



## TOWARD A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF IMMIGRATION

TO: LEGISLATORS

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**I**t's a real blessing to have so many Freshman Congressmen tracking with the ministry in the Capitol. Some of you have asked me to do a Bible study on Immigration, since that is currently being debated. Accordingly, I am revising an earlier study I did a year or two ago that you probably didn't see (unless you were exposed to it in one of our state capitol ministries). It is a good time for all legislators to refresh themselves on the subject – and a good time for me to improve the study with an eye toward developing a systematic theology regarding Immigration; I invite your input and help with such a momentous task.

My prayer is that God will use His Word to inform everyone on the Hill regarding this particular matter, because we all need the wisdom of Solomon on this most difficult matter.

May God guide your actions as you study what the Bible says about nations and Immigration.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

With the number of illegal immigrants in this country estimated at over 13 million and growing, and the present governmental determination to attempt to reform a badly broken policy, it seems timely and proper for me to once again engage God's Word on this subject for your benefit.

When it comes to the Bible and Policy it is the responsibility of a careful Bible expositor to discover the analogous, repeated voice of God's Word on a matter (or if not specifically spoken of in Scripture, to discover and apply related and proper biblical principles). Conversely, it is not my job to offer detailed policy positions or solutions. That's your job as a Christian legislator, and I might add a more difficult one. But in order for you to do your job effectively and in a way that pleases God, you must have accurate biblical input. Without this guidance, it is much more difficult to arrive at policies that are both pleasing to God and beneficial to the advancement of the nation. The book of Judges illustrates deficient, ill-principled reasoning when it twice states, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25). That is my concern regarding immigration policy. Biblically uninformed policy inevitably makes for bad policy. Witness the *No Fault Divorce* legislation that Ronald Reagan signed into law as the Governor of California in 1969. He would later state that this was his "greatest regret."<sup>1</sup> The policy backfired, having a deleterious effect on marriage and our country because it was based in pragmatic expedience, not biblical exposition. Why? That state law undermined the biblical law of **cleaving/being joined** as God expressly commands in His institution of marriage. This serves as a good, earlier, parallel example of hubristic humans attempting to redefine God's institution of Marriage.

May Immigration Reform be not driven by expedience and convenience! May "everyone do what is right in God's eyes." As tempting as

pragmatic solutions might be, they lack God's wisdom, and end up hurting more than helping all involved. Keep this in mind as you weigh immigration reform.

In my ongoing Bible and Policy Series that I issue from time to time, my desire is to provide you with the non-negotiable bedrock biblical principles for service to you in framing God-honoring policies. Please come to Bible study and let me know if I've missed anything here – as I am by no means perfect in my craft.

In metaphoric summary of this introduction, hopefully what follows is a balanced meal brought forth from God's kitchen – void of any alterations by the waiter – and now it's up to you the diner to assimilate the meal.

### II. THE TOWER OF BABEL

Our understanding and construction of a systematic theology on Immigration begins (like most theology) in the Book of Genesis, after the flood in Genesis 9:1 and 9:7, God repeats His command to mankind (that is first given in Genesis 1:28) to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Keep this in the back of your mind.

After the fall of man (Gen. 3) God's creation begins to show an ongoing proclivity to disobey God – even His simplest commands. It is this overt and ongoing rebellion that necessitates the flood. But inundation did not put an end to insubordination: soon thereafter creation's defiance of God surfaces again in this way: Rather than **scatter** from the region of Ararat (per God's specific command in 11:4 and in concert with His earlier command to "fill the earth") the descendants of Noah willed to do just the opposite. They desired to stay-put and build a monument – not to God's greatness, but to their own! That monument is known as the Tower of Babel. Note how God reacts to this in Genesis 11:6-8:



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***The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them. "Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.***

Here then is the underlying biblical reason why God wants there to be a diversity of nations, which is rudimentary to understanding the mind of God as it relates to immigration. The sin nature *in* man necessitates a separation *of* man, versus the accumulation of man and his power. The veracity of the axiom, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupt absolutely"<sup>2</sup> is underscored by this passage. It is this principle of Scripture that informed our Founding Fathers relative to the separation of powers within our Government. The Tower of Babel illustrates the idea that one of the results of Man's fallen nature is pride and an over-estimation of his own importance – and that self-importance is the seedbed for man's desire for power. All of this was in play at Babel: Here was an all-out quest for a one-nation-in-the-world form of existence and governance, wherein man worships his own greatness rather than God's. Babel serves to illustrate man's open defiance of God. And its modern-day equivalent is the philosophy of Humanism.

Further evidence of God's opposition to a one-nation-world is the establishment of such by the coming Antichrist in the future. Note Revelation 13:7:

***It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.***

At this point in time God grants Satan and his pawn, the Antichrist, temporary control over Civil Government as the Antichrist rules over a one-nation-world.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly both Genesis 11 and Revelation 13 in different ways serve to underscore this biblical truth and rudimentary principle in the formation of a theology on immigration:

**PRESENTLY GOD DESIRES THE  
WORLD TO BE COHABITATED BY  
NUMEROUS INDEPENDENT NATIONS**

This foundational premise is where our study of immigration need begin, and many things flow out of it: It follows that nations, by God's design are to have different languages, cultures, and boundaries. Out of necessity and remedy for the fall and the power-hungry presence of sin, this is God's blueprint for today. In this way God is more apt to receive glory from His creation than if, like the prideful world-conquering empires of history – Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, the dream of Hitler, or that of the coming Antichrist – mankind becomes caught-up in self-worship and uses his unchecked assimilation of power to abuse others whom God has created in His own image and likeness. This is the witness of history wherein the diversification of nations principle has been violated by world conquerors. Accordingly and importantly, **so the Lord scattered**. Summarily, this is the reason and the basis for multiple, autonomous nations, which are so fundamental to a Christian worldview understanding.<sup>4</sup>

### III. BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES

If sin necessitates God's standard and design for the world to be composed of independent nations, then sin in essence is the underlying reason why there need be national borders and boundaries. It follows that borders and boundaries are sanctioned by and stem from the mind of God; and it therefore follows that the enforcement of borders and boundaries by governments is tantamount to manifesting the mind and will of God.



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Now add to our theological construction Romans 13:1. This passage expressly states and reinforces the proposition: God is the author of each nation.

***Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.***

Scripture therefore teaches that God not only **scattered** people, but in addition He specifically **established** nations. These are key constructive, essential principles relative to immigration.

That the will of God is for the existence of independent nations with respective borders and boundaries is further evidenced by God's descriptive words relative to the classification of people in the OT nation of Israel....

#### IV. COUNTRYMAN AND SOJOURNERS

In numerous OT passages one learns that the God of Israel distinguished between three types of people in the land:

##### DISTINGUISHING VARIOUS PEOPLE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

Designation	Known As	Hebrew
Citizen	Countryman	<i>Asb</i>
Legal Immigrant	Sojourner	<i>Ger/Toshab</i>
Foreigner	Illegal	<i>Nokri/Zar</i>

An Israelite citizen is referred to as a **countryman** *ach*, whereas a legal immigrant is referred to as a **sojourner** *ger* or *toshab*, and a foreigner is called an **illegal** *nokri* or *zar*. Important to this study, evident from the OT, is that an **illegal** did not possess the same benefits or privileges as a **sojourner** or **countryman**. This fact can be illustrated from many passages. Notice for instance the words of

Ruth the Moabite, and her response to Boaz the Israelite in Ruth 2:10:

***Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?"***

Not only was Ruth a **foreigner** *nokri*, an illegal immigrant, she was a Moabite illegal, whom according to Deuteronomy 23:3 was forbidden to migrate into Israel altogether! In relation to the immigration laws of the land, to entertain Ruth whatsoever was a remarkably generous and gracious offer on behalf of **Citizen** Boaz, if not illegal? (Perhaps Boaz already had marriage on his mind which tends to bypass the paperwork necessary at "Ellis Island" so to speak). The point is that Ruth's self-declaration serves to underscore the classification of people in and by Ancient Israel.

Furthermore a **citizen/countryman** was expressly forbidden to take advantage of or mistreat a legal immigrant, known as a **sojourner**, per Exodus 22:21 and Deuteronomy 10:19 respectively:

***You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.***

***Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.***

In forming an immigration theology, a **sojourner** could be likened to a legal immigrant and a **foreigner** could be likened to an illegal immigrant today. Note Hoffmeier, a biblical expert on this subject:<sup>5</sup>

A sojourner (sometimes translated as stranger) was a person who entered Israel and followed legal procedures to obtain recognized standing as a resident alien.

Hoffmeier goes on to say, that on the other hand, Israel treated illegal immigrants differently:



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Illegal immigrants should not expect these same privileges from the state whose laws they disregard by virtue of their undocumented status.

The classification of people today in most every nation is based on Israel's OT example. More importantly, these standard categories of one's standing and the differentiation between citizens, immigrants and foreigners are representative of the will of God; they have been the distinctions in the mind of God ever since He scattered the people into different nations in Genesis 11. Summarily to this point:

### THE GOD OF INDEPENDENT NATIONS DIFFERENTIATES BETWEEN THE PEOPLES OF A NATION

It therefore follows that governmental leaders today in every nation – to be biblically representative – should invoke and staunchly maintain legal distinctions of status between their resident peoples: Citizens, Immigrants and Foreigners. To state confidently that America is *One Nation Under God* means these classifications should never be obliterated; the eradication of these classifications should not be on the table of immigration policy discussions. As obvious as this conclusion may seem, there are those who believe that because God is impartial, and created all mankind in His image, that believers should be the leading proponents of a borderless world. Impartiality and *Imago Dei* however, in no way eclipse the specificity of the aforementioned mind of God on this matter. In fact, these further characteristics of God can be easily folded into the above nationalistic distinctions also revealed in Scripture: the later mentioned truths in no way cancel the former truths (cf. Acts 20:27) relative to a biblical theology on Immigration. Legal status in the country you reside in, impartiality and *Imago Dei* in no way contradict one another in the mind of God – nor should they conflict in our personal mind or national laws. One should not be deemed a racist who believes in upholding legal status in a country...More about that a bit later in the study.

### V. OBEYING CIVIL AUTHORITY

Romans 13:1-7 and 1Peter 2:13-14 infer that all people should respect and obey the immigration laws established by the leadership of a given country. Note in this regard Romans 13:4:

***For [Government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.***

In this passage, Paul, a **citizen** of the Roman Empire is addressing believers who are **citizens** of the Roman Empire living in the Capital city of the Roman Empire. Not only does he state here the need for them to abide by the rule of law, which immigration was certainly an aspect of, but in addition carefully notice that he is implying what the motive should be behind the lawmakers' (herein term **ministers** *diakonia*, meaning servants) lawmaking: To look out for the welfare of other **citizens**; such laws are intended **to you for good**.

It is not overreaching to extrapolate from this passage that immigration laws, like all of a nation's laws, should stem from a desire to protect a nation and its citizenry.<sup>6</sup> That protection should deter a myriad of intrusions by outsiders: such as illegal drugs, weapons of destruction, disease, property and job theft, and the likes, which could result from **illegals** who have never pledged their allegiance to the nation and its laws by virtue of the fact that they have broken the laws of the land by entering the country illegally.

In that God intends for citizens to obey their governing authorities, and in that those authorities have deemed positive and negative migratory policies, it follows that the immigration laws of every nation need be biblically based and strictly enforced – all with utmost confidence and assurance of God's approval!



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**VI. RESTRICTIONIST NOT RACIST**

It need be especially underscored that an advocate of immigration restriction does not necessarily equate to being a racist. Imposing strict restrictions on immigration should stem from biblical motives of ensuring the general welfare of the nation versus denying an illegal the potential for a better way of life. To procedurally exclude foreign individuals from citizenship who might be criminals, traitors or terrorists, or who possess communicable diseases is not racist in the least! It is good stewardship to protect the citizens of a nation who have unmistakably pledged their allegiance! Holding to a biblical theology on immigration in no way implies that one is necessarily a racist!

**VII. NO BOUNDARIES,  
NO COMPASSION**

One additional misnomer is to believe that those who are tough on immigration are patently compassionless. Just the opposite is true: In a world of limited resources and GDP, for a nation to enforce no boundaries or defense relative to alien incursion is in the end to be compassionless. Such leniency, as evidenced by current American immigration policies, eventually bankrupts the treasury. This happens when non-citizens are the recipients of endless grants of entitlements, health benefits, employment insurance, education scholarships, etc. – all to those who have never pledged allegiance to the flag that they willingly take from! A bankrupt treasury ends up not being able to render appropriate gestures of compassion, such as administering the procedures and processes of legitimate immigration requests.

**VIII. ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES**

The standard of Scripture on immigration is obvious, consistent and not difficult to understand. I have probably not said anything new that the seasoned Christian lawmaker does not already know. But the question as to how a nation that has

strayed from God's standard gets back to God's standard is a complex and difficult one – and if you have read this far, that is probably what you are waiting for me to address! Let me see if I can.

(Typically this is where I start to get off the train as an expositor, and defer to the wisdom of the boarding policymakers, having done my duty of exegeting for you the bedrock, inviolate biblical principles related, in this case, to immigration. But not so fast! The services of exposition should include illuminating other inviolate principles of Scripture and attributes of God – all of them, not just some – that need be incorporated in a comprehensive biblical understanding. Summarily, there are at least six biblical principles that come to my mind that bear on this matter:

**A. GOVERNMENTS MUST PROTECT  
THEIR PEOPLE**

I have already made this point. But it is the first in the sense of priority relative to the five that follow. In Romans 13:4 Paul states under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “for it [governing authorities] does not bear the sword for nothing.” Most governments seek the welfare of their people by punishing evildoers; that is how God designed them to be. People that are in a country *illegally* are a potential threat to the welfare of those who are in the country *legally*. It is out of an inherent desire imbued by their Designer, that governmental bodies want to protect their citizens – and if they don't they should. In terms of immigration, for a government to be pleasing to God and receive His blessing, it has no option but to protect its citizenry from illegal immigration per Romans 13:4. It must always protect its borders and punish illegals for entrance. Any governmental response that is less than this violates God's intention for governments.

**B. PERSONAL INDUSTRIOUSNESS, NOT  
GOVERNMENT, IS GOD'S MEANS OF  
PROVISION FOR INDIVIDUALS**



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Part of the curse of The Fall of Man in Genesis 3:17-19 was the economic necessity that man would now have to work in order to obtain necessary provisions. Paul restates this same idea in the NT book of 2Thesallonians 3:10:

***For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.***

The Institution of Government is not God's intended means for providing for people; rather Government's role is limited to "rewarding those who do good and punishing those who do evil" (1Peter 2:13-14). God intends for people to support their government, not for their government to support them. Fundamental to immigration reform is the need to remove the governmental magnet of alluring entitlements that serve to entice illegal entry into the country in order to thereafter easily receive them. Such forms of provision are not pleasing to God and only work to destroy personal honor, character and productivity in the recipient. Government entitlement programs are not biblical for anyone, let alone illegals. God intends for people to first meet their own needs; but if for some legitimate reason that is impossible, and they possess needs, they are to be met by other individuals in their family, or else the Church, but not the State. In the genius of God, the real needs of the individual can be met and perhaps overcome much more effectively and efficiently through those closest to him than by the impersonal state.

#### C. GOVERNMENTS MUST FURTHER THEIR COUNTRY

Akin to the above, also based upon Romans 13:4, is the inherent responsibility of a government to advance the country, meaning its leaders will want to enact immigration policies that only allow people into the country who can advance, not detract from it. It also means that its schools should prioritize the enrollment of its citizens and exclude illegals.

#### D. GOVERNMENTS ARE ENTITLED TO COLLECT TAXES

In that every country is competing with others in the world market, the lesser the tax the more competitive the nation. Having stated that, God grants every government the right to collect all forms of tax from every citizen. Note Romans 13:6

***For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them; tax to whom tax is due...***

Especially interesting to this topic, the Greek word for **taxes** *phoros* specifically relates to the taxes a person would need to pay to those who conquered their nation. The double emphasis being this: Even if one is in subjugation to a foreign leader (which is the case with an Illegal), they are nevertheless biblically obligated to pay taxes. Further, the word for **Render** *apodidomi* has the connotation of "paying something that is owed."

If concessions are granted to illegals to obtain citizenship status over a period of years while remaining in the country as a part of Comprehensive Immigration Reform, then this biblical insight needs to be taken into consideration in a God-glorifying workout plan.

#### E. GOVERNMENTS MUST PUNISH EVILDOERS

Also in Romans 13:4, God intends for Governments to bear the sword. They are to be "an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." This means Government is sanctioned, bound and responsible to punish those who break the law. There must be an extraction of due recompense for crimes committed, including illegal immigration. Appropriate and just fines need to be levied both if illegals choose to stay and work toward citizenship or else choose to leave. God's attribute of righteousness and justice means there is



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always to be a payment to balance an offense (versus simply letting an illegal go back to his or her country with no fines). This principle suggests that immigration reform must demand a cost for those who have entered America illegally. Immigration amnesty on the other hand, creates an injustice with those who have instead worked through the legal process to become a citizen of the United States.

## F. GOVERNMENTS AND MERCY

When you think about it, whereas God, individuals, families, churches and corporations can manifest grace and mercy, the institution of Government cannot. Whenever Government does that it manifests injustice toward someone else. Therefore fundamental to Immigration Reform is the need to demand that illegals meet the same requirements as others who have legally obtained citizenship status.

## IX. APPLICATIONS OF THEOLOGY

Here then are six principles from this embryonic Biblical Theology Of Immigration. These need to be manifest in Comprehensive Immigration Reform in order to create laws that are in line with, and pleasing to God:

**A:** Foreigners should not be allowed into a country. Borders and Oceans should be impenetrable so as to discourage entrance.

**B:** Foreigners should not be able to partake of any governmental entitlements (Governments should not be in that business to begin with). Nor should they be allowed to have any licenses, legal identification or enrollment in any institutions.

**C:** Foreigners who can help advance (not detract) should be afforded immigration consideration. Foreigners seeking citizenship (F) should have citizen-sponsors who can testify to their past value productivity, character and loyalty.

**D:** Foreigners should be required to pay similar taxes, as do citizens, both present and past due.

**E:** Foreigners, whether headed toward citizenship or expulsion, should be justly punished.

**F:** Given the *government's* violation of the biblical principles associated with Immigration, exceptions need to be made by it to achieve a successful work-out plan for a stated period of time – given the inordinate amount of illegals the Government has allowed to enter, live here,, and give birth to others. Such is not so much an unjust display to those who have gained citizenship legally, as it is the repentance of the Government for having broken God's principles relative to the aforementioned.

May God grant you, our lawmakers, wisdom in crafting this last point into a policy that is pleasing to God. I will be praying for you in this regard.

<sup>1</sup> Judy Parejko, author of *Stolen Vows: The Illusion of No-Fault Divorce and the Rise of the American Divorce Industry*, (InstantPublisher, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2012) states CA Assemblyman Hayes "was responsible for doggedly pursuing [the no-fault divorce] bill because he was facing a divorce and he didn't like the rules at the time. Nowadays, his actions would be called a conflict of interest."

<sup>2</sup> John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, first Baron Acton (1834–1902) is attributed to the author of this quote.

<sup>3</sup> In a study of the doctrine of sin, specifically Corporate Sin, it need be noted that Satan is *not* presently in control of Civil Government (a theological gaffe shared by many Evangelicals who thereby reason that "All governments are evil" and logically justify their separation from any involvement in it thenceforth). Even though Satan acts like he controls the world when he tempts Christ in Luke 4, we know elsewhere from Scripture that he does not (in the Luke 4 temptation Satan is lying to Jesus).

<sup>4</sup> This is the biblical basis and reasoning as well for why a country should not use its military might to conquer others, eclipsing whatever other pragmatic reasons might be proffered. Fortunately and rightfully, this has not been a historic temptation of our superpower nation.

<sup>5</sup> Hoffmeier, James K. *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* (Crossway Books, Wheaton, 2009) p 52

<sup>6</sup> Such proper attitudes are reflected by the lawmakers who wrote the US Constitution. It states that the laws of America are motivated by and meant to "ensure domestic tranquility" and to "provide for the common defense." Such are noble, biblical desires that need continue to be incorporated in the attitude and spirit of necessary immigration reform policies.