

Jesus and the Immigrant - Bible Verses

The Bible has a lot to say about the treatment of foreigners and immigrants. This is a long but not exhaustive list with interpretive headers. Bear in mind that while there may not be a one to one connection to undocumented immigration today, the use of the word 'foreigners' that is used in scripture is most closely reflected in what we see today.

Do not mistreat or oppress foreigners

Exodus 22:21 - You must not mistreat or oppress foreigners in any way.

Exodus 23:9 - You must not oppress foreigners. You know what it's like to be a foreigner, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 24:14,17 - Never take advantage of poor and destitute laborers, whether they are fellow Israelites or foreigners living in your towns...True justice must be given to foreigners living among you and to orphans, and you must never accept a widow's garment as security for her debt.

Numbers 15:15 - Native-born Israelites and foreigners are equal before the Lord and are subject to the same decrees. This is a permanent law for you, to be observed from generation to generation.

Jeremiah 7:5-7 - But I will be merciful only if you stop your evil thoughts and deeds and start treating each other with justice; only if you stop exploiting foreigners, orphans, and widows; only if you stop your murdering; and only if you stop harming yourselves by worshiping idols. 7 Then I will let you stay in this land that I gave to your ancestors to keep forever.

Jeremiah 22:3 - This is what the Lord says: Be fair-minded and just. Do what is right! Help those who have been robbed; rescue them from their oppressors. Quit your evil deeds! Do not mistreat foreigners, orphans, and widows.

Zechariah 7:9-10 - This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another. Do not oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor.

Leviticus 19:33-34 - Do not take advantage of foreigners who live among you in your land. **Treat them like native-born Israelites, and love them as you love yourself.**

Matthew 22:37-40 - 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: '**Love your neighbor as yourself.**' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.

Biblical justice is caring for and elevating the oppressed and marginalized

Leviticus 23:32 - When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. Leave it for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 25:35-36 - If one of your fellow Israelites falls into poverty and cannot support himself, support him as you would a foreigner or a temporary resident and allow him to live with you. Do not charge interest or make a profit at his expense. Instead, show your fear of God by letting him live with you as your relative.

Caring for foreigners and immigrants is an act of following his example

Psalm 146:9 - The Lord protects the foreigners among us.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 - (God) ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. **So you, too, must show love to foreigners**, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.

God calls out spiritual and earthly leaders who don't care for foreigners and immigrants

Malachi 3:5 - I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, **or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice**, for these people do not fear me.

Ezekiel 22:6-7,28-29 - Every leader in Israel who lives within your walls is bent on murder. Fathers and mothers are treated with contempt. Foreigners are forced to pay for protection. Orphans and widows are wronged and oppressed among you...And your prophets cover up for them by announcing false visions and making lying predictions. **They say, 'My message is from the Sovereign Lord,' when the Lord hasn't spoken a single word to them.** Even common people oppress the poor, rob the needy, and deprive foreigners of justice.

Psalm 94:2-20 - Give the proud what they deserve...They crush your people, Lord, hurting those you claim as your own. They kill widows and foreigners and murder orphans...**Can unjust leaders claim that God is on their side - leaders whose decrees permit injustice?**

God actively stands in opposition to those who don't care for foreigners and immigrants

Deuteronomy 27:19 - Cursed is anyone who denies justice to foreigners, orphans, or widows.

Jeremiah 7:5-6 - But I will be merciful only if you stop your evil thoughts and deeds and start treating each other with justice; only if you stop exploiting foreigners, orphans, and widows.

God's redemptive story from the beginning has run through foreigners, immigrants, exiles and refugees

- Abraham wandered from one foreign land to another, even after God promised him land

Genesis 17:8 - The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.

Hebrews 11:8-10 - It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.

And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

- Moses was a foreigner in Egypt and led the people of Israel through foreign lands for forty years

Exodus 2:22 - Later she gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, for he explained, “I have been a foreigner in a foreign land.” (Gershom sounded like a Hebrew phrase meaning “a foreigner there”)

Acts 7:29 - When Moses heard that, he fled the country and lived as a foreigner in the land of Midian. There his two sons were born.

- Ruth was a foreigner

Ruth 2:10 - Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. “What have I done to deserve such kindness?” she asked. “I am only a foreigner.”

- David was in exile running from state violence at the hands of King Saul

1 Samuel 21:10 - So David escaped from Saul and went to King Achish of Gath.

- Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were a foreigners and refugees from state violence in Egypt

Matthew 2:13-15 - After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod’s death.

*The people of Israel finally took the land of Canaan for themselves, but were only able to hold it for 400 years before they were taken into exile in Babylon where they were once again foreigners. Even when they were allowed to return to their homeland it wasn’t theirs. It belonged to Persia, then Greece, and then Rome. In the 2000 years of Jewish history between Abraham and Jesus, **the Israelites were foreigners and immigrants for 80% percent of that time.***

- We are described as foreigners in this world

1 Peter 2:11 - Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.

A Jesus centered view of the treatment of foreigners

Matthew 25:41-45 - Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. **I was a stranger (xenos)**, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’ Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’ And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’

- The greek word translated as stranger is 'xenos' - a foreigner or other. You may recognize it as the prefix to the modern word xenophobia. Xenophobia is a word that describes a fear or hatred of people or things that are perceived as foreign or strange. It can also refer to a dislike of customs, dress, or cultures that are different from one's own. Xenophobia is not the way of Jesus.

Luke 10:27-37 - The man answered, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

"Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!" The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. Then a **despised Samaritan (foreigner)** came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.'"

"Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked.

The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy."

Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."