

A Biblical View of Immigration

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Ask any Christian what they think about immigrants coming to America, and you'll probably get a quick opinion. Ask them again what they think about foreigners hopping a fence without the proper documentation, and you're bound to get a passionate response. Follow up your question with: "**Where does the Bible teach that?**" and you'll probably get frustrated silence, perhaps bewilderment. *Why one would care to know what the Bible says about it?* It's almost as if the Bible would do best to stay out of the discussion.

But what does the Bible say about immigration? And should Christians oppose and help send away immigrants who arrive in the United States without proper documentation?

The Old Testament

Laws and narratives about immigrants are plentiful in the Old Testament. Israelites were commanded to provide for immigrants through an ancient agrarian welfare system, where foreigners could glean from an Israelite's field (Lev 19:10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-22; cf. Ruth) and were to receive a portion of a third-year tithe stored up in the cities (Deut 14:23-29; 26:12-13). They participated in Israel's covenant by resting on the Sabbath (Exod 10:10; 23:12; Deut 5:14) and were to be paid in a timely manner for their work (Deut 24:15). They were to receive justice in the courts (Deut 1:16-17) and were not to be taken advantage of by the powerful elite (Deut 24:17-18; 27:19). In other words, immigrants—regardless of their faith commitment—were to be treated with care, honor, and dignity because they were created in God's image.

Now, some texts forbid foreign marriages, but these have to do more with syncretism (blending two religions) and not ethnocentrism (ethnic superiority), as the positive portrayals of Rahab (Josh 2) and Ruth (Ruth 1) indicate.

The Prophets have a very strong view of immigration. They frequently call down heavy fire on anyone who claims to be a follower of Yahweh and mistreats a foreigner. You can't claim to be a believer and mistreat the resident alien (Jer 22:3; Ezek 22:7, 29; Mal 3:5; cf. Ps 94:6). On the flip-side, to care for immigrants is good evidence that one actually believes in God (Jer 7:4-8; Zech 7:8-10). As such, the OT prophets would have been ran out of some churches today, probably following the ironic claim of being unbiblical.

New Testament

This theme of caring for foreigners thumps its way through Scripture and doesn't miss a beat when it comes to the New Testament. In many ways, it becomes more intensified. Between Jesus's outreach to the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-20), his rebuke of James and John's racist violence (Luke 9:51-53), countless encounters with other Samaritans (e.g. Luke 17:11-19), His famed parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:28-35), and His vision to reach all ethnic groups with the gospel (Matt 8:11-13; 28:18-20)—**Jesus agrees with the OT prophets. Love and care for foreigners is evidence of truth faith.** Jesus could not be more explicit than he was in his longest description of judgment day, when He made caring for the poor, outcast, prisoner, *and immigrant* to be necessary evidence for true faith. On judgment day, Jesus will look at true Christians and say: "**I was a stranger and you welcomed me**" (Matt 25:35, 38) and look at those damned to hell and say "**I was a stranger and you did not welcome me**" (Matt 25:43). As M. Dan Carroll says: "To ignore any of these people, these 'little ones', is tantamount to refusing Jesus himself" (Carroll, [Christians at the Border](#), 123).

From Acts to Paul to the General Letters (with varying degrees of emphasis), the rest of the New Testament reinforces this theme: Christianity is a foreigner-loving, immigrant-caring, nation-welcoming, other-centered and otherness-embracing religion. To fail to cherish this truth is to deny an important theme in Scripture—the prophets called it a denial of faith itself.

So what is the Christian response to undocumented immigrants? Find out tomorrow in my follow up post!