

## **Bible and the Headlines: Migrate Home**

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It is appropriate that as America observes the birth of her Savior, we remember why the Messiah was born in Bethlehem: a government edict that caused the migration (Luk 2:1-3). Two millennia since the Nativity and the headlines show government edicts are still involved in migration.

On December 5th, Iran's Ariana News announced, "Iran Offers Fully Funded Virtual Education for Afghan Students Returning from Abroad." Currently, there are over 6 million Afghans living in Iran. This new initiative by Iran seeks to encourage Afghans to return home. An Iranian minister said, "Tehran is ready to deliver online education to Afghan students inside Afghanistan." Both Afghanistan and Iran have an interest in this project succeeding.

South China Morning Post on December 16th featured, "China Offers More Support To Returning Overseas Students As Influx Grows." China's Ministry of Education has partnered with the private sector to ease reintegration from abroad. A spokesman for a Beijing think tank stated, "Overseas students drive innovation and entrepreneurship. They play a vital role across various industries and in the development of our talent pool." Three quarters of China's current leaders in healthcare, education and national projects are former overseas students.

CBS News on December 22 presented, "DHS Increases Offer for Undocumented Migrants to \$3,000 if They Voluntarily Leave by End of 2025." The government was formerly paying \$1000 to people who self-deported. In addition to this payment, each reverse immigrant ". . . will also receive free airfare to their home countries and be waived of certain civil fines or penalties tied to remaining illegally in the U.S." Immigration officials note that the programs cost less per person than detaining and processing an individual.

As stated in the first paragraph of this piece, government-ordered migration is at the heart of the Christmas story. It is also part of two other major migrations in the Bible. At the end of 400 years of slavery, the Israelites were ordered by Pharaoh to leave Egypt (Ex 12:31-33). This was the first occupation of the Promised Land. Then hundreds of years later, after the Babylonians removed the Israelites from the land, King Artaxerxes ended their exile with the proclamation, "Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom . . . may go. You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God" (Ezra 7:13-14).

Sadly, the Israelites were unfaithful to God so there was another out migration caused by the Roman Empire. This exile persisted until modern times. The re-establishment of Israel was aided by the passage of a law in the Knesset in 1950 called the Law of Return. This governmental edict ". . . grants Jews and their descendants the right to immigrate to Israel and obtain citizenship ." The law started a re-migration that fulfilled God's promise in the prophets, "Hear the word of the LORD, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd'" (Jer 31:10).

There is one more migration for believers, but the government is not involved in it. At the end of planet earth, "He will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Mat 24"31). We will rush to migrate home.