

## **A Biblical Basis on Immigration Reform**

As people of faith we are called to ground our conduct and treatment of others in our reading and understanding of scripture and what God, as revealed through scripture and through Jesus Christ, instructs and teaches us to be and to do. As such, our views on immigration are to be grounded and reared in Biblical Revelation. As we examine what the bible says about immigration, we quickly encounter that the seeds for the establishment of Israel and all Christianity begin with the following statement:

*The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you." Genesis 12:1*

The people we come to know in the scripture as Israel, and we as a Christian people, begin our history by God ordaining immigration. It was God's call to migration and immigration that changed human history.

God called one man to leave the known for the unknown, hence, to be immigrants – aliens in a strange land. Abraham's motivation was God's call to build a great nation of promise and blessing (*Genesis 12: 2-3*). It is a promise of something better – a better life, a better future and it motivates sojourns into the desert in search of a better tomorrow.

This is one of many immigration stories found in scripture. It creates an understanding, a call from God to never forget this history and requires of God's followers specific treatment of those called strangers, aliens, and immigrants. God instructs us, His people, "*to love those who are aliens for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt*" and to treat strangers by providing a place of rest, food and hospitality (*Genesis 18:4, 5; Deuteronomy 10:19*).

This model of hospitality and treatment informs the development of a biblical policy of care for the stranger. It is a policy grounded in the actual experiences of God's people who traveled to strange lands and who were often abused and exploited, as was the case of the people of Israel during the time of Moses. These experiences taught and required God's followers that care and treatment of the immigrant needs to inform our activities in this day. The Scripture clearly says,

*When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:33, 34*

*Do not mistreat the alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt. Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know what it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt. Exodus 23:9*

*Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow. Deuteronomy 27:19*

Throughout the Old Testament, lack of fidelity to a true worship of God as expressed in the ignoring of these precepts of fairness and justice were reasons for God's judgment against His people and their impending tragedy.

In the New Testament, this theme of the treatment of aliens and strangers or immigrants is continued. We find early in the narrative that our Savior was an immigrant forced to flee to Egypt. It is this history and experience of being an immigrant people that inform the words of Jesus throughout the gospels and which are clearly expressed in Matthew 25:37. The passage teaches to us about how we should treat others and it states, "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a **stranger** and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you came to visit me*".

It is a call from Christ to all of us that are His followers to treat the alien, the stranger the immigrant with fairness, justice and hospitality. It is a call grounded in years of history and personal experience.

It is the same call to the care of others that God expects throughout the Biblical narratives from His people. It is a call grounded in what God seeks from His children and it is to be expressed in their works today (*Matthew 25:40*).

As a faith-based organization, Esperanza USA is called to live and act in the requirements articulated in scripture. These principles or calls to service are clear and definitive. They require demonstrations and actions that show concern for the immigrant by showing hospitality, providing shelter and care.

It is our Christian responsibility to care for those that live among us today. Given this understanding:

- Esperanza USA believes we must secure our borders and that Border Security remain a federal responsibility.
- Esperanza USA believes we should provide comprehensive reform that provides a legal and dignified way to be a part of our country.
- Esperanza USA believes we should not inflict inhumane and unreasonable demands on those here today simply to rectify our policy failures of the past.
- Esperanza USA believes it is unchristian to criminalize acts of mercy and compassion. We call on Senators to step up to the challenge in crafting a bill that would merit the support of the Evangelical faith community.
- Esperanza USA calls on our Evangelical brothers and sisters to denounce unchristian policy reform that ignores millions within our borders and millions more who would legally apply if there were means to do so. We ask for all Christians to stand for reform that reflects the values expressed in our history as followers of Christ.