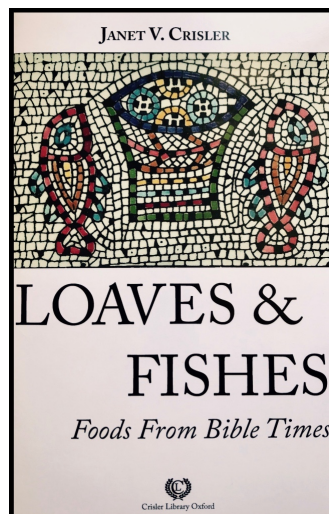

CRISLER LIBRARY OXFORD



Crisler Library Oxford



Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Crisler Library Oxford and welcome to our newsletter 'Loaves & Fishes, Foods From Bible Times' which features some rare and mouth-watering ancient recipes.

I was once lucky enough to be invited to Julia Child's kitchen for a croissant and coffee to see if I might like to start a cookery school of my own! Well, instead I set up the Crisler Library, Ephesus in Turkey and while doing research for the book, the then Secretary for the Albright Institute in East Jerusalem recommended I contact Mrs. Nima Gabriel who gave traditional Palestinian cooking lessons; recipes going back many generations. Mrs. Gabriel agreed to

give me private lessons at her home in Bethlehem, located on Manger Square next to the Church of Nativity. First day, after an hour or so, she put down her large wooden cooking spoon and said, “Now Janet, I will teach you an ancient recipe going back to the time of King David still made today in the countryside using the village Taboon ovens.” It’s made with the spice somac, available in Middle East food stores and you can find the recipe on page 73 of 'Loaves & Fishes'. What this spice does for onions is unique and quite delicious and makes a dramatic dinner presentation statement.

Equally interesting is Nima's description of manna which you'll find a recipe for in the section on Moses. Regarding *manna* - Nima told me that even today the Bedouin and traditional Palestinian women go a certain time of the year to the dessert; usually August after a tiny insect punctures the stems of a desert plant from which oozes a sweet white substance that is called in Arabic “muun”. From the derivation of that word we have “manna”. Mrs. Gabriel believes this white substance is reminiscent of the reference in Exodus. The women scrape it off the branches and put it into jars to be used through the winter months. Interesting, n'est pas? You can find the new edition of 'Loaves & Fishes' SIGNED by the author on our website shop for some mouth-watering and truly seasonal recipes.

Enjoy and Agape!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janet Crisler', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Janet Crisler,
Director, Crisler Library Oxford

“Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.”

— SOLOMON, Proverbs 30:8

WHAT BETTER WAY for the Crisler Library Oxford to prepare for Christmas this year than by introducing you all to Janet Crisler's unique and brilliant cookbook 'Loaves & Fishes, Food from Bible Times'. Combining accurately researched and delicious ancient Biblical delicacies with Janet's Cordon Bleu training, this book will inform you whilst titillating your tastebuds. Take, for example, the magnificent recipe for charcoal broiled fish with honeycomb which, Janet writes, 'is an approximation of the only meal that Jesus ate which is recorded in the Bible (Luke 24:42 - 43).' What an extraordinary dish to prepare that would be. Whilst showcasing both succulent and well-balanced menus, each chapter references one of twenty key biblical figures or groups with Noah, Moses, David and Solomon comprising the Old Testament and a plethora of kings, prophets, disciples, emperors and tyrants featuring in the New. Here you will find recipes for manna, references to the sumptuous fare of Royal Egyptian dining and a range of fish, flesh and fowl from Red Sea Scallops in Shells to Herodian veal and Sinai quail with cherries. Yet here too, are simpler staples such as spinach custard and a reliable recipe for pita bread in a book sensitively balanced between accurately evoking the tastes and ready ingredients of an ancient diet and the Biblical references to all things culinary.

SO HOW DID this all come about? In her preface Janet recalls that it was her husband, B. Cobbey Crisler, 'who launched this whole idea one evening before dinner on a Monday night, "Honey, I'm teaching the Exodus Thursday night at the Library (Greenwich, Connecticut, where we were living at the time). I would like to serve something at the break. Can you figure out a recipe for 'manna' and make some to serve at the break. Just use what the text mentions (Exodus 13:31).' Further on in the book, alongside an ingenious gastronomic interpretation, Janet notes: 'Monks at St. Catherine's have a traditional explanation dating to the time of St. Anthony. The theory is that manna was formed from the secretions of insects . . .' you will, of course, have to invest in the book to find out the rest!

What is obvious in the contexts for these recipes is the sheer level of experiential knowledge, culinary skill and imagination, combined with the archeological research conducted by the Crislens on sites investigated to

determine grain and vegetable seed types and so gain a clearer understanding of the ancient diet. Janet explains: 'during a sifting process working at the archaeological site of Caesarea Maritima, we were sifting soil samples from specific areas in an attempt to find seeds cultivated for human sustenance during early Roman times. The goal was to find a definite correlation between ancient and modern foods.' This ethos is beautifully presented in Janet's book by a fastidious dedication to the original dishes insofar as she is able, whilst sensitively replacing some ancient ingredients or methods such as 'dropping red-hot rocks into the pot'! This modestly scaled volume includes images such as the one below to give a flavour of artefacts contemporary to the recipes. I say modestly scaled because this particular cookbook is lightweight enough to take with you for unique and fascinating cooking whilst on a trip but will also rest nicely on a work surface or kitchen plinth when making the food.

HERE IS ONE of my favourite recipes in the chapter on Moses, for its title alone, to compliment a Bitter Herb Salad:

Wilderness Salad Dressing

1/4 cup honey
1/2 cup olive oil
1/4 cup cider vinegar
1/4 teaspoon cumin
1/8 teaspoon coriander
1/4 teaspoon dill weed
1 teaspoon anise seed
Salt to taste

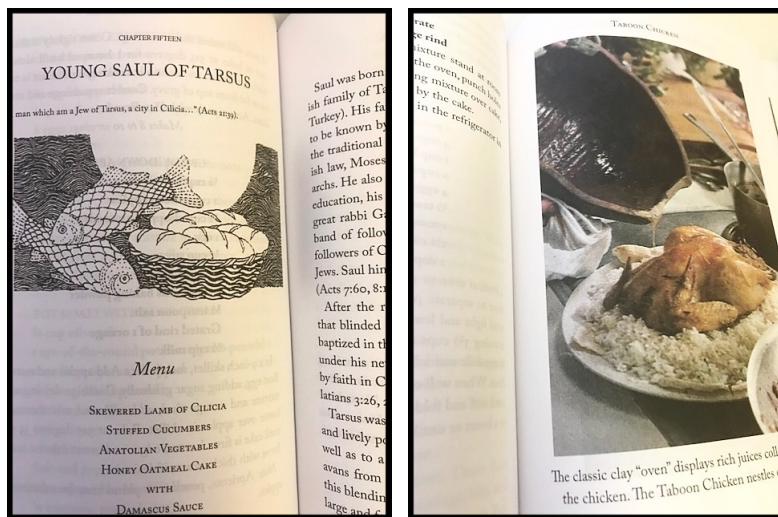
Combine all ingredients in a jar or bottle and shake vigorously. Or whirl in blender if desired. *Makes about 1 cup dressing.*

THROUGHOUT THE BOOK what strikes the reader is the historical context and background for many of the figures and dishes presented. Janet's clear and warm descriptions evoke banqueting in the time of Nero, for example: 'the

dinner proper might include sows' udders, a boar's head, dishes of fish livers, flamingoes' tongues, or peacocks' brains and pheasants mixed together. It was not uncommon of the main course of such a banquet to include over twenty different dishes.' In keeping with this, Janet outlines the preparations for Veal Birds and Plum Mousse. Elsewhere in the book, the fare is quieter: John the Baptist is given Ezekiel Bread and Carob Cakes - carob and many of the other ingredients Janet points out, are readily available in health food stores: Ezekiel 4:9 "Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentiles, and millet, and fitches [a kind of wheat according to some scholars or perhaps dill] and out them into one vessel, and make thee bread thereof . . . three hundred and ninety days shall thou eat thereof." In the spirit of Ezekiel, 'Loaves & Fishes, Foods from Bible Times' presents sustenance and scholarship at its finest. For Christmas celebrations why not try preparing the Bethlehem Shepherds' recipe for Gingered Prunes or follow the Spiced Cider instructions in Chapter Nine - Wise Men of the East? In Janet Crisler's capable hands, these dishes will educate and delight!

'There they made . . . a supper, and Martha served . . .'

— JOHN, 12:2



Order *your* SIGNED copy of 'Loaves & Fishes, Foods from Bible Times'
from the Crisler Library Shop.