

# The Stranger Among Us

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On Monday, January 20, 2025, Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America. He wasted no time getting to work, signing 26 Executive Orders, 12 memorandums, four proclamations, and four staffing announcements on Day One alone. At least six of those Executive Orders addressed illegal aliens, sealing and securing the borders, and declaring drug cartels to be foreign terrorist organizations. As a consequence, the border was shut and arrests and deportations began that very day.



This prompted Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde of the National Cathedral to reproach President Trump the next morning at the traditional National Prayer Service:

*“Let me make one final plea, Mr. President. ... In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. ... The people who pick our crops and clean our office buildings; who labor in poultry farms and meat packing plants; who wash the dishes after we eat in restaurants and work the night shifts in hospitals. They...may not be citizens or have the proper documentation. ... I ask you to have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away. And that you help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here. Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land. May God grant us the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, to speak the truth to one another in love and walk humbly with each other and our God for the good of all people. Good of all people in this nation and the world. Amen”*

Budde gave voice to the angst that many on the Left, especially those in progressive churches, feel regarding President Trump’s move to secure our nation’s borders and deport illegal aliens. In doing so, she invoked Scripture, claiming that “Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land.” In doing so, she was saying that it is wrong, contrary to God’s Word, to arrest and deport those among us who “may not be citizens or have the proper documentation” but that we should be compassionate, welcoming, and merciful to them.

So, is that true? Should we welcome the strangers among us who lack proper documentation? Just what does the Bible say?

Well, in Leviticus 19:33-34, God instructed the Hebrews:

*<sup>33</sup>And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. <sup>34</sup>But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*

God is even more explicit in Deuteronomy 10:18-19:

*<sup>18</sup>He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. <sup>19</sup>Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

However, if we look at Exodus 12:43-49, we begin to see that loving the stranger among you is not without restrictions:

*<sup>43</sup>And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: <sup>44</sup>But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. <sup>45</sup>A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. <sup>46</sup>In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. <sup>47</sup>All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. <sup>48</sup>And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. <sup>49</sup>One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.*

Notice in verse 43 and 45 that God says that the stranger, the foreigner, and the hired servant are forbidden to eat or keep the Passover. But, in verse 48, God says that a stranger can keep the Passover. Is this a contradiction? Or is there something more going on here?

Well, there is. The first Hebrew word translated in this passage as stranger in verse 43 is *nekar* (נֶכָר). The second Hebrew word translated as stranger in this passage is *ger* (גֵּר), appearing in verses 48 and 49. To understand the difference, consider the context in which these two words are used. The first, *nekar*, refers to the stranger that is barred from the Passover celebration, along with the foreigner and the hired servant. All three are barred because none of them are desirous of becoming a part of the Hebrew nation. The hired servant is only there until the job is done. The foreigner is loyal to another nation. Likewise, the *nekar* stranger is there but does not plan nor desire to become a part of the nation. The second stranger, the *ger*, is different, however. This is the stranger that desires to be a part of the Hebrew nation and is evident by the instruction found in verse 48, “let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land”.

In other words, God knew that there would be non-Jewish people dwelling amongst the Hebrew children. Some would be there because they embraced the Jewish culture, religion, and nation. Others would be there because they were travelling, working a job, transacting business, representing another nation, or even, more nefariously, undermining or corrupting the Jews. Consequently, He gave Moses instructions in the Law on how to deal with the strangers that they would find among them.

Perhaps this can be better understood by considering the example of Ruth, in the Book of Ruth. In Ruth 1:1-2 we read:

*<sup>1</sup>Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. <sup>2</sup>And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Beth-lehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.*

As the story unfolds, the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, each marry a Moabite woman. Later, Elimelech and his sons die, leaving Naomi alone with her two Moabite daughters-in law. Naomi desires to return to her hometown of Bethlehem and frees her daughters-in-law from any obligations that they may have had and urges them to return back to their families. Although both women evidently loved Naomi and said that they would go with her, Naomi argues that it would be better for them if they returned to their respective families. One, Orpah, relents and returns to her family but the other, Ruth, refuses to leave Naomi, insisting in Ruth 1:16-17:

*<sup>16</sup>...Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: <sup>17</sup>Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.*

Consequently, when Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, while Ruth is a stranger, she is desirous of being a part of her new home. She no longer identifies with the culture and religion of Moab but rather with the culture and religion of Naomi's people. She is the epitome of the *ger* stranger and, as such, welcome to participate in all the cultural and religious activities and celebrations of her new home. Had she merely accompanied Naomi as a *nekar* stranger, even if she loved Naomi and did not want to be separated from her, she would have lived among Naomi's people but not have identified with them or desired to become one of them.

Treatment of strangers under Jewish law was based on which type of stranger someone was, whether they were a *nekar* or a *ger*. Each were to be treated fairly and hospitably but only the *ger* were to be afforded the privilege of participating in the civil and religious aspects of the Hebrew nation. The *ger*, like Ruth, were those who had switched their allegiance and loyalty from where they were from to Israel. Consequently, as we saw in Exodus 12:48-49, the *ger* were to be considered just as much a part of Israel as the native-born Hebrews were.

We see a similar reminder to treat the *ger* the same as the native-born in Leviticus 24:22:

*Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the LORD your God.*

The *nekar*, on the other hand, were viewed differently because, despite living among the Jews, the *nekar* maintained their allegiance and loyalty to where they were from. They considered themselves distinct from Israel and, accordingly, they were denied full participation in the religious and civil life of Israel. Consider, for instance, Ezekiel 44:5-9:

*<sup>5</sup>And the LORD said unto me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of the LORD, and all the laws thereof; and mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary. <sup>6</sup>And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, <sup>7</sup>In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations. <sup>8</sup>And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves. <sup>9</sup>Thus saith the Lord GOD; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.*

In fact, not only were the *nekar* prohibited from entering the sanctuary of God, according to Leviticus 22:25, they could not even supply offerings:

*Neither from a stranger's hand shall ye offer the bread of your God of any of these; because their corruption is in them, and blemishes be in them: they shall not be accepted for you.*

Nevertheless, despite their not wanting to pledge allegiance to the Hebrew nation, God made it clear that the *nekar* are responsible to obey His law while dwelling amongst His people:

*Strangers shall submit themselves unto me: as soon as they hear, they shall be obedient unto me. (2 Samuel 22:45)*

*As soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me: the strangers shall submit themselves unto me. (Psalm 18:44)*

So, getting back to Bishop Budde's plea for President Trump to have mercy on those who, as she put it, "may not be citizens or have the proper documentation," how should we deal with them? Well, whether they want to pledge their allegiance and loyalty to America and be a part of this great country, like the *ger* strangers in the Bible, or if, like the *nekar*, they do not, we should expect that they obey our laws. Those that genuinely want to be a part of our nation should be glad to do so - legally.

But what about Budde's plea for mercy for those hard-working immigrants whose only crime may have been to break our immigration laws in their desperation to escape from a terrible homeland? Well, consider one final passage of Scripture, Proverbs 6:30-31:

*<sup>30</sup>Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; <sup>31</sup>But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.*

While we may sympathize with why someone broke the law, it does not absolve them from the consequences of breaking the law. Therefore, I would suggest that the Bishop, and all who agree with her, remember that President Trump was elected to enforce the law that all, native born or not, are expected to obey.

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