# The Bible and Immigration

## Biblical Texts on Immigration, Refugees, and the Stranger

Gen 12:1–3: The LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your native land and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you.” *Abraham: the world’s first immigrant.*

Gen 12:10–20 (and variants): And Abimelech said, “Here, my land is before you; settle wherever you please” (20:15); Abimelech then charged all the people, saying, “Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall be put to death” (26:11). *Abraham and his family, strangers in strange lands, at the mercy of foreign kings, are treated with respect.*

Gen 15:13: He said to Abram, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs.” *The Israelites were strangers in Egypt—and how were they treated there? Should we be emulating Pharaoh?*

Gen 18:2–5: Looking up, he saw three men standing near him. As soon as he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them and, bowing to the ground, he said, “My lords, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let a little water be brought; bathe your feet and recline under the tree. And let me fetch a morsel of bread that you may refresh yourselves; then go on—seeing that you have come your servant’s way.” *Abraham as a model of hospitality for the stranger who passes by.*

Gen 23:3–6: Then Abraham rose from beside his dead, and spoke to the Hittites, saying, “I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial.” And the Hittites replied to Abraham, saying to him, “Hear us, my lord: you are the elect of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places; none of us will withhold his burial place from you for burying your dead.” *The Hittites modeling the appropriate behavior toward a stranger in their land.*

Gen 37:1: Now Jacob was settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan (see also Gen 17:8; 28:4; 36:7; Exod 6:4). *Canaan not as homeland for Abraham and his family, but as the place where they were once strangers—we were all immigrants once.*

Gen 41:38–43: And Pharaoh said to his courtiers, “Could we find another like him, a man in whom is the spirit of God?” So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you.” Pharaoh further said to Joseph, “See, I put you in charge of all the land of Egypt.” And removing his signet ring from his hand, Pharaoh put it on Joseph’s hand; and he had him dressed in robes of fine linen, and put a gold chain

about his neck. He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command, and they cried before him, “Abrek!” Thus he placed him over all the land of Egypt. *The Pharaoh of Genesis demonstrating the honor due to the immigrant Joseph who contributes to his adopted society; contrast this with the new pharaoh of Exodus (see below); note also the honor given to Joseph’s family in light of his contributions, 45:18–20.*

Exod 1:8–10: A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground.” *How a leader acts who does not recognize the valuable contributions of immigrants but governs instead by fear.*

Exod 1:15–21: The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, saying, “When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.” The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, letting the boys live?” The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth.” And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly. And because the midwives feared God, He established households for them. *An act of civil disobedience against unjust laws and fear-mongering rulers.*

Exod 12:49: There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you. *Even for Israel’s most culturally identifying rites, such as the Passover, one law for both native and immigrant; see also Lev 24:22; Num 9:14.*

Exod 22:20: You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. *Straight up.*

Exod 23:9: You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of a stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt. *Straight up.*

Lev 19:10: You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger. *The stranger as a vulnerable class, and therefore in need of special legal and social protection.*

Lev 19:33–34: When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. *Straight up.*

Lev 25:23: The land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with me. *The Israelites, even when settled in the promised land, are still strangers themselves. Know where the true power lies.*

Num 15:14–16: And when, throughout the ages, a stranger who has taken up residence with you, or one who lives among you, would present an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD—as you do, so shall it be done by the rest of the congregation. There shall be one law for you and for the resident stranger; it shall be a law for all time throughout the ages. You and the stranger shall be alike before the LORD; the same ritual and the same rule shall apply to you and to the stranger who resides among you. *You and the stranger shall be alike before the Lord.*

Num 20:14–21: From Kadesh, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom: "Thus says your brother Israel: You know all the hardships that have befallen us; that our ancestors went down to Egypt, that we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and that the Egyptians dealt harshly with us and our ancestors. We cried to the LORD and He heard our plea, and He sent a messenger who freed us from Egypt. Now we are in Kadesh, the town on the border of your territory. Allow us, then, to cross your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, and we will not drink water from wells. We will follow the king's highway, turning off neither to the right nor to the left until we have crossed your territory." But Edom answered him, "You shall not pass through us, else we will go out against you with the sword." "We will keep to the beaten track," the Israelites said to them, "and if we or our cattle drink your water, we will pay for it. We ask only for passage on foot—it is but a small matter." But they replied, "You shall not pass through!" And Edom went out against them in heavy force, strongly armed. So Edom would not let Israel cross their territory, and Israel turned away from them. *Edom as an example of how not to treat the refugee, even one who wants only to cross through territory to reach the land beyond—as in the case of refugees trying to reach Europe today.*

Num 23:9: As I see them from the mountain tops, gaze on them from the heights; there is a people that dwells apart, not reckoned among the nations. *Israel as refugee people, "not reckoned among the nations," but viewed as an existential threat by Balak, the king of Moab, who tries to have them cursed by the prophet Balaam.*

Deut 10:16–19: Cut away, therefore, the thickening about your hearts and stiffen your necks no more. For the LORD your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. *God as the one who fights for the stranger; our care for the stranger being a case of imitatio dei.*

Deut 24:14: You shall not abuse a needy or destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. *How to treat the laborer, with no distinction made between native and immigrant.*

Deut 24:17: You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless. *Straightforward.*

Deut 24:19-21: When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. *On the social responsibility to support the stranger as a vulnerable category.*

Deut 26:5: You shall then recite as follows before the Lord your God: My father was a wandering Aramean.

Deut 26:11: You shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the Lord your God has bestowed upon you and your household. *Even when enjoying the gifts that God has given to Israel, those gifts are to be shared with the stranger in your midst.*

Deut 27:19: Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. *Straightforward.*

1 Kgs 8:41–43: If a foreigner who is not of your people Israel comes from a distant land for the sake of your name—for they shall hear about your great name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when he comes to pray toward this House, oh, hear in your heavenly abode and grant all that the foreigner asks you for. *The foreigner who wishes to join the congregation of Israel should be blessed by God.*

Isa 1:17: Learn to do good. Devote yourselves to justice. Aid the wronged. *Amen.*

Isa 10:1: Ha! Those who write out evil writs and compose iniquitous documents to subvert the cause of the poor, to rob the rights of the needy of my people! *How power is abused, through what appear to be official channels and documents.*

Isa 11:6: The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. *The word "dwell" here is the same used for residing as a stranger: the eschaton will be a time when even those who once seemed dangerous are able to live in the greater society.*

Isa 16:3–4: Give advice, offer counsel. At high noon make your shadow like night: conceal the outcasts, betray not the fugitives. Let Moab's outcasts find asylum in you; be a shelter for them against the despoiler. *Explicit instructions regarding the treatment of refugees from a foreign land; especially for lawyers: give advice, offer counsel.*

Isa 56:8: Thus declares the Lord God, who gathers the dispersed of Israel: "I will gather still more to those already gathered." *The eschatological vision of all peoples being gathered together, a vision that we should not wait for, but should try to bring to fruition in our own time.*

Isa 66:18: The time has come to gather all the nations and tongues. *Indeed.*

Jer 7:6–7: If you do not oppress the stranger, the orphan, and the widow; if you do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place; if you do not follow other gods, to your own hurt—then only will I let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers for all time. *Remaining in the promised land is not a given; it is dependent on not oppressing the stranger. Without care for the vulnerable, we do not deserve the land.*

Jer 22:3: Do what is just and right; rescue from the defrauder him who is robbed; do not wrong the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow; commit no lawless act, and do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place. *Straightforward.*

Ezek 16:3: Thus said the Lord God to Jerusalem: By origin and birth you are from the land of the Canaanites—your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. *Recognizing the immigrant and mixed origins of Israel.*

Ezek 22:6–7: Every one of the princes in your midst used his strength for the shedding of blood. Fathers and mothers have been humiliated within you; strangers have been cheated in your midst; orphans and widow have been wronged within you. *Abuses of power.*

Ezek 22:29–30: The people of the land have practiced fraud and committed robbery; they have wronged the poor and the needy, have defrauded the stranger without redress. And I sought a man among them to repair the wall or to stand in the breach before me in behalf of this land, that I might not destroy it, but I found none. *This is the wall that God wants: the wall protecting the needy, protecting the divine values.*

Ezek 47:21–23: This land you shall divide for yourselves among the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as a heritage for yourselves and for the strangers who dwell among you, who have begotten children with you. You shall treat them as Israelite citizens; they shall receive allotments with you among the tribes of Israel. You shall give the stranger an allotment within the tribe where he resides—declares the Lord God. *Ezekiel's eschatological vision, in which those immigrants who have chosen to be part of Israel, who have intermarried—the Dreamers—shall be treated as citizens, even receiving allotments of inheritable property.*

Mal 3:5: I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of me: who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert the cause of the widow, orphan, and stranger, says the Lord of Hosts. *God as advocate for the stranger and other vulnerable peoples.*

Ps 39:13: Like all my forebears, I am an alien, resident with you. *Immigrants once, immigrants always.*

Ps 146:9: The Lord watches over the stranger. *Amen.*

Ruth: *The entire book of Ruth is the story of an immigrant who comes to work in the fields, is taken in, treated well, intermarries, and becomes not only part of Israelite society, but*

*indeed becomes the ancestor of David, and therefore also Jesus. Would Ruth have been allowed in to today's America?*

1 Chr 29:15: We are sojourners with you, mere transients like our fathers. *Immigrants once, immigrants always.*

Matt 2:13–14: Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt. *Jesus, like Abraham, was an immigrant – and even a refugee from political persecution.*

Matthew 5:1-11: When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount recognizes blesses the vulnerable.*

Matt 25:31–46: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And

these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." *The last judgment: how we treat the least among us—how we welcome and care for the stranger—determines our righteousness before God.*

Luke 10:29-37: But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." *Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan: who our neighbors are and how to treat them. Neighbors are defined by behavior, not by nationality.*

John 1:1-2, 14: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. *The Word – God – migrated from heaven to earth.*

Acts 7:6, 29: And God spoke in these terms, that his descendants would be resident aliens in a country belonging to others, who would enslave them and mistreat them during four hundred years…. 29 When he heard this, Moses fled and became a resident alien in the land of Midian. *Stephen's speech recounts the history of God's people as resident aliens*.

Rom 12:13: Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. *Saints and strangers alike are to be provided for.*

Eph 2:14, 19: For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. . . . So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God. *Antagonism toward the stranger and alien is antithetical to the mission of Jesus.*

Heb 11:13–16: All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them. *God is welcoming to those who, despite being strangers, seek a homeland, a better country.*

Heb. 13:1-2: Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. *Hospitality to strangers is the definition of love.*

Rev 21:25–26: Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. *Again the eschatological vision of peoples from all over the world being gathered together*.