

Surah 2. Al-Baqara

Asad: And [remember] when you said: "O Moses, indeed we cannot endure but one kind of food; pray, then, to thy Sustainer that He bring forth for us aught of what grows from the earth - of its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, its lentils, its onions." Said [Moses]: "Would you take a lesser thing in exchange for what is [so much] better?"⁴⁶ Go back in shame to Egypt, and then you can have what you are asking for!"⁴⁷ And so, ignominy and humiliation overshadowed them, and they earned the burden of God's condemnation: all this, because they persisted in denying the truth of God's messages and in slaying the prophets against all right: all this, because they rebelled [against God], and persisted in transgressing the bounds of what is right.⁴⁸

Malik: Remember when you said: "O Musa (Moses)! We cannot endure one kind of food; call on your Rabb to give us a variety of food which the earth produces, such as green-herbs, cucumbers, garlic, lentils, and onions. 'What?' Musa asked. 'Would you exchange the better for the worse? If that's what you want go back to some city; there you will find what you have asked for. Gradually they became so degraded that shame and misery were brought upon them and they drew upon themselves the wrath of Allah; this was because they went on rejecting the commandments of Allah and killed His prophets unjustly, furthermore, it was the consequence of their disobedience and transgression.

Mustafa Khattab:

And ?remember? when you said, "O Moses! We cannot endure the same meal ?every day?. So ?just? call upon your Lord on our behalf, He will bring forth for us some of what the earth produces of herbs, cucumbers, garlic, lentils, and onions." Moses scolded ?them?, "Do you exchange what is better for what is worse? ?You can? go down to any village and you will find what you have asked for." They were stricken with disgrace and misery, and they invited the displeasure of Allah for rejecting Allah's signs and unjustly killing the prophets. This is ?a fair reward? for their disobedience and violations.

Pickthall: And when ye said: O Moses! We are weary of one kind of food; so call upon thy Lord for us that he bring forth for us of that which the earth groweth of its herbs and its cucumbers and its corn and its lentils and its onions. He said: Would ye exchange that which is higher for that which is lower? Go down to settled country, thus ye shall get that which ye demand. And humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them and they were visited with wrath from Allah. That was because they disbelieved in Allah's revelations and slew the prophets wrongfully. That was for their disobedience and transgression.

Yusuf Ali: And remember ye said: "O Moses! we cannot endure one kind of food (always); so beseech thy Lord for us to produce for us of what the earth groweth its pot-herbs and cucumbers its garlic lentils and onions." He said: "will ye exchange the better for the worse? Go ye down to any town and ye shall find what ye want!" They were covered with humiliation and misery; they drew on themselves the wrath of Allah. This because they went on rejecting the signs of Allah and slaying His messengers without just cause. This because They rebelled and went on transgressing.^{74 75}

Transliteration: Waith qultum ya moosa lan nasbira AAala taAAamin wahidin faodAAu lana rabbaka yukhrij lana mimma tunbitu alardu min baqliha waqiththaiha wafoomiha waAAadasiha wabasaliha qala atastabdiloona allathee huwa adna biallathee huwa khayrun ihbitoo misran fainna lakum ma saaltum waquribat AAalayhimu althhillatu waalmaskanatu wabaoobighadabin mina Allahi thalika biannahum kanoo yakfuroona biayati Allahi wayaqtuloona alnabiyyeena bighayri alhaqqi thalika bima AAasaw wakanoo yaAatadoona

Author Comments

46 - I.e., "Would you exchange your freedom for the paltry comforts which you enjoyed in your Egyptian captivity?" In the course of their wanderings in the desert of Sinai, many Jews looked back with longing to the comparative security of their life in Egypt, as has been explicitly stated in the Bible (Numbers xi), and is, moreover, evident from Moses' allusion to it in the next sentence of the above Qur'anic passage.

47 - The verb *habata* means, literally, "he went down a declivity"; it is also used figuratively in the sense of falling from dignity and becoming mean and abject (cf. Lane VIII, 2876). Since the bitter exclamation of Moses cannot be taken literally, both of the above meanings of the verb may be combined in this context and agreeably translated as "go back in shame to Egypt".

48 - This passage obviously refers to a later phase of Jewish history. That the Jews actually did kill some of their prophets is evidenced, for instance, in the story of John the Baptist, as well as in the more general accusation uttered, according to the Gospel, by Jesus: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee" (Matthew xxiii, 37). See also Matthew xxiii, 34-35, Luke xi, 51 - both of which refer to the murder of Zachariah - and I Thessalonians ii, 15. The implication of continuity in, or persistent repetition of, their wrongdoing transpires from the use of the auxiliary verb *kana* in this context.

74 - The declension of the word *Misr* in the Arabic text here shows that it is treated as a common noun meaning any town, but this is not conclusive, and the reference may be to the Egypt of Pharaoh. The *Tanwin* expressing indefiniteness may mean "any Egypt", i.e., any country as fertile as Egypt. There is here a subtle reminiscence as well as a severe reproach. The rebellious children of Israel murmured at the sameness of the food they got in the desert. They were evidently hankering after the delicacies of the Egypt which they had left, although they should have known that the only thing certain for them in Egypt was their bondage and harsh treatment. Moses's reproach to them was twofold: (1) Such variety of foods you can get in any town; would you, for their sake, sell your freedom? Is not freedom better than delicate food? (2) In front is the rich Promised Land, which you are reluctant to march to; behind is Egypt, the land of bondage. Which is better? Would you exchange the better for the worse?

75 - From here the argument becomes more general. They got the Promised Land. But they continued to rebel against God. And their humiliation and misery became a national disaster. They were carried in captivity to Assyria. They were restored under the Persians, but still remained under the Persian yoke, and they were under the yoke of the Greeks, the Romans, and Araba. They were scattered all over the earth, and have been a wandering people ever since, because they rejected faith, slew God's messengers and went on transgressing.

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