



# God's Heart for Migrants

Biblical Wisdom for a World in Turmoil

Bible Studies for Lent 2017 by Dr David Shepherd

*Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland*

**God's Heart for Migrants.**

2017 Bible Study Series

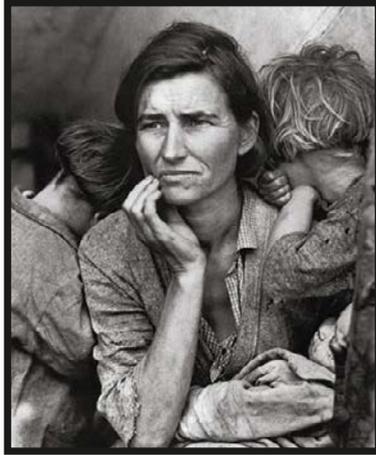
The seventh Bible Study resource offered by BACI

Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland

[www.bibliahibernica.wordpress.com](http://www.bibliahibernica.wordpress.com)

Biblical Association for the Church of Ireland

## Lenten Bible Study 2017



# God's Heart for Migrants

Biblical Wisdom for a World in Turmoil

A 5-part Bible Study by David Shepherd

# CONTENTS

- 1. God's People as Migrants** **p. 5**

From the beginning, when Abram left Ur of the Chaldees for Canaan, the Hebrew people wandered from place to place as migrants, until, led by Moses out of Egypt, they settled in the promised land.
- 2. God's Heart for Migrants** **p. 9**

Reminding the Jewish people that on account of their own sufferings as migrants in Egypt, God requires them in the Law to love and respect the foreign migrants in their community.
- 3. Ruth – a Story of Migration** **p. 13**

The book of Ruth offers a personal story of the hardships and dangers of migration especially for women on their own.
- 4. Ruth – a Story of Integration** **p. 17**

Ruth, the foreign widow of a man who emigrated only to die away from his home, took a huge risk in returning to his people with his mother. How did she come through?
- 5. A Migrant People** **p. 21**

Migration continues to be a theme throughout Jewish history, explored by prophets and historians alike. This Study looks at how their ideas feed into the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels.

# INTRODUCTION

***'Any man's death diminishes me,'*** wrote the Anglican cleric John Donne some 500 years ago, ***'because I am involved in mankind'***.

APART from the gender-specific language, this could serve as a motto for those who cherish the lives of immigrants equally with their own. There are few enough such people, perhaps fewer each year as the millions of refugees from the Middle East continue to increase and the resources of Western democracies shrink.

So the challenge of Jesus Christ is huge: 'I was hungry and you gave me no food... I was a stranger and you did not welcome me... Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to the least of these, you did not do it to me... Depart from me into the eternal fire.' (Matt.26.41 – 44)

His challenge is being met by **some** Christians – and some of other faiths. It is a challenge that far too many who claim to be Christian are refusing, especially Christians in the West. In Lebanon, however, where one third of the population are refugees from other countries, Christian families have been particularly good at hosting refugees who are fellow Christians. Yet refugees determined to reach Europe tend to stay in the camps run by refugee agencies such as UNHCR, which entitles them to seek resettlement in the West.

In Jordan there are around 4 million refugees, 1.4m from Syria, the others mostly from Iraq or Palestine. Only around 25% of the Syrian refugees are in the camps, around 85,000 in Za'atari, around 30,000 in Azraq, and more living in unofficial camps around the country. As in Lebanon, those in the camps get the best deal in terms of education and communal facilities – and onward movement. The Christians among them are disappointed that their religion gives them no advantage in terms of getting to Europe. Should churches here try to change this? Or should we, like the relief agencies, refuse to discriminate?

If ***any man's death diminishes me***, who is my neighbour?

Rowan Williams, at St Martin in the Fields recently, suggested that it is ***'the stranger who could save me'***. Often, as in the case of the Good Samaritan, it is from beyond the 'walls' that we build with our labels for others that blessing and rescue reaches us. We are surprised by God's grace and blessing where we least it expect it. Must we not also be channels of unexpected blessing to those beyond our 'borders'? Are we not called to be ***life-givers*** to all without exception?

A young English woman, recently graduated from Oxford, would surely support such refusal to discriminate. Anna is the only European working with Relief International as an English teacher in the camps in Jordan, the only woman of the group not wearing a veil. Her best friends are now her Syrian co-teachers in the Za'atari and Azraq camps, and it is heart-warming to see photos of her with her Muslim girl-friends, so clear is the warmth of their affection for one another.

Reflecting on her relationships with those who are now closest to her, she writes: 'I suppose the strangest thing for me personally is how little I associate my friends, colleagues and students in the camps with the war I read about in the news. They seem so normal, so friendly, always encouraging me to eat more or to get married, telling me how much they love football and asking if I support Manchester United or Chelsea. I feel I should be able to perceive more differences between me and them. The little girls are like little girls I know back home; they care about playing with their friends, and dancing, and dressing fancy. Yet these girls lived alongside members of ISIS, saw bombs being dropped daily on their cities, and now live in a house the size of my bedroom. When the media talk about 'Syrians' it's about people who seem to have no agency, people who don't seem entirely real. Yet I teach and work with hundreds of Syrians a week and I can't totally get my head to merge the two kinds of 'Syrians' I think about. I forget that they're one and the same.'

Another remarkable woman working with refugees, former MP Sara Teather, notes that she and her colleagues at Jesuit Refugee Service never refer to the refugees they help as their *clients* but as their **friends**, for that is what they so quickly become, many of them also becoming co-volunteers. And she points out that in Hebrew the word **rea** does duty for friend, neighbour, colleague and companion.

The message from all these three is that the refugee, or immigrant, is not just some one we are called to **do good to**, but some one who, like the 'Samaritan' normally rejected by the Jews, turns out to be one who blesses or even 'saves' us, as much as we save him or her. This year's study, reading old stories in new ways, shows that this idea of the outsider as helper / contributor begins already in the Old Testament, before flowering in the teaching of Jesus. Please note that the Bible translation used is the ESV, a recent version which aims to stay as close to the Hebrew or Greek text as possible.

 for BACI

# 1. GOD'S PEOPLE AS MIGRANTS

## Introduction

NOT FOR the first time, immigration is in the news these days and by and large the news is not good. Long gone are the news stories of immigrants contributing to economies, enhancing diversity, and enriching our society. Taking their place on our screens and in the pages of our papers are the 'problems' of immigration—not merely theoretical ones for politicians and policy-makers, but practical problems for real people. The problems for many immigrants in Europe and elsewhere are plain to see: many refugees, propelled from their homelands by war, famine and prejudice, discover that their exodus is fraught with danger. We know (and they discover, first-hand) that migration can be deadly. And if it doesn't cost your life, it may cost your life-savings, as others seek to take advantage of your desperation. Or, if you're very lucky, perhaps the only casualty will be your dignity, as you arrive in a new place to be perceived as someone else's 'problem': taking their jobs, threatening their traditions and simply being 'not from here.'

While these problems are complex and Christians need to look in a variety of directions for answers, one crucial source of wisdom for a world in the turmoil of migration is the Scriptures, and especially that part of the Scriptures in which some of us spend less time: the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible. In its pages we find a Hebrew word, *ger*, whose translation in the King James Version, 'sojourner', is no more helpful than 'resident alien' (NRSV)—which conjures up images of people not from another country, but another planet! The fact that the *ger* is one who comes from elsewhere to live amongst people with whom they don't have a blood or native connection, suggests that the pages of the Hebrew Bible are full of 'immigrants'. Indeed, the father of God's people, Abraham, leaves Ur of the Chaldees (modern day Iraq) to settle in Canaan (modern day Israel / Palestine), but overshoots and settles in Egypt, only to return to settle again in Canaan. His grandson, Jacob, flees for his life (and a wife) to the land of his forefathers and then returns to Canaan, before his son, Joseph is forced to go to Egypt by his brothers, who then eventually join him there along with Jacob himself! If the stories of Genesis were not sufficient to persuade us that 'migration' is embedded deep within the DNA of God's people as we meet them in the Hebrew Bible, we need only turn over the page to Exodus to encounter a people fully aware of their 'immigrant' status and the vulnerabilities which accompany it.

# Reading

## Exodus 1.5 – 2.25

<sup>5</sup> All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt.<sup>6</sup> Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. <sup>7</sup> But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. <sup>8</sup> 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. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.<sup>12</sup> But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. <sup>13</sup> So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves<sup>14</sup> and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. <sup>15</sup> Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,<sup>16</sup> "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." <sup>17</sup> But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. <sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and let the male children live?"<sup>19</sup> The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them."<sup>20</sup> So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. <sup>21</sup> And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. <sup>22</sup> Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

## Exodus 2:1

Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup> The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup> When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. <sup>4</sup> And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. <sup>5</sup> Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. <sup>6</sup> When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." <sup>7</sup> Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?"<sup>8</sup> And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup> And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. <sup>10</sup> When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and

he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."<sup>11</sup> One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people.<sup>12</sup> He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.<sup>13</sup> When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together. And he said to the man in the wrong, "Why do you strike your companion?"<sup>14</sup> He answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid, and thought, "Surely the thing is known."<sup>15</sup> When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian. And he sat down by a well.<sup>16</sup> Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.<sup>17</sup> The shepherds came and drove them away, but Moses stood up and saved them, and watered their flock.<sup>18</sup> When they came home to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come home so soon today?"<sup>19</sup> They said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for us and watered the flock."<sup>20</sup> He said to his daughters, "Then where is he? Why have you left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread."<sup>21</sup> 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 [immigrant] in a foreign land."<sup>23</sup> During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.<sup>24</sup> And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.<sup>25</sup> God saw the people of Israel--and God knew.

## Notes

1.7 – 'fruitful and increased greatly', the narrator reminds the reader that Yahweh is beginning to fulfil his promise to make a nation of Abraham's family (Gen 12.2; 15.5 etc.).

2.18 – 'their father, Reuel', scholars have long puzzled over why Moses' father-in-law is called Reuel here and Jethro in the following chapter (3:1). The ancient writer or editor does not appear to have felt that this apparent discrepancy would trouble his ancient readers.

2.22 – '*Ger*(shom)', includes the Hebrew word *ger* (immigrant) discussed above. This theme of 'remembering' one's own immigrant status will recur.

2.25 – 'God knew', is a literal translation of the same Hebrew verb used in 1.8 where the narrator attributes the oppression of the Israelite immigrants to the rise of a Pharaoh (recognised as a God in Egypt) who did not 'know' Joseph. In verse 25, the reader must decide what or whom 'God knew'.

## Questions

1. What forms of oppression do the immigrants suffer at the hands of the Egyptians?
2. Which if any of these things might be suffered by immigrants today in Europe and/or elsewhere in the world?
3. What types of feelings motivate the various Egyptians' actions toward the immigrants in their midst? Do you or others today identify with these feelings?
4. What facilitates Moses' integration in Midian when he migrates there?
5. How does Exod. 2.23-25 suggest God feels about his migrant people and based on what we know of the rest of Moses' story, what are the means by which he expresses these feelings?

## Prayer

As individuals or as a group take some time to ask God to help you reflect his heart for immigrants and to think about how you might be able to make a difference for good in the life of someone who is not originally from here and may need some help of some kind.

Be alert to the Spirit's leading as you listen for a response to this prayer in the coming days.

Take some time to find out more about the plight of migrants/refugees in other countries in Europe or elsewhere and pray that they would feel God's love for them.

## 2. GOD'S 'HEART' FOR MIGRANTS

WHEN we speak of someone 'pouring out their heart,' it's a reminder that in English, we think of the heart as an 'emotional' organ, the 'source' of love, hate and other passions. In Hebrew, by contrast, *layv*, the word we translate as 'heart' isn't associated with emotion; it's an organ of intention, the place where we decide to do things. This means that when God's people in the Old Testament are exhorted to 'Love Yahweh your God with all your heart.' (Deut. 6.5), it is first and foremost an encouragement to devote themselves to God fully and intentionally—'whole-heartedly'; we would say in English. How God's people were called to express this whole-hearted love to him in the Old Testament is summed up nicely by Jesus' own insistence in the New Testament: 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments' (John 14.15).

At the same time, the line from a famous old song, 'Oh how I love Jesus... because he first loved me' captures something important about the order of things: God's people in the Old Testament were called to loving obedience to his commandments, because He had first loved them. God's love was expressed in countless ways, but within the Old Testament tradition this love was remembered best in the Exodus, the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt, a land in which, as we have seen, they were already immigrants enduring oppression. In fact, if Moses named his son Gershom as a reminder of his own migration experience, God gave the Israelites an even better way to remember theirs: the *Pesach*, or Passover. Encouraged by Exodus itself ("You shall tell your child on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.'" [13.8]), Jews from ancient times to the present day read and commemorate the Exodus story of redemption and migration in the annual *Seder* meal. The unleavened bread (baked in haste), the bitter herbs (reflecting the bitterness of their suffering), the *charoset* (symbolizing the mortar of the bricks used as migrant workers) and other elements all take their place in the ritual re-enactment of the sparing of the Israelite firstborn during the final, terrible plague against Egypt. In this Passover observance, the Jewish tradition remembers their redemption from Egypt and their flight—a migration of migrants—eventually to a new land.

It is only because God 'first loved' the suffering immigrants by allowing them to migrate again, that he asked them to love him—by creating a righteous community which would allow this holy God to be present among them. According to the Old Testament, this is the true purpose of the Law found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—not to be a burden, but a blessing, expressing God's 'heart' (will) and enabling a close relationship between God and his people. By the same token, the people's obedience to this law was understood to be a loving response of gratitude for divine deliverance and redemption of this immigrant people.

One important way in which God called his people to love him by living out their divine vocation as a holy community, was to love others who originated *within* the community. But as we will see in the following readings, God's 'heart' for people also extended *beyond* those who were 'his own'.

# Readings

## Deuteronomy 10.12-19

<sup>12</sup>“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,<sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? <sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. <sup>16</sup> Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. <sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. <sup>18</sup> He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner [immigrant], giving him food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> Love the sojourner [immigrant], therefore, for you were sojourners (immigrants) in the land of Egypt.

## Deut. 1.13-17

[<sup>9</sup>At that time I said to you ...] <sup>13</sup>‘Choose for your tribes wise, understanding, and experienced men, and I will appoint them as your heads.’<sup>14</sup> And you answered me, ‘The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do.’<sup>15</sup> So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you, commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officers, throughout your tribes. <sup>16</sup> And I charged your judges at that time, ‘Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien [immigrant] who is with him. <sup>17</sup> You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike.’

## Deut. 5.12-15

<sup>12</sup> Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.<sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner [immigrant] who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup> You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

## Deut. 26.7-13

<sup>7</sup>Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. <sup>8</sup> And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>10</sup> And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit

of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God. <sup>11</sup> And you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner [immigrant] who is among you. <sup>12</sup> When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner [immigrant], the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled, <sup>13</sup> then you shall say before the LORD your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner [immigrant], the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.'

## Notes

The bulk of the book of Deuteronomy is presented as Moses' last and longest sermon, offered to the migrant Israelites as they are poised on the eastern bank of the Jordan, not yet arrived in the land that was promised. The word which Moses speaks to the people in Deuteronomy is not so much a 'second' (deutero) 'law' (nomos) as an impassioned reiteration of the instructions which had already been given by God through Moses at Sinai (see Exodus). Both there and here, the emphasis is on obedience as a righteous response to God's redemption of his people.

10.12 and repeatedly in these passages – 'the LORD', an English translation which reflects the use of God's personal name here in the Hebrew, Yahweh, translated as 'LORD' in English as a means of reverencing the divine name as was done in early Judaism.

10.16 – Circumcision is of course a physical mark and reminder of the covenant established with Abraham (Gen 17.10-17) and it is a practice which is maintained amongst many Jewish communities today as a sign of Jewish identity. God's exhortation to metaphorically 'circumcise the heart' encourages God's people to commit themselves 'whole-heartedly' to the covenant with him and abandon a half-hearted or even hard-hearted resistance to His will revealed in His instruction. Thankfully, God does not leave his people to do this on their own but takes an active role in the process (cf. Deut. 30.6).

5.12-15 – Like circumcision, the sabbath or shabbat (Heb. 'to cease') is an ancient and enduring Jewish practice which sanctifies (i.e. sets apart) time to encourage the community to remember its dependence on God. It is included in the 'Ten Words' or 'Ten Commandments' recorded earlier in the giving of the law at Sinai (Exod 20), where it is explained in terms of God's resting after creation.

5.14 – 'within your gates', gates of cities in the ancient Hebrew world were the place where commercial, legal and other business was carried out; more importantly they

were a symbol of the protection afforded to those within the walls and afforded the immigrant entry to the protection of the city.

26.12 – ‘tithe’, a tenth of what was produced, a proportion laid down in the law to be given to Yahweh, not as an act of charity, but in recognition that it ‘belongs’ to him (Lev.27.30) and that all produce comes from him.

## Questions

1. In Deut.10.17-19, how do the other mentions of ‘love’ in this passage help to explain why God exhorts/commands his people to ‘love’ the immigrant?
2. In Deut.1.13-17 Moses recalls commanding that immigrants not be deprived of justice. Why and in what ways might immigrants be potentially or actually vulnerable to not receiving the same legal treatment as ‘locals’?
3. In Deut. 5.12-15, how does Israel’s own past relate to how it should treat the ‘immigrant’? Employment has been and continues to be a motivation for migration. Why and in what ways might immigrants be vulnerable to exploitation as ‘workers’? What can be done to reduce the risks?
4. How do Deut 26.7-13 and 10.12-19 suggest that an immigrant might experience God’s love for them in practical terms? In what way might our love for immigrants be expressed in similarly practical terms?
5. Deut. 26.11 encourages God’s people to rejoice in God’s goodness with others, including the immigrant. How might individuals and church communities become more inclusive of immigrants in their celebrations?

## Prayer

Take some time to pray as individuals and/or as a group for ‘immigrants’ you may know.

Pray for God to bring ‘immigrants’ across your path or into your awareness, so that you may practically love immigrants with God’s love for you and them.

Pray for some way of giving materially or financially to support migrants, both as individuals and as a community.

Ask God for guidance as to how you and your church might be more inclusive in your celebrations.

### 3. RUTH – A STORY OF MIGRATION

THE LAW gives us a clear sense of God's 'heart' for migrants and why he insists that his people reflect his love for them by loving the immigrant in their midst in very practical ways. In the way that laws usually do, it deals with the 'migrant' as an anonymous abstraction, according the 'immigrant' not even a number, let alone a name! In the same way, without getting into the specifics, the law offers hints as to why an immigrant might be vulnerable to isolation, alienation, exploitation and even abuse. But the Old Testament consists of more than just law. It also displays a refreshing awareness that migration is not a matter of theory or mere principles, but rather a matter of people in real-life situations. One of the most helpful explorations of the real-life complexities of migration in the Bible is to be found in the Book of Ruth.

Ruth signals its interest in migration in its very first verse (1.1): 'In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in [emigrated to] the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.' This same flight from famine, this elemental need for food which drove many from Ireland long ago, continues to propel people from their places of origin today, especially in certain parts of Africa.

Sadly, having made a life as migrants in Moab, finding local wives for their sons, the family from Bethlehem is struck by tragedy, when both the husband, Elimelech and the sons die, leaving the wife, Naomi, alone with her two Moabite daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. When Naomi, doubly disadvantaged by being both an immigrant and a widow, hears news that the famine has ended in Bethlehem, she sees no alternative but to return home. Recognizing how gloomy her own prospects will be as a returning widow too old to bear more sons, and knowing from experience how difficult life as an immigrant can be, Naomi encourages her Moabite daughters-in-law to return home to their fathers, where they may yet hope to make a new life and have families in their homeland. Orpah agrees, but surprisingly Ruth insists on returning with Naomi to Bethlehem, becoming a migrant herself, pledging her loyalty with the famous words (1.16): 'Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.'

The narrator of the story does not tell us much about the return journey from Moab: down from the plains into the valley, across the river Jordan, and then back up through the Judaeian hills to the fields of Bethlehem. Though not as long as some other migrations in the Old Testament, the journey cannot have been easy for two women, if as we are led to believe they travelled alone. What the story does tell us is that when Naomi arrived in Bethlehem with her foreign daughter, Ruth, 'the whole town was stirred because of them.' Naomi's recounting of her bereavements in her adopted country and her sense that God has treated her badly may well have confirmed the townspeople's perception that Naomi should never have

emigrated to Moab in the first place. We may well wonder if the ‘fields of Bethlehem’—however ripe for the harvest—will be any more welcoming for the Moabite migrant, Ruth, than the fields of Moab were for Naomi.

## Readings

### Ruth 2

<sup>1</sup> Now Naomi had a relative of her husband’s, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. <sup>2</sup> And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.” And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.” <sup>3</sup> So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

<sup>4</sup> And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, “The LORD be with you!” And they answered, “The LORD bless you.” <sup>5</sup> Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?” <sup>6</sup> And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, “She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.” <sup>7</sup> She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.’ So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest.” <sup>8</sup> Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. <sup>9</sup> Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.” <sup>10</sup> Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favour in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” <sup>11</sup> But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. <sup>12</sup> The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” <sup>13</sup> Then she said, “I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants.” <sup>14</sup> And at mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. <sup>15</sup> When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, “Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. <sup>16</sup> And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.” <sup>17</sup> So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

<sup>18</sup> And she took it up and went into the city. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also brought out and gave her what food she had left over after be-

ing satisfied.<sup>19</sup> And her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, “The man’s name with whom I worked today is Boaz.”<sup>20</sup> And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “May he be blessed by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” Naomi also said to her, “The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.”<sup>21</sup> And Ruth the Moabite said, “Besides, he said to me, ‘You shall keep close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.’”<sup>22</sup> And Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, “It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, lest in another field you be assaulted.”<sup>23</sup> So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

## Leviticus 19.9-10

<sup>9</sup>“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 [immigrant]: I am the LORD your God.

## Notes

2.3 – ‘happened to come’, what is here presented as a coincidence will turn out to be no such thing, when viewed through the eyes of faith (2.20).

2.3 – ‘gleaned after the reapers’, during the barley harvest; to glean is to collect what the reapers have missed on their initial pass through the fields.

2.6 (and elsewhere in this chapter) – ‘Moabite/Moab’, the narrator seems intent on emphasizing Ruth’s ‘foreignness’.

2.9 – ‘not to touch you’, the Hebrew verb *naga* translated in the ESV as ‘touch’ is used elsewhere to refer to physical contact which is sexual and sometimes violent. For this reason, we might be better to translate ‘molest’.

2.10 – ‘I am a foreigner’, the Hebrew word used by Ruth to refer to herself here is not the word *ger*, ‘immigrant’, but *nokriyah*, ‘foreigner’ (fem.). Ruth has only recently arrived in Bethlehem and is not perceived by herself or others as having even the gleaning rights of an immigrant (see Lev 19.9-10).

2.20 – ‘our redeemers’, the Hebrew word *go’el* is a technical term referring to a near relative who might intervene to reacquire or redeem lands or even family members which have been sold and might otherwise be lost to the extended family on a permanent basis. The significance of this practice will become clear in the next session.

2.22 – ‘assaulted’, the Hebrew verb here *paga* translated in the ESV as ‘assaulted’ is used elsewhere in contexts where encounters between two parties are fatal, as for

instance when Gideon kills the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna in Judges 8.21. Given that the latter days of the Judges includes mention of some of the most horrific violence toward women in the Old Testament, the news that the book of Ruth takes place in the 'days when the Judges ruled' is worryingly suggestive of danger for Ruth.

Lev.19.9-10 – a passage drawn from that part of the book of Leviticus which contains the laws relating to how the covenant community is to imitate God's holiness (comparable to the traditions we have explored already in Deuteronomy) through its treatment of others within and beyond the community.

## Questions

1. What does your reading of Ruth 2 suggest are some of the challenges which face Ruth as a new arrival in a foreign culture? What are her vulnerabilities?
2. To what extent do you think immigrants to Ireland or other countries face some of the same challenges Ruth faced?
3. What things do you think help Ruth—as a recently arrived 'foreigner'—to integrate?
4. Do you think that Boaz was simply expressing God's love for the immigrant (Lev.19.9-10) or was he going above and beyond the expectation of the law?
5. How might Ruth 2 encourage us as individuals, as churches and as a country to treat 'foreigners' and 'immigrants' differently than we currently do?

## Prayer

As individuals and as a group, take time to pray that you will become more alert to the challenges faced by people arriving here and in other countries from elsewhere.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to make you more aware of ways in which you and your church can treat 'foreigners' and 'immigrants' with a dignity which they may not have experienced elsewhere in Irish society.

Pray that immigrants would be afforded opportunities to use their skills, talents and industry in their new home.

## 4. RUTH – A STORY OF INTEGRATION

THE STORY of Ruth as it is told in the first two chapters of the book relates the decision of Ruth the Moabite widow to migrate with her also widowed Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, back to the fields of Bethlehem. In chapter 2 however, it becomes clear that the fields of Bethlehem are not an easy or even safe place for someone made doubly vulnerable by being both a woman and a foreigner. The threat of sexual interference, violence even—and of a potentially lethal sort—seems to be a real and present danger. If being a widow may mean that Ruth is entitled to collect what has been left behind by the male reapers, her extraordinary gratitude for Boaz's protection may suggest that this protection itself was rather extraordinary—the exception to the rule—and that widowed women recently arrived from other lands may not have expected to receive the protections afforded to those in Bethlehem long enough to be considered 'landed immigrants'.

Despite Boaz's protection and Ruth's gleanings from the barley harvest, however, her situation as a Moabite migrant worker in Bethlehem remains precarious, even though she has returned with Naomi, a native of the town. The harvest will not last forever and with no men to work her dead husband's field, Naomi must sell the field in order to survive. But after the money from the field runs out, what then?

Naomi's mention of a 'redeemer' in chapter 2 (see above) suggests there may be hope, however faint. Under normal circumstances the land—apportioned by God to the people according to tribe, clan and household—should be kept by any and all means within the family. Unfortunately, the circumstances of Ruth and Naomi were far from normal and were in fact desperate. The best scenario would be for the land to be 'sold' to a relative (someone called a 'redeemer') so that the land would at least be preserved within the extended family. Ideally (hope against hope!) this redeemer would also marry Ruth and produce a son, who could then eventually work the land and preserve the name of Elimelech and his son, Ruth's dead husband, Mahlon. But all of this remains merely a hope—and a rather distant one at that—at the end of the second chapter of Ruth.

In chapter 3, however, Naomi hatches a plan to help both her and her immigrant daughter-in-law. Knowing that Boaz is a redeemer, Naomi sends Ruth to him (discreetly so as to avoid any hint of impropriety) to ask him to become their 'redeemer'. Boaz agrees, but there is a hitch. There is another relative who is nearer to them and has the first right of refusal to redeem the land and marry Ruth. So as we move into the fourth and final chapter of the book, Ruth must return to Naomi and wait to hear if and how she will be more fully integrated into her adopted homeland.

# Readings:

## Ruth 4

<sup>4</sup> Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, "Turn aside, friend; sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down. <sup>2</sup> And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down. <sup>3</sup> Then he said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech.

<sup>4</sup> So I thought I would tell you of it and say, 'Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you." And he said, "I will redeem it."<sup>5</sup> Then Boaz said, "The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance."<sup>6</sup> Then the redeemer said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."<sup>7</sup> Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. <sup>8</sup> So when the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he drew off his sandal. <sup>9</sup> Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. <sup>10</sup> Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day."<sup>11</sup> Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, <sup>12</sup> and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman."<sup>13</sup> So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. <sup>14</sup> Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!" <sup>15</sup> He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him."<sup>16</sup> Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. <sup>17</sup> And the women of the neighbourhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. <sup>18</sup> Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, <sup>19</sup> Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, <sup>20</sup> Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, <sup>21</sup> Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, <sup>22</sup> Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

## Notes

4.1 –‘the gate’, the place where transactions and various types of business were carried out in the ancient Near East. (cf. the reference above to the ‘immigrant in your gates’ in the law on p.11)

4.2 –‘elders of the city’, these functioned as judges and witnesses in cases of what we might now refer to as ‘family law’ (see Deut. 21.2)

4.6 –‘impair my own inheritance’, in buying the land alone, the relative would have provided revenue or even an income (if he worked the land) for Naomi. However, to marry Ruth and produce an heir to inherit this land would be for the benefit of Elimelech’s name, not his own name, which would be carried on by his own son.

4.12 –‘Tamar bore to Judah’, a reference to Genesis 38, where another non- Israelite woman, Tamar, went to extraordinary lengths to conceive and give birth to Perez, from whom Boaz himself was descended (vv. 18, 21).

4.22 –‘Jesse fathered David’, the reference here to David cannot be incidental, given his status as the most famous son of Judah and the greatest king of Israel within the Jewish tradition. For Christians, the mention of David allows Ruth’s story to be situated within the wider story which includes Jesus, the son of God, but also the son of David.

## Questions

1. In Ruth 4.6, the anonymous potential ‘redeemer’ of Naomi’s field retreats from his original interest, saying that he ‘cannot’ redeem it. What is the superficial reason for his change of heart? What is the deeper, underlying reason, do you think?
2. What superficial and deeper reasons are there for our own reluctance to engage with and help immigrants and the reluctance we see in our culture/society and other societies?
3. In what ways does Ruth, the migrant, contribute to the well-being and prosperity of those who are originally from Bethlehem?
4. In what ways have migrants contributed to your own life and/or the lives of those you know? To what extent have migrants ‘blessed’ and benefited Irish society and the communities within it?

## Prayer

Take time individually and/or as a group to pray about your own attitude toward immigrants we meet or see in the media.

Ask God to help you to identify any reluctance in your own heart to reach out to immigrants and the reasons for it.

Give thanks to God for the ways in which migrants have contributed to your own life or the lives of those you know and pray that immigrants would be given opportunities to bless people here and that they would seize these opportunities.

## 5. A MIGRANT PEOPLE

WHILE the Book of Ruth begins by illustrating the challenges of migration and integration—first for Naomi in Moab and then for Ruth in Bethlehem—the book appears to end ‘happily ever after’: the future of both women is secured and Ruth is offered the opportunity to begin again in her new home. And yet, to the end, Ruth remains a Moabite (Ruth 4.10), someone from elsewhere. Moreover, it is worth reflecting on how this immigrant Ruth achieves the level of integration which she does. Naomi’s local knowledge and Ruth’s own initiative and industry certainly contribute, and God’s blessing is acknowledged, but the decisive factor for Ruth (and Naomi) is Boaz’s redemption of the field and his marrying Ruth. One wonders what these women’s lives might have been like had Boaz not got involved.

The provision for immigrants which we have seen reflected and enshrined in the law may well have allowed Ruth to survive, gleaning what she could, accepting whatever tithe came her way, being included in the cultural and religious life of the Judahite community in Bethlehem, at a certain level. But no matter how long she stayed in Bethlehem, it seems quite clear that at another level, Ruth would always remain ‘the Moabite’, the immigrant, the person from elsewhere (and therefore not ‘here’). While the provision of Deuteronomy will have ensured that she was included in the community of God’s people, Deuteronomy 23.3 may suggest that Ruth as a Moabite was not allowed to engage with all aspects of their religious life. The verse reads: “No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of The LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of The LORD forever” (ESV). Whatever the level of integration, she would always be the ‘immigrant’—a ‘blow-in’, as non-locals are sometimes called in this country.

Yet there are also clues within the Old Testament itself that things might not always continue this way, that things might be different in the future. We catch a glimpse of this in the book of Ezekiel, a prophet called by God to speak his word to his people after they themselves had been deported, when, long after the days of the Judges, Judah and Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian invaders and the temple was destroyed. Those forced to migrate to Babylon and live in exile there in a foreign culture were once again what their ancestors had been: immigrants. Amidst the pain of their dislocation and alienation from their homeland, God’s word through Ezekiel was that God’s people would—like Naomi and like the Exodus generation long before—return to the land which would be divided up amongst them as it had been after the Exodus.

But not quite as it had been. We read in Ezek.47.21, “So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel.<sup>22</sup> You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners [immigrants] who reside among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.<sup>23</sup> In whatever tribe the sojourner [immigrant] resides, there you shall assign him his inheritance”, declares the Lord GOD.

Here we see the beginning of a radical expectation, not that God's people would welcome the immigrant at arm's length as before, but that the immigrant would be welcomed with open arms, indeed fully embraced to the extent that the notion of 'them' and 'us' begins to dissolve and perhaps even disappear entirely. In Ezekiel's prophetic hope is the beginning of a notion of God's people in which ethnic and national distinctions, 'who has been where and for how long', become irrelevant. Such a hope seems still to have been nurtured down to the coming of Jesus and the writings of his followers, to which we now turn.

## Readings

### Matthew 2.13-23

...An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."<sup>14</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt<sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.<sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:<sup>18</sup> "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."<sup>19</sup> But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,<sup>20</sup> saying, "Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."<sup>21</sup> And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.<sup>22</sup> But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee.<sup>23</sup> And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophet might be fulfilled: "He shall be called a Nazarene."

### Matthew 25.34-39

<sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'<sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,<sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'<sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?'<sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?'<sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'<sup>40</sup> And 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.'

## 1 Peter 2.6-11

<sup>6</sup> For it stands in scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."<sup>7</sup> So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"<sup>8</sup> and "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.<sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

## Philippians 3.20-21

<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

## Notes

Matt.2.13 –'Herod', the Great, who died in 4 BCE. Archelaus (v. 22) was one of the sons amongst whom his kingdom was divided on his death.

Matt.2.14 –'Out of Egypt, I called my son', a reference to the Old Testament prophecy of Hosea 11.1: 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.' This in turn draws on the identification of Israel as God's son in Exod.4.22-23, where the otherness of God's people is being exploited by the Egyptians.

Matt.2.22 –'afraid to go there', giving the impression that were it not for Archelaus, Joseph and his family might well have settled in Bethlehem, where Jesus was born and Joseph was from.

Matt.25.35, 38 –'stranger', the Greek word is *xenos* from which English derives the word 'xenophobia' (a fear or dislike of strangers). This is also the word which the Greek translators of Ruth used to translate the Hebrew word, *nokriyah*, 'foreigner', with which Ruth introduces herself to Boaz.

Matt.25.39 –'the least of these my brothers', suggests that Jesus has in mind here showing hospitality to his followers, disciples etc., who will in Matthew shortly be sent out to fulfill the great commission (ch. 28). These then are not immigrants, but foreigners, strangers. Yet the point is clear: those who might otherwise expect to be unwelcome or mistreated because of their foreignness are to be welcomed as the people of God. This applies equally to immigrants.

1 Peter 2.6 –'believes in him', a reference to belief in Jesus, to whose followers this letter is addressed.

1 Peter 2.11 –‘sojourners and exiles’, a combination of terms in the Greek which corresponds well to the idea of ‘immigrants’. The two terms appear in the Greek translation of Genesis 23.4, where Abraham refers to himself as he is seeking to purchase from local Canaanites a plot of land on which to bury his wife. Abraham is not a local or native to the place, having come to Canaan from elsewhere. Here in 1 Peter, Christians are being encouraged to think of themselves as ‘immigrants’, made different from those around them by living lives which are morally responsible (v. 11) and obedient to the word of God (v. 8).

Philippians 3.20 –‘our citizenship is in heaven’, this idea of heaven as our final destination, the ‘home’ where we really belong, is an idea which allows us to make sense of 1 Peter’s insistence that we as Christians really are ‘immigrants’ in this world and ‘strangers’ to a culture around us which does not follow Christ or heed God’s word. See also Hebrews 13.12–14 for Jesus as ‘outsider’ and Christians’ hope in a heavenly city to come.

## Questions

1. Why do you think it is important for Matthew to let his readers know that Jesus was an migrant/refugee?
2. In what ways, if at all, does Matthew’s presentation of Jesus himself as a refugee from state violence affect how you view refugees from state (and other) violence today?
3. How aware are we of ‘foreigners’ in our midst who are our Christian ‘brothers and ‘sisters’? Do God’s people have a particular responsibility to welcome the ‘stranger/foreigner’ who follows Jesus?
4. While Christ has returned to heaven to prepare a heavenly city in which the question of ‘who is from where’ will not be relevant—a city to which we as his followers already belong—in the meantime, we are called to live as ‘foreigners’ here within the increasingly secular culture in which we find ourselves. In what way does 1 Peter 2.8-11 imply that part of this foreignness should include loving the immigrants whom we encounter?
5. How important do you think it is that Christians and the Church make clear in our ministry to migrants that our love and care for them is rooted in God’s love for them? Why?

## Prayer

Pray that those who are fleeing from violence, whether state-sponsored or otherwise, might find refuge and safety.

Pray particularly for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are migrating for whatever reason, and especially those who are doing so for the sake of the gospel.

Pray for protection for them on the journey and a warm welcome on their arrival in a new land.

Pray for the grace to love immigrants wherever you find them and to do so 'in the name of Jesus', meeting their needs as best you can, in a life-giving way.

*Blessed Lord  
who caused all holy scriptures to be written  
for our learning:  
Help us to hear them,  
to read mark learn and inwardly digest them  
that through patience and the comfort  
of your holy word,  
we may embrace and for ever hold fast  
the blessed hope of everlasting life,  
which you have given us in our Saviour  
Jesus Christ.*

Book of Common Prayer



Dr. David Shepherd is a Lecturer in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament in the School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology at Trinity College Dublin and director of the Trinity Centre for Biblical Studies. He and his wife Hilda and three daughters worship at Kill of the Grange Parish in Co. Dublin.

Email: [shepherd@tcd.ie](mailto:shepherd@tcd.ie)

#### BACI OFFICERS:

Chair: **Revd. Dr William Olhausen**

Vice-chair: **Revd. Canon Ginnie Kennerley**

Hon.Sec.: **Annette MacFarlane**

Hon.Treasurer: **Barbara Bergin**

Web-site: **Revd. David Compton**

Parochial: **Revd. Dr Paul Houston**

Website: [www.bibliahibernica.wordpress.com](http://www.bibliahibernica.wordpress.com)

#### PATRONS:

**The Most Revd Dr Richard L. Clarke, Armagh.**

**The Most Revd Dr Michael St.A. G. Jackson, Dublin.**



Cover photo courtesy  
of Creative Commons,  
photo by David Erickson  
on Flickr