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Report of the Battle

31: 1-12

Report of the battle DIG: What threat did the Midianites pose? Who led the Israelites into battle? What holy vessels were taken? Why is this a holy war? Whose vengeance was carried out? What was done with the spoils of war? What happened to Balaam?

REFLECT: What enemies, or threats to God's covenant, do believers face today? How might their existence jeopardize God's plans for His people? How serious do you feel this threat is? In what situations would you go to battle against that perceived threat?

Parashah 43: Mas'ei (Journeys of) 33:1 to 36:13

(See my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link [click Af](#) - Parashah)

[In regular years read with Parashah 42, in leap years read separately]

The Key People are Israelites, Moshe, Aaron, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, Eleazar, Joshua, one leader from each tribe, Gileadite heads, and the five daughters of Zelophehad.

The Scenes review wilderness stops (Numbers 33:4-9), while on the plains of Mo'av (Numbers 26:3, 33:50 and Deuteronomy 34:1 and 8). Other scenes describe borders in the Promised Land, the Levitical towns, cities of refuge and land for Zelophehad's daughters.

The Main Events include a list of journey stops, more traveling, instructions to drive out the Canaanites, to destroy the high places and divide the Land, the list of leaders to divide inheritance, cities for Levites, cities of refuges, mitzvot about murder, mitzvot about each tribe handing down its own inheritance, and Zelophehad's daughters marrying within the tribe to keep their inheritance.

At last, Balaam received the reward for which he had worked so hard.

The instructions for the battle (31:1-6): The malice of **the Midianite people** had cost the lives of **24,000 Israelites (31:2)**. In biblical thought, a blood relative could take **vengeance** on the killer of the slain (**to see link click Gk - Cities of Refuge**). There is a sense here that **the LORD** is **the Kinsman of His people**, who issues the command for **His** own holy vendetta. The battle was one of holy reprisal for the near destruction of **His people by the Midianites.**⁷⁰⁴

Moses sent out **twelve clans** (Hebrew: *elep*, could mean *a thousand* or it could mean *a clan*), or **elite units** that every **tribe** would provide, to make **war** against **the Midianites.**⁷⁰⁵ Thus, **ADONAI** said to **Moshe**, “**On behalf of the people of Isra’el, take vengeance on them.** Holy **war** differed from other kinds of **war** in that **the LORD Himself** led the **Israelites** into battle. **After that, you will be gathered with your people.”** God had already told **Moses** that **he** would **die** before **the Israelites** entered **the Land (27:13)**. So, this would be **Moshe’s** final **war**. **He** would not get to lead the **war** of conquest in Canaan; that would be for **his** successor **Joshua** to accomplish. But at least **he** was able to lead the battle against the foe that had nearly destroyed **his** people.⁷⁰⁶

Moshe said to the people, “**Equip men from among yourselves for war. They are to go and fight Midian, in order to carry out ADONAI’s vengeance on Midian.**” You are to send an elite unit from every one of Isra’el’s tribes. **Rashi explains that “The one who stands against Isra’el is as if he is standing against the Holy One, Blessed is He” (Rashi on Numbers 31:3).** **Moshe** sent them into the war along with **Phinehas the son of Eleazar the high priest** to lead them into the battle (**Deut 20:2-3**). Here we see **Phinehas** once again acting as the antidote to **Balaam**. Just as **he** countered **Balaam’s** plan to seduce **the Israelites** at **Ba’al-Peor** (see **Ea - Taking a stand for God**), so now **he** serves as the spiritual leader of **Isra’el’s** elite units as they sought retribution from **the Midianites**, in whose midst **Balaam** was also active (see below). **This leads the midrash to conclude that it must have been Phinehas himself who killed Balaam (Targ. Yer. On v8; Sanh. 106).**

The Israelites also carried **the holy vessels and the silver trumpets** (see **Bl - Two Silver Trumpets**) for **sounding the alarm** into the battle. We can only guess what **the holy vessels** were. Since **the Urim and Thummim** (see **Exodus Gb - The Urim and Thummim: The Means of Making Decisions**) were to be consulted in **war (First Samuel 14:41 and 28:6)**, and since **the Ark** of the Covenant was brought into battle until the Temple was built (**Numbers 14:44; Second Samuel 11:11; First Kings 8:8**), it is therefore likely that **Eleazar** accompanied the elite units with all **his** sacred garments, including **the Ark** and **the Urim and Thummim.**⁷⁰⁷



The report of the victory (31:7-12): They fought against Midian, as ADONAI had ordered Moshe, and killed every male who dwelled in the central and northern Transjordan highlands. But other Midianite tribes survived elsewhere, as is clear from Judges Chapters 6 through 8. In the battle, all the Midianite princes were killed along with the others who were slain - Evi, Rekem, Tzur, Hur and Reva, the five princes of Midian. These were the same men that had summoned Balaam in 22:7. They were the nobles of Midian that Sihon, king of the Amorites had appointed as his princes. They were the last vestiges of his government. So great was their hatred and malice toward Isra'el that they prostituted their own daughters in the effort to seduce the Israelite men. Cozbi, the woman Pinehaus impaled with his spear, was the daughter of Tzur (25:6-9). This was a tremendous victory for God and His people. Not a single Jewish soldier was killed (31:48-49).

Midianite dwelling places were reduced to rubble and ash by the scorched-earth policy of holy war. That which could be retained as spoils of war was then brought back to the Israelite encampment on the plains of Mo'ab, where the goods were presented to Moses their leader and Eleazar their high priest in view of the assembly Israelites community.⁷⁰⁸ The Torah tells us that Balaam, the son of Beor, was killed with the sword. Balaam's name, amid the naming of the five princes of Midian, suggests that he was their advisor, their spiritual guru. Always after the shekel, Balaam had a new gig. But his death completes the story of Chapters 22 through 24 (see [Dm - The Story of Balaam](#)). At last he received the reward for which he had worked so hard. He lingered for too long with the Midianites. The Israeli soldiers took captive the women of Midian and their little ones, and they took as spoils of war all their cattle, flocks and other goods. They set fire to all their cities in the areas where they lived and all their camps. They took all the spoils of war (including all the gold and silver Balaam had

received from Balak for **his** plan of defeating **the Israelites** with **the Midianite women** and **their gods**), **all the people and animals they had captured, and brought the captives, the spoils of war and presented them to Moshe, Eleazar the high priest and the community of Isra'el in the camp on the plains of Mo'av by the Jordan across from Jericho.**

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for being so wonderful! Thank **You** for being the perfect balance of love and of justice against evil. It is so reassuring to know that when evil happens to me, you feel the hurt and you want evil to be wiped out. **You** desire a life of shalom, of peace and joy, for me. **These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have shalom. In the world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:33)!** You are **a Father** who protects **His** children. When someone attacks **Your** child, it is like they are hurting the apple of **Your** eye. **For thus says ADONAI-Tzva'ot, He has sent me after glory to the nations that plundered you - because whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye (Zechariah 2:12).** Thank **You** that **You** are not mean and vengeful, but are holy and pure and have a righteous wrath against sin and evil. It cost **You** so much to redeem mankind from sin's grip and penalty of death. When **You** come against evil it is out of the purest of motives, that we may not be polluted by its filth.*

*It was your pure love that sought to protect your people against the awful immorality of **the Midianites**. **You** wisely guided **Your people** to wipe out **the Midianites**, including **Balaam**. **He** had been the instigator of **Midianites** seduction of **Isra'el** and **he** deserved the punishment of death that **he** got. **He** thought **he** could get away with deceitfully seducing **Your people**, but **You** saw what was going on and you took **him** out. **Your** loving and holy nature sought to protect **Your people** from deceitful immorality. Thank you that no matter how big someone is who tries to hurt me, **You** are right there with me. **You** are such a wise and wonderful heavenly **Father**. I love to serve **You** even when it is hard. **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).** I know that someday I will spend all eternity praising **You** in heaven. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*