

SPECTRUM

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BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION ON MIGRATION

PART 2: THE NEW TESTAMENT

The second part of this study looks at the Son of God, Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God which he introduced.

In the first study we examined some principles God gave his people, Israel, as they migrated to, and then settled in, their Promised Land. These principles, which included the care of the vulnerable foreigner, were all part of the covenant which God made with them. Unfortunately, the Israelites broke the covenant and were exiled into Babylon as a result. This involved deportation and forced migration to a strange land. Eventually, they returned as part of another migration back to their homeland but their national, political and religious struggles continued.

Expectations of a Messiah, someone who would liberate them from foreign oppression and restore the blessings of God to their land developed. He would be some form of liberator, all powerful, royal and priestly. It was some shock, therefore, that this Messiah would take the form of a migrant.

1. The second verse of the famous Christmas Carol 'Once in Royal' talks of Jesus being a migrant. Have you ever thought of Jesus as a migrant in this sense? What did this migration achieve?

He came down to earth from heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

2. What other migrations occur in the Christmas story? Read Matthew 2:13-15. What does this passage add to our discussion?

3. Read Luke 9:58. What does this say about Jesus' lifestyle?

4. How might the 'Jesus story' offer hope to many migrants, today? Read and discuss the quote below.

'Jesus assumed the human condition of the most vulnerable among us, undergoing hunger, thirst, rejection and injustice, walking the way of the cross, overcoming the forces of death that threaten human life. He enters into the broken territory of human experience and offers his own wounds in solidarity with those who are in pain. The Jesus story opens up for many migrants a reason to hope, especially in what often seems like a hopeless predicament.' Daniel G. Groody, *Theology in an Age of Migration*

5. Luke 10:25-37 recounts the parable of the Good Samaritan. In view of the original question 'who is my neighbour?' how might this parable possibly challenge us with respect to asylum seekers and refugees who are fleeing persecution and war?`

6. Jesus practiced a radical form of hospitality. He ate, talked and socialised with people, defying cultural expectation and boundaries in the process. Read Matthew 25:31-40. In what ways might these words extend to Christians caring for migrants in need?

7. New Testament Christians were encouraged to hold on lightly (not tightly) to the things of this world. Why? Read Ephesians 2:19, 1 Peter 2:11 and Philippians 3:20.

8. NIMBY is an acronym for 'not in my backyard'. In the light of question 7, which calls Christians to be pilgrims on this earth, to what degree should Christians be 'NIMBY – ites'?

9. Often those who are existing residents of a place have a fear of how things might change if immigrants come. What do you think these fears are, are they justified and how, as Christians, should be respond to them?

10. Read Revelation 7:9-11. Do you think that in heaven all Christians will have the same culture and identity or do you think there will still be racial and ethnic differences?

'The inhabitants of the new creation are not portrayed as a homogenised mass or a single global culture. Rather they display the continuing glorious diversity of the human race through history.' Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*

11. If you think people will retain some diversity and difference in the age to come, how is it possible for the church today to reflect this variety?

12. As a result of these studies has your thinking stayed the same, changed a lot or altered slightly? What is the main thing you have learnt?

LEADERS NOTES

Question 1

This Christmas Carol talks of Jesus giving up the security of heaven and migrating to earth as a human babe. This migration leaves Jesus extremely vulnerable as part of a poor, human family in a dark and difficult world.

Question 2

Jesus and his family, for fear of persecution at the hands of Herod, migrate to Egypt. They are refugees and immigrants in a foreign land. This must have been a traumatic time and one that highlighted the vulnerability and poverty of this family. It adds to our discussion in that it firmly identifies Jesus with the migrant.

Question 3

Jesus had an itinerant ministry; he never seemed to settle. Such a lifestyle relied on the hospitality of others. We are used to a 'fixed' lifestyle most of the time and migration can seem 'strange' to us.

Question 4

Jesus understands the lifestyle of a migrant and the insecurity which goes with it. He can empathise with the migrant. Being a migrant might be closer to Jesus' understanding of disciple than being comfortable in one's own secure environment.

Question 5

The Samaritan helped the wounded and vulnerable man. Jesus contrasted the actions of this Good Samaritan (most Samaritans were considered bad) with the Priest and Levite who should have known better and come to his aid. Often we think that asylum-seekers and refugees are someone else's problem. They are the problem of another country, another agency, another group of people - but are they?

Question 6

These words can apply to any 'brother or sister' who is in need. Does our idea of hospitality extend to the challenging scenarios which Jesus talks about in these verses?

Question 7

This world is our temporary residence not our permanent one. We should be strangers in this world, in the sense that it is not where our true citizenship lies. We should have that sense of being migrants and pilgrims in this world – we are just passing through.

Question 8

This idea that we are not permanent residents on this earth should mean we have less of a NIMBY attitude. We, of course, want a good quality of life but we have to examine our motives if we don't want other people living where we are living because it would spoil it for us.

Question 9

People's fears can range from

- 'things won't be the same anymore' – a fear of change of the English way of life they know and love
- the fear of the stranger they don't know or understand
- the fear of competition for resources (jobs, schools etc.)
- the fear of terrorism

The question is how justified are these fears and how, as Christians, should we respond to these fears? When do we choose not to believe in sweeping generalisations? When should we believe in people as being made in the image of God? When do we have faith in God that, if we are generous and loving, he will honour that? Equally, when do we stop being naïve and say 'enough is enough'?

Question 10

In the new creation it appears that, even though there will be a great unity under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, there will be great diversity of culture as well. Ethnicity and race will somehow be celebrated and enjoyed.

Question 11

Church should be a microcosm of heaven. The more church can reflect the wonderful diversity of culture, ethnicity and race in the worship of Jesus, the closer it reflects heaven. Welcoming and accommodating migrants is one way this can happen in the here and now.

Question 12

You might like to refer back to question 2 of the first study/discussion when asking this question.

Other resources on the Spectrum website are available for members of your group to look at and download.