

MUSLIM REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES: HOW GOD VIEWS THEM AND DESIRES THE CHURCH TO FOLLOW IN OBEDIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

In the recent US presidential election between Donald Trump and former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the topic of refugees and immigrants who seek entry into the United States was highly debated. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Refugees are people fleeing conflict or persecution. They are defined and protected in international law, and must not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk.”¹ As of late, the United States has experienced a surge of refugees from Muslim countries such as Iraq, Syria, Somalia, and Afghanistan.² Historically, the American public has welcomed refugees, but terrorist attacks throughout Europe over the last two years, carried out by ISIS fighters from Syria, have drastically swayed the opinions of Americans about refugees, specifically of those who are Muslim. Nevertheless, the Obama Administration welcomed a record 38,901 Muslim refugees during the fiscal year of 2016.³

One such example is the Al Haj Kasem family from Syria who has lived in Greensboro, North Carolina since arriving there in September 2012. Their journey from Syria to Jordan and then to the United States was filled with challenges and several interviews before they received approval by the US State Department to enter the United States as refugees.⁴ They were welcomed and assisted by a caseworker from Church World Service, a resettlement agency that assists refugees adapt to life in the United States.⁵ Today, their family is only a tiny representation of the 4.8 million Syrians who have fled their country due to war.⁶

In the face of great hostility by a large percentage of the American public, how should American church leaders and lay people handle the issue of Muslim refugees in the United States? *North American churches, following their leadership, should welcome and embrace Muslim refugees who move into their communities by meeting their physical and emotional*

¹ “Refugees,” UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/refugees.html>.

² Phillip Connor, “U.S. Admits Record Number of Muslim Refugees in 2016,” *Pew Research Center*, last updated October 5, 2016, accessed November 12, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/05/u-s-admits-record-number-of-muslim-refugees-in-2016/>.

³ Ibid. This makes up 46 percent of all 85,000 refugees who entered the US during that same period.

⁴ Phoebe Zerwick, “Fleeing War, a Syrian Family Makes a New Home in North Carolina,” *National Geographic*, last updated February 27, 2015, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/02/150227-syria-refugees-resettlement-north-carolina-cultures-war>

⁵ Zerwick, “Fleeing War, a Syrian Family Makes a New Home in North Carolina,” *National Geographic*.

⁶ “Syria Emergency,” UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency, last updated October 23, 2016, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/syria-emergency.html>.

needs, and by engaging them with evangelism and discipleship, thus fulfilling both the 'near' (Judea and Samaria) and 'far' (the ends of the earth) aspects of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. This will be accomplished by examining God's commandments in the Pentateuch concerning foreigners, Jesus' ministry to Gentiles in the four Gospels, and the current situation of incoming Muslim refugees to the United States.

THE FOREIGNER IN THE PENTATEUCH

Unlike the UNHCR's definition of *refugee*, the first refugees on the earth did not flee conflict or persecution caused by others. They fled, rather, due to their own sin, and as Arthur Pink writes, "Sin always results in separation."⁷ Adam and Eve, the first two human beings created by God, were also the first two refugees. Their refugee status was not caused by the serpent or by God; it was caused by their own rebellion. After their rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-13), they were cursed (Gen. 3:16-19), kicked out of the garden (Gen. 3:23), forced to survive the rest of their lives away from the home God had given them (Gen. 3:24), and kept outside the garden by an angel with a flaming sword who guarded the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Rebecca Solnit, a liberal American writer, compares Adam and Eve's situation to modern-day refugees and immigrants who wish to enter the United States. She writes, "Adam and Eve are the first refugees, the fig leaves the first cancelled passports, Paradise [Eden] the first immigration-restricted country."⁸ Solnit misses the mark in her comment on the fig leaves as "cancelled passports," and neglects any comment on the Lord's provision of better garments for Adam and Eve.

Scripture provides humanity with a precedent for borders in the Garden of Eden (2:8, 10-14; 3:24), God's division and allotment of the land of Canaan (Deut. 32:8; Josh. 13:8-19:48), and Ezekiel's revelation of the coming New Earth (Ezek. 47:13-23; 48:1-29). In his appeal to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens, the Apostle Paul said, "From one man he [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us" (Acts 17:26-27, NIV). Borders are to be respected, but a border does not connote the rejection of refugees.

Because of Adam and Eve's sin, their children would not know the availability of each plant and tree at their disposal for food (Gen. 1:29), nor would they know the sound of God as He walked among them in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). Adam and Eve became strangers in a strange land, and their descendants up until now anxiously wait to return to a land where God will dwell with them again (Rom. 8:23; Rev. 21-22). Like Adam and Eve, refugees today are "out in the cold," and will only survive by the grace of God.⁹

In August 2016, Dr. Michael Cloer, the pastor of Englewood Baptist Church in Rocky Mount, North Carolina gave evidence from the Old Testament to his church as reason for them

⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 45.

⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), 79-80.

⁹ Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1 – 11:26*, The New American Commentary 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 257.

to engage refugees and other foreign-born nationals who live in their community. Dr. Cloer argued that God often uses conflict so that nations may know Him through the faithful acts and witness of Christians. He pointed to God's plan to harden Pharaoh's heart so that the Egyptians may know God is the Lord (Exod. 14:4), David's statement that the world would know there is a God in Israel through the defeat of Goliath (1 Sam. 17:46), King Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation to the "peoples, nations, and men of every language, who live in all the world" concerning the "Most High God" who delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace (Dan. 3:26 – 4:3), and a similar proclamation by King Darius to "all the peoples, nations, and men of every language throughout the land" to "fear and reverence the God of Daniel" following his survival in the lion's den (Dan. 6:25-27).¹⁰

Indeed, God does use conflict so that people may know Him. In Europe, mass conversions of Muslim refugees to Christianity have been reported. In one example, a reported 80 Muslim refugees from Afghanistan and Iran converted to Christianity and were baptized in Hamburg, Germany in May 2016.¹¹ Another news outlet writes that churches in Austria and Germany have reported hundreds of Muslim refugees filling their pews, registering for adult christening, and taking part in baptism in only the first few months of 2016.¹² One might argue these are small numbers in comparison to the millions of refugees who have already entered Europe. However, if these reports are true, Christians in the United States should take note.

The question then becomes 'What is God's desire for refugees and immigrants?' In order to answer this question, one must first look to God's instruction to the Children of Israel in the Pentateuch. These instructions can properly be placed into the following categories: love and fair treatment, help in poverty, inclusion in celebrations, and introduction to and worship of YHWH.

Within the law of the Pentateuch, an "alien" was usually a Gentile who lived in the camp with the Children of Israel. The use of this term not only identified those of different ethnicities but also those who were vulnerable and might be intentionally taken advantage of.¹³ Aside from the tradition of hospitality, the first ordinance concerning foreigners living among the Israelites was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. God instructs Moses to tell the people, "Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt" (Exod. 22:21). He reiterates the command again not long afterward, saying, "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt" (Exod. 23:9). This comes just after Moses had led the people out of Egypt in a miraculous rescue by YHWH. The Israelites should be particularly sensitive to the well-being of their foreigner co-habitants since they, too, were once in the same

¹⁰ Michael Cloer, "Biblical Basis of Missions," from notes in booklet *Missions Intensive: The Church & God's Global Mission*, 3. Event took place at Englewood Baptist Church in Rocky Mount, NC, August 26, 2016.

¹¹ Florence Taylor, "Muslim refugee converts to Christianity forgive their persecutors," from *Christianity Today*, June 8, 2016, accessed November 1, 2016. <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/muslim.refugee.converts.to.christianity.forgive.their.persecutors/87905.htm>.

¹² Margarita Simonyan, ed., "'Since I became a Christian I fear no one': Refugee explains mass conversions from Islam," from *RT*, last updated June 7, 2016, accessed November 1, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/345745-muslim-refugees-convert-christianity/>.

¹³ R. J. D. Knauth, "Alien, Foreign Resident," from *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 26.

situation in Egypt.¹⁴ In Leviticus, the Lord reminds the Israelites that aliens should not be “mistreated,” which is a word that “usually connotes economic exploitation, the deprivation of property, or denial of legal rights” (Lev. 19:33-34; cf. Lev. 25:15; Ezek. 22:29; 45:8).¹⁵ As refugees begin their new life in the United States, Christians should conduct honest business with them and treat them fairly.

Israelites were expected to help aliens financially if they were found to be poor. In the description of the Year of Jubilee, God uses an alien as an example to the Israelites as to how to treat another Israelite who becomes financially in need of assistance. The text reads that Israelites should help their fellow countrymen, “as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you” (Lev. 25:35). Additionally, God instructs Israel to include the resident alien in the celebrations of the Feast of Weeks (Deut. 16:11) and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 16:14). Although Christians do not celebrate these annual events, this serves as an example that God desires for all people to be, at the very least, introduced to Christian worship of Him. One aspect of worship is thankfulness for what God has done and who he is. The holidays of Thanksgiving and Christmas are wonderful opportunities for Christians to invite their refugee neighbors in their home to celebrate together, much like the Feast of Tabernacles, which celebrated the “goodness of the Lord in the provision of food for another year.”¹⁶ Moses continues God’s message to Israel that during the time of first fruits when they enter the land God gives them, the aliens living among them will worship with them and the Levites. Here, the resident alien sees for himself the goodness of God and responds in rejoicing to God not as a mandatory requirement, but out of genuine awe of who God is. Additionally, as Israel gives their first fruits from the blessings of God, it has a direct result on the alien living among them who enjoys the benefits of God’s blessing His people Israel.¹⁷ When God blesses His people, He expects His people to be a blessing to others that they may be in awe of Him.

One blessing foreigners were to receive from the Israelites was the Sabbath rest. The fourth commandment given to Moses on Mount Sinai says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.... In it you shall do no work: you, ...nor your male servant, nor your female servant, ...nor your stranger who is within your gates” (Exod. 20:8, 10, NKJV). The foreigner, who may have also been a servant to an Israelite, was also exempt from labor on the Sabbath. Because foreigners could not possess land in Israel, one could be subject to abuse through hard labor, even though God commanded them not to do so (Exod. 23:9). Therefore, God defends the foreigner who lives among the Israelites, demanding they be able to enjoy a day of rest also.¹⁸ Immigrants in the United States today should not be mistreated with hard labor or denied appropriate rest.

¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament 3 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 273.

¹⁵ Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 3 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014), 252.

¹⁶ Peter C. Craige, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 245.

¹⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 344.

¹⁸ Mark. F. Rooker, *The Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty-First Century* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 83.

Lastly, God conveys His ability and desire to provide for foreigners. Moses tells the Israelites, “He [God]...loves the alien, giving him food and clothing” (Deut. 10:18). Verse 18 looks forward to Jesus’ teaching that God will provide for the needs of those He loves, specifically food and clothing (Matt. 6:25-33). Historically, God provided for the foreigners who lived among the Israelites just as He provided for His own people Israel.¹⁹ Again, the Lord tells His people He will bless them and, in return, they will be a blessing to the foreigner among them (Gen. 12:2-3; Deut. 14:29). By no means were foreigners considered lazy; they needed the support of Israel because they were not included in the promise, and thus were not given an inheritance of land from which to survive on. Like the Levites, they would survive on the offerings of Israel (Josh. 13:14; 14:3; 18:7).²⁰ God then gives the command for Israel to love those who are aliens, because His people Israel were once aliens in Egypt (Deut. 10:19). Peter Craige writes that there were two reasons the Israelites were to love the foreigners among them. First, God loved not only Israelites but foreigners also, thus they should love them. Second, they had been treated poorly as foreigners in Egypt before. With this in mind, the Israelites were to love the foreigner among them in the opposite way they had been treated by Pharaoh in Egypt.²¹ In the same way, American believers should provide for refugees because they arrive with almost nothing. In this way, Christians will be a blessing to others as God intends.

JESUS AND GENTILES

The New Testament is literary evidence that Jesus not only cares for refugees, but desires for the church to do so also. When Matthew begins his Gospel with the genealogy of Christ, he includes four Gentile women: Tamar the Canaanite (Gen. 38:2; Matt. 1:3), Rahab the Canaanite (Josh. 2:8-13), Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 1:16, 4:9-12; Matt. 1:5), and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:3; Matt. 1:6). Before she became the wife of King David, Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who fought for Israel (2 Sam. 11:6-7, 15). Theories abound concerning Bathsheba’s ethnicity, but she ultimately became an Israelite through her marriage to David, and bore him his son Solomon, thus Bathsheba’s inclusion into the genealogy of Christ. Three of these women come from sexually immoral backgrounds, and Ruth was not supposed to be included into the congregation as a Moabite (Deut. 23:3).²² Matthew’s inclusion of these female Gentiles should communicate to the reader that other Gentiles will follow Israel’s Messiah, no matter what sins are in their background, which reaches a climax in Matthew 28:19.²³ God loves the nations so much that He chooses to include Gentile women—not only men from Chosen Israel—to bring about the promised Messiah.

Upon the arrival to Bethlehem, Mary was forced to give birth to Jesus outside of usual living quarters, because she placed Jesus in a manger and there was no room in the local inn (Luke 2:7). While Scripture does not provide the exact setting of the delivery itself, one should notice a lack of obedience of the Law of Moses by all those in Bethlehem, because they did not

¹⁹ Craige, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT, 206.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 206-7.

²¹ Craige, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT, 207.

²² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 23.

²³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 37.

open their homes to Mary and Joseph when they needed it most. Leon Morris notes that it seems that it was a lonely birth for Mary and Jesus because she alone wrapped Jesus in the swaddling cloths (2:7); the birth narrative “points to poverty, obscurity, and even rejection.”²⁴ Following Jesus’ birth, shepherds from the fields of Bethlehem were the first to visit. They were followed by Magi from the East, who bowed down and worshipped Jesus while he was only a child (Matt. 2:1, 11). God allowed His own people Israel to worship Jesus first (via the shepherds), and then allowed the nations to come and worship Him second (via the magi). Matthew’s genealogy and sole account of the foreign Magi foreshadows the opportunity of the Jewish people to respond to the gospel first, and the Gentiles second.²⁵ After his birth, Jesus and his earthly parents, Joseph and Mary, fled to Egypt after a warning by an angel of the Lord to escape (Matt. 2:13-14). They became refugees to Egypt in order to stay safe from the genocidal King Herod (Matt. 2:16). Upon their repatriation to Israel, they were again forced to take refuge in the region of Galilee because Archelaus, son of Herod, was ruler over Judea (Matt. 2:22).²⁶ Stephen Bauman writes, “One thing is clear: the millions of refugees in our world today have an advocate in Jesus, who was ‘made like them, fully human in every way’ (Heb. 2:17), able ‘to empathize with our weaknesses’ (4:15)—even with the particular experience of having to flee one’s home in the middle of the night in search of refuge.”²⁷ Simeon, who was led by the Spirit into the Temple where he saw Jesus with his parents (Lev. 12:2-8; Luke 2:22-24), took Jesus in his arms, blessed God, and described Jesus as “a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32, NKJV). Craig Evans argues this anticipates the universality of the gospel.²⁸ Salvation is no longer for a chosen few; it is for all people everywhere on the face of the earth (cf. Isa. 49:6).²⁹

In Luke 4, Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1-2 to those gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth and enrages them by reminding them what Elijah and Elisha did with Gentiles (Luke 4:25-28), which was enough to make the Jews want to kill Jesus (Luke 4:29-30). Elijah was sent to provide food for a widow from Sidon and her son during a famine (1 Kings 17:8-16), later raising the son back to life (17:17-23), which led the widow to believe the word of the Lord (17:24). Elisha healed Naaman, commander of the Syrian army, of leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-14), which led him to believe in the God of Israel (5:15). Of all the widows and all the lepers in Israel, God chose two Gentiles, and Jesus said He would do the same. The people in Nazareth were furious; they expected the coming Messiah to destroy Israel’s enemies, not minister to them.³⁰ The mere idea that churches or individual Christians should minister to unbelieving Muslim refugees is enough to enrage many within the church. Leon Morris notes that Scripture does not report of a return to Nazareth by Jesus after this. He warns, “Rejection can be final.”³¹ Jesus was rejected by the religious crowd in Nazareth and perhaps never returned. His teaching to serve the enemy continues to be

²⁴ Leon Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 3 (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1988), 92.

²⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 26.

²⁶ Paul Hertig, “The Multi-ethnic Journeys of Jesus in Matthew: Margin Center Dynamics,” *Missiology* 26, no. 1 (January 1998), 24. Joseph did this in response to a warning from God in a dream (Matt. 2:22).

²⁷ Stephen Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Issam Smeir, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (Chicago: Moody, 2016), 32.

²⁸ Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, New International Biblical Commentary 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 39.

²⁹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 116.

³⁰ Evans, *Luke*, NIBC, 72.

³¹ Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale, 119.

rejected by many within the church today. One can only wonder if these people abide with the Holy Spirit or live in opposition to Him (Matt. 25:31-46; John 14:21-26).

To abide by the Spirit and live, Jesus gives the command to love one's neighbor as one's self (Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27-28). To clarify, Jesus tells the parable of a Samaritan who helps an Israelite man (Luke 10:29-37). Jesus' parable teaches that believers should help anyone who is in need of help, not only those who share one's ethnicity, religion, or nationality in common.³² According to Jesus' teaching, believers alive today should treat refugees from Syria, Iraq, or elsewhere with love and respect, no matter if they are Christian, Muslim, or atheist. Jesus commands all Christians to love their neighbors, no matter the cost.³³

MUSLIM REFUGEES & THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

While there are many church pastors who preach the parable of the Good Samaritan and instruct their churches to love their neighbors as themselves, the opposite is actually taking place. Although the command to welcome the stranger is the second most repeated command in the Old Testament, only one in five evangelical Christians report to have been encouraged by their church leadership to engage refugees and immigrants in their community.³⁴ In the annual sermon to the Baptist Missionary Society, Charles Spurgeon said, "Love is a grand word to talk of, but it is nobler as a principle to be obeyed. Can there be love of God in that man's heart who will not help to send the gospel to those who are without it?"³⁵ Indeed, John writes, "For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20b, NIV). To take up this act of love, faith-based organizations work throughout the United States to serve incoming refugees adapt to life in the US. Those in North Carolina include World Relief, Catholic Charities, and Church World Service. Secular organizations include North Carolina African Services Coalition (NCASC) in Greensboro, Carolina Refugee Resettlement in Charlotte, and the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants – NC in Raleigh. These parachurch and secular ministries do a noble thing, but it is a sign of failure on the part of the church. Mark Dever writes that the local church "has the duty and obligation to ensure the continuance of a faithful gospel witness.... No body outside of the whole congregation has this same degree of responsibility."³⁶

The Refugee Resettlement Act of 2016 passed by the North Carolina General Assembly could pose as a potential barrier for additional refugees to relocate to North Carolina. It states that local governments within the state of North Carolina have the right to request a moratorium on any refugee resettlement activities.³⁷ If a local government desires to welcome new refugees, H.B. 1086 requires said local government to first hold a public hearing and then notify the North Carolina Refugee Assistance Program of its capacity to accept refugees. This can also be a

³² Bauman, Soerens, and Smeir, *Seeking Refuge*, 34.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁵ Charles Spurgeon, "A Heavenly Pattern For Our Earthly Life," *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia*, vol. 11, presented April 30, 1884 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 115.

³⁶ Mark E. Dever, "The Church," *A Theology for the Church*, Daniel L. Akin, ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 796.

³⁷ General Assembly of North Carolina, "House Bill DRH30487-MDa-115 (01/19)," 1, passed as "H.B. 1086" May 10, 2016, accessed October 19, 2016, <http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2015/Bills/House/PDF/H1086v0.pdf>.

positive thing so that communities may know and be prepared for an upcoming arrival of refugees. The bill goes on to further state that local governments are “prohibited from requesting the settlement of additional refugees within their jurisdiction until they have documented that they have the capacity to settle additional refugees and have held a public hearing concerning refugee resettlement.”³⁸ However, the outlook for receiving future Muslim refugees into the United States is unknown. US President-elect Donald Trump said during his presidential campaign in 2015 that Muslims should no longer be allowed to enter the United States.³⁹ However, in his final speech before the 2016 election, President-elect Trump said that his administration would “not place refugees [anywhere] *without the support* and permission of the communities.”⁴⁰ This suggests that refugee resettlement is not yet dead. In a speech made after the 2016 presidential election, former US President George W. Bush urged, “Anger shouldn’t drive policy. What needs to drive policy is what’s best for the people who are angry, and how does that benefit people in our country.”⁴¹ The goal should be to host refugees legally, responsibly, and lovingly.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “From one man He [God] has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. He did this so they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27, HCSB). God alone determines where people will live and when they will live there. It is now the decision of the church of how to respond. In Rocky Mount, Dr. Cloer encouraged his church, saying, “Not only are we blessed to be a blessing, but we are blessed to be a blessing to the nations as promised by God to Abraham.”⁴² Although his church is very active in reaching unreached people groups overseas through short-term trips and long-term commitments, Dr. Cloer stressed the need for his church to bless the nations represented in their community. The North Carolina Baptist Association has pinpointed the following Muslim populations in Rocky Mount and the surrounding Nash County region: Palestinian (725), Kuwaiti (65), Yemeni (34), Moroccan (30), Jordanian (37), Bangladeshi (71), and Wolof-Senegalese (18).⁴³ Other countries represented that may possibly include Muslims are India (143) and Israel (33). In Edgecombe County, which borders the city of Rocky Mount, there are foreign-born immigrants from the Muslim countries of Iran (21), Egypt (14), and India (60).⁴⁴

To date, no Syrian refugees have been placed in these local areas, but local churches in Rocky Mount have partnered together with a plan to reach their international communities. In a sermon addressing how to engage internationals in Rocky Mount, Pastor Wing Yip—who is originally from China—encouraged those listening with practical advice, saying, “Be a local missionary. They [Internationals] like to speak English.... More than that, they want to learn

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Jeremy Diamond, “Donald Trump: Ban All Muslim Travel to U.S.,” CNN, December 8, 2015, accessed November 18, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/07/politics/donald-trump-muslim-ban-immigration/>.

⁴⁰ Tessa Berenson, “Donald Trump: Minnesota Has ‘Suffered Enough’ Accepting Refugees,” *Time*, November 6, 2016, accessed November 18, 2016, <http://time.com/4560078/donald-trump-minnesota-somali-refugees/>.

⁴¹ Patrick Svitek, “After Trump election, Bush says ‘anger shouldn’t drive policy’,” *The Texas Tribune*, November 15, 2016, <https://www.texastribune.org/2016/11/15/after-trump-election-bush-says-anger-shouldnt-driv/>.

⁴² Cloer, “Biblical Basis of Missions,” *Missions Intensive: The Church & God’s Global Mission*, 3.

⁴³ Cloer, “Peoples Next Door,” from *Missions Intensive: The Church & God’s Global Mission*, 9.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

about American culture.... Invite them into your home for holidays, and once they leave, keep in contact with them.”⁴⁵ Dr. Bruce Ashford, Associate Professor of Theology and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggests that God’s embrace of the Gentiles in the present time will eventually provoke Israel to jealousy (cf. Deut. 32).⁴⁶ Perhaps the American church’s embrace of refugees will provoke the American public to jealousy as well, leading them back to faith in God.

CONCLUSION

This essay sought to answer how American church leaders and lay people should handle the issue of Muslim refugees in the United States. *North American churches, following their leadership, should welcome and embrace Muslim refugees who move into their communities by meeting their physical and emotional needs, and by engaging them with evangelism and discipleship, thus fulfilling both the ‘near’ (Judea and Samaria) and ‘far’ (the ends of the earth) aspects of the Great Commission in Matthew 28.*

In 1670, a ship named the *Carolina* reached the New World, at an island off the coast of what is known today as South Carolina. The ship was full of servants who had left behind a land ruled by a taxing king in England in the hope of reaching a land where they could start a new life and be part of a governing process.⁴⁷ Perhaps the only two differences between those refugees and the ones who arrive today are skin tone and religion. Scripture, through the Law of Moses and the life of Christ, beckons church leaders in the United States to follow Jesus by fulfilling the Great Commission within their own borders. God has brought the nations to small communities within North Carolina because He desires for believers in America to proclaim the gospel to those who otherwise might never know. David Platt argues that God’s intentional design for church leaders is that they be a display of His glory.⁴⁸ In order for the church to thrive in their engagement with refugees, church leaders must learn to love them and lead their churches with Christ-driven purpose to point the their refugee neighbors to Christ (Prov. 29:18). However, apart from the help of the Holy Spirit, the church can do nothing.

⁴⁵ Wing Yip, “Be a Local Missionary,” sermon delivered September 18, 2016, Englewood Baptist Church, Rocky Mount, NC.

⁴⁶ Bruce Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011), 152.

⁴⁷ Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus, *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 295.

⁴⁸ David Platt, “The Gospel and Church Leadership,” *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), 53.

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