

5 Things to Remember About Jesus, the Migrant

Our biblical worldview must include thinking through modern political issues, with scriptural insights regarding our nation's complex immigration laws and policies.

What can we learn and apply from the life and practice of Jesus, the holy migrant, regarding our country's current crises of migration, asylum, the rule of law and human compassion? Here are five factors to consider.

First, Jesus emigrated from heaven to earth.

The world, people and family which Jesus of Nazareth joined as the incarnate Son of God were oppressed by the occupying forces of the ruling Roman Empire. In the prior centuries, the Jews had been allowed to migrate back to their homeland after being conquered and forcefully exiled (in two separate mass migrations); the Northern Kingdom to Assyria in the eighth century B.C. and later the Southern Kingdom of Judah exported to Babylon (Persia) in the sixth century B.C.

The Northern Kingdom became assimilated into the Assyrian culture and its future. But, after 70 years in Babylonian captivity, the Jews of the Southern Kingdom were allowed to return to their homeland and to rebuild their temple, cities, and culture.

Then, at just the right time, the sovereign Father God in heaven sent His Son to redeem those who were under the laws of Moses, "that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:5b). All those who believed in Jesus of Nazareth and confessed Him as the eternal Son of God could claim to be children of Father God, in heaven. They were no longer mere servants of God, but heirs of God in heaven, through Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.

During His earthly migration, Jesus taught that He did not grasp for authority on earth, because His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). On His last night with His disciples, John's Gospel tells us that He "knew that he came from God and was going to God" and that "the Father had given all things into His hands" (13:3). Jesus' migration to earth was about to come full circle.

In the critical issues surrounding immigration, we must always seek to understand the higher dimensions of God's goals of spiritual redemption and eventual Kingdom reign.

Second, Jesus' family once sought safety and asylum in another country and culture.

Jesus' earthly parents Joseph and Miriam (Mary's Hebrew name) traveled from Nazareth in the region of Galilee in northern Israel, to the small town of Bethlehem. Bethlehem, in the Judean hills southwest of Jerusalem, was known as "David's city." Joseph was a direct descendant of the famous Jewish King David, who was himself a descendant of the patriarch Abraham. The Roman authorities required everyone to return to their ancestral hometown for a census and to be taxed.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, "wise men ... from the east" arrived in Jerusalem and consulted with the Roman-puppet-king Herod about "Where is He who was born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the east and have come to worship Him" (Matt. 2:2) Herod was "troubled" by this unexpected arrival and announcement of another king and sought an answer from the Jewish chief priests and scribes. A search of the Scriptures revealed (Mic. 5:2) that such a one was to be born in "Bethlehem ... of Judea."

These spiritually-minded men were happy to learn this and followed the guiding star to the very house where the Christ-child was, with Mary, His mother. There, the men presented to Him expensive gifts of "gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Matt.

2:11c). After they had departed “by another route” (Matt. 2:12b), to avoid reporting to Herod, the angel of the Lord came to Joseph in a dream and told him to take Mary and Jesus and escape to Egypt, because King Herod wanted to find and kill the baby king.

The holy family fled by night to seek safety and asylum in Egypt. They remained there until the death of King Herod, who ordered the slaughter of “all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under” (Matt. 2:16b), which his wise men had calculated as the possible age of the Christ-child.

We are not told how long the family was in Egypt, but it was God’s plan for it to be a temporary, protective reprieve (Matt. 2:13). How could they afford to live while in this foreign land?

Biblical scholars suggest they used the expensive, God-provided gifts from the wise men to cover their living expenses during this time of asylum. These foreign aliens, on a non-permanent status in Egypt, brought private resources and provided for themselves. They had no expectation that they were entitled to receive support from the host country’s taxpayers.

Third, Jesus’ family returned to their home country when the crisis was over.

Joseph was again given divine direction in a dream after King Herod had died, and the family “self-deported” (to use Mitt Romney’s words from 2012) from Egypt. Joseph settled his small family again in Nazareth of Galilee, “that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled “‘He shall be called a Nazarene’” (Matt. 2:23b).

Experts believe that Jesus was educated in the local synagogue and spoke the regional dialect of Aramaic, as well as Hebrew and Greek. We are told that during His adolescence “Jesus

increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:52). The writer to the Hebrew diaspora spoke of these "growing years" when he said that Jesus can sympathize with our human weaknesses, because he "was in every sense tempted like we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

God has appointed "fixed times and the boundaries of (our) habitation," (Acts 17:26b) that we might seek Him and find Him. That is more easily done when we are "back home" with family and friends.

However, while foreign visitors are legally among us, perhaps as students or guest workers, we should reach out to them, befriend them, share the Gospel and disciple them for greater kingdom purposes when they return home when their temporary stay among us is over.

Forth, this holy migrant from heaven sustained himself and his family by working.

In Nazareth, Joseph was a carpenter and Jesus followed him in this skilled trade. Later, after He began His public ministry, Jesus came back to Nazareth and taught in the local synagogue on the Sabbath. The people were astonished at his words, wisdom, and miracles. They all knew Him and His four brothers and His sisters and they questioned, "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary" (Mark 6:3a)?

Today, thousands of immigrants enter our country legally each year. Some are short-term visitors, or "sojourners," as the Old Testament called them. Others have visas and work permits in hand. They can make positive contributions to our country and the communities where they temporarily live and work.

Many of these foreigner guests go on to seek permanent residency or even naturalized citizenship. Laboring and living in our communities and learning our English language along with the legal structure of our government provide the bases for genuine assimilation into our "melting pot" nation.

Some obtain citizenship by virtue of being born on U.S. sovereign-soil and become the first link in legal migration, residency or citizenship for their extended families. Others may come legally to our country as students, but overstay the legal expiration of their visas. The result is festering illegality which abuses the generosity of our citizens and social welfare.

Unfortunately, many who enter our country illegally and undocumented buy stolen IDs, creating financial chaos for the victims of this fraud. They use the stolen documentation and proceed to work as day laborers or find other employment. Other illegals give themselves to crime, gang association and other criminal activity—often accompanied by violence perpetrated on innocent citizens and even other minorities, both legal and otherwise.

These violent-prone immigrants do not contribute to the community or the well-being of our country. By rejecting the rule of law when they cross our borders illegally, they sustain themselves and their extended families by consuming health and welfare benefits paid for from taxes on the earnings of other workers, which are inflated to pay for the entitlements provided to the illegals.

Fifth, after Jesus' "visit" to earth, most of the world's Jewish population became immigrants.

After the Roman destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70, many of the Jews living in the land (including Jewish followers of "The Way") dispersed throughout the known world, seeking geopolitical rest and economic sustenance. The latter half of the book of the "Acts of the Apostles" and the epistles these apostle wrote in the New Testament were compiled during that first century.

These religious immigrants became "aliens" and "strangers" in various countries and cultures during the following centuries.

During this same time, many Jewish and Gentile Christ-followers were persecuted and killed for their faith. Ironically and sadly, after Christianity became the approved religion by the Roman Emperor Constantine in the early fourth century, many Jews were persecuted and murdered for being "Christ-killers."

Jews were targeted for oppressive persecution and banished from their homeland for nearly two millennia. They encountered ethnic discrimination in small towns and pogroms in cities throughout Europe. Islamic-supremacist persecution of all non-Muslims rolled through the Middle East and North Africa, beginning in the seventh century. For 450 years, the Islamic Ottoman Empire threatened Europe and Asia, until after World War I. Finally, Jews faced the demonically inspired, government-sponsored annihilation efforts during the 20th century Nazi Holocaust. With moral regret and remorse, survivors were promised a "homeland for the Jewish people" in the historic land of the Bible.

The geopolitical success story of modern Israel is a story of great inspiration. It is a story of an indigenous, religious people returning to the land of their ancestors, creating an exemplary, modern society, based on biblical values and aspiring to be "a light to the nations" (Isa. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3).

Lesson: Followers of Jesus, the holy migrant, must carefully consider their own responses to the afflictions and prejudices experienced by modern aliens, strangers and asylum seekers, knowing that "there but for the grace of God go we." {eoa}

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