

Numbers 31:53

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

(For the men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.)

Analysis

(For the men of war had taken spoil, every man for himself.)—The parenthetical clarification distinguishes between **spoil** (לָבָז bazaz, plunder) kept by individual soldiers 'every man for himself' (לִּי וְלִי שֵׁן ish lo) and the officers' voluntary thanksgiving offering. While soldiers retained personal plunder (gold, clothing, livestock from v.32-47), officers gave above-and-beyond offerings from their leadership portions.

This verse establishes biblical pattern for giving: ordinary provision for personal need + extraordinary generosity from abundance. Jesus commended the widow's sacrificial two mites over wealthy gifts from surplus (Mark 12:41-44). Paul taught: 'Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor... that he may have something to give to him who has need' (Ephesians 4:28)—working provides both self-sufficiency and capacity for generosity.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern military customs typically allowed soldiers to keep battlefield plunder as compensation (since standing armies received minimal pay). Israel's law required dedicating some war spoils to the tabernacle (Numbers 31:26-30) while permitting soldiers to retain portions. Officers' additional voluntary offerings exceeded required contributions, modeling exceptional generosity.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does the distinction between soldiers' retained plunder and officers' additional offerings model the difference between legitimate provision and sacrificial generosity?
2. What does the officers' giving from abundance (beyond personal retention) teach about leadership responsibility to set generous examples?
3. How can you practice both appropriate self-provision and sacrificial generosity, rather than viewing them as mutually exclusive?

Interlinear Text

אֵשׁ	הַצָּבָא	בָּרָזוּ וְ	אֵשׁ	לִי
every man	of war	had taken spoil	every man	H0
H376	H6635	H962	H376	

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 20:14 (Parallel theme): But the women, and the little ones, and the cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the LORD thy God hath given thee.