

Numbers 11:31-35

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After the seventy men had been commissioned, the LORD then met the people's desire for meat in their diet. He caused a wind to blow countless quail into the Israelite camp to supply this meat. As it turned out, this was both a blessing and a curse because not only did the LORD accommodate the people, He also judged them for their lack of gratefulness by sending a plague upon them through the meat.

The complaint of the people earlier in this chapter was that they had no meat to eat. They had only manna, which they were weary of at this point. In response, *there went forth a wind from the Lord and it brought quail from the sea* (v. 31). The word for “wind” here is the same one for “Spirit” in verses 17 and 26. The LORD used the “wind” (“ruah”) to meet the people’s need for meat in their diet, and the LORD used the “Spirit” (“ruah”) to enable Moses and the seventy to be able to deal the people and their needs.

That the wind was “from the sea” was unusual, since quail (most probably the European or “Common” quail which are known to migrate through the Sinai peninsula) usually flew northeast from central Africa. To cause them to fly “from the sea” meant that the wind was from the southeast (Psalm 78:26 – 28), from the Gulf of Aqabah and to the northwest across Sinai. This unusual event was no doubt a miraculous work of the LORD.

When the quail reached the camp, the LORD *let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side*. This means that there were so many quail that they covered the ground for miles (“a day’s journey”) in every direction. The coverage of quail was *all around the camp and about two cubits deep on the surface of the ground*.

A “cubit” was around eighteen inches (or around 46 cm.), making the coverage around three feet deep. Some have taken this to mean that the quail flew three feet off the ground, and the people plucked them out of the air. Others have taken it to mean that the piles of quail were around three feet deep. The Hebrew text is ambiguous as to how this is to be viewed.

Whatever it means, *the people spent all day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail* (v. 32). The people, it seems, were obsessed with gathering as much quail as they could because that was what they did for two days and two nights. Their greedy endeavor resulted in *he who gathered least gathered ten homers*. Ten homers was equivalent to sixty bushels, which was quite a bit of quail. And given the number of people who gathered the quail, the amount of available quail must have been staggering. In their pride, *they spread them out for themselves all around the camp* to show off and brag about what they accumulated.

Earlier, while at Mount Sinai, the people engaged in an orgy of paganism (Exodus 32). Here, they had an orgy of gluttony. The scene was one of the people gorging themselves with quail meat. However, something happened *while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was*

chewed (v. 33). The phrases *while the meat was still between their teeth* and *before it was chewed* indicate that the people had just barely started to eat the quail meat. They were not even able to enjoy it before *the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people*.

The next verse (v. 34) states the reason why the LORD was angry—the people were “greedy.” Greediness and self-centeredness were not traits that the LORD wanted for His people. Instead, He wanted them to rely upon Him, in humble obedience, and love their neighbors as themselves (Leviticus 19:18).

The result of the LORD’s anger was that *the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague*. The nature of the “plague” was not given here. Regardless, the plague resulted in many people dying.

As a result of so many people dying from this plague, *the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah* (v. 34). The name *Kibroth-hattaavah* means “the graves of the craving.” The location of this place is unknown. It was named this *because there they buried the people who had been greedy*. Perhaps the people who were killed here were the ones that were obsessed with gathering all the quail they could for themselves, and were the most eager to consume the quail.

It seems that the LORD does not want His people to crave earthly things as their top priority. Jesus teaches us that if we will crave following His ways, we will have ample things of this world (Matthew 6:33). Romans tells us that God’s wrath is poured out upon any who lust by granting them that which they crave. But it turns out to be a curse rather than a blessing (Romans 1:24,26,28).

The LORD wants us to love Him and crave His grace, not the world (1 John 2:15). This is because God loves us, and seeks our best. He desires that we have life, and have it abundantly (John 10:10). Following His ways leads us to life. Even though the world lures us to follow its ways, they lead to death (Romans 6:23).

Following this failure, *from Kibroth-hattaavah the people set out for Hazeroth, and they remained at Hazeroth* (v. 35). The exact location of “Hazeroth” is not known, but it was the location of where the events of the next chapter occurred ([See Map](#)).

Biblical Text

³¹ Now there went forth a wind from the Lord and it brought quail from the sea, and let *them* fall beside the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and a day’s journey on the other side, all around the camp and about two cubits *deep* on the surface of the ground. ³² The people spent all day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers) and they spread *them* out for themselves all around the camp. ³³ While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague. ³⁴ So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had been greedy. ³⁵ From Kibroth-hattaavah the people set out for Hazeroth, and they remained at Hazeroth.