

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Eighteenth Week - Tuesday

GOD PROVIDES QUAIL

"Then you shall say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of Yahweh, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt." Therefore Yahweh will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised Yahweh who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?"'" (Numbers 11:18-20).

When all the purposes of Israel's sojourn among the Sinai mountains had been accomplished, the signal for their departure was given. This was on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year of their departure from Egypt. Miraculously guided, the tribes proceeded for three days till they came to the wilderness of Paran, and there they were directed to pitch their tents.

At this place the people began to murmur, from what cause we are not told, but the indulgence allowed to their weakness on their first departure from Egypt is no longer conceded. They now have a law and know what it expects from them; and by that law they must be judged. So the fire of Yahweh came and "consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp." The judgment was recognized as his punishment for their sin, and the name of Taberah, or *the burning*, was given to the spot in sorrowful memory of the event.

Since the Israelites encamped in a most orderly manner--according to their tribes, those in the outermost parts of the camp must surely have been the mixed multitude that we have had former occasion to notice. How little they profited by this punishment is seen by the fact that a new and more serious murmuring arose among them at the very next station, which spread rapidly among the tribes. "Mixed multitude" hardly conveys the contemptuous force of the original. They have before been called a "rabble." They are now called the A-SAR-SEF--the force of which can perhaps only be conveyed by such strictly analogous terms as riff-raff or ruff-scuff. However, this term rather denotes their moral and social disorganization than their low estate in this world's possessions; for poverty, low birth, and destitution are in themselves never mentioned with disrespect or contempt in the books of Moses.

And what would one suppose ails them now? A lack of food or water perhaps? No. They have become finicky! They have had their limit of manna; their soul loathes "this light food," as they contemptuously call it. They long for the fish, the flesh, the vegetables they had eaten in Egypt. Now let us not sympathize with them but consider that all their needs were provided day-by-day without any care, thought, or labor on their part. The poorest of them had as much wholesome food as he could eat, without cost, whereas in Egypt it was purchased with stripes and hard toil.

This murmuring awakened the deep displeasure of their Divine King. In fact, Moses himself must have begun to suspect that this generation, fresh from their bondage in Egypt, was hardly fit for the vocation to which it had been called. In his dejection he cries to Yahweh, "Why have You afflicted your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? . . . I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me."

Because the Lord had great pity on his fainting servant, seventy elders were appointed to assist him. But this was not all--the much coveted flesh was promised not for one day only, nor for two, nor for five, nor for ten, nor for twenty, but even for a whole month. The promised supply was provided by immense flocks of quail that poured into the camp, being brought up from the direction of the sea by a strong wind. The people stood up all that day and night, and the following day, to secure an ample provision. But although their request was granted, the flesh greedily collected and ravenously devoured "was still between their teeth" when a great pestilence broke out among them. It is not said how many died, but from the number being buried the place took the name of Kibroth-hattaavah, "the graves of lust."

Thus were they taught the wisdom of leaving the supply of their needs to the will of Him who watched over them with paternal care, and who knew what was best for them in all the circumstances of their condition. It is very possible that the inordinate indulgence in animal food, after long abstinence from it, became the instrument of their punishment. It is known that dangerous and often fatal maladies are frequently thus produced by a change in diet. Some have thought that the quails themselves might at this time be "out of season" and therefore unwholesome. But this same food at the same season the preceding year had been eaten with no ill effects; but at that time they had been too recently removed from Egypt to be affected by a change of diet.