Transformation
2018, Vol. 35(2) 91–101

DOI: 10.1177/0265378818802698
journals.sagepub.com/home/trn
SAGE

The Refugee Crisis – A Shared Human Condition: An Old Testament Perspective

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Abstract
This article provides an introduction to what the Old Testament has to say regarding displacement and displaced people – refugees, migrants and the marginalized members of society. It surveys the instructions regarding the correct attitude and protective actions owed to 'the stranger' found in the Old Testament Law and it points to the divine preference to side with the suffering and the vulnerable evident in the Old Testament Prophets. Although not an exhaustive treatment of Old Testament passages tackling this topic, the discussion helps make clear the fact that God is particularly concerned with justice and care for the disadvantaged members of the society, including aliens, refugees and migrants. The conclusion of the article calls the readers to consider some of the missiological-ethical implications of such concern in our contexts today.

Keywords
Gēr (stranger) in the Old Testament, migrants, Old Testament Law, refugees, social justice

A Shared Human Condition, Including God's People

Migration runs like a thread through the whole Bible. People on the move (for all kinds of reasons) are so much part of the fabric of the biblical story that we hardly notice it as a major feature. Indeed, when the text actually points out that Yahweh, God of Israel, has been involved in the migrations of peoples other than Israelites, some Bible translations put that affirmation in parentheses – as though to separate it off from the main narrative (e.g. NIV in Deut. 2:10-12, 20-23). Nevertheless, when rightly interpreted as an integral part of the theological context of the story, the message that clearly comes across is that Yahweh is the God of all nations, including all their historical migrations and settlements.

Migration is also the story of God's people. This is a people that began and continues the journey through history as 'foreigners and strangers' – as migrants, immigrants and indeed occasionally

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refugees.[1] And this is who we are, as well. Migration has been part of our theological and historical DNA ever since Abraham. The following sample of texts illustrates this point well:

- Genesis 23:4 – Abraham says to the Hittites that he is a 'stranger' and an 'alien' (immigrant) in their land.[2]
- Exodus 2:22 – Moses names his son Gershom and explains it etymologically as a derivative of the Hebrew word *gēr* (foreigner), thus pointing to his status as an 'alien' (refugee, immigrant) in the foreign land of Midian.
- Exodus – The Israelites are called 'Hebrews' in Egypt, most likely a derogatory term to indicate that they do not belong there, that they are immigrants.
- Leviticus 25:23 – God tells the Israelites that the land of Canaan is His and that they are 'aliens' and 'tenants' in it. In other words, they do not live in the land by right but by resident alien status, as immigrants.[3]
- Deuteronomy 23:7 – The Israelites may not 'abhor' the Egyptians because they used to be 'aliens' (immigrants) in the Egyptians' land.
- Deuteronomy 26:5 – The Israelite farmer who was bringing his first fruits to the Sanctuary was to declare before God: 'a wandering Aramean was my ancestor', which, by implication, meant that he was himself an immigrant in the land of Canaan.
- Ruth – an entire story about refugees; Naomi and her family first, as refugees in Moab, and then Ruth, an immigrant in Israel.[4]
- Amos 9:7-9 – God is the one who moves peoples around.
- The Babylonian Exile – A significant, though painful, period in Israel's history during which the Israelites learn what it means to be forcibly displaced and taken to a foreign land.
- Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 – Matthew portrays Jesus as a migrant. First, Joseph, Mary and Jesus escape (are refugees) to Egypt because of the threat posed by Herod. Second, upon their return they settle in Nazareth (are internally displaced persons) because of the threat posed by Archelaus, Herod's son.[5]
- Acts 8:1 – The first Jerusalem Christians are dispersed (forcibly displaced, refugees) throughout the country because of persecutions.
- 1 Peter 1:1 (cf. James 1:1; 1 Peter 2:11-12) – The apostle writes to 'the exiles of the Dispersion', that is, to believers who were living as immigrants throughout the Roman Empire.[6]

It follows from the above that migration is a biblical theme. The mixings and migrations of nations are part of the whole biblical narrative. And all of it lies within the framework of God's overall sovereignty in human history and geography.

Admittedly, not all people movements are the same. This is clear from the examples provided above and it is clear in our world today. For instance, apart from having moved from one country to another, there is no comparison between the circumstances in which economically motivated migrants leave their homes and the plight of millions of refugees escaping war-ridden countries. Nevertheless, the point remains: in the midst of the vastly differing reasons for, and conditions of, different migrations, such great people movements have been part of human history for millennia, and God is not uninvolved or uninterested in them. On the contrary, the witness of the Bible is that such people movements – that is, migration – are an integral part of God's story with the world.

The present article offers an entry point into what the Old Testament in particular has to say regarding displacement and displaced people – the instructions regarding the correct attitude and protective actions owed to 'the stranger' found in the Old Testament Law and the divine preference to side with the suffering and the vulnerable evident in the Old Testament Prophets. It is hoped that,

although far from being exhaustive, the discussion below helps make at least one point clear: that God is particularly concerned with justice and care for the immigrant. The conclusion of the article calls the reader to consider some of the missiological-ethical implications of such concern in our contexts today.

Hermeneutical Preliminaries

Since we will be looking at the Old Testament for ethical light on a major contemporary issue, it is necessary to prelude the discussion on migration with two hermeneutical clarifications pertaining to how and why such an inquiry is justified.

First, is it legitimate to use the laws and institutions given to ancient Israel, and the narratives and prophecies found in their scriptures, with any kind of ethical relevance or authority in modern society and states? As argued by Wright,[7] the answer to this question is 'Yes', if we see the identity and role of Old Testament Israel as intended by God to be a 'light to the nations', and if we adopt a 'paradigmatic' approach to Old Testament hermeneutics. Broadly, that is to keep in mind that the God whom we meet in the Old Testament as the redeemer and covenant Lord of Israel, the giver and owner of Israel's land and the moral judge of all that happened there, is also the God who is the sovereign Lord of all nations, creator of the whole Earth and moral judge of all human history. In other words, what God does in Israel is intended to speak to all nations throughout history. So, it is legitimate to make responsible connections between the ethical standards and motivations contained in the Old Testament and Christian reflection on social, economic and political realities today.

Second, regarding the conquest of Canaan – isn't everything that the Old Testament has to say about foreigners negated by the treatment of the Canaanites? In other words, does the Old Testament have any moral authority to address ethically the contemporary refugee predicament? Again, this is a topic that has been competently addressed before,[8] and it need not concern us here. The following quick points should prove sufficient in order to put this issue aside and allow an analysis of migration from the premise that the Old Testament ought, and has the authority, to inform Christian reflection today.

- The conquest was a unique and historically limited event, not intended to be a model for the way God's people should deal with foreigners.
- It was explicitly justified on an ethical basis: namely as divine judgment on a society that had become morally degraded and wicked, in a way not yet fully developed at the time of Abraham (Gen. 15; Lev. 18; Deut. 9)
- God warned Israel that if they were to go the same way as the Canaanites, he would bring judgment and expulsion upon them too. They did and he did. So the moral consistency of God is preserved in the Old Testament.
- The conquest narrative is an integral part of the overarching biblical story of God's engagement with the fallen realities of the world in order ultimately to bring salvation through the cross and resurrection of Christ – a redemption for which even the nations are invited to give praise and thanks to God (Ps. 47).

Relevant Biblical Terminology

Israel throughout the Old Testament period (especially the pre-exilic nation) was a complex society, and they recognized different varieties of 'foreigner', as reflected in the terminology and legislation. As a state (and later as two separate kingdoms), Israel was itself a mixed community

comprising not only those of strictly Israelite ethnicity (the tribes that claimed descent from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob), but also many other groups. We are told that as early as the exodus, they were a 'mixed multitude', presumably because many groups of oppressed slaves joined them as they fled Egypt (Ex. 12:37-39). As a result, the regulations for the Passover had to lay down what was permissible for such groups (Ex. 12:43-49).

Moreover, Palestine itself has always been a major land bridge between major populations and competing powers. In biblical times it was the cross-roads between Egypt to the west, Mesopotamia to the east and the Anatolian nations to the north. Economic and military factors caused constant migrations to and through the land that Israel came to possess. Thus, for example, we are given the interesting statistic from Solomon's census, recording the fact that there was a substantial community of foreigners resident in his kingdom – 153,600 – whom he used for manual labour of various sorts (q.v. 2 Chr. 2:2).

Hints such as these, confirming the presence of various groups of people and the recognition of different social conditions in ancient Israel, are common throughout the Bible. The several words used in the Old Testament to describe the status of people living in the land of Israel are:

1. *'ezrah* – this is the term used (though not very often) for a native-born Israelite, resident by God's gift and grant within the land of Israel (e.g. Lev. 25).
2. *gēr* (plural *gērîm*) – this is the most important and the commonest term to note in the context of this discussion. It appears 92 times in the Old Testament, mostly in the Pentateuch, and it stems from a verbal root that carries the connotation of dwelling for a long time in a foreign land.[9] It is usually translated as 'alien' or 'foreigner', but its social and economic meaning is more nuanced.[10] People called *gērîm* were not ethnic Israelites, but were resident in the land, sometimes as members of Israelite households, sometimes not. They did not have a share in the land itself, but many would have been employed to work on the land. They were different from slaves on the one hand (in that they were free), and from visiting foreigners (*nokrî'îm*) on the other hand (in that they were more permanently resident). But their status meant they were similarly economically and socially weak and vulnerable to being exploited, since they lacked the security of land ownership and the strong ties of Israelite kinship in the tribal system. According to Burnside:

> We may understand the *ger* as a person from another tribe, city, district or country who has left his homeland and who is no longer directly related to his original setting. He is someone who lacks the customary social protection of privilege and who has, of necessity, placed himself under the jurisdiction of someone else … This being so, it is sensible to suggest that the noun *ger* should be translated as 'immigrant'. The phrase 'resident alien' is awkward and the term 'sojourner' is archaic. 'Immigrant' … adds the motif of 'social conflict'. It does this in three main ways. First it highlights the original circumstances of social conflict that are inevitably responsible for causing people to become immigrants in the first place. People usually become *gerim* as a result of social and political upheaval. This could be caused by war, famine, oppression, plague and other social misfortunes. Second it is consistent with the conflicts that can result when immigrants try to settle in a new environment … Third, it highlights the immigrant's 'outsider' status in the adopted social setting.[11]

3. *tôšāb* – a term used in close connection with *gēr*, sometimes as its analogous descriptor (e.g. 1 Chr. 29:15; Ps. 39:12) and at other times as a hendyadis (e.g. Gen. 23:4; Lev. 25:23, 47). Arguably, however, *tôšāb* is not entirely synonymous with *gēr*. The *tôšāb* does not enjoy the access to the life of the community that a *gēr* can have, especially if they become assimilated into the community through circumcision (q.v. Ex. 12:45 vs. 12:48 and Lev. 22:10). Thus, *tôšāb* may denote a more 'transitory existence within the host community'.[12]

This would also explain why the Jubilee law did not apply to a *tôšāb* and consequently why their children could be purchased and made permanent slaves (Lev. 25:45).

4. *nokrî* (plural *nokrīyîm*) and *zār* (plural *zārîm*) – these were the true aliens or 'strangers', that is, foreigners who came from outside the land of Israel, had no natural link to the land and were temporary visitors, perhaps as travelling merchants or mercenary soldiers. They were more independent outsiders, to whom some of the laws of life within the Israelite community did not apply. For example, they could be charged interest (Deut. 23:20), and the sabbatical year cancellation of debt did not apply to them (Deut. 15:3). They were less vulnerable than *gērîm*, and the text often speaks of them with a degree of suspicion or with an antagonistic attitude – mainly since they were assumed to worship other gods and so posed a religious threat. Nevertheless, Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple expressed the surprising assumption that they could be attracted to come and worship Yahweh, the God of Israel, in his temple. Solomon prays that Yahweh would answer their prayer, which would result in amazing missional consequences for Yahweh's reputation worldwide (1 Kgs 8:41-43). Similarly, Isaiah 56:3-7 holds out the eschatological (and equally missional) promise that foreigners would come to be accepted in God's house, and their offerings at his altar (cf. Isa. 60:10; 61:5-6). Such texts breathe the missional air of the Abrahamic covenant's promise in relation to all nations.

From this brief analysis it can be seen that it is the *gērîm* who stand closest to what we would speak of as 'immigrants' today, and also closest to those we would categorize as 'refugees' or in a more general sense 'migrants'. Accordingly, we will concentrate mainly on that group in the following survey of legal and prophetic texts that relate to how Israel was expected to treat such people within its community.[13]

Israel's Law on Immigrants/Migrants/Refugees

Israel's law adopts a remarkably positive stance towards the *gērîm*.[14] They are regularly listed alongside other categories of vulnerable people (widows, the fatherless, the poor) as being in special need of protective justice and social inclusion. Israel was to reflect in their own society the express concern of their God for the landless, the family-less and the homeless. This was far from being merely a sentimental generalization. It took specific legal shape, which consisted of:

- General, comprehensive protection for foreigners (refugees, migrants) from any and all forms of abuse and oppression (Ex. 22:21; Lev. 19:33).
- Specific protection from unfair treatment in court (Ex. 23:9 – in the context of instructions for court procedures; Deut. 1:16-17; 24:17-18). According to these laws, court officers had to ensure that justice was done impartially, for the Israelite and the foreigner alike.
- Inclusion in Sabbath rest (Deut. 5:12-15; cf. Ex. 20:9-11). The Sabbath was one of the key and unique innovations of Israelite economics and social culture, for nothing similar has been discovered yet in other Ancient Near Eastern cultures.
- Inclusion in worship and covenant – *gērîm* were to be included in the whole life of the community, especially if they were assimilated through circumcision. This meant that:

- *gērîm* could partake of the Passover, if circumcised (Ex. 12:48-49).
- *gērîm* benefitted from the triennial tithe – a social fund for the destitute (Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12-13).
- *gērîm* were included in the joy and holiday of the annual feasts (Deut. 16:10-14).

- *gērîm* were to observe the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-30).
- *gērîm* could offer sacrifices to God just as the Israelite (Num. 15:14).
- *gērîm* were to be present at occasions of covenant renewal and the reading of the law (Deut. 29:10-13 and Deut. 31:12).
- gērîm were to observe purity laws (Lev. 17:12, 15; 18:26) and to participate in community actions of restoring the order of the law (Le. 24:16) together with the Israelites.

- Provisions for fair employment practices – *gērîm* were to be employed with justice:

- The 'Hebrews', in the slave laws of Exodus and Deuteronomy, probably were not ethnic Israelites, but a social class of people, similar in some ways to *gērîm*, who lived by selling their labour – a kind of 'underclass', possibly related to the *'apîru*, a socially rootless class of people known across the Ancient Near East. This category of people, something like migrant workers, were to be given their freedom after six years of service – i.e. effectively a six-year contract, after which the 'Hebrew' was free either to leave or to make their relationship with that household permanent, and that at their own choice, not their masters' pleasure (Ex. 21:2-11; Deut. 15:12-18).
- Prompt payment of wages was another concern of Israel's employment law. In this case, the *gērîm* are listed alongside indigenous 'hired workers'. Such people, often working for daily wages, were an easy target for exploitation and ill-treatment. In the Israelite law, neglect in paying a fair day's wage for a fair day's work is counted not just as carelessness, but as being 'guilty of sin' (Deut. 21:14-15). In other words, such stipulations are more than some social charter regulating employment; they are in fact part of the law of holiness in the Old Testament.

- Access to agricultural produce – gleaning rights. Since *gērîm* did not have a share in the distribution of the land, they were dependent on the Israelite households for whom they worked for being able to enjoy the fruitfulness of the land. And God insisted that since the land was his anyway (as the supreme landlord – Lev. 25:23), then the landless must be given the opportunity to feed themselves, to 'eat and be satisfied' along with the rest of the population (Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22). This is the law that Ruth takes advantage of in the fields of Boaz, in the book of Ruth.
- Right of asylum and non-return – slaves who run away from their masters have universally been subject to severe punishment across all human cultures that have had slavery as part of their society. And those who harbour runaway slaves likewise exposed themselves to legal penalties. That was so in the cultures surrounding ancient Israel, which makes Israel's law on the matter so surprising, since it was the diametric opposite – the Israelites were to offer such people full protection (see Deut. 23:15-17). Admittedly, this is a law concerning slaves, not strictly *gērîm*, that is, immigrants or refugees. Nevertheless, one assumes that the reason a slave would seek refuge is that he or she was suffering cruelty or some other form of injustice and oppression. The principle of the law surely therefore applies to those in a comparable situation today, who are fleeing from unbearable circumstances.[15] Furthermore, although there is a difference between the few refugees that this law seems to assume[16] and the mass exodus of millions of refugees that we see in today's world, the assumption of the law is surely that people have a right to escape ill-treatment, and the right to choose an alternative place to live.
- Equality before the law with native-born (Num. 15:15-16) – this is possibly the most radical and far-reaching of all Israel's laws relating to foreigners. While there were clear religious, social and economic distinctions between ethnic Israelites, in their sustaining covenantal

network of kinship and land, and the non-Israelite *gērîm*, they were to be treated with equality and justice in any legal dispute between them, or any criminal proceedings. Indeed, the same love commandment that applied to 'your neighbour' (a fellow Israelite) was to be obeyed in relation to the foreigner – 'love him as yourself' (Lev. 19:34; note the balance with v. 18; cf. Also Num. 15:29-30).

Taken altogether, then, this is a remarkable list of laws and exhortations relating to the treatment of foreigners and immigrants, some of whom at least must have been comparable to refugees today. And the strongest word that is used to summarize it all is the love command. The expression, 'and you shall love …' (in this particular grammatical form, in Hebrew) occurs only four times in the Old Testament. Two of them are what Jesus called the first and second greatest commandments in the law: love for God and love for one's neighbour (Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18). The other two are about love for the immigrant (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:17-19).

The motivation for such laws, illustrated several times among them, is threefold:

- Israel's own history. Those who had experienced what it was like to be an exploited ethnic immigrant community (originally famine refugees) must show compassion to others in similar circumstances (e.g. Deut. 10:18-19). In this regard, it should be noted that the laws of Israel are placed in the canon within the narrative framework provided by Israel's story – a strong hermeneutical clue that Israel's laws are both a reflection of Israel's lived history (that is, the contextual nature of the laws) and a corrective response to certain aspects of that history (that is, the power to shape contexts the laws have).[17]
- The character and historic actions of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Those who worship him must walk in his ways and live by his values and priorities (cf. Deut. 10:18).
- The desire for God to continue to bless his people, if they would respond to his prior grace and redemptive blessing by showing comparable compassion and justice to the poor in their own midst.

In other words, Israel's ethic in relation to refugees was built on the strong foundation of gratitude to God for what God had done, and reflection of the character of God as revealed in those actions.

Finally, alongside all this positive motivation we do need to mention the negative sanction. Among the sobering list of curses for covenant disobedience comes this one – a stark warning to Israel (and by ethical inference to any society faced with the issue of immigrants and refugees): '"Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow". Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"' (Deut. 27:19).

The Prophets

When we read the oracles of the 'latter prophets' (Isaiah to Malechi) within the larger narrative framework of Israel's story as seen through the eyes of the 'former prophets' (Joshua to 2 Kings), it is clear that injustice and oppression of the poor is one of the key complaints that God had against his people – for centuries. And sometimes this focuses on their treatment of foreigners and immigrants in their midst. The following examples should help make the point:

- Though Moab was an inveterate enemy of the two Israelite kingdoms, and though several prophets include Moab in their oracles expressing God's judgment on surrounding nations, Isaiah calls upon the political leaders of Judah to respond to the plight of Moab's refugees during one of the military crises that had engulfed her and caused their population (including vulnerable women) to flee (Is. 16:2-5).

- Jeremiah condemned the people of Judah in general for failure to care for the disadvantaged people in their own midst, including foreigners, while they carried on with their obsessive worship in the temple. Their attitude was among the social sins for which God would eventually expel them from land and temple (Jer. 7:6-7).
- Jeremiah also told the government of his country that unless they did change their policy towards such needy people, they would lose the legitimacy and authority of their office altogether. Notably, ill-treatment of foreigners/immigrants is placed in the same moral category as shedding innocent blood (Jer. 22:3).
- Ezekiel has the same scale of ethical values. He accuses the political leadership of Judah of oppressing disadvantaged people, a transgression as grave as the violation of the worship and covenant commitments of Israel (Ezek. 22:6-9).
- Ezekiel also perceived, in eerie anticipation of the same phenomenon in our own contexts today, that the attitude of the politicians mirrored (and possibly fomented) callous and xenophobic attitudes among the general population (e.g. Ezek. 22:29).
- In Ezekiel's vision, the land of Israel is divided among Israelites and 'aliens' alike (Ezek. 47:22-23).
- Zecharia reminds the returnees from Babylon that the exile was God's punishment for Israel's oppression of the needy, including the immigrant (Zec. 7:10).
- Right to the very end of the Old Testament, Israel's wrong attitude towards the foreigner remains a matter of pressing concern for God, through his prophets. A 'day of the LORD's coming' is announced, which is the time when God will bring judgment on his people. And among the primary reasons for it is their treatment of the needy, including the immigrants (Mal. 3:5).

It should be obvious from the above that the concern for the rights of the needy, including the immigrant, is as much in view in the second section of the Hebrew canon (the Prophets) as it is in the first (the Law). It is an integral part of the prophetic critique of Israel's deviations from covenantal obligations, a critique that is usually accompanied by the prophetic call to restore social justice, expressed as care towards one's 'neighbour' (which always includes the immigrant, the stranger, the alien). The mission of Ancient Israel's prophets was to uphold community values that matched Israel's covenantal obligations. As such, they denounced strongly any and all social, political, economic and religious realities that were incongruent with Israel's theological discourse and that disconnected the human agent (i.e. the individual Israelite) from practical ethical living.[18] In this light, the fact that among these challenged realities we also find condemnation of the oppression of *gērîm* helps the interpreter today grasp more fully the important place that the rights of, and care for, the stranger (indeed, the immigrant and the refugee) occupy in God's order for human communities.

Conclusion

Considering the prophetic message and the legal provisions regarding immigrants together, one cannot but be struck, nay overwhelmed, by the sheer quantity of biblical material on this theme. The scale of statute laws, ethical exhortation, historical and theological motivation and prophetic condemnation around the issue of immigrants surely marks it out as a major concern of biblical faith and life. One cannot but conclude that (in Old Testament perspective) God really cares about the treatment of outsiders, migrants, refugees, immigrants!

By implication, this also begs the question whether there is anything like the same degree of ethical concern (let alone political passion) for this issue among Christians today, who claim to

honour, believe and obey the Bible. How does the care for refugees and immigrants weigh in the scales of our moral values, alongside other issues we deem important? For instance, the Old Testament has very clear teaching in the law, the narratives, the prophets and the wisdom literature about God's standards for sexual behaviour. This has given Christians solid ground for extensive ethical and moral instruction on human sexuality. It may surprise, though, to find out that the Bible's condemnation of various deviations from God's standards and commands for human sexual activity is greatly outweighed in sheer volume by the deluge of texts dealing with God's concern for social justice and compassion towards the marginalized of society, including the persistent mention of foreigners and immigrants. Of course, this is not to say that sexual morality should weigh less on our scale of moral values, but to point out that, if anything, the emphasis on social justice in Christian talk and practice nowadays ought to increase if we are to at least match the importance given to this subject in the Bible.

The urge for increased care for refugees and migrants implied in this statement is more than a call to a renewed Christian deontology. As suggested in this article, the very existence of a narrative framework, that is, the story of God with Israel, within which Old Testament laws and prophecies ought to be read and understood, provides a hermeneutical clue for felicitous application of their message within our context today. To clarify, the most important question we can ask is not: how are we to apply this law or that prophetic warning in our contexts? Rather, it is: to what extent are we willing and equipped to see our contemporary stories in the light of God's story? That is, we ought to try (at least) to perceive the kingdom (sovereignty) of God at work (like yeast, or mustard seed, or a net, or any of the other metaphors that Jesus provided for our assistance) in the midst of human affairs of such tragic proportions.

For Old Testament Israel, the fact that they themselves had been refugees and foreigners in Egypt led to a strong and repeated emphasis in their law and society – namely, to care for foreigners in their midst, and especially for those who were vulnerable and easy to exploit. Indeed, they were commanded to love the foreigner to the same extent and manner as they were to love their neighbour – as themselves (Lev. 19:18, 34; Deut. 10:19-20). Thus, Israel's story shaped Israel's ethic.

In a similar fashion, as we identify with God's story, and therefore with God's people throughout history, all that the Bible has to say about, for and on behalf of migrants ought to reshape the way we relate to the 'strangers' that arrive at our gates today. This is the missiological-ethical angle that motivates the present article. Such identification with God's story necessarily leads to participation in God's work of renewal – it compels us to work towards changing social realities incongruent with the vision of God's story (which is now our story). In other words, the biblical story, so appropriated, can activate and transform reality – it inspires us to act tirelessly upon life circumstances and our environment so that they come to be more in tune with the divine vision for the creation and the wellbeing of humanity. And this necessarily includes the wellbeing of the most disadvantaged members of society – the immigrants and refugees in our communites.[19]

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. By corroborating epigraphic and archaeological evidence with relevant Biblical passages, Simon B Parker has argued convincingly that, throughout Ancient Israel's history, refugees were a constant presence in the land of Palestine. See Parker SB (2003) Graves, caves, and refugees: An essay in microhistory. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27(3): 259–288.

2. On Abraham as migrant, see Gallagher SD (2014) Abraham on the move: The outpouring of God's blessing through a migrant. In: Nguyen V and Prior JM (eds) *God's People on the Move: Biblical and Global Perspectives on Migration and Mission*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, pp. 3–17.
3. On Israel's relationship to the Promised Land, see Brueggemann W (2002) *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith*. 2nd edn. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. See also Wazana N (2014) 'Everything was fulfilled' versus 'The land that yet remains': Contrasting conceptions of the fulfilment of the promise in the Book of Joshua. In: Berthelot K, David JE and Hirshman M (eds) *The Gift of the Land and the Fate of the Canaanites in Jewish Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 13–35.
4. On Ruth as a story of migration, see Bergant D (2003) Ruth: The migrant who saved the people. In: Campese G and Ciallella P (eds) *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, pp. 49–61.
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6. On Peter's opening as a description of social status, see Elliot JH (1990) *A Home for the Homeless: A Social-Scientific Criticism of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
7. See Wright CJH (2004) *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. More generally, for an accessible text on the use of the Bible in Christian ethics, see Birch BC and Rasmussen LL (1989) *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press.
8. E.g. Wright CJH (2008) *The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. See also Copan P (2011) *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; Copan P and Flannagan M (2014) *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; Lamb DT (2011) *God Behaving Badly: Is the God of the Old Testament Angry, Sexist and Racist?* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
9. Gallagher RL (2014) Coming to Gath: Migration as mission among the Philistines. In: Nguyen V and Prior JM (eds) *God's People on the Move: Biblical and Global Perspectives on Migration and Mission*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, pp. 29–45.
10. On *gēr, s*ee Burnside JP (2001) *The Status and Welfare of Immigrants: The Place of the Foreigner in Biblical Law and Its Relevance to Contemporary Society*. Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, pp. 10–16. See also Tromp KJ (2011) Aliens and strangers in the Old Testament. *Vox Reformata: Australian Journal for Christian Scholarship* 76: 4–24.
11. Burnside (2001: 13–14).
12. Tromp (2011: 5).
13. On the ensuing discussion, see also Gorospe AO (2015) What does the Bible say about migration? Three approaches to the Biblical text. In: Ringma CR, Hollenbeck-Wuest K and Gorospe AO (eds) *God at the Borders: Globalization, Migration and Diaspora*. Manila: ATS / OMF Literature, pp. 125–159.
14. On *gēr* in Israelite law, see Carroll MDR (2008) *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, pp. 91–112; Rendtorff R (1996) The *Gēr* in the priestly laws of the Pentateuch. In: Brett MG (ed.) *Ethnicity and the Bible*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, pp. 77–87; Van Houten C (1991) *The Alien in Israelite Law*. JSOTS 107. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
15. On this, see further Theocharous M (2017) Refugee asylum: Deuteronomy's 'disobedient' law. *Studies in Christian Ethics* 30(4): 464–474.
16. If large numbers ran away, slavery would soon cease to exist; the law therefore is evidence that slavery in ancient Israel was not the horrendous inhumanity that we associate with Roman galley slaves and black African slaves in the Americas.

17. On the relationship between Israel's law and its history, see further Burnside JP (2010) Exodus and asylum: Uncovering the relationship between Biblical law and narrative. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34(3): 243–266.
18. See Măcelaru MV (2014) Theology encounters globalization. *European Journal of Science and Theology* 10(1): 67–78.
19. On reading the Bible missiologically, see Măcelaru MV (2016) The Bible, Christian existence and mission. In: Constantineanu C, Măcelaru MV, Kool AM et al. (eds) *Mission in Central and Eastern Europe: Realities, Perspectives, Trends*. Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series 34. Oxford: Regnum, pp. 67–83.

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