

Bible Study on Immigration and Refugee Issues
 Rev. Barbara Callaghan
 1.6.18

Old Testament root words:

The alien or sojourner (*ger* in Hebrew) appears 92 times in the OT.
 Another word used for outsider in the OT is *nekar*, (foreigner) which is usually used if an outsider is perceived as a threat to Israel.

New Testament root words:

Xenos (stranger), *paroikos* (foreigner), *parepidemos* (exiles/sojourner/slightly more spiritual meaning)

Matthew 25:31-46 has *xenos* 5 times (I was a stranger and you either did or did not...)

Ephesians 2:19 – So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household. (*xenos* and *paroikos*)

Hebrews 11:13 – All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (*xenos* and *parepidemos*)

Etc.

Made in the image of God (i.e. inherent worth)

Ontologically (Genesis 1:26-28) Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’

So God created humankind in his image,
 in the image of God he created them;
 male and female he created them.
 God blessed them...

Relationally (Romans 8:15-17)

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Why was Old Testament law so emphatic about taking care of the stranger/sojourner/alien?

- 1) God loves them – God’s preferential option for the poor and oppressed (Gustavo Gutierrez, James Cone).
- 2) They were once strangers themselves

Beyond coexistence:

The sojourner along with the widow, orphan and poor (the most vulnerable in society) were the most at risk in Israel. Extended family was primary resource for anyone in need, but those in this category didn’t have that as an option. The OT law was written with this in mind. This group was naturally dependent on others for their welfare and could be take advantage of (much like today) – exploited for labor without recourse. God instructed the people to do more than give handouts, but rather to give them the same rights as any of them would have:

*Gleaning privileges at harvest time (Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Ruth 2-3) When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

*The every three year (triennial) tithe (Deuteronomy 14:28-29) Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake

*Rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14)

But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns.

*To be paid a fair wage on time (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy labourers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt.

*To be protected from oppression (Jeremiah 7:5-7; 22:2-5; Malachi 3:5)
 For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever.

*To be allowed to participate in the most core and sacred rituals of Israel's religious life (Exodus 10:8-11; 12:48-49; Leviticus 16:29-30; Deuteronomy 16:11, 14)
 This shall be a statute to you for ever: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall deny yourselves, and shall do no work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you. For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the LORD.

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