



Wise Welcome

A Bible Study on Immigration

By Professor James K. Hoffmeier, Ph.D.

Adapted from *The Immigration Crisis*

"If you want to know what the Bible says about immigration, look no further."

~ Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer*, and, *If You Can Keep It*



Endorsements of *Wise Welcome*

"If you want to know what the Bible says about immigration, look no further. We needed a deeper explanation of what it means to follow Jesus in this area, and I am so grateful we finally have it."

Eric Metaxas, author of *Bonhoeffer* and *If You Can Keep It*

"As a legal immigrant whose citizenship journey took fourteen years, I have seen the onslaught of illegal immigration and am alarmed at what is happening to this country I love so much. *Wise Welcome* makes sense of a polarizing topic by viewing it through the lens of the Bible. This is a 'must read' for every person in America."

Dr. Mark Christian, President, Global Faith Institute

Reviews of *The Immigration Crisis*

"Doubtless some will question this or that detail of his reading of Scripture, but Hoffmeier's book is a very healthy antidote to the merely sentimental readings that dominate much Christian thought on this complex and challenging issue."

D.A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

"I come from a troubled nation from which hundreds of thousands of people have emigrated to Western nations — some legally and some illegally. I resonate fully with the dual biblical emphasis presented in this book of caring for the alien and of submitting to the laws of the land."

Ajith Fernando, National Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka

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Old Testament scholar and archaeologist

Author, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens and the Bible*

Foreword

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Special Thanks

To Dr. James Hoffmeier: For your decades of scholarship, teaching, and care for Scripture and people, thank you. Your insights illumine this study guide, as a beacon in the fog. (Old Testament scholar and archaeologist, James Hoffmeier, has lived as both a resident alien, and a refugee.)

To David Kullberg: For your careful reading of Dr. Hoffmeier, commitment to Scripture, and wise editorial consulting, we are grateful.

To Bill Blankschaen and StoryBuilders team: For your careful and excellent work of editing and publishing, and for bringing this study guide to life, thank you.

Foreword

by Kelly Monroe Kullberg

Each human being is made in the image of God, and citizenship in God's kingdom is offered to every person, in every nation. Knowing this, Christians naturally embrace people "of every tribe and tongue." The family of God knows no borders. I've experienced joys, sorrows and fellowship with Christians from many nations.

As a short-term missionary who came alongside orphans, widows and the poor in six countries, I can see how the gospel animates lives and cultures. Because of love, believers are to live out Jesus's final words, "Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing and... teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). This Great Commission begins with our own families, neighbors, cities, nation and then "all nations."

Like many, I've wondered if we could open America's borders to welcome all who want to enter. Perhaps this is one way of fulfilling the Great Commission, as well as alleviating suffering, I reasoned. But as I've studied the Bible, I've come to see that one could not arrive at an "open borders" position, or a "closed borders" position, without cherry-picking the Bible. In Scripture, we find principled discernment or what we call *Wise Welcome*.

This study guide is not an exhaustive work on citizenship and immigration, but it does try to represent the whole counsel of Scripture on this important subject that shapes cultures, nations and their futures.

Because the Lord loves people, he instructs us in the ways of peace. How we need His wisdom in our world today. Biblical teaching and American laws on wise, peaceable and lawful immigration yield harmony and beauty. Most of our ancestors who came to America took oaths of citizenship, and sacrificed to build families, communities and a great nation. Many others with the same good intentions are applying to come, even now.

But ignoring biblical wisdom, on any issue, creates the chaos and harm that we see in our daily news. Loss of employment to cheaper labor. Human trafficking. Sanctuary cities. Caravans. Children without parents. Voter fraud. Escalating disease, drugs and crime. Few issues are dividing Americans, including Christians, more than illegal immigration. How tragic and unnecessary when **a biblical understanding of wise welcome could heal both the Church and nation**, including helping the poor both home and abroad.

Though news media tend to focus on the divisions in our cultural conversation, a recent wide-reaching poll conducted by Harvard University reveals that **79% of U.S. voters — across party lines — agree that the U.S. needs secure borders.**¹ How can we balance security and hospitality in America, the world's most generous and welcoming nation?

Counter to the common sense of most Americans, many curious ministers often advocate for mass migration. Biblical wisdom belongs in public as in private, but **cherry-picking Scripture** for personal or political agendas (more on this later) can be deceptive and dishonoring of the Lord and of one another. Let's instead seek to be centered, deeply grounded and accurate.

¹Harper, Jennifer. "Roughly 80% of all voters say U.S. needs secure borders, including 68% of Democrats: Harvard poll." National. The Washington Times. January 23. https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/jan/23/roughly-80-of-all-voters-say-us-needs-secure-borde/?fbclid=IwAR3TLbcOeR3wtllx3SETbWYhq00kFS2YB59n24rNg-FT_09_CL1wmlwrrTBo.

To understand biblical context, terms and principles, we have the help of esteemed Old Testament scholar and archaeologist, **Dr. James Hoffmeier**. We'll glean from his classic book, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens and the Bible* (Crossway.) Raised in Egypt by missionary parents, Dr. Hoffmeier has been a refugee from war and an alien in two different countries. We appreciate his heart for people and his mind for Scripture.

In the Bible, **the alien (*ger*) was a person who entered Israel with permission**, following legal procedures to obtain recognized standing as a "resident alien" (*The Immigration Crisis*, page 52). Israel's own experience as mistreated aliens in Egypt contributed to their giving special consideration to aliens and their vulnerable plight in a foreign land. The many laws in Scripture that protect such aliens reflect God's concern for the "resident alien" (*The Immigration Crisis*, page 68).

In contrast, **the foreigner (*nekhar* or *zar*) was not a legal resident** and could be an invading enemy, squatter, temporary worker or merchant, or someone simply passing through (*The Immigration Crisis*, page 51).

Believers understand the language of Hebrews 11, that we ourselves are aliens, looking for a "better country," as citizens of a heavenly home. Yet while called to be stewards here and now, countries since biblical times have had the right to clearly established secure borders. Nations have had the right to determine who enters their land and who would be invited to stay should the arrangement be mutually beneficial. This is one of the ways nations, like gardens, can flourish.

As we'll see in this study guide, the Bible teaches neither *open borders*, nor *closed borders* — it teaches **wise welcome**. Given the tragic realities of a fallen world, and our calling to bless our fallen world, **we're to maintain walls with doors**. We're to show hospitality to the *ger*, and resident aliens are required to respect the laws, customs and indigenous culture of the country they have entered.

When received, the gospel of Jesus Christ gives new life to every person, in every nation. Nowhere does Scripture dismiss the vitality of unique cultures, and the sovereignty of nations. People living in both Old and New Testament times, from Abraham to Jesus to Paul, honored national borders and customs. They did not presume to enter without being welcomed, and they came only as a blessing.

From Scripture, we learn that the Lord intends nations to exist *and* to have boundaries. The God of the Bible objects to a stateless world of open borders and lifeless "open society" monoculture ruled by a global oligarchy. I'll say it again, **the gospel is for the flourishing of every individual person, culture and nation**. Heaven will be filled with people from every tribe, tongue and nation. But temporarily, in our hurting world, doors have locks and nations must have laws and borders. Thus, not surprisingly, the Bible teaches us to use discernment and common sense.

²For more financial information see www.USASpending.Gov.

A Personal Note —

As a short-term missionary with Harvard students in several war-torn Central and Latin American countries, I did not see the need for borders, nor laws of citizenship. I had little knowledge of immigration law and history, nor the value of national sovereignty, and only selective knowledge of Scripture. **I meant well, I just didn't know much.** And as I later attempted to adopt two Haitian children, I became frustrated by legal and economic hurdles. I wondered, *why is adoption and legal migration so hard, when illegal entry is so easy?*

After volunteering with grad students to help turn a Salvadoran garbage dump into a livable community for 8,000 people in desperate poverty, I was surprised to see our mission organization, World Relief, and other "voluntary agencies" (VOLAGs) begin to close down good, hard-fought efforts (circa 2009) to prioritize "welcoming" migrants to the United States. Agencies and nonprofits like World Vision, Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Services (LIRS), Catholic Charities, U.S. Catholic Bishops, Church World Service and others began to receive hundreds of millions of dollars from the U.S. Department of State, USAID, and curious anti-faith "progressive" foundations to "resettle" large migrations of people in American cities. Ironically, much of the funding for these efforts comes from U.S. taxpayers who, polls clearly show, do not desire an influx of foreign labor and porous borders.

After "resettling" hundreds of thousands of foreigners, asylees, and refugees in our communities, these agencies tend to move on, leaving the work of care to often-struggling, unprepared American citizens, churches, social services, police and schools. God loves hospitality, and faith stretches us in many important ways, but if welcome is not wise, and newcomers do not assimilate, the fabric of our communities can be torn as we try to navigate what sociologist Thomas Sowell calls the unwise "welcome of incompatible values."

Shockingly, the same agencies, while often claiming to be Christian in nature, agreed to sign an Obama-era **pledge to be silent about the gospel** — and not share the Christian faith with migrants and refugees, many of whom are Muslim. Yes, practical aid is of great value, but it's hard to imagine Jesus, the apostles, or any faith leaders throughout history agreeing to withhold knowledge of God's love in Christ in exchange for money.

As a missionary, I saw the magnet of America as a "savior" nation disrupt and harm people in other nations. It's a complex chord. I'm still learning about this puzzling issue. Agencies do good work caring for those in need, but by helping to make America a magnet attracting millions of foreign people, these agencies can unwittingly **weaken the nations that migrants abandon.** The most vulnerable, such as girls, women and grandparents, are often left behind. In many cases, children are sent on a nightmare journey "*el norte*," making them easy prey to abusers, drug cartels, and sex trafficking.

The agencies see their work as love. We can assume that most mean well and truly do care for people in need, but as we read the headlines and crime statistics, we now need to ask, ***What is the true nature of love? How can we grow in real love for both migrants and citizens — both of whom God loves?***

I began to ask such questions as I discovered the funding and political motives behind the move to open borders, "open cities" and many **globalist projects of Open Society and related "progressive" foundations.** I saw that mass migration was not entirely about love of human beings. Many refugees, for example, say that they would rather remain in their home regions, and yet the United Nations and related non-profits treat people as pawns in a dangerous game of social engineering.

Consider the harm and injustice of open borders and “open society” throughout the world. The elderly in many nations are deserted and made vulnerable. **Children are often used for asylum status of adults, or worse.** People applying for legal U.S. entry and citizenship are often delayed, for years. European women are sexually assaulted without legal recourse because of “cultural differences.”

Again, God loves refugees, foreigners and citizens. He died to save us all. This includes millions of American citizens who should not be victimized by the unnecessary dangers of drugs, crime, wage suppression and voter negation. How unloving to steal the story, character and future of a nation. The greater love of biblical wisdom is our path of healing and renewal, and so deeply needed now.

Real people need answers. For personal reflection and group discussion, let's begin with these questions, explored in our Bible Study, as we dive into *Wise Welcome*:

- What does the Lord actually say in His Word about immigration and citizenship?
- What is the nature of love? Is being *nice* the same as being *kind*?
- How do we protect family and citizens, as Jesus commands, while also being kind to strangers?
- Should we differentiate when it comes to strangers? The Bible distinguishes aliens (*ger*) from foreigners (*zar* and *nekhar*). Why?
- How does *mercy* differ from *justice*? How is biblical justice different from “social justice”?

In Scripture, we find the call to proactively steward the culture in which the Lord has placed us. We find instructions on **how to best love** neighbors and strangers, citizens and aliens. And we find the Great Commission to **advance the gospel and Kingdom of God for the flourishing of people in all nations.**

I believe that the Church and nation can uphold wise public policy, do justice to the American Experiment and Constitution, and redouble efforts to serve people in every nation with the gospel that energizes hope.

Let's move past the pundits, community organizers, preacher-activists and politicians, and go straight to Scripture itself. In the Bible, we find neither fully closed borders, nor fully open borders. We find discernment. We find wise welcome. We find truths by which all people and cultures can flourish.

Kelly Monroe Kullberg
Former missionary, Central & South America
Former Chaplain, Harvard Graduate School Christian Fellowship
Author, *Finding God Beyond Harvard: The Quest for Veritas*

Introduction

by Dr. James K. Hoffmeier

Emeritus Professor of Old Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Christians living in the West are facing a growing hostility to a biblical worldview. Yet inspired by our confidence in a sovereign and loving God, we are called to seriously study current controversial issues in the light of **an informed reading of Scripture**. Each believer is responsible for seeking God's wisdom as it pertains to our families, communities and national life. **Churches especially need to take the lead** in helping individuals examine our culture from a scriptural perspective: be it from the pulpit, in Sunday school classes or Bible studies. Only informed Christians can help others understand and apply biblical solutions to complex public policy issues.

Recent controversies surrounding illegal immigration, as well as the inadequate vetting of non-assimilating refugees, has been especially divisive for the Christian community. The 2016 election cycle uncovered the tremendous fault line in our culture in general and in the church in particular. Some Christians point to Bible passages from the Old Testament Law that are friendly to the alien. They believe that "loving" undocumented aliens in our midst requires our government to give amnesty. Others, with equally strong biblical convictions, likewise point to Scripture and take a totally different view. Based on Romans 13, they argue that those entering our country illegally are subject to the laws of the land on immigration or any other matter. When the laws are violated, lawful penalties should be enforced.

This dilemma is exacerbated by two problems:

1. Christians generally lack specific, in-depth knowledge of the whole counsel of Scripture as it applies to immigration.
2. Key Hebrew terms vary among various English translations, thereby misleading readers.

This short booklet is devoted to a biblical understanding of immigration, both the obligation to care for strangers and the responsibility to protect a nation's citizens. Our goal is to highlight relevant Scriptures and provide some much-needed contextual clarification about critical passages. We hope this approach helps arm Christians with the whole counsel of Scripture.

Reading Scripture, especially the Old Testament, in its original social and cultural context is imperative. Applying these principles outside of that context, such as in contemporary Western nations, can be problematic. The laws that governed ancient Israel from Exodus 20 through the book of Deuteronomy were part of God's covenant demands on His people, the Israelites. The laws were both civil and religious, with no bifurcation between them. There was no "separation of church and state." Hence the biblical law as originally given was not intended for America or any other country.

Many Old Testament laws seem remote and irrelevant today. The 21st century Christian must ask, why did God include this law? What good was He safeguarding? What theological principle is at work here? From these questions we begin to understand what Scripture really advocates and its relevance to present-day issues. Simplistic correlations between ancient laws and present dilemmas are neither convincing nor helpful, and can do much damage by misrepresenting God's intentions for humans, especially for the believing community. Great wisdom and blessings follow any culture or nation that lives by Scriptural principles; after all, *"righteousness*

exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). This verse applies to all people, both Christians and non-believers. Having said this, the theological values of Scripture speak most directly to Christ’s Church.

My appeal is that those who study the Scriptures presented in this book will grow in their understanding of how the church should respond to the challenges of illegal immigration and the threats of open borders. In the light of God’s wise counsel, **we can find legal and peaceful means to advocate for biblical principles** within our increasingly godless culture.

“Do not be overcome by evil,” St. Paul admonishes in Romans 12:21, *“but overcome evil with good.”* This is our challenge in all moral and ethical issues, and this is certainly true of our nation’s ongoing dispute over immigration.

Exploring the Whole Counsel of Scripture:

Key Bible Passages with Commentary by Professor James K. Hoffmeier

How does God counsel us in the Bible regarding migration, hospitality to strangers and citizenship? How do we keep peace and grow a healthy culture and thriving civilization? What is the role of law and government regarding immigration? Are we citizens of the world or of nations?

To bring clarity and wisdom to these questions, we turn to key Bible passages with commentary by Professor James Hoffmeier from his classic book, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible*. Our focus will be on biblical principles regarding borders, immigration, refugees and culture-building. We seek the whole counsel of Scripture, not sweeping generalities or isolated verses.



Professor Hoffmeier, Emeritus, is an eminent archaeologist and respected scholar. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Toronto and long served as Professor of Old Testament and Near Eastern archaeology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. For a deeper study, and to read in full context, we recommend reading the extended passages in your Bible and the many books by Dr. James Hoffmeier beginning with his excellent short book, *The Immigration Crisis*.

References to Dr. Hoffmeier's book, *The Immigration Crisis*, will be marked "IC," with page numbers.



Scripture passages, unless otherwise marked, are from the New International Version (NIV).



Additional comments are by editors.

Let's begin the journey, together.

1. The Whole Counsel of Scripture



One unfortunate way of applying biblical law to modern issues and laws is to look for literal correlations between the two without fully understanding the setting and context of the passage in question. Advocates on all sides of the immigration issue have clouded the debate by isolating specific verses that advance their favored perspective. Christians are invited to grow in Bible knowledge and discern what believers call "the whole counsel of Scripture."

We recommend this comprehensive view that encourages Christians to seek an understanding of ethical principles through the teaching of the Bible in theological, social and economic areas. An established biblical worldview provides a much more effective means of evaluating contemporary social and legal issues. (*Immigration Crisis*, IC 25-27)

2. National Sovereignty and Boundaries



Territorial borders were taken seriously. Even a traveler, a foreigner passing through the territory of another, had to obtain permission. By his actions, Abraham demonstrated that as an alien, he had to obey the laws and customs of the host country. (IC 32, 33, 48)

FACT

Under federal law, illegally entering the U.S. is generally a criminal offense and also carries civil penalties. Unlawful presence in the U.S. is generally a civil violation and can result in deportation but not a prison sentence.



Genesis 47:4-6 NRSV – [Joseph’s brothers, the sons of Jacob] said to Pharaoh, *“We have come to reside as aliens in the land... let your servants settle in the land of Goshen.”*



The Lord calls us to be faithful stewards of the land, domain, time and nations in which he has placed us. Joseph was second in command in Egypt; his brothers still had to seek approval from Pharaoh, the governing authority, to enter the country. We see this respect of boundaries, cultures and nations throughout Scripture.



Numbers 20:14,16,17,19 – *Moses dispatched messengers to Edom’s king with the following request... “Now we are here in Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. Please let us pass through your country... We will go along the main road, and if we or our livestock drink any water, we will pay for it. We only want to pass through on foot nothing else....”*



National borders were respected. To pass through without permission was considered a criminal action, and perhaps even an act of war. Israel respected the boundaries of nations with whom they disagreed.



Acts 17:26 – *From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.*

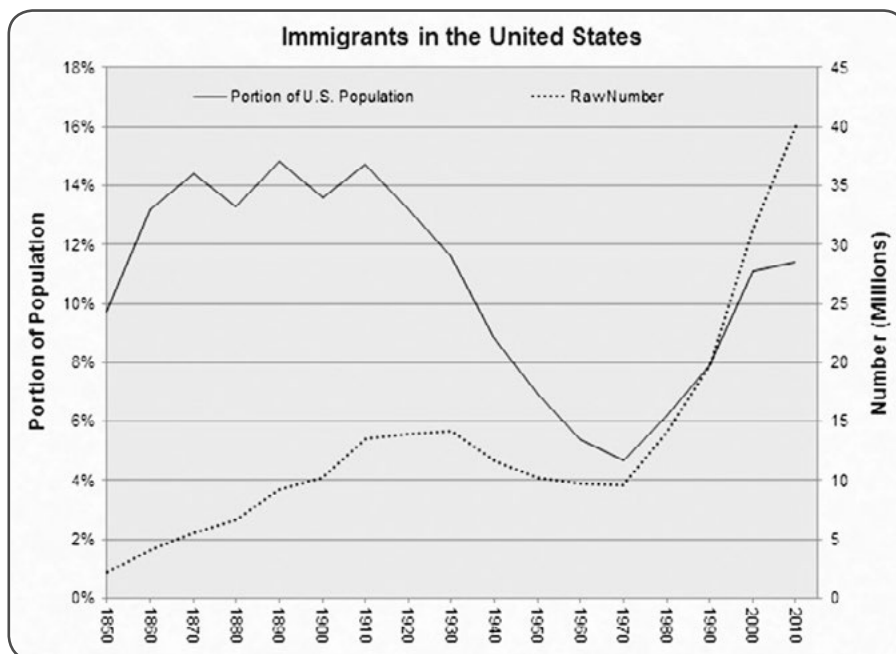


Paul the Apostle reiterates the Genesis theme, that all people are of common origin and are to inhabit and steward the earth. Nations have distinct boundaries ordained by God. In the book of Revelation, we learn that the kings and peoples of many nations will be in heaven.

FACT

In the United States, immigrants can be classified into three broad categories:

- 1. Citizens**
- 2. Non-citizens who live in the U.S. legally**
- 3. Non-citizens who live in the U.S. illegally**



FACT

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 43.1 million immigrants, comprising 13.5% of the U.S. population, were living in the U.S. as of 2016.

3. Protecting and Controlling a Nation's Borders



Nehemiah 2:17 – *Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.”*



2 Chronicles 14:2-5,7 – *[King] Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God. He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He commanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his laws and commands “Let us build up these towns,” he said to Judah, “and put walls around them, with towers, gates and bars. The land is still ours, because we have sought the Lord our God; we sought him and he has given us rest on every side.” So they built and prospered.*



Isaiah 60:18 – *No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise.*



Given the realities of a fallen world, we are to build in the ruins and work for peace, human flourishing, and the glory of God. This effort can include strong borders and the rule of law that yields order and peace. Healthy national boundaries are viewed as a sign of blessing, while lax borders are seen as an urgent problem to be remedied.

Boundary Stones: One way the Lord reveals his care for widows, orphans and the rights of all is to forbid an aggressor from coveting and stealing personal, ancestral and national property.

Deuteronomy 19:14 Do not move your neighbor's **boundary stone** set up by your predecessors in the inheritance you receive in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess.

Deuteronomy 27:17 "Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor's **boundary stone.**" Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

Job 24:2 There are those who move **boundary stones**; they pasture flocks they have stolen.

Proverbs 15:25 The LORD tears down the house of the proud, but he sets the widow's **boundary stones** in place.

Proverbs 23:10 [*Saying 11*] Do not move an ancient **boundary stone** or encroach on the fields of the fatherless,

Hosea 5:10 Judah's leaders are like those who move **boundary stones.** I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water.

FACT

Illegal Non-Citizens

Immigrants who illegally live in the U.S. are known as "unauthorized," "illegal," or "undocumented" immigrants.

Unauthorized immigrants include people who enter the United States through:

- "illegal means such as crossing the border without inspection."
- "legal means with a tourist, student, or work visa but overstay the time frame allowed by the visa."

4. Hebrew Word Distinctions: "Resident Alien" & "Foreigner" – Ger & Nekhar



The Hebrew Bible (O.T.) uses several different words when referring to foreigners. The words *ger* (Leviticus 19:33) and *nekhar* (Exodus 23:12; Deuteronomy 1:16; 14:21) refer to two different categories of people. The two should not be confused. Understanding the Bible's definition of an alien or sojourner and how one attained that status is critical to the current debate because advocates for illegal immigration are using passages from the Old Testament to support their positions.

In the Hebrew Bible, the alien (*ger*) was a person who entered Israel with permission, and followed legal procedures to obtain recognized standing as a "resident alien." (IC 48-52)

The rationale for Israel giving special consideration to aliens and their vulnerable plight in a foreign land is rooted in Israel's own experience as mistreated aliens in Egypt. The many laws intended to protect aliens reflect God's concern for the *ger*, the "resident alien." (IC 68) In contrast, the foreigner (*nekhar* or *zar*) was not a legal resident and could be an invading enemy, squatter, temporary worker or merchant, or someone passing through. They are not provided the same legal and social protections as those received by the *ger*. (IC 48-52)



Leviticus 19:33-34 ESV – *When a stranger (ger) sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*



Legal sojourners must be more than tolerated. They should be loved by citizens in line with Leviticus' version of the Golden Rule. This passage might be considered a kind of Magna Carta for foreigners in ancient Israel.

5. Rule of Law



Resident aliens are required to obey the same legal code and statutes as the native-born citizens of Israel. Israelites were not to receive preferred treatment under the law. But also, aliens were subject to the same regulations, and if they were guilty of an offense, the same justice was meted out against them. This means that while the alien was to be treated in an equal manner legally, the expectation was for the foreign resident to adhere to all the rules and regulations of Israelite law.

Aliens could not, for instance, ignore certain social laws because they differed from those of their native culture or because they disagreed with some aspect of Israelite law. They could not pick and choose which laws to obey and yet remain in good standing with the covenant community. (IC 77, 78)



Exodus 12:49 NRSV – *There shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.*



Leviticus 18:26 NRSV – *But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you.*



Leviticus 24:22 NRSV – *You shall have one law for the alien and for the citizen: for I am the Lord your God.*



Numbers 15:29-30 NRSV – *You shall have the same law for anyone who acts in error. But whoever acts high-handedly, whether a native or an alien, affronts the Lord, and shall be caught off from among the people.*



Resident aliens or sojourners (*ger*) were offered the same protections under the law. And they were expected to obey a nation's laws regardless of the cultural or legal norms from where they came. For example, they were to keep the same sexual and purity laws as Israelites to continue their status. Just as Israelites were to be rejected for disobedience, sojourners would be also.

FACT

Non-Citizens Committed a Disproportionate Share of Federal Crimes, 2011-2016.
21% of those convicted of non-immigration crimes were non-citizens — 2.5 times their share of the population.

Among the findings of the new data on federal crimes:

Areas where non-citizens account for a much larger share of convictions than their 8.4 percent, or more, share of the adult population include:

- 42.4 percent of kidnapping convictions;
- 31.5 percent of drug convictions;
- 22.9 percent of money laundering convictions;
- 17.8 percent of economic crimes (e.g. larceny, embezzlement, and fraud);
- 13.4 percent of administration of justice offenses (e.g. witness tampering, obstruction, and contempt);
- 13 percent of other convictions (e.g. bribery, civil rights, environmental, and prison offenses); and
- 12.8 percent of auto thefts.

Data. These tables showing convictions were compiled by the Government Accountability Office at the request of the Senate Judiciary Committee based on data from the U.S. Sentencing Commission “Interactive Sourcebook of Federal Sentencing Statistics”. Convictions are in the federal courts for felonies and class A misdemeanors. Death penalty cases and petty offenses are not included. The non-citizen share of the overall adult population comes from the public-use data file of the 2011-2016 American Community Survey collected by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The hyperlink below reflects the breakdown of convictions for federal crimes by their primary offense and citizenship: See: [DHS.gov](#), [ICE.gov](#), & [CIS.org](#) for current statistics and information.

FACT

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the federal agency that “enforces federal laws governing border control, customs, trade and immigration to promote homeland security and public safety.”

6. How Did a Person or Nation become a *Ger*? (A Resident Alien or Sojourner)



Genesis 47:4-6 ESV – *They said to Pharaoh, “We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants’ flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen.” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock.”*



A person became a sojourner by invitation, and only in this way might they be invited to remain.

FACT

Non-citizen immigrants who legally live in the U.S. are known as “legal permanent residents” or “lawful permanent residents.” These people are authorized to permanently live, work and study in the United States. The federal government issues green-colored identification cards to legal permanent residents, and thus, they are also known as “green card holders.”

7. Assimilate: Conversion to the Same Worldview and Faith



Isaiah 56:5-8

For thus says the Lord...

“I will give in my house and within my walls

a monument and a name

better than sons and daughters;

I will give them an everlasting name

that shall not be cut off.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,

to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,

and to be his servants,

everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,

and holds fast my covenant—

these I will bring to my holy mountain,

and make them joyful in my house of prayer;

their burnt offerings and their sacrifices

will be accepted on my altar;

for my house shall be called a house of prayer

for all peoples.”



The end of the assimilation process is to be a salvation based not on ethnicity or privilege, but on unity of belief and practice “for all peoples.”

8. Ruth — The Ultimate Example of Assimilation



Ruth, a former Moabite woman, came to Israel to be a blessing. She completely assimilated and became an Israelite. (IC 103) She vowed, "Your people will be my people and your God my God."



Ruth 1:16 ESV – *But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."*



Ruth 2:10 Orthodox Jewish Bible – *Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, "Why have I found chen (favor, grace) in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a nokhriyah (foreigner, alien)?"*



Ruth 2:11 ESV – *But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before."*



Ruth asks why she's being treated with favor, considering her foreign origin? Boaz instructs his men to treat Ruth kindly, and that she deserves to be "redeemed," because she has herself been an example of kindness. And in showing that Ruth became the grandmother of King David, thus also a forebear of Jesus, the Old Testament makes clear that this foreigner obtained the same status of the natural-born citizen and became equal in God's sight.

9. Inclusion



During the reign of Hezekiah, aliens participated in eating the Passover meal and received the priestly blessings. The beauty of the story is that it shows that the religious inclusion for the alien was being taken seriously over five hundred years after the exodus from Egypt when the first aliens were permitted to join in the celebration of God's deliverance. The inclusion of the alien in the Passover illustrates that God wanted aliens to be recipients of His salvation, provided they followed the provisions laid out in the Law for their incorporation into the community of Israel. (IC 111)



2 Chronicles 30:23,25 NRSV – *Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the festival for another seven days; so they kept it for another seven days with gladness.... The whole assembly of Judah, the priest and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the resident aliens who came out of the land of Israel, and the resident aliens who lived in Judah, rejoiced.*



Numbers 9:14 NRSV – *Any alien residing among you who wishes to keep the passover to the Lord shall do so according to the statute of the passover and according to its regulation; you shall have one statute for both the resident alien and the native.*



Nowhere is the nation taught to welcome or celebrate foreign and incompatible beliefs, laws and practices. However, the nation is to welcome and celebrate aliens who convert, join and/or honor the faith of the nation.

10. Biblical Justice



When Israel's prophets called Israel's leaders and the people to justice, the standard for justice was none other than the Sinaitic covenant, the Law. When the prophets speak of oppression of the alien, the fatherless and the widow, they are attacking problems such as defrauding wages or extortion. The prophets, then, were not just social reformers pointing the people of Israel in a new or different direction (or definition) of social justice, but to an old and familiar – but sadly neglected – path found in the Law. (IC 114-122) *“Therefore, the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails.”* (Habakkuk 1:4)



Jeremiah 22:3 NRSV – *Thus says the Lord: “Act with justice and righteousness and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place.”*



Exodus 22:21 NRSV – *You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.*



Deuteronomy 10:17-18 NRSV – *For 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 providing them food and clothing.*



These verses bring to the forefront the importance of understanding the different Hebrew words for those who enter one's country. According to Dr. Hoffmeier, when the Old Testament requires social services to include aliens, it is for the resident alien and the legal immigrant. Foreigners, on the other hand, including those who have broken the law or who are in the country illegally, are not mentioned as beneficiaries of this social generosity. (IC 48-52)



Malachi 3:5 NRSV – *Then 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.*



The NIV renders “thrust aside” as “deprive aliens of justice.” Assuming this understanding, Malachi is expressing God's displeasure at those who deprive the alien of the justice that the Law stipulates for the *ger* [resident alien]. (IC 120) Another form of “oppressing the hired workers” is bringing foreign workers into a country in a way that allows the wages of a nation's workers to be undermined. Workers who can no longer work due to an influx of foreign workers will soon find it difficult to provide for their own families.

11. Not All Foreigners Were Tolerated or Seen as the *Ger* (Aliens & Sojourners)



Deuteronomy 7:1-6

When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess.... Make no treaty with them.... Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other Gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them: Break down their alters, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles, and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.



The work of faithfulness and stewardship is hard and serious business. Pluralism and Globalism are not entirely new to the 21st century. The Lord is clear that his people must remain faithful to him, and not be absorbed into pagan cultures. Here the Canaanite peoples seem unwilling to assimilate. Consequently, they would threaten the holiness of the people of Israel.

12. Charity and Social Services



The poor, including aliens, were sustained in ancient Israel by the practice of gleaning (which required work) and the tithe (which was distributed locally). There clearly is a basis for legal immigrants (*ger*) who are needy receiving the same social benefits that government offers to disadvantaged citizens.

“Foreigners,” on the other hand, including those who have broken the law or who are in the country illegally, are not mentioned as beneficiaries of this social generosity. (IC 86)



Leviticus 23:22 NRSV – *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 for the alien: I am the Lord your God.*



Deuteronomy 24:20-21 NRSV – *When you beat your olive 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.*



Matthew 25:35 – *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.*



Luke 10:33-35 – *But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have."*



In the "Good Samaritan" parable, Jesus expands our understanding of "neighbor," and our care for his or her misfortune. The parable does not teach the relocation of thousands of people to foreign lands, although it is often used this way in public policy advocacy.

In the Leviticus and Deuteronomy passages, the poor and alien do the work of gleaning. This imparts the blessings of community integration, earned happiness and shared harvest.



1 Timothy 5:8 – *Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*



This passage sets our order of priorities in caring for others. We should start with those closest to us, our family, then work outwards to community, state and nation. It's not that people outside our family or nation are unimportant and should not be helped. Not at all. But because no one can help everyone, our priorities should begin with those in need closest to home. What then should we make of state or private relief programs that aid illegal immigrants at the expense of citizens.

FACT

Some of the benefits of becoming a naturalized citizen include the ability to: (Per U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services)

- "vote in federal elections."
- "travel with a U.S. Passport."
- "run for elective office where citizenship is required."
- "participate on a jury."
- "become eligible for federal and certain law enforcement jobs."
- "obtain certain state and federal benefits not available to non-citizens."
- "obtain citizenship for minor children born abroad."
- "expand and expedite their ability to bring family members to the United States."

13. Employers



The Bible is manifestly clear that just like other workers, aliens should be paid on time and according to the standard rates. Employers who discriminate against workers because they are perceived to be powerless and lack legal protection, and consequently pay them below the standard wage, need to be appropriately sanctioned and fully prosecuted. Romans 13 applies to bosses too. (IC 158)

Likewise, employers should not favor cheaper foreign labor, which harms citizens who then lose gainful employment.

14. Exiles & Refugees



During the period of the Babylonian captivity, the Jews are never called aliens (*gerim* – one who resides in a foreign land by choice with the permission of the host nation). They are referred to as exiles. Yet despite their forced immigration, God admonishes them to, *seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper* (Jeremiah 29:1,4-7). They should work hard and be constructive, thereby promoting the shalom of their new homeland, because as it flourishes, so will they. A second point from Jeremiah’s message is that aliens are to avoid social and political insurrection.

15. Sanctuary Cities



The idea of short-term “sanctuary” originated in Old Testament Israelite law. This practice had specific requirements and was open to people who had accidentally killed someone. The biblical practice of sanctuary, either in the Temple or a city of refuge, was to protect the offender from vigilante justice and to ensure that he received a fair trial.

Sanctuary was never intended as a place to avoid the law, but to allow the law to take its proper course rather than retaliation when it was not called for. American cities and churches that offer sanctuary for illegal immigrants cannot claim to be following the practice described in the Bible. Rather they are twisting biblical statutes and subverting federal law. (IC 83, 84)



Numbers 35:15 – *These six towns will be a place of refuge for Israelites and for foreigners residing among them, so that anyone who has killed another accidentally can flee there.*



The passage notes that these six “sanctuary” cities were open to both Israelites and foreigners alike. The concept was to protect a person who had accidentally killed someone from those seeking a vigilante retribution. The accused found temporary protection in the sanctuary until they could receive a fair trial. This term is now abused as a safe space for those who wish to hide from authority and law.

16. Authority, Conscience and an Orderly Society



Clearly the person who fears God and believes that He is in sovereign control of the course of human events will be motivated by conscience to follow the edicts of the state unless there is a very clear conflict with the teachings of Scripture. Based on Paul’s clear instruction, I believe that citizens and foreigners should be subject to a nation’s laws, and this applies to immigration laws and how one enters a country and becomes a legal resident (or citizen). Every country has such laws in order to promote an orderly society. (IC 142)

Certainly any nation should treat visitors, legal or otherwise, with dignity and respect. As a Christian, I expect that of my country. However, a government official or authority should not look the other way when a crime is committed. There is no basis in Scripture for such a stance. Each country has a right to control who enters its borders and who is denied. I see nothing in Scripture that would abrogate current immigration laws.

When Jesus answered, *“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s,”* he demonstrated that one does not have to pit the earthly ruler against God. He also illustrated that there are obligations to Caesar that do not infringe the rights of God. (IC 140)



Deuteronomy 31:12 NRSV – *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.*



Romans 13:1,5 – *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God....Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.*



My Christian citizenship does not excuse me from the responsibility to the laws when I visit other lands, nor does it permit me to select laws I prefer in my homeland by which to live in a different land. Rather, Paul declared and commentators like Luther affirmed, I am obligated to submit to the laws even if I don’t like them or think they are unfair or inconvenient. (IC 144)

FACT

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is the federal agency that “oversees lawful immigration to the United States.” ICE and USCIS are divisions of the Department of Homeland Security, which is under the authority of U.S. President. Before 2002, the Immigration and Naturalization Service carried out the functions of both ICE and USCIS.

17. Conscientious Resistance



There are clear situations when a Christian may, on moral grounds, object to the laws and orders from government authorities and in good conscience resist such laws. The examples in Scripture of rejecting secular law in favor of clear biblical teaching or because of conscience usually entail the preservation of life. In the case of the apostles in Acts 4, the issue was freedom for Christians to proclaim the gospel. (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8)

Surely breaking immigration laws to improve one’s economic standard does not rise to the same moral level as a medical professional refusing to perform an abortion. (IC 147)

18. Matthew 25 – “I was a Stranger...”



Matthew 25:35 – *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.*



In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus describes help for those in need. He states, *I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me* (v. 40). Some believe that Jesus is referring to all humanity, but this all-inclusive interpretation of Matthew 25:40, 45 is problematic because the New Testament nowhere refers to all humanity as the “brothers of Jesus.” As D.A. Carson observes, “there is no parallel for this.”

Regardless of Matthew’s use of “brothers” in a specialized and restrictive manner, the obvious starting point for Christians should be the recognition that all humans are made in the image of God, and we should seek to love our neighbor (including our citizen neighbors) as ourselves, and to treat the needy with dignity and compassion. But this ethic does not mean that Christians turn a blind eye to those who violate the law, whether the issue of immigration, robbery, identity theft, or other transgressions of the law. Matthew 25 is a beautiful passage, but it should not be used to determine federal policy or national immigration law. (IC 150-151)

19. Mercy and Justice



The challenge of applying a biblical worldview to the contemporary issue of immigration is quite apparent. We must be willing to see that a command like, *When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the stranger* (Leviticus 19:33-34), does not contradict Paul’s admonition that, *everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities* (Rom. 13:1) – i.e., the laws of the land.

The New Testament sets forth two important principles. The first is that governments are ordained by God, and that the laws and ordinances made by humans, unless they clearly violate divine principles or teachings, should be followed. The second is that Christians themselves are considered aliens in this world, and their attitude toward others should be, as Paul instructs, *as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers*. (Gal. 6:10)

Yet nowhere in the Old Testament is there any sense that a nation had to accept immigrants, nor was being received as an alien a right. Permission was required. But when the alien does seek permission and enters legally, I believe they ought to have most of the rights of citizenship (voting and serving on juries are current exceptions). Meanwhile, illegal immigrants should not expect these same privileges from the country whose laws they disregard by virtue of their undocumented status.

The Bible clearly distinguishes between the status of a legal alien (*ger*) and a foreigner (*nekhar* and *zar*), and one consequence of this is that there really is a difference between the legal standing of a present-day documented alien and an illegal immigrant. Therefore, it is legally and morally acceptable for a government to deal with those in the country illegally according to the nation's legal provision, including expatriation (as Abraham experienced). But the Christian rightfully insists, however, that they be dealt with in a humane manner. (IC 156)

There is no need to drive a wedge between the New Testament's teaching about being compassionate to people and the state's responsibility to enforce its laws and provide for its citizens. Clearly what we need is a fair and balanced treatment of all relevant biblical material to examine how it addresses these issues and to see what wisdom it might offer us for both national immigration law and federal policy. (IC 150-152)

20. A Warning about the Ascension of Foreigners as a Means of God's Judgment



Deuteronomy 28:43-45 – *The foreigners who reside among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. They will lend to you, but you will not lend to them. They will be the head, but you will be the tail. All these curses will come on you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you.*



Isaiah 1:7 – *Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners (*zar*) right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.*



Obadiah 11 – *On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners (*zar*) entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them.*



Lamentations 5:2 – *Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers (*nekhar*), our homes to foreigners (*zar*).*



When citizens and believers fail to obey the Lord, and fail to observe his commands and decrees to shape their own lives, families and nations, the Lord will allow foreigners to overtake and oppress a nation.

King Solomon tells us, *Where there is no vision, the people perish. But happy is he who keeps the law.* (Proverbs 29:18) The Living Bible translates it this way: *Where there is ignorance of God, crime runs wild; but what a wonderful thing it is for a nation to know and keep His laws.*

Israel had to learn, over and over again, to return to the Lord and live in the true story of God's good creation, a tragic fall and the presence of the Lord with them to build in the ruins. Passivity creates a void that aggressive ideologies and populations will fill. Though opponents cleverly work to intimidate and silence citizens, propaganda and deception must be overcome with God's truths, creativity, cultural justice and courage.

Conclusion

Cultural Stewardship and Kingdom-building

In Scripture, we see that God loves both citizen and alien, and that he gives us wisdom to understand the nature of a loving society. We can also now see that favoring foreign persons at the expense of our citizen neighbors, or allowing anyone to live outside of the laws that govern our nation, is neither just, nor fair, nor wise, nor loving. Only wisdom yields peace.

Culture is a kind of garden, and gardening is hard, but good, work. From Genesis to Revelation, God invites us into his life-giving work of wisdom, creativity and redemption. In the first chapter of Genesis, He blesses us and gives us a cultural mandate to fill the earth, to be fruitful and multiply, to steward and do our best with the time and opportunities given to us.

Even after the Fall, we're taught to cultivate and create, to live and work in such a way that enhances life and glorifies God. Stewardship is not just care-taking; it is culture-making. We observe the laws of nature, and of nations, that yield peace. We cultivate the land that yields harvest. We honor the nature of human beings in order to promote harmony, love, family, and community.

America is known for freedom and opportunity. Our Constitution recognizes the God-given dignity of all persons, as well as our rights and duties in a free republic.

For readers who desire further study, we suggest that you carefully read the longer Bible passages themselves. You will also benefit from Dr. Hoffmeier's classic book, *The Immigration Crisis*.

We hope this Bible study inspires you to love as the Lord commands. Equipped with clarity from Scripture, let's move past the pundits, activists, and politicians to embrace "wise welcome," because biblical wisdom is true love for human beings, yielding the greatest good for all cultures.

Together, let's increase our efforts to share, in word and deed, **the good news (gospel) of God's Kingdom for all who hear and believe. -- in every nation. Let's sow the seeds of revival – because of love.**

Kelly Monroe Kullberg

Author, *Finding God Beyond Harvard: The Quest for Veritas*

Former missionary in Peru, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Russia and Guatemala

For Further Exploration

Visit AmericanEvangelicals.org/Issues to enjoy Dr. James Hoffmeier's videos on immigration.

Read Dr. James Hoffmeier's short, classic book *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible*.

Dr. Hoffmeier (Ph.D., University of Toronto), taught for more than thirty years as a professor of Old Testament and Near Eastern archaeology. He recently retired from his post at Trinity International University and is continuing research and writing. Born and raised in Egypt, he has been a refugee from war and an alien in two different countries, giving him firsthand experience with immigration issues.

Reviews of *The Immigration Crisis* —

"Doubtless some will question this or that detail of his reading of Scripture, but Hoffmeier's book is a very healthy antidote to the merely sentimental readings that dominate much Christian thought on this complex and challenging issue."

~ *D.A. Carson, Research Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

"I come from a troubled nation from which hundreds of thousands of people have emigrated to Western nations -- some legally and some illegally. I resonate fully with the dual biblical emphasis presented in this book of caring for the alien and of submitting to the laws of the land."

~ *Ajith Fernando, National Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka*

"James Hoffmeier brings the clarity and structure of biblical society to the confusion and chaos of modern America For anyone who believes in the Judeo-Christian way of life, this book is essential reading."

~ *Rabbi Benjamin Scolnic, Temple Beth Shalom, Hamden, Connecticut*

"Hoffmeier allows the Bible to speak for itself within its cultural context without reading modern politics into the text He provides a road map for the church to stay true to its biblical roots while serving its calling to be a light to the nations."

~ *Steven M. Ortiz, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

"Read this book if you want to throw light on the subject of immigration and not merely more heat. A valuable perspective on national borders, guest workers, the difference between documented aliens and foreigners in Old Testament times, and many other matters."

~ *Marvin Olasky, former Editor-in-Chief, World Magazine*

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