

Bread in the New Testament



A bible series for small groups and individuals during the season of Harvest and Autumn

Bread is a central symbol in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It contains many meanings and is used in many ways throughout the scriptures. We know Jesus referred to himself as the Bread of Life, the meaning of the place name Bethlehem in Hebrew in House of Bread and for many churches a simple meal of bread and wine is part of worship. In these Bible studies we look at bread in the first two books of the Old Testament. We explore what these ancient texts and stories say to us today as we celebrate harvest and remember people in our own communities who cannot afford to buy food to eat and face hunger on a regular basis. We remember too that we share these scriptures with Jewish people for whom bread is a very important symbol in their worship and festivals.

Session One: Bread as a Curse - Genesis 3

Read - Genesis 3: 17-21

17 And to the man he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
about which I commanded you,

‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;

and you shall eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

20 The man named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all living. 21 And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife and clothed them.

This short extract is taken from the part of Genesis when God has been walking in the gardens and finds that Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit from the forbidden tree. Punishment is given first to the snake, then to the woman and then God says this to the man, Adam. This is the introduction of work and toil into the creation narrative, it is the first time bread is mentioned in the Bible. The edict ends with a reminder of the mortality of humanity - perhaps until this point humans were going to live eternally.

Before the fall life seems very different - no work, no clothes, no death and possibly no bread. Early Christians saw the coming of God's Kingdom as a restoration of this time when God and humans walked together in the garden. When we pray 'on earth as it is in heaven' from the Lord's prayer perhaps we are praying for a time when we live as Adam and Eve are said to have lived in the very first days.

Reflect

- Read Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis - what clues do you have about life before the fall? What in the world that is depicted reflects the Trussell Trust values of Compassion, Justice, Community and Dignity?
- What signs do you see in the world around you today of sin and the fallenness of humanity?
- Where do you see the Holy Spirit at work, restoring the connection between God, humanity and creation?

- If you were in charge of this country for a day, what change would you make to make earth more like heaven?
- What could you do to in the coming days, weeks and months to help restore the harmony we glimpse in Genesis and help to build God’s Kingdom of love, justice, joy and compassion?
- Has this Bible study given you any gifts (new insights), challenges (something that has changed the way you see things) or further questions that you want to explore?

Meditate

For meditation: **Revelation:21** Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Pray

The Lord’s Prayer together

For further thought and discussion

Often people who can’t or don’t work are stigmatised. ‘Working families’ are often targeted for support rather than other people who cannot afford the essentials they need. Does this passage of scripture challenge the way you feel about people who are in receipt of benefits?

Read Wayne’s story about how the pandemic and rises in cost of living cost have impacted him over the past years.

Wayne’s Story

“I’m a 57-year-old man. I am a long-time sufferer of depression and stress related anxiety and I’m on Job Seeker’s Allowance - social security payments that help when you are looking for work. With the rise in cost of living right now, I am struggling day in, day out.

Currently, I’m unemployed due to my mental health. I also think there is a stigma attached to people with mental health which affects their employability. When you are working or

applying for work and talk about mental health, people around you start to act differently.

Now with all the struggles we have, with COVID, rising energy costs and the cost of living becoming so hard, it puts even more stress and pressure on me. I know I'm going to have some bad days but I'm trying my best not to let it get to me and back into the darkest part of my life.

With the increase in energy bills, food and rent I have to juggle my finances so much it puts a constant stress on me. With rent increases, I'm having to sometimes go without food just to make sure my rent is paid. Then we have the pressure of the energy rises which leaves me with even less money for food. The government cost of living payment might help me for a month then I will be back to square one, trying to get by on little bit money I have. With the energy prices expected to rise again later in the year, it looks bleak for me.

Session Two: Bread as God's Blessing - Genesis 14

Read - Genesis 14: 17-20

17 After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh, that is, the King's Valley. 18 And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. 19 He blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High
maker of heaven and earth,
20 and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything

Apologies to whoever read this passage - I always stumble over Melchizedek and have no idea how to pronounce Chedorlaomer. Melchizedek is an interesting figure; his name probably means King of Righteousness. He is both a priest and a king from the city of Salem, which later became Jerusalem, meaning peace. He is not a Jew but he worships the one God. The eternal order of his priesthood is affirmed in Psalm 110 and then again in Hebrews 7 when Jesus is called a priest in the order of Melchizedek. In this Genesis story, which is all we know of this mysterious figure, Melchizedek blesses Abram with his words and a symbolic meal of bread and wine, in response Abram gives him one tenth of his plunder. It takes place after Abram rescues his nephew, Lot, from Team Chedorlaomer who had defeated Team Sodom taking Lot and his family into captivity.

Reflect

- We understand this story to be about an encounter between strangers. Why might this mysterious figure have decided to bless Abram after the rescue of Lot from captivity?
- What is the significance of Bread and Wine for you in this story?
- Have you ever had a significant but fleeting encounter with a stranger that has left you feeling blessed?
- Encounter is an important part of our food banks' work. Knowing and using someone's name can be a good way of giving dignity to that encounter. What else do you think is important to make sure that visiting a food bank is as dignified as possible for the person who cannot afford to buy the essentials they need?
- Jesus encountered many people who were in some kind of need. He treated these people with dignity and compassion. Are their places in your neighbourhood where people who need support are welcomed? Could you or your church join in with this kind of work?

- Has this Bible study given you any gifts (new insights), challenges (something that has changed the way you see things) or further questions that you want to explore?

Meditate

For meditation: **Mark 10 51** Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man (Bartimaeus) said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” **52** Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Pray

The Lord’s Prayer together

For further thought and discussion

Sometimes a cup of tea and a conversation can be life-changing. Read the story of Louise and how her life changed after a cup of tea in a food bank

Louise’s Story

“I suffer from mental health problems. I have anxiety, depression, and complex PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). I had periods where due to mental health issues, I couldn’t work.

In 2019, I had been working and claiming Income Support as an extra income then I was moved to Universal Credit because I was declared ‘not fit for work’. When I was moved to Universal Credit, I had to be re-assessed whether I was fit for work. While I was waiting for the assessment appointment to come through, I was still expected to work. If you can’t work, you must provide sick notes to showcase temporary period of sickness. I was doing it every four weeks as my issues weren’t temporary.

In the run up to Christmas, I couldn’t get a doctor’s appointment, so I sent my sick note two days later than the date I was supposed to. Because I had missed the date, I was sanctioned which I didn’t realise until my next social security payments were due on 12th January - this meant I didn’t get paid anything that month.

That’s when I had no option but to use a food bank.

The first thing they did was to give me a cup of tea. Not making me feel like a burden. They treated me like a human, not just an issue to be solved. When you are battling against bureaucracy, you do feel like just a number. Just someone giving me a cup of tea, asking if you would prefer tea or coffee in your food bank package makes you feel human again. They asked me if I needed extra toilet roll, shampoo, and conditioner too. They had diverse foods, vegetarian options too.

They signposted me to appropriate charities that could help with energy suppliers. They also helped me fill in the appropriate forms to appeal certain dates and decisions. They gave me more food when I was going through the appeal process as they said the appeal process would take at least two weeks.

I wanted to share my story because I've seen the number of people who had mental health issues and were sanctioned like me in the past year and lost their lives because of it. I was lucky. Somebody came and helped me. I was brought to Citizens Advice. I don't know what I would've done otherwise. I was so overwhelmed at the time; I couldn't see a way to ask for help.

I got my first job at 12 and never thought I would end up receiving social security payments. I worked all through high school, all through college, sometimes two jobs at the same time. Because I wanted to do better for myself. I didn't think I would be in this situation. People need to understand that the benefits system is there for a reason. We need to de-stigmatise how we talk about the social security system. It is a support system. It's like the NHS, we have it for a reason.

Unless you come from a particularly wealthy background, you are one illness from going bankrupt, one bad car accident away from not having enough money. Most people don't have a lot of savings or savings that could see you through for three, four months if something happened. And things do happen. Your life can change in a day."

Session Three: Bread as Hospitality - Genesis 18

Read - Genesis 18: 17-20

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. 2 Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

3 He said, "If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4 Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. 5 Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

6 So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread."

7 Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 8 He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

This is one of the best known stories in Genesis, perhaps thanks to the 15th century icon written by Andrei Rublev which depicts the visitors as angels but is often known as an icon of the Trinity. The story continues as one of the men asks for Abraham's wife, a request that might have caused some alarm, but then promises her a child in due season. Sarah laughs at the idea but in due course, Isaac, a child of covenant and promise is born.

We don't know if Abraham recognised these visitors as God, angels, messengers or just weary travellers caught in the desert in the heat of the day but we do know that he greeted them with humility and extravagant generosity, ordering a huge meal to be prepared, bowing before them as he invited them to eat and rushing over to welcome them when he saw them arriving in the distance.

This is one of a series of stories in the early books of the Bible in which God walks the earth, interacting with humanity and creation but it also reminds of us of the angelic visitor to Mary, who promised her a child at a very different time of her life.

Reflect

- Imagine you were dozing in your front garden on a hot day and three angels or God-like figures walked down your street. How would you feel and what would you do?
- Has God ever spoken to you through an unusual person?

- Do you find it easier to give or receive hospitality? Does your church tend to offer or receive hospitality? Have you ever felt unable to offer hospitality? How did that make you feel?
- Where are some of the hospitable places in your neighbourhood? Could you join in with the work they do?
- Churches often pride themselves on being strong communities but often strong communities have strong boundaries that can exclude as well as include. Are there people who might feel excluded if they came to your church?
- Has this Bible study given you any gifts, challenges or further questions that you want to explore?

Meditate

For meditation: **Hebrews 13** Let mutual affection continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. 3 Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them, those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured

Pray

The Lord's Prayer together

For further thought and discussion

In some churches the bread used at communion is called the 'host'. Jesus offers us all hospitality and we receive the meal as guests, equally and in community. Sometimes we are so used to providing services, doing things for people and inviting people into our space that we forget to be open to the gifts God wants to give us, sometimes from people and in spaces outside of church. Being a guest can feel uncomfortable, we might lose some of our power.

Think about which you prefer - giving or receiving hospitality. What makes it easy to be a guest? What makes it difficult? If someone came to your church who was facing financial hardship, how would they be welcomed?

Session Four: Bread as God's Provision - Genesis 16

Read - Genesis 16: 4-8

4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?" 8 And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord."

Here is one of the most famous stories of God's provision for God's people. The Israelites have been freed from slavery in Egypt and now find themselves as refugees in the wilderness, making their ways towards the Promised Land.

At the beginning of Chapter 15 of Exodus the Israelites are full of praise and sing songs of thanksgiving to God. But by the end of the Chapter they face a new hardship - the lack of food and water - and they begin to complain. God turns the bitter water sweet and then promises them that God will also give them food, enough for each day, day by day.

When the 'bread' appears in the morning the Israelites ask, 'What is this? Man-hu is the Hebrew translation of the question, giving us the word Manna. Rabbis have compared the provision of manna by God to the provision of milk by a nursing mother, with enough food every day, day by day. In the book of Wisdom it is even claimed that the Manna tasted different to different people so everyone enjoyed eating it. (Wisdom 16 v21)

Reflect

- What do you depend on God to give you every day? Has this changed over time?
- Asylum seekers who have escaped oppression face a difficult process if they manage to get to the UK. Often, they need to use a food bank and many face homelessness during their time here. Who in your area is seeking to make sure that people fleeing violence and persecution are welcome? Could you or your church help make these people welcome in your community?
- Why do you think God told the Israelites only to collect enough for today?
- What structures and systems are in place in the UK in 2022 that mean some people have more than they need and some people do not have enough? Who is working to try and create a more just and equal society?

- How do we find a balance between making sure that we and our households have what they need, planning for a financially secure future and taking seriously Jesus's commandment to love our neighbour and care for people who cannot afford shelter, clothing, heating and food?
- Has this Bible study given you any gifts, challenges or further questions that you want to explore?

Meditate

For meditation: **Matthew 6** 31 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' 32 For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

34 "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

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Pray

The Lord's Prayer together

For further thought and discussion

Jesus said he was the Bread of Life and whoever came to him would never be hungry. (John 6.35) At the Trussell Trust we don't only want to give people emergency food but we want to end the need for food banks by making sure people have the money the need to buy what they need, so they are never hungry. Our strategy, called Together For Change, is working towards this and has three strands: Changing Minds, Changing Communities and Changing Policy. We'd love your churches to join us in our vision of a UK without the need for food banks. How do you think this dream could become a reality? Could you help us? Read all about our strategy here: www.trusselltrust.org/about/our-strategic-plan/

Session Five: Bread as God's Presence - Exodus 25

Read - Exodus 25: 4-8

23 "Make a table of acacia wood—two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it. 25 Also make around it a rim a handbreadth[e] wide and put a gold molding on the rim. 26 Make four gold rings for the table and fasten them to the four corners, where the four legs are. 27 The rings are to be close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table. 28 Make the poles of acacia wood, overlay them with gold and carry the table with them. 29 And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings. 30 Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times.

This bread is also known as the show bread or the Bread of Face, referring to the face of God. There were twelve loaves representing the twelve tribes of Israel that were made with fine flour and covered in incense. They were made at the beginning of week and sat in the tabernacle or the temple in the space where God dwelt most fully. In this way, they became holy and only the priests were allowed to eat them at the end of the week. This is the first time the Bread of Presence is mentioned in the Old Testament but there are many other references to it in other books.

Reflect

- Can you talk about a time when you sensed God's presence in something quite ordinary?
- Where do you most often see the face of God?
- While bread is and was an ordinary food staple in the Middle-East this was made with fine flour and covered in incense. What makes something holy for you?
- The tabernacle is richly decorated and designed to bring glory to God. How do you make decisions in your church or community on spending money on buildings or resources that enable worship and spending money on tackling poverty and injustice? What did Jesus say that influences your spending individually and collectively?
- Where can people who face hunger in the UK find the presence of God, the generosity of God and the hospitality of God in your neighbourhood? How would they know God is present?
- Has this Bible study given you any gifts, challenges or further questions that you want to explore?

Meditate

For meditation: **Luke 24 28** As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. **29** But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. **31** Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. **32** They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

Pray

The Lord’s Prayer together

For further thought and discussion

The disciples on the road to Emmaus were able to talk to Jesus about what was troubling them. He explained the scriptures to them and they were comforted. How honest can people be in your church groups? Are their places someone who is experiencing a financial crisis could talk and be heard in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding?

If you have found this resource helpful and want to receive updates from our Church Engagement team including new resources to help you and your church join the fight against hunger then sign up here:

www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/church-support/join/