

# Jeff Sessions Needs a Sunday School Lesson on Immigration

By [John Gehring \(/biography/john-gehring\)](/biography/john-gehring) 01-09-2017



Image via RNS/Gage Skidmore via Creative Commons

While Donald Trump thrilled crowds during the election campaign, with his pledge to build a “great wall” on the U.S.-Mexico border, Alabama Sen. Jeff Sessions cited the Bible to make a Judeo-Christian defense of the president-elect’s plans.

“I recall Nehemiah returning to Jerusalem,” Sessions, who is known for his hard-line views on immigration, told the [Faith and Freedom Conference \(http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/penny-starr/sessions-border-security-nehemiah-built-wall-jerusalem-and-it-wasnt-keep\)](http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/penny-starr/sessions-border-security-nehemiah-built-wall-jerusalem-and-it-wasnt-keep) in Washington five months before the election. “He went to build a wall in Jerusalem, and it wasn’t to keep the people in, you know.”

Confirmation hearings begin this week for the senator, who is Trump’s pick for U.S attorney general.



Sessions, who has taught Sunday school at his family’s church, is not afraid to spar with pastors.

During a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on immigration reform in 2013, David Fleming, senior pastor of the Champion Forest Baptist Church in Texas, referenced lines from Leviticus that command believers to “treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt.” Sessions **retorted** (<http://www.rawstory.com/2013/04/sen-sessions-struggles-to-explain-biblical-basis-of-his-anti-immigration-views/>) that the pastor was “leading little ones astray” by citing Scripture “loosely,” and fired back with another biblical story from the Book of Numbers, in which the king of Edom denied the Israelites the right to pass through his land.

**READ: My Perspective of América Died on Nov. 9 (<https://sojo.net/articles/my-perspective-am-rica-died-nov-9>)**

While the Bible has plenty of contradictory passages, Scripture scholars and religious leaders — including many conservative evangelicals — widely agree God’s central message to the Israelites is to protect and defend the stranger. In the New Testament, Jesus

radically expanded the definition of neighbor in the parable of the good Samaritan, praising the foreigner, and despised Samaritan for stopping to help a man wounded by the side of the road while the respectable of society — a priest and a Levite — passed him by.

SHARE

Conservative Christian leaders frequently draw from biblical sources to make a moral case for why we need just and compassionate immigration reform that includes an earned pathway to citizenship. The Evangelical Immigration Table, a coalition that includes representatives from the National Association of Evangelicals and the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, educates congregations and lobbies lawmakers. Evangelical and Catholic leaders who have sparred with Democrats over same-sex marriage and contraception are some of the most influential advocates for comprehensive immigration reform, and largely reject “enforcement-only” border proposals as inhumane and ineffective.

Public Religion Research Institute has found that 54 percent of white evangelicals support the opportunity for undocumented immigrants to earn citizenship. Statements from Sessions’ own denomination, the United Methodist Church, reference scriptural passages in defending the rights of immigrants. And the church has adopted a resolution urging Congress to “pass comprehensive immigration reform that makes family unity, students being able to get an education at an affordable rate, fair and just treatment of laborers, and a reasonable path towards citizenship a priority.”

---

ADVERTISEMENT



Sessions has long been, in the words of one prominent immigration advocate, the “most anti-immigrant senator in the chamber.” When George W. Bush, a self-styled “compassionate conservative” and born-again Christian, pushed a comprehensive immigration reform bill in 2007 that was supported by many business and law-enforcement officials, Sessions railed against what he called the “no illegal alien left behind bill” and led the charge against the failed effort. “Good fences make good neighbors,” he said at a press conference the year before.

Sessions is also opposed to increases in legal immigration, and his views are well outside the mainstream. **The Southern Poverty Law Center** (<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/11/18/jeff-sessions-champion-anti-muslim-and-anti-immigrant-extremists>) notes that Sessions “has longstanding and extensive ties to both anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim extremist groups.”

---

**READ: Sanctuary Movement Sees Post-Election Resurgence. Here's How to Get Involved. (Sessions has long been, in the words of one prominent immigration advocate, the “most anti-immigrant senator in the chamber.” When George W. Bush, a self-styled “compassionate conservative” and born-again Christian, pushed a comprehensive immigration reform bill in 2007 that was supported by many business and law-enforcement officials, Sessions railed against what he called the “no illegal alien left behind bill” and led the charge against the failed effort. “Good fences make good neighbors,” he said at a press conference the year before.)**

---

Sessions might want to find fodder in the Bible for his reactionary positions, but the fact is he is isolated and out of step with more than a millennium of Christian thought and discipleship. “A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian,” Pope Francis said in February when reporters asked him about Trump’s promises to build a border wall. “This is not the gospel.”

The senator has a right to his views, but dressing them up in Christian clothing is an insult to those who take Jesus seriously.

Via **Religion News Service** (<http://religionnews.com>).



SHARE

---

---

### **John Gehring (/biography/john-gehring)**

John Gehring is Catholic program director at Faith in Public Life and author of *The Francis Effect: A Radical Pope's Challenge to the American Catholic Church*.

## Have Something to Say?

Add or Read Comments on  
*'Jeff Sessions Needs a Sunday School Lesson on Immigration'*

Launch Comments

By commenting here, I agree to abide by the [Sojourners Comment Community Covenant guidelines](#)

## MUST READS

---

[Mahershala Ali Becomes First Muslim to Win Acting Oscar \(/articles/mahershala-ali-becomes-first-muslim-win-acting-oscar\)](/articles/mahershala-ali-becomes-first-muslim-win-acting-oscar)

---

[Longing for Resettlement \(/articles/longing-resettlement\)](/articles/longing-resettlement)

X

---

[When Did Christians Become Comfortable with the Loss of Truth? \(/articles/when-did-christians-become-comfortable-loss-truth\)](/articles/when-did-christians-become-comfortable-loss-truth)

SHARE

---

[WATCH: 5 Veterans of Civil Rights Movement Offer 'Full Frontal's Ashley Nicole Black Tips for Resistance \(/articles/watch-5-veterans-civil-rights-movement-offer-full-frontal-s-ashley-nicole-black-tips\)](/articles/watch-5-veterans-civil-rights-movement-offer-full-frontal-s-ashley-nicole-black-tips)

---

[Christians in the Pew and Pulpit Diverge Over Trump Policies on Refugees \(/articles/christians-pew-and-pulpit-diverge-over-trump-policies-refugees\)](/articles/christians-pew-and-pulpit-diverge-over-trump-policies-refugees)

---

## Subscribe

E-Mail

Zip code (US only)

## Publications

---

[Sojourners \(/articles\)](/articles)

[Sojourners Magazine \(/magazine\)](/magazine)

[Digital Edition \(http://digital.sojo.net/h/\)](http://digital.sojo.net/h/)

[Write for Us \(/about-us/what-we-cover/write-us\)](/about-us/what-we-cover/write-us)

[My Subscription \(/user\)](/user)

## Resources

---

[Preaching the Word \(/preaching-the-word\)](/preaching-the-word)

[Products, Books, and Discussion Guides \(/resources\)](/resources)

[Classifieds \(/classifieds\)](/classifieds)

[Just Giving Guide \(http://digital.sojo.net/h/i/299658636-2016-just-giving-guide\)](http://digital.sojo.net/h/i/299658636-2016-just-giving-guide)

[ONWARD \(http://onward.sojo.net\)](http://onward.sojo.net)

## Support

---

[Fund Our Work \(/join/fund-our-work\)](/join/fund-our-work)

X

[Become a Sustainer](#)

[SHARE  
\(https://secure3.convio.net/sojo/site/Donation2;jsessionid=88CA2CE6A68D8F4A03E7BD5A79B7460D.app325b?df\\_id=3120&3120.donation=form1\)](https://secure3.convio.net/sojo/site/Donation2;jsessionid=88CA2CE6A68D8F4A03E7BD5A79B7460D.app325b?df_id=3120&3120.donation=form1)

## About Us

---

[Who We Are \(/about-us/who-we-are\)](#)

[Sojourners In the News \(/about-us/news\)](#)

[Work With Us \(/about-us/who-we-are/job-openings\)](#)

[Intern at Sojourners \(/about-us/who-we-are/internships\)](#)

[Advertise With Us \(/advertise-us\)](#)

[Privacy Policy \(/privacy-policy\)](#)

## Contact

Phone: 202.328.8842

Fax: 202.328.8757

Email: [sojourners@sojo.net](mailto:sojourners@sojo.net) (mailto:sojourners@sojo.net)

408 C St. NE

Washington DC 20002

Follow Us

Unless otherwise noted, all material

© Sojourners 2017

