

1 Faith and History

- 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 5/12/18)
- Peter J. Williams, lecture, Moral Objections to the Old Testament?: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0rCsQixNIg> (last accessed 5/16/20)
- 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 5/12/18)
- Clay Jones, lecture, Killing the Canaanites was Justified Capital Punishment, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4fv8apO3_4 (last accessed 5/27/17)
- Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, Did God Really Command Genocide? (Baker Books, 2014)

3 A Judeo-Christian View of History

- Christianity is a historical faith. If you do away with the history underlying the faith, the teachings of Christianity cease to have meaning.
- With most or all other religions, you can do away with the history altogether and the teachings of the faith are essentially unchanged.
- Christian view of history is linear rather than cyclical. History (time) has a beginning and a telos (and end in view).
 - History is important because it leads to a goal.
 - Progress is desirable and attainable.

4 The Christian Apologist's Concerns

- Christian faith and history are inextricably linked together since Christianity is the story of God's acting in human history.
 - As Christian apologists, we cannot allow unbelievers and skeptics to define, distort, or discount the history of God's working in and through his people, both in biblical times and in the ongoing history of the church.
- Christianity's successes and contributions—
 - often ignored or dismissed.
- Christianity's failures—
 - often exaggerated.
- Misunderstandings and mistaken ideas about Christian history.

5 Some Questions from History

- The Conquest of Canaan and other annihilation commands.

- Miracles in the Bible.
- Christianity and the fall of Rome.
- Constantine, the first Christian emperor.
- The “Dark Ages”.
- Witch hunts.
- Slavery.
- Exploitation of the New World.
- Christian missions and “exploitation”.

6 Understanding the Past

- Ignorance of the Ancient Near East (ANE) leads to much misunderstanding of Biblical history.
 - e. g. The role of covenants in the culture.
 - e. g. The structure and importance of the patriarchal nature of 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.

7 The Conquest of Canaan

- What is really at stake in people’s objections to the conquest accounts?
 - Is the bible, particularly the portions re: the conquest of Canaan, God’s word?
 - What is the character of God as represented by the Old Testament?
- 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.

8 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. God's 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.

9 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.

10 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.

11 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.

12 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."

13 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.

14 The Conquest of Canaan

- Is God a racist, as some charge, because of the destruction commands?
 - All families of the earth are to be blessed through Abraham.
 - God's commands to drive out the Canaanites was based on a moral assessment of the Canaanites, and not on any supposed superiority or inferiority of any racial group. (Deut. 9:4, 5)
 - 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.)
 - The inclusion of other races in God's redemptive plan, even from those peoples judged by God.
 - e.g. Ruth, the Moabitess
 - e.g. Rahab, the Canaanite harlot, and her family.

15 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.

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

- This was a one-up situation, never again to be repeated in Scripture or history.
 - The unique situation of a time and a land.
 - A specific land conquest was in view.
 - A specific time period was in view.
 - God specifically prohibited such steps against any peoples outside the bounds of the land promise (including against refugee Canaanites who fled).
 - 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.)
 - Singular exceptions to the previous two 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.)

17 **Can God's Conquest Commands Be Used Today?**

- 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.
- The canon of Scripture is now closed, so no person or people can legitimately claim to have such authority from God now or in the future.
 - The conquest had to do with a unique situation in Israel's history, never again repeated.
 - The conquest had to do with a unique situation in redemptive history, which can never again be repeated.

18 **A Christian View of God's Judgment on Canaan.**

- Why are we troubled by the destruction commands?
 - Is it a lack of faith?
 - Or should we be troubled by such judgment?
- How should we as Christians view these accounts?
 - To not be bothered by the tragic loss of life and suffering would be inhuman, and unchristian.
 - It should invoke in us a deep sense of concern for the lost.
 - It should sober us to realize the holiness of God and the terrible consequences of sin.

19 **Next Week:**

- Christianity and Slavery