Immigration and the Bible

Part 1 of 1: Immigration and the Bible
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Welcome to The Table. We discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Darrell Bock, Executive Director for Cultural Engagement at Dallas Theological Seminary, and our topic today is "The Biblical Background to a Discussion on Immigration." And my guest is Professor of Old Testament at Denver Seminary, Daniel Carroll-Rodas, who is a long-time, life-long friend, and also an expert in Old Testament ethics.

And he's done a book called Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bibles. And he writes it from a perspective that – well, I'll let him tell you about it.

Danny, first of all, welcome, and we're glad to have you today with us.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

Well, good to see you, Darrell – Dr. Darrell Bock – and I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Darrell Bock

Yeah. So, tell us a little bit about why you wrote this book.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

Well, there's really a personal history behind it. As you know, I'm half Guatemalan. My mother was from Guatemala. So, we were raised bilingual and bicultural. And we spent time in Guatemala, growing up. And then I worked there for 15 years, teaching at a seminary in the capital.

And so, issues related to Latin Americans, Hispanics, are very dear to my heart. And when we moved back to the U.S. from Guatemala into Denver, where I am now. That's where I began to hear the discussions in this country about immigration.

We began an Hispanic program at the seminary, and then I had undocumented students. And so, it became very personal, and I began to go to an Hispanic church on Sunday afternoons. So, there's this personal aspect to it. And then the biblical aspect is I would hear Christians who would have a conversation, but it wasn't a Christian conversation about the topic, really.

And so, that's what drove me to write the book. You have this first edition. It's now out in its second edition.
Darrell Bock: Well – and the topic of the book has kept you pretty busy, hasn't it? I mean you've been – done a lot of speaking on this around the country.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Right. And that wasn’t why I wrote it. I wrote it, actually, just to inform evangelical Christians and others. But it's just generated all kinds of speaking and other writing, besides the book, that I just hadn't anticipated. But it's been quite a journey.

Darrell Bock: Yeah. So, let's talk a little bit about the book. You said that the discussions that you sometimes have aren't particularly Christian. Why don't you elaborate what you mean by that?

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Well, I would talk to people who claimed a Christian faith, but the conversation would be about the economics of immigration, which is important, the social impact of immigration, legal implications, all these things, which are issues you need to get to. But there was not really a Christian piece to it. It was the same conversation I could have with a non-believing neighbor.

And if they did go to anything biblical, it was just the default to Romans 13 and to say that these immigrants have broken the law, and that was the extent of the Christian conversation.

Darrell Bock: Okay. Well, then, the next question, obviously, is then what would make a conversation about immigration a Christian conversation?

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Well, I would say to look at the breadth of the Scriptures. And when I tell people – in fact, I had a radio interview this morning, up in Buffalo, New York, and he asked me the same question. And I said, "Well," and he asked me the Romans 13 question. And what I told him was – when I speak on immigration, I tell them, "Well, you have to get to Romans 13, but it's on Page 1,100 in my Bible. So, why don't we go to Page 1 and begin at Page 1. And then we'll get to Romans 13, but we'll have seen a thousand pages of other biblical teaching.

Darrell Bock: In other words, to give Romans 13 some context.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Exactly. And to put it into, I believe, its proper, biblical, fuller context, and then begin in Genesis Chapter 1.
So, Genesis Chapter 1 is the starting point. Where does it start us?

Well, with the idea that everyone's made in the image of God. So, what you have then is everyone has worth. The fact that we are to rule and to subdue the Earth and to steward it, in Chapter 2, tells you that humans have potential.

So, let me give you an example. If we talk about legal matters, if we understand that immigrants are made in the image of God and have all kinds of potential, then what we do, we look at how do we immigrate immigrants into this country to facilitate their contribution as image bearers for the common good?

Instead of going at the law strictly in a punitive sense, now what you're doing is you're creating law in a constructive sense, constructive for them, yes, but also constructive for the more general common good. And by starting it in Genesis 1, instead of Romans 13, you've changed the legal discussion. Even though it is still a legal discussion, you've changed it. You've given it a different tone, a different direction, a different set of goals.

Okay, now, as we kind of move through, in this first segment, we want to kind of deal with the biblical elements. One of the things that comes up or tends to come up is how the foreigner or the alien or the sojourner is handled, particularly in the Old Testament. There's a lot that's said about that due to Israel's experience as having been subjected to slavery in Egypt, that kind of thing.

So, let's talk a little bit about that. And I want to put a particular view on the table for you to discuss, and it is the idea that when we look at the terms of the Old Testament, we get distinctions in how these terms are used in that one can discern, within the Old Testament, the categories that would, in effect, translate into legal or illegal alien and make a distinction that way.

What are you – how do you see those kinds of efforts, and what do you think is going on in the Old Testament?
Daniel Carroll-Rodas

Well, I can appreciate the effort or the perspective. I think it's misplaced. I think it's trying to put the modern distinctions back into an ancient world. You do find different terms for the foreigner in the Old Testament, but it's not based on legality. It's more based on whether they are adapting to or even want to adapt into the whole country – in this case Israel. And they're actually different terms.

And so, the legislation that you find that is the constructive positive legislation, in the Old Testament, is directed toward those who are coming and looking, we would say, for work and a new life. We think the other term and the more negative term would be maybe like the merchant classes that would come in, the traders, things like this, who really weren't interested in living there; they were interested in commerce or something; we're not really sure.

But the bulk of the legislation is legislation directed at vulnerable immigrants who've come in, those who are looking for work, who are looking for protection and food. And so, what you find are a set of laws that are meeting those vulnerable aspects of their lives.

Darrell Bock

And you've argued that this concern that we see in the Bible, we tend not to see in laws in the surrounding ancient Near East, that this is something that's particularly distinctive to the Old Testament, that shows the heartbeat and concern of the Old Testament for the dignity of the person and honoring that dignity. Is that right?

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

Right. Now you find immigrant peoples in other nations. But this would have been the result of war. For instance, when Judah, after the fall of Jerusalem, and then thousands were taken away into Babylon. Well, they become immigrants. Right? We would now call formally "forced migration."

So, what you have, in the ancient world, are a lot of forced migrants from wars, for instance, that have been brought in to work, usually. But there's not really legislation for them, which is a different kind of thing.
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And so, this is where the Old Testament's very unique, and it's grounded in Israel's particular story of their own slavery in Egypt, and it's grounded, ultimately, in the person of God himself. And we can talk about that, if you want, but the key passage there would be Deuteronomy 10. Verses 17-19 would be where it's grounded in God Himself.

_**Darrell Bock**_

Okay, now, as we think about working with these categories and distinctions, the passage that I think is the most classic, that many people are actually aware of, is the law that allows the corner of someone's agricultural lands to be free for anyone to utilize. And it seems to me that in this category of the distinction, that some people argue for, that if you were to look at a passage like that, it doesn't make sense to think through – is the corner of the field left open for the person who can prove that they have the right to the food, or is it left open for anyone who walks by who might have need?

_**Daniel Carroll-Rodas**_

Well, I think that's probably the modern question. I don't even know if it would enter into their heads.

_**Darrell Bock**_

That's actually the point of asking the question that way.

_**Daniel Carroll-Rodas**_

Well – I know – and the classic, example, of course, is Ruth. You don't see Ruth coming across and going through some kind of immigrant weigh station to move from Moab to Bethlehem. But what you find they're doing, in Chapter 2, is working in the fields. And that's precisely your point.

Were there distinctions made in Israel? Probably. Were there some kind of control measures? Perhaps. We have no record of them. So, to try to build a case that some do on this legal/illegal distinction is really to read back into the text what we do versus what would have been done in ancient Israel.

_**Darrell Bock**_

So, you'd be suggesting that be an anachronistic kind of reading of the text.

_**Daniel Carroll-Rodas**_

Yeah, I can see the book on your desk there. That particular professor is one of the ones who argues the way that you're talking about. And we do have, for instance, archaeological evidence for each Eastern frontier, where they would have a series of forts to control the coming in and going out of people coming in for food. Of course, Abram, in Genesis 12, is an example of this.
And we see very clearly, on Egyptian reliefs, how they made distinctions ethnically, color. You can see this. When they depict people, they'll do it by their color; they'll do it by their facial hair; they'll do it by their dress, all these kinds of things. So, they're very – just like today, we're very sensitive to people who are different. And they're actually portraying then in their texts and in their reliefs.

But those kind of distinctions and markers and forts and all this kind of stuff, we don't see in ancient Israel, as far as we know. So, that might be telling us that it's moving in a different direction.

Darrell Bock
Interesting. So, we come to the New Testament. There are probably two sets of texts that are important to talk about. One would be just the general teaching and approach of Jesus, and, of course, the other is the very much-discussed Romans 13.

So, let's take those in turn. How does Jesus impact this discussion as you see it? Because there isn't a direct immigration text in the Gospels, at least that I'm aware of.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas
No. I would take it in two directions. One is the experience of Jesus Himself, who lives for a time as a refugee in Egypt. And you would know more about this than I do. But they have to flee from Herod, and they may have gone to Alexandria, where there was a large Jewish community. But they were refugees.

And so, one would be the life experience of Jesus. The second would be just how he would work with people unlike himself, or unlike his background. And there's a great text, if you give me a minute. You know, the Leviticus 19 about love your neighbor. Well, later on in that same Chapter, when you get to Leviticus 19:13-14, it says love your – love the foreigner as yourselves.

And so, it's interesting that that would be the hardest neighbor to love – right?

Darrell Bock
Mm-hmm.
Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Then you get to Jesus and the good Samaritan parable, and the question that he is asked is, "Who is my neighbor?" Because that's the one you're supposed to love. Right?

Darrell Bock: Yeah. And the intent is probably to suggest that there's such a thing as a non-neighbor.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Right. And then when Jesus tells the story of the Samaritan, which would be a people they would not like, what He doesn't say on the frontend – Jesus – he doesn't say on the frontend, "Well, just do what the Samaritan did." He asks – he turns the question. He says, "So, who was the neighbor? Well, who was the neighbor to the man who was hurt?"

Well, the neighbor was the Samaritan, which goes back to the original question, "Who was he supposed to love?" And so, Jesus is pushing him to love the other who was different and hated by him.

Darrell Bock: Mm-hmm. In fact, so much so that when He asks, "Who was the one who proved to be the neighbor," he can't even say, "The Samaritan."

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Yeah, he just says, "The guy who helped the other guy."

Darrell Bock: Yeah, exactly right.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: And that's precisely the point. And so, what you see Jesus doing then, even on the cross, "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they do." Well, the Romans knew what they were doing, but they didn't all in the same package. You see?

And so, what you see is that Jesus is reaching out and ministering to and even dying at the hands of the other, even as he's reaching out to them. And, of course, that's just the example and the pattern that we should follow, too.

Darrell Bock: So, that brings us to the Romans 13 passage, in which, I think, the common reading – and I don't think it's a very difficult reading, actually – is the idea that we have a responsibility to submit to the government and to obey its laws. And so, the emphasis becomes on obedience.
How does everything that we've talked about put that text into context?

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

I've seen at least two ways. One is the question that people don't tend to ask is if it's a good law or not. They just assume that it's an American law, so, it must be good. So, then what I try to do is I say, "Well, why don't we go to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1950, and let's do Romans 13 there. Why don't we go to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1860, and do Romans 13 there.

And now you begin to see that Romans 13 is a little uncomfortable, because now it's a very cruel, hateful, even murderous law. So, now you have to ask yourself, "Okay, if we're gonna talk about Romans 13, we need to talk about the kind of laws that we have. And so, that's a whole other discussion about how U.S. law is not only inadequate, it's outdated, and it doesn't work.

Then what I try to do is I tell – so, for many people, that's the first time they've even thought about the fact. But I really say, "Look, in the U.S., one of the wonderful things about this country is that we can change laws that we don't agree with. And we do this all the time, whether it's the school board, or whether it's housing. We're always changing our laws.

So, the question is, if this is not the current U.S. law, not a workable or a good law, well, then we need to work to change it. Now, again, we're reframing Romans 13, not calling for revolution, but now we're putting it in a different kind of conversation.

Darrell Bock

And the other thing that you're not doing, that some people might accuse you of having done, is you're not saying, "Well, you need to disobey the law." No, you're saying, "We need to reconsider the law." That's not the same thing.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

And reconstruct it. And what I say is that I would start the reading for Romans 13 back in Romans12, where it says, "Don't be conformed to this world." And what's happened is, on this conversation and others, is that part of our conforming to the world is that we've conformed to the ideologies of our time.
And so, instead of – on this topic, and so, instead of thinking through biblically, we've absorbed the ideology of the media or our political party. And then we jump to Romans 13. Instead of understanding that to get to Romans 13 you've got to go through the rest of Romans 12, which will even tell us to love our enemies. So, even if you think of immigrants as your enemies, you are called to give them water and to give them food and to love them.

So, you're changing the whole Romans 13 discussion in multiple ways just by putting it into its fuller biblical context.

And so, the point of the exercise is is that if we step back – and this is part of what you are meaning earlier, when you said, "This needs to be a Christian conversation, and it needs to be wrapped in this ethic of the image of God, this ethic that says that we're to be characterized by compassion.

A whole series of texts which we only alluded to, but didn't really develop, that talk about caring for the foreigner and making sure that those who are in a needy position, where the foreigner is equated with categories like the widow or the orphan, that kind of thing, meeting the needs of those kinds of people, and being sensitive to their vulnerability.

Yeah, and I would add, if I could, a couple of other things. In the Old Testament law, there's four vulnerable groups. There are the widows and the orphans and the poor. And the fourth one that's added to that group are the immigrants. So, it's telling you that God is seeing all those as a package, which is interesting.

The second thing is that you'll see multiple migrant stories in the Old Testament, which I'd be happy to talk about later. But the other thing on the New Testament side is that in 1 Peter, as you would know, migration is even applied to every Christian. We are all strangers and sojourners.

And so, what you see is not only is it an important topic, it becomes a central metaphor for what it means to be a Christian. And so, the more we understand about migration, the more we understand about immigrants, really it'll help us understand what it means to be a stranger in a strange land, which is a whole other take of the immigration story.
In a sense, immigration becomes something we need to grapple with so that we can understand what it means to be a Christ-follower in an increasingly post-Christian world.

*Mmm. That's a whole different direction that moves into discipleship as opposed to public policy.*

Right.

So, kind of wrap this biblical theological discussion up for us a little bit and say, when you put this all together, what are we – what do you think we're looking at?

What do you mean? I'm not sure of the –

Well, the point is, when you – if you were to bottom line the whole package of biblical – where does this take us?

Well, I think it takes us into a different kind of discussion. It takes us into the meaning of the identity of the Christian Church.

In terms of its characteristics of how it interacts with the world around it?

Its mission.

Yeah.

But also its identity. Because – let me phrase the question in a different way.

Okay.

A couple of years ago – of course, now the numbers would be higher – the United Nations estimated about 220 million people are migrating worldwide. Now, it's worse now because of what's happened in the Middle East.

Right.
If that is true, and I don't doubt it, then the question is, with 220 million people migrating worldwide, looking for safety and food and a job for their families, what does it mean to be a Christian? Now, you've changed the question. If 220 plus are migrating worldwide to just survive, what does it mean to be the Church?

Now you're talking about not only Christian mission, but Christian identity. How is our identity, in the light of those realities, any different than the world around us?

How are we called to respond to the person who shows up, needing a place to stay at 2:00 in the morning, and it's cold outside; it's the middle of winter? Do we just leave them outside, or do we take them in?

Right. And if we make that the metaphor for the country, what we're seeing massing at the borders of Western Europe, do you go to fortress Europe to keep the hordes out? The world is not the same anymore. I mean the wars that we have generated has changed the face of the planet, and will change the demographics of every western country in the world.

And so, what we're seeing is are people placed, if I can say it this way, in tension because of our failures to one another as human beings? And in the midst of that, that calls for a Christian response that reflects the care and the goodness and the grace and the compassion of God.

I couldn't say it any better than that, Darrell.

Yeah. So, well, it's an interesting – it's an interesting problem as we're laying the biblical groundwork for this and in thinking about how to even approach the question. On the other side, I want to talk a little bit – but what do you do for the person who'd breaking the law?

Because the core question that keeps hovering over people's minds is, "Well, these people have broken the law, and so, in one sense or another, they have a responsibility." How are you dealing with that?
And I actually think that in this conversation there has been an effort by those who are framing the possibility – of framing the laws to think through that dimension of the question, even though sometimes it's not heard by people on the other side, that that has been considered and is a part of what's going on.

By the way, in fairness, we should mention that the book that was alluded to, in which the distinctions – the lexical distinctions – are mentioned. It's called The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible by James Hoffmeier, who teaches Old Testament at TEDS, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

And this is a conversation, a Christian conversation, if you will, that's been going back and forth between Danny and Jim; they know each other and have interacted in public about this. So, I think it's an example of a way to have the conversation, which is important in thinking through the back and forth that you have on trying to figure out, "Okay, what is it exactly the Bible is saying?"

Well, Danny, let's talk about kind of where we are now. We've – kind of done the biblical background, where we find ourselves. And I think to ask the question about where we find ourselves, and as we deal with the issue particularly about legality issues, it's important to understand how we got to where we are.

So, let me ask the question this way. Where are we when it comes to immigration law? Why is it that immigration law needs reform? And why the laws, as they are, might not be as workable as we might wish. And then what does that mean for the legality discussion?

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

Well, that's a great question, Darrell. Until 1875, immigration law was state law. And in 1875, it moves to the federal level, which is the classic American tension between state and federal jurisdictions. And when we saw it playing itself out in Arizona, a couple of years ago, there was that tension where Arizona made its own laws, and the Obama Administration sued them.

In terms of proper law, no matter what Arizona may have thought about whether they were doing their job or not, the Obama Administration had every right to sue them, because since 1875, it was federal jurisdiction.
So, what happens is the first major piece of immigrant legislation in the country, at the federal level, was in 1882, which was the Chinese Exclusion Act. Now, we had imported Chinese labor because of the Gold Rush, to build the railroads and things like this. But as the Chinese began to multiply, California began to pass a series of laws to put that under control. And some were instituted so not to let Chinese women off the boats, because they didn't want the Chinese to multiply.

So, in 1882, it's the Chinese Exclusion Act, which kept almost all the Chinese out of the country. And even if you were born here, but of Chinese descent, you were not allowed to be a citizen. And that law was in place till 1943.

What you also have, as the years go on, going into – from the 19th to the 20th century, as we begin to develop a series of quotas. Some were based on – motivated by religion, because the Irish and the Italians were Catholics, and this was a Protestant country. So, we put quotas on the Italians and the Irish, for instance. So, what you're seeing is, throughout the history of the country, there's been this openness to immigrants, but also this constant fear or rejection that will wind its way into legislation, which isn't surprising; that's what happens.

So, we have to appreciate the fact that the history of immigration law is checkered. Now, what most people don't recognize is that today, versus immigration law quotas by country of origin, which was a hundred years ago. Now, it's by certain quotas of different categories.

And so, for instance, if we talk about unskilled labor, the national quota per year is between 5,000 and 10,000 people. Well, that's just ridiculous. You'll probably have 5,000 or 10,000 people within 25 miles of the seminary that are undocumented, working in the restaurants and cutting grass. I mean – but what you're seeing is a quota system that was established years ago. It doesn't match economic need, and that it's too politically charged to even touch the quotas.
Another thing that people don't understand about law, and now I'm moving to the legality piece, is that U.S. law's about entry. So, if you get into this country, the law has nothing for you. There is no way, if you're here undocumented, there is no office to go to, there's no fine to be paid. There is nothing that you can do to legalize your status under current law? Because the law was about entry. It doesn't really contemplate you being here unless you've come in properly.

So, what happens, then, the only thing that U.S. law contemplates is deportation. And this is what you're hearing in the media. So, what you're seeing is the law has nothing for the 11 million to 12 million who are here undocumented. There's nothing they can do.

**Darrell Bock**

Even if they've been here three generations?

**Daniel Carroll-Rodas**

You know, if you're born here, you're a citizen.

**Darrell Bock**

Mm-hmm.

**Daniel Carroll-Rodas**

But it's the first generation. You see? So, what you have, in all families like this, at the church I go to, is that you'll have the parents and one of the children who came, in this one particular family I know of, that the boy came, when he was one year old, with the two parents.

Well, now he has two siblings. So, it's a family where the parents and the eldest child – he's now like 12 – are undocumented. But the two younger ones, five and nine, let's say, are U.S. citizens. And there's nothing that the U.S. law can do to help them.

**Darrell Bock**

If they went in, what you would face is a breaking up of a family.

**Daniel Carroll-Rodas**

Well, that's what happens.

**Darrell Bock**

Yeah.
Another thing that I hear, which, again, is a misrepresentation, this whole – one particular candidate in particular was talking about anchor babies. Well, most people don't realize, under current law, if you have a child here, that child can sponsor you when that child reaches 21 years of age. That's not an anchor baby. There's 21 years of wait time before that person can even sponsor their parents. So, the whole anchor baby thing is kind of a red herring, because it doesn't help the parents at all.

So, part of the problem and part of the issue that you're raising and saying that our laws are problematic is that they actually aren't structured to deal with the reality in which we find ourselves. That we've got millions of people here that it would make all the public policy sense in the world to get them assimilated into our culture and to have their status be established and determined rather than to leave them in this no-man's land that they find themselves in.

Exactly. Another piece that most people don't realize is that 40 to 45 percent of undocumented immigrants came in legally. They came in on tourist visas; they came in on student visas; they came in on short-term worker visas, and they just stayed. So, even the entry wasn't controlled fully, because a full control, which current law doesn't contemplate, is they would track you once you were in. But current law doesn't do that either, really, well. And so, what you have then is 40 percent of the undocumented population actually came in legally.

That's interesting. I hadn't thought about this ever in this discussion until you just mentioned this. But I remember when we came into Scotland as students, as aliens – that's what the British called foreigners – six months into our stay, we got a visit from bobbies. And they were just checking out if we were properly there, with the right papers, etcetera. And they were doing their job in terms of control. And I really hadn't thought about that since it happened to us. And that's what was going on.

Yeah. And another thing that people don't realize, because the Hispanic population is so large, in the last two years, the largest numbers that are coming in are not Hispanics or Chinese. And so, you never hear that in the media. We don't hear the fact that up to 15 to 20 percent of all Koreans are here undocumented.
So, you've got all these other stories that are out there, that the media does not know, or doesn't follow up on. And what you're seeing, Darrell, is that this isn't some kind of bullet point, 30-second commercial kinda discussion. It's a very complicated discussion legally, historically, morally, economically, whatever way you want to go.

And what's been said, up to this point, is not to say that you're arguing that Christians should – that Christians should support a view that breaks the law. You're saying the law is broken, if I can say it that way, and needs fixing, and we have a means within our system for fixing it. So, we should think Christianly about how to have good, solid immigration policy.

And a policy that would be flexible. I know you were going to get to this, but one of the things about the immigration reform movement, for instance, was to link the quotas to economic need, which makes perfect sense.

So, if you needed a certain number of construction workers, you'd guesstimate how much you need for the year and things like this. Well, then it's a floating quota, and there's many, many, many, many quota categories. But what you would do then is that your quotas would fluctuate in terms of national need, which makes common sense, I think.

It's good public policy, basically, is what you're talking about.

Exactly, exactly.

So, let's talk about the proposal side of this. Okay? So, we're thinking about this; we're trying to think about it Christianly. We're thinking about all the features that we're dealing with. We're thinking about the people who are here, who are here. Well, you've really mentioned two categories. There's the people who got here legally, but have now overstayed their legal stay. I could think about it that way, and then there are people who just came in illegally.
And so, the people who are concerned about national laws will say, and with every right, our laws should be respected. We should have some regard for how those laws are enacted and overseen. So, how does immigration reform propose to deal with those kinds of groups?

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

Well, the immigration reform that was proposed by the bipartisan senate group, a couple of years ago, was trying to meet all those issues. There was the idea of beefing up border patrol and organizing it better, because it's still a mess. That was the border side. But as I've mentioned, now you've got to deal with the people who are already here, which current law doesn't really contemplate.

So, then the idea was to put into place a pathway to legal status. Now, what they did, because this is a whole other discussion, Darrell, is because the backlog is so long, they put in an eight-year period just to catch up with the cases that are on the docket now.

Darrell Bock

Those aren't even the ones they don't have registered yet.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

Yeah. I mean those – yeah, exactly.

Darrell Bock

Yeah.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

But the point is that you'd have to get registered. They give you a certain amount of time. And if you don't get registered, okay, that's on you. But there'd be that eight-year period just to clear the backlog that we have now. That was the estimate that it would take to get through our backlog.

Then they tagged on five more years. Now, what you're seeing then is that if I were an undocumented immigrant, and I signed up for today, it would take me 13 years –

Darrell Bock

To do the right thing.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas

– to get the status. In that time, you would have had a police background checks. You would – they'd work on the whole tax mess. There would be a fine to be paid. All these things. But it was a 13-year process proposal.
Now, what happens in the media is – again, it's a game of words – and so they throw out the word amnesty. Well, I don't know how a 13-year period, with fines and police back checks and all kinds of other controls – that is not, in my dictionary, a definition of amnesty.

Darrell Bock: Amnesty is you declare it and it's done.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: That's what Reagan did in 1986, the great Republican. And he granted amnesty. Amnesty's not even on the table in the immigration reform movement. But it's still the red-flag word that people use, because they go, "Well, it's the same as amnesty."

I'm going, "No, it's not." But that's the word that'll trigger the emotions of the voter.

Darrell Bock: Mm-hmm. So, the proposal was to create this – well, to work through the backlog of – we're talking about – what? – 13 million people, 14 million people? Is that –

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Eleven million to 12 million.

Darrell Bock: Eleven million to 12 million, okay. So, it's just going take that long to process all these people was the thought.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: No, that's not even those people.

Darrell Bock: That's not even those people. So, we –

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: No, the five years was those –

Darrell Bock: Were the ones that –

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: The eight years are those that are in the system now that are still in process.

Darrell Bock: Okay, I see. So, they're in – and they're in limbo currently.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Yes.
Darrell Bock: Okay.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: And so, it's not the ones – that first ten years was not the ones who would be signing up. They were just going to be signing up to begin a process that for them would not begin until eight years later.

Darrell Bock: Oh, wow.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: And, for instance, in our current law, we have what's called family reunification. So, if I'm a Filipino, and I want to sponsor my mother and father, because even those numbers are quoted. So, the worst, as far as I've heard, is the Filipinos. So, only a certain amount of Filipinos can come in per year on this family reunification. The current wait time for the Filipino is between 21 and 23 years.

So, if I want to sponsor my mother, and I put her paperwork in now –

Darrell Bock: And she's 50 years old, I don't see her until 73.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Yeah.

Darrell Bock: Yeah.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: I mean this is what we're talking about that nobody knows. You see? So, the eight years was just to clear up the backlog that now exists. And then the five years was to kind of move these other ones through who have already been registered, been through the background checks, paid their fine and gotten their tax situation squared up.

Darrell Bock: So, to return to the biblical discussion here for a second, what the proposal is actually trying to do is to play with all of these factors. The legal factor, the Romans 13 factor, if you want to think of it that way.

Daniel Carroll-Rodas: Right.
The compassion factor in thinking through – we need to think about how to care for and assimilate these people, some of whom have been with us for multiple generations. That kind of thing. So, the proposal was an attempt to touch all the biblical – at least the proposals that I've seen, supported by some of the evangelical ethnic groups, across the board, was an attempt to touch all the biblical bases in some ways.

Correct. And that's why a lot of evangelical leaders supported the immigration reform that was proposed. But I think what the biblical piece would add is that you're not doing this top down only, like you're doing them a favor. At the same time, you're appreciating what they actually bring to the country.

So, now what you're doing is you're putting into plain daylight versus the shadows 11 million to 12 million workers, students, children, moms, dads that get their – everything – you know?

Most of whom live a life that contributes to the society and isn't a detriment to it. I mean we tend to hear about the bad apples, but the majority of people that we're talking about don't fit in that category. If they weren't here on an illegal basis, you would think they were another citizen.

Right. And – well, I could tell you all kinds of stories about that, but let me just touch briefly on the bad apples. I've focused on Genesis 1 and 2, but Genesis 3 is the fall. So, if you want a complete immigrant biblical thing, well, there's going to be bad apples. That's Genesis 3. It's just like if you were Anglo or African-American or whatever, there's bad apples in every population. Why would we expect no bad apples in the immigrant population? Of course we're going to get them.

But what happens is, they get singled out, and they get paraded as, "This is what the immigrants are like," which is just a false caricature.

Yeah, it's a serious gross generalization.

Yeah, it is.
Okay. So, let's shift the discussion. I think it's important that people understand the way the proposal worked. So, the question is, this looked like this is – you had a bipartisan support; you had all the biblical bases being touched. What happened?

It was the children at the border. That's the summer that 65,000 children or under aged, unaccompanied minors massed at the border. And there's – I can have a discussion on that, if you want, on how that happened.

But it looked like we were a few votes short of getting that reform passed. But once that happened at the border, that changed the whole equation, and everyone backed off – or at least the number that we needed to get over the hump, so to speak, backed off. And what we think – because I was in Guatemala later that summer – was that – you know, it's sad to say – we talk about human trafficking. One aspect of human trafficking is immigrant trafficking.

And so, the rumor that was in Guatemala, when I was there, that they were saying that if you give us your children, we can – because they're children, we can get them into the U.S. And so, what you had were poor families sending their children with these coyotes, up to the border, having paid several thousand dollars each. And basically what the coyote would do is say, "Walk across, present yourself, and they'll let you in."

Well, there is a law that allows children to come in if they're seeking asylum, but you got to prove that you need asylum. So, you had all these children who are unaccompanied minors come across because they had been told that this would work, and they came across, and then we put them in detention centers along the border because, once again, we were seeing where the U.S. law just didn't know what to do with them.

And so, that complication basically torpedoed the whole immigration reform bill that is now apparently dead.

So, what do you – we're kind of running out of time here, so we've got to be – move a little bit quickly, but the last thing I think I want to talk about is just the tone of the conversation that we have here. Why is it you think we – this becomes one of the more emotional issues that people can discuss?
Well, I think it's a fear of someone who's different, which is very human. And the biblical places I take people is Exodus Chapter 1, where you see the Egyptians who had once accepted Joseph and his extended family and their descendants, if you read the text, what scared them were the numbers. And so, they put all these draconian laws into place to control the Israelite population.

At an individual level, just read the narratives of Daniel, where other advisors hate him because of who he is and his character, and they do things to set him up to be killed. So, what you're seeing, it's a very human kind of thing. You're afraid of the outsider and how they will change the demographics of the country as you know it. You feel threatened by all of this.

The beautiful thing about this country is we absorb immigrant populations over time, even though it's a painful process. St. Patrick's Day would be a great example. But the Irish were despised when they came. My grandfather was Irish, and we had Irish ghettos in Boston and things like this, and I could give you stories about what we did to the Irish. But now we celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

Well, that was a painful story a hundred years ago. We're seeing the same with Hispanics, whether you're talking about baseball, soccer, largely Latin. The food, the music is now being slowly absorbed into mainstream culture.

So, what you're seeing is the process that we've always gone through, but it's always been a very painful process. So, Christians, I think, can bring a more positive, constructive tone as the country goes through that process.

And so – and by that you mean by exhibiting the kind of receptiveness and openness to the variety of people that God has created in a way that welcomes and assimilates them and tries to draw the best out of them.

Right, and to realize that in that process, we will change, because when you absorb another culture, you will change. But it can be an enriching process, not a threatening one.
Okay. Well, Danny, we've covered a lot of ground in a short time. We've moved through the biblical backgrounds of immigration. And we've talked about a little bit why we are where we are, and it's hard to know exactly where this is going to go, because obviously it's – part of it's associated with the political process that we're in the midst of.

But I do want to thank you for taking the time with us to sit back and kind of walk us through first the Scripture and then kind of where we are in all this. And I know this is an important topic to you.

It's become an important topic to me as well, because I do think that thinking through this Christianly and the whole mission aspect of what goes on here, and the potential for showing how God handles people is an important one.

So, I thank you for being a part of The Table today and helping us with this.

And if I could just put a mention again about that book, it's called Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible. You can get it on amazon.com. The second edition is the white cover. And it would cover all of these things in much more detail.

Well, we thank you again, and we thank you for being a part of The Table with us today.

Thank you.