

Immigration and the Refugee

An Exploration of Scripture

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Chapter 1

An Age of Migration

Thinking about migration in our contemporary contexts

We live in an age of migration. Migration is a global phenomenon. In 2020, 82.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced. Children accounted for 42% of this figure. Of this 82.4 million, 26.4 million were refugees. The top five countries which sourced refugees were

- 1) Syria (6.7 million)
- 2) Venezuela (4 million)
- 3) Afghanistan (2.6 million)
- 4) South Sudan (2.2 million)
- 5) Myanmar (1.1 million)

The top five countries which hosted refugees were

- 1) Turkey (3.7 million)
- 2) Columbia (1.7 million)
- 3) Pakistan (1.4 million)
- 4) Uganda (1.4 million)
- 5) Germany (1.2 million)

It is estimated that 1 in 95 people on earth have fled their home.¹

In addition to this, in March 2022 the war in Ukraine suddenly erupted, producing a flood of refugees onto the mainland continent of Europe. At the time of writing an estimated 4 million people mostly women and children have left their homes and their country with a further 6.6 million displaced.

Some migrants, of course, choose to migrate, others are forced but sometimes the lines are blurred. People who flee political or religious persecution, war, violence or famine are usually forced to migrate. Very often these migrants will seek asylum in another country as refugees. Voluntary migration may describe students studying at universities abroad, those who emigrate on retirement, and those who decide that they want to seek work abroad because the pay is better. Sometimes, though, economic migrants may consider their migration is forced because living conditions and employment opportunities in their home country are so bad that they cannot support themselves or their families.

Whatever the reason for migration it can lead to tensions within countries and communities. Immigration can lead to an existing, resident population becoming concerned and fearful about a range of issues. These often include a sense that the culture and way of life they have known is changing irrevocably, that the equilibrium of a community is being tipped, that social cohesion is breaking down, that the dominant faith system is being opposed, that security is being threatened, that public services are being overwhelmed, that jobs are being taken and housing is becoming scarce.

For members of existing, resident populations these fears, some of which may be valid and some of which may be exaggerated, often block from view the fears and needs of the actual immigrant. Each immigrant and each refugee has a story. This story is often one of risk, pain, aspiration and courage. Especially for those who have been forced to leave their own homeland, the story is usually one of considerable loss and extreme vulnerability. Such stories provide important contemporary contexts to consider the subject of immigration.

Thinking about migration in biblical contexts

The Bible is littered with examples of people on the move. Biblical contexts and biblical narratives also offer intriguing insights into human migration, generally, and immigration, specifically.

In thinking about these great historical, migratory events in the Bible it is important to reflect upon the way God communicates through them, how God's purposes unfold and how God might continue to speak through Scripture to his people today.

Interpreting Scripture theologically is grounded on some basic presuppositions. First, Scripture's 'interpretation is and must be ruled by its nature as the Word of God.'² As God's Word, Scripture is inspired and authoritative. Second, God speaks through Scripture and it contains message and meaning. It is a speech-act which conveys God's active purpose of bringing hope and salvation to the world. If we listen carefully we can hear God's voice.

Third, the act of interpreting Scripture is a slippery one! As interpreters, we bring our own understandings, perspectives and commitments to the biblical text. Whereas it is necessary and advantageous to approach a text with some understanding and experience (rather than having an empty head full of nothing), the danger is that we read into the text what we want it to say. In relation to immigration we need to be continually critical of ourselves, seeking to detect any unreasonable bias which would negatively colour a responsible interpretation of Scripture.

In addition, we also need to accept that there is considerable historical distance between the horizon of Scripture and the horizon of the world we know and experience. We cannot just overlay what we are familiar with onto the pages of Scripture. 'We easily assume that the experience to which the text witnesses mirrors our own; we look down the well and see ourselves.'³ So, as we look down the biblical well of migration, we must be careful not to see our own form of it too closely. It might be quite different.

Even though 'the text cannot be understood from a neutral position,'⁴ awareness of these pitfalls can enable the interpreter to do everything possible to arrive at a legitimate meaning. Study of the historical contexts, examination of the text, self-critical analysis, appeal to the corporate interpretation of the church (past and present) and reliance on the Spirit can all contribute to a responsible, albeit provisional, interpretation of Scripture. It is such an interpretation which this booklet aspires to.⁵

Question: Do you think it is possible for anyone to approach the emotive subject of immigration objectively? How might personal experiences, political affiliations, Christian background and exposure to the media make this task very difficult?

Chapter 2

Made in the Image of God

Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...
 So God created mankind in his own image,
 in the image of God he created them;
 male and female he created them.
 (Gen.1: 26, 27)⁶

From St Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, up until the present day, these words from Genesis 1:26-27 have engaged the minds of many a great theologian. These words at the beginning of our Scriptures are hugely important because they say something about our value as human beings. Ignore them and we can easily ignore the possibility that all humanity is equal before God.

Today, the most accepted views regarding the meaning of 'image' in these verses are:

- (1) Humankind's rational and spiritual capacities
- (2) Humankind's role as God's representatives on earth
- (3) Humankind's potential for being able to relate to God

For our purposes, whether this image is still intact in humankind is just as important a question as what 'image' means. Does all of humanity still portray the image of God in which they were originally made? The traditional, evangelical understanding is that this image was marred by the 'fall' in Genesis 3 and Christ's redemptive work acts to restore it.⁷ This marring of the image, however, does not equate to it being eradicated or lost. J. Daniel Hays asserts 'whether or not one believes that the image was marred or blurred in the fall, it seems clear that humankind was created in the image of God and that remnants of that image, at the very least, still remain, distinguishing humans from animals and the rest of creation.'⁸

Hence, a profound, central truth of the Judaeo-Christian Faith is that all humanity still reflects the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1–3; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas 3:9). Such truth defines our humanity. 'The image of God is not so much something we possess as what we are. To be human is to be the image of God. It is not a feature added onto our species; it is definitive of what it means to be human.'⁹ Our humanity is only fully understood when it is viewed as an act of creation, created in the image of the Creator.

From this baseline our personalities, desire for relationship, spirituality, even humour stems. Good human attributes and values derive from the moral attributes of God. Whilst unable to mirror the perfection and holiness of God, falling short of his glory, humanity still reflects something of God's intrinsic glory in these attributes.

So it is that we all share a common humanity which is grounded in God-likeness. 'This forms the basis of the radical equality of all human beings, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or any form of social, economic or political status.'¹⁰ Consequently, it is for no human being to de-humanise

another. We do not have that right. No one can claim some higher authority to devalue the human dignity of another. The playing field is perfectly level.

Christopher Wright quotes an ancient Akkadian proverb to show the distinctiveness of Old Testament thought on this subject. He says that 'the Akkadian proverb "a man is the shadow of a god; and slave is the shadow of a man," found no endorsement in Israel. Israel had functional social gradations but a slave in Israel did not have to fight for the right to be regarded as human.'¹¹ Humanity included all humans, no one was sub-human. All had value as being created in God's image. Slaves were to be treated with respect and dignity reflecting 'Old Testament civil laws [which] are quite unparalleled in any other ancient Near Eastern Code' (cf. Ex. 21:20-21; 21: 26-27; Deut. 23:15-16).¹²

As this basic equality applies to all people, including migrants and foreigners, our human tendency to stereotype and generalise should be checked.

If people on the move are only seen as migrants or workers, or worse, as lawbreakers, aliens or criminals, then their suffering makes no moral claims on us, and we can rest content on our side of the dividing wall because we convince ourselves they are excluded for a reason.¹³

People are more than migrants, immigrants or refugees. Such labels are in danger of carrying stigma and devaluation. People are God's creation and each created person should seek to treat another with value and worth. So, when we see an immigrant 'we see someone created by God, addressed by God, accountable to God, loved by God, valued and evaluated by God.'¹⁴ This godly way of seeing will prevent domination, degradation, oppression and unfairness. Being made in the image of God requires nothing less.

As we think about immigration it is easy to label, generalise, stereotype and stigmatise. This is an unacceptable substitute for the necessary discipline of serious, informed thinking which should characterise debate on human migration.

Question: Do you think calling someone an immigrant or a foreigner could be taken as an insult? Do you think the way some parts of the media talk about immigrants could be construed as thinly veiled racism?

Chapter 3

Israel: Migrant and Immigrant

The Genesis Narratives

Migration is as old as humanity itself. Indeed, human mobility was part of God's created order. It is worth noting that the first command and blessing of God to humanity, found in Genesis 1:28, is to 'be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.' This verse is an early mandate for migration. Human movement throughout the created earth was commanded by God. But, then, of course, the earth did not have 7.9 billion people in it!

Aspects of this command are echoed in Genesis chapter 12:1. God commanded Abraham to 'go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you'. Abraham was to emigrate and move amongst foreign peoples. In his lifetime he lived amongst the Canaanites (Gen. 12:6-8), Egyptians (Gen. 12:10), Hittites and Amorites (Gen. 14:13) and the Philistines (Gen. 21:32-34).

Linked to this command to migrate, God gives Abraham some hugely important promises. Genesis 12:2-3 speaks of God blessing Abraham and making him into a great nation. It also talks of all the people on earth being blessed through him. Abraham's movement into the nations is the beginning of God's purpose to bless the nations. His migration is missional.

In a very literal way Abraham encounters the peoples of the world as an immigrant, travelling through their land(s). As such, Abraham and his family's very status as foreigners in the land serves as one of the primary means by which God's missional purpose comes to pass.¹⁵

Migration is missional in that it enables God's blessing to be conferred on the nations. The king of Sodom experiences this blessing as Abraham's men defeat the warring King Kedorlaomer and his allies. This whole episode and the appearance of Melchizedek to boot would have introduced the king of Sodom to 'God Most High who delivered your enemies into your hand' (Gen. 14:14-20). The covenant between Abraham and Abimelech, king of Gerar, which affords security to the latter, is another example of literal blessing being bestowed on the nations (Gen. 21:22-34). These small acts typify the greater blessing Abraham would bestow on the nations as the 'father' of Israel and as an ancestor of Jesus Christ himself (Matt. 1:1-17).

Migration is also missional in that it takes the God of the nations to the nations. Yahweh is not a local, family or tribal god. 'In contrast to the limited regional gods, the God of Abraham was not restricted to a single geographical location. Instead, God's authority and power were boundless, present with Abraham as he travelled through the lands...'¹⁶ The God of Abraham is universal. Thus migration takes the God of the whole earth to the whole earth. The Genesis narratives are the beginning of this missional process.

Questions: How is Matthew 28: 19-20 relevant here? How does immigration also provide missional opportunities?

Israel: slavery and freedom

The migratory road, though, was to prove a difficult one. Jacob and his wider family migrated to Egypt to be reunited with Joseph. All went well initially but a new pharaoh in a new generation feared the numerous Hebrew immigrants and for four hundred years they were enslaved within Egypt's powerful regime. Yet God heard their cry and brought about an exodus which resulted in a mass movement of people out of Egypt into the wilds of Canaan with its sporadic cities and kingdoms. Refugees trying to find refuge in a wilderness.

These Hebrew peoples were a mixed multitude rather than a homogenous pure race. Judah and Simeon, two of Jacob's sons had already married Canaanite women (Gen. 38 and 46:10), and Joseph married the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Gen. 41:50). Over a period of four hundred years in captivity the group of seventy men and their wives (Gen. 46:27) who entered Egypt and who increased to a people of tens of thousands are likely to have had offspring who inter-bred with the indigenous population. Even if this was not the case, Exodus 12:38 says that during the exodus 'many other people went with them...' suggesting that people of foreign descent mixed with the Hebrews to form an eclectic mix of migrating humanity. These peoples 'were Israelites because they chose to follow God, not because they had an automatic birth-right or unifying ethnic roots.'¹⁷ To maintain, therefore, that all these wanderers had a truly Abrahamic lineage is highly contestable.¹⁸

One factor in the rejection of immigrants or foreigners by a resident population today, rests on the perception that the resident population is the indigenous race and rightful occupiers of the land. Israel could not legitimately make that claim when they eventually possessed the Promised Land; few peoples can.

Question: Is there such a thing as a pure race?

As Israel migrated throughout the territory of Canaan they were involved in some bloody battles. Israel comprised of thousands of landless people trying to reach a place they could call a secure home amidst people groups renowned for their violence. The conquest to secure this land raises difficult questions even if we accept that this land was promised to the Israelites by God. Further difficult questions are met later when the Israelites return from exile in Babylon.

Chapter 4

Israel: Settlers

Just as migration is seen to be a common aspect of human living in the biblical world of Mesopotamia, so is settlement, boundaries and borders. Indeed one purpose of migration is to settle in a new land. These purposes are within the intention of God for from the 'days of old,' God has, set up boundaries for the peoples...' (Deut. 32:7-8).¹⁹ Division and apportioning of the land, for example, is given great store in the book of Joshua accounting for chapters 13-22.

To live with a sense of national identity is all part of God's purposes for humanity. As we have already inferred 'the Bible does not imply that ethnic or national diversity is in itself sinful or the product of the Fall...'²⁰ Consequently, 'national distinctives are part of the kaleidoscopic diversity of creation at the human level analogous to the wonderful prodigality of biodiversity at every other level of God's creation.'²¹

For Israel to now find her identity as God's called-out-people in a defined area of land was of great importance; it would be part of the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham. Indeed the subject of land is inextricably tied to Israel's destiny and identity.²² Yet Israel's identity comes first and foremost through their belonging to Yahweh. This cannot be overstated. 'The central unifying and identifying feature of this people is the covenant relationship that YHWH will form with them...'²³ Israel's primary identity lies in this covenant relationship with God. Only then does Israel find identity in having a land with boundaries and borders. Once settled, God does not expect them to become xenophobic or insular. Instead, God's ethical demands on Israel in relation to the stranger and the immigrant are brought into focus.

God's appeal is experiential

In Exodus 23:9, we read, 'Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.' God's appeal here is experiential. On the basis of Israel's own experience they, of all people, should understand from a humanitarian perspective the importance of treating the foreigner fairly.

Such 'foreigners' in this text are known as *gerim*. As Guy Brandon points out, '*gerim* were part of normal Israelite society, integrating culturally and economically and hence were protected by, but also expected to live by, Israelite standards.'²⁴ Nevertheless they were still 'resident aliens' in Israel, 'who remained different and [were], as a result likely to be vulnerable.'²⁵ They did not have their own land, property or law but abided by the law of their host country. They were at the very least sympathetic with the worship of YHWH, Israel's God. This observation should not go unnoticed.

In contrast, Brandon also draws attention to the *nokrim* or *zarim* 'often translated as 'foreigners', who lived outside of Israel and had no real link with the land, its people or their God. They might typically have been mercenaries or merchants.'²⁶ They were not under Israel's law and did not benefit from it. They did not integrate into society and were often viewed with more suspicion.

Consequently, they were not strictly immigrants or refugees as we think of these terms but people who were transitory migrants. They were also economically independent.

Determining who the *gerim* are and who the *nokrim/zarim* are today, is not a straight forward exercise. Brandon suggests that the *gerim* 'can most closely be identified with today's asylum seeker or refugee.'²⁷ He interestingly includes the 'multinational companies which operate in the UK but are domiciled elsewhere or have arrangements in place to avoid paying tax here,'²⁸ as examples of *nokrim*.

Whether this is a good dynamic equivalent of Old Testament terminology is open to debate. To attempt to find parallels between ancient Israel's situation and contemporary immigration contexts is fraught with difficulty. What is less debatable, however, is Brandon's conclusion that 'ethnicity was not the factor that decided how the Israelites treated foreigners. In this respect, there was no difference between *ger* and *nokri*. The distinction is instead one of intention and self-identification.'²⁹

God's appeal is covenantal

God's appeal to Israel with respect to the foreigner is also covenantal. It is based on an understanding that 'the earth is the Lords and everything in it,' (Ps. 24:1) for he is and remains the landlord in any covenant or treaty. 'Israel could not treat the gift of land as a license to abuse it, because *the land was still YHWH's land*. He retained the ultimate title of ownership and therefore also the ultimate right of moral authority over how it was used.'³⁰ With the Year of Jubilee in mind, Leviticus 25:23 also asserts unequivocally, 'the land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.'

Thus the relationship between God and Israel is one of landlord and tenant. Israel possesses the land, God owns the land. Israel must be good stewards of the land. Israel has no right to treat the immigrant poorly. They are to treat them as people who need protection, special consideration and compassionate justice, just as Israel receives protection, special consideration and compassionate justice from God. This is all part of God's covenantal agreement and serves to maintain the value and dignity of the immigrant in a vulnerable context. Such action is indeed commended in the book of Ruth as Boaz treats Ruth, the Moabite, with protection, special consideration and compassion.

Israel's national identity, then, is inextricably bound to their belonging to Yahweh who owns all the earth. His blessing to them is shown in his permitting Israel to possess land on the basis that to be a blessing to others they should treat the *ger* well. Other foreigners who threaten their relations with Yahweh or their stability economically and socially are to be treated with caution.

Question: With reference to Guy Brandon's suggestions as to possible modern day equivalents (above), do you think there are principles in these biblical passages which might guide immigration policy? Or are we in danger of looking down the well of immigration and wrongly seeing our own contexts?

Chapter 5

Israel: Deportation and Restoration

As settlers, land possessors and owners of a national identity, Israel's breaking of the covenant through disobedience to God was a catastrophe. For many, deportation, forced migration and exile into a foreign Babylonian land resulted. They were again captive in a strange land. Having lost land, temple and cultic ritual, a theological restructuring and rebuilding of identity was necessary.³¹ Lamentations is but one book which offers a window into the agony and soul-searching this process involved.

Their return to the wastelands of Judah which happened in truncated fashion over a lengthy period (c.538 – 432BC), saw a re-establishment of the Law and a rebuilding of the temple and walls. The intentions of both Ezra and Nehemiah were to establish 'continuity with historic Israel whose name and inheritance were carried on by this remnant (c.f., Ezra 2:2b), and... separation from the taints of heathenism.'³² It is this separatist and exclusivist theology which presents theological tensions in our modern day, inclusivist Western society. For example, Ezra the Priest who, on learning that 'the people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, had not kept themselves separate from the neighbouring peoples with their detestable practices like those of the Canaanites, Hittites ...' (Ezra 9:1), instigates an enforced expulsion of foreign wives, back to their countries of origin (Ezra 9-10).

If care is not taken, these texts could be used as a mandate for condoning misogyny and xenophobia. The suppression of 'others', repatriation of foreigners to their home countries and ethnic cleansing could be the unsatisfactory result. We therefore need a means of interpreting these verses, legitimately.

First, it needs to be understood that these actions advocated in Ezra-Nehemiah are not against women or foreigners despite the fact that it is the foreign wives who are expelled. Susanna Snyder (*Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church*, 2012) would disagree. She believes that the 'the story told in Ezra-Nehemiah is one-sided and oppressive.'³³ Driven by an 'ecology of fear' in a strange, new situation, surrounded by different peoples including foreign women, Snyder interprets Ezra-Nehemiah as being a text which is androcentric and gender discriminatory. Her feminist reading leads her to conclude that 'being "foreign" in Ezra-Nehemiah is intimately linked with being female.'³⁴

This reading needs to be questioned on the basis that Scripture, in the Law and the Prophets, is consistent in its condemnation of idolatry and in Ezra-Nehemiah the issue is idolatry. These foreign wives are not forced to leave because they are women or because they are foreign but because they are idol worshippers. The Law forbade it, 'you shall have no other gods before me' (Ex.20:3), and the prophets condemned it. Jeremiah, for example, was already identifying the women who were burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and attributing their prosperity to her (Jer. 44), well before the exiles return. As the Jews returned from exile in Babylon, one of the main contributory factors to their exile, the foreign idolatry-practises of the women, was still going on in their midst. For Ezra-

Nehemiah (Ez.9:2; 10:2, 6, 10: Neh. 13), there was only one course of action, to expel the root of this idol worship, otherwise it would be ground-hog day.

Second it needs to be understood, as we have previously mentioned, that Israel's identity as a people and nation is in their covenant commitment to Yahweh. They did not exist as a nation with some religion bolted on; their existence as the people of Israel and as the nation of Israel was completely interwoven with their covenantal relationship with God. Hence, allegiance to other gods, which the foreign wives idolised and promoted, was completely outside this commitment. It was disrespectful, unfaithful and contract-breaking. It would lead to a loss of God's protection – just as it had done before!

Third, we read that the *gerim* who had 'separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbours' (Ez. 6:21), were able to celebrate the Passover with the Jews who had returned from exile. This strongly suggests there was not a racist or anti-women agenda. The foreigner, whether male or female, was still welcome – albeit conditionally.

In reading these biblical texts it is soon apparent that they were written in and for very different contexts than ours. Is our contemporary understanding of the concept of nation and national identity the same as that of post-exilic Israel circa 450 BC?³⁵ No. Is the relationship between the church and state in Western countries, even withstanding huge national variations, the same as that of post-exilic Israel in the days of the Medes and the Persians? No. The lesson we must learn is not to be too quick to make judgements from our distant horizon.

Theologically, however, we can repeat that God throughout the Old Testament seeks to bless other ethnic groups through Israel. For this blessing to happen, Israel needs to witness to the premise 'that knowing God to be God is the supreme good and blessing for human beings made in God's image.'³⁶ God's blessing of other peoples is severely limited if Israel is not a witness to this. Idolatry undermines this possibility. Victimisation of foreign migrants and defenceless women does not seem to be the issue in these texts but dismissing God and turning to the supposed goodness and blessing of foreign deities certainly is.

Question: Should Christians be cautious about the number of immigrants of other faiths entering their country? Or should Christians be more concerned about ensuring their worship of God through Jesus is not diluted by trappings and temptations?

Chapter 6

The Son of God as Migrant and Refugee

The ongoing inability of Israel to be a channel of God's blessings on earth heralds the arrival of God's Son. He came as 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles...' (Luke 2:32). He came as God's image in human form. 'The very fact that God became truly human underlines the value of human life. The Creator did not become a lion (apologies to C.S. Lewis) or a dolphin or a parrot. He became one of us.'³⁷ It should not go unnoticed that Jesus, in his perfection, took the form of a human migrant.

'In the Incarnation, God migrates to the human race, making his way into the far country of human discord and disorder, a place of division and dissension, a territory marked by death and the demeaning treatment of human beings.'³⁸ In this sense Jesus emigrated from heaven and immigrated to earth. The incarnation is a migration. The plans and purposes of God once again embrace leaving that which is familiar, secure and safe. Yet Jesus was not an earthly immigrant who distanced himself from the indigenous people and paid little heed to culture. He fully immersed himself in human flesh, human culture, and human life. In this respect Jesus took on human citizenship and became one of us.

The incarnation shows us a God who moves towards humanity. Leaving behind the comforts and securities of heaven, Jesus came here. Jesus identified with all of humanity by becoming human and, in particular, identified with the migrant by becoming a migrant. It is poignant, then, that one of Jesus' first human journeys is a migration. In literal, concrete terms, Jesus and his family knew what refugee status felt like being taken into Egypt for fear of the murderous Herod (Matt 2:13-15). Fleeing persecution, known to many asylum seekers and refugees the world over, was known to Jesus' family at such an early stage.

Jesus, although known as a resident of Nazareth and familiar with the region of Galilee, lived, at least for parts of his ministry, as an internal migrant. At times he seemed to be a man of no fixed address. 'Foxes have holes,' he said, 'and birds have their nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Luke 9:58). The hospitality of others as facilitating and enabling the ministry of Jesus should not be overlooked.³⁹ This basic, itinerant lifestyle is concordant with Jesus' identification with the poor and vulnerable. His dependency on others for life-giving sustenance meant Jesus had much in common with the needy in society.

Jesus assumed the human condition of the most vulnerable among us, undergoing hunger, thirst, rejection and injustice, walking the way of the cross, overcoming the forces of death that threaten human life. He entered into the broken territory of human experience and offered his own wounds in solidarity with those who were in pain. The Jesus story opens up for many migrants a reason to hope, especially in what often seems like a hopeless predicament.⁴⁰

What is more the work of Christ has a migratory tone. His work focuses on helping humanity migrate from a place of hopelessness and alienation before God to a place of belonging and reconciliation.

Through Jesus, God enters into the broken and sinful territory of the human condition in order to help men and women, lost in their earthly sojourn, find their way back home to God.⁴¹

This migratory work is found in the cross, resurrection and ascension. At the cross, Christ offers atonement, a way home to the Father through the shedding of blood and the forgiveness of sins. 'Once you were alienated,' Paul says, 'now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death' (Col. 1:21-22). In the resurrection, Christ migrates from death to life. The grave which is the final dead end or terminus now becomes a departure lounge for the follower of Christ who will also rise as Christ has risen.⁴² A truly positive migratory hope exists for every believer. And the ascension, the return of Christ in heaven is anticipatory of our migration to heaven. Jesus says, 'I am going there to prepare a place for you' (John 14:2).

Question: What incidences in Jesus' life particularly resonate with the experiences of asylum-seekers and refugees?

Chapter 7

Loving as Oneself

It is widely understood that Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God on earth.⁴³ This kingdom is not a physical kingdom with borders and boundaries. It 'is based not on geography or politics but on divine initiative and openness of heart, leading to a different kind of vision of the current world order, where many of the first are last and the last first (Matt. 19:30; 20:16; Mark. 10:31; Luke. 13:29 - 30).'⁴⁴

This kingdom, founded on the rule and reign of God, is 'now' as well as 'not yet'. The kingdom has come in the present just as the kingdom is yet to come in the future. The present day aspect of the kingdom causes the follower of Christ to realise that the kingdom makes contemporary claims on his/her life. It challenges and confronts. It makes an existential impact. It means that issues such as migration and immigration need consideration now from a kingdom perspective.

A good starting point in this pursuit is Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God itself. He makes it clear that at the kingdom's epicentre are two commandments which are actually enshrined at the heart of Israel's law. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:27//Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). These verses beg the question who is my neighbour? And, if our answer includes the immigrant, what does it mean to love the immigrant as oneself?

Hospitality and the foreigner

Israel was to welcome the foreigner because Israel had been foreigners in Egypt. They were also to welcome the foreigner so as to convey God's blessing. The new aspect found in Jesus' teaching is that in welcoming and caring for the needy and vulnerable the disciple is actually ministering to Jesus himself.

In the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46), the sheep are depicted as those who inherit eternal life because they have provided hospitality for the stranger, clothed the needy, cared for the sick and visited the prisoner. Incredulously, they ask of the Christ-King, 'when did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you.' And the King replies, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me' (verses 38-40).

Loving neighbour and brother is exemplified in the New Testament's use of hospitality. Building upon a strong Middle Eastern tradition of hospitality Jesus himself extends hospitality to those who were marginalised racially, economically, religiously and morally. What other Rabbi would be seen dead eating with tax-collectors and sinners? It has been said that Jesus 'got himself crucified by the way he ate.'⁴⁵ Hospitality is highly relational and inclusive. It means, 'not simply "to do something for" or "to give something to" somebody, but "being with" somebody.'⁴⁶ In doing this Jesus migrated across borders and broke down barriers. He was willing to step over a line that others had drawn.

Hospitality is risky both individually and nationally. Will our guests appreciate us or abuse our friendship? What will others think? Will there be enough food and drink? Is there enough space?

Hospitality is willing to go beyond these risks trusting in the providence of God. This is a challenge to the Christian, to the church and to any nation that would dare to call itself Christian.

The Challenge of Neighbourliness

Neighbourliness is a challenge and a risk. It is also a partial solution to the lack of integration and social cohesion which immigration may bring. Immigrants often live in areas where others who share their ethnic or religious identity also live. This is understandable for this is what they know and where they feel secure. It may also be the only place they can initially find housing. Existing residents of an area who live in these or other areas often feel that these immigrants do not want to integrate into the established communities but rather want to assert their own culture and establish their own communities. If this is true social cohesion will suffer. The challenge of neighbourliness is to seek to go beyond our social borders, bless others and build relationships.

Stephen Backhouse (*Red, White, Blue...and Brown: Citizens, Patriots and the Prime Minister, 2007*), drawing upon the parable of the Good Samaritan, suggests that citizenship and a sense of belonging comes through neighbourliness more than patriotism. He says that 'we need to recognise the importance of the narrative of national identity, and to go beyond it.'⁴⁷ To 'go beyond it' means that 'ultimately, it is a sense of "neighbour" rather than "nation" that will best contribute to citizenship in modern Britain.'⁴⁸ How this works out in practice is open to discussion. Encouraging a sense of corporate, national identity whether through commemoration of those who have died in war, those representing the country in Olympic Games or national celebrations are all important. How effective patriotic flag waving is though, in creating flourishing, cohesive societies, remains questionable. As Backhouse states, whilst 'nationhood contributes to the context in which individuals live and work, supplying a number of the essential ingredients of modern society...it does not supply the content of that society...'⁴⁹

The content for a healthy society must include a way of living which chooses not to cross to the other side of the street when there is someone in need on this side - even if they are racially different. In Christian terms, this content must include loving one's neighbour as oneself as one seeks to dismantle stereotypes and prejudices. If 'the politics of migration has, too often, been framed in crude terms of "us" and "them" with scant regard for the Christian traditions of neighbourliness and hospitality,'⁵⁰ then Christians need to put the Christian content of neighbourliness and hospitality back into society. Neighbourliness and hospitality are not just peripheral activities of a few good hearted do-gooders but an integral part of the Law of God and teaching of Christ.

Question: Do you find it harder to accept some people groups more than others? Why do you think that is? Who would Jesus say is your neighbour?

Chapter 8

Adopting the Migrant Mentality

Many people are rooted to a place. This sense of place, belonging to a place, having identity with a place is good. These places can be many. Usually, where people live creates for them a sense of place. This place needs to be a secure place and people need to find a sense of well-being in that place. Migration tends to uproot people from a place or cause change for others within their place of rootedness. For this reason migration is unsettling. A country needs to have a fair, well managed policy on migration to minimize 'unsettledness'. It needs borders, boundaries, fair entry requirements, compassion and reasonable expectations of what a citizen of a country will adhere to. A country needs core values which provide ethical and moral boundaries for all its citizens. Israel, in the Old Testament, had the Law. As we have seen, this provided a socio-ethical framework which the *gerim* were to respect. All this was to ensure security and well-being in a place.

The Bible does not undermine national or racial identity. Neither does it devalue the importance of loyalty to a country or rootedness to a place. Indeed Paul remains identifiable as an 'Israelite... a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin' (Rom. 11:1), a 'Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia,' (Acts 21:39), and a Roman citizen (Acts 22:22-29). If a person's sense of self-identity is threatened it needs to be taken seriously. Thus, to be concerned about some possible negative effects of uncontrolled immigration need not be racist or un-Christian. Rather it might be quite appropriate if immigration is causing residents of a place to fear.

Having said this, if a person is follower of Jesus, their primary identity is no longer in their place or nationality. It is in Christ.

The Pilgrim Principle

Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God was often scandalous and, in many ways, counter-cultural. Jesus' demand on the rich young ruler to sell all his wealth seemed so extreme. Jesus called him to switch his identity from being an affluent ruler to being a poor follower – he couldn't do it. Jesus called him to give up his place and follow – become a migrant – he couldn't do it. If it was difficult, then, for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:16-30), how much more now in a Western world which promotes a 'lifestyle of luxury and self-indulgence. Its whole aim and ethos is this-worldly comfort.'⁵¹

Jesus' counter-cultural, kingdom-based teaching, finds expression in the Early Church in their migrant mentality. They adopted a migratory worldview, a pilgrim principle.⁵² They didn't seem to overly treasure material goods but kept in view the transience of this world and the age to come. Paradoxically, it was by virtue of them being 'no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow-citizens with God's people' (Eph. 2: 19), that they were also 'aliens and strangers in the world' (1 Peter 2:11).

As aliens (*parepidemos*, meaning transient visitors) and strangers (*paroikos*, meaning foreigners), the Christians were people who held an inbetween status. 'They saw themselves as dislocated on this earth and being en route to a heavenly home, an attitude that may have stemmed from the extensive travels of their leaders and their own experiences of social marginalisation.'⁵³ Their

citizenship was in heaven (Phil: 3:20), their temporary home, on earth. Such thought is migratory. It does not entertain the idea of earthly permanence but of being resident aliens, sojourners ready to move on. Thus Giovacchino Campese's comments are not too extreme when he says 'the true Christian is the person who acknowledges in every moment the fact of being on a journey, of being a pilgrim of the reign of God, for this is the final goal of those who believe in the God revealed by Jesus Christ.'⁵⁴ This is the pilgrim principle, the migrant mentality.

On this basis it can be said, that, metaphorically, we are all migrants. The Christian, above all, should live as if

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through,
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.⁵⁵

As pilgrims and migrants, then, how might this affect our attitude to immigration and the foreigner? The Israelites were reminded under the Old Testament covenant that the land ultimately belonged to God even though they possessed it. They were temporary residents of it. As temporary residents of this world, how should followers of Christ, under a new covenant, respond? How tightly or lightly should we hold to that which we call our own? How much should we be concerned about 'our own backyard'? How much should we see the care of the asylum seeker, refugee and immigrant as investing towards 'treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy' (Matt. 6:20)?

Questions: Are migrants better placed to identify with the insecurities the Early Church faced? Are Christians in the West too rooted to physical places and material possessions they call their own? How would being less rooted affect our attitude to newcomers?

Chapter 9

From Every People and Nation

In a world of racial division, class division and gender division the words of Paul, 'there is no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28), offers a radical vision of a redeemed human race under the Lordship of Christ. These people do not degrade or dehumanise others for all equally belong. This kingdom has no prejudice or discrimination because all belong equally.

In Revelation 7:9, John sees these people of this kingdom as 'wearing white robes', worshipping God; people characterised by diversity not uniformity despite their attire! 'The inhabitants of the new creation are not portrayed as a homogenised mass or a single global culture. Rather they display the continuing glorious diversity of the human race through history.'⁵⁶ These people are an eclectic mix from 'every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb' (Rev. 7:9). The new heaven and new earth will appear and 'the glory and honour of the nations will be brought in to it' (Rev. 21:26). In Christ, all nations and ethnic groups will be represented and come together as one. All this 'is a picture of the reality which will exist in the climactic kingdom of Christ, and as such, provides a model for us to strive toward. John sees the kingdom of Christ as a multi-ethnic congregation.'⁵⁷

The culmination of the Christian's migratory existence on earth is, therefore, revealed. The Christian has arrived at 'a better country – a heavenly one... God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them' (Heb. 11:16). With this end in view, with such an eschatological vision of the holy, universal church glimpsed, how then might the people of God live now to resemble this multi-national multitude? If the church is truly catholic and migratory how can it offer in our present age a foretaste of this multi-national assembly?

In truth, such diversity is not possible without migration. With migration a church can glimpse this future. Without migration the church in each nation remains mono-cultured; a painting of but one colour and medium, lacking a global perspective. With migration, many nationalities join together as many different parts, reflecting the variety and extravagance of God in common worship through different cultural forms. A national church can only reflect its international God-ordained purposes when it opens its doors to migrants who are (or who will become) worshippers of Christ as well.

Summing Up

Based on the assertion that all humanity is made in the image of God and therefore shares equal value and worth, an exploration of Scripture on the subject of immigration discovers God's relationship with Israel as migrant and settler, Jesus as a migrant Son and the Christian as a migrant on this earth. In each area attitudes and values of the people of God are called into question in relation to the migrant. Throughout, the human capacity for self-interest and self-preservation is challenged and confronted.

Israel, in the Old Testament, experiences migration and settlement. Once settled, God commands Israel to show compassion to the migrant on humanitarian and covenantal grounds. Unless

immigrants threatened Israel's security or stability they were to be treated well. This was particularly true for those who were in need. This was to happen in the context of the metanarrative that God would bring blessing to the nations through Abraham's descendants. Such generosity was based on the understanding that the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord. As tenants of the land Israel were to possess not own it. This was to shape their attitude to others.

The coming to earth of God's Son is a migration. With Israel's religious leaders unable to fulfil the Law and the covenant, Jesus' migration to earth and his work on earth, serves to move those alienated from God toward and into God's kingdom. This is the ultimate blessing on the nations for it is salvation. It is fitting that Jesus experiences migration and identifies with the migrant's suffering and vulnerability in bringing this about.

To be part of God's kingdom people need to follow Jesus. This following is a call to be a migrant, a pilgrim, a traveller who adopts values and attitudes often counter-cultural to society. These values include hospitality to the stranger and foreigner who is vulnerable, persecuted, or in poverty when others close the doors. This is also a continuation of God's blessing to the nations. Holding on lightly (not tightly) to land and material possessions aids the Christian's witness. On earth, life is a temporary existence not to be devalued or dismissed but seen for what it is – a place to invest in what will not fade rather to be consumed by what will.

Nationalistic or patriotic tendencies may not be wrong in themselves but may not achieve what is hoped for. They are not the whole answer. Whilst safety, security and stability rightly inform national policies on immigration, such measures can easily pander to self-centred and self-preservationist tendencies. What is in my own interest rather than the interest of others can be the outcome. That outcome does not love your neighbour as yourself but loves your neighbour less than yourself.

We are all migrants. One day we are here the next we are gone. This subject may be of more significance than we think.

Question: What do you think worship will be like when Christians from all races and nationalities worship Jesus in the age to come? Having completed this booklet is there anything that has surprised you? Based on Scripture, how would you summarise your theology of immigration?

End Notes

Chapter 1

¹ , UNHCR/UK, *Figures at a Glance*, <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html> [accessed 19.03.22].

² Gregg R. Allison, 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation,' *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14.2 (Summer 2010): 28-36 (p. 29).

³ John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1995), p. 257.

⁴ Goldingay, *Models*, p. 253.

⁵ I would also add that personal experience of migration and working with migrants can enhance theological insight and the 'doing' of theology. For a comprehensive theology of migration of a contextual, liberatory nature see Susanna Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

Chapter 2

⁶ All references from the Bible are from the NIV.

⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: IVP, 1994), pp. 442-450.

⁸ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Leicester: Apollos, 2003), p.50.

⁹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: Apollos, 2004), p.119.

¹⁰ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham, IVP, 2006), p. 423.

¹¹ Wright, *Mission*, p. 423.

¹² Wright, *Ethics*, p. 292.

¹³ Daniel G. Groody, 'Theology in the Age of Migration', *The National Catholic Reporter* (September 2009), <<http://ncronline.org/news/global/theology-age-migration>>

¹⁴ Wright, *Mission*, p. 423.

Chapter 3

¹⁵ Sarita D. Gallagher, 'Blessing on the Move: The Outpouring of God's Blessing through the Migrant Abraham,' *Mission Studies* 30 (2013) 147-161 (p.151).

¹⁶ Gallagher, 'Blessing', p. 160.

¹⁷ Guy Brandon, 'A Christian Response to Immigration' *The Jubilee Centre* (2011), <<http://www.jubilee-centre.org/christian-response-immigration-guy-brandon>> p.7.

¹⁸ For a fuller treatment of this subject read J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, pp. 65-68.

Chapter 4

¹⁹ For the sake of brevity, observations regarding the origin of nations/ethnic groups and the messages which come of the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 10-12) are omitted as are broader discussions about the significance of national identity within Israel in the O.T (c.f. footnote 36).

²⁰ Wright, *Mission*, p. 455.

²¹ Wright, *Mission*, p. 456.

²² Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* 2nd Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) charts the 'story of land gift, land possession and consequently land loss,' from the nomadic patriarchs through to monarchy and onto exile.

²³ J. Daniel Hays, *Race*, p. 66. This point is particularly important when we consider the teaching of Ezra-Nehemiah.

²⁴ Brandon, 'A Christian Response to Immigration', p.8.

²⁵ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking*, p. 165-6. Snyder gives a more detailed etymology of *gerim* as well as other relevant Hebrew categories of foreigner.

²⁶ Brandon, 'A Christian Response to Immigration', p.7.

²⁷ Guy Brandon, *Votewise, 2015: Making a Difference at the Ballot Box and Beyond* (London: SPCK, 2014), p. 56.

²⁸ Brandon, *Votewise*, 2015, p. 56.

²⁹ Brandon, 'A Christian Response to Immigration', p. 8.

³⁰ Wright, *Ethics*, p.93 (his italics).

Chapter 5

³¹ D.L. Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

³² Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: IVP, 1979).

³³ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking*, p. 143.

³⁴ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking*, p. 151-2.

³⁵ For a biblical understanding of 'nation' in the Old Testament, see Daniel. I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

³⁶ Wright, *Mission*, p. 128.

Chapter 6

³⁷ Graham A. Cole, *The God who became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation* (Nottingham: Apollos, IVP, 2013), p.150.

³⁸ Groody, 'Age of Migration'.

³⁹ Luke 10:38-42 is one example. Martha and Mary gave Jesus hospitality on more than one occasion.

⁴⁰ Groody, 'Age of Migration'.

⁴¹ Daniel G. Groody, 'Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees' *Theological Studies* 70 (2009), pp.638-667 (p.649).

⁴² Again, for the sake of brevity I will not mention or discuss the words found in the Athanasian Creed, 'he descended into hell'. These words would, however, add to the migratory tone if they were included in this section.

Chapter 7

⁴³ Many New Testament books on theology will expound and discuss this theme. Two classics are A.M. Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology* (Bungay: SCM Press, 1957) and George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel and the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (London: Paternoster Press, 1959).

⁴⁴ Groody, 'Crossing the Divide', p. 661.

⁴⁵ Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian* (New York: Paulist, 1985), p.47 cited by Groody, *Crossing the Divide*, p. 658.

⁴⁶ Gioacchino Campese, C.S., 'The Irruption of Migrants: Theology of Migration in the 21st Century' *The Free Library Theological Studies*, (2012).

<<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+irruption+of+migrants%3a+theology+of+migration+in+the+21st+century.-a0280855775>>

⁴⁷ Stephen Backhouse, 'Red, White, Blue...and Brown: Citizens, Patriots and the Prime Minister,' *Theos*, 2007, <<http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2007/08/15/red-white-blue-and-brown>> p.10.

⁴⁸ Stephen Backhouse, 'Citizens', p. 10.

⁴⁹ Stephen Backhouse, 'Citizens', p. 58.

Chapter 8

⁵⁰ 'Who is my Neighbour?' *The Church of England* <<https://churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2015/02/house-of-bishops'-pastoral-letter-on-the-2015-general-election.aspx>> p.44

⁵¹ Dewi Hughes and Matthew Bennett, *God of the Poor: A Biblical Vision of God's Present Rule* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1998), p. 64.

⁵² Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009), pp.3-15.

⁵³ Snyder, 'Asylum-Seeking', p. 133.

⁵⁴ Campese, 'Irruption'

⁵⁵ 'This World is not my Home' is a negro-spiritual song made popular by Jim Reeves.

Chapter 9

⁵⁶ Wright, *Mission*, p. 456.

⁵⁷ J. Daniel Hays, *Race*, p. 205.

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