

**Numbers 31:1 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,  
Numbers 31:2 Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people.**

We know that scripture declares that vengeance belongs to the LORD...

*Romans 12:19 "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."*

...but sometimes He uses men to accomplish that vengeance. As the Creator of all life, He alone has the right to take someone's life.

This chapter opens with the LORD telling Moses that he was to oversee and ensure that the actions of Midian against the children of Israel were avenged. After this was accomplished, he would join the other saints of old that had preceded him in death.

**Numbers 31:3 And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and avenge the LORD of Midian.**

**Numbers 31:4 Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war.**

**Numbers 31:5 So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war.**

**Numbers 31:6 And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand of every tribe, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow in his hand.**

Moses told the people to prepare for war against Midian as agents of God's vengeance. Each tribe was to send 1000 men to form an army of 12,000 men armed for war. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, would lead the army to battle with the "holy instruments" and the trumpets (in recognition that God was their true leader).

**Numbers 31:7 ¶ And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males.**

**Numbers 31:8 And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.**

They did just as Moses commanded and attacked the Midianites. They killed all the males, including the five kings of Midian—Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba. They also killed Balaam the son of Beor. (Testimony to the fact that he had returned to Midian and was the instigator behind the strategy of luring the Israelites to idolatry by using their women to seduce the men of Israel as noted in chapter 25 and affirmed by Moses in the following verses.)

Note: King Zur was the father of the Midianite woman that was killed along with Zimri.

*Numbers 25:15 “And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian.”*

**Numbers 31:9 And the children of Israel took *all* the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods.**

**Numbers 31:10 And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire.**

**Numbers 31:11 And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, *both* of men and of beasts.**

**Numbers 31:12 And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil, unto Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and unto the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the camp at the plains of Moab, which *are* by Jordan *near* Jericho.**

The army of Israel took all the women and little ones of Midian as captives. They also took possession of all their cattle, flocks and goods, but they burned down all their cities and fortresses. They took all the spoil of both man and beast. They brought all the captives, prey and spoil to Moses and Eleazar and to the congregation of the people that were camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan River near the city of Jericho.

**Numbers 31:13 ¶ And Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp.**

**Numbers 31:14 And Moses was wroth with the officers of the host, *with* the captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, which came from the battle.**

**Numbers 31:15 And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive?**

**Numbers 31:16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.**

**Numbers 31:17 Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him.**

**Numbers 31:18 But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.**

Moses, Eleazar and the seventy appointed leaders of the congregation went to meet the returning army outside the camp. Moses was very angry with the officers in charge because they had not killed all the women. He reminded the officers that it was the women of Midian that had lured the people to trespass against the LORD according to the counsel of Balaam. This had resulted in the plague that had killed so many.

Moses then instructed the officers to kill every male child and every woman that was not a virgin. The virgins could be kept alive for their own possession.

The NIV Commentary made a pertinent observation regarding the killing of the

women and male children: “The only way to understand such a ghastly command is to realize what was at stake in the story of Baal Peor. Numbers 25 records an altogether new type of sin and rebellion—one that bears within itself the threat of the doom of the nation as a whole. It was this very type of evil that finally destroyed the Hebrew kingdoms in the land. Objectively, the destruction of the women and the boys was an act of God’s mercy—for Israel. Divine judgment is sure for the nations who are a threat to the existence of God’s people or who have rejected his grace.”

I also liked David Guzik’s observation: “Christians are often tripped up by things that were a threat but they did not see them as a threat. Though most Israelites thought these women were safe, they were more dangerous to Israel than an army of mighty warriors. Israel could overcome mighty warriors if they were spiritually strong; but if they were seduced into immorality and idolatry, they would certainly fall. 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.”

**Numbers 31:19 And do ye abide without the camp seven days: whosoever hath killed any person, and whosoever hath touched any slain, purify *both* yourselves and your captives on the third day, and on the seventh day.**

**Numbers 31:20 And purify all *your* raiment, and all that is made of skins, and all work of goats’ *hair*, and all things made of wood.**

After all had been done according to the command of the LORD as instructed by Moses, they were to abide outside the camp for seven days—this specifically applied to anyone that had killed a person or touched a dead body. They were to purify themselves and their captives on the third and seventh days according to the established process. They were to purify all their clothing, everything made of skins and goat hair, and everything made of wood by water.

Guzik had another good observation on this section: “This is a valid principle for us to observe when Christians want to “plunder” things from the world and use them for the cause of the gospel, such as music, media, and other things. But some things cannot be cleansed, and must be done away with; other things can be cleansed, and may be used by the people of God for the glory of God.”

**Numbers 31:21 And Eleazar the priest said unto the men of war which went to the battle, *This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD commanded Moses;***

**Numbers 31:22 Only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead,**

**Numbers 31:23 Every thing that may abide the fire, ye shall make *it* go through the fire, and it shall be clean: nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of separation: and all that abideth not the fire ye shall make go through the water.**

**Numbers 31:24 And ye shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and ye shall be clean, and afterward ye shall come into the camp.**

Eleazar went on to instruct the soldiers as to the LORD's command to Moses regarding gold, silver, brass, iron, tin and lead. Items made of these metals were to be purified by fire and with the water of separation. Anything not fireproof was to be purified with water only.

On the seventh day they were to wash their clothes and they would then be allowed to come back into the camp.

**Numbers 31:25 ¶ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,  
Numbers 31:26 Take the sum of the prey that was taken, *both* of man and of beast, thou, and Eleazar the priest, and the chief fathers of the congregation:  
Numbers 31:27 And divide the prey into two parts; between them that took the war upon them, who went out to battle, and between all the congregation:  
Numbers 31:28 And levy a tribute unto the LORD of the men of war which went out to battle: one soul of five hundred, *both* of the persons, and of the beeves, and of the asses, and of the sheep:  
Numbers 31:29 Take *it* of their half, and give it unto Eleazar the priest, *for* an heave offering of the LORD.  
Numbers 31:30 And of the children of Israel's half, thou shalt take one portion of fifty, of the persons, of the beeves, of the asses, and of the flocks, of all manner of beasts, and give them unto the Levites, which keep the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD.**

The LORD then instructed Moses to take an inventory of all that had been taken as the spoils of war. Moses, Eleazar and the seventy leaders were to divide the spoil into two parts; one part for the men that went to war and one part for the congregation.

They were then to levy a tribute of the portion set aside for the men of war as follows: one out of every 500 people, cattle, asses and sheep. The tribute was to be given to Eleazar as a heave offering to the LORD.

For the portion assigned to the people, the tribute included: one out of every 50 people, cattle, asses, flocks and any other animals. This tribute was to be given to the Levites that took care of the tabernacle.

**Numbers 31:31 And Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses.  
Numbers 31:32 And the booty, *being* the rest of the prey which the men of war had caught, was six hundred thousand and seventy thousand and five thousand sheep,  
Numbers 31:33 And threescore and twelve thousand beeves,  
Numbers 31:34 And threescore and one thousand asses,  
Numbers 31:35 And thirty and two thousand persons in all, of women that had not known man by lying with him.**

Moses and Eleazar did as the LORD had commanded. The total of the spoils of war included:

- 670,500 sheep
- 72,000 cattle
- 61,000 asses
- 32,000 virgin women

**Numbers 31:36 And the half, *which was* the portion of them that went out to war, was in number three hundred thousand and seven and thirty thousand and five hundred sheep:**

**Numbers 31:37 And the LORD'S tribute of the sheep was six hundred and threescore and fifteen.**

**Numbers 31:38 And the beeves *were* thirty and six thousand; of which the LORD'S tribute *was* threescore and twelve.**

**Numbers 31:39 And the asses *were* thirty thousand and five hundred; of which the LORD'S tribute *was* threescore and one.**

**Numbers 31:40 And the persons *were* sixteen thousand; of which the LORD'S tribute *was* thirty and two persons.**

**Numbers 31:41 And Moses gave the tribute, *which was* the LORD'S heave offering, unto Eleazar the priest, as the LORD commanded Moses.**

The half that went to the men of war included:

- 337,500 sheep - 675 of which were tribute to the LORD
- 36,000 cattle – 72 of which were tribute to the LORD
- 30,500 asses – 61 of which were tribute to the LORD
- 16,000 virgin women – 32 of which were tribute to the LORD

All the tribute was given to Eleazar as the LORD had commanded Moses.

**Numbers 31:42 And of the children of Israel's half, which Moses divided from the men that warred,**

**Numbers 31:43 (Now the half *that pertained unto* the congregation was three hundred thousand and thirty thousand *and* seven thousand and five hundred sheep,**

**Numbers 31:44 And thirty and six thousand beeves,**

**Numbers 31:45 And thirty thousand asses and five hundred,**

**Numbers 31:46 And sixteen thousand persons;)**

**Numbers 31:47 Even of the children of Israel's half, Moses took one portion of fifty, *both* of man and of beast, and gave them unto the Levites, which kept the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD; as the LORD commanded Moses.**

The half that went to the people of the congregation included:

- 337,500 sheep – 6,750 of which were tribute to the LORD
- 36,000 cattle – 720 of which were tribute to the LORD
- 30,500 asses – 610 of which were tribute to the LORD
- 16,000 virgin women – 320 of which were tribute to the LORD

All the tribute was given to the Levites as the LORD had commanded Moses.

**Numbers 31:48** ¶ And the officers which *were* over thousands of the host, the captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds, came near unto Moses:

**Numbers 31:49** And they said unto Moses, Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war which *are* under our charge, and there lacketh not one man of us.

**Numbers 31:50** We have therefore brought an oblation for the LORD, what every man hath gotten, of jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, earrings, and tablets, to make an atonement for our souls before the LORD.

**Numbers 31:51** And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of them, *even* all wrought jewels.

**Numbers 31:52** And all the gold of the offering that they offered up to the LORD, of the captains of thousands, and of the captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels.

**Numbers 31:53** (*For the men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.*)

**Numbers 31:54** And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tabernacle of the congregation, *for a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD.*

The officers presented themselves to Moses and told him that they had accounted for every single man that had gone to war and not one of them was missing. In gratitude they had brought an offering to the LORD from the jewelry they had plundered. Moses and Eleazar accepted the offering of gold and jewels and brought it into the tabernacle as a memento of the people's gratitude to the LORD. The offering totaled: 16,750 shekels or about 420 pounds of gold.

I think it is saying that the soldiers they had commanded had received a portion of the spoil that was not included in this offering.