

A Believer's Guide to the Immigration Debate

There are no biblical passages laying out the details of a just immigration policy for the U.S. today. A modern nation like ours is not analogous to ancient Israel, nor are biblical figures easily comparable to contemporary illegal immigrants. Immigration is a complex subject, and there are no easy answers for it, but here are 10 considerations that thoughtful U.S. Christians should bear in mind:

» **1. The oft-quoted** command in Leviticus 19:33-34 that “you shall not oppress the alien” should shape our attitude toward immigrants. But the passage doesn’t say how many aliens should be admitted to the U.S. today. Compassion for the foreigner does not necessarily mean admitting all comers.

» **2. The “sojourners”** in ancient Israel were not illegal immigrants. They were temporary residents who agreed to comply with Israel’s laws and respect its customs. They could expect to receive basic justice, but not the full privileges of an Israelite.

» **3. Mary and Joseph** were not illegal immigrants when they fled to Egypt to protect the baby Jesus. They were refugees seeking asylum from political persecution—a right that is recognized under today’s international law. There is no evidence that they broke any Egyptian laws.

» **4. Alongside the biblical** teachings about hospitality to strangers stand the teachings about the importance of the rule of law. Passages such as Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 stress a duty to obey properly constituted human authorities, when their demands do not violate conscience.

» **5. U.S. authorities** are within their powers when they attempt to regulate the flow of immigration into this country.

Any state that loses control of its borders will not be able to fulfill its basic God-given responsibility to protect its citizens.

» **6. It is important** to distinguish the callings of church and state. The church is called by God to welcome all with the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ without distinction for nationality or immigration status. But the state is called by God to enforce justice. It properly makes distinctions between those who obey and those who break the law.

» **7. The state properly** places first the welfare of its own citizens. It does not have to admit immigrants it believes will detract from national well-being.

» **8. There is no place** for racism in the immigration debate. People shouldn't be admitted to or excluded from the U.S. based on their ethnicity.

» **9. There are cases** in which a state may decide to show mercy to those who have broken its laws. It may conclude that strict enforcement of the law—for example, trying to deport all illegal immigrants—would be impossible or counterproductive.

» **10. The possible** unintended consequences of granting amnesty to immigration-law violators must be weighed. We saw this demonstrated with the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, in which amnesty for most who had been in the country illegally led to a spike in new illegal entries. The problem of illegal immigration was amplified.

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