

Job 30:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Who cut up mallows by the bushes, and juniper roots for their meat.

Analysis

Who cut up mallows by the bushes (הַקֹּטְפִים מַלּוּחַ מְלִי־שִׁיחַ)—The participle describes ongoing action: 'plucking' (קֹטְפִים, qotfim) maluach (מַלּוּחַ, saltbush or orache), a bitter shrub eaten only in desperate hunger. These grew among siach (שִׁיחַ, bushes/scrub). **And juniper roots for their meat** (וְשֹׁשְׁבִי רִתְמִים לֶחֶם)—The roots of retamim (רִתְמִים, broom tree/juniper) became their 'bread' (לֶחֶם, lechem), an ironic reversal of staff-of-life imagery.

The detailed botanical description isn't ornamental—it shows outcasts surviving on plants even animals avoid. Elijah sheltered under a broom tree in suicidal despair (1 Kings 19:4); these people ate its roots. The passage confronts comfortable religion with extreme poverty's degrading reality. Jesus, who had 'no place to lay his head' (Matthew 8:20), identified with such radical dispossession.

Historical Context

The Malluach (saltbush) and Retamim (broom tree) are both desert shrubs found in the Negev and surrounding wilderness areas. Ancient sources confirm these were famine foods, eaten only when all else failed. The broom tree provided minimal shade but had woody, nearly inedible roots—making Job's description all the more poignant.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does Job's botanical precision force readers to confront the concrete reality of poverty?
2. In what ways does our theology address (or ignore) the most economically marginalized?
3. How does Jesus's voluntary poverty inform Christian response to those eating 'mallows and juniper roots' today?

Interlinear Text

הַקֹּטֵף יִם	מַל וִם	עֲלֵי	שׁ יִם	וְשׁ רֶשׁ	רִתְּמֵ יִם	לֶחֶמָם:
Who cut up	mallows	H5921	by the bushes	roots	and juniper	for their meat
H6998	H4408		H7880	H8328	H7574	H3899

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