

1 **Difficult Issues from History**

Conquest of Canaan, Slavery, and the Crusades

- Module: History
- Lesson 35

2 **Some Recommended Sources**

- Paul Coulter, web article, Old Testament Mass Killings, <https://www.bethinking.org/bible/old-testament-mass-killings> (last accessed 6/2/21)
- Peter J. Williams, lecture, Moral Objections to the Old Testament?: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0rCsQixNIg> (last accessed 6/2/21)
- Clay Jones, scholarly paper, We Don't Hate Sin So We Don't Understand What Happened to the Canaanites, <http://www.clayjones.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/We-Dont-Hate-Sin-PC-article.pdf> (last accessed 6/2/21)
- Clay Jones, lecture, Killing the Canaanites was Justified Capital Punishment, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4fv8apO3_4 (last accessed 6/2/21)
- Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, Did God Really Command Genocide?
- Paul Copan, Is God a Moral Monster, Making Sense of the Old Testament God
- Rodney Stark, God's Battalions, The Case for the Crusades, and The Triumph of Christianity

3 **Understanding the Past**

- Ignorance of the Ancient Near East (ANE) leads to much misunderstanding of Biblical history.
 - e. g. The structure and importance of the patriarchal nature of the culture.
 - e. g. The role of covenants in the culture.
 - e. g. The nature of ancient warfare and ANE conquest accounts.
- Chronological snobbery.
 - "...the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited." -C. S. Lewis-
 - Culture shock occurs not only geographically, but chronologically as well. (We tend to have a negative reaction to cultures that differ from ours, whether in a different place or a different time.)
- Old Law—New Covenant.
 - Mosaic Law—designed for a particular people, in a particular place, at a particular time, for a particular purpose.
 - The history of the Bible discloses a redemptive movement. What was appropriate at one place and time becomes inappropriate and vice versa as the redemptive plan moves forward.

4 **The Conquest of Canaan**

- What did God actually command, and how did Israel understand it?

- Some conservative scholars believe the earlier chapters of Joshua record God's commands and Israel's actions in the form of ANE warfare hyperbole. (That God did not command total annihilation of all living things.)
 - Hyperbole is a legitimate genre of literature in scripture.
 - There is some textual (in Deut, Judges, and later Joshua chapters) and historical evidence for such a view. Not all conservative scholars accept this view.
- Regardless of whether or not some of the commands/descriptions in Joshua are hyperbole, it is clear that at some level Scripture represents God as commanding the killing of and/or expulsion of the Canaanites at some level, and at some level the Israelites carried out those commands.
- Four typical criticisms:
 - God, if he actually did so, was not morally justified in giving these commands.
 - Israel was not morally justified in carrying out these commands.
 - The existence of the biblical narrative incites ongoing religious violence and conquests.
 - The God of the Canaanite commands is not consistent with the Christian view of a loving and good God.

5 The Conquest of Canaan

- The problem of our presuppositions.
 - Contrasting views of reality.
 - Skeptics/atheists view reality in which a good, holy, benevolent creator does not exist.
 - Christians view reality in which such a God does exist, and where he always acts with morally justified reasons and in concert with his total character.
 - Critics unfairly isolate the conquest narratives from the total biblical narrative about God before assessing the morality of the divine commands.
 - Critics of the conquest commands criticize the conquest aspects of the biblical narrative.
 - At the same time, they disregard other aspects of the biblical narrative which constitute the context of the Canaan and other judgment narratives:
 - e. g. The biblical description of God, and of his creation of humankind.
 - e. g. The narratives regarding the Patriarchal era.
 - e. g. The narrative regarding Israel in the Wilderness.
 - e. g. The horrific wickedness of the Canaanite peoples.

6 The Conquest of Canaan

- Did Israel have epistemic warrant for the conquest commands?
 - The Israelites had voluminous public verification that God was actually speaking to them.
 - e. g. The miraculous events of the plagues, the Passover, and the exodus.

- e. g. God audibly addressed the entire congregation of Israel at Mt. Horeb.
- e. g. The numerous miraculous events in the wilderness (manna, pillar of cloud and fire, etc.)
- Modern-day fanatics who claim divine sanction for religious violence have no such verification.

7 The Conquest of Canaan

- Some important facts about the Canaanites:
 - The population of Canaan was significantly greater than that of Israel, and posed a significant military and moral threat to Israel.
 - The Canaanites had long persisted in horrendous wickedness.
 - Perverted idolatry, including grossly demeaning depictions of El, the God of Israel, and cultic prostitution, both bi-sexual and homosexual.
 - Extreme violence.
 - All sorts of sexual perversion (adultery, incest, rape, homosexuality, institutionalized pederasty, and widespread bestiality).
 - Cultic child sacrifices to the idol Molech.

8 The Conquest of Canaan

- Some important facts about the Canaanites (cont.):
 - Did the Canaanites have fair warning of their wickedness and God's judgment?
 - They all had their consciences. (Rom. 1)
 - For many years they had the witness of the lives of the patriarchs.
 - Melchizedek, King of Salem (Jerusalem), lived among them and was a priest of the Most High God.
 - They had witnessed God's deliverance of the five cities of the plains through his servant Abraham on the account of righteous Lot.
 - They had witnessed the judgment of God on Sodom and Gomorrah, two wicked Canaanite cities.
 - They had forty years while Israel crossed the wilderness to repent and call on God for deliverance. (Remember the faith of Rahab. Josh. 2:10, 11)
 - God waited nearly 500 years (Israel in Egypt for 430 yrs and then in the wilderness for 40 years.) before he brought judgment on the Canaanites.

9 The Conquest of Canaan

- Some important facts about God:
- Remember, critics of God's Canaanite annihilation commands fail to consider the whole biblical narrative.
 - God is omniscient. He knows who is wicked. He knows who will repent. He knows all contingent facts (including what each one would do if allowed to act).

- God is love. He never acts apart from or in disregard for his love for mankind.
 - As a loving God, he takes no delight in anyone's death, nor does he desire that anyone would perish.
 - Ezekiel 18:32 "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies... therefore repent, and live."
 - 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is...not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."

10 The Conquest of Canaan

- Some important facts about God (cont.):
 - God is a righteous judge, and acts righteously whenever he judges. ("There is none who does good, not even one." Ps. 53:4)
 - As the righteous judge of all the earth, God would not sweep away the righteous with the wicked.
 - Genesis 18:25 "Will not the judge of all the earth do right?" -Abraham, re: Sodom-
 - Jeremiah 5:1 "If there is one who does justice...then I will pardon her." -God, re: Jerusalem-
 - As a righteous judge, according to the total biblical narrative, God did not kill innocent people in Canaan.
 - God is sovereign. As our creator, we are God's and our lives belong to Him.
 - God brought identical judgment on Israel as he did on the Canaanites when Israel persisted in the same kinds of sins. (Many Israelites died at the hands of a conquering powers [Assyria and Babylon], most of the rest were expelled from the land and subjected to slavery.)

11 Was God Justified in Issuing Such Commands?

- God is holy and is justified in judging sin, at any level and at any time. (The testimony of Scripture is that each of us, apart from God's grace, is a morally depraved rebel against our Creator and under the curse of death, spiritual and physical. (Ps. 14:1-3; Rom. 3:10-18))
- God is omniscient. He knows who will repent and who will not repent. (Even children.)
- Atheists and skeptics often ask, "Why doesn't God do something about evil?" then protest when the bible says he actually does.
- In the case of the Canaanites the chief aim was expulsion, not annihilation. Destruction commands appear to be directed only at resisting Canaanites. There is no command to pursue those refugees who left the land ahead of the conquest.
- Children who have been abused and/or molested or grow up in wicked and violent environments tend themselves to perpetuate that wickedness and those abuses on others.
- Many Christians believe children who die before the age of accountability go to the presence of God.

12 Can God's Conquest Commands Be Used to Justify Violent Conquest Today?

- Jews throughout history, as a people, never used these passages to warrant military conquest at a later date.

- Christianity, as a whole, has never seen these passages as warranting religious violence or conquest. (Not even during the Crusades.)
- God's dealing with people since Jesus has been through the Gospel. In neither the Old or New Testaments has he ever called for the spread of either the Jewish or Christian faiths through military conquest.
- Singular exceptions to the preceding points on the part of some religious fanatics are cases where the passages have been lifted out of the essential context. (Much like the atheists and critics do with the passages in question.)

13 Slavery in The Old Testament

- Historically, slavery had been practiced world-wide in virtually all societies in which an individual could produce sufficient surplus to make it profitable, or there was sufficient wealth to accommodate owning slaves. All early empires practiced slavery.
- In the patriarchal era and in ancient Israel, slavery was more akin to indentured servanthood than to the chattel slavery of antebellum America.
 - It was a safety net for the poor and disadvantaged in a patriarchal/tribal culture.
 - A patriarchal/tribal culture, such as in the ANE, had no other institutional mechanism to address severe poverty and starvation, or to accommodate people who had lost their connection to a patriarchal clan. (e.g. Hagar in Gen. 21)
 - It was frequently volitional, entered into to avoid extreme poverty, starvation, or cultural isolation.

14 The New Testament on Slaves

- The Apostle Paul and other N. T. writers did not condemn slavery or call for its abolition.
 - It would have been unrealistic to call for the immediate overthrow of such an entrenched world-wide, millennia-long, aspect of the social and economic structure.
 - Consider what would have happened to the comparatively small Christian community if it had been perceived by Rome to be an element of, or to be encouraging, a slave revolt.
 - Rome had very strict restrictions of manumissions, making any general call to Christians to free their slaves a perceived direct threat on Rome.
 - New Testament teachings eventually led to Christianity effecting the abolition of slavery not once, but twice in Western societies.

15 Refuting the Use of the Bible to Justify Slavery

- Attempts to justify slavery from the bible were rooted in a flawed hermeneutic and racism.
- Though God tolerated and regulated slavery, he has in the past tolerated and regulated other human behavior of which he clearly disapproved.
 - Divorce: God clearly states he hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), yet he permits and regulates it due to the hardness of human hearts, though it violates his creational intent. (Matt. 19:8).

- Polygamy: God's instructions re: marriage in Genesis (Gen. 2:24) as well the teachings of Jesus (Matt. 19:9) and Paul (1 Tim. 3:2) clearly indicate that polygamy was outside of God's plan, yet God permitted and regulated it.
- Slavery under the Mosaic law was not a parallel to the chattel slavery of Antebellum America. It was more equivalent to indentured servanthood.
- The Mosaic Law prohibited kidnapping as a capital offense. Chattel slavery in Antebellum America was based on the practice of kidnapping.

16 Refuting the Use of the Bible to Justify Slavery

- The teachings of Jesus to love one's neighbor as oneself, and to do unto others as you would have them do to you, are impossible to obey while using one's power to enslave another.
- The New Testament teachings on the dignity of all humans (the Imago Dei), free will, the oneness of the Church, and the full inclusion of slaves in all the fellowship, functions, and offices of the church obviates the practice of slavery and eradicates its racial justification. Historically, the church has predominantly understood this.
- Paul's letter to Philemon, eventually circulated throughout the churches and recognized as canon, anticipates Philemon's "obedience" (v. 21) implying that Paul's "request," though expressed gently (vv. 8-10), was in fact a command.
- For the early church to openly denounce slavery and overtly call for the manumission of slaves would have been interpreted by Rome as encouraging a slave revolt and would have resulted in a crushing response from Rome as it did in other slave revolts.

17 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #1: The Crusades were an unjustified and unprovoked military aggression by barbarous Europeans against peaceful and enlightened Muslims.
- Facts:
 - Seljuk Turks had conquered the Holy Land and much of Byzantium, and were moving rapidly towards Constantinople.
 - The militant Turks were committing horrific barbarisms on Christians in the Holy Land.
 - Western Christendom launched the Crusades only after a plea from the Emperor of Byzantium for assistance.
 - The Crusades were launched as a war of defense, not of aggression, according to the principles of Just War Theory.

18 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #2: The Crusades were an attempt to gain riches and land for individual European families, and the first European foray into colonization. Europeans needed to provide for an "excess of sons" who could not inherit family lands and wealth in Europe.
- Facts:

- There was no promise of either wealth or land to the Crusaders. The personal cost to Crusaders involved debt, mortgaging of entire estates, and often bankruptcy.
- It was not an “excess of sons,” but typically leading members of families who led their relatives on Crusade.
- The chance of survival from a Crusade was less than 50%.
- The Crusader Kingdoms were not colonies that provided resources and wealth back home. They were a heavy financial and strategic burden on the West (which is what led to the eventual failure of the Crusades).

19 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #3: The Crusades were an attempt to spread Christianity by the forceful conversion and subjugation of Muslims.
- Fact:
 - The motivation or intention of converting Muslims to Christianity did not play a role in the call to Crusading.
- Myth #4: Muslims have held a grudge against Christians for the Crusades since the Middle Ages. The 9/11 attacks were a Muslim response after more than a millennium of resentment of Western civilization that began with the Crusades.
- Fact
 - So-called Muslim resentment was only aroused beginning around the beginning of the 20th century. Two primary causes of that resentment:
 - The decline of the Ottoman Empire (European advances into previously Ottoman territory.)
 - The Establishment of the State of Israel.

20 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #5: The Old Testament war commands were the motivation and justification for the Crusades which were simply a continuation of a tradition of holy wars.
- Facts:
 - Christianity had no previous tradition of holy wars.
 - Old Testament war texts were not used to justify the Crusades or to motivate would-be crusaders.
 - In Medieval times the Joshua war texts were typically understood in Christian theology as a metaphor representing the church in Christian evangelism.
 - The primary biblical texts used to justify and motivate the Crusades were the Gospels and the teaching of Jesus re: loving your neighbor, the life of discipleship, etc.

21 Popular Mythology of the Crusades

- Myth #6: The Crusaders were barbaric and uncivilized invaders who sought to conquer the chivalrous, civilized, and sophisticated Muslims
- Facts
 - It must be remembered that this is medieval warfare, not 21st century warfare.

- It was, in part, Islamic barbarisms against Christian pilgrims and those living in Palestine which precipitated the Crusades in the first place.
- Prior to and throughout the Crusades there were numerous instances of Muslim brutality and massacres.
 - Much is often made of Ayyubid Sultan Saladin (sultan of Egypt and Syria) having spared the lives of the Christians when he retook Jerusalem in 1187 as evidence of Islamic civility. But Jerusalem was the exception. Saladin was otherwise notoriously brutal in his treatment of captured combatants, sometimes personally participating in the slaughter of captives.
- There were cases of shameful Crusader barbarisms. These were clearly wrong, and should be acknowledged. (Though some that are popularly thought to be so are misunderstood or exaggerated.)

22 **The Crusades: An Assessment**

- The Crusades were not unprovoked, but a response to brutal Seljuk Turkish atrocities in the Holy Land and the threat to Byzantium. There was no history of a Christian tradition of holy wars that preceded or precipitated the Crusades. Old Testament war texts were not used in calls to Crusaders. In the medieval era those texts were viewed as metaphors for the Church in evangelism.
- The Crusades were not an attempt to Christianize Muslims nor the first foray into European colonization. They were not conducted for land or loot.
- The Crusaders were not barbarians bent on the conquest of the culturally sophisticated, peaceful, and enlightened Arabs. Tales of medieval atrocities and brutalities are numerous on the part of both Arabs and Crusaders.
- Crusaders themselves consisted of many devout, pious, self-sacrificing men who believed themselves to be answering Christ's command to love their neighbors and lead lives of discipleship. They were accompanied by many others who were "louts, brigands, and killers" (Hart).
- After the first Crusade, subsequent endeavors were sporadic, limited, inconclusive, and seemingly pointless. (Hart)
- It is misleading and historically inaccurate to represent the Crusades as either a completely unjustified and morally reprehensible Christian endeavor, or as every aspect of the Crusades being justified by Islamic atrocities, threats, and aggressions. The Crusades are an extremely complex story covering a period of two hundred years, multiple individual Crusades, and countless battles.

23 **Next Week**

- Origin of Orthodoxy and Western Progress