομέω*) into God's dwelling place (2:21–22; cf. similarly 4:16). Yet the growth of the new humanity into “the perfect man” is still to be attained (4:13–16) and involves both a “putting off” of the old person and a “putting on” of the new one (4:22, 24).

Plutarch and Philo's works are representative of the trope found throughout Hellenistic philosophical works which elevate virtue (*ἀρετή*) and wisdom to the highest good, and assume that a person can be guided by both, and choose the right path in a manner according to nature and/or in imitation of God.¹⁶ In regard to virtue, Ephesians also places a great emphasis on “walking” the right way (*περιπατέω*; e.g., 2:10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15; speaking of ethical practice in imitation of the Hebrew idiom), including the counsel to do so “not as unwise, but as wise” (5:15) and even to imitate God (5:1). The goal is to be holy and blameless before God (1:4); constituting a holy temple; an appropriate dwelling place for God's Spirit (2:21–22). Half the letter is taken up with instructions on how to live, such as the kind of vice and virtue lists found in other Greco-Roman writings (e.g., 4:17–5:21) including “household codes” (5:21–6:9) (Cohick, 2020: 342–48). Yet it is not assumed that this is possible for a person to choose without being spiritually awakened by Christ (see 5:14). The natural state of humanity without such intervention is a life lived “*ἐν σαρκί*” (2:3, 11). Far from being naturally capable of imitating God, such a person is literally “godless” (*ἄθεος* in 2:12).¹⁷ The innate condition of humanity is as “sons of disobedience” (2:2; 5:6) and “children of wrath” (2:3; here meaning deserving of wrath). Humanity in Christ is instead characterized as “beloved children” (5:1) and “children of light” (5:8). For this reason, they must not be “co-sharers” (*συμμέτοχος*) with such a one (5:7); that is not to partake (*συγκοινωνέω*) with them in the unfruitful works of darkness (5:11). Wisdom (1:8, 17; 3:10; 5:15), knowledge and understanding (1:9, 17; 3:3,

5, 10, 19; 4:13, 23; 5:17) and enlightenment (3:3–10; 5:8–14) is important for Ephesians, as it is for the Hellenistic philosophical tradition. However, wisdom is not something that can be acquired through the study (or path) of philosophy. Rather humankind is entirely dependent on God to reveal the *μυστήριον* (mystery), which was previously hidden to all, even to the “saints of former generations” (1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19), but is now disclosed to the holy apostles and prophets of the church (3:5). This illumination comes by the Spirit whom they have received (1:13; 2:18, 22; 3:5; 4:3–4, 30), and the way to receive more of this wisdom is to pray for it (1:17; 3:16–20; 5:18; 6:18).

Unlike other NT writings which, like the philosophers, emphasize the pilgrim’s sojourn on this earth (e.g., 1 Pet 1:17; 2:11; Heb 11:13), the perspective of Ephesians is more obviously focused on the transformation already achieved from aliens to citizens in the present age. Like Phil 3:20, this is a heavenly citizenship, but Ephesians goes even further than Philippians in speaking not just of a future hope of transformation from heaven (Phil 3:20–21) but of a union with Christ that is *already* shared with him “ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις” (in the heavenly places). *Every* spiritual blessing is now available to believers there (Eph 1:3) and the experience of the believer mirrors that of Christ, who raises us and seats us there (1:20; 2:6). To be sure, the rulers and authorities are also there (3:10; 6:12), an evil day awaits (6:13) and beyond that, an age still to come (1:21; 2:7) yet nevertheless Ephesians underscores the completed nature of salvation and the blessings that can be accessed through union with Christ in the here and now (e.g., 2:5, 8–10).

Finally, on a tentative and ancillary note to the preceding discussion, the philosophers tend to stress the alienation between soul and body and a longing for bodiless existence in an afterlife. Ephesians does not accent the importance of bodily existence like, say, 1 Corinthians, but it regularly uses “body” (1:23; 2:16; 4:4, 12, 16; 5:23, 30) and “head” imagery (1:22; 4:15; 5:23) for the relationship between Christ and the Church.¹⁸ Of course, this says nothing about Paul’s view of the physical body but he does speak comfortably about the church working like a physical human body (4:16) and openly of a positive delight in one’s own body (5:28). Although most modern commentators take Paul’s reference to reconciliation “in one body” (2:16) to refer to the church, it is certainly possible that it may have a dual reference to both the church and the physical body of Christ on the cross, and Paul chooses to speak of this reconciliation having taken

place through the *σῶψ* of Christ (2:14; speaking of his crucifixion), just as he speaks positively of the physical flesh of a person and the one flesh relationship of husband and wife (citing Gen 2:24) in 5:29, 31 despite using the term pejoratively in 2:3, 11 (Muddiman, 2001:135). Additionally, the reference to Christ being raised (1:20) is clearly to a physical resurrection, so it is noteworthy that believers are also said to be raised in like manner (2:6; cf. 5:14), even if, for now, this is not speaking of a physical resurrection in the present age.

Conclusion

Paul's figurative employment of aliens, strangers, and citizens language in Eph 2:12, 19 was compared to its use in Hellenistic philosophy, since his Gentile audience may well have been influenced by this worldview when living in "the flesh" (Eph 2:11). Philosophers understood the universe as one state to which all belonged, and viewed all people as citizens of the universe, not just their native land. However, many distinguished between the wicked, who live as foreigners in the world, and virtuous persons who are the only true citizens. All spoke of life on earth as a sojourn from their true heavenly home—just as long as the soul must dwell in the body—with philosophy as the only trustworthy guide through this earthly life. Ephesians also presents a comprehensive picture of a unified cosmos ruled by God, but this unity is yet to be completely realized. In their natural state, it is not the case that all or even those who live virtuously are citizens of the universe. Rather, they exist in a state of alienation from God until the estranged parties are reconciled to God and one another through Christ and his cross. Ephesians still calls for virtuous living, but this cannot be attained by the study and practice of philosophy. Instead, this wisdom or "mystery" must be revealed to them by the gospel through the Spirit. Readers are not merely sojourning as strangers and aliens on earth but enjoy a new citizenship through a union already available with Christ in the "heavenly places" with its concomitant spiritual blessings. Rather than the physical body being a hindrance to the soul, Paul uses positive imagery for both body and even (sometimes) for flesh; viewing the flesh as the place where Christ brought reconciliation and where believers may live out their lives as citizens with all of God's saints.

End Notes

¹ I add the usual caveat that the authorship and audience of Ephesians is disputed. For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to the author as Paul. Although I take the position that Paul is the author, nothing in this discussion rests on this fact nor on whether the audience are solely residents of Ephesus or a collection of churches in two or more cities in Asia Minor.

² The word can mean right of citizenship, commonwealth/state, or way of life (“πολιτεία,” BDAG, 845). Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Bible Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 137 argues for “commonwealth”, but as Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 356–57 avers, the reference to fellow-citizens in 2:19 suggests “citizenship” as the primary referent here, with e.g., Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 241 and Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 257–58. Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 155 makes a good case for relating all three possible senses to this reference.

³ Agreeing with Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 151; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 392–96; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 179.

⁴ E.g., Best, *Ephesians*, 3–4.

⁵ For a comprehensive study, see especially Adrian N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), and in shorter form: Adrian N. Sherwin-White, “The Roman Citizenship A Survey of Its Development into a World Franchise,” *ANRW* 1.2 (1972): 23–58.

⁶ See Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 47–66 and Francis Lyall, “Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Aliens and Citizens,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 48.1 (1976): 3–14.

⁷ Carmen Bernabé Ubieta, “‘Neither *Xenoi* Nor *Paroikoi*, *Sympolitai* and *Oikeioi Tou Theou*’ (Eph 2:19): Pauline Christian Communities: Defining a New Territoriality,” in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honor of Bruce J. Malina*, ed. John J. Pilch (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 260–80; Dunning, “Strangers”.

⁸ See a more comprehensive explanation and basis for this approach in Philip N. Richardson, *Temple of the Living God: The Influence of Hellenistic Philosophy on Paul’s Figurative Temple Language Applied to the Corinthians* (Eugene, OR.: Pickwick, 2018), 2–3.

⁹ See more on the justification for this method in Richardson, *Temple*, 39–40, 121–23. Moses Chin, “A Heavenly Home for the Homeless: Aliens and Strangers in 1 Peter,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1 (1991): 96–112 at

106–108 touches on some of the references I shall cite from Philo, but is not comprehensive.

¹⁰ E.g., I also examined the works of Aelian, Aelius Aristides, Alcinous, Apollonius of Tyana, Apuleius, Arius Didymus, Galen, Aulus Gellius, Fronto, Hierocles, Lucretius, Maximus of Tyre, Petronius, Sextus Empiricus, and Valerius Maximus.

¹¹ For careful study on the meaning and use of *πάροικος*, which pertains more to the concept of an alien with right to residence see e.g., K. L. Schmidt and M. A. Schmidt, “*πάροικος*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 5, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 841–53 and John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 24–49, with special reference to 1 Peter. On *ξένος* as pertaining more to foreigner status, implying fewer rights and only temporary residency, see especially Gustav Stählin, “*ξένος*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 5, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 1–36.

¹² All translations provided in this section are taken from the respective Loeb Classical Library editions.

¹³ See e.g., Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 108–09 for examples.

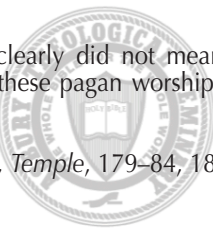
¹⁴ Without thereby eradicating all ethnic and cultural differences between them, see Lionel J. Windsor, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians After Supersessionism: Christ’s Mission Through Israel to the Nations*, New Testament After Supersessionism (Eugene, OR.: Cascade, 2017), 143–46.

¹⁵ See further on this theme in Max Turner, “Mission and Meaning in Terms of ‘Unity’ in Ephesians,” in *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell*, eds. Antony Billington, Tony Lane, and Max Turner (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995), 138–66. The theme of unity is recognized by commentators as central to Ephesians; e.g., Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 102–03.

¹⁶ See for example the summaries in Richardson, *Temple*, 85–86, 103–04, 108–09.

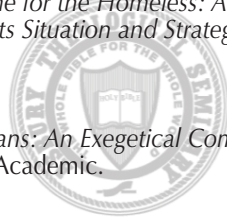
¹⁷ Although this clearly did not mean “atheist” in the modern sense. According to Paul, these pagan worshipers of many gods failed to worship the one true God.

¹⁸ See Richardson, *Temple*, 179–84, 189–92.



Works Cited

- Barth, Markus
1974 *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday.
- Bernabé Ubieta, Carmen
2001 “‘Neither *Xenoi* Nor *Paroikoi*, *Sympolitai* and *Oikeioi Tou Theou*’ (Eph 2:19): Pauline Christian Communities: Defining a New Territoriality.” In *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honor of Bruce J. Malina*, edited by John J. Pilch, 260–80. Leiden: Brill.
- Best, Ernest
1998 *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Chin, Moses
1991 “A Heavenly Home for the Homeless: Aliens and Strangers in 1 Peter.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1: 96–112.
- Cohick, Lynn H.
2020 *The Letter to the Ephesians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Dunning, Benjamin H.
2009 *Aliens and Sojourners: Self as Other in Early Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
2006 “Strangers and Aliens No Longer: Negotiating Identity and Difference in Ephesians 2.” *Harvard Theological Review* 1, no. 99: 1–16.
- Elliott, John H.
1981 *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Hoehner, Harold W.
2002 *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Lincoln, Andrew T.
1990 *Ephesians*. Word Bible Commentary. Dallas: Word.
- Lyll, Francis
1976 “Roman Law in the Writings of Paul—Aliens and Citizens.” *Evangelical Quarterly* 48.1: 3–14.



- 1984 *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Muddiman, John
2001 *The Epistle to the Ephesians*. Black's New Testament Commentaries. London: Continuum.
- Richardson, Philip N.
2018 *Temple of the Living God: The Influence of Hellenistic Philosophy on Paul's Figurative Temple Language Applied to the Corinthians*. Eugene, OR.: Pickwick.
- Schmidt, K. L., and M. A. Schmidt
1967 "πάροικος." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 5*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, 841–53. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Sherwin-White, Adrian N.
1972 "The Roman Citizenship A Survey of Its Development into a World Franchise." *ANRW* 1.2: 23–58.
1973 *The Roman Citizenship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stählin, Gustav
1967 "ξένος." In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 5*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, 1–36. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Thielman, Frank
2010 *Ephesians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
- Turner, Max
1995 "Mission and Meaning in Terms of 'Unity' in Ephesians." In *Mission and Meaning: Essays Presented to Peter Cotterell*, eds. Antony Billington, Tony Lane, and Max Turner, 138–66. Carlisle: Paternoster.
- Windsor, Lionel J.
2017 *Reading Ephesians and Colossians After Supersessionism: Christ's Mission Through Israel to the Nations*. New Testament After Supersessionism. Eugene, OR.: Cascade.
- Yarbro Collins, Adela
1985 "Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Revelation and Its Social Context." In *To See Ourselves as Others See Us': Christian Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, eds. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs, 187–218. Missoula: Scholars Press.