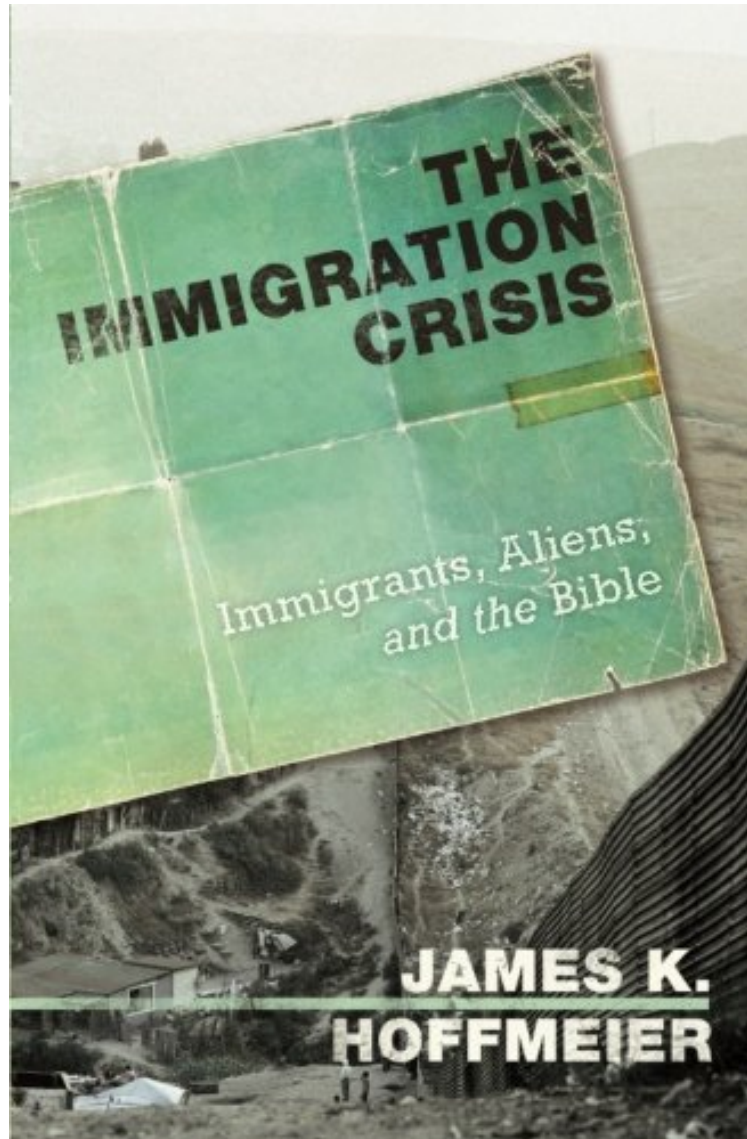


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## The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible

*James K. Hoffmeier*

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**James K. Hoffmeier : The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. immigration by the BookBy k.williamson I've been searching for at least 5 yrs at this writing for a well-researched, a definitive work of scholarship to inform shape my thinking from Scripture about this world's early 21st century immigration surge from the middle east to Western Europe points

further north, to North America. Hoffmeier's book is by far the best I've discovered to date. His arguments are based entirely on Scripture published archaeological research. Further, he exegetes the relevant passages from Scripture, exploring in depth the original languages in their historical context. The outcome for me is what I believe anyone well grounded in Scripture would expect. Immigrants should be welcomed subject to due diligence vetting by the host country held accountable for complying with the host's laws. For those immigrants intending-hoping to remain in the host country long-term /or to become citizens, they're expected to acculturate themselves to the host's culture. Advocates of open borders 'pure' compassion driven response to immigration will probably be disappointed by these outcomes. To the extent that they believe their arguments are based on Scripture, Hoffmeier's scholarship should compel them to engage their own research in the same whatever other relevant sources they can find. They'll be hard pressed to counter his arguments.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Failed to prove the author's primary claim

By Bill Fortenberry

**The Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of this book was to prove that the commands regarding Israel's treatment of strangers were only intended to apply to legally resident aliens. In order to prove this point, Hoffmeier put forward the claim that in the Hebrew Bible the alien (*ger*) was a person who entered Israel and followed legal procedures to obtain recognized standing as a resident alien. In contrast, Hoffmeier described the foreigner (*nekhar*) as those who were passing through the land with no intention of taking residence, or perhaps they would be temporarily or seasonally employed.

I purchased this book, because it was recommended as one of the best defenses of this claim, but I found Hoffmeier's reasoning to be embarrassingly weak and his evidence to be paltry at best.

**First Example of Flawed Logic: Jacob**

For an example of Hoffmeier's reasoning, consider his conclusion after he pointed out that Jacob purchased land from the sons of Hamor in Genesis 33. According to Hoffmeier: Once again we see that the Hebrew patriarchs did not presume for themselves the right to live wherever they wanted but had to obtain permission, and then Jacob purchased land. Hoffmeier uses this and similar examples in an attempt to prove that the term *ger* in the Bible only refers to those who have permission from the government to live in a given region. The only problem with this argument is that the patriarchs hardly ever sought government permission before buying land. The permission that they sought was not from the government; it was from the landowners. Jacob obtained permission from the sons of Hamor before buying land because he was buying land from the sons of Hamor. To take this and then claim that Jacob had to have permission from the government before buying land is a huge leap in logic that Hoffmeier makes no effort to explain.

**Second Example of Flawed Logic: Charging Interest**

Another example can be found in Hoffmeier's claim about charging interest to foreigners. Here's what Hoffmeier wrote: For a good example that illustrates the difference in status between the foreigner [*nekhar*] and the alien [*ger*], consider the laws regarding paying interest. Leviticus 25:35-37 records that Israelites should not charge interest on loans to fellow Israelites and aliens. Foreigners (*nokharim*), on the other hand, could be charged interest (Deut. 15:3). Clearly there is a difference in status between the *ger* and the *nekhar* and *zar* as reflected in the laws regarding interest. At first glance, Hoffmeier would seem to have made an excellent point here, and if the passages that he referenced actually said what Hoffmeier thinks they say, then this claim would be a very powerful point in his favor. Unfortunately, for Hoffmeier, the passages that he listed are speaking of two completely different issues. The passage in Leviticus is in fact a passage about charging interest, but Deuteronomy 15:3 has nothing to do with interest. That passage is actually about the release of debts every seven years. Hoffmeier's case would have been stronger if he had referenced Deuteronomy 23:20 instead, for that passage does speak about charging interest. In fact, referencing Deuteronomy 23:20 would have fit perfectly with Hoffmeier's claim since that passage uses the word *nekhar* for the stranger instead of the word *ger* which is used in Leviticus 25:35. Deuteronomy 23:20 says that the stranger (*nekhar*) can be charged interest whereas Leviticus 25:35 mentions a stranger (*ger*) in the context of not charging interest. Using Deuteronomy 23:20 would have helped Hoffmeier's case tremendously, and I can't figure out why he chose to use Deuteronomy 15:3 instead. Nonetheless, even if Hoffmeier had used Deuteronomy 23:20, the difference in Hebrew terminology here still would not have been sufficient to prove his point. According to Hoffmeier, Leviticus 25:35-37 teaches that the Israelites were not allowed to charge interest to either a fellow Israelite or a stranger (*ger*). However, I have not been able to find a single translation of Leviticus 25:35 which identifies the stranger (*ger*) in this passage as a resident alien. Without fail, every single translation that I have read identifies the stranger in Leviticus 25:35 as a fellow Israelite. The KJV is a great example of this: "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee." Similarly, the ESV translates this verse as: "If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. In every translation of this passage, we can see that the stranger being referenced here is not a resident alien, as Hoffmeier claims, but rather a fellow Israelite. Thus, the Leviticus passage is teaching that the Israelites were not allowed to charge interest on loans to fellow Israelites, and Deuteronomy 23:20 similarly indicates that the Israelites were not allowed to charge interest on loans to fellow Israelites. The Deuteronomy passage goes further by explaining that interest could be charged on loans to foreigners (*nekharim*), but neither passage gives any indication that the term *ger* refers to resident aliens as opposed to the term *nekhar*.

**Third Example of Flawed Logic: Ruth**

Hoffmeier's most obvious logical fallacy, of course, is found in his treatment of Ruth. Throughout the book, Hoffmeier repeatedly identified Ruth as the ideal example of the term *ger* being a reference to legally resident aliens.

Twice in chapter 2, twice in chapter 4, throughout most of chapter 5, and twice again in chapter 9, Hoffmeier focuses on story of Ruth as a case study for how legally resident aliens were treated in ancient Israel. Unfortunately for Hoffmeier, the term *ger* (which he claims is the appropriate term for a legally resident alien) is never once used in Scripture in reference to Ruth. Instead, Ruth is identified by the term *nekhar* in direct contradiction to Hoffmeiers claims. And what was Hoffmeiers explanation for this discrepancy? Perhaps Ruth did not realize that in Israel, thanks to the special protective status of the alien in biblical law, she had a right to glean the fields. Alternatively, she may have used the term in a self-deprecating manner in order to accentuate the generosity of Boaz. This is a rather bold speculation on Hoffmeiers part. Ruth presents a direct contradiction to the primary claim of Hoffmeiers book, and his best response is to say that maybe Ruth didnt understand the Hebrew language as well as he does.

**First Example of Insufficient Evidence: The Babylonian Captivity** In addition to Hoffmeiers flawed logic, he also failed to consider some pretty important evidence which contradicts his claim. For example, when writing about Israel and Judahs eventual captivities, Hoffmeier said: What is intriguing about the period of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities is that the Jews are never called aliens (*gerim*), and neither is the verb to sojourn nor to live as an alien (*gwr*) ever used in the Hebrew writings that treat the exile period. Rather they are called exiles (*golah* or *goluth*), and they were exiled (*hegelah*) to Babylon. While Hoffmeier is correct in saying that the term *ger* was never applied to the Hebrews during this period, he neglected to point out that the term *nekhar* was used during this time. The Jews were not just called exiles. Judah was also referred to as a stranger (*nekhar*) when he was carried into captivity (Obadiah 1:12). This use of *nekhar* is significant because it doesnt quite fit with the way that Hoffmeiers defined this term as referring to those who were passing through the land with no intention of taking residence, or perhaps they would be temporarily or seasonally employed. The Jews were not just passing through the land of Babylon. They were going there to live, and in fact, God specifically commanded them to make Babylon their home (Jeremiah 29:4-7). The command in Jeremiah 29 would be much more consistent with Hoffmeiers definition of *ger* than with his definition of *nekhar*, yet God Himself used the word *nekhar* to describe Judah at this time. This is just one of several significant uses of the term *nekhar* of which Hoffmeier seems to be completely unaware. Another important use of the term *nekhar* in Scripture can be found in the account of Davids flight from Absalom.

**Second Example of Insufficient Evidence: Ittai the Gittite** When David fled Jerusalem during Absoloms rebellion (II Samuel 15), he was joined by a band of soldiers from Gath led by Ittai. When David saw that Ittai and his men had joined him, he took him aside and told him that he did not need to flee with David since he was just a stranger (*nekhar*). Ittai replied by telling David in terms very similar to Ruths speech to Naomi that his proper place was with David no matter what may come. Now, we do not know exactly how long Ittai had been in Israel at this point, but we can tell from his response that he was not there as someone who was just passing through the land with no intention of taking residence. We could also consider that the term *nekhar* was used in reference to Solomons wives in I Kings 11 in spite of the fact that they were very obviously in Israel as citizens. Hoffmeiers definition doesnt seem to fit these usage of *nekhar*, but there is an alternative definition that I think fits not only these passage but also every use of *nekhar* throughout the Old Testament.

**An Alternative Definition: Location vs. Heritage** Hoffmeier is correct to note that the terms *ger* and *nekhar* are not completely interchangeable in the Old Testament. There is a difference between these two terms, but I dont think that Hoffmeier can defend his particular distinction. I think that a better explanation of the two terms would be that the term *ger* refers to one who is from a foreign place whereas the term *nekhar* refers to one who is of foreign blood or descent. In other words, the difference between the two terms is one of location as opposed to heritage.

**The Definition of Nekhar** The validity of this set of definitions can be easily seen when we consider the terms that are used as opposites of the terms *ger* and *nekhar* in the Bible. For example, I previously mentioned that Deuteronomy 23:20 uses the word *nekhar*, and when we look at the opposite of *nekhar* in this verse, we find that opposite to be the term *brother* (*ach* in Hebrew). The term *brother* is a term of relation. It is a reference to one who is a blood relative. To an Israelite, a brother would be anyone else who was also a descendant of Jacob. The term *nekhar* is used here as the opposite of a brother which would indicate that it is a reference to anyone who was not a descendant of Jacob. Throughout the Old Testament, the term *nekhar* is repeatedly used as the opposite of those who were of the same descent. This distinction is made very clear in Genesis 17:12 where *nekhar* is used to refer to one which is not of thy seed. And the most interesting use that I have found of this distinction is in Ezekiel 44 where the *nekhar* is identified as one who is uncircumcised in either his heart or his flesh. Circumcision of the flesh is what identified one as being of Israeli blood, but circumcision of the heart is what God identified as what truly made one and Israelite. This concept is what the Apostle Paul referenced in Romans 2:25-29. This definition also makes sense of the fact that the term *nekhar* was used in reference to Ruth, Ittai and the wives of Solomon. Each of them was of foreign descent regardless of their civic status within the nation of Israel, and therefore, each of them could be referred to by the term *nekhar*.

**The Definition of Ger** In contrast with the usage of the term *nekhar*, notice the terms which are used as opposites of the word *ger*. In Joshua 8:33, for example, the term *ger* is used as the opposite of he that was born among them. This is a reference to location. The focus is not on the parentage of the individual but rather on the location of his birth. The stranger (*ger*) in this passage is the one who was born somewhere else. Similarly, the strangers (*gerim*) mentioned in II Chronicles 30:25 were Israelites who left their homes in the northern kingdom in order to live in the southern kingdom of Judah. They were of the same blood, but they were

strangers in Judah because they were from a different place, i.e. the northern kingdom of Israel. And then in Ezekiel 47:22, we find the term *ger* again being used as the opposite of one born in the country. The term "*ger*" occurs in 83 verses of the Old Testament and it is repeatedly identified as the opposite of one born in the land (see Exodus 12:19, 12:48, Leviticus 16:29, 17:15, 24:16, 24:22, Numbers 9:14, etc.) Conclusion As far as I can tell, every use of the terms *ger* and *nekhar* falls within these two definitions. *Ger* is a reference to someone from a different location. *Nekhar* is a reference to someone who is of foreign descent. If these definitions are accurate, then all of the commands for the Israelites to "not oppress a stranger" must apply equally to legally resident aliens and illegal aliens (although the concept of an illegal alien is a relatively modern concept that didn't even exist in America until about the beginning of the 20th century, but that's a discussion for another time). These definitions succeed everywhere that Hoffmeier's definitions fail, and they have a much greater explanatory scope in that they have applications beyond just our current, 21st century immigration debates. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Hoffmeier does a thorough job explaining what the Bible teaches about immigrants and aliens. By Customer His analysis is thoughtful and measured. He attempts, where applicable, to speak to modern day situations in light of the ethical teaching derived from Scripture. I think this is a timely work and should be consulted by deacons and church boards as well as others who work with immigrants and aliens.

An estimated twelve to fifteen million people now reside illegally in the United States, posing a major social and legal challenge to the nation. Americans are divided over the best course of action in dealing with these illegal immigrants, and Christians are using the Bible to stake out different positions. *The Immigration Crisis* addresses this complex issue through a comprehensive look at the Bible. By a careful study of relevant materials in the Old Testament, in combination with archaeological and sociological materials, the author forms a clear definition of an alien in Israelite society. This understanding is an important starting point in the current debate. The book concludes by suggesting how the Bible might assist Christians in thinking about the problem of legal and illegal immigrants, and in developing the implications of the biblical teaching for public policy.

From Publishers Weekly This short volume attempts to apply biblical teachings to the present-day U.S. immigration crisis. Hoffmeier, a professor of Old Testament and archeology who was born in Egypt, argues that the Hebrew Bible's many legal and ethical proscriptions against mistreating the alien were addressed to a class of people who in this day and age might be thought of as resident aliens or permanent residents, not illegal immigrants. He also argues that the so-called sanctuary movement, in which church leaders have on occasion sheltered illegal immigrants from imminent arrest, is twisting biblical statutes and subverting federal law. The book offers little in the way of sociological, political or economic insight into the circumstances surrounding modern-day illegal immigration, beyond advocating for a law-and-order approach. Missing from this analysis is an understanding of the Bible as a prophetic document more concerned with larger issues of justice. Still, Christians looking for a biblical justification for strict federal enforcement of immigration laws may find much to like. (Apr. 30) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "Read this book if you want to throw light on the subject of immigration and not merely more heat. Dr. Hoffmeier's biblical exegesis gives us valuable perspective on national borders, guest workers, the difference between documented aliens and foreigners in Old Testament times, and many other matters." Marvin Olasky, Editor in Chief, *World Magazine* "Doubtless some will question this or that detail of his reading of Scripture, but Hoffmeier's book is a very healthy antidote to the merely sentimental readings that dominate much Christian thought on this complex and challenging issue." D. A. Carson, research professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; cofounder, The Gospel Coalition "The *Immigration Crisis* offers biblical perspectives on how Christians might respond to the complex needs and challenges that legal and illegal immigration pose. Dr. James Hoffmeier's knowledge of the ancient Near East unlocks the door to the biblical wisdom that shaped Israel's compassionate response to this timeless issue. You will discover how love and compassion for immigrants involves so much more than building or removing walls and deciding who receives or is denied amnesty." Vin Upham, Pastor, Immanuel Baptist Church, New Hartford, New York "Hoffmeier has produced an authoritative work on what the Bible does and does not say about immigration. He allows the Bible to speak for itself within its cultural context without reading modern politics into the text. While his knowledge of the biblical text and the greater ancient Near East sets the groundwork for an accurate hermeneutical approach, his sensitivity to the issues provides a road map for the church to stay true to its biblical roots while serving its calling to be a light to the nations." Steven M. Ortiz, Associate Professor of Archaeology and Biblical Backgrounds, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary "I come from a troubled nation from which hundreds of thousands of people have emigrated to western nations—some legally and some illegally. Many have done so because of genuine pain, danger, or need they have experienced in Sri Lanka. I have always discouraged people from using illegal means to do this and often preached about this in Sri Lanka. I resonate fully with the dual biblical emphasis presented in this book of caring for the alien and of submitting to the laws of the land." Ajith Fernando, Teaching Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka; author, *The Call to Joy and Pain* "Dr. Hoffmeier has written with insight and balance. There is biblical compassion and legal accountability throughout the pages of this

engaging journey of history and culture. This book should provoke meaningful discussion among civil and church leaders on this timely topic of immigration."Roger Haber, Senior Pastor, Central Baptist Church, Middleborough, Massachusetts"How can we resolve the immigration crisis in America today with humane sensitivity but with respect for the rule of law? James Hoffmeier brings the clarity and structure of biblical society to the confusion and chaos of modern America. He is one of the rare scholars and thinkers who listens to the Bible and does not tell the Bible what it should say. He hears the Bible speaking about the true meaning of sanctuary and of being a part of a society rather than a stranger. As a rabbi, I have shared Hoffmeier's conclusions with members of my Jewish community who are fascinated and open to hear the message of this provocative and intellectually stimulating book. For anyone who believes in the Judeo-Christian way of life, this book is essential reading. I wish that we could have more books like this on the other important controversies of our time."Benjamin Scolnic, Temple Beth Shalom, Hamden, Connecticut; Adjunct Professor, Southern Connecticut State University"With his book *Immigration Crisis*, Jim Hoffmeier has done the church a real service. He brings the Word of God to bear on one of the most pressing political and social issues of our day. Hoffmeier himself is especially well-equipped to bring us guidance on this issue. His own life, family, and career have been deeply intertwined with the issues of immigrants and aliens. Coupled with his long and fruitful career as a Biblical scholar, Hoffmeier has the tools to help us. A real strength of the book is its panoramic view of the entire canon. Certainly those of us who follow Christ need biblical light to shine on these pressing questions of our day. I would highly recommend Jim Hoffmeier's work as a wonderful starting place for developing a biblical perspective on the immigration crisis."Vic Gordon, Senior Pastor, Beachpoint Church, Fountain Valley, California

About the Author James K. Hoffmeier (PhD, University of Toronto), who has taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels for more than thirty years, is now professor of Old Testament and Near Eastern archaeology at Trinity International University. Born and raised in Egypt, he has been a refugee from war and an alien in two different countries, making him sensitive to immigration issues.