

**Into the Promised Land • Joshua's Story**  
**Lesson #25 - "Moses' Final Battle Campaign"**  
**• HANDOUT •**

▶ The Second Generation of Israel is now camped on the plains of Moab opposite Jericho; they will soon be faced with the same moral, ethical and spiritual dilemma the First Generation faced in the wilderness. Will they be faithful to their unique covenant relationship with Yahweh their God, or will they succumb to the temptations that lay ever before them, as the First Generation had done?

▶ The need for Moses' last campaign comes from Chapter 25 – [Lesson #21] where the Midianites, through the influence of Balaam, seduced Israel into committing sexual immorality and pagan worship of Baal of Peor. This last assignment isn't about Moses' personal revenge, nor is it about the conquest of territory, nor a lust for a last plunder. This campaign is about the Lord's vengeance because of the wicked behavior of the Midianites toward Israel.

▶ The most important issue is not to concentrate on the suffering and pain this chapter describes, but to reflect on the holiness of the Lord that the chapter celebrates. In the midst of His terrible wrath, God is faithful to remember His mercy toward His Covenant people.

▶ Numbers 31:1-2 • The LORD said to Moses: "Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites. After that, you will be gathered to your people."

Q: The Lord seems to be continually reminding Moses that his time on earth is about done, how does Moses respond to this news and to these final assignments from the Lord?

▶ [Ref: Verses 3-6] • This war was ordered by God as a Divine reprisal against the Midianites. Twelve thousand men were sent into battle, a thousand from each tribe. The men selected Holy implements from the Tabernacle to take with them into battle, along with the priestly trumpets. Scripture doesn't tell us what specific Holy implements were selected, but we do know they were chosen to demonstrate and assure Israel that Yahweh was with them in the battle.

It does not appear that they took the Ark of the Covenant into war for this battle, even though they would later make a practice to do so. Unfortunately, over time, the Ark was treated as a talisman to assure that they would be successful in battle. But that practice had not yet occurred.

Q: What were the "priestly trumpets" and why were they taken into battle?

**The Battle is Fought as the Lord Commanded • the Victory is Described ...**

▶ [Ref: Verses 7-12] • We are not told about the actual battle, but we are given the results of the battle, which is described in this way: Every Midian man was killed, including the five kings of Midian. Also killed was Balaam, son of Beor, who was the one who suggested to King Balak the strategy to seduce Israel into sexual immorality and idolatry so that Balaam could get the substantial amount of money promised by King Balak. [Balaam had apparently stayed on in Midian and was acting as their advisor.] Israel then burned all the towns and camps of the Midianites, took all the herds and flocks along with any goods they found, claimed as their spoils of war. They also capture the Midianite women and children, claiming them as plunder as well.

Q: Why were the cities and camps burned?

Q: Why were the women and children spared?

**The Plunder, the Captives, and the Animals were all brought back to Israel's Camp. Moses, Eleazar, and to the tribal elders, met the commanders as they returned from battle. Their reception wasn't what they were expecting ...**

Numbers 31:13-16 · Moses, Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the community went to meet them outside the camp. Moses was angry with the officers of the army--the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds--who returned from the battle.

"Have you allowed all the women to live?" he asked them. "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."

Q: What were the commanders and the soldiers expecting when they arrived in camp?

Q: Surely it was common knowledge these women were responsible for turning the Israelites away from the Lord. Why would the commanders not only spare their lives but bring them back to Israel's camp?

**Moses gives a shocking command ...**

Numbers 31:17-18 · Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.

Q: Why kill all the boys?

Q: What is the sense of irony and poetic justice by bringing all the virgin girls into Israel's family culture?

Q: How are we to understand the harsh Divine Judgment dispensed in this passage?

### Now, Moses addresses the soldiers themselves ...

Numbers 31:19-20 • "All of you who have killed anyone or touched anyone who was killed must stay outside the camp seven days. On the third and seventh days you must purify yourselves and your captives. Purify every garment as well as everything made of leather, goat hair or wood."

Q: What is the significance about God's instructions to the soldiers to purify themselves?

### Eleazar, the priest, gives detailed instructions regarding the ritual cleansing ...

Numbers 31:21-24 • Then Eleazar the priest said to the soldiers who had gone into battle, "This is the requirement of the law that the LORD gave Moses:

Gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, lead and anything else that can withstand fire must be put through the fire, and then it will be clean. But it must also be purified with the water of cleansing. And whatever cannot withstand fire must be put through that water.

On the seventh day wash your clothes and you will be clean. Then you may come into the camp."

Q: What stands out the most in these instructions?

Q: What mark of Grace do we see in these instructions?

### God instructs Moses how the Distribution of the Spoils of War are to be handled ...

Numbers 31:25-31 • And the Lord said to Moses, "You and Eleazar the priest and the family leaders of each tribe are to make a list of all the plunder taken in the battle, including the people and animals. Then divide the plunder into two parts, and give half to the men who fought the battle and half to the rest of the people. From the army's portion, first give the Lord his share of the plunder -- one of every 500 of the prisoners and of the cattle, donkeys, sheep, and goats. Give this share of the army's half to Eleazar the priest as an offering to the Lord . From the half that belongs to the people of Israel, take one of every fifty of the prisoners and of the cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats, and other animals. Give this share to the Levites, who are in charge of maintaining the Lord's Tabernacle." So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the Lord commanded Moses.

Q: What is surprising about this distribution?

### The total sums of the plunder taken in battle are recorded ...

► The amount of plunder taken was enormous. Moses recorded that there was 675,000 sheep and goats, 33 72,000 cattle, 34 61,000 donkeys, and 32,000 virgin girls – all of which were distributed in accordance with God's command to Moses. The task must have been enormous, given the numbers involved.

Q: What purpose for recording the method of distribution and the total sum of the plunder taken?

Q: Potentially, who are the virgin girls who have been listed as plunder along with the animals?

Numbers 31:48-50, 54 • Then all the generals and captains came to Moses and said, "We, your servants, have accounted for all the men who went out to battle under our command; not one of us is missing! So we are presenting the items of gold we captured as an offering to the Lord from our share of the plunder -- armbands, bracelets, rings, earrings, and necklaces. This will purify our lives before the Lord and make us right with Him."  
So Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted the gifts from the generals and captains and brought the gold to the Tabernacle as a reminder to the Lord that the people of Israel belong to him.

Q: What is most significant about this passage of scripture regarding the men in the army?

Q: Why would offering to the Lord all of the captured gold purify Israel's lives before the Lord?

Israel is camped on the East side of the Jordan near the Dead Sea.  
It is almost time for them to cross the Jordan  
so they can claim the Land of God's Promise to Abraham.  
They have completed the 40 years of punitive wandering;  
the first generation of male Israelites have died.  
Israel has experienced victories over the Moabites, Amorites and the Midianites.  
God has told Moses his life is about to come to an end.  
So Moses speaks to the people, summarizing their journey after leaving Egypt.



Next Time • Lesson #26  
"Moses Recounts Israel's Journey After Leaving Egypt"

