

**ALIENS AMONG US**

**God's Call to Christians in the United States on Treatment of the Immigrant**

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## PREFACE

My interests in the subject of immigration and aliens in the Bible began with my first experience of being an “alien” in another country. I planned to immigrate to the country of South Africa in 2002 in order to be near my fiancé and his family. My excitement about living in another country quickly turned to confusion and frustration as I experienced the full force of “culture shock” within the first few months of living there. I went from functioning as a full adult in my home country to what felt like that of a two year old. I had to relearn how to drive, shop, count money, interact with people, things I had taken for granted in the United States, and above all avoid cultural taboos. I had never felt so vulnerable in my whole life. After a year of struggling, I returned to the United States defeated, only to have to walk through the same experience with my now husband, who had to go through his own experience as an “alien” in the United States.

After such a difficult experience I found that I looked at the immigrants in the United States very differently than I had before. Were they, too, struggling with everyday life in this new country? Did they struggle with social interactions? Did they also feel like social outcasts? If those immigrants in America felt the same vulnerability that I had as an alien in South Africa, then Christians in the United States of America have a golden opportunity to reach people in great need. I soon discovered that the Bible has a lot to say about “aliens” and how the people of God should interact with them. This led me to the great adventure of exploring this topic from a Biblical perspective.

I would also like to thank several individuals who helped make this thesis possible. First I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. William Raccah, whose patience and grace in working

through my ideas and chapters has made this paper what it is. He has done an amazing job at encouraging me to keep my work at an academic level while remembering that my desire is to tackle a topic that needs to be practically addressed by the church of the United States. His time and attention to detail has been greatly valued.

I also want to thank the professors and staff at Northwest University for helping me grow in my knowledge of Biblical Studies. Professor Dr. Ronald Herms, along with my language professors Dr. Bob Stallman and Dr. Kari Brodin, have helped bring depth and insight to this paper that I would never have been able to accomplish without hours of class instruction.

Lastly, I want to thank my husband for all his support through the writing of this thesis. His sacrifice of becoming an immigrant to the United States in order to be with me, and his experiences as an alien in this country have greatly influenced my perspective and interest in this topic. He has always been the first to encourage me to pursue my degree and has made this thesis possible.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### General:

BCE	Before Common Era
CE	Common Era
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NIV	New International Version

### Bible books (in alphabetical order):

1 Chr.	1 Chronicles
1 Pet.	1 Peter
2 Chr.	2 Chronicles
2 Sam.	2 Samuel
Col.	Epistle to the Colossians
Dan.	Daniel
Deut.	Deuteronomy
Eph.	Epistle to the Ephesians
Exod.	Exodus
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Gen.	Genesis
Heb.	Epistle to the Hebrews
Hos.	Hosea
Isa.	Isaiah
Jer.	Jeremiah

Josh.	Joshua
Lev.	Leviticus
Lk.	Gospel according to Luke
Mal.	Malachi
Matt.	Gospel according to Matthew
Num.	Numbers
Phil.	Epistle to the Philippians
Prov.	Proverbs
Ps.	Psalms
Rom.	Epistle to the Romans
Zech.	Zechariah



## INTRODUCTION

Some of the biggest areas of controversy among Christians today are the problems presented by immigration. The most controversial are the issues surrounding “illegal” immigrants and how Christians should respond to this growing concern. As more immigrants come to the United States in the twenty-first century, the country is changing dramatically. With each new group of immigrants entering the United States cultural, linguistic and ethnical shifts take place. Christians have to decide how they should respond to the changes created by this influx of people. Pastors, priests and church leaders are in need of great wisdom as to how they should approach the problems of immigration and lead others in their response to it.

One has only to look at the history of the United States to see that American Christians have been dealing with the issues of immigration since the first settlers set foot onto this new land. Since many of the first immigrants came to this country for religious reasons, immigration has always been intertwined with religion and the church in a complicated way. Different Protestant and Catholic groups in the United States have varied in their responses to immigration and its treatment of immigrants over the centuries. These different responses cause us to ask if the Bible has anything to say about interaction with immigrants and if so, how American Christians should respond to “aliens” who are living among us.

This thesis aims to explore this question to Christians in America and how it should interact with immigrants from a Biblical perspective. It focuses mainly on the responses of the Protestant and Catholic Christians who have played a major role in immigration in the history of the United States of America. This thesis does not dive into the responses of the Eastern Orthodox Christians in the United States. The first section in this journey of exploration will

focus on the Bible to see what it has to say about aliens, focusing first on the words used for immigrant, foreigner, and alien in its original Hebrew. An analysis of the words for native-born and the words used for “alien” in the LXX will also be done. The aim of this section will be, to see if the foreigner, or alien, in the Old Testament can be put in the same category as the immigrant coming into America in the twenty-first century

This thesis will then explore who the aliens in the Old Testament were, including the various instances when the people of Israel were considered to be foreigners, or aliens, during their history. The accounts of the Patriarchs, Joseph, Israel in Egypt and Israel’s experience in exile will be looked at. A thorough investigation of God’s specific commands on how the people of Israel were to interact with and treat the aliens who lived among them will then be made, including how God felt about the mistreatment of aliens.

A look at the New Testament and at Jesus’ interactions with aliens and His teaching on the subject during His ministry will then be our focus. An inquiry into the first Christian communities and their interactions with foreigners will be made, especially as seen through the Apostles’ letters to the early churches. To do so, we will look at the various words used for “foreigner” and “alien” in Koine Greek, and how these were used.

The second section of this thesis will focus on who the immigrants are, in twenty-first century America. We will first look at the history of immigration in the US, exploring the first immigrants and each new wave that came through the centuries. How these newcomers were treated and the difficulties they experienced will be presented, and we will then look at Christians in America to see how they responded to immigration. In this part of the thesis it will

be important to examine separately the various Catholic and Protestant perspectives because of their very different stances regarding the issues of immigration in the United States.

This thesis will then explore some of the many contemporary controversial issues surrounding undocumented aliens, including reasons why undocumented aliens chose to come to the United States and the ways they got into the country. It is important to look at the experience of both the documented aliens and migrant workers, and the way they are treated by employers in the United States.

Lastly, this thesis will address the subject of biblical ethics and how what we have learned from the Bible, and the current cultural issues of immigration, come together to challenge how Christians should respond to this serious concern. Through this, we will see if God has anything to say to the American Christian with regard to the treatment of aliens, and how Christians should respond to documented and undocumented aliens. This thesis will hopefully lead to biblically-based wisdom, and clarify how God feels about aliens and the Christian. It will hopefully lead to practical ways that Christians in the United States can respond to the various issues of immigration it faces, and do so in a manner that reflects the holiness of God.

**SECTION ONE:**

**ALIENS IN THE BIBLE**

## CHAPTER ONE

### Words for “Alien” in the Old Testament

Understanding the Hebrew words used when describing the alien in the Old Testament and what these words mean in their original contexts is of utmost importance. Four different words are used for “alien” in the Old Testament: two are adjectives and two are nouns. Often these four words are translated into English by the single word “foreigner,” thus losing their individual specific meanings. It is also important to see what words were chosen for translation into Greek when the Septuagint was created in the mid-second century BCE.<sup>1</sup> These translators may have had a better understanding of the Hebrew text when going over their task over two thousand years ago.

#### *The Four Hebrew Words*

The first word is נָכַר and is found throughout the entire Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> In the English Old Testament “foreign” or “alien” are often used to translate this adjective. נָכַר is used in various Semitic languages that attest well to its translation.<sup>3</sup> It is found six times in the Qumran writings dated from the second century BCE, and is used in this ancient text the same way it is used in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Clancy. "The Date of LXX." *SJOT* 16, no. 2 (January 1, 2002): 207-225. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 26, 2012): 223.

<sup>2</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997): 109.

<sup>3</sup> This includes Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Imperial Aramaic. See VanGemeren, 108-109.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Mitchell. "A Brief History of the Dead Sea Scrolls." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 53, no. 1 (September 1, 2010): 3-14. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 26, 2012): 3.

According to Brown, Driver and Briggs, the Hebrew word נָכַר is often used in a negative sense to mean “enemy” or “hostility.”<sup>5</sup> When the Hebrew Bible uses this word, it refers to something or someone excluded from Hebrew society, such as objects, values, actions, or people considered dangerous or immoral.<sup>6</sup> Thus נָכַר is used to represent foreign wives, as can be seen in 1 Kings<sup>7</sup>: “King Solomon, however, loved many **foreign** women besides Pharaoh’s daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites.”<sup>8</sup> In Proverbs 2:16, נָכַר is used to portray the adulterous woman who leaves her husband and children.<sup>9</sup> “It will save you also from the adulteress, from the **wayward** wife with her seductive words.”<sup>10</sup> This word can also mean idolatry and foreign gods as can be seen in the book of Joshua. “If you forsake the LORD and serve **foreign** gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”<sup>11</sup>

Similar to נָכַר, the Hebrew word נָזִיר is used seventy one times in the Old Testament; it, too, means “foreign” or “alien.” It also indicates something that is “forbidden,” and “unauthorized.”<sup>12</sup> It often refers to political enemies of Israel, like the Assyrians, Egyptians, or Babylonians as can be seen in the book of Isaiah.<sup>13</sup> “Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by **foreigners** right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by **strangers**.”<sup>14</sup> Isaiah also used this word to describe the foreign gods of other nations: “You have forgotten God your Savior; you have not remembered the Rock, your

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<sup>5</sup> F. Brown, C. Briggs, and S. Driver. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2001): 649.

<sup>6</sup> VanGemeren, 109.

<sup>7</sup> See also Ezra 10:2.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 11:1. *New International Version*. (Grand Rapids, MN: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985.) Note: The NIV version will be used for all following Biblical passages in this paper.

<sup>9</sup> Prov. 2:16; see also Prov. 5:20, 7:5, 23:27.

<sup>10</sup> Prov. 2:16; see also Prov. 5:20, 7:5, 23:27.

<sup>11</sup> Josh. 24:20; see also Jer. 5:19, Mal. 2:11.

<sup>12</sup> VanGemeren, 1142.

<sup>13</sup> See also Hos. 7:9, 8:7, Jer. 51:51, Ezek. 28:7, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Isa. 1:7.

fortress. Therefore, though you set out the finest plants and planted **imported [foreign] vines** (gods).”<sup>15</sup>

וְר is so similar in meaning to נִכְר that it is used in parallel in Isaiah 28:21: “The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon—to do his work, his **strange** work, and perform his task, his **alien** task.” Israel would have thought that God’s true task would have been in the calling, saving, and leading of Israel to fulfill His promises. Instead, this verse reveals that they were blind to his “other work” of upholding his judgment against those who refused to follow His commands.<sup>16</sup> In this case, God is the enemy of those who have chosen to disobey Him, and his “alien task” is instead punishing them for their deeds.

Very different from the words נִכְר and וְר is the Hebrew word תּוֹשֵׁב translated as “alien” or “settler.” תּוֹשֵׁב is found fourteen times in the MT with seven of them in Leviticus 25, a portion of scripture that centers on the responsibilities of the Jubilee Year.<sup>17</sup> This Hebrew word is the most challenging to define as it occurs only a few times in the Old Testament.<sup>18</sup> It centers on the idea of this type of alien as a “hireling” in the community, implying that these foreigners were economically dependent on the people of Israel.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the תּוֹשֵׁב is separated in meaning from the גֵּר, the Hebrew word most commonly used in the Old Testament to refer to the alien.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in Exodus 12, that concerns itself with the Passover meal God commands concerning the תּוֹשֵׁב: “Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, but a **temporary**

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<sup>15</sup> Isa. 17:10; see also Deut. 32:16, Jer. 2:25; 3:13, Ps. 81:9.

<sup>16</sup> John D.W. Watts. *World Bible Commentary Isaiah 1-33* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1985): 371.

<sup>17</sup> VanGemeren, 284.

<sup>18</sup> M. Daniel R. Carroll. *Christians at the Border* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Academic, 2008): 101.

<sup>19</sup> See also Lev. 22:10, 25:6, 40.

<sup>20</sup> This Hebrew word will be discussed in greater details in following paragraphs.

**resident** (תושב) and a hired worker may not eat of it.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, later in the chapter using the word גֵר God commands: “An **alien** (גֵר) living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it.”<sup>22</sup> It thus seems evident that the תושב was a type of alien who was not entirely assimilated into the society, both socially and religiously.<sup>23</sup>

Of the four Hebrew words translated as “alien” or “stranger,” the most important to this study and the most commonly used in the Old Testament is גֵר. גֵר can also be translated to mean “one who becomes a refugee.”<sup>24</sup> In English it is often translated as “sojourner,” a word that can be defined as someone who lives temporarily in a place.<sup>25</sup> This word גֵר occurs eighty one times in the MT with a few uncertain cases, and ninety two times in the Old Testament.<sup>26</sup> It can be used as a noun or as a verb (גיר), meaning, “to dwell as a stranger.”<sup>27</sup> The גֵר was not considered a temporary resident or a hired worker from another land because they show signs of being settled in the land for some time. They may have abandoned their homeland for economic or political reasons.<sup>28</sup> Examples of גֵר given in the Old Testament are Abraham in Hebron, Moses in Midian, Elimelech and his family in Moab and the Israelites in Egypt.<sup>29</sup>

The Hebrew noun גֵר has a connection to the Hebrew words גֵרית used for hospitality or lodging, and מְגוּר meaning a place of residence or sojourning place.<sup>30</sup> These two words reveal more about this type of person in the ancient world. Travel was much more difficult and

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<sup>21</sup> Exod. 12:44-45.

<sup>22</sup> Exod. 12:48.

<sup>23</sup> VanGemeren, 284.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 836.

<sup>25</sup> Sojourner <a href=http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sojourner ></a>

<sup>26</sup> VanGemeren, 836.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 836.

<sup>28</sup> VanGemeren, 837.

<sup>29</sup> See Gen. 23:4, Exod. 2:22, Ruth 1:1, Exod. 22:20.

<sup>30</sup> VanGemeren, 836.



dangerous during this time and extensive hospitality was a necessary part of each culture as every man hoped, and would certainly expect, to receive this same treatment when they in turn found it necessary to travel.<sup>31</sup>

God often puts the גַּר in the same category as the widows and orphans among the Hebrew people, revealing that this group would have been at high risk of being taken advantage of by those who wanted to make money.<sup>32</sup> God makes many important commandments in the Pentateuch regarding the protection of the גַּר: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”<sup>33</sup>

גַּר is used in the Old Testament in other ways than just describing a people group in Israel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all considered examples of גַּר in Canaan; this is revealed in the text by the detail that they owned no property except the cave of Machpela where Abraham buried his wife Sara.<sup>34</sup> Many verses use גַּר to describe Israel’s position in Egypt, after moving there from Canaan in order to survive the seven years of famine.<sup>35</sup> This is also seen in Moses’ experience in Midian after he fled from Egypt, and is part of the name he gave his son “Gershom,” saying in fact, “I have become an alien in a foreign land.”<sup>36</sup>

There are also places in the Bible that refer to being a גַּר as the position of the Israelites in the presence of God.<sup>37</sup> These verses indicate God’s relationship with His chosen people as being

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<sup>31</sup> Carroll, 93.

<sup>32</sup> Hartley, 307.

<sup>33</sup> Lev. 19:33-34.

<sup>34</sup> See Exod. 6:4.

<sup>35</sup> See Gen. 15:13, Exod. 23:9.

<sup>36</sup> See Exod. 18:3.

<sup>37</sup> VanGemeren, 837.

like aliens or sojourners in their own land, and in their relationship to God.<sup>38</sup> This distancing would have been caused by their sinful lives and lack of obedience.

### *Tension Between the Two Types of Aliens*

One of the largest and most complicated issues surrounding these Hebrew words for “alien” is where to draw the line between the גֵר and the נֹכַר. It is challenging to see the difference in the Old Testament between a foreigner who might threaten the culture of Israel and lead them away from God and a foreigner living among the people who are to be treated with the same social justice as a widow or orphan.<sup>39</sup>

The book of Malachi addresses this problem when God declares, “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, earlier in the book God also declares, “Judah has been unfaithful. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves by marrying women who worship a foreign god.”<sup>41</sup> Both the women who worship foreign gods and the foreigner who is being mistreated by the people of Israel could be considered alien’s in Israel, yet the Bible does not set out a clear “line” as to the main difference between the two. This could be considered an unresolved issue in the Old Testament.

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<sup>38</sup> See Lev. 25:23, 1 Chr. 29:15, Ps. 39:12-13, 119:19.

<sup>39</sup> Comment by Dr. Blaine Charette on July 6, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Mal. 3:5.

<sup>41</sup> Mal. 2:11.

## *The Native Born*

Instead of oppressing the גֵר the Israelites were to treat them as, אזרה that is the Hebrew word meaning “native,” “one born at home,” or “born at a nation.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the alien was to be treated by the people as a native born. To understand what the native born means is to understand what typically the alien was not. אזרה originally meant: “one arising from the soil or a free tribesman,”<sup>43</sup> with all that this implies. Thus the book of Numbers declares: “Everyone who is **native-born** must do these things in this way when he brings an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the LORD.”<sup>44</sup> In the Old Testament, this word came to be understood to mean a “citizen,” implying the responsibility that each person has towards his or her God and towards others.<sup>45</sup> In God’s eyes, to be a citizen, or native born, is to always be identifying with the alien.<sup>46</sup> God requires that none enjoy the benefits of citizenship without remembering that each member was once an alien.<sup>47</sup>

אזרה is similar to the word אזרהלי, an adjective that means “of family.”<sup>48</sup> The similarities between these words show that a “native born” had a responsibility to his fellow citizens as neighbors, in the sense that they are his family. Family was extremely important to the social structure of Israel. Everything in the life of the Israelites was connected to the family. They saw their relationship to the land, their nationality, and their relationship to God all interconnected with the family unit.<sup>49</sup> The family unit had a moral responsibility that extended outward to the entire community and included the aliens. This was all connected to God’s deliverance of the

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<sup>42</sup> Hartley, 322.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, Driver, Briggs, 280.

<sup>44</sup> Num. 15:13.

<sup>45</sup> VanGemeren, 345.

<sup>46</sup> See Exod. 12:19, 49, 23:12, Lev. 17:12, 13, 15, 18:26, 20:2, 22:18, 24:16, Num. 15:15, 26, 29, 30, 35:15, Deut. 1:16, 5:14, 14:21, 16:11, 14, 29:11, 31:12, Josh. 20:9.

<sup>47</sup> See Exod. 23:9, Lev. 19:33, Deut. 10:19, 23:7.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, Driver, Briggs, 280.

<sup>49</sup> William Raccah. *Widows at the Gate* (Kohl, Germany: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2009): 311.

Israelites from Egypt. Since God was a god who freed the slaves and listened to the cries of the oppressed, then each family unit in Israel was to display the same kind of actions in its own community.<sup>50</sup>

### *The Alien in the LXX*

In the Septuagint, written in Koine Greek, the words chosen to translate אֲלֵן are παροικος that is used six times, προσηλυτος that is used sixty-three times, and γειωρας that is used only once.<sup>51</sup> The word παροικος, means “to inhabit a place as a foreigner” or “to be a stranger.”<sup>52</sup> In the LXX this word was used mostly to mean “a stranger who lives in a place without citizenship.” This word also meant “a person who lives as a stranger on earth far from their heavenly home.”<sup>53</sup>

The word προσηλυτος, however, has an entirely different meaning. It was used to describe “one who has come over from polytheism to the Judean religion and practice” or a “convert.”<sup>54</sup> Considering the fact that this word is the most commonly used to translate אֲלֵן, this gives some insight into the type of person the alien was in the society. The LXX connotes that they were not only living in a new place but that they had adopted or converted to the faith of Israel. This conversion would have been a voluntary one, where they had chosen another religion, another way of life and thus another people group.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 315.

<sup>51</sup> Christina Van Houten. “The Alien in Israelite Law.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 107 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1991): 180.

<sup>52</sup> Walter Bauer. *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000): 779.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 779.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 880.

<sup>55</sup> Comment by Dr. William Raccah on 2/27/20012 at 9pm.

However, there are other instances where “convert” would not make sense in the text as it describes Israel among other nations; this may mean that προσηλυτος might have been used as merely “alien” instead of “convert”.<sup>56</sup> Yet it is believed that when the LXX was translated there were people among the Hellenistic society who converted to Judaism and were called by this word, leading eventually to the title of proselytes.<sup>57</sup>

A quick study of these words in Koine Greek gives a clearer understanding why “alien” took on an entirely different meaning in the New Testament setting, as more and more gentiles became part of the Christian faith. This Greek word later was understood to mean the “Christian,” one who does not belong in the world but whose real home is in heaven.<sup>58</sup> This brings a different understanding of the exact definition of the word, because it moves away from the concept of גֵר as a person dwelling in a strange land. Yet, this understanding reveals the Christian’s connection to the גֵר as they, too, experience this alienation, because they were not only in a “strange” land, but also among “strange” people.

### *Conclusion*

Clearly there were many different ways of expressing the concept of an alien or foreigner in the Old Testament. The original Hebrew had four different words to describe the alien. נֶכֶר and זָר used the words “foreign” to describe something or someone morally incorrect or sinful. תושב was used to describe a temporary settler who was not necessarily a permanent part of the Hebrew society. גֵר was the word most often used to describe a person from another land who resided permanently among the Israelites. The “native born” is the natural opposite to how a

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<sup>56</sup> Van Houten, 180.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

<sup>58</sup> Bauer, 779.

person understands the alien in the community. Yet, God commands that the גֵר be accepted as a  
אזרה.

It is unfortunate that in English, the distinctions between these four Hebrew words have been lost. Instead, the idea of the foreigner as an enemy, and the foreigner as family has been converged into one word “alien.” It is, therefore, important to have a clear understanding of the passages that use the word גֵר and what they say in regards to God’s commands.

The LXX reveals a more complicated understanding of the “alien” in the Old Testament. It reveals that the גֵר may have been someone who had not only changed locations but had converted to the faith of Ancient Israel. It is, however, possible that the meaning of the Hebrew words were equally confusing when translated into Greek, as it is into English, since that society was greatly influenced by converts during the Hellenistic age.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Israel as Aliens

One of the best ways to understand what life was like as a foreigner in the Old Testament is to look at the experiences of the Israelites. Almost every major character in the Old Testament had some degree of experience living as a foreigner in a strange land. Abraham, who is often known as the father of both the Jewish and Christian faiths, began his experience of following God, as a foreigner. This eventually led to similar occurrences by his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, his great-grandson Joseph and eventually the entire Hebrew nation as slaves in Egypt; each understood the life of an alien in a different way. When Israel was conquered by Babylon, the entire nation again experienced life as an alien in a foreign land, through the experience of exile. Among the exiles were Daniel and Esther, two important people who demonstrated what life was like serving their God as aliens in a foreign land.

#### *The Patriarchs*

Israel's experience as an "alien" began with God's call to Abram: "The LORD had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'<sup>59</sup> From that point on, Abraham left the security of his home and family and lived a nomadic life. According to the Old Testament, from this call of God until his death, he was considered a "sojourner." "The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an **alien**, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Gen. 12:1.

<sup>60</sup> Gen. 17:8; see also Gen. 20:1, 21:34, 23:4.

During this period, when people left their home, they also lost any rights they may have had, becoming dependent on the hospitality of the people group in the new land.<sup>61</sup> Travel was much more difficult and dangerous, and extending hospitality was a necessary part of each culture, as every man hoped to receive this same treatment when he found it necessary to travel.<sup>62</sup> This show of hospitality included food, lodging, bathing, and care of animals. Examples of this type of hospitality occur in many places in the Old Testament, including Abraham's lavish treatment of the three men in Genesis.<sup>63</sup>

Shortly after Abraham's arrival in Canaan, he journeyed to Egypt because of a severe famine in the land, to seek food for his family.<sup>64</sup> The Nile River had very rich soil and was a constant water source. Because of its abundant and dependable agricultural supply, Egypt became a place of refuge for many who suffered from the harsh living conditions prevalent in that region. Thus, Egypt experienced a great deal of immigration both short and long term.<sup>65</sup> Many, like Abraham, came from the Sinai-Negev region and were called "sand-dwellers."<sup>66</sup> Even though Egypt took action to regulate its borders to keep out many of these foreigners, wars were fought over the disputed territories. Archeological evidence has revealed that at key entry points into Egypt, forts were built that issued permits for those who were allowed to enter.<sup>67</sup> Although there is no evidence in the Old Testament of Abraham having to obtain any type of permit, it is clear that he was very fearful in Egypt, as he lied about his marital status to Pharaoh

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<sup>61</sup> Gleason L. Archer, R. Laird Harris, and Bruce K. Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980): 155.

<sup>62</sup> Carroll, 93.

<sup>63</sup> See Gen. 18.

<sup>64</sup> See Gen. 12:10.

<sup>65</sup> Carroll, 73.

<sup>66</sup> James K Hoffmeier. *Israel in Egypt-The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*. (Oxford, England: University Press, 1996): 54.

<sup>67</sup> James K. Hoffmeier. "The Uses and Abuses of the Bible in the Immigration Debate" (*Center For Immigration Studies* <http://www.cis.org>, Dec, 2011): 2.



and lied when he was in the land where Abimelech ruled, probably as vassal of Egypt.<sup>68</sup> The text states that Abraham intended to “settle” in Egypt as an alien, indicating his intent of long-term settlement.<sup>69</sup> Allowing his wife into the courts of Pharaoh and Abimelech may have allowed him status as a residential alien and therefore greater protection and wealth in these lands.<sup>70</sup>

The children and grandchildren of Abraham experienced this same life as aliens. “Then the LORD said to him [Abraham], ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be **strangers** in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.’”<sup>71</sup> Isaac moved to Egypt during a time of famine and later, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to obtain food.<sup>72</sup> These men were also declared “sojourners” in the Old Testament as they struggled to follow their God in a difficult environment.<sup>73</sup> The experience of being an alien in a strange land became a very important part of how the Jews saw themselves as a people. Years later it was part of the spoken confession by the head of the household when presenting the first fruits of the harvest to the Lord.<sup>74</sup> “Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: ‘My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation.’”<sup>75</sup>

### *Joseph*

Joseph’s experience was different from that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was forced into a life of slavery in Egypt without even the benefit of support from his own family or

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<sup>68</sup> See Gen. 12:10-20, 20:1-18: the same thing happened with Isaac in Gen. 26:1-11.

<sup>69</sup> See Gen. 12:10.

<sup>70</sup> Gordon J. Wenham. *Word Bible Commentary: Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word Book Publisher, 1983): 286.

<sup>71</sup> Gen. 15:13.

<sup>72</sup> Gen. 26:1, 41:57-42:6, 43:1-7.

<sup>73</sup> See also Isaac in Gen. 35:27, 37:1, Jacob in Gen. 28:4, 32:4, and Jacob’s sons Gen. 47:4, 9.

<sup>74</sup> Carroll, 73.

<sup>75</sup> Deut. 26:5a; see also 1 Chr. 29:15, Ps. 39:12.

culture.<sup>76</sup> As an alien, he had no right to defend himself when falsely accused and was forgotten in prison. He experienced the very worst of alien life: deceit, mistreatment, and loneliness.<sup>77</sup> He was forced to submit to the many aspects of the culture of Egypt and yet kept his devotion to God.

He submitted to the Egyptian culture by first being shaved when brought before Pharaoh, something that would have dramatically changed his appearance.<sup>78</sup> The Pharaohs during Joseph's time were Hyksos, a northwestern Semitic people who conquered the Egyptians during the Middle Kingdom.<sup>79</sup> This may have been why Joseph was allowed to rise to power so quickly in Egypt, because he had a similar Semitic culture, and in order to keep out of power the original Egyptian people.<sup>80</sup> Joseph was given a new name, married an Egyptian woman (most probably Hyksos) and had two sons with her.<sup>81</sup>

Joseph never truly forgot his status as an alien, as can be seen by the names he gave to his sons: "Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, 'It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household.' The second son he named Ephraim and said, 'It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.'"<sup>82</sup> Joseph adopted so much of the culture of the Hyksos rulers and the Egyptian people in both dress and make-up, that, years later, when his brothers encountered him in Egypt they did not even recognize him.<sup>83</sup> The Egyptians

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<sup>76</sup> See Gen. 37:28.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Edward Van Engen. "Biblical Perspectives on the Role of Immigrants in God's Mission." *Journal of Latin American Theology* 3, no. 2 (January 1, 2008): 15-38. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed January 14, 2012): 27.

<sup>78</sup> See Gen. 41:14.

<sup>79</sup> "Hyksos." *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 6th Edition* (November 2011): 1. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed February 26, 2012): 1.

<sup>80</sup> Joel J. Forman. "Glimpses of the Past In Genesis-Exodus." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (January 2008): 49-53. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed February 26, 2012): 51.

<sup>81</sup> See Gen. 41:45.

<sup>82</sup> Gen. 41:51-52.

<sup>83</sup> See Gen. 42:8. Note: This may also have been due to his age difference as he had grown from a teenager to a man.

were not permitted to eat with the Hebrew people and Joseph made sure to observe this custom by eating separately from his brothers.<sup>84</sup> Joseph's submission to the Egyptian culture reached to the extent of his burial, as he was embalmed and placed in a coffin (sarcophagus), as was the custom of the Egyptians.<sup>85</sup>

It is clear that Joseph earned the respect of the Hyksos Pharaohs and many Egyptian rulers and was accepted by them. This is most clearly seen at the death of his father Jacob.

So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt besides all the members of Joseph's household and his brothers and those belonging to his father's household. Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen. Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company.<sup>86</sup>

Not only does this reveal the way God had blessed Joseph in Egypt but also that foreigners had an important place in Egyptian society and were often assimilated into the culture.<sup>87</sup>

### *Israel in Egypt*

Joseph's success in Egypt led to the opportunity for his family to move to Egypt during a time of great famine. This may have been allowed because the Hyksos Pharaohs wanted the Hebrew people to support them against the conquered Egyptians.<sup>88</sup> However, the Hebrew people's status as "alien" never left them, especially when, in the mid-sixteenth century BCE the Hyksos were re-conquered by the native Egyptians.<sup>89</sup> "Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become

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<sup>84</sup> Carroll, 76. Gen. 43:32. Note: He used this Egyptian custom to further deceive and therefore test his brothers.

<sup>85</sup> Gen. 50:26. Note: This also may have been done so that the Hebrew people could take his bones with them when they left Egypt.

<sup>86</sup> Gen. 50:7-9.

<sup>87</sup> James K. Hoffmeier. *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*: 94.

<sup>88</sup> Forman, 51. Note: This may also have been why they were allowed to live in such an important and lush land in Egypt.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 51.

much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”<sup>90</sup> The Egyptian government took drastic measures to control the population. This included slavery and infanticide.<sup>91</sup> Under the Egyptian rulers, the Hebrew people had no power to stop such horrible things from happening, revealing their helplessness as aliens in the Egyptian society.

Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, as well as Nahum M. Sarna, believe that Israel was enslaved and terribly mistreated under the rule of Ramses II. There is evidence of this in records of his extensive building projects during his reign. Ramses II, who ruled for sixty-six years, moved the center of Egyptian government to the eastern delta, making a new capital near Avaris.<sup>92</sup> Not only did the construction in this new capital include the building of enormous temples, statues, and obelisks, but this new capital was right in the location where the people of Israel had settled for hundreds of years.<sup>93</sup> These building projects required an unlimited supply of labor to make bricks and masonry and required a high degree of organization. “So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh.”<sup>94</sup> Two texts from the time of Ramses II discuss the “Apiru slaves engaged in the building campaign.”<sup>95</sup> “Apiru” that appears in cuneiform as Habiru refers to foreigners who served the Egyptians during this time.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Exod. 1:8-10.

<sup>91</sup> See Exod. 1:15-2:4

<sup>92</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, "Exploring Exodus: The Oppression." *Biblical Archaeologist* 49, no. 2 (June 1, 1986): 68-80. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed January 15, 2012): 71.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 73.

<sup>94</sup> Exod. 1:11.

<sup>95</sup> Cyrus H. Gordon, and Gary A. Rendsburg. *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997): 142.

<sup>96</sup> James B. Prichard. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955): 22.

For his new building program, Ramses II preferred to use foreigners as laborers, as opposed to native Egyptians.<sup>97</sup> This state slavery was an organized demand on the male population for an indefinite term of service under brutal conditions. There is no evidence to show that the Hebrew women were enslaved or that slavery somehow divided the family. Possibly, this is so the women would assume the responsibility of preparing meals for the men, rather than the Egyptians.<sup>98</sup>

The men were organized into large groups of laborers. This caused the relationship between slave and master to be a very impersonal one. “The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh’s slave drivers were beaten and were asked, ‘Why didn’t you meet your quota of bricks yesterday or today, as before?’”<sup>99</sup> Beatings were a way of life in Egypt, used to collect taxes, educating scribes, or in the performance by servants of any type of daily task.<sup>100</sup> Therefore beatings were a common treatment for the Hebrew slaves. Workers were required to maintain a certain quota of bricks per day. Bricks were needed in every form of Egyptian construction projects, since building stones were sparse and had to come from very far away. Papyri and Egyptian paintings reveal the process for making bricks. It required a large supply of water carted from the canals, mixed with clay and stubble, and formed into bricks to dry in the sun.<sup>101</sup>

Many slaves also worked in agricultural fields, a task that was even more difficult. The canals from the Nile River needed to constantly be maintained in order for the valley to remain

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<sup>97</sup> Sarna, 74. Note: The Hebrew people were the perfect fit as they previously supported the Hyksos who had used the Egyptians for their personal laborers. Now the Egyptian Pharaohs could “turn the tables” as it were.

<sup>98</sup> Comment provided by Dr. William Racciah. February 27, 2012.

<sup>99</sup> Exod. 5:14. Note: Appointing Israelite foremen to oversee the work of other Israelite is something that was also implemented by the Nazis when they used *kapos* in their concentration camps.

<sup>100</sup> Gordon, 144.

<sup>101</sup> Sarna, 76. Note: This brick-making process is still prevalent around the undeveloped world, especially in Africa and the Middle East.

fertile.<sup>102</sup> Those who worked in the fields were required to constantly water the plants, a task that required lifting buckets of water all day. They were also required to harvest the fields by carrying buckets of grain to far away barns and ships.<sup>103</sup> There is no doubt as to why the Hebrew people soon cried out to God for deliverance from such conditions.<sup>104</sup> “So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.”<sup>105</sup>

Israel’s experience as aliens in Egypt was first a blessing, but later turned into a curse. Their status as aliens in the land made it possible for the Egyptian people to mistreat and take advantage of them when they had the opportunity. Their experience was so horrible that God wanted them never to forget their experience as aliens in Egypt.

### *Israel in Exile*

God delivered the Israelites in a supernatural way, and they eventually were no longer aliens but had a land of their own. Yet, as the Old Testament reveals, the people did not continue to serve God.

In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods<sup>8</sup> and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced.<sup>106</sup>

Israel again experienced life as aliens, this time as deportees in Assyria, Babylon and later Persia. At the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, the greater part of its citizens entered seventy years of

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<sup>102</sup> The canals needed to be maintained because of the large amount of silt and alluvia carried by the Nile river during the flooding season.

<sup>103</sup> Sarna, 74, 75. Note: In ancient times, Egypt was known as the bread-basket of the Mediterranean.

<sup>104</sup> See Exod. 2:23.

<sup>105</sup> Exod. 2:25.

<sup>106</sup> 2 Kings 17:6-8.

captivity.<sup>107</sup> The lives of these exiles were different from person to person. If an exile was highly skilled, he may have been given a good job among the Assyrians and Babylonians. Carpenters and smiths were in high demand, as well as those who worked in government.<sup>108</sup>

Although in this strange new environment many Jews were allowed to form colonies, there was great sorrow and shame in leaving their home land. “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.”<sup>109</sup> Yet, despite this sorrow these exiles were forced to make a new life for themselves, building homes, learning the language of their captives, mainly Aramaic, and adopting the Babylonian calendars and speech habits.<sup>110</sup> The prophet Jeremiah encouraged his type of activity. “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ‘Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.’”<sup>111</sup>

Daniel was among those taken into Babylon because of his noble descent and high physical and intellectual abilities. The reason for this kind of exile was that by taking the best youths it would weaken the state of Judah, thus decreasing any chance of rebellion.<sup>112</sup> Babylon hoped to assimilate the youths into its own culture, rendering itself stronger in the process. Therefore, Daniel reveals that he was encouraged to forget past loyalties and to become a Babylonian, almost a type of brain washing.<sup>113</sup> Daniel was given the Babylonian name Balatsu-

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<sup>107</sup> Walter C. Jr. Kaiser. *Towards an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978): 236.

<sup>108</sup> See 2 Kings 24:14.

<sup>109</sup> Ps. 137:1, 4-5.

<sup>110</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer. *Exile and Return* (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Book House, 1962): 50.

<sup>111</sup> Jer. 29:4-5.

<sup>112</sup> Pfeiffer, 89.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 89.

usur and was entered into a training program studying the religion, science, and cultural traditions of the Babylonians.<sup>114</sup>

Ezekiel was another exile taken to Babylon in 597 BCE. It is believed that he settled into a community of Jews southeast of Babylon named Tel-abib along the River Chabar.<sup>115</sup> He married and had a house of his own and was five years into Exile when he started receiving visions from God.<sup>116</sup> The winged creature he describes is similar to that of Babylonian art, revealing that he may have had great knowledge of the Babylonian temples.<sup>117</sup> Unfortunately, Ezekiel was not even accepted by his own community in exile as he predicted the final fall of Jerusalem, a very unpopular message among his peers.<sup>118</sup>

Over time many Jewish people preferred to remain in their new adopted country, even though they were allowed to return home.<sup>119</sup> The account of Esther shows the challenges of those Jews who chose to remain in Babylon and Persia. In Neo-Babylonian cuneiform literature the name Mordecai appears.<sup>120</sup> He was a devoted Jew living in Susa who could trace his ancestry back to Benjamin and had a cousin named Esther.<sup>121</sup> From the book of Esther it is clear that there were strong anti-Semitic feelings in the court because she kept the fact that she was Jewish a secret when she married Xerxes.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> See Dan. 1:3-7.

<sup>115</sup> Pfeiffer, 97.

<sup>116</sup> See Ezek. 1, 8:1.

<sup>117</sup> See Ezek. 1:8.

<sup>118</sup> See Ezek. 13:1-10.

<sup>119</sup> Pfeiffer, 119.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 121.

<sup>121</sup> See Esther 2:5.

<sup>122</sup> See Esther 2:17-18.



The text reveals that Mordecai was still proud of his Jewish ancestry and that there was a rivalry between Jews and Amalekites when he refused to bow before Haman.<sup>123</sup> Again, this reveals the dangers of living as an alien in this land, as Xerxes gave Haman permission to wipe out all the Jews on the thirteenth of Adar. Esther saved the day with the encouragement of her cousin Mordecai, and the day instead became the feast of Purim to remember God's provision and protection in a foreign land.<sup>124</sup> "Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor."<sup>125</sup>

Despite the environmental and physical hardships the Jewish people experienced during their seventy years of exile, the most detrimental was the spiritual hardships they endured. As the older generations died, the younger ones began to slowly assimilate into the cultures surrounding them, losing various aspects of their religion including their native Hebrew in the process. Thus, when the exiles finally made it back home to Jerusalem and Ezra wanted to have the Law read in front of the people, paraphrasers had to be used to translate it into Aramaic so the people could understand.<sup>126</sup> This was probably a very sad experience for the people as they realized how much of their culture they had lost while in exile.

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<sup>123</sup> Haman was an Amelekite, not a Babylonian, or a Persian. Either he was a mercenary or a descendant of a conquered people. Animosity between the Amelekites and Israel dated back all the way to the time of Abraham. This animosity may have been the reason behind his desire to kill the Jews.

<sup>124</sup> Pfeiffer, 123.

<sup>125</sup> Esther 9:20-22.

<sup>126</sup> Comment provided by Dr. William Racciah on February 27, 2012.

## *Conclusion*

The Jewish people in the Old Testament were familiar with what it was like to be an alien in a foreign land. In fact, it seems as though this type of existence not only became part of their history, but also part of their present, as almost all of the feasts and celebrations include some aspect of remembering their difficult times as foreigners. Their aim was never to forget the hardships they experienced in Egypt and when in exile. Yet, many of the Jewish people did not leave these foreign nations when allowed to do so, but instead became part of the new culture, adapting themselves to their new environment. Still, many kept their religion and cultural ways alive. It is no great mystery that the Jewish people think of themselves as strangers in the world and are constantly reminded in the Law to remember those who are aliens among them.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Aliens in Israel

After the long history of the patriarchs' landlessness and after residing in Egypt for hundreds of years and eventually becoming slaves, God gave commandments to the people of Israel on how they should set up their community in a land of their own. Throughout the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, history and the laws from God are interconnected, revealing that the Law is always anchored in the events where Israel encountered Yahweh.<sup>127</sup> The book of Leviticus commands, "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."<sup>128</sup>

God's commands in the Law regarding the treatment of aliens in Israel and how the people are to interact with them are quite clear. It is therefore important to understand who these aliens were, living among the Israelites during this specific time in history, and how they functioned in that society since there were many aliens who were part of Ancient Israel, and who became a crucial part of Israel's history. It is also imperative to look at how Israel treated the alien's among them, in light of God's clear commandments, as this will give a deeper understanding to the laws themselves as they pertain to the aliens and to the Israelites.

#### *Who were the "aliens" in Israel?*

When the people of Israel settled in the Promised Land, they were already dealing with the issues of foreigners in their midst. The Old Testament records that many people

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<sup>127</sup> John E. Hartley *Word Bible Commentary: Leviticus* (Dallas, TX; Word Books Publisher, 1992), xxxi.

<sup>128</sup> Lev. 19:33-34.

accompanied the Israelites when they left Egypt. Exodus chapter fourteen states: “The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. Many **other people** went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds.”<sup>129</sup>

Later on there were also Canaanites living in Israel. The Canaanites were a Semitic-speaking people who lived in the Phoenician region. The name Canaanite means “merchant, or trafficker,” as that was their primary profession in the ancient world.<sup>130</sup> The Canaanites worshiped Baal, Hadad the storm god, Dagon, and the goddesses Asherah, Astarte and Anath. All these gods had violent characteristics that centered on sex and war.<sup>131</sup> The Old Testament records a Canaanite by the name of Rahab, who helped the Hebrew spies and was later allowed to live among the Israelites.<sup>132</sup> She married a Hebrew man named Salmon who was the father of Boaz and is recorded in the line of Jesus in the New Testament.<sup>133</sup>

Ruth was another alien in Israel and is of importance in both the Old and New Testament. Ruth was a Moabite the widow of a Hebrew man named Mahlon, son of Elimelech. Moab was located on the plateau east of the Dead Sea. It was a thriving culture with strengths in agriculture, pastoral pursuits, elaborate building and pottery and had a well-organized and powerful army.<sup>134</sup> During Ruth’s lifetime, Eglon king of Moab, constantly invaded Israel and oppressed the people of Israel, thus making Moab an enemy of the Israelites.<sup>135</sup> Having become

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<sup>129</sup> Exod.12:37-38.

<sup>130</sup> *New Bible Dictionary* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996) 161.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>132</sup> See Josh. 2.1, 6:25.

<sup>133</sup> See Matt. 1:5.

<sup>134</sup> *New Bible Dictionary*, 776.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* 776.

a widow, Ruth eventually married Boaz while she was living in Israel, and she too, is recorded in the line of David leading to Jesus.<sup>136</sup>

During David's reign, the Old Testament records a man in the army of Israel named Uriah the Hittite.<sup>137</sup> The kingdom of the Hittites was located along the central ridge of Judah and the Hittites were constantly interacting with the people of Israel as early as the time of Abraham.<sup>138</sup> "Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!'"<sup>139</sup> It is clear from this passage that Uriah was not only loyal to David, but that he had made a connection with the God of Israel. Uriah demonstrates the full extent to which that an alien could become, part of the Israelite society. Sadly, King David had him murdered to cover up the fact that he had slept with Uriah's wife and she was with child.<sup>140</sup>

A great number of foreigners lived in Israel during the time of the kings. We read in the Second Book of Chronicles that: "Solomon took a census of all the aliens who were in Israel, after the census his father David had taken; and they were found to be 153,600."<sup>141</sup> It is estimated that this number would be about a tenth of the country's total population.<sup>142</sup> Most of these aliens in the land were unskilled workers who may have at one time worked on the temple itself.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> See Ruth 1, 4:13, Matt. 1:5.

<sup>137</sup> See 2 Sam. 11:6.

<sup>138</sup> *New Bible Dictionary*, 476.

<sup>139</sup> 2 Sam. 11:11.

<sup>140</sup> See 2 Sam. 11:14-25.

<sup>141</sup> 2 Chr. 2:17.

<sup>142</sup> "Alien, Strangers, and the Gospel" in Intersociety Christian Fellowship (2011). [www.intersociety.org/ism/article/439](http://www.intersociety.org/ism/article/439): 1.

<sup>143</sup> See 1 Chr. 22:2, 2 Chr. 17-18

Much of the economy of Israel was agrarian and, therefore, ownership of land was most important for making a living and supporting a family.<sup>144</sup> Typically, ownership of land was passed down in the family to the next male heirs. This was a huge challenge for the alien in the land because they did not have relatives with a history of owning land in the region and therefore no possible inheritance of property. It is most probable that the aliens had left behind their own inheritance and supportive network. This made them very dependent on the people of Israel for work, economic provision, and protection.<sup>145</sup>

When the Old Testament talks about an alien, it refers to either a single person, or a family.<sup>146</sup> According to the biblical text, these groups of people were considered among the poor and are to be included with the widows and orphans in the community.<sup>147</sup> They were often ignorant of the customs, standards, and prices of merchandise among the Israelites and, therefore, an easy target to be taken advantage of by those who wanted to make a larger profit.<sup>148</sup>

### *Aliens in the Law*

When the Law was given to the Israelites, God not only revealed to them how they should live, but the reason why they should follow His laws: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: **‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’**”<sup>149</sup> God’s requirement for holiness is of the utmost importance. His commands in Leviticus chapters 18 and 19 are apodictic laws, meaning that they are general commands given

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<sup>144</sup> Carroll, 102.

<sup>145</sup> Raccah, 269.

<sup>146</sup> Van Houten, 67.

<sup>147</sup> See Lev. 19:10, 23:22, 25:35, Deut. 24:19, 24:20-21, 26:12-13.

<sup>148</sup> Hartley, 322.

<sup>149</sup> Lev. 19:1-2.

by God, and are not designed for application in a court of law.<sup>150</sup> Instead, God required obedience because the people of Israel represent who He is to the people around them.

Among the apodictic laws found in Leviticus 19 are God's commands for the treatment of the alien: "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God."<sup>151</sup> God places considerable importance on this particular command because he emphasizes a further reasoning behind the correct treatment of the aliens: they [the Israelites] knew what it was like to be aliens. He does this even though it is an apodictic command and does not need further reasoning as to why the people of Israel need to obey.<sup>152</sup> This further command was to install a heart of generosity in the people of God as He not only reminded the Israelites of his treatment of them when they were aliens in Egypt, but also of the blessings the future would hold if they in turn treated those in need with the same graciousness.<sup>153</sup>

The laws that then proceed from this apodictic command reveal how the Israelites were to live out this love for the alien. They are presented in a very practical way. Not only do these commands reveal more of who the alien was in Israel, but also God's heart of compassion for them. The alien was allowed to participate in gleaning: "Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the **alien**. I am the LORD your God."<sup>154</sup> That the alien was included with the poor in this law reveals that there

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<sup>150</sup> Tim Bulkeley. "Apodictic and Case Laws." Hypertext Bible Commentary: Amos. (<http://www.bible.gen.nz/amos/literary/apodictic.htm>) 2005. Note: In contrast, casuistic laws were "case laws," always containing "if" or "when" to be used in a legal setting.

<sup>151</sup> Lev. 19:33-34.

<sup>152</sup> Conversation with Dr. William Raccah on Saturday, February 4, 2012.

<sup>153</sup> Van Houten, 107.

<sup>154</sup> Lev. 19:10, 23:22, See also Deut. 24:19-22.

may have been times when there was little work for them to earn a living, especially for someone unfamiliar with the current customs.

Through the act of gleaning the aliens retained their dignity by being able to work for their own food. God commanded those who did own land to leave portions of the harvest from their fields and vineyards in order to show generosity to those who had need, and to be thankful for what they had.<sup>155</sup> A very generous land owner would make sure to leave a little extra grain for the poor.<sup>156</sup> In obeying this law of gleaning, Israel was showing God's concern for those in need among whom the alien figures prominently.

This action of gleaning also helped the landowners remember that the land God had given them still belonged to the Lord. "The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants."<sup>157</sup> Just as the aliens were guests among the Israelites and came under their protection through gleaning, so too the families of Israel were aliens on the land owned by Yahweh and came under His protection.<sup>158</sup> This emphasized God's close relationship with the people of Israel and the security that He offered them, a security that was to be extended to aliens among them.

The Law also commands that a special tithe be taken for the alien. "At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites [who have no allotment or inheritance of their own] and the **aliens**, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your

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<sup>155</sup> Hartley, 314.

<sup>156</sup> See Ruth, 2:15-16.

<sup>157</sup> Lev. 25:23

<sup>158</sup> Hartley, 437.



God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”<sup>159</sup> God called for rejoicing together every third year as the Levites and aliens feasted on the tithe of food.<sup>160</sup> Eating, in the Law, goes hand in hand with rejoicing in God, remembering that He had brought the people into a land of their own and provided them with food.<sup>161</sup>

There are commands in the Law that address how the Israelites were to treat the aliens when they were hired workers. For example, Deuteronomy 24 states: “Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an **alien** living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.”<sup>162</sup> The type of work the alien must have been doing would have been very laborious and paid very little, for though they were working, they were still considered “poor” and “needy”. Later on as the monarchy grew in Israel, so did the different social classes; thus the monarchy created more demand on the land and made life that much more difficult for the lower members of society.<sup>163</sup>

God commanded that the aliens participate in the Sabbath rest.<sup>164</sup> “But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the **alien** within your gates.”<sup>165</sup> In these cases, the employer might have been tempted to take advantage of the aliens desperate need for work by keeping their pay or working them extra hard on the Sabbath in order

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<sup>159</sup> Deut. 14:28-29, see also Deut. 26:12-13.

<sup>160</sup> See Deut. 26:11.

<sup>161</sup> Van Houten, 85.

<sup>162</sup> Deut. 24:14-15

<sup>163</sup> Van Houten, 93.

<sup>164</sup> See Exod. 20:10, 23:12, Deut. 5:14.

<sup>165</sup> Exod. 20:10

to accomplish more work. Not only is this called a sin, but God is setting up a system to protect the alien from harsh living and working conditions.<sup>166</sup>

When dealing with legal cases, the alien was not to be treated with any less justice than a fellow Israelite.<sup>167</sup> “And I charged your judges at that time: Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an **alien**.”<sup>168</sup> The law demanded equal rights for both the alien and the Israelite, although it did not put them both on the same social standing. The law was addressed only to the Israelite and the alien could not enforce the law; he was in fact dependent on the Israelite to uphold it.<sup>169</sup>

Most importantly, according to the Law, aliens were allowed to participate in the religion of the Israelites. They were offered forgiveness for unintentional sins and were afforded access to the cities of refuge if needed.<sup>170</sup> They were also allowed to feast with the Israelites to celebrate the Day of Atonement, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Tabernacles, and First Fruits.<sup>171</sup> Interestingly, many of the laws concerning the Passover regulations do not include the aliens. This is significant when looking at the celebration itself. Its main purpose was for the Israelites to remember their slavery in Egypt and their own personal history as aliens. Just as God used His power to deliver Israel, so they are to use their power in the land as citizens to help the disenfranchised.<sup>172</sup>

Along with inclusion of the aliens in the faith of Israel came responsibilities. They were to be included in the reading of the Law: “Then Moses commanded them: ‘At the end of every

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<sup>166</sup> In late medieval Judaism, it became the custom to hire a non-Jew to do some “necessary” work around a synagogue, and to keep lights burning. Comment provided by Dr. William Raccah on Saturday, February 4, 2012.

<sup>167</sup> See Deut. 1:16-17, 24:17-18, 27:1

<sup>168</sup> Deut. 1:16

<sup>169</sup> Van Houten, 97.

<sup>170</sup> See Num. 15:17-19, 35:15.

<sup>171</sup> See Lev. 16:29-30, Exod. 12:48-49, Num. 9:14, Deut. 16:11, 16:14, Deut. 26:11.

<sup>172</sup> Van Houten, 90.

seven years, in the year for canceling debts, during the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the **aliens** living in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.”<sup>173</sup> This commitment not only meant that the alien had fully accepted the God of Israel, but that they would be able to speak and understand Hebrew.<sup>174</sup> This command also meant that the aliens would hear and understand their rights as aliens within the Israelite society and know when the people of the land were disobeying God and mistreating them.<sup>175</sup>

The aliens were commanded in the Law to never serve other gods, or to blaspheme against the Lord.<sup>176</sup> They were to follow the same purity laws, sexual taboos, and many of the dietary restrictions the Israelites were required to follow.<sup>177</sup> The penalties of the criminal laws also applied to them. “Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death. You are to have the same law for the **alien** and the native-born. I am the LORD your God.”<sup>178</sup>

However, as Van Houten points out, there were still some requirements imposed on the Israelites that did not extend to the aliens. Thus, a few distinctions were made between the aliens and the native Israelites. In particular, there were certain dietary laws that did not apply to the

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<sup>173</sup> Deut. 31:10-12

<sup>174</sup> Carroll, 106.

<sup>175</sup> Conversation with Dr. Raccah on Saturday February 4, 2012.

<sup>176</sup> See Lev. 20:1-2, 24:10-16, Num. 15:30-31.

<sup>177</sup> See Num. 19:10, Lev. 18:26, Exod. 12:19, Lev. 17:10-15.

<sup>178</sup> Lev. 24:21-22.

alien.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, the book of Deuteronomy reveals a reluctance to allow certain aliens to participate in the Assembly of the Lord.

No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. <sup>4</sup> For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. <sup>5</sup> However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. <sup>6</sup> Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.<sup>180</sup>

These verses identify some people who were to be excluded from the assembly of the Lord based on nationality, not socio-economic status. This seems to designate groups of people who refused to participate in the religion of the Israelites.<sup>181</sup>

### *Mistreating the Aliens*

From the books of the Old Testament, it is obvious that there were many aliens living among the Israelites during the time they dwelt in the promise land, from the days of Joshua to the time of Solomon. God proclaims in His laws how these aliens were to be treated in the community. Yet, the books of the prophets reveal another dimension of life encountered by aliens residing in Israel. The prophetic book of Zechariah was written in 518BC, about the time Judah was exiled to Babylon.<sup>182</sup> Zechariah and the many different authors who were believed to take part in authoring this prophetic book were part of a group of reformed prophets who called for a return to the Law and the traditions of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah.<sup>183</sup>

This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.” But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or

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<sup>179</sup> See Deut. 14:21.

<sup>180</sup> Deut. 23:3-8

<sup>181</sup> Van Houten, 101.

<sup>182</sup> Elizabeth Achtemeier. *Interpretations Nahum-Malachi* (Atlanta, GA; John Knox Press, 1986): 110.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.* 110.

to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry.<sup>184</sup>

Oppression of the aliens is listed here among the many terrible things that were happening in Judah before their exile to Babylon. Since that time, the land of Judah has stood in the midst of the ruins caused by their disobedience.<sup>185</sup> It was the fulfillment of everything God had warned them about if they strayed from the commandments of the Lord.<sup>186</sup>

The book of Malachi also addresses the terrible things that were happening in the land of Israel during this time. Written in the first half of the fifth century shortly before the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah,<sup>187</sup> the book of Malachi is presented as part of a court setting, where God questioned the people and answered the reasons why they were being punished. It also centers on the key themes: that the Israelites had not loved the Lord as they were called to and that they had not acted as the God of justice commanded them to act, in order to fulfill their covenantal duties.<sup>188</sup> “So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive **aliens** of justice, but do not fear me,’ says the LORD Almighty.”<sup>189</sup>

Mistreating the alien is listed among the many sins of the nation. It is equal to oppression of the widow and the orphan and in this passage, even compared with sorcery and adultery.

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<sup>184</sup> Zech. 7:10

<sup>185</sup> Achtemeier, 112.

<sup>186</sup> See Deut. 28:15-68.

<sup>187</sup> Achtemeier, 172.

<sup>188</sup> See Mal. 1:2, 2:17.

<sup>189</sup> Mal. 3:5.

## *Conclusion*

Aliens were a constant part of the society in Israel, from the first day they left Egypt and entered the Promise Land, to the people's capture and exile by the Assyrians and Babylonians. God's commands as to how the Israelites were to treat this group of people living in their midst were very unique and practical. Most importantly, God reveals in the Law that Israel was to be the tangible example of who God is to the surrounding nations. "Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."<sup>190</sup> Israel was to express this love for its neighbors, not just in loving those who were part of their family or their native Israelite community, but also to the aliens living among them.<sup>191</sup> Their care and concern for the aliens revealed God's character, in that He protects and loves the helpless.<sup>192</sup> To ignore the cry of the needy and helpless, or to harm them, was to misrepresent God, and a great sin.

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<sup>190</sup> Lev. 19:18

<sup>191</sup> Carroll, 104.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* 104-105.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Aliens in the New Testament

As can be seen, the Old Testament speaks a lot about how the Jewish people were aliens at different times in their history, and how they were to treat the aliens living among them. It is also very important to see the role aliens played in the New Testament era and how Jesus interacted with them. Looking at the historical setting it is clear that there were many foreigners living in Palestine during the period of the New Testament. Jesus does not say a lot about how to interact with the aliens living among His people, but he does make a few references to “strangers” and his actions say a lot about how one is to interact with foreigners. Peter, on the other hand uses the term “alien” often, but not quite in the same way it is used in the Old Testament. Paul often expounds on the concept of the alien it being a personification of the Christian in this world.

#### *Historical Setting*

During the time of Christ, the land of Palestine was an extremely challenging and difficult place to live in. The land was divided into different regions that included Tyre, Galilee, the Decapolis, Samaria, Judea and Idumea.<sup>193</sup> These regions were ruled by “governors” of Rome or one with an appropriate magisterial title who worked with those governments in the region while maintaining Roman military power.<sup>194</sup> Many Jews resented the Roman presence and revolted against this type of government, causing a great deal of political unrest in the region. The presence of Rome therefore brought a huge influx of foreigners into the region in the form of soldiers, merchants, travelers and rulers.

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<sup>193</sup> *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* revised edition (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977): 145.

<sup>194</sup> *New Bible Dictionary* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996): 1023.

Another important group that may have been considered as “alien” by the Jews, and that played a key role in the New Testament, was the Samaritan. Although not a lot of historical information is available about who they were, it is clear that they were a group of people who practiced some form of the Jewish faith from about the third century BCE until the Christian era.<sup>195</sup> They shared many beliefs with the Jewish people, including monotheism and the avoidance of images, and seemed to practice a more conservative branch of Judaism. They claimed to be descendents of the Patriarchs and were strict observers of the Torah.

Still, the Jews and the Samaritans had many disputes and are portrayed in the New Testament as hating each other, although historically it is unclear why. The Samaritans built a temple on Mount Gerizim that greatly angered the Jews as they felt that the temple in Jerusalem was the only place of worship. To worship in another place was to deny God. There were disagreements about the priesthood and the resurrection of the dead.<sup>196</sup> These, eventually, led to hostility between the two groups and though the Samaritans lived in the land of Israel for a long time, the Jews treated them as foreigners.

### *Aliens and Jesus*

Jesus’ interaction with aliens began during His childhood. The New Testament reveals that Herod the Great wanted to kill Jesus because the three magi told him that they were on their way to see the newborn King of the Jews.<sup>197</sup> Out of fear and jealousy, Herod ordered that all boys under the age of two in Bethlehem and its vicinity should be killed. Therefore, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Egypt to save his life.<sup>198</sup> Although Mary and Joseph may have lived among

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<sup>195</sup> R.J. Coggins. *Samaritans and Jews* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1975): 113, 164.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* 140.

<sup>197</sup> See Matt. 2:1-8, 2:13-14.

<sup>198</sup> Matt. 2:16-18.



a thriving Jewish population in Alexandria, Jesus first' experiences as a child would have been that of an alien in Egypt.<sup>199</sup>

Years later, we find Jesus back in Judea on his way to Galilee. “Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, ‘Will you give me a drink?’”<sup>200</sup> These verses reveal a powerful interaction between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, someone considered alien to the Jews. John’s gospel says that Jesus “had” to go through Samaria even though this region was often avoided by the Jews in order to stay out of Samaritan territory.<sup>201</sup>

Not only did Jesus have a very important lesson to teach his disciples, but His ministry was to the Samaritans in that area. Talking with a Samaritan woman, one with a questionable reputation at that, was against Jewish tradition.<sup>202</sup> Here Jesus reveals his mission and how he felt towards this foreigner, despite what the tradition of his people demanded. Jesus not only brought this woman to faith in Him, but many in her town believed as well.<sup>203</sup>

### *Jesus Teaches on the Stranger*

Jesus’ actions speak volumes about his convictions; however, Jesus did very little direct teaching on how the disciples should interact with aliens in Israel. In the gospel of Matthew Jesus does make a direct appeal toward the “alien” that is often translated “stranger”:

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<sup>199</sup> Carroll, 115.

<sup>200</sup> John 4:4-7.

<sup>201</sup> Merrill C Tenney. *The Gospel of Belief: John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976): 91.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.* 96.

<sup>203</sup> See John 4:39-42.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 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** (ξενος) and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a **stranger** (ξενον) and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a **stranger** (ξενος) and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a **stranger** (ξενον) or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”<sup>204</sup>

In these verses, Jesus uses the word ξενος, translated as “stranger.” This word can be used to mean “alien” or “foreigner” in Greek with its origin in the firmly entrenched code of hospitality of the Mediterranean world.<sup>205</sup> It implies those in the community who one might be unfamiliar with, but who ought to be treated as a guest.<sup>206</sup>

These verses put the stranger in the same group as the hungry, naked, sick and thirsty, and place a huge importance on correct response to such needs, even to the point of costing a

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<sup>204</sup> Matt. 25:31-46.

<sup>205</sup> Briggs, 684.

<sup>206</sup> See also Eph. 2:19, Heb. 11:13, Ac. 17:21.

person's salvation. Craig S. Keener, in his commentary on the gospel of Matthew, states that these verses have been incorrectly understood because they indicate that salvation somehow comes through works. He writes that when Jesus says "stranger" he is not really referring to an actual alien in Israel. Instead he argues that this important passage emphasizes how one is to treat the disciples of Jesus because he uses the phrase "these brothers of mine."<sup>207</sup> Therefore, this may indicate that, to accept, receive, and help the disciples is to accept the message of Christ and therefore salvation. Keener states that the most recent Christian commentaries on these verses have come to the same conclusion about it.<sup>208</sup>

In contrast, Sigurd Grindheim, in his article "Ignorance is Bliss: Attitudinal Aspects of the Judgment According to Works in Matthew 25:31-46," argues that Jesus is really referring to the poor, needy, and ultimately the stranger in this passage. He states that the outward actions of caring for the needy and poor in the world with true heartfelt devotion reveal a true heart of change that can only come through the power of Christ working salvation in the Christian.<sup>209</sup> The Sermon on the Mount, given by Jesus in Matthew chapter five, does not indicate salvation by works, but instead the true heart of love and devotion that God requires of all who are to spend eternity with Him, and can only be accomplished through Christ. The reaction of surprise of the righteous in this passage reveals that they were not doing their works for the sake of salvation but from a true heart of mercy.<sup>210</sup> Jesus' nature and acts of mercy in the book of Matthew and the gospels reveal that He is interested in crossing the cultural boundaries between

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<sup>207</sup> Craig S. Keener. *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999): 605.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.* 605-606.

<sup>209</sup> Sigurd Grindheim. 2008. "Ignorance is Bliss: Attitudinal Aspects of the Judgment According to Works in Matthew 25:31-46" (*Novum Testamentum* 50, no. 4: 313-331. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed February 4, 2012): 315.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.* 323.

Jews and Gentiles.<sup>211</sup> Therefore there is no reason why Matthew 25:35-44 would indicate anything less than reaching out to the “alien” in the community. These acts of generosity and mercy towards the alien make known the heart of God.<sup>212</sup>

Choosing either understanding for this passage reveals a lot about Jesus’ view of the alien. On the one hand, Jesus puts the disciples in the same category as the poor, the hungry and naked, revealing that they themselves will be like aliens here on the earth as they follow Christ. Understanding this passage from the other viewpoint, the aliens are to be embraced and cared for as one would themselves. Both reveal Jesus saying that, to be His follower, is to identify with the alien in all aspects.

### *Early Christians as Aliens*

When, in his letters, Peter addresses the Churches in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor in 63-64 AD, he refers to them as aliens.<sup>213</sup> “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, **strangers** in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.”<sup>214</sup> In this verse Peter uses the word *παπεριδημους* for “alien.” The Greek word *παπεριδημους* described one who is sojourning or residing temporarily in a place. This word is most often used in the New Testament to describe a Christian who is not at home in this world and can be described as one who has chosen to sojourn.<sup>215</sup> Peter may have chosen this exact word in Koine Greek, because the people he was writing to in his letters were actual foreigners in the regions where they were, the Roman provinces in Asia Minor.<sup>216</sup> Considering the diversity of people

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<sup>211</sup> See also Matt. 8:10-13; 15:28; cf. 4:15; 12:18-21; 21:43; 24:14; 28:19.

<sup>212</sup> Grindheim, 331.

<sup>213</sup> *New International Commentary*, 1370.

<sup>214</sup> 1 Pet. 1:1.

<sup>215</sup> Briggs, 775. See also 1 Pet. 1:1, 2:11, Heb. 11:13.

<sup>216</sup> *New International Commentary*, 1370.

groups during this time in these regions, and that these Christians were probably a mix of Jewish and Gentile origins, this may have been the case. Still there is no indication that Peter was referring to a particular nationality in his letters.

Rather, Peter's letters would have been addressed to a very diverse gathering of Christians who may have been native to their particular regions and had connections with a pagan background. Instead, Peter may have been using the term "alien" in a figurative sense, in that their Christian lifestyle had distanced them from their pagan neighbors.<sup>217</sup>

Peter further emphasizes this point later in his letter as he writes, "Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as **strangers** here in reverent fear."<sup>218</sup> Here Peter uses the Greek word *παροικους* also used in the LXX, and means the same in the New Testament, that is, one who lives in a place that is not one's home.<sup>219</sup> It later took on an entirely new meaning in the Roman culture to indicate an inferior social political status.<sup>220</sup> Peter later commands "Dear friends, I urge you, as **aliens** and **strangers** in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."<sup>221</sup> Both these Greek words for alien are used in this verse the first being *παροικους* and the second being *παπεριδημους*.

Peter's words to the Christians during this time not only reflect their different conduct in the world but the challenging historical situation they found themselves in. The closeness of the Christian community, and the difference in values would have caused a great deal of ridicule and

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<sup>217</sup> *New International Commentary*, 1370.

<sup>218</sup> 1Pet. 1:17.

<sup>219</sup> See also Eph. 2:19.

<sup>220</sup> Briggs, 779.

<sup>221</sup> 1 Pet. 2:11.

suspicion in Roman society.<sup>222</sup> Therefore, calling oneself a Christian during this time, meant to become isolated from the society in one way or another. Peter indicates in his letters that through living differently than the world, and becoming aliens through abstaining from sinful desires, the Christians are ultimately reflecting who God is, and therefore leading others to salvation.<sup>223</sup>

Paul continues this theme of Christians being aliens in the world in his letters. “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>224</sup> Here Paul contrasts the idea of “citizenship” between Roman and Jewish understandings. The Christian was no longer meant to see themselves as merely part of an earthly community or people group, but rather primarily as citizens of Heaven. Again Paul writes in Ephesians “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”<sup>225</sup>

The author of the book of Hebrews is unknown and yet this person also writes, “Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.”<sup>226</sup> The entire New Testament reveals this idea that Christians are no longer citizens of an earthly kingdom, but instead of a Heavenly one. Therefore, Christians not only find themselves acting and living as aliens here on the earth, but can uniquely identify with those aliens living in each country where they find themselves.

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<sup>222</sup>Donald Senior. "The Conduct of Christians in the World (1 Pet 2:11-3:12)." (Review & Expositor 79, no. 3 (June 1, 1982): 427-438. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed February 5, 2012): 427.

<sup>223</sup> Senior, 429.

<sup>224</sup> Phil. 3:20.

<sup>225</sup> Eph. 2:19.

<sup>226</sup> Heb. 13:13-14.

## *Conclusion*

Clearly, the alien played a very important role during the New Testament period. Not only were there many aliens living among the Jews in the time of Jesus, but His interactions with the Samaritans of His day reveal that He had no qualm whatsoever about bringing His message of salvation, and His care and concern for their physical needs, to them. Jesus does teach about the “stranger” in the gospel of Matthew and emphasizes the importance of taking in the “stranger,” as an indication of God’s salvation work in the heart of the Christian. It is apparent that Jesus’ love for the alien is no different from the heart that God has for the alien seen through the laws and commands in the Old Testament.

It is also evident that the early Christians empathized with the aliens in their community as they saw themselves living a similar existence in their own communities. Peter, Paul, and many other New Testament writers remind the early Christians that they are living out the values and morals of God that sets them apart from their pagan neighbors and makes them foreigners. Maybe these early Christians cared for the aliens in their community as an outward sign of the change God had done in their lives, reflecting who Jesus was to a Roman world that had never heard of Him. Maybe they cared more for the aliens because they understood to a greater degree what it meant to be an alien because their true citizenship was in heaven.

**SECTION TWO:**

**ALIENS IN THE UNITED STATES**



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Aliens in our History

In the Old Testament, God constantly reminds the Israelites that they were once aliens. He does this because He understands that human beings are quick to forget their own history. Once we have moved from the difficult place we once were in, and into a more comfortable position we feel we have somehow gotten there through our own efforts, and we forget God's grace and deliverance.<sup>227</sup>

Knowing this, when talking about aliens in the United States it is important to understand our own history, and the history of immigration in this country. When looking at its relatively recent history one could say that the United States is truly a "nation of aliens." The sonnet written by Emma Lazarus in 1883 and inscribed on the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor where millions of immigrants entering the United States for the first time expresses this well:

Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!<sup>228</sup>

This poem reveals a time in American history when aliens, even those who were poor and outcast from their own countries, were welcome.<sup>229</sup> This welcome would not last long.

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<sup>227</sup> Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang. *Welcoming the Stranger*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009): 45.

<sup>228</sup> Emma Lazarus. *Selected Poems*, ed. John Hollander (New York, NY: Library of America, 1987): 58.

<sup>229</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 48.

When considering the history of immigration in the United States it is important to know exactly who the first immigrants were, and how their first impressions of living as aliens in this new country has influenced today's United States of America. It is also crucial to look at each new wave of immigration, and how people already living in the nation treated them. It is also important to understand the context of when the first immigration restriction laws were passed and how they changed through the centuries.

### *The First Aliens in the United States*

The first immigrants to what was to be known as the United States of America, included a group of English, French, and Spanish settlers; all experienced the harshness of the new continent.<sup>230</sup> Some had dreams of gold and riches. Others escaped religious persecutions from their home countries. All experienced lack of supplies, starvation, disease and conflict with the Native Americans already living in the land. For many, this extreme experience sent them sailing back home, while others remained.<sup>231</sup>

Some of the most famous aliens in American history were the 102 passengers aboard the Mayflower who sailed from England on September 16, 1620.<sup>232</sup> A third of the passengers were English Puritan refugees who were escaping religious persecution from the Anglican Church. These passengers referred to themselves as "saints" and were eventually given the name "pilgrims" in the nineteenth century.<sup>233</sup> Because of much-needed repairs and bad weather, they landed in Cape Cod (naming it New Plymouth), where the harsh winter killed half of those who had made the voyage. The Native Americans of that region helped the remaining survivors who

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<sup>230</sup> Kenneth C. Davis. *America's Hidden History* (New York, NY: Smithsonian Books, 2008): 32-33.

<sup>231</sup> Davis, 33.

<sup>232</sup> "Pilgrims." *The Hutchinson Dictionary of American History* (Ebook, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, England : Helicon Publishers, 2005): 448.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

celebrated the first Thanksgiving in 1621.<sup>234</sup> Many other colonies like the one in New Plymouth were established along the East Coast of the United States.

The early leaders of the United States felt that immigration was a very important part of settling the new land. Addressing an association of Irish immigrants, George Washington said: “The bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions, whom we shall welcome to participate in all of our rights and privileges, if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment.”<sup>235</sup> Yet, despite this openness towards immigration it did not take long for these first settlers to begin to resent the new waves of immigrants as they established themselves into their new home. Benjamin Franklin revealed these feelings when he wrote about the mass arrival of Protestant German immigrants into Pennsylvania: “Why should [immigrants] establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens who will shortly be so numerous as to [change] us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion?”<sup>236</sup>

Among these first waves of immigrants who chose to come to America, were those who had no choice in the matter. It is estimated that 645,000 African men and woman were taken involuntarily from their homes and forced to work in what is now the United States. This is referred to historically as involuntary migration and in the modern world as human trafficking.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup>“Pilgrims.” *The Hutchinson Dictionary of American History*, 448.

<sup>235</sup> Roger Daniels. *Guarding the Golden Door* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2004): 7. Note: This was written by George Washington after the battle of Yorktown.

<sup>236</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 48.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.* 50.

## *Waves of Aliens*

Although all the first settlers in the United States were considered aliens in the new continent, they came in smaller groups, establishing themselves in different parts of the country over long periods of time. The first big waves of immigration lasted from 1820-1860. Because of the failed potato crop in Ireland, and the government of Germany trying to stamp out an attempted revolution, Irish and German immigrants fled to the United States where farmland and democracy were abundant.<sup>238</sup> Over five million immigrants arrived during this time, a dramatic difference from the 250,000 that had arrived between 1776 and 1820.<sup>239</sup> Almost all these new arrivals were Catholic and they settled in the northeastern United States. The increasing number of Catholics in the country unsettled the Protestant natives groups that led to the first anti-immigrant mass movement in American history.<sup>240</sup> In the 1830's and 1840's riots occurred in these areas. Burning convents and attacking Catholic churches became prevalent. A new political organization was formed in the 1850's whose adherents are often called the "Know-Nothings," and who made it their goal to place in all government offices native-born Protestant citizens and resist the policies of the Church of Rome and other foreign influences.<sup>241</sup> This group grew to over a million members, electing anti-immigrant candidates into office as governors and other political positions. During this time, many states enacted anti-immigrant statues. This party however, soon dissolved as the Civil War began and many of these immigrant soldiers fought on both sides of the war.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Soerens and Hwang 50.

<sup>239</sup> Brian N. Fry. *Nativism and Immigration: Regulating the American Dream* (EBook. New York, NY: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2007): 39.

<sup>240</sup> Daniels, 10.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.* 10. Note: They were called the "Know-Nothings" because the members of this secret order were instructed to reply, "I know nothing" to any questions about the organization.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.* 10-11.

On February 2, 1848, over 100,000 foreign born people became American citizens the same day as the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, making the Mexican territory that included portions of California, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado part of the United States.<sup>243</sup> Many Mexicans became American citizens on this day while still living in their native homeland. Sadly, many of the Mexicans who chose to become American citizens lost their land and home. A few U.S. Senators were believed to “accidentally delete” the records of their ownership of land so they could sell it for personal gain.<sup>244</sup>

In the 1850’s, large numbers of Chinese immigrants began to come to California in search of gold and to work across the country on the railroads. They referred to themselves as “guests” or “sojourners,” numbering up to 60,000 (mostly men) by 1870.<sup>245</sup> Historically, the anti-Chinese movement began around 1869, led by Henry George, a radical reformer and economist who wrote about how the United States was being invaded by an Asian army, later referred to as the “Yellow Peril.”<sup>246</sup> As jobs became scarce, there was also fear that the Chinese workers were taking jobs away from American citizens. Fear soon turned into action, as Chinese aliens were forced from their homes, victims of lynchings and other violent acts.<sup>247</sup>

The anti-Chinese hysteria soon found its way to Washington. As one congressional report stated, “not sufficient brain capacity in the Chinese race to furnish motive power for self government” and “there is no Aryan or European race that is not far superior to the Chinese.”<sup>248</sup> In 1882 the US government passed the first major law in American immigration history, commonly called the Chinese Exclusion Act that prohibited the entry of Chinese laborers both

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<sup>243</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 52.

<sup>244</sup> Orlando Crespo. *Being Latino in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003): 148.

<sup>245</sup> Daniels, 12.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>247</sup> Jean Pfaelzer. *Driven Out* (New York, NY: Random House, 2007): 256-290.

<sup>248</sup> Daniels, 18.

skilled and unskilled.<sup>249</sup> Immigration would not be open to the Chinese until the bill was repealed in 1943. Not only did this bill create the first major restrictions against people entering the United States, but it also started the first wave of illegal immigration, as many Chinese workers found their way in through other means.<sup>250</sup> Still anti-Chinese sentiments continued even towards those American-born Chinese.

By 1895 the United States Government finally had its first immigration service. By then, almost sixteen million aliens had entered the United States.<sup>251</sup> The next wave of immigration occurred between 1880 and 1920, and was mainly from southern and eastern Europe: Italians, Poles, and people of Jewish descent fleeing Russia.<sup>252</sup> These were the people entering the U.S. mainly through Ellis Island. It is estimated that 23.4 million aliens entered the United States during this time, making the foreign born population between thirteen to fifteen percent of the total population.<sup>253</sup> Most were peasant farmers suffering from a globalized economy, as well as those fleeing political and religious persecutions.<sup>254</sup> They largely settled in large cities, mainly New York City, dramatically altering the social and political make-up of these cities in the process.

Again, this new wave of immigration brought more anti-immigrant sentiments led by a new political party called the Immigration Restriction League, founded by Harvard graduates in 1894. The league's goal was to "save" the nation by preventing any further inroads on Anglo-Saxon American by strangers.<sup>255</sup> The league's first major lobbying effort was for a literacy test

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<sup>249</sup> Daniels, 19.

<sup>250</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 55.

<sup>251</sup> Daniels, 30.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>253</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 55.

<sup>254</sup> Nancy Foner. *From Ellis Island to JFK* (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 2000): 20.

<sup>255</sup> Daniels, 31.

to be part of the immigration process, resulting in a law that passed in 1917. Many Americans accepted these ideas and joined in the pursuit of restricting immigration.<sup>256</sup> This led to the 1924 bill that restricted immigration from Eastern Europe.

Many Eastern Europeans experienced racial attacks including calling them the “inferior European races,” although the modern day American would consider them to be “white.”<sup>257</sup> It was publicly acceptable to discriminate against Jews and Italians in public places and in newspapers, and there were strong prejudices against such immigrants in the workplace.<sup>258</sup> This discrimination even extended to higher education since elite schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton had very restrictive quotas on how many Jews could be admitted. Their fear was that political power and influence would shift if they did not.<sup>259</sup> One newspaper advocated that pay for common labor workers was to be done according to race: “White \$1.30, Italian \$1.15,” while another advertised “Christian Carpenter Needed,” in order to discriminate against Jewish workers.<sup>260</sup> All this led to the passing of further laws to restrict immigration in 1921, and again in 1922.

The bill of 1924 had the largest effect on immigration in America. This act put a tight cap on immigration, restricting those allowed to be 2 percent of the foreign population of the given country.<sup>261</sup> This would dramatically limit the number of Eastern Europeans entering the country, and seemed to be the main goal of that bill. There were no limitations set on Western hemisphere immigrants, mainly because Western legislators insisted that they needed Mexican

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<sup>256</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 57.

<sup>257</sup> Foner, 146. Note: According to racial theory, race is a sociological rather than biological construct and has been subject to change.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.* 148.

<sup>259</sup> Comment provided by Dr. Joseph Saggio on July 6, 2012.

<sup>260</sup> Foner, 148.

<sup>261</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 57.

agricultural workers.<sup>262</sup> Also, special allowances were made for Japanese immigrants, because of their growing economic and political importance.<sup>263</sup> All these restrictions had a huge effect on immigration, and the number of immigrants entering the country dwindled down.

In 1942, during WWII, labor was very limited; so, the United States passed the Bracero program that allowed 400,000 agricultural workers from Mexico to enter the United States. These workers were supposed to be temporary residents, but many stayed illegally after the allowed time. Influenced by Cesar Chaves, the program was eventually canceled as he argued that it was unfair for both the workers and the employer.<sup>264</sup> This led to the civil rights era, as President John F. Kennedy aimed to change parts of the immigration laws that were discriminatory. This bill was passed by President Lyndon Johnson, and set a quota on immigration from every region of the world, including the Northern Hemisphere.<sup>265</sup> He summed up America's current stance on immigration by saying, "The days of unlimited immigration are past. But those who do come will come because of what they are, and not because of the land where they sprung."<sup>266</sup>

Since this time immigration has focused on reunification of families and people fleeing war. This led to a huge influx of immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, Cuba, and again immigrants from Eastern Europe. By the 1990's as well as Mexican immigrants, the biggest number of immigrants came from the Philippines, Korea, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. Since September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, the United States has become increasingly sensitive to issues

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<sup>262</sup> Daniels, 52.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.* 52.

<sup>264</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 59.

<sup>265</sup> Note: President Kennedy was not able to pass the bill because he was assassinated in 1963.

<sup>266</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 62.



involving immigration for fear of terrorism. In the United States xenophobia has risen, leading to the killing of Sikhs in America who were mistaken for Muslims.<sup>267</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The history of American immigration is not only filled with stories of adventure, struggle, and hard work, but also stories of prejudice and hatred. Throughout the years each new wave of aliens was disliked because of ethnicity, religion, or poverty. Then it seems as though the children and grandchildren of those very immigrants were the ones trying to keep out the next waves of aliens. Immigration was encouraged in the United States when the country was new and people were needed, but discouraged as the land filled up and the population got wealthier. Still, this did not keep people from desiring to escape their current condition and come to the United States.

The history of immigration in the United States reveals that somewhere down the line all Americans, except Native Americans, have ancestors who experienced life as aliens.<sup>268</sup> How quickly most Americans have forgotten their history and, instead, feel hostile towards the next group of immigrants because they are different, and threaten their current lifestyle? This history is one that Americans, and especially Christians in the United States, should familiarize themselves with.

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<sup>267</sup> Comment by Dr. Joseph Saggio on July 6, 2012.

<sup>268</sup> Many of the xenophobic practices foisted upon aliens were also foisted upon Native Americans who were indigenous to North America. Comment by Dr. Joseph Saggio on July 6, 2012.

## CHAPTER SIX

### American Christian and the Aliens

After looking at the history of aliens in America, it is clear that there has been a great deal of social challenges and many controversies. Christians in America have always been influential and influenced by these waves of immigrants. One of the biggest areas of conflict over the centuries has been between various Protestant Churches that provided some of the first immigrants to the United States of America and the later waves of Catholic immigrants. These two types of groups have reacted to immigration very differently over the centuries. Many still take a very different approach to the challenging issues of immigration in this country today.

#### *United States Catholic Christians and Immigration*

When looking at the history of immigration in America, it is no surprise to discover that the many Catholic Churches have been one of its strongest supporters. One could say that many Catholic Churches “are” the main body of immigrants throughout the centuries, as most immigrants both past and present have Catholic roots. Most of the time, those immigrants who were Catholic had the hardest time being accepted in the United States because of their religion. A constant flow of newer immigrants into the Catholic Church over the years has helped keep the difficult experiences and needs of the immigrants fresh. Many Catholic Churches have been known to assist immigrants in advocating for their rights and many religious workers have often challenged the U.S. Immigration policies.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Cecilia Menjívar. "Religion and Immigration in Comparative Perspective: Catholic and Evangelical Salvadorans in San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Phoenix." *Sociology of Religion* 64, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 21-45. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 3, 2012): 29-30.

In North America, various Catholic Churches have embraced many of the ideals of Liberation Theology that was an angry critique of the activity of the Churches in Latin America and addresses many of the social injustices that were occurring in this area of the world.<sup>270</sup> Liberation Theology is often thought to have been influenced by Marxism. Many Catholic Churches are known to embrace the concept that all truth comes from God and therefore can be seen through the wisdom of individuals, even those who do not share faith in God.<sup>271</sup> Liberation Theology claims that God is on the side of the poor primarily and that the history of salvation is the history of the poor. It believes that the most important part of religion on earth is social action and defense of the poor.<sup>272</sup> Since many immigrants in the United States are from Latin America and have experienced a great deal of poverty, the influences of Liberation Theology in Catholic Churches is huge.

Many Catholic Churches in the United States have aimed to help immigrants whether they stem from their ranks or not. They view the church as one whole, instead of isolated congregations. The type of help they offer immigrants includes running workshops on filling out immigration forms or Temporary Protective Status, or naturalization, a very challenging and complicated process. Many congregations even go as far as making announcements during Mass about ongoing immigration laws, and constantly remind the congregations that they are there to provide support and are willing to lobby on their behalf.<sup>273</sup> One Catholic priest in Washington D.C. talked about a recent welfare bill that was about to be passed, to his congregation:

President Clinton will sign the law of social [welfare] reform, and when this law passes, there will be great hunger and poverty in our streets. The Catholic Church categorically

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<sup>270</sup> Brian Hearne. "Liberation Theology and the Renewal of Theology." *Afer* 26, no. 6 (December 1, 1984): 357-368. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 18, 2012): 358.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.* 358.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.* 367.

<sup>273</sup> Menjivar, 30.

opposes the passage of this law [with a closed fist hitting the podium] the way it's written. Our Cardinal wrote to the President because this law will affect all immigrants, legal and illegal, the women, the poor. . . . What do we say to all this? Jesus provides us with examples of compassion, of love. For instance, one day the disciples wanted to get rid of all the poor people because Jesus was tired, but Jesus had a mandate for them: feed them. The disciples had to respond to these people. Jesus did not let them abandon the hungry. Jesus doesn't abandon us, but politicians do. Politicians want your vote, Jesus doesn't. He's with us, in the Eucharist, accessible to all. Jesus gives us an example of conscientization. Our Lord calls us to respond, to help others, to have compassion for our neighbors, and importantly, to do something, to act.<sup>274</sup>

As seen, during that Mass, the teaching and prayer groups attempted to make connections between the experiences of the immigrant and that of Christ. One Bishop states, "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, living in exile in Egypt to escape the fury of an evil king, are, for all times and places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends, and to seek a foreign soil."<sup>275</sup> Another bishop in Oklahoma writes about his immigrant communities as he supports a bill that helps further the rights of immigrants: "The suffering faces of the poor are the suffering face of Christ."<sup>276</sup> Clearly these actions and statements by priests are based in what they believe are the clear teachings of the Bible, on how they should be treating the immigrants in their community.

Most Catholic churches and parishes in the United States are very diverse, yet they have a collective approach. A priest in Washington held sessions of reading the Bible from a "Hispanic" or "Latino" perspective, or one where he understands the Bible from the viewpoint of the immigrant, but still encouraged trying to solve their various problems in a way that would positively affect them as a group. Each member has the feeling that they are all united in Christ and part of the church. There is a sense of a personal relationship with Christ, but they view

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<sup>274</sup> Menjivar, 30.

<sup>275</sup> Michael A Scaperlanda. "Immigration and the Bishops." *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life* no. 180 (February 2008): 14-16. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost (accessed March 3, 2012): 15.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

their mission to the world as a collective effort. This mission is to the poor and needy, that means the church does not have many economic resources to help; instead, it meets the needs as a community.<sup>277</sup> This is much easier to do as a community than the church trying to meet the needs of those who are destitute through its own resources.

### *United States Protestant Christians and Immigration*

American Protestant churches views on immigration over the centuries has varied from generation to generation and from denomination to denomination. Since the first immigrants were predominantly Protestant, they were the first to respond to the incoming waves of immigrants to the United States. Many Protestant churches clearly responded very negatively to the incoming Irish and German Catholics who arrived in the early nineteenth century. They felt threatened and responded with violence.<sup>278</sup> This was an interesting response considering the Protestant grandparents of this generation probably came to America to escape religious persecution.

Many Baptist churches felt threatened by the next wave of immigration in the 1890's and early 1900's and chose a political anti-Catholic and anti-foreign position.<sup>279</sup> They emphasized that it was the duty of America Baptists to protect America from Romanism, fearing that Catholics were more loyal to the Pope than they were to their new country.<sup>280</sup> There was a feeling that to be a Protestant Christian meant to support Americanism. This is exemplified by

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<sup>277</sup> Scaperlanda, 34. Note: An exception to this type of thinking are the Charismatic Catholic groups who emphasize prayer and less social teachings.

<sup>278</sup> Fry, 39.

<sup>279</sup> Rosalie Beck. "Alien or American? Baptists and Immigration at the Turn of the Century." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 37, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 257-265. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 2, 2012): 262.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.* 262.

John T. Christianson who wrote a book in 1895 entitled “Americanism or Romanism: Which?” that captured the thinking of most Protestants during this time.<sup>281</sup>

Still there were moments in American history where many Protestant groups defended the immigrants. Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist clergymen often started many new churches among the Chinese communities during the wave of Chinese immigration.<sup>282</sup> Many Protestant Christians felt that instead of being threatened by the immigrants in their nation they should look at it as an opportunity to convert them to their form of Christianity. Marie Buhlmaier was a German woman who attended the local Baptist church. She worked with the local immigrant population interpreting, acting as a social worker and pastoring those in need around her.<sup>283</sup> She would often work at the pier, handing out Bible’s and meeting the new immigrants as they arrived, viewing them not as a threat but as human beings who needed help. Also, during this time, Howard Grose wrote a series of popular books that talked about the incoming millions of immigrants as an opportunity to take the gospel to those in our own country and talked about the number of things a person could do to help their immigrant neighbors, including teaching them English.<sup>284</sup>

Many Protestant churches were very quick to criticize the restrictions on immigration of 1924 as unfair. Yet, when J. F. Kennedy planned to repeal this bill and open immigration again, the Protestant church did not support it.<sup>285</sup> This may have been because Kennedy was the first American president claiming to be Catholic. Clearly these Protestant churches had mixed feelings about how to respond to immigration in the United States over the centuries.

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<sup>281</sup> Beck, 263.

<sup>282</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 60.

<sup>283</sup> Beck, 264,

<sup>284</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 60.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

Present day Protestant churches have the same mixed response to the issues of immigration today. A poll taken in 2006 found that sixty three percent of white evangelicals see immigrants as a threat to their customs and values, as well as to the United States, and sixty four percent consider foreigners a burden to society. This was the highest negative response among any church or secular group.<sup>286</sup> These numbers and reactions seem to follow the examples of their American ancestors who opposed immigration. They make it challenging for those in the evangelical churches who desire change and who work to reform immigration laws.

Today, many Protestant churches are less inclined to speak about immigration issues in the church, focusing instead on prayer and accepting Christ.<sup>287</sup> Opposite to that of many Catholic Churches, that sees itself as one big Church, many Protestant churches tend to be more isolated and individualized. They tend to focus on the personality of the pastor and the “mission” he is interested in fulfilling in order to help immigrants.<sup>288</sup> This means that individual pastors are often the ones helping the immigrant in the community, filling out immigration forms, or helping and counseling them about their personal problems. In many Protestant churches, the greatest emphasis is placed on salvation of the individual instead of larger social concerns and injustices. There is a greater push for immigrants to attend churches and act a certain way in order to receive support and acceptance by and from the church.

Today, there are those in various Protestant churches who are taking more of an interest in immigrant population, as many evangelical churches are experiencing a great deal of growth through immigrant members.<sup>289</sup> As this is happening, many Protestant leaders are taking a

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<sup>286</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 173.

<sup>287</sup> Scaperlanda, 38.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

<sup>289</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 162.

greater stand towards immigration reform in this country, as well as investing in strategies to help the immigrants, while still respecting the laws of the United States.

### *Conclusion*

It has been easy for many in Catholic Churches to respond sympathetically to the struggles of the immigrants because of its history of persecution in the United States. This history, as well as the influence of Liberation Theology that has become such a strong part of many Catholic Churches through its Latin American members, has caused Catholic Christians to have a strong stance of support for the immigrants in this country. Many in leadership are involved in immigration reform, as well as offering individual programs that help immigrants settle into their new lives and maintain their rights as Americans.

Other Churches have had different responses to immigration through the centuries. Various Protestant churches have felt threatened by the waves of Catholics and other immigrants with different religions, feeling that they might negatively influence their country and way of life. These churches have been hesitant to get involved in immigration reform but instead desired to be more concerned with the basic teachings of salvation and Christian living. Still the populations of aliens are finding their way into various Protestant churches and this is starting to bring some interest about immigration reform and the social injustices displayed towards immigrants.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Documented and Undocumented Aliens

After looking briefly at the history of immigration in America, the different waves of immigrants, and in order to understand how the Christians should respond to these issues, it is important to better comprehend where America is today. The current wave of immigration to the United States could arguably be defined as the wave of Latino or Hispanic immigration. It is estimated that the Hispanic population in the United States is now at least forty million, or about 14% of the national population. Although the majority of these immigrants are legally in the country with permanent residency or citizenship, it is estimated that roughly twelve to twenty million, with the largest percentage being of Mexican extraction, are undocumented aliens.<sup>290</sup>

This massive wave of immigration brings up many controversial issues, both at the national level and in different American churches, both Catholic and Protestant churches. One of the biggest issues is that of the church's response to immigrants in the United States who do not have any documentation to be here. They are often referred to as "illegal aliens" or "undocumented aliens." Often churches feel that, because these people are in this country illegally they should not be considered as part of the church's mandate to care for the "alien" because they have broken the law by being in the United States of America without proper documentation.<sup>291</sup> Still, others feel that this type of "alien" can still be considered among the poor and fit the Biblical definition of "alien" and that therefore they should be treated as part of God's command to care for the needy.

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<sup>290</sup> Carroll, 40.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.* 131.

When addressing the subject of “undocumented aliens,” it is important to look at a few things. First, we need to understand who these people are, as well as how and why they have come illegally into the United States. It is also important to look at the undocumented migrant workers, a group of people so crucial to the American economy for so many years. It is necessary to understand how these illegal immigrants affect the economy of the United States, and what it would mean for them to be forced out of the country or allowed to legally live here.

It is also important to know who the legal aliens coming to the United States are. Although, at this time in American history the majority are of Hispanic descent, many other immigrants from different nations around the world are entering the United States as well. These immigrants are often thrown into the category of “illegal aliens” without a second thought. They are to be considered citizens of this country, as much as any other American in our history. Lastly, it is imperative to look at Romans chapter 13, which is a key passage influencing Christians in the United States feel that supporting and caring for undocumented aliens goes against the Bible.

*“Why do they come?”*

The main reasons most illegal immigrants come to the United States are: 1) to find a better paying job and quality of life, 2) to be re-united with family members or 3) to seek the freedoms that the United States offers its citizens.<sup>292</sup> When a group of illegal immigrant men were interviewed in a Mexican/American border town in Arizona, they revealed the reasons behind why they chose the path of coming to America illegally.<sup>293</sup> Among these men, the main

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<sup>292</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 30.

<sup>293</sup> Lawrence A. Deluca. "United States-Mexico Border Crossing: Experiences and Risk Perceptions of Undocumented Male Immigrants." *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 12, no. 1 (n.d.): ProQuest: Research

motivation behind this dangerous endeavor was for the sake of their families. They all mentioned that they had left their families at home in Mexico in order to come to the United States. Those with children had reported their wages were so low at their jobs in Mexico that they were unable to provide food for their families and education for their children. Others reported that their children had medical issues and they were unable to provide adequate medical treatment for them with their current wages in Mexico.<sup>294</sup>

Many of the men spoke about the problems of unemployment in Mexico and their desperation to find work in order to provide for their wives and children. Most planned to make money in the United States in order to send most of it back to their struggling families. They spoke about how they were inspired to continue the dangerous journey for the sake of their families, who remained at home, often in a very vulnerable and dangerous situation, having their main source of income and protection gone.<sup>295</sup>

Another documented story by a couple called “Pedro” and “Martha” record how they struggled financially living in a small town in Mexico where more than ten percent of the population live on two dollars a day.<sup>296</sup> After struggling for many years, and finally getting into a great deal of debt trying to give their children an education, the couple felt they had no other option but to pursue a better life for their family in the United States. In this case, Pedro decided to venture to the United States with his older son, while Martha remained behind with the other three children. For this family it was worth the risk.

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Library (SRU), EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2012) 114-115. Note: This information was gathered using Quantitative Research.

<sup>294</sup> Deluca, 117.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

<sup>296</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 31.

## *Border Crossing*

Most undocumented immigrants know very well about the dangers that they will face when trying to cross the border from Mexico into the United States. Family, friends, and neighbors, as well as the newspapers and television programs report on the extremely dangerous conditions the crossing requires.<sup>297</sup> It is estimated that 400 illegal immigrants die each year trying to cross the border into the US; one million are deported, and at least three million make it safely into the US.<sup>298</sup>

Still most of the men, when reflecting on their border crossing experience stated that they were unprepared for how dangerous it really was. In the Tucson/ US-Mexican border area there are over one hundred reported deaths each year from the heat conditions alone.<sup>299</sup> Most of the crossers reported that their biggest fear was running out of water in the extreme desert conditions as they often showed signs of dehydration during the journey. One man reported eating wild cacti in order to re-hydrate during the crossing.<sup>300</sup> The desert also poses the risk of extreme cold, as well as wild animals and poisonous snakes.

Still others were fearful of being robbed or abandoned by their “coyote,” a type of guide or smuggler who was supposed to see them safely across the border. Smugglers have been known to kill those who do not have adequate funds for the journey. Thieves, who know the routes, rob and beat up those on their way to the United States. Those crossing are encouraged

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<sup>297</sup> Deluca, 117.

<sup>298</sup> Don Mitchell. “Work, Struggle, Death, and Geographies of Justice: The Transformation of Landscape in and Beyond California's Imperial Valley” (*Landscape Research*, Vol. 32, No. 5, 559 – 577, (October 2007): 563.

<sup>299</sup> Deluca, 113.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.* 117.

not to bring anything with them on the journey, including any types of medicine or outdoor survival items; should they bring such items with them, these will be taken away.<sup>301</sup>

In the case of Pedro, he had to pay the smuggler three thousand eight hundred dollars to get him into America that was another family loan they had to take.<sup>302</sup> Pedro's group was spotted by the U.S. Border Patrol agents, causing the group to split and the loss of his guide, as everyone ran in different directions. Pedro and his son stayed together and eventually jumped onto a slow moving train where they had to hold on for twelve hours as they desperately tried to keep each other awake.<sup>303</sup> When his wife Martha crossed over into America years later to be reunited with her husband after leaving her other children at home, she experienced trekking the desert for days, being drugged by her smuggler and being caught by immigration officials, before finally making it and being reunited with her husband. After such a traumatic experience, she questioned bringing her other children from Mexico into the United States but missed them terribly.<sup>304</sup>

Among those who cross the border illegally, many do not make it to the other side. Several people who try to cross into the United States turn themselves to the authorities when they are abandoned by their guides, get lost in the desert, or simply realize that the risk is too great and the journey too dangerous to continue.<sup>305</sup> Yet, most of those who fail in their border-crossing attempt admit that they are willing to try the dangerous journey again. They feel that the United States is their only option for a better future for themselves and their families.

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<sup>301</sup> Deluca, 119.

<sup>302</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 31.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>305</sup> Deluca, 117.

## *The Migrant Worker*

As seen in the chapter on the history of immigration in the United States, migrant workers from Mexico have always been an important part of the American economy. In fact, this is the main reason why immigration was open to those in North America who wanted to immigrate into the United States for so long.<sup>306</sup> They still are extremely important to the American farmer today, and restrictions on immigration have only made things more difficult for the undocumented aliens. The state of California produces 350 different types of crops that enter state, national and international commerce.<sup>307</sup> What happens there sets a precedent for the way the rest of the country functions. California needs about 800,000 workers each year to do farm labor. Right now, undocumented immigrants perform almost all of these laborious jobs. These workers are mainly from Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras.<sup>308</sup>

The turnover rate for workers is extremely high and new sets of workers are hired every year. The reason for the high turnover rate is that the work on these farms can be extremely dangerous. Accidents are often not reported because of the fear of deportation, but from the statistics that are recorded we see that the life expectancy for a farm laborer is forty-nine years old compared with the US average of seventy-five.<sup>309</sup> The accidents that are recorded from this kind of labor show the highest rates in the US for respiratory illness, malnutrition, back injuries, cancer and other horrible infirmities. Infant mortality rates are the highest among these people

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<sup>306</sup> Daniels, 52.

<sup>307</sup> California Department of Food and Agriculture. "Division of Marketing Services." <http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/> (accessed March 18, 2012).

<sup>308</sup> Mitchell, 562.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.* 568.

groups and it is even estimated that children accomplish twenty-five percent of the labor work done on these farms.<sup>310</sup>

Wages for these undocumented workers are below minimum wage and have been shown to decrease over the years. The reason for this unfair pay is simply that the farmers can get away with paying a low salary because the workers are in the country illegally and lack any recourse to get their money. Most of the time, this level of income is well below the US poverty line and these workers are often forced to find some other form of subsistence living. This leads to drug dealing, prostitution, or theft. Farmers rely on a new wave of illegal immigrant workers as the previous workers die, get injured and can no longer work, or make an attempt elsewhere to earn a better living. And some unscrupulous farmers may even report the illegal workers at the end of the season so as to not pay their remaining salary.<sup>311</sup> Many close their eyes to this type of injustice and instead chose to focus on the fact that these people have broken the law by illegally being in the United States. They feel they deserve this type of treatment and punishment.

Yet, despite all this, these people are willing to work hard and often do work that other Americans would not be willing to do. Even more shocking is the fact that these American farmers and corporations benefit monetarily from this influx of undocumented immigrant workers and come to count on it each year. Therefore, it could be said that through the hiring of such workers, illegal immigration is encouraged, and exploitation of these human beings continues to occur. The deadly crossing of undocumented aliens seems to benefit the farmers in California. This is because the option of work for undocumented aliens is available in the US, and yet the chance of death or deportation is always a factor. This crisis makes the

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<sup>310</sup> Mitchell, 568.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.* 570.

undocumented labor force on these farms powerless to control their own working and living conditions.

### *Economic Implications*

As a new wave of immigration falls upon the US there is always the fear that this new influx of immigrants will threaten the economy of the country.<sup>312</sup> Yet, some feel that this new wave of immigration is the best thing for America, and that immigration should be open to all, especially those who are willing to work hard. In his article in Forbes Magazine entitled, “Let them In,” Philippe Legrain argues that to open the borders of America would make this country richer, more entrepreneurial and more secure.<sup>313</sup>

Most undocumented aliens are willing to do the jobs that US born citizens despise, but that are extremely important to the American economy. People born in the United States are not only living longer but are also much more educated. Therefore, there is a greater need for labor workers than ever before. This often leads to businesses investing in undocumented workers, especially among the farming, construction, and restaurant industries.<sup>314</sup>

If these workers were allowed to immigrate legally and peacefully, the money and time spent on sealing the borders could be spent elsewhere, including searching for terrorists coming into the country. Legrain states that the fears that these immigrants would somehow threaten the American workers are misplaced, and are similar to the traditional thought of the past that included men worrying that woman would take their jobs when they started becoming a large

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<sup>312</sup> Groups such as the Minutemen and the Tea Party are alarmed at the influx of immigrants and are working hard to stem the tide. Comment by Dr. Joseph Saggio on July 6, 2012.

<sup>313</sup> Philippe Legrain. “Let Them In.” (*Forbes*, (June 28, 2010): 22.

<sup>314</sup> Soerens and Hwang, 32.



part of the workforce.<sup>315</sup> Opening the borders would instead create more jobs, not only through the type of jobs they would perform but through various entrepreneurial endeavors that are impossible to do if these workers are busy hiding their funds and unable to have access to bank loans. This, in turn, would stimulate the economy instead of hindering it, as so many worry about.

### *Documented Aliens*

Americans are quick to feel that all immigrants into the United States are “illegal,” when this is not true. In the last ten years, the United States has seen more growth in immigration than any other time in its history. Roughly, forty million immigrants have come to the United States between 2000 and 2010, and, during this time economic growth has been primarily driven by legal immigration.<sup>316</sup> The top sending countries in the last ten years have been Mexico (11,711,103), China, Hong Kong, Taiwan (2,166,526), and India (1,780,322).<sup>317</sup> Among the many immigrants who have come to America in the past ten years, most are from Latin America. Many who are legally here are treated as illegal immigrants merely because of their ethnicity and not because they are lacking paperwork.<sup>318</sup>

Not only are many of these immigrants legally in the United States, but they soon become citizens. Many who experience hostility from others in the United States who fear illegal immigrants, are just as much citizens as those who have been here for generations. They have the full right of any American who is treating them as non-Americans. Each state and every American will have to deal with new immigrants. Many are citizens and deserve to be treated

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<sup>315</sup> Legrain, 23.

<sup>316</sup> Care for Immigration Studies. “A Record Setting Decade for Immigration: 2000-2010.” <http://cis.org/2000-2010-record-setting-decade-of-immigration> (accessed March 18, 2012).

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

with the respect and freedom any American would desire and enjoy. To assume that any immigrant of Hispanic origin is illegal is to make an ethnocentric assumption.

### *What About Romans 13?*

Many Christians in the United States feel that Romans 13 is a key reason why Christians should never support and protect undocumented aliens in this country.

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.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup>For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. <sup>4</sup>For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.<sup>319</sup>

Many believe that to cross the border into the United States is to break the law of this country and therefore goes against the authority of this country. Yet, there are a few things to consider when looking at these verses. One is that the Christian cannot merely assume that all governments are inherently good and just.<sup>320</sup> Looking at the history of immigration law clearly reveals that there are many aspects of these laws that are done with wrong motives, and are unjust towards the immigrant. The United States itself admits that its legislation is in need of change in regards to immigration law revealing there must be aspects of injustice within the system.<sup>321</sup>

Also these verses in Romans must not be taken out of context. A careful study of Romans 12 reveals that Paul also writes, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's

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<sup>319</sup> Rom. 13:1-4.

<sup>320</sup> Carroll, 132.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.* 133.

will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will.”<sup>322</sup> Paul also commands, “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”<sup>323</sup> These verses are clearly more complex and need to be read entirety before an assumption should be made on what should be considered right and wrong in regards to immigration law.

### *Conclusion*

Immigration is a permanent part of being American. When seriously considering undocumented aliens in the United States, and what they have to go through in order to enter this country, one discovers them as true human beings instead of statistical numbers. Most “illegal aliens” come to this country because they want a better life for their wives, children, and families. Many of them feel that they have no other option but to immigrate in such a way. The dangers they face in crossing the border and the fact that they are willing to do so repeatedly reveal the true desperate state that these aliens find themselves in.

Instead of the title “illegal immigrant,” it seems that they could be better compared to a “refugee.” Just as Abraham moved to Egypt to escape the great famine throughout his land, so also the poor and uneducated Hispanic workers flee to another land in order to service and provide for their family. The desperation in each story reveals the true humanity behind the immigration debate that needs to always be kept in mind when the church is contemplating its position towards illegal immigration.

Still, among all these undocumented immigrants, there is a need to remember that there are many documented citizens. Today, hatred towards immigrants can be easily excused by assuming all immigrants, especially those of Hispanic origins, are “illegal.” The very same fears

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<sup>322</sup> Rom. 12:1-2.

<sup>323</sup> Rom. 12:13.

rooted in “nativism” were seen throughout American history in dealing with the waves of German and Irish, Chinese, Italian, Jewish, and Polish waves of immigrations. This parallels the current paranoia dealing with the current waves of Hispanic immigration. This historical pattern reveals a deep fear of those who are “different” than us, as well as a desire to protect and maintain our own lives, sometimes at the cost of others around us who are in need.

Lastly, Romans chapter 13 is a huge issue in churches when dealing with illegal immigrants. Yet, it is clear that this chapter and these verses in the Bible cannot be taken out of context of the Bible in its entirety. Although Paul states that Christians are to follow the laws of where they live and respect those in authority it does not mean that they are to simply follow these laws and rulers if they conflict with the principles of God for love and justice towards others. These Biblical passages are much more complex and Christians in the United States need to constantly be search all of the scriptures in order to fully understand what God’s heart is towards immigration in this country.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Our Biblical Mandate

A careful study of the history of Israel in the Old Testament reveals a lot about whom the “aliens” were and how they were to be treated. The New Testament also reveals a lot about Jesus’ attitude towards the “aliens” and how he treated them during His ministry on earth. Similarly, a detailed study on immigration in the United States of America reveals the different types of “aliens” in this country, how they were and are treated, and the ongoing challenges they face.

To further explore this topic, Christians of the twenty-first century should first have an understanding of biblical ethics and the role the Bible plays in determining how it should actualize its faith in the world. It is important to make a correct interpretation of how the Bible calls the people of God to remember their past as aliens. Christians need to understand principles expressed through both Testaments and how they reveal the way followers of Jesus should treat aliens. Lastly, it is imperative that we look at the difficult issues surrounding illegal immigration and see if the Bible places these types of immigrants in the same category as the biblical “aliens.”

#### *Biblical Ethics*

When looking at the concept of “ethics” in the Bible, one first needs to understand the difference between morals and ethics. The study of morality has to do with changing patterns in society, looking at what people are doing in a certain culture.<sup>324</sup> Ethics, on the other hand, has an entirely different meaning. The study of Ethics is the study of a set of standards that dictate how

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<sup>324</sup> William Racciah. “Pentecostal Ethics” in *Testimony* (January 2004): 1.

a person should live and that never change.<sup>325</sup> Ethics shapes how a person ought to live, act, and react to various parts of life. Therefore, to look at Biblical ethics means to look at the absolute standards that God has set up for all people and how they should live.

When God commands in the Old Testament He does not always give a reason why the people were to obey. Yet, it is apparent when studying the Law that God's ultimate reason behind why people were to obey His commands was to "**Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.**"<sup>326</sup> This was important, because the people of Israel were to be God's expression of Himself in the world. Similarly, Christians are the extension of who God is in Jesus, as its actions reflect who He is to the world. It is in, and through people, that God interacts with the world.<sup>327</sup> Christians are required to act in holiness because God is holy.

The way Christians treat people is rooted in its understanding of the biblical view of persons and their creation.<sup>328</sup> The Bible states that each person was made in the image of God and has a mandate to care for the earth and for each other.<sup>329</sup> Just as God showers all of the good things of creation upon every person, so also the Christian is called to work for the physical, social, economic, and political well-being of everyone.<sup>330</sup>

Another absolute command from God is to love our neighbors in the same way that we love ourselves.<sup>331</sup> In the Bible, a neighbor does not refer to someone's geographical location. Instead, it refers to a "fellow man" finding all things common in our bearing the image of

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<sup>325</sup> Raccah *Testimony*, 1.

<sup>326</sup> Lev. 19:1-2.

<sup>327</sup> Conversation with Dr. William Raccah on Saturday March 10, 2012.

<sup>328</sup> Ronald J. Sider. *Good News and Good Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993): 141.

<sup>329</sup> See Gen. 1:27-30, 2:15.

<sup>330</sup> Sider, 141.

<sup>331</sup> See Lev. 19:18, Matt. 22:39.

God.<sup>332</sup> The Bible's description of a "neighbor" is that of people in the community, who are most prone to be ignored, mainly those of a different social class or who are in different social situations.<sup>333</sup>

The aliens fit into this group, as it is a group of people who belongs to a different social class, or experiences different social situations. Aliens often speak a different language, practice different customs brought from their home country. They may also eat different foods, smell or dress differently than the people in the new country they now live in. All these things may cause a person who has been living in the home country for a long time to feel uncomfortable and anxious. Therefore, this seems to be the reason why the Bible mandates that aliens not be overlooked. They are instead to be considered as God's creation, and as a neighbor. The call to love one's neighbor as oneself does not simply imply a "feeling" of love, but also an action that requires providing assistance, protection and meeting of their needs as a person would provide for and protect himself or herself.

Thus, according to the Bible, the concept of "love" and "doing good" are interchangeable ideas.<sup>334</sup> This is the reason why Biblical Ethics is so important. Ethics becomes important as Christians reveal who God is, through their actions in the world. It is equally as important in sharing the good news of Christ through action, as sharing it through words.

The gospels reveal this kind of ethical action in the person of Jesus, who spent a huge part of his ministry caring for the physical needs of people who often belonged to a different

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<sup>332</sup> Rodney S. Sadler Jr. "Who is my Neighbor? Introductory Explorations." *Interpretations* 62, no. 2 (April 2008): 9.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.* 4-5.

social class or who experienced different situations.<sup>335</sup> He declared this at the beginning of His public ministry when He read from the scroll of Isaiah:

“The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him (Jesus). Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to release the oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”<sup>336</sup>

While on earth, Jesus always identified with the poor, the marginalized and the outcast and He called those around Him to do the same. He asked others to treat their fellow human beings with the values of the Kingdom of God that are, ultimately, the value of God Himself.<sup>337</sup> So also, Christians are called to live out these values through caring for the poor and needy in its community. To reject or neglect the poor in the community is a clear rejection of God Himself and His nature.<sup>338</sup>

Throughout the Bible, “aliens” were placed in the same group as the poor, orphaned and needy; therefore, justice and care for the “alien” living among us becomes a crucial matter. The act of caring for the poor and marginalized in society reveals who God is to the world. These actions stand out because often the “world” treats these people groups otherwise. Those in pursuit of economic gain will take advantage of anyone they can in order to benefit from these

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<sup>335</sup> See Matt. 4:23, 9:35-36.

<sup>336</sup> Lk. 4:17-21.

<sup>337</sup> Sider, 143.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.



peoples' misfortune. This leads to social structures that are harmful and corrupt. God denounces this type of structures through the prophets when He declares:

This is what the LORD says:

“For three sins of Israel,  
even for four, I will not turn back my wrath.  
They sell the righteous for silver,  
and the needy for a pair of sandals.  
They trample on the heads of the poor  
as upon the dust of the ground  
and deny justice to the oppressed.”<sup>339</sup>

Clearly, social injustice is rooted in sin and, therefore, the opposite of who God is, and what He values. Just as God hates and despises this type of injustice, so also Christians are called to fight against such structures. To love these individuals as we would love ourselves is to fight against injustice for their sake, as we would fight it if it were a system where we ourselves were suffering.

### *Resolving the Tension*

It is also important to remember that when looking at the history of aliens in Israel and comparing them to aliens in the United States Christians often find too many similarities. Earlier we saw that there was a type of unresolved tension in Israel between the two types of aliens. First there was God's call to the people of Israel to embrace the aliens and treat them justly, and at the same time a fear of the alien corrupting their culture and bringing it away from the principles of God. Often many Christians in America feel this same fear that these aliens bring new customs and often new religions to the United States. They feel that God's commands to the people of Israel to exclude and reject these aliens are equally meant for these Christians in

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<sup>339</sup> Amos 2:6-7a.

the United States to follow. Many Christians in this country feel that same tension as the people of Israel must have between these two types of aliens.

Yet, it is imperative to remember that the situations of the people of Israel and Christians in the United States are very different in many ways. The country of Israel was a theocracy set up by God. Although influenced by the principles of Christianity, modern day America is not a theocracy and therefore very different.<sup>340</sup> As we have seen in previous chapters, the writers of the New Testament have revealed that the Christian should not see themselves as part of an earthly Kingdom, but that of heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven and therefore, modern day American Christians should not identify with the people of Israel looking at the United States as a similar type of theocratic country, but instead with that of the alien. Recognizing that despite our country of citizenship and where we live, our true home is with Christ and therefore we are aliens in this world. This viewpoint greatly influences how Christians in the United States should look at ourselves and ultimately treat those aliens living among us.

### *Remember Who You Are*

Part of God's call to the people of Israel to be holy involved ways of constantly remembering the difficult life they used to have and the blessings God had brought to them. It is clear from the study of the history of Israel that they experienced the harshness of life as aliens in many different ways. God wanted them to remember this and therefore, each year during the celebration of the First Fruits, the people were to: "...declare before the LORD your God: 'My

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<sup>340</sup> Conversation with Dr. Blaine Charette on July 6<sup>th</sup> 2012.

father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation’.”<sup>341</sup>

Even the celebration of Passover had an important aspect of reminding the people the great difficulties that they had endured as aliens in Egypt that would promote correct treatment of those who experienced the same hardships as aliens in their communities.<sup>342</sup> God is constantly reminding His people to remember their past as aliens when considering their treatment of the aliens living with them. He thus decreed: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”<sup>343</sup>

While it is important to God that the people of Israel never forget their past as slaves and remember this through the Passover, it is equally important to God that New Testament believers remember their past as being slaves to sin. This is seen when Jesus calls for this type of remembrance of Him, His sacrifice, and the Christians redemption through His death on the cross: “And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me’.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ““This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you’.”<sup>344</sup> The Church practices this “remembrance” as a type of commemoration of Who Christ is and who we are when we participate in the Lords Supper, or communion. That act of taking the bread and juice as a habitual part of our church services is a way of constantly bringing to mind an important part of our faith, and making sure that we never forget it.

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<sup>341</sup> Deut. 26:5a.

<sup>342</sup> Van Houten, 90.

<sup>343</sup> Lev. 19:33-34.

<sup>344</sup> Lk. 22:19-20.

Just as God requires this type of remembrance of the past by the people of Israel, and the universal Christian church, it is important to remember our past as Americans. The history of American immigration reveals each new group coming to the United States as people striving to escape religious persecution, or economic struggles. The blessings that we experience today are often only after years of hardship by our alien forbearers in a new land, as they endured not only a perilous journey, but often social ridicule and tough working conditions. Each American can trace his/her history back to some such history and this needs to be remembered to keep in mind who we are and what it was like to be an alien.

Since Christians in the United States represent God to this country and understand His command to “remember our past,” we should be the first to practice some type of commemoration by that remembering our history as aliens. This way of recollection will not only help us bear in mind who we are, but promote correct treatment of the aliens living among us, as well as influence involvement of our churches into social reforms within our communities.

There is one custom in the United States that parallels somewhat the religious festivals practiced by Ancient Israel, and reminds us of our previous status as aliens. Each year, Thanksgiving is celebrated at the end of November. This celebration is rooted in the experience of some of the first immigrants to the United States as they celebrated their long journey to the New Land, and their survival of a very difficult winter. It is called “Thanksgiving” because the community of Puritans desired to give thanks to God for all that they had been blessed with in their new land.

In modern day America, the holiday of Thanksgiving has evolved into a time for giving thanks for random things in life, or merely an excuse for a holiday, to eat, and watch football.

However, this could be an important way for American Christians to remember what life was like for their first ancestors in the United States, and how thankful they were for the blessings God had given them, as well as the difficulties they had been delivered from. This concept could be further expanded to remember all the different personal histories of immigrants who came to this country, remembering their struggles and hardships. It would allow Christians to not only recall their past, but include those new aliens living among them who might not understand the holiday, or may be celebrating it for the first time in the United States.

### *Treatment of Aliens Among Us*

Knowing how crucial it is for Christians to reflect the holiness of God in the communities we live in, it is therefore important to understand how Christians in the United States should treat the aliens living in their midst. Beyond merely remembering what it was like for us, or our forefathers, to live in this country as aliens, it is important to live it out practically.

In the Old Testament, God called for His people to practice gleaning: “Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the **alien**. I am the LORD your God.”<sup>345</sup> Gleaning is something entirely separate from the tithe; it requires that those in need work for their food. It meets the need while at the same time giving those who receive it a sense of dignity as they feel a sense of accomplishment in working for their own food. This type of charity also allows those in need to work on basic skills that may help them in the long-term obtain a full time job. The action of gleaning, addresses the sources of injustice in a society. Often, merely meeting someone’s needs without dealing with the injustice that put the person in that place of need does not benefit anyone and can be considered

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<sup>345</sup>Lev. 19:10, 23:22, See also Deut. 24:19-22.

an injustice itself.<sup>346</sup> In the twenty-first century, the act of only giving food to someone in need should not be considered “gleaning.” This, in many instances, increases dependency and decreases self-reliance.

Finding something equivalent to the action of gleaning is a challenge. It requires a great deal of listening to the actual problems of injustice and difficulties that the aliens are experiencing, as well as a strong desire to address prejudices found in our societies.<sup>347</sup> Providing job skills and education for the alien is a great start to living out the Biblical mandate of “gleaning” and this is something that the church can actively participate in.

Giving to the aliens, however, is also part of God’s command to His people: “At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year’s produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the **aliens**, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.”<sup>348</sup> Often, many churches tends to look at the tithe’s purpose as being for the care of the pastoral staff and its building. Although God’s command for tithing does include these elements, it reveals that the primary purpose of the tithe is for the poor and needy in the community.<sup>349</sup> The tithe should be a safety net for those in the community, those who are most hard hit by economic problems, including the aliens who may be struggling in a new country.

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<sup>346</sup>Henry Victor. "New Christian Social Activism: Gleanings!" *Religious Studies and Theology* 22, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 17-31. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 10, 2012): 28.

<sup>347</sup>*Ibid.* 28.

<sup>348</sup>Deut. 14:28-29, see also Deut. 26:12-13.

<sup>349</sup>Gunther H. Wittenberg. "The Tithe an Obligation for Christians? Perspectives from Deuteronomy." *Journal Of Theology For Southern Africa* no. 134 (July 1, 2009): 82-101. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 11, 2012): 100.

When addressing work compensation regarding aliens, the Old Testament calls for justice and fairness: “Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an **alien** living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.”<sup>350</sup> This command needs to be enacted by all those who call themselves Christian in the twenty-first century. It particularly applies to those who may be hiring undocumented workers. Their status as “undocumented” should never be an open door to lower wages, or any other type of injustice. Many laws in the United States protect the worker from such injustice, but the undocumented worker does not fall under these protections and, therefore, it becomes incumbent on the Church to advocate for such protection and never be found guilty of such abuse.

The same is true concerning observance of the Sabbath: “But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the **alien** within your gates.”<sup>351</sup> The undocumented worker does not fall under the protection of the laws of the United States that require either limited work hours, or to be paid overtime if the worker works beyond a certain number of hours. This is another situation where Christians should not take advantage of undocumented aliens, by forcing them to work long hours, without the correct payment or rest. The Church should always try to voice concern for those workers who are being mistreated that way.

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<sup>350</sup> Deut. 24:14-15.

<sup>351</sup> Exod. 20:10.

The Bible calls for justice in the legal system for the aliens living among us: “And I charged your judges at that time: Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an **alien**.”<sup>352</sup> In twenty first-century America, injustices in the legal system are often caused by racism and prejudice. Aliens may experience injustice because of their lack of understanding of their rights, or the fact that they are unable to communicate clearly enough in English to explain their side of a situation.

Christians are called to protect those in our community who are experiencing this. As seen in pervious chapters, many Catholic Churches have set an excellent example of what this looks like practically. They provide translators, legal services, counselors and other services to help alleviate these injustices; all of that is being paid for by the church itself.<sup>353</sup> History in the United States unfortunately reveals many Protestant Churches are often standing on the sidelines while racism and prejudice wreak havoc on our country.<sup>354</sup> It is our mandate, as representatives of God’s holiness, to stand up for those who suffer racism and prejudice in our country and to bring healing and reconciliation. The apostle Paul understood this aspect of our calling ad Christians when he wrote to the church of Colossae:

“Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”<sup>355</sup>

Most importantly, the Old Testament calls for the aliens to be allowed into the fellowship of the people of God and to participate in their faith. Integration of the aliens in our Church

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<sup>352</sup> Deut. 1:16.

<sup>353</sup> Menjivar, 30.

<sup>354</sup> David K. Clark, and Robert V. Rakestraw. *Readings in Christian Ethics* Vol 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996): 285.

<sup>355</sup> Col. 3:10-13.



community has always been a struggle and is seen by the fact that most Sunday morning Church services are quite segregated.<sup>356</sup> This is often because there are many challenges, ranging from different languages and customs, to aliens often feeling different and uncomfortable, unsure of how to act in a Church setting that is very different than the one they were used to in their home country. In order to help new immigrants in the Church, it is important to first meet them where they are. Providing people in the church who can speak their language and help guide them through integration in both the Christian community and the United States is crucial to reaching the aliens among us.<sup>357</sup>

Many Churches have separate congregations for specific ethnic groups that provide a place where a common language can be spoken and where they can meet people who have experienced the similar struggles of immigration.<sup>358</sup> Many immigrants find this extremely helpful. However, this does not always help to create a welcoming environment in the Church for new immigrants, as they remain segregated. In these types of situations, many Churches in the United States need to come up with creative ideas about bringing the two groups together for some type of activities, so that both sides get to know each other. One creative idea may be to learn some worship songs in the immigrant's native language that could be sung together during the church service. It also would be very helpful for the church to hear testimonies experienced by different immigrants so that the congregation understands the struggles they have had to endure. One of the best ways to integrate interaction between two different ethnic groups is to have them serve together. This can be anything from working together on a project at the

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<sup>356</sup> Glenn E. Berg-Moberg. "Ministry with Immigrants: Sharing the Mission." *Word & World* 29, no. 3 (June 1, 2009): 289-22. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 11, 2012): 289.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.* 289-290.

<sup>358</sup> Kretcha Roldan-Rodriguez. "Finding a Home in the Immigrant Church." *Family and Community Ministries* 23, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 40-41. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 11, 2012): 40-41.

church, to an outreach to the homeless in their home city, or a mission trip to another country. All these activities would further encourage interaction in the congregation. Most importantly, it is crucial to remember that any amount of welcoming attitude and encouraging environment goes a long way for an immigrant who is feeling nervous and out of place in the Church community.

### *American Christians and Undocumented Aliens*

The issues surrounding undocumented immigrants and how Christians in the United States should interact with this group of people are both real and complicated. In most states it is legal to preach the gospel to an undocumented alien.<sup>359</sup> This makes it clear that the church is free to share the gospel with undocumented aliens and still be under the authority of our judicial system. In some states, however, this becomes more challenging. In Arizona, for example, it is illegal to pick up kids who are not legally in the country for a church youth group.<sup>360</sup> This creates a conflict within the church: choosing to follow the laws of this country or to follow the call of God to preach the gospel. Those working in these states feel that the call of the apostles in the book of Acts is applicable to their situation when they cry out: “We must obey God rather than men.”<sup>361</sup>

Many Catholic Churches are clear in their stance of support of the undocumented aliens, and its clergy often set an example for many Protestant churches as to what it really means to care for those in need in our community. When looking at those who do come illegally into the

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<sup>359</sup> Mark DeYmaz, M Daniel Carroll R, and Matthew Soerens. "What Should Churches do about Illegal Immigrants in their Midst? Meeting the Sojourner." *Christianity Today* 55, no. 2 (February 1, 2011): 52-53. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost (accessed March 11, 2012): 53.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.* 53.

<sup>361</sup> Acts 5:29.

United States, it becomes clear that the main reason they do so is because of poverty in their home country and the desire to provide a better life for their families. This places this type of alien among the poor in the community of the church. God's call is to care for the poor in our midst and this is the mandate of the Christian.

The undocumented aliens cannot be ignored or viewed as no longer human because they are considered "illegal." They remain creations of God who find themselves in a very difficult situation. The Church in the United States should always remember that each undocumented alien is still a fellow human being, and God still considers him or her, our neighbor. We are called to love them as we would love ourselves and that requires action of meeting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, and protecting their rights as human beings.

### *Conclusion*

God's care and concern for aliens in the Bible is undeniable through both the Old and New Testaments. His practical commands about how we treat the immigrants living among us are clear enough to reach into the twenty-first century and be applied to and by Christians, even in the United States. This includes helping the aliens by providing for their needs through the tithe and through other outreaches that would help them learn how to provide for their own needs and the needs of their families. It also includes Christians involvement in fighting social injustices in this country that directly affect the aliens in our community. Christians in America can be a powerful reflection of who God is and of His holiness to this nation and the nations around the world. Therefore, it is our ultimate calling to reflect this through our interaction with the many aliens who find their way to the United States in search of a better life.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this thesis was to address many of the confusing issues Christians in the United States faces when dealing with immigrants both in and around the church community. My aim was to look first at the biblical account and find out who the immigrant, or alien, was in the Bible and what God commanded about how the people of Israel were to relate to this type of person in the community. Answering whether the 21<sup>st</sup> century “alien” is the same as that presented in the Old and New Testament context was one of the purposes of this thesis. This, therefore, led to the conclusion of how Christians should respond to God’s commands for treatment of aliens living here.

### *Aliens in the Bible*

The study has been an amazing adventure. By looking first at the Hebrew words used for alien in the Old Testament, we discovered that there were four words used to describe the alien. These four Hebrew words are not to be interchanged and each has different meanings. זָר and נָכַר used the words “foreign” to describe something or someone morally incorrect or sinful, while תּוֹשֵׁב referred to a temporary settler who was not necessarily a permanent part of the Hebrew society. גֵּר was the Hebrew word most often used to describe a person from another land who resided permanently among the Israelites. It was also the word that pertained most to this study as it was used most often and had the closest connection to the modern day “immigrant.” We discovered that there was an unresolved tension between the two types of aliens and how the people of Israel were to treat them. When looking at the Greek words chosen to translate these Hebrew words into the LXX, we discovered that the meaning of foreigner was taken further to mean someone who had converted to the faith of the people of Israel.

From this study, we concluded that not all words that translate into English as “foreigner” or “alien” have the same meaning in the Old Testament and the LXX. Therefore, the context where the words lie becomes extremely important in order to understand correctly what the authors are trying to communicate when they speak of the “alien.” Since the Hebrew word אֲרָם is the word used most often in the Old Testament, and since it is the word that reflects most similarity to a modern day “immigrant,” it is important to understand what God commands in the Old Testament towards treatment of the אֲרָם in order to know how He wants the church of the United States to treat the aliens we encounter.

Much of Israel’s history in the Old Testament involved the people of Israel experiencing life as an alien in a strange land. This began with the experience of Abraham as an alien in the land of Canaan, and his son, grandson, and great-grandson. Eventually Israel settled in Egypt as aliens that later became one of the darkest times in its history. We discovered that many of God’s instructions toward the people of Israel, commanded them to remember their history as aliens. Leviticus 19:33-34 became a very important passage in our study, as God stated: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”<sup>362</sup> Many of their religious feasts centered on the concept of remembering their past as aliens in a foreign land. The people of Israel again experienced life as aliens when they were exiled to Babylon and Persia.

After looking at this history, we can conclude that the people of Israel knew what it was like to be an alien in a foreign land. God places a huge importance on remembering this, especially when it comes to relating to aliens in the land of Israel and His commands on how

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<sup>362</sup> Lev. 19:33-34.

they were to be treated. This strengthened the concept of treating the alien as one would want to be treated. “Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”<sup>363</sup>

This led to a very important part of this study that explored who the aliens who lived among the Israelites were. The very practical commandments God gave the people of Israel as to how they were to treat these aliens living among them such as the act of gleaning and tithing that would help the alien, was also explored. The Israelites were to make sure the alien was paid correctly, and was allowed the Sabbath’s rest. They were also required to allow the aliens to know their rights by hearing the law being read and allow them to participate in their religious festivals. As God gave the people of Israel different commands regarding the alien, He revealed why they were to do this. They were to represent Him to the nations around them. How they treated the aliens represented His holiness and was an extension of Himself to the nations. This revealed the extreme importance for the people of Israel to follow His commands and to treat the aliens correctly. Yet, the Old Testament shows that the people of Israel chose to misrepresent God and mistreat the aliens living among them. This greatly angered God!

This study showed that the way the people of God treat others, and especially the way we treat aliens who live with us, represented God’s holiness to the world around us. God’s commands regarding the treatment of aliens was not a small issue for the people of Israel and is not a small issue for the Church today. To misrepresent God is a great sin. Instead, we should reveal God’s heart for the poor and needy in our care for the aliens.

The New Testament revealed that Jesus further emphasized this type of interaction with aliens when He was on earth. His dealings with the Samaritans and His teaching on caring for the stranger revealed that He lived out this heart of love for the aliens, actions that go hand in

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<sup>363</sup> Lev. 19:18.

hand with the commandments from the Old Testament. Also seen was that the early Christian fathers called themselves “aliens” as their faith in Christ made them live differently from their pagan neighbors. This led to further empathy towards the aliens of that day in that, as Christians, we are all truly aliens in the world and therefore our place of birth, the country we live in, and our ethnicity make no difference.

From this we could conclude that the New Testament holds the same view towards the aliens and how they are to be treated as that of the Old Testament. Jesus did not change the concept of correct treatment of the alien, but instead further emphasized that these commands in the Old Testament reveal the heart of God. The New Testament additionally shows that there should not be any distinction within the church between an “alien” Christian and a native born person as we are all foreigners and strangers on this earth.

### *Bringing the Two World Together*

This study then moved from the Biblical account of the aliens, to the Church of America and the type of aliens we interact with. An understanding of today’s immigration in the US could not be obtained without first looking at the history of immigration in this country. Immigration is a critical part of our history since the country began with immigrants. We discovered that the first immigrants were of Protestant background. This became important, especially when the first new waves of immigrants who arrived were Catholic. Many Protestant groups in the United States became very hostile to these new groups of immigrants because they felt they were threatening their way of life and religion. Then, as each new wave of immigrants came to the United States, there were those who disliked the new group because of their poverty and cultural differences. This feeling of hostility towards immigrants is often there, even though

almost all Americans have some sort of history of ancestors coming to the United States as immigrants.

From this study of immigrants in American history, we can conclude that just as the people of Israel have a history of living as aliens in another country, so do those who are American citizens. When God gave the command to Israel: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”<sup>364</sup> His command directly relates to each American in that we should remember we were once aliens in the United States and therefore this should influence our treatment of those aliens around us. Yet it seems, that we have forgotten this, just as the people of Israel were quick to forget their history as aliens and mistreat the aliens living with them. The history of immigration in the US reveals that each generation eventually forgot what it was like to be an alien in the United States, and instead became very hostile to new immigrants.

We then looked at the history of Christians in the United States and how they reacted to issues of immigration over the centuries. Because many of the new immigrants in this country were Catholic, many Catholic Churches in the United States have always been strong supporters of the plight of immigrants. For this reason it has been greatly inclined towards Liberation Theology that now is very influential because of the waves of immigrants coming from Latin America. Many Catholic Churches today are involved in immigration reform, as well as setting up many programs throughout the church to help immigrants in this country adjust to their new surroundings.

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<sup>364</sup> Lev. 19:33-34.



Sadly, the history of many Protestant churches interaction with immigration is a very negative one. These churches have frequently felt threatened by immigrants and have a history of often being involved in violent acts against immigrants, as well as strong supporters of making immigration more difficult for those who wish to come to the United States. Although there were some Protestants in history who were involved in helping immigrants in the country, the majority did not take this stance. Even today, many Protestant churches are hesitant to become involved in anything regarding immigration reform.

From this study we can conclude, that the history of many Protestant churches in the United States and their interaction with immigrants is one that does not follow the principles laid out in the Bible. In this way, it has not done a good job of reflecting God's heart for the aliens to the world around us. Perhaps the reason behind this negative response to immigration is that these Christians are the furthest removed from the immigrant experience, being the first immigrants into the United States. In order for these Protestant churches to return to the commands of God and correct the treatment of immigrants in this nation, it can first look for ideas from its Catholic neighbors who have been working with immigrants throughout the history of the United States.

The undocumented alien was one of the most difficult issues on Immigration in the United States dealt with in this study. To truly understand the undocumented aliens one needs to first comprehend why they chose to come illegally into the country. Most of these types of immigrants come because of economic hardships in their home countries and chose to brave extreme dangers in crossing the borders on order to help their families. Many work at difficult jobs where their employers take advantage of their status as undocumented immigrants. Because

most of the new immigrants in the United States are from Latin America, many Americans assume that all persons of Latin descent are undocumented. This is an unfounded assumption, as the majority are legal residents and many are citizens of the United States.

From this simple study, we can conclude that, although the issue of how Christians should relate to undocumented aliens is difficult, these immigrants are still human beings and most are very poor. The Bible does mandate that Christians care for the poor and needy in our communities and this group of people would definitely fall into that category. Christians are called to stand up for the injustices these people are experiencing in this country, and to never be involved in exploiting this people group because of their illegal status. We can also conclude from this study that the majority of Latino members of our communities are legal residents or American citizens and that a person should never be judged based of ethnicity. To assume that a person is “illegal” because of their race is wrong and against the principles of God.

Lastly, the section on biblical ethics revealed that these commands from God were absolute standards for living and are applicable to all people. We learned that living out our Christianity through actions is just as important as doing it through words. We then discussed many practical ways of applying these standards from the Bible towards the immigrant population. Every person is valuable to God because they are part of His creation and bear the image of God. Each immigrant, whether documented or undocumented, is part of God’s creation and considered our neighbor. This does not mean that every immigrant is perfect and without fault. They are still human beings who are capable of great sin and acting out in harm towards others.<sup>365</sup> Still as Christians we should always be involved in standing up for the injustices

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<sup>365</sup> Not all immigrants are noble individuals. In the 1980’s when the massive influx of Cuban refugees arrived in America under the auspices of the Mariel airlift it was discovered that many of them were criminals, sexual

experienced by immigrants in this country, helping with job training as well as helping to provide for their physical needs. We also saw that it was crucial for many Churches to create some type of practice that helps remind its members of their history as immigrants in the United States. This will help us remember what it is really like to be aliens in another country and therefore remind us of the needs of those around us who are experiencing it for the first time.

### *The Call to the American Christian*

The Call of God to the American Christian is to reach the immigrants. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal that this is the true heart of God towards those aliens living in this country. The immigrants in the Bible and the immigrants of twenty-first century United States are not so different. The needs seem to be the same, as each alien finds himself in an extremely defenseless place where others can take advantage of their poverty, and lack of knowledge of the new lands customs and culture. Christians are meant to protect and help those in this situation, representing God's character and heart to the immigrant and the world.

God calls for Christians to remember our history as aliens just as He called Israel to do the same. Remembering this history helps us realize that we are not so different from the new immigrants, and that we had our moments of vulnerability too. As human beings, we are quick to forget and therefore it is crucial for us to remember, and to make an act out of this remembrance as often as we can.

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predators, and other undesirables who Fidel Castro was only too happy to get rid of. Many of America's finest individuals are immigrants who have made amazing and lasting contributions to the fabric of our society, but just as the people of America are a "mixed bag" so are the immigrants who arrive. Comment by Dr. Joseph Saggio on July 6, 2012.

Christians in the United States have a special call from God to reach the immigrant. We are blessed with a country that has a strong economic system and allows a great deal of personal and religious freedom. This is extremely desirable for those who do not enjoy such freedoms. Therefore, it is a place where many want to immigrate to and are doing so, whether legally or otherwise. Christians in the United States have a unique opportunity to show the holiness of God's through its interactions with these people. We can stand up for injustice, reach out to the poor and needy, and share the love of God through our interaction with the immigrants.

So many desire to share Christ around the world through missions, and yet the United States has the mission field coming into this country by the millions. These immigrants are truly our neighbors in all senses of the word, as we have a chance to show the love of God to so many at a time in their lives when they are most helpless.

Imagine a group of Christians who reach out to these new waves of immigrants in every practical way, treating these aliens among us, not as immigrants but as ourselves... as native born.

Why should we do it? Because He is the Lord our God.

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