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"IN FAMINE AND DROUGHT"

by ERIC F. F. BISHOP

MR. BISHOP'S exegetical studies in New Testament words and phrases are always fresh and enlightening because of his facility in bringing to bear on them his long experience of Near Eastern life, especially in the Arab world.

THIS phrase, occurring in 2 Corinthians 11: 27, is usually rendered in English "hunger and thirst." It comes in the list of accumulating evidences that St. Paul was adducing of his being a true minister of Christ. Might it be suggested that a more realistic rendering for the Eastern Mediterranean area, Palestine in particular, would be "in famine and drought?"

This is the only occurrence of the second word (δίψος) in the N.T. There are a dozen other contexts where the first (λιμός) is found. In every case except this (and Luke 15: 17) it would seem to have been translated "famine." Thus in Mark 13: 8 (and parallel passages) "famines" are mentioned along with "earthquakes"; while the singular is used in two contexts in the Apocalypse.¹ In Luke 4: 25, our Lord referred to the "great famine over all the land" in Elijah's time; while in the great parable (Luke 15: 14) He pictured a "severe famine" in the "far country." The O.T. allusion certainly meant "drought" as well as "famine," though the latter term was enough with "the heavens shut up" for three and half years!² Luke has a second historical reference—this time from Stephen—with a "great famine all over Egypt and Canaan," when Joseph was governor of the former country.³ Four chapters later (Acts 11: 28), we have the record of another "great famine," both in prospect and retrospect—one that St. Paul can hardly have forgotten and to which possibly he referred in his letter to Galatia.⁴ Finally there is his other "famine" memory—it must surely have been this—as among the disasters that cannot separate us from the love of Christ.⁵

Commenting on the Corinthian phrase Plummer suggests that this implies "*involuntary fasting*"—"hunger and thirst caused by

¹ Rev. 6: 8; 18: 8.

² James 5: 17.

³ Acts 7: 11.

⁴ Gal. 2: 10.

⁵ Rom. 8: 35. It is disappointing that the N.E.B. has, for some reasons, rendered λιμός in this context as "hunger" instead of "famine." See my *Apostles of Palestine*, pp. 142 f.

inability to obtain food and drink,"⁶ as in the case of the Prodigal Son. The English versions from the A.V. render the words as "hunger and thirst" or through equivalent adjectives, including individual translations. But these words in Corinthians are followed by more personal experiences—"in fastings often," as if St. Paul remembered some occasions when deprivation was deliberate, whether parallel with the experiences recorded in 1 Cor. 4: 11; or to his later commendation of the ministry, as he would have himself and others know it, "in watchings and fastings" (2 Cor. 6: 5), which rather went together in the exercise of the pastoral office. Self-discipline was involved in fasting, while "famine and drought" he shared with others (as perhaps we may surmise from 2 Cor. 8-9). He wanted the Corinthians to realize that he wrote from the experiences he had been privileged to have with Christians further east—men and women who did not have the opportunity to go to Corinth with her affluent society. Incidentally, however the two words be rendered, they are conspicuous by their absence in the list of the requirements of the ministers of God, who would not of necessity pass their lives in circumstances where "famine and drought" would come their way. Corinth was blessed with two ports.⁸

This "glowing passage,"⁹ enshrining the ideal that abides for the ministers of Christ for ever and a day, occurs in the letter of his apostolic reconciliation,¹⁰ though some were (doubtless) echoes of similar and more personal expressions in the Painful Letter, in which St. Paul vindicated his ministry through his missionary experiences. From the nature of the case some of these were his own—the beatings, the stoning, "by toil and moil," but others were matters of joint-endurance. Not many people are shipwrecked all to themselves! Some of the perils—from robbers to Judaizers—were faced in company. Surely "famine and drought" are here included among the shared experiences, reminiscent of rainless Palestine on some of his visits, or even dating from the times when he was "brought up" in Jerusalem or sat later at "the feet

⁶ *International Critical Commentary*, on 2 Corinthians, p. 328. At Luke 15: 17 the phraseology in Arabic might well mean "perish because of the famine."

⁷ *Non cuius homini contingit adire Corinthum.*

⁸ Cenchræe (8 miles) and Lechaëum (2 miles)—a "location on the high road of commerce from the East to the West" (Craig in *The Interpreter's Bible*, X, p. 3).

⁹ 2 Cor. 6: 3-10.

¹⁰ The readjustment of 2 Corinthians which places chapters 10-13 earlier than chapters 1-7 is accepted.

of Gamaliel."¹¹ These various experiences emphasized his later biddings in his commendation of the Christian ministry, which in forgoing of sleep or food.

an atmosphere of "much patience" would include the purposeful

Of course it is possible to be hungry and thirsty otherwise than during a famine—in the desert for instance, of which Psalm 107 is sufficient evidence. Plummer looks to two O.T. notices outside the Psalter for "perils in the wilderness,"¹² a likely place to "continue three days and have nothing to eat." So it was one never-to-be-forgotten day not far from the Lakeside, when the crowd had reached the end of its resources, and the Lord took the problem of provision into His own hands. This was so that the people should not have to return "unfed" (N.E.B.). This was not just *hungry*, for Mark (and Matthew) use the word connected with *fasting*¹³ rather like Paul the minister in the twin Corinthian passages. For the "five thousand" and their families it had not been involuntary deprivation. They had spent a couple of spring nights "watching" with Him, neglectful of precaution, perhaps natural for a Palestinian, and more so when they learned that "words of life" were "more than meat." It is not for nothing that millions in the world today are "fasters" from their own volition, whether on their acceptance of an obligation in the month of Ramadan—twelve hours at a stretch for thirty days on end—or in the self-discipline of Lent with its different observances in east and west. But it is thus that many learn, Muslim or Christian, some sympathy with the genuinely hungry and thirsty,¹⁴ some of whom suffer from the inequalities of the world supply of foodstuffs, or, like the Apostle, share in the more natural tribulations arising from "famine and drought." Whichever way it is, the juxtaposition of the two campaigns, "Freedom from Hunger" and "Feed the Minds of Millions," constitutes a reminder both of current world situations and of those days in Palestine two millennia ago, when *Christianity* in sincere following of her Master "took western man completely by surprise."¹⁵ "I was *famished* and you gave me food; *thirsty* and you gave me drink" (Matt. 25: 35).

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¹¹ Acts 22: 3. "I was brought up in this city (Jerusalem), and as a pupil of Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained . . ." (N.E.B.).

¹² Deut. 28: 48; Is. 49: 10. The first context might well be rendered "famine and drought."

¹³ Mark 8: 2, 3; Matt. 15: 32. R.S.V. has "hungry." Arabic versions use "fasting" in the appropriate places.

¹⁴ Muslim friends of the older generation in Jerusalem would insist on this discipline as valuable for inculcating sympathy.

¹⁵ Isma'il al-Faruqi, *Arabism and Religion*, p. 72.