

Numbers 11:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?

Analysis

Moses' continued doubt: 'there are six hundred thousand footmen' (Hebrew ragli, רַגְלִי—men of war, foot soldiers) specifies the enormity of the congregation. This number (600,000 fighting men) suggests a total population of 2-3 million including women, children, and elderly. Moses emphasizes the scale of the challenge: how could anyone feed such a multitude in the wilderness? His focus on numbers reveals human perspective that measures problems by their magnitude rather than by God's power.

The question 'and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month' contrasts God's promise with apparent impossibility. The pronoun 'thou' emphasizes that this was God's promise, not Moses' idea. Moses essentially says, 'You promised this, but I don't see how it's possible.' This represents the struggle of faith—believing God's word despite visible impossibility. The tension between divine promise and human calculation appears throughout Scripture, resolved always by God proving His word true regardless of circumstances.

This verse captures a crucial moment: the servant of God wrestling with doubt while still committed to God's service. Moses didn't abandon his calling or refuse to speak God's message, but he struggled internally with the logistics. This honest struggling faith differs from Israel's rebellious unbelief—Moses brought his doubt to God (verse 21-22) while Israel complained against God (verses 4-6). The

distinction is vital: faith can include questions directed to God, but unbelief makes accusations about God.

Historical Context

The figure of 600,000 men matches the census numbers in Numbers 1:46 and 26:51. This large population meant enormous daily needs—water, food, and organization. The wilderness of Sinai/Paran couldn't naturally support such numbers, requiring continuous divine provision. Historical and archaeological debate continues about how literally to interpret these numbers, but the text's theological point remains clear: Israel's needs far exceeded natural provision, requiring supernatural intervention. Whether the numbers are literal or represent military units/tribal divisions, the principle stands—God provides what human resources cannot.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Moses' focus on the size of the problem ('six hundred thousand footmen') illustrate the danger of measuring difficulties by their magnitude rather than by God's power?
2. What does Moses' bringing his doubt directly to God (rather than speaking it to the people) teach about proper handling of struggles with faith?

3