

Bible Study 3: Securing Food for All

Introduction

We still live in a world where hunger and famine haunt the land. While natural causes may result in crop failure, hunger in the world is clearly linked to human causes – environmental damage, climate change, conflict, unsustainable consumption, and unjust economic and trading systems.

The need for a secure, reliable source of food is a repeated theme throughout the Bible. God is shown as caring intimately for the primary need of his people for food to survive. The Gospels show how food was central to Jesus' ministry, sharing food to build relationships with others. The imagery of bread is at the heart of the Christian faith, sustaining body and soul. This passage from Leviticus shows how humanity must live in a relationship of harmony with creation to ensure there is food for all.

This Bible study is for use by small groups or individuals, to be adapted to your own context.

Leviticus 25: 1-19 ~ Sustainable and harmonious living

The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the LORD. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath—you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound labourers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food...

...And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces...

...You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God. You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely.

Discussion

You may wish to open in prayer. Read the Bible passage *twice*, if possible using different translations, and then discuss these questions.

In biblical times:

- *What is this passage about? Please re-tell it in your own words.*
- *How were people told to care for the land?*
- *How would humans survive in harmony with the land and all creation?*
- *How would these laws help communities to have better and fairer relationships?*
- *It is written in verse 23 that God says: "The land is mine; you are but tenants" What should this mean for how humans treat the land?*

In our time:

- *In what ways do bad or unjust relationships within and between human societies cause hunger in our world today?*
- *How do human actions damage our environment and lead to hunger?*
- *The Jubilee law set out a plan for humans to live sustainably with the environment. What would you put into a Jubilee law for today?*
- *What actions can be taken locally and globally to help ensure reliable daily food for all?*
- *What practical actions can we commit to take as individuals and communities?*

How could we be changed by this Bible study?

By knowing:

- *that hunger in our world is caused by human failings*
- *that hunger can be ended by just relationships and collective action at national and international levels*

By feeling:

- *that God requires us to care for the natural world and each other's needs*
- *that each of us can act to help ensure that all communities have food security*

By acting:

- *to protect our environment and help others, near and far, to have secure, reliable food*
- *to advocate with our leaders for just systems and adequate planning and funding for food security for vulnerable communities*

Prayer

Loving Father,

We thank you for your loving care for your world and your people. We know your desire for the hungry to be fed, that each of us, your children, will receive our daily bread. Forgive us where we have failed and allowed the poor and vulnerable to go hungry. Forgive us that, despite all your blessings, we have damaged creation and deepened poverty, so that famine still haunts our world. Create in us a hunger for justice, a thirst for action to see your Kingdom come in righteousness, where all are fed today and feel secure in their food for tomorrow.

In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Further passages for reading

Luke 3: 10-14: Jesus teaches about sharing our resources with those in need.

Luke 4: 16-19: Jesus refers to the language of the Jubilee, 'the year of the Lord's favour', in his manifesto.

Luke 12: 13-21: Jesus teaches people not to hoard resources on earth for themselves.

Matthew 6: 9-13. Jesus teaches the Lord's Prayer, with its concern that people should get their daily bread now as well as the promise of the Bread of Life in heaven.

References and other Bible Studies

Bible text cited from NRSV 1989

South Africa Church Land Programme Bible Study on Food Security

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