

## **Are Walls Immoral?**

### ***What does the Bible say about immigration?***

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*Abstract:* Some Christians invoke the Old Testament laws of hospitality and equity to strangers as setting a precedent that modern nations, especially nations with a Christian heritage such as the United States, must not refuse to allow non-citizens to enter. In this essay I examine how the many teachings of the Bible on relationships to strangers and foreigners can be generalized to the present day. In particular, I discuss two themes relevant to this discussion that flow throughout the Bible: the theme of the “safe place” and the theme of the “welcomed guest”.

#### **Introduction**

Discussing immigration in our day raises emotions, as our views on this topic have tremendous implications. In the political sphere, those who support unlimited or significantly greater immigration into wealthy nations are accused of selfishly wanting to import new voters for their own political movements; those who want to reduce immigration are accused of xenophobia and selfishly wanting to not help the poor. With millions of displaced people in the world, some fear that mass movement of peoples could cause social upheavals and economic disaster in the nations they enter; others fear that pitilessly leaving people without options to escape their disastrous conditions will lead to worldwide resentment of wealthy nations and worldwide instability.

In the midst of this strenuous debate, the precedent of the Bible has often come to the forefront. Christians who support open immigration have invoked the laws of Moses aimed at helping the poor, such as the gleaning laws and the laws requiring equal treatment under the law of the alien and the citizen, as well as the general call to welcoming the stranger in the Bible;<sup>1</sup> even those who do not believe the Bible sometimes invoke the same passages to argue that Christians who support controls on immigration are being hypocritical.

Applying any law of Moses to the present day, or even moral imperatives in the New Testament that have the nature of law, requires great care, for two reasons. First, as the Apostle Paul and Christian theologians have argued since the time of Christ, we are not “under the Law;” in other words, the covenant of Moses, with its various civil, ceremonial, and moral laws, is not our covenant: we have a New Covenant through Jesus. Second, over thousands of years, culture has changed enormously. Such things as computers, airplanes, and medical treatments that did not exist at the time of the writing of the Bible are obvious examples, but other changes are less obvious but just as impactful, such as the rise of the modern concept of the nation-state and the modern concept of a commissioned police force.

It is too simplistic to dismiss the laws of the Bible out of hand as irrelevant to our modern culture, however. The laws of the Bible set a precedent for the interaction of the eternal moral

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., J. Wallis, “The Bible’s case for immigration reform,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 2013.

standards of God and culture. As Christopher Wright has argued,<sup>2</sup> just as Jesus is our moral paradigm for individual behavior, yet we know intuitively that we do not need to wear sandals as he did, so too the Law of Moses created a paradigm for a moral government within the specific setting of the ancient culture of the Middle East that we can apply to today, yet we should not mindlessly adopt each detail to the present. In the same tradition, the Westminster Confession, generated in the English Reformation and used by Presbyterian churches today, teaches that there are eternal moral principles in the Bible that are reflected in the details of the specific laws of the Old Testament, but we must use wisdom in adapting any of the civil laws of Moses to the present day, and we are not required to adopt all of them wholesale.<sup>3</sup>

The general approach of this essay then, is to first ask how specific laws operated within the culture of their day to reflect the general moral character of God. Having established that general principle in a specific case, we can then try to apply that general principle to today. Some cases are easy. For example, Deuteronomy 22:8 says that every house must have a parapet around its roof. Learning about ancient culture, we find that it was common for people to walk on the roofs of houses, even strangers passing by from house to house, and a parapet would deter people from falling off the roof. This law then sets the precedent of liability, embraced in modern culture, that we must take reasonable precautions to prevent injury to people on our property. We do not require that the roof of every house has a parapet, but we do require that high balconies have railings and that people remove the ice from the sidewalks in front of their houses.

On the issue of immigration, then, we must look to the general principles and themes of the Bible that underlie the specific rules. There are two such general themes that apply to this issue. At first glance, they may seem opposed to each other. It is our job to use wisdom to extract how they apply today without doing violence to either principle. I will call these themes the principle of the *safe place* and the principle of *love of strangers*.

### **The theme of the safe place in Scripture**

Starting at the beginning of the Bible through to its view of the very end of times, there is a consistent theme that we can call the “safe place.” This concept entails the distinction between an “inside,” which is safe, and an “outside,” which is not guaranteed to be safe. The mercy and care of God for his people puts them in safe places where they do not have to fear.

At the very beginning of the Bible, the Garden of Eden is one such safe place. As I have argued previously,<sup>4</sup> the Garden was not the whole earth; rather, it was a protected place where God walked with Adam and Eve, with an outside, where Adam and Eve were eventually cast. Adam was commanded to “keep” the Garden (Genesis 2:15), which has the sense in Hebrew of protecting it from dangerous outside forces, and he was commanded to expand it to fill the whole earth, subduing the untamed forces outside (Genesis 1:28), until the whole world became a safe place for humans.

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., C. Wright, *An Eye for an Eye*, (IVP).

<sup>3</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* 19.4: “To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.”

<sup>4</sup> D. Snoke, *A Biblical Case for an Old Earth*, (Baker, 2006).

Later, we see the tabernacle and the camp of the Israelites having the same inside-outside structure. The tabernacle for the worship of God, with walls to keep trespassers out, lay in the middle of the camp, surrounded by the camping grounds of the tribes. Later, when the tabernacle was converted to the fixed Temple in Jerusalem, it had an additional wall distinguish the court of the foreigners (Gentiles) from the inner, more protected area. The walls were watched carefully to keep the unclean out (Chronicles 8:14, 23:18-19).

In this context, the curse of God in the Bible is always associated with an outward motion, and God's blessing with an inward motion, drawing near to God. So, for example, the ceremony of the scapegoat placed the sins of the people on a goat, which was then sent outward from the dwelling of the people into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:8-26), just as Adam and Eve had been sent outward from the Garden. Later, Jesus invoked this same image as he talked of those rejected by God in the final judgment as thrown outside, where there is darkness and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30). Jesus himself underwent this motion in his death, when he was taken outside the city to be crucified.

This imagery reflects the nature of people's experience of safe places in the ancient Middle East. By and large, there were two types of safe place in those days. One was the home, which could be a walled house or the tenting area of a nomadic family group; a home could also include a walled pen for animals. The second was the walled city. Between the walled cities and nomadic tenting areas was the much wider "wilderness," or "open country," (in Hebrew, "*sada*") mostly empty of people. This wilderness area had the various dangers of wild animals, bandits, and lack of any expected rescue if an accidental injury occurred. There was no police force, and the only people who traversed these spaces were armies on the move, merchants moving between cities as quickly as possible, bandits seeking to catch the merchants, and itinerant migrant workers, that is, the homeless poor, called the "aliens" or "strangers" in the Bible (in Hebrew, the "*ger*"). The strong distinction between the assumed safety of the city and the wilderness is seen in how cases of rape were treated; in the outer wilderness, the presumption of guilt was on the man (Deuteronomy 22:25-27), while in the city, it was presumed that a woman could cry out for help and others would run to keep her safe.

Both the home and the city had a strong sense of a boundary separating the inner safe place from the outside uncontrolled and unsafe area. These boundaries prevented crossing of unwelcomed people from outside to inside. The law of Moses specifically allowed the use of force by a homeowner to stop an intruder, and in the case of an intruder at night, even the use of force that led to death of the intruder (Exodus 22:2).

In this context, the writers of the Old Testament celebrate the existence of walls as shorthand for the existence of a safe place with God's blessing, and mourn the lack of walls as the evidence of the curse of a lacking a safe place. Psalm 122 may be called an ode to the walls of Jerusalem, which are "firmly put together;" Psalm 51 ends by invoking this as the blessing of God: "Build up the walls of Jerusalem." The prophets similarly envision the future blessing of Israel in terms of walls:

“In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: ‘We have a strong city; he sets up salvation as walls and bulwarks.’” (Isaiah 26:1)

“Foreigners shall build up your walls.” (Isaiah 60:10)

“On your walls, O Jerusalem, I have set watchmen; all the day and all the night they shall never be silent.” (Isaiah 62:6)

“I shall look upon his vindication...a day for the building of your walls” (Micah 7:9-11)

Not only are walls celebrated, but God himself is envisioned as a fortress with a wall, that is, “stronghold,” a safe place of protection:

“My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence.” (2 Samuel 22:3)

“The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.” (Psalm 9:9)

“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2)

“For you have been a stronghold to the poor a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall.” (Isaiah 25:4)

The same vision is taken up in the New Testament in Revelation 21, where the walls of the New Jerusalem are celebrated:

“It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed.” (Revelation 21:12)

By contrast, the *lack* of walls is mourned as a sign of God’s curse. This is a regular theme during the exilic period. Psalm 80 mourns that when Jerusalem is without walls, “all who pass by pick its fruit;” Psalm 89:40 directly attributes the breaching of the walls, the breakdown of the stronghold, to the discipline of God on his people, as do Lamentations 2:7-8, Isaiah 25:11-12, Jeremiah 50:15 and Ezekiel 26:7-12. Isaiah 5:5 puts this in the first person:

“And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.” (Isaiah 5:5)

Here the image is of a garden or farm with a wall, the other common walled structure in the ancient near east besides a city. The destruction of walls is also included as part of the curse on Babylon in Jeremiah 51:44 and 51:58.

Because a walled safe place is good, and the lack of walls is a curse, the Old Testament goes on to establish a moral imperative to create or repair walls, and defines it as sin to neglect them:

“Your prophets have been like jackals among ruins, O Israel. You have not gone up into the breaches, or built up a wall for the house of Israel, that it might stand in battle in the day of the LORD.” (Ezekiel 13:4-5)

“And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none.” (Ezekiel 22:30)

In the culmination of this theme of walls in the Old Testament, one whole book of the Bible may be summarized as entirely about the joy of walls and the mourning of not having them. The book of Nehemiah starts out with the following words:

“And they said to me, ‘The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire.’ As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven.” (Nehemiah 1:3-4)

The plot of the book revolves entirely about Nehemiah’s attempts to remove the shame of no walls, thwarting their enemies’ plots to prevent the building of the walls, ending with a grand celebration of the completion of the walls:

“And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres...And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall. Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks.” (Nehemiah 12:27-31)

The existence of walls is often seen negatively in our present day, as we associate them with prison walls to keep people penned in, as with the Berlin Wall. But as we have seen in this survey, in the ancient Near East, walls represented safety and security, a protection against those who would oppress, whether bandits or armies. Indeed, they represent a predominant metaphor in the Bible for the safety of the believer in God’s protective care.

Although the New Testament is not concerned with cities as such, the same theme is taken up. Jesus adopted the image of the kingdom of God, and the nation of Israel, as a safe place with a wall, either as a vineyard with a wall or fence (Matthew 21:33, Mark 12:1), as in Isaiah 5, quoted above, or a sheepfold with a wall (John 10:1-16). More generally, the language of an “inside” and an “outside” of the kingdom is frequently used. Paul, discussing church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, says “What do I have to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.” The picture is that of a safe place which is kept free from evil people, “wolves” who may

attack the sheep in the sheepfold (cf. Acts 20:29). Paul frequently uses the term “outsiders” (1 Corinthians 14:23-24, Colossians 4:5, 1 Timothy 3:7) to refer to those who do not belong to the church.

In the same way, the book of Nehemiah may be seen as a unified picture of the establishment of an inside and outside of the people of God. While most of the book is concerned with the city walls of Jerusalem, the book ends with a putting away of the outsiders, pagan wives that Jewish men had brought in.

### **The theme of stranger-love in Scripture**

Along with the celebration of walls and safe places in the Bible, we find another theme equally pervasive, namely the virtue of hospitality, or welcome of strangers. Lack of welcome to strangers is a severe sin, and overflowing hospitality to them is a great virtue and a sign of God’s blessing.

In the book of Job, which takes places in the most ancient culture of the Bible, Job says that lack of help to the poor who came to his tents would be a sin deserving a curse:

“If I have withheld anything that the poor desired, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless has not eaten of it...if his body has not blessed me, and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep...then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder, and let my arm be broken from its socket. (Job 31:16-22)

Similarly, Abraham practices overabundant hospitality when he welcomes God and the angels coming to him in the flesh (Genesis 18). There is no indication at the beginning of this passage that Abraham knew that he was dealing with God and his angels incarnate; it is more likely that his behavior of rushing to provide abundant hospitality for travelers was normal practice at the time. The book of Hebrews in the New Testament seems to refer to this incident in saying, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (Hebrews 13:2). By contrast, later in Genesis 19, the severe lack of hospitality of the Sodomites toward the angels is implicitly accounted as one of their sins demanding judgment.

When the nation of Israel is established in the land, Moses gives to them several regulations specifically addressed at helping the *ger*, the homeless wanderers in the open country. One set of laws addresses treating these wanderers as equals:

“There shall be lone law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.” (Ex. 12:49)

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

Another set of laws set aside resources for these people to use, for example, allowing them to glean the fallen grain at the edges of harvested fields (Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22), allowing them to pick fruit and grain to eat from orchards, but not to carry any away (Deuteronomy 23:25-26), allowing them to collect food from fallow land in the Sabbath year (Exodus 23:11), and the general call to be openhanded to the poor: “You shall open wide our hand to your brother, to the needy, and to the poor” (Deuteronomy 15:11).

The prophet Isaiah takes up this theme as one that should be obvious to the people:

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?” (Isaiah 58:6-7)

The same theme is taken up in Ezekiel 18:7-9, and in the New Testament by Jesus: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35).

This theme is also generalized to give a picture of God himself: all of us are sinners who were once outside the kingdom of God, and God welcomed us in as needy strangers. This is especially true of Gentiles:

“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2:11-19)

The language here of stranger is that of the *ger*, the wandering alien, and outsider to Israel. Yet Israel was once told the same thing: they were also to consider themselves as wandering *ger* welcoming in by God:

“And you shall make response before the LORD your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous.’” (Deuteronomy 26:5)

All people reside in the presence of God only by his gracious welcome to strangers.

### **Putting the themes together**

We thus have two themes that run side by side in the Bible, the theme of the safe place with a wall to keep others out, and the theme of welcome to the stranger, bringing them in. How can we reconcile these two?

The key to putting these two together is to recognize the two functions of the *gate*, or door, in the wall. At the gate, a judgment is made to sort outsiders into two categories. Those who are humble come to the gate and are welcomed in; those who are judged as threats are kept out. In other words, hospitality to strangers is always initiated by a *welcome*, at the invitation of the host. The outsider who wishes to come in waits patiently and humbly for the welcome, and does not force his way in. The default assumption about anyone forcing his way in is that he comes with ill intent. As Jesus said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.” (John 10:1)

It would be unthinkable in ancient culture for anyone to force his way into a home, walled farmyard, or city, and then to expect hospitality. The law of Moses even allowed a homeowner to kill a person breaking into his house at night, based on the presumption of ill intent (Exodus 22:2).

To enforce the distinction between enemies and welcome guests, walled cities had *watchmen* and *gatekeepers* to look out for those forcing their way in (1 Chronicles 9:23, 2, Isaiah 62:6, Psalm 127:1, Jeremiah 6:17, Nehemiah 11:9). A watchman who failed to warn of a threat was morally in sin (Ezekiel 33:1-6). It is perhaps not coincidental that the judges of ancient cities sat at the city gate, that is, at the portal through the wall. Among other things for them to decide would be who to allow to enter. This function seems to be indicated by verses that condemn the judges of a land for refusing to welcome the poor: Amos 5:12 says “For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins—you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate.” This seems to indicate that a regular function of the judges at the gate was to “turn aside” unwelcome visitors. (Cf. Proverbs 22:22.) Judges are condemned for failing to show hospitality to the humble poor who enter at the gate, but there is no indication that the existence of the gate, or the wall, with its gatekeepers, is itself an injustice.

In the same way, in the New Testament church with its inside and outside, there is both a welcome to strangers, but also a stricture that they must come in the proper way, and that enemies must be put out. Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate” (Matthew 7:13) and “I am the way... no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). As discussed above, Paul discusses church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5, and Jesus also discusses it in Matthew 18, as a putting of people outside.

It is tempting to view the tension between the protected safe place and the command to hospitality as the same as the tension between law and grace. But which is which depends on who is in view. To the insider, *grace* consists of a safe, protected place, which is used metaphorically to represent God’s gracious inclusion in his home. It is a place where a person can rest without fear. For many people, having no place to truly feel safe leads to a real sense of oppression. The *law* to this insider commands love to strangers, to welcome the needy.

For the outsider, the roles are reversed. For the outsider, *grace* is the welcome into the protected area from wandering in fear. But the *law* to them is that they must come in the proper



way, repentant and humble, requesting admission not demanding it, at the designated gate, and not over the wall.

### **Extrapolating to the present day**

Having now seen how these two themes work in Scripture, we can attempt with great care to extend their general principles to the present day.

The most difficult problem for this extrapolation is that we no longer live in a society with walled cities. This is a relatively recent development in history, which coincides with the rise of the modern concept of a nation-state with well-defined borders. In most of the world including Europe well up through the 1700s, walled cities were the norm, and outside the cities landowners live in walled homes with heavy, locked shutters and gates, and with armed servants. Starting in the 1800s, the shift began in the US and other western nations toward almost the opposite of the ancient view: rural areas as the safe places, and the cities as dangerous places filled with crime. Houses in the countryside in the US, Canada, and other western nations mostly have no defensive walls and no shutters on their windows.

There are many complex reasons for this change, but in large part it was driven by the perception that the entire country was now a “safe place”—border guards protected the borders of the nation from outside attack, and police patrolled the land inside to prevent crime. This had an enormous impact on the productivity of the land. While in ancient days, a farmer had to retreat to a walled city at night, in the new concept of wide open safe areas, millions of people could live in the countryside without fear, opening up much more of the land to cultivation, far from the protection of defended walls. On the other hand, in many cities, the population outgrew the ability of police to prevent crime, leading to the reappearance of the equivalent of walled cities, namely “gated communities” or high-rise buildings with guards.

The question before us is what, if anything, is the modern equivalent of the city wall which defines a safe place. The present debate is essentially between two choices. First, we can define the national border of a country as the modern equivalent of the ancient city wall, with all of the land inside the country as the safe place, and the ports of entry at the national borders as the equivalent of the gates in the wall. In this view, the safe place has been expanded over history from home to tribe to city to nation. Alternatively, we can reject the notion of a national border, and in so doing, implicitly call for a return to the ancient model of walled cities, with unsafe open spaces (*sada*) in between, and gates to each city that act much as the ports of entry into nations do today. A third option, to reject all notion of borders and walls, including for cities and homes, is to argue for no safe places at all, in contrast to the celebration of safe places that we see in the Bible.

The tension between safe places and hospitality drives much of the modern tension in the immigration debates. Part of the dispute is based on differing assessments of the danger presented by immigrants, if the national borders are not enforced strictly. Many people who want stricter border control believe that without it, the number of immigrants could be overwhelming. Some polls indicate that more than 700 million people in the world would emigrate to the United

States if given the chance.<sup>5</sup> Some who want stricter border controls may also believe that immigrants as a whole are more dangerous than other people; indeed, poverty and crime are correlated,<sup>6</sup> and poverty is a major reason for seeking to immigrate. By contrast, many of those who favor unregulated motion of peoples tend to assume that the numbers would remain low, similar to the generally small numbers of wandering *ger* seen in biblical times, and see any categorization of immigrants as more dangerous than other people as xenophobia.

The debate is therefore partly over facts: how many people would come if enforcement of borders were relaxed, and what would their impact be on safety in the country? Would it be a small trickle or an overwhelming flood? But much of the rhetoric in the debate also deals with the general categories discussed above. Some of the those who want fewer border controls chide those who want greater border enforcement as un-Christian; the desire for a safe place is mocked as selfish. But as we have seen, the Bible recognizes the desire for a safe place as legitimate, and associates the lack of a safe place with a state of oppression of a people. People who favor less regulation on immigration need to recognize that much of the reason others favor strict borders is that they implicitly hold to the view of the whole nation as a safe place. Do those who want less border control reject this view because they themselves live in relative safety, whether in “good” communities with little crime, or gated buildings with guards, such as often exist in big cities? To make their argument biblically, they need to address legitimate concerns for safety that others in rural areas have, including realistic assessments of the impact of large numbers of immigrants.

On the other hand, people who want more limited immigration can be challenged by asking whether they have unrealistic expectations for the degree of safety that can be achieved in a sinful world. The practice of hospitality, or welcome to strangers, is intrinsically risky to some degree. While it is legitimate to require that strangers enter through the gate, with permission, even in that case there will always be risk.

The concerns of each group cannot be dismissed out of hand. It is not unbiblical to long for safe places well protected by walls; rather, the Bible affirms this as a deep desire of all people. And it is not possible to dismiss the theme of charity and welcome to strangers throughout the Bible.

It is hard to realistically argue that society would be better off returning to the ancient culture in which only walled cities (or gated communities) are safe and all the rural areas are unsafe, with people darting from one city to another as fast as possible. Therefore invoking the law of the landless *ger* from the Old Testament to apply to modern rural areas is disingenuous. Therefore, the debate should rightly be about whether to raise, lower, or keep the same the number non-citizens brought into a country via a welcoming, legal process, while maintaining control of walls and borders. Whether one favors more or less immigration, the biblical pattern is to have regulated portals at which questions are asked of outsiders. Crossing borders without permission, whether of nations or some new version of walled cities, amounts to climbing over a wall, and being taken as a “thief or robber.” Such is to presume upon hospitality, not to humbly

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<sup>5</sup> “Number of Potential Migrants Worldwide Tops 700 Million,” [news.gallup.com](https://news.gallup.com), June 8, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., E. Harrell and L. Langton, “Household Poverty And Nonfatal Violent Victimization, 2008-2012,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, [www.bjs.gov](http://www.bjs.gov).

ask. And forcing the poor to cross hundreds of miles of desert on foot to gain admission is not hospitality.

## Conclusion

At the end of time, the prophet Zechariah envisions a day in which walls around cities will no longer be needed, because the entire land is safe, protected by God:

“Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of people and livestock in it. And I will be to her a wall of fire all around, declares the LORD, and I will be the glory in her midst.” (Zechariah 2:4)

This eschatological vision is the fulfilment of the command to Adam and Eve to expand the protected place of the Garden of Eden to fill the earth, so that the entire world becomes a protected place. In a way, the present condition of the US and other nations with no city walls and a safe countryside is a step toward this ultimate vision, as the safe places are increasingly expanded. A rejection of national borders, and a return to the older model of walled cities each with their own border guard, would be a retreat, a step backwards.

Some would argue against both city walls and national borders by saying that we should move toward this eschatological vision by dropping national borders, defining the entire earth as a safe place. This vision of one world with one government is a goal for some people, and may indeed have its roots in the Christian vision of the future. But even that final eschatological Christian vision still does not eliminate the role of walls or the concept of inside and outside. In the Zechariah passage above, there is still a wall, but God is that wall. And there is still an outside, namely hell. As described at the end of Revelation,

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.” (Revelation 22:15)

Even at the end of time, the celebration of the wall around the inner safe place continues, and those who enter the safe place must enter properly at the gates, or be left in outer darkness.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss all the varied issues of immigration, such as amnesty, the length and steps of the process for admission, treaties with other countries, etc. There are also many historical issues that lead to distrust on each side; those who oppose illegal immigration are often accused of secretly opposing all immigration, on the basis of a real history of racism and xenophobia; on the other side, those who oppose stricter border control are accused of secretly wanting to expand their own power base by manipulating large numbers of uninformed newcomers, as has also happened in our history. Rather than trying to assess the existence of such secret agendas, in this essay I have addressed only the fundamental issues. On these issues I can firmly say that walls are *not* immoral according to the biblical ethic, nor gates with gatekeepers. At the same time, allowing *zero* immigration of the poor is not to practice hospitality and violate the strong command of stranger-love. Debate among Christians should

proceed on the assumption that no one is arguing for no walls, and no one is arguing for zero immigration. As with one's own home and resources, the question is not whether we can help others, but how much we can realistically help others without endangering those we have care for.

It is always hard to generalize any of the structures of the law of Moses to the present day without reading in our own political preferences and biases. But we also cannot isolate God's law from the present, because God's abiding moral principles relate to human desires and human nature everywhere. The Bible clearly presents moral imperatives: the need for safe places with guards, and the need for those inside the place of God's blessing to reach out to invite others in. In embracing the broad theme of love of strangers in the Scriptures, we must not dismiss the broad theme in Scripture of protection of a community, with a well-defined inside and an outside, with guards at the gates. To dismiss the deep longing of humanity for a safe place is to deny an crucial aspect of our nature, the desire to be at rest without fear.