

INTRO: When we look at our world, we see it bloodstained with religious terrorism and ethnic cleansing. Christians say that the Bible is the answer. But when we read the Bible, we soon arrive at texts like Numbers 31, OT war narratives, which resemble modern religious terrorism in our eyes. So our knee jerk reaction is to ask, How are OT ethics any different from radical Islamic jihad and Hamas? Isn't religious warfare the worst kind because of how totalizing it is? It kills with divine sanction, and then wonders why nobody understands. So how can the Bible be the answer? Come to think of it, isn't the Bible actually what's wrong with the world today, precisely because people use OT war texts to justify modern religious violence? So today we come to a text in the Bible, Numbers 31, which makes any modern person ask, How can that be part of Christianity? How can Jesus approve of that? How can anyone take Christianity seriously when this kind of religious violence is not only in the Bible but even commanded by God?

And that last question raises another. How can Christians take the Bible seriously when the Bible itself seems to include two radically different sets of ethical principles—one set like this to justify Israel's conquest of Canaan, and another set, like the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, or the Golden Rule, to represent what Jesus thinks? I mean, how much easier could it be to poke holes in the Bible? I thought Christianity was about grace, love, salvation, mercy, caring for the poor. But Numbers 31 looks a lot like what we would call unwarranted military aggression, ethnic cleansing, execution of non-combatants, and crimes against humanity.

On top of all that, just yesterday was the annual March for Life in DC to protest abortion, and we in this church are pro-life. We think abortion is murder, infanticide. So as an unbeliever, as an outsider looking in on American Evangelicals, you might look at our pro-life stance, and our preaching of Numbers 31, and scratch your head...or, more likely, you shake your head in disbelief. Or maybe you just smirk at the delicious irony: How in God's name can pro-lifers be so sensitive about the beginning of life, and so calloused when they preach OT judgment texts about Israel's conquest of Canaan like we find in Num 31? It doesn't add up. And the conclusion drawn is, Christianity is hopelessly conflicted within itself, so I guess I'll have to look for another worldview to make sense of reality. So what can Christians possibly say for themselves about such things? How does a Christian honestly read Numbers 31 and think of Jesus at the same time, without inconsistency or what a psychologist would call cognitive dissonance?

Caveats. So in order to help you even want to listen to a sermon on this kind of text, let me make five introductory, clarifying statements. **First**, Numbers 31 really happened in real, time-space history. This is not historical fiction; it's historical fact. **Secondly**, no Christian should think Numbers 31 is a blueprint for the success of the gospel through the church today. Christians are not called to holy war in the same way as the Israelites were in Numbers 31. The gospel of Jesus Christ does not advance by the sword; it advances by the word. **Thirdly**, Christians do not approve of ethnic cleansing, or war crimes—like summary execution of non-combatants—for any reason, and especially not based on Numbers 31 or any other OT passage that describes holy war. This passage is descriptive, not prescriptive. **Fourthly**, however, this passage does apply to the way we live today, but only in terms of living in light of what God will do in the future. **Fifthly**, the gospel is a gospel of salvation, and because that is true, we have to ask, "salvation from what?" Numbers 31 illustrates the "what" from which Christians think sinners need to be saved. So we think that even holy war texts like this are organically related to the gospel of Jesus Christ, not as the blueprint for the church's advancement of the gospel, but as the God-ordained warning that His judgment is coming, and that all sinners everywhere need to be saved from it, regardless of ethnicity, location, sex, or socio-economic status. In other words, what we're dealing with here in Num 31 is a warning passage—a warning of what God's judgment looks like, the judgment Jesus endured when he died on the cross, and the judgment Jesus will accomplish all by Himself when he returns to make all things right and all things new.

In a narrative passage like this, I'd normally tell you the story and save the point for the end, and then do application. But because so many people take offense at this kind of account before they understand how it fits into God's plan of salvation, I need to give you the point of the text up front so you don't get off on the wrong

foot and listen with the wrong idea in mind. Here it is: When we as Christians look at this text in its whole-Bible context, as God intends, what we learn afresh is that **Jesus will avenge God's enemies, bless His people, and usher God's kingdom into a clean new world**. Now, I know Jesus name is never mentioned in Num 31. But after we walk through the text, we'll see that what Israel does here in carrying out God's judgment in Canaan, Jesus will do at the end of time in carrying out God's judgment on all the earth. What we see Israel doing here is a foreshadowing not of what the church will do, but of what Jesus will do as the New and True Israel, God's Army of One. So let's walk through this text to understand it on its own terms, and then we'll see how it testifies to Jesus and to the gospel.

Vengeance 31:1-12

V.2 "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Avenge the people of Israel on the Midianites. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people.' So Moses spoke to the people, saying, 'Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the Lord's vengeance on Midian. You shall send a thousand from each of the tribes of Israel to the war.' So there were provided, out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand from each tribe, together with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand..."

This is God's response to 22:1-6 where Balak king of Moab, with these Midianites, send a joint delegation to Balaam to curse Israel. It also goes back to 25:1 at Peor where the Midianite women seduced Israelite men into sexual immorality and idolatry. That's why God had said in 25:17 "*harass the Midianites and strike them down, for they have harassed you with their wiles, with which they beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in theatter of Cozbi, the daughter of the chief of Midian, their sister, who was killed on the day of the plague on account of Peor.*" So the war here in Num 31 is retributive justice. This is not ethnic cleansing. This is about avenging Midian's role in trying to curse Israel. The Midianites were nomads, they were spread all over the Middle East, and these particular Midianites are the ones associated with the Moabites east of the Jordan River—the ones who took part in Balak's plan to curse Israel using Balaam.

Phinehas is chosen because of his role in checking the plague by killing Zimri and Cozbi in 25:7-13 with a jealousy that reflected God's jealousy. Was Phinehas sent as a reward for his own faithfulness? You wonder if he's sent as accountability for the soldiers so they don't make the same mistake twice.

v.7 "They warred against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword. And the people of Israel took captive the women of Midian and their little ones, and they took as plunder all their cattle, their flocks, and all their goods. All their cities in the places where they lived, and all their encampments, they burned with fire, and took all the spoil and all the plunder, both of man and of beast."

So in some ways, the Israelites respect the Geneva Convention. They only kill every male, and all the kings, and they kill Balaam the false prophet. But the non-combatants—the women and little ones—they don't kill. They just take them captive. They show mercy to the non-combatants. In other ways, we find their war tactics disturbing. They take all the cattle, sheep, and property, and then burn their cities and camps down to the ground. They even take non-combatants as prisoners. So in v.12 "*they brought the captives and the plunder and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the people of Israel, at the camp on the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.*" You get the idea that they bring all the captives and plunder to Moses as if he's going to be proud of them. Mission accomplished, right? Their approach to Moses raises our expectations of what Moses is going to think of the job they did. Will he approve or disapprove? The warriors apparently think Moses is going to give them a "that a boy... Well done...." But what does Moses say?

Thoroughness 31:13-18

"Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the chiefs of the congregation went to meet them outside the camp. And Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. Now at this point we assume Moses is angry because the warriors went too far. But it's just the opposite in v.15. "Moses said to them, 'Have you let all the women live? Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord. Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him keep alive for yourselves.' " The soldiers may have been too thorough for us, but they were not thorough enough for Moses. They had too much mercy. Instead of sparing the women, they should have made sure there were no seductresses among them by killing any woman who was not a virgin. This is not sexism; it's not misogyny; it's not gender discrimination. The women of Midian were guilty as sin for leading Israel into sin. So the Israelites were not supposed to take any chances of the Midianite women seducing Israel again. Any Midianite woman who had ever had sex, was to be executed as an enemy of the Israelite state. That's not because the Bible is prudish or anti-woman or anti-sex. It's because God is holy, He expects His people to be holy, and He doesn't want His people tempted to sin like that again. These women were not to be rehabilitated, or assimilated. They were to be condemned, executed. There would be no mercy for them. The only women who were to be spared were the virgins. And they would be assimilated in v.18 "But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him keep alive for yourselves." These would be treated as part of God's goodness to Israel, and the Israelites were to be good to them and treat them as gifts from God.

The hardest verse to fathom in the whole chapter and maybe one of the hardest to understand in the whole Bible, is 31:17. "Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones...." That sentence is morally repugnant to us, no matter what the context, time, or anything else. In fact, when a preacher like me stands up here and says he's going to try to explain it, our gut reaction is, "I'd rather you not bother, because there is no explanation for that." These would be war crimes if they were committed today. So how can God be good and then stand idly by to tacitly affirm a command from Moses to kill male children? What kind of God is this? What good can possibly come from this? And how can any church that claims to believe in the love of Jesus ever preach this?

We will come back to the morality of all this in a few minutes. For now, from an OT perspective, this is part of OT holy war conventions in Dt 20. If a city was far from where the Israelites would live, then they could let the women and children live and grow up there. They could live at peace with them from a distance. But in Dt 20:16, "*In the cities of these people that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction.*" So in distant cities not given to them for an inheritance, mercy was the rule. But in the local cities God was giving them, no mercy to anyone, and the reason in **Dt 20:18** is "*that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God.*" But we're way past that in Num 31. Before Israel had even crossed the river, these Midianite women had already seduced them into illicit sex and false worship. These women are not knocking on heaven's door asking to get in. They're using sex to work against God's saving interests; so their lives are forfeit.

Purification 31:19-24

In v.19, once the soldiers were done, they had to be purified in order come back into the camp. "*Encamp outside the camp seven days. Whoever of you has killed any person and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves and your captives on the third day and on the seventh day. You shall purify every garment, every article of skin, all work of goats' hair, and every article of wood. Then Eleazar the priest said to the men in the army who had gone to battle: 'This is the statute of the law that the Lord has command Moses: only the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless, it shall also be purified with the water for impurity. And whatever cannot stand the fire, you shall pass through the water. You must wash your clothes on the seventh day, and you shall be clean. And afterward you may come into the camp.'*" Back in Num 19, contact with death made you ceremonially unclean. The reason is that death is the realm and wage of sin, whereas God and His camp were to

be holy. Even the precious metals themselves had to be cleansed in both fire and water, and anything else taken as the spoils of war had to be washed first before it was brought into the camp, out of respect for God's own perfect cleanliness. Nothing unclean would enter the camp—whether it was people or possessions.

PLUNDER 31:25-47

According to v.27, all the plunder was to be split in two groups—"between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation." And these two piles of plunder were then further divided.

To the Lord (31:28-29; 32-41). In 31:28-29, Moses says "*Levy for the Lord a tribute from the men of war who went out to battle, one out of five hundred, of the people and of the oxen and of the donkeys and of the flocks. Take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priest as a contribution to the Lord.*" In vv.32-41, one out of every 500 came to 675 sheep, 72 cattle, 61 donkeys, 32 people.

To the Levites (31:30-31; 42-47). In 31:30-31 "*And from the people Israel's half you shall take one drawn out of every fifty, of the people, of the oxen, of the donkeys, and of the flocks, and of all the cattle, and give them to the Levites who keep guard over the tabernacle of the Lord. And Moses and Eleazar did as the Lord commanded.*" Apparently, a small percentage of Midianite people and animals were to be given to the Levites to assist and resource their services in the tabernacle (→ Isa 66:21). In vv.42-47 the Levites' portion is not numbered, but the ratio is 1 of every 50.

PROTECTION Atonement Memorial 31:48-54

The lead officers of the army come back to Moses in 31:49 and they say "*Your servants have counted the men of war who are under our command, and there is not a man missing from us.*" Of all 12,000 men sent out to war, not one was missing. Every single one of them lived to tell about it. That sentence serves as a rebuke to the fear of the previous generation. The previous generation feared for their own wives and little ones. But here, it was the Midianite's wives and little ones who became the prey, not the Israelites. Not even a single Israelite soldier went down. That's how faithful God was to his own promise to protect them and to prove himself powerful for them. And maybe that's why they bring as much as they bring for the Lord's offering in v.52—16,750 shekels of gold.¹ That's way more than God required as a ransom or atonement offering.

In Ex 30:11-16, when Israel counted all their men, each one was to give a ransom payment of a half-shekkel. So if these 12,000 soldiers had just done the minimum, it would have only been 6,000 shekels total. They give 16,750 shekels for their ransom payment—almost 3 times the required amount. That's gratitude motivating generosity. They found God true to his promise of protection and power and providence for them, and in response, they give. They realize that it wasn't their own prowess that saved their lives in battle. It was God's providence and power and faithfulness. He had ransomed them as it were, so they made a generous ransom offering, not from obligation, but gratitude—after he had already save them, not in order that he would. And this ransom payment was given as a memorial, as something for future generations to remember. They wanted this generous gift to bear witness to future generations that the Lord's promises are worth trusting, they're worth taking into battle, and they're worth every dime of gratitude we have. Giving is an act of worship, and it reflects the value you place on God's promises, power, presence, and protection. **TRANS: So, what should you as a non-Christian do with conquest and holy war texts like this from the Bible?**

1. Take it as a warning. The temptation, the easy thing to do, is to reject Christianity out of hand as false because OT war accounts seem inhumane. Everybody knows that killing children is wrong...except abortion activists, of course. But aside from abortion, killing children is a gross violation of the 6th command against murder. And taking other people's things is stealing, a violation of the 8th command. So, you might conclude, this is ridiculous. Look how easy it is to point out the contradictions in the Bible, we say. Look at how under-evolved the Judeo-Christian ethic is. But that would be to

¹ Iain Duguid, *Numbers* PTW; probably following the numbers explained in R.A. Cole, *Numbers* NAC, 504, which I follow here.

Don't take this as an opportunity to pat yourself on the back for being so morally evolved compared to the ancient Israelites. God did not give you this text as a boost to your self-esteem by comparison with the past. God gave you these texts to warn you what your own future will be if you don't side with Him against your sin and false worship of Him and other gods. You are listening to Numbers 31, in God's providence, because God wants you to learn from the Midianites mistakes, not laugh at the Israelites. So we should all receive these accounts as historical warnings to us that God's judgment is still coming, and it will be so comprehensive and violent that it offends our present sensibilities.

But if this is the case, then how do we resolve the apparent contradiction between loving your neighbor and killing the Midianites and even their little boys? Numbers 31 is not a regression in the evolution of human ethics. It's an in-breaking of God's end-time judgment back from the future, to warn all of us that God's common grace for unbelievers and His patience with them will one day come to a swift and comprehensive end.² The ethic of this era will not remain forever. God is no slave to his law. The law is not God. God is God. This is the era in which God's patience is lingering, inviting and commanding all people everywhere to repent. But a day is coming when God's patience will be spent, and He will send His Son to judge all those who refuse to repent and believe in Him, to destroy and recreate the earth, and to make it a clean, new habitat for all his people who have turned to trust in Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of their sins and their self-righteousness. Meredith Kline calls the holy war ethic in Num 31 "an anticipatory abrogation [an early repeal] of the principle of common grace during the OT age." That's a mouthful. What he means is that during Israel's conquest of Canaan, God briefly suspended his common grace to unbelievers in order to graphically illustrate and warn us that Canaan's conquest pre-figured God's comprehensive, end-time judgment to come. One day, God will repeal His common grace to humanity, and you dare not test Him. Numbers 31 proves that God will in fact be merciless in His justice against those who disbelieve and disobey Him, and we should be grateful that in the OT era, Numbers 31 was the exception, not the norm, and that it will not be repeated until it is fulfilled at the end of time. Still, if you are an unbeliever, Numbers 31 calls you to repent of your self-reliance, self-righteousness, and self-indulgence. It calls you to take God's judgment seriously. It calls you to quit thinking of God as harmless—that is idolatry. It calls you to quit idolizing the projection of your own preferences as God, and to believe God's warnings, which testify to his judgment, and to trust His promises, which testify to His salvation.

But to say that Num 31 prefigures God's end-time judgment just seems like kicking the can down road, because that means that at the end of time, God will not hesitate to kill what we might call non-combatants. His judgment will condemn the elderly, children, and others who we are told now to view with compassion. And isn't that worse? Because it's not just the loss of physical life, but damnation. How can Christians believe such things? And it is at this point that we shut our mouths and say that for God to be God means that no one holds Him accountable. Friend, do you really think you have the wisdom and knowledge to hold God accountable for

² Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997, originally published 1989), esp. pp.162-164, is most helpful here. "Within this temporary shell of the Intrusion there is a permanent core. The pattern of things earthly embodies realized eschatology, an actual projection of the heavenly reality. It is the consummation which, intruding into the time of delay, anticipates itself" (Kline, Structure, 156). "There was introduced in the OT age a pattern of conduct akin to that found in prophetic portrayals of the kingdom of God beyond the present age of common grace. Our thesis is that the OT ethical pattern is an aspect of this intrusion. Included in it are both anticipations of God's judgment curse on the reprobate and of his saving grace in blessing his elect...The distinction made is not one of different standards but of the application of a constant standard under significantly different conditions..., an anticipatory abrogation of the principle of common grace during the OT age" (Structure, 160). "The welfare of man is not the chief end of man; ...we sinful creatures have no inherent rights which our holy Maker must respect" (161). "Our Lord rebuked the Boanerges when they contemplated consuming the Samaritans with fire from heaven (Luke 9:54; Mk 3:17). We may not seek to destroy those for whom, perchance, Christ died. But in the final judgment the Lord will not rebuke James and John if they make similar requests" (161-162). "this ethical intrusion appropriately attaches itself to the activity of persons and institutions which were types of things to come in the age of the consummation." (162). "The conclusion cannot be avoided that radically different principles are at work. For if Israel's conquest of Canaan were to be adjudicated before an assembly of nations acting according to the provisions of common grace, that conquest would have to be condemned as unprovoked aggression and, moreover, an aggression carried out in barbarous violation of the requirement to show all possible mercy even in proper execution of justice....It will only be with the frank acknowledgment that ordinary ethical requirements were suspended and the ethical principles of the last judgment intruded that the divine promises and commands to Israel concerning Canaan and the Canaanites come into their own" (163). "The conquest...was not...an instance in the ethical sphere of arrested evolution but rather of anticipated eschatology." (164). Therefore, "in union with the phenomenon of typology, there was during the OT dispensation an anticipatory exercise of the ethics of the world to come" (170). Kline is followed, and amplified, by G.K. Beale, *The Morality of God in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013).

His actions? You're the one to do that? Do you hear how arrogant that sounds? "God has to answer to me." No he doesn't. We have to answer to Him. What it means to be God is that it is morally right for Him to be totally free of accountability to anyone but Himself, because He is the ONLY all-righteous, all-glorious, all-knowing, all-wise, almighty, all-present God who works all things after the counsel of His righteous and indomitable will. If any of those things are not true of Him, He is no God. And if you believe anything lower of Him than that, you make an idol of your own mental image of him. To assume God is accountable to you is to make yourself god, which only proves you vulnerable to the very divine judgment you criticize. You are not God's umpire, calling balls and strikes on him. He is your umpire, you have struck out, and you are not to argue balls and strikes with Him. That's what gets you thrown out of the game.

It doesn't have to end like this for you. But if not, then what do you have to do to be saved from God's judgment? You must believe that this kind of destruction in Num 31 is what your own sins deserve. This is what you must be saved from—God's righteous wrath breaking out against your sin. And then you must believe that this is exactly what Jesus endured for you on the cross—God's wrath breaking out against Him for your sin. That is the gospel. Numbers 31 is a graphic portrayal of the wrath of God from which we must be saved, and the wrath of God that Jesus endured on our behalf, so that God Himself would remain just even as He justifies the ungodly. The Bible, then, is plenty consistent in maintaining that Jesus had the best of all reasons to become a man and to die, and it wasn't just to be a good example. No one allows themselves to be literally crucified simply to set a good example. He was crucified to endure God's judgment. So while you may ask us how we can believe these things as Christians, we ask you, how can you not?

2. Realize that God judges those who lead others into sin. The Midianite women led Israel into sin, and they paid dearly. Jesus agrees with this principle. He says it's inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to those through whom they come. It'd be better for them that a millstone be hung around their neck and they be drowned in the sea. Don't let that be you.

3. Realize what God thinks of humanity's attempt to know good and evil without accounting for Him? Numbers 31 is what he thinks of it. It's damnable. He will not leave unpunished anyone who suppresses His truth because they think they know better than what He has revealed of Himself in the world and in His word.

4. Realize that there will be no one in heaven who lived a life committed to sin on earth. We saw in vv.19-24 that everything brought into the camp from Midian had to be purified by fire, water, or both (31:19-24). God was purifying a place where He Himself would live, in all His holiness, with Israel. And this purification of the Promised Land illustrates the purity of the New Jerusalem that will one day come down from above in **Rev 21:27** "*Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*" Or again in **Rev 22:14-15** "*Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they might have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*"

What then should Christians do with conquest and holy war texts like this?

1. We should make war against the sin within us by Christian self-denial. When we read the NT, we're grateful to see that the idea of holy war is no longer nationalized or militarized; it's internalized, spiritualized. The call to war is not against other people. It's a call to kill the sin in our own hearts. **Rom 8:13** "*For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*" "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh [our old identity in sin] with its passions and desires* (Gal 5:24). We put to death whatever is worldly in us—*sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry* (Col 3:5). We put on the whole armor of God, and the only sword we have is the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, Scripture (Eph 6:12-18; cf. 1Thess 5:8). We kill our own sin, not other sinners. And we put to death our old way of siding with our sins, and identifying ourselves by our sins (PM).

2. We should make war against unbelief in the world by preaching the gospel and loving our neighbor, which includes warning them of the wrath to come. Acts 19:20 “*So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.*” The word of God itself is God’s way of waging war against unbelief. When God wants to conquer a soul in this age, He sends His word to break our sinful resistance, subdue our minds, and reconcile us to Him (2Cor 10:1-5; 1Tim 1:18; 6:12; 2Tim 4:7; Heb 4:12). Paul preaches in Acts 17:31 “*God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead.*” That is the NT preaching of God’s word about Jesus not only as Risen Savior but as Risen Judge in order to motivate repentance in those who don’t yet believe.

3. We should suffer persecution and hostility from the world with hope that vengeance is God’s and that Jesus will return to judge our enemies in a way we are not equipped or allowed to do. 2Thess 1:6-8 says “*God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed....*” The New Testament, not just the Old, testifies that the wages of sin is death, that vengeance is God’s, and so we should leave it to Him. And that is the Christian’s hope for ultimate justice when it does not seem forthcoming as yet.

4. We should hope for the day when Jesus will share the spoils of His victory with us. Isa 53:11-12 “*Out of the anguish of his soul He shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.*” As the warriors divided the spoils of war with the people, so Jesus will share the spoils of his victory with us, not simply because he will judge unrepentant sinners, but ultimately because he Himself was judged for our sin. He took the wrath intended for us, righteous though he was, so that God might count us as righteous as He is.

5. We should trust that Jesus can and will preserve us even as he judges the world (2Pet 2:4-10). Just as not one of the Israelite warriors was missing, so not one of God’s people will be missing after he judges the world at the end of time. 2Pet 2:4-10 *If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly, and if he rescued righteous Lot..., then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority* (cf. 2Pet 3:4-10; Jude 5-8).

5. We should resist the seduction of the world’s charms (Rev 18). God will judge the harlot Babylon who seduced the nations, much like he judged the Midianite women who seduced Israel. And we have to resist the seduction to avoid the fate of the seductress (Rev 19:11-16).

6. We should build ourselves up in our faith even while people scoff at the truth of Jesus’ coming judgment, Jude 14-15. “*Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousand of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.’ These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain an advantage. But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, following their ungodly passions. It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God....*

CONCLUSION

God's patience with sin and sinners, will not last forever. What we find here in Num 31 graphically illustrates the truth of "*They will say, 'Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were for the beginning of creation.' For they deliberately over look this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*" One day, God's patience with sinners will turn to a resolve to punish them. On that day, the humane restraint of God's wrath in our own age will give way to the it's full release. And those who have made themselves out to be gods, trying to hold God accountable, will themselves be held accountable by God. Today is the day of salvation.

God warns us that he will judge all his enemies as did the Midianites. God warns us that the age of redemption will end, and the time for retribution will come. **Jesus will one day avenge all God's enemies in order to save and bless His people.** God's patience and common grace for sinners is coming to an end. The era of common grace for sinners will one day end in judgment. **Jesus will judge God's enemies, take their blessings, and give them to his people.** We should therefore be reconciled to God in Christ, kill our own sin, and carry out the ministry of reconciliation among others. God's vengeance assures us that he will judge his enemies and give their blessings to His people. **God has every right to judge his enemies, take their blessings, and give them to his people.** God will use Jesus to avenge his enemies, take their blessings, and give them to his people. Vengeance is God's, and Jesus is His agent to judge his enemies, take their blessings, and give them to his people. God will avenge the wrongs suffered by his people. God will bless His people by judging His enemies. God's common grace to all humanity will come to a terrible end. Christians must mortify our own sins because God will one day avenge his enemies to save his people. God's people should kill their sins and love their neighbors before God condemns unrepentant sinners. Since Jesus is coming to execute God's vengeance, we should kill our sins and love other sinners while there's still time.