

Israel and Genocide

Scandalous Texts

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Our Scripture lesson is taken from Numbers 31, page 260. Numbers 31.

1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 ‘Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites. After that, you will be gathered to your people.’ 3 So Moses said to the people, ‘Arm some of your men to go to war against the Midianites and to carry out the Lord’s vengeance on them.’

The word of the Lord. [“Thanks be to God.”]

May we pray.

Help me, Lord, as I begin a new series on these difficult passages we find in the Bible, passages that cause modern people in particular to wonder, how could a good God command these things? Lord, help me to be clear. Help me to be concise. Help me to be compelling. Help me, Lord, to explain in such a way that does not distort what Scripture says, but uses Scripture to interpret Scripture, that we may understand and apply these truths to our hearts. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Well, I’m starting a new series today that was actually prompted by last Sunday’s sermon on Pentecost when I talked about the Tower of Babel was the beginning when nations rose up against nations. Prior to that, of course, there’d been murder, going back to Cain killing Abel, and prior to the flood, there’d been great violence throughout the world but never before the Tower of Babel had nations joined together against nations and engaged in annihilation of other nations.

And so, as I was sharing that with a friend, he asked me the question, “Well, what about Israel and their committing genocide?” And it caused me to ponder, and as I prayed about it, I thought, I need to address these texts before I die and I need to leave a lasting legacy of explanation for God’s people so that they are not embarrassed, so they don’t stumble.

By the way, the word “scandal” means “to stumble; to stumble over a stumbling block” (skándalon, σκάνδαλον). And so, I’ve entitled the series, “Scandalous Texts,” that is, texts that cause most Christians today, real Christians, to stumble and to say, “How could this be?”

So, in that light, let’s look at what we have before us in Numbers 31, “Israel and Genocide.” Notice that Moses has been instructed by God himself to wipe out the Midianites, and if we think about this, we flip over to the next page, 261, and we read in verse 15,

15 ‘Have you allowed all the women to live?’ he asked them.
16 ‘They were the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the Lord’s people. 17 Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man,

Isn’t that disturbing? I mean, you think about it. Think about what you would feel like were you one of those people.

Now we’ve got to understand something here, and that is what happened at Peor, and so for that, we need to turn back to Numbers 25. Go back about six chapters, Numbers 25, and that’s page 250 and look at verse 1, Numbers 25:1,

1 While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, 2 who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. 3 So Israel joined (the Hebrew word, it’s *tzamad* (šāmad, תָּצַד).’ Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor.

Now let’s think about that for a moment, because you’re going to hold your hand there, and you’re going to come back. We’re going to turn over to 1

Corinthians 10:20. Are there other gods besides the one God that's revealed to us in Scripture whose proper name is Yahweh? And the answer that the Bible would give us is yes and no. Yes and no. So, if we look at 1 Corinthians 10, page 1,783 and he says in verse 20, "No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons." Let's reflect on that a moment.

Who was Baal, as the name is pronounced in Hebrew? Who was Baal? Baal was a god of fertility, of storms and lightning. And Baal, as sometimes apparitions of the Virgin Mary take on certain place names, like Medjugorje or Fatima, and so on, so Baal manifested himself in different places at different times, and he is called in Numbers 25, Baal of Peor (Ba'al P'owr, בַּעַל-פְּעוֹר), that is, the place was Peor. And what's going on here? Well, what's going on here in 1 Corinthians 10:20, he says, "the sacrifices of pagans are often to demons." So, who was Baal? He was a demon.

So in other words, the gods of the heathen are real, but they're not gods. They like to pretend they're gods. Remember, Satan wanted to be as God, that's how he fell (Isaiah 14:13-14; Ezekiel 28:13-16). And so all those who followed Satan wanted to be as God. That was his temptation to Eve, "You'll be as gods." (Genesis 3:5) And So, the demons following Satan want to convince human beings they're gods. "I'm a god. Look at me, I can do this for you, I can do that for you."

And do you know that demons can perform miracles? Demons can bring sickness or health, as we read about in 2 Thessalonians 2 (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12), and also in the book of Revelation (Revelation 13:12-14; 16:13-14). So, demons are real. They're real entities. They exist. They exist absolutely as much as any of you here and I exist. They're real, but they're not gods. They're phony.

So, he says, "I don't want you to participate." He says, "the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons," and what happens when you sacrifice to a demon? You receive that demon. You have communion with the demon.

Just as the Lord's Supper is more than simply crackers and juice, just as the Lord's Supper is an actual communion, a sharing with Christ himself, so that in some sense we receive Christ as we receive the Supper. In some sense. I can't explain what sense that is, but I know that it's real because some people in Corinth were drunk at the Lord's Supper and they got sick because

of it. Some people were drunk at the Lord's Supper, and they even died as a result because they took the Lord's Supper in a careless way (1 Corinthians 11:30). But Jesus is really present in the Supper. There's really communion with him. That's why we call the Lord's Supper Holy Communion. And So, what is Paul saying in 1 Corinthians 10? He says in verse 20 in answer to the question, is there any such thing as an idol? He says, "No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be," and the word is translated "communion," (κοινωνός, κοινωνός) *koinonia* (κοινωνία, κοινωνία), "I don't want you to be participant with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons."

So, as we go back to Numbers 25, what do we see happening here? Now there's another interesting revelation here in Numbers 25 and that is the connection between physical union between people and union with their gods. That's certainly the pagan idea, isn't it? That's why these women who were both Moabites and Midianites, used their physicality, their sensuality, to seduce the men, because when the men were seduced and copulated with these women, in the minds of the worshipers in the pagan world, they were joining themselves, literally, actually copulating with the god. That's the pagan view. That's the pagan view.

(What Israel experienced here was some of the debased ritual practices of the Canaanite people. The act of prostrating themselves before the pagan deities was probably participation in a fertility ritual, nothing short of cultic prostitution. This was a blatant disregard of the covenant and the Law. If something were not done, the nation would have destroyed itself. The verb is "yoked" to Baal Peor. The word is unusual, and may suggest the physical, ritual participation described below. It certainly shows that they acknowledge the reality of the local god. The evidence indicates that Moab was part of the very corrupt Canaanite world, a world that was given over to the fertility ritual of the times.) (Harris, W. Hall, eds. (2019) *The NET Bible Notes*. 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), *in loc.*)

So, notice, and we're told that Balaam was behind this. Think about it for a moment. You remember Balaam, the false prophet? He tried to curse Israel. He'd been hired to come and curse Israel but every time he opened his mouth, the Lord twisted his tongue, and every time he uttered a curse, it

came out of his blessing (Numbers 22-24). And So, finally, Balak said, “Go home. Go home. Yahweh has deprived you of your reward” (Numbers 24:11). But Balaam, like all false prophets, loved money (1 Timothy 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15), and so he came up with a clever idea.

“How can I curse Israel? The only way I can curse Israel is to get that covering, that protection over Israel, taken away. And how can I do that? I know how I can do it.” And So, he went there and he counseled the leaders of the Midianites and the Moabites, “This is what you need to do. Get your girls to dress all scantily. Get them to make themselves up really well. Get them to wear a “come hither look” and send them out there for those Israelite boys, and once that happens, they’re going to drop like flies and the hedge of protection over Israel is going to be gone.” (Cf. Numbers 31:8, 16; Revelation 2:14).

You see, that’s really what’s at stake here, and So, we go back to Numbers 25 and verse 1. “While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with the Moabite women who invited them to the sacrifices of their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods, so Israel, *tsamad* (šāmad, טָמַד), “So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor, and the Lord’s anger burned against them.” (‘The verb is “yoked” to Baal Peor. The word is unusual, and may suggest the physical, ritual participation described below. It certainly shows that they acknowledge the reality of the local god.’ (Harris, *op. cit.*))

4 The LORD said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the Lord’s fierce anger may turn away from Israel.’ 5 So Moses said to Israel’s judges, ‘Each of you must put to death those of your men who have joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor.’ 6 Then an Israelite man brought to his family a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 7 When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand 8 and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear through both of them—through the Israelite and into the woman’s body. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; 9 but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.

Now I'm going to say something to you. We live in a world that thinks this is real, and what you can't see isn't real. Anybody here ever seen with your naked eye the COVID-19 virus? No. There are a lot of things you can't see that affect you. There are a lot of things you can't see that affect you. We know now with electron microscopes that every cell in your body contains a universe in itself. It's just amazing what is inside every single human cell. The point is, unseen things affect the things we can see. What we cannot see that in this very place on Robison Road are unseen spiritual forces. There are angels here who are good, and there are fallen angels or demons who are evil, and the fallen angels or demons want to work on your mind. They want to make you think, "This guy really is nuts." And they want to make you think as you read a passage like Numbers 31, "This is crazy. What kind of a God is that?"

Here's a clear demon thought for you. You want a good demonic thought? Here it is: The God of the Old Testament obviously is not the true God. The true God is found in the New Testament. And you know there are a lot of people that believe that? They believe that the Old Testament is completely a wrong book, a bad book, because it has things in it like Numbers 31, and the point I want to make is that in this very building there are demon spirits who work on your minds, "Why did he put his watch down? He never pays attention to it." And there are also good spirits who are defending your mind against those kinds of thoughts. And then, of course, there is the blessed Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity who proceeds from the Father through the Son to you and me, and he is here, and he works sovereignly in our hearts through the word.

So, what I want you to see here is that this unseen world of Numbers 25 resulted in death—24,000 people died as a result of this! This is very serious. This is the heart of the matter. So, now I want us to go back and consider this. Turn with me, if you would, to the book of Romans 9. What do we do with these difficult things? The first thing again to remember as we're turning to Romans 9 is that things that we may judge as relatively inconsequential have enormous spiritual impact. And this is on page 1,759 and at verse 20 as we're getting there. Romans 9:20. So, what we've got to understand about these difficult passages of Scripture is that there was much more here than meets the eye. This resulted in the death of 24,000 people, actually, literally died because of this, and then we come to this thought, Romans 9:20, page 1,759.

“But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’”

I want you to think about it for a moment. What standard would you appeal to against the God of the Old Testament? You got a standard above him? Is there a standard by which you can judge the God of the Old Testament? And the answer to that question is, “No.”

If there is no God, nothing is wrong and nothing is right. Never forget that. If there is no God, there is no such thing as right and wrong. That’s why in the modern world, where people try to distance themselves from the belief in God, there is no morality.

You remember back at the founding of the country in the same year that Congress sent down the US Constitution, they also passed the Northwest Ordinance governing public schools. It says, what are we going to do with these Northwest Territories that we’ve now got in 1787? That’s places like Ohio and Indiana. And it said, “religion, morality, and knowledge being essential for a good citizenship, public schools will always be maintained.”

(“Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” (*Northwest Ordinance* (1787), Article 3
<<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/northwest-ordinance>>))

You want to know the purpose of a public school in the United States in the very beginning? It was about religion, and religion is essential for morality. Without religion, there’s no morality, and if you don’t have religion and morality, knowledge goes out the door. I think about my grandson who’s resigned as a public-school teacher. He just can’t take it because when there’s no religion, there’s no morality, and what you’ve got is chaos. It’s sad, but true.

So, when we come to judge God, what is the standard above God? Is there a standard above God? Is it not rather that God’s word, God’s commandments, God’s laws, God’s sense of justice, flows out of who he is himself? Thinking of a prism that refracts light and shows the invisible light actually is made up of a whole range of colors from infrared to ultraviolet and beyond—God’s character is refracted in his word and character.

So, we can never come and say to these difficult, these quote, “scandalous texts,” “How could this God do that?” Because there is no standard by which we can judge God. What is our response? It is to **bow our knees and say**, “Lord, I don’t understand. I don’t understand. How could this be?”

Turn with me if you would to the book of Judges for a moment. Judges 2 and verse 3. Here’s the consequence. Judges 2:3 and we’ll see something interesting here.

So, what happens? Does Israel obey God? And the answer to that is on page 373. No, they did not obey God. Did they drive out the inhabitants of the land completely as they had been commanded to do? And the answer is they did not. So, look here in Judges 2 and beginning at verse 1.

“The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.’ Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? Now therefore,” look at verse 3, “Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.”

Israel’s failure to obey God and annihilate the inhabitants resulted in, what? A snare—Terrible pain that they suffered. Read the unfolding in the book of Judges and you see how as they did not obey God, the end result was all of this terrible, terrible stuff that happened to them over and over again. And **their gods were a snare. Their gods were a snare.**

See, we think because we live in a pluralistic nation that that’s the ideal thing, and I’m not saying that we should try to change it in the United States. That’s not what I’m really about here. I’m about warning you that in a pluralistic nation, there are dangers in joining yourself to other religions. I think about Hinduism.

Hinduism is an interesting religion. Unlike Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, which are exclusivistic religions, you cannot be a Muslim and be something else, you cannot be a Christian and be something else, you cannot be a Jew and be something else, some religions are inclusivistic. Hinduism is an inclusivistic religion. In other words, Jesus can be another god along with Krishna, along with the black Kali, along with Shiva, and all these other

gods. So, in other words, Hinduism is an inclusivistic religion, and I can see in Hinduism something not unlike what the Midianites and the Moabites were practicing. “Just one more god. . . Come on, Israel, just add our god along with your God.” But the God of the Bible, of both the New Testament and the Old Testament, is a God who says, “If you don’t want to have me exclusively, to hell with you.”

What did he say?

The God of the Bible, both the New Testament and the Old Testament, is an exclusive God and he says, “If you do not want me exclusively, then to hell with you.” And we’re going to look at that in just a moment.

So, what we find here is that what Israel was warned about certainly came true; their failure to do this resulted in that. Now, I want you to turn with me to Revelation 19, and while you’re on your way there, I want you to reflect on the words of God to Abraham. God promised Abraham that he would give him that land to him and to his descendants, but not immediately. So, as you turn there to Revelation 19, and that’s page 1,934, remember what God said to Abraham. He said, “I’m going to give you all this land and to your descendants, but I can’t do it yet. Why can’t I do it yet? Because the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”

I want you to picture in this life, in this world, that God has judgment on nations, and it’s as a scale. I’m not talking about the individual and his relationship with God through Jesus. That’s a different matter. But God deals with nations such as the United States, such as Great Britain, such as Russia, such as the Ukraine, such as China, such as Saudi Arabia, he deals with nations with a scale. And God is saying to Abraham in Genesis 15, “The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.” What does it mean then that God is saying to Abraham in Genesis 15:16, the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full? (šālēm, אֲשׁוּרִים: “The sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its limit. The justice of God is apparent. He will wait until the Amorites are fully deserving of judgment before he annihilates them and gives the land to Israel.” (Harris, *op. cit.*))

When it’s full, like little stones being put in a scale, like little weights being put in a scale, where nations are judged pros and cons, but when enough of those little weights go on the negative side, what happens?

It comes crashing down. And God is saying to Abraham, “I cannot yet annihilate the people of this land and give it to your descendants, because the people who live there, their wickedness, their evil, the horrible things they do.”

What did they do? They killed their own children. They shed the blood of their children, and they sometimes burned their children alive as sacrifices to their gods. They engaged in sexual immorality with their gods, in a manner of speaking. That’s what they believed. They did all these horrible things. They were perverted and twisted. And what happens is, as the Amorites keep adding iniquity on iniquity on iniquity, what happens is that in the year 1446 BC, the scale comes crashing down.

The iniquity of the Amorites is now full, and what Israel is commanded to do is to execute God’s judgment on those wicked people.

Now I want to say, this is something that’s never repeated in history, except under Israel at this point in time.

It’s repeated in history, but not under divine authorization. Only ancient Israel had such a commission from God to be God’s judgment on a people group, and groups of people as well, who had sinned to the uttermost, and so destroyed everything that was of value in life.

There have been other genocides, and there will be more genocides until Jesus returns, but there will never be a divinely sanctioned genocide until what we read about in Revelation 19.

“After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.’ 3 And again they shouted: ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.’”

You see what’s going to happen? There is coming a day of universal genocide on our planet. On whom? On those that do not love God. On those who have defied his law. On those who have said, “We’re going to do it our way. We don’t need a God like the God of the Bible.” God is going to execute his judgment on them.

Who is the great whore? That's something we should study another time when I get back to my study, if I do, on "Last Things." Who is the great whore? The point I will make is: I wouldn't be surprised if it isn't where we are right here. I'm not talking about Texarkana. I'm talking about what is the great sewerage pipe producer that corrupts the morals of the entire world? What is like our movies? What is like our TV shows? What is like our music? Now, I'm not saying that we are the fulfillment of that, but I'm saying when we begin to get full of jingoistic pride of our nation, never forget, we are the producers of more filth in the world than any other nation on earth. Wow! That's something to think about.

My point is, there is coming a day when Almighty God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man, leading his armies, is going to annihilate life on this planet, except for—turn to the very end, Revelation 20, and we read these words, Revelation 20, and we read these words, 11, Revelation 20:11.

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done."

Is this going to be a fair judgment? Absolutely fair. Absolutely fair. Everything people have done, everything people have said, every thought they've ever entertained, because they wanted to entertain the thought, everything, that's all there, judged according to what they'd done.

Look at verse 14, "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death." Look at verse 15,

"If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

My last point is this: When Israel was commanded to commit genocide and annihilate these people, she was acting as a foreshadowing, as a type, as a pattern of what is about to happen on our planet. And the result is, what?

Everyone will be judged fairly. Nobody will be able to say, “Well now wait a minute, God,” because if I’m judged by the things that I have done and left undone, by the things I’ve said and left unsaid, by the thoughts that I have entertained and the thoughts I’ve refused to entertain—if I’m judged by those things, where am I going, dear ones? I’m going to hell. I’m going to hell. I’m going to the lake of fire.

Who is not going to go to the lake of fire? George Washington? He may end up in the lake of fire. I don’t know. I don’t know. Name the politician. I don’t know. I just need to know for myself. That’s who I’m responsible for. Myself. “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” Wow!

So, as I look at Israel’s genocide of the nations, one of the scandalous texts in the Bible, I realize I can’t answer back to God and say, “You had no right to do this.” I also have to understand that—what?

That spiritual actions have physical consequences. 24,000 people died because of the Moabites and Midianites. I also have to understand that people will rise up and take the place of their ancestors and rise up against people if they’re left alive. I also have to understand that finally what Israel did is a foreshadowing of a future that may not be very far off.

May we pray.

Lord, take these words, feeble though they be, and give us to be quiet before you, to be like a still child who doesn’t open his mouth, but rests in the love of his mother (Psalm 131:1-2).

So may we rest in your love for us.

Lord, I cannot be concerned about how you deal with the nations, how you deal with Hindus and Muslims and Jewish people who’ve never repented and come to Jesus. I can’t be concerned about those things. I can’t be concerned about individuals that I know and love. I must know for sure myself, do I know the Lord Jesus Christ?

And Lord, I thank you that I do know that I know the Lord Jesus Christ. Bless us, Lord, now as we would celebrate Holy Communion. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

