

International Law Studies—Volume 60

Documents on Prisoners of War

Howard S. Levie (Editor)

The thoughts and opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily of the U.S. Government,
the U.S. Department of the Navy or the Naval War College.

DOCUMENT NO. 1

**THE BIBLE
(B.C.E.)**

**SOURCE
The Bible (King James Version)**

NOTE

In biblical days capture by the enemy usually meant death. This was the almost universal rule with regard to men and it was frequently the rule with regard to women and children. The extracts from the Bible given below are indicative of the general low value placed upon human life which prevailed throughout the world of that time period to the extent that history was being recorded.

EXTRACTS

NUM. 31:7-8

7 And they warred against the Midianites, as the LORD commanded Moses, and they slew all the males.

8 And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; *namely*, Ēvī, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian; Bā'llāām also the son of Beor, they slew with the sword.

DEUT. 3:3 and 6

3 So the LORD our God delivered into our hands Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people, and we smote him until none was left to him remaining.

6 And we utterly destroyed them, as we did unto Sihon, king of Heshbon, utterly destroying the men, women, and children of every city.

DEUT. 20:16-17

16 But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee *for* an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth,

17 But thou shalt utterly destroy them; *namely*, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Cā'naanites, and the Periz'zites, the Hivites, and the Jebūsites, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee,

JOSH. 6:20-21

20 So the people shouted when *the priests* blew the trumpets; and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

21 And they utterly destroyed all that *was* in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.

1 SAM. 15:3

3 Now go and smite Am'alek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

But see

2 KINGS 6:21-23

21 And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite *them*?

22 And he answered, Thou shalt not smite *them*. Wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

23 And he prepared great provision for them. And when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.