

WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS ABOUT ILLEGAL ALIENS

Written by Calvin Fox

Friday, 21 November 2014 14:29 - Last Updated Friday, 21 November 2014 15:40

Many Christians (and others) favor five arguments to support an open door immigration policy, and particularly a Federal Government Policy that will facilitate welcoming "undocumented workers" or illegal immigrants into full inclusion in American life with all of its rights and privileges. These arguments are "Hospitality", "Humanity", "Image of God", "we are all immigrants" and especially the argument using what the Bible teaches about Aliens in Israel. These Christians claim the four arguments are Biblical and Christian. They are not.

"Hospitality" is commanded 3 times in the NT. The word (philoxenos) literally means "love of strangers" but is used to mean "being generous to guests". In debate about the treatment of illegal immigrants, some use the command to practice hospitality as a Biblical and Christian reason to welcome illegal immigrants into the United States That is an unwarranted stretch of the three texts about hospitality. The word does not mean granting the legal privileges that citizens of a Nation have to those who enter that Nation illegally. It is not a simple command treating guests in our homes generously.

Many signs protesting Arizona's new immigration law have words on them that say simply, "We are human". They are rightly concerned about the use of "racial profiling" and "racism" in pursuit of the new Law. Of course, illegal aliens are human and must be treated as humans, i.e. humanely. This does not mean they must not be deported if found in Arizona. It would mean, in that case, that they must be treated humanely while being deported. To say the latter contradicts the former is simply arbitrary and not valid. Being "human" does not excuse anyone from from being responsible for their behavior. All law-breakers are human beings. They should all be treated with respect as human beings, but that does not mean that all law breakers should be allowed to get away with breaking laws because they are human. In fact, one of the most important characteristics of being "human" is the ability to make choices and to be responsible for the consequences of those choices, including the illegal ones. The normal human being has an innate sense of morality and knows right from wrong.

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To treat people as "human" includes respecting exactly that about them and treating them accordingly.

Another version of same muddle-headed thinking or poor argument is the use of the doctrine that everyone is created equal in the Image of God in defense of illegal immigrants. It has the same weakness as the argument about being human and is just as irrelevant in the defense of law-breakers.

Still another popular argument is also fallacious in the same way: it persistently equates "immigrant" with "illegal immigrant". Almost every article writer and commentator seems to make this mistake. These are not the same! It is often repeated that America is a land of immigrants- we all are immigrants or children of immigrants. No one contests that, but that is not what the current debate is about.

The problem and debate before us now is about those people who have been entering the US illegally (:jumping the line: as it were, ahead of those standing in the line for years, obeying the Rules that they might become legal immigrants).

That is specially

egregious because current [and incorrect] interpretation of the 14 Amendment of the Constitution provides full citizenship with all its legal rights to the babies of the illegal immigrants jumping the line upon the birth of those babies within the borders crossed illegally! [update: Mr Obama's latest Order shields from deportation almost 5 million illegal adult aliens on the basis that their children are US citizens, inasmuch as their were born here]

What does the Bible say about aliens in Israel? This is not what many think!

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Probably the major "Christian" argument in favor of open borders and full inclusion of "illegal aliens" into American life with all rights and privileges of Citizens is based on the Bible and what it allegedly says about "aliens", "sojourners" and "strangers" in Israel. Yes, the Bible has texts like these-

Exo 22:21 "You shall not wrong a sojourner [a temporary inhabitant, a newcomer lacking inherited rights or foreigners in Israel] or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

Lev 19:34 "You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

An OT Professor from Denver Seminary [evangelical Baptist] has this to say in an article published on the Seminary website, "This concern for the sojourner in their midst was grounded in Israel's past. It had been born as a nation of despised foreigners, workers in an oppressive system in Egypt. God, though, had redeemed them in the Exodus, and that experience as immigrants was to mark them as a people for all time. Because they had come from immigrant stock, they were to be compassionate to the foreigners, who moved into their land. They were never to forget their immigrant history. That history defined them, and their treatment of the outsider was a measure of their faith in God (Lev. 19:34). God had designed Israel's laws to shine as an example to other peoples (Deut. 4:5-8), and the provisions for the sojourner were

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part of this exemplary legislation."

Well, yes, but this argument is superficial and a very selective use of Bible texts that overlooks important distinctions.

There were actually, four groups of "aliens" mentioned in the Bible.

More specifically, there are four words designating four groups of people. Each word or name had nuances that changed over time, but the following conclusions are reasonable. (a good source on this subject is the article, "Sojourners", in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1988 revised edition]

Looking closer, the group of non-Jews who were fully accepted in Israel were the "**Gerim**", who voluntarily assimilated fully in all things Jewish.

For all practical purposes they converted to Judaism and became members of the People of God (the LXX Greek equivalent for Gerim is "Proselytes").

They were accepted as Jews with all the rights and responsibilities of the Hebrew People, thus fulfilling the Biblical admonitions to treat Gerim properly (Deut 29:10f)

This group of "Aliens" (-our word.

In the Bible texts Gerim is translated as "Sojourners") submitted to the Laws of Israel in all matters, the males became circumcised, they observed Passover and all the other Feasts and Festivals and offered sacrifices in the Temple. (Lev 16:29, 17:8, Numbers 9:14, Exodus 12:47-49 etc.)

There were periods in their later history when natural born Israelites treated the Gerim as second-class citizens.

But Ezekiel prophesied the day when that would end and the Nation would experience peace and unity of all its citizens (47:22) This prophecy will be fulfilled in the Church.

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There was another Hebrew word, **Tosab**, used 14 times. It was interchangeable with Ger (Gerim, pl)

But there were two other outside groups of aliens. The **Nokri** were "strangers", foreigners, living in Israel. They did not assimilate and were considered a threat to the Nation (Neh 9:2, Ezek 44:7-9, Zeph 1:8, Mal 2:11, Isa 2:6, etc) And there were the **Zarim**

These people living in Israel were considered foreigners, outsiders and truly "aliens" in every way.

They did not belong and were seen as "illegitimate" outsiders.

They were seen as dangerous to the country, enemies.

Israel was warned against these Nokri and Zarim and they were not treated the same as the Gerim.

(Joel 3:7, Prov 5:10, Psalm 54:3, etc)

Texts about these last two groups must be included when people go to the Bible for guidance in how to treat illegal aliens in America, (See Prov. 5:10; Psalm 54:3; Ezek 7:21, 11:9; 16:32; Isa 1:7, 29:5; Hosea 7:9; Jer 5:19, 30:8, 51:51, etc)

And we must remember the Bible warned Israel against intermarriage with members of these groups, e.g.- Ezra 9-10. In addition, there was the constant effort to eradicate non-Jews from the promised land when the Tribes of Israel entered it. In this case,

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those people were (debatable) the original "citizens" and the Hebrew tribes were (debatable) the foreign invaders.

The point is that the Bible (God) discriminates between peoples according to their potential blessing or trouble for the Nation. Those that did not fully adopt the ways of Israel (especially its Religion and Laws), were not given a warm welcome by the natural Citizens and treated as equals with full rights and privileges of those citizens.

After the Exile and during the period between the Testaments, Israelite feelings (their prejudice and hate against the Nokri and the Zarim hardened. Thus began the divide of Humanity between Jews and Gentiles. The heart of the Gospel as Paul preached it was that this division was to disappear through the work of Christ and by unity found in Him of both Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:19ff, Gal 3:28, Rom 3:19ff)

But how can all this be applied to the problem of Illegal Immigrants in America? At the very least, it means that Scripture can not be used to support a Federal Government "open door" Immigration Policy.

It also means the Hospitality, We are Human, We are all made in the Image of God and we are all

Immigrants Arguments do not support an Open Door Policy either.

It should be obvious what the Bible teaching does support.

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There are realities that must be faced. For all the high principled rhetoric, the real underlying issue here is money and jobs. That includes the demand by American businesses and private employers for certain kinds of workers. legal or not.

Another reality is that there are 10-15 million plus illegal immigrants already here and they can not be ignored and no one can or will deport them all. At the very least, there must be a policy enacted and action taken that closes the border now to prevent any more people from entering the Country illegally while we figure out a humane and equitable way of caring for those who are here. And all the laws governing Immigration must be updated and improved and made more fair and workable. This must include correcting the current interpretation of the 14th Amendment regarding birth rights to remove a major incentive for many foreign adults who come here to take advantage of that loophole.

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