

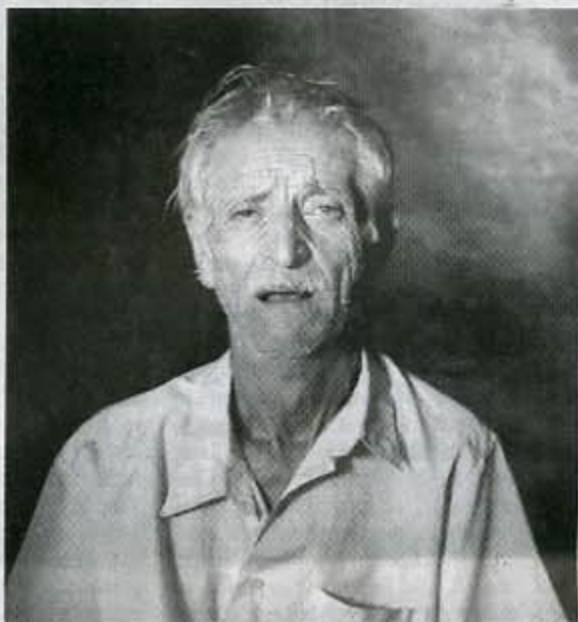
Biblical Heroes in Dire Straits

Israeli photographer Adi Nes began his latest series, *Biblical Stories*, at a moment of crisis in his own life. "I just ended a long-term relationship; I was alone with no money, no apartment, no job. The economic situation was very bad in Israel; most of my friends were unemployed. Also, my father passed away," he said in an interview with the *Forward*. "I chose the Bible as a framework for this series because, at a time when everything was breaking apart, I was looking for my roots."

Nes, a gay man raised in a conservative Sephardic home, said he wanted to "work with people who lost their identity," using "biblical heroes with issues of their home." To emphasize this message, he staged Israeli actors dressed as homeless people as a way to appeal to viewers' hearts. An exhibit of the work opens today at the Tel Aviv Museum.

— CAROLINE LAGNADO

Job: "My first idea with Job was to cast my father, because he had a hard life, and you could see it on his face," Nes said. Unfortunately, the photographer's father passed away before the shoot, so Nes cast his uncle, Nissim, who faced a similarly challenging immigrant life. Nissim paved roads for a living and has suffered with ailing lungs. In this shot, he is literally gasping for breath. "He could be Job, my father, his brother or any homeless man," Nes observed.



Ruth and Naomi: "These are proud, strong survivors, even in low life," Nes remarked about Ruth and Naomi, heroines from the Book of Ruth. Nes staged this photograph to French realist painter Jean-François Millet's classic "The Gleaners." Here, Ruth and Naomi pick onions off the ground. "Usually onions make tears, but if you're poor and find onions [on the ground], it's like finding gold."



Hagar: The image of Sarah's servant is based on Dorothea Lange's Depression-era photograph, "Migrant Mother," yet Nes made the conscious decision to exclude Ishmael from the image. Hagar is shown waiting, sad and alone, yet still proud.



Abraham and Isaac: "How many fathers sacrifice their own sons?" Nes wondered, when asked about the basis for this photograph. "Death exists in everyday life, [but particularly in Israel] with the army and constant threat of attacks... Still, having children is something bigger than you, you must do it."



Jacob and Esau: Nes was inspired to make this photograph after noticing the proliferation of soup kitchens. Here, Esau sells his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup — literally.