

Message #33

Numbers 31:1-54

In many passages of the Bible, God promises that He will pour out vengeance on the enemies of His people. This is true in the O.T. and it is true in the N.T.. In fact, God says, “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” (Rom. 12:19). Now God does not just forget about this.

In Numbers 25:16-18, God told Moses you are to be hostile to the Midianites and strike them down. Now God does not say, well let’s just let it go. God promises I will send my vengeance and wrath against you.

Because most people have never seen the wrath and anger of God, most people tend to think it doesn’t exist. Most people think God is this big, loving Being who just goes along for the ride in the lives of people. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Apostle Paul says that people are storing up wrath and when it reaches a certain point, God will pour it out full force. That is scary. In fact, Numbers 31 is scary.

When it comes time for God to judge and pour out vengeance, He does not forget about wrongs committed against His people. **We may unequivocally say that those who curse Israel will be cursed.** God remembers those who do and say negative things against Israel and He will repay them and He will punish them. That point is stressed in Numbers 31.

GOD JUDGES THE MIDIANITES FOR THE WRONG THEY HAVE DONE AGAINST HIS PEOPLE AND HE POURS OUT HIS FULL VENGEANCE ON THEM.

The Midianites had attempted to destroy Israel by their infiltration and seduction into their religious worship. They lured the Israelites to their immoral worship services and God said it is time to settle that score.

This will be the last battle Moses will need to fight as Israel’s leader. After this, Moses will die. But before he does, he must oversee one more battle. Really, this is a prelude battle to the battles Israel would fight in the Promised Land. They needed to obey God and trust God. This Midian battle was, as Dr. Wiersbe said, “a dress rehearsal for the battles Israel would fight in the land of Canaan” (*Be Counted*, p. 167).

Verses 1-2 say that the LORD directly spoke to Moses and told him to take “full vengeance” against the Midianites for what they did to Israel and that after that, he would be gathered to his people. The idea behind “full vengeance” is full vindication.

When God says take “full vengeance” on someone or something, it is a total and complete vindication of the people of God. For the enemies, there is no grace, there is no mercy; it is a judgment that unleashes the full vengeance of God and that is scary.

In **verse 3**, Moses told the people to arm men for war that they may go against Midian to execute the Lord's vengeance on Midian. The Hebrew words are emphatic here. God wants thorough revenge to be poured out on the Midianites. He is ordering the full brunt of His wrath to be poured out.

Think about this for a moment. If you are going to war, you could die. You certainly would not want to go to war out of fellowship with God.

This is what is so needed today. We as believers are in war and it is insane to try and be in this war if we are not in close fellowship with God.

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Moses organizes the military from the tribes of Israel. **31:4-5**

Moses organized one thousand men from each of the twelve tribes for a total of twelve thousand men to go to war. This is truly a holy war specifically ordained by God. In fact, not one soldier will be missing at the end of this fight (**31:49**).

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – Moses sent the military and the priest into this war. **31:6**

Moses sent the twelve thousand and Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron and the son of Eleazar (Aaron's son) to the war with them and he also sent the holy vessels and trumpets so that he could sound the alarm. These were not the "shofar" trumpets; these were the signal war trumpets of Numbers 10:2-9.

The duty of the priest before a battle was to build morale by encouraging the men to have courage and trust God (Deut. 20:2-4).

It was Phinehas who specifically upheld the righteousness of God and put a stop to the plague by executing the culprits responsible for idolatry (Numbers 25:6-13). So he went with Israel back to confront the Midianites.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – The Israelites made war against Midian and killed all males and kings. **31:7-8**

Israel hit the Midianites hard and they were successful. When the text says in **verse 7** that "they killed every male," it means that every Midianite male they found they killed. All of those who were against Israel will be destroyed.

They destroyed every man including five Midianite kings—Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, Reba. They also killed "Balaam son of Beor" who was the false prophet who was very instrumental in luring Israel away from God.

In Numbers 23:10 Balaam requested that God would let him die the death of the upright. He wanted to end up good. God said, "No way!" Numbers 31:8—he died with the wicked.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – The Israelites captured the women and children and took all the spoils and burned down their cities. **31:9-10**

Apparently the military leaders did not specifically know whether or not they should destroy the woman and children, so they captured them and took them back to the Israelite camp. However, both Midianite and Moabite women had been involved in luring Israel away from God into immoral things.

Two types of places were burned down: their cities and their camps (**31:10**).

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – The Israelites took all the spoils and people and gave them to Moses, Eleazar and to the congregation of Israelites. **31:11-12**

HISTORICAL FACT #6 – Moses and Eleazar and the leaders went out to meet the commanders. **31:13**

HISTORICAL FACT #7 – Moses was angry with the military leaders because they spared the Midianite women who had been the reason the Israelite men had sinned against God and received a plague. **31:14-16**

Moses was angry because it was these women who had been responsible for Israel's idolatry and downfall. These soldiers had allowed the very women to live who had been responsible for the downfall of the nation.

HISTORICAL FACT #8 – Moses orders every male regardless of age and every woman who has been with a man executed. **31:17**

Now many who read this are angry about it. The reason is because people do not understand the holiness of God and the anger and wrath of God.

Habakkuk says, "Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and thou canst not look on wickedness with favor" (Hab. 1:13). God is a Holy God and the entire sacrificial system that says a sacrifice must die in order to have a relationship with God clearly establishes this.

These people wanted to kill a relationship with God, so God said kill them. God does not and will not tolerate sin.

God demanded that the male children be killed and all the women who had been immoral be killed in order to put a stop to the horrible sin that had almost destroyed God's people.

God does not want His people associating with anything that is sexually immoral.

There is another Day of Vengeance coming against the entire Gentile world. God will avenge Israel and He will destroy men, women and children who were Israel's enemies.

HISTORICAL FACT #9 – Moses allows the girls who have not been with a man to live. **31:18**

The Israelites could keep the young girls for themselves. Either as wives or slaves.

HISTORICAL FACT #10 – Moses requires a purification of the disobedient soldiers before they may enter back into fellowship. **31:19-24**

No form of impurity of any kind was ever to be brought into this camp. The warriors who had been in contact with that which was dead had to go through this purification ceremony. This was true for the soldiers and the captive women.

God will not ever accept or bless that which is contaminated by sin. Sin must be washed clean away if God is to have fellowship with His people.

HISTORICAL FACT #11 – Moses distributes the spoils to the people. **31:25-47**

Now this was one victory God gave to Israel, which gave them a tremendous number of spoils of war from the Midianites:

According to **verse 32**, the total number of sheep was 675,000.

According to **verse 33**, the total number of cattle was 72,000.

According to **verse 34**, the total number of donkeys was 61,000.

According to **verse 35**, the total number of captives was 32,000.

Now God said this is the way I want these victory spoils divided:

1) The soldiers who went to war get half of the spoils. **31:36-40**

337,500 sheep and out of that they are to give to the LORD 675 sheep (**vrs. 36-37**).

36,000 cattle and out of that they are to give the LORD 72 cattle (**v. 38**).

30,500 donkeys and out of that they are to give the LORD 61 donkeys (**v. 39**).

16,000 human beings and out of that they are to give the LORD 32 persons (**v. 40**).

Verse 41 says that Moses gave the offering given to the LORD to Eleazar just as the LORD commanded.

2) The congregation of Israel in the camp got the other half of the spoils. **31:43-46**

337,500 sheep. **31:43**

36,000 cattle. **31:44**

30,500 donkeys. **31:45**

16,000 human beings. **31:46**

Now from the sons of Israel, Moses took one out of every 50 and gave it to the Levites (**31:47**).

So the levy or tax to pay the Priests turns out to be one out of every 500 and the levy or tax to pay the Levites turns out to be one out of every 50.

God provided for His people and He sure provided for His ministers.

HISTORICAL FACT #12 – The Israelite leaders brought a special offering to God. **31:48-54**

Verse 49 is remarkable. Not one soldier from Israel was killed.

God will not give great victory until evil things are removed.

God is already beginning to bless Israel. When you get evil things out, this is always what God does.