

# Is God a Moral Monster?

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## Introduction:

- I. Alyssa's story
- II. Many people today are turned off by the God of the Old Testament.
  - A. There are portions of OT scripture that modern people are sure to struggle with.
    1. There are cultural, historical, civil, and religious elements to consider.
    2. As is often the case, we moderns apply our current understanding of the world to the ancient situations we see in scripture and we balk at the contrast.
  - B. Atheists and skeptics loudly object to the teachings of the OT.
    1. Richard Dawkins' description of God, from *The God Delusion*:

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving, control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.
    2. Christopher Hitchens, from *God is Not Great*

The forgotten Canaanites were “pitilessly driven out of their homes to make room for the ungrateful and mutinous children of Israel.”
  - C. It isn't just atheists; even believers struggle with legitimate questions about OT morality. It is important that we do not shy away from these subjects. People need to be equipped with answers about these difficulties in scripture.
  - D. Objectives:
    1. Consider God's command to the Israelites to utterly destroy the Canaanites and expel them from the Land.
    2. We will explore the difficulties as well as some various approaches to the subject.

## Body:

### I. The Command to Destroy the Canaanites and Expel Them from the Land

- A. There are numerous references in Deuteronomy to the command from God to drive out the Canaanites (6:18-19; 7:1-26; 9:1-6; 12:1-4, 29-31; 20:1-20; et al). **Two primary texts**, which give more attention to the subject, from Deuteronomy are outlined below.
  1. **Primary texts: Deuteronomy 7, War Against Canaanite Nations to be Expelled**
    - a) Instructions for Taking the Land (7:1-6)
      - (1) Command to “utterly destroy” (1-2a)
      - (2) Not to make covenants or intermarry (2b-3)
      - (3) Reasons why:
        - (a) They will turn your hearts (4a)
        - (b) God's anger will burn against you (4b)
      - (4) Tear down their religious devotions (5)
      - (5) Reason why: You are a holy people whom God has chosen (6)

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- b) Israel's Election by God's Grace (7:7-11)
    - (1) God chose them despite their smallness (7-8)
    - (2) God blesses those who love Him and curses those who do not (9-10)
    - (3) Israel urged to obey (11)
  - c) The Reward for Obedience (7:12-16)
    - (1) If they will obey, God will bless them.
    - (2) He will:
      - (a) Honor His promise and covenant to their fathers (12)
      - (b) Multiply the produce of the womb, the ground, and flocks (13, 14b)
      - (c) Give them higher status than all nations (14a)
      - (d) Remove all sickness/disease and put them on their enemies (15)
      - (e) Drive out the surrounding nations (16)
  - d) Encouragement in Driving Out the Nations (7:17-26)
    - (1) Do not be fearful, God will be with you (17-21)
    - (2) These nations will be driven out "little by little," God will confuse and destroy them (22-23)
    - (3) He will remove their kings (24)
    - (4) Burn the images of their gods, do not take the silver/gold on them (25)
    - (5) These things are an abomination to God, therefore have nothing to do with them (26)
- 2. Primary Texts: Deuteronomy 20, Israel's Conduct of War**
- a) General introduction (20:1-4)
    - (1) The Lord would fight for Israel. Do not be fearful or intimidated (1)
    - (2) The priest would encourage the army to be courageous and trust God in battle (2-4)
  - b) Exemptions from military service (20:5-9)
    - (1) One who has built a new house but not dedicated it is exempt (5)
    - (2) One who has planted a vineyard but not yet put it to use (6)
    - (3) One betrothed but not yet married (7)
    - (4) One who is afraid is exempt, so as not to cause fear in others (8)
    - (5) Appointment of commanders (9). Implies that Israel had no permanent, standing army.
  - c) Conduct of war against cities "very far" from Israel (20:10-15)
    - (1) Offer terms of peace. If accepted, enslave those within the city (10-11)
    - (2) If offer rejected, besiege the city, kill the males, take the women, children, and animals as plunder (12-14)
  - d) Conduct of war against the cities "nearby" (20:16-18)
    - (1) The cities "nearby" are those of the nations listed (17; cf. 7:1). These were to be utterly destroyed (16-17)
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- (2) Israel was to destroy them so they would not learn their ways (18)
- e) Trees in the vicinity of the enemy cities (20:19-20)
- (1) During a siege, do not cut down the fruit trees, but use their fruit (19)
- (2) Cut down trees which do not bear fruit and use them for siege works (20)
- B. The Canaanite Nations
1. “Seven nations” (Deut. 7:1)
    - a) *E.H. Merrill*: “The nations in view are seven in all—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Inasmuch as the number seven is commonly used to speak of totality, it is possible that the peoples listed here represent all the inhabitants of the land no matter their nationality or ethnic identity.” (*The New American Commentary: Deuteronomy*, p. 177)
    - b) Six are listed in Deuteronomy 20:17, with the Girgashites absent.
  2. These nations are said to be “greater” and “stronger” than Israel. Greater in number, and stronger in force.
    - a) Recall the Pharaoh who said “Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we.” (Ex. 1:9)
    - b) Deut. 9:1-2 calls the nations “greater and mightier,” “a people great and tall,” with “great cities fortified to heaven.”
    - c) Given the census data provided in the book of Numbers (1:20-46; 26:5-51), 603,550 and 601,730 respectively, these nations were apparently larger than those figures.
  3. Some of these nations can be easily researched with a simple Bible dictionary, while less is known of others.
- C. “Utterly Destroy Them” — *herem warfare* (7:2; 20:17)
1. Lit. “Devote to the ban”
    - a) In short, the Hebrew word *herem* is the idea that everyone and everything in a particular city or region was set apart to God via total destruction.
    - b) *E.H. Merrill*: ... But Israel must follow this up by subjecting these hopelessly unrepentant idolaters to the *hērem*, that is, to **total and unexceptional destruction**. The verb “destroy them totally” used to describe this act occurs only in the causative stem (*heḥrîm*) and means “to **devote someone or something to the Lord by exterminating it**.” (Emphasis mine, *The New American Commentary: Deuteronomy*, p. 179)
    - c) *A.D.H. Mayes*: “the verb *charam* is the technical term used for the **extermination of the enemy in a holy war** as well as for the **exclusive reservation of certain things to Yahweh**.” (Emphasis mine, Quoted in Bratcher, R. G., & Hatton, H. A. (2000). *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, p. 64)
    - d) *R. D. Bergen*: This kind of warfare, called *herem*, was practiced only against peoples who had come under the **Lord’s severest judgment** (e.g., Jericho). It required the **destruction of all people and possessions captured in battle**. The task was a solemn and holy one since those Israelites who carried it out functioned as the **Lord’s agents of judgment**. The soldiers were not to profit from their assignment through the acquisition of slaves or booty; like Aaronic priests who offered up burnt offerings (*’ōlāh*) to the Lord, they were to receive no compensation for their efforts other than the satisfaction of having fulfilled **a divinely mandated mission**. (Emphasis mine, *The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Samuel*, p. 168)

2. *Herem* warfare was **not normative** in Israel.
- a) The Conquest was unique in its' purpose and procedures. *Herem* was never intended to be Israel's permanent strategy for war (cf. Deut. 20).
  - b) *Christopher J. H. Wright*: "...the conquest was a **single episode** within a **single generation** out of all the many generations of Old Testament history... even including all this, though, [the broader scope of the OT narrative - blw] it was **limited in the specific duration** of the warfare involved. Although the process of settling and claiming the land took several generations, the actual **invasion** and **destruction** of key fortified cities **took place mostly within a single generation**. And it is this event, confined to one generation, that constituted the conquest.

Now there were many other wars recorded in the Old Testament... Some of those other wars also had God's sanction—especially those where Israel was attacked by other nations and fought defensively to survive. ***But by no means are all the wars in the Old Testament portrayed in the same way as the conquest of Canaan.*** Some were clearly condemned as the actions of proud and greedy kings or military rivals. It is a caricature of the Old Testament to portray God as constantly on the warpath or to portray the conquest simply as 'typical' of the Rest of the story. It is not. The book of Joshua describes one key historical event, but it was finished. It should not be stretched out as if it were the background theme music for the rest of the Old Testament." (Emphasis his, *The God i Don't Understand*, p. 90)

- c) *Paul Copan*: "...the *herem* ('ban' or 'consecration to destruction') language connected to Israel's warring against other nations first focuses on the Canaanites (*herem* used thirty-seven times); the second cluster of *herem* warfare (*herem* used ten times) focuses on the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15. The use of *herem* for the conquest period—with its additional application to Israel's longstanding Amalekite enemies—indicates that the **language is restricted**. The language is not applied to Israel's warfare with other nations, nor do Israel's 'holy wars' with other nations go beyond this **limited time period**." (*Is God a Moral Monster?* p. 174)
- D. **Why Did God Give the Command to Utterly Destroy the Canaanite Nations?**

1. This was an **act of God's judgment** upon the **wickedness of the Canaanite nations**.
  - a) Numerous texts speak of the general wickedness of the Canaanites
    - (1) **Lev. 18:24-30:** <sup>24</sup> 'Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these **the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you.** <sup>25</sup> **For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.** <sup>26</sup> You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations, either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you <sup>27</sup> (for **all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled**), <sup>28</sup> lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. <sup>29</sup> For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people. <sup>30</sup> 'Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God.' "
    - (2) **Lev. 20:22-23:** <sup>22</sup> 'You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. <sup>23</sup> And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for **they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them.**

- (3) **Deut. 9:4-6:** <sup>4</sup> “Do not think in your heart, after the LORD your God has cast them out before you, saying, ‘Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land’; but **it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out from before you.** <sup>5</sup> It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but **because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you,** and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>6</sup> Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people.
- (4) **Deut. 18:9-14:** <sup>9</sup> “When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow **the abominations of those nations.** <sup>10</sup> There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, <sup>11</sup> or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. <sup>12</sup> For **all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you.** <sup>13</sup> You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. <sup>14</sup> For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.

2. **To protect His people from the wicked influence of the nations.**

- a) **Ex. 23:31-33:** <sup>31</sup> “And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. <sup>32</sup> You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. <sup>33</sup> They shall not dwell in your land, **lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.**”
- b) **Ex. 34:12-16:** <sup>12</sup> “Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, **lest it be a snare in your midst.** <sup>13</sup> But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images <sup>14</sup> (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), <sup>15</sup> lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, <sup>16</sup> and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods.”
- c) **Lev. 18:3:** “You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, **nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan** where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes.”
- d) **Num. 33:50-56:** Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying, <sup>51</sup> “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, <sup>52</sup> then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; <sup>53</sup> you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess. <sup>54</sup> And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone’s inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers. <sup>55</sup> But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that **those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you** in the land where you dwell. <sup>56</sup> Moreover it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.’”

- e) **Deut. 7:1-5:** <sup>1</sup> “When the LORD your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, <sup>2</sup> and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. <sup>3</sup> Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. <sup>4</sup> For **they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods**; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. <sup>5</sup> But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.
- f) **Deut. 7:16:** Also you shall destroy all the peoples whom the LORD your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for **that will be a snare to you.**
- g) **Deut. 12:2-4, 29-32:** “You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their **gods**, on the high mountains and on the hills under every green tree. You shall tear down their **altars** and smash their **sacred pillars** and burn their **Asherim** with fire, and you shall cut down the **engraved images** of their **gods** and obliterate their name from that place. **You shall not act like this** toward the Lord your God... When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations which you are going in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, **beware that you are not ensnared** to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?’ **You shall not behave thus** toward the Lord your God, for every abominable act which the Lord hates they have done to their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.”
- h) **Deut. 18:9:** “When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall **not learn to imitate the detestable things** of those nations.”
- i) **Deut. 20:16-18:** <sup>16</sup> “But of the cities of these peoples which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, <sup>17</sup> but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, <sup>18</sup> **lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God.**
- E. God’s Infinite Wisdom and Sense of Justice
1. What the scriptures say about (some of) God’s attributes.<sup>1</sup>
    - a) God is morally perfect.
      - (1) He is **holy** (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8)
      - (2) He is **just** and **righteous** (Psa. 89:14)
      - (3) He is **good** (Psa. 100:5; 106:1)
      - (4) He is **patient** and **long-suffering** (Ex. 20:6; Num. 14:18; Ps. 57:10; 145:8)
    - b) Therefore, all that God does, commands and approves must of necessity be good

<sup>1</sup> Most of this numeric section (I. E. 1.) was taken from a Wayne Jackson article “Old Testament Events and the Goodness of God.”

- (1) **Psa. 19:7-9:** 7 The law of the Lord is **perfect**, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is **sure**, making wise the simple; 8 The statutes of the Lord are **right**, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is **pure**, enlightening the eyes; 9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are **true** and **righteous altogether**.
  - (2) **Psa. 119:138:** 138 Your testimonies, which You have commanded, Are **righteous** and very **faithful**.
  - (3) **Psa. 145:17:** 17 The LORD is **righteous** in all His ways, **Gracious** in all His works.
  - (4) **Deut. 32:4:** 4 He is the Rock, His work is **perfect**; For all His ways are **justice**, A God of **truth** and **without injustice**; **Righteous** and **upright** is He.
2. God, as the **Creator** and **Giver** of life, has the **sole right** to determine who lives and who dies, and when they live or die.
    - a) **Acts 17:24-26:** <sup>24</sup> “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; <sup>25</sup> nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all [people] life and breath and all things; <sup>26</sup> and He made from one [man] every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined [their] appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation”
    - b) *William Lane Craig:* “He [God] gives life and takes life as He chooses. We all recognize when we accuse some authority who presumes to take life as ‘playing God.’ Human authorities arrogate to themselves rights which belong only to God. God is under no obligation whatsoever to extend my life for another second. If He wanted to strike me dead right now, that’s His prerogative. What that implies is that God has the right to take the lives of the Canaanites when He sees fit. How long they live and when they die is up to Him.” (“The Slaughter of the Canaanites”, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org>.)
  3. Just how wicked were the Canaanites?
    - a) God’s knowledge of justice is perfect. His ability to properly assess the thoughts and actions of men, and His ability to properly assess His divine response is infinitely good and right.
    - b) There is ample evidence, biblical and extra-biblical, to show that the Canaanite peoples were extremely wicked.
      - (1) Biblical evidence
        - (a) Leviticus 18 includes all manner of **sexual sins**, which the Canaanites are said to have committed (18:6-20, 22-23)
        - (b) Children being **offered to Molech** (Lev. 18:21; Deut. 12:31; 18:10)
        - (c) **Divination, witchcraft, sorcery, mediums** and **spiritists** were prevalent (Deut. 18:10-12)
      - (2) Extra-biblical evidence
        - (a) The Canaanites nations were guilty of idolatry, incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and child sacrifice, among others.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Clay Jones offers a well-documented summary of Canaanite sins in this paper: <http://www.clayjones.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/We-Dont-Hate-Sin-PC-article.pdf>

- (b) *William Lane Craig*: “By the time of their destruction, Canaanite culture was, in fact, debauched and cruel, embracing such practices as ritual prostitution and even child sacrifice.” (“The Slaughter of the Canaanites”, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org>.)
- (c) *Wayne Jackson*: “[T]he goddess Anath is pictured as killing humans by the thousands and wading knee-deep in blood. She cuts off heads and hands and wears them as ornaments. And in all of this gruesomeness, the Baal-epic says that her liver was swollen with laughter, and her joy was great.” (“Old Testament Problems And The Goodness Of God,” *Essays In Apologetics*, Vol. 1, 71)
- (d) *William Albright*: [regarding a massacre of Anath, a Canaanite deity] “The blood was so deep that she waded in it up to her knees—nay, up to her neck. Under her feet were human heads, above her human hands flew like locusts. In her sensuous delight she decorated herself with suspended heads while she attached hands to her girdle. Her joy at the butchery is described in even more sadistic language: ‘Her liver swelled with laughter, her heart was full of joy...’ Afterwards, Anath ‘was satisfied’ and washed her hands in human gore before proceeding to other occupations.” (*Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 77; quoted in *Is God a Moral Monster?* by Paul Copan, p. 159)
- (e) *Clifford Wilson*: “Funerary jars have been found with the bodies of young children distorted by suffocation as they struggled for life after having been buried alive as a sacrifice to Canaanite gods. Such young children have been found in the foundation pillars of Canaanite houses, and sometimes religious ceremonies were associated with their sacrifice.” (*That Incredible Book – The Bible*, 1973, p. 85, quoted in Wayne Jackson, (“Old Testament Problems And The Goodness Of God,” *Essays In Apologetics*, Vol. 1, 71)

#### 4. God’s Patience and Large-Scale Judgments

- a) God knew the Canaanite nations would fall into depravity. Centuries before the Conquest, God stated that the judgment of this Canaanite group would be due to their wickedness.
- (1) **Gen. 15:13-16**: Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that **your descendants** will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them **four hundred years**.<sup>14</sup> And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.<sup>15</sup> Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.<sup>16</sup> But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for **the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete**.”
- (2) The Amorites are listed among the seven nations of Deuteronomy 7:1. Some argue that the term “Amorites” in Genesis 15:16 is an all-encompassing term which would include all the Canaanite nations of Deut. 7.
- (3) *Victor P. Hamilton*: “Only when the iniquity of the Amorites (i.e. the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Palestine) has run its full measure will the Israelites enter Palestine to claim it and possess it. Only when the iniquity of the Amorites has reached the point of no return will they forfeit the land... This commentary on the immorality of the indigenous population of Canaan also establishes Joshua’s invasion as an act of justice rather than of aggression” (*The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, pg. 436).
- (4) *William Lane Craig*: “God stays His judgment of the Canaanite clans 400 years because their wickedness had not reached the point of intolerability! This is the long-suffering God we know in the Hebrew Scriptures. He even allows His own people to languish in slavery for four centuries before determining that the Canaanite peoples are ripe for judgment and calling His people forth from Egypt.” (“The Slaughter of the Canaanites”, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org>.)



- b) Although God delayed His judgment upon the Amorites for centuries, the inhabitants of **Sodom and Gomorrah** had reached their **full measure of iniquity** (Gen. 18:16-19:26).
- (1) God's long-suffering is evident as He informs Abraham that He would spare the city if only ten righteous could be found within it (Gen. 18:32).
  - (2) How long God delayed the destruction of these cities is unknown.
- c) After waiting a period of 120 years, God **destroyed the entire world** with a **flood** (Gen. 6-9).
- (1) **1 Pet. 3:20**: "...when the **patience of God kept waiting** in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark..."
  - (2) **2 Pet. 2:5**: "... and **did not spare the ancient world**, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the **world of the ungodly**..."
- d) God delayed the judgment upon **Assyria** 120+ years because they repented at the preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:10).
- e) Rome was God's instrument of judgment upon **Jerusalem** when the "full measure" of guilt was reached (Mt. 23:32-35).
- f) Each of these examples shows that God is not capricious in His judgments, nor is He quick-tempered. His judgments are carefully calculated and timely in deliverance.
- (1) **Jer. 18:7-10**: <sup>7</sup> The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, <sup>8</sup> **if that nation** against whom I have spoken **turns from its evil, I will relent** of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. <sup>9</sup> And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, <sup>10</sup> **if it does evil** in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then **I will relent concerning the good** with which I said I would benefit it.
5. God, in His infinite sense of wisdom and justice, decided that it was time for the Canaanite nations to be judged, and He used the nation of Israel to be the rod of justice.
- a) Israel was not acting without divine guidance. If they had, their actions would have been wrong.
  - b) *William Lane Craig*: "The slaughter of the Canaanites represented an **unusual historical circumstance**, not a regular means of behavior." (Emphasis mine, "The Slaughter of the Canaanites", <https://www.reasonablefaith.org>.)
  - c) *Paul Copan*: "What guidelines do we have to determine when a culture is irredeemable, beyond the point of no moral and spiritual return? Don't we need something more than mere mortals to assess a culture's ripeness for judgment? Aren't these considerations **too weighty for humans** to judge? Yes, they are! Any determinations should be left up to God—namely, through **special revelation**... The requirement of special revelation before any such undertaking is precisely what we have in scripture." (Is God a Moral Monster? p. 161)
6. God does not owe us an explanation for His actions.
- a) **Gen. 18:25**: <sup>25</sup> "... Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?"
  - b) **Ezek. 14:22-23**: <sup>22</sup> "...you will see their conduct and actions... <sup>23</sup> "...for you will know that I have not done in vain whatever I did to it..."
  - c) If God commanded the Canaanites be "utterly destroyed," then so be it. He is God; that's His prerogative. Who are we to question it?
  - d) But He *did* give us an explanation of His intentions regarding the Canaanites; and scriptures gives us more than adequate affirmation that God's justice is perfect. Thus,

even if we don't fully understand it—or don't like it—as people of faith, we must accept it.

## II. How Should We Understand the *Herem* Command?

### A. Was it **Genocide** and **Ethnic Cleansing**?

1. Atheists and skeptics are quick to denounce this command of God as immoral, and they claim it promotes genocide and ethnic cleansing.
  - a) There is an obvious logical inconsistency in calling attention to the existence of an objective moral law while denying the existence of the Law-giver.
  - b) Furthermore, they often criticize God because, as they say, “If God is so good, why does He not stop the evil in the world?” The above texts of scripture clearly state that this is an example of God stopping the evil in the world, yet the atheists then cry foul because God acted and made the evil stop!
2. To argue that God and, by extension, His people, are supporters of genocide and ethnic cleansing is either **dishonest** or **ignorant**. Scriptures clearly affirm from beginning to end that God is concerned for the spiritual well-being of all people.
  - a) God said to Abraham the “all families of the earth” would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3).
  - b) Rahab, a Canaanite woman, was accepted among Israel because of her faith (Josh. 6:25). If the slaughter of the Canaanites was solely due to their race and/or ethnicity, why was Rahab spared?
  - c) The Law of Moses commanded the Israelites to treat “strangers” among them well (Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 10:17-19).
  - d) God sent several prophets to foreign, gentile nations to warn them of their sin. Why would He do this if He had no concern for them?
  - e) In both 722 and 586, God brought the very same judgments to fall upon His people. God would not exempt His own people from the very judgment which He brought upon the Canaanite nations! If God is “genocidal” then at least grant that He is an equitable promoter of genocide (sarcasm!).
3. The Conquest of Canaan is **never justified** on the basis of ethnic or racial superiority. In fact, any notion which Israel might entertain regarding superiority, God extinguishes:
  - a) **Deut. 7:7:** <sup>7</sup> “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples...”
  - b) **Deut. 9:4-5:** <sup>4</sup> “Do not think in your heart, after the LORD your God has cast them out before you, saying, ‘**Because of my righteousness** the LORD has brought me in to possess this land’; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out from before you. <sup>5</sup> **It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart** that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
4. God is concerned about **sin**, not about race or ethnicity, social standing or political affiliation, or any other dividing line within a society.
5. Christ came to redeem men “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). If God is a promoter of genocide or ethnic cleansing, He sure did a poor job of revealing it.

### B. Was it Immoral for God to Call for the **Killing of Babies**?

1. We should repeat the point stated earlier; that God is God and His determination of when someone's life is taken is His prerogative. Whether He gives an explanation or not, we should not question His perfect judgment. Instead we must have faith enough to accept it.
  2. Consider the outcome had the infants grown into adulthood.
    - a) The worst thing possible for the Canaanite infants would be to grow into adulthood and become...Canaanites! They almost assuredly would have learned the abominable practices of their fathers and become condemned themselves.
    - b) By dying in infancy, they are spared the contamination of sin.
  3. Innocents who die go to be with the Lord.
    - a) **2 Sam. 12:22-23:** <sup>22</sup> And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' <sup>23</sup> But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.**"
    - b) God does these children no wrong by taking their lives.
  4. Sometimes the innocent suffer because of the actions and choices of the guilty.
    - a) This does not mean:
      - (1) God **does not care** about the innocent. God was compassionate towards **120,000 innocent children** in Nineveh who would have suffered had the city not repented (Jonah 4:9-11).
      - (2) God is **punishing the innocent**.
- C. Arguments in Favor of a **Literal Understanding** of the Command
1. A literal understanding is the most **natural reading** of the text.
  2. The harsh command to utterly destroy the Canaanites was justified because of their **wickedness**.
  3. The command was not unfair because God warned Israel that they, too, would **experience the same judgment** if they became wicked (Lev. 18:26-30; Deut. 28:15-68).
  4. Presumably any believing Canaanites, like Rahab of Jericho, could have **been spared**.
- D. Common Objections to a Literal Understanding of the Text<sup>3</sup>
1. **Theological and moral** objection.
    - a) *Les [some guy, somewhere, with a blog]:* "If God is all good, how could he have commanded an act that we, sinful humans, all acknowledge as morally reprehensible, namely slaughtering a people group and taking over their land?"... How could a good God have given this horrific command?"
    - b) Response: This is not an argument against—it is *the* point in question, the very issue being debated.
  2. **Christological** objection.
    - a) Jesus taught non-violence, love for enemies, etc. Slaughtering a people group does not "mesh with the life of Jesus and Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God (Heb. 1:3)."

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<sup>3</sup> These were taken from a blog post by a man named Les Bridgeman. I found his blog while researching this subject. His objections are typical, so for simplicity I've only cited his post.

- b) *Derek Flood*: “God does not look like a warrior king clothed in the blood of his enemies; God instead looks like Jesus, clothed in his own blood, shed for his enemies.”

(1) Response: Mr. Flood needs to read **Isaiah 63:1-6** and **Revelation 19:13-16**.

- c) Response: Jesus did not dismiss OT narratives as wrong and claim that He had a better way (See E. 3. below).

3. **Psychological and emotional** objection.

- a) “Perpetrators of violence tend to experience emotional and psychological stress because of the acts they have committed. That means in the warfare commands, God was commanding his people to not only kill others, but to suffer as a result of what they had done.”

- b) This is a diagnosis of “ancient PTSD.”

- c) Response: The mental health of war veterans is indeed a serious issue; but the Israelites were obeying a command of God, with God Himself leading them into battle. Israel was obligated to fulfill this command. Surely this important fact would help alleviate the psychological stress of war.

- d) Response: What about the psychological and emotional consequences of letting the Canaanites continue to commit infanticide? What about the emotional and psychological stress on parents who burned their children, or siblings who watched their siblings be burned as a sacrifice?

4. It can be, and has been in the past, used as a **justification** for **violence**.

- a) *Peter Enns*: “It’s hard to appeal to the God of the Bible to condemn genocide today when the God of the Bible commanded genocide yesterday.”

- b) Response: If one tries hard enough, he can twist the scriptures to justify almost any evil behavior. That does not mean that scripture actually condones the behavior.

- c) Response: See section (II. A.) above “Was it genocide and ethnic cleansing?”

E. **Wrong Approaches** to the Alleged Immorality

1. *These texts must be interpreted as allegory, to find their spiritual meaning.*

- a) Some as early as Ambrose and Augustine argued for this; not specifically as it related to the Canaanite expulsion, but regarding general OT difficulties which seem to present moral challenges.

(1) *Augustine*: “Whatever there is in the word of God that cannot, when taken literally, be referred either to purity of life or soundness of doctrine, you may set down as figurative. Purity of life has reference to the love of God and one’s neighbor; soundness of doctrine to the knowledge of God and one’s neighbor.” (*On Christian Doctrine*, 3.10.14)

(2) *Augustine*: “Anything in the divine writings that cannot be referred either to good, honest morals, or to the truth of the faith, you must know is said allegorically.... Those things... which appear to the inexperienced to be sinful, and which are ascribed to God, or to men whose holiness is put before us as an example, are wholly allegorical, and the hidden kernel of meaning they contain is to be picked out as food for the nourishment of charity.” (*On Christian Doctrine*, 3.10.12)

- b) Problems with this approach:

(1) Allegorical interpretations often seem **arbitrary** and **contrived**. True, one can find “spiritual” applications virtually anywhere in scripture (e.g. the Israelite Exodus as a

parallel to bondage in sin and freedom from it); but such “spiritual” applications are secondary in purpose and meaning to the original audience.

- (2) *Christopher J. H. Wright*: “The people in the stories are not allegorical fictions but are presented as historical. *It was not allegorical Israelites who attacked or allegorical Canaanites who died.* (Emphasis his, *The God i Don’t Understand*, p. 84)

2. ***The Israelites thought it was God’s command, but they were wrong.***

- a) **The argument**: In a show of nationalistic fervor, Israel decided to take the land of Canaan and thought they had God’s blessing in so doing. But, they actually did not have God’s blessing, because God would never command such activity.

b) **Response**:

- (1) God claimed to be the One behind the Conquest.

(a) **Ex. 23:20-23**:<sup>20</sup> “Behold, **I am going to send an angel** before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the **place which I have prepared**.<sup>21</sup> “Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since **My name is in him**.<sup>22</sup> “But if you truly obey his voice and **do all that I say**, then **I will be an enemy to your enemies** and an **adversary to your adversaries**.<sup>23</sup> “For **My angel** will go before you and bring you in to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; and **I will completely destroy them**.

(b) **Josh. 23:3-5, 9-10**:<sup>3</sup> “And you have seen **all that the Lord your God has done** to all these nations because of you, for the Lord your God is He who **has been fighting for you**.<sup>4</sup> “See, I have apportioned to you these nations which remain as an inheritance for your tribes, with all the nations which I have cut off, from the Jordan even to the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun.<sup>5</sup> “The Lord your God, **He will thrust them out** from before you and **drive them** from before you; and you will possess their land, just as the **Lord your God promised** you...<sup>9</sup> “For **the Lord has driven out** great and strong nations from before you; and as for you, no man has stood before you to this day.<sup>10</sup> “One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for **the Lord your God is He who fights** for you, just as **He promised you**.

- (2) God never corrected Israel’s “false” thinking.

(a) When **King David** sought to **build a house** for the Lord, God sent Nathan the prophet to him to correct him (**2 Sam. 7**). Why didn’t God tell Israel that their thinking was incorrect?

(b) **Jehu** was commissioned to destroy the house of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Kings 9:6-10). But he turned his efforts into a bloodbath, and his actions were later **denounced by God** (Hos. 1:4). Where is the scripture that condemns Israel’s overreach?

(c) God condemned **gentile nations** who were **unjustly cruel** in their war efforts (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1). If the Israelites massacred the Canaanites unjustly, where is the condemnation of their actions?

- (3) There is no hint of evidence in scripture that the Conquest was a “mistake.”

(a) *Christopher J. H. Wright*: “The main problem with this view is that everywhere else in the Bible the conquest is never explained away as a colossal mistake; on the contrary, it is anticipated, commanded, achieved, and remembered as

something that *accomplished* God's will." (Emphasis his, *The God i Don't Understand*, p. 83).

- (b) The Conquest of the Land is linked to:
  - i) The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:18-21)
  - ii) The exodus redemption from Egypt (Ex. 6:6-8)
  - iii) The Sinai Covenant (Deut. 5:31-33; et al in Deut.)
  - iv) The prophets referred to the Conquest (Amos 2:9; Hos. 2:14-15)
  - v) Stephen (Ac. 7:45) and Paul (Ac. 13:19) spoke of it as Israelite history.
- (c) How can one suggest that this was (although a sincere effort) a serious error in judgment?

### 3. *This was an OT problem which the NT corrects.*

- a) This is basically the "OT God vs. NT God" idea. The OT God was all wrath and anger, but Jesus came and showed the way of love and grace.
- b) This approach will not work for numerous reasons:
  - (1) In addition to the texts which speak of His wrath and anger, the OT presents a picture of a loving, compassionate, and merciful God (Ex. 34:6-7; Ps. 103:8-14; 145:9-17; Hos. 11:8-9; et al.).
  - (2) The NT speaks of God's wrath and justice too, not just His love and forgiveness.
    - (a) Jesus spoke of hell more than anyone else, along with numerous references to eternal punishment (John 3:36; Matt. 10:15; 13:40-42; 18:34; 22:13; 25:41).
    - (b) NT writers also (Rom. 1:18-2:16; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 1 Pet. 4:17).
    - (c) *Miroslav Volf*: "I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn't God love? Shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath? God is love, and God loves every person and every creature. That's exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3,000,000 were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination, and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in 100 days! How did God react to the carnage? By dotting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators' basic goodness? Wasn't God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love."<sup>4</sup>
    - (d) *C.S. Lewis*: "When we merely say that we are bad, the 'wrath' of God seems a barbarous doctrine; as soon as we perceive our bad-ness, it appears inevitable, a mere corollary from God's goodness." (*The Problem of Pain*, p. 46)

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<sup>4</sup> Miroslav Volf is a Croatian Protestant theologian and public intellectual and Henry B. Wright Professor of Theology and Director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture at Yale University (wikipedia). He lived through the difficult years of ethnic strife in the former Yugoslavia.

- c) Jesus and NT writers do not dismiss or discredit OT narratives, but endorsed their validity by regularly teaching and preaching from them.
- (1) The Flood (Matt. 24:36-41; 2 Pet. 3:3-7)
  - (2) Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15; 11:23-24)
  - (3) Wilderness plagues (1 Cor. 10:6-10)
  - (4) The Conquest of Canaan (Acts 7:45; 13:19; Heb. 11:30-31);
  - (5) Jephthah (Heb. 11:34)
- F. A Modern Approach Which Prevails Among Scholarship
1. ***Yes, God gave those commands, but they contain hyperbole and should not be understood literally.***
    - a) Paul Copan seems to be the one deserving the most credit for popularizing this notion, although he was not the first to make this case.<sup>5</sup> He argues that taking the commands too literally is to misread the genre of ancient warfare rhetoric.
      - (1) The rhetoric of ancient near eastern military writings commonly used hyperbole when describing military exploits.
        - (a) He cites numerous ancient pagan works and their usage of terms like “annihilate totally,” “make empty” [of all humanity], utterly destroyed,” etc.
        - (b) Therefore, he argues, Joshua’s phrasing like “utterly destroy” should not literally understood, but rather likened to a modern sports team saying “we destroyed the other team!”
          - i) K. A. Kitchen also expresses this same view (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, p. 173-174).
      - (c) Some passages claim “utter destruction” but later passages state that the same people group remains in the Land.
        - i) Claims of total destruction: Josh. 10:28-42; 11:11-23
        - ii) Claims of Canaanite continuance: Josh. 13:1ff; 23:5-7, 12-13; Judg. 1:27-2:4.
    - (2) Further, Copan argues that the primary point God was concerned about was the *religion* of the Canaanites, not the Canaanites *themselves*.
      - (a) *Paul Copan*: “On the one hand, God tells Israel that they should ‘defeat’ and ‘utterly destroy’ the Canaanites (7:2)—a holy consecration to destruction. On the other hand, He immediately goes on to say in the very next verses:
 

**Deut. 7:2-5:** <sup>2</sup> ... You shall **make no covenant** with them and show no favor to them. <sup>3</sup> **Nor shall you make marriages** with them. You shall **not give your daughter** to their son, **nor take their daughter** for your son. <sup>4</sup> For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to **serve other gods**; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. <sup>5</sup> But thus you shall deal with them: you shall **destroy their altars**, and **break down their sacred pillars**, and **cut down their wooden images**, and **burn their carved images** with fire.

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<sup>5</sup> He argues this in his book *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (somewhat persuasively, I might add). I found his book to be very helpful overall on various topics, although I do not agree with portions of it; I do recommend it.

If the Canaanites were to be completely obliterated, why this discussion about intermarriage or treaties? The final verse emphasizes that the ultimate issue was religious: Israel was to destroy altars, images, and sacred pillars. In other words, destroying Canaanite religion was more important than destroying Canaanite people.” (*Is God a Moral Monster?* p. 172-173)

b) Is it *really* just hyperbole?

(1) What are we to make of other passages where Joshua used comprehensive terms? Are these hyperbolic, too?

(a) **Josh. 21:43-45:** <sup>43</sup> “So the LORD gave Israel **all** the land which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they **possessed it** and lived in it. <sup>44</sup> And the LORD gave them **rest on every side**, according to **all** that He had sworn to their fathers, and **no one of all their enemies** stood before them; the LORD gave **all their enemies** into their hand. <sup>45</sup> **Not one** of the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel failed; **all** came to pass.”

(b) **Josh. 23:14-15:** <sup>14</sup> “Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that **not one word of all the good words** which the LORD your God spoke concerning you has failed; **all** have been fulfilled for you, **not one** of them has failed. <sup>15</sup> “It shall come about that just as **all** the good words which the LORD your God spoke to you have come upon you, so the LORD will bring upon you **all** the threats, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

(2) What about other **judgments** from God? Are they hyperbolic, too?

(a) Was **the Flood** just an exaggeration or literal?

- i) The Flood was justified because God knew the hearts of men were wicked (Gen. 6:5). He determined that total destruction was the appropriate solution.
- ii) Only eight souls were spared (1 Pet. 3:20). How many men, women, and children were killed in the Flood?
- iii) Should we “soften” the story of the Flood because countless numbers of women and children were destroyed? If not, then why should we do it regarding the Canaanites?

(b) Was the complete destruction of **Sodom** and **Gomorrah** just an exaggeration?

- i) Ironically, Lot’s oldest daughter confirmed the total destruction of the cities by using hyperbolic language (Gen. 19:31 NASB).
- ii) Her justification for their plot to get Lot drunk and become pregnant by him was “there is not a man on earth [or, *in the land*] to come into us...”
- iii) If this was a *literal* judgment from God, that *literally* destroyed every life in these cities save a few, why should we interpret the Canaanites’ judgment as hyperbolic?

(3) **Achan’s sin** and herem warfare.

(a) Why was God angry with **one man**, who took just **a few items** from the plunder of Jericho, if, after all, His command to “utterly destroy” was just an exaggeration? Israel lost their next battle in Ai, thirty-six soldiers died, and Achan and his family were eventually killed.

(b) God told Joshua to “destroy” (*shamad: to desolate:—destroy(-uction), bring to nought, overthrow, perish, pluck down*) the plunder from the camp (Josh. 7:12).



God’s anger did not subside until the guilty ones were killed and the items burned with fire (7:15, 26).

- (c) Does this not suggest that the *herem* destruction was intended to be total and all-encompassing, with **no items** to be **excluded**?

(4) **King Saul’s** disobedience (1 Samuel 15)

- (a) Saul was commanded to carry out *herem* on the Amalekites (15:3). This was to be part of the fulfillment of Exodus 17:14-16.

**Ex. 17:14-16:** Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that **I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek** from under heaven.” Moses built an altar and named it The Lord is My Banner; and he said, “The Lord has sworn; **the Lord will have war against Amalek** from generation to generation.”

- (b) King Saul was removed from being king because he disobeyed (1 Sam. 15:9, 11, 19, 23, 26, 28).
  - i) In his rebuke of Saul, Samuel charged him with **rebellion** and **insubordination** (15:23).
  - ii) God removed Saul from the throne because he **spared one man**, Agag, and **some animals**. Later, Samuel “hewed Agag to pieces” and carried out what Saul did not (15:33).
- (c) Does this not also suggest that the *herem* destruction of the Amalekites was to be total, with **no people** or **plunder** excluded?
  - i) Compare Saul’s claims to the reality of the situation:

King Saul (1 Sam. 15)	
Claim	Reality
“I have <b>carried out</b> the command of the Lord” (15:13)	“he...has <b>not carried out</b> My commands” (15:11)
“ <b>I did obey</b> the voice of the Lord” (15:20)	“You have <b>rejected the word</b> of the Lord” (15:23, 26)

- ii)
- (d) Why are Saul’s claims of victory denied and rebuffed by Samuel (and the Lord) when Joshua’s claims of victory are not?
  - i) Saul’s claims of victory were rejected because his efforts were ultimately disobedient to God’s instruction.
  - ii) Joshua’s actions and claims, however, were never rejected because his efforts were obedient to God’s instruction.

Conclusion:

- G. All of these approaches seem to be efforts to do one of two things, the first of which being my objective to address in this study:

1. Soften or explain away the harshness of the command of God regarding the Canaanites.
  2. Explain the apparent contradiction between Joshua's claims of "utter destruction" with the statements of Judges that the Canaanites remained in the land. (See appendix for a possible solution).
- H. Is it possible that we bristle and object to God's judgment upon the Canaanite simply because we do **not abhor sin** and wickedness in the **way that God does**? Perhaps if we hated sin with the same hatred which God has, then we would see the command to destroy the Canaanites as a just punishment for their guilt before God.

*Clay Jones*: "...do we genuinely comprehend the depth of Canaanite sins? Do we understand the significance of God's having all but destroyed Israel for committing Canaanite sins? Could it be that because our culture today commits these same Canaanite sins we are inoculated against the seriousness of these sins and so think God's judgment unfair?... In short, most of our problems regarding God's ordering the destruction of the Canaanites come from the fact that God hates sin but we do not."

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## Appendix

### *Harmonizing Joshua's Claims of Canaanite Destruction and Judges' Statements of Canaanite Continuance*

**Note:** I have attempted to provide a harmonized approach that accepts both Joshua's and Judges' claims as literal and true. I cannot bring myself to accept any of the above approaches in trying to explain it. However, I felt compelled to offer something better rather than just criticize other views. I ask for your (gentle) critique of this approach.

#### III. A Literal, Harmonized Approach.

- A. **Deut. 7:22** says God would drive out the Canaanites **"little by little"** (cf. Ex. 23:29-30). (For "wild beasts" and "hornets," cf. Ezek. 5:17, 14:15)
  1. We should not interpret the Conquest as a quick striking from a swarming, all-consuming Israelite army that took the land in a few weeks.
  2. Rather, the books of Joshua and Judges present a slower conquest that is mixed with successes and failures.
- B. It took about **ten years** for Joshua's portion of the Conquest to be completed. This fits the gradual approach which God said would occur.
  1. 450 years from the oppression of Abraham's descendants to the inheriting of the land (Acts 13:17-20).
  2. The Israelites were enslaved in Egypt 400 years (Acts 7:6).
  3. They wandered in the wilderness 40 years (Acts 13:18).
  4. Thus, 10 years remain (Acts 13:19).
- C. Some of the Canaanite peoples doubtless **escaped** their cities and towns before Israel's army came, and **later returned** to their cities (cf. Josh. 10:19-21).
  1. They knew that Israel was favored by God and would take the land, and they feared them (Josh. 2:8-11; 9:1-3; 10:1-2).
  2. Cities facing battle usually had people —mainly noncombatants— who fled for safety. These people would later return to their cities and continue life as before.
    - a) **Jer. 4:29:** <sup>29</sup>At the sound of the horseman and bowman **every city flees**; They go into the thickets and climb among the rocks; **Every city is forsaken, And no man dwells in them.**
    - b) *Eric Lyons:* "...could Israel not have conquered various regions one year and let it be retaken by certain Canaanites (who temporarily fled their homeland for fear of their lives) in subsequent months or years (cf. Josh. 10:36-39; 15:15-16)? No doubt, many statements in Joshua and Judges are referring to two different periods of time..." ("Did the Israelites Completely Destroy the Canaanites or Not?" [www.apologeticspress.org](http://www.apologeticspress.org))
- D. Since God knew it would take time for the Israelites to drive out the Canaanites, He warned them not to intermarry or make covenants with them (Deut. 7:2-3).
  1. These commands to avoid intermarriage and covenants with the Canaanites people are not in contradiction to the command to "utterly destroy."
  2. It is a recognition that the total destruction and expulsion of the Canaanites would take time, and a warning to Israel of what to avoid during that time.

- E. Joshua did what he was capable of doing — i.e he drove out and destroyed the inhabitants *to the degree it was possible for him to do so*. Others would be expected to carry on the Conquest of Canaan, and the judgment of God upon these wicked peoples.
1. **Joshua 13:1ff**: even upon the time of Joshua's death there was still land to be conquered and Canaanites to be expelled. **Judges 1:1** has the Israelites ready to continue carrying out the Conquest.
  2. Judges 1 records some of the victories (1:1-26), but also records the failures (1:27-2:4).
  3. **Judges 3:1-7** says Israel failed to expel the Canaanites, and they intermarried with them.
  4. The book of Judges is a story of "the Canaanization of Israel." It is a narrative about how the inhabitants of the Land corrupted God's people, rather than God's people living in holiness in their Land.