



# The Middle East Initiative

Pray.  
Learn.  
Engage.

## ***Diaspora and Exile: Refugees and Migrants***

*By Nafkot Mamuye Dessalegn*

### **Scripture**

*Leviticus 19: 33-34*

*When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 34 The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*

*Hebrews 13:1-2*

*Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. 2 Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.*

### **Relating the Text to Today**

When we look at the Scriptures and we read the story of the Israelites we can see that they have moved from place to place and we realize that migration is not a current issue but it has been there ever since. The Bible talks about migration in several ways, including the verses I chose for this meditation.

It was this past month of April as I was doing my internship in the Marrakech parish that 4 young men came asking for help. They were all from Mali, one of them had what seemed to look like a broken leg injury and another had an arm injury. The other two seemed to be physically alright but one thing they all had in common was sadness and desperation.



I have worked in the Comité d'Entraide Internationale (CEI) ministry of the Evangelical Church in Morocco for a few years and never have I seen such despair, especially from young men like them. It was like someone had sucked all the joy and hope from them. The police had driven them back to Marrakech from Melilla as they attempted to cross the Moroccan border to reach the other side (Europe). They got all the injuries from that incident and they were also robbed in the process.

As we were waiting for Franck (the CEI agent for the Marrakech parish) to get to church, I sat down with them to have a little talk. They all came from the same village they left their families and their jobs (they were farmers) to hope for a better future. But little did they know that the journey was going to be this hard. The problem was not the fact that the journey was difficult but knowing that even if they reach Europe their chances in having a good job was close to 0%. And as we talked some more, they seemed to understand that they have been misled by those who manage to cross the border and send pictures from the other side making it look like that they are living a good life, which in most cases they're not.

At the end of our discussion I offered to pray for them (as we often do in these sessions) and they gladly agreed. Franck arrived few minutes later and we gave them some food and they also took showers there. While they were eating, they were all so silent, they weren't talking to each other at all and they weren't talking to us either. A great silence filled the place as they ate and at some point one of them had his head bowed, tears falling from his eyes. A few minutes later he sat up straight, looked into my eyes, and said, "I will go back home."

Wow! I don't know if you realize what this meant; allow me to interpret it for you. It meant that he would go back home regardless of the fact that he and his family invested (lost) so much money on his journey. They probably sold some of their belongings or were indebted. He would go back home regardless of the fact that his family, friends and neighbors would all be disappointed in him for not making it to the other side. The list of disappointments goes on but you see, this man left his wife and two daughters thinking that he'd get to the other side in a few days and support them better than before, to give them a better life than he had.

Isn't that what all parents want? To give their children better tomorrows? So why are we condemning immigration so much these days? Our Bible study today is meant to help us meditate about how God expects us to treat foreigners.

## **Questions**

1. What does the word "foreigner" mean to you?
2. How does the Bible encourage us to treat strangers or foreigners?
3. Have you ever lived in a foreign land? Share your experience.

4. Have you encountered foreigners living in your country? What is your attitude towards them? What are your friends or other people's attitude towards them?
5. What are your thoughts about those who are prevented to enter certain countries because of their origins?
6. What are your suggestions to stop today's migration problems?

## ***Prayer***

Lord, we come to you with broken hearts as we think of migrants and refugees around the world. Lord, we understand that people wouldn't have to leave their lands if all their needs were met, so we pray for peace in the countries around the world that are in war. We also pray for economic and political stability for all countries around the world. Lord we pray for all leaders in our countries as you give them wisdom to lead and take decision that do not harm the world.

Lord, we think of the families that are split as they are trying to save their lives; we think of the mothers looking for their children, the lost crying children who are looking for a shelter. We pray that you give us hearts like yours, hearts to love and take care of those who are in need, to share what we have with our neighbors. Help us be the light and salt that you expect us to be and let our faiths be followed by actions.

Lord, we thank you for all of those who have dedicated their lives to help others; we think of the health assistants (doctors, nurses etc.) rescuing lives in danger zones; we think of all organizations helping refugees and migrants around the world; we pray for all those fighting for a better world. We thank You Lord!

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