

Biblical roots for involvement in refugee and immigration ministries

The following is published by Joan Maruskin, who gives permission for its reprinting.

The Bible is the ultimate immigration handbook. It is written by for and about immigrants and refugees. It begins with Adam and Eve being exiled from the Garden of Eden to make their home in a new land. Noah and his family are victims of a natural disaster that makes it necessary for them to rebuild their world. Abraham and Sarah are sent from their land to a place which they will be shown. Moses is a criminal alien fleeing for his life, who returns to lead the Israelites out of political persecution to the Promised Land in search of religious freedom. Ruth follows her mother-in-law and is dependent on Boaz for food and life. The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) prophets are seen fleeing for their lives and finding protection and help in strange lands.

In the New Testament, the Messiah becomes an undocumented refugee fleeing to Egypt, with his parents Mary and Joseph, to escape political persecution and death. Jesus begins his public ministry by reading from the sacred book of Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jesus lives out his life as an itinerant teacher with no place to lay his head. Throughout the New Testament, the stranger is affirmed and included as those for whom Christ died. The New Testament closes with John living as an exile on the Isle of Patmos.

Throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, there are repeated instructions to care for and to welcome the alien, the stranger, and the sojourner. This is modeled first by God, who sews clothes for Adam and Eve before sending them into exile. Abraham later welcomes the strangers near the oaks at Mamre – the strangers who are the manifest Lord.

A partial list of Biblical texts concerning immigrants, refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers follows:

Genesis 3:22-24	Adam and Eve sent out of the garden
Genesis 12:1	Abraham - “Go to the land I will show you.”
Genesis 18:1-8	Abraham at Mamre
Genesis 23:4	Abraham, stranger, acquires burying ground
Genesis 37-46	Joseph, the foreigner, works for Pharaoh
Exodus 22:21	Remember to treat strangers well
Exodus 32:9	... once you were strangers in the land
Deuteronomy 6:10-12	Remember, once you were sojourners...

Deuteronomy 10:17-19	Food, clothing, love for sojourners
Deuteronomy 14:28-29	Sharing tithe
Deuteronomy 24:17	Do not deprive the resident alien of justice
Deuteronomy 26	Remember and celebrate with the strangers
Deuteronomy 27:19	Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, the widow of justice...
I Chronicles 29:14-15	All things come of thee...we are strangers
Leviticus 16:9	Atonement for all
Leviticus 19:10	Gleanings for strangers
Leviticus 19:33-34	Do stranger no wrong
Leviticus 23:22	Gleanings for strangers
Leviticus 25	Jubilee Year
Joshua 8:35	Shares word of Moses with aliens
Kings 8:41	Kindness towards foreigners
Psalms 137	By the waters of Babylon
Psalms 146	Justice for the oppressed, prisoners freed....
Isaiah 3:14-15	Why do you crush the face of the poor?
Isaiah 52:4	God's people aliens in Egypt
Jeremiah 22:3	Do not mistreat orphan, widow, stranger
Malachi 3:5	Judgment against those who thrust aliens aside
Matthew 2:19-21	Jesus and parents flee to Egypt
Matthew 8:20	Son of Man nowhere to lay his head
Luke 2:7	No room in the Inn
Luke 14:12-24	Good Samaritan
Acts	God's missionaries to foreigners
Acts 7:1	History of Abraham in a strange land
Hebrews 13:1-2	Welcome strangers – angels unawares
Romans 12:13	Extend hospitality to the stranger