

# **Moving Stories:**

## **The Bible and Migration**

### **A series of Bible Study Reflections**



Photo: Rhaea Russell-Cartwright

# Endorsements

The Declaration of Principle that is the basis of Baptists Together is very clear in its commitment to seeing Jesus Christ through Scripture. Furthermore, the Bible itself encourages us to, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly' (Colossians 3:16). We go to Scripture to enable us to grasp God's gracious activity through history and we also seek to see and interpret our world through the lens of Scripture. This resource is aimed at helping individuals and groups to get their teeth into some serious theological reflection about the refugee and migration crisis that is currently unfolding across Europe and, indeed, around the world. The suffering of those fleeing war, poverty and persecution, the risk of human trafficking and the exploitation of the vulnerable are all vital global issues that we need to engage with as Christians and this resource will enable you to hear beyond the headlines to the voices of those who face the harsh realities of being a refugee today.

*Moving Stories* is an apt name for this resource. Through offering a set of biblical, historical and contemporary reflections around the issues of migration you will be drawn into a bigger story concerning the travelling God who journeys with the migrants who are forced to flee their homes in the hope of a safer future. As you listen to the different voices of these studies, and as you see the world through different cultural lenses, my prayer is that you would be hearing, seeing and following Jesus with them.

**Lynn Green**

General Secretary, Baptist Union of Great Britain

At a time of momentous events involving migrants, especially on the perimeters of Europe, with the impact that these movements of large numbers of people is having on people's attitudes all over Europe, and especially in Britain (for example Brexit and the reasons for leaving), this excellent collection of studies makes migration 'an unavoidable issue'<sup>1</sup> for all Christians and Christian Churches. The blend of Bible with historical and contemporary material is particularly pertinent in an era of appalling biblical illiteracy and popular preaching that relies more on personal authority and highly selective use of biblical verses (proof texting). It is important to ground these studies in substantial passages of scripture that tell their own story - which of course is God's story; ultimately, this is the only story that matters.

These studies will compel every one of us to think deeply about our attitudes to immigrants and especially those that cross the thresholds into our church buildings or live on our streets in our neighbourhoods.

I commend these studies to every believer and Bible study group in our family of churches with the hope that many refugees in this country will experience the warmth of the love of Christ through our costly and maybe sacrificial actions.

**Joe M Kapolyo**

Lead Minister Edmonton Baptist Church, London

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<sup>1</sup> A phrase borrowed from 'Jews for Jesus' who are committed to making the Messiahship of Jesus for all Jews an unavoidable issue

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# Introduction

Migration has always been a part of the human story. The history of the small island of Great Britain is traditionally told in terms of successive waves of 'invasions'; the Celts, the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons, the Vikings and the Normans. To different extents these were all people movements and so can be compared with the patterns of our migration that are part of our more recent experience.

The Bible is very honest about what it means to be human and as a result it tells the stories of a number of different people movements. Among others:

- there's the scattering of people as a judgement of God after the debacle at Babel (*Genesis 11:8*); the journey of Abraham at the command of God to Canaan via Haran (*Genesis 12:1-9*);
- the journeys Abraham and then his descendants make to Egypt because of food shortages (*Genesis 12:10, 42:1-3*);
- the escape from slavery in Egypt and the journey to the land of promise told in the books from Exodus to Joshua;
- the deportation of God's people into captivity in Babylon (*2 Kings 24:10-16, 25:11*);
- the return of the exiles from Babylon to Judah (*Ezra and Nehemiah*);
- the flight of Jesus's family into Egypt because of the violence of King Herod (*Matthew 2:13-15*);
- and the scattering of the Jerusalem Church as a result of persecution (*Acts 8:1*).

Many of these stories resonate with the people movements of the last few centuries:

- the deportation of thousands of enslaved people from West Africa to the Americas and to the Caribbean;
- the occupation of the Americas, Australia and New Zealand by people of European origin;
- the migration of people to European nations from their former colonies;
- the arrival in Europe and the United States of America of thousands of economic migrants;
- the movement of people within the European Union's free market area;
- the movement of large numbers of people seeking asylum because they fear political, religious or ethnic persecution in their homelands;
- and, most recently, the widely reported current and continuing refugee crisis which has seen vast numbers of people from Syria and elsewhere enter camps in other Middle Eastern countries while many others have sought refuge in Europe.

We are especially conscious of migration at the moment. It became a major issue in the recent referendum on British membership of the European Union. There were regular reports from the camps near the French channel ports where thousands of people lived as they waited to gain entry to the United Kingdom. And journalists continue to cover the stories of people making the sea crossing to Europe from Turkey and North Africa.

These are major issues and important talking points. It is our conviction that we should allow the Bible to speak to them. It seemed to us that one good way to achieve this would be to issue a series of Bible studies. We also felt that the best people to draft these studies would be people whose own stories had been shaped or impacted by a significant people movement. So, we asked a number of people to write something for us. They were each asked to choose a Bible story that related to their own particular experience. The first part of each study addresses the Bible story. The next section talks about a particular more recent people movement. And the final section is about the legacy of that movement; the way it continues to affect people's lives today. Each section ends with questions for individual reflection and/or group discussion.

These studies are not intended to present a formal Baptist theology of migration. Nor is it intended that every study is fully consistent with all the others. We are hoping to offer material for reflection. While all the studies follow the same pattern, they take different approaches. Some contain stories while others offer analysis. Those who lead groups that use these studies will choose to use the material in different ways. The studies are offered in the order in which the texts selected appear in the Bible.

The opening study draws on the call and migration of Abraham and compares it with the call of European missionaries to Africa and the current phenomenon of African missionaries being called to Europe. Next is the story of Jacob which is compared to the issue of unaccompanied children in the camp at Calais. The third study examines the Exodus story and offers reflections on the needs of migrants today. Then come two complementary studies on the book of Ruth. Both reflect on the book in the light of the current refugee crisis. We have included them as separate items, but they could be used together as a single study. After that there is a study that considers the Exile of God's people in Babylon along with the Atlantic slave trade and its legacies. The last two studies both focus on Acts 8 and look at the issue of the relationship between persecution, migration and mission.

In every case we are hoping that people in our churches will want to relate the chosen Bible passages to stories of migration and their contemporary legacies. All of the stories demand a response from us. Some invite us to become involved in practical action and evangelism, others ask us to campaign for justice. They all demand that we reflect and that we pray.

It is our hope that these studies will enable both individuals and groups of people within our churches to think about migration, a major issue in the contemporary world, in the light of the Word of God in the Bible.

### **About the Editors**

**Israel Olofinjana** is the Director for Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World  
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# Contributors



**Israel Olofinjana** is the director for Centre for Missionaries from the Majority world. He is an accredited Baptist minister and the author of *Reverse in Ministry and Mission: Africans in the Dark Continent of Europe* (2010), *20 Pentecostal Pioneers in Nigeria: Their Lives, Their Legacies* (2011), *Partnership in Mission: A Black Majority Church Perspective on Mission and Church Unity* (2015) and editor of *Turning the Tables on Mission: Stories of Global South Christians in the UK* (2013) and co-editor of *Encountering London: London Baptists in the 21st Century* (2015). Israel has a BA (Hons) in Religious Studies from the University of Ibadan Nigeria and an MTh from Carolina University of Theology.



**Helen Paynter** is a Baptist minister in Bristol, and Research Fellow at Bristol Baptist College. She has a PhD in Old Testament from the University of Bristol. Her current research interests are in the Old Testament texts of violence and how they relate to modern situations of conflict. She lives in Bristol with her husband, Stephen, and their three daughters Susanna, Louisa and Victoria.



**Wale Hudson-Roberts** is an ordained Baptist minister who has been the Baptist Union Justice Enabler for fourteen years. He is married to Christine and they currently have one foster child (12 years of age) and their own son (13 years old), as well as numerous god children. Wale is a frequent contributor to *Keep The Faith*, an African and Caribbean Christian magazine.



**Dion-Marie White** is a Joint BA Hons degree graduate of Religious Studies combined with Theology. She has a heart for young people, 'misfits' and those at the margins of society, especially vulnerable women. She would like to explore a creative ministry and pastoral care in the future.



**Louise Brown** has been working in Lebanon with BMS World Mission for the last eleven years. She is there with her husband Arthur and their four children. Louise has worked in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon as an English teacher. Three years ago she set up and now runs an Education Project with Lebanese, Syrian and Iraqi children through Resurrection Church Beirut. She is currently studying for her Masters at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary and has had a specific focus on people migration and ethical mission. Louise enjoys swimming, reading and baking cakes with her daughters.



**Arthur Brown** is Assistant Professor of Youth Ministry and Applied Theology at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) and Associate Director of Youth Initiatives and at ABTS' Institute of Middle East Studies (IMES). He is also a member of faculty on IMES' Masters in Middle Eastern and North African Studies and is Chair of The Feast Lebanon, an inter-faith youth initiative. He is an ordained Baptist Pastor [Youth Specialist] with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and has been seconded to ABTS by BMS World Mission since 2005. He is married to Louise and they have four children, Jessica, Naomi, Jack and Jonathan.



**Norva Oliver Rodney** is a graduate of Mico Teachers' College, United Theological College of the West Indies and also has a Masters of Arts (with distinction) from University of the West Indies. He has been an ordained minister since 1995 and pastors Kitson Town Circuit of Baptist churches. He is a member of Jamaica Baptist Union Executive, committees and commissions of the Jamaica Council of Churches and Baptist World Alliance. He is also a lecturer in Practical Theology and the author of *Mission in a New Key, Soundings in Practical Theology* (2015). Norva is a chair of School Boards, Moderator of a Ministers' Fraternal, Chaplain of Institutions, Contract Inspector with the National Education Inspectorate an advocate for Human Rights and a JP. He is married to Naomi and has one teenage daughter.



**Elnur Jabiyev** was born in Azerbaijan. He was raised in a Muslim family and was a teacher of the Koran. When he was 17 his uncle led him to Christ. After graduating from Police Academy he worked as a chief police officer in Baku. He was fired from his job because of his Christian faith. He served as General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Azerbaijan before he went to Spurgeon's college in 2009. He is founder and CEO of Turkic Belt Ministries. He is an accredited Minister of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and also serves as Minister for International Mission at Streatham Baptist Church in London.



**Rupen Das** is with Canadian Baptist Ministries on secondment to the European Baptist Federation (EBF). He is Research Professor at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, as well as on the faculty of the International Baptist Theological Study Center in Amsterdam. Previously he was on secondment to the Lebanese Baptists in Lebanon working with refugees and with the Navigators in the US, South East Asia, and India. He has been World Vision's Field Director in the South Pacific, a director in Emergency Response, and a professor and program coordinator of International Project Management at Humber College in Toronto.

# Study 1:

## Migration and the Mission of God

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Bible Readings:</b>         | Genesis 12:1-3, Hebrews 11:8-10        |
| <b>Historical Perspective:</b> | European missionaries in Africa        |
| <b>Contemporary Legacy:</b>    | African missionary migrants in Britain |

### Introduction

This study looks at the issue of migration through the story of Abraham. It does this as a way of understanding the relationship between migration and God's mission. We will see that God has used, and continues to use, migration as a means of fulfilling his mission.

### 1 Bible Story: The migration of Abraham

**Read** Genesis 12:1-3

In the Old Testament God reveals his interest in migrants. He often uses migration to accomplish his purposes. Migration and mission complement one another. Take for example the classic case of Abram's (God later changed his name to Abraham) call in Genesis 12:1-3. God's calling of Abram meant that he had to migrate from Ur of the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) to the new land God was showing him in Canaan (modern day Israel and Palestine). The writer of Hebrews was so convinced that Abraham was a missionary migrant that at 11:9 he uses the verb *paroikeyo* to describe Abraham's journey. It means to come from home to live somewhere else, to *migrate*.

Another way of rendering verse 9 is, 'By faith he migrated into a land of promise as in a foreign land...' Abraham, as an Aramean nomad, passed on this trait of temporary residence to Isaac and Jacob and we see this unfold in the Patriarchs' stories in Genesis. (Read Hebrews 11:9 again).

The story of Abram in Genesis 12 teaches us about God's calling into mission; in fact one could argue that the God of mission called Abram to be a missionary. Abram's calling started with his salvation as God called him out of the nature religion of his people into a journey with Yahweh. Therefore in one sense, God's calling on Abram was a salvation call as well as a missionary calling. Now Abram was called from one country into another and this reflects the modern missionary movement that started in Europe that saw the establishment of Christian missions in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Christians such as William Carey, Mary Slessor, Robert Moffat and David Livingstone all felt God calling them to serve in other nations in Africa. It is now interesting to observe that the fruits of these missions



are now returning to Europe to serve as missionaries. This is what is known as 'reverse missionaries' - that is, people from the former mission fields now serving in Europe. There are many pastors and missionaries serving in the UK who have come from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

These missionaries from former mission fields are responding to God's call to serve in Britain just as Abram responded to God. Some of these missionaries have come to the UK as economic migrants, political migrants and missionary migrants.

While the term missionaries historically applies to Christians who went overseas to serve God, it is important to stress that God can call us to serve our neighbour, in our community, school, college, university or any other local context. This reflects current understanding of mission and missionaries.

### Questions for Reflection



- What is the connection today between mission and migration?
- Are all migrants economic migrants or are there other types of migrants?

## 2 Historical Perspective: European missionaries in Africa

Just as Abraham responded to God's call and migrated, there are those who have migrated in response to God's call of mission. The whole enterprise of European missions in Africa serves as an example. There are different views about Western missionaries in Africa; some commentators view them as unsuccessful because their work was associated with trade, slave trade and colonialism. In essence, the European mission is seen as having caused more problems than it resolved; and African people are still wrestling with its legacies today. On the other hand, there are those who, despite the connection between mission and trade or the later combination of Christianity, commerce and civilisation, believe that European mission in Africa was a success; it enabled Christianity to become rooted into African culture and religion so that today we can talk of the growth, indeed explosion, of African Christianity. In my opinion, a balanced view is needed. We have to understand that European mission in Africa was a complex issue. It certainly had its weaknesses and yet it also has its strengths.

Whatever view we subscribe to, one thing we cannot deny is that European missionary enterprise in Africa involved migration. People migrated as explorers, traders, slave masters, colonial masters, officers, and so on, as well as representatives of mission agencies and churches, in order to share their faith with Africans.

There were four major European missionary initiatives in Africa from the Middle Ages through to the beginning of the twentieth century. The first was by Roman Catholic Orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans who wanted to share the Gospel with the Muslims in North Africa. Their main methods of evangelising were martyrdom and apologetics. This attempt was partly successful. The second attempt was by the Roman Catholic Portuguese explorers in West, Central and Southern Africa in the fifteenth century. They shared the message of the gospel with kings and the chiefs of the people with the understanding that these kings would enforce Christianity upon their loyal subjects. Again, this was partly successful. However, by far the most successful initiative was the third which took place in the nineteenth century and was carried out by evangelical Protestant churches and mission agencies influenced by the Evangelical Revival. The gospel was shared, schools built, transport networks developed and communications improved. The fourth attempt, which enjoyed the fruits of the third and built on its successes, was that of Pentecostal missionaries at the beginning

of the twentieth century. These missionaries worked and served alongside indigenous Pentecostals creating affiliations and networks of churches in the process. In total therefore it took around four waves of missionary migration over a period of 800 years before the gospel took root in Africa.



### Questions for Reflection

- What are your thoughts on the European missionary migration to Africa?
- Do you think the European missionary enterprise in Africa was a success or a failure?

### 3 Contemporary Legacy: African missionary migrants in Britain

One of the positive results of European missions in Africa is that today we have many African churches in Europe doing mission. While most of the time we talk about migrants as economic, some of the African pastors and missionaries who are serving in Britain today are what I call missionary migrants because some of them were intentionally sent to Britain to do mission. Many of them, like Abraham, have left their country, people and even families. They have not come to receive benefits from the UK government, but have rather come to give and to be a blessing. Here are the stories of three missionaries from Africa who are serving in Britain.

#### Story A: Matthew Ashimolowo - founder of Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC)

Matthew Ashimolowo was sent in 1984 by Foursquare Gospel Church to come and help plant a church in the UK. Foursquare Gospel Church, Nigeria, was receiving many letters from their members who were living in London asking for a church to be established there. It was decided that a Pastor was needed and therefore Matthew's denomination mentioned to him that they wanted to send him as a missionary to the UK. Matthew had other plans in mind as he was preparing to undertake a Masters Degree in Canada and his visa was already arranged. However he accepted the call and came to the UK on 11 February 1984 as a Foursquare Gospel Church missionary from Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. Matthew began pastoring with eleven adults and three children in London. The congregation grew steadily and increased to 64 people although the membership later dropped to 16. As a result of this decline he was advised by the co-ordinating ministers to stop pastoring and look for something else to do. He persevered however and after around eight years (1984-1992) the congregation grew to around 600 people. In 1992, Ashimolowo left Foursquare to start an independent church known as KICC which was named the largest church in Britain in 1998. The church now has about 12,000 people in attendance on Sundays.

#### Story B: Peter Oyugi - African Inland Mission (AIM)

While Matthew Ashimolowo was sent intentionally to come and plant a church in the UK, the second story is distinct in that Peter Oyugi was invited in 2005 by Elmfield Church in North West London to be their lead pastor. Elmfield Church is an independent evangelical church with Brethren roots. The church has a predominantly white and middle-class congregation and one of the reasons the leadership invited Peter was to help them to reflect more of the cultural diversity of the local area. Peter served at the church for a few years and is now working with African Inland Mission (AIM) as a mobiliser for the South of England and Wales. Peter is also one of the directors of the Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World, a mission initiative designed to help prepare, encourage and train missionaries from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

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<sup>1</sup> Foursquare Gospel Church is a North American Classic Pentecostal Church. Its work in Nigeria was founded in 1955.

### Story C: My own Story

I was sent by my Pentecostal church in Nigeria in 2004 to plant a church here in the UK. However, I decided not to plant that church because I did not want to lead a Nigerian church. After observing a few Nigerian churches in the UK and how they were struggling to reach the indigenous people, I decided to join a Baptist church. I started attending a Baptist church in South East London because I wanted to understand the church culture and context in the UK. This Baptist church has people from different parts of the world and became the place where I learnt the dynamics and challenges of a multicultural church setting.

After serving as a youth leader and student minister in the church for a while, I became one of the pastors of the church (serving alongside a white female pastor), making me the first black minister in the 100 years of the church's history. Since then, I have had the privilege of leading a White majority church and am currently leading Woolwich Central Baptist Church, a multicultural, multi-ethnic, intergenerational church in South East London.

These three stories serve as examples of how God uses migration in mission.



#### Questions for Reflection

- What are your reflections on these stories?
- Who are those in our churches that are missionary migrants and how can we welcome and support them?

#### Suggestions for Further Reading

Adeyemo, Tokunboh (ed) - *African Bible Commentary*, Nairobi Kenya: WordAlive Publishers, 2006.

Adogame, Afe - *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

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Wright, Chris - *The Mission of God*, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2006.

**Israel Olofinjana**

# Study 2:

## Jacob - Economic migration and family reunification

|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Bible Readings:</b>         | Genesis 45:3-11; 45:25 - 46:7; 46:28 - 47:12 |
| <b>Historical Perspective:</b> | Economic migration from Africa               |
| <b>Contemporary Legacy:</b>    | Unaccompanied minors in northern France      |

### Introduction

In this study we will reflect on Jacob's 'economic migration' to Egypt and consider what might constitute sufficient cause for migration. We will then turn our attention to some of the causes of, and trends in, African migration. Moving on to the contemporary issues that this raises, we will examine the problem of unaccompanied minors in the camp at Calais and the importance of family reunification, a key theme in the Jacob story.

### 1 Bible Story: Jacob is pushed and pulled to Egypt

**Read** Genesis 45:3-11; 45:25 - 46:7; 46:28 - 47:12

The back story of Joseph will be familiar to most. But that well-known tale of fraternal discord and the over-riding sovereignty of God might also be told, in modern terms, as a story of human trafficking. Jacob's favourite son has been lured, trapped, sold and transported against his will to do forced labour in a country utterly alien to him in language, custom and religion. In the typically spare style of Old Testament narrative, the story does not dwell on Joseph's sense of lostness, alienation, and grief, but if we are to be sensitive readers, we must read between the lines to infer it. The story does, however, give us a moving glimpse of Jacob's anguish at the apparent death of his son (Gen 37:31-35).

This is important background to understand Jacob's journey to Egypt, which is a tale of migration. The perils of this overland desert journey, made by an old man and his extended family including 'little ones', along with their livestock and belongings packed into wagons (see Gen 46:5-7), should not be underestimated by modern readers accustomed to international travel in comfort and ease. No journey of this nature is undertaken on a whim. What were the factors that compelled Jacob to risk it?

Modern scholars who study migration speak of 'push' and 'pull' factors; negative conditions that propel someone away from their land, and positive features that attract them to their destination. In these terms, the push factor for Jacob was the 'severe famine' (43:1) afflicting Canaan and beyond. From media images of drought and malnutrition in parts of Africa we have all glimpsed the desolation experienced by a parent watching their children starve. However, the pull factor for Jacob was just as strong: the desire to see his lost son again; to reunite his family. Again, we can imagine, even if we have never experienced it, the dereliction of forced separation from loved ones; Jewish stories from the Second World War are just one example among many.

In 1954, psychologist Abraham Maslow described a hierarchy of human needs, beginning with physiological needs (such as food and water), followed by the need for safety, then for relationship, then self-respect and esteem, and finally the need for self-actualisation. In Maslow's framework, Jacob's decision to migrate is comprehensible as a pursuit of the three most fundamental: food, safety and family. Today he would be described as an economic migrant.

But this is not simply another story of human migration, like the great people movements of ancient times. This is sacred story; the story of God's great purposes for the world. And in theological terms, leaving Canaan presents a real problem for Jacob.

The theme of 'land' is very strong in the book of Genesis. Though God promises Canaan to Abram in 12:1, the patriarch never takes possession of it; he travels the length and breadth of the land (eg 12:6-9) but never owns it. Indeed, on his wife's death, he has to purchase a burial plot for her (chapter 23). His son Isaac lives there in somewhat precarious circumstances (chapter 26), but when his son Jacob flees from there, God promises to bring him back, which he duly does (28:10-17; 33:12-20). So when, in his old age, famine and family disruption threaten to displace Jacob from the land, he has good reason to be concerned. Is this an act of disobedience which will jeopardise the promise of God to his family?

No, says the LORD (46:2-4). The purposes of God are not so easily thwarted, his promise is surer, and his plan is far, far bigger than Jacob – or we – can imagine. Through hospitality and later through hostility, the part that Egypt will have to play in the life of the nation of Israel is greater than anyone has yet foreseen. It will become the founding story of the nation, and a key paradigm for the saving work of Jesus.



### Questions for Reflection



- What push or pull factors would compel you to move your family from your city and country of residence? How far up Maslow's hierarchy is it legitimate to pursue needs in this way?
- For all Christians, Jewish and (by in-grafting – see Romans 11:11-24) Gentile, this story of Jacob is our story, too. This economic migration – and the great people movement of the exodus that follows it – is a key part of the history on which God has built his church. How do you react to that?



## **2 Historical Perspective: Economic migration from Africa**

The term 'economic migration' is often used perjoratively to describe those who are dissatisfied with their current circumstances and who greedily eye the fatter fare on offer elsewhere. These people, it is often believed, enter by stealth to steal our jobs, enjoy our welfare benefits, and freeload on our prosperity. The situation, of course, is rarely as simple as that.

Historically, most African migration (I am speaking of voluntary migration, rather than the enforced migration of enslavement) has taken place within the continent. In 1960, for example, there was net migration into Africa. Even today, most African migration is to neighbouring countries, and the Gulf countries and the Americas receive a large proportion of those who do leave the continent.

The causes of African migration are complex and still incompletely researched, but certain facts are clear, and some of them are counter-intuitive. While poverty clearly is a motivating factor in many cases, migration is actually higher from the rather more developed countries in the continent. This is probably best explained by understanding that in addition to the 'push factors', migration is also driven by aspiration and facilitation. Thus as economic growth develops within a poor country, the resultant improvements in education increase aspirations; and alongside this the increase in material resources, and advancements in infrastructure and transport links, make the prospect of emigration more feasible. Further, as migration patterns become established, the development of trans-national kinship structures, social groups, and informational networks reduce the psychological and economic cost of migration, making the venture a less risky prospect.

In terms of 'push and pull' factors, these probably fall into three main categories. Conflict continues to be a major cause, although only 14% of migrants leaving the continent are officially classified as refugees; the majority move for reasons of family, work or study. Second, financial hardship is important. However, traditional economic models based on calculations of relative earning potentials, skills dividends and cost-benefit ratios are increasingly being challenged by the additional subtleties of aspiration and facilitation touched on above. Third, liberal democracy, with its attendant civil, political and social freedoms, exercises a powerful 'pull', especially towards those traditionally disadvantaged in their own societies. This is probably one of the chief factors in the visibly increasing numbers of women now emigrating from Africa.

Finally, it is not appropriate to consider this subject without touching on the historical and current responsibility which receiving countries bear for many of the driving causes of migration. Historical colonial practices and the Atlantic slave trade have established and shaped migration patterns. Ironically, the process of decolonisation, with the formation of nation states along lines of expediency, and with little attention to ethnic diversity and tensions, set the stage for political instability in many regions. Proxy wars in Africa, whether through direct military intervention or supply of arms, have caused further destabilisation. Strongly competitive international trade policies of protectionism, through tariffs and subsidies, have contributed to indebtedness of the poorest countries and the partial collapse of the agricultural sector, resulting in mass urbanisation. Climate change, still probably in its infancy, is accelerating the expansion of the Sahara desert, necessarily displacing those who have traditionally subsisted on its margins.

While internal issues such as corruption and poor governance cannot be ignored, the role which Britain and other developed countries have played in the impoverishment and destabilisation of large parts of Africa should not be overlooked. So-called 'economic' migration is perhaps not as straightforward as it may appear.



### Questions for Reflection

- To what extent have Britain and the other ex-colonial powers contributed to the 'push' factors which drive economic migration from Africa? Does this affect our ethical responsibilities on the world stage?
- What are the disadvantages to the origin states of those who emigrate for financial or aspirational reasons?

### 3 Contemporary Legacy: Unaccompanied minors in northern France

In his novel *Oliver Twist*, the Victorian writer Charles Dickens vividly portrays the cynical entrapment and criminalisation of youngsters whom fate had brought to the streets of London, alone and unadvised. But their predicament, and worse, is being shared by youngsters in Europe today, and one of the defining judgments on our generation will relate to our action or indifference on this matter.

I visited the camps at Calais and Dunkerque in February of 2016. My abiding memories are of calf-deep mud, inadequate shelter, piles of rotting garbage, and the general air of confusion, fear, and disillusionment. After its partial demolition later that month, the Calais camp was reduced to one third of its previous size, with the tragic loss of many community facilities. But this attempt by the French authorities to curtail its growth was entirely ineffectual; in August 2016, it had an estimated and unprecedented 9000 residents. They were sleeping on top of one another, as one aid organisation described it, like sardines in a tin. But the full demolition of the camp in October 2016 brought about its own problems. Most notably, inadequate facilities for the registration of migrants resulted in many people, including many minors, sleeping on the streets; and some being arrested for the 'crime' of not having registered with the authorities.

Many of the people from the camp are so-called economic migrants from Africa. Hundreds of them are unaccompanied minors. Some are fleeing conflict, some are seeking to join family in Europe, some have been sent to Europe by their family because it is judged to be safer or otherwise advantageous for them.

Under the EU's so-called 'Dublin regulation', legally residing non-EU residents can bring close family members to the member state where they are living. The family members should not need to enter 'under the radar', as there is a clearly established process for this family reunification. Independently of this, in May 2016, the Labour peer Alfred Dubs (a beneficiary of the Kinder transport in 1939) secured an amendment to the Immigration Act, whereby Britain committed herself to provide homes for an unspecified number of unaccompanied child refugees 'as soon as possible'.

There were over 200 children in the Calais camp who claimed entitlement to enter the UK by the Dublin regulation. By early October, only a handful, around 40, had been brought into the country, and these cases were not pro-actively sought by our government, but were brought to court by independent charities. Even when Britain agreed to take the child, bureaucratic delays were forcing them to wait in the camp for further weeks. Further, by the point of the demolition, fewer than 30 children had been brought into the country under the Dubs amendment. In the meantime, hundreds of children and young people roamed feral in the camps - unloved, unguided, undisciplined - and without adequate health-care, education or protection. Some of them were as young as 8 or 9.

By early October, cumulative pressure from aid organisations, and the forthcoming demolition brought about a small flurry of activity by the British government, and around 200 children had their cases expedited. Many volunteers on the ground regarded this as too little, too late.

The indignity and squalor that I witnessed during my visit are the least of what these unaccompanied children are facing. Assuming they make it to Europe – and an average of two children a day are drowning in the Mediterranean – they next have to contend with the inherent hazards of transit camps (which still exist in many parts of Europe). These include fire (which I experienced at first hand), disease, or sickness from an inadequate diet. Many face the nightly risks of suffocation, road accident or assault as they attempt to stow themselves onto lorries. Add to that the pressure of perhaps caring for younger siblings, the despair of disappointed hopes (an estimated 10% are self-harming), and prolonged separation from family (mobile phones are a life-line for all the camp residents).

And then put into the toxic mix those who will deliberately prey on them. Many – perhaps most – of these young people are being sexually abused, some selling themselves to pay for their journeys, some simply preyed upon by their elders. Many migrant children – Europol estimates 10,000 – have simply gone missing. God alone knows where they are.

This is not Victorian England. This is 21st century Europe, and it is happening on our watch.



### Questions for Reflection

- Who is my neighbour? What responsibility do I bear them?
- What is the prophetic role of the church in this situation? What might that look like in practice?

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**Helen Paynter**

# Study 3:

## Exodus – I have a dream

**Bible Readings:** Exodus 12, Exodus 15:1-18

**Historical Perspective:** Migration and land

**Contemporary Legacy:** All lives matter

### Introduction

This study will look at migration through the Exodus prism. It will help us appreciate God's quest to liberate his people from injustice and oppression. It will help Baptist churches consider how best they can support migrant communities.

### 1 Bible Story: Exodus

**Read** Exodus 12, Exodus 15:1-18

The story of Exodus is powerfully told in a few dramatic chapters. 600,000 men, besides women and children, (Exodus 12:37) left Egypt in search of freedom and land. God not only punished their enemies, but drowned Pharaoh's army with its chariots and cavalry in the Red Sea and brought his people to Mount Sinai where they witnessed the revelation of the Decalogue – God's commandments to his people. Yet the Exodus story is far more than a gripping read. It is a fast-moving drama that provides insight into the character of God. For example:

- ***Israel knew Yahweh as liberator:***  
For Israel, bondage, cruelty, servitude and humiliation were behind them. Yahweh had finally led his people into freedom. In so doing he proved his power, for not even the greatest forces in the world were sufficient to halt Yahweh's liberation advances. Israel's gratitude towards their liberating God is eloquently expressed in the Song by the Sea (Exodus 15:1-18).
- ***The Exodus brought further knowledge of God to Israel and the surrounding nations:***  
The Exodus was not an exclusionary event. It was not solely for Israel; Egypt (their former oppressor) was to know about Yahweh too. Such knowledge was brought about in part through the presence of Moses who, on behalf of Yahweh, requested that Pharaoh release his people. Yahweh spoke to Pharaoh, not through lengthy apologetic arguments, but through a language that Pharaoh could understand: signs. First as wonders and then as plagues, these were to widen the pagan king's experience, so that he and the Egyptian people might encounter Yahweh.

- **The signs and wonders showed Yahweh as superior to the Pharaoh:**

We must not forget Pharaoh's position. To the Egyptians he was a god king; he was deity. Whatever else the Egyptian people may have seen through the incidents, they must surely have been persuaded of the power of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Indeed, the plagues were sent by God as a sign for the Egyptian people rather than for God's covenant people.

### Questions for Reflection



- Is it possible for a migrant to speak about God as liberator?
- As God advocated on behalf of Israel, in what ways can your church advocate on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees?

## 2 Historical Perspective: Migration and land

What does: 'And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.' (Exodus 6: 8) mean? The word 'land' is one of the most common nouns in the Old Testament, even more prevalent than 'covenant', suggesting that land is a dominant theme. What is behind this?

There are four possible reasons:

- **Land is a promise:** The most forthright promise of land is found in Yahweh's speech to Abraham: 'To your offspring I will give this land.' (Genesis 12:7). This is a sworn promise, while sometimes given in isolation, it is also interlaced with other promises, mainly as descendants (Genesis 13: 14-16; 26:4).
- **Land as a gift:** In Deuteronomy, the notion of land as a gift occurs thirty times. This recurring theme reinforces again and again the free act of grace on the part of Yahweh. Israel's part in the grace encounter was zero. The grace initiative arose out of God's great love for his chosen people, and the accompanying gift of land is explained as follows: 'Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his presence and his great strength, to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today.' (Deuteronomy 4:37-38). The abundance of vineyards, olive trees and land were gifts to Israel because God loved his people.
- **Land as a blessing:** Because land represents the blessing of rest, the Promised Land was regarded as a blessing. This rest is not peace of mind per se, it is a reference to physical rest; a rest from the oppression of enemies. No more wandering. Safety has replaced restlessness. Peace has come. In the wilderness this was not at all possible. The Israelites were migrants in search of freedom, on a constant sojourn for rest. Joshua summed it up well in the words 'Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you after he said, "The Lord your God will give you rest by giving you this land"' (Joshua 1:13).
- **Land and life style:** The Old Testament reminds us that continued occupancy of the land is dependent on observance of the law. Through faithful adherence to the admonitions, Israel can remain in the land. If blessing follows obedience, curse within the land (and deportation from it) will result from disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Even though the impression given is that obedience to God's ordinance was a condition for entry into the land, these statements caution Israel, lest through disobedience they forfeit the right to continue in the land.





### Questions for Reflection

- Can you explain why you think land is important to migrants?
- In order to encourage integration, what kingdom values should Britain embrace?

### 3 Contemporary Legacy: All lives matter

Applications for British citizenship from EU nationals living in the UK rose by 14 per cent in the run up to June's EU referendum. The surge in applications included a 26 per cent rise in applications from Italians and a 9 per cent rise from Polish nationals<sup>1</sup>. Poles are now the largest foreign-born population in Britain, overtaking the Indian community for the first time, with 831,000 living in the UK in 2015, compared with 795,000 Indians<sup>2</sup>. Pakistanis and Irish people in Britain are now the third and fourth largest foreign-born communities<sup>3</sup>.

So what are some of the factors responsible for the escalating figures? The need for employment and safety are by far the main reasons.

Migrating to a new country is a hugely challenging process. It involves a multitude of economic and emotional challenges. While remaining conscious of the economic struggles experienced by migrants, we can be oblivious to the emotional and psychological legacy. Migration leaves its scars - often invisible - on the many migrants forced to flee their land.

The correlation between migration and mental health issues should come as no surprise. Whether it's a Romanian migrant fleeing poverty, a Syrian migrant fleeing war, or a Sudanese migrant fleeing imprisonment, deep levels of stress are associated with the process of leaving family and land.

Immigrants typically have elevated rates of physical and mental disorders, particularly when compared with the population of the host country. Significant increases in rates of schizophrenia and related psychoses diagnosed in many immigrants is a disturbing concern<sup>4</sup>. The size and complexity of their 'internal baggage' is determined by the levels of trauma connected with their exodus experience but the presence of trauma is seen in most if not all migrants - a palpable psychological legacy.

So here is the question? How best can our churches address the psychological legacy migrants are forced to live with? Churches best able to deal with these concerns are those with big hearts - able to listen to the pain of migrants without judgement, sometimes not even commenting until much of their story has been narrated, churches brimming over with radical hope and hospitality. If migrants can experience a bit of their promised land in their new church community, this will support them in their quest to find a semblance of home in a strange land.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2016/citizenship>

2 Office for National Statistics - Population of the United Kingdom by Country of Birth and Nationality – released 25 August 2016

3 Office for National Statistics - Population of the United Kingdom by Country of Birth and Nationality – released 25 August 2016

4 *Journal of Contemporary African Studies – Refugees, Patterns, Problems and Challenges* (page 157- 178) by Jeff Crisp and <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/jun/08/experts-sound-alarm-mental-health-toll-migrants-refugees-depression-anxiety-psychosis>

Images of the body of Alan Kurdi<sup>5</sup> washed up on a Turkish beach sent shock waves around the world. There can be little doubt that the single picture did more than document the refugee crisis, it helped parts of Europe recognise the magnitude of the crisis - not local, but global in its size and implications. This picture, captured so poignantly by a Turkish photographer, helped to transition an elusive concept into the hearts of young and old people. It became our reality. Now that the crisis is here to stay, churches need to honour migrants as created in the image of God.

### Questions for Reflection



- Who are the migrants in your church and locality?
- In what ways can your church address the legacy of migration you see in the migrant community?

### Conclusion:

The Exodus event and the Passover celebration of Exodus 12 have much theological resonance. Both events are paralleled by the Cross and the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. The presence of a 'mixed crowd' illustrates the 'true Israel.' It also suggests a fulfilment of Yahweh's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: 'and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed'. Finally, Yahweh's great redemptive act was not based on birth or ethnicity but rather on relationship to Yahweh and his covenant. Justice for non-Israelites and the Israelites is one of the perennial themes in the book of Exodus. And even though its application to the local is never easy, the book of Exodus reminds us of the importance of justice for all while building true community.

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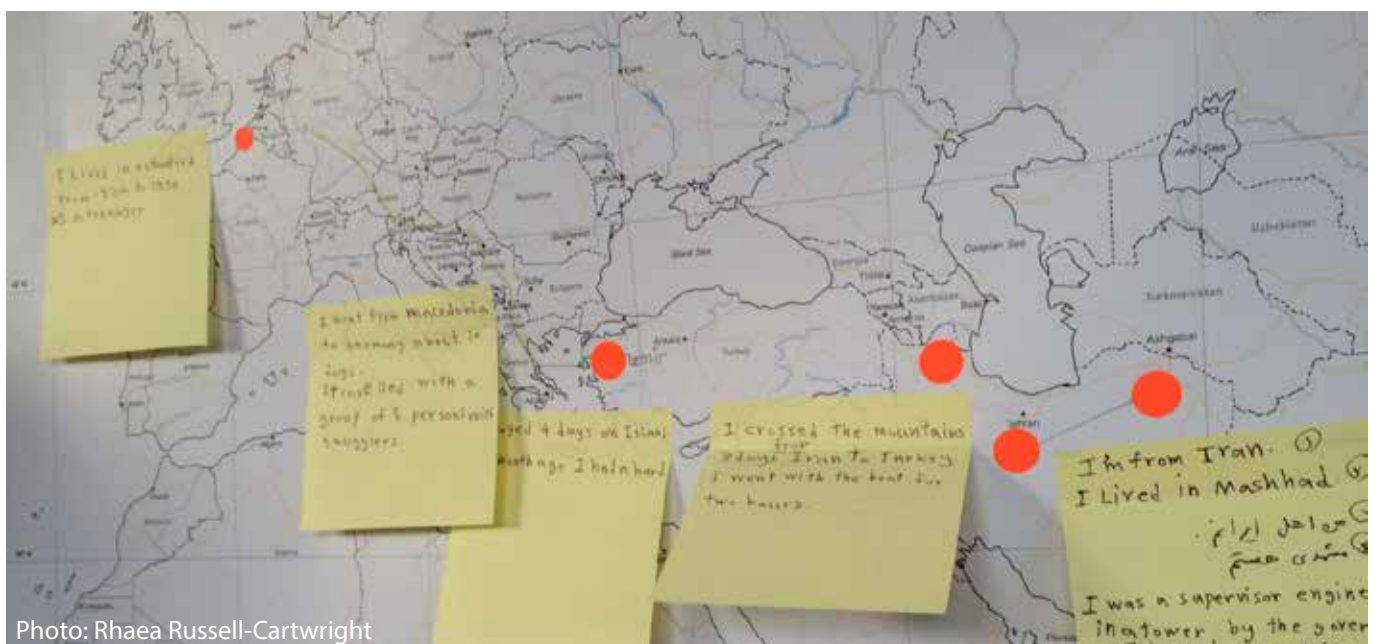


Photo: Rhaea Russell-Cartwright

5 A three-year-old Syrian boy who made global headlines after he drowned in the Mediterranean Sea on 2 September 2015

# Study 4:

## Entering Canaan - Migrants, Hosts and those Left Behind

**Bible Readings:** Deuteronomy 6:1-15

**Historical Perspective:** Migration from the Caribbean to the UK

**Contemporary Legacy:** Second and third generation migrants

### Introduction

Migration inevitably brings about significant change in the lives of those moving to another nation. Their descendants are also affected as a result, along with those that are left behind; and the people of the host nation. These changes and their effects will be considered in light of a Bible study that will be linked to the migration of West Indians to Britain and to other people movements today.

### 1 Bible Story: the Israelites move to Canaan

**Read** Deuteronomy 6:1-15

The Israelites wanted a better life than the one they had in Egypt. Like anybody today who leaves their homeland to settle in a foreign place, the Israelites were looking for somewhere that they considered to be safer, better, happier; in general somewhere that would help change their status, particularly in terms of wealth. They had spent 40 years traipsing about in the wilderness after having been enslaved in Egypt for hundreds of years. They had been promised a land where they 'lacked nothing' that was filled with 'milk and honey...' (Deuteronomy 6:3). They were also told they would take possession of 'land, with large flourishing cities, houses filled with all kinds of goods, wells and vineyards that did not belong to them' (Deuteronomy 6:10-11). It was not going to be as simple as strolling in and taking over from the Canaanites; they had to fight for these things.

Despite their initial burst of religious enthusiasm, there were pockets of people that the Israelites could not defeat and who continued to live beside them. This is not to mention the sneaky and calculating Gibeonites (Joshua 9) who tricked them into a peace treaty. The Israelites came to understand their struggles as being down to the fact that they had not fully followed God's commandments. So, as Joshua's fears came to be fulfilled, the people of Israel abandoned the law and their former monotheistic, 'pure' and humble days in the wilderness. They had left behind the days where they lived off water, manna and the not-so-appetising quail (Numbers 13:31-34). They now tasted a new way of life with exotic women, new foods and drink. Many even married Canaanite

women, taking on their beliefs and adopting worship practices forbidden by the law. (Judges 3:6) Joshua realised that this would lead to the Israelites forgetting their promises to God, and failing to keep the faith, even though they denied this by saying they would indeed serve the Lord their God (Joshua 24:21). However, even if that generation had kept the faith, it does not mean that their descendants and the generations after them would have been as faithful.



### Questions for Reflection

- How might the Canaanites have felt about this account?
- What was God's purpose in bringing about the conquest of the land?

## 2 Historical Perspective: Migration from the Caribbean to the UK

There are many groups of people around the world who, just like the Ancient Israelites, were seeking a better life somewhere new. However the hope and dream of the migrant is often sadly in vast contrast to their actual experience. One example of this is Aldwyn Roberts. As he stepped off the *Empire Windrush* he sang:

*To live in London you are really comfortable  
Because the English people are very much sociable  
They take you here and they take you there  
And they make you feel like a millionaire  
London that's the place for me.*

*London is the Place for Me, Lord Kitchener*

This was a far cry from the reality of life in England for all those that had migrated from the Caribbean to seek better job opportunities and a better lifestyle in general. The *Empire Windrush* arrived at Tilbury dock in London in June 1948. It was full of enthusiastic men and one woman. However, they were greeted very coldly by the people and by the weather. Just like the Israelites, they had high expectations about where they were heading. The imagery that most of the migrants used to motivate themselves on their way to England concerned a place where the 'streets were paved with gold'. Sadly this did not prove to be the case. Their living conditions were quite difficult as they experienced rejection, prejudice and the hostility of their host nation. There were signs on boarding houses which read 'No Dogs, no Blacks and no Irish'.

The West Indian migrants may have wanted things to have worked out differently, just as the Israelites did in Canaan, but inevitably it was not going to happen. All immigrants will always have some sort of difficulty adjusting to and being completely accepted by their chosen homeland. There are a few reasons for this, such as the assumption that immigrants pose a threat to their new nation and its cultural norms and traditions. Things such as different dress, beliefs and language can often exacerbate



Photo: Sam Saunders | flickr.com

problems because it automatically separates the individual immigrants from members of the host community. Negative reactions to strangers, however, are deep-rooted. They may spring from a past where strangers came to unsettle nations and rape and take control over the land. So although most migrants over time have no such intentions, there is still some fear and hostility. This lack of trust and acceptance, however, can often lead to migrants creating their own gangs and groups to identify with, despite an initial intent and enthusiasm to integrate. People tend to focus on differences perhaps due to feelings of insecurity, inferiority or even a love of hatred. Then often, if people can't find a real difference, they may choose to focus on something trivial such as hair colour or postcode to assert their superiority.



### Questions for Reflection

- What experiences do you have of migration or of migrants?
- How does the gospel speak to those who treat others on the basis of fear?

### 3 Contemporary Legacy: Second and third generation migrants

Over time, some of the initial hostility and the sense of separation of migrants from their new homeland, has changed. One of the factors has been the number of inter-marriages and of mixed heritage families. These have helped social barriers to be broken down to some extent. Although many see inter-marriage as a positive thing, for others it can be very challenging, especially in terms of religious and spiritual practice. In Deuteronomy 21:10-11, God gives the Israelites permission to marry women captured from their enemies but not those of the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 20:16). Although the inter-marriage between the two may suggest a negotiated peaceful coexistence, this may appear less than ideal. To those of future generations this may seem a better solution than the slaughter of the Canaanites that some texts suggest was commanded. The subject of inter-marriage is something still causing concern today, especially where women are used as possessions and bargaining-chips. However, even where people freely choose a life-partner from another ethnic group, the result may be conflict.

The first generation of migrants often managed to accept things as they were and build a new life quite successfully. However, subsequent generations find themselves wondering how they relate to Britain, the land of their birth, and to their original homeland where their parents or grandparents were born. How should they relate to family members who remained there? How should they deal with feelings of loyalty to a far away country? Or with the awareness of rights concerning that land? A land that they may never have visited. These emotions may cause them to support a cricket team for whom they and their families feel deep affection and so fail the so-called 'Tebbit Test'. Is it right that those born here should feel more strongly attached to and supportive of British culture and traditions rather than those of their forebears?

While it has already been said that migration can bring to light various problems, its effect on the host nation can be positive in many respects. Migrants bring their own food, music, dance and culture which has enriched the experience and expectations of the host nation.

Although many Caribbean people migrated, many also stayed, just as not all the Israelites crossed the Jordan. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh chose to stay on the eastern side of the river. Despite this they sent a contingent to enable the other tribes to settle in Canaan. Similarly, those who did not make the journey to Britain before the 1962 British Nationality Act made migration



so problematic, supported their friends and relatives who did make the move. Even where this didn't happen, there remained a kinship and certain obligations are understood to exist on the part of 'prosperous' migrants to their relatives left behind.

There has always been, and will always be, people moving across the globe. Even if there were fewer people moving at one time than there are today, many past movements caused conflict. So it's no surprise that there is still a lot of tension caused today. The vision of St John the Divine of 'a great multitude... from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne in front of the lamb.' (Rev: 7:9) has yet to be realised. However, at least it can be said that people are coming together.

### Questions for Reflection

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- If you migrated somewhere new today, how do you think you would be treated as you find yourself having to adjust to an unfamiliar country and culture?
- How does your church react to strangers who are unfamiliar with its worship customs or who are indeed totally unfamiliar with church?

**Dion-Marie White**



# Study 5:

## Ruth and Refugees from War and Famine

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Bible Readings:</b>         | Ruth 1  |
| <b>Historical Perspective:</b> | What is happening in Lebanon?                   |
| <b>Contemporary Legacy:</b>    | Impact on both migrants and Lebanese Christians |

### Introduction

This study seeks to understand the book of Ruth from the perspective of people fleeing from war and famine. It also uses the book as a lens for thinking about appropriate church responses to refugees who become our neighbours.

### 1 Bible Story: Ruth, the foreigner finds a welcome

**Read** Ruth 1

The book of Ruth is the story of two women of faith and love. One, an Israelite widow, and the other, her daughter-in-law, a Moabite widow. These two women, on the margins of society, leave the land of Moab as they hear that God has blessed the land of Israel. For Ruth, this is a step into the unknown; the Israelites view her people as the enemy (Deuteronomy 23:4), and yet she promises Naomi that 'where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God' (1:16).

They are economic migrants in search of a better future. They are vulnerable, unprotected and without a male to provide for them. Ruth knows that by making this journey she will be an outsider, a stranger in this new land. Naomi had another daughter-in-law she loved, Orpah, who chose to return to her own people (1:14-15).

Earlier in the story we see that Naomi and her husband Elimelech leave Bethlehem in search of food. There is a sense of being compelled to leave. Orpah reveals to us that for Ruth it was an active choice.

Into this story comes Boaz, an Israelite man who shows kindness, listens with respect to the story of Ruth, offers protection, financial assistance and later, by marrying her and fathering her son, a place in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

When I was preparing this study, I decided to begin by sitting with three young Syrian migrants who, while living in Lebanon, have started walking with Jesus. We read the story together and, when we came to Boaz, they described him as a man of 'compassion and respect'. Later at the end of the story they said that it reflects what refugees really need. They don't want pity and handouts but people who listen, value them and then offer to help.

Ruth is vulnerable and in need of assistance. Yet the story does not end with Boaz giving help; it goes beyond that. It ends with Ruth, through the birth of her son, bringing new life and hope to Naomi and Boaz. Indeed, she enters into salvation history as an ancestor of Christ. Migrants come from a different land, a different culture, maybe a different faith system, and yet they can rejuvenate and bring new life to the lands to which they come.

The voice of God is surprisingly absent in this book. We are left to discover him working through people and their stories. God is there in the interactions of Naomi and Ruth, Ruth and Boaz and Boaz and the wider community. He is there as people take risks of faith, step out of their comfort zones and approach the stranger, and discover the new life that is available for those who trust him.

I asked the three Syrian young people why they thought this story was in the Bible. They responded that it "teaches us that it is okay to leave your country as God is with us wherever we go". All the young people had positive things to say about their new life in Lebanon. When talking about the difficulties, they remained positive and one girl said that the hard times had taught her to look for God and he had given her courage. They had all experienced loss of a homeland, friends and family, but migration had given them new friends, new opportunities and a greater love for God. God had been with them in their journey as he had been with Ruth and Naomi. Like Ruth, their stories did not generate the emotion of pity. They are strong, courageous young people who deserve both our support and our respect.

### Questions for Reflection



- Why do you think Ruth chose a different path to Orpah? What were the risks Ruth took and what was her motivation?
- Why do you think this story is in the Bible?



Make-shift refugee homes in Lebanon's Beka'a Valley

Photo: Issam Abdallah | IRIN



## 2 Historical Perspective: What is happening in Lebanon?

In Lebanon today we have long-standing refugees from Palestine and more recent arrivals from Syria and Iraq who are fleeing war, persecution and, in certain parts of Syria, famine. Many are women and children who are unprotected and vulnerable as their men have died in the war or have stayed behind trying to protect their homes and villages. The women have left their homes in search of safety in a land that they are not sure will accept them.

Before the crisis in Syria the population of Lebanon was just over 4 million. Today, migrants have increased the population by half. The country is struggling to provide water, electricity, jobs, accommodation and schooling. Lebanon was already a fragile mix of minorities which had seen war and had deep political divisions. For some people, the Syrian and Iraqi migrants are family, but for many others they were a fierce enemy during Lebanon's own civil war. This is particularly the case for many Christians.

The church in the region is stepping up. Walid Zeila, a faculty member at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, and member of a local Baptist church, describes the Lebanese church as acting in the likeness of Boaz; 'leaving behind deep-rooted historical tensions, the Lebanese church decided to reflect God's love to the traumatised, poor and marginalised.'<sup>1</sup>

The church is primarily a place of hospitality. It has welcomed migrants when others have rejected them. The refugees have found people who will listen to their story without judging them. They have found a place where they are valued and respected. The church I belong to provides food aid, medical assistance, winterisation kits, and education for the children. We believe that real love needs to be acted out. All this has been done in collaboration with the world-wide church who have generously given resources to make this work possible.

As with the story of Ruth, who brought renewal to her new community, we have found that the migrants have brought new life to our church. We have been transformed, in just seven years, from a small local church of about 50 members, with little impact on the local community, to an outward-focused community of well over 1000 members. As we have seen God move we have grown in faith and compassion. The Lebanese Christians have put their faith into practice, actively loving their enemy until the point that the migrants from other lands and the Lebanese are now one church.

I have been running an education project for the last three years for both Lebanese and refugees. Initially the Lebanese church was running the project as an act of love for those outside of its community. As a project we were transformed when we started recruiting staff who are themselves migrants. We became a project that was not working for migrants but with migrants. We have grown so that we can see and employ the skills of the migrants. Operating with both compassion and respect helps us to avoid the twin dangers of patronising and humiliating the migrants or seeking to serve them for our own benefit.



### Question for Reflection

- The young migrants I spoke to talked of the need for the dual gift of compassion and respect. Why is important to keep these gifts together and how might both these gifts be shown in your community towards migrants?

<sup>1</sup> See more at: <http://www.ethicsdaily.com/lessons-from-ruth-speak-to-middle-east-immigration-cms-23007#sthash.RWWdWBqV.dpuf>

### 3 Contemporary Legacy: Impact on both migrants and Lebanese Christians

It is hard to talk of the legacy for Lebanon in hosting so many migrants because the crises in Syria, Iraq and Palestine are far from over. However, I think there are some important lessons that will stay with the migrant community and the churches in Lebanon. When you enter into a relationship with someone different from yourself, you open up the possibility of you both being changed. As you listen to each other's story, you see the world, yourself, and even God differently. The God of Ruth and Boaz is in these interactions as we step beyond our comfort zones in order to welcome the other.

In time the other needs to be welcomed in. They need to become part of the community and the community needs to be prepared to change. As Ruth married Boaz she became part of the story of Israel. As the migrants in our church now far outnumber the local population, our church is also their church. The culture needs to be allowed to change and the migrants encouraged to become leaders. We cannot be church for migrants, we need to learn to be church with migrants, seeking to serve the spiritual and physical needs of both communities as we worship God together. Finally, when you become one family, compassion fatigue is not an issue. The stranger has become a brother and sister in Christ and love does not run out. As in a good marriage it grows over time rather than becoming weaker.

#### Questions for Reflection



- All the major characters in the book of Ruth crossed either physical, social, cultural or religious boundaries to enter into a relationship with each other. In what ways do we need to cross boundaries to enter into relationships with migrants? What boundaries have they crossed to be willing to enter into a relationship with us?
- In the book of Ruth new life and hope is brought by both the Moabite woman entering Israel and Boaz entering into a relationship with her. What might this new life look like in your context?

#### Suggestions for Further Reading

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<http://www.ethicsdaily.com/lessons-from-ruth-speak-to-middle-east-immigration-cms-23007#sthash.RWWdWBqV.dpuf>

**Louise Brown**



# Study 6:

## Ruth and Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Bible Readings:</b>         | Ruth, Matthew 1:1-16, Acts 2:42-47  |
| <b>Historical Perspective:</b> | Syrian refugees in Lebanon  |
| <b>Contemporary Legacy:</b>    | The continuing story of the Church in the Middle East and Middle Eastern Christians in Europe |

### Introduction

In this study we consider the story of the migrant Ruth and the way she finds a home in Bethlehem. This story will help us find insights into the ways the Lebanese church has responded to the arrival of refugees from the civil war in Syria, a country which had a record of interference in Lebanon's internal affairs.

### 1 Bible Story: Ruth, the foreigner finds a home

**Read** Ruth 2:1 - 4:22

Boaz, an Israelite man of good standing, had a choice to make when he first encountered Ruth working [gleaning the scraps of the harvest] in his field. The Moabites were the archenemies of Israel, as a result of their refusing to offer help to Israelite immigrants on their way to the Promised Land [Deut 23:4]. Moabites were also regarded as the offspring of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters that resulted in the birth of Moab (Genesis 19:36-37). The fact that Ruth is so often referred to as 'a Moabite from Moab' (eg 2:6), is clearly a means of emphasising her 'otherness' within a community who viewed themselves exclusively as the people of God - pure and unadulterated. Mixed marriages between 'the holy race' and Moabites were also clearly unacceptable [this is suggested by Ezra 9:1-2 though the text comes from a later period in Israel's story]. So would Boaz follow conventional social and religious wisdom, a path that would have been far and away the most acceptable option? This would have kept his relationships 'pure' and beyond reproach. The risk-averse option that would be the norm for most people then, and, let's be honest, for most of us today. Or would the actions of one man - though he probably had mixed motives - become a prophetic framework for a nation? Boaz's willingness to 'embrace' the other became a transformative moment in the salvation narrative; this is the story that brings another 'outsider of questionable moral heritage' into Christ's genealogy (Matt 1:5).

There is much that is unknown about the book of Ruth. The author is unknown, and there are also questions about the date. There are also different views on the reasons why the book is included in

the Old Testament canon. All that said, it is clear that there are principles which may be drawn from this incredible story that not only impacted the biblical story as it unfolded, but provide insights for us today; the significant role of women of faith - including those from beyond traditional religious boundaries - in the salvation narrative; the place of *faith in*, rather than *fear of* the outsider; the significance of loyalty and love.

What is interesting to me within the story is that both Ruth and Boaz take extraordinary risks. Both offer themselves to the other. And both receive from the other. Rather than a typical 'helper-client / giver-receiver' power dynamic, each recognises, at different points in the story, what they can offer and receive. Boaz's story is transformed and his lineage restored. Ruth and Naomi are given security and a place to belong. All become important players in the salvation story.

All the social and religious barriers that appear to have been broken down within the story of Ruth occur as a result of individual people meeting each other, face-to-face, and recognising the humanity of the other. First Boaz enquires about this strange woman in his field (2:5). He then breaks tradition and speaks to her, even ensuring that she will be provided for and protected (2:8-9). Ruth takes a huge risk by very blatantly and provocatively going to Boaz on the threshing floor at night (3:6-9).

Another key factor in the story is that of loyalty and love. The Hebrew word *hesed* has been used to denote 'loving kindness' or 'faithfulness in action'. Both seem to be very obvious at different stages in this unfolding story. They are exemplified in Ruth's loyalty to and love for Naomi, and Naomi's commitment to Ruth. You can see them in Boaz's kindness in attitude and actions. Most importantly, the story demonstrates God's faithfulness not only to the Israelites, but to those beyond Israel, and ultimately, of course, to us all.

One somewhat disturbing feature that some have pointed to is the fact that Ruth's own identity is, in many ways, completely subsumed into her new identity. Within the context of the story this is, of course, not surprising. In today's context however, the way we welcome people into our churches may look quite different - but does it really? Do we expect people to conform to our traditions or are we open to new ways of doing things in a church family that celebrates unity in diversity?



### Questions for Reflection

- Which character in the story of Ruth do you most associate with? Why do you think this might be?
- Ruth used all her feminine charms on Boaz with the aim that she and Naomi might be cared for? How do you respond to this? Was it manipulation? Did you find it surprising? How do people seek to get what they need today?

## 2 Historical Perspective: Syrian refugees in Lebanon

### A The historical situation

Lebanon and Syria have a complex history which for many Lebanese includes, military occupation, political dominance, personal loss and enmity stretching back decades. After massive non-violent demonstrations in Beirut in 2005, the Syrian army - resident in Lebanon since 1976 - returned home. For the Lebanese this was something to be celebrated. And yet today, Lebanon, a small country [10,452 sq Km / 4,036 sq miles], with a pre-Syrian conflict population of about 4.5 million [some 12% of whom were Palestinian refugees] is host to well over 2 million Syrian, Kurdish and Iraqi refugees, who have fled the atrocities of the so-called 'Islamic State' [Da'ish] and the horrors of the war in Syria. The church in Lebanon had, and has, a choice. They could become an extraordinary, prophetic, hospitable

and Kingdom-minded community demonstrating God's love and acceptance of all regardless of history, prejudice, fear and 'otherness'; or be an ordinary community that retains the status quo and which is dominated by the past, by fear, hatred and mistrust; or, maybe, become a complex mix of both.

## **B The current situation**

Lebanon is host to well over 2 million members of various refugee communities. Unlike other countries in the region, there are no official camps, and so the newcomers are spread across Lebanon, in urban and rural areas. The infrastructure is at breaking point and it is literally a miracle that significant conflict has not consumed parts of the country. The tension is palpable and people have no sense that an end is in sight. And yet, in the midst of this crisis and pain, we are seeing God working in the most incredible and unexpected ways. Syrian, Kurdish, Iraqi and other nationals, fleeing their old homes, are finding a new home within the Body of Christ.

Many local churches have been revitalised as a result of their new sense of calling and purpose. Many are also learning what it means to minister holistically to those in need. Churches have been providing food, clothing, winter kits, mattresses, baby milk formula and sanitary products, as well as offering Bible studies, worship services, discipleship groups, prayer and visiting. In a very real sense we are experiencing something of the early church. The church I attend has grown from a typical weekly congregation of 150 about five years ago, to one of over 1,200 in multiple services.

However what is really significant is that the Lebanese in the church [now a minority!] have learned how to love their enemy, an enemy who have become their neighbour, their friend, and, in many cases, their brother and sister in Christ. Deep-rooted pain and hurt has been transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit into self-giving practical love. Stereotypes have been shattered as people have met face-to-face with and become involved in the lives of those who are different. It has often been a messy and confusing process, but, at the same time, one full of grace and beauty. The church is discovering what it really means to be the church. Theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, based on his reading of Acts 2: 42-47, defines the church as a 'sent community to embody God's hospitality'. The church is missional in that it is sent by God; it is incarnational as it embodies the Kingdom of God within its locality; and it is hospitable as it opens up to the 'other', affirming both its own and the 'other's' identity, while sharing the gospel within and as a result of such a hospitable community.

It is very significant that new leaders are emerging from within the newcomer community. Having been empowered, trained and equipped, they are now leading regular Life Groups in their own homes - often in very challenging conditions. They are inviting their neighbours and the gospel is spreading. We now have at least 170 regular Life Groups meeting each week.



### **Questions for Reflection**

- Have there been times when you have felt like a stranger in a strange land? Do you feel like this now? In what ways can this be a positive experience and in what ways a negative one?
- What risks do people take to ensure safety and security for them and their families?
- How is hospitality practised within your culture? Have you experienced hospitality in different cultures? If so, what was this like and what differences did you observe?



Syrian refugees sit amongst tents in an informal tented settlement in the village of Gaza, in the Bekaa Valley, east of Lebanon.

Photo: Dalia Khamissy/United Nations Development Programme

### **3 Contemporary Legacy: The continuing story of the Church in the Middle East and Middle Eastern Christians in Europe**

It is often easy to forget that the Church has its roots in the Middle East, a place where the Church today often faces significant challenges. These challenges include war and armed conflict, discrimination, persecution, and human rights abuses including those of religious registration, statelessness and limited freedom of religious expression and mass migration - forced and otherwise. The Church in Iraq (and now Syria) has been decimated.

It is easy to become pessimistic about the future of the Middle East Church. And yet, in some places, and despite very difficult circumstances, the Church is growing in dramatic and unexpected ways, both numerically and in its missional understanding. New expressions of church are emerging that are more contextually relevant. Sometimes traditional churches may find some of these challenging, however, we should be willing to show patience, grace and generosity towards these emerging movements, and not put God and his Church into a box - however comfortable that may be for us.


Churches across Europe have also shared stories of numbers of people arriving at their churches and, in some cases, at least doubling the congregation. Often these are new believers, who came to faith in churches in the Middle East, and have made it into Europe. The first place they seek community is the church. Sometimes they are surprised by the differences between the European churches and those they have experienced before. And sometimes their hosts are surprised by the new arrivals. Yet both groups find that grace is evident, patience is being learned and hospitality is being enjoyed.

In contexts like Europe, North America, and parts of the Middle East, where new communities are arriving, it is beholden on the church to become a new home, offering sanctuary, welcome, relationship and hope; all based on a theology of the human dignity of all (Genesis 1:27). However, the host communities should first listen and gain a holistic understanding of the needs of their new neighbours, rather than seeking to develop actions based on their limited understandings.



In polarised and politicised contexts, where responses to migrant and refugee communities are easily influenced by fear and anger, the Church should be a prophetic voice, led by the Holy Spirit of God, and not the media or political view of the day. As a result, the Church should be proactive in its actions, rather than reactive. I remember visiting our local mosque in East London [before I moved to Lebanon] soon after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Another leader of our church and I expected to speak privately to the Imam. Our aim was to emphasise that as followers of Jesus [people of the Book] from the local community, we were aware that his faith community was about to face negative reactions, but that we would not be part of such a reaction. We went in peace, and we were welcomed with peace. It ended up with Jim and me speaking to about 30 worshippers in the mosque, and our visit being really welcomed and appreciated. Small actions such as this have the potential to build bridges, rather than walls. This is something that the church is called to do, especially to new and old neighbours who would be otherwise marginalised and despised by society at large.

### Questions for Reflection

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- Which communities and individuals are most marginalised within your community and society? Why do you think this is?
  - How does our language and the way we label people demonstrate a welcoming attitude or an unwelcoming attitude? Have you heard language used about people from refugee communities recently that has disturbed you? What might a Christ-like response to this be?
  - What role does the church have in confronting an attitude of fear and hostility towards those we view as 'other'? What social, cultural, religious and perhaps even legal 'rules/laws' are we willing to break in order to become a more welcoming community?
  - How might we practise hospitality in a way that does not seek to make our guests fit into our own way of doing things, but values their own cultural, religious and personal histories?
  - How can our churches find a healthy balance between providing for people's material and immaterial needs?
  - How have churches in your area responded to new communities of refugees and migrants in your locality? Has this differed from other responses? How have they been impacted by their new relationships? Does this impact their understanding on what the church is, and how the church functions?
  - How would your church need to change if 25% of its congregation were newcomers from a different cultural and/or religious background? How about if one or two people from the same background began attending?
  - Who might God be asking you to visit - someone outside of your own cultural or religious background?

### Suggestions for Further Reading

Deuteronomy 10:18-19

Hebrews 13:1-3

Matthew 25:31-46

**Arthur Brown**



# Study 7:

## The Exile of Israel and Judah and the Enslavement of African People

### Bible Readings:

Psalm 137:1-9, Jeremiah 29:4-14

### Historical Perspective:

The transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the Caribbean

### Contemporary Legacy:

Diaspora

### Introduction

Forced migration is a theme that dots the pages of the Old Testament. The story of Israel's formation began when Abraham was commanded to migrate from his country, his people and his father's household to the land that God had promised to him (Gen 1:1-2). Some of Abraham's descendants later migrated to and resided in Egypt, and the patriarch Moses lived almost his entire life as a perpetual migrant. It was primarily he whom God employed to lead the mass migration of Jews from Egypt.

### 1 Bible Story: The exile of Israel in Assyria and Judah in Babylon

**Read** Psalm 137:1-9, Jeremiah 29:4-14

Historically, Israel and Judah experienced a number of major migration moments. Foremost among these was the forced migration of the northern kingdom of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians around 720 BCE. Israel became an exiled people, presumably deported and scattered within the then Assyrian Empire (2 Kings 17:1-6). Their dispersal gave rise to the tradition of the 'ten lost tribes of Israel'. In 597 BCE, many of the leading inhabitants of the southern kingdom of Judah, including the prophet Ezekiel, were taken into captivity by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24:10-17, Ezekiel 1:1-2) and in 586 BCE, when the temple was sacked and burned by the Babylonians, a new wave of Judean migrants arrived in Babylon (2 Kings 25:11-12). Others fled to Egypt (2 Kings 25:26), although a significant number of Judeans probably remained in Judah. By the sixth century BCE, there were vibrant pockets of Jewish people living in both Egypt and Mesopotamia (most of today's Iraq and Kuwait).

For these Jewish communities, living as migrants posed a challenge, if not a crisis. The Psalmist eloquently represents their distress as they languished in their melancholy beside the rivers of Babylon and pondered the taunts of their oppressors, rhetorically asking, "how can we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?" (Ps 137:4). Living outside the Promised Land, existing without the temple, Judean exiles were compelled to develop new ways of forming a community and worshipping God.

Many managed not simply to survive but to thrive. Some regarded their enforced status as God's way of employing foreign powers to bring his people back in line with a particular ethic. They called for the people to repent, to turn back to God, so that they might be restored. From this perspective, the forced migration of the Jewish people was not simply a geographic displacement; it had become a reflection of the spiritual, even existential condition of estrangement from God.

In one sense, the Babylonian exile of the sixth century BCE ended when King Cyrus of Persia issued an edict in 538 BCE allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their city and their temple (2 Chr 36:23, Ezra 1:1-4, Ezra 6:3-5). This was viewed as an affirmation of Jeremiah's prophecy that the exile would end after 70 years (Jer 25:11-12, Jer 29:10-11) and was heralded by Isaiah's call that all exiles should return to the homeland (Isa 48:20). But, in another sense, the developing notion of exile as an existential condition, a spiritual separation from God, meant that geographic return alone could not bridge the divide or end the exile. Indeed, a number of writers in the later Second Temple period, among them the authors of the books of Daniel and Ezra, understood the exile to endure many centuries later and still anticipated a more fulsome restoration.

### Questions for Reflection



- What might have been some of the challenges experienced by the Judeans as they sought to come to grips with their new status as enforced migrants in Babylon?
- What were the probable strategies they employed, in order for them to survive? Read Jer 29:4-14. How were the children of Israel to order their lives while in exile?
- How may this text serve to inform and inspire migrants, now domiciled in the UK?

## 2 Historical Perspective: The transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the Caribbean

Research indicates that the transatlantic slave trade was responsible for the forced migration of 12-15 million people from Africa to the Western Hemisphere from the middle of the 15th century to the end of the 19th century. Those four hundred years of the ignominious slave trade not only led to the violent transportation overseas of millions of Africans but also resulted in the deaths of many millions more. The computation continues regarding the total number of human beings who died during slave raiding and wars in Africa, during transportation and imprisonment and in the horrendous conditions of the so-called 'middle passage', the ghastly voyage from Africa to the Caribbean.

The kidnapping of Africans occurred mainly in the region that now stretches from Senegal to Angola. However, in the 19th century, some enslaved Africans were also transported across the Atlantic from parts of eastern and south-eastern Africa.

It is a known fact that all the major European powers were involved in this enterprise, but by the early 18th century, Britain became the world's leading slave trading power. It is estimated that British ships were responsible for the forced transportation of at least 2-3 million Africans in that century alone. So dominant were British ships and merchants that they carried away African captives not only to British colonies in the Caribbean and North America, but even to the colonies of their main economic rivals, the French and Spanish, as well as to others.

While the slave trade had a major impact on the socio-political, cultural and economic development of the modern world, it also contributed to the emergence of a new African diaspora, particularly

the spread of people of African origin to the Americas. Today there are tens of millions of people of African descent who, as a consequence of the forced removal of their ancestors, live in the Caribbean, the United States, Brazil and other countries in the Western Hemisphere, as well as elsewhere outside of Africa.

When these millions of people were physically removed from their homelands, they took with them their languages, beliefs, craftsmanship, skills, music, dance, art and other important elements of culture. As a result, today we are surrounded by the legacy of the slave trade in a multiplicity of forms.

In concluding this section of our reflection, we assert that the story of European geo-political and economic expansion in this Caribbean region is incomplete without it speaking to the associated twin evils of cultural genocide and warped spirituality. These manifested themselves in the inhumane extraction and enslavement of Africans who were trafficked to replace the eradicated Amerindian labour force. This forced migration established a platform for 'free for all' principles and colonial domination, buttressed by twisted religious justifications. Together, they ensured disregard for human rights, indigenous family values and principles of justice, equality, and love.

The consequences of European callous exploits have spread and infected the western world in the succeeding centuries. Their true legacies are an exploitative value system and a socio-cultural and economic model that have proven to be the seeds of corruption in western society. The question is: will we pass on this legacy, or will we strive at changing it?

### Questions for Reflection



- In what ways may we justify an assertion that 'forced migration is a crime against humanity'?
- In what ways might Europeans compensate for the atrocities that were wreaked upon African people between the 14th and the 19th centuries?
- How does the Word of God inform us regarding an appropriate Christian response?

### 3 Contemporary Legacy: Diaspora

In the same way that members of the Afri-Caribbean diaspora today come from various backgrounds and emigrated for diverse reasons, so their relations and contributions to host societies are, as well, very diverse. The interaction between both also depends on the country of destination, as some nations are more Creole than others. In the Caribbean nations for instance, such as in Jamaica, Haiti or Cuba, the community of African descent had a huge impact on the culture of the country, as migrations were very important in terms of numbers and also very influential in the cultural sphere.

The presence of an important African diaspora in a given place creates opportunities for cultural exchanges between members of the different nations. National policies aimed at strengthening diasporas are increasingly being put into place, through the action of embassies abroad. In fact, they are often the place where different nationals from a community gather, for instance during special events organised by the embassies themselves. This helps in enhancing migrants' feeling of belonging to a national community. The integration of diasporas within the framework of foreign policies, encompassed in the scope of the action of embassies, indicates the growing interest of public authorities for this group of citizens living abroad. It also contributes to promoting African cultures and nations, which are not always understood in the western world.

Due to the different nature of the migrations, the idea of returning to their homeland, which used to be very present for members of older generations of diaspora, is not as strong any more. Installed, and often well integrated in host societies, members of the diaspora often do not want to go back to their motherland to live once they retire, as the situation in their countries would not allow them to enjoy a particular kind of social life. In many cases, throughout the year, the choice is made to settle definitively in the North.

The impact of diasporas as a phenomenon is also to be seen in the second generation of migrants. Generally speaking, children of African migrants, born in Europe, tend to emphasise the European part of their identity over their African origin, while still feeling attached to Africa and claiming to be of part of the African people. In terms of reshaping of identities, the diaspora phenomenon tends to give birth to individuals who feel sort of uprooted, not genuinely anchored in one specific culture, but rather relating in different ways, both to their motherland and to their country of origin.

### Questions for Reflection



- What are some of the primary social costs-benefits realities associated with modern migration?
- Identify creative ways in which embassies may interact with diasporic groupings pursuant to aiding the socio-economic development of their countries of origin.
- What are the real challenges and opportunities for the Caribbean Church relative to the increasing number of migrants of Caribbean origin, who are now living in the UK?

### Notes of other consequences of migration

At its best, migration can be a rewarding experience that is made in the interest of the household's welfare. However, moving to another country and being separated from one's immediate family usually takes place at considerable emotional cost.

According to Kahn, migration increases the risk for family breakdown, fragmentation of social networks and psychosocial stress (Kahn et al 2003). The emotional impact is not limited to the migrants themselves, but also to the family left behind. As described by D'Emilio et al (2007), the longer the separation between the migrating parents and their children, the more these children are likely to fall prey to societal dislocations and cultural confusion resulting in deviant behaviour patterns. Parents are gradually replaced by other family members, or the children take upon themselves the task of parenting. The feelings of rejection, abandonment and loss follow the children left behind, and cannot be adequately compensated by the material gifts and remittances sent from abroad. To some extent the recent technological advances in terms of e-mail and affordable telephone calls might allow the transnational families to form and foster social ties, even at a distance.

Although migration is usually a voluntary and planned choice of the individual, the reality might turn out to be very different from the original expectations. Too often the intended aspirations of the migrants do not materialise but many are trapped in trafficking. Young women are often exploited as sex workers abroad, and in many cases they have been promised legitimate work at the destination but then forced into prostitution upon arrival (see Kebede 2001). Also children are commonly victims of trafficking that can lead to life-long trauma. The abuse of migrants by the middle men or the recruitment agencies is a problem that is growing in magnitude as the migration flows increase and the phenomenon becomes more commercialised.

Migration of people, just as international trade, benefits both the sending country and the receiving country. The welfare gain for the destination country is due to the fact that immigration increases the supply of labour, which increases employment, production and thus Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Immigration has also been found to increase the productivity of the receiving economies through the contribution of migrants to innovation. Another way in which immigration increases productivity is that immigrants free up the local workforce to move to higher productivity occupations.

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**Norva Oliver Rodney**



# Study 8:

## Persecution Serves God's Mission

**Bible Readings:** Acts 8:1-4, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8

**Historical Perspective:** Persecution, migration and mission - Azerbaijan

**Contemporary Legacy:** Mission in Azerbaijan and beyond

### Introduction

100 million Christians around the globe are currently suffering for their faith in Jesus Christ. Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world as persecution against Christians is reported in 110 countries. Nevertheless, Christianity today is the world's largest faith group and some of its growth has come through persecution.

In 197 AD Tertullian, an early church leader, made a famous statement in his 'The Apology', saying that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church', and this has been confirmed throughout history. Persecution against Christians has helped the Church to spread and grow globally. From the beginning of the Church, Christians, as result of persecution, have migrated from one place to another. This remains the case today and there are examples all over the world.

This study will try to answer the question of how persecution serves God's mission. We will look at Acts 8 for an example of Christian persecution in history, and then at persecution based on a personal story.

### 1 Bible Story: The persecution of the early Church in Jerusalem

**Read** Acts 8:1-4, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8

From the beginning, Christianity aimed at being a world-conquering faith. The task that was set before the Church was huge. Jesus himself set the boundaries of preaching the gospel 'to the end of the earth' (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). He warned his disciples that the task would not be easy. He taught them to be prepared for persecution. He told them clearly what they should suffer, and from whom, and motivated them to carry on bearing testimony to him (Luke 21:12-13). When facing persecution Jesus commanded them to 'run to the next city' (Matthew 10:23). Note that it is a command – it ensures more mission. Flight is not always a jeopardising of mission: it is sometimes an extension of it<sup>1</sup>.

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1 Bruner, Matthew - A Commentary. Vol.1: The Christbook: Matthew 1-12 p479

Acts 8 records the outbreak of persecution against the Church following the martyrdom of Stephen, and as a result, 'all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria' (Acts 8:1). This great persecution led to a great dispersion<sup>2</sup>. The danger of persecution forced the first Christians to flee for their lives and migrate to new places away from trouble. Had they remained they would have had to hide their identity and keep quiet. Instead they moved on and they were more motivated to share the good news as they travelled; 'Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went' (Acts 8:4). Luke tells us how the Great Commission was fulfilled as a result of persecution. The great dispersion led to the dissemination of the Gospel<sup>3</sup>. Persecution indeed was a part of the plan for God's mission. It has played a major role in spreading the Gospel all over the world.

### Questions for Reflection



- What is the connection today between mission and persecution?
- Would you consider all migrants as economic migrants or are there other types of migrants?

## 2 Historical Perspective: Persecution, migration and mission - Azerbaijan

There are many examples of Christians fleeing persecution and then engaging in mission. The policies of the Emperor Nero led to severe attacks on the Church which subsequently spread throughout the Empire. There was persecution of dissenting Christians in England in the 17th century. The Pilgrim Fathers and then the Puritans migrated to North America where they were able to spread the gospel.

Persecution is not a new term for me. It has been with me since I gave my life to Jesus and it has been a part of my faith journey with Jesus Christ ever since. It may be helpful if I share some of my life story, which will explain my understanding of how persecution has served God's mission in my personal walk.

I will tell the story of persecution in Azerbaijan through my own experience. I was born into a Muslim family and in my early teenage years I decided to follow Islam. I learned and taught the Koran and was a very committed Muslim. My uncle became a Christian at that time and had been forced to leave his home on account of persecution. He fled with his wife and two little children to the capital. Instead of hiding his faith he began to lead Muslims to Christ and started the first Azerbaijani Baptist Church in Baku.

He met with me on different occasions and shared the gospel with me. We had intensive discussions every time that we met. Finally, he led me to Christ and the day I gave my life to Jesus I had a face-to-face encounter with my heavenly father. My uncle has been suffering for Christ since he became a Christian. As with other Christians in the country he has been mocked, ridiculed, arrested and imprisoned for his faith in Christ, but he has never stopped sharing the good news of Jesus with Muslims. God used him in planting many home groups all around the country and still actively uses him in his mission in the country.

At the very beginning of my Christian journey my family was extremely unhappy that I had become a Christian. I was rejected by my family who saw me as a betrayer. I knew that was going to happen to me because Jesus clearly taught his disciples about persecution. Therefore, persecution has shaped my understanding of the Christian faith and formed my Christian theology. Instead of getting me

2 Stott, John RW - *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth* p145

3 Stott, John RW - *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth* pp145-146

down and leading me to hide my faith in Jesus, persecution has motivated and encouraged me to share the good news of Christ with my family, friends and other Muslims in my country.

Later on I graduated from the Police Academy and worked as a chief police officer in Baku. I knew that I had to be careful not to speak about Jesus in my work place but I found I could not keep it quiet and eventually I was fired because of my Christian faith.



### Questions for Reflection

- What can we learn from this story?
- Do you think persecution serves or damages God's mission?

### 3 Contemporary Legacy: Mission in Azerbaijan and beyond

Although it was very hard for me and for my pregnant wife to survive persecution, we both committed ourselves to serving God and preaching the gospel to Muslims in Azerbaijan and in neighbouring countries.

When we were persecuted in one city, we moved to another and carried on preaching the gospel to Muslims. As a result of our movement, more people in more cities, and in other countries where we served, gave their lives to Christ.

Persecution has become my friend and helped me to develop my ministry nationally and internationally. I was ordained as a Baptist Minister and served as the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Azerbaijan before my family and I came to the United Kingdom to study at Spurgeon's College in 2009.

Sadly, after completing my course at the College, we were unable to return to Azerbaijan because of continuing persecution. However, I was encouraged to become more involved in preaching the Gospel among Muslims in the United Kingdom and Europe. More recently I was involved in founding Turkic Belt Ministries<sup>4</sup> in the United Kingdom. Through this organisation, we are now supporting persecuted Christians in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran and Central Asian countries. And we are leading Muslims to Christ in these countries as well as in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe.



### Questions for Reflection

- What are your reflections on this story?
- How should a Christian respond to persecution and how can we welcome and support our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters?

4 [www.turkicbeltministries.co.uk](http://www.turkicbeltministries.co.uk)



Photo: g215 | shutterstock.com

## Conclusion

History tells us how migration as a result of persecution has served the purposes of God's mission. I can also testify through my own personal experience that persecution has helped me to get to know Jesus better and has deepened my faith in Jesus to a much deeper level of relationship with him. I consider it a great privilege to be persecuted for Christ. As a result of persecution, my family and I cannot go back to our own country and have ended up living in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, God has fired up my passion to share my faith with more people in the United Kingdom and around the world who do not know Jesus.

## Additional historical examples

History tells us that although persecution in the early Church occurred periodically from the beginning, it was first officially sanctioned by the government of Nero, the sixth Emperor of Rome. It has been suggested that, in order to cover up accusations that he had started the fire in Rome in 64 AD, Nero chose the Christians as suitable scapegoats by calling them followers of a 'new and depraved evil superstition'.<sup>5</sup> Christians were branded as haters of humanity and so tortures were inflicted on them as just punishment for their rebellion against the Roman authorities in failing to worship the recognised deities and participate in certain religious activities.

Some Christians were burned alive, others were sewn into the skins of wild animals and given to dogs to tear, and many were crucified. This created a martyr culture within Christianity and did not crush the missionary zeal. Instead of abolishing the name of Christ, the Church continued to grow and spread throughout the Roman Empire because of the persecutions. It scattered Christians and forced them to preach the truth in new locations<sup>6</sup>. This is seen frequently throughout the first three centuries, even as far west as France where persecution in Lyon and Vienne during the year 177 AD dispersed the church but spurred on further evangelism<sup>7</sup>.

5 White, Cynthia - *The Emergence of Christianity*

6 Acts 8:1-4

7 Walsh, Michael J - *The Triumph of the Meek* p 183

Religious intolerance and migration as a result of persecution were the norm throughout the Christian Middle Ages also. The era of the Reformation is especially notorious for persecution in England<sup>8</sup>. Seventeenth century England witnessed a dramatic transformation from religious persecution and enforced uniformity to toleration and religious pluralism<sup>9</sup>. Christians in England have paid the high price of persecution for the establishment of freedom of faith and religious tolerance norms in today's United Kingdom. Hundreds of Protestants were arrested, executed, and burned at the stake. In 1620 a group of English Separatists known as the Pilgrim Fathers fled to America to escape the religious persecution caused by the volatile religious and political climate under James I. In 1630 the Puritans also left England in search of religious freedom. Both the Pilgrim Fathers and Puritans went to America to practise their religious beliefs freely and to spread the gospel.

After centuries of Christian persecution in England, today the United Kingdom is recognised as a Christian country. Today there is much religious freedom in the United Kingdom as a result of those Christians who stood up for the freedom to preach the gospel and who were persecuted and killed for their faith and beliefs.

### **Suggestions for Further Reading**

Bruner, Frederick Dale - *Matthew: A Commentary. Vol.1: The Christbook: Matthew 1-12*. [Paperback edition], Revised and expanded edition (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004).

Coffey, John - *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558-1689* (London: Longman, 2000).

Grell, Ole Peter; Israel, Jonathan I; and Tyacke, Nicholas; eds - *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

Stott, John RW - *The Message of Acts: To the Ends of the Earth*. 2nd edition with Study Guide, 2nd edition (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991).

Walsh, Michael J - *The Triumph of the Meek*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986)

White, Cynthia - *The Emergence of Christianity*, (Westport: Greenwood Press 2007)

[www.turkicbeltministries.co.uk](http://www.turkicbeltministries.co.uk)

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8 Grell, Ole Peter, Jonathan I Israel and Nicholas Tyacke

9 Coffey, John.



# Study 9:

## The Church - Refugees, Migrants and Foreigners

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| <b>Bible Readings:</b>      | Acts 8:1-8, 26-40  |
| <b>Historical Movement:</b> | Collapse of the Roman Empire and the Syrian crisis today |
| <b>Contemporary Legacy:</b> | God uses forcibly displaced people to spread the gospel  |

### 1 Bible Story: The persecution of the Jerusalem Church

**Read** Acts 8:1-8, 26-40

Note how God sometimes scatters the church and they become refugees and migrants.

#### Questions for Reflection



- What provokes persecution?
- What happens when the Church is persecuted?
- In Acts 8:1-8, why did the crowds listen to what Philip had to say?

### 2 Historical Perspective: Collapse of the Roman Empire and the Syrian crisis today

We can see from historical examples that God sometimes brings scattered people – refugees and migrants – to the church. The present Syrian refugee crisis, and how the church is responding to human needs, is reminiscent of the Early Church's response, in the 4th and 5th centuries, as the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire collapsed and poverty increased. The cities were unable to absorb the poor refugees, most of whom were not Roman citizens. Princeton University Church historian Peter Brown writes, 'The existing structures of the city... collapsed under the sheer weight of a desolate human surplus, as the cities filled with persons who were palpably 'poor'. They could not be treated as citizens, neither could they be ignored...' It was the Christians, still a relatively small, though growing, minority, who responded to the needs of the poor, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or religion. Brown writes about these Christians, 'They [lay and clerical alike] were themselves, agents of change.' The impact of showing compassion was not just social. German missiologist Adolf von Harnack, in

his monumental book *The Mission and the Expansion of Christianity*, states that the 'gospel of love and charity' was one of the main factors in the rise and growth of the Church.

For centuries the Middle East has been known as the 'graveyard' of missionaries because they saw little fruit from their evangelism. Government restrictions and religious edicts limited what they could do. As the Syrian crisis started unfolding in 2011 and hundreds of thousands of refugees flooded into Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, local churches responded to the humanitarian needs of the desperate refugees and intentionally showed them love. They provided food, items to keep them warm in winter, set up schools and other programmes for the children, water projects, and so on. There was no conditionality nor any discrimination based on religion or ethnicity when they provided assistance. As the refugees had seen their homes destroyed and their towns reduced to rubble, the church gave them a sense of community and belonging.

Then as the refugees started to flood into Europe, many churches decided to be hospitable and welcome them. In spite of opposition from extremists in society to migrants, foreigners and refugees, the European churches decided to be prophetic and show through their love and actions what the Kingdom of God is like and that there is a God who is compassionate. This demonstration of love and compassion in the Middle East and in Europe has had a significant impact as hundreds have wanted to know about a God who cares and listens to their cries for help.

### Questions for Reflection



- What attitudes have you noticed in your area to the arrival of refugees in the UK?
- Is there a difference between reactions in the church and in the rest of the community?
- What reflections do you have on any differences or absence of them?

### 3 Contemporary Legacy: God uses forcibly displaced people to spread the gospel

Sometimes, as was the case with Philip, the church through persecution is forced to go to places it normally would not have gone. At other times, people are forced to flee from their homes to places where there are churches that are willing to be hospitable, as with the Syrian crisis.

Ibn Khaldun, the 14th century Arab sociologist and historian, wrote that tribes survive in the desert by taking care of their own. They rarely take care of people from other tribes. Even today, this attitude is deeply ingrained in Middle Eastern society. So, when Christians reached out in compassion to help Muslim refugees who had lost everything, it was startling. Many Muslims would ask the churches why they were helping them, even though they were not part of the Christian community. Veteran missionary and Professor at Fuller Seminary, Dudley Woodberry, after interviewing 700 followers of Christ from Muslim backgrounds about why they decided to believe in him, found that an overwhelming majority said that one of the reasons was that Christians had shown them love.

The legacy of being compassionate during the present crisis is seen in the fact that the churches, just like Philip in Samaria (Acts 8:1-8), responded to both the spiritual and physical needs of the people. Philip did not set up a relief programme or an evangelistic campaign. Instead he responded to individual needs, as he did with the Ethiopian eunuch – a foreigner (Acts 8: 26-39).

## Conclusions

We, as the Church today, need to be sensitive to what the God of history is doing. As people become refugees and migrants, they are in desperate need of help and for a community that cares. Alan Kreider, writing about the reasons for the growth in the Early Church says, 'Rumours that God was present in Christian gatherings may have also attracted outsiders to investigate Christianity.' The times have not changed and it is this reality of God's presence that those who have lost everything are still seeking.

## Questions for Reflection

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- As you look at church history and also at how the churches have responded to the Syrian crisis, how have the refugees encountered God?
- Who are the refugees, migrants and foreigners in your community who are living on the margins of society?
- How could a local church demonstrate the love and compassion of Christ to migrants, refugees, and foreigners?

Rupen Das

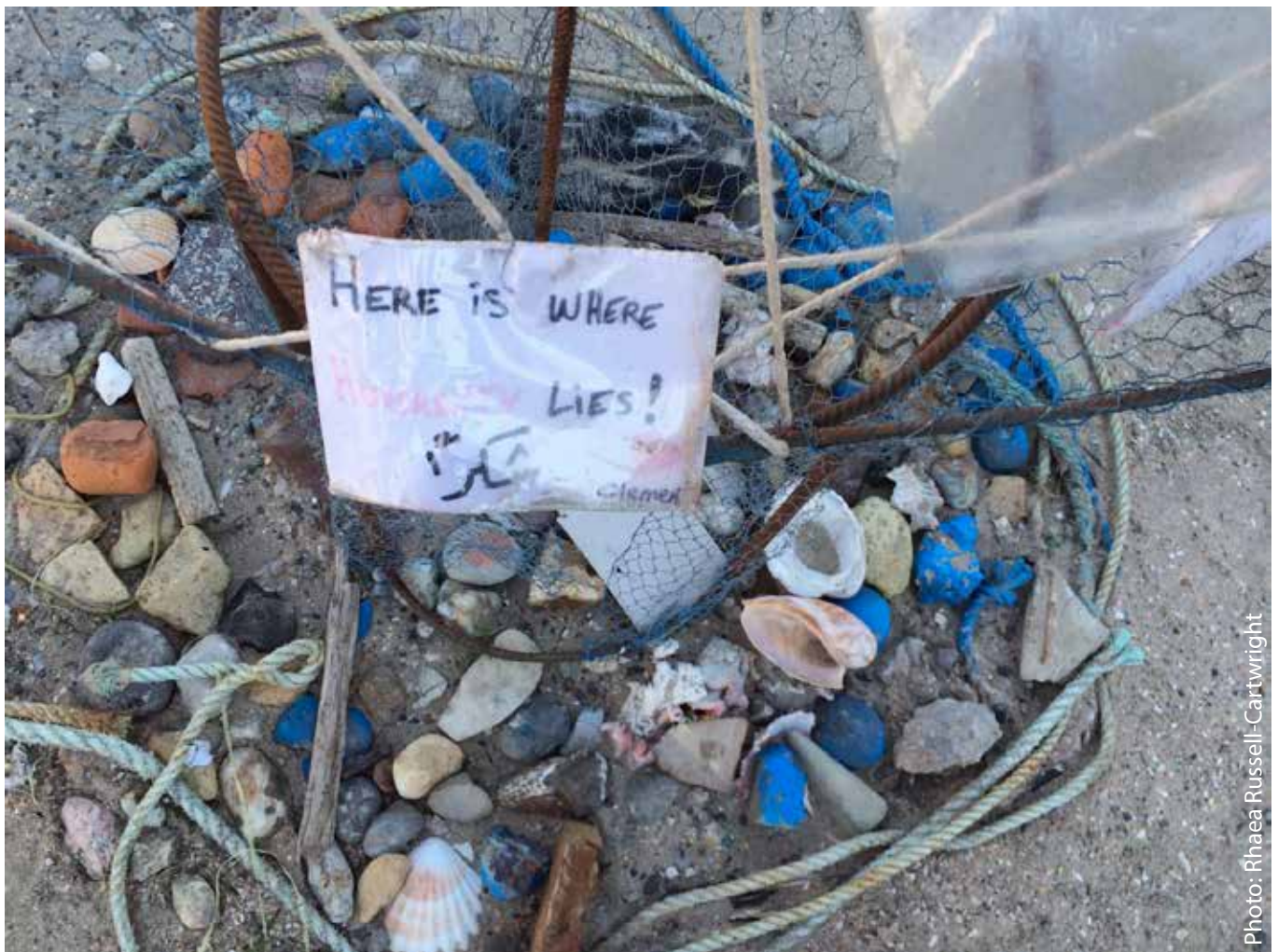


Photo: Rhaea Russell-Cartwright