

Numbers 11:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp.

Analysis

The statement 'And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day' describes sustained, exhausting labor gathering quail. The verb 'stood up' (Hebrew *qam*, *qā*) implies active rising and working, not passive standing. For thirty-six continuous hours, Israel engaged in frenzied gathering, driven by craving not hunger. This excessive effort expended on satisfying fleshly appetite contrasts sharply with their frequent laziness regarding spiritual obedience. Sinners will labor intensely for what cannot satisfy while resisting work that would bring genuine blessing.

The phrase 'he that gathered least gathered ten homers' establishes the minimum quantity, implying many gathered far more. Ten homers (approximately 220 liters or 58 gallons each) represents massive excess—far more than any family could consume before spoiling. This compulsive hoarding revealed hearts ruled by greed, not gratitude. They treated God's provision as scarce commodity to be stockpiled rather than daily gift to be received with thanksgiving. Their behavior violated the manna-principle: gather what you need for today, trust God for tomorrow (Exodus 16:19-20).

The detail 'and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp' indicates preservation efforts—spreading quail for drying or salting. Yet their plans proved futile. Before they could enjoy their hoarded supply, 'the LORD smote the

people with a very great plague' (verse 33). The irony is devastating: they gathered obsessively but died before tasting their abundance. This warns that earthly accumulation provides no security—death can come before we enjoy what we've hoarded. Only treasures laid up in heaven are secure (Matthew 6:19-21).

Historical Context

The ten-homer minimum is staggering: if the camp had 600,000 men plus women and children (perhaps 2-3 million total), and each gathered at least ten homers, the total would be 20-30 million homers (4.4-6.6 billion liters). Even accounting for hyperbolic ancient Near Eastern numbers conventions, the quantity was clearly enormous and far exceeded need. The preservation method (spreading around the camp) was standard ancient Near Eastern practice for drying meat, but the futility of these preparations emphasizes the tragedy: they labored to preserve what would never be eaten because divine judgment would strike before consumption.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does the people's willingness to labor exhaustively for quail (while often resisting spiritual obedience) illustrate the sinful human tendency to work hard for what cannot satisfy while avoiding what truly matters?
2. What does the futility of their preservation efforts teach about the insecurity of earthly accumulation and the importance of eternal perspective?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּקָּם	וְהָעָם	כָּל	יּוֹם	הַהוּא	וְכָל	לַיְלָה
stood up	And the people	H3605	all that day	H1931	H3605	and all that night
H6965	H5971		H3117			H3915
וְכָל	יּוֹם	וְהַיּוֹמָה	אָסְפוּ	אֶת	הַשְּׂלָו	
H3605	all that day	and all the next	and they gathered	H853	the quails	
	H3117	H4283	H622		H7958	
הַמִּמְעַיִט	אָסְפוּ	עֶשְׂרֵה	חֲמֵרִים	שָׂטוּ		
he that gathered least	and they gathered	ten	homers	and they spread		
H4591	H622	H6235	H2563	H7849		
לָהֶם	שָׂטוּ	סָבִיב	הַמַּחֲנֶה:			
H0	and they spread	for themselves round about	the camp			
	H7849	H5439	H4264			

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 45:11 (Parallel theme): The ephah and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of an homer, and the ephah the tenth part of an homer: the measure thereof shall be after the homer.

Exodus 16:36 (Parallel theme): Now an omer is the tenth part of an ephah.