

1. My title is "The benefits and risks of being either a man or woman". Now there is a title that will get me in trouble no matter what else I write. However, that is the common thread of these two chapters. Let me explain what is happening here, and then I can explain why I choose this title, and more importantly why any of us should care.
 - a) Chapter 30 can be summed up by this sentence: "Don't make any sort of vow unless one plans to keep it." It goes on to say in effect, "Women living under the authority of a man can have her vows be revoked if the man of the house chooses to null that vow." Nothing is said about son's making vows. Over and above the idea that a vow is not a good thing as God holds us responsible for that vow, the main topic of this chapter is about a women who make vows living under a man's authority.
 - b) OK if that topic is not dangerous enough to tackle, Chapter 31 then says that some of the Israelites were ordered to go to war against the nation that was involved with the sexual sins among them from a few chapters back. The Israelite soldiers were ordered to kill all the Midianite men including the male children, as well as all of the women old enough to bear children. Only the young girls not yet capable of having babies were to be kept alive.
 - i) Apparently the war was so successful even to the point where none of the Israelite men were killed who fought in it. Whatever stuff the Israelites captured from that war was then taken back and divided up as stated in this chapter in detail.
 - c) The big question here is why are these chapters here and more importantly, why should we care? Let's start with answering the question of why are these chapters are here:
 - i) Two chapters back, Moses was told by God that he would die soon. Then the last chapter focused on how the Israelites are to worship God once they actually enter the Promised Land. Now we get Chapter 30, about the importance of keeping a vow to God and then Chapter 31 about fighting the Midianites. So what gives?
 - ii) Know that the bible is real clear on the idea that vows are not a good thing, but if they are made, they are to be kept. If we can't be trusted to keep our vows to God, why would anyone trust us if we are trying to be good witness to other people?
 - iii) Even with that stated, the main focus of Chapter 30 is on women and vows. Why is that? Part of the answer is war is about to happen. Chapter 31 is in effect a start of the next five years of these Israelites' life where they have to go to war against the current residents of the land of Israel. The point is that since families are going to be separated for a long time, vows were probably common. I can just see a wife or a daughter saying, "If you just bring my man home safely, I promise God I will do this or that thing". Obviously, a boy or a man could also make a similar type of vow. Because this is a time of war, vows before God were a concern here.
 - iv) As to Chapter 31, it is hard to ignore the fact that this is a cruel chapter. The war is with the Midianites. They introduced the Israelites to Baal worship a few chapters back. These Midianite women seduced Israelite men into having sex with them in order to honor that false god. This religion required the sacrifice of their babies in order for rest of them to grow and prosper by trusting in Baal.
 - a) Chapter 31 is effectively says this group is still in your backyard. It is time for a "mercy killing" on that particular group of people. That is why all of the men were killed as well as the women old enough to bare children.
 - v) The background story is that God told the common ancestor of the Jews over 400 years earlier that the people who lived in this land had 400 years to repent. If they refused, God is going to use the Jewish nation for this mercy killing in order to bring to an end to any group that sacrifices their children to honor their false gods.

2. OK, if that history is not tough enough to teach, now comes the harder part to explain why all of this text is in the bible and how it applies our lives.
- a) Why is the emphasis on women in this chapter? Chapter 30 does not say anything about when sons make vows. This is not a male ego trip. This is God saying that He choose the men to be the leaders. It is like my commonly told joke that goes, "When two people slow dance, someone has to lead, and God picked men to lead".
 - b) If anything, I'd rather be a woman in this situation. In other words, if I made a vow that I know I could not keep, the man of the house could make that vow null and void. On the other hand, if a man makes a vow or even a woman who is widowed or divorced makes a vow, they must keep it. The underlying point is that vows to God are not good things.
 - i) There are lots of scriptures to support this. I'll use the words of Jesus as the best example here. He said in effect, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no, and any thing one says over and above that is a waste of time". (Based on Matthew 5:37.)
 - ii) If that is true, why is there a big emphasis here on women's vows when they are under the authority of their father or husband? It is God's way of establishing His order in the family structure. Again, someone has to lead and God picked the men to be the leader. (Don't blame me, this is how God designed it. ☺) Again, if I was a women that was under a husband's or father's authority, I would be grateful that if I made a vow in haste, my husband or father could overrule that.
 - iii) That leads me to a quick talk about forgiveness. The New Testament teaches that the only unforgivable sin is denying that Jesus is God. (I base that on my view of Matthew 12:31.) Therefore, one can also read this chapter as saying in effect, "We are all God's children. We shouldn't make vows in the first place. However, if we do, we have to suffer the consequences of not keeping that vow. Still God can and does eternally forgive us for breaking that vow, as He is in authority over us.
 - a) My point is we may suffer the consequences if we fail to keep that vow, but it is not sin that God does not eternally forgive us for making.
 - c) Speaking of women and tough situations, that leads me to the application of Chapter 31.
 - i) The short version is that there were not a huge number of Midianites to fight. That is why Moses picks 12,000 fighting men with the difficult order to not only kill all of the Midianite men, but also kill the boys and the male babies, as well as any of the women old enough to produce babies. While all of this would be cruel by any human standard, one has to remember the "mercy killing" concept. The point is that God wanted this type of practice of child sacrifice to come to an end. That is why He desired this group be completely wiped out as a group punishment.
 - ii) This is about the Israelites keeping their vow to God that they were chosen by Him to conquer this land not just so that they would have a homeland, but also to judge the sins of the people currently living there. The difficult application is to accept the idea that God sometimes gets involved in our word in order to judge sin.
 - iii) As far as killing children, if there were no heaven and hell, this would be an unfair punishment. If we are all going to be eternally judged individually, I trust in a God that will judge all individuals fairly for their eternal destiny.
 - d) Well, I would say that is a difficult enough introduction for one lesson. I've done my job so far. ☺ Now it is time to start the text itself.
3. Chapter 30: Moses said to the heads of the tribes of Israel: "This is what the LORD commands:
- a) Notice there is no discussion about how Moses knew what God wanted. It just talks about Moses obeying His commands. Let's be honest, knowing God's laws are no good unless we take the time to teach them to others. That is what we have Moses doing here.
 - b) This also shows that even though Moses knew he was going to die soon, God was not through with his life yet. It shows that even to the end, Moses was focused on obeying God and His desires for his (Moses) life.

4. Verse 2: When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.
- a) Chapter 30 only gives one verse on the topic of a man making a vow to God and how he is obligated to keep it. To state the obvious by now, the chapter focuses on what women are to keep and are not obligated to keep when they are under a man's authority.
 - b) Verse 2 is the reminder that no matter how tough it was to be a woman in those days, in effect it was tougher to be a man, at the least when it came to the topic of keeping a vow to God. This verse is essentially saying, "if a man makes a vow, he is stuck with it".
 - c) If one goes through the Old and New Testament, most of the vows that we read of are bad things. Those stories show either the failure of someone to keep a vow or the bible text shows the consequences of not keeping that vow. In Moses final big speech that he will give to the Israelites (essentially, the book of Deuteronomy), he expands upon this idea. The point here is simply about keeping one's word.
 - d) So why is God so tough on this issue? Many years ago, I knew a man who's word could never be trusted. When he said he would be somewhere at a certain time, he may or may not show up. The point was he was not a man of his word. Not only did it give this man the reputation of being flaky, he was not someone anyone would trust to keep his word.
 - i) That in effect, is why God does not want us to make vows in the first place. Even when we do, we are expected to keep them. If we don't, I promise that word gets out quickly that such a person can't be trusted to keep their word.
 - ii) When a person says something like, "I swear on a stack of bibles that is true", does that mean we can't trust you when you don't swear on a stack of bibles? That is why God is against vows. He just wants us to keep our word.
 - iii) If that part of the chapter is not convicting enough, now we get to women and vows. It is time for me to get into more trouble. ☺
5. Verse 3: "When a young woman still living in her father's house makes a vow to the LORD or obligates herself by a pledge ⁴ and her father hears about her vow or pledge but says nothing to her, then all her vows and every pledge by which she obligated herself will stand. ⁵ But if her father forbids her when he hears about it, none of her vows or the pledges by which she obligated herself will stand; the LORD will release her because her father has forbidden her.
- a) My loose translation: If an unmarried woman still living with her parents makes a vow, that vow can be overturned once the man of the house becomes aware of the vow. If he hears about it and doesn't say anything that vow is still on the books.
 - b) Think of the vow this way: In the next chapter and for about the next five years, they are going to be involved in a war. (In the book of Joshua, Chapter 14, I explain how I know it was five years.) Meanwhile, one can easily see a young girl say, "Dear God if you bring my father home safely, I promise to do this or that with my life."
 - i) While there is nothing wrong with wanting to bring a father home safely, the issue is about when one makes a vow to God, He expects us to keep it, period.
 - ii) If the vow was something harsh, the father of the house can overturn it once he hears about it when he gets back home.
 - c) Now think about God as our heavenly father, with a big emphasis on the word "father".
 - i) This is another reminder that it is a sin to make a vow and not keep it, but it is not a sin that is unforgivable. We should ask God to forgive us for the sin of making a vow that we have not or cannot keep. We may still suffer the consequences in this lifetime for that vow, but to break it is not a sin that can keep us out of heaven.
 - ii) My point is one can see all of us, men and women as that "daughter" who can be forgiven for making that vow to God. My point is these verses are not designed as "male sexist" things about men being in charge as much as they are about the idea of thinking of God our Father as the one who can forgive us for the vows we have not kept in life.

6. Verse 6: "If she marries after she makes a vow or after her lips utter a rash promise by which she obligates herself⁷ and her husband hears about it but says nothing to her, then her vows or the pledges by which she obligated herself will stand.⁸ But if her husband forbids her when he hears about it, he nullifies the vow that obligates her or the rash promise by which she obligates herself, and the LORD will release her.
- a) These verses essentially repeat the key point of the last set of verses, but instead of the word "daughter" we have the word "wife" here. The verses say in effect, a husband has the right to cancel a wife's vow once he becomes aware of it. If the husband keeps his mouth shut once he hears it, that vow is still on the books.
 - i) If anything, these verses teach the importance of forgiveness. If a woman says something harsh about her husband, he has the right to forgive her. I know that most married men desire peace in their relationships more than being right. It is easier to forgive than to try to correct behavior. I continue to learn the hard way over my own marriage of the necessity to forgive my wife just as I desire that God does forgive my own sins.
 - ii) I've also learned the hard way that it is God's job to deal with my wife, not mine. That is why the most important words a man can say to his wife is "I'm sorry."
 - iii) I've also had to learn the hard way that if there is an issue in our marriage, the first thing to do is to bring it to God in prayer, and then watch it work out for the best.
 - iv) I'm also far from perfect at this. Like most men, I am slowly learning. ☺
 - b) Meanwhile, back to vows. God is establishing order in the homes when it comes to vows. If anything, it is much tougher to be a man, as there is no getting around the consequences of making a rash vow. With a wife, at least she has a "shot" if her husband voids it.
 - c) Finally, let us return to our relationship with God. A term used in the New Testament to describe the entire Christian church is the "bride of Christ". (See 2nd Corinthians 11:2 and Revelation 19:7.) All of us believers are this wife who are under Jesus' authority who can and does forgive us of sins and even vows we make against God.
7. Verse 9: "Any vow or obligation taken by a widow or divorced woman will be binding on her.
- a) This verse is saying that if a woman has no man in her life either due to the fact that her husband has died or if she is divorced, her oaths are binding.
 - b) To state the obvious, this is not condemning such woman. One cannot blame a woman if her husband is dead. It is just teaching the principal that men are to be in charge, and if there is no man in the life of a woman at that moment, her vows are binding.
 - c) Now let's come back to the idea of Jesus being in charge of our life. Think of that idea in terms of someone (man or woman) walking away or ignoring their relationship with God. This is God saying, in effect, "You make a vow in my name, whether you believe I exist or not, since you made that vow, I now hold you accountable for that vow".
 - d) There is a story I've been dying to sneak in this lesson and this seems to be a good place to do it. There is a book that came out fairly recently about the life of Louis Zamperini. The book is called "Unbroken" and I recommend it highly if you haven't read it.
 - i) My point here is that he was in an airplane that was shot down in World War II. He still holds the world record for the longest time surviving while adrift at sea. During that time he stated how he made a vow to God that if He would get Louis through that time, he would serve God. While Louis ignored God for many years, he eventually gave his life to God and served Him up to this day.
 - ii) While this vow has nothing to do with widows and divorcees it is a great example of how God expects us to keep vows that we make, even in difficult situations.
 - iii) If nothing else, this story reminds us about how seriously God expects us to keep the vows we make to Him, and how we can be mentally tortured by the fact we know we have made that vow and are now stuck with it.
 - e) Meanwhile, I still have seven more verses about vows to go in this chapter.

8. Verse 10: "If a woman living with her husband makes a vow or obligates herself by a pledge under oath ¹¹ and her husband hears about it but says nothing to her and does not forbid her, then all her vows or the pledges by which she obligated herself will stand. ¹² But if her husband nullifies them when he hears about them, then none of the vows or pledges that came from her lips will stand. Her husband has nullified them, and the LORD will release her. ¹³ Her husband may confirm or nullify any vow she makes or any sworn pledge to deny herself. ¹⁴ But if her husband says nothing to her about it from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or the pledges binding on her. He confirms them by saying nothing to her when he hears about them. ¹⁵ If, however, he nullifies them some time after he hears about them, then he is responsible for her guilt."
- a) These verses expand upon the man's role when a wife makes a vow. The short version here is that if a man keeps his mouth shut, the wife is obligated to keep that vow.
 - b) What is worse is that the husband accepts the responsibility for her guilt. In other words, it is not "too bad for you honey, you never should have made that vow". Instead the issue is now "I too am in trouble for accepting that vow and I as the husband am now under the same obligation that you my wife must keep it."
 - c) The bottom line is that the husband in effect has a duty to be aware of any vow that the wife makes, and if it is too hard to keep, he should nullify it the moment he could.
 - d) If anything, these verses and this chapter teach about responsibility. A wife cannot just say, "I made this vow, and I don't care if my husband wants to kill it, I made it, and I'm sticking with it". The husband must bear the consequences of that vow if he refuses to put that vow to death at that moment.
 - e) These verses teach in effect it is harder to bear the responsibility of man of the house than it is for a woman to keep her word. I would rather be a wife in this situation than having the husband's responsibility. Instead of complaining about her rights, a wife should be grateful she has less authority and not be stuck in a situation she would regret later in life.
 - i) Remember that these verses are not about telling a husband he should do "this or that". The subject is just about the obligation of keeping vows we make to God.
 - ii) Again, think about this chapter in terms of all of our relationship with God. In effect, since we are making that vow to Him, He is the one who can overrule those vows in terms of how it effects our lives and our relationship with Him.
9. Verse 16: These are the regulations the LORD gave Moses concerning relationships between a man and his wife, and between a father and his young daughter still living in his house.
- a) The final verse is saying in effect, "That is all I have to say on this matter". Again notice there is no comment about sons and vows. This section was not designed to be an all-encompassing chapter on vows. It is to teach about all of our relationship with God the Father when it comes to vows and how He wants to respect His authority over our lives.
 - b) The good news is we made it through this 16-verse section about men and women and vows. The bad news is we have a longer chapter to go on men, women, war and how we should respond after such wars are over. I'll warn the men reading this right now, that if the last chapter was easy on men, this one is a lot harder. So if women reading this lesson so far think that "men didn't get theirs yet, wait until we get through Chapter 31."
10. Chapter 31, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ²"Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites. After that, you will be gathered to your people."
- a) This chapter starts with the reminder in effect, "Hey, Moses, I didn't forget about the fact I told you that you were going to die soon. Yes you still have to give your final big speech, which is in effect the book of Deuteronomy. However, even before we get to that, there is still the issue of the Midianites. I want you to tell the Israelites that they are to go fight against these people. Soon after that war is over, then will come your big death scene."
 - b) If anything, this verse reminds us that as long as we live on this planet, we are never done being used by God until He says it is now time for us to go home to Him.

11. Verse 2: So Moses said to the people, "Arm some of your men to go to war against the Midianites and to carry out the LORD's vengeance on them. ⁴ Send into battle a thousand men from each of the tribes of Israel." ⁵ So twelve thousand men armed for battle, a thousand from each tribe, were supplied from the clans of Israel. ⁶ Moses sent them into battle, a thousand from each tribe, along with Phinehas son of Eleazar, the priest, who took with him articles from the sanctuary and the trumpets for signaling.
- a) If you recall from early chapters in Numbers, there were about 600,000 men who were able to fight in a war. That was the "soldier head count" from a few chapters back.
 - i) Apparently this war against the Midianites is a warm up for the big war once the Israelites actually enter the land of Israel. God says that only 12,000 men are to go into this battle. If my math is correct, about one out of 50 men were needed here for this battle. I picture Moses counting, "Forty seven, forty eight, forty nine, okay 50, you sir, have to fight." Then the count starts again. I don't know if it was really done that way. My point is 12,000 from each tribe was picked to go out to this war.
 - ii) We also have a character from a few chapters back coming back for an encore appearance. Phinehas was the grandson of Aaron, the original high priest. He was the one who brought a deadly plague on the Israelites to an end, by killing a couple having sex right in front of the main Jewish temple. That couple consisted of a Jewish man and a Midianite woman. Anyway, the text states that he was to be a leader in this battle and use the trumpets to signal the troops.
 - b) It is time to recall a little about the Midianites. This was a nomadic group (a tribe that does not have a homeland). They were the group that caused the Israelites to sin when their women would have sex with Israelite men in order to entice their god "Baal".
 - i) That false god will be a plague upon the Israelites for hundreds of years.
 - ii) The idea of serving Baal is that one would sacrifice newborn children to this god in order to entice that god to bless them in the future with more children and lots of possessions to live off of.
 - iii) The Israelites themselves were already punished (many of them died) due to the sexual sin of this relationship. However, the Midianites were never punished up to this point for performing a sin that lead to the death of innocent children.
 - iv) Thus Moses was told in effect, "I have one more mission for you before you die. I need you to show the Israelites how seriously I take sin by eliminating what has caused the Israelites to sin this way in the first place."
 - v) If you haven't figured it out by now, one of the underlying issues of this chapter has to do with the danger of lust. The idea is about killing that desire dead so it no longer has a hold on our life. I was once taught that the best way to deal with the temptation to sin is literally to crucify that desire from our lives. The idea is about getting away and staying away from whatever is tempting to our lives. This is an example of that. With that convicting thought, back to the book of Numbers.
12. Verse 7: They fought against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and killed every man. ⁸Among their victims were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba--the five kings of Midian. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword. ⁹ The Israelites captured the Midianite women and children and took all the Midianite herds, flocks and goods as plunder. ¹⁰ They burned all the towns where the Midianites had settled, as well as all their camps. ¹¹ They took all the plunder and spoils, including the people and animals, ¹² and brought the captives, spoils and plunder to Moses and Eleazar the priest and the Israelite assembly at their camp on the plains of Moab, by the Jordan across from Jericho.
- a) Time for the short version: The Israelites fought and defeated five specific groups of these Moabites. They killed all the men and took the women, children and animals as plunder. Then they brought all of that stuff to Moses and the top priest (Eleazar, son of Aaron) in order to know what to do next. It also says they killed Balaam. Let me discuss that.

- b) If you recall from a few chapters back, there was a non-Israelite profit named Balaam. He was hired by a tribe of people called the Moabites to curse the Israelites for him. Balaam said in effect, "I can't curse what God has blessed" and he makes a number of speeches in order to state that fact. The problem with Balaam is that he still wanted to earn the fee for cursing the Israelites. Since he could not curse what God has blessed he tells the Moabite king, "I've got an idea, have the local Midianite women entice the Israelite men to have sexual relations with them in order to honor the false god Baal". That act stated a plague on the Israelites that I've already beaten to death in a previous lesson.
- i) The point here is that Balaam himself hung around the Midianites. Balaam was not a member of that group. Maybe a Midianite woman enticed him and was now living amongst that group. Another possibility is he just wanted to see the results of what happened when the Israelites actually had illicit sex with these women. Either way, Balaam was still in the wrong place at the wrong time and he died.
 - ii) Notice at the end of Verse 8, it makes the point of stating that Balaam was killed with a sword as opposed to a spear, which is probably how most of the Midianites were killed. Why is that mentioned there? If I had to guess, it is to show the idea of putting to death what causes us to sin. The sword in the bible is a symbol of the Word of God. (See Ephesians 6:17.) It shows God's word prevailing over sin.
 - iii) Again, the specific sin in view here is lust. The idea for us is that anything that causes us to turn away from what God desires for our lives has to be removed, including whatever causes us to sin in the first place. Most people have things in their lives that are no big deal to others, but for us, it causes us to stumble. That is why the bible is so big on teaching about removing such negative influences from our lives as much as possible.
- c) One more thing to mention and then I can move on. Notice the five kings are mentioned by name. I believe that is to rebuke that this is a made up story and not a historical event.
- i) Know that this was not the end of the Midianite people. They are mentioned as an enemy of the Israelites many years later in the book of Judges Chapters 6-7. That is why I believe these five kings are listed by name. It indicates that this was not a complete end of this group, just those people that lived under these five kings.
- d) Meanwhile, the 12,000 soldiers that were involved in this short war, march back to Moses with the captured women, children and animals. Now we see what happens next.
13. Verse 13: Moses, Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the community went to meet them outside the camp. ¹⁴Moses was angry with the officers of the army--the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds--who returned from the battle. ¹⁵"Have you allowed all the women to live?" he asked them. ¹⁶"They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the LORD's people. ¹⁷ Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, ¹⁸but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.
- a) Now we come to what appears to be the cruel section of the chapter. It is one thing for a soldier to kill a potential threat to his life like these Midianite men. It is another thing to ask them to slaughter male children and women who could have children.
 - b) Yet that is exactly what we read of Moses commanding these soldiers to do here.
 - c) Yes one can argue that if the male children were not killed, they would grow up and try to take revenge for the killing of the parents. Still, how does that justify killing male babies?
 - i) To answer this, remember the fact that the Israelites were not ordered to kill every male of every group they ever encountered. This was a specific punishment given against a specific group of people. This is God saying in effect, "This particular group has been guilty for hundreds of years of killing babies by sacrificing them to their gods. Here is an appropriate punishment for them."
 - ii) Do I believe those children are in heaven? Probably, but that is God's business.

- iii) The point is one has to see this punishment as being appropriate for the actions of this people and what they have done. The same goes with killing the women who were at the age where they could have children. It is about giving an appropriate punishment to a group of people who were guilty of sexual sins by enticing others to have sexual relations with them in order for them to appease their false gods.
- iv) The sad note about history is that Israel battled Baal worship their entire history as a nation. Even around the time of Jesus and Paul, there were cities in that region that had temple prostitutes who tried to entice men to join them in sex in order to honor the false gods and yes, sacrifice their children to honor their gods.
- v) God is saying to those of us who trust in Him, I want none of that to be a part of the lives of believers. Therefore, you believers must kill (eliminate from our own lives) anything associated with that lifestyle.
- vi) All of this gets me back to the issue of lust. Let's be honest, it is tempting. What we don't see is the consequences of letting that desire grow. As any man will tell you, that desire never ends. That is why we rely on His power to overcome it.
- d) Believe it or not, this leads me back to my lesson title about men and women in society. Let's be honest, this was a cruel time to be alive and the consequences of lust come with a steep penalty back then as well as today. To state the obvious some more, God is not anti-sexual relationships. He designed it to be in the context of marriage. The point is through God's power, we are to overcome our desire for lust outside of the bonds of marriage.
 - i) That is because we know it is not pleasing for Him with our lives. At any time one can turn on say, television and see the consequences of adultery and lust. It is part of our society. I'm not saying entertainment from those mediums is a bad thing. I am saying that the desire for lust is part of our human nature and we have to learn to control that desire by His power, not by our willpower.
 - ii) Practically, it means praying something like this, "Father, I don't have the power to resist that temptation based on my own strength. However, only by Your power, You can help me overcome that desire as I know it does not please You."
 - a) I am not saying that desire will die in 24 hours. I am saying that any desire that is not pleasing to God has to be "crucified to death" and that includes acting out lust outside of how He desires it to be in the life of the believer.
- e) Meanwhile, the Israelites were ordered to kill all the boys and the women who could bear children. So why were the young girls spared and not the boys? Another good question.
 - i) First of all Moses was saying in effect, "These are the women and older girls who did had sexual relations with these Israelite men, so they should be punished."
 - ii) Maybe by Moses sparing the young women, God is teaching the Israelites to raise up these young girls as if they were their own daughters. Then you men can see them as girls who need God in their lives and not sexual objects.
 - iii) If that is true, why didn't they spare the older women? I think it is a combination of an appropriate punishment for sin and at the same time teaching God's people how to properly treat women in their lives. By having the Israelites be in charge of the young girls, they have to learn all the more how to properly treat women by having those young girls in their midst. Whether those girls became slaves or family members, they were still around and had to be treated right.
- f) OK, I have now been wrestling with this issue for over a page. It is time to get back to the text. The next issue that is brought up in this chapter has to do with the spoils of the war and even how the soldiers are to cleanse themselves from the battle.
 - i) As we read the next set of verses, I want you to think about this practically. If this group of women were involved in sexual sins, I suspect sexual disease was there. Therefore, the cleansing ritual was more than helping the soldiers draw close to God, it may have had practical benefits to stop the diseases from spreading.

14. Verse 19: "All of you who have killed anyone or touched anyone who was killed must stay outside the camp seven days. On the third and seventh days you must purify yourselves and your captives.²⁰ Purify every garment as well as everything made of leather, goat hair or wood."
- a) Keep in mind that the camp of the Israelites was about 2,000,000 people. The number of Israelite soldiers in that war was 12,000 men. Moses is saying to these soldiers, before you get back with the big group, you have to go through a washing ritual.
 - b) Like I just said, part of it could have been practical. Diseases could spread by being a part of garments. Therefore, a three and seven day washing ritual was practiced. The soldiers bathed and washed whatever garments were made of these materials.
 - i) I shared with you some lessons back, an interesting fact about the great plague of the Middle Ages. This plague that spread all over Europe killed millions. At that time, no one knew back then that germs were a bad thing that caused the spread of disease. No one washed before seeing victims.
 - a) At that time, most Jewish communities in Europe were spared from these plagues. We know today it is because those Jewish communities practiced ritual washings as taught in verses like this in Numbers. That washing protected them from the spreading of germs that caused that plague.
 - ii) This ritual as described in these verses may have been to help the soldiers get their minds off the killing that they did and focus on God. At the same time, there was a practical purpose of preventing the spread of disease to the Israelite community. For those nonbelievers who like to argue that God is cruel and does not care for the life of believers, the understanding this passage rebukes that idea.
15. Verse 21: Then Eleazar the priest said to the soldiers who had gone into battle, "This is the requirement of the law that the LORD gave Moses:²² Gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, lead²³ and anything else that can withstand fire must be put through the fire, and then it will be clean. But it must also be purified with the water of cleansing. And whatever cannot withstand fire must be put through that water.²⁴ On the seventh day wash your clothes and you will be clean. Then you may come into the camp."
- a) Apparently the washing was not just for things one can wear, or say lay on. It was also for metal objects like gold, silver, and bronze as listed in Verse 22. By listing all of the metals, the text is saying, "don't forget anything". The soldiers did not have to throw away anything of value, but it did have to be cleansed before it could be used again.
 - b) So could say, silver spread sexual diseases? I don't know. Even if this washing ritual had no practical purpose (which I refuse to believe), it still teaches the Israelites that the things they associate with "the world" can be purified for their own use.
 - c) Besides the cleansing of the clothes and metal, the soldiers themselves had to wash on the seventh day. That means they had to bathe before entering in the camp. I assume that the soldiers have been so busy fighting for who knows how long, the rest of the camp would appreciate them bathing before they entered. Again, besides the practical aspect, it also teaches a principal about being clean before God.
 - d) Notice the washing was on the third and seventh day. The third day is associated with being blessed by God as Genesis 1:10-12 states He says, "it is good" twice on that day.
 - i) The seventh day ties to a complete period of time, just as the seventh day is a day of rest. The bottom line is that these soldiers could not just run home to go see their families. They needed to spend the next seven days cleaning up everything they brought back with them and after finishing that whole project.
 - e) OK, so the Israelites washed themselves and there was no disease in the camp. Tell me why I should care about this stuff? The idea is that if we trust in God to guide our lives, then in effect, all we do is "holy" in that we are separated for His use. Therefore, anything we bring into our lives needs to be cleansed. Consider the most valuable thing we own, our time. Are we using our time and stuff to glorify Him? That's the issue here.

16. Verse 25: The LORD said to Moses, ²⁶ "You and Eleazar the priest and the family heads of the community are to count all the people and animals that were captured. ²⁷ Divide the spoils between the soldiers who took part in the battle and the rest of the community. ²⁸ From the soldiers who fought in the battle, set apart as tribute for the LORD one out of every five hundred, whether persons, cattle, donkeys, sheep or goats. ²⁹ Take this tribute from their half share and give it to Eleazar the priest as the LORD's part. ³⁰ From the Israelites' half, select one out of every fifty, whether persons, cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats or other animals. Give them to the Levites, who are responsible for the care of the LORD's tabernacle." ³¹ So Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the LORD commanded Moses.
- a) Meanwhile, we are not done talking about dealing with the things the soldiers brought back with them from the war. Let me summarize these verses so it is easy to grasp:
 - i) The soldiers were to pile up everything they captured and brought back from the war. This includes, as we will read lots of animals, plus the young girls.
 - ii) Then they to divide everything they got and put it in two equal piles.
 - iii) One of those two piles belonged to those 12,000 soldiers. They are to give 1/500th of their share to the priests.
 - iv) The other equal pile of the whole loot belongs to the rest of the Israelites. The rest of the Israelites are to give 1/50th to the priests.
 - v) Therefore, the solders themselves got to benefit 10 times as much as everyone else.
 - b) OK, it's time for another "so what" lecture as if you didn't see that coming. ☺
 - i) As an example, in every church group, there is always a smaller group that does most of the work. There are also the ones who just show up every Sunday. They are not as involved as those doing the work there at the church. The question is who is the one who benefit the most from being of service to God? The ones who do the "heavy lifting" benefit far more than those who just show up and don't use their lives to make much of a difference for God.
 - ii) Think of this in terms of those who do trust Jesus for dying for their sins, but then never use their lives very much to do much based on that belief. They are like the rest of the Israelites who have to give up a larger share of their rewards. They are like the one's who have to give up "1/50th" of their rewards in these verses.
 - a) Those who do dedicate a good portion of their time to making a difference for God get to keep a lot more stuff. The idea is that those doing the work benefit more from making that difference for Him.
 - iii) While we are wresting with that bit of guilt, I'll sneak over to the next set of verses.
17. Verse 32: The plunder remaining from the spoils that the soldiers took was 675,000 sheep, ³³ 72,000 cattle, ³⁴ 61,000 donkeys ³⁵ and 32,000 women who had never slept with a man. ³⁶ The half share of those who fought in the battle was: 337,500 sheep, ³⁷ of which the tribute for the LORD was 675; ³⁸ 36,000 cattle, of which the tribute for the LORD was 72; ³⁹ 30,500 donkeys, of which the tribute for the LORD was 61; ⁴⁰ 16,000 people, of which the tribute for the LORD was 32. ⁴¹ Moses gave the tribute to Eleazar the priest as the LORD's part, as the LORD commanded Moses.
- a) Let's be honest: If I asked us 30 seconds from now, how many cattle did the soldiers get to keep, I doubt most of would get that answer right. While the specific number of girls and animals taken may have spiritual significance, I don't want to focus on that aspect.
 - b) What I do want us to see is the obedience. The soldiers captured a large share of stuff. They did exactly what their civil leader (Moses) and religious leader (Eleazar) asked them to do, which was to give 1/500th of their share to the priests. If one studies their bible a lot, one notices God seems to go out of His way to mention when people are obedient.
 - c) Here is another thing to catch: Consider that God told Moses to only send 12,000 troops. Yet among the loot was 32,000 young girls (and female babies) that were captured. That means the number of the Midianites was likely must large than the 12,000 men. It shows that God was building the confidence of the soldiers by winning a battle larger than them.

18. Verse 42: The half belonging to the Israelites, which Moses set apart from that of the fighting men--⁴³ the community's half--was 337,500 sheep, ⁴⁴ 36,000 cattle, ⁴⁵ 30,500 donkeys ⁴⁶ and 16,000 people. ⁴⁷ From the Israelites' half, Moses selected one out of every fifty persons and animals, as the LORD commanded him, and gave them to the Levites, who were responsible for the care of the LORD's tabernacle.
- a) Meanwhile, we are still not done counting sheep, donkeys and young girls. The last set of verses only covered the half the 12,000 soldiers got to keep. In these verses we talk about the other half that the rest of the Israelites got to keep. The main point is that the rest of the Israelites were also obedient in that they gave up 1/50th of their share of the loot to the priests for their use.
 - b) Let me come back to the issue of the size of the Midianite nation here. There were a total of 32,000 young girls captured alive. Let me speculate and say that the average guy had two young daughters. That means there were at least 16,000 men that fought against the Israelites, and most likely, a lot more than that. These verses also give us an idea of how much damage was done by those 12,000 Israelite soldiers. Besides the fact they probably killed over 20,000 men and a lot of boys and older women, they also captured all of this stuff successfully. (Picture these soldiers trying to carry all the babies back to the camp.)
 - i) I bring this up here, as I want to go back to the issue of Baal worship. The idea of worshipping that pagan god was in effect, "If you are willing to dedicate some of your children to me, I promise to bless you with lots of stuff." Let's be honest here, the Israelites captured lots of stuff from this nomadic tribe. Therefore, in effect the Baal worship worked in that the Midianites were blessed with lots of stuff.
 - ii) However, the consequences of that sin of illicit sexual relations in order to entice Baal have its own consequences. For a while, it appears this sin paid off. Let's be honest, for a season, sin can be pleasurable. However, there is always a price to be paid for our sins and that is what this chapter teaches. While the Midianites got for a while a reward of lots of animals and children, they eventually had to pay a price of destruction for the sin of sacrificing their own children to their false God.
 - iii) Let me quickly add here, that if anyone reading this has had an abortion, this is not an unforgivable sin. Jesus said in effect that the only unforgivable sin is in effect a lifetime denial that He is God. (I base that on Matthew 12:31.) While we may have to suffer the consequences in this lifetime for sins, God is more than willing to forgive us of any sin if we are willing to turn from it with our lives.
19. Verse 48: Then the officers who were over the units of the army--the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds--went to Moses ⁴⁹ and said to him, "Your servants have counted the soldiers under our command, and not one is missing. ⁵⁰ So we have brought as an offering to the LORD the gold articles each of us acquired--armlets, bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces--to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD."
- a) There are Jewish commentaries on this chapter that try to make the argument that this is a made up story. They base that argument on the fact the text says that not one soldier died in this battle as stated here in Verse 29. If the 12,000 Israelite men had to fight against a group larger than them and the soldiers had to put all of the men and most of the women to death, it is hard to believe that not one Jewish life was lost here. At the least, one could think a life would be lost fighting over the stuff they brought back.
 - b) I like to believe this story is factual. That is why the specific names of the kings of these five tribes of the Midianites were named earlier in this chapter. Can I prove it was factual as reported in these verses? Of course not. However, I do believe the bible is the word of God, and I use the traditional belief here that, "If the plain text makes perfect sense, then seek no other sense. If the plain text does not make sense, then seek some other sense."
 - i) Is it possible for the soldiers to get out of this war without a loss of life? Possibly. The point is the soldiers' obedience and their reward for this obedience.

- c) One has to remember there is another purpose for this war. It was in effect a warm up for the big war that was going to happen when all 600,000 fighting men (as counted earlier in the book of Numbers) have to cross the Jordan River and fight in the Promised Land. By these 12,000 soldiers returning not only alive, but also with lots of stuff, it teaches the rest of the Israelites that God can be trusted not only to lead the Israelites to victory, but also come back in good health with lots of stuff.
- i) Does this mean we as Christians should go attack our unbelieving neighbors? Of course not. Does it mean that all Christian nations win whatever war they do get involved with? Not based on recorded history.
 - ii) It does mean is that God promises victory to those who trust in Him. That victory may not come until eternity. Most of us know that life gets harder as we get older. I may get "stuff" in this lifetime, but that is not what I trust in. I trust in my belief that Jesus is God and that He did die for my sins. For that reason I dedicate some of my time to make a difference for Him and that is what I am encouraging you as the reader to do as well.
20. Verse 51: Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted from them the gold--all the crafted articles.⁵² All the gold from the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds that Moses and Eleazar presented as a gift to the LORD weighed 16,750 shekels.⁵³ Each soldier had taken plunder for himself.⁵⁴ Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted the gold from the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds and brought it into the Tent of Meeting as a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD.
- a) These verses are the epilogue of the story that say in effect, "Everybody obeyed God and got rewarded for it." Those that stuck their necks out in war got a far greater reward than those who stayed in the background, but still everyone benefited. Just as those who use a lot of our time to make a difference for God benefit more than those who just trust that Jesus died for our sins get a greater benefit for the use of that time.
21. Let's face it, I could have called this lesson, "the danger of lust", but I suspect many people would not read it all if I used that title. This chapter dealt with the issue of lust and the consequences of that sin. Let's be honest, this was a deadly issue not only to the Moabites, but if you recall from a few chapters back, many Israelites died when they had sexual relations with those women. Even the prophet Balaam who was still hanging around this group died in this war.
- a) Again, God is not saying that sexual desire is a bad thing. He is just saying that there are consequences in life when that desire is fulfilled outside of the bonds of marriage.
 - b) At the same time, Chapter 30 mostly focuses on the issue of vows and how women are exempt from those vows if they are under the authority of a man. I made the argument that one can read those vows in terms of thinking of all believers as being "a women" in terms of our relationship to God and He can forgive us for any bad vow we make. Still there are consequences from turning from Him, which is a main point of this lesson. At the same time we learn that sin is forgivable, but again, we suffer the consequences in this lifetime for those sins.
 - i) My lesson title about the benefits and risks of being either a man or woman does refer to our relationship with one another sexually as well as our individual and collective relationship with God the Father. The point is we can trust Him to deal with those desires in a way that is pleasing to Him with our lives.
 - ii) Let me explain further in my closing prayer:
22. Let us pray: You have called us to live a life individually and collectively to make a difference for You in this world. Help us "let our yes be yes and no be no" and not make vows. When we do make them, help us to keep them. Also, help us to deal with the issue of lust. It is only by Your power that we can overcome that issue. Even if that is not a significant issue to us at this time, help us to remember that we can only make a difference for You by relying upon Your power to make a difference for You in this world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.