

When Aliens Are Citizens

International Bible Lesson

Ezekiel 47:13-23

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“And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel” (Ezekiel 47:22—KJV).

“You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel” (Ezekiel 47:22—NRSV).

Four types of people lived in the land of Israel. Even before the days of Ezekiel, many Israelites had turned from serving the LORD alone to worshiping the idols of their neighbors. These idolatrous Israelites were similar to a second group that Ezekiel labeled “foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and flesh” (Ezekiel 44:7). With all of their abominations, these two groups broke God’s laws and covenant with Israel. God condemned the idolatrous priests in Jerusalem for appointing idolatrous foreigners to act for them “in keeping my charge in the sanctuary” (Ezekiel 44:8). The third group was the true Israelites, physical descendants of all the tribes of Israel who were circumcised in heart and flesh. They loved the LORD and sought eagerly to express their love by obeying the Law of God as revealed to Moses and emphasized by the prophets of God. The fourth group was aliens. Though aliens descended from foreigners, they came to love the LORD and accepted the Law of God as the standard for how to live in the land of Israel. Through Ezekiel, God commanded the true Israelites to treat these aliens with equality since they all obeyed the Law of God. In the days of the Judges, Israel had done this, and Ruth was a Moabite who became an alien when she loved the LORD and moved to Israel with her mother-in-law. Ruth became an ancestor of Jesus Christ. Today, Jews and Gentiles are “one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

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Thinking Further

1. Why do you think God gave boundaries to the 12 tribes of Israel?
2. Since the Israelites often did not do what God told them to do, why do you think God included sins of omission in the Bible?
3. Why do you think Ezekiel’s vision from God included such detailed instructions for building a new temple and dividing the land?
4. What is the difference between a foreigner in Israel and an alien in Israel?
5. Why do you think it was difficult for the Jews in the early church to treat the Gentiles in the early church with Christian respect and the quality?