

# Refugees and the Bible

## Welcoming the stranger

### Session 1: Jesus the refugee

#### Pray

Spend some time in prayer dedicating your discussion and reflections to God.

#### Watch

##### Part 1: Jesus the refugee

(Download from [biblesociety.org.uk/refugeesandthebiblefilms](http://biblesociety.org.uk/refugeesandthebiblefilms))

Discuss the clip. How do you react to what was said? Do you agree with it? Is there anything you disagree with?

What difference, if any, does it make to know that Jesus had been a refugee, as child? What difference might it have made to him? Does it change how you think about him?

#### Read

Ask someone to read the passage out loud slowly, leaving enough gaps for reflection; you might also want to leave a few minutes for silent reflection at the end.

##### Matthew 25.31-46 (Contemporary English Version)

<sup>31</sup> When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all of his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. <sup>32</sup> The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats.

<sup>33</sup> He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. <sup>34</sup> Then the king will say to those on his right, "My father has blessed you! Come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created. <sup>35</sup> When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me, <sup>36</sup> and when I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me, and when I was in jail, you visited me."

<sup>37</sup> Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, "When did we give you something to eat or drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear <sup>39</sup> or visit you while you were sick or in jail?"

<sup>40</sup> The king will answer, "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me."

<sup>41</sup> Then the king will say to those on his left, "Get away from me! You are under God's curse. Go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! <sup>42</sup> I was hungry, but you did not give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty, but you did not give me anything to drink. <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger, but you did not welcome me, and I was naked, but you did not give me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of me."

<sup>44</sup> Then the people will ask, "Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?"

<sup>45</sup> The king will say to them, "Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me."

<sup>46</sup> Then Jesus said, "Those people will be punished forever. But the ones who pleased God will have eternal life."

## Unpack

- In Matthew 25, Jesus links the response at the throne of judgement with the way people treated those who were hungry and thirsty; strangers; those without clothes; those who were sick and those in prison. Possibly even more importantly than that, he said that whenever these actions were or were not done, it was as though they were or were not done to him.
- Did you know that Middle Eastern sheep and goats are almost identical to look at? And that they are kept together in the same flock? The only person who can tell them apart is their own shepherd. Even then they would need to come very close to the shepherd, for the shepherd to tell the difference between them. This helps to understand the image here a bit better – Jesus on the throne will recognise (or not recognise) those who come close and make a judgement about them based on this recognition.
- One of the hardest features of this passage is the implication that Jesus' judgment is based on how nice we have been to those in need rather than on the basis of faith in Jesus. There has been extensive discussion about this and no easy answers. It's worth considering this passage alongside another idea present in Scripture, that although we are saved because of our faith in Jesus, there is an expectation this will impact how we live. Even the apostle Paul expects our faith to result in changed behaviour, particularly in how we relate to others. We can claim to have faith in Jesus but the real test can be seen in what we do. Jesus' recognition of us as people who do have faith in him might be related to whether that faith does, in fact, make any difference to how we live.

## Reflect

- What do Jesus' words in the passage mean for us in practice? If you were to respond to someone as 'though you were doing it to Jesus', how might you do it differently than if you were to treat them as 'just' a hungry person, or 'just' a stranger?
- Knowing that Jesus himself was a 'stranger' as a child in Egypt, does this affect the way you read his command in Matthew 25?
- The problem, of course, is that it would be nigh on impossible to help every hungry or sick person that we meet in the course of our lives. What do you think Jesus might want to say about how we choose who to help?
- Is there anything that you have explored in your discussion today that you would want to apply to the question of how we think about and/or welcome refugees?

## Pray

Spend time in prayer committing what you have discussed to God. Bring to him in prayer those who are wondering whether to flee their country; those who are currently seeking safe haven and those who are in refugee camps in various places around the world. Use stories from [biblesociety.org.uk/prayertree](https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/prayertree) to help you pray.