

Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible – by M. Daniel Carroll R.
Synopsis by Ryan Holloway

The purpose of *Christians at the Border* is to present a relevant, biblical and culturally informed discussion of the current state of Hispanic immigration in the United States. The author's intent is to present the foundational considerations for understanding immigration from a culturally American worldview, as well as a Christian worldview and show how the two work together. Carroll provides unique insight into the discussion from his own background of being "the son of a Guatemalan mother and an American father," who spent many summers growing up in Guatemala living with family, and later teaching professionally at El Seminario Teológico Centroamericano. Currently he is Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Denver Seminary and adjunct professor at El Seminario Teológico Centroamericano.

Chapter 1. Hispanic Immigration: Invasion or Opportunity?

Chapter one asks, who decides *culture*? The majority culture in America is accepted as the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant that has assimilated many other culture groups immigrating to the U.S. throughout history. However, Carroll notes how the Hispanic population is rising and has now surpassed African-American culture as being the largest minority culture. This leaves the majority culture wondering why the Hispanic population is not assimilating to Americanism as quickly as other minority cultures have. This tension between majority culture and minority culture is understandable, but it will eventually move into a time of renovation for the American culture. A culture that Carroll claims has never been static.

Economics are also affected by immigration. Carroll recognizes that the primary concerns of the Hispanic influx are 1.) educational funding, 2.) Hispanic criminals and their cost of incarceration 3.) immigrants are willing to accept below-average wages, and 4.) the health-care system being taken advantage of by undocumented immigrants. Considerations to counter these points are the influx of unskilled labor workers filling jobs, and therefore, boosting social security taxes withholding allowing the system to remain sustainable. Carroll also notes that the rate of incarceration among Hispanics is lower than among other people groups, and mentions how much money Hispanics are spending within the borders of this country.

Chapter 2. Of Immigrants, Refugees, and Exiles: Guidance from the Old Testament, Part I

Migration and immigration are human issues. As human issues they inherently deal with the worth, destiny, rights, and responsibilities of humans. The Bible discusses the creation of humans as the pinnacle of creation (Gen. 1), which carries the *imago Dei*, or image of God. Humans, as God's image on Earth, are meant to represent Him. Each person carries this image and the potential for a relationship with God. One way the

majority culture can reflect this image is to show compassion to immigrants who are seeking a better way of life.

The Old Testament has many examples of migrations and people movements. Abraham moved about as he lived a nomadic life following the pastures. He would often live alongside of other cultures. Abraham also became a sojourner (migrant) in Egypt while there was a famine in the land. Ruth is also an example of a family that had to move to a new land due to famine and hard times. There are also examples of forced exiles, such as Joseph, who was sold into slavery in Egypt. Eventually Joseph accepted his entire family into Egypt – as immigrants. Daniel is another example of a forced exile and one who assimilates to a degree, but still keeps a significant part of his own culture and heritage.

Chapter 3. The Law and Sojourner: Guidance from the Old Testament, Part II

Hospitality in the Ancient World can be seen in the interaction between Abraham and the three strangers who visit in Genesis 18. Considering Abraham's actions towards the strangers, the Christian today should take note and consider Carroll's exhortation: "to be hospitable is to imitate God."

Other Biblical references to hospitality and the treatment of foreigners are present within the Law. The Law, given to the redeemed people of God, still has bearing on Christians today. It is also a reflection or example of a life that is pleasing to God. From this standpoint, the Law takes into consideration a few main topics: 1.) Terminology for the Sojourner, 2.) Laws Pertaining to the Sojourner – labor and land laws, 3.) Motivations Behind Laws – Lev. 19:34, and 4.) Assimilation and Future Hope of the sojourner.

Remember, the Law explains the ethical orientation God intends for all humanity. Accordingly, there is responsibility for both the majority culture and minority culture.

Chapter 4. Welcoming the Stranger: Guidance from the New Testament

Chapter four begins by detailing Joseph and Mary's retreat to Egypt, then focuses on Jesus' interactions with Samaritans, focusing on the Woman at the Well in John 4. Carroll's summation of this is to say there is no direct teaching on immigration in the Gospels. But, Carroll does raise the question, "will the Son of Man and Father in any way demand an accounting of this country's [America's] actions toward Christian Hispanics?"

The beginning to the answer is to remember that Christians themselves are sojourners. 1 Peter addresses the audience as "strangers" in 1:1, and later as "aliens and strangers" in 2:11. Peter also claims that through a good testimony others will take notice and some would acknowledge God (2:12, 15; 3:1-2, 16).

Romans 13: 1-7 ("Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities...") is often quoted against allowing illegal/undocumented immigrants the same rights as others in the

U.S. However, this passage should be read in the preceding context of 12: 3-21, where Christians are exhorted to serve, show love and compassion, and help their enemies. What is important is for each Christian to have a set of beliefs formed from the Bible and to search its pages for guidance in immigration issues.

Chapter 5. Where Do We Go From Here? Final Thoughts

As Carroll concludes, he reminds the reader of the *double entendre* of the title. The two meanings reflect the literal view of American Christians standing at an economic, political and geographical border with Hispanic immigrants and Christians, as well as the metaphysical border of whether American Christians will chose to stand on the side of American politics and economics, or the Word of God. When confronted with controversial issues such as this one, Carroll hopes Christians will make decisions based on values – values which come from searching of scripture and searching for God. Carroll closes with a challenge that is universal in its application: “Christians are to display the life of Jesus, and this requires acquiring a set of virtues, like peaceableness, kindness, hospitality, and patience.”

Christians at the Border serves as a foundation for Biblically considering a response to the questions and issues involved with Hispanic immigration into the United States. Carroll provides a brief history, covering 150 years of Hispanic immigration as the beginning point to his discussion. Then, he draws implications from the Old Testament on the response of the people of God, before drawing implications from the New Testament on the Christian response to immigration and to Hispanic Christians entering the U.S. His final thoughts are a way to spur on the discussion from an informed beginning place. That place is the Word of God.