

# The Sin of Triangulation

## Thought for the Week:

"Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your people." (Numbers 31:2) Why did God want the Israelites to take vengeance on the Midianites?

## Commentary:

In an effort to ensnare the Israelites, the Midianites and Moabites had sent their daughters to entice the men of Israel into worshipping Baal of Peor. The plan worked. Many Israelite men were led away by the seductive allure of the Moabite and Midianite women. They committed fornication with them and worshipped idols. Their wickedness incited the wrath of the LORD, who struck Israel with a devastating plague.

This explains why the LORD commanded Moses, "Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites" (Numbers 31:2), but it also raises another question. The Midianites were not solely responsible for the affair of Peor. They had been coconspirators with the Moabites. The Moabites also used their daughters to seduce the men of Israel, as Scripture says, "The people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab" (Numbers 25:1). Why then did God say, "Be hostile to the Midianites and strike them" (Numbers 25:17), and, "Take full vengeance ... on the Midianites" (Numbers 31:2), but regarding Moab He only said, "Do not harass Moab, nor provoke them to war" (Deuteronomy 2:9)? The Moabites and Midianites were responsible for the same sin, but one was singled out for punishment while the other was not.

The Moabites had a legitimate concern and grievance against Israel. The hosts of Israel had entered their land and were camping on their territory. Balak, the Moabite king, was afraid that the throngs of Israel were going to strip bare his land and conquer his kingdom. The Midianites, however, had no legitimate interests at stake in a fight with Israel. Their territory was not threatened, and Israel had done nothing against them. Rashi says, "The Midianites interfered in a quarrel that did not concern them."

The Midianites were not only guilty of the affair at Peor, they were also guilty of triangulation. This can be compared to a man who sees two dogs fighting in the street. He tries to stop the fight by grabbing one of the dogs by the ears. As a result, he gets bit by the dog. The Proverbs say, "Like one who takes a dog by the ears is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him" (Proverbs 26:17).

Triangulation happens when a person gets involved in a quarrel between other people. It happens when you pick up someone else's grievance and carry a grudge on their behalf. By imposing oneself in a situation that is not really your business, you needlessly place yourself in harm's way.

According to Rashi's explanation, God forgave the Moabites because they had a legitimate reason to fear and undermine Israel. He did not forgive the Midianites, though, because they had needlessly stuck their noses into someone else's business.