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5 Hot Topics, Part 1

Immigration

A LifeWay research poll commissioned by the Evangelical Immigration Table in 2015 found that only twelve percent of evangelicals cited the Bible as the primary influencer of their thinking about immigration.[[1]](#footnote-2) In addition to immigration being a social or political problem, it is a theological issue. I am eager to know what the word of God, the Bible, has to say on this issue and I want my opinion and my stance to be informed by the word of God. Throughout this series I will argue that while we need to be politically informed and aware of current policies and trends, we are to be anchored in historic biblical teaching and that that teaching ought to be our *primary* source as we figure out where to stand. In this first in a series of sermons on contemporary and potentially divisive issues, I want to reason from the scriptures. I am taking my cue from Paul as he functioned as an apologist and evangelist, in a synagogue in Thessaloniki. Acts 17:2 describes Paul’s stance:

*Then Paul, as his custom was, went to them, and for three Sabbaths* ***reasoned with them from the scriptures.***

Those who study movements of people groups, migrations, usually speak of two factors at play in migrations.[[2]](#footnote-3)

1. Pull
2. Push

A *pull* factor is anything that calls you *out* of a country. It can be a rumor that things are better in another region. It can be the promise of freedom or asylum or a better quality of life. That news *pulls* you from your home and has you seeking a better country.

A *push* factor is usually negative. Something happens where you are and you need to leave: war, severe famine, severe drought, lack of support services so that your family can thrive, political oppression.
The Bible describes the people of God, at the beginning of civilization, as immigrants.

Deuteronomy 26:5

*My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt* (PULL) *and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.*

Genesis 12:1

*Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country* (PUSH) *, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.”*

As we look at this issue, we must be very cautious. There are passages in the Old Testament which are particular to Israel, and they do not apply to the United States of America in 2022. There are other passages, and the context will determine which is which, that espouse a general principle which can and should be applied across the board...and across the world.

An example of a general principle that might be universally applied is in Leviticus 19:33-34:

*33 ‘And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. 34 The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*

Another instructive passage is in Exodus 22:21.

*You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

That was said to Israel, but it is such good counsel that *anyone* in *any* culture or country could and should heed it.

Israel is told to be kind to the stranger and to remember that they themselves were once immigrants. On some topics, the Bible does not give clear guidance. Sometimes we must arrive at our position by inference rather than clear command. The Bible does not address stem cell research or student loan forgiveness or free lunch programs for students from low-income families.

The Bible is, however, clear on immigration. The Bible is pro-immigrant, pro-alien. These passages from Exodus and Leviticus are OT versions of the Golden Rule found in Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31. We are to treat people as we would want to be treated.

Most of us probably don't have issues with welcoming immigrants. The problem for most is *illegal* immigration. People want more robust border control and enforcement of laws pertaining to *how* one enters the country. We have laws and we should, most of the time, obey them. I say “most of the time” because occasionally we might find ourselves in a situation in which to obey the law will have us act without compassion toward the immigrant and that’s simply wrong. For example, if a person is undocumented or has come into the country improperly and they come to us for food, we could cite the laws and say an illegal immigrant has no right to social services. But to say that, violates the command of God that we care for the poor, the vulnerable, the disadvantaged. At that point, we place the laws of God in a higher position than the laws of the nation.

**Illus.**

Acts 5 tells the story of imprisoned apostles. They are instructed to stop preaching Jesus. An angel of the Lord frees them from prison and instructs them to stand in the temple and preach Jesus. The authorities find them and remind them of what they, the lawmakers, said. The apostles respond, “*We ought to obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:17-29). Religious groups have designated themselves and their facilities as sanctuaries and have intentionally sought undocumented persons and provided harbor and refuge for them. Is that wrong? These groups would see this as obeying the higher law of God rather than humanity’s law. The argument gets complex because Romans 13 says that government is of God. I will address this more substantially in a future sermon in this series. For now, let us agree that governmental law and order are important. However, they are always subordinate to the higher law of God regarding care for the poor, the vulnerable, the disenfranchised.

In the Bible, the Exodus, the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, was God’s way of protecting mistreated immigrants. The short summary: The children of Israel went to Egypt to start a better life. They were mistreated and enslaved there. God brought them out. Let’s look at Exodus 1:1-14.

**Israel’s Suffering in Egypt**

**1**Now these *are* the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt; each man and his household came with Jacob: **2**Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; **3**Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; **4**Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. **5**All those who were descendants of Jacob were seventy persons (for Joseph was in Egypt *already*). **6**And Joseph died, all his brothers, and all that generation. **7**But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.

**8**Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. **9**And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel *are* more and mightier than we; **10**come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and *so* go up out of the land.” **11**Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. **12**But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. **13**So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. **14**And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve *was* with rigor.

Whether we are ready to admit it or not, some of our fears regarding immigration have to do with the coloring of the nation. Some simply don't want more people of color coming into the country.

**Illus.**

Several years ago, former radio talk show host Jerry Bowyer debated Pat Buchanan. Bowyer asked Buchanan if 200 years from now, this country is filled with people who read and love Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, but who are overwhelmingly dark-skinned, would that be a good thing? Buchanan said that would be a tragedy and a disaster.[[3]](#footnote-4)

In the OT, Israel was not merely to *tolerate* an outsider. They were to *love* them.

Deuteronomy 10:19:

*Therefore, love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

In our response to the foreigner, the stranger, the immigrant, we are to take our cue from our God.

The mission statement from the website of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services:

*The USCIS upholds America’s promise as a nation of welcome and possibility with fairness, integrity, and respect for all we serve[[4]](#footnote-5)*

In Deuteronomy 10, look at verses 17 and 18:

***17****For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.* ***18****He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.*

Maybe instead of patterning our immigration stance after a political party, we ought to imitate God!

The OT uses two words to describe migrants, people on the move. *Ger* describes a sojourner, a person who feels at home. They are permanent residents. *Nokri* refers to the person who is a stranger and who is not feeling at home. They own no property, have no vested interests. Those linguistic distinctions might help a nation shape policy but those distinctions should not change how the Church responds to such people. We are to love and welcome every immigrant, every sojourner, every alien, every vulnerable person.

In multiple biblical passages the foreigner is grouped with the fatherless and the widow. This trio of vulnerability is important to God. See Deuteronomy 24:19-21; 27:19; Psalm 146:9; Jeremiah 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5.

Our nation has been working on immigration policy for at least 140 years.

From [ballotpedia.org](http://ballotpedia.org):

*Among the first laws passed to limit immigration were the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Immigration Act, both enacted in 1882. The Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the entry of Chinese laborers into the country for 10 years, while the Immigration Act established a 50-cent tax to enter the country, to be paid by each immigrant upon entry. The Immigration Act also excluded "any convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of him or herself without becoming a public charge" from entry altogether.*

*The Immigration Act of 1882 set a precedent for barring categories of individuals from entry, and the next major immigration law, the Immigration Act of 1891, expanded these categories to include polygamists, individuals convicted of crimes of moral depravity, and those with contagious diseases that posed a threat to public health. The law also created the first federal agency dedicated to enforcing immigration law, the Office of the Superintendent of Immigration within the Treasury Department*.

We cannot, practically, simply open all our borders and say, “come on in”. That would be to unleash chaos upon the cities in which those immigrants would settle. We do have a cap as to how many immigrants we, as a nation, admit into the country each year. The numbers are not simple. There are complicated formulae used to arrive at the numbers. However, I found some numbers that, while flexible and having exemptions attached therefore, help us understand the enormity of the issue.

From immigration[road.com](http://road.com):

*The annual limit for total number of legal immigrants is 675,000. This is the maximum allotment of visa numbers per year, covering both foreign nationals who receive immigrant visas at consular offices abroad, and those who adjust status within the United States.*

*675,000 is a "flexible" cap, with certain categories of immigrants exempted from the limit (for example, immediate relatives of U.S. Citizens and certain special immigrants) The annual limit is divided into three main categories: family sponsored, employment-based, and diversity visa*

*675,000 = 480,000 + 140,000 + 55,000*

We only have so much housing and so many dollars for assistance while these immigrants settle. You cannot add ten thousand people to a city without straining that city’s infrastructure in some way. Schools must find room for additional unexpected students. Housing complexes must assess their occupancy numbers and see if there are apartment units available. Hospitals must assess their readiness for new patients, in need of care in their new city.

The bible portrays God as being in favor of borders and boundaries and limits and markers.

Deuteronomy 32:8

*When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations,*

*When He separated the sons of Adam,*

*He set the boundaries of the peoples*

*According to the number of the children of Israel.*

In Ezekiel 47:13-23 you will read details of the borders of the Promised Land.

**I am not arguing for a position in which, in the name of God, we open all borders and have no plan for accommodating, with dignity, the immigrant. Rather, I am arguing for increasingly open *hearts*, that see the stranger, the alien, the migrant, as loved *by* and valuable *to* God. I am arguing for our being the welcoming voice of God in those sojourners’ ears.**

Practical steps:

1. INFORMATION

Get informed. Study the issue. We’d have to work hard to be ignorant about this issue today. There are sooooo many free articles, lectures, webinars and seminars available. From the comfort of our homes, we can open our laptops and go to school on any subject, including immigration.

1. IMPLEMENTATION

Act. Begin a friendship with a person from a different ethnic group. We will be announcing, shortly, an opportunity for us to host a Congolese congregation from Clarkston, for an event here. As we did at the baby shower event on July 9, this past summer, we want to show up and extend ourselves and our hospitality.

3. SUPPLICATION

Pray. Let us make this issue, and our response to it, a matter of prayer. God cares about the immigrant and so should we.

M. Daniel Carroll, in his book, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church and the Bible*, describes God as having “a deep love for the needy and disenfranchised, whoever they are and whatever the cause of their situation.”

May we all have that same deep love.

Amen

1. LifeWay Research, “Evangelical Views on Immigration”, February 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Immigration and Christianity: Walls, Exiles, and Migration-

Faith + Lead.faithlead.luthersem.edu/immigration-and-christianity [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Forum: The Bible is unabashedly pro-immigrant. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. June 25, 2006 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)