

What does the Bible say about foreigners and integration of foreigners?

There are broadly two terms for immigrants in the Bible. The *ger*, often translated 'alien' or 'sojourner' was typically someone who came to Israel without resources of their own, and who were dependent on others for support. They were usually willing to integrate fully with Israelite life and religion, and were to be treated the same as native Israelites under the law. The *ger* appears repeatedly alongside other vulnerable groups who lacked family and land, such as orphans and widows. The Israelites were commanded to love the alien and not mistreat them, 'because you were aliens in Egypt' (Leviticus 19:34).

Then there was the *nokri*, the 'true' foreigner, who was economically independent, who had different values and who did not integrate into Israelite life. The Israelites are repeatedly warned about the *nokri*, because they represented a threat to Israelite culture and religion – Solomon's many foreign wives being the most notable example (1 Kings 11:1-13). All the same, if a *nokri* showed willingness to convert then they were also to be welcomed.

It was therefore the duty of the Israelites to welcome those who genuinely showed an openness to integrating, and to protect the vulnerable, but also to treat with caution those who did not share their faith and ideals and who would potentially undermine their society and economy as a result.

Twenty-first century Europe, with its many faiths and worldviews, is so different from Old Testament Israel but can we extrapolate some helpful guidance from the biblical principles?

Modern-day equivalents of the *ger* would include the asylum-seeker/refugee and arguably the low-paid economic migrant, who has travelled to Europe to escape serious hardship. Equivalents of the *nokri* would include those who are self-sufficient but choose not to integrate meaningfully in terms of maintaining religious and cultural customs contrary to the laws of their host country (e.g. Sharia law or honour killing).

Biblical wisdom indicates that, if they want full rights, then there is a duty upon the foreigner not just to follow immigration and asylum procedures but to integrate into society. But actually the greater biblical duty is on the host community generously to welcome and care for the vulnerable foreigner, to facilitate their inclusion and to treat these newcomers as full citizens.