

The QUAIL

in Numbers chapter 11 **were** / are ...

"Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought **quail** from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. And the people stayed up all that day, 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. But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed [*cut (off)*], the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving." (Numbers 11:31-34)

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a somewhat

familiar food (Ex. 16:13)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

able to be

dried & stored (11:32)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

also in

Psalms 78:26-31

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

an indication

of God's anger & power

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

both

delicious & dangerous

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

brought near

by God's wind (Psa. 78:26)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

deadly

for many (11:33, Psa. 78:31)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Descriptive



Common (European) Quail

Meditation

* * *

eaten

for a whole month (11:19-20)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

like and unlike

the quail in Exodus 16:13

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

passing by

during their migration

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* *

somewhat like

Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2, 12:7-9)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

to correct

the people (Psa. 78:26-31)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

to deal with

the mixed multitude (11:4)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

to remove

many lustful troublemakers

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

to show the need

for self-control (11:33-34)

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

* * *

very different

from the manna

(Agree? yes, no, partly)

Directions: after reading through **Numbers chapter 11**, Psalm 78:24-32, and some quality articles on Common European Quail, consider and discuss how the quail in Numbers chapter 11 are described above. (Caution: the quail incident in Numbers 11 is not same as the earlier one in Exodus 16.) **Do you agree with the various points made? Would you change them in some ways? At the end, discuss the most important descriptive phrases and make applications.** In this, think about why God chose to use dangerous (seasonally poisonous) quail in such great numbers. Various points in the bottom row above are about this. — © 2022 by Jon F. Mahar, Hakusan City, Japan and Alexander, Maine, U.S.A.

Why did God send deadly quail?

The Lord was angry at the lustful people who complained about the manna and the lack of meat (Numbers 11:4-10, 33). Unlike earlier in Exodus, chapter 16, his anger is clearly seen since many died. So many who craved the familiar Egyptian food were removed, and the number of troublemakers who opposed Moses (11:4, Psa. 78:31) was reduced. (Notice that the quail were sent in answer to Moses' prayer.)

What was the great plague in 11:33?

This verse shows that the plague was associated with eating quail. From ancient times, it has been known that Common European Quail often eat poisonous plants or seeds during their fall migration from Europe to Africa. So they become poisonous for humans to eat though the quail themselves are not harmed. During the spring migration from Egypt to Europe the quail do not eat the same food. So they are safe to eat in the spring. The quail in Exodus chapter 16 were spring quail, but those in Numbers chapter 11 were not.

Why didn't everyone die?

Perhaps some people, Moses for instance, refused to eat the quail, choosing to continue to eat only manna. In addition, probably some of the quail had not eaten the poisonous plants. Ultimately, God made the difference by protecting some but not others.

Why is the quail story controversial?

First, scholars who distrust the Scriptures falsely claim there was only one story originally and that biblical authors got confused and turned the original story into two different ones. Thus they err by ignoring the seasonal difference in quail mentioned above.

Second, how could the quail poison the people before they even chewed the meat (11:33)? The simplest answer to this is that God can do anything whenever and however he wishes, but perhaps there is another answer. The term often translated "chewed" means to cut and often means to cut off. So 11:33 may simply mean that the plague or poisoning began before the huge supply was cut off or exhausted.

How could a loving God send poisonous quail to his people?

The simplest answer is that some of the people were probably not true believers. This is implied by the "mixed multitude" phrase in 11:4. (See First Corinthians 10:1-12.) Later in Numbers 21:4-9, the Lord sent vipers among the people because of their complaining. Yet, God's love was shown through the provision of salvation, the brazen serpent in 21:8-9. Ultimately, this pointed to the death of Christ (John 3:14-15) and to the love of God (John 3:16).

What are the applications?

We should not be like those who complained and lusted for the food that they had eaten in Egypt. Since we have been born again from above, we should live differently, by faith, being content with the Lord's provision. (See 1 Cor. 10:6, Phil. 4:11-12, and Heb. 13:5, and notice that there is an emphasis in Numbers 11:21-24 on the Lord's ability to provide.) This requires faith-based self-control (2 Pet. 1:5-7) regarding food, in marriage (Hebrews 13:4-5), and in other ways. The message here is not just about food.