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The Earth is the Lord's:

The Bible and Borders—Old Testament

The Bible does not address all of the issues that affect modern discussion of immigration and refugee status—but it does deal with a number of themes that might guide those conversations.

1. The earth is the Lord's —"borders" are artificial, transient products of human conception.

- Above all . . . see Genesis 1.

- Also Psalm 24:1 —"The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it."

- And numerous passages like this: "Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel and its Maker: "Will you question me about my children or command me concerning the work of my hands? I made the earth and created humankind upon it" (Isa 45:11–12).

Thus, immigration may be considered in light of **stewardship.** The biblical view is that all things (including territory and land) belong to God. Human beings may be stewards or tenants of God's property, but they are never *owners* in any absolute sense.

For example—God sets boundaries for the Promised Land where the Israelites might live (Exod 23:31)[1], but numerous laws clarify their status as residents of this area:

- God says, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity*, for the land is mine*. With me, you are but aliens and tenants." (Lev. 25:23)

[1] The issue of Israel's borders is controversial because the descriptions of those boundaries differ (Gen. 12:5; 17:8; 15:18-21; Num. 34:1-12; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:3-4; Judg. 20:1; 1 Sam. 3:20; 2 Sam. 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kgs. 4:25; 10:23-24). According to the promise to Abram in Genesis 15, the land of Israel would include portions of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

This verse happens to come from Jubilee legislation. Walter Brueggemann says the whole purpose of such laws was to remind Israel that she was not free to do with the land whatever she wanted, or to claim eternal possession of it. The land was not "given over to Israel's self-indulgence."[2]

In other words, like all tenants, Israel was accountable to her (divine) landlord for proper treatment of what was ultimately another's property—God's property.

As we will see, one of the most important "caveats" for appropriate use of the land was insurance of welfare for those who did not "own" land: widows, orphans, the poor, and the unprotected foreigners who are variously called "strangers," "sojourners," "aliens," or "migrants."

Some "takeways" from this point:

- A proper starting point for faith-based discussion of borders and immigration may be the realization that, biblically, **ownership is an illusion.**

- To some extent, national boundaries and borders must be respected in the same way that "property rights" for individuals must be recognized for society to function without chaos (Melanchthon 's "first use of the law").

- Nevertheless, national claims to possession of land must be viewed with a degree of suspicion and nuance. In particular, we should critique such claims when they imply an exclusive use of property or resources, denying access to those whom God favors.

2. All people are made in the image of God.

- "Then God said, 'Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness' . . . so God created humans in [God's] image"(Genesis 1:26 – 27).

For this reason, God is portrayed throughout the Bible as compassionate not only toward God's "chosen people" (Exod 34:6–7; Joel 2:13) but also toward all nations and all people:

[2] Brueggemann, Walter, 2002, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith,* Fortress Press, Minneapolis, p. 59.

- "The Lord is good to all, and [God's] compassion is over all that [God] has made" (Ps 145:9).

Indeed, the reason God chooses the descendants of Abraham to be a "special people" is so that through them God will be able to bless all nations:

- "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing . . . in you all the families on earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:2–3).

Even among the most "wicked" nations, God's compassion abounds for the innocent (e.g., children and animals).

- When Jonah deems the Assyrians unworthy of God's mercy, God responds, "Should I not be concerned about Nineveh [the capital of Assyria], that great city in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many animals?"

<u>Some "takeways" from this point:</u>

- "The creation of all persons in the image of God must be the most basic conviction for Christians as they approach the challenges of immigration today. Immigration should not be argued in the abstract because it is fundamentally about *immigrants*. Immigrants are humans, and as such they are made in God's image. Each and every one of those who have come to the United States is God's creation and is worthy of respect."[3]

- "Because immigrants are made in the divine image, they have an essential value and possess immense potential to contribute to society and to the common good."[4]

- "The topic of immigration at some level needs to be considered from a human rights perspective and not be defined solely in terms of national security, cultural identity, or economic impact . . . a human rights perspective has as its particular focus the needs and fate of the immigrants themselves."[5]

[3] Carroll R., M. Daniel, *The Bible and Borders: Hearing God's Word on Immigration* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2020), p. 13.
[4] Carroll, *Bible and Borders*, p. 13.
[5] Carroll, *Bible and Borders*, p. 14.

3. God's people were often undocumented migrants.

The story of God's people begins with a call for Abram to leave his native land and migrate to a foreign land.

- "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you'" (Gen 12:1).

- From that time on, the patriarchs are often referred to as "sojourners" or "aliens" (Gen 17:8; 20:1; 21:34; 23:4; 34:4; 35:27; 37:1; 28:4; 32:4; 47:4, 9).

As the story continues . . .

- the tribes of Israel migrate to Egypt to escape famine (Gen 42–47).
- the Israelites wander for 40 years through wilderness areas after the exodus (Exod 15:22 – 40; Numbers; Deuteronomy)
- many Israelites (ten tribes) are forced into captivity in Assyria (2 Kings 17:1–6).
- most of the remaining tribes are forced into captivity in Babylon (Jeremiah 20–22; 24–29; 32; 34–45; 52).

After the return from Babylon (and into the New Testament period), the Jews live almost as aliens in what they regard as their own land under Persian, Egyptian, Syrian, Greek, or Roman rule—conditions vary, but they always lack rights and protections afforded to the dominant party.

The biblical story also records numerous instances of individuals seeking refuge in foreign lands:

- Jacob goes to Paddan-aram to escape Esau's revenge (Gen 27:41–28:5)
- Moses flees to Midan after killing a taskmaster (Exod 2:11–22).
- Elimelech and family seek refuge from a famine in Moab (Ruth 1:1–2); then Naomi returns to Israel with Ruth, an alien Moabite widow (Ruth 1:6–14).
- David hides out in many hostile territories in order to avoid King Saul (1 Sam 19–26).
- Jeroboam must go to Egypt to flee Solomon (1 Kings 11:29–40; 12:2–3).
- Elijah crosses the Jordan to hide from King Ahab (1 Kings 17:1–7).

More often than not, the "host cultures" in the areas where God's people find themselves are depicted negatively, as cruel or exploitative (e.g., Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman). This is often blatant, but at other times, hardships or desperate circumstances faced by migrants are simply assumed.

- Abram feels he must pass his wife off as his sister when he is a refugee/migrant/sojourner in Egypt and Gerar (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18).

- Boaz must tell Ruth, "I have ordered the young men not to bother you" when she gleans the portion of the field left for aliens/migrants/sojourners like her (Ruth 2:9).

Israelites were encouraged to remember this essential part of their story and to preserve aspects of "being aliens" as intrinsic to their identity as God's people.

- Significantly, they were always to reference this aspect of their origins in the first line of their confession of faith offered annually at the First Fruits festival.

    - "When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it before the altar . . . you shall make this response before the Lord your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor' . . ." (Deut 26:4–5)

- Images and references to being "alien" and seeking refuge occur often in Israelite prayers, even when the people lived in circumstances where their literal status was more settled.

    - "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forbears" (Psalm 39:12).

    - "Let me abide in your tent forever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings" (Psalm 61:4).

    - "Open my eyes so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. I live as an alien in the land; do not hide your commandments from me" (Psalm 119:18–19).

    - And consider the full version of a famous "offertory" taken over into Christian liturgy: "All things come from you, and of your own have we given you. For we are aliens and transients before you, as were all our ancestors" (1 Chron 29:14–15).

- And perhaps most important—the memory of having been "aliens" is to inform and affect attitudes toward and treatment of those who are now aliens in their midst.

    - "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Exod 23:9).

    - "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Lev 19:33–34).

    - This is a common theme: see also Exod 22:21; Deut 5:15; 10:19; 23:7; 24:18, 22.

Some "takeways" from this point:

- A great deal of biblical literature deals with the trials, tribulations, hopes, and dreams of people who live in a society where they are not the "dominant class"— God's people have been persons who must travel or live in a place where their residency is regarded as less legitimate than that of native or conquering powers.

- Thus, Bible readers are frequently expected to empathize with migrants and aliens and are often urged to adopt their perspective on the world.

- In those portions of the Bible where Israelites *are* the dominant class (living in a land that they believe to be their own), empathy with the biblical characters involves *remembering* their former status and determining how to avoid treating migrants or aliens in a manner they would not have appreciated themselves.

4. Old Testament legislation insures protection of "outsiders" residing in Israel—migrants, refugees, exiles, sojourners, and other "non-Israelites" living in the land.[6]

[6] English Bibles use a variety of terms to refer to "foreigners living in the land of Israel"(or to Israelites living in a foreign land)—NRSVue often translates Hebrew *gēr* as "alien" or "resident alien" (which are probably understood to be synonymous expressions).

We may note, first, the strong encouragement in biblical literature for showing **hospitality** to strangers, without regard for their nationality, provenance, or destination.

- Gen 18 – Abraham and three visitors
- Gen 24 – Laban and Jacob
- 1 Kings 17 – Elijah and widow of Zarephath
- 2 Kings 4 – Elisha and the Shunammite couple

And for negative examples . . .

- Gen 19 – Lot in Sodom
- Judg 19 – Levite in Gibeah

Beyond this . . . many biblical passages call for just and kind treatment of those who may be regarded as foreigners or unprotected outsiders within the land of Israel.

- First "aliens" are explicitly listed as persons who are not to be oppressed.
  - "Do no wrong or violence to **the alien**, the orphan, and the widow" (Jer 22:3).
  - "Thus says the Lord of hosts" 'Render true judgments, show kindness to one another, do not oppress the widow, the orphan, **the alien**, or the poor" (Zech 7:9–10).

- By the same token, vituperative writings of the prophets are directed toward those who for some reason (nationality, social class, military might) believe they belong to a superior category of people who may exploit or dominate those who are less privileged.
  - "Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; **the alien** residing within you suffers extortion; the orphan and the widow are wronged in you" (Ezek 22:7).
  - "The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery; they have oppressed the poor and needy and have extorted from **the alien** without justice" (Ezek 22:29).

- "'I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely; against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside **the alien** and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts'" (Mal 3:5).

- Indeed, repentance of unjust treatment of aliens is listed as one of the conditions for God to continue dwelling among the people.

  - "If you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress **the alien**, the orphan, and the widow or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place" (Jer 7:5–7).

To be more specific . . . numerous laws explicate what fair and just treatment of foreigners or "unprotected outsiders" might entail.

- Migrants/sojourners/aliens are to be granted equal justice under the law.

  - "Give the members of your community a fair hearing and judge rightly between one person and another, whether kin or **resident alien**" (Deut 1:16).

  - "You shall not deprive a **resident alien** or an orphan or justice" (Deut 24:17).

  - "Cursed be anyone who deprives an **alien**, an orphan, or a widow of justice" (Deut 27:19).

- They are allowed sanctuary in the "cities of refuge" (where people could seek protection from blood vengeance or vigilante justice).

  - "These six cities shall serve as a refuge for the Israelites, for the **resident or transient alien** among them so that anyone who kills a person without intent may flee there" (Num 35:15; see also Judg 21:9).

- They are to be paid in a timely fashion.

  - "You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or **aliens** who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them" (Deut 24:14–15).

- Edges of a field and fallen fruit were to be left unharvested for them.

  - "You shall not strip your vineyard bare or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and **the alien**" (Lev 19:10).

  - "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and **the alien**" (Lev 23:22).

  - "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for **the alien**, the orphan, and the widow . . . when you beat your live trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for **the alien**, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for **the alien**, the orphan, and the widow" (Deut 24:19–21).

- They are to be given a portion of special tithes set aside for the needy.

  - "Every third year, you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year and store it in your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as **the resident aliens**, the orphans, and the widows in your towns may come and eat their fill" (Deut 14:28–29; see also Deut 26:12–15).

- They are to be granted rest from their work on the Sabbath and other holy days—regardless of whether they participate in the religious or political observances associated with these days.

  - One of the Ten Commandments says, "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy . . . you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or **the alien** resident in your towns" (Exod 20:8–10; see also Exod 23:12; Deut 5:14).

- For the Day of Atonement: "In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble yourselves and shall do not work, neither the native-born nor **the alien** who resides among you" (Lev 16:29).

- For the Festival of Booths: "Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, **the strangers** [= aliens, migrants], the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns" (Deut 16:14).

As evident in several of these texts, legislation regarding "the alien" was often parallel to that regarding the poor, widows, orphans, or other marginalized groups—Levites were sometimes included among those requiring special consideration because they did not possess land or own property.

<u>Some "takeways" from this point:</u>

- The purpose of the law in Israelite religion (and politics) was to offer a description of what life pleasing to God should look like—and for Israel, treatment of *non-Israelites* was an essential component of this description. So, Carroll: "we should recognize that the way [Old Testament law] deals with the foreigner says something very important about Israel's fundamental character and about the God who gave it these rules."[7]

- This is one aspect—perhaps the most notable aspect—of Israelite law that contrasts with other law codes known to us from the Ancient Near East. Possibly unique to Israel was the understanding that their very identity as a nation was dependent upon their commitment to those who were not a part of that nation. Carroll suggests that for modern nations, the treatment of "outsiders" reveals something "about the soul of the host country"[8]

- Nothing in the Old Testament laws ever suggests any distinction between "legal" or "illegal" status. We do not know whether there were procedures for immigrants to obtain some kind of recognized status that distinguished them from other "non-citizens." If so, such status appears to have been irrelevant with regard to the moral

[7] Carroll, *Bible and Borders,* p. 59.
[8] Carroll, *Bible and Borders*, p. 56.

demands of the law concerning the attitude and behavior expected of Israelites toward all "outsiders" residing among them.

- "The Bible does not provide a blueprint for modern legislation, but it does clarify the spiritual and moral call . . . the purpose of looking at biblical laws is to ascertain a *moral compass* for Christians as they enter these discussions."[9]

5. God's people have a moral imperative to love and care for migrants, sojourners, immigrants, and refugees.

Caring for disadvantaged foreigners is often presented as a mark of "true religion."

- When Job seeks to justify himself as righteous (29:11–17; 31:13–22), he testifies to how he has helped the poor (29:12; 31:16, 19–20); the orphan (29:12; 31:17–18, 21); the wretched (29:13); the widow (29:13; 31:16, 18); the blind (29:15); the lame (29:15); the needy (29:16); and **the stranger** [*gēr* = migrant, alien] (29:16; 31:32).

Most important . . . the great commandment "love your neighbor" applies to aliens/sojourners/migrants as well as fellow Israelites.

- "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall **love the alien as yourself**" (Lev 19:34; cf. Lev 19:18).

Why? Because God loves them (and don't forget you were once one yourself).

- "The Lord watches over the **strangers** [*gēr* = aliens, migrants]" (Ps 146:9).

- "The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the **strangers** [*gēr* = aliens, migrants], providing them

[9] Carroll, *Bible and Borders,* p. 80.

food and clothing. You shall also l**ove the stranger** [*gēr* = alien, migrant],, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut 10:17–19).

There is hope for full integration and religious conversion.

- "Moses commanded them, 'Every seventh year . . . you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women, and children, as well as **the aliens** residing in your towns—so that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law and so that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God" (Deut 30:10–13).

Some "takeways" from this point:

- For anyone who regards the Old Testament as scripture, the starting point for discussion of immigration practices and policies should always be concern for the immigrants themselves—what will be of the greatest benefit to them? Concern for the impact of immigration on the culture and status quo of the host country will be a legitimate but always secondary concern.

- Authentic followers of Jesus will be willing to deny themselves for the sake of those whom God loves—and whom they love accordingly. They will not be primarily concerned with preserving their own security, status, or privileges but will be eager to make sacrifices that will benefit those for whom the God of scripture has special affection and concern.

- Loving and caring for actual or potential immigrants (documented or otherwise) does not necessarily imply granting all such persons everything that they would want. A strong case might be made that restrictive practices and policies are actually to the ultimate and greater benefit of those seeking to enter the United States in various ways and for various reasons. But for authentic followers of Jesus, the case for such policies and practices would have to be made *on those grounds*.

- An authentic follower of Jesus (or anyone who accepts the authority of Old Testament scripture) will always ask, "How is this to the benefit of those whom God [and I] love?"

CITIZENSHIP in Heaven:

The Bible and Borders—New Testament

Introduction: Travel and Immigration in the New Testament World

People travel a great deal in the New Testament, though only within the confines of the Roman empire—there is no sense that they need formal documents to pass from one area to another, but a level of uncertainty and even danger imbues any movement from one's familiar area of habitation to a less familiar one.

- For example, when Jesus goes from Judea to Samaria, he does not leave a nation ruled by Jews to enter a nation ruled by Samaritans (both were essentially ruled by Romans); rather, he leaves an area more-or-less designated as "Jewish territory" for an area more-or-less designated as "Samaritan territory"—and he can encounter hostility as a result (Luke 9:51–55).

- Likewise, Paul is able to travel freely (without documentation or permission) to Galatia, Ephesus, Corinth, and other places, but he is expected to abide by local customs and regulations and he can easily encounter problems as an "outsider"—or at least he could if he did not have Roman citizenship, which trumps all other identifications (Acts 22:25–29; compare 21:39).

Thus, there is no exact parallel in the New Testament for people crossing a boundary that marked them as "illegal immigrants" in the new territory that they had entered. But there are close analogies to the phenomenon of people migrating without invitation to an area where they would be viewed as "foreigners" or "outsiders," where they might not be welcome, and where they might be denied rights and privileges accorded the dominant population. Analogies to modern situations can be fairly close without imposition of formal definitions of "legality."

On terms used for migrants, foreigners or aliens in the New Testament—see Appendix.

1. Key New Testament characters are often presented as refugees, migrants, or "uninvited immigrants."

- Although different in many particulars, both Gospel accounts of Jesus's nativity present his parents as being forced to undertake difficult travel due to oppressive political rule.
    - In Luke, Joseph must travel to Bethlehem with his very pregnant wife to meet requirements of a census (Luke 2:1–5).
    - In Matthew, the parents and child must flee as refugees to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod (Matt 2:13–14); then they must settle in Galilee rather than Judea because of Archelaus (Matt 2:21–22).
- As an adult, Jesus is described as a wandering, itinerant minister who lacks the comforts and protection of home.
    - Jesus says to a would-be follower, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matt 8:20).
- Jesus sometimes travels through Samaria (rather than circumventing the area, as was traditional).
    - He engages in conversation a Samaritan woman who is surprised by his presence, and by his audacity in speaking to her (John 4:1–9).
    - He is spurned by "a village of the Samaritans" because he is traveling to Jerusalem—he must rebuke his disciples for wanting "to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them" (Luke 9:51–55).
- Jesus says that his followers will encounter hostility as "aliens" in the lands to which they travel with his message.
    - Their situation will sometimes be likened to that of "sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matthew 10:16).
    - They will suffer oppression from both political and religious authorities (Matt 10:17–18), from stress that threatens to divide and break down their family

systems (Matt 10:21), and they will sometimes need to stay "on the move," travelling quickly from one city to another (Matt 10:23).

- In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus explicitly identifies what his "brothers and sisters" will experience when they become "aliens" (NRSVue, "strangers") in the world to which he sends them: they will be sometimes hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, or imprisoned—and they will always be dependent on hospitality from people who may or may not be willing to provide it. —*more on this important text later*.

- The Apostle Paul testifies that the sort of hardships Jesus predicted often tallied with his experience as one traveling to countries and territories where he was not always welcome.

  - "Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I have been shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked" (2 Cor 11:25–27).

- Of course, the book of Acts also reports numerous accounts of Paul and other missionaries suffering various hardships as they travel throughout the empire.

  - Of particular relevance is the story of Paul and Silas being beaten, shackled, and imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:16–40). Their oppressors are local businessmen who object to a demon being cast out of a clairvoyant slave girl. Their complaint: "These men, these Jews, are disturbing our city and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us, as Romans, to adopt or observe" (Acts 20:20–21).

  - Likewise, the great disturbance in Ephesus (where Paul and his Macedonian travel companions are endangered) is provoked by a concern that the incursion of Christians in the community will have a negative effect on the region's economy, which depends on fidelity to Artemis and her temple (Acts 19:21–41).

<u>Some takeaways from this point:</u>

- The circumstances of these New Testament travelers offer only rough analogies to the situations of modern-day refugees, migrants, or asylum seekers. The biblical characters did not have to concern themselves with formal distinctions between "legal" and "illegal" modes of crossing boundaries. And, of course, the missionaries entered "foreign" lands for evangelistic purposes, not to flee intolerable situations in their homeland (but see Acts 8:1–8; 11:19–30).

- Nevertheless, we should note that "experiencing hardship when leaving one's home to visit or live in a foreign environment" is a common phenomenon in the New Testament. When Bible readers empathize with Joseph, Mary, Jesus, the apostles, Paul, and other New Testament figures, they will be encouraged to adopt a perspective informed by such experiences—and this may aid them in finding points of empathy with those in our modern world who have experienced the hardship of leaving home to become possibly unwelcome foreigners in a land that offers opportunity only with caveats.

2. Jesus is presented as supportive of "typically unwelcome foreigners" within his homeland.

- He praises the faith of a Gentile centurion in Capernaum, and heals his son/servant (Matthew 8:5–18).

- In one parable, he uses "a Samaritan" to exemplify a person who does God's will (Luke 10:30–37) and in another instance calls attention to the fact that "a Samaritan" was the only one of ten healed lepers to give appropriate thanks to God (Luke 17:11–19).

3. New Testament writers (and other early Christian authors) trivialize political definitions of "citizenship" in favor of theological ones.

- **Paul:** although the book of Acts presents Paul as possessing Roman citizenship from birth (22:25–29; compare 21:39), he insists in his letters that he and all other believers have a transcendent citizenship in heaven.

    - "Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).

- **Peter:** Jesus's premiere disciple refers to Christians as "aliens" and "exiles" on earth.

- "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the **exiles** (*parepidemos*)of the dispersion . . . who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:1–2).

- "Beloved, I urge you as **aliens** (*paroikos*) and **exiles** (*parepidemos*) to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

  It is possible that the intended audience for this letter included persons who had literally been forced to leave their homeland (e.g., Christians who fled persecution in Rome); but the references are probably also intended as metaphors for all Christians who have a transcendent citizenship as the people of God).

- "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Peter 2:9).

- **Hebrews:** the author of this anonymous letter applies the "foreigner/alien/stranger" metaphor to all of God's faithful people, past and present.

  - The author interrupts his famous "roll call of faith" that lists heroic ancestors (Heb 11:2–38) to say, "all of these . . . confessed that they were **strangers (*xenos* = aliens, migrants**) and **foreigners** (*parepidemos*) on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland" (Heb 11:13–14).

- **James**: the brother of Jesus refers to Christians in the world as a **diaspora** (NRSVue: "dispersion" (James 1:1).

  This term was, of course, rich in theological meaning, originally describing Jews (chosen people of God) who lived outside their homeland (the nation of Israel). James appropriates the term "diaspora" to refer to all of God's people (Jewish or Gentile) who live apart from their homeland in heaven.

- **Other early Christian writers** consistently refer to Christians with language that highlights their status as "foreigners" on earth (because their true homeland is the transcendent kingdom of God).

- The First Epistle of Clement (c. 96 CE) begins with the words, "From the church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the church of God sojourning at Corinth."

- The Epistle of Diognetus (late second century) describes Christians thus: "They live in their own homelands, but as **resident aliens** (*paroikoi*); they participate in all things as citizens, but endure all things as **strangers (*xenos* = aliens, migrants).** Every foreign country is their homeland, but every homeland is a foreign country (5:9) . . . They spend their time on earth, but they have their citizenship in heaven (5:17).

Some takeways from this point:

- The metaphor of "Christianity as a "diaspora" became one of the most compelling and defining images for the church—people who are "in the world" but not "of it" (John 17:15–16). The same thought informs the notion of Christians as "pilgrims" or "sojourners" in the world—traveling through a place that is not ultimately their home. Carroll says, "Diaspora and its entailments are part of the church's DNA."[10]

- Nevertheless, in modern countries where Christianity has been a dominant culture, believers find it difficult to think of themselves as "strangers in a strange land" (compare Exod 2:22)—that is, many modern Christians find it difficult to think of themselves in the manner that the biblical writers assumed they would.

- The entire New Testament is probably written to be understood by people who identify themselves in some sense as "aliens." Adopting the perspective of undocumented migrants (or simply, the perspective of uninvited and potentially unwelcome foreigners) may be a prerequisite for understanding these scriptures in a manner congruent with the expectations of their authors.

- So, Carroll notes, "This is where foreign believers in our midst can be helpful. They can remind native-born Christians of what it means to be an outsider and to carry that label wherever they go."[11]

[10] Carroll R., M. Daniel, *The Bible and Borders: Hearing God's Word on Immigration* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020), p. 101.
[11] Carroll, *Bible and Borders*, p. 103.

4. The New Testament prioritizes hospitality to uninvited/unwelcome migrants as a prime virtue and as an essential marker of the Christian faith.

- "The elder in the Johannine community writes, "Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brothers and sisters, even though they are **strangers (*xenos* = aliens, migrants)** to you" (3 John 1:5).

- Paul tells the Romans, "Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue **hospitality to strangers** (*philoxenon*)" (Rom 12:13).

- And Paul says that one qualifications to be a bishop is that the person must be **"a friend to foreigners"** (*philoxenon*)"(1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8)—note that here the NRSVue simply says, "he must be hospitable" (with a footnote on Titus 1:8 indicating what *philoxenon* actually means).

- The same was apparently a qualification to belong to the Order of Widows: "she must be well-attested for her good works as one who has brought up children, **shown hospitality [to strangers]** (*xenodocheō*), washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way" (1 Tim 5:10). Again the NRSVue omits the words "to strangers" here, though that is clearly what the word means.

5. Sometimes hospitality to uninvited or potentially unwelcome immigrants is interpreted as hospitality to God—or, at least, to angels, or to the Son of Man.

- "Do not neglect to **show hospitality to strangers** [*philoxenia*], for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb 13:2).

- "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. . . Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for . . . I was a **stranger [*xenos* = alien/migrant]** and you welcomed me . . Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord . . when was it that we saw you a **stranger [alien/migrant]** and welcomed you? . . . And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you,

> just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'
>
> Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels . . . I was a **stranger [alien/migrant]** and you did not welcome me . . . "Lord, when was it that we saw you . . . a **stranger [alien/migrant]** . . . and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me'" (Matthew 25:31–46).

Some takeaways from this point:

- The famous "Judgment of Sheep & Goats" passage in Matthew 25 is essentially about care for undocumented, uninvited, and often unwelcome immigrants or aliens. These are probably the primary class of people with whom Jesus says that his incognito presence will be manifest—since the assumption seems to be that those who are described here as hungry, thirsty, naked, imprisoned, etc. experience those conditions *because* they are "strangers" (aliens, migrants, uninvited foreigners).

- God identifies very closely with the people who we might call "undocumented immigrants" or "illegal aliens"—what is done to them is done to Christ. Positively, this means that assistance to such persons may be understood as an act of worship.

- Negatively, a *failure to welcome* such persons comes under severe judgment. The "goats" are not described as having been actively hostile in rejecting these "strangers"; they are judged simply for failing to welcome them.

- We can probably take the references to "eternal fire" and "everlasting punishment" (Matt 25:46) as metaphorical apocalyptic rhetoric—still it could be significant for the church in the modern world to note that one of the only times Jesus says that some people are going to hell forever, the people he has in mind are those who refuse to welcome undocumented and possibly illegal immigrants.

6. In general terms, attitudes and practices regarding immigration might be considered in light of New Testament teaching on stewardship, distribution of wealth, and love of neighbor.

- The stewardship parables of Jesus (e.g., "The Wicked Tenants" in Mark 12:1–80) affirm the Old Testament teaching that everything belongs to God and humans are merely stewards not owners.

    - Thus, whatever else we say about "the immigration issue" we should at least be able to recognize that it is fundamentally . . . and *obviously* . . . a matter of perceived ownership. What if it's *not* "our" country? What if it's *not* "our" land? Of course, we do need to be responsible stewards of the territory in which we live. We need to ask meaningful questions about how the land is best worked and occupied. Viewing the immigrant issue as a matter of stewardship doesn't solve or clarify all the questions of what we need to do . . . but it does offer a biblical starting point.

- Jesus and other New Testament figures frequently encourage those who have more than they need to give to those who have less (Mark 10:21–22; Luke 3:10–11; 6:30; 12:48; 14:13–14; James 2:15–17;1 John 3:16–18). One of the Beatitudes specifically applies this distribution principle to "land": the oppressed (Gk., *praüs*; NRSVue, "meek") are blessed because when God's will is done, they will "inherit the earth," that is, receive the fair share of the earth's resources which should have been theirs all along (Matt 5:5).

    - Thus, immigration issues in modern America might be considered in light of paradigms of abundance and scarcity. We may need to be protective of our resources, but such protection need not consist of maintaining an obscene abundance while others have far too little. Compare Paul's claim that "if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these" (1 Tim 6:8) with the attitude of rich men in parables of Jesus: the man who builds bigger barns to store his excess (Luke 12:13–21) and the man who feasts in splendor while a poor beggar starves at his gate (Luke 16:19–31). How often have American Christians heard those parables and wondered, Are we the ones who have more than we need? Can we justify protecting an affluent lifestyle when those facing dire circumstances are now almost literally at our doorstep?

- Jesus indicates that "love for neighbor" is one of the most important commandments—indeed, he says that all other commandments depend on this one (or should be viewed as expressions of this one). See Matthew 22:34–40. The Parable of the Good Samaritan

in Luke 10:25–37 indicates that he supports Moses's clarification that the neighbor includes not only citizens but those regarded as "aliens" (cf. Lev 19:18, 34).

- Thus, for authentic followers of Jesus, immigration issues will always be addressed from a perspective of love for the "immigrants" themselves and with primary concern for their benefit. Followers of Jesus will be willing to deny themselves (Mark 8:34) for the sake of those who might otherwise be at a disadvantage. And, of course, they will always apply the Golden Rule (Matt 7:12) when considering these issues, asking how they would hope to be treated if they were the ones in the position of the immigrants.

How the NRSVue translates *xenos*		
Ruth 2:10	"foreigner"	"Then [Ruth] fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to [Boaz], "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a **foreigner**?"
2 Sam 12:4	"wayfarer"	"Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the **wayfarer** who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him."
2 Sam 15:19	"foreigner"	"Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why are you also coming with us? Go back, and stay with the king; for you are a **foreigner**, and also an exile from your home."
Job 31:32	"stranger"	"The **stranger** has not lodged in the street; I have opened my doors to the traveler."
Matt 25:35, 38, 43, 44	"stranger"	"I was a **stranger** and you welcomed me" . . . "When was it that we saw you a **stranger** and welcomed you?" . . ."I was a **stranger** and you did not welcome me" . . . "When was it that we saw you . . . a **stranger**. . . and did not take care of you?"
Matt 27:7	"foreigners"	"They used [the 30 pieces of silver] to buy a potter's field as a place to bury **foreigners**.
Acts 17:21	"foreigners"	"Now all the Athenians and **foreigners** living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new."
Eph 2:12	"strangers"	"Remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and **strangers** to the covenants of promise."
Eph 2:19	"strangers"	"You are no longer **strangers** and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints."
Heb 11:13	"strangers"	"They confessed they were **strangers** and foreigners on the earth."
3 John 1:5	"strangers"	"Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brothers and sisters, even though they are **strangers** to you.

The common translation of the word as "stranger" is unnecessarily vague. As context for most of these passages indicate, the word has a more precise meaning of "foreigner" or "noncitizen." It does not simply mean "a person unknown to us," but "a person in a foreign land who lacks the legal rights and protections of citizenship." Typically these would be undocumented, probably uninvited, and possibly unwelcome immigrants.

Terms related to *xenos*		
philoxenon	"hospitality to strangers"	"Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue **hospitality to strangers**" (Rom 12:13).
philoxenon	"hospitable"	"A bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, **hospitable**, an apt teacher . . ." (1 Tim 3:2).
philoxenon	"hospitable" ("a friend of foreigners")	"(A bishop) must be **hospitable*,** a lover of goodness, self-controlled, upright, devout, and restrained" **(**Titus 1:8) *Gk., *a friend of foreigners*.
xenodocheō	"shown hospitality"	"(A "widow") must be well-attested for her good works as one who has brought up children, **shown hospitality**, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way" (1 Tim 5:10).
philoxenia	"hospitality to strangers"	"Do not neglect to show **hospitality to strangers**, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb 13:2).
These words always refer to hospitality shown to aliens or foreigners (as indicated by *xenon/xenia*) – the NRSVue only sometimes makes this clear.		

How the NRSVue translates *paroikos* and *parepidemos*		
parepidemos	"foreigners"	"All of these . . . confessed that they were strangers and **foreigners** on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland" (Heb 11:13–14).
parepidemos	"exiles"	"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the **exiles** of the dispersion . . . " (1 Peter 1:1).
paroikos parepidemos	"aliens" "exiles"	"Beloved, I urge you as **aliens** and **exiles** to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).
These words are essentially synonyms. Daniel Carroll says they "typically refer to "outsiders who had moved into an area to reside there, perhaps by force or of their own volition . . . These outsiders were not granted the rights and privileges of full citizenship, so they lived with economic, political, and social limitations. Because they were different, they were not always welcome in their new context"[Carroll, *Bible and Borders,* p. 99. Carroll cites Benjamin H. Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners: Self as Other in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 35–45].		