

Famine: Predicted – Emerging

Introduction

In the Matthew 24:7's composite of end-time signs, Christ described them as the "*beginning of sorrows*" (KJV), or more accurately, "*birth pangs*" (NIV). Famines are referenced. Biblically, this usually refers to a lack of food, as in that Olivet discourse.

- In places dependent on seasonal rainfall, as in Palestine, its inappropriate timing or drought conditions led to loss of crops and pasture, hence, a shortage of food.
- In that Bible land there were two key rainy seasons: the "early rain" (October–November) and the "latter rain" (March–April). They were required for sprouting and a productive harvest.

War, sieges of cities (II Kings 6:25), insects, and hail are recorded as famine causes. The record also notes that famine has led to widespread disease (I Kings 8:37; Jeremiah 14:12, 21:9; Luke 21:11).

Famines were also used by God as punishment (Jeremiah 14:12, 15), to raise Joseph to a position of Egyptian authority (Genesis 41–47), and to bring about His purpose to warn and correct His people (I Kings 17:1, II Samuel 21:1).

- Scripture records many famine stories (e.g., Abraham – Genesis 12:10, Isaac – 26:1, Joseph – 41–47, Ruth – Ruth 1:1, David – II Samuel 21:1 and Elijah – I Kings 17–18).
- A devastating Jewish starvation and death toll was recorded by Josephus when the Roman armies put a siege on Jerusalem in 70 A.D.¹

Perhaps the most significant allusion to a "lack of nourishment" is a ***famine for truth***.

- "*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD*" (Amos 8:11). This was a primary result of apostasy and, secondarily, of God's "curse."
- The "*black horse*" seal (Revelation 6:5-6) unveils an apocalyptic famine from a Christ-centered gospel (discussed later).

Though this world has more than enough food for every individual, famine tragically haunts many areas, claiming scores of lives annually. In addition, approximately 842 million people suffer from hunger worldwide.²

Has this planet reached a level of hunger and death to deem it one of Christ's end-time signs? The evidence suggests "Yes." Jesus characterized famine as part of a calamity bloc with wars, earthquakes and pestilence. That amalgamation began to statistically trend upward in the 1975–1980 window.³ This study focuses on the current status of famine.

¹ Josephus, Flavius; *The Wars of the Jews*, v. 5. X .3, ~75 A.D.

² <https://borgenproject.org/15-world-hunger-statistics/>

³ <https://www.emdat.be/database>

Top Ten Countries with Food Shortages

In December of 2018, the International Rescue Committee ranked the ten highest countries at risk for a lack of food, leading to a humanitarian crisis in 2019. Their predictions have proved correct. This is what they observed:

1. Yemen (bitter civil war since 2015 with airstrikes hitting civilian and medical facilities, 24 million people in desperate need of assistance)
2. Democratic Republic of Congo (war for 20 years, the whole country remains in chaos, 4.5 million people are displaced. They are experiencing the second largest Ebola outbreak in history).
3. South Sudan (civil war since 2012, estimated 380,000 casualties, 1.6 million displaced with 2.47 million refugees)
4. Afghanistan (wars since 2001, a resurgence of the Taliban is bringing unexpected violence, major drought)
5. Venezuela (economic collapse, 3 million people have left the country, widespread disease is on the rise, food shortages are everywhere)
6. Central Africa Republic (armed groups since 2013, civilians at their mercy, 500,000 without enough food)
7. Syria (war since 2011 with no place to flee, collapse of health and education services, 6.2 million displaced with 5.6 million refugees)
8. Nigeria (persistent attacks from armed groups, communal violence over water and land, 2 million displaced, with 230,000 refugees)
9. Ethiopia (war, volatile politics, 1.4 million displaced)
10. Somalia (war, natural disasters, 2.6 million displaced with 870,000 refugees)

In each country noted, hunger has reached crises levels. The most severe is in the Central African Republic, where 550,000 people have little to eat. In South Sudan 6.1 million people now have a major shortage of food. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo 13.1 million people have “food insecurity.” Yemen has warehouses with stockpiles of food – but it cannot be distributed because of the war. 63,500 citizens are starving.⁴

The United Nations has stated that Yemen may soon experience the worst famine in living memory.

- Cholera is currently the worst in that nation’s history.
- 10,000 civilians have been killed since 2015.
- Many parents are skipping meals to give food to their children.⁵

⁴ <https://www.rescue.org/article/top-10-crises-world-should-be-watching-2019>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/25/famine-in-yemen-could-become-one-of-worst-in-living-memory-un-says>

Not listed in these general statistics, North Korea is facing a major food crisis this year. Forty percent of their people are chronically short of food. The last harvest was so poor that the country limited each person to eleven ounces of food per day. 10,100,000 people are hungry and there is not enough nourishment until the next harvest.

- The regime exploits and starves its own people to advance its unlawful nuclear weapons program.
- The country has shortages of fuel, fertilizer, and spare parts for farming equipment.
- The U.N. sends large amounts of food to North Korea, in spite of their weapons program.⁶ It is not enough.

Starvation

From the latter part of the nineteenth century to the past three decades 100 million people died from starvation! Seventy percent did not succumb because of weather or food shortage – but from human indifference and political tyranny.

- Michael Watts, professor emeritus of geography and development studies at the University of California, Berkley, described this as “silent violence.”⁷

The history of such horrendous deaths fills history books. In the memory of many readers, there are three horrible, unbelievable, lethal famines that occurred:

1. The Nazi Hunger Plan – 1941

This was the largest starvation “crime” in history, as part of “Operation Barbarossa,” occurring when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

- This was the biggest land invasion in world history, with 4.5 million troops.
- Hitler believed that the Germans needed more agricultural land to secure their future survival. That area would provide for their long-term needs.

The plan initially diverted food from the local Soviet Slavic population to Germany, letting them literally die of starvation. Hitler said that they were “useless eaters.” It is estimated that 4.7 million people did die of starvation, famine-induced disease, and the cold, in that first operation.

The war ended before the plan could be totally executed.⁸

⁶ <https://strangesounds.org/2019/05/north-korea-food-crisis-famine-2019-video.html>

⁷ Watts, Michael J.; *Silent Violence, Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (University of Georgia Press), 2013.

⁸ <https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/educational-resource-what-everyone-should-know-about-famine/>

2. China's Great Leap Forward

The communist party assumed power over China in 1949. A decade later party leader Mao Zedong began a program called "The Great Leap Forward." He wanted to modernize China from an agrarian society to an industrial superpower.

- In 1958 his government began to relocate 700 million peasants into mass communes, containing about 5000 family members each.
- Within one year 25,000+ communes were formed!

They were to be the backbone of China's agriculture enterprise. However, thousands were moved away from their already successful farms to 600,000 steel mills.

- Mao ordered untenable farming techniques.
- The steel was of such poor quality it was useless.
- He then ordered a "war on sparrows" because they ate grain and were "animals of capitalism." But – the locust then had no natural predators and they began to destroy crops.

Mao crushed anyone who disobeyed him or opposed his policies. The results were disastrous. By 1962, at least 36 million people had died of starvation. This has come to be called "The Great Famine."⁹

- Mao realized his grip on power was lessening, so by 1966 he began the "Cultural Revolution." Schools were closed. The youth of the country brought mayhem to China.
- Upward of 2 million more lives were taken by violence.

3. Ethiopian Famine – 1983–1985

After a revolutionary government, known as Dergue, took power in 1973, it faced many internal rebellions. Its counter-insurgent operations used food deprivation against the rebels.

- The military also diverted crops to feed its troops, even stealing food provided by the "World Food Programme" for the starving citizens.
- By 1985 at least 600,000 Ethiopians had died from famine. In 1991 a coalition of rebels overthrew the Dergue government.

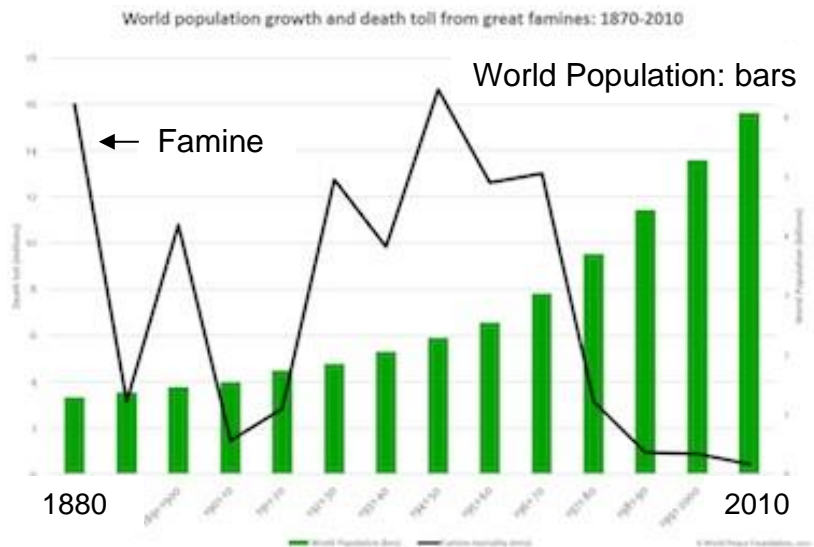
Such human tyranny has begun to emerge again.

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Leap_Forward

The Decline of Famine

Over the past 30 years famine had seen a major decline. See graph to the right.¹⁰

The main reason has been the diminished numbers of tyrannical leaders. Charles Kenny, senior fellow at the Center for Global Development, said that famines hardly ever happen in societies that are relatively free. He noted that “they didn’t happen ... in any country where leaders show the slightest interest in the wellbeing of its citizenry.”¹¹



But – famine has returned! Humanitarian crisis expert Alex de Waal, in his book *Mass Starvation: The History of and Future of Famine*, noted that he felt initially that food shortage might become history:

- “During a May 4 conference at Tufts University, he [de Waal] said: ‘When I started working on this, I thought I could write a history of famine, and say actually this is a problem we have resolved and confined to history.’

“But as he worked on the project, a shift began to set in that forced him to reconsider the book’s premise and purpose. ‘Unfortunately, during the writing,’ he said, ‘famine made something of a comeback.’

“The first red flag came in December 2016, when the Famine Early Warning Systems Network announced that a famine was underway in some remote regions of Nigeria. By January 2017, threats of famine had also been identified in Yemen, Somalia and South Sudan. Soon after, alarms were sounded over Syria. It was clear that, after years of progress, global hunger numbers were rising again and poised to rise much more. A United Nations report showed that 11 percent of the global population in 2017 was chronically malnourished – an increase of 40 million over the year before.

“The past year has been unquestionably terrible, notes de Waal, with famine or near-famine conditions putting millions of people at risk of severe malnutrition and even death across Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Nigeria and Yemen.”¹²

- “This prompted Kimberly Flowers, director of the Global Food Security project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, to write her landmark article in late 2017: ‘The Four Famines: The Alarm Bells Are Ringing, But Who Is Listening?’”¹³

¹⁰ <https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/famine/>

¹¹ <https://www.scp.org/news/2011/07/27/27911/foreign-policy-murder-by-starvation/>

¹² Jacques, Jeremiah; *The Philadelphia Trumpet*, November–December 2018, p. 17.

¹³ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/four-famines-alarm-bells-are-ringing-who-listening>

The Morocco Threat

In the 1960s the growing use of synthetic fertilizers expanded the amount of land useable for agriculture. Phosphorous was a key ingredient, with 75% of the world's resources coming from Morocco.

- It is expected, however, that by 2033 the world's supply will run out.
- The United States is the planet's largest exporter of food and obtains a major quantity of phosphorous from Morocco.

The Iranian government is using its terrorist proxy, the Hezbollah, to support a separatist group in this country, called Polisario Front. They are being given military and weapons training by the world's number one state sponsor of terror, Iran. Anti-West extremism is on the rise, especially by Moroccan youth, goaded by that Front. The global food chain is being seriously threatened. As this terrorist group rises and controls larger segments of land, the possibility of major starvation looms in many global areas.¹⁴

Myths Regarding Famine

1. Famine is a shortage of food. An Indian scholar, Amartya Sen, said: "Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not characteristic of there not being enough food to eat."
2. Famine is the result of natural causes. Drought sometimes plays a role in creating food shortages, but it does not create famine without political tyranny.
3. Overpopulation causes famine. The world's population grew from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 6.8 billion in 2010, during which time famine death drastically declined (see graph on previous page).
4. Famine is just an African problem. Famine has killed more in Asia than in Africa (73% vs. 10%).
5. Climate change will inevitably lead to famine. Scientists debunk this notion. Political decision is the greater threat where food is used as a weapon.¹⁵

Until famine becomes politically intolerable, it is projected that the world will soon see a major resurgence of starvation. The United Nations noted in **May 2019** that famine is on the rise in the Near East and North Africa. Fifty-two million people are suffering from food shortage. Both areas are "conflict zones."

Though there is a call for improved agricultural production and food distribution, war threatens both.¹⁶

¹⁴ <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/morocco-draft-dodge-radicalization/>

¹⁵ <https://sites.tufts.edu/wpf/educational-resource-what-everyone-should-know-about-famine/>

¹⁶ <https://www.france24.com/en/20190508-famine-rise-near-east-north-africa-fao>

Food Shortage in America?

In the United States, Midwest farmers are deeply in debt. Several years of low corn and soybean prices led to 223 bankruptcy filings in 2018 alone. Slumping grain prices have been devastating because of competition from Brazil and Russia. This has been compounded by:

1. China's tariffs on U.S. soybeans – they have turned to Brazil for this crop.
2. Mexican tariffs on cheese, which is now hurting dairy farmers in the U.S.
3. Flooding of major farming areas in nine states. Half of America's grain fields cannot be planted (2019) because of floods.

Result? Income is half of what it was five years ago.

Over the past fifty years America has lost 160 million acres of farmland. Brazil has gained 230 million acres. In addition, the United States has lost control of the world's strategic sea gates through which food flows (Panama, Gibraltar, Suez and Singapore), making possible the hostile blocking of food distribution.

In retaliation of America's new trade policies, China has slapped 25% tariffs on U.S. soybeans; and Mexico has imposed 25% tariffs on U.S. cheese. America is still the world's largest exporter of food. But – dark clouds are on the horizon.

- The Midwest floods are being called the **worst agricultural disaster** in modern U.S. history.
- Millions of calves, chickens, hogs, and other livestock have been wiped out.

American food reserves aren't enough to last even a year should a major need arise! We are hearing an echo from the ancient past:¹⁷

- *“The field is wasted, the land mourneth; for the corn is wasted: the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Be ye ashamed, O ye husbandmen; howl, O ye vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley; because the harvest of the field is perished”* (Joel 1:10-12).
- *“How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. O LORD, to thee will I cry: for the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame hath burned all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness”* (Joel 1:18-20).

America is not on the “famine watch” list. But – a few geopolitical changes have already diminished the world's need for U.S. agricultural products (wheat is down 60%, corn 40% and soybeans 50% – rounded percentages). Food dominance has been part of America's strength and has led it to be the largest humanitarian donor in the world. That may be changing soon.

¹⁷ *The Philadelphia Trumpet*, August 2019.

A Spiritual Famine

The end of time (a period of time) will be characterized by antichristian sentiment, hatred, persecution (Mark 13:9-13), betrayal, deceptive false teachers and people with cold, hard hearts (Matthew 24:9-12). Sadly, Paul's lengthy list of evil behavior are of those who claim to be religious (II Timothy 3:1-5).

- A spiritual famine would exist. This has become acute. A cry from ancient times is apropos today.
- *"We do not see any signs of God's presence; there are no longer any prophets and we have no one to tell us how long this will last"* (Psalm 74:9 – NET).

The Bible is filled with illustrations of apostasy and God's response to rebellion. Many reach a point where truth is no longer understood and heaven's appeal ceases.

- Probation closed for this people. *"Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone"* (Hosea 4:17). That group is not listed among the 144,000 (Revelation 7:5-8).
- *"And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it"* (Amos 8:12). This is a time when the unrepentant sense a need for help beyond themselves. But it is too late – none will be found.
- *"Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes"* (Luke 19:42). Those who reject the friendship of heaven will reach a point when they cannot understand the Word of God.

God disclosed an end-time prophecy regarding this spiritual famine in Scripture's last book.

Four distinct sequential horses are presented as Christ, the Lamb, breaks the first four of a seven-sealed scroll (Revelation 6:1-8). Each horse has a different color commensurate with its *mission* and *who* it is.

- A horse figuratively represents people on a military assignment (Song of Solomon 1:9, Isaiah 63:13, Zechariah 10:3, Job 39:19-25, Psalm 76:5-6, Proverbs 21:31, Joel 2:1-4).
- Our focus is on the third and black horse, its rider, and the third *"living creature"* that beckons *"Come and see."*
- In it there is a hidden "food" source, a glimmer of light, working in the midst of terrible darkness.

***"And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand"* (Revelation 6:5).**

The *"third living creature"* had the face of a man (Revelation 4:7). This was the *ensign* for the tribe of Reuben, one of Israel's four lead tribes. He is highlighted, along with the tribe of Judah,

in amazing end-time imagery in a highly symbolic prophecy of God's end-time church (Ezekiel 44:19).

- Reuben apostatized, but then he did repent. This horse symbolizes those in darkness. Their lamps are no longer burning. Truth is not cherished.
- Some, however, still have a little oil and a flame is yet flickering. They want more light. Reuben is listed among the 144,000 (Revelation 7:5). His flame for right was rekindled.

“Black as sackcloth” symbolizes utter darkness in Revelation 6:12. This is a representation for the absence of truth – it is in darkness (e.g., Matthew 4:16, Luke 1:79, John 1:5, 3:19, Acts 26:18, Colossians 1:13).^{18,19}

- This body of people lacks spiritual nourishment. Corporately, they do not have Christ's righteousness.²⁰ Most don't care.
- When this third seal is broken, the horse shows **no activity**. But – God soon reveals that some of the black horse people are waiting for a call to *“Come out of her, my people”* (Revelation 18:4). They need an invitation; they need to hear the word “Come”!

Of the four horsemen, the black-horse rider is the only one without a weapon. Instead, He has a balance for weighing in His hand.

In ancient times, such scales ensured justice (Proverbs 16:11, Job 31:6, Daniel 5:37, Ezekiel 45:10). Nothing is noted on those scales! The rider is waiting to pass judgment on the individuals of this horse group. Jesus, the judge and rider, is holding those scales (John 5:26-27, 30). How will they respond to truth and that call?

- Hopefully, *“The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up”* (Matthew 4:16).
- John then hears a voice from an unseen “individual” – likely God the Father:

“And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine” (Revelation 6:6).

The balances are for **weight!** Here, the **“measure”** is related to **volume!** The scales symbolize a spiritual judicial device “in waiting.” The grain lesson is pointed.

- The illustration relates to **cost!** The focus is not on the grain per se – except that the amount of each is only enough to sustain an individual life for one day. Its cost is exorbitant – 8 to 16 times the average in the Roman Empire at that time. The *denarius* was a day's wage only. Therefore, it would not support a family nor cover other living expenses – even for an individual.

¹⁸ Stefanovic, Ranko; *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI; 2002), p. 231.

¹⁹ <https://www.stepbible.org/version.jsp?version=Clarke> on Revelation 6:5. Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible,

²⁰ LaRondelle, Hans K., Th.D.; *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (First Impressions; Sarasota, FL 34243; 1997), p. 126.

- ***Spiritual starvation is in evidence. Truth now comes at a great cost!***

Wheat and barley are used to make bread, representing Christ and His Word (Matthew 13:3-30; Luke 8:11; Matthew 4:4; John 5:35, 14:6). There is a famine for truth as it is in Jesus.²¹

The price is high because it is scarce. Truth will also come at a high cost, through resistance and persecution.

Why are we told to not hurt the oil and the wine?

“Oil” represents the Holy Spirit. Zechariah 4:1-5: “... *then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts*” (Zechariah 4:6).

“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).

Anointing is by oil – but Christ was given a “direct” heavenly gift, not the symbol.

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38 (cf. Luke 3:22).

Wine relates to the blood of Christ. There are many texts, along with I Corinthians 11:25-29, that highlight this association.²²

What is all this intimating?

There is a group of individuals, wherever they might be, that is in darkness relative to the wonders of truth. It is a time of spiritual famine. This relates to when the pure truth of Christ’s righteousness is hard to come by. A famine for God’s Word is present. But – the Holy Spirit is working on some hearts. The saving blood of Christ has begun to work in their hearts. “Be careful how you treat those in darkness, they might be in this group.” “Don’t hurt the work of the oil and the wine!”

- After the 144,000 (the white horse seal) goes out –
- After persecution has begun (red horse seal) (through apostate Protestantism) –
- The hearts of these individuals are being stirred, though they are residing in darkness. They wait for the call to “*Come*” given by God’s witnesses. That invitation will bring “famine relief” through their “loud cry.”

²¹ Stefanovic, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

²² Paulien, *op. cit.*, p. 232. Doukhan, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Conclusion

Christ said that there would be a time of famine related to food, along with war, earthquakes and pestilence as a sign that His coming was near. A famine for truth would also be a concomitant sign of the nearness of the eschaton. Spiritual light is being shut off by the evil and darkness of this age. That is represented by the amazing black horse prophecy of Revelation 6. That “famine” era is deepening.

The lack of food availability **is associated with** Christ’s prediction: *“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold”* (Matthew 24:12 – NIV). The resolution to this crisis defies any human answer. National accords, the vast work of the United Nations, the scores of relief agencies, cannot resolve what we are now seeing. Satan’s spirit has replaced the Holy Spirit in so many hearts.

For those who have had little light, God’s witnesses will be allotted the final task of taking the saving truth to every individual. John informs us that their *“testimony”* will be completed (Revelation 11:7a). That cry will bring many out of darkness.

- *“And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities”* (Revelation 18:4-5).
- That will be a separation appeal, a final invitation, to come into the light.

Secularization is assuming control of the world’s populace. Prophecy predicts a time when a God-directed helplessness will plague mankind. Individuals will sense the need of a power greater than themselves. How they respond to the rescue mission of that last gospel call will bring either eternal separation or eternal restoration. The world will then be divided into two groups – the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:32-33).

Franklin S. Fowler; Jr.; M.D.
Prophecy Research Initiative – non-profit 501(c)3 © 2019
EndTime Issues...; Number 228; August 1; 2019