

Numbers 31 Commentary

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Source: Ryrie Study Bible

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS "Wilderness Wandering"								
WALKING Numbers 1-12			WANDERING Numbers 13-25			WAITING Numbers 26-36		
Counting & Camping Nu 1-4	Cleansing & Congregation Nu 5-8	Carping & Complaining Nu 9-12	12 Spies & Death in Desert Nu 13-16	Aaron & Levites in Wilderness Nu 17-18	Serpent of Brass & Story of Balaam Nu 21-25	Second Census 7 Laws of Israel Nu 26-30	Last Days of Moses as Leader Nu 31-33	Sections, Sanctuaries & Settlements Nu 34-36
Law & Order			Rebellion & Disorder			New Laws for the New Order		
Old Generation			Tragic Transition			New Generation		
Preparation for the Journey: Moving Out			Participation in the Journey: Moving On			Prize at end of the Journey: Moving In		
At Sinai Mt Sinai			To Moab Mt Hor			At Moab Mt Nebo		
En Route to Kadesh (Mt Sinai)			En Route to Nowhere (Wilderness)			En Route to Canaan (Plains of Moab)		
A Few Weeks to 2 Months			38 years, 3 months, 10 days			A Few Months		
Christ in Numbers = Our "Lifted-up One" (Nu 21:9, cp Jn 3:14-15)								
Author: Moses								

Numbers 31:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

OUTLINE OF NUMBERS 31 -

- Mobilization of the troops (Nu 31:1–5)
- The war itself (Nu 31:6–13)
- The death of the captive women (Nu 31:14–18)
- The purification of the warriors and booty (Nu 31:19–24)
- The distribution of the booty (Nu 31:25–54)

**HOLY VENGEANCE
 UNHOLY WOMEN**

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Jewish Torah Readings - [Matot, Mattot, Mattoth, or Matos](#) (מַטּוֹת — Hebrew for "tribes", the fifth word, and the first distinctive word, in the parashah) is the 42nd [weekly Torah portion](#) (פַּרְשָׁה, *parashah*) in the annual Jewish cycle of [Torah reading](#) and the ninth in the [Book of Numbers](#). It constitutes Numbers 30:2–32:42. It discusses laws of vows, the destruction of Midianite towns, and negotiations of the Reubenites and Gadites to settle land outside of Israel.

Wiersbe - Though the people of Israel were wrong in getting entangled with the Midianites at Baal Peor, Midian was wrong in following Balaam's counsel and trying to destroy Israel. Those who curse Israel, God will curse (Gen. 12:1-3), and the time had come for God to punish Midian (25:16-18).[Moab had also been involved in the seduction at Baal Peor (Nu 25:1), but since the Moabites were relatives of the Jews, God spared them (Deut. 2:8-9). For the same reason, God wouldn't allow Israel to engage the Ammonites.] This battle would be a "dress rehearsal" for the battles Israel would fight in the land of Canaan. But this would be Moses' last battle; then he would meet "the last enemy" which is death (1 Cor. 15:26). (Be Counted)

Numbers 31:2 "Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your people."

- Avenge: Nu 31:3 25:17,18 De 32:35 Jdg 16:24,28-30 Ps 94:1-3 Isa 1:24 Na 1:2 Lu 21:22 Ro 12:19 13:4 1Th 4:6 Heb 10:30 Rev 6:10 Rev 18:20 19:2
- the Midianites: Nu 25:6,14-18 Ge 25:1-4 Ex 2:16
- gathered: Nu 27:13 Ge 15:15 25:8,17 Jud 2:10 Ac 13:36
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Justice and Divine Vengeance Pursuing Crime
by Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, c. 1805–1808

Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites- Paul taught about the Lord's vengeance in Romans "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord." (Ro 12:19) Here God uses His chosen people to extract justice and vengeance.

Take full vengeance in Nu 31:2 is a combination of the verb *naqam* and the noun *neqamah* which emphasizes the necessity of Moses and the sons of Israel following through on Yahweh's command!

Vengeance (noun)(05359)([naqam - click for detailed study](#) from the verbal root *nqm* which expresses the notion of revenge) is the act of taking revenge (harming someone in retaliation for something harmful that they have done). It refers to punishment inflicted or retribution exacted for an injury or wrong and can refer to punishment beyond what is physical. **Naqam** is translated in the Septuagint in this verse with [ekdikeyo](#) (**ek** = out or from + **dike** = right, justice; see cognates = [ekdikesis](#) and [ekdikos](#)) is literally that which proceeds from justice. The idea is to vindicate one's right or to do one justice. In Isaiah 61:2+ **naqam** is translated with the Greek noun [antapodosis](#) (from **anti** = in turn + **apodidomi** = render. cp related verb = [antapodidomi](#) = give back in return for something received) which describes the action of recompensing, repaying or rewarding and stresses the action of giving back an equivalent which depending on the context can be positive or negative "payback." In the case of Isa 61:2a the sense is negative and speaks of God's coming judgment on Israel.

Take vengeance (verb)(05358)(**naqam**) means to avenge, take vengeance, revenge, avenge oneself, be avenged, be punished. (*Qal*) to avenge, take vengeance, to entertain revengeful feelings. (*Niphal*) to avenge oneself, to suffer vengeance (*Piel*) to avenge. The first use in Ge 4:15 has "whoever kills Cain, **vengeance will be taken** on him sevenfold." In Lev 19:18 individual in Israel are instructed "You shall not **take vengeance**, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people" On the other hand Yahweh has the right to vengeance declaring "I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant." (Lev 26:25). The last OT use in Nahum 1:2 gives us a good sense of the meaning as it applies to divine vengeance - "A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD **takes vengeance** on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies." God allows and uses men to take vengeance as Numbers 31 and also in the case of Samson when he "called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time, O God, that I may at once **be avenged** of the Philistines for my two eyes." (Jdg 16:28) That God is a God of righteous, just, holy, perfect vengeance should comfort all who have been unfairly treated, injured, etc in this life, for Deuteronomy 32:43 says "Rejoice, O nations, with His people; For He will avenge (verb *naqam*) the blood of His servants, And will render vengeance (noun *naqam*) on His adversaries, And will atone (*kaphar*) for His land and His people."

Naqam (verb) - 31v - [avenge](#)(9), [avenged](#)(5), [avenger](#)(2), [avenging](#)(2), [exact](#)(1), [execute](#)(1), [punished](#)(1), [revengeful](#)(1), [take](#)(2), [take revenge](#)(1), [take vengeance](#)(4), [taken](#)(1), [takes vengeance](#)(1), [taking](#)(1), [vengeance shall be taken](#)(1), [vengeance will be taken](#)(1). Gen. 4:15; Gen. 4:24; Exod. 21:20; Exod. 21:21; Lev. 19:18; Lev. 26:25; Num. 31:2; Deut. 32:43; Jos. 10:13; Jdg. 15:7; Jdg. 16:28; 1 Sam. 14:24; 1 Sam. 18:25; 1 Sam. 24:12; 2 Ki. 9:7; Est. 8:13; Ps. 8:2; Ps. 44:16; Ps. 99:8; Isa. 1:24; Jer. 5:9; Jer. 5:29; Jer. 9:9; Jer. 15:15; Jer. 46:10; Jer. 50:15; Jer. 51:36; Ezek. 24:8; Ezek. 25:12; Ezek. 25:15; Nah. 1:2

Vengeance (noun)([05360](#))(**neqamah** from [naqam](#) - vengeance) is a noun means avengement, the taking of revenge, punishment. The first two uses are in Numbers 31:2-3 in context of the sin of the Midianites against Israel at Baal of Peor (Nu 25:1-3+)

TWOT - Although this root, including its derivatives, is only used about seventy times in the OT, it expresses a truth that is theologically important, but greatly misunderstood. Vengeance and revenge are ideas that would appear to have no good ethical validity whether coming from God or man. But such is not the case when the use of this root is properly understood in its OT setting and NT application. The concept of divine vengeance must be understood in the light of OT teaching about the holiness and justice of God and its effect on man as a sinner. In terms of the presuppositions of some modern "Christian" theologies, such a God of vengeance will be labeled unchristian and unethical. Understood in the full orb of biblical revelation, balanced as it is by the mercy of God, divine vengeance is seen to be a necessary aspect of the history of redemption.

VENGEANCE — punishment in retaliation for an injury or offense; repayment for a wrong suffered. The Levitical law prescribed, "You shall not take vengeance" (Lev. 19:18). Only God was qualified to take vengeance, because His acts were based on His holiness, righteousness, and justice, which punishes sin and vindicates the oppressed and the poor in spirit (Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19). (NNIBD)

Num. 31:2; Num. 31:3; Jdg. 11:36; 2 Sam. 4:8; 2 Sam. 22:48; Ps. 18:47; Ps. 79:10; Ps. 94:1; Ps. 149:7; Jer. 11:20; Jer. 20:10; Jer. 20:12; Jer. 46:10; Jer. 50:15; Jer. 50:28; Jer. 51:6; Jer. 51:11; Jer. 51:36; Lam. 3:60; Ezek. 25:14; Ezek. 25:15; Ezek. 25:17

Afterward you will be gathered to your people- This is a euphemistic way (a "poetic expression") to say he is going to die, but otherwise the meaning is uncertain. The reference from 2 Kings below certainly suggests that it at least in part refers to literally being buried in a **grave** (Hebrew word [geber](#) means grave, tomb, sepulcher and same verb [asaph](#) is used for "gather" in both passages).

Three other times Moses is told he will be gathered to his people...

Deuteronomy 32:50 "Then die on the mountain where you ascend, and **be gathered to your people**, as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people,

Numbers 27:13 "When you have seen it, **you too will be gathered to your people**, as Aaron your brother was;

Deuteronomy 32:50 "Then die on the mountain where you ascend, and **be gathered to your people**, as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people,

Gathered to (one's) people - (to his) Gen. 25:8; Gen. 25:17; Gen. 35:29; Gen. 49:33; Num. 20:24; Num. 20:26; Deut. 32:50 (to your) Num. 27:13; Num. 31:2; Deut. 32:50; 2 Ki. 22:20; 2 Chr. 34:28 (to their) Jdg 2:10

2 Kings 22:20 "Therefore, behold, I will **gather you** (KING JOSIAH) **to your fathers**, and you will be **gathered** ([asaph](#)) **to your grave** in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place." So they brought back word to the king.

Gathered to his people - G A Lee in ISBE (Revised) has this note on **gather** - Of the significant or unusual uses of the term, perhaps most interesting is its use in contexts of death. Most frequent in these contexts is the expression "**to be gathered** [Heb [ne'ēsap](#), lit "to be added"] **to one's people**." This expression is used of Abraham (Gen. 25:8), Ishmael (25:17), Isaac (35:29), Jacob (49:29, 33), Moses (Nu. 27:13; 31:2; Dt. 32:50), and Aaron (Nu. 20:24; Dt. 32:50); perhaps it was intentionally restricted to this select group. A similar expression, "to be gathered to one's fathers," occurs only in Jdgs. 2:10 and 2 Ki. 22:20 (par 2 Chr. 34:28); the former passage concerns all of Joshua's generation, who "served the Lord" (v 7), and the latter passage is about Josiah (note that this passage adds the phrase "be gathered to your grave in peace"; for the significance of this and other apparent references to burial see below). The qal of ['āsap](#) is used in apparently abbreviated forms of these expressions (Jgs. 18:25; 1 S. 15:6; Job 34:14; Ps. 26:9; 104:29; cf. Nu. 20:26, where the niphal of ['āsap](#) occurs alone, with apparently the same meaning as the fuller expression; cf. also Isa. 57:1).

The meaning of these expressions is debated. Archeologists have found family graves with evidence of secondary burial and have concluded that these expressions refer to such group interment (see Kenyon, p. 263). This idea finds biblical support in several passages that mention the “gathering” (Heb ’sp) of bodies or bones (Jer. 8:1f.; 25:33; Ezk. 29:5). Some, e.g., Meyers, add that the expression “to be gathered to one’s people” reflects not only a family burial but also a belief in the afterlife—in SHEOL the whole family of Israel is assembled (see also BURIAL IV). Tromp (p. 168) holds that this sense of reunion in Sheol developed from the practice of family burials, and that this development occurred before the biblical texts were written. For Heidel and others the expression refers only to the afterlife; it cannot refer to burial because other terms for burial occur in the context (cf., e.g., Gen. 25:8f.; 2 K. 22:20) or the burial is clearly a later event (cf. Gen. 49:33 and Ge 50:3–13). That the expression is used of those who were not buried in an ancestral grave, e.g., Abraham, Moses, and Aaron, seems a telling point (on these points see Alfrink; but cf. J. Skinner, comm. on Genesis [ICC, 1910], p. 352) (Here is Skinner’s note on Ge 25:8 = “gathered to his kindred (see on Ge 17:14)”) Originally, this and similar phrases (Ge 15:15; 47:30; Dt. 31:16 etc.) denoted burial in the family sepulchre; but the popular conception of Sheôl as a vast aggregate of graves in the under world enabled the language to be applied to men who (like Abraham) were buried far from their ancestors.—Isaac and Ishmael]). (Bold added)

What Does “Gathered to His People” Imply?

What was the Old Testament saints’ concept of life after death? Did they have a clear belief in life after death? If so, what did it involve? For example, was it a ghostly existence? Did it involve personal, conscious awareness? Did they expect the spirit to be joined with a body? At what point? All of these questions are relevant to understanding this text about Abraham.

The expression “to be gathered to one’s people” is similar to another expression, “to go to one’s fathers,” found in Genesis 15:15. The former phrase is found frequently—for example, here in Genesis 25:8, 17; 49:29, 33; Deuteronomy 32:50; and 2 Kings 22:20. Do these phrases simply mean, as many scholars claim, that the Old Testament individual was laid to rest in the family grave? Is it true that there was no thought of an afterlife?

By Abraham’s time, the human life span had been so curtailed, due to the physical effects of the Fall, that 175 years was regarded as a “good old age.” What happened after Abraham died? Was he simply buried with his ancestors, end of story? Unfortunately, too many carelessly conclude that this is precisely the case.

Actually, the expression “he was gathered to his people” or “he went to his fathers” cannot mean that he was buried with his relatives and ancestors. In Genesis 25:8–9 such an analysis is impossible, because we know that none of Abraham’s kin, except his wife, was buried at the cave of Machpelah.

In the Old Testament, those who have already died are regarded as still existing. The event of being “gathered to one’s people” is always distinguished from the act of burial, which is described separately (Gen 25:8–9; 35:29; 49:29, 31, 33). In many cases only one ancestor was in the tomb (1 Kings 11:43; 22:40) or none at all (Deut 31:16; 1 Kings 2:10; 16:28; 2 Kings 21:18), so that being “gathered to one’s people” could not mean being laid in the family sepulcher.

Readers of the text should not infer something special from the use of Sheol in some of these texts. In every one of the sixty-five instances of Sheol in the Old Testament, it refers simply to “the grave,” not to the shadowy region of the netherworld. The writer of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament supports the notion that the patriarchs expected an afterlife:

All these people [from Abel to Abraham] were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb 11:13–16)

Here is a clear testimony that through faith these early participants in the promises of God were fully expecting to enjoy life after death. While the full revelation of the life hereafter and the resurrection of the body awaited a later unveiling in the Old and New Testaments, the common assertion that the Old Testament saint knew nothing at all about such a possibility is an error caused by preconceptions.

In Genesis 17:8 Abraham was given a promise by God: “The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you.” The rabbis reasoned that since Abraham never actually enjoyed the fulfillment of this promise, he would be raised from the dead to possess the land.

While this reasoning is curious, it is not all that far off. It is no more fanciful than the reasoning of our Lord in reminding the Sadducees—who did not believe in the resurrection—that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was not the God of the dead but of the living. Thus the patriarchs were not to be counted out of the hope of resurrection (Mt 22:23–32). The believer’s relationship to

God carries with it life in the body now and immortality in the future.

If some object that such concepts are too "developed" for the primitive times and minds of Old Testament people, we need only remind each other that life after death was already the overriding passion of the Egyptian culture. It was to be a life of material things, with real bodies, real wine, women and song. That concept had been imaged in the pyramid monuments for a thousand years before Abraham arrived in Egypt. How, then, could the afterlife be an impossible concept for him?

Other evidences of the belief of a real life after death are afforded by the stern warnings from Mosaic times about any dabbling in necromancy, the cult of contacting the dead. What harm would there have been in fooling around with something that had no reality? Already in the middle of the second millennium B.C., the Israelites knew the afterlife was real, and thus they were warned not to be involved in any contacting of individuals who had passed beyond this world.

Abraham died and was buried. But he also joined a community of believers who had gone on before. No details of the nature of that community are given at this point. But these expressions, "to be gathered to one's people" and "to go to one's fathers," are not a mere euphemism for death without any clear theological import. The evidence argues to the contrary. ([Walter Kaiser - Hard Sayings of the Bible](#) - recommended resource)

Numbers 31:3 Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the LORD'S vengeance on Midian.

- **Arm** : Ex 17:9-13
- **LORD'S vengeance**: Nu 25:11,13 Ex 17:16 Lev 26:25 Jdg 5:2,23 2Ki 9:7 10:30 Jer 46:10 Jer 50:28
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passage:

Deuteronomy 32:35 **Vengeance** is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them.'

HOLY VENGEANCE IS MINE SAITH THE LORD

Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the LORD'S vengeance on Midian - The men over 20 were numbered in Numbers 26 and now are going to have a little "spring scrimmage" as we say in football, so they will be ready when the "big leagues" come as they enter the Land of Promise. Why the LORD'S vengeance? Because ultimately all sin is against Yahweh and in this case jeopardized the fulfillment of His covenant promises to the patriarchs of giving them the promised land.

TSK on the **LORD'S vengeance on Midian** - It was God's quarrel, not their own, that they were now to take up. These people were idolaters, and had seduced the Israelites to practise the same abominations. Idolatry is an offence against God; and the civil power has no authority to meddle with what belongs to Him, without especial directions, certified, as in this case, in the most unequivocal manner. Private revenge, ambition, or avarice were to have no place in this business: Jehovah is to be avenged; and through Him, the children of Israel, (ver. 2,) because they were nearly ruined by their idolatries. If Jehovah, instead of punishing sinners by earthquakes, pestilence, or famine, is pleased expressly to command any person or people to avenge his cause, this commission justifies, nay sanctifies, war, massacre, or devastation. Though none at present shew such a commission, yet the Israelites could; and it is therefore absurd to censure Moses, Joshua, and Israel, for the dreadful slaughter made by them. God himself passed sentence of condemnation, and employed them merely as ministers of his vengeance; and unless it could be proved that the criminals did not deserve their doom, or that God had no right to punish his rebellious creatures, such objectors only shew their enmity to God by becoming the unsolicited advocates of his enemies.

This is a reiteration of Yahweh's words in Numbers 25:16; 17+ "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Be hostile to the Midianites and strike them."

Numbers 31:4 "A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war."

- Of every tribe a thousand: Heb. A thousand of a tribe, a thousand of a tribe

- a thousand: Lev 26:8 Jdg 7:2 1Sa 14:6
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

TWELVE THOUSAND MEN OF WAR

A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war- We don't know the size of their enemy but God does and 12,000 was just fine with God. As discussed below remember Gideon's band of men who won the battle not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit. Who gets the glory when the numbers and "human odds" are aligned against us? God of course. And that is our purpose on this planet in this short time God has granted each us, that He might be greatly glorified in and through our lives! As Paul rightly said, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor 10:31).

Numbers 31:5 So there were furnished from the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war.

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TWELVE THOUSAND ARMED FOR WAR

So there were furnished from the thousands of Israel- Numbers 26:51 said there **"were numbered of the sons of Israel, 601,730"** who were **"able to go out to war in Israel."** (Nu 26:2)

A thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. - Not just going to war, but were also **armed for war**! Where did they obtain the accoutrements for carrying out war? The text does not make this clear.

THOUGHT - If this verse does not "preach" I don't know what will! Beloved, we are in a war, a spiritual war, a war against an intractable, malicious, deceitful, lying, destructive invisible enemy! Like these brave 12,000, we must also be daily "armed for war," because when we leave our house in the morning (probably even before we leave!) we are entering the battlefield and the enemy does not want to take any prisoners alive, but to destroy the army of the LORD. You and I are "in the army now," but we must be armed for war. If you have not memorized Ephesians 6:12-18+, then here is your encouragement/exhortation to do it now! Don't say you cannot memorize! That will be a weak excuse at the Bema Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10+). By God's gracious Word and Spirit may we daily (and continually throughout the day) put on the full armor of God and walk forth as more than conquerors in Christ Jesus for the glory of our Father. Amen.

Numbers 31:6 Moses sent them, a thousand from each tribe, to the war, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand.

- **Phinehas:** Nu 25:7-13
- **the holy vessels:** Nu 14:44 33:20-22 Ex 25:9 Jos 6:4-6,13-15 1Sa 4:4,5,17 1Sa 14:18 1Sa 23:9 2Sa 11:11
- to blow: Nu 10:8,9 2Ch 13:12-15
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries



Phinehas takes a spear in Nu 25:7,8+

FAITHFUL PHINEHAS

"HOLY WARRIOR"

Moses sent them, a thousand from each tribe - This is a small number compared to **those who were numbered of the sons of Israel, 601,730**, (Nu 26:31+). Compare Gideon's army (incidentally also against Midianites as well as Amalekites) where he had too many as described in Judges 7:2-7+

The LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, '**My own power has delivered me.**'" 3 "Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is afraid and trembling, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.'" So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained. 4 Then the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many; bring them down to the water and I will test them for you there. Therefore it shall be that he of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go with you; but everyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." 5 So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "You shall separate everyone who laps the water with his tongue as a dog laps, as well as everyone who kneels to drink." 6 Now the number of those who lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, was 300 men; but all the rest of the people knelt to drink water. 7 The LORD said to Gideon, "I will deliver you with the 300 men who lapped and will give the Midianites into your hands; so let all the other people go, each man to his home."

COMMENT - Do you see the principle that also applies here to the "numbers" in Numbers 31:6?

The crux of the issue is when the victory is won, who gets the glory, God or the people (cf "'My own power has delivered me.' Jdg 7:2) Centuries later Paul echoed this timeless principle writing "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do (present tense = continually this is only possible as we depend on the Spirit) all (HOW MUCH?) to the glory of God." (1 Cor 10:31). This principle is still in force. **Do you give God the glory for the "victories" in your life? Try it and watch what God will do!**

"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying,
'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,'
says the LORD of hosts.
Zechariah 4:6

Regarding the **trumpets** earlier we read about the purpose for sounding trumpets -- it was not just a call to war but an appeal to the LORD:

"When you go to war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then **you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets**, that (TWO FOLD PURPOSE) you may **be remembered** before the LORD your God, and **be saved** from your enemies.." (Nu 10:9+)

To the war, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand - This is not like human wars in general, but is a legitimate **'Holy War'** of God's people for God's honor ("vengeance" Nu 31:3) fighting against the troops of the Adversary, in this case "disguised" as Midianites. Satan has always tried to destroy Israel and this would be no exception, but he is always underestimates God, for here we find that the battle is the Lord's (1 Sa 17:47) and He would win the victory with the 12,000 led by a **holy priest** with **holy vessels** and a **holy trumpet** (cf priests with trumpets in [Battle of Jericho](#) in Joshua 6:13) Let's ask the sixty four dollar question -- Did the [Ark of the Covenant](#) go out with the "holy vessels?" I think it (**HE**) did. Let's reason this out -- In Israel's first "battle" once they had entered the promised land of Canaan we read...

"Also seven priests shall carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the [Ark](#); then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. 5 "It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead." 6 So Joshua the son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "**Take up the [Ark of the Covenant](#), and let seven priests carry seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD.**"....13 The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD went on continually, and blew the trumpets; and the armed men went before them and the rear guard came after **the [Ark of the LORD](#)**, while they continued to blow the trumpets. 14 Thus the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp; they did so for six days. 15 Then on the seventh day they rose early at the dawning of the day and marched around the city in the same manner seven times; only on that day they marched around the city seven times. (Joshua 6:4-6, 13-15)

The [Midrash](#) on the **holy vessels** concluded that Numbers 31:6 refers to the [Ark of the Covenant](#), to which Numbers 7:9+ refers

when it says, "theirs was the service of the holy objects."

Another piece of evidence supporting that the [Ark of the Covenant](#) went out before the warriors (none of whom were killed, clearly a miracle wrought by Yahweh) is the story of the sinful, unbelieving sons of Israel in Numbers 14:39-45+ where the [Ark of the Covenant](#) did not go with the rebels and they were struck down by the enemy.

When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. 40 In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned (REMORSE NOT REPENTANCE!!!), but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised." 41 But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD (IN OTHER WORDS YOU JUST CONFESSED YOUR SIN SO WHY ARE YOU CONTINUING TO SIN?!!!), when it will not succeed (A PROPHECY)? 42 "Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. 43 "For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And **the LORD will not be with you.**" 44 But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; **neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD** nor Moses left the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah.

THOUGHT - This begs a simple question -- do we go out to battle with the Ark or without the Ark (so to speak)? In NT terms, do we go out to battle filled with the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17+, cf Col 3:16+) and filled with the Spirit of Christ (Eph 5:18+) or filled with our self? Beloved, "thanks be to God, Who gives (present tense - continually gives) us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 15:57).

Numbers 31:7 So they made war against Midian, just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every male.

- all: De 20:13,14 Jud 21:11 1Sa 27:9 1Ki 11:15,16
- the males: Jdg 6:1,2,33
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD

So they made war against Midian, just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every male- The text **just as the LORD had commanded Moses** suggests complete obedience, but was it truly "complete?" I don't think so, because they killed all the men but spared the women and children and Moses, as God's representative, because angry. And this time it was righteous, not sinful anger like at Meribah.

Numbers 31:8 They killed the kings of Midian along with the rest of their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword.

- **the kings:** Nu 22:4 Jos 13:21,22
- **Zur:** Nu 25:15,18
- **Balaam:** Nu 22:10 24:25 Jos 13:22 Ps 9:16 10:2 1Ti 6:9,10 2Pe 2:15 Jude 1:11 Rev 2:14 19:20
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Five Kings of Midian Slain by Israel
(illustration from the 1728 Figures de la Bible)

ALL THE KINGS AND BALAAM THE DIVINER SLAIN

They killed the kings of Midian along with the rest of their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword - Remember this is the Midianites, so Balak king of the Moabites is not in this grouping. What were Balaam's "**wages of unrighteousness**" (2 Peter 2:15+; unrighteousness = sin - 1 John 5:17+)? The same wages God always pays to sinners Ezekiel writing that "**The soul who sins will die.**" Paul adding that "**the wages of sin is death**" (Romans 6:23+, cf John in Rev 21:8+).

Recall that **King Zur** had a personal connection with Israel's sin at [Baal of Peor](#)..

Numbers 25:15+ The name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi **the daughter of Zur**, who was head of the people of a father's household in Midian.....25:18 for they have been hostile to you with their tricks, with which they have deceived you in the affair of Peor and in the affair of Cozbi, **the daughter of the leader of Midian**, their sister who was slain on the day of the plague because of Peor."

COMMENT - Do you know what Cozbi's name means? Lying, deceitful, false, "my falsehood." Wow! The proverb says "Charm is deceitful," (Pr 31:30) and Cozbi lived up to her name and died because of her "name!" Hebrews 3:13+ warns us to "encourage one another day after day (EVERY DAY - DO YOU HAVE AN ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER WHO DOES THIS AND YOU FOR HIM/HER?), as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the **deceitfulness** of sin."

Recall Balaam's "prayer" or "desire" in Numbers 23:10+ "Who can count the dust of Jacob, Or number the fourth part of Israel? **Let me die the death of the upright, And let my end be like his (JACOB - ISRAEL)!**" It is one thing to mouth righteous words, but the proof is in living righteously, something that Balaam had no interest in resulting in his death in his sins, the wages" of which "earned him" eternal punishment

James Hastings - THE WAGES OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.—Num. 31:8.

1. Driven with disgrace and dishonour from the presence of him at whose bidding he had undertaken this ill-omened journey, having offended God without pleasing men, like so many who forfeit heaven and yet fail to win earth, who, letting go the substance, snatch at the shadow, and miss shadow and substance alike, Balaam makes one last and desperate effort to obtain the favour and the rewards which he sees escaping from his hands; and he, the man to whom and by whom God had spoken, who saw the vision of the Almighty, whose eyes God had opened, is the author of the devilish suggestion that the children of Israel should be seduced to uncleanness, and so robbed of their righteousness. Their crime and punishment are related in Deuteronomy and Numbers. And from the narrative given in Numbers, it appears that Balaam was the contriver of the whole matter. It is also ascribed to him in the Book of Revelation, where he is said to have taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel.

2. This was a man who would not for lucre or for influence disobey his conscience, yet laboured to corrupt his conscience. He saw the good and the blessing of goodness, yet longed and strove to transfer that blessing to the evil, and "paltered with eternal God" for leave so to bestow it. He saw that the endless victory must rest with the children of God, and he yearned to attain to it through a death like theirs; yet he set himself to defraud God of His children, and His children of their God, by the fiercest temptation of their flesh. We are not to suppose that Balaam now threw off the mask and became openly a bad man. It would appear that he still kept up his self-deceit and dissimulation, as if what he was doing were but lawful and right, so that he not only led them into practices of sin, but corrupted and perverted their principles also, persuading them that they might thus hold with God and yet with sin and the flesh.

¶ The moral law of Jehovah and the comparative purity of the Israelites as His people kept them separate from the other nations, gave them dignity and vigour. To break down this defence would make them like the rest, would withdraw them from the favour of their God and even defeat His purposes. The scheme was one which only the vilest craft could have conceived; and it shows us too plainly the real character of Balaam. He must have known the power of the allurements which he now advised as the means of attack on those he could not touch with his maledictions or gain by his soothsaying. In the shadow of this scheme of his we see the diviner and all his tribe, and indeed the whole morality of the region, at their very worst.

3. But retribution came, and swiftly. The due reward of Balaam's works was given him. The death of the righteous was not destined for this corrupting traitor, for this apostate seer. It is no wonder that a little later he is entangled in the doom of those with whom he has made common cause against God; and that, when the Midianites perish beneath the sword of Joshua, he should perish with them. There is something very significant in the brief parenthetical notice which records his doom: "Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword."

So on the blood-stained turf, so amid the routed ranks, so by the pitiless swords of the men whom he had seduced to their ruin, so after the wasted life and desecrated gifts, his blows frustrated, his curses foiled, his name degraded into a by-word, died one who, had he but been faithful to his own best convictions, might have been almost as great as Moses himself. For the hope of a handful of paltry dross he had sold his eternal jewel to the enemy of man, and he had earned the dreadful twofold epitaph which the New Testament inscribes with ceremonious reprobation upon his name. One epitaph is "Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness." The other is, "Balaam who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication."

¶ It is to be noted that it is neither by us ascertainable what moments of pure feeling or aspiration may occur to men of minds apparently cold and lost, nor by us to be pronounced through what instruments, and in what strangely occurrent voices, God may choose to communicate good to men. It seems to me that much of what is great, and to all men beneficial, has been wrought by those who neither intended nor knew the good they did; and that many mighty harmonies have been discoursed by instruments that had been dumb or discordant, but that God knew their stops. The Spirit of Prophecy consisted with the avarice of Balaam. Could we spare from its page that parable, which he said, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open; though we know that the sword of his punishment was then sharp in its sheath beneath him in the plains of Moab?... Selfish in their industry, unchastened in their wills, ungrateful for the Spirit that is upon them, men may yet be helmed by that Spirit whithersoever the Governor listeth; involuntary instruments they may become of others' good; unwillingly they may bless Israel, but short-coming there will be of their glory, and sure, of their punishment.

THE DOOM OF THE DOUBLE-HEARTED

"Balaam also, the son of Bear, they slew with the sword." – Numbers 31:8

Balaam had taken the field against Israel— against a people whom he had pronounced blessed— whom he had pronounced invincible both by earth and hell. Yes; Balaam "the son of Beor,"— he, and not another of the name— he rushes on the bosses of the Almighty's buckler; he defies Israel and Israel's God! But he fails. He would sincerely have cursed Israel; but he could not. He counseled Moab to seduce Israel by temptation, and his device succeeded too well. He now fetches his last stroke. In vain He perishes ignobly. He is slain with the sword which he had defied. Such is the end of the backslider; of one who knew the truth but did it not; who once said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." It was certainly not the end he prayed for; yet it was the end to which his whole life had been tending. He reaped what he sowed, and in him "God was not mocked." He died as he lived, in fellowship with Moab, yet in heart persuaded that Israel was the beloved of the Lord, and that Jehovah was God. His life had been with Midian, and so was his death. His grave is with the unclean. He passes from earth with none to soothe his death-bed and close his eyes; none to lament for him or to build his monument.

Sad end of a life of halting and indecision, and resistance of the Spirit, and braving of conscience, and rejection of light, and wretched covetousness. He loved the wages of unrighteousness, and verily he had his reward. Let us see what he wanted and how he failed; how ambitious he was, yet what a life of utter failure and disappointment was his. He would sincerely have risen, but he sunk. He would sincerely have been rich, but he lost everything. What a wasted life! Yet the life of one who knew better things but did them not; who knew that the world was vanity, yet followed it; who knew that Israel's portion was the best, yet chose that of Moab; who knew the true God and the true Messiah, but preferred the idolatries of Israel's enemies. He saw Him from the top of the rocks, but that was all. He got a passing glimpse of the cross, but no more. It was all he saw of the way of life, before he plunged into death and woe.

I. He wanted to serve two masters. These were the same as the Lord in after days designated God and mammon. He wanted not to offend either; to please both. He was like Issachar crouching between two burdens. But it would not do. He failed. Such is the certain failure of all who make the like attempt. "You cannot serve God and mammon." He loved the one master, mammon; and he dreaded the other; but would sincerely do the will of both. He could not afford to lose the favor of either. Miserable life! More miserable death! The life and death of one whose whole career was one long attempt to do the bidding both of God and the devil.

II. He wanted to earn two kinds of wages. The wages of righteousness and the wages of unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15) were both in his eyes; he would sincerely have the pay both of God and of the devil. He was unwilling to do or say any which would deprive him of either. He was as cautious and cunning as he was covetous. He would not work without wages; and he would work for a hundred masters if they would only pay him well. How like many so-called "religious" men among ourselves.

III. He wanted to do two opposite things at the same time. He wished both to bless and to curse. He was willing to do either according as it might serve his interests. The only question with him was, "Would it pay?" If the blessing would pay, he would take it; if the curse would pay, he would take it. If both would pay, he would take them both. Blessing and cursing were both alike to him, confessing and denying the true God, worshiping Baal or Jehovah, it mattered not, if by "this craft he could have his wealth." So with many among us. If Sabbath-keeping will pay, they will keep the Sabbath; if Sabbath-breaking will pay, they will break the Sabbath. True Balaams— without principle, without faith, and without fear!

IV. He wanted two kinds of friendship. He would sincerely be friends with everybody. Perhaps he was timid; of those whom Scripture calls "fearful" (Revelation 21:8); perhaps, also, he was ambitious, and sought great things for himself wherever these could be obtained (Jeremiah 45:5); certainly he had before him "the fear of man which brings a snare," and the love of man's approbation which brings no less a snare; he dreaded Israel's God, of whom he knew much, but he dreaded also Moab's gods, though whether he really believed in them we know not. Made up of these contradictions, and acting not by faith but unbelief, he tried to secure the friendship of all whom he counted great, whether in heaven or in earth. He shut his eyes not only to the sin but to the impossibility of

such a course; he saw not that the friendship of the world is the enemy of God, and that whoever will be the friend of the world must be the enemy of God.

V. He wanted to have two religions. He saw religion to be a paying concern, a profitable trade, and he was willing to accept it from anybody or everybody, to adopt it from any quarter if it would but raise him in the world, and make his fortune. Perhaps he thought all religions equally right or equally wrong, equally true or equally false. He would rather not offend any god if he could help it. He would make concessions to "religious prejudices" of any kind if the prejudiced people will only help him on. He was like Erasmus of old, whom a German writer thus describes— "Erasmus belongs to that species of writers who have all the desire to build God a magnificent church; at the same time, however, not giving the devil any offence, to whom, accordingly, they set up a neat little chapel close by, where you can offer him some touch of sacrifice at a time, and practice a quiet household devotion for him without disturbance."

Such was Balaam; two gods and two religions he wanted to have. But this double service, and double friendship, and double religion would not do. He could make nothing by them. They profited him nothing either in this life or that to come. His end was with the ungodly, his portion with the enemies of Israel. And his soul, where could it be? Not with Israel's God, or Israel's Christ, or in Israel's heaven. He reaped what he sowed. He was a good specimen of multitudes in these last days. An educated and intelligent man, shrewd and quick-seeing, of respectable character, high in favor with the rich and great, a religious man, too, after a fashion, not unsound in creed so far, for he acknowledges Jehovah as the true God.

But he is fond of the world, fond of money, fond of preferment; one that would not let his religion stand in the way of his advancement; who could pocket all scruples if he could pocket a little gold along with them; hollow of heart, but with a fair outside; just an Erasmus; no Luther, no Calvin, no Knox, no confessor, no martyr. His worldly interests are the main thing to him. He would rather not risk offending God, but yet he would not like to lose Balak's rewards and honors.

He would rather not take up his cross, nor deny himself, nor forsake all for his God. Religion with him is not just a thing to be suffered for— at least if he can help it. So is it with multitudes among us. They want as much religion as will save them from hell; not an atom more. The world is their real God; gold is their idol; it is in mammon's temple that they worship. Love God with all their heart! They don't so much as understand the meaning of such a thing. Sacrifice riches, place, honor, friends to Christ! They scoff at the thing as madness. Oh, be on the side of God, out and out. Don't trifle with religion.

Don't mock God and Christ. Love not the world. Be religious in your inmost soul. Don't mistake sentimentalism for religion, or a good character for the new birth. You may go very far and yet not be a Christian. You may follow Christ in some things; but if not in all, what is your following worth? This world or the world to come, that is the alternative; not this world and the world to come. Christ all or nothing. The soul more precious than worlds, or utterly worthless. No middle ground; no half-discipleship; no compromise. No. The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Come out and be separate. The new birth, or no religion at all.

Look to your latter end! What is it to be? Where is it to be? With whom is it to be? Anticipate your eternity. Is it to be darkness or light, shame or glory? Oh make sure, make sure! Do not sear your conscience by praying Balaam's prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous." What will that avail you? It is the life of the righteous that God is calling you to lead and he will take care of your death. Decide, halt not; else surely yours will be a wretched life and a still more wretched death. What will gold, or purple, or honor do for you when you lie down to die, or rise up to be judged?

Numbers 31:9 The sons of Israel captured the women of Midian and their little ones; and all their cattle and all their flocks and all their goods they plundered.

- Nu 31:15,16 De 20:14 2Ch 28:5,8-10
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The Women of Midian Led Captive by the Hebrews
Watercolor by James Tissot

WOMEN AND CHILDREN TAKEN CAPTIVE

The sons of Israel captured the women of Midian and their little ones; and all their cattle and all their flocks and all their goods they plundered - Spare the women! Are you kidding me! These are the women's compatriots who resulted in 24,000 dying in the plague at [Baal of Peor](#)! (Nu 25:9+) What were they thinking? Short answer they were NOT thinking soberly (cf 1 Pe 1:13+, 1 Pe 5:8-9+), they were looking and lusting! (The same basic heart problem that cost Achan his life - Joshua 7:21 = saw > coveted >

took > concealed!) **And don't say you might not have done the same thing dear male reader!** Remember that the acts and actions of Israel in the OT are often a very sobering depiction of our fallen flesh even as believers!

PONDER THIS -- This sparing of the adult Midianite women is very surprising in view of the fact that a priest named Phinehas was with the army and he was the very priest who had killed the Moabite woman (read Nu 25:7-8+). So apparently either he made no protest or was overruled by the armed men!

Numbers 31:10 Then they burned all their cities where they lived and all their camps with fire.

- Jos 6:24 1Sa 30:1 1Ki 9:16 Isa 1:7 Rev 18:8
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BURNED THE CITIES

Then they burned all their cities where they lived and all their camps with fire- Burning the cities would have completely eradicated all of the elements (images, etc) associated with their abominable idolatry. Of course, they had spared the human elements, the women, who undoubtedly were familiar with the idolatrous practices. Israel not only burned the cities but claimed the Midianite territory, later giving it to the tribe of Reuben (Josh. 13:15-23).

Numbers 31:11 They took all the spoil and all the prey, both of man and of beast.

- De 20:14 Jos 8:2
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The Oblation Out of the Spoils of the Midianites
(illustration from the 1728 *Figures de la Bible*)

Related Passage:

Deuteronomy 20:13-14 When the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword. 14“Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given you.

They took all the spoil and all the prey, both of man and of beast -The word (malqoach) for **prey** also refers to the spoils of war (used 7x in OT - Num. 31:11; Num. 31:12; Num. 31:26; Num. 31:27; Num. 31:32; Isa. 49:24; Isa. 49:25).

Numbers 31:12 They brought the captives and the prey and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by the Jordan opposite Jericho.

- the plains of Moab: Nu 22:1
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THEY BRING CAPTIVES AND SPOIL TO MOSES

They brought the captives and the prey and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by the Jordan opposite Jericho

Numbers 31:13 Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp.

- went forth: Ge 14:17 1Sa 15:12 30:21
- without the camp: Nu 31:12,22-24 5:2 19:11
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp- Note **outside the camp** because these men had blood on their hands and were ritually defiled from having potentially touched corpses.

HCSB Study Bible - The purpose of holy war was to eradicate impure elements, whether persons or property, from society. This battle followed on the heels of the idolatrous activity of Baal-peor (chap. 25) that began with unholy sexual relations and resulted in the death of thousands of Israelites. It also set the stage for the instructions in Nu 33:50-56 for possessing the promised land by driving out the Canaanites and eradicating the sources of idolatry. Critics suggest this holy war mentality was a development among ancient peoples and not in keeping with God's purpose; but these instructions were specific in time and place at the critical point of the founding of the theocracy of Israel, where their survival as the holy community of faith was at stake. Numbers 31 is consistent with the instructions given in other pentateuchal passages, including Dt 7:5,24-25; 12:1-12; and Dt 20:16-19 (purging of idolatry) and Dt 21:10-14 (female captives)

Numbers 31:14 Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come from service in the war.

- wrath: Nu 12:3 Ex 32:19,22 Lev 10:16 1Sa 15:13,14 1Ki 20:42 2Ki 13:19 Eph 4:26
- battle: Heb. host of war
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THE RIGHTEOUS ANGER OF MOSES

Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come from service in the war - As Moses came outside the camp, imagine his horror as he saw these foreign women, which were the very reason 24,000 brethren had to be slain. The thoughts that must have flown through his mind - How could you? Are you crazy? Do you have short term memory loss? etc, etc.

The nation had **won the battle** but was now in danger of **losing the victory**, a mistake that God's people have made more than once down through the centuries.
-- Warren Wiersbe

G Campbell Morgan - Num. 31:14 Moses was wroth with the officers of the host.-Num. 31.14.

This is a chapter, of terror, recording an avenging, by the order of God, which was terrible indeed. We have stressed these particular words because they emphasize all the rest. Moses was wroth with the officers, not because of the severity of the judgment they had executed on Midian, but rather because, they had failed to carry out the judgment completely. In order to understand this we must recognize the cause of the wrath. Here we touch again the history of Balaam. He was still living, and from the fact that he was numbered among the slain, we may safely infer that he was still exerting his evil influence. This man, who under Divine compulsion had been compelled to bless when he intended to curse, had yet wrought the most terrible evil in Israel, in that he had been the means of causing the nation to commit fornication with the corrupt people of Midian. The words of Moses show that this had been definite and dreadful (see verses 15, 16). The holy seed was polluted. Therefore the judgment upon the polluting people was drastic. Again we say, this is a chapter of terror; but it is well that we recognize that there is a false pity which is of the essence of cruelty. That is true love which makes no terms with evil, and which is able, in circumstances of stern necessity, to adopt stern measures and carry them out without relenting. (Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible)

Numbers 31:15 And Moses said to them, "Have you spared all the women?"

- De 2:34 20:13,16-18 Jos 6:21 8:25 10:40 11:14 1Sa 15:3 Ps 137:8,9 Jer 48:10 Eze 9:6
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

And Moses said to them, "Have you spared all the women?" - Did you notice the adjective "all"? Apparently they did not kill any of the women! Amazing!

Years later another foolish king names Saul did the same thing in spite of being clearly told "Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." (1Sa 15:3, read 1 Sa 15:3-21). These men needed to hear Samuel's words "'Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. 23" "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king." " (1 Sa 15:22-23)

The **flesh** cries out to SPARE evil habits, pet sins, and lust.

Old addictions and bad habits are hard to break.

This **flesh** of ours has some muscle! It is strong!

-- Rod Mattoon

Numbers 31:16 "Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD.

- **these caused:** Nu 24:14 25:1-3 Pr 23:27 Ec 7:26 2Pe 2:15 Rev 2:14
- **in the matter:** Nu 25:18 De 4:3 Jos 22:17
- **and there:** Nu 25:9
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BALAAM'S RUSE COMES TO LIGHT

Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD - Thankfully, the warriors did not spare Balaam! In this answer Moses explains why he is so angry with the warriors bringing the Midianite women back as "booty."

Numbers 31:17 "Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately.

- kill every male: Jdg 21:11,12
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Moses Ordering the Slaughter of the Midianites
(1650 painting by Claes Corneliszoon Moeyaert)

Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately - Why? What is the problem or danger? The danger is described by Jesus' half brother James centuries later when he wrote that "each one is **tempted** when he is **carried away** and **enticed by his own lust**. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren." (James 1:14-16+). The problem in Israel was the problem in the heart of every man, born again or not, the problem of lust, of strong desire for what is forbidden and yet transiently gratifying. Paul stated the basic principle that would have led to the destruction and defeat of the sons of Israel when he wrote in 1 Cor 5:6 **"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?"** The leaven of idolatry and immorality which was latent in the Midianite women would have destroyed the nation of Israel, just as it destroys any man or woman who gives himself or herself over to this seductive, sensual sin! May this story of Baal of Peor and the vengeance God was forced to extract be a warning to all of us to **"Flee** immorality ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)). Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." (1 Cor 6:18+) In the case of Israel the "body" was the nation of Israel (so to speak) and when the individual men fell into the sin of immorality ultimately the toll would be taken on their own "body," **the entire nation of Israel!**

TSK - The sword of war should spare women and children, as incapable of resisting; but the sword of justice knows no distinction, except that of guilty or not guilty, or more or less guilty. This was the execution of a **righteous sentence upon a guilty nation**, in which the **women were the greatest criminals**; and it may safely be said, that their lives were forfeited by their personal

transgressions. With respect to the execution of the male infants, who cannot be supposed to have been guilty, God, the author and supporter of life, who has a right to dispose of it when and how he thinks proper, commanded it; and "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Rod Mattoon - God is condemned by liberals for being harsh in His judgment here. It is ironic that the same group of people approve of abortion, and argue that abortion shows concern and compassion. Who's harsh? This same group also complains about capital punishment and wants to let murderers go free.

HCSB Study Bible - We often think of many things as dangerous to us as Christians – hostile government, secular humanism, academic attack, and so forth. But the things we accept in our midst as Christians that open the door to immorality and idolatry can do far more real damage than any of those other things.

UTTERLY DESTROY THE CANAANITES

Passages on utterly destroy* -

Exod. 22:20; Num. 21:2; Num. 21:3; Deut. 2:34; Deut. 3:6; Deut. 4:26; Deut. 7:2; Deut. 12:2; Deut. 13:15; Deut. 20:17; Jos. 2:10; Jos. 6:21; Jos. 8:26; Jos. 10:1; Jos. 10:28; Jos. 10:35; Jos. 10:37; Jos. 10:39; Jos. 10:40; Jos. 11:11; Jos. 11:12; Jos. 11:20; Jos. 11:21; Jdg. 1:17; Jdg. 21:11; 1 Sam. 15:3; 1 Sam. 15:8; 1 Sam. 15:9; 1 Sam. 15:15; 1 Sam. 15:18; 1 Sam. 15:20; 2 Chr. 32:14; Isa. 11:15; Isa. 34:2; Jer. 25:9; Jer. 50:21; Jer. 50:26; Acts 3:23

Question: [Why did God command the Israelites to completely destroy the Midianites in Numbers 31:17?](#)

Answer: Understanding and applying passages from the exodus and conquest of Canaan can be challenging. The passages about putting certain inhabitants to death are among the most difficult. Among those is Numbers 31.

God told Moses, "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites" (Numbers 31:1). The Israelites obediently armed themselves and attacked the Midianites, killing the men (verse 7). Also, "the Israelites captured the Midianite women and children and took all the Midianite herds, flocks and goods as plunder" (verse 9). When the troops returned to Moses, he was angry that they had not fully carried out the Lord's vengeance (verse 14; cf. verse 3). The Midianite women were those who had caused Israel to sin at Baal Peor (see Numbers 25). So Moses commanded that the women be killed, and also "kill all the boys" (Numbers 31:17).

When we look at the command to kill the male Midianite children, there are two perspectives we might take. One is the more understandably temporal. During the timeframe in question, tribal warfare was rampant. It was highly likely that the male Midianite children would grow up and seek revenge for their fathers and grandfathers against Israel. Avenging the death of one's father is a commonly accepted necessity in every culture and even in popular fiction—it's what motivates Hamlet in Shakespeare's classic play and what energizes Inigo Montoya in *The Princess Bride*.

Further, the utterly disgusting depravity in which these Midianite boys had been raised is well documented. Regular behaviors among the Midianites included child sacrifice, cult prostitution, and bestiality. The divine prohibition of these acts was codified, and the acts were known to the Israelites (Leviticus 18:21, 23–24). Male inhabitants carrying on the lineage of this culture would have been a perennial problem for Israel.

The other perspective we should consider is the divine. Now, we cannot know the mind of God or comprehend the depths of His wisdom (Isaiah 55:8–9). But we *can* know that, given the depravity of the Midianites, God's command to kill the Midianite boys might have been an act of divine mercy. In His perfect knowledge—including His knowledge of what would happen in the lives of those young Midianites, had they lived—it's possible that God brought them to Himself before they had the opportunity of choosing to reject Him. It is highly possible that, had these males grown to maturity, they would have embraced the wanton rebellion and idolatry of their fathers. From God's perspective, it may have been better for them to die at a young age than to endure a life of depravity and the attending temporal (and eternal) consequences.

In all this, we must remember that God *is* goodness. He is not simply a good moral agent like humans are commanded to be; He is not beholden to or measured by a standard outside of Himself. We cannot look at God's actions as being in any moral category like human actions. God is not a man (Numbers 23:19). The very nature of God is such that He cannot do evil. "The LORD is righteous in all his ways" (Psalm 145:17). This is the point by which we must reconcile passages such as Numbers 31:17 with the likes of John 3:16.

Moreover, a major mistake we sometimes make is to think that our lives are our own. We are creatures, not the Creator. We could not exist for one moment without God's willing our existence (Hebrews 1:3; Acts 17:28). We should not think that God owes us anything, be it a long life, a life free of suffering, or anything else. God desires our ultimate good, which is everlasting union with Him (2 Peter 3:8–10). Our ultimate good may not be realized in a long life or one devoid of pain and suffering. As strange as it may sound, the ultimate good of the Midianite males may not have come about without their being killed by the Israelites in warfare. This is “brass tacks” and gets to the root of whether one thinks that man was made in the image of God or whether one makes a god in the image of man.

It is difficult to discuss these topics rationally because emotions often take over, and proclamations of “the innocence of children” grow loud. We sometimes hear things like “I could never believe in a God like that.” We are correct in the visceral reaction to children suffering and dying. At the same time, we must differentiate the cause and circumstance of the young Midianites' deaths from current situations. Suffering today is not brought about by God's people taking possession of their promised land against a morally depraved and militant people group.

Also, we are profoundly incorrect when we start embracing notions like “if I were God, I certainly would not have done that.” God does not see human events as we do; He sees them as only God can. Thus, we have no basis by which to say that God would not have a humanly understandable, morally sufficient reason for commanding the death of children during the conquest of Canaan. GotQuestions.org

Norman Geisler - NUMBERS 31—How can it be morally right for the Israelites to totally destroy the Midianites?

PROBLEM: According to the record of events in Numbers 31, Moses commanded the Israelites to utterly destroy the Midianites. Verse 7 states that they killed every Midianite male. Verse 9 records that they took all the women and children as captives, and verse 10 states that the Israelites burned all the cities and camps of the Midianites. Again, in verse 17, Moses commanded the people to kill every male child of the Midianites and every Midianite woman who had intercourse with a man, leaving only the female children and young virgins. How can such a total destruction be morally justified?

SOLUTION: First of all, it must be remembered that it was the Midianites who corrupted God's people by leading them into idolatry at Baal-Peor so that 24,000 Israelites died in the plague (Num. 25:9). It was necessary to totally eliminate this evil influence from Israel. Further, it was not on the authority of Moses that Israel performed this destruction. Rather, it was at the direct command of God. Verse 2 records God's command to Moses to carry out the Lord's vengeance upon the Midianites. The abominable nature of the influence which the Midianites had upon Israel in leading them into idolatry merited the destructive judgment of God. God dealt severely and decisively with this cancer. The moral justification for this action is found in the fact that God has the right to give and take life. Since the wages of sin is death, and the Midianites engaged in a terrible sin, they justly reaped the consequences of God's vengeance (see comments on Joshua 6:21). ([When Critics Ask](#))

Norman Geisler - DEUTERONOMY 20:16–18—Were the captives to be spared or killed?

PROBLEM: In Deuteronomy 20:11, 15, Moses commanded the Israelites to spare the lives of their captives and make them servants. But only a few verses later he instructs them to “let nothing that breathes remain alive” (v. 16).

SOLUTION: The general rule was to make captives of the people conquered. Only in the specific case of the “seven nations” of Canaan were they to exterminate them (see comments on Josh. 6:21). This was because of their “abominations” which were so obnoxious to God that the land “vomits out its inhabitants” (Lev. 18:25). ([When Critics Ask](#))

Norman Geisler - - JOSHUA 6:21—How can the total destruction of Jericho be morally justified?

PROBLEM: This passage states that the Israelites “utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.” But how can such a ruthless destruction of innocent life and property be justified?

SOLUTION: First, the Canaanites were far from “innocent.” The description of their sins in Leviticus 18 is vivid: “The land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants” (v. 25). They were cancerously immoral, “defiled” with every kind of “abomination,” including child sacrifice (vv. 21, 24, 26).

Second, it must be remembered that God had given the people of Palestine over 400 years to repent of their wickedness. The people of that land had every opportunity to turn from their wickedness. According to Genesis 15:16, God told Abraham that in 400 years the descendants of Abraham would return to inherit this land, but that the iniquity of the people was not yet full. This prophetic statement indicated that God would not destroy the people of the land, including those who dwelt in Jericho, until their sins were

such that their guilt merited their complete destruction in judgment.

Third, as for the killing of the little children, several things should be noted. (1) Given the cancerous state of the society into which they were born, they had no chance to avoid its fatal pollution. (2) Children who die before the age of accountability go to heaven (see comments on 2 Sam. 12:23). This was an act of God's mercy to their souls to take them into His holy presence from such an unholy environment. (3) God is sovereign over life (Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21) and can order its end according to His will and in view of the creature's ultimate good.

Fourth, Joshua and the people of Israel were acting according to the direct command of God, not on their own initiative. The destruction of Jericho was carried out by the army of Israel, but the army of Israel was the instrument of judgment upon the sins of these people by the righteous Judge of all the earth. Consequently, anyone who would question the justification of this act is questioning God's justice.

Fifth, it was necessary to completely exterminate any trace of the city and its people. If anything had remained, except that which was taken into the treasure house of the Lord, there would have always been the threat of heathen influence to pull the people away from the pure worship of the Lord. Sometimes radical surgery is required to completely eliminate a deadly cancer from the body([When Critics Ask](#))

Warren Wiersbe on God's command to exterminate the Canaanite nations:

But wasn't it cruel and unjust for God to command Israel to exterminate the nations in Canaan? Not in the least! To begin with, He had been patient with these nations for centuries and had mercifully withheld His judgment (Gen. 15:16; 2 Peter 3:9). Their society, and especially their religion, was unspeakably wicked (Rom. 1:18ff) and should have been wiped out years before Israel appeared on the scene.

Something else is true: These nations had been warned by the judgments God had inflicted on others, especially on Egypt and the nations east of the Jordan (Josh. 2:8–13). Rahab and her family had sufficient information to be able to repent and believe, and God saved them (Josh. 2; 6:22–25). Therefore, we have every right to conclude that God would have saved anybody who had turned to Him. These nations were sinning against a flood of light in rejecting God's truth and going their own way.

God didn't want the filth of the Canaanite society and religion to contaminate His people Israel. Israel was God's special people, chosen to fulfill divine purposes in this world. Israel would give the world the knowledge of the true God, the Holy Scriptures, and the Savior. In order to accomplish God's purposes, the nation had to be separated from all other nations; for if Israel was polluted, how could the Holy Son of God come into the world? "God is perpetually at war with sin," wrote G. Campbell Morgan. "That is the whole explanation of the extermination of the Canaanites.

The main deity in Canaan was Baal, god of rainfall and fertility, and Ashtoreth was his spouse. If you wanted to have fruitful orchards and vineyards, flourishing crops, and increasing flocks and herds, you worshiped Baal by visiting a temple prostitute. This combination of idolatry, immorality, and agricultural success was difficult for men to resist, which explains why God told Israel to wipe out the Canaanite religion completely (Num. 33:51–56; Deut. 7:1–5). ([Be Available Judges](#))

Knowing God's Word by Stanley A. Ellisen - This book highlights a crucial, moral question--how God's chosen people could be justified in taking Canaan, slaughtering its population, and expropriating its land and wealth as their own. We face that moral issue in other books such as Numbers and Samuels where Israel wields the sword on the heathen rather than preaches the Word. Why were they not sent into Canaan as evangelists rather than executioners? Several significant reasons should be noted from the historic background.

1. Because of Canaan's Debased Religion. The cultic religion of Canaan had become especially abhorrent in its views of God and of morality itself. Ugaritic excavations have shown the extreme lewdness of their whole religion with its pantheon of gods, e.g., El the head deity is pictured proudly as being completely sensual, sordid, and bloodthirsty even with his own . The three Canaanite goddesses are shown with serpents wrapped about them in vile , sexual postures. The system gave homage to serpents, was totally debased , and was due for extinction .

2. Because of Their Degenerate Culture . This worship of demonic sex and war idols reflected a society with the grossest kinds of immorality and violence . Archeological digs reveal their temples were centers of vice with Sodomite priests and prostitute priestesses. Burning children alive on their altars had become a common ritual . The wretchedness of this idolatry may be contrasted with that of Egypt and Mesopotamia whose morality had not sunk to such depths of vulgarity and brutality. The whole culture was due for destruction (Lev. 18:25).

3 . Because of God's Warnings and Patience . The text many times declares that the Lord was the real landowner of Canaan and

could give or deny it to whom He would for reasons not always apparent to men. His plan of giving and probation is several times noted long before Moses and Joshua :

- a. Through Noah God predicted judgment on the Canaanites for their lewdness (Gen. 9:22-27) .
- b . To Abraham and his children the Lord promised the land of Canaan which they would receive after the sins of the Amorites were full (Gen . 15 : 13-16) .
- c . As with the Sodomites before its destruction, the Lord doubtless gave the Canaanites ample opportunities to respond by repentance (Gen . 18:25; Rom. 1:18-22). God waited 400 years for that response .

4. Because of Israel's Divine Commission. Israel was not called to be a religious organization only, but a civil government with covenant obligations to the Lord . As such, its first commission was to execute judgment on a corrupt and violent society in compliance with the Noahic covenant (Gen. 9:6). Though continually reticent to perform this sordid duty, Israel was under specific command of the Lord to take the land, destroy the Canaanites, and receive its wealth (Num. 31:7; Deut. 9:3; 7:16 ; Josh. 1 : 1-7) . Israel ' s attacks, in fact, were often responses to the Canaanites initial attacks (Num. 21 : 1 , 23-24,33; Josh. 9:1-2; 10:1-4; 11 : 1 - 5).

5. Because of God's Covenant Promises. As declared to Abraham and Israel by the Lord , the final occupation of Palestine by Israel will extend from Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen . 15 : 8; pp . 60-61 Deut . 1 : 7-8; 30 : 5) . Before that future, final occupation, however, the Lord will again purge the land of vile idolatry and brutality brought in by a Satan-inspired religious system (Rev . 1 4:16f. ; 19:15)

Question: [Why did God command the extermination / genocide of the Canaanites, women and children included?](#)

Answer: In 1 Samuel 15:2-3, God commanded Saul and the Israelites, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'" God ordered similar things when the Israelites were invading the promised land (Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:6; 20:16-18). Why would God have the Israelites exterminate an entire group of people, women and children included?

This is a difficult issue. We do not fully understand why God would command such a thing, but we trust God that He is just – and we recognize that we are incapable of fully understanding a sovereign, infinite, and eternal God. As we look at difficult issues such as this one, we must remember that God's ways are higher than our ways and [His thoughts are higher than our thoughts](#) (Isaiah 55:9; Romans 11:33-36). We have to be willing to trust God and have faith in Him even when we do not understand His ways.

Unlike us, God knows the future. God knew what the results would be if Israel did not completely eradicate the Amalekites. If Israel did not carry out God's orders, the Amalekites would come back to trouble the Israelites in the future. Saul claimed to have killed everyone but the Amalekite king Agag (1 Samuel 15:20). Obviously, Saul was lying—just a couple of decades later, there were enough Amalekites to take David and his men's families captive (1 Samuel 30:1-2). After David and his men attacked the Amalekites and rescued their families, 400 Amalekites escaped. If Saul had fulfilled what God had commanded him, this never would have occurred. Several hundred years later, a descendant of Agag, Haman, tried to have the entire Jewish people exterminated (see the book of Esther). So, Saul's incomplete obedience almost resulted in Israel's destruction. God knew this would occur, so He ordered the extermination of the Amalekites ahead of time.

In regard to the Canaanites, God commanded, "In the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them — the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites — as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). The Israelites failed in this mission as well, and exactly what God said would happen occurred (Judges 2:1-3; 1 Kings 11:5; 14:24; 2 Kings 16:3-4). God did not order the extermination of these people to be cruel, but to prevent even greater evil from occurring in the future.

Probably the most difficult part of these commands from God is that God ordered the death of children and infants as well. Why would God order the death of innocent children? (1) Children are not innocent (Psalm 51:5; 58:3). (2) These children would have likely grown up as adherents to the evil religions and practices of their parents. (3) These children would naturally have grown up resentful of the Israelites and later sought to avenge the "unjust" treatment of their parents.

Again, this answer does not completely deal with all the issues. Our focus should be on trusting God even when we do not understand His ways. We also must remember that God looks at things from an eternal perspective and that His ways are higher than our ways. God is just, righteous, holy, loving, merciful, and gracious. How His attributes work together can be a mystery to us – but that does not mean that He is not who the Bible proclaims Him to be. GotQuestions.org

R A Torrey - [Difficulties in the Bible](#) - THE SLAUGHTER OF THE CANAANITES BY GOD'S COMMAND

There are few things in the Bible over which more intelligent readers have stumbled, and over which infidels have more frequently gloated and gloried, than God's command that certain people should be utterly exterminated, sparing neither sex nor age. Men, women and children were to be killed. Thus, for example, we read in Deuteronomy 20:16–17 this command of God to the people of Israel: "But of the cities of these peoples, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: but thou shalt utterly destroy them; the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite; as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee" (RV). In regard to other cities, it was commanded that if they sued for peace, it was to be granted and all the inhabitants spared; if they made war, the adult males were to be slain but the women and children were to be spared (Deuteronomy 20:10–15). These were the cities that were far away. But the inhabitants of the cities of the lands that the Israelites themselves were to inhabit were to be utterly exterminated.

How can we reconcile any such appallingly harsh commands as these with the doctrine so plainly taught in the New Testament that God is love? It is said that these commands can certainly not have been from God, and that the Old Testament is certainly wrong when it says that they were from God. What shall we say in reply to this?

1. It is certainly appalling that any people should be utterly put to the sword, not only the men of war but the old men and old women, the young women and the children.

But there is something even more appalling than this. That is that the iniquity of any people should have become so full, their rebellion against God so strong and so universal, their moral corruption and debasement so utter and so pervasive, even down to babes just born, as to make such treatment absolutely necessary in the interests of humanity. But this was precisely the case with the nations in question. Not from the Bible alone do we learn how unfathomable were the depths of moral pollution to which these nations had sunk. They had become a moral cancer threatening the very life of the whole human race. That cancer must be cut out in every fiber if the body was to be saved. Cutting out a cancer is a delicate operation, but often it is the kindest thing a surgeon can do under existing circumstances. The kindest thing that God could do for the human race was to cut out every root and fiber of these grossly wicked people.

2. God certainly has a right to visit judgment upon individuals and upon nations sunk in sin.

The only wonder is, when one stops to think of it, that He is so long-suffering, and that He does not visit judgment upon individuals and upon nations sooner. When one really comes to understand His holiness on the one hand, and the depths of covetousness, greed, lust, vileness, lawlessness and contempt for God to which certain groups today have sunk, and how even the young children go astray into unmentionable vileness, one sometimes almost wonders why God does not blot them out as He commanded the Israelites to do with the Canaanites of old! The command to exterminate the Canaanites was a command big with mercy and love. It was mercy and love, first of all, to the Israelites. Unless the Canaanites were exterminated, they would themselves be exterminated. In point of fact, the Israelites were contaminated for the very reason that they did not carry out God's stern decree to its fullest extent. They stopped short of what God commanded them to do, to their own lasting loss.

But what about the women—might not they be spared?

The answer is very plain. The women were the prime source of contamination (Numbers 31:15–16). Though true women are nobler than true men, depraved women are more dangerous than depraved men.

But what about the children? Might not they be spared?

Anyone who has had experience with the children of the depraved knows how persistently the vices bred for generations in the ancestors reappear in the children even when they are taken away from their evil surroundings and brought up in the most favorable environment. By the regenerating power of the gospel it is possible to correct all this, but we must remember that this case was centuries before the gospel proclamation.

Love and mercy for Israel demanded just what God commanded. Love and mercy for the whole race demanded it. God's purpose in Israel was not merely to bless them. Through Israel He planned to bless all men. He was training a people in the seclusion of centuries in order that when the training was completed they might come out of the cloister and carry benediction, salvation and life to all nations.

3. God's plans are not only beneficent but vast, and it takes centuries to work them out. We creatures of a day in our conceit look at some little fragment of God's infinite plan and presume to judge the whole, of which we know little or nothing.

It would be well if we could only learn that God is infinite and we infinitesimal, and so of scientific and philosophic necessity His

judgments are unsearchable and His ways past tracing out (Romans 11:33). A child never appears a greater fool than when criticizing a philosopher, and a philosopher never appears a greater fool than when criticizing God.

4. The extermination of the Canaanite children was not only an act of mercy and love to the world at large; it was also an act of love and mercy to the children themselves.

What awaited these children, if they were allowed to live, was something vastly worse than death. What awaited them in death it is impossible to be dogmatic about, but unless one accepts the wholly unbiblical and improbable doctrine of the damnation of all unbaptized infants we need have no fears. Even today I could almost wish that all the babies born into families of wicked influence might be slain in infancy, were it not for the hope that some concerned Christian will carry to them the saving gospel of the Son of God.

5. But someone may still say, "Yes, I can see it was an act of mercy to blot out people so fallen; but why was it not done by pestilence or famine, rather than by the hand of the Israelites?"

The answer to this question is very simple. The Israelites themselves were in training. They were constantly falling into sin and they needed the solemn lesson that would come to them through their being made the executioners of God's wrath against the wickedness and vileness of the Canaanites. A deep impression of God's holiness and hatred of sin would thus be produced. They were distinctly told before they carried out God's judgment that the reason why they were to utterly destroy the Canaanites was "that they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods" (Deuteronomy 20:18). The whole proceeding is an impressive illustration of the exceeding hatefulness of sin in God's sight. It says to us that sin persisted in is a thing so grievous and ruinous as to necessitate the utter destruction of the entire race, male and female, young and old, that persists in it. It is simply the lesson that the whole Bible teaches, and that all history teaches: "The wages of sin is death."

6. Those who regard sin lightly and who have no adequate concept of God's holiness will always find insurmountable difficulty in this command of God. But those who have come to see the awfulness of sin and have learned to hate it with the infinite hate it deserves, those who have caught some glimpses of the infinite holiness of God and have been made in some measure partakers of that holiness, will after mature reflection have no difficulty whatever with this command. It is consciousness of sin in our own hearts and lives that makes us rebel against God's stern dealings with sin.

7. The sneering objection is sometimes made by infidels to the sparing, in certain cases, of the women as recorded in Deuteronomy 20:10–15, and also the sparing of the women in Numbers 31:21–35, 40. These critics claim that the women were to be spared for immoral purposes. One writer asks, "Am I to understand that God approved of taking as tribute in spoils of war, a number of virgins for a use that is only too obvious?" Words of similar import are to be found in a number of books. But to any fair-minded man who reads the actual Scripture account there is not the slightest intimation that the virgins were preserved for the use suggested. The whole context of the passage in Numbers 31, which is the one most frequently cited in this connection by unbelievers, is a solemn warning against immorality of this kind. Far from being a suggestion that God countenances acts of this character, it shows how sternly God dealt with this impurity.

In Numbers 25:1–9 we are told how the men of Israel did give themselves up to impurity with the daughters of Moab, but how in consequence the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and how God visited their impurity with the sternest judgment. In the very chapter in question every woman who had been guilty of impurity was slain (Numbers 31:17). In actual fact, it is suggested, at least by verse 18, that it was only the female children who could be spared. It was certainly an act of mercy on God's part to deliver these "women children" from their evil surroundings and hand them over to Israel for training where they would be brought in contact with a pure religion and trained up to become pure women. According to the record, far from being handed over to the Israelites for immoral purposes, they were entrusted to them for the highest purposes.

Gleason Archer - How can the total destruction of Midian in Numbers 31 be morally justified?

Numbers 31 narrates the total destruction of the Midianites who had conspired to seduce the Israelites to fornication and idolatry at the incident of Baal-peor (Nu 25:1–9). The resultant plague against the Israelites on that occasion mounted to a total of twenty-four thousand and a serious alienation with God. The heinousness of their crime against the Lord's people and the threat of future allurement to apostasy made the Midianites ripe for judgment. Chapter 31 tells us very plainly that it was the Lord Yahweh Himself who commanded this punitive action; it did not originate with Moses or his men. They were commanded to "execute the LORD's vengeance on Midian" (Nu 31:3, NASB) by sending against them an army of twelve thousand warriors, one thousand from each tribe, under the leadership of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron (Nu 31:6).

The attack was so successful that without a single casualty (Nu 31:49) the Israelites defeated and killed all five kings of the Midianites and all their men as well. Balaam, the unfaithful prophet of God from Beor, had been the instigator of the apostasy of Baal-peor; so he also was killed. The married women and all the younger women who had been sexually active were likewise put to death (Nu 31:15–18), after Moses had given special orders to do so. Only the young girls and virgins had their lives spared, and they

were taken as servants into the Israelite households. A stated percentage of the Midianite livestock was devoted to the Lord and the service of the tabernacle. Of the gold ornaments taken from the enemy, 16,750 shekels were also given to the Lord's service. Thus the entire affair was concluded and the baneful effects of fraternization with degenerate pagans became a thing of the past—all but the unhappy memory and **the solemn warning against yielding to the seduction of Canaanite idolatry.**

Was this action morally justified? Those who wish to argue that it was cruel and uncalled for will have to argue with God, for He commanded it. But it seems quite apparent in the light of all the circumstances and the background of this crisis that the integrity of the entire nation was at stake. Had the threat to Israel's existence as a covenant nation been dealt with any less severely, it is extremely doubtful that Israel would have been able to conquer Canaan at all, or claim the Land of Promise as a sacred trust from God. The massacre was as regrettable as a radical surgery performed on the ailing body of a cancer victim. If his life is to be preserved, the diseased portion must be completely cut away. (Further discussion concerning this whole problem of extermination will be found in connection with Joshua 6:21—"Was Joshua justified in exterminating the population of Jericho?") ([New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties](#)) (Bold added)

Related Resource

- [Why did God condone such terrible violence in the Old Testament? | GotQuestions.org](#)

Numbers 31:18 "But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves.

- keep alive for yourselves: Lev 25:44 De 20:14 21:10-14 2Ch 28:8-10 Isa 14:2
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SPARE THE VIRGINS FOR YOURSELVES

But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves - Presumably they would be raised in the teachings of the Hebrews and would grow up and could then be "equally yoked" with sons of Israel.

Wiersbe points out that "Once the nation was established, a different law applied to the treatment of captives taken in victories over cities outside the land of Canaan (Deut. 20:1-21:14). However, the conflict with Midian wasn't a normal battle; it was God's punishment of Midian for trying to weaken and destroy His chosen people. He wanted the Midianites to be exterminated so they couldn't pollute the land anymore or tempt His people to sin." (Be Counted)

TSK - It has been groundlessly asserted, that Moses here authorised the Israelites to make concubines of the whole number of female children; and an insidious objection against his writings has been grounded upon this monstrous supposition. But the whole tenor of the law, and especially a statute recorded in De 21:10-14, proves most decisively to the contrary. They were merely permitted to possess them as female slaves, educating them in their families, and employing them as domestics; for the laws concerning fornication, concubinage, and marriage, were in full force, and prohibited an Israelite even from marrying a captive, without delays and previous formalities; and if he afterwards divorced her, he was to set her at liberty, "because he had humbled her."

CRITICISM OF MOSES - In the late eighteenth century, the deist [Thomas Paine](#) commented at length on Moses' Laws in [The Age of Reason](#) (1794, 1795, and 1807). Paine considered Moses to be a "detestable villain", and cited **Numbers 31:13-18** as an example of his "unexampled atrocities".^[171] In the passage, the Jewish army had returned from [conquering the Midianites](#), and Moses went to meet it, saying angrily: *"Have you spared all the women? Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD. Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves."* Prominent atheist [Richard Dawkins](#) also made reference to these verses (Nu 31:13-18) in his 2006 book, [The God Delusion](#), concluding that Moses was "not a great [role model](#) for modern moralists".^[172]

Numbers 31:19 "And you, camp outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves, you and your captives, on the third day and on the seventh day.

- Nu 5:2 Nu 19:11-22 1Ch 22:8

- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passage:

Numbers 19:11-13+ 'The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days. 12 'That one shall purify himself from uncleanness with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and then he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. 13 'Anyone who touches a corpse, the body of a man who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from Israel. Because the water for impurity was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is still on him.

RITUAL PURIFICATION OF WARRIORS

And you, camp outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves, you and your captives, on the third day and on the seventh day. Though the Israelites had acted by the commission of God, yet they had contracted pollution by touching the dead; and the spoil having been used by idolaters, must also be purified in the prescribed manner.

- See related commentary on **waters for purification** in Nu 19:11-22
- See also article in Wikipedia - [water of lustration](#).

Norman Geisler - NUMBERS 31—How can it be morally right for the Israelites to totally destroy the Midianites?

PROBLEM: According to the record of events in Numbers 31, Moses commanded the Israelites to utterly destroy the Midianites. Verse 7 states that they killed every Midianite male. Verse 9 records that they took all the women and children as captives, and verse 10 states that the Israelites burned all the cities and camps of the Midianites. Again, in verse 17, Moses commanded the people to kill every male child of the Midianites and every Midianite woman who had intercourse with a man, leaving only the female children and young virgins. How can such a total destruction be morally justified?

SOLUTION: First of all, it must be remembered that it was the Midianites who corrupted God's people by leading them into idolatry at Baal-Peor so that 24,000 Israelites died in the plague (Num. 25:9). It was necessary to totally eliminate this evil influence from Israel. Further, it was not on the authority of Moses that Israel performed this destruction. Rather, it was at the direct command of God. Verse 2 records God's command to Moses to carry out the Lord's vengeance upon the Midianites. The abominable nature of the influence which the Midianites had upon Israel in leading them into idolatry merited the destructive judgment of God. God dealt severely and decisively with this cancer. The moral justification for this action is found in the fact that God has the right to give and take life. Since the wages of sin is death, and the Midianites engaged in a terrible sin, they justly reaped the consequences of God's vengeance (see comments on Joshua 6:21). ([When Critics Ask](#))

QUESTION - [What is the significance of a red heifer in the Bible? Is a red heifer a sign of the end times?](#)

Answer: To meet the requirements of the Old Testament law, a red heifer was needed to help accomplish the purification from sin—specifically, the *ashes* of a red heifer were needed. The red heifer was a reddish-brown cow, probably at least two years old. It was to be "without defect or blemish" and to have never borne a yoke. The sacrifice of the red heifer was unique in the law in that it used a female animal, it was sacrificed away from the entrance to the tabernacle, and it was the only sacrifice in which the color of the animal was specified.

The slaughtering of a red heifer is described in Numbers 19:1–10. [Eleazar](#) the priest was to oversee the ritual outside the camp of the Israelites. After the animal was killed, [Eleazar](#) was to sprinkle some of its blood toward the front of the tabernacle seven times (Nu 19:4). Then he left camp again and oversaw the burning of the carcass of the red heifer (Nu 19:5). As the red heifer burned, the priest was commanded to add "some cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool" to the fire (Nu 19:6).

The ashes of the red heifer were collected and stored "in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp." The ashes were used "in the water of cleansing; it is for purification from sin" (Nu 19:9). The law goes on to detail when and how the ashes of the red heifer were used in purifying those who came into contact with a dead body: "Whoever touches a human corpse will be unclean for seven days. They must purify themselves with the water on the third day and on the seventh day; then they will be clean" (Nu 19:11–12). The purification process involved the ashes of the red heifer in this way: "Put some ashes from the burned purification offering into a jar and pour fresh water over them. Then a man who is ceremonially clean is to take some hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle . . .

anyone who has touched a human bone or a grave or anyone who has been killed or anyone who has died a natural death" (Nu 19:17–18).

The imagery of the red heifer is yet another foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ for believers' sin. The Lord Jesus was "without blemish," just as the red heifer was to be. As the heifer was sacrificed "outside the camp" (Numbers 19:3), Jesus was crucified outside of Jerusalem (Hebrews 13:11–12). And just as the ashes of the red heifer cleansed people from the contamination of death, so the sacrifice of Christ saves us from the penalty and corruption of death.

The red heifer ritual was established in the Mosaic Law; in the interval since that time, Judaism has added many standards to what was originally a straightforward, rather simple set of instructions. Talmudic tradition speaks of the type of rope the red heifer was to be bound with, the direction it was to face when being slaughtered, the words spoken by the priest, the wearing of sandals during the ritual, etc. The rabbinical rules listed many things that would disqualify a red heifer from being sacrificed: if she had been ridden or leaned on, if she had a garment placed over her, if a bird had rested on her, and if she had two black or white hairs, among many other conditions.

According to rabbinical tradition, there have been nine red heifers sacrificed since Moses' time. Since the destruction of the [second temple](#), no red heifers have been slaughtered. The rabbi [Maimonides](#) (1135—1204) taught that the tenth red heifer would be sacrificed by the Messiah Himself. Those who anticipate the construction of a third temple are eager to find a red heifer that meets all the conditions, because the red heifer ashes will be necessary to purify the new temple. Many consider that the appearance of a red heifer will herald the construction of the temple and the return of Christ. According to the Temple Institute, a group advocating the construction of a third temple, a flawless red heifer was born in August 2018 in Israel.

According to the [futurist](#) timeline of eschatology, there will indeed be a third temple of God in Jerusalem. Jesus prophesied a desecration of the [temple](#) during the tribulation (Matthew 24:15; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:4); for that to occur, there obviously will have to be a temple in Jerusalem to desecrate. Assuming that those who dedicate the end-times temple follow Jewish law, they will need the ashes of a red heifer, mixed with water, for the ceremonial cleansing. If a blemish-free red heifer has truly been born, it could be seen as one more piece falling into place leading up to the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. [GotQuestions.org](#)

Numbers 31:20 "You shall purify for yourselves every garment and every article of leather and all the work of goats' hair, and all articles of wood."

- raiment: Nu 19:14-16,22 Ge 35:2 Ex 19:10
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

RITUAL PURIFICATION OF GARMENTS, ETC

You shall purify for yourselves every garment and every article of leather and all the work of goats' hair, and all articles of wood."

Numbers 31:21 Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to battle, "This is the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded Moses:

- Nu 30:16
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ELEAZAR PASSESS ON MOSES COMMAND FROM YHWH

Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to battle, "This is the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded Moses - This would be a new law Israel needed because they would soon conquering the abominable, defiled Canaanites.

Numbers 31:22 only the gold and the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin and the lead,

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- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

only the gold and the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin and the lead,

Numbers 31:23 everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean, but it shall be purified with water for impurity. But whatever cannot stand the fire you shall pass through the water.

- abide: Isa 43:2 Zec 13:9 Mal 2:2,3 Mt 3:11 1Co 3:13 1Pe 1:7 4:12 Rev 3:18
- **it shall be purified:** Nu 8:7 Nu 19:9,17
- ye shall make: Lev 11:32 15:17 Eph 5:26 Tit 3:5,6 1Pe 3:21
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

RITUAL PURIFICATION BY FIRE AND WATER

everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean, but it shall be purified with water for impurity. But whatever cannot stand the fire you shall pass through the water - Interesting that even after purging in fire God still commanded ritual purification with waters of purification. This emphasizes Yahweh's focus on absolute need for holiness in His holy people, down to the smallest detail! That is still true today beloved of God!

There is a fascinating somewhat related passage where "fire" is used (primarily) figuratively to describe the purging of national Israel in the last days at the time of Messiah's return, the prophet Zechariah recording

"And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" (Zec 13:9+, cf Zech 12:10+, Da 12:7, 10+ where "holy people" = Israel)

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily - Numbers 31:23 Everything that may abide the fire, ye shall make to go through the fire.

The great aim of this enactment was to render these articles ceremonially clean. They had been in the use of the Midianites, and required cleansing, before they could be appropriated by Israel. But the cleansing processes were to be determined by their texture. Fire for what would stand fire; water for what could not stand fire.

We must be thoroughly cleansed. — If a man will purge himself, he shall be a vessel unto honor, meet for the Master's use. Not cleverness, but cleanliness, is the prime condition of service. Jesus will not put throne-water into impure and polluted receptacles. What fellowship hath Christ with Belial?

We shall not be passed through fire, unless we can stand it. — Our faith is too precious to God to be exposed to risk. He will not let us be tempted beyond what we are able, lest we be discouraged, and make shipwreck. If, then you are called at this time to pass through an unusually searching ordeal, be sure that your Heavenly Father knows that you can endure it. "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

We must go through water, if not through fire. — The law provided also that "all that abideth not the fire, ye shall make go through the water." The one is negative, the other positive; the first appertains to John the Baptist, the second to the Holy Spirit. The latter is the best; but be thankful, if you cannot endure it, that there is a discipline more tempered and gentle, which will yet render you meet for the handling of the Holy Savior.

AMONG THE FURNACES - Susannah Spurgeon

"Everything that may abide the fire, you shall make it go through the fire, and it shall be clean." Numbers 31:23

Is not this Your way, even now, O Lord? The ancient statute has never been repealed, this "ordinance of the law which the Lord commanded Moses" is still in force in a spiritual sense for His own spiritual Israel. His prey which He has taken from the mighty, His precious spoil which He has gathered from among all nations — must be cleansed and purified — before it can be fit for His use. And so it comes to pass, that all that may abide the fire, shall be made to go through it.

Herein, surely, are comfortable thoughts for tried and afflicted souls. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you;" it was even so in the days of old, and there is a needs-be for the fulfillment of the commandment yet.

If we are God's gold — we must be subjected to constant purifying by fire. If He claims us as His silver — we shall be refined again and again, that our pollution may be purged, and all that is true and precious may shine forth with fresh luster to His glory.

It is not the actual separation of the ore from its original dross that is here referred to, but the necessary cleansing of fashioned vessels and shapely treasures — which have contracted any defilement, or suffered some dishonor. Alas! our inmost hearts tell us what abundant need there is that "the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is."

But now, dear Lord, help me to apply this Your law, to my own most valued possessions. Let me see what I have that will "abide the fire." Will my "good hope through grace" stand the test of such an ordeal? Will my "joy and peace in believing" crumble into nothingness under the fierce heat of tribulation? Can the "strong consolation" which God gives me, disappear as a vapor when the flame of affliction touches it? Or, if I should lose my best and dearest treasures — can the hot furnace of bereavement burn up all my strength and comfort? God forbid!

The true work of grace in a human heart — can abide the fire of any trial to which the Lord may be pleased to expose it. We can sing of His love — when the heat is most vehement; and glorify Him — by proving that promise true, "When you go through deep waters — I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty — you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression — you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:2-3

This is why the command is so frequently heard, thrilling through heart and life, "You shall make it go through the fire!"

Because our faith is so precious, and our love is so golden, and our hope is so uplifting — that they must be ever subject to the Refiner's fire. Does the flesh sometimes shrink from such an refining as this? Yes, doubtless it does; "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak!" Yet need we not fear; the purpose of our great Refiner is to discipline — not to destroy us. He makes the sighs of the furnace to strike the key-notes of the new and everlasting song; and the coming forth of His "tried gold" will be found "unto praise, and honor, and glory at His appearing."

Dear Father, what a blessed reason this gives for glorying in tribulations also, for thus we are being made perfect to do Your work and will. What though the fire is hot, and the process a painful one — can we not see Your eyes watching tenderly, and hear Your loving voice saying, "Fear not, for I am with you!" And does not Your presence give "fullness of joy" anywhere — even in the furnace? To abide the fire — is sure proof that we shall pass through it, and emerge at last in Your likeness.

You do not refine, and try, and prove that which is spurious and valueless; but, having seen the glint of the gold which is Yours, even through the defilement which defaces us — You patiently wait, and "perfect that which concerns us."

"It shall be clean!" O glorious promise! Not a moment longer than the furnace is needed — shall we be exposed to its heat. But only when all that is vile is consumed — shall we come forth white and glistening.

Dear Lord, we cannot love the fire — but we do praise You for the fire's work upon us. By Your grace, we would rather feel the hot breath of the purifying flame as it destroys our rust and rubbish — than disgrace our Lord and Master by living tarnished and corroded lives.

Numbers 31:24 "And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may enter the camp."

- Nu 19:19 Lev 11:25 14:9 15:13
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

RITUAL CLEANSING ON SEVENTH DAY

And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may enter the camp- Everything involved with the war with Midian was considered defiled and had to be purified for 7 days and this even included the captive virgins.

Wiersbe sums up the significance of the purification - Whether in peace or in war, it was important to Israel that they maintain a holy relationship with the Lord. They had to make a difference between the clean and the unclean, and no compromise was permitted. This week-long period of purification would remind the 12,000 soldiers and the people in the camp that the nations they would face in Canaan were dangerous, not only because they were enemies but they were also unclean sinners who could tempt them and defile them. Moses wanted to prevent another defeat like Baal Peor. (Be Counted)

Numbers 31:25 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

Numbers 31:26 "You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers' households of the congregation take a count of the booty that was captured, both of man and of animal;

- that was taken: Heb. of the captivity, Nu 31:26
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

NOT A BODY COUNT BUT A BOOTY COUNT

You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers' households of the congregation take a count of the booty that was captured, both of man and of animal - Man is generic for the men (even male children) had been exterminated.

Wiersbe - The people and animals that Israel took as spoils of war were distributed three ways: the soldiers got half, the people in the camp got half, and both the soldiers and the people gave a percentage to the Lord. After all, it was the Lord who gave them the victory. (Ibid)

Numbers 31:27 and divide the booty between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation.

- **divide:** Jos 22:8 1Sa 30:4,24,25 Ps 68:12
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

DIVISION OF BOOTY

and divide the booty between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation- Years later King David also divided booty between those who went to war and those who remained home.

"And who will listen to you in this matter? For **as his share is who goes down to the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage; they shall share alike.**" So it has been from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel to this day. (1 Sa 30:24-25)

Numbers 31:28 "Levy a tax for the LORD from the men of war who went out to battle, one in five hundred of the persons and of the cattle and of the donkeys and of the sheep;

- **levy:** Ge 14:20 Jos 6:19,24 2Sa 8:11,12 1Ch 18:11 26:26,27 Pr 3:9,10 Isa 18:7 23:18 60:9 Mt 22:21
- **one soul:** Nu 31:30,47 18:26
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BOOTY TAX

Levy a tax for the LORD from the men of war who went out to battle, one in five hundred of the persons and of the cattle

and of the donkeys and of the sheep - The tax was 1/500th of persons and each type of beast.

NET NOTE - The verb is the Hiphil, "you shall cause to be taken up." The perfect with vav (w) continues the sequence of the instructions. This raised offering was to be a tax of one-fifth of one percent for the LORD.

Numbers 31:29 take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priest, as an offering to the LORD.

- **as an offering:** Nu 18:26 Ex 29:27 De 12:12,19
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BOOTY TAX FROM WARRIORS TO ELEAZAR

take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priest, as an offering to the LORD- The offering (or "heave offering") was to be lifted up to Yahweh acknowledging it was His. The Septuagint translated *teruman* with [aparche](#) which means First fruits.

Offering (heave offering) ([08541](#))([terumah](#) possibly from **rum** = to be high or exalted, depicts something being lifted up as one would do in an offering) is a feminine noun that means offering, and can be translated as "offering, portion, gift, contribution." Biblical authors use this noun as a general term for various offerings. The word "contribution" is also used of all kinds of holy gifts given to the priests (Num 5:9; 15:19–21; 18:8, 19; Deut 12:6, 11, 17; 2 Chron 31:10, 12, 14; Neh 12:44; 13:5; Ezek 20:40). The first use referring to the contributions from the sons of Israel to God for the building of the Tabernacle (Ex 25:2-3). **Terumah** describes a number of different offerings - contribution of materials for building (Ex 25:2; 35:5); an animal for sacrifice (Ex. 29:27; Nu 6:20); the thigh part of the animal to the priest (Lev 10:14); a shekel as a contribution to the LORD (Ex 30:13-15 - the purpose of the offering being to atone); gold for the priests (Nu 31:52); land for the priests (Ezek. 45:6, 7); **the offering of war booty** (Nu 31:29) and materials for an idol (Isa 40:20)! In one instance, this word is used to describe a ruler who "takes bribes" ("demands contributions" - HCSB) (Pr. 29:4).

Numbers 31:30 "From the sons of Israel's half, you shall take one drawn out of every fifty of the persons, of the cattle, of the donkeys and of the sheep, from all the animals, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the LORD."

- one portion: Nu 31:42-47
- flocks: or, goats
- and give: Nu 31:28 18:24-28 1Co 9:13,14
- keep the: Nu 3:7,8,25,31,36-39 18:1-5,23 1Ch 9:27-29 23:32 26:20-27 Ac 20:28 1Co 4:2 Col 4:17 Heb 13:17
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BOOTY TAX FROM SON'S OF ISRAEL'S HALF

From the sons of Israel's half, you shall take one drawn out of every fifty of the persons, of the cattle, of the donkeys and of the sheep, from all the animals, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the LORD - Sons of Israel paid a higher tax (1/50th) and this went not to Eleazar but to the Levites to support their work in the upkeep of the Holy Tabernacle.

Numbers 31:31 Moses and Eleazar the priest did just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Moses and Eleazar the priest did just as the LORD had commanded Moses - Unquestioning, unhesitating obedience.

Numbers 31:32 Now the booty that remained from the spoil which the men of war had plundered was 675,000 sheep,

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- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

BOOTY TOTALS

Now the booty that remained from the spoil which the men of war had plundered was 675,000 sheep,

Booty - It appears from the enumeration here, that the Israelites, in this war with the Midianites, took 32,000 female prisoners, 61,000 asses, 72,000 beeves, and 675,000 sheep and small cattle; besides the immense number of males who fell in battle, and the women and children who were slain by the divine command. (v17.) This booty was divided into equal parts, by which partition a far larger share was justly given to the warriors employed on the expedition, who were only 12,000, than to those, who being equally willing to go, were ordered to stay in the camp. Each party was to give a certain proportion to Jehovah, as their sovereign, in grateful acknowledgement that to him they owed their success. The soldiers to give to the Lord one out of every five hundred persons, beeves, asses, and sheep, (v28,) and the people, who by staying at home risked nothing, and had no fatigue, were to give one out of fifty of each of the above to the Levites, who were far more numerous than the priests. (v30.) The booty, its division among the soldiers and people, and the proportion given by each to the Lord and to the Levites, will be seen at one view by the following table: It does not appear that a single ox, sheep, or ass, was required by Moses as his portion; or that there was any given to him by the people; and though he had a family as well as others, yet no provision was made for them above the common lot of Levites! (TSK)

Numbers 31:33 and 72,000 cattle,

and 72,000 cattle,

Numbers 31:34 and 61,000 donkeys,

and 61,000 donkeys

Numbers 31:35 and of human beings, of the women who had not known man intimately, all the persons were 32,000.

- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

and of human beings, of the women who had not known man intimately, all the persons were 32,000.

Numbers 31:36 The half, the portion of those who went out to war, was as follows: the number of sheep was 337,500,

FIFTY PER CENT TO WARRIORS

The half, the portion of those who went out to war, was as follows: the number of sheep was 337,500

Numbers 31:37 and the LORD'S levy of the sheep was 675;

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and the LORD'S levy of the sheep was 675- This comes out to 0.2% or 1/500th.

Numbers 31:38 and the cattle were 36,000, from which the LORD'S levy was 72;

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and the cattle were 36,000, from which the LORD'S levy was 72- Again right on the "money" at 1 in 500 or 0.2%.

Numbers 31:39 and the donkeys were 30,500, from which the LORD'S levy was 61;

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and the donkeys were 30,500, from which the LORD'S levy was 61- Again right on the "money" at 1 in 500 or 0.2%.

Numbers 31:40 and the human beings were 16,000, from whom the LORD'S levy was 32 persons.

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and the human beings were 16,000, from whom the LORD'S levy was 32 persons- Again right on the "money" at 1 in 500 or 0.2%.

Numbers 31:41 Moses gave the levy which was the LORD'S offering to Eleazar the priest, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

- Eleazar: Nu 31:29-31 18:8,19 Mt 10:10 1Co 9:10-14 Ga 6:6 1Ti 5:17 Heb 7:4-6,9-12
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Moses gave the levy which was the LORD'S offering to Eleazar the priest, just as the LORD had commanded Moses- There is not evidence Moses kept any and of course he would not need any as he was soon to be gathered to his people (what about his offspring?)

Numbers 31:42 As for the sons of Israel's half, which Moses separated from the men who had gone to war--

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As for the sons of Israel's half, which Moses separated from the men who had gone to war- Exactly as he was commanded by the LORD.

Numbers 31:43 now the congregation's half was 337,500 sheep,

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now the congregation's half was 337,500 sheep - All split 50/50 with warriors and lay people.

Numbers 31:44 and 36,000 cattle,

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and 36,000 cattle, - All split 50/50 with warriors and lay people.

Numbers 31:45 and 30,500 donkeys,

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and 30,500 donkeys - All split 50/50 with warriors and lay people.

Numbers 31:46 and the human beings were 16,000--

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and the human beings were 16,000 - All split 50/50 with warriors and lay people.

Numbers 31:47 and from the sons of Israel's half, Moses took one drawn out of every fifty, both of man and of animals, and gave them to the Levites, who kept charge of the tabernacle of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

- the Levites: Nu 18:21-24 De 12:17-19 Lu 10:1-8 1Th 5:12,13
- kept the charge: Nu 31:30 Ps 134:1 Isa 56:10,11
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

TWO PER CENT TAX GIVEN TO LEVITES

and from the sons of Israel's half, Moses took one drawn out of every fifty, both of man and of animals, and gave them to the Levites, who kept charge of the tabernacle of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses

Division of the Midianite Spoils

Type of Spoils	Total Booty	Warrior Share	Eleazar's Portion	Congregation's Share	Levites' Portion
Sheep	675,000	337,500	675	337,500	6,750
Cattle	72,000	36,000	72	36,000	720
Donkeys	61,000	30,500	61	30,500	610
Persons	32,000	16,000	32	16,000	320

Numbers 31:48 Then the officers who were over the thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, approached Moses,

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LEADERS OF ARMY APPROACH MOSES

Then the officers who were over the thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, approached Moses - As subsequent passages show, these men were motivated by gratitude for God's supernatural protection and deliverance.

Numbers 31:49 and they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken a census of men of war who are in our charge, and no man of us is missing.

- 1Sa 30:18,19 Ps 72:14 Joh 18:9
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passage:

1 John 5:4 For **whatever is born of God overcomes** (present tense of [nikao](#) - gets the victory, conquers) **the world**; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

CASUALTY REPORT: ZERO LOST!

and they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken a census of men of war who are in our charge, and no man of us is missing - Beloved, this is clearly supernatural protection by Yahweh! Beloved, you as a chosen one in Christ are protected by the LORD and nothing and no one can even touch you without your Father's permission. This reminds me of Psalm 105:15

"Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm"

Spurgeon - Abraham and his seed were in the midst of the world a generation (kingdom) of priests (cf Ex 19:6+) anointed to present sacrifice unto the most High God; since to them the oracles were committed, they were also the prophets of mankind; and they were kings too, a royal priesthood; hence they had received a threefold anointing. Their holy office surrounded them with a sacredness which rendered it sacrilege to molest them. **The Lord was pleased to impress the wild tribes of Canaan with a respectful awe of the pious strangers who had come to abide with them, so that they came not near them to do them ill.** The words here mentioned may not have been actually spoken, but the impression of awe which fell upon the nations is thus poetically described. God will not have those touched who have been set apart unto himself He calls them his own, saying, "*Mine* anointed" he declares that he has "*anointed*" them to be prophets, priests, and kings unto himself, and yet again he claims them as his prophets. "*Do my prophets* no harm." **All through the many years in which the three great fathers dwelt in Canaan no man was able to injure them; they were not able to defend themselves by force of arms; but the eternal God was their refuge.** (Nahum 1:7, Ps 2:12, Ps 46:1) **Even so at this present time the remnant according to the election of grace cannot be destroyed, nay, nor so much as touched, without the divine consent. Against the church of Christ the gates of hell cannot prevail. In all this we see reasons for giving thanks unto the Lord, and proclaiming his name according to the exhortation of the first verse of the Psalm.** Here ends the portion which was sung at the moving of the ark: its fitness to be used for such a purpose is very manifest, for the ark was the symbol both of the covenant and of that mystic dwelling of God with Israel which was at once her glory and her defence. **None could touch the Lord's peculiar ones, for the Lord was among them, flaming forth in majesty between the cherubims.**

The presence of God having remained with his chosen ones while they sojourned in Canaan, it did not desert them when they were called to go down into Egypt. They did not go there of their own choice, but under divine direction, and hence the Lord prepared their way and prospered them until he saw fit to conduct them again to the land of promise.

Gotquestions comments - Since all believers are God's anointed, does this mean that His command "Do not touch my anointed ones" keeps us from all harm? No, believers still suffer the effects of living in a fallen world. But, at the same time, believers know that God is 100 percent in control, and He can easily protect His children. Whatever happens to them is allowed by Him. Satan himself can't lay a finger on God's children without God's explicit permission (see Job 1:12; 2:6). So we trust God in everything. No matter what happens in our lives, we trust that God is in control and will equip, empower, and protect us to complete His plan for us: "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6ESV). See full discussion - [What does the Bible mean when it says not to touch God's anointed? | GotQuestions.org](#)

Numbers 31:50 "So we have brought as an offering to the LORD what each man found, articles of gold, armlets and bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD."

- an oblation: Ps 107:15,21,22 116:12,17
- an atonement: Ex 30:12,15,16 Lev 17:11
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

A "FREE WILL OFFERING" BASED ON GRATITUDE

So we have brought as an offering to the LORD what each man found, articles of gold, armlets and bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces, to make atonement ([kaphar](#)) for ourselves (lit "our souls") **before the LORD** - The officers of the army having mustered their men, found they had not lost a man in the contest with Midian! Overwhelmed with gratitude for this clear supernatural interposition of Providence in their favour, they now offer to Jehovah the golden jewels which they had found among the spoil, to the amount of 16,750 shekels. The officers were so grateful for the victory that they gave over 400 pounds of gold to the Lord. The victory was the result of God's power and working in the battle. Our victory is in Jesus Christ.

Wiersbe - They brought a special gift for the sanctuary of God out of the spoils they themselves had received. It's one thing to bring offerings to God because it's our duty, and quite something else because we love Him and appreciate what He's done for us. (Ibid)

Why did they make **atonement**? They had taken the adult Midianite women captive and brought them back to the camp and this was a sin! Another interpretation says "This spontaneous extra offering of the soldiers was "to make atonement," i.e., to substitute for the lives of those soldiers who might have died in battle, but whom God had spared (v. 49)." (Believer's Study Bible) Notice that while they offer gold for the atonement, this exchange in no way suggests that they were "buying" forgiveness from God. The Psalmist is clear writing

Even those who trust in their wealth And boast in the abundance of their riches? 7 No man can by any means redeem his brother Or give to God a ransom for him— 8 For the redemption of his soul is costly, And he should cease trying forever— 9 That he should live on eternally, That he should not undergo decay. (Ps 49:6-9)

Spurgeon - With all their riches, the whole of them put together could not rescue a comrade from the chill grasp of death. They boast of what they will do with us, let them see to themselves. Let them weigh their gold in the scales of death, and see how much they can buy therewith from the worm and the grave. The poor are their equals in this respect; let them love their friend ever so dearly, they cannot give to God a ransom for him. A king's ransom would be of no avail, a Monte Rosa of rubies, an America of silver, a world of gold, a sun of diamonds, would all be utterly condemned. O ye boasters, think not to terrify us with your worthless wealth, go ye and intimidate death before ye threaten men in whom is immortality and life. **For the redemption of their soul is precious**, and it ceaseth for ever. Too great is the price, the purchase is hopeless. For ever must the attempt to redeem a soul with money remain a failure. Death comes and wealth cannot bribe him; hell follows and no golden key can unlock its dungeon. Vain, then, are your threatenings, ye possessors of the yellow clay; your childish toys are despised by men who estimate the value of possessions by the shekel of the sanctuary. No price could secure for any man **that he should still live for ever**, and not see corruption. Mad are men now after gold, what would they be if it could buy the elixir of immortality? Gold is lavished out of the bag to cheat the worm of the poor body by embalming it, or enshrining it in a coffin of lead, but it is a miserable business, a very burlesque and comedy. As for the soul, it is too subtle a thing to be detained when it hears the divine command to soar through tracks unknown. Never, therefore, will we fear those base nibblers at our heels, whose boasted treasure proves to be so powerless to save.

Wiersbe has another explanation for the atonement in this passage - According to Exodus 30:11-16+, each time there was a census in Israel (and one had just occurred—Numbers 26), the men twenty years and older were each to give a half shekel of silver as an offering to the Lord. This was known as "atonement money" and was originally used to make the sockets for the posts that helped to form the tabernacle frame (Ex. 38:21-28+). Realizing that their lives had graciously been spared, the 12,000 soldiers wanted to give extra "atonement money" in thanksgiving to the Lord. Instead of bringing silver, they brought over 400 pounds of gold, which Moses and Eleazar received and put into the sanctuary. (Be Counted)

NET Note - The expression here may include the idea of finding protection from divine wrath, which is so common to Leviticus, but it may also be a thank offering for the fact that their lives had been spared.

John Trapp - Thankfulness for public deliverances is still due to the Most High:

"Let all who are around Him bring gifts to Him who is to be feared." {Ps 76:11}

Spurgeon - He who deserves to be praised as our God does, should not have mere verbal homage, but substantial tribute. Dread Sovereign, behold I give myself to thee. (Ro 12:1+)

Today's Best Illustrations - What's Real Giving?

When it seemed as if every home in our community were getting an answering machine, Deb and I would affirm our mutual dislike for those machines and our refusal to ever buy one.

Two summers ago while on vacation in Minnesota, I called home to talk with our teenage daughter who stayed behind to work. I got an answering machine. I figured I'd dialed the wrong number. So I hung up and dialed again. When I got an answering machine the second time, I worried that I had forgotten my phone number after two weeks of vacation. So I rang a third time. This time Kristen answered.

She said, "Did you just call?"

I said, "Yeah, but I got the wrong number."

She said, "No you didn't." She explained that she had just bought her mother an answering machine for her birthday.

I'll admit that we've enjoyed the use of that machine the last two years. But we have laughed so many times about Kristen's idea of giving. Kristen gave her mother what she wanted—an answering machine to get messages from her friends. Over the years, we've laughed a lot about our kids' perspectives on giving.

For example, our kids all agree that homemade things are not real gifts. "Don't give me a homemade thing," they say. "Don't embarrass me by sending me to a birthday party with a cheap gift. Anything under ten dollars is an embarrassing excuse for a gift." That's their wisdom about giving birthday gifts.

What's your wisdom about giving? In your mind, what constitutes a "real" gift? What do you think real giving to God is? What kind of giving pleases him, honors him, advances his work?

—John Casey, "Real Giving," Preaching Today, Tape No. 156.

See: Numbers 31:50; Proverbs 3:9; 2 Corinthians 9:7.

Numbers 31:51 Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, all kinds of wrought articles.

- Nu 7:2-6
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, all kinds of wrought articles.

Numbers 31:52 All the gold of the offering which they offered up to the LORD, from the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, was 16,750 shekels.

- offering: Heb. heave-offering, Nu 31:52
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

All the gold of the offering which they offered up to the LORD, from the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, was 16,750 shekels

Numbers 31:53 The men of war had taken booty, every man for himself.

- De 20:14
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

The men of war had taken booty, every man for himself.

Numbers 31:54 So Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it to the tent of meeting as a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD.

- a memorial: Nu 16:40 Ex 30:16 Jos 4:7 Ps 18:49 103:1,2 115:1 145:7 Zec 6:14 Lu 22:19 Ac 10:4
- [Numbers 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

A MEMORIAL BEFORE THE LORD

So Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it to the tent of meeting as a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD - The gold that the officers gave served as a "memory aid" of Jehovah giving them a victory and also forgiving their sin of bringing the Midianite women as "booty."

Biblical Illustrator - this offering was brought by Moses and Eleazar the priest into the tabernacle of the congregation, for a "memorial for the children of Israel before the Lord." Now in all this we can discern progress in Israel's history. In the earlier part of it we do not meet with any such arrangement, but when brought into immediate covenant union with God, He taught them practically that they themselves, and all that they had, belonged to Himself. He trained them to a spirit of self-denial. This is an important lesson which this history impresses upon us. If we were asked, "What are the two graces in which Christians are most wanting?" we should answer, "charity" and "self-denial"; that charity which bears long, which covers a multitude of sins, and that spirit of self-denial which leads us habitually to crucify the old man, and to place God's glory before our own comfort, ease, and pleasure. There are many Christians who are sound in doctrine, and who seem to glory that they are free from this and that error, but there is much self-indulgence in their lives. (G. Wagner.)