

Numbers 31 Bible Study Notes Part 1 of 2

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

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: The Midianites were the posterity of Abraham by Keturah, **Ge 25:2**. Some of them settled south of Canaan, among whom Jethro lived, and they retained the worship of the true God; but these were settled east of Canaan, and had fallen into idolatry, neighbours to, and in confederacy with, the Moabites.

Clarke Lee's Commentary: I would not have picked up on this but Matthew Henry says that the Midianites are the descendants of Abraham by Keturah as seen in: **Ge 25:2,4; 1 Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. 2 And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. 3 And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. 4 And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah.**

Abraham's true wife was Sarah. We see again in scripture; Abraham, not trusting God to do as promised, taking multiple wives leads to trouble in the long run. As we see here that God is now going to exact vengeance on the Midianites who are seed of Abraham, by one who was not his true wife. We shall meet the Midianites again in Judges 6.

Notice, the vengeance is for the Lord. It is punishment for the Midianites who joined Moab in tempting and leading Israel away from God. They did this through sexual misconduct and seduction and led them into idolatry. We see in this a picture; God exacts punishment of those who are the enemies of God, as well as those who are enemies to his own chosen people.

This enlightens us on the scripture in: **1Pe 4:17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?**

We see this principle demonstrated here in Numbers. In the previous chapter God first rebuked, in judicial judgment, Israel for yielding to temptation, and now in this chapter God is exacting judicial judgment on the tempters.

This is a stark reminder; the time is coming when God shall exact eternal punishment and vengeance on all that are not his own. May God help us all to be found faithful in our service to him and one another. Building up one another in love, lest we fall into temptation and be led away in temptations ourselves.

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.

Clarke Lee's Commentary: God also reminds Moses that he will not enter the Promised Land, and that he is to die soon. We see; Moses immediately sets about to do God's bidding, even knowing that his life will shortly be over. This is a good lesson to us; we are to never stop serving the Lord; as long as there is life and breath there is hope that we can do good in the name of the Lord.

We point out that this was a war, which was instigated by God to serve his own purpose of judicial judgment, of vengeance upon the enemies of God's people and God himself. We remember that even in the Garden of Eden, when the serpent tempted Eve and Adam, there was a penalty to be paid by the tempter for his part in the fall of man in sin.

As we think about this; we see a deeper meaning in the scriptures teaching us about walking uprightly and not leading others astray by our bad works.

Pr 28:18 Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once. We see here; there is reward for walking uprightly and a doom for ungodly walks, as demonstrated by the war set upon here in Numbers against Midian.

2Co 4:1-2 1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commanding ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. In the New Testament; we find that we are to walk uprightly and not to practice deceitfulness. This is to be evidence to those around us, the saved and the lost, that we are God's willing servants.

Demonstrated again in: **2Pe 2:15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;** This very text speaks of the vengeance of God that we are reading about now in Numbers. This text also reminds us of the scripture: **1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.** This is exactly what happened to Balaam.

4 Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war. 5 So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. 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. 7 And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males.

Clarke Lee's Commentary: We see that they slew all the males, which would extinguish the lineage of Midian, except, we remember the Matthew Henry commentary stating; the Midianites divided into two separate groups which settled in different places. This then gives us the explanation of why we see the Midianites again in Judges 6. We know from Judges 6 that the lineage of Midian was not totally extinguished or they couldn't have appeared again in scripture in another time and place.

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.

Clarke Lee's Commentary: We have a reference here of a verse given in the previous chapter: **Nu 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.** The verse seemed to have no real significance except to point out that the chief people of Midian were involved in getting Israel to sin.

A second thought; as we remember the occurrence of the instance; both the man and woman involved in the act of willful sin, very near the tabernacle of the Lord and seen by those there present, were of chief people of their respective tribes. They seemed to think that their exalted positions in the eyes of men would protect them and they find out that God does not look upon men with the eyes of men, rather, God judges with a righteous judgment and they were both slain. Here, we see that the woman's father, Zur, was one of the kings slain.

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. 10 And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire. 11 And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts. 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. 13 And Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation, went forth to meet them without the camp. 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.

Clarke Lee's Commentary: We see that Moses is mad at the troops for bringing the Midianitish women back with them as captives. Why? Because the Midianite women were the very source used to lead Israel into temptation. Apparently the Midianite women had not lost their sexual appeal for they were taken captive and this would have been a continued source of sin to Israel.

15 And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? 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. 17 Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him. 18 But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.

Clarke Lee's Commentary: Why would they be allowed to keep any of the women alive? To answer this we can look at 2 references given earlier in scripture.

Le 25:44 Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. First we see; the bondmen and bondwomen were to be of strangers and not of Israel itself.

De 20:14 10 When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it. 11 And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. 12 And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: 13 And when the LORD thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: 14 But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee.

Secondly, Israel is following a commandment of God that was given some time ago. Even though it is in the book of Deuteronomy the time of giving is before the time of this war, as best I can discern, because it was some time before we see Joshua appointed in Deuteronomy.

Why only women who had not lain with a man? Several reasons, I think:

First, if they had known a man they were of an age to have learned the practices of the idolatrous worship services of the pagans. The women were leaders in idolatrous worship and prostituted themselves to that end.

Second, If they had lain with a man they may be pregnant and might bring forth a man child and thus the lineage would be carried on.

Finally, we would suppose that the ones left alive were young enough to be trained up in the way of the Lord.

I believe the main purpose of keeping them was for bondservants, but there was provision made for them to marry among the Israelites, and be freed from bondage. See **De 21:10-14; 10 When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the LORD thy God hath delivered them into thine hands, and thou hast taken them captive, 11 And seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her, that thou wouldest have her to thy wife; 12 Then thou shalt bring her home to thine house; and she shall shave her head, and pare her nails; 13 And she shall put the raiment of her captivity from off her, and shall remain in thine house, and bewail her father and her mother a full month: and after that thou shalt go in unto her, and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife. 14 And it shall be, if thou have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go whither she will; but thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her.**

Did you notice that this text says a beautiful woman? This is a reminder to us today to look the best we can, especially women in search of a husband. Likewise, the man should present himself as a worthy husband.

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. 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. 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; 22 Only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead, 23 Everything 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. 24 And ye shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and ye shall be clean, and afterward ye shall come into the camp.

Clarke Lee's Commentary: We see that they were commanded to observe the purification process of touching dead bodies, before they came back into the camp, that the camp itself might be kept clean. This application was made to the Israelite warriors, the captives, and all the spoil.

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