

Numbers 31:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.

Analysis

All the women children, that have not known a man...keep alive for yourselves—the Hebrew *na'arah* (young women/virgins) specifies those who hadn't participated in Baal-Peor's sexual immorality. This mercy within judgment demonstrates God's discrimination: punishment falls on actual offenders, not innocent parties. The phrase 'keep alive' (Hebrew *chayah*) means preserve life, with these captives becoming servants integrated into Israelite households under Mosaic law's protections (Exodus 21:7-11, Deuteronomy 21:10-14).

This preservation illustrates redemptive grace: women who could have inherited their mothers' idolatry instead entered covenant community, potentially converting to Yahweh worship—anticipating Rahab, Ruth, and other Gentile women grafted into Messiah's lineage. The principle: God judges specific sins while extending mercy to those not complicit, offering outsiders gracious adoption into His people (Ephesians 2:11-13).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern warfare typically enslaved defeated populations without age or gender distinction. Mosaic law provided unusual protections: female captives couldn't be sold, had mourning time for family, and if married then divorced, went free (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). These provisions treated captives humanely compared to surrounding cultures' practices. The 32,000 virgin captives (verse 35) were divided according to verses 25-47: half to warriors, half to congregation, with

portions for Levites and the Lord's tribute. Many likely married into Israel, bringing ethnic diversity—similar to mixed multitude from Egypt (Exodus 12:38).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does God's distinction between guilty offenders and innocent bystanders in judgment give you confidence in His perfect justice?
2. What does the incorporation of foreign captives into Israel teach about the gospel's power to redeem and adopt former enemies?

Interlinear Text

וְכָל	הַטַּף	בְּנֵי יִם	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא	יָדְעוּ	מִשְׁכָּב
H3605	children	But all the women	H834	H3808	that have not known	by lying
	H2945	H802			H3045	H4904
זָכָר	הָחַי וְ	לָכֶם:				
a man	with him keep alive	H0				
H2145	H2421					

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