

Numbers 31:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses; and they slew all the males.

Analysis

They warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses—The phrase *ka'asher tzivah YHWH* (כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה, just as Yahweh commanded) emphasizes covenantal obedience. This was not ethnic cleansing or imperialism but executing divine judgment **and they slew all the males**—specifically the military-age males who participated in Baal-Peor (v. 8 specifies five Midianite kings and Balaam).

The totality language reflects ancient Near Eastern warfare hyperbole (compare Joshua's conquests), focusing on military and leadership destruction rather than genocide. Verse 9 shows women and children were spared (though Moses later commanded executing those complicit in idolatry, vv. 14-18). This was targeted justice, not indiscriminate slaughter.

Historical Context

The campaign fulfilled God's command in Numbers 25:17 following the Baal-Peor incident. Archaeological evidence shows Midianites were nomadic traders and raiders; this military strike disrupted their ability to threaten Israel during the conquest. The Midianites survived as a people (Judges 6-8), confirming this was not total annihilation.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the "as the LORD commanded" emphasis inform your approach to difficult obedience versus cultural preferences?
2. What does this account teach about God's justice, which may include temporal judgment, while ultimately pointing to Christ who bore divine wrath?
3. How do you wrestle with difficult Old Testament passages while maintaining trust in God's perfect justice and mercy?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּצְבְּאוּ H6633	עַל H5921	בְּמִדְיָן H4080	כְּאֲשֶׁר H834	צִוָּה H6680	יְהוָה H3068
And they warred		against the Midianites		commanded	as the LORD
אֶת H853	מֹשֶׁה H4872	וַיַּהַרְגוּ H2026	כָּל H3605	זָכָר: H2145	
	Moses	and they slew	all the males		

Additional Cross-References

Judges 21:11 (Parallel theme): And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man.

1 Samuel 27:9 (Parallel theme): And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned, and came to Achish.

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