

**Reformation Fellowship Notes • May 26, 2019**  
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**Handout #15**  
**Numbers 31 & 32**

**I. Introduction**

- A. From last week
  - 1. What is a vow?

The vow is a pledge or oath of a religious character, and a transaction between man and God, in which man dedicates himself or his service or something valuable to God. A common feature in ancient religions, it is also a frequent exercise in religious life among the Israelites. Though generally a promise made in expectation of a divine favor eagerly sought, there were also vows of voluntarily imposed self-discipline for the achievement of character, and of self-dedication for the attainment of certain goals. (ZPED vol. 5 pp. 890-1)

- a) Jephthah (Judges 11:29-40)
- B. Moses gets his last assignment.
  - 1. Get vengeance on the Midianites.

**II. Numbers 31:1-12**

- A. Midianites
  - 1. Jethro was a Midianite.
    - a) Different tribe?

The Midianites seem to have been a large yet loosely associated confederation of nomadic and seminomadic tribes who traveled the regions of the Sinai peninsula, the Negev of southern Israel, southern Jordan and the Arabah, and southeastward into the northwestern part of the Saudi Arabian peninsula. (Cole, p. 493)

- 2. Midianites were allies with Moabites.
    - a) Presumably this was vengeance on the alliance (Moabites and Midianites).
- B. Why vengeance?
  - 1. The Midianites (Moabites) seduced the Israelites into worshiping the Moabite gods.
  - 2. The Israelites have enough trouble staying on the straight and narrow without having someone trying to lead them astray.
  - 3. Moses calls it “the Lord’s vengeance.”
    - a) It is an affront to God when his people are led astray by others.
      - (1) It is an assault on his honor and glory.

Whereas the Israelites seek redress or compensation from the Midianites for causing the devastating plague of Baal Peor, the Lord desires to exact retribution from them for the sacrilege they committed (v. 16) by seducing the Israelites into worshiping Baal Peor. (Milgrom, p. 256)

- C. Moses is instructed to do this one last thing before he dies.
1. Unfinished business
    - a) Defend God's honor
  2. A thousand fighting men are drawn from each tribe.
    - a) 12,000 total men
    - b) Phineas goes with them.
      - (1) Son of High Priest
        - (a) Why the son?
          - (i) Keep High Priest away from corpses/death.
          - (ii) Eleazar (son of Aaron) gathered the censers after Korah's rebellion (when Aaron was still alive).
      - c) He was to take holy vessels and trumpets.
        - (1) As we will see, this battle roughly fits the rules of *herem* (holy war).
          - (a) *Herem* is not talked about until Joshua, but this is clearly a similar idea.
          - (b) *Herem* refers to the disposition of the plunder.
            - (i) Every living thing killed (in its strictest form)
            - (ii) Moveable goods burned
            - (iii) Metal given to God
  3. Five kings of Midian and Balaam were killed.
    - a) According to Milgrom, the Hebrew verb suggests that they were executed rather than killed in battle (Milgrom, p. 257).
    - b) Rekem is the Hebrew name for Petra.
    - c) Zur was the father of the Moabite woman that Phineas ran through with a spear.
    - d) Balaam is highlighted as one who was killed.
  4. Captured women and children, flocks and herds
  5. Burned all the cities and camps
  6. Brought all the plunder to Moses, Eleazar, and the congregation

### III. Numbers 31:13-20

- A. Moses was angry with the leaders of the military.
1. They did not kill the women.
    - a) Women are the ones who seduced the Israelites at Baal Peor.
  2. Moses suspects a spirit of disobedience.
  3. They were instructed to kill all male children and all non-virgin women.
    - a) I don't know why this arrangement.
      - (1) Males are the greatest security threat.
      - (2) Females are the carriers of culture.

- b) This was apparently carried out.
- B. Fighters were instructed to stay outside of camp for 7 days.
  - 1. As agents of God, they needed to be clean.
  - 2. Purify on third and seventh day.
  - 3. Purify all garments.

**IV. Numbers 31:21-24**

- A. Everything that can pass through the fire, must pass through the fire.
- B. Whatever can't be passed through the fire, must be washed.

**V. Numbers 31:25-31**

- A. How the plunder was to be divided
  - 1. A record was made of all the plunder taken.
  - 2. It was divided in half.
    - a) One half was given to the warriors.
      - (1) .2% (1/500<sup>th</sup>) goes to the Lord (the priests).
    - b) One half was given to the congregation.
      - (1) 2% (1/50<sup>th</sup>) goes to the Lord (the Levites)

**VI. Numbers 31:32-34**

- A. Total amount of plunder
  - 1. Sheep 675,000
  - 2. Cattle 72,000
  - 3. Donkeys 61,000
  - 4. People 32,000

**VII. Numbers 31:36-41**

- A. What the fighting men got
  - 1. Sheep 337,500 (675 went to priests)
  - 2. Cattle 36,000 (72 went to priests)
  - 3. Donkeys 30,500 (61 went to priests)
  - 4. People 16,000 (32 went to priests)

**VIII. Numbers 31:42-47**

- A. What the congregation got
  - 1. Sheep 337,500 (6,750 went to Levites)
  - 2. Cattle 36,000 (720 went to Levites)

3. Donkeys 30,500 (610 went to Levites)
  4. People 16,000 (320 went to Levites)
- B. All of the dividing happened just as God had commanded.

### IX. Numbers 31:48-54

- A. Commanders approached Moses and said that no one was missing.
1. A census had been taken.
    - a) Exodus 30:11 says that whenever a census is taken, a ransom must be paid for each person.
      - (1) I don't think the commandment applies in this case.
    - b) The commanders paid double the ransom required for each soldier.
      - (1) The commanders are being extra careful to follow the law.
  2. Other soldiers were allowed to keep their plunder.
    - a) An enormous amount of plunder was taken.
      - (1) Compare Judges 8:26
    - b) This is amazing generosity on the part of the commanders.
- B. Moses and Eleazar fashioned the gold into a memorial for the sons of Israel to be placed in the Tabernacle.

### X. Numbers 32:1-5

- A. After plundering the Midianites, the Israelites have too many animals to move around.
1. The Transjordan area was excellent pasture land.
  2. The Reubenites and Gadites and some of the Manassahites wanted to settle down in the Transjordan to accommodate their animals.
- B. These tribes approached Moses and Eleazar and asked to be allowed to settle in the Transjordan.

### XI. Numbers 32:6-15

- A. Moses was angered by this request.
1. This is the same thing that the spies did.
    - a) They went into the land and spied it out.
    - b) They came back with a report that discouraged the Israelites.
    - c) This angered God.
      - (1) God therefore condemned the older generation to die in the wilderness.
      - (2) Because they did not followed God fully
        - (a) Only Caleb and Joshua had followed God fully.
      - (3) So God led the Israelites into the wilderness for 40 years.
        - (a) Until the whole generation died off
        - (b) All who had done evil in the sight of the Lord
  2. This would discourage the rest of the Israelites from taking the land.

- a) What they have proposed is going against God's commands like the older generation did.
  - (1) If you turn away from God, God will turn you back into the wilderness.

**XII. Numbers 32:16-19**

- A. Let us get our flocks and our families settled here.
  - 1. Then our soldiers will go across and help fight for the land.
    - a) We will leave our families and flocks here.
    - b) They will be in fortified cities.
      - (1) Because they may be attacked by the locals
    - c) Our soldiers will not quit fighting until the land has been conquered.
      - (1) Only then will they return.
      - (2) But they will return because this is the land that has been allotted to them.

**XIII. Numbers 32:20-27**

- A. Moses grants conditional approval.
  - 1. If they will send their soldiers across with the rest of the Israelites and stay until the land is subdued, they will have no other obligation.
  - 2. If they don't do this, it will be a sin, and their sin will find them out.
  - 3. Go ahead and build your cities and sheepfolds, and do as you have said.
- B. They agree to do what they have said.

**XIV. Numbers 32:28-32**

- A. The agreement has to be cleared with Eleazar because he is the one in charge of making the allocations.
  - 1. Moses reports the agreement.
  - 2. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh consent to the terms.

**XV. Numbers 32:33-42**

- A. The three tribes got the land they conquered in the Transjordan.
  - 1. Land of Sihon
  - 2. Land of Og
  - 3. Manassah took Gilead from the Amorites.
- B. Many cities that were already built
  - 1. Nearly move-in ready

**XVI. Conclusion**

- A. Why did God give Moses this one last assignment?
1. There was a battle.
    - a) Why not have Joshua do it?
    - b) The battle is not highlighted.
      - (1) The disposition of the booty is much more prominent than the battle.
  2. This was one huge last favor to Moses.
    - a) Moses sees the Israelites gain an important military victory without him.
    - b) Moses sees the Israelites acquire a huge amount of wealth.
      - (1) This is a huge boost.
    - c) Moses sees a spirit of obedience in the Israelites.
      - (1) Fears that they have disobeyed his instructions to kill the Midianites
        - (a) But they killed them when told to do so.
      - (2) The commanders are so determined to obey the law that they go over and above what was required.
      - (3) When the Gadites and Reubenites want to settle in Transjordan, Moses suspects them of being disobedient.
        - (a) But they offer to lead the Israelites in battle over the Canaanites.
    - d) Moses got to see a new and different spirit in the younger generation.
      - (1) This would have been more gratifying than getting to cross into the land.