

Numbers 31:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel,
shall ye send to the war.

Analysis

Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel—The equal conscription (elef echad, אֶלֶף אֶחָד, one thousand each) ensured tribal solidarity in holy war. All twelve tribes shared responsibility for defending covenant holiness, not just warrior tribes like Gad or Naphtali. This unified response to the Midianite threat contrasts with later tribal divisions.

The total force of 12,000 (v. 5) was modest compared to Israel's fighting-age men (over 600,000, Numbers 26:51), signifying trust in divine power rather than numerical superiority. Gideon's 300 against the Midianites (Judges 7) and Jonathan's "nothing can hinder the LORD from saving" (1 Samuel 14:6) echo this principle: victory belongs to God.

Historical Context

This selective conscription preserved most of Israel for the impending Jordan crossing and Canaan conquest. The campaign was surgical and specific, targeting the Midianite leadership and those directly involved in the Baal-Peor seduction. It was not total annihilation of the Midianite people—Midianites appear later in Judges.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the equal tribal contribution to holy war challenge individualism in the church's spiritual battles today?
2. What does the modest army size (12,000 from 600,000) teach about trusting God's power over human resources?
3. In what areas of spiritual warfare might you be relying on numerical strength rather than divine empowerment?

Interlinear Text

אֶלֶף	מִתְּנִת	אֶלֶף	מִתְּנִת	לְכָל	מִתְּנִת
a thousand	Of every tribe	a thousand	Of every tribe	H3605	Of every tribe
H505	H4294	H505	H4294		H4294
וְיִשְׁנַאֲלֵ	תְּשִׁלֵּחַ	לְאַבְרָהָם			
of Israel	shall ye send	to the war			
H3478	H7971	H6635			

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org