

## 141 "The stranger, the widow and the fatherless"

Television news bulletins across Europe are filled with pictures and stories of the thousands of people desperately trying to escape from their own countries and somehow reach Europe, seen as the land of peace and plenty; their experiences are heart-rending, the nature of their lives beyond belief. On the one hand there is a natural recognition that "something must be done" for these, our fellow human beings in such need; on the other hand, there is a real fear that by assisting these poor folk we will simply open the floodgates for millions more to arrive on European shores.

What would a God-fearing, Christian-orientated government actually do about all this? - (unfortunately we have to say "would" for obvious reasons); what are some of those Precedents, Promises and Principles the Lord has given in His Word for our guidance in a complex, tragic situation such as this?

The Lord was quite clear over what He expected of the children of Israel, as for example in Exodus 22.21-23 - "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword ...." (AV - incidentally, an example here of the value of the thou/thee and you/ye distinction retained in the AV, the "thou" here being the nation, and the "ye" being the people as individuals).

Another example giving the same message concerns the precious instruction about "gleaning" (eg., Deuteronomy 24.19-22): a sheaf, some olives, some grapes - were to be left in the fields "for the stranger, the fatherless and the widow". Ruth was to benefit from that kindness herself (Ruth 2.1-3).

So the Israelites had no excuse for not getting the message! - and nor do we, either as nations or as individuals. How good and right it is that so many of the people on the front line of trying to show compassion and comfort to these needy ones do so in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the rest of us can play our part with our prayers and our money.

And then the Lord speaks of the other side of the picture too - the need for the preservation of the identity of the host nation and its people. Time and again the Lord insists that the Israelites remember who they are - God's chosen people, the people of the covenant, holy, set apart, different. He tells them through Moses for

example, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people ... and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19.4-6). Relations with surrounding nations were to be limited - "Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods" (Exodus 23.32), with cross-border marriage being frowned upon (which got Moses into some trouble, eg., Numbers 12.1-3).

Here therefore we see that the responsibility of a host nation, while showing full compassion to the "stranger", is also to protect its own identity. Applying this broad principle to the current European situation, albeit different and complex as it is, we observe that a large proportion of the migrants are from various, very turbulent, Islamic countries. These desperate folk are arriving in a Europe which is as it is because of the primacy of the Christian Faith over many centuries - even though the "powers that be" rarely acknowledge that fact these days.

So it is reasonable for European host nations not to accept on a permanent basis large numbers of folk whose way of life is markedly different. For everybody's sake, alongside the short-term need for compassion, the efforts must be geared towards getting the migrants back to their own countries, cultures and homes, when sense and peace in those countries have been re-established. The British Government, to its credit, emphasises this point, targetting resources into refugee camps close to the countries of origin.

There is nothing quick or easy about the current, awful situation, and the politicians are in great need of prayer, as always. But we find in God's Word the twin principles which need to be followed here, by nations and individuals alike: we are to care for "the stranger" without hesitation; and we are to preserve our Christian identity without guilt.

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