

Refugees in the Bible

From beginning to end, Scripture is filled with stories of forcefully displaced people.

Use this guide to explore causes of forcible displacement.

Open up the texts and explore their context.

Pay attention to the emotions and trauma experienced by those displaced.

Notice how God is actively engaged in the stories.

Ponder how God used forcibly displaced people in their land of refuge or exile.

Consider how these stories might be similar to those of forcibly displaced people today.

Contemplate whether God might be actively engaged in the lives of refugees now – just as he was throughout the biblical narrative.

ADAM AND EVE

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

Displaced by famine to Egypt

“Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe.” Genesis 12:10

Displaced by authorities in Egypt

“Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!” Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.”

Genesis 12:19-20

Displaced by scarcity and conflict

"But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's."
Genesis 13:6-7

LOT

Displaced by invasion and conflict

"The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom."
Genesis 14:11-12

HAGAR

Displaced by persecution and slavery

"Your slave is in your hands,' Abram said. 'Do with her whatever you think best.' Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her."
Genesis 16:6

JOSEPH

Displaced by human trafficking

"So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels[b] of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt."
Genesis 37:28

MOSES

Displaced due to oppression and slavery

"By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger..."
Hebrews 11:27

NAOMI AND RUTH

Displaced by famine into Moab

"There was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab."

Ruth 1:1

DAVID

Displaced by persecution

That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath."

1 Samuel 21:10

"David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place."

1 Samuel 23:13

ELIJAH

Displaced by persecution

"Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan.... Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. "

1 Kings 17:3,7

Displaced from one refuge to another due to drought

"Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the LORD came to him: 'Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.'"

1 Kings 17:7-9

ALL OF ISRAEL

Forcibly displaced by war

"So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria..."

2 Kings 17:23



“He [Nebuchadnezzar] carried all Jerusalem into exile: all the officers and fighting men, and all the skilled workers and artisans—a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.

2 Kings 24:14

ESTHER AND MORDECHAI

Displaced by war *“Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai... who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon... Esther 2:5*

JEREMIAH

Displaced by war

“They took Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah along with them.”

Jeremiah 43:6

EZEKIEL

Displaced by war

“In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River...”

Ezekiel 1:1

DANIEL, HANANIAH, MISHAEL, AND AZARIAH

Displaced by cultural assimilation

“Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king’s service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility...He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians... Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.”

Daniel 1:2-4,6

JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

Displaced by political oppression

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place

while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem

Luke 2:1-4

Displaced by political persecution

“An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.’ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt...”

Matthew 2:13-14

THE EARLY CHURCH

Displaced by religious persecution

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.”

Acts 8:1

PHILIP

Displaced by religious persecution

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.”

Acts 8:4-5

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

Displaced by ethnic persecution

“Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome.”

Acts 18:1-2

Thank you for taking the time to reflect on this sampling of stories in the Bible. We hope that it is helpful as you seek to develop a biblically informed framework related to people who are forcibly displaced in our world



today. Please feel free to share your insights, thoughts, and questions with us. You can reach us by email at info@iafr.ca