

## The heart of immigrants and our international God (Exodus 23:9-13)

Preached March 10, 2024, by Pastor Phil Layton ([www.gcb.church](http://www.gcb.church))

Please open God's Word to the book of Exodus, chapter 23.

- Last week I was at ShepCon with men from dozens of countries they journeyed from.
- Friday night men 5000 men from 50 states and nations sang Is He Worthy from Rev 5
- It was a joy to be with Jared and Laura last Sunday as they prepare to journey to Czech.

Missions exists where worship doesn't. Let's give and pray for them, as sojourning is hard

Ex 23:9 ESV *"You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt."*<sup>10</sup> *"For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield,"*<sup>11</sup> *but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard."*<sup>12</sup> *"Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed."* (other translations 'resident alien' or 'foreign resident'<sup>1</sup>)

**'alien' there is the same Hebrew word translated 'sojourner' in v. 9 (repeated theme)**

v. 9 NAS *You shall not oppress a stranger, because you know the feelings of a stranger ...*

- word NAS translates "immigrants who stay in Israel" in Ezekiel 14:7
- NIRV: *"You yourselves know how it feels to be outsiders ..."*
- **Some of you have felt what it's like to be new, not from here, and a nice person refreshes you**
- One paraphrase (BBE) says like this: "Do not be hard on [a person] from a strange country who is living among you; for you have had experience of the feelings of one who is far from the land of his birth..."

In our church I counted over 20 here living far from the land of their birth.<sup>2</sup>

- My pastor friends in Sacramento have more internationals, our county not very many.
- I spent time Wed. with a pastor in Sac that has a big Chinese population 1<sup>st</sup> generation.
- He said many visit his church not for religion, for relationships in their language.
- I learned since 2013 over 50% of all emigrating to CA are from Asia.
- I heard Slavic speakers in Sac valley are 250K. Sac is a top refugee welcome city.
- This passage is very applicable to CA (23% of U.S. immigrant population is in CA)

**Just in NorCal are millions of sojourners (meaning landed here from another land)**

How many of you here have lived at least a few weeks in a country other than America?

- Those of you that have know a bit of the feelings of journeying to a very foreign land.
- My heart knows as most of my younger years was what scripture calls a sojourner (MK in RP)
- I was a strange-looking foreigner who didn't fit or blend in (Filipinos not tall or white).

Some stared or pointed or laughed and that took a little getting used to!

Most of them were really good natured and friendly, only a few anti-American politically

But as I learned some of the language, I was always aware I was an outsider in their land.

I remember times in Korea and Congo where I was alone and nobody spoke English.

- It felt scary to see a fight break out or to see riot police and know I stand out as a target.
- I know a bit how it feels to need help and have a kind citizen help.

**v. 12 talks about a foreigner being refreshed, I've had that in foreign churches**

- Coming back to America from another land I also felt like a stranger here (out of it).
- This past week I've been working with Didier on travel plans back to CA in the spring.
  - o I'm freshly aware he needs extra care as he journeys.

We also need care not to alienate unnecessarily about aliens.

**To our polarizing world, v. 9 is an empathizing Word about the feelings of foreign newcomers**

- Anyone aware of immigration debates?

Anyone heard of controversy about journeying over the border and security or safety concerns?

- As we journey through the Bible verse-by-verse, this is a timely and contemporary book.
- God's Word speaks to our world, challenges hearts, stretches minds, and steps on toes.
- I didn't pick this subject and I don't pick fights over it, but we don't skip what God says.
- Our next text in God's Word is already one of the hot button issues in elections this year.

Even if immigration is reformed and enforced, millions are in limbo, kids, complications, etc.

- Not many pastors teach on immigration, many won't touch this with a 10-foot pole-saw.
- I know from experience cutting limbs has dangers on both sides to be careful about.
- But I've prayed God will help me cut straight His Word in our next text on immigrants.

**Ex 23 is a legal code so it doesn't directly address the illegal elephant in the room**

I get in trouble if I get political (even if it relates to the text), but this text is personal.

- v. 9 says to God's people leaving a foreign land 'you know the heart of an immigrant.'
- Set aside the heat over immigration and let God shine light on the heart of an immigrant. Set aside your opinions about the policies for now and think about the people, like v. 9
- Try to separate politicians who make it a mess vs. people hurt by that mess.

Pray for political leaders and/or try to vote them out, but where's our heart and God's in this?

- v. 9 says Israel knew the heart feelings of sojourners, and needed sympathy to sojourners.
- I have no simplistic soundbite to fix a complex system but we have scripture that gives

[the heart of immigrants and our international God \(title\)](#)

- Outline:
1. The context of immigrants (v. 9)
  2. Their care by God and His people (v. 10-12)
  3. Some concerns for immigration (v. 13, 27-33)
  4. How Christ and His gospel applies

v. 9 has a context behind it in Genesis and Exodus: immigrants were/are oppressed.

- The first time this root word for sojourn is used is Gen 12:10, Abram's sojourn to Egypt.
- He feared he would be killed and his wife taken but his lie got him kicked out the land.

Next time Gen 19:9: *"Stand back! This fellow," they sneered, "came here as an immigrant, and now he dares to give orders! We'll treat you worse than them!"* (NAB).

- In that context, they attempted sexual assault on the foreign visitors.
- Immigrants for thousands of years have been victimized by mistreatment and abuse.
- Immigrants are illegally targeted and trafficked.
  - o God's Law says in Ex 21:16 traffickers deserve to die.
- I'm told child labor industry today and under-table worker underpayment is in billions.
- Don't think this is just an ancient problem, there's much oppression of sojourners in CA.

**There are criminals and cartels and 'coyotes' that illegally prey on incoming foreigners**

Jacob the father of Israel sojourned with Laban (Gen 32:4) who oppressively mistreated.

- Turn to Gen 47 for more context on Israel's sojourn in Egypt (the background to Ex 23).
- In world history you didn't just cross borders to other lands without official permission.
- A leader or host had to authorize your immigration, even a temporary trip or residence.

47:4 is Joseph's family: <sup>4</sup> *They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen."* <sup>5</sup> *Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. <sup>6</sup> The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen..."*

So sojourn = dwell = settle in a foreign land you come to, you're not just visiting on a trip

That's what a sojourner was in the context, seeking permission from leaders of the land.

- Israel was given legal work and a place, but that initial protection turned to oppression. Look at Ex 1 where the Jewish immigrants and descendants multiplied and filled the land. This is the context: Ex 1:8 *Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.* <sup>9</sup> *And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. <sup>10</sup> Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."* <sup>11</sup> *Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens [v. 12 adds oppressive slave labor]. Gen 15:13 prophesied Israel would be 'sojourners in a land that is not theirs...mistreated' (LSB).*

Ex 22:21 says don't wrong or mistreat sojourners like Egypt did

Pharaoh isn't presented as a positive example here, judging increasing immigrants as enemies.

- I think this context cautions us not to speak against or about immigrants like Pharaoh did.
- If the majority feels threatened, the answer isn't oppression or rejection of all minorities.
- In a melting pot, things get hot and bubble up, but it can be different in God's people.
- God's followers are to treat sojourners well, not mistreat like Egypt did.

That's their context, much like our continent that hasn't always liked people not like us growing

- 400 years ago, native Americans felt threatened by an influx of white foreigners coming.
- Over time the majority became English descent, then European.
- Now non-European, Asians or South Americans in certain fields are a majority.

Do you think or speak like Pharaoh of immigrants, as too many, or assume they're enemies?

- In your heart as you see someone struggling with English or obviously new here...
  - o do you have God's heart for them and want to help to show Him?
- Do you react with impatience, instant judgment, or ignore foreigners who may need help?
- Are you indifferent to outsiders, or interested in them as you hear their accent?
- Do you make judgments about people who look different than you, ethnically, externally?
- If you see some wear a turban or traditional dress, do you smile (or move next aisle)?
- You can tell by broken English who's a newcomer, what's your thought process or heart?
- Man looks at the outward, God sees the heart

And He sees your heart and can help you have more of His

In Ex 2 Moses sojourned to another land, saw some Arab women, and helped them.

- He chose to live there, undoubtedly learned the language if not already, and assimilated

Look at 2:21 *And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah.* <sup>22</sup> *She gave birth to a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land."*

- That's the word Moses writes in Ex 23, knowing the heart of a **ger** (word for immigrant).
- At the invitation of a host, a *ger* comes to live in a land, learn its language, love its people
- For 40 years Moses sojourned with his wife in Arabia, he had no prejudice against Arabs.
- It seems in Numbers 12 after Zipporah died, Moses married a black African Ethiopian.
- God's family plan is multi-national.

Now go to Ex 12 and this is key in the context. Moses returns to Egypt to bring Israel out. 12:38

*A mixed multitude also went up with them [=Israel in v. 37, a multitude of mixed ethnicities joined the exodus]*

*...<sup>43</sup> And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the statute of the Passover: **no foreigner shall eat of it...***

Different Hebrew word nekhar, not a resident legally among the Jews, just a regular Gentile, not a sojourner.

v. 45 repeats that this right is not for foreigners, another different Hebrew word<sup>3</sup> ('foreign guest' in Lev 22:10).

In our day think tourists, travelers, or temporary Visa, you don't get the rights of citizens

<sup>48</sup> *If a stranger [Hebrew ger] shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it.* <sup>49</sup> *There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you."*

- That's the legal resident alien *ger*, and they had a path to be full citizens by circumcision.
- But v. 19 says a *ger* or native violating Israel's law could be cut off/excluded/kicked out.
- Law-abiding immigrants could have the same benefits as law-abiding Israelites.
- There was one law for all and foreign guests had to follow the law to stay.
  - o If you sojourned right, you got rights.

If you submitted to the laws, customs, and circumcision you were a proselyte, a citizen of Israel.

- Ruth and other Gentiles fully assimilated ('*your people will be my people, your God, my God*')  
**We're the church, not the State or Israel, but this context has principles and God's wisdom**

### That's #1. the prior context of immigrants, the #2 principle: their care by God and His people

Go back to Ex 23 and it moves from the heart of immigrants to practical help for those in need.

- Ex 23:10-11 talks about crop rotation in the land, to let it rest and leave extra for the poor.
- The end of v. 11 says Israel also did this with vineyards and olives groves.

Different landowners may have been on different cycles,<sup>4</sup> if all on same 7<sup>th</sup> year didn't work.

- But it's a sabbatical, owner not working land, and the poor could for a season.
  - o And every week God's people were to bless and refresh immigrants. <sup>12</sup> *Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed.*

Turn ahead to Lev 19 as the law expands God's caring legal system for migrant workers.

- Lev 19 broadens it to fields year-round, not just those on a sabbatical off-year.
  - o **19:9** *When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. <sup>10</sup> And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner [let them work edges, gather leftovers].*

This leads up to v. 18, look at end of v. 18: '*...you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*' Who is my neighbor?

**In context, it includes immigrants, the impoverished, or ill-treated person in your path, Jesus taught<sup>5</sup>**

The Samaritan didn't check the hurting stranger's paperwork, he ministered to his needs, loved cross culturally.

<sup>33</sup> *When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. <sup>34</sup> 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...*

- That's not just OT, the NT quotes Lev 19 as 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest command.
- Dt 10:18 adds God '*loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.*'

**God loves alien residents and cares for their needs, therefore love immigrants as yourself**

Do you? Is God's compassion and affection driving, or conservative talking points and anger?

- We can get so up in arms over issues and miss commands to open arms to individuals.
- In Dt 26 God's people were to give part of their tithe to benevolence needs of sojourners. And in Dt 16 sojourners wanting to worship and fellowship were to be joyfully welcomed
  - o *you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and... [the list includes] the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you... (v. 14 includes them at your table and at feasts of God's people).*

Dt 31:12: *Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD...* and it includes children of immigrants

**The law welcomed aliens in worship, sacrifice, even holiest days if they feared God**

There was to be no segregation of believers, God's ideal was full integration and assimilation.

- American churches have a gospel opportunity to love strangers, introduce to God's love.
- Many haven't seen it in other countries, but may they see it in Christians and churches.

- The NT word for hospitality is literally ‘love of stranger’ (philaxeno vs xenophobia).
- Will you love, invite in? You can start after church talking to people you don’t normally.
- If you see a foreigner out there, do you respond with a smile or suspicion or step back)?
- Are you compassionate to the plight of refugees seeking a better life (or just life)?
- Many of them fatherless, widows, or workers that sinful men take advantage of

Malachi 3:5 (NET) *“I will come to you in judgment... those who exploit workers, widows, and orphans, who refuse to help the immigrant and in this way show they do not fear me,” says the LORD who rules over all.*

*Other versions warn don’t ‘defraud laborers of wages...deprive aliens...thrust aside the sojourner’<sup>6</sup>*

Love doesn’t mean we throw aside border security or throw open doors to everybody.

- But God puts in your path strangers, can you love that neighbor?

In the Good Samaritan story, are you the religious person avoiding or excusing indifference?

- Jesus said *go and do likewise*, love your neighbor in need even if a historic ethnic enemy.
- I heard a good brother at this church confess a struggle to love Muslim sojourners.
- I also heard of a good outreach, Arab-American Learning Center in Sac (immigrant help).
- They give resources, ESL classes, etc., church volunteer help

*Josh Pino knows Pastor Saed and Christians loving on Arab immigrants, can share more*

We had a refugee family here from Ukraine for a short time, and Sac has many immigrants.

- One of our members here teaches mostly international college students, a high percent.

If you work or go to school down the hill, internationals are a great opportunity to befriend

- We’re ignorant in many ways of immigrant life,
  - o so take interest, seek to impact with God’s love.
- Some come to America from restricted countries we can’t go to but can reach out to here.
- As more work from home and move up from Bay Area, I hope we welcome more here
- When Jesus said ‘look, the fields are white unto harvest,’ it was nearby Samaritans (Jn 4).
- Jews had no dealings with Samaritans, even their dirt they shook out at border crossings.
- But Jesus lived and taught cross-cultural loving neighbors.

In CA I recognize there’s challenges in bad immigration laws and breaking laws.

*So go back to Ex 23 and we need to balance care and love with concerns and law*

3. Some concerns for immigration. Right after Ex 23:12 talks about legal benefits for aliens, v. 13 warns of some not wanting to fit in your society but to bring it under their god or law. 23:27 *I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the **people against whom you shall come**, and I will make all **your enemies** turn their backs to you [v. 28 lists Canaanites, Hittites, etc.] ...<sup>31</sup> And I will set **your border** from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall **drive them out** before you. <sup>32</sup> You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. <sup>33</sup> **They shall not dwell in your land**, lest they make you sin against me...*

*v. 4-5 talk about love for enemy, but the same chapter says don’t let every enemy dwell with you*

Pagans from Canaan or Hittite enemies weren’t to dwell in the land of Israel’s borders.

- But it wasn’t about ethnicity, it was about any who’re enemies of God and His people.
- A Canaanite or Hittite converting to Israel’s faith or way of life could dwell with Israel.
- Rahab was a Canaanite fearing the Lord who was fully welcomed as a sojourner in Israel.
- Remember Uriah the Hittite, a faithful soldier when the Jew King David was unfaithful.

So v. 33 isn’t against all Canaanites or Hittites, it’s guarding from those who **come against**.

- v. 27 uses the phrases “*people against whom you shall come*” and “*your enemies.*”

God’s immigration concern isn’t fear of strangers, it’s fearing God vs. those against His law.

- Notice v. 31, God says ‘*I will set your border...*’ It’s not wrong to set borders, God does!

- It's not wrong to protect from enemies or drive them out!

**God does but we need to be careful because we're not God, or God's old covenant theocracy**

DeYoung: 'part of the problem [is] bad guys and good guys aren't always easy to distinguish ...the vast majority of displaced persons are simply looking for peace and a new chance at life. But does anyone doubt there may also be a small number of extremists waiting in the same line ...radical jihadists... how do we balance competing goods—the good of welcoming in suffering people and the good of keeping out those who want to inflict suffering on others? And how do we pursue these ends when it may be impossible to know if we are helping the right people?... Christian charity means loving the safety of the neighbor next door at least as much as loving the safe passage of the neighbor far away. It's not unreasonable or unfeeling to think that in some cases supplying refugee camps with humanitarian aid or protecting safe havens elsewhere could be a responsible approach that avoids the risks of immediate resettlement in the United States... My plea is that the [immigration] conversation reflect the complexity of the situation and goes beyond the familiar dichotomies of love versus hate, inclusion versus exclusion, and fear versus compassion. There are too many important things, and too many human lives, at stake to move quite so quickly from solid Christian principles to simple policy prescriptions.'<sup>7</sup>

**Further study: James Hoffmeier, [The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible](#)**

God in love protects and sets borders from the beginning.

- When Adam and Eve were sent out of Eden, God set guards at the border to the garden.
- God Himself set the border to Eden and set cherubim with swords to stop unlawful entry.
- That's Gen 3 before the flood, in Gen 9 God calls us to fill the earth to spread out on it.
- In Gen 11 He made languages that made natural borders.

Acts 17:26 *And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having **determined** allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,*<sup>27</sup> *that they should seek God...* God set boundaries and borders of land and language as He determined, but also pre-determined His global gospel plan.

**Every tribe and tongue of worshippers are part of His family and ours**

**4. How Christ and His gospel applies.** Did you know He knows firsthand feelings of a refugee?

- Like immigrants today fleeing evil dictators, the family of baby Jesus fled Herod.
- Young Jesus was part of an immigrant family in Egypt during His earliest years.
- He knew the heart of a stranger with His own people, alienated from His own siblings. He seemed so foreign to many
- He told Pontius Pilate He came there from another faraway kingdom '*not of this world*'

At the end of this world He'll welcome some to His heavenly kingdom, part of what He'll say: '*I was a stranger and you welcomed me...*' *the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you...'* *the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'* ...*he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire...I was a stranger and you did not welcome me...as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me'* (Mt 25)

- Welcoming strangers is a gospel issue of eternal importance to our King on judgment day
- '*my brothers*'=Christian brethren, special care for aliens in the family of faith (many are)
- He loved the least and the lawbreaker, the outsider and outcast, the stranger and sojourner
- He heals foreigner lepers, sojourns in Samaria where they said He's 'Savior of the world'
- He crossed every border or boundary culturally and was falsely accused of illegal activity
- He gathered leftover grain in fields with followers as poor were allowed but on a Sabbath
- But the Pharisees in legalism and ethnocentrism didn't care for people in need as He does

- His gospel story includes immigrants, Simon of Cyrene Africa helping carry Jesus' cross
- He died to redeem from every tribe and tongue of believers and He rose to give new life
- In justification He gives us an alien righteousness, completely foreign to our sinful nature
- We have no native goodness, but to all who receive Him He gives the right to be children
- We're not born into His people, but by repentant faith we're born again into God's people
- In OT, nations could come in, 'be circumcised,' NT says go out, 'be saved by faith alone'

**It was always by grace, but there's no more Jew-Gentile checkpoint keeping out**

Eph 2 says Jesus broke down the dividing wall that separated Jews from other nations and abolished the enmity. It says Gentiles were '*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel...But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ...Now therefore, you are **no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God***' (an integrated family! v. 12-19 NKJV)

- May our church welcome one another as Christ welcomed us, to God's glory (Rom 15:7)
- As you meet a stranger after church, Heb 13:2 says don't neglect hospitality to strangers
- Next time you see a Middle Easterner, think of our Middle Eastern Messiah and His love
- If you struggle to like people not like you, ask His forgiveness and grace to be like Him

**Whether Syrian or South American or Somalian – Christ's blood is the same and His love**

Ex 23:9 says '*you know the heart of a sojourner,*' the NT says all Christians know that feeling. Heb 11 says believers through history confess '*they are aliens and strangers on earth.*'<sup>8</sup> We of all people should love earthly ones because we're spiritual ones. Our citizenship is in heaven, as sojourners we don't fit in with this sinful world. Peter calls Christians exiles and says the world thinks we're strange as we don't live like them. 1 Pet 2:11 *I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles...* (NAS)

**May God be glorified as we live different than the world and put on His heart for it, amen?**

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<sup>1</sup> CSB, HCSB.

<sup>2</sup> At least 6 born in Slavic countries, 4 from Asian countries, 3 from Congo, 2 from Cuba, also Holland, Germany, New Zealand, South America, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Tosab*, also translated "guest" in Psalm 39:12, or "temporary resident" in Leviticus 25:47 in several versions.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 531.

<sup>5</sup> See Luke 10:27-37.

<sup>6</sup> NIV84, ESV.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/immigration-policy-must-be-based-on-more-than-an-appeal-to-compassion/>

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 11:13 NIV84.