

# Mass Migration

About 12 years ago I wrote an article for the *ET* entitled, 'The stranger within our gates'. Our congregation, like others was experiencing an influx of *asylum seekers*. Some of the challenges included providing food, helping with accommodation and attending appeals against deportation. The situation impacted upon our worship and we ended up providing sermon notes in Turkish and also in French for DRC Congolese. Recently we have helped a European *economic* migrant. He had minimal English and much time was spent overcoming the language barrier to complete forms to secure financial benefits so that his landlord could be paid. It is evident that, without border controls, multiplying such scenarios will lead to an unsustainable situation. How should Christians react to mass migration, whether economic or refugee? The Bible, provides various instructive examples.

## Early Migrations

The first migration resulted from sin and it and subsequent migrations involved sin. We learn of Adam that God sent him out of the Garden of Eden and prevented his return (Genesis 3.23-24) but Adam and Eve left the Garden with the promise that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent (Genesis 3.15). They could, therefore, journey in hope if striving against sin. As the human race increased after the Fall and each sought a homestead there would be various migrations.

Lesson 1. *These early migrations would were in conditions that would not cause economic stress.* Vast territories replete with resources awaited the ancient settlers. The migrants were equipped with the necessary physical energy and intellectual gifts to replenish the earth and to subdue it. Much of the world today is densely populated and cannot absorb large numbers of migrants without serious impact on resources and living standards and policy needs to be directed to inhabiting and utilizing new

sustainable regions of the world.

The early migrations were migrations of sinners some of them notorious. Cain, who murdered his brother Abel 'went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod' (Genesis 4.16) His descendent Lamech was a bigamist and murderer (Genesis 4.16-24). Not all were so. Around the same time, Enoch the Sethite 'walked with God' (Genesis 5.24). He was not perfect but he was saved and lived a spiritual life and was translated that he should not see death. There was a mixture in the human race that continues to this day. Gradually, the Sethite godliness declined and the early dispersals of mankind resulted in the conditions described in Genesis 6.5, where we read that 'the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually'. It remains true today that all migrants, like all residents, are sinners.

*Lesson 2. It is not xenophobic to be realistic and we must not be naïve in exercising compassion. Migrants bring their sins with them and in some cases selfishness and deceit are very evident.* We soon found that some asylum seekers were really economic migrants. The passage of time drew a sharp line between the authentic and spurious. One couple's main reason for coming to the UK was the education of their son and they wanted a large loan from a church member to set up in business! We had one professing Christian who defrauded the church of money to send home to Africa for his daughters' schooling. Had he been honest about the need, we would have most likely helped without his deception. Thankfully the bad are counterbalanced by those who settle in work and in Christian churches.

## **The dispersion from Babel**

After the flood, mankind was again dispersed, this time from Shinar. Moses records that 'the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord

did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth' (Genesis 11.8-9). This was a very significant migration and led to the foundation of nations that have shaped world history.

Lesson 3. *At Babel, factors were introduced that militate against multiculturalism. Ways of thinking and languages spoken became diverse.* To this day this problem has not been surmounted even by Christians. Migration has brought into Britain African churches, Korean churches, Chinese churches and others. The Apostle Paul would have regretted the loss of the visible expression of the truth that we are all one in Christ Jesus but language remains a significant problem.

### **Israel's foundational migration.**

The Exodus, wilderness wanderings, and entrance into Canaan were accompanied by many demonstrations of divine power. Individual stories of migration today might be remarkable, if not amazing, but the migration of the children of Israel was miraculous. God led the Israelites out of Egypt with a mighty hand, sustained the Israelites in the wilderness, and gave them Manna from heaven for their bread and fresh water from the rock to drink. He gave his law with displays of his glory and omnipotence.

Believers can see in all of this a vivid picture of the divine omnipotence at work in our spiritual pilgrimage. We are delivered from the power of darkness. We are spiritually nourished by Christ the living bread. Christ is our Rock smitten that we might drink of the water of life. In the warfare of faith we are more than conquerors. It is, however, a regrettable feature of modern Evangelicalism that a preoccupation with the miraculous has led to a loss of the sense of omnipotence in daily life for cleansing from sin, equipping for service and ensuring providential supply.

Lesson 4. *The achievements of Victorian social reformers, confident in the power of God, suggests that Christian action*

*needs more vision, unified action, breadth and depth to effect fundamental solutions regarding migration.*

## **The Jewish Deportation**

The exile in Babylon came about as a result of several enforced deportations that reduced the wayward Israelites to slavery once again. Out of this arose new lives in a new country without reference to a rights culture. They had no rights but, by diligent labours, men like Daniel rose to high office in their new home. He followed, in spirit, the divine instruction in Jeremiah 29.5-7: 'Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters ... that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace'.

*Lesson 5. It is surely relevant advice for migrants today to settle, build and seek the peace of friendly host nations. For the Jews in Babylon to become a source of non-commitment, restlessness or revolution would have been self-defeating.*

## **The Saviour's Migration**

In Matthew 2.13-14 we read of Christ's migration following the visit of the wise men. This migration was perpetuated in Christ's ministry. He was no resident but passed from place to place. We find important pointers here concerning Christ's redemptive work: (1) Christ's humiliation (Philippians 2.5-7) (2) Christ's death. Even in his infancy an enemy sought to destroy him. In this migration, commencing with an escape by night, we have a vivid reminder of the agony of the cross. Redemption could not be accomplished in a tranquil way for 'without the shedding of blood there is no remission'; (3) 'Out of Egypt have I called my son' (Matthew 2.15) brings before us Christ as the head of the body of redeemed people. Just as God brought Israel out of the Egyptian bondage with a mighty hand so the greater spiritual reality is

accomplished in Christ.

*Lesson 6. Forced migration in the modern age reminds us that all man's sophisticated achievements and methodologies are not redemptive. They cannot answer to man's fundamental needs. The spiritual side of life must not be overlooked.*

### **Spiritual migrations: Abraham**

Israel's migrations began with Abraham. We read in Genesis 12.1-2 that 'the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation'. This family migration is probably one of the best known in the world. For the Jews it is the key event in their ethnic existence and spiritual heritage. Christians also look to Abraham as our forefather in the faith and the Biblical accounts about him are rich in the spiritual themes of covenant, promise, faith, justification, obedience and blessing. All began with a migration from Mesopotamia, via the Fertile Crescent into the land of Caanan. It was the beginning of a new life in many ways for Abraham but best of all a new spiritual journey. We read in Hebrews 11.8-10: 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country ... For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God'.

*Lesson 7. Migration can lead on to spiritual pilgrimage and we must recognize the spiritual opportunities that migration brings. Some recent migrants to the UK have made the same spiritual journey as Abraham since arrival in Britain and we must thank God for it and build upon it where we can.*

### **Spiritual migrations: Christian persecutions and mission**

We read in Acts 8 of an enforced migration. Luke recounts, 'And at that time there was a great persecution against the church

which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles... Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word' (Acts 8.1, 4). We are reminded that, as long as Christians maintain a spiritual frame of mind, even adversity will promote the Gospel.

Paul's first mission took him to Cyprus and modern Turkey. On his second mission he penetrated further into ancient Asia and thence to Greece. His third mission involved revisiting these areas. In Romans 15.28, Paul speaks of plans to visit Spain. We cannot doubt that there were many, like Priscilla and Aquila, whose migration and settlement in new regions strengthened the Gospel cause. They were certainly a great help to Paul. (Acts 18.1-2).

Lesson 8. *These examples are a timely reminder that, in the providence of God, migration can be a means of building his kingdom.* It has certainly led to some multi-racial congregations in the UK, giving visible expression to Paul's dictum, 'All one in Christ Jesus'. In Galatians 3.28, he writes of believers, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'. From its inception the Christian Church has been cosmopolitan and should have continued that way. The qualifications for ministerial office are not social class or ethnicity but relate to godly character, preaching gifts, Biblical doctrine and divine vocation.

## **Conclusion**

No doubt the focus of the local church regarding mass migration must be on worship, evangelism, fellowship and compassion. There are very few Josephs or Daniels among us with access to the levers of state and ability to use them competently. Notwithstanding, Christians cannot afford to neglect the call of providence to address the socio-economic implications of mass migration. Those from Babel were onto virgin soil and regions abounding with resources. The mass migrations into Europe are into territories with already stretched resources. As the clergyman

Malthus showed, the economics of life can be cruel and brutal because most resources are limited relative to demand for them. In consequence, compassion is costly. If a household of limited means takes in a family of refugees, each family member will 'feel the pinch'. It is the same for a nation. Entire populations could face unsustainable burdens through mass immigration. It is no good proclaiming 'compassion' without an eye to 'cost'. We live in a *fallen* world and Calvary reminds us that the Saviour's compassion had to be *self-sacrificing* compassion. There is no other way to responsible compassion and no government can legislate compassion. We must pray for our rulers. At the very time when the Christian message is most relevant for Europe, European governments including our own are marginalizing Christianity, oppressing Christian conscience and seeking to control the church of Christ in the public square, open air or Sunday schools. In consequence, we are ill prepared for mass migration as a nation. It is God's gauntlet to humanistic idols and the gracious message on it is, 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near' (Isaiah 55.6).