

# IMMIGRATION: Opportunity or Threat?

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## MAIN TEXTS

The stories of the Pharaohs in the times of Joseph (Genesis 37-47) and Moses (Exodus 1)

## BIG PICTURE

While some people, including some within the Church, see the arrival of immigrants as a threat, Scripture challenges us to see immigration as an opportunity to “make disciples of all nations” within our own communities.

- 1. The biblical story of Joseph and Pharaoh provides us with a model for seeing the arrival of immigrants as an opportunity and responding with hospitality**
  - A. Joseph was an involuntary immigrant forced to migrate to Egypt (Genesis 37:28)
  - B. As one model of how to respond to immigrants, consider the way that the Pharaoh over Egypt interacts with Joseph
    - i. Pharaoh recognized that Joseph, an immigrant, brought unique skills and wisdom that could be an opportunity to help his nation (Genesis 41:38-40)
    - ii. When Joseph’s brothers and father arrived as immigrants in Egypt, Pharaoh welcomed them with hospitality, offering them the best of the land (Genesis 47:5-6a)
    - iii. Pharaoh consistently looked for how the arrival of immigrants could be an opportunity: he asks Joseph to place the most skilled among his brothers over his own livestock (Genesis 47:6b)

**2. Scripture also gives us the negative example of a different Pharaoh, some years later, who saw immigrants a threat and responded with hostility**

- A. After Joseph's death, a new Pharaoh came to power who "did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8); when we only see people as a mass, rather than see each person as a unique individual, it is natural to respond as this Pharaoh did, sensing a threat
- B. Pharaoh's became afraid of the Hebrews because...
  - i. They became numerous, presenting a demographic challenge to his rule (Exodus 1:9)
  - ii. He worried that they would join his enemies, presenting a national security concern (Exodus 1:10)
  - iii. He did not want to deport the Hebrews, because he benefited from their labor, but he also would not grant them the same rights as the native-born Egyptians (Exodus 1:11-14)
- C. Because he perceived the presence of these foreigners as a threat, Pharaoh responded with hostility, ultimately ordering the genocide of Hebrew baby boys (Exodus 1:22)

**3. As Americans living in a country to which many immigrants are arriving, we can see immigration as an opportunity and respond with hospitality, or believe that immigration presents a threat and respond with hostility**

- A. Economists almost universally agree that, contrary to popular misperception, immigration and even illegal immigration in particular have a net positive impact on the U.S. economy
  - i. 96% of economists surveyed by the Wall Street Journal said that illegal immigration had had a positive impact on the U.S. economy
  - ii. We err if we focus only on the costs that immigrants bring, without accounting for their contributions as workers, taxpayers, consumers, and entrepreneurs
  - iii. Michael Gerson, a Christian and a former speechwriter to President George W. Bush, notes that immigrants "are not just mouths but hands and brains. They are a resource"
- B. But for Christians, the opportunity of immigration is much greater than just an economic benefit: it presents a divinely-orchestrated opportunity to join God in His mission
  - i. We are commanded to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), and because of immigration, the nations have arrived at our doorstep

- ii. Many immigrants are already strong believers, and they breathe new life into churches and denominations in need of revitalization, serving as agents of God’s mission both in their own ethnic communities and beyond
  - iii. Other immigrants are not yet believers, which presents us the opportunity to share the hope of the gospel as we reach out in love to our newest neighbors
  - iv. Dr. Timothy Tennent says that “86% of the immigrant population in North America are likely to either be Christians or become Christians. That’s far above the national average...The immigrant population actually presents the greatest hope for Christian renewal in North America... We shouldn’t see this as something that threatens us. We should see this as a wonderful opportunity.”
- C. Too many American Christians are missing this missional opportunity, because they have accepted a media-driven narrative that leads them to view immigrants as a threat rather than viewing the arrival of immigrants through the lens of the Bible
- i. Most white evangelical Christians in the U.S., when asked about their views on immigrants, said that immigrants present “a threat to American customs and values”
  - ii. That attitude is not because evangelical Christians take the Bible more seriously than other groups, but rather because, by our own admission, the vast majority of evangelicals view immigration primarily from a perspective other than that of their Christian faith: just 12% of evangelicals say their views on immigrants are primarily influenced by the Bible.
  - iii. Perhaps as an effect of Christians viewing immigrants as a threat, many immigrants of non-Christian religious traditions say that they do not even know a Christian, suggesting we are not doing a great job of reaching out to our immigrant neighbors: fully 60% of those of non-Christian religious traditions in the US, most of whom are immigrants, say they do not know a Christian.

## CONCLUSION

If we think about immigration merely from a political, economic, or cultural perspective and fail to examine the issue from a biblical, missional perspective, we may miss out on the opportunity God has presented to his Church within the U.S. to join in what He is doing through the migration of people, drawing people to Himself.