

Sermon Outline: Refugees & Asylum Seekers

When we think of the Old Testament image of the nation of Israel we normally imagine a mono-cultural and mono-ethnic group. We think of the commands to Joshua and the Israelites to wipe out all of the nations residing in the Promised Land. But the laws of Israel present a different picture. Throughout Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy the Israelites are commanded to look after the foreigners who live amongst them.

HOW TO USE THIS OUTLINE

The emphasis of this sermon is on the following issues:

- The laws of Israel apply evenly to Israelites and foreigners. Foreigners are not to be denied justice
- The Israelites are to treat foreigners fairly because they were once foreigners in Egypt
- The 'laws of the land' included assistance for foreigners.

The outline will need to be customised and contextualised by each Corps Officer for the congregation to whom the sermon will be preached:

- Adding appropriate illustrations that will connect with the specific congregation
- Modifying language to be appropriate to the socio-cultural setting of the Corps
- Modifying sermon style if you prefer a topical rather than expository sermon style
- You may also wish to make the application more specific to your context.

PowerPoint slides have been provided for the following:

- Title Slide – Introducing the Sermon
- Scripture Slide – Deuteronomy 24:14–22 (whole passage)
- Scripture Slide – Deuteronomy 24:14–15 (highlight verse)
- Scripture Slide – Deuteronomy 24:22 (highlight verse)
- Scripture Slide – Deuteronomy 24:19–22 (highlight verse)
- Blank Slide – which you can customise if you wish

Scripture:

Deuteronomy 24:14–22 NIV

¹⁴ Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. ¹⁵ Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the LORD against you, and you will be guilty of sin.

¹⁶ Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

¹⁷ Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. ¹⁸ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

¹⁹ When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰ When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. ²¹ When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. ²² Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

Sermon Outline: Refugees & Asylum Seekers

Introduction

The issue of refugees and asylum seekers are major news in Australia. The issue has undoubtedly impacted every Federal election over the past ten years. It is easy to get caught up in the media coverage and political rhetoric. The Bible too is not silent on the issue of refugees and asylum seekers.

For ancient Israel the reality of oppression in a foreign land was the foundation of their national and cultural understanding. Their experience in Egypt and God's deliverance through the Exodus was the defining moment of their national and religious identity. Today's passage comes from Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy shows how the Jewish law was to be enacted in the Promised Land. The land and God's covenant with Israel are the major themes of Deuteronomy.

It is important to understand the terms of refugees and asylum seeker.

Migrant— someone who freely chooses to move to another country to live and has the freedom to choose to return to their country of origin without fear of persecution.

Refugee— The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone: "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."

Asylum Seeker— Someone who is seeking asylum (recognised refugee status and immunity from extradition) in a country other than their own.

The key differences to note are: a migrant has a choice to move, a refugee has been recognised as requiring assistance and an asylum seeker is someone seeking assistance.

The Laws of Israel Apply Evenly To Israelites and Foreigners

1. Verses 14–15 show that the law was to be applied equally to all workers regardless of their nationality. There was not to be two laws, one for the Israelites and one for the foreigners. The needs of the poor, whether Israelite or foreigner, were to be looked after within the society.
2. Verse 15 suggests that if the poor worker who is denied justice, either an Israelite or a foreigner, cries out to the LORD against the perpetrator then the perpetrator is guilty of sin.
3. The idea of the law applying equally to the Israelites and foreigners residing in Israel is explored further in Leviticus 19:33–34 and Numbers 15:13–16.
4. Leviticus 19:34 states that any foreigner living in Israel must be treated as a native-born.
5. Numbers 15:13–16 suggests that foreigners were to be included in the religious and cultural aspects of Jewish life. Verse 15 states, "You and the foreigner shall be the same before the LORD." If foreigners and Israelites are the same before the LORD then what excuse was there for foreigners to be treated differently to the Israelites?

The Israelites Are To Treat Foreigners Fairly Because They Were Once Foreigners in Egypt

1. Verse 22 in the reading connects the LORD's ordinances with the Israelite's experience in Egypt. The Israelite nation has first hand experience of being oppressed in a foreign land. The LORD commands them not to repeat the oppression in the Promised Land.
2. This idea is also picked up in Leviticus 25:35–38, Exodus 22:21 & 23:9 and Deuteronomy 10:17–19.
3. Exodus 23:9 reminds the Israelites that they know what it feels like to be a foreigner. This experience is to motivate them to not oppress the foreigners residing in Israel.

4. Share a personal story of being/feeling like a foreigner and how it motivates you.
5. Deuteronomy 10:17-19 reminds the Israelites that the LORD shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow. The fatherless and the widow are those who could not defend their own cause. He loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. Verse 19 says that the Israelites are to love those foreigners as the LORD loves them.

The 'Laws of the Land' Included Assistance for Foreigners

1. Verses 19–22 of the reading outline how crops are to be harvested. For an agricultural society the harvest of crops was their main economic activity. The Israelites are told to leave parts of their crop harvest for the poor and for the foreigners to collect.
2. In our economic rationalist world this approach does not make sense. If we want to give to the poor and needy we give from our abundance. We do the work, collect our pay, pay our taxes, put a roof over our head and feed our family. Then we give to the poor and needy.
3. Foreigners in ancient Israel were not land owners. They were not able to harvest their own crops. Their ability to take part in the economic life of ancient Israel was limited. They were to be assisted to be included in the economic life of the community. They were to be assisted to survive by collecting food from the harvest.
4. Leviticus 25:35–38 continues this theme, however this time it subverts the expectation. Verse 35 says that any Israelite who becomes poor is to be assisted "as you would a foreigner and stranger." The level to which you are prepared to help a foreigner is the level to which you are to help a fellow Israelite. The poor are to be assisted so they can continue to live in the community.
5. Ruth Chapter 2 tells the story of Ruth following the harvesters and collecting the leftovers from the harvest. Ruth (a foreigner and a widow) and Naomi (a widow) benefit from the enactment of this command from the LORD.

Conclusion

1. God's commandments to the Israelites are relevant to Australian Christians in the 21st Century. Just as the Israelites had to make the law work in their community we too must take the principles and apply them to our lives and the lives of our community today.
2. We would like to draw neat distinctions between how we treat migrants, refugees and asylum seekers but this is not the Biblical image. All people are to be treated equally before God and before God's law, which was also the law of the Israelite nation.
3. Foreigners were to be treated the same as Israelites. They were to be full members of the community. They were to be incorporated into community life.
4. The Israelites are to treat foreigners fairly because they were once foreigners in Egypt. The Israelites were to remember the oppression that they had suffered and were not to repeat that on the foreigners in their land.
5. The 'laws of the land' included assistance for foreigners. Further than this the law suggested that a poor Israelite is to be assisted as you would assist a foreigner.