

## Surviving among Strangers: Strangers' Survival Strategies

**Emmanuel Oghene**

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*Surviving among Strangers is a thoughtful Christian text that considers how immigrants and those in the lands they enter might live together.*

Emmanuel Oghene's *Surviving among Strangers* draws upon biblical texts to suggest timely advice for immigrants.

With practical advice and lessons for people interacting with immigrants, as well as for immigrants themselves, the book begins with a discussion of what the process of immigration is like today, starting with arrival in a new land, and covering topics like cultural and economic excuses for hostility toward immigrants.

The book supports all of its arguments with references to biblical characters whose experiences were similar to those of contemporary immigrants, including Joseph and Nehemiah. It investigates the relationships that immigrants may form with those already living in the lands they enter, and covers processes of returning to one's country of origin. All such subjects are approached in the language of faith; for example, the book emphasizes the need to seek God's protection during travel and after arrival, and uses biblical stories to reflect on how relationships between immigrants and those in the lands they enter are often volatile, and can be characterized by unfriendliness and suspicion.

To counter this, the book suggests that immigrants maintain good relationships with those who live in their host countries. It names proper modes of conduct for immigrants in clear, direct language. From its perspective, immigrants have a responsibility to respect and learn about the cultures of their host countries, to contribute to their economies, and to interact with, and form relationships with, their new neighbors.

The book includes some illuminating personal anecdotes from an immigrant's perspective, as with an account of seeking God's direction while searching for employment. It also includes secondary accounts of how immigrants have been treated, and discusses families' expectations for their relatives to succeed in foreign lands. But such personal touches are rare in a text that often sticks to dry presentations.

Ultimately, the text runs too long, and it draws on relatively few biblical accounts to support its work. It returns multiple times to stories like Jacob's departure from his home to live with his uncle, Abraham and his sons' experiences with foreigners, and Ruth leaving her home country to live among her husband's people. The insights drawn from these texts are also repeated without need, and the chapters are so lengthy that their main ideas are often buried. However, the sections are thematic: they explore the spiritual, economic, and cultural aspects of immigration in turn, tying each to the titular theme.

Still, too many of the book's discussions require unsupported speculations about the meanings of biblical accounts. Characters' motivations are assumed, and the book takes liberties in expanding their stories into spaces where the Bible is silent. Suggestions that Jacob was a recluse who did not get along with people in his uncle's country, and that Samuel did not have a good relationship with the leading citizens of his country, play in.

*Surviving among Strangers* is a thoughtful Christian text that is exhaustive in considering how immigrants and those in

the lands they enter might live together.

EDITH WAIRIMU (June 30, 2021)

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