

A FAMINE AND FOUR LEPERS

Dr. Daniel Botkin

The Bible tells about a great famine in the days of the prophet Elisha, when the Syrian army besieged the city of Samaria. During this famine, people were paying eighty pieces of silver for the head of a donkey and five pieces of silver for a pint or two of dove's dung. There were two women who were so hungry that they agreed to boil their own babies and eat them, one on one day and the other on the next day. The first woman went through with the gruesome task and shared the flesh of her son with the other woman. Then the next day she complained to the king, because the second woman refused to boil her son. The king got angry and vowed to take off Elisha's head. (See 2 Kings 6.)

We see from this story that famine can result in three things. First, it changes the relative value of things. (Donkey heads and dove's dung are pretty worthless in normal circumstances.) Second, famine causes desperate people to take desperate action. (Mothers do not normally eat their babies.) Third, the righteous often get blamed for the terrible conditions that famine brings. (People want to blame somebody for their suffering.)

The Bible also speaks about spiritual famine: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord Yahweh, 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 Yahweh. And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, and they shall run to and fro to seek the word of Yahweh, and shall not find it (Amos 8:11).

There is a spiritual famine taking place today in many churches and synagogues where people are not hearing the word of Yahweh. In these places we hear the words of this world's wisdom - the words of psychologists and psychiatrists and sociologists - but not the word of Yahweh. We hear testimonies of half-converted celebrities and religious



rock musicians, but not the word of Yahweh. We hear the words of preachers who went to Bible schools where they studied everything except the Bible, but we rarely hear the word of Yahweh that satisfies our deepest longings.

Spiritual famine brings the same three results that physical famine brings. First, it changes the relative value of things. Spiritually-famished people are willing to swallow almost anything they are taught, and they pay a high price for it. Second, spiritual famine makes people desperate. People who lack the spiritual nourishment they need can end up losing their children to the world system by making foolish choices. And third, those in positions of power often blame the righteous for the spiritual famine.

Many of God's people are experiencing this spiritual famine described by Amos. They are wandering from sea to sea and running to and fro, from conference to conference, from seminar to seminar, from church to church, looking for the nourishment their spirit craves. An accurate description of these people is also found in Jeremiah: "My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain

to hill, they have forgotten their resting place" (50:6). Hosea says that God's people "are destroyed for lack of knowledge" and that the reason for their predicament is because "they have forgotten the law of thy God" (4:6).

The people who ate donkey heads and dove's dung in Elisha's day are a pathetic yet accurate picture of spiritually-starved people today. Like the Israelites who paid eighty pieces of silver to eat an unkosher donkey head, many of God's people today give their hard-earned money to false teachers and hireling shepherds who feed them unkosher teachings. Doves are kosher, of course, but the Israelites weren't eating the doves - they were eating the dung that came out of them! Dung is dung, regardless of how kosher its source is. Many false prophets and teachers will draw their teachings from a kosher source - the Bible - but by the time the message is digested by them and passes through them, there is nothing substantial left, and they end up feeding their flock nothing but dung. Dung may fill the belly (or the mind), but it cannot satisfy the appetite.

The woman in Samaria who boiled her son cried out, "Help, my lord, O king!" Likewise, some spiritually-famished people cry out to political leaders for salvation. "Help, O Mr. President, Mr. Congressman, Mr. Senator! Rx our nation's problems!" There is not much hope for salvation to come from political sources, especially when the President is a pervert, when there are Congressmen who are crooked, and when there are Senators who are sodomites. And like King Jehoram, many political leaders do nothing to solve the problem, and just blame the righteous. "It's those ultra-religious right-wing radicals! If we could just get rid of them, our nation's problems would be solved!"

While the people were looking to political leaders and donkey heads and dove's dung as the means of their

survival, God's prophet had the word of Yahweh: The famine would not last much longer, Elisha said. The time was soon coming when there would be so much food available that everybody would be able to eat and be satisfied.

This was the word of the prophet, and I believe it can be the word of Yahweh for our generation if people will repent and turn back to God's holy Torah as Yeshua taught it. If our generation will repent and return, then the spiritual famine will end. Right now God's people "are destroyed for lack of knowledge" because they "have forgotten the Torah" (Hos. 4:6). Things do not have to remain this way, though. God can provide so much spiritual food and make the knowledge of His Torah so available, that no one need starve.

How can such a change come about in our generation? The answer to that question is in the rest of the story.

After Elisha prophesied the end of the famine, four lepers outside the gate of Samaria sat talking to one another about their predicament. They knew it would do them no good to go inside the city, because there was no food there. They also knew they would soon starve if they just continued to sit at the gate. One of the lepers suggested going over to the Syrian camp and surrendering. Maybe the Syrians would have pity on them because they were lepers, and give them a crust of bread and let them live. Maybe the Syrians would kill them, but what did they have to lose? If they just stayed where they were, death was certain, so they headed toward the Syrian camp.

When the four lepers arrived at the camp, they found it completely deserted. The Lord had caused the Syrians to hear a great noise of chariots and horses, and the Syrians had fled in fear and left an abundance of food, clothing, silver and gold. The lepers had stumbled upon a great treasure.

Leprosy is a picture of sin. What leprosy does to the body, sin does to the soul. Mankind is like those four lepers. Some of us knew that there

was no hope for us in the dying world around us, so we went in quest of salvation and found Yeshua of Nazareth, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). The treasures of Torah that we have in Messiah are greater riches than the treasures the four lepers found.

These four lepers started feasting right away, of course. After eating their fill, they began carrying away the rest of the food and treasure and hiding it. They soon realized, though, that there was far more than they could ever use just for themselves. Then they remembered all the starving people back in the city.

This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace," one of them said.

They awoke to their duty and returned to the city to share the good news with the starving people. Wagons were sent out to haul the food to the city, and Elisha's prophecy was fulfilled. The famine had ended.

Someone once said that sharing the gospel is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Like the four lepers, we have a duty to share the good news with starving people. Many people today are paying a high price to false shepherds who feed them unclean meat from the head of a jackass and fill their minds with dove's dung for dessert. We need to let these people know that the real food, the real deliverance, the real treasures of Torah are found in the Messiah Yeshua, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins" and "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 1:14 & 2:3).

"O taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Psalm 34:8)



RELIGIOUS LABELS What Do We Call Ourselves? by Dr. Daniel Botkin

*Worshippers? Messianic Jews?
Sabbath-Keepers? Commandment-Keepers?*

The term most commonly used to describe people who believe in the Messiah is "Christian." However, many people who believe in Yeshua as the Christ (i.e., Messiah) have begun to shun the term "Christian" in recent years. There are a number of reasons for this.

Many Jewish people associate the word *Christian* with persecution, pogroms, forced conversions, etc. Therefore many Jewish believers prefer to call themselves Messianic Jews or Believers.

Some non-Jews shun the "Christian" label for a different reason. They have studied enough to know that the word *Christian* does not mean the same thing today that it meant in the time of the Apostles. Because of all the paganism that has crept into the Church and corrupted Christian worship, these people do not wish to be identified with today's Christianity.

If someone asks me if I am a Christian, I usually answer, "Yes, but..." Many times I feel a need to clarify my answer by explaining the difference between what the term originally meant and what it now means. I am not especially fond of the term *Christian*, for the reasons discussed above, and also for another reason: the word *Christian* is found only three times in the New Testament. There is a different term that I prefer to use to describe a follower of the Messiah, and this word is found 370 times in the New Testament. The word is *disciple*.

Why do most followers of Yeshua identify themselves as "Christian," a word used only three times in the New Testament, and shun the term "disciple," a word used 370 times? The answer should be obvious. The word *disciple* implies a disciplined life and a commitment to the terms of discipleship that Yeshua demanded of His followers. If Yeshua's terms of discipleship are read and seriously considered, most Christians will find that they are not truly His disciples.

I say we resurrect the word *disciple* and make it a part of our vocabulary. If the word is used often enough, maybe it will shame some Christians into becoming true disciples. Q