

Luke 15:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

Analysis

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land (δαπανήσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ πάντα ἐγένετο λιμὸς ἵσχυρὰ, dapanēsantos de autou panta egeneto limos ischyra)—The aorist participle dapanaō (δαπανάω, having spent/squandered) indicates complete depletion. Then external disaster compounds personal folly: a 'strong famine' (limos ischyra, λιμὸς ἵσχυρά) arises. God's common grace had preserved him while he rebelled, but now even natural provision fails.

And he began to be in want (καὶ αὐτὸς ἤρξατο ὑστερεῖσθαι, kai autos ērxato hystereisthai)—The verb hystereō (ὑστερέω, to lack, be in need) describes desperate poverty. The prodigal who sought abundance now experiences destitution. This is sin's trajectory: initial pleasure, progressive enslavement, ultimate poverty. Yet this want becomes the crisis that drives him home (v.17). God uses even famine redemptively.

Historical Context

Famines in the ancient Near East were catastrophic—crop failures meant starvation, death, and social collapse. Without family networks or covenant community, foreign Jewish exiles faced particular vulnerability during food shortages. Local populations prioritized their own, leaving outsiders to perish. The son's self-imposed exile from his father's house now meant exile from the safety

net that sustained others. His rebellion's consequences became viscerally, desperately clear.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does God sometimes use the natural consequences of sin—the 'famine' that follows squandering—to bring you to repentance?
2. In what ways is spiritual poverty (being in want) sometimes God's severe mercy to awaken you to your need?
3. What does the timing—famine after total loss—reveal about God's redemptive use of circumstances to drive rebels homeward?

Interlinear Text

δαπανήσαντος δὲ αὐτὸς πάντα ἐγένετο λιμὸς ἵσχυρὸς
had spent **And** **when he** **all** **there arose** **famine** **a mighty**
G1159 G1161 G846 G3956 G1096 G3042 G2478

κατὰ τὴν χώραν ἐκείνην καὶ αὐτὸς ἤρξατο ὑστερεῖσθαι
in **land** **that** **and** **when he** **he began** **to be in want**
G2596 G5561 G1565 G2532 G846 G756 G5302

Additional Cross-References

2 Chronicles 33:11 (Parallel theme): Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.