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THE PREPOSITION *B* IN ISAIAH 27:13

by F. C. FENSHAM

WE are glad to publish this short study of an interesting point in the grammar and translation of a verse in the "Isaiah Apocalypse". Dr. Fensham is a young South African theologian who has been introduced to THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY by our Editorial Correspondent in that country, the Rev. J. Norval Geldenhuys.

ALL the modern translations of Isaiah 27: 13 render the preposition *b* before 'eretz 'Ashshur and 'eretz Mitzrayim by "in" or "to".¹ The same translation and idea is present in all the modern commentaries.² The translation of the Authorized Version runs as follows: "and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt". Grammatically this translation is possible. It was never questioned as far as my knowledge goes. The very same translation is also present in the Greek version.³ But it is interesting to note that the Latin version gives "*de* terra Assyriorum" for the first *b*, but "*in* terra Aegypti" for the second. Is there any evidence in or outside the Old Testament for translating *b* by "from"? Or is it by chance that it is translated *de* in the Latin version?

It seems to me more likely that this passage should be translated as follows: "and the lost shall come *from* the land of Assyria, and the outcasts *from* the land of Egypt".

The Grammars of Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley and Joüon mention only the partitive use of *b* in sharing something with another.⁴

¹ Cf. A.V., R.V., New Dutch Version, Brouwer's Version, Afrikaans Version, Lutheran Version, the translation of Buber-Rosenzweig, Norwegian Version, Swedish Version, etc.

² Cf. G. B. Gray, *ad loc.*; Duhm *ad loc.*; Van der Flier *ad loc.*; Ridderbos *ad loc.*, etc., also the monographs of Van Ravesteijn: *De eenheid der eschatologiese voorstellingen in het boek Jesaja* (Utrecht, 1910) and Mulder: *Die Teologie van die Jesaja-Apokalipse* (Groningen, 1954).

³ ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τῶν Ἀσσυρίων ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ.

⁴ Cf. *shathah b*, "to drink from" or "of something". Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, 1949[1910]), § 119 m.; Joüon, *Grammaire de l'Hébreu Biblique* (Rome, 1947), § 133 c.

This is also the case with all the standard dictionaries.⁵ It is possible, however, as a result of our knowledge of the Ugaritic language, to come to a new conclusion. In the Ugaritic texts the use of *b* with the meaning "from" is strongly attested.⁶ Gordon gives a list of places in the Old Testament where *b* is probably to be translated "from".⁷ Also in the Phoenician inscription of Eshmunazar of Sidon *b* is used with the meaning "from".⁸ Presumably the Egyptian preposition *m* is also to be translated "in" or "from".⁹ While *b* is attested to mean "from" in Ugaritic and Phoenician, which are closely related to Hebrew and especially to the language of Canaan before the Israelitic conquest, and while in quite a few places in the Old Testament *b* is to be translated "from", I am convinced that *b* should be rendered "from" in Isaiah 27: 13. The translation then runs much more smoothly and is grammatically sure.

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⁵ Cf. Köhler-Baumgartner, *Brown-Driver-Briggs and Gesenius-Buhl*.

⁶ C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Handbook* (Rome, 1947), § 10: 5.

⁷ Dt. 8: 7, Judg. 20: 18, 2 Kings 2: 9, Am. 6: 6.

⁸ Cf. lines 6 and 21. Also C-F. Jean, *Dictionnaire des Inscriptions Sémitiques de l'Ouest* (Leiden, 1954).

⁹ Cf. Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (London, 1950), § 162: 8, *Pr m*, "go out from", etc.