

# NUMBERS 31

## What is this text about??

### The Background - Numbers 25

The Midianites seduced the Israelites into sexual immorality and the worship of their gods. The chief's daughter even flaunted the sexual immorality publicly. God told Moses to kill the Israelites who had united themselves with Baal.

### The Problem - Numbers 31

The LORD then told Moses to treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them for their deception.

### The Commission to Battle - Numbers 25:16-17

<sup>16</sup> The Lord said to Moses,  
<sup>17</sup> "Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them."  
<sup>18</sup> They treated you as enemies when they deceived you.



## Troublesome Verses:

<sup>5</sup> "Have you allowed all the women to live?" he asked them. <sup>16</sup> "They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the Lord in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the Lord's people. <sup>17</sup> Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, <sup>18</sup> but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.

- Why kill all the boys?
- What happened to the girls?

*One problem with how people interpret this is that they assume that since the girls that were saved were the ones who hadn't slept with a man, that it must be that the Israelites were allowed to rape them and keep them as child sex slaves. But this does not say this in the text. It is an assumption that is exaggerated and then taught as*



---

# NUMBERS 31

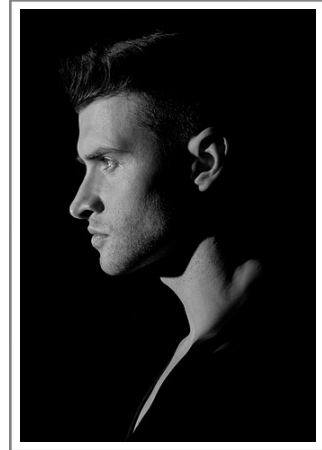
---

## Killing the Boys? Keeping the Virgin Girls Alive?

---

### Why kill all the boys?

This was likely done as young men would not or could not assimilate into an enemy nation. They would grow up and avenge the death of their fathers. History is full of these kinds of scenarios.



### What about the girls?

- The fact that they were virgins simply meant they were not participants in this sexual immorality. Those who were involved in the sexual immorality were killed for their behavior.
- Girls could grow up and one day become of the age to marry.

### Did they rape them and make them sex slaves?

- No. That isn't even in the text. That is a false assumption used to attack God's character and the Christian faith. It is an assumption found nowhere.
- Rape and sexual were punishable by death in Israel. God would not punish them for a behavior and then allow them to do the very same thing. Remember, the Israelites men were killed too who had participated in this behavior (Numb 25). God dealt strongly with sexual immorality.
- Girls could grow up and one day become of the age to marry. When they had children, they would be more connected to Israel as mothers in a different way than the boys.
- There were very strong rules that governed the marriage of anyone who had been a captive of Israel when they came of age.

---

# NUMBERS 31

---

## Rules on Marrying Conquered Peoples

---

### The Text of Marrying of Captives

<sup>10</sup> When you go to war against your enemies and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, <sup>11</sup> if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife.

<sup>12</sup> Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails <sup>13</sup> and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. <sup>14</sup> If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her. (Deut 21:10-14)

### What We Know



- In this context, the women Midianites for the most part had been killed. Mainly the “young women” were left. These “young women” were preserved as they hadn’t defiled themselves at the sex cult of Baal.
- Marriage took place among the Hebrews when a girl had reached at least puberty (implied in Ezekiel 16), and were “grown up” and ready to be married (Ruth 1:12-13). We also know from the time of Jesus that the girl had to be at least older than 12 as a 12 year old was considered a child as the word *Korasion* is used by the Jews (Mark 5:41; Luke 8:42).
- The person the Israelites could marry was a “woman.” It doesn’t say he could marry a young girl or even a young woman. Captive or not captive. In Hebrew culture, she had to be of age to marry before she could be taken as a wife.
- If there was a “woman” that was available whom a man was attracted to (notice it doesn’t say young girl), then the girl had to make herself entirely unattractive. After a full month, she could be his and he could be hers, which implies a level of mutual consent. But he must treat her a wife and not as a slave. If he wants to divorce her, he cannot treat her a slave as he has dishonored her.

---

# NUMBERS 31

---

## The Other Verses

---

### But What about This Verse?

**<sup>18</sup> But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him keep alive for yourselves.** (Numbers 31:18)

- These “young women” were preserved as they hadn’t defiled themselves at the sex cult of Baal.
- The young girls were brought into the Israelite homes to be raised. Where else would they go? The purpose was to have them grow up and one day marry into Israel.

### But What was the Test to Determine their Virginity?

- Critics say the girls had to be “tested” to see if they were virgins. What is being implied here is that a man had to have sex with her to determine her virginity. Or they inappropriately touched her. That’s not the case.

Does a man go around and sleep with a bunch of women to determine if she is a virgin before he decides to find a good wife because he only wants to marry a virgin? Or touch her inappropriately? Not at all.

- Typically in ancient culture a married woman was marked by ornaments or symbols or different types of clothing. Not unlike we have a symbol today of wedding rings. Or other symbols in ANY country today.

If she was a temple prostitute, that typically was noted as well by special symbols. In fact, ancient culture had a much more clear designation of the “maidens” and “virgins” and those that were “married” and not virgins.

- The ancient culture and even in places today like Tajikistan, on the wedding night the wedding sheets and the blood on them was the proof of a woman’s virginity. If there wasn’t blood, she came under suspicion and it created problems. But the virgin was MARRIED at this point (Deut 22:13-15).

---

# NUMBERS 31

---

## Conclusion

---

### In Summary

- To say this text is about rape and sex captives is to go beyond the text and make assumptions that aren't even in the text. Rape and sex outside of marriage, were, in fact, highly punishable by death.
- There is NO ONE example in Scripture of someone who married a child, captive or otherwise, or made them into sex slaves. (Some will say, but Rebecca was 3 when she was married. That argument is even more ridiculous and full of lies. See the respective blog post at [www.gracedfollower.com](http://www.gracedfollower.com)).
- There is no admonition or example of a girl being married before her time.



### About God and Humans

- If at any point God destroys every human, he would be absolutely just in doing so. We are sinful. If every attitude, thought of your heart and action were displayed on a screen at a stadium, we would all see the truth.
- God is righteous when he judges. We are not.
- Worship of other gods and sexual immorality, which was the problem that the Midianites enticed the Israelites into and even flaunted it, is more evil than we understand.