

Numbers 31:1-54

As we enter Numbers chapter 31, we encounter a pivotal moment in Israel's history. This chapter records God's command to Moses to wage war against the Midianites, a final act before Moses' death and Israel's entrance into the Promised Land.

God's Command to Avenge Israel (Verses 1-6)

God instructs Moses:

"Avenge the children of Israel on the Midianites; afterward, you will be gathered to your people." (Numbers 31:2)

This was Moses' last mission before his death—a divine judgment against the Midianites for their role in leading Israel into sin through idolatry and immorality (Numbers 25). Balaam, the prophet who had earlier attempted to curse Israel, played a key role in this deceit. Thus, Israel was to act as God's instrument of justice.

Moses commands 1,000 men from each of Israel's twelve tribes, totaling 12,000 soldiers. Phinehas, son of Eleazar the high priest, accompanies the army, carrying holy articles and trumpets, symbolizing God's presence in the battle.

Victory Over the Midianites (Verses 7-12)

The Israelites defeat the Midianites as God commanded, killing all the men, including Balaam. They capture the women, children, livestock, and wealth, burning the cities and strongholds. Balaam's death highlights the tragic end of a man who, despite recognizing God's power, allowed greed to lead him astray (Numbers 22-24).

Moses' Anger and Purification Laws (Verses 13-24)

Upon the army's return, Moses becomes angry because they spared the Midianite women, who had been the primary agents of Israel's earlier downfall. He commands them to kill all the male children and non-virgin women, sparing only the young girls.

This harsh judgment reflects the severity of sin's influence and God's desire to protect Israel from moral corruption. The soldiers undergo purification rituals, including washing themselves and their clothes, and purifying the spoils of war with fire and water, as per God's law.

Dividing the Spoils and Offerings to the Lord (Verses 25-54)

The spoils are divided equally between the soldiers and the rest of the community. A tribute is given to the Lord:

- **From the soldiers' portion:** One in every 500 items goes to Eleazar the priest.
- **From the community's portion:** One in every 50 items is given to the Levites.

Remarkably, when the army is counted, not a single soldier is missing. In gratitude for God's protection, the officers present a voluntary offering of gold and precious items to the Lord, totaling 16,750 shekels.

Personal Application

1. The Seriousness of Sin:

- The Midianites' downfall reminds us of the destructive nature of sin. It not only affects individuals but can corrupt entire communities. God's judgment here, though severe, underscores His holiness and the seriousness of leading others into sin.

2. God's Justice and Mercy:

- While God's judgment may seem harsh, it is rooted in His justice. The Midianites' culture was deeply depraved, involving idolatry, immorality, and child sacrifice. God's command aimed to protect Israel from being influenced by these practices. Yet, we also see God's mercy in the preservation of Israel's soldiers and the opportunity for gratitude through offerings.

3. The Danger of Compromise:

- Israel's earlier failure with the Midianite women teaches us about the dangers of compromise. Small compromises can lead to significant spiritual downfall. We must guard our hearts and remain steadfast in our faith.

4. Gratitude and Generosity:

- The officers' voluntary offerings after the battle reflect a heart of gratitude. When we recognize God's protection and provision in our lives, it should lead us to worship and generosity.

5. The Legacy of Choices:

- Balaam's story is a cautionary tale. Despite witnessing God's power, he allowed greed to dictate his actions, leading to his tragic end. Our choices have lasting consequences. Aligning our hearts with God's will is vital for a life of purpose and blessing.

Final Reflection

Numbers 31 challenges us with difficult truths about sin, judgment, and holiness. Yet, it also points us to God's faithfulness, His desire for purity among His people, and the importance of gratitude for His protection. As we reflect on this chapter, may we examine our hearts, uphold God's standards, and live lives marked by integrity, gratitude, and unwavering faith.

"They brought the offering to the LORD, an offering of gold... to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD." (Numbers 31:50)