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## A Tragic Answer to Prayer (or The Tragedy of God's Second-Best)

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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"He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their souls" (Psalm 106:15).

What a sad 'but' that is! It represents God's frustration and disappointment. It means that God has so left the decision and choice with man that He will not force or coerce. It points to the fact that God has a great intention where His people are concerned but they may miss it.

But when all that has been said, the reason for the tragedy was - and can be - persistent insistence on having what the people who pray want rather than what the Lord had so evidently shown to be His will.

It is therefore possible for God to yield to us, to answer our prayer, and for the result to be an everlasting regret and reproach.

What are the alternatives? The context of the verse in Psalm 106, and the reference to Numbers 6, shows that it all hinged upon the food question.

The Manna was too mysterious, too inscrutable, too delicate, too heavenly, too miraculous, too 'spiritual'. It contrasted with the tangible, certain (?), understandable, and *naturally* gratifying food of Egypt. The fact is that their spiritual life had dropped to such a low level as to make them forget the

tyranny, labour, heartbreak, and groanings in Egypt, and to be in an illusionary mentality about that terrible history. Get spiritually low and the world holds out false attraction. Granted that the life of faith and a supernatural basis of life has trials and difficulties for the flesh and the natural man, but it has a daily miracle of sustenance at its heart. The point of departure with them was whether their own souls were to be gratified or whether they were to be a testimony to the Lord.

The phrase "leanness into their souls" indicates that, firstly, thinness, scantiness, smallness, starvation, tenuity, weakness, and contraction in spiritual stature and measure are quite contrary to a God who is so full, abundant, and beneficent. Such contraction and limitation could never be a testimony to Him.

In the next place, the words indicate that the heavenly, the supernatural, the spiritual, and the way of faith is really the way of spiritual robustness and substance.

How lean-souled many of the Lord's people are! How little many of them and many churches have to give! How rare it is to find those - individually or collectively - who have much more than they need themselves and plenty for others! Starvation conditions are all too common among the Lord's people. There are many reasons for this, but our verse says that it is the preference for the earthly to the heavenly, and an unwillingness to forego the natural for the spiritual. This whole matter is threshed out in the First Letter to the Corinthians, a church characterized by spiritual leanness, weakness, and smallness.

Spiritual leanness can be a judgment. "He *sent* leanness into their souls", while he gave them their request for natural fatness.

At any cost let us set the highest value and importance upon spiritual fulness, the fulness of Christ, and never by any means limit Him, or be instrumental in limiting Him in others!