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Famine

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# Understanding Famine:

In this [study](study.html) I would like to understand the nature and meaning of a famine. I am specifically looking to understand the [PaRDeS](remez.html) perspective of a famine as it relates to the famine detailed in Megillat [Ruth](ruth.html).

Famine, by definition, is a lack of [food](food.html). The Torah often uses bread to represent [food](food.html). In Megillat [Ruth](ruth.html) we see that the text specifically tells us that famine is a lack of bread:

[***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***1:6*** *Then she arose with her daughters in* [*law*](law.html)*, that she might return from the country of* [*Moab*](stages.html)*: for she had heard in the country of* [*Moab*](stages.html) *how that* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *had visited his people in giving them bread.*

Thus we can view famine as a lack of bread. This suggests that we will be examining the meaning of bread at the [PaRDeS](remez.html) level and then viewing famine as the lack of “bread”.

What are the effects of a famine? Those who are starving will learn to [eat](eating.html) anything that has a chance to bring them nourishment. A moldy crumb will be eagerly consumed, *and will be very satisfying*. Those who are starving, learn to be content with small portions that are not necessarily edible.

During a famine, mortality is concentrated among children and the elderly. A consistent demographic fact is that in all recorded famines, [male](male+female.html) mortality exceeds [female](male+female.html). This has profound implications for the Bnei Yisrael when you consider that the elderly were the ones with great wisdom and the young were the impressionable ones who most needed the elder’s wisdom. In a famine, they both perished and the [community](community.html) was further devastated.

During our [time](time.html) in the wilderness, after our [departure from Egypt](thebirth.html), the Bnei Yisrael bitterly complained to Moshe about the lack of water, and then (after the supply of [matza](chametz.html) which they had brought [from Egypt](thebirth.html) ran out) about the lack of [food](food.html). They, who only days before had sung to [HaShem](hashem.html), “Who is like You among the heavenly powers, [HaShem](hashem.html)”, were now bitterly cursing their imminent starvation and implicit abandonment by [HaShem](hashem.html): “If only we had died by the [hand](fourteen.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html) in the land of Egypt”. There are no true believers in a famine. Such are the effects of a famine!

These famine effects have some very profound implications when we consider the meaning of a famine at the [remez](remez.html), [drash](remez.html), and the [sod](sod.html) levels. We will examine the implications of this when we look at those levels.

Like the Book of Iyov, Megillat [Ruth](ruth.html) opens with a series of catastrophes occurring in [one](one.html) family, in [five](five.html) consecutive episodes:

1. A man walks from [Bethlehem](bethlehem.html) to [Moab](stages.html);
2. He is joined by his wife and [two](two.html) sons;
3. He dies, leaving behind the wife and sons;
4. The family is enlarged by the sons’ marriages, then decreased by the sons’ deaths, leaving [three](three.html) widows;
5. The [three](three.html) widows are on their way to [Bethlehem](bethlehem.html).

[Avraham](avraham.html) Avinu also left [eretz Israel](city.html) seemingly for the same reasons that Elimelech left:

***Genesis 12:10*** *And there was a famine in the land: and* [*Abram*](avraham.html) *went down* [*into Egypt*](thebirth.html) *to sojourn there; for the famine [was] grievous in the land.*

Notice the similarity of the words that Torah uses to describe these [two](two.html) departures:

[***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***1:1*** *Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of* [*Moab*](stages.html)*, he, and his wife, and his* [*two*](two.html) *sons.*

They both left because of a famine. They both “sojourned” in a foreign land.

However, there are certain differences between these [two](two.html) verses. The famine in the days of [Avraham](avraham.html) Avinu is described as “grievous”. There is no such modifier used to describe the famine in the days of Elimelech. The Torah mentions that Elimelech took his family, while no such mention is made, initially, for [Avraham](avraham.html) Avinu.

[Avraham](avraham.html) Avinu chooses Mitzrayim, most likely because that land is watered by the Nile river rather than by rainfall. [Avraham](avraham.html) Avinu traveled a great distance to a land watered by the Nile and not dependent on [HaShem](hashem.html) for rain. So, why does Elimelech choose the land of Moav? What is there about the land of Moav that would attract a wealthy, aristocratic [Jew](gen-jew.html) in [time](time.html) of famine?

The ending for these [two](two.html) stories is quite different. Elimelech never return from the land of Moav. Elimelech, his unborn child, and his [two](two.html) grown sons all die in Moav. All of his wealth is also consumed.

[Avraham](avraham.html) Avinu, on the other [hand](fourteen.html), returns from Mitzrayim with fabulous gifts and his wife Sarah returns with Paro’s daughter as her maid.

Why is the outcome of these [two](two.html) stories so different? Why does [HaShem](hashem.html) bless [Avraham](avraham.html) Avinu and smite Elimelech? The text suggests that [HaShem](hashem.html) was purposely sending [Avraham](avraham.html) to Egypt. In addition, there wasn’t a [community](community.html) that was depending on [Avraham](avraham.html) for encouragement and support. This is in contrast to Elimelech who was clearly [one](one.html) who could provide for his people. The [community](community.html) was depending on Elimelech. It would appear that [HaShem](hashem.html) is not just punishing Elimelech for leaving the land, but also for shirking responsibilities and for not [coming](coming.html) back in a timely manner.

Elimelech went to a land *very* close to Eretz Yisrael. So close he could have traded in [Moab](stages.html) and lived in Eretz Yisrael. If the famine did not cross the border, then surely this would be a clear [sign](signs.html) from [HaShem](hashem.html). Additionally, Moav was a land [known](daat.html) for it’s miserliness:

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:3-4*** *An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*; even to their tenth* [*generation*](toldot.html) *shall they not enter into the congregation of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth* [*out of Egypt*](thebirth.html)*; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.*

# In the beginning:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 3:17*** *And unto* [*Adam*](adam.html) *he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the* [*voice*](voice.html) *of thy wife, and hast* [*eaten*](eating.html) *of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not* [*eat*](eating.html) *of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou* [*eat*](eating.html) *of it all the days of thy life;*

In Amos 8:11, the Prophets speaks of the [end of days](lastdays.html), “Behold days are [coming](coming.html)…”, when there will be a famine for the Word of [HaShem](hashem.html). In Matityahu 5:6, [Mashiach](mashiach.html) ben [Yoseph](joseph.html) praises those who hunger and thirst for Torah. And in Yochanan 7:37, we see [Mashiach](mashiach.html) ben David inviting those that are thirsty, to come to Him, on the last day.

Thus we have now connected the end with the beginning,[[1]](#footnote-1) and with Megillat [Ruth](ruth.html). [Adam](adam.html) HaRishon began the process and [Mashiach](mashiach.html) ben David will complete the process.

# Peshat:

The [Mishna](orallaw.html) speaks about famine and relates it to drought, or a lack of rain or of tumult:

***Avot Chapter 5 Mishnah 8.*** *Even kinds of punishment come to the* [*world*](worlds.html) *for* [*seven*](seven.html) *categories of transgression: When some of them [i.e. the people] give tithes, and others do not give tithes, A famine from drought comes, and some go hungry, and others have plenty; when they have all decided not to gives tithes, a famine from tumult comes…*

At the peshat level, famine is a lack of [food](food.html). The Torah normally uses bread when it speaks of [food](food.html) in a generic sense. **So, famine is a lack of bread**.

As we mentioned before, a famine will tend to desensitize those that are starving. They will tend be satisfied with very little, and the quality of the [food](food.html) will not matter. Even garbage will become acceptable. The Bnei Yisrael will no longer care whether the [food](food.html) is kosher. Whether it is fit to nourish the soul, as well as the [body](body.html), will no longer matter. In such a society, kosher [food](food.html) will be impossible to find. Kosher eateries will disappear and kosher [food](food.html) will no longer be stocked in the supermarkets.

# [Remez](remez.html):

At the [remez](remez.html) level, a lack of bread is an allegory for Torah. As it says:

***Pirke Avot 3:17*** *Where there is no bread, there will be no Torah. Where there is no Torah, there will be no bread.*

The Nazarean Codicil also equates Torah and bread:

***Luqas (***[***Luke***](luke.html)***) 4:4*** *And* [*Yeshua*](yeshua.html) *answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.*

Thus we can see that **famine is a lack of Torah**, at the [remez](remez.html) level. The Prophet Amos speaks of just such a famine:

***Amos 8:11*** *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of* [*hearing*](file:///D:\Word\Shavuot\Ruth%20Portions\mashal.html) *the words of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*:*

Yalkut Shimoni says that where there is a lack of Torah a famine for [food](food.html) also occurs. There was a famine in the days before [Adam](adam.html) went forth from [Gan Eden](eden.html). In the same way there was a famine before Elimelech went forth from the promised land.

Famine is the judgment that comes upon the [world](worlds.html) when justice is delayed or perverted. The famine for bread was the [physical](physical.html) manifestation of a famine for [spiritual](physical.html) sustenance. The Word of [HaShem](hashem.html), Torah, is also called bread[[2]](#footnote-2), and because the people of Israel had neglected to nourish their souls by the [study](study.html) of Torah, neither were their [bodies](body.html) nourished. This is accordance with the words of the [Talmud](orallaw.html) that “if there is no Torah, there is no bread” (Pirke Avot). There was a both a hunger for bread and a hunger for Torah when Elimelech abandoned the [land of Israel](city.html) for the land of Moav.

Note also that the famine was not in the land of Moav, this should have alerted the [Jews](gen-jew.html) that the problem was of a [spiritual](physical.html) nature rather then that of a [physical](physical.html) nature.

At the [remez](remez.html) level, a famine for Torah will tend to desensitize those that are starving. They will tend be satisfied with very little in terms of Torah learning, and the quality of the Torah learning will not matter. Even polluted Torah from Christians and messianics will become acceptable. When there is a famine for Torah, we will no longer demand a normal healthy “meal” from our Hakhamim. We will be quite satisfied by pitiful portions of spoiled and inedible lessons from the “garbage cans” of false Torah teachers.

# [Drash](remez.html):

The [Hebrew](hebrew.html) word for *famine*: **רעב** ra’ab (ra’[av](feasts.html)). It comes from a root רעב ra’eb which means *to be hungry* (Strong’s 07458). It’s gematria is 272.

**ערב** (erev - evening) also has a gematria of 272.

**בער** (ba’ar - burn) also has a gematria of 272.

Bread is the unity of many grains of wheat [coming](coming.html) together for a common and higher purpose. In addition, we break bread with the [community](community.html) for fellowship. Bread thus binds the [community](community.html) together.

Since bread = Torah at the [remez](remez.html) level, when we move to the [drash](remez.html) level this analogy must [speak](mashal.html) to the king, it must [speak](mashal.html) to [Mashiach](mashiach.html). To understand this [connection](connection.html) we need to look at some pasukim which address this:

The [Midrash](orallaw.html) indicates that the [world](worlds.html) is destined to have [ten](ten.html) famines which [HaShem](hashem.html) will send as part of the Messianic [redemption](redemption.html):

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah -*** [***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***I:4*** *THAT THERE WAS A FAMINE IN THE LAND.* [*Ten*](ten.html) *famines have come upon the* [*world*](worlds.html)*.*

1. [*One*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Adam*](adam.html)*,*
2. [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Lamech,*
3. [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Abraham*](avraham.html)*,*
4. [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Isaac*](isaac.html)*,*
5. [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*,*
6. [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Elijah,*
7. [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Elisha,*
8. [*one*](one.html) *in the days of David,*
9. [*one*](one.html) *in the days when the judges judged – mentioned in the days of the Book of* [*Ruth*](ruth.html)*, and*
10. [*one*](one.html) *which is destined still to come upon the* [*world*](worlds.html)*.[[3]](#footnote-3)[175]*

[*One*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Adam*](adam.html)*, as it is said, Cursed is the ground for thy sake (Gen. III, 17);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Lamech, as it is said, From the ground which the Lord hath cursed (ib. V, 29);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Abraham*](avraham.html)*, as it is said, And there was a famine in the land; and* [*Abram*](avraham.html) *went down* [*into Egypt*](thebirth.html) *(ib. XII, 10);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Isaac*](isaac.html)*, as it is said, And there was a famine in the land, beside the* [*first*](one.html) *famine (ib. XXVI, 1);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*, as it is said, For these* [*two*](two.html) *years hath the famine been in the land (ib. XLV, 6);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Elijah, as it is said, There shall not be dew nor rain these years (I Kings XVII, 1);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of Elisha, as it is said, And there was a great famine in Samaria (II Kings VI, 25);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of David, as it is said, And there was a famine in the days of David* [*three*](three.html) *years (II Sam. XXI, 1);* [*one*](one.html) *in the days of the Shoftim (Judges), as it is said, THERE WAS A FAMINE IN THE LAND; and* [*one*](one.html) *which is destined to come to the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, as it is said, That I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of* [*hearing*](file:///D:\Word\Shavuot\Ruth%20Portions\mashal.html) *the words of the Lord (Amos VIII, 11).*

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah - Genesis XXV:3 3.*** *WHICH COMETH FROM THE GROUND WHICH THE LORD HATH CURSED (V, 29). Famine visited the* [*world*](worlds.html)[*ten*](ten.html) *times. Once in the days of* [*Adam*](adam.html)*: Cursed is the ground for thy sake (Gen. III, 17); once in the days of Lamech: WHICH COMETH FROM THE GROUND WHICH THE LORD HATH CURSED; Once in the days of* [*Abraham*](avraham.html)*: And there was a famine in the land (ib. XII, 10); once in the days of* [*Isaac*](isaac.html)*: And there was famine in the land, beside the* [*first*](one.html) *famine that was in the days of* [*Abraham*](avraham.html) *(ib. XXVI,1); once in the days of* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*: For these* [*two*](two.html) *years hath the famine been in the land (ib. XLV, 6); once in the days when the judges judged: And it came to pass in the days when the judges judged, that there was a famine in the land (*[*Ruth*](ruth.html) *I, 1); once in the days of Elijah: As the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years (I Kings XVII, 1); once in the days of Elisha: And there was a great famine in Samaria (II Kings VI, 25);* [*one*](one.html) *famine which travels about in the* [*world*](worlds.html)*; and once in the Messianic* [*future*](future.html)*: Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of* [*hearing*](file:///D:\Word\Shavuot\Ruth%20Portions\mashal.html) *the words of the Lord (Amos VIII, 11).*

There were [ten](ten.html) famines that affected the entire [world](worlds.html):

1. In the [time](time.html) of [Adam](adam.html) when he sinned and was cursed. God had said, "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Genesis 3:17).
2. In the [time](time.html) of Lemekh. He therefore said, "The soil which God has cursed." He could not have been [speaking](mashal.html) of the famine that was in [Adam](adam.html)'s [time](time.html), since if this had lasted for [ten](ten.html) [generations](toldot.html), people could not have lived. Actually, there was [one](one.html) famine in the [time](time.html) of [Adam](adam.html), and a second [one](one.html) during Lemech's lifetime.
3. In the [time](time.html) of [Abraham](avraham.html) (see Genesis 12:10).
4. In the [time](time.html) of [Isaac](isaac.html) (see Genesis 26:1).
5. In the [time](time.html) of [Jacob](israelja.html) (see Genesis 41:56).
6. In the period of the Judges (see [Ruth](ruth.html) 1:1).
7. In the [time](time.html) of King David (2 Samuel 21:1).
8. In the [time](time.html) of Elijah (1 Kings 18:2).
9. In the [time](time.html) of Elisha (2 Kings 6:25).
10. The tenth famine exists continually and constantly increases. There is no way of satiating this hunger. This is not a hunger for [food](food.html) or water, but a great hunger for the mysteries of the Torah. [Regarding this, God said, "I will send a famine in the land. Not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but [one](one.html) of [hearing](file:///D:\Word\Shavuot\Ruth%20Portions\mashal.html) God's word" (Amos 8:11).

According to the [*Jerusalem*](city.html) *Targum*, the famine in the days of [Ruth](ruth.html) was [one](one.html) of [ten](ten.html) famines from [HaShem](hashem.html) to chastise his people:

[*HaShem*](hashem.html) *has decreed* [*ten*](ten.html) *grievous famines to take place in the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, to punish the inhabitants of the earth, before the* [*coming*](coming.html) *of* [*Mashiach*](mashiach.html) *the king. The* [*first*](one.html) *in the days of* [*Adam*](adam.html)*; the second in the days of Lamech; the* [*third*](three.html) *in the days of* [*Avraham*](avraham.html)*; the* [*fourth*](four.html) *in the days of Yitzhak; the* [*fifth*](five.html) *in the days of* [*Yaaqov*](jacob.html)*; the* [*sixth*](six.html) *in the days of Boaz, who is called Abstan (Ibzan) the just, of* [*Bethlehem*](bethlehem.html)*-Judah; the* [*seventh*](seven.html) *in the days of David, king of Israel; the* [*eighth*](eight.html) *in the days of Elijah the prophet; the* [*ninth*](nine.html) *in the days of Elisha, in Samaria; the tenth is yet to come, and it is not a famine of bread or of water but of* [*hearing*](file:///D:\Word\Shavuot\Ruth%20Portions\mashal.html) *the word of prophecy from the* [*mouth*](body.html) *of the Lord; and even now this famine is grievous in the* [*land of Israel*](city.html)*.*

Another Targum also speaks of these [ten](ten.html) famines:

*1- It happened in the days of the judge of judges (Ibzan - judge par excellence) that there was a severe famine in the* [*land of Israel*](city.html)*.* [*Ten*](ten.html) *severe famines (cf. Targum Shir Ha-Shirim 1:1 has a list of* [*ten*](ten.html) *songs, and Targum* [*Esther*](esther.html) *II 1:1 a list of* [*ten*](ten.html) *kings) were ordained by* [*Heaven*](heaven.html) *to be in the* [*world*](worlds.html)*, from the day that the* [*world*](worlds.html) *was created until the* [*time*](time.html) *that the king* [*Mashiach*](mashiach.html) *should come, by which to reprove the inhabitants of the earth. The* [*first*](one.html) *famine was in the days of* [*Adam*](adam.html)*, the second famine was in the days of Lamech, the* [*third*](three.html) *famine was in the days of* [*Avraham*](avraham.html)*. The* [*fourth*](four.html) *famine was in the days of* [*Isaac*](isaac.html)*, the* [*fifth*](five.html) *famine was in the days of* [*Jacob*](israelja.html)*, the* [*sixth*](six.html) *famine was in the days of Boaz, who is called Ibzan the Righteous (cf. Baba Bathra 91a, Judges 12:8,10), who was from* [*Bethlehem*](bethlehem.html)*, Judah. The* [*seventh*](seven.html) *famine was in the days of David, King of Israel, the* [*eighth*](eight.html) *famine was in the days of Elijah the prophet, the* [*ninth*](nine.html) *famine was in the days of Elisha in Samaria. The tenth famine is to be in the* [*future*](future.html)*, not a famine of* [*eating*](eating.html) *bread, nor a drought of drinking water, but of* [*hearing*](file:///D:\Word\Shavuot\Ruth%20Portions\mashal.html) *the word of prophecy from before the L-rd (Amos 8:11). And when that famine was severe in the* [*land of Israel*](city.html)*, a great man went out from* [*Bethlehem*](bethlehem.html) *Judah, and went to live in the country of* [*Moab*](stages.html)*, he and his wife and his* [*two*](two.html) *sons.*

By focusing the [number](nchart.html) of famines to [ten](ten.html), the [Midrash](orallaw.html) is explicitly pointing to [Mashiach](mashiach.html) and to the unity He will bring. I explored the [number](nchart.html) [ten](ten.html) and it’s relationship to [Mashiach](mashiach.html) in my paper titled: [Ten](ten.html).

This suggests that at the [drash](remez.html) level, bread is the unity of the [community](community.html) as exemplified by the king who is The [Mashiach](mashiach.html). To put it concisely, at the [drash](remez.html) level, **famine is the lack of a king**; **famine is the lack of** [**Mashiach**](mashiach.html) **ben David**.

The [Midrash](orallaw.html) also speaks of a series of [five](five.html) famines that includes the famine in Megillat [Ruth](ruth.html):

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah - Genesis LXIV:2*** *And it came to pass in the days when the judges judged, that there was a famine in the land (*[*Ruth*](ruth.html) *I, 1); once in the days of David: And there was a famine in the days of David (II Sam. XXI, 1); once in the days of Elijah: As the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years (I Kings XVII, 1); once in the days of Elisha: And there was a great famine in Samaria (II Kings VI, 25);* [*one*](one.html) *famine which travels about in the* [*world*](worlds.html)*; and* [***one***](one.html) ***in the Messianic*** [***future***](future.html)*, as it says, Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of* [*hearing*](file:///D:\Word\Shavuot\Ruth%20Portions\mashal.html) *the words of the Lord (Amos VIII, 11).*

At the [drash](remez.html) level, a famine for Torah justice and rule will tend to desensitize those that are starving. They will tend be satisfied with very little in terms of Torah justice and non-Torah kings will be quite acceptable, and the quality of the justice will not matter. Even polluted justice from Christians, messianics, and even secular and atheistic judges and kings will become acceptable. When there is a famine for justice and rule, we will no longer demand a normal healthy “meal” from our kings and other judges. We will be quite satisfied by pitiful portions of spoiled and inedible justice from the “garbage cans” of anti-Torah kings.

# [Sod](sod.html):

At the [sod](sod.html) level, famine speaks to issues of cosmic significance. At the [drash](remez.html) level we saw that famine is the lack of unity in the [community](community.html). At the [sod](sod.html) level, **famine speaks to the lack of unity of the** [**ten**](ten.html) **sefirot and the men of the** [**community**](community.html). Famine has implications both above and below.

The *bread from* [*heaven*](heaven.html) is the cosmic terminology for this [sod](sod.html) level:

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 16:4*** *Then said* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *for you; and the people shall go out and* [*gather*](gather.html) *a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will* [*walk*](walking.html) *in my* [*law*](law.html)*, or no.*

***Yochanan (John) 6:51*** *I am the living bread which came down from* [*heaven*](heaven.html)*: if any man* [*eat*](eating.html) *of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the* [*world*](worlds.html)*.*

At the [sod](sod.html) level, a famine for the unity of the sefirot and the [ten](ten.html) men who rule on earth will tend to desensitize those that are starving. They will tend be satisfied with disunity and will have very little [desire](needs.html) for [HaShem](hashem.html) and His [oneness](oneness.html). Even the so called “[community](community.html)” of the Christians, messianics, and even secular and atheists will become acceptable. When there is a famine for unity, we will no longer demand a normal healthy “meal” from our gods. We will be quite satisfied by pitiful portions of spoiled and inedible love (hate) from the “garbage cans” of an anti-Torah society.

# Reasons for Famine:

The Sages of the [Talmud](orallaw.html) have given us [one](one.html) reason for a famine:

***Berachot 55a*** *R. Johanan said: There are* [*three*](three.html) *things which the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, Himself proclaims, namely, famine, plenty, and a good leader. ‘Famine’, as it is written: The Lord hath called for a famine. ‘Plenty’, as it is written: I will call for the corn and will increase it. ‘A good leader’, as it is written: And the Lord* [*spoke*](mashal.html) *unto Moses, saying, See I have called by* [*name*](name.html) *Bezalel, the son of Uri.*

[One](one.html) of the [three](three.html) things “which the Holy [One](one.html), blessed be He, proclaims in person”, famine was regarded as the direct result of transgressions. This is specifically mentioned in the Tanach where the rule is that famine and drought are either threatened or suffered for [sins](sin.html):

***Vayikra (Leviticus) 26:15-26*** *And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my* [*commandments*](cmds613.html)*, but that ye break my* [*covenant*](covenant.html)*: 16 I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the* [*eyes*](body.html)*, and cause sorrow of* [*heart*](body.html)*: and ye shall sow your* [*seed*](flower.html) *in vain, for your enemies shall* [*eat*](eating.html) *it. 17 And I will set my* [*face*](body.html) *against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. 18 And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you* [*seven*](seven.html) *times more for your* [*sins*](sin.html)*. 19 And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *as iron, and your earth as brass: 20 And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.* *21 And if ye* [*walk*](walking.html) *contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring* [*seven*](seven.html) *times more* [*plagues*](plagues.html) *upon you according to your* [*sins*](sin.html)*. 22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in* [*number*](nchart.html)*; and your high ways shall be desolate. 23 And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will* [*walk*](walking.html) *contrary unto me; 24 Then will I also* [*walk*](walking.html) *contrary unto you, and will punish you yet* [*seven*](seven.html) *times for your* [*sins*](sin.html)*. 25 And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my* [*covenant*](covenant.html)*: and when ye are* [*gathered*](gather.html) *together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the* [*hand*](fourteen.html) *of the enemy. 26 And when I have broken the* [*staff*](staff.html) *of your bread,* [*ten*](ten.html) *women shall bake your bread in* [*one*](one.html) *oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall* [*eat*](eating.html)*, and not be satisfied.*

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 11:16*** *Take heed to yourselves, that your* [*heart*](body.html) *be not* [*deceived*](garment.html)*, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; 17 And* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*’s wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the* [*heaven*](heaven.html)*, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *giveth you.*

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 28:15*** *But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the* [*voice*](voice.html) *of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *thy God, to observe to do all his* [*commandments*](cmds613.html) *and his statutes which I* [*command*](cmds613.html) *thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: 16 Cursed shalt thou be in the* [*city*](city.html)*, and cursed shalt thou be in the* [*field*](field.html)*. 17 Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. 18 Cursed shall be the fruit of thy* [*body*](body.html)*, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. 19 Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. 20* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine* [*hand*](fourteen.html) *unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the* [*wickedness*](wicked.html) *of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me. 21* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. 22* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. 23 And thy* [*heaven*](heaven.html) *that is over thy* [*head*](body.html) *shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.*

The [Midrash](orallaw.html) agrees with the Torah that famine comes as a result of transgressions:

[***Midrash***](orallaw.html) ***Rabbah -*** [***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***Prologue III*** *‘But as for the pure, etc.,’ refers to the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, who deals with them with uprightness in this* [*world*](worlds.html) *and yet gives them their full reward in the* [*future*](future.html)*, like a craftsman who works faithfully for his employer. At that moment the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, says, ‘My children are rebellious; yet to destroy them is impossible, to take them back to Egypt is impossible, change them for another people I cannot; what then shall I do to them? I will chastise them with suffering and try them with famine in the days when the judges judge.’ That is the meaning of the verse, AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THE DAYS WHEN THE JUDGES JUDGED THAT THERE WAS A FAMINE IN THE LAND.*

Amos interprets occurrences of these calamities as prods to repentance, warning notices of [HaShem](hashem.html)’s wrath aimed to bring the people to contrition and thus avert final destruction:

***Amos 4:6*** *And I also have given you cleanness of* [*teeth*](body.html) *in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*. 7 And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet* [*three*](three.html) *months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon* [*one*](one.html)[*city*](city.html)*, and caused it not to rain upon another* [*city*](city.html)*:* [*one*](one.html) *piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. 8 So* [*two*](two.html) *or* [*three*](three.html) *cities wandered unto* [*one*](one.html)[*city*](city.html)*, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*. 9 I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your* [*fig*](bethphag.html) *trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*.*

The tendency of the Hakhamim was to make famine the punishment for specific transgressions, the failure to give the tithes and other dues from [one](one.html)’s produce, as a kind of quid pro quo:

***Avot Chapter 5 Mishnah 8.***[*Seven*](seven.html) *kinds of punishment come to the* [*world*](worlds.html) *for* [*seven*](seven.html) *categories of transgression: 1) When some of them give tithes, and others do not give tithes, a famine from drought comes-some go hungry, and others are satisfied. 2) When they have all decided not to give tithes, a famine from tumult and drought comes; 3) [When they have, in addition, decided] not to set apart the dough-*[*offering*](korbanot.html)*, an all-consuming famine**comes. 4) Pestilence comes to the* [*world*](worlds.html) *for* [*sins*](sin.html) *punishable by death according to the Torah, but which have not been referred to the court, and for neglect of the* [*law*](law.html) *regarding the fruits of the* [*sabbatical*](shmita.html) *year.*

***Shabbath 32b*** *For the crime of robbery locusts make invasion, famine is prevalent, and people* [*eat*](eating.html) *the flesh of their sons and daughters, for it is said, Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy.*

So, failure to obey Torah brought famine. On the flip side, our Hakhamim also saw the contrary promise of abundance as a reward for bringing tithes based on a reading from the Tanach:

***Malachi 3:10*** *Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of* [*heaven*](heaven.html)*, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. 11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the* [*time*](time.html) *in the* [*field*](field.html)*, saith* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *of hosts.*

If the Bnei Yisrael decide not to tithe, then famine comes not only as a result of lack of rain, but also as a result of war. Since people will be out fighting war, they are not able to tend to their lands and many more people will go hungry.

In *Meam Loez* we find that famine is the judgment that comes upon the [world](worlds.html) when justice is delayed (inuy ha’din ענוי הדין) or perverted (ivuth ha’din עוות הדין). In this sense, then “It was in the days of the judging of the judges”; that is, the judges of the heavenly tribunal judged the judges of the [generation](toldot.html). Their decree: There was to be a famine in the land. The famine for bread was the [physical](physical.html) manifestation of a famine for [spiritual](physical.html) sustenance. The [Talmud](orallaw.html) agreed with this outlook:

***Shabbath 33a*** *As a punishment for delay of judgment, perversion of judgment, spoiling of judgment, and neglect of Torah, sword and spoil increase, pestilence and famine come, people* [*eat*](eating.html) *and are not satisfied, and* [*eat*](eating.html) *their bread by weight, for it is written, and I will bring a sword upon you, that shall execute the vengeance of the* [*covenant*](covenant.html)*:*

The word of [HaShem](hashem.html), Torah, is also called bread:

***Mishlei (Proverbs) 9:1-5*** *Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her* [*seven*](seven.html) *pillars: 2 She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her* [*wine*](wine.html)*; she hath also furnished her table. 3 She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the* [*city*](city.html)*, 4 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, 5 Come,* [*eat*](eating.html) *of my bread, and drink of the* [*wine*](wine.html) *I have mingled. 6 Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.*

Because the Bnei Yisrael had neglected to nourish their souls by the [study](study.html) of Torah, neither were their [bodies](body.html) nourished.

[***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***1:1*** *It happened in the days of the judging of the judges…*

This pasuk introduces the anguish of a famine in Eretz Yisrael which, as we can now see, was Heavenly retribution for the corruption of the judges who were subject to the judgment of those whom they themselves were to judge.

The [first](one.html) pasuk of [Ruth](ruth.html) goes on to indicate that the famine caused a man to leave Eretz Yisrael and flee to [Moab](stages.html):

[***Ruth***](ruth.html) ***1:1*** *Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of* [*Bethlehem*](bethlehem.html) *Judah went to sojourn in the country of* [*Moab*](stages.html)*, he, and his wife, and his* [*two*](two.html) *sons.*

In Masekhet Bava Kama the [Gemara](orallaw.html) succinctly comments:

***Bava Kama 60b*** *If there is famine in the* [*city*](city.html)*, scatter your* [*legs*](body.html) *[meaning, move out of the* [*city*](city.html)*], as it says, ‘There was a famine in the land, and so Avram went down to Egypt to reside there’.*

Not only does the [Gemara](orallaw.html) advise [one](one.html) to move out of a famine-stricken area, it cites proof from the story of [Avraham](avraham.html)’s relocation in Egypt to escape the famine, clearly giving its stamp of approval to [Avraham](avraham.html)’s decision.

The Ramban, in a famous passage, claims that [Avraham](avraham.html) committed a grave [sin](sin.html) by leaving Canaan to escape the famine. For [one](one.html) thing, the Ramban writes, he should not have devised the scheme to pose as brother and sister, effectively subjecting his wife to defilement in order to protect himself. Secondly, he should have remained in Canaan, the land where [HaShem](hashem.html) ordered him to reside, and have faith in the divine promise of blessing and prosperity.

Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg, in his “Yalkut Yehuda,” suggests reconciling the [Gemara](orallaw.html)’s comment with the Ramban’s theory. When an individual suffers from economic hardship, then he should, indeed, relocate. The [Nation](nations.html) of Israel as a whole, however, must trust in [HaShem](hashem.html)’s guarantee of protection, even if this requires anticipating a miracle. [Avraham](avraham.html)’s mistake, according to the Ramban, was that he acted as an individual, rather than recognizing his role as representative of all his progeny. As an individual, he acted properly, and thus the [Gemara](orallaw.html) cites his residence in Egypt as a valid example for other people to follow. He erred, however, in that he should have followed the proper procedure for the [Nation](nations.html) of Israel, which would warrant remaining in their homeland despite the hardships they might encounter there.

Hakham Moshe Alshich suggests the following reason for the famine in the days of [Ruth](ruth.html):

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 16:20*** *Justice, justice shall you pursue that you may live, and* [*inherit*](inherit.html) *the land which* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *thy God gives thee.*

“Chazal[[4]](#footnote-4) explain that the [appointment](appointm.html) of worthy judges preserves Israel and maintains them in their land. Hence, the verse adds: That you may live and [inherit](inherit.html) the land. This cannot refer to the conquest of the land since, by [law](law.html), judges can only be [appointed](settimes.html) once the land has been conquered. Consequently, the promise must mean that if worthy judges are [appointed](settimes.html), Israel will [merit](merit.html) to remain in the land forever. The word [inherit](inherit.html) implies continuity, unlike a gift which is not handed down from [one](one.html) [generation](toldot.html) to another[[5]](#footnote-5).”

“It follows from this that if unworthy judges are [appointed](settimes.html), Israel’s right to inhabit the land will be jeopardized. Now the verse makes more sense. In the days when the people chose unworthy judges and justice in general was corrupt, it was inevitable that there would be suffering and the means of survival would be denied the people[[6]](#footnote-6).”

Finally, there is an idea[[7]](#footnote-7) that Elimelech was leaving [Eretz Israel](city.html) in order to end the famine. He understood that the famine was caused by the lack of proselytes and that he could end this famine by returning a *good dove* from [Moab](stages.html):

***Baba Kama 38b*** *When R. Samuel b. Judah lost a daughter the Rabbis said to ‘Ulla: ‘Let us go in and console him.’ But he answered them: ‘What have I to do with the consolation of the Babylonians, which is [almost tantamount to] blasphemy? For they say “What could have been done,” which implies that were it possible to do anything they would have done it.’ He therefore went alone to the mourner and said to him: [Scripture says,] And the Lord spake unto me, Distress not the Moabites, neither contend with them in battle. Now [we may well ask], could it have entered the mind of Moses to wage war without [divine] sanction? [We must suppose] therefore that Moses of himself reasoned a fortiori as follows: If in the case of the Midianites who came only to assist the Moabites the Torah commanded ‘Vex the Midianites and smite them,’ in the case of the Moabites [themselves] should not the same injunction apply even more strongly? But the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, said to him: The idea you have in your mind is not the idea I have in My mind.* [*Two*](two.html) *good doves have I to bring forth from them;* [*Ruth*](ruth.html) *the Moabitess and Naamah the Ammonitess [virtuous proselytes]. Now cannot we base on this an a fortiori argument as follows: If for the sake of* [*two*](two.html) *virtuous descendants the Holy* [*One*](one.html)*, blessed be He, showed pity to* [*two*](two.html) *great* [*nations*](nations.html) *so that they were not destroyed, may we not be assured that if your honour’s daughter had indeed been righteous and worthy to have goodly issue, she would have continued to live?*

Thus we can see that once [Ruth](ruth.html) had been “found” and Elimelech, Kilion, and Machlon had died, only then did the famine end. Since [HaShem](hashem.html) ended the famine once these [two](two.html) [events](feasts.html) had occurred, then we see that the famine was only brought to accomplish these [two](two.html) [events](feasts.html). Thus Elimelech sacrificed himself and his sons in order to end the famine.

# Major Theme:

**The major theme of Megillat** [**Ruth**](ruth.html) **is famine,** as we can see from the [first](one.html) verse. (This was [one](one.html) of the [ten](ten.html) famines.) This famine was the result of “everyman doing what was right in his own [eyes](body.html)”. The reaction of the people to this famine is what drove Elimelech, a judge, to move to the land of Moav. This man had an opportunistic mind rather than an aristocratic [one](one.html). The common man would tend to want [food](food.html) to [eat](eating.html), while the aristocrat would want to [know](daat.html) “why” this famine has come. The aristocrat cares about how to end the famine and the consequence hunger of his people, while the common man has no [time](time.html) for such things. He just [needs](needs.html) to figure out how to get his next meal. Our focus shows us our class. If we do not care about the cause of the famine, then we are not ruling, we are existing. A ruler cares about the causes so that they can be avoided, while most of us care only about our own stomachs.

The [Mishna](orallaw.html), in Sanhedrin 29a, rules that when a beit din (court of [Jewish](gen-jew.html) [law](law.html)) accepts testimony regarding capital offenses, it is necessary to [first](one.html) “intimidate the witnesses” in order to impress upon them the severity of false testimony. “What,” asks the [Gemara](orallaw.html) (ibid.) “do we tell the witnesses [in order to intimidate them]?” Rav Yehuda said: We tell them the following:

***Mishlei (Proverbs) 25:14*** *Like Clouds and wind, but no rain, is a man who takes pride in a dishonest gift.*

Procuring monetary gain by testifying falsely causes famine, so that even if clouds fill the skies and winds blow, rain will not fall. Thus Chazal tell us that false testimony causes famine.

The famine, in Sefer [Ruth](ruth.html), immediately evokes several stories in Bereshit, each of which was a catalyst in the forcing interaction between the Patriarchal family and a “significant” outsider:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 12:10*** *And there was a famine in the land: and* [*Abram*](avraham.html) *went down* [*into Egypt*](thebirth.html) *to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.*

***Bereshit (Genesis) 26:1*** *And there was a famine in the land, beside the* [*first*](one.html) *famine that was in the days of* [*Abraham*](avraham.html)*. And* [*Isaac*](isaac.html) *went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.*

***Bereshit (Genesis) 41:57 – 43:2*** *And all countries came* [*into Egypt*](thebirth.html) *to* [*Joseph*](joseph.html) *for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands. 1 Now when* [*Jacob*](israelja.html) *saw that there was corn in Egypt,* [*Jacob*](israelja.html) *said unto his sons, Why do ye look* [*one*](one.html) *upon another? 2 And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die.*

In almost diametrical opposition to the narratives of Sefer Shoftim, Sefer [Ruth](ruth.html) shows no concern whatsoever with national issues ([save](salvation.html) the famine and its reversal, which are necessary for the set-up of the plot); it is totally focused around the fortunes of [one](one.html) family.

Elimelech and his family left the [land of Israel](city.html) during the famine, his action reversed the communal trajectory, and it meant that he chose to be a [*ger*](aliens.html) *toshav*, a resident [alien](aliens.html), outside his own place.

Placing Sefer [Ruth](ruth.html) in the context of the faminenarratives of Bereshit which generate emigration from Israel, like [Avraham](avraham.html), almost [Yitzchak](isaac.html), and [Yaaqov](jacob.html) and his sons, suggests several contrasts. For example, [Avraham](avraham.html) and [Yaaqov](jacob.html) return home after suffering danger with enormous wealth, while Naomi returns home without children or wealth. She is more like the Shunamite (II Kings 8:1-6) who returns to find her land has been lost. The famines of Bereshit are not explicitly related to [sin](sin.html), while some Biblical famines are as in the days of Elijah (I Kings 17:1). Which pattern does this famine in Sefer [Ruth](ruth.html) follow? [Midrash](orallaw.html) [Ruth](ruth.html) suggests that the [sin](sin.html) is [one](one.html) of a leader abandoning his flock and his land in [time](time.html) of trouble.

[**Beit Lechem**](bethlehem.html)suggests King David’s (I Samuel 17:12) and hence [Yeshua](yeshua.html)’s birthplace.

**Mahlon and Kilion** – disease and destruction – are not long for this [world](worlds.html), just as Hevel was transitory like breath. (Judah’s [two](two.html) sons – Er = *ariri*, childless and Onan = [mourning](mourning.html) also died childless [one](one.html) after the other leaving Tamar in need of yibum)

“Why was Elimelech punished? Because he struck despair into the hearts of Israel. He was like a prominent and prosperous man who dwelt in a certain country and the people for that country depended on him and said that if famine should come, he could supply the whole country with [food](food.html) for [ten](ten.html) years. So Elimelech was a notable of his town and a leader of the [generation](toldot.html). But when the famine came, he said, ‘Now all Israel will come knocking at my door for help, each [one](one.html) with a basket.’ Therefore he fled from them. This is the meaning of the verse in [Ruth](ruth.html) 1:1 “An *Ish*/ prominent man of the House of Bread in Judah went to live in the fields of Moav” [which was condemned in Deuteronomy 23:4-7 for refusing to give bread and water to the refugee [Jews](gen-jew.html) [leaving Egypt](thebirth.html)]. ([Ruth](ruth.html) Rabbah 1:4). The [midrash](orallaw.html) picks up on the Biblical and rabbinic pattern of famine as punishment (from the days of Elijah) and on Naomi [speaking](mashal.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html)’s punishing her, without making the [sin](sin.html) explicit.

Elimelech as a leader would have been obligated to support the poor in Judah, The result of his emigration was for his family to become widowed and later impoverished which would be a measure for measure punishmentfor abandoning the poor. Our Hakhamim can make a strong argument that this is the peshat since there is a Biblical Divine warning about mistreating widows and orphans, with an explicit threat that “your wives will be come widows and your sons orphans” ([Exodus](exodus.html) 22:21- 23). The same punishment for denial of c*hesed* is the eradication of [one](one.html)’s [name](name.html) ([Psalm](psalms1.html) 109:8-18). Thus the theological-moral interpretation of the famine and death of the notable family that left a [city](city.html) of famine for foreign land of plenty is completely in line with the Biblical worldview.

A further argument for the midrashic reading’s rootedness in Biblical peshat is that the people of Moav where Elimelech found refuge are [known](daat.html) for not extending the basic human hospitality of bread and water to Israel when they were refugees [coming](coming.html) up [from Egypt](thebirth.html)

***Devarim (Deuteronomy) 23:3-4*** *An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*; even to their tenth* [*generation*](toldot.html) *shall they not enter into the congregation of* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth* [*out of Egypt*](thebirth.html)*; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee.*

Thus reading identifying [Moab](stages.html)’s character with Elimelech’s we have a strong literary contrast of Judah versus [Moab](stages.html), insider versus outsider. Then [Ruth](ruth.html)’s behavior shows us the Moabite [Ruth](ruth.html) who is generous can [redeem](redemption.html) her ancestors, can dispel Judahite prejudices and can [teach](teacher.html) the people of [Bethlehem](bethlehem.html) that they have much to learn ethically from the Moabite outsider. She also tests whether Judah is as filled with chesed to strangers as they would like to think. It reverses the situation in Deuteronomy 23 where the [Jews](gen-jew.html) were in need of hospitality. The happy ending of our story in contrast with its punitive opening will be [Ruth](ruth.html)’s decision to comes to Judah out of chesed and solidarity as against Elimelech’s decision to abandons Judah out of denial of solidarity. All this goes beyond what the peshat can “prove” but it is a reasonable and dramatically persuasive scenario built out of Biblical building blocks.

**Proselytes:**

Another way of understanding the famine is that the famine was a famine of proselytes. Israel [needs](needs.html) proselytes and without them the people will feel the lack. Elimelech left eretz Yisrael in order to seek the Moabite proselyte which would end the famine for the land.

\* \* \*

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1. Sefer Yetzirah 1:7, Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 46:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Proverbs 9:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sifri, Shoftim 144 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bava Bathra 129b [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the introduction to [Esther Rabbah](file:///D:\Word\Shavuot\Ruth%20Portions\orallaw.html), Number 11, “God said to them, ‘You treat your judges with contempt. I promise that I will bring upon you a calamity you will not withstand.’ That is the famine, as it is written, And there was famine…”. (Also cf. Midrash Tanchuma Semini 9, Zohar chadash, Ruth 77b.) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I learned this from my teacher Hakham Dr. Yosef ben Haggai. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)