

Numbers 31-33

December 18, 2011

Introduction:

- Today we are going to look at **Numbers chapters 31 through 33**. Before we study this, you need to remember what took place in **chapter 25 verses 1 to 9**. *Israel had been guilty of idolatry and immorality with the people of Midian. Those who led the way in this sin were executed on the spot (25:4-5). One man had a Midianite woman with him and was killed by a priest with a spear after he ran into the Tabernacle (25:6-8). 24,000 people died by a plague sent from God to judge their sin (25:9).*

31:1-20 Who can tell us what takes place in verses 1 to 20?

- God tells Moses to send an army to punish Midian for leading Israel to sin (31:16). The army of Israel killed all of the men and returned to the camp with the spoils of battle, the women of Midian, and the children. Moses then instructs the soldiers to kill every woman who was not a virgin and all of the male children.

Why do you think that the judgment here was so harsh?

- God obviously was seeking to destroy any chance of these Midianite people becoming an evil influence on His own people. The sin nature is passed down through the male (**Exodus 20:5 & Romans 5:19**); this could possibly have something to do with killing the Midianite boys. The sexually experienced women may have been a greater moral temptation to the Israelites. God did not want Israel to “import” the sinful, cultural practices of the Midianites.

When we read this today, this seems to be too harsh a judgment. What is God trying to teach us?

- **First** of all, God is teaching His people that He is holy. **See 1 Peter 1:15-16**. There are two things that we always measure poorly: (1) our sin is much more sinful than we think and (2) God is far more holy than we realize.
- **Second** of all, God is teaching His people how easy it is to be led into sin. **See Ecclesiastes 9:18b & 1 Corinthians 15:33**. It is easier for a sinner to pull down a saint than it is for a saint to lift up a sinner.
- **Third**, God is showing how radical we must be in order to keep our lives pure before Him. **See Matthew 5:29-30**. [29 So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.]

Do you think that Moses may have known more about the Midianite people than we are told in Scripture? If so...why?

- Moses' wife was a Midianite woman, the daughter of a Priest of Midian (**Exodus 2:15-22**). Moses' wife had prevented Moses from circumcising their second son. On the way to Egypt, God had opposed Moses for not obeying Him. Zipporah finally circumcised their second son and called Moses a “bridegroom of blood” (**Exodus 4:24-26**).

31:8,16 What do we discover in verses 8 and 16?

- Balaam the prophet was living with the Midianites and was also killed by the army of Israel. In **verse 16** we see that it was Balaam who was responsible for seducing the Jews to commit idolatry and immorality with the Midianites.

Verse 8 tells us how Balaam was killed. Is there any significance to how he died?

- He was killed with a sword. In **Numbers 22:31**, the angel of the Lord was about to slay Balaam with a sword. Several weeks ago, we asked why the angel of the Lord wanted to kill Balaam. Now we know why. As a result of his influencing Israel to sin in Peor (*PEA-or*), over **24,000** Jews died (**Numbers 25:9**).

31:21-24 In **verses 21 to 24** we are told how the Jews would make the spoils of the battle “clean”.

31:25-47 What are we told about how they divided up the spoils of war among the Jews?

- The **12,000 men** who went into battle (**31:4**) would get half of the spoils but they had to give some of it to the High Priest (**31:28-29**) and some of it to the Levites (the priestly tribe) as an offering to God (**31:30**). Those who did not go to battle divided the other half of the spoils (**31:27,42-47**).

31:48-54 In **verses 48 to 54** we see a love offering given to God out of thanksgiving for His blessing. Who can tell us about it?

- In **verse 49** we see that not even one Jewish soldier died in this battle. See **Deuteronomy 28:1-2,7,13-14**. Because they were grateful for God’s blessing, they gave Him a huge love offering (**over \$10.5 million in today’s gold prices**).

What might we learn from this offering?

- We need to express our gratitude to God for His blessing. This offering was not required; it was just their way of acknowledging that God was the source of their blessings and their remembering to keep Him first in their lives.

32:1-32 Who can tell us what happens in **chapter 32**?

- The tribes of **Reuben** and **Gad** ask Moses if they can settle east of the Jordan River in what is now the nation of Jordan. Moses assumes that they are trying to split off from the nation and rebukes them. He reminds them of what happened to their fathers and grandfathers when they refused to go into the land **40 years** earlier. The two tribes assure Moses that their armies will go into the **Promised Land** with all of Israel and will fight until all of the land was conquered. Moses then gives them permission to settle east of the Jordan River.

God is omnipresent (everywhere all of the time). See **Proverbs 15:3 & Psalm 139:1-12**.

Where is this principle mentioned in this chapter?

- **32:23** tells us to *be sure that our sins will find us out*. In other words, we cannot sin and God not know it.

33:1-49 In **chapter 33 verses 1 to 49** we have a record of the journey of the Jews in the wilderness.

Remember that there were **2.5 million of them** and every time they moved they had to take down camp and set up camp (a gigantic undertaking). In this list of places, which of them have memorable stories that we have discussed?

- At **Marah** (*MAH-rah*; **33:9 & Exodus 15:22-25**) the bitter waters were made sweet by throwing a specific tree (**Exodus 15:25**) into the water. That tree was a picture of Jesus and the cross.
- They camped at **Elim** (*EE-lim*; **33:9 – Exodus 15:27**), a place of plenty, right after Marah, a place of trial. Sometimes God’s rich blessings are just on the other side of difficult times.
- At **Rephidim** (*REF-ih-dim*; **33:14 – Exodus 17:1-7**) Moses struck the rock and the water fed the nation.
- In **Sinai** (*SEYE-neye*; **33:15 – Exodus 19 & 20**) Moses received the **10 Commandments**.

- **In the Wilderness of Zin (33-36 – Numbers 20:1-14)** Moses struck the rock when he was told to speak to the rock. This cost him the privilege of entering the Promised Land. In **1 Corinthians 10:4** we learn that both of the rocks that brought water were Jesus in the form of a rock. Even when we feel like we're in a spiritual or emotional desert, Jesus our Rock is nearby to help us survive.

It is interesting to note that Aaron died exactly 40 years (to the day) from the time that Israel left Egypt (33:3 & 38).

33:50-56 What do we learn in verses 50 to 56?

- The Jews were to drive out *all* of the inhabitants of the land and destroy *all* of their gods. The amount of land each tribe would receive in the Promised Land would be proportional based upon the size of the tribes. If they allow any of the people to remain in the land, those people will become a problem to them.

33:53 What do we learn in verse 53?

- God has already given the land to them, even though they must fight to claim it. God has given us everything we need to be like Christ (**2 Peter 1:3a**), but we must battle our old natures to become who God wants us to be.

33:56 What do we learn in verse 56?

- If they disobeyed the Lord (and they would), He would drive them out of the land (which He did). When we obey the Lord, God is our ally. When we disobey the Lord, He can become our adversary (**1 Peter 5:5**). God is holy and intends for us to pursue holiness in our lives.