

Creation in Peril: Famine in the Old Testament



1

Exports from Ireland to Liverpool on a single day: 20 December 1846 - 6 ships



- Sheep (1823)
- Pigs (651)
- Cows (391)
- Cattle (62)
- Fowl (10 boxes)
- Calves (5)
- Horse (1)
- Meat
- Bacon
- Tongues
- Hams
- Butter
- Lard
- Eggs
- Oats
- Wheat
- Oatmeal
- 47 bags potatoes


4

Creation in Peril: Famine in the Old Testament

- Causes of Famine - Reactions - Responses
- A. Joseph
- B. The Widow of Zarephath
- C. Ruth and Boaz

2

Great Famine – Clonakilty (13 February 1847)




The horrors of the poverty became visible, in the vast number of famished poor, who flocked around the coach to beg alms: amongst them was a woman carrying in her arms the corpse of a fine child, and making the most distressing appeal to the passengers for aid to enable her to purchase a coffin and bury her dear little baby.

WOMAN BOWING BY CLONAKILTY. James Mahony, The Illustrated London News

5

The Tipperary Free Press

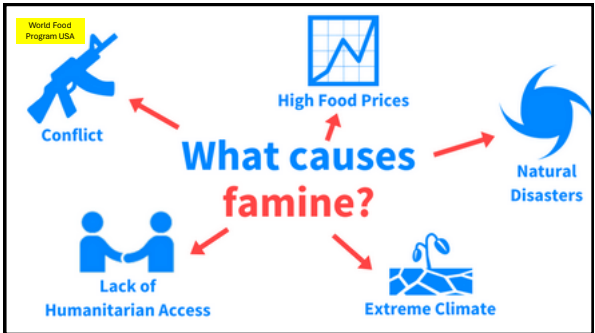
January 1846



Seldom, indeed we may say never, have we witnessed a more splendid Ball in Nenagh ... Supper, consisting of every delicacy that the season could afford, was laid for over 200 ... more than 150 partook of the sumptuous fare prepared for the occasion


1st Royals

3



6

Jeremiah 14:2-4
 The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the **drought** Judah mourns ...
 Her nobles send their servants for water; they come to the cisterns, they find no water, they return with their vessels empty.
 They are ashamed and dismayed and cover their heads, because the ground is cracked.




7

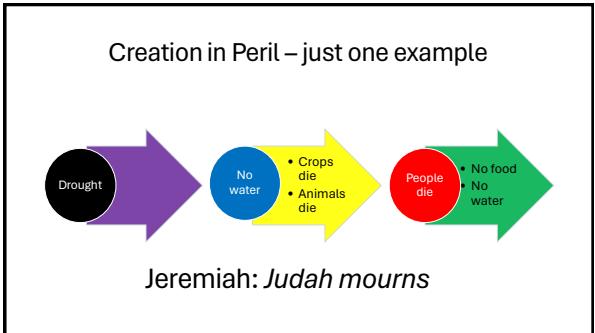


10


Jeremiah 14:4-5
 Because there has been no rain on the land the farmers are dismayed; they cover their heads.
 Even the doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn because there is no grass.



8




11



Jeremiah 14:6
 The wild asses stand on the bare heights, they pant for air like jackals; their eyes fail because there is no herbage.

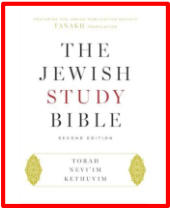
9

Drought in Babylon (Jeremiah 51:43)
 Her cities have become an object of horror, a land of drought and a desert, a land in which no one lives, and through which no mortal passes.




12

Drought




“Drought is a divine reaction to human sin”



13

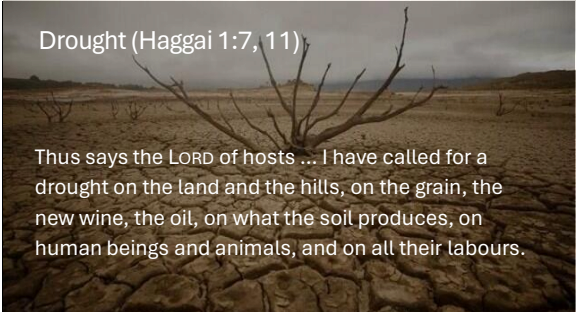
Deuteronomy 11:13, 14-15



If you will only heed his every commandment ... then he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; and he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill.

16

Drought (Haggai 1:7, 11)



Thus says the LORD of hosts ... I have called for a drought on the land and the hills, on the grain, the new wine, the oil, on what the soil produces, on human beings and animals, and on all their labours.

14

Flood



Michelangelo, *The Flood* (Sistine Chapel)

17

Drought (Deuteronomy 11:16-17)

Take care, or you will be seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshipping them, for then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly from the good land that the LORD is giving you.

15

Plague 7 (Hail)



Exodus 9: 22, 25
Stretch out your hand towards heaven so that hail may fall on the whole land of Egypt ...
The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field.

18



Plague 5 (Livestock Disease)

Exodus 9:3

the hand of the LORD will strike with a deadly pestilence your livestock in the field: the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks.

Golden Haggadah (British Library)

19



Plague 8 (Locusts)

Exodus 10:13

Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts.

Golden Haggadah (British Library)

22



Plague 6 (Boils)

Exodus 9:8-9

'Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and shall cause festering boils on humans and animals throughout the whole land of Egypt.'

Golden Haggadah (British Library)

20

• Joel 1:4

What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.

23

Plague 6 (anthrax?)

Dead flies (Plague 4) – source of anthrax; Spread by the flies to cattle (Plague 5); & humans (Plague 6). Anthrax: animals → humans

21

Judges 6:3, 4 War with the Midianites

whenever the Israelites put in seed, the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the east ...would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the land, as far as the neighbourhood of Gaza, and leave no sustenance in Israel, and no sheep or ox or donkey.

24

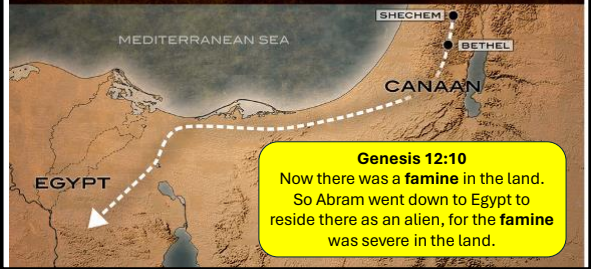
2 Kings 25:1, 3: The Siege of Jerusalem



King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it ... the famine became so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.

25

ABRAM'S JOURNEY TO EGYPT



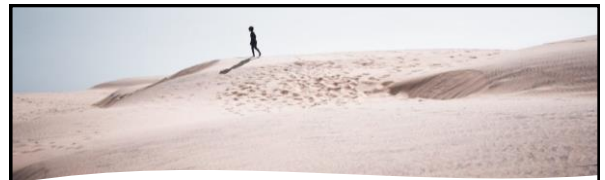
28

Siege of Samaria (2 Kings 6:25)



As the siege continued, famine in Samaria became so great that a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a *kab* of dove's dung for five shekels of silver.

26



Isaac

Now there was a **famine** in the land, besides the former **famine** that had occurred in the days of Abraham. And (Genesis 26:1) Isaac went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines.

29



Reaction 1: Migration


27

Sons of Jacob (Genesis 47:4)



They said to Pharaoh, 'We have come to reside as aliens in the land; for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks because the **famine** is severe in the land of Canaan.'

30




Naomi & Elimelech
(Ruth 1:1)

there was a **famine** in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.

Copy of 16th Century Miniature

31




No water in the desert

Exodus 17:3
The people thirsted there for water; and the people **complained** against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?'

34

Moving to Moab – a sign of desperation



• **Genesis 19:36-37**
Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day.


Marcantonio Franceschini, Lot and His Daughters

32


Marah

• **Exodus 15:23**
When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah.

• Marah = bitterness




35



Reaction 2: Throw a tantrum

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33



He cried out to the LORD

Exodus 15:24-25
And the people **complained** against Moses, saying, 'What shall we drink?' He cried out to the LORD; and the LORD showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

Morgan Bible (13th century)

36

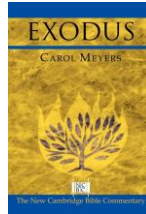
Exodus 16:2-3



The whole congregation of the Israelites **complained** against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them ... you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'

37

Manna – a miracle?



There is no naturalistic explanation. The manna tradition ... is a miraculous aspect of the arduous journey. The powerful God who can perform the miracle of the [Red] Sea is also a nurturing deity who can provide sweet water and delectable food where neither exists.

40

Manna



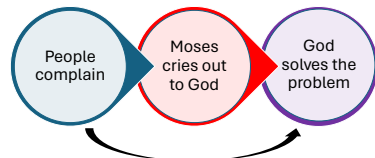
• Exodus 16:13-15

In the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ... Moses said to them, **'It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.'**

James Tissot, The Gathering of the Manna

38

Pattern in Exodus



41

Manna – Honeydew?



- Sweet, edible honeydew
- Found in parts of the Sinai in June and July
- Scale insects and aphids feed on the sap of tamarisk trees
- Secretes it on to the branches
- Crystallises & falls to the ground
- Bedouin use it as a sweetener

39



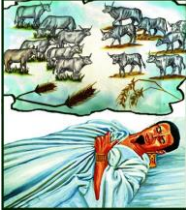
Del Parson, Joseph resists Potiphar's Wife

Joseph in Egypt



42

Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream




- **Genesis 41:26-27**

The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one. The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of **famine**.

43

1 Kings


- 1 Kings Chapters 1 – 2
The Davidic Succession
- 1 Kings 3 - 11
Solomon's reign
- 1 Kings 12 – 16
Division of the kingdoms:
Israel and Judah
- 1 Kings 17 - 2 Kings 2
The prophet Elijah



Elijah

Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna

46



TEXT A: JOSEPH

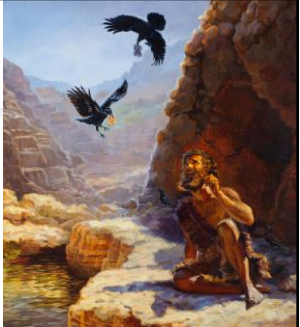
Genesis 41:46-49; 53-57
Genesis 47:13-21; 22-25

What adjective(s) would you use for Joseph's behaviour in these passages?

44

1 Kings 17:5, 6-7

- he went and lived by the Wadi Cherith ... The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the wadi. But after a while the wadi dried up, because **there was no rain in the land**.



47

1 & 2 Kings


From the last days of David *to the Babylonian Exile*




Bathsheba, Solomon, Nathan, and Abishag tend to ageing David, National Library of the Netherlands

Gebhard Fugel, By the rivers of Babylon

45



32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time: Year B (20 November 2024)

48



TEXT B
Widow of Zarephath

1 Kings 17:8-16

What is your reaction to the Widow's story?

49

A dangerous occupation

• **Ruth 2:8-9**

Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ... I have ordered the young men not to bother you.'

• **Ruth 2:22**

Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, 'It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field.'

52

Return to Bethlehem

Ruth 1:6

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard ... that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food.

Ruth 1:22

They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.



Sandy Frockleton Oagan, Whither Thou Goest

50



TEXT C

RUTH & BOAZ

- Leviticus 23:22
- Deuteronomy 24:19
- Ruth 2:15-16

Compare what is laid down in the passages from Leviticus and Deuteronomy with Boaz's instructions to his men.

Michael Whelan, Pathless

53



Ruth 2:2-3

And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain...

She said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers.

51

Boaz feeds Ruth

• **Ruth 2:9**

If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.'

• **Ruth 2:14**

At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over.



• **Ruth 3:15**

54

חֶסֶד: *Hesed (loving kindness)*

- **Ruth 2:4**
Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, 'The LORD be with you.' They answered, 'The LORD bless you.'
- **Ruth 2:20**
Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'Blessed be he [Boaz] by the LORD, whose **kindness** has not forsaken the living or the dead!'

Cf. Bail ó Dhia ar an obair – God bless the work!

55

God's *Hesed*
→ the alien, the orphan, and the widow

- **Deuteronomy 24:20-21**
When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for **the alien, the orphan, and the widow.**
- **Deuteronomy 27.19**
'Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.' All the people shall say, 'Amen!'
- **Psalm 68.5**
Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

58

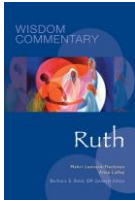
Translating *Hesed*

- Benevolent Action
- Compassion
- Covenant Loyalty
- Faithful love
- Faithfulness
- Loving kindness
- Mercy
- Steadfast love

➔ Not just an emotional response to a particular situation - Practical activity

56

The Challenge of *Hesed*



- God acts with loving kindness toward all of creation, toward all human beings, and, in particular, toward God's chosen people.
- God calls people to act with loving kindness toward one another.

- page xi

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Hesed

- A divine attribute
- **Psalm 107:1**
O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his **steadfast Love** endures for ever.
- Human beings reflect and imitate it when they show *hesed* to others.

57



60