

## e-concepts

A Weekly Publication of Relational Concepts Inc.

### Old Testament Israel Treated Immigrants as Guests, Not Citizens

By Dr. David DeWitt

Whereas the church is not a government but a plurality of believers living under different governments all over the world, Israel was a government. So what can we learn from God's commands to the nation of Israel about immigration? First of all, we must say that the immigrants living in Israel were not exactly the same as immigrants to our countries. Since Israel was a racially oriented theocracy, foreign immigrants were never completely assimilated (Deuteronomy 14:21; 15:1-3). The closest Hebrew word to "immigrant" would be the common word (*ger*). Here is how it is translated: alien (40), aliens (11), foreigners (1), immigrants (1), sojourner (5), sojourners (2), stranger (25), stranger's (1), and strangers (6).

#### Here Are Three Relevant Principles

1. No (*ger*) "immigrant" was to be immediately assimilated into the nation, especially if they had a history of treating Israel poorly.
  - Deuteronomy 23:3-4 — *No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.*
2. No (*ger*) "immigrant" was to be treated unjustly just because they came from a different country or were of a different race. The government was to instruct its citizens to support every (*ger*) "immigrant" who needed support, as they would their own orphans and widows.
  - Deuteronomy 24:17-18 — *You shall not pervert the justice due **an alien** or an orphan ... But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore, I am commanding you to do this thing.*
  - Ezekiel 22:29 — *The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the **sojourner** without justice.*
3. Every (*ger*) "immigrant" who immigrated into the nation was to keep the religious customs of the nation. They were not allowed to import their religious customs.
  - Exodus 20:10 — *but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or **your sojourner** who stays with you.*
  - Joshua 23:7 — *... you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods.*

#### Conclusion

Individuals should treat immigrants as they would any neighbor. Immigration policies are to be determined by governments. Christians should not suppose, expect, or encourage their governments to follow the compassion-oriented commands of Jesus or the apostles because those were given to individual believers, not governments. If we see Jesus' commands about turning the other cheek, loving your enemy, and giving to those who hate you, as pertaining to government, then government would not carry out its two prime objectives: (1) to protect its people and (2) to defend the justice written in its nation's laws.

Compassion is for individuals  
Immigration regulation is for governments