

situation might be strikingly analogous to this one, we should remember that there is rarely, if ever, a particular group of God's people whose preservation is as vital to His programme as was that of the Israelites in Moses' time. It is all too easy to be influenced by selfish motives, and thus to be led to use God's glory as an excuse, when it is not the real reason at all. A mistake at this point can easily make an individual or a nation actually guilty of murder. Hence, although the Israelites were justified (in fact required) to destroy this branch of the Midianites, it is necessary to be extremely cautious in securing from it a warrant for any similar activity today.

Verses 1-12 describe the attack. Evidently the group of Midianites involved was not particularly large, for Moses sent only 12,000 men against them (4-5). After the list of slain kings of Midian, Balaam is mentioned (8; cf. Jos.xiii.21-22). His wish to 'die the death of the righteous' (xxiii.10) was not fulfilled. After speaking the word of God he must have remained in the neighbourhood to see if he could find another way to get the reward Balak had offered. The plague described in xxv had come as a result of his evil suggestion (16), but he received only death for his pains. When Moses met the returning warriors, he expressed anger that the Midianite women had been spared (13-16) and gave very severe instructions (17-18). The women were the cause of the evil done to Israel. They had willingly lent themselves as agents for Israel's destruction. It would have been absurd to punish the men and spare the women. The harsh directions were intended only for the present instance, where female wickedness had been the cause of such terrible harm to Israel. (cf. Dt.xxi.10-14)

The soldiers had to remain outside the camp for seven days. Even though the slaying was done at God's ~~direct~~ command, those who had participated in it had to be cleansed, since a sharp line must always be drawn between the taking of human