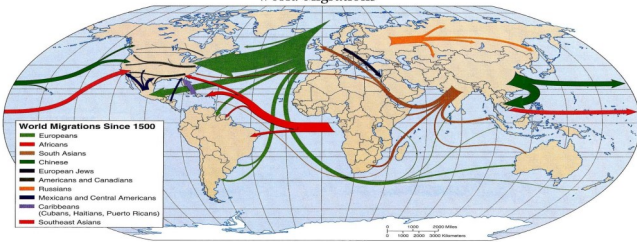


Insert here Your individual/Church's/ministry's mantra

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2024: THE YEAR OF MIGRATION



Many in history have lived their entire lives in one place. Others have made long-term moves between different jurisdictions, sometimes in mass migrations. We recollect the ancient nomadic tribes, the European settlement of the new world, the displacement of 12 million Africans in the slave trade, and 10 million in the partitioning of India.

Why, then, is 2024 labeled the year of migration? Clearly, transport has increased mobility; media has exposed prospects elsewhere; the world's refugee highways are well-trafficked; and migrant difficulties are daily news. But this year the handling of illegal immigration will determine elections in the U.S., U.K., and Europe. (Image: www.reddit.com.)

WHY MIGRATE ?

Not everyone migrates for the fun of it—for the climate, scenery, or better pay. Many have migration forced on them by various emergencies. Consider:

Economic migration: Those on subsistence levels of food or hit hard by famine have nothing to lose. The ubiquity of Irish pubs testifies to the severity of the potato famine in Ireland (1847). It created 1,500,000 migrants.

Conflict migration: The loss in war of family and home loosens bonds to personal roots. With the devastation often comes an openness to a fresh start elsewhere.

Social migration: Religious persecution and political oppression play their part. From 1910 to 2010 nine Middle Eastern countries lost Christians: Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestinian territories, Syria, and Turkey. Christians in Pakistan are down from 30 to 3 million.

WHY AGITATE ?

Given such traumas and the fact that most of us have immigrants in our family histories, why is it that today's

migrants receive such a mixed reception? After all, we like to track down *our* ancestors and *our* DNA. In a word: sin. When we broke loose from God at the dawn of time, we lost our racial cohesion. Sin has ever since set man against man. True, we built together the tower of Babel as an arrogant attempt to return to God on our terms (Genesis 11:1-9). God, though, rebuked the endeavor, scattering our race by the creation of different languages and resultant ethnicities. While languages are fascinating and ethnicities beautiful, the scattering served to highlight just how sinful we are. Once separated from each other, we cultivated xenophobic talk of races, with each people group within our one race jealously defending its self-interest (*our* land, *our* jobs, *our* way of life, and *our* freedoms), and envying what belongs to others. Indeed, it was for *Lebensraum* (living space) that Hitler rationalized his invasion of his neighbors.

WHY LEGISLATE ?

Because of sin migration needs legislation. Open borders are chaotic, unsafe, and unjust. Some migrants feign religious and political oppression. Smugglers, spies, and terrorists enter and bed down. Islam, with its message of submission and Sharia law, uses emigration to subvert nations. The Bible teaches that governing authorities have a God-given responsibility to protect and to reward their citizenry (Romans 13:3). The woke and illegals deem secure borders racist, but they are fine with the crippling of local economies. Rightly utilized, borders simply state, "Try the front door!"



Those migrants entering legally are not to be feared but celebrated. They bring much benefit to society. Recall how Protestant nations gained much from the skills and work ethic of the Huguenots following Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685); and the contribution of the *Gastarbeiter* from Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey to the post-war "economic miracle" in West Germany; and how today's migrants sustain aging work forces in the West where birth rates have become critically low.

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WHAT GOD THINKS OF MIGRANTS



While the Bible uses neither the term *migrant* nor *refugee*, and predates border patrols, passports and visas, it nevertheless has much to say of *strangers* and *foreigners*.

THE BIBLE CHALLENGES OUR MINDS

Although God scattered our race following the tower of Babel, he did so in mercy and grace to restore to himself, and on his own terms, those of every tongue and nation. Reconciliation with God paves the way for reconciliation with one another. Thus, God's Son, Jesus Christ, "*came and preached peace to [Gentiles] who were far off and peace to those [Jews] who were near*" (Ephesians 2:17). Today, then, the Christian church, for all her faults, is the most diverse body on earth. This diversity, though, is but a prelude to the perfect peace and full diversity of the new world to come (Matthew 19:28).

This vision began taking shape in Old Testament times. Although the Israelites were called out from the world to receive God's salvation, the obligations placed on them to love the stranger and the foreigner reflected God's yearning to make strangers his friends and foreigners his own. To signal this, they were allowed in Israel and were circumcised to denote their membership of God's people (Deuteronomy 29:10-12). Once circumcised they could partake of the Passover and joined the celebration of Israel's liberation from Egypt (Exodus 12:19). Following the inauguration of the nation at Mount Sinai, they were subject to the same judicial laws as the Hebrews.

Not so the uncircumcised. To preserve the theological orthodoxy (right opinion) and moral purity of Israel, they were denied the oil used to anoint the tabernacle and priests (Exodus 30:33), and could not be king. Hebrews were not to marry uncircumcised (that is to say, pagan) strangers or foreigners.

God communicated to his people, then, a nuanced approach to strangers and foreigners. His inclusion of them bespoke his yearning for the return of those estranged by sin, and yet the exclusion of uncircumcised strangers and foreigners ensured the preservation of Israel for the forthcoming of God's Son, whose atonement for sin would be sufficient for all without distinction of tongue or ethnicity.

THE BIBLE CHALLENGES OUR HEARTS

God expected his people to emulate his compassion, embracing strangers and foreigners without allowing them to turn their hearts from God. To this end, God reminded

the Hebrews that they, too, had been strangers and foreigners:

- Moses, who became their redeemer, having killed an Egyptian, fled to Midian. There he married Zipporah, and named his son Gershom, saying, "*I have been a sojourner in a foreign land.*" (Exodus 2:22).
- Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt to Canaan, "*the land of sojournings*" (Genesis 17:8) earlier promised to Abraham.
- Following Israel's golden age the nation split. Both the northern and southern kingdoms so sinned against God that he exiled them; Israel (the northern tribes) to Syria in 722 B.C. and Judah (the southern tribes) to Babylon in 586 B.C. (Jeremiah 5:19. Lamentations 5:2).

Applying this history, God told his people: "*You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt*" (Exodus 23:9). Instead, they were to "*love the sojourner*" (Deuteronomy 10:19), albeit in a principled rather than a sentimental fashion. Strangers and foreigners were to support the faith of Israel and not to undermine it.

THE BIBLE CHALLENGES OUR WILLS

God, however, did not so qualify his emphasis on compassion as to negate the Israelites' responsibility toward strangers and foreigners. He called his people to:

(i) *Love strangers and foreigners:* Interestingly, the Bible speaks of the care of sojourners in the same breath as that of widows and the fatherless. Deuteronomy 10:18: God "*executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing*" (cf., Psalm 146:9).

(ii) *Include strangers and foreigners:* God's people are called to dismantle their cliques. In Israel sojourners were included in the offer of salvation (Isaiah 56:6-7), the renewal of the covenant (Joshua 8:33), the preparation of stones for the building of the temple (1 Chronicles 22:2), and the national celebrations (2 Chronicles 30:25).

(iii) *Protect strangers and foreigners:* In Israel, they were entitled to sabbath refreshment like anyone else (Exodus 23:12), to uncorrupted justice (Deuteronomy 24:17), and to freedom from violence and extortion (Psalm 94:6; Ezekiel 22:7, 19).

(iv) *Help strangers and foreigners:* God instructed his people to leave grapes for the poor and the sojourner to gather, and to leave for them the edges of the fields unreaped (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22).

What a call Christians have today to reflect the heart of God whenever we can. After all, our hopes for eternity rest entirely on one who was himself a migrant.

THE MIGRANT WE EACH NEED

Loving strangers and foreigners is no small matter. From God's vantage point, they are an opportunity to reflect:

- *The heart of God.* His concern for the financially and emotionally impoverished symbolized his care for those aware of and troubled by their spiritual poverty.
- *The plight of man.* Christians treat strangers and foreigners best when we recall that, apart from God's grace, that is what we are to God. Listen to King David. For all his earthly wealth and power, he confessed to God that, **"we are strangers before you and sojourners, as all our fathers were"** (1 Chronicles 29:15).
- *The need of Messiah.* To adapt a saying from the early theologians, the Son of God became a migrant that we, estranged from God, may become sons of God.

JESUS WAS A MIGRANT FROM HEAVEN

Jesus was a migrant like none other. He had neither need nor obligation to leave heaven for earth. He was not:

- *An economic migrant:* Recall the words of the apostle Paul: **"Though [Christ] was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich"** (2 Corinthians 8:9).
- *A conflict migrant:* Nothing could have been more tranquil, joyful, and pleasurable than heaven and the love eternally known within the Godhead (John 17:24). How satisfied the Son of God would have been to have remained in heaven were it not for the agreement within the Godhead that he should leave the idyllic conditions of heaven to rescue helpless sinners here below (Psalm 40:7-9; Hebrews 10:7).
- *A social migrant:* Heaven was without political oppression or religious persecution. Yes, Satan had revolted against God, but Jesus recalled that he had seen **"Satan fall like lightning from heaven"** (Luke 10:18).

It was, then, all for God's glory on the one hand, and in love for strangers and foreigners to God on the other that the Son migrated from heaven. To quote the hymn of Frank Houghton (1894–1972):

*Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor,
all for love's sake becomest poor;
thrones for a manger didst surrender,
sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendor,
all for love's sake becomest poor.*

JESUS WAS A MIGRANT FROM ISRAEL

Instead of running from poverty, conflict, and oppression, Jesus entered for our sakes the plight of migrants. Note



that he:

- *Experienced poverty.* Joseph, his legal father, was a lowly carpenter. Mary, in her Magnificat, describes herself as of **"humble estate"** (Luke 1:48). Having embarked on his itinerant ministry, Jesus remarked that, **"foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head"** (Matthew 8:20).
- *Experienced conflict.* Tyrant monarch, Herod the Great, on hearing from the magi of the birth of a king, set about exterminating all the male infants in the vicinity of Bethlehem. God, though, was ahead of him, warning Joseph to flee with Jesus and his mother to Egypt. Through the night, Joseph and Mary departed on the long, arduous journey, remaining in Egypt until Herod's death. Jesus thus became a migrant, fulfilling upon Herod's death the prophecy of Hosea, **"Out of Egypt I called my son"** (Matthew 2:13-18; cf., Hosea 11:1).
- *Experienced persecution.* Although Jesus was eventually crucified by pagan Romans, it was the Sanhedrin, the council of 70 leading the theocracy, which paved the way for his execution via political oppression and religious persecution.

JESUS WAS A MIGRANT FROM NAZARETH

As a baby Jesus had been preserved in Egypt for the sake of his ministry, but as a man he embarked on a ministry that required his death. Thus, the point came, when, conscious of what our salvation needed, Jesus **"set his face to go to Jerusalem"** (Luke 9:51). There he gained for strangers and foreigners access to God. Writes Paul, **"through him we both [believing Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father"** (Ephesians 2:18).

Luke, the Gospel writer, indicates very particularly how intentional was Jesus' migration from the north of the land to Jerusalem. By his third foretelling of his death (Luke 9:21-22, 43-45; 18:31-34). Jesus had drawn near to Jericho, just twenty miles northeast of Jerusalem (Luke 18:35). Entering Jericho, he passed through, coming next to Bethany and Bethphage, just two miles from the city (Luke 19:1, 28-29). From there he climbed the Mount of Olives to the city, to complete his sufferings for our sin.

Christ's life was not "the American dream," a quest for personal fulfillment or protection, but a commission from heaven to save the alienated and the estranged. His atonement is the hope of all who know that our sins have distanced and estranged us from God. But has this hope become yours? (Image: <https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/>.)

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READY TO MIGRATE?

Sin and estrangement from God are so familiar to us that they feel normal. When, however, God begins to work in our lives, we feel keenly our distance from him, the role our sin has played in that estrangement, and our inability on account of it to gain access to God.

It is then, and only then, that our hopes turn to Christ. The Spirit of God helps us to grasp our spiritually poverty, to see the ravaging effect on our lives of scandalous or respectable sin, and to appreciate how the Devil has enslaved us. Thereby, the Spirit creates within us a yearning to come to God, to receive his favor, and a new life in his kingdom. In other words, the Spirit convicts us of our sins, and of the sinful and futile endeavor to enter the kingdom of God by ways other than by Christ. He impresses on us that we come to God by Christ, or not at all, for there are, and can be, no "illegal migrants" in heaven.

We come to Christ with a passport and a visa. Unlike government travel documents, these are free to us. The one is repentance, the other faith. Repentance without faith in Christ bespeaks conviction of sin without hope that Christ has atoned for it. Faith in Christ without repentance implies desire for access to God and his favor without a forsaking of the sin that so offends God and blocks our way to him. (Image below: www.europeanleadership.com.)

We need, then, a believing repentance *and* a penitent faith. Those so repenting and believing testify that "[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).



Come, then, to Christ! He calls you to leave the one kingdom for the other. Do it for yourself and, as migrants do, for future generations of your family, too.



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