

Numbers 31:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead,

Analysis

Only the gold, and the silver, the brass, the iron, the tin, and the lead—this verse begins specifying which plundered materials could withstand fire purification (v.23). The Hebrew lists six metals: zahab (gold), kesef (silver), nechosheth (bronze/brass), barzel (iron), bedil (tin), and oferet (lead). This technical knowledge reflects ancient Near Eastern metallurgy—Israel distinguished metals by melting points and purification methods.

The list demonstrates God's concern for practical details: holiness isn't abstract spirituality divorced from material reality. Different materials require different cleansing methods—fire for heat-resistant metals, water for organic materials (v.20,23). This principle extends spiritually: God's refining fire purifies believers differently based on temperament and calling (1 Corinthians 3:12-15, 1 Peter 1:7). What matters isn't the method but the result: holiness suitable for God's presence.

Historical Context

Bronze Age/early Iron Age metallurgy (c. 1400 BC) worked with these six metals commonly. Gold and silver were precious metals for currency and ornamentation. Bronze (copper-tin alloy) provided weapons, tools, and household items. Iron, increasingly common by this period, made superior weapons. Tin (alloyed with copper for bronze) and lead (for weights, sling bullets, and architectural purposes) completed the metal inventory. The Midianites likely possessed significant metalwork given their trading culture. Fire purification at high temperatures

eliminated organic contamination from battlefield deaths while allowing metal reuse—economically wise and ritually necessary.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's attention to technical details in purification encourage careful obedience in seemingly mundane areas of life?
2. What 'metals' in your character—areas of strength—can withstand God's refining fire, and what requires gentler water cleansing?

Interlinear Text

אֶת	אֶת	הַזָּהָב	וְאֶת	הַכֶּסֶף	אֶת	הַנְּחָשִׁית	אֶת
H389	H853	Only the gold	H853	and the silver	H853	the brass	H853
		H2091		H3701		H5178	
לְ	אֶת	הַבַּיִרֹן	וְאֶת	הַבִּדְיִל	וְאֶת	הָעֹפֶרֶת	
		the iron	H853	the tin	H853	and the lead	
		H1270		H913		H5777	

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