

THE BLEEDING OF OUR BORDERS

Selected Scriptures

In this lesson we look at the subject of immigration through the lens of Scripture.

OUTLINE

As of 2016, the problem of refugees and undocumented immigrants is broached almost daily in the American and international news cycles. Christians are torn between compassion toward strangers in our midst and an obligation to obey civil laws. What is the biblical perspective?

- I. The Potential of Immigration**
- II. The Problems With Immigration**
 - A. Problems With Legal Immigration
 - B. Problems With Illegal Immigration
- III. The Past of Immigration**
- IV. The Principles of Immigration**
 - A. God's People Are to Assist the Stranger
 - B. God's People Are to Accept the Stranger
 - C. God's People Are to Assimilate the Stranger
- V. The Perfection of Immigration**

OVERVIEW

Immigration has become a hot political and social issue creating sharp division in the United States. But historically, immigration has been part of our national DNA. Our nation's historic attitude toward immigrants is eloquently expressed in the poetic words of Emma Lazarus engraved on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

American immigration began with the Puritans in the early 1600s who sought religious freedom. Then, over two centuries, hundreds of thousands of Africans were forcibly brought to America as slaves. From 1820 through 2010, the United States attracted 80 million newcomers—60 percent of all the world's immigrants. And the rate has ballooned in the twenty-first century with almost 14 million arriving between 2000 and 2010.¹

In the last few decades, the pattern of immigration in America has shifted: fewer from Europe, more from the Middle East and Asia, and the largest segment from Latin America, especially Mexico. The hot-button issue in America regarding immigration at present is the number of undocumented (illegal) immigrants, which is estimated at 13 million. What to do about undocumented immigrants is a divisive issue in America.

THE POTENTIAL OF IMMIGRATION

Americans love the diversity of cultures, food, music, and even holidays that result from centuries of immigration. People not born in the United States now make up large proportions of small business owners. Multitudes of immigrants also work as gardeners, nannies, cooks, policemen, maids, teachers, farm workers, construction workers, entertainers, and athletes.

But there is another way immigrants are impacting our society: spiritually. In a day when American Christians are feeling marginalized by American secularism, many immigrants, especially from Latin America, are bringing their vibrant faith to our churches. Joseph Castleberry, who spent 20 years on the mission field in Latin America, refers to these immigrants as "the new Pilgrims." As the first Pilgrims brought their vibrant faith to the New World, so the new Pilgrims are bringing their own faith to an America that is declining in religious vitality.²

Seventy-five percent of those who migrate to America profess to be Christians when they come to this country. That's five percent higher than the number of American residents who claim to be Christians. And the faith of these immigrants reveals an amazing intensity and sincerity that will compound their effect on America's faith.³

THE PROBLEMS WITH IMMIGRATION

Working against the perceived immigration advantages are several growing and unsolved problems with both legal and illegal immigration.

Problems With Legal Immigration

Employment: American workers have lost jobs to immigrants who are willing to work for lower wages. And many have dropped out of the labor force altogether. The U.S. Department of Labor suggests that cheap immigrant labor is a substantial cause of the lack of growth in wages. Immigration also hurts the countries from which people emigrate as well-educated and highly-skilled workers seek out better-paying jobs in America. Many students come to the U.S. for education and never return home.

Another growing problem is the failure of some ethnic groups to integrate into American life. Immigrants used to assimilate into the American "melting pot." Yes, America slowly changed over time with that assimilation. But today many ethnic groups refuse to assimilate and expect America to change to accommodate their preferences. An example is public schools in some southwestern border states where the Mexican flag is flown along with the American flag.

Lack of learning English is another flashpoint—some immigrants refuse to learn English. Their children grow up unable to find well-paying jobs due to lack of English language skills. Adherence to religious customs can also be a problem as illustrated by many Muslim communities of immigrants. Some American Muslim communities function more and more autonomously, setting up their own community standards and laws. Because radical Islamic groups like the Muslim Brotherhood encourage and support these walled-off communities, they can become breeding grounds for anti-American and terroristic sentiments.

Many Americans are afraid that what has happened in Europe will happen in America. An open-arm policy to Muslim immigrants has resulted in an increase in radical Islamic terrorism in France, Germany, and England. Nearly all acts of terrorism in America have been committed by radicalized Muslims.

Problems With Illegal Immigration

According to three U.S. government agencies, illegal immigrants to America commit an extremely high number of crimes. More than 55,000 illegal aliens are imprisoned in the U.S. They have been arrested 459,614 times—an average of eight arrests per person. The crimes they have committed run the gamut: violent crimes, sex crimes, drug crimes, vehicle crimes, and more.⁴

The cost for social, educational, medical, and government services to illegal immigrants is staggering. By law, hospital emergency rooms cannot turn anyone away, and so many immigrants go there for medical services even when they are not emergencies. This results in crowded facilities that prevent true emergencies from being addressed. America's second-largest maternity-service hospital recently delivered 16,000 babies in one year, 70 percent of which were to illegal immigrant mothers in the first three months of that year. The cost? \$70.7 million. The hospital subsequently had to add Spanish-speaking staff. And the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School now includes Spanish language requirements to its curriculum.⁵

The cost of social services for illegal immigrants is tens of billions of dollars annually. The drain on resources has put an unsustainable burden on the budgets of many smaller communities.

Perhaps the biggest problem facing America is that illegal immigration is just that: illegal. Our government has failed for years to address illegal immigration and now the problem is of crisis proportions. We have laws that are not being enforced, which creates an anarchist mentality in the society. Voting rights have long-term consequences. When illegal immigrants are allowed to vote they will vote for candidates and parties that will continue to provide free benefits and lax regulations. Who would vote for a political candidate who promises to make one's life harder?

These problems cause many to worry about America's future—and rightfully so.

THE PAST OF IMMIGRATION

God's plan for one human family speaking one human language was thwarted by sin. Humanity was divided into groups as seen in the story of the Tower of Babel. The pride of the people to assume control over their own destiny caused God to confuse their languages. While that judgment stopped their prideful tower-building, it resulted in the birth of ethnic groups that populated the world (Genesis 11:1-9).

Dividing humanity into nations (Acts 17:26-27) has made it harder for humans to unite in powerful rebellion against God, creating a fractured human race. That is the price of sinful human pride and lust for power in the face of God. Modern one-world-government movements are not the will of God. Such a movement will characterize the sinful end times under the rule of the Antichrist.

So how are Christians to respond to those who show up at our borders or cross our borders illegally?

THE PRINCIPLES OF IMMIGRATION

In Scripture we find principles for addressing the question of foreigners living in our midst or seeking refuge.

God's People Are to Assist the Stranger

God's admonition to Israel to care for strangers and sojourners was based not just on compassion but on their own history as "strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9). Travel in ancient times was treacherous; hospitality could mean the difference between life and death. Jeremiah exhorted King Zedekiah to "do no wrong and do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow" (Jeremiah 22:3). The prophets were not kind to those who oppressed strangers in their midst (Ezekiel 22:29; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5).

God's People Are to Accept the Stranger

The Old Testament notes many non-Israelites who were accepted within Israel: Rahab a Canaanite (Joshua 6:25) and Ruth a Moabite (the book of Ruth) are good examples. Both were honored in Israel and both were ancestors of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5-6). Uria the Hittite (2 Samuel 11:1-17) and Ittai the Gittite (2 Samuel 15:19-22) were both soldiers loyal to King David. Doeg the Edomite was King Saul's chief herdsman (1 Samuel 21:7).

Jesus was accepting and welcoming of non-Israelites like the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26) and a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21-28). And He made a Samaritan man the hero in a story He told about compassion (Luke 10:25-37). And Peter made it clear that "God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34-35), a stance later affirmed by the apostle Paul (Galatians 3:28).

God's People Are to Assimilate the Stranger

Reading those examples it is evident that in ancient Israel strangers (non-Israelites) who wanted to live in Israel were to be assimilated. They were subject to the same laws as were the native Israelites (Leviticus 18:26). Strangers (immigrants) were not free to

live as they pleased. This seems harsh, but it was to keep at bay pagan customs and beliefs that could weaken Israel's faith and relationship with God over time. Strangers were subject to capital punishment just as Israelites were (Leviticus 24:16; Numbers 15:30).

Immigrants to Israel were expected to work and make their own way. When it came time to build the temple in Jerusalem, Solomon put 153,600 aliens to work as construction workers (2 Chronicles 2:17).

The principle was clear: If aliens would accept the culture and contribute to the national economy, they were welcomed. If they were unwilling to assimilate, they would be unwelcome.

THE PERFECTION OF IMMIGRATION

The ultimate goal of God's plan is to reunite humanity, restoring the unity planned in the beginning. Revelation 7:9-10 pictures a throng "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (NIV) worshipping God in heaven. Though we do not see that unity among nations and people today, we will in eternity. Peter referred to it as the "restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21). Even the prophets foresaw unity among humanity: Egyptians, Assyrians, Israelites together, "a blessing in the midst of the land" (Isaiah 19:24). The idea of peace between Israel and her Arab neighbors seems like a dream today but the day will come when the temple of God "shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7). "In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zechariah 8:23).

Christ's millennial kingdom will represent a time of peace and unity among all men due to the righteous reign of Christ as King. Every person is created in the image of God and is of great value to Him. That value will be recognized and celebrated.

We don't have that now, but we are enjoined to love others today with the same love God has always shown us (1 John 4:11). Therefore, we must treat strangers and foreigners among us as image-bearers of God, people whom He loves. The challenge is to know how to express that love in the midst of an unsolved problem like immigration and border security.

The problem centers on civil law. Scripture says we are to obey civil law because it is instituted by God for purposes of order and the safety of citizens (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-14). America has immigration laws that our own government has failed to enforce. The result is millions of undocumented immigrants living among us.

A group of evangelical Christian leaders gathered in 2012 and produced a statement calling for immigration reform consistent with biblical principles. It contained well-thought-out recommendations, but of course the group had no power of enforcement. They could only add a biblical voice to the national discussion.

Rightly or wrongly, we have foreigners and strangers living among us. It is as if the mission field has come to America! James Kessler, in the weekly magazine of the Assemblies of God Church, asked this question: "How should Christians respond to the overwhelming tide of immigration—the influx of foreign, anti-Christian cultures and religions?" He answered his question by saying, "It is imperative that we take a new, long look at Christ's command and develop a responsible attitude toward Home Missions. America has become a mission field in the truest sense."⁶

As of this writing, the church I pastor in El Cajon, California, sponsors five international congregations: Arabic, Filipino, Iranian, Iraqi, and Hispanic. Our city is home to the largest population of Iraqi immigrants in the U.S.—approximately 25,000. Each of these five groups has worship services in their own language ranging in size from 30 to 700. We were recently given a church property in Encinitas, California, where we transmit by satellite English services in the morning and Spanish services in the afternoon. These two services reach around 900 Hispanics each week. Because our Hispanic pastor is such an excellent communicator, the two Hispanic TV stations in our area have given us two hours of free airtime to broadcast the Hispanic services. Almost every week in our main church service we hear testimonies of believers who are baptized—and often a translator is needed!

The point is, while our government sorts out the "immigration crisis" from a legal and practical standpoint, we can minister to the strangers and foreigners who are in our midst. In a Providential way, God has allowed millions of people to come to our country, many of whom have never been exposed to the Gospel of Christ at all. And we can tell them! We can show them how much God loves them by demonstrating that we love them.

Samuel Rodriguez has summarized the issue well:

Immigration reform is both a vertical and horizontal issue. Vertically, the heart of God stands moved by the plight of immigrants and their suffering. Horizontally, passing immigration reform will serve as a reconciliatory prescription for a nation divided by partisan politics.

Accordingly, it is the cross that prompts us to lift our hands toward heaven and to stretch our hands toward our neighbor . . . It is the cross that compels us to declare that a human being cannot be illegal. It is the cross that drives us to reconcile the rule of law (Rom 13) with treating the immigrant as one of our own (Lev. 19).⁷

There is no better way to bring heaven to earth than to reach out to the strangers and foreigners among us and share the love of Christ.

Notes:

1. "US Immigration History Statistics," accessed March 18, 2016, <http://m.emmigration.info/us-immigration-history-statistics.htm>.
2. Joseph Castleberry, Ed.D., *The New Pilgrims: How Immigrants Are Renewing America's Faith and Values* (TN: Worthy Publishers, 2015).
3. *Ibid.*, 4.
4. Summarized from Jim Kouri, "Illegal aliens linked to rise in crime statistics," *Renew America*, June 22, 2006, <http://www.renewamerica.com/columns/kouri/060622>. Based on statistics from the Government Accounting Office, U.S. Department of Justice, and National Security Institute. Accessed March 21, 2016.
5. Summarized from a circulating email confirmed by Snopes.com, August 2015, <http://www.snopes.com/politics/immigration/parkland.asp>. Accessed March 16, 2016.
6. James Kessler, "New Dimensions in Mission America," *Pentecostal Evangel*, August 4, 1985, 26.
7. Samuel Rodriguez, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2013), foreword.
8. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153992/150-Million-Adults-Worldwide-Migrate.aspx>. Accessed May 14, 2016.

APPLICATION

1. After the Flood, what was the eventual state of mankind? (Genesis 11:6a)
 - a. What was God's means of judgment that resulted in groups and eventually nations? (Genesis 11:7-9)
 - b. What particular act of emigration changed the course of world history? Where did this family travel "from" and "to"? (Genesis 11:31; 12:1)
 - c. What did the writer to the Hebrews call these early migrants? (Hebrews 11:13)
 - d. What is the chief motivation for migrants? What are they seeking? (Hebrews 11:14, 16)
 - e. What is the better country all believers are seeking?
2. In times of geo-political turmoil, on what can we rely? (Acts 17:26)

3. What command did Moses give to the people regarding strangers in their midst? (Exodus 23:9)

a. Why are immigrants often the most empathetic to other immigrants' plight?

b. What reason did the Israelites have for treating strangers with kindness?

4. What did the people of Israel do that drew the ire of the prophets?

a. Ezekiel 22:29

b. Zechariah 7:10

c. Malachi 3:5

d. With what groups of people within Israel did the prophets always mention the alien or stranger? What did all those people have in common?

5. Why was God so eager to allow aliens and strangers to find a home within Israel? What do Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, and 60:3 suggest is the reason?

a. How brightly does the light of the Gospel shine in most countries compared to America?

b. Why is that a reason for American Christians to welcome strangers and aliens?

6. Read Romans 13:1-7.

a. What is the Christian's basic responsibility to government? (verse 1a)

b. Why is that our responsibility? (verse 1b)

c. How would you define the government's responsibility "for good" (verse 4) when it comes to immigration? What laws should the government enact?

d. Is the current status of immigration in America "good"? How could it be made better?

7. What admonition concerning strangers is found in Hebrews 13:2?



DID YOU KNOW?

The same person is eventually both an immigrant and an emigrant depending on the perspective. An immigrant is a person who *comes* to a foreign country to establish residency (think: i = immigrant = *into*). And an emigrant is a person who *leaves* his or her own country to settle in a foreign country (think: e = emigrant = *exit*). So every emigrant who leaves his country eventually becomes an immigrant when he settles in another country. A 2012 Gallup survey found that 640 million people in the world would, if they could, emigrate to a different country. The United States was the top choice of countries to emigrate to, Britain being second.⁸