

Numbers 31:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods.

Analysis

The children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones—the Hebrew shabah (took captive) describes taking prisoners of war. Initially, the soldiers spared the women and children contrary to God's intent, prompting Moses' rebuke in verse 15. The taking of **all the spoil of all their cattle...flocks...and goods** (Hebrew shalal for spoil, malqowach for prey) was standard ancient warfare practice, but Israel's campaigns differed—spoils belonged to Yahweh first, then were distributed by divine law.

This verse sets up the theological problem addressed in verses 15-18: the women of Midian had been instruments of Israel's seduction to Baal-Peor (25:1-18), making their preservation dangerous. The soldiers' initial mercy violated God's purpose to remove the source of Israel's spiritual corruption, demonstrating that human compassion without divine wisdom can perpetuate sin's influence.

Historical Context

This campaign against Midian (c. 1406 BC) executed divine judgment for the Baal-Peor incident where Midianite women, following Balaam's counsel, seduced Israelite men into idolatry and sexual immorality, resulting in a plague killing 24,000. The Midianites were descended from Abraham through Keturah (Genesis 25:1-4), making this judgment against distant relatives particularly poignant. The

battle occurred on the plains of Moab just before Israel's entry into Canaan, serving as Moses' final military act.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How can well-intentioned mercy toward sin's sources undermine God's purposes for holiness in your life?
2. What 'captives' are you taking—influences or relationships—that seem harmless but carry spiritual danger?

Interlinear Text

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| וַיִּשְׁבּוּ captives H7617 | בְּנֵי And the children H1121 | אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל of Israel H3478 | נָשֵׁי י took all the women H802 | מִדְיָן of Midian H4080 | וְאֵת H853 | |
| טַף and their little ones H2945 | וְאֵת H853 | כָּל H3605 | בְּהֶמְתָּם of all their cattle H2929 | וְאֵת H853 | כָּל H3605 | מִקְנֵהָם and all their flocks H4735 |
| וְאֵת H853 | כָּל H3605 | חֵילָם and all their goods H2428 | בָּזְזוּ: and took the spoil H962 | | | |