

Numbers 31:40

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the persons were sixteen thousand; of which the LORD'S tribute was thirty and two persons.

Analysis

And the persons were sixteen thousand; of which the LORD'S tribute was thirty and two persons—The Hebrew nephesh adam (נֶפֶשׁ אָדָם, 'souls of men') refers to the 32,000 Midianite virgins taken captive (Numbers 31:35), of whom 32 were given to the Levites. These women became servants in Israel, likely performing domestic tasks for the priesthood. While jarring to modern sensibilities, this passage reveals God's concern even for war captives' systematic care.

Unlike ancient Near Eastern practices where captive women faced abuse or slavery, Israel's Law regulated their treatment (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). The allocation to Levites—who had no land inheritance—provided both labor and potential integration into covenant community through marriage.

Historical Context

Ancient warfare typically resulted in massacre or enslavement of conquered populations. Israel's selective sparing of virgins (who hadn't participated in Baal-peor seduction) and their regulated treatment represented relative mercy within ancient context. Integration into Levitical households offered protection and community.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does God's concern for systematic care of even war captives inform your view of His justice and mercy?
2. In what ways does the Old Testament's treatment of captives point forward to Christ's redemption of spiritual captives?
3. How should Christians balance God's historical judgments with the New Covenant's universal offer of grace?

Interlinear Text

נְפָשָׁה:	אֲדֹם	שְׁשָׁה	עַשְׁרֵה	אֶלָּפֶת	וּמְכַסָּם
persons	And the persons	were sixteen	H6240	thousand	tribute
H5315	H120	H8337		H505	H4371

נְפָשָׁה:	וְשָׁלַשׁ	יָמִים	שְׁנַיִם	לִיהְיוֹה
of which the LORD'S	and two	was thirty	persons	
H3068	H8147	H7970	H5315	

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