

Numbers 31:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive?

Analysis

Have ye saved all the women alive?—Moses' rhetorical question drips with incredulity at the soldiers' misguided mercy. The Hebrew construction expects a negative answer: 'You haven't really saved all the women, have you?' This rebuke introduces verses 16-18's explanation: these women caused Israel's sin at Baal-Peor through Balaam's counsel, making their preservation spiritually catastrophic.

The question reveals a recurring biblical principle: mercy divorced from justice and holiness becomes mere sentimentality that perpetuates evil. The soldiers showed natural compassion without supernatural discernment, endangering Israel by preserving the very instruments of their previous seduction. Christ's teaching balances love with judgment: He welcomes sinners who repent but warns of judgment on the impenitent (Matthew 23:33, Luke 13:3). God's people must discern when mercy serves righteousness versus when it enables ongoing sin.

Historical Context

The Baal-Peor incident (Numbers 25) occurred recently—perhaps months earlier—when these same Midianite women had invited Israelite men to sacrificial feasts involving ritual prostitution in Baal worship. This syncretism triggered a plague killing 24,000 Israelites, stopped only by Phinehas's zealous execution of a flagrant offender (25:6-9). Moses' rhetorical question assumes the soldiers knew this recent history, making their preservation of the women inexplicably naive. The incident

demonstrated how quickly even God's redeemed people forget recent judgments and repeat vulnerabilities to sin's seductions.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. When have you shown 'mercy' that actually enabled ongoing sin rather than promoting true repentance and change?
2. How do you discern the difference between Christ-like compassion and sentimental tolerance that preserves evil's influence?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־כַל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־כַל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
said H413 And Moses alive H3605 all the women
H559 H4872 H2421 H5347

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 15:3 (Parallel theme): Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and sucking, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

Jeremiah 48:10 (Parallel theme): Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.

Deuteronomy 2:34 (Parallel theme): And we took all his cities at that time, and utterly destroyed the men, and the women, and the little ones, of every city, we left none to remain:

