

# Refugees in the Scriptures

## Ambivalence

### ● Exclusion

- Identity - holiness & marriage

### ● Inclusion

- Their own history of being exiles & the prophets

## Exclusion of Foreigners

- They were especially frightened of their religions and that the faith of Israel would be corrupted through marriages.
- Criterion Lev. 19, 2 You shall be holy, for I the Lord and Holy.
- Fear of marriages: **Ex 34, 14ff; Deut. 7, 3f; 13, 6.9**
- Discrimination against foreigner: debts not cancelled **Dt. 15, 1-3**; interest Dt 23, 20 cannot become King Dt 17, 15.
- After the Exile identity became a major question
- Ezra 10, 10
- *All these had married foreign women, and they sent them away with their children.* Ezra 10, 44

## Inclusion - Old Testament

- Dt. 26, 5-8 My father was a wandering Aramean
- Ex. 22, 21-7 Don't wrong the resident alien we were also aliens in Egypt
- Lev. 19, 33f treat as a citizen; love the alien as yourself ....

## Care for Aliens

- Gleaning: **Lev. 19, 9-10**; 23, 22 & **Dt 24, 19** leave a sheaf for the alien, the orphan and the widow.
- Tithing. Annual tithes of grain, wine, oil and first fruits. On the third year these were to be distributed to Levites, resident aliens, orphans and widows Dt. 14, 28f; **26, 12**.
- Justice to strangers. Equality of the stranger before the law. Ex. 12, 49; **Dt. 24, 17f**; Dt. 10, 18. Also some interesting law as about not handing slaves back. Don't withhold wages of poor whether Israelite or alien. Dt. 24, 14f

## Other OT themes re Aliens

- Universal God. God liberates all and shares his blessings with all.
- Second Isaiah. light to the nations 42, 6f; turn to me all the ends of the earth 45, 22; my justice a light to the peoples 51, 4. Suffering servant also includes all the nations.
- Third Isaiah. 56, 3.6.7 foreigners will be included.
- Jonah. Reluctant universalism.
- Ruth. Intermarriage the positive reply to Ezra.
- **Justice for all because God is the God of all.**

## Inclusiveness - New Testament

- Jesus reaches out to the excluded rather than strangers.
- Jesus was a refugee. Flight into Egypt. Mt. 2, 13-23.
- Jesus moved from town to town, Lk. 13, 22. No place to lay his head, Mt. 8, 20.

- Mary gives birth away from home and is forced to flee to Egypt
- Love your neighbour as yourself. Matt. 22:39 Mark 12:31
- The judgement of the nations. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Mt. 25, 31-46.

### **Parables & Inclusiveness**

- Challenge the legal or merit system: [God's world is not one of merit but of need and generosity]
  - Workers in the vineyard, Mt. 20, 1-16
  - Prodigal Son Lk. 15, 11-32
- Those excluded
  - Pharisee & Publican Lk. 18, 9-14
  - Great Feast Mt. 22,
- Good Samaritan Lk. 10, 25-37

### **Paul & the Early Church**

- Pentecostal Experience
- No distinctions Col. 3,11; Eph. 2,14; Rom. 15, 7.
- Christians are pilgrims exhorted to hospitality Rom 12, 13
- Early Church's struggle with Gentile members. Another struggle between identity and God's universal love and presence. Eg. Peter & Cornelius
- Goal is the creation of a new humanity where there will be no slave or foreigner. Gal. 3, 27-29

### **Some Summary Points**

- Scriptural picture is human - fear and welcome
- OT. Welcome because of their history, and recognition that God is the God of all
- Special call to look after the vulnerable. Job 29, 11-20
- Jesus' option for the excluded and obligation to love your neighbour
- Last Judgement - test of our Christianity
- Parables challenge our expectations, threaten our secure worlds, and celebrate mercy, compassion and people before merit
- Jesus asks us to put people first and discover who we are through our relationships with the fringe people
- Christ died for all 2 Cor. 5,14
- Church's struggle to recognise the presence of God. Battle of universal and special call [identity]
- Offering hospitality offers the possibility of individual and community transformation

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