

The Book of Numbers

The Defeat of the Midianites

Text: Numbers 31

Introduction:

1. In Numbers 25:17ff, God ordered the Israelites to smite the Midianites because of their actions in seducing Israel to commit idolatry.
2. Chapter 31 records Israel's obedience to God's instructions.

I. The Instructions for Battle

(31:1-5)

- A. The instructions came from God to Moses.
- B. The word 'avenge' comes from two Hebrew words meaning, "Avenge the vengeance."
- C. This was to be done before the death of Moses.
- D. 1,000 men out of each tribe were to be sent to the battle; thus, a force of 12,000 soldiers.

II. The Results of the Battle

(31:6-12)

- A. Note the prominent role of Phinehas the priest in the battle (cf. 25:6-8).
- B. The phrase "holy instruments" is a reference to the trumpets (cf. 10:9).
- C. In their victory, Israel slew all the adult males of Midian – including their 5 kings and Balaam.
- D. The women, children, herds, flocks, and goods were taken as spoil.
- E. All of the cities and the encampments of the Midianites were burned.

III. The Devastating Judgment upon Midian

(31:13-18)

- A. Moses was angry with the men of Israel because they had not killed the women and male children.
- B. This seems to cause many to doubt or to question the love and mercy of God.
 1. It must be remembered that this was a judgment of God upon a nation that had become utterly corrupt.
 - a. Remember that Midian had learned of God's works of judgment upon Egypt.
 - b. Also, they had seen firsthand that Balaam was unable to overcome the power of God and to curse Israel.
 - c. Yet, in spite of the evidence, they still chose to attempt to thwart God's plan and to defeat God's purpose by enticing Israel to idolatry.
 - d. Their hardness of heart was no different and no less than that of Pharaoh and the Egyptians.
 - e. Thus, God used Israel to bring judgment upon Midian.
 2. Also, the women had been personally responsible for seducing the Israelite men to commit fornication.
- C. Thus, the entire nation of Midian was devastated and destroyed.
- D. Only those women who were virgins were spared from death.

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- IV. The Purification after the Battle (31:19-24)
- A. Because they had come in contact with dead bodies, the soldiers had to be purified.
 - B. Notice that Eleazar, not Moses, commanded the soldiers in their purification of the spoil.
 - C. The spoil was to be purified by fire and by the water of separation (cf. Num. 19).
 - D. This demonstrates the corruption of the world – especially idolatry – and the separation God’s people must keep from it.
- V. The Division of the Spoil (31:25-54)
- A. The spoil was to be divided into two parts – half going to the soldiers who fought in the battle, and the other half given to the rest of the congregation.
 - B. Out of each half, God was given His portion as a heave offering and as bounty to the tribe of Levi.
 - C. Note verses 48-49 – *Not one Israelite was lost during the battle with Midian!*
 - D. Thus, the soldiers brought an extra offering to the Lord – to express their gratitude for His mercy and protection.