

What is the difference between Numbers 31 and the last chapter of Judges?

In the Book of Numbers the Lord gave Israel victories on their way to the Promised Land (Nu 21:1–4, 21–35; 31:1–54). One of these victories was over five Midianite kings (Nu 31:1–54). The spoils of war included thirty-two girls who were assigned to the priests to become slaves or to be employed in the sanctuary (Ex 38:8; 1 Sam. 2:22).¹ It was God’s desire that the children of Israel come out of idolatry and be separated.

In the last book of the Book of Judges the tribes of Israel had responded in anger over the treatment of a Levite concubine (Judg 20:1–21:25). The tribes of Israel had sworn not to allow their daughters to marry a Benjamite (vv. 21:1–7).²

Regarding the matter of taking wives³, the Faithlife Study Bible commentary explains:

21:9 the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead Since Jabesh-gilead had failed to participate in bringing justice on Benjamin, the Israelite men decide that the city must now be punished. They seemed to have viewed this decision as falling within a provision of divine war....The Israelite men probably decided to spare a group of virgins because Moses had previously made a similar decision (Num 31:17–18). This is how they end up providing women for the remaining Benjaminite men, so that the Benjaminite tribe may continue to exist....

21:10 and the women and children The order again typifies the degradation of the times. While the people assemble at Bethel (v. 2) and lament before God for Benjamin, they never consult Yahweh for a solution. This, and the overall absurdity of the decisions of the Israelite men, suggests that although the Israelite men thought they were following Yahweh’s principles, they weren’t.

21:11 thing you will do The tribes of Israel impose the principle of *cherem* on Jabesh-gilead, sparing only virgin girls....⁴

God’s way is the best way. When confronted with a dilemma, his wisdom and guidance should be sought. He requires that his people separate themselves from the ungodly world system (1 Jn 2:15).

¹ Willmington, H. L. (1999). *The Outline Bible* (Jdg 20:46–21:25). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² *Ibid* (Jdg 21:1–7).

³ For the people were numbered, and, behold, there were none of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead there. And the congregation sent thither twelve thousand men of the valiantest, and commanded them, saying, Go and smite the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the children. And this is the thing that ye shall do, Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man (Jdg 21:9–11).

⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Jdg 21:9–11). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.