

Numbers 31

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[0 : 00] your Bibles and go with me to the book of Numbers, Numbers chapter 31. Numbers chapter 31 is where we are at tonight. As we just make our way currently through the book of Numbers, really in the grand schema thing, we are making our way through the Old Testament on Sunday nights and Wednesday nights, and this is where we have gotten to five plus years. So we're in Numbers chapter 31.

As we will look at the text in its entirety tonight, I think it's just one of those passages that we are of greater benefit reading it together as opposed to trying to break it apart. So let's open up with a word of prayer, and then we'll just get right to the text together. So let's pray.

Lord, I thank you so much for this evening, and Lord, we thank you for, Lord, just a time of fellowship. Lord, we also thank you for the time of gathering together around your word. And Lord, what a benefit, what a blessing it is to open up the pages of your word and to read it together, to study it together. Lord, we pray even as we are in what seem to be these obscure Old Testament passages, Lord, that the truth of God would be clearly seen, that we would know more of your character, we'd understand more of who you are and what it is you're doing. And Lord, that the truth of the scripture would captivate our minds and grab our hearts, and Lord, draw us closer to you and closer to one another, in all things and all ways, Lord, we ask that you'd be glorified, we ask that you would be honored, and Lord, we pray that you'd be with those who are in the back. I pray that you would just lead and guide them as well. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Numbers chapter 31 is where we will land tonight, and we'll just get right into it together. Let's kind of put it in context. In

Numbers chapter 25, God had given a command to Moses. Numbers chapter 25 follows after the sin of Peor, or the sin of Baal at Peor. The sin of Baal is running on the heels of the blessings of Balaam, and we say blessings because he was called to curse God's people, but ended up blessing them three times. And then there is the sin of the Lord's people with Baal of Peor, namely that they went in, they worshiped the false God, they partook in immoral actions. Now, I want to put this in proper context because I think it helps us to understand it. The chapters that follow that, Moses is dealing with some, I guess you would call in-house issues, because immediately following that, not because of that, but because of his sin at the waters of Meribah, Moses is not allowed to go into the promised land. The nation is encamped, waiting around that Mount Pisgah area, about to cross the Jordan River. They're in that final stage. They've already went to the northern side of the, they're on the, what you'd call the eastern side of the Jordan River. They went north, and they've defeated Sihon and Og, and they've got that land there, which, you know, will be divided up in the next chapter. So they're waiting for God's word to say, okay, go in and take possession of the promised land. God tells Moses, you're not going in. Moses pleads, says, oh, I want to go in. He says, no, you're not going to go in. You know, because of your sin, you did not treat me as holy in the sight of my people. You're not going to go in. And he says, essentially, you're about to die. You know, your time is drawing near. So get things in order. Moses is 120 years old. He's still very healthy. He is going to climb the mountain, look over the promised land, and God's going to bury you.

[3 : 41] But before he does that, he entrusts some of his leadership to Joshua. He encourages the people with their calendar of worship. Remember that whole chapter was given to a yearly calendar of worship.

It's an amazing chapter, really. It shows how they worship God daily. They worship him weekly. They worship him monthly and how they worship him throughout the year. So Moses gives this, this is how you worship. And then he kind of gets into breaking down some of the roles of the sacrificial system with the priest. And he's really given instructions. Now he'll give one great final instruction, namely the book of Deuteronomy. But there's one physical matter Moses still has to lead the people to, and that was the command given in Numbers 25. Numbers 25, God says, we're going to, now

this is Billy Joe terminology, okay? We're going to take care of the Midianites because of the sin of Bel-Pior. We're going to render justice on the Midianite nation. Now, this is why I say all of that. When Balak called Balaam to curse God's people, Balak is not a Midianite. He is a Moabite. Remember? He's from Moab because they are encamped in Moabite territory. And the king of Moab, Balak says, these people are pretty bad people. They've already, you know, pretty strong people. So before I fight them on the physical front, I want to do battle with them on the spiritual front. So he hires this professional fortune teller, sthousayer, magician named Balaam. He calls Balaam over there. Balaam is called to curse God's people. He ends up blessing them. Now, keep in mind, Balak is from Moab. It's important because God's people could not touch the Moabites.

Balak didn't know that. Balak thought that the nation of Israel was going to inhabit his land because they've already taken land from Sihon and Og. But Sihon and Og are what? Amalekites. I knew you knew that. You were right on top of things. I appreciate you understanding that.

[5 : 46] Now, the Amalekites were part of the people that were cursed when God was giving the land to Abraham. He told them he was going to remove the Amalekites. That's important. I say all this stuff.

Listen, this is where I get excited in the details of scripture. Why? Because God's not just playing games. God's doing exactly what he said he was going to do. Right? The sin of the Amalekites has come to fruition.

400 plus years later, he calls the people to go on the northern side or the eastern, the northern portion of the eastern side of the Jordan River to render his justice on the Amalekite kings, Sihon and Og. They come back down and the Moabites go, oh man, now it's our time.

God had said, leave the Moabites alone because the Moabites were the descendants of Lot. Right? So they couldn't touch the descendants of Lot. So Balak was safe, but he didn't know it.

But the people sin with the Midianites women. This is why I'm trying to paint this big picture.

[6 : 46] God's enemy had a tool to cause his people to sin. God's enemy, God's people's enemy, the Moabites, used the Midianites to cause them to sin.

God is about to render justice on that which was used to cause them to sin. Now I say all this because as I read this chapter, you're going to think, God is just, ah, just a big mean God calling his people to go to battle.

Listen, let's just go ahead and set this stage first of all. You have an enemy of your soul. The Bible tells us he is roaring around like a lion seeking, whom he may kill, steal from, destroy. And I want to tell you something.

Satan attacks each and every one of us in a different way. Satan has a Midianite for each one of us. And what God wants to do is defeat the Midianites in our life.

That is what God is using to cause us to sin. Because the Moabites were those who were fighting against them, but they used the Midianites. God will judge the Moabite people. That's for him to judge, not the nation of Israel.

[7 : 48] The nation of Israel had to leave them alone. But God says, but we're going to take care of this stumbling block, this thing here in context, it's the Midianites. We're going to take care of that which your enemy is using to cause you to sin.

That's what this whole chapter is about. Our enemy has innumerable Midianites at his disposal. And God calls each one of us, now take care of it.

Remove the problem. Annihilate it. Don't let the enemy use that anymore. And we see it in Numbers 31.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites. Afterward you will be gathered to your people. And Moses spoke to the people, saying, Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the Lord's vengeance on Midian.

A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war. So there were furnished from the thousands of Israel a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. Let's just go ahead and say right here, that's not a large army.

[8 : 55] Okay, it's not a big army. It did have to be. It's only twelve thousand people. So that's a lot of people. Well, when you consider the size of the Jewish nation, even at that time, that's not a large army.

Not even really a big army going to fight the Midianites, who were probably more numerous than that. In verse 6, Moses sent them a thousand from each tribe to the war, and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, to war with them.

Remember Phinehas, the priest that went in with a spear and slew the two, the Midianite woman and the man from the nation of Israel who were sinning, right? The Simeonite man. Phinehas was zealous for the holiness of God.

So now he's going to get to go practice that zealousness. I love this because these always aren't just soft people. In Scripture, God uses people. So Phinehas goes to Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, to war with them and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand.

So they made war against Midian just as the Lord had commanded Moses, and they killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian along with the rest of their slain, Eva and Recham and Zer and Hur and Reba and the five kings of Midian.

[9 : 57] Twelve thousand people killed five kings, okay? And they also killed Balaam, the son of Beor, that soothsayer, the son of Beor with a sword. The sons of Israel captured the women of Midian and their little ones and all their cattle and all their flocks and all their goods they plundered.

Then they burned all their cities where they lived and all their camps with fire. They took all the spoil and all the prey both of man and beast, and they brought the captives and the prey and the spoil to Moses and Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel to the camp of the plains of Moab, which are by the Jordan opposite Jericho.

Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp. Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of the thousands and captains of the hundreds, who had come from service in the war.

And Moses said to them, Have you spared all the women? Behold, these caused the sons of Israel through the council of Balaam to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor. So the plague was among the congregation of the Lord.

Now therefore kill every male among the little ones and kill every woman who has known men intimately. But all the girls who have not known men intimately spare for yourselves. And you camp outside the camp seven days.

[11 : 05] Whoever has killed any person, whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves, you and your captives, on the third day and on the seventh day. You shall purify for yourselves every garment and every article of leather and all the work of goat's hair and all the articles of wood.

Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to battle, This is the statute of the law which the Lord has commanded Moses, only the gold and the silver and the bronze and the iron and the tin and the lead. Everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire and it shall be clean.

But it shall be purified with water for impurity. But whatever cannot stand the fire, you shall pass through the water and you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean. And afterward you may enter the camp.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, You and Eleazar the priests and the heads of the fathers, households of the congregation, take account of the booty that was captured both of man and animal and divide the booty between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation. Levy a tax for the Lord from the men of war who went out to battle. One in five hundred of the persons and of the cattle and of the donkeys and of the sheep. Take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priests as an offering to the Lord.

[12 : 08] From the sons of Israel's half, you shall take one drawn out of every fifty of the persons of the cattle, of the donkey and of the sheep from all the animals and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the Lord.

Moses and Eleazar the priests did just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Now the booty that remained from the spoil which the men of war had plundered was 675,000 sheep and 72,000 cattle and 61,000 donkeys.

And of human beings, of the women who had not known man intimately, all the persons were 32,000. The half of the portion of those who went out to war was as follows.

The number of the sheep was 337,500 and the Lord's levy of the sheep was 675. The cattle were 36,000 from which the Lord's levy was 72. And the donkey were 30,500 from which the Lord's levy was 61.

And the human beings were 16,000 from whom the Lord's levy was 32 persons. Moses gave the levy which was the Lord's offering to Eleazar the priest just as the Lord had commanded Moses. [13:10] As for the sons of Israel's half which Moses separated from the men who had gone to war, now the congregation's half was 337,500 sheep and 36,000 cattle, 30,500 donkeys and the human beings were 16,000.

And from the sons of Israel's half, Moses took one drawn out of every 50, both of man and of animals and gave them to the Levites who kept charge of the tabernacle of the Lord just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Verse 48. Then the officers who were over the thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, approached Moses. And they said to Moses, Your servants have taken a census of men of war who are in our charge, and no man of us is missing.

So we have brought as an offering to the Lord what each man found, articles of gold, armlets and bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before the Lord. Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, all kinds of wrought articles, and all the gold of the offering which they offered up to the Lord from the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds was 16,750 shekels, the men of war who had taken booty every man for himself.

So Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds and brought it to the tent of meeting as a memorial for the sons of Israel before the Lord. All right.

[14:31] That's a lot of stuff. I understand. One thing that's interesting, I'll point it out because I probably won't catch it much in the message, is you see the division of the spoil of the battle was equally distributed from those who went out and even those who stayed behind.

That's a practice we see again later in Scripture when David does the same thing. When David takes some of his men, some stay with the luggage and some go out to battle and they come back and they divide it equally, right? So it's just kind of this repeated theme.

We see the division of the spoil among those who fight and among those who stay behind. And we see it happening here for the first time. But I want you to see tonight the defeat of the Midianites. And we'll try to make our way through it pretty quickly because I know we have other matters to get to. But we won't concern ourselves so much about the division of the spoil. And we see that God took more from the sons of Israel than he did from the people who went out to war.

He took one out of 500 from the warriors and one out of every 50 from the people who stayed behind. These were given to the priests and then they were later given to the Levites as well. And it's divided up to be used in the temple service.

[15:31] And all those practices of things being dedicated to the Lord, we're not going to spend as much time with that because it's pretty much self-explanatory. And it's really just there to show that they did not keep all this stuff themselves, right?

This wasn't just theirs. God commanded and even declared that some of it be given to him and for his service. And that's rightfully so. But we see here when God defeats the Midianites here in the life of the nation of Israel, and even I would say the Midianites in our own life, what God uses or how God moves to cause us to completely cut off that which the enemy has at his disposal to cause us to trip, we see a number of things.

The first thing we see, and we don't want to lose this because I know we're in the Old Testament passage and it seems that it can be harsh and it seems that it can be kind of rough, especially when we start talking about women and children and all these others and the slain and all this thing. And our natural tendency is to kind of be repulsed by him, to be pulled back and say, oh, that's just horrible. And it is. But we see in this horror some great truths of Scripture.

The first thing we notice here is the concern of the father for his children. I know it's kind of hard to see there, but look at the concern of the father for his children. Because look at how it opens up.

[16:47] Then the Lord spoke to Moses. Now you need to understand this, okay? We need to go ahead and just put this in our mind even if we don't like it. Everything that follows is a direct command from God.

I say even if we don't like it because sometimes we don't like it when God does things that we wouldn't do. But we need to go ahead and say, okay, everything that follows then the Lord said is what God commanded to do.

And if God commanded it to do it, then it is right. Okay? It's right. It's holy. And it's perfect. Regardless of our feelings about the issue.

Feelings are subjective. Feelings and opinions can sway. God's standard is perfection. And when God says do this, He has a perfect reasoning for doing that. Even if we don't understand it, we need to, by faith, declare it. God is right in what He commands. Period.

[17 : 55] Period. It says, Then the Lord said, He told Moses, One thing you're going to do before you die. Now look at this wording. Take full vengeance.

Whose vengeance is it? We'll get to that in just a minute. The word vengeance appears twice in the American Standard here in just a couple of verses. But this first one really captivates the concern of the Father. Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel.

Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel. Then the Lord, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, that is Yahweh, the covenant name of God, the God who'd entered into a covenant relationship with His people, the God who said, I will be your God and you will be my people, the God who'd called them out of Egypt, the God who'd led them out of slavery, the God who was providing for them, the God who'd wandered with them in the wilderness, the God who was sanctifying them.

He was concerned. He says, Take full vengeance for my sons. 24,000 people fell as a result of the sin of the Midianite women.

Now, were those 24,000 guilty? Yes, because they did it. But God says, I'm going to hold him accountable who made you do it.

[19 : 18] Later on, Jesus would say, The Son of Man is going to go just as it has been told. But it would be better for the man who's going to hand him over to never been born. Right?

He says, If you're going to cause a little one to stumble, you might as well tie a millstone around your neck and be cast into the sea. Don't be the avenue Satan uses to cause one of God's people to fall.

Because God says, I'm going to take full vengeance for my people. In this world in which we live, and a lot of God's people are suffering persecution, a lot of God's people are suffering shame, and a lot of God's people are being put in positions that they probably never thought they would be, one thing can be certain, and one thing that we see when we open up the book of Revelations, the Father is concerned, and there will be a day where he takes full vengeance for his children.

Because he will not allow his children to be mocked, he will not allow his children to be ridiculed, and he will not allow his children to continue to be put in places of temptation and places of failure without being concerned.

So the very first thing we see here is the concern of the Father. God says, This is what is causing them to sin, so I'm going to remove this. And he's going to use them to remove the very thing that was causing them to sin.

[20 : 41] So when God puts that presence of the Holy Spirit inside of us, now we don't operate in swords and clubs and spears, you know, today anymore, right? But now when the presence of the Holy Spirit inside of our lives and that conviction comes and God is telling us to slay that Midianite in our life that Satan is using, you understand the reason he's telling you to completely remove it is because he's concerned for you.

He has a great concern for you that this thing is causing you to sin. You say, well, it doesn't seem that bad. You know, it's not that bad. I like having it over here on the fringes. Besides, I'm about to move away from it. We're about to cross the Jordan and they're going to stay over here in Moab. God says, no, we're going to get rid of it now because you can't flee from this thing. You have to address this thing. And God calls them to do that because of his concern for them.

It is full vengeance for his people. The second thing we see in every episode we read in the Old Testament is a reminder of this thing and it should be forefront in our memory.

And I think God puts it on full display all throughout the Old Testament so that when we get to the New Testament, we can really stand in awe of what happens on the cross.

[21 : 46] And we can stand in awe of the mercy and the forgiveness and the grace and all those things that are offered to us. And it is the cost of sinful behavior. The second thing we see is not only the concern of the Father, but the cost of sinful behavior.

Do you want to know why men, women, boys, and girls or men, women, and the boys died? It's because they died in their sin. This is the wages of sin.

The wages of sin is death. And this is exactly how much it cost. And it didn't matter their stance in society. Notice the five kings.

They were somebody important in society, right? That doesn't matter when it comes to having a reckoning because it says, Moses now moves and says, now we're going to take the Lord's vengeance.

Not the vengeance for his people, but the Lord's vengeance for man's sin. So we see God acting in a manner of judgment here and he is right in his judgment. Just because they held a position in society, namely being a king, it did not mean anything.

[22 : 51] They would still die as a result of their sin. Some were very popular in an international scale like Balaam. Balaam still died in his sin. Some even have a knowledge of the true God such as Balaam.

Balaam even professed, oh, I wish that I could die the death of the righteous. Yet what we see, though he wished he could, he did not. He dies the death of the sinful because he had a hope-so faith, not a know-so faith, right?

He had a, I think I see him over there, I see these things, but what we are reminded with and confronted with in episodes like this is this is exactly what sin demands.

Sin demands an ugly death of people who commit it. And that should not shock us. Because the reality is is this is what we deserve. We're not good people.

We're sinful people who have been led astray by the wicked schemes of the enemy who are an enemy with God and his holy standard and this is what we deserve but for the bloodshed on the cross.

[24 : 03] These highlights of the cost of sinful behavior are there to show us the glory of the forgiveness and the mercy and the grace that is on display on Calvary.

And if we did not see this, we would not understand our need for a savior because we understand. Friend, listen, I would dare say in everyday company, many of the people who died in this battle were pretty good.

Right? I would dare say that we would hang out with them. They're okay. I would dare say that most of them are probably just like me.

But the cost of sinful behavior is death. And the reason it shocks us so much is because we wish it wasn't so. But the gift of forgiveness found in the savior is amazing.

As Billy Graham once said, the extent to which we see sin will always determine the extent to which we see the glory of the king. How grave we see our sinful behavior will always determine how great we see our savior.

[25 : 20] When we make little of our sin, we make little of our savior. But when we come to passages like this and we say, God, why do they all have to die? The only answer is, the Bible says that every man dies in his own sin.

And this is what sin costs. Salvation, forgiveness, and mercy, and grace, that's what God gives. We just must come to grip with that.

The third thing we see in this passage, the concern of the father, the cost of sinful behavior, we see the caution to maintain holiness. The caution to maintain holiness. Now, God is using these 12,000 soldiers as instruments to render his judgment upon the Midianite people.

They are tools in his hand. God was using them. By the way, God can use whoever and whatever, whenever he wants. And he just so determines at this point, he's going to use 12,000 soldiers from the nation of Israel to be his instruments of judgment.

As they go into the promised land, God is using the nation of Israel as his instruments of judgment upon the rest of the ites, right? The Canaanites and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the rest of the Malachites and the Hivites and all the ites that are there.

[26 : 32] They are not doing it to be mean. They are doing it to be God's instrument of judgment. They are being used of God to deliver the judgment for their sinful behavior. But just because these 12,000 men were being used of God did not give them an excuse to discount the holiness God required of them.

Because let's bring this to application. Just because we're being used of God doesn't mean we have an excuse to do anything we want. I always remind myself God can speak through a donkey or he can use a rooster crowing to do whatever he wants to do and he can even use a bush burning so it doesn't mean anything other than the fact that God is using you.

But that rooster could only crow twice and that donkey could only say what he wanted to say and that bush only had to be there. Right? Just because God is using you doesn't mean you have an

excuse to act however you want.

God's people do this all throughout scripture. Moses and Eleazar come out of the camp because they see the 12,000 coming back and they're coming back with the spoils of battle and they have saved every one of the women and Moses gets mad.

Moses gets mad. He says what are you doing? these have caused you to sin. Don't take lightly the fact that this is what your enemy used to cause you to sin.

[27 : 54] Get rid of it. Samuel's going to do the same thing with King Saul later on. Saul, what is this bleeding and lowing of the sheep and cattle which I hear?

And what is this king I see over here in captivity? Oh, we bring this to be an offering. He said God didn't require an offering. God requires obedience. God's not so worried about enriching his people as he is how much his people will obey.

Moses says get rid of them. They've caused you to sin once they can cause you to sin again which means don't play around with those things in your life those Midianites in your life get rid of it completely.

Don't hold on to it just a little bit of it. And then Eleazar says and by the way don't rush back into the camp. Why? Because if you had touched a dead person you were defiled and you had to stay outside the camp or you would defile the camp and by defiling the camp God's holiness was in the midst of the camp literally the tabernacle was there and the Shekinah glory of God was there and if you defiled the camp you were putting everybody in the camp at risk of dying in your defilement right?

So he says stay outside the camp seven days on the third day be washed on the seventh day be washed now how would they be washed? In the ashes of the red heifer remember that glorious picture the red heifer and the ashes are out there running water he said there's a way for you to be clean outside the camp but don't come back in yet just because you've won the battle out there don't mean you can come in here how you want to you're still coming back into God's presence be careful maintain your holiness build a fire any spoil that you have that God has given you pass it through the fire if it will stand the fire burn it then if it won't stand the fire cleanse it with water what was the call here?

[29 : 34] be careful take caution to maintain holiness this is something that we understand that the temptation comes when we're being used of God to do any work for him that we kind of let down our guard a little bit from the holiness which God demands but there must always be caution there must always be caution to maintain the holiness which is demanded fourth and finally we end here there's the concern of the father there's the cause of the sinful behavior there's the caution to maintain this holiness fourth and finally there is cause for celebration as they're outside the camp the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds say hey it's time to take a census let's count and see where we're at now they know they've won the battle right they know they've brought back the spoil they know they've destroyed all the cities they know they've defeated the kings but they also know they went out with twelve thousand so they counted and lo and behold they had twelve thousand not a single soldier was missing not only had God given them the victory God had given them protection no one was missing now more than likely they had fought a battle in which they were greatly outnumbered we don't know because the numbers might give it to us but if we had to assume we would say that they probably went in with smaller numbers and the reason I make that assumption is because that is that is kind of consistent with the character of God

God always likes to use the small to overrule the big right God always likes to do things in an amazing way and here we see that they count and say nobody's missing so there's cause for celebration so they take it upon themselves now that which God demanded that was not a free will offering God said divide the spoil of the spoil give me this much we would call that to tithe right this is what God said you give me this much that's the standard when they take the count they look up and say hey nobody's missing then they worship then they give an offering because then they bring this to Moses they say since none of us are missing each of us took from those things which we found armlets bracelets earrings gold 16,750 shekels about 6,700 ounces of gold that's a lot of money in any time this is what we have to offer because we realize what we can give back pales in comparison to what God has done we have calls to celebrate and we want to celebrate offering the free will offering see what we have found in our lives is God calls us to be the destroyers of those Midianites those things which the enemy uses to cause us to stumble and to sin and when we come to that place of complete and absolute destruction and we walk hand in hand with other brothers

and sisters in

Christ and we see God lead us victoriously through those things we stand amazed at his divine protection upon us in the midst of that battle and his grace and mercy and friend then we don't hold back from our giving to him and worship and we celebrate because not only have we won the victory but he has brought us through whole and complete and perfect and we celebrate who he is and all he has done for his glory and his alone numbers chapter 31 thank you brother so