

Problem Passages – Canaanite Genocide (1)

Adapted from “Is God a Moral Monster?” by Paul Copan

- I. **The Problem Stated: Why did God command the Israelites to seemingly wipe out whole nations, including women and children?**
- A. **The Commands and the Actions**
 1. Deuteronomy 20:16-18
- B. **Context: The Canaanites**
 1. God was willing to wait 430 years before the Canaanites reached a sin overflow (Gen 15:16)
 2. Incidents such as the Flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah show that a tipping point can be reached with regard to a people's sin.
 3. People tend to follow the mores of their gods. The Canaanite gods were filled with sexual depravity, and so incest, bestiality, homosexuality and ritual prostitution were common and not always condemned. The goddess Anath was delighted with human gore, and so bloodlust and violence were part of life, as was rampant child sacrifice. Canaan was no moral paradise when Israel entered in.
 4. Israel had no right to enter the land apart from grace, and the Canaanites had no right to stay in the land apart from grace.
 5. The Canaanites were morally accountable, and were rejecting the light they had (Rom 1:19-20). Rahab is proof that any Canaanite could have turned to the true God with the light he had.
- C. **God's Intentions**
 1. There was nothing xenophobic or ethnically biased about God's Laws. Recall His desire to bless all nations through Abraham, the references to godly foreigners in the Pentateuch, the laws protecting foreigners in Israel, and Israel's mandate to be a kingdom of priests to the whole earth.
 2. Ammon and Moab were placed under a specific ban for specific reason (Deut 23:3-4). Recall also that Ruth was a Moabitess, and was received, because of her embrace of God.
 3. God reminds Israel that it was nothing in them that merited God's favour (Deut 7:7-8)
 4. Israel herself was threatened with being expelled from the land for idolatry, this should end the debate over whether this was an act of ethnic cleansing.
 5. Behind the idols of the Canaanites stood demons. The cosmic battle between God and Satan was behind the clash of Israel with the Canaanites. This battle was spiritual, and not simply political. Consider
 - a. Israel was not allowed to have a standing army (Remember David's sinful census?)
 - b. Soldiers in Israel were not paid; they were volunteers.
 - c. Only prophets under divine revelation could call for a war.
 - d. Israel's victories were usually against overwhelming odds, proof that God was with them.
- D. **The True History**

1. The books of Joshua and Judges show that Israel did not enter the land through one massive military campaign. It also involved settling, infiltration and slow progress. A lot less bloodshed than some imagine. (Judges 2:20-23)
2. Joshua used a rhetorical device of his day to praise the victories God had given them (Josh 10:40). However, Judges 1:21, 27-28 shows that Joshua did not drive all the people out. Even when the campaign was over, there was much more to be done (18:3)
3. If a complete genocide had taken place, why all the warning against intermarrying and turning to false gods? (Josh 23:12-13)
4. In the end, the emphasis was on destroying Canaanite religion (Deut 12:2-3)
5. Hyperbolic language is applied to Saul's attack on the Amalekites, and yet they appear again in 1 Sam 27, 30, 1 Chronicles 4:43, and even in the book of Esther (Haman is an Agagite).