

A Biblical Worldview on Immigration

INTRODUCTION

When we evaluate a question like immigration, one needs to be careful in evaluating the text. Most of the passages that refer to concepts of nationals, aliens, and immigration are in reference to Israel. The Law of Moses was provided to Israel as a direct revelation and functions as their constitution. The Law provided their rules for religious, criminal, and civil practices. Part of these rules included laws for the visiting alien, the resident alien, and the immigrant. What we are going to look for are the principles of God's love and justice.

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:21).

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it (Exodus 12:43)."

You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countrymen you shall not charge interest (Deuteronomy 23:20).

You shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses, one from among your countrymen; you may not put a foreigner over yourselves who is not your countryman (Deuteronomy 17:15).

There are two main principles we can see here, but these are without contradiction. God commands compassion toward the foreigner. At the same time, He establishes the government with the responsibility to maintain order, protect its citizens, and have different rules for citizens and foreigners.

In our study of developing a biblical worldview, we have already seen that reality is defined by God, truth flows from His revelation, knowledge comes through His general and special revelation, wisdom is the skillful application of that truth in daily life, and our ultimate purpose is to glorify Him by knowing and loving Him and loving our neighbor in ordered ways. Today we apply that same framework to the issue of immigration.

The question before us is not "Are you for or against immigrants?" That is far too simplistic. The real question is, "What does Scripture actually teach about how a nation should treat foreigners, how believers should respond personally, and what role government has in regulating borders and entry?" Only when we let the text speak plainly can we avoid the error of pitting compassion against justice or turning one principle into the whole counsel of God.

GOD'S INTENTION FOR THE IMMIGRANT AND THE FOREIGNER

The Old Testament repeatedly commands Israel to treat the stranger, with justice and compassion. This command is rooted in Israel's own history.

You shall not oppress a sojourner, for you know the heart of a sojourner, since you were sojourners in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:21).

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When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:33-34).

He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:18-19).

These laws are concerning the *ger*, they are to follow the Law (Exodus 12:19, 48, 20:10; Leviticus 17:8-10, 18:26, 20:2). They were expected to get circumcised and follow the Law of Moses just like the native Israeli citizen.

Notice some important observations from the text.

1. The command is addressed to the individual Israelite and to the nation.
2. The "stranger" or "sojourner" here is one who immigrated, living under their laws and within their community.
3. The motivation is remembrance of their own experience as oppressed sojourners in Egypt and the character of Yahweh who defends the vulnerable.

This is not a command for open borders or unrestricted entry. It is a command for just and compassionate treatment of those who are lawfully present, who immigrated, who are incriminated into the culture and dedicate themselves to the laws. The same law codes that protect the sojourner also regulate how and under what conditions a foreigner could live among Israel. Israel was not required to absorb every person who wanted to enter; she was required to treat fairly those who did immigrated correctly.

In contrast we have different rules found in the text

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover: no foreigner is to eat of it (Exodus 12:43)

You shall not eat anything which dies of itself. You may give it to the alien who is in your town, so that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner, for you are a holy people to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk. (Deuteronomy 14:21)

You may charge interest to a foreigner, but to your countrymen you shall not charge interest, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land which you are about to enter to possess. (Deuteronomy 23:20)

What is the difference? This is for the foreigners (*nākrî* or *nēkār*), that is one that is in the land but has not properly immigrated to Israel. They were not permitted to participate in the religious practices, and they had different rules for economic and civil matters.

It is within the principles of God that there are responsibilities for the one who wants to immigrate and there are separate laws for those who in the land but have no intention of living there.

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GOVERNMENT'S GOD-GIVEN ROLE: LAW, ORDER, AND THE SWORD

The New Testament is equally clear about the role of governing authorities. Paul writes to believers living under Roman rule:

"Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." (Romans 13:1)

The government "does not bear the sword in vain; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." (Romans 13:4)

God has delegated to human governments the responsibility to maintain order, punish evil, and protect the innocent. This includes the right and duty to control who enters the nation and under what conditions. A government that refuses to enforce its own laws or that allows unchecked lawlessness is failing in its God-ordained function.

This does not mean every law is perfectly just or that believers must applaud every policy. It does mean that the principle of ordered authority and national boundaries is not a human invention but part of God's design for a fallen world. Even in the Old Testament, Israel maintained borders, required circumcision and adherence to certain laws for full integration (Exodus 12:48-49), and at times restricted or removed threatening foreign influences.

WARNINGS WHEN FOREIGNERS RISE AGAINST THE NATION

Scripture also contains sober warnings about the consequences when Israel loses control of its own land and laws.

"The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail." (Deuteronomy 28:43-44)

Again, this is not directed at every nation; this is part of the curses for breaking the covenant as God's chosen nation. But we understand the principle of having a conflict of interest within a nation. The point is not hatred of foreigners but the natural result of a nation who loses its foundation through foreign influences. A nation that cannot or will not maintain its own laws and borders eventually finds itself ruled by those it has adverse intentions.

A REAL-LIFE BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: NEHEMIAH

The book of Nehemiah provides a powerful picture of balancing compassion, justice, and practical protection.

When Nehemiah heard of the distress of the returned exiles and the broken walls of Jerusalem, he asked the king for permission to return and rebuild. Once there, he organized the people to rebuild the walls. When enemies threatened, the response was clear:

"From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates... So we carried on the work with half of them holding spears from dawn until the stars appeared." (Nehemiah 4:16-21, summary)

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They worked; they posted armed guards. They refused to be intimidated or to lower their standards. It was not because they hated the surrounding people, it was because they loved their countrymen. Nehemiah showed mercy and justice at the same time: rebuilding for the welfare of God's people while protecting them from those who wanted to destroy the work.

WISDOM IN TENSION: COMPASSION AND JUSTICE TOGETHER

Biblical wisdom does not choose one truth and ignore the other. It understands all the principles and applies them to the circumstance.

- We are commanded to love our neighbor, which includes showing mercy and practical help to the vulnerable (Leviticus 19:34; James 2:15-16; Galatians 6:10).
- We are also commanded to love our own household and community first in ordered responsibility (1 Timothy 5:8; Galatians 6:10 – "especially to those of the household of the faith").
- Government has the God-given duty to distinguish between the law-abiding immigrant and the law-breaker, between the genuine refugee and the opportunist or criminal.
- The believers' role is different from the state's role. The church ministers the gospel and meets needs as it is able; the state maintains justice and order.

A wise biblical immigration policy would therefore seek to:

- Maintain secure and orderly borders (government's responsibility under God's institutions).
- Welcome and integrate those who come legally, who respect the laws of the land, and who desire to live peaceably (consistent with the treatment of the ger in the Old Testament).
- Believers are encouraged to provide compassionate, help to genuine needs without undermining the rule of law or expecting government to replace Christ-like responsibility. We also need to remember the continuity of love.
- Recognize that mass uncontrolled migration brings real burdens (economic, cultural, security, and social) that affect the ability to love our existing neighbors well.

Ignoring borders is not compassion; it often harms the very poor it claims to help and burdens the citizens already present. At the same time ignoring the compassion for the immigrant is not justice; it hardens us against people made in God's image.

QUESTION

Practically, what would "wise" immigration look like in a fallen world? It would value both the dignity of the image-bearer who wants to come and the duty to protect the citizens already here. It would favor legal, orderly, assimilating immigration over chaos. It would expect the newcomer to adopt the core values that make the host nation function (rule of law, language, work ethic) rather than demanding the host nation abandon its own identity.

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CONCLUSION

The Biblical worldview does not give us a detailed policy manual for 21st-century immigration. It does give us clear, non-contradictory principles: God cares and loves all people including the immigrant and foreigner. God ordains government to bear the sword and maintain order. Wisdom applies both truths without canceling either. Our ultimate purpose remains the same: glorify God by thinking and acting in line with His revealed truth, loving Him fully and loving our neighbor in the ordered way Scripture directs.

Therefore, we pursue wisdom. Study the whole counsel of God. Refuse to let political tribal or emotional appeals replace careful, text-driven thinking. When we do this, we will be able to show both the compassion of Christ and the justice of a holy God without apology.

A Biblical Worldview on Immigration: Balancing Compassion and Justice

Exploring dual scriptural principles: treating immigrants with individual kindness while upholding the government's duty to maintain order and law.

