

THE BLOODY BIBLE #2 – THE CONQUEST OF THE CANAANITES:

This morning we are going to look at the conquest in the book of Joshua. At first, reading the violence initiated by God leaves us feeling quite troubled. Now, a bit of a backdrop to this story. God had led the people of Israel out of slavery, and out of Egypt. He was not only forming them into new people, a new nation, but taking them to a new land. What became known as the Promised Land. It wasn't just given to them. They had to take it. Possess it and, at times, conquer it. That's what brings us to one of the bloodiest scenes in the Bible. The slaughter of the Canaanites by the Israelites on the directive of God himself. Now, there's a lot of places where this pops up in the Bible. Let me read you an overview section that will serve it up and then we'll talk about it. **¹⁰ When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. ¹¹ If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. ¹² If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. ¹³ When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. ¹⁴ As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies. ¹⁵ This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby. ¹⁶ However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. ¹⁷ Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹⁸ Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God. Deuteronomy 20:10-18.**

Now, was that an indiscriminate massacre, an ethnic cleansing along the lines of Hitler and the Jewish holocaust, or Saddam Hussein's slaughter of the Kurds? Something that deserves not only universal condemnation, but a complete rejection of the God of the Bible?

The Canaanites were marked by the worst possible aspects of slavery (not that there's anything good about slavery, but they took slavery to the darkest place that you can take it), the worship of false gods, religious prostitution and sexual cults. In fact, scholars have called the Canaanite cult religion the most sexually depraved of any in the ancient world and perhaps the most depraved in all ancient history. They had given themselves over to every kind of sexual depravity, including incest and even bestiality. At worst, their worship of idols even included the human sacrifice of both children and adults. There's imagery of their cult sexual practices of bathing themselves in blood.

The Bible says that God had been tolerating this for over four-hundred years. Their wickedness kept increasing and increasing and God kept burying it and burying it. Four hundred years of

restraint and patience. Why? Because if you didn't know this, get it now. No matter what you've heard, judgment is always His last resort. But the wickedness reached a point where scripture talks about how God couldn't stomach it anymore and he vomited them out of his mouth.

Then we must deal with this scripture, ²¹**They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys. Joshua 6:21.** At first glance this sounds like genocide, which is **The deliberate and systematic extermination of an entire ethnic or national group.**

First, as we read, this was for the cities, not the outlying areas. In the culture of the ancient near east, most people lived in outlying areas, not the cities. The cities were military fortifications, for soldiers and military officers. It's not where the women and children, farmers and labourers were. So, in terms of warfare, this was not about civilians.

Second, in terms of the ancient language of the day, this was a common hyperbole, meaning exaggeration. It wasn't about literally taking every life but ensuring that the job was done. The war was won. The enemy was defeated. The task was completed. This was not genocide but a decisive military victory. A little bit like me saying wow! You should have seen our rugby team today. We absolutely thrashed them. Oh, yeah, what was the score? 21-20.

When you study the language of Ancient Near Eastern cultures, this is very common. They would talk about how they destroyed every man, and then later talk about what they were going to do with their survivors. In other words, destroying everything meant winning big time. Not literally destroying everything. This was more about purifying than purging. Matthew Luynch in his book flood and fury comments, this **language exaggerates the extent and severity of the killing as was common in ancient warfare.**

We also, think that Israel must have had a great army. Well compared to other armies, they were actually quite weak. Why? Because God wanted them to know that it was he and not them that won the victories and ushered them into the promised land. ⁴**After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you.** ⁵**It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Deuteronomy 9:4-5.**

There was also something else going on. We have these weird references to Nephilim. These were probably the people that scared the original spies who went to the land of Caanan. All except Caleb and Joshua, of course. ⁴**The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also**

afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. Genesis 6: 1-4. This strange reference to the Nephilim seems to refer to fallen angels mating with human women and producing giant human beings.

Then we discover them again in Numbers, ³² **And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” Numbers 13: 32-33.** This leads The Old Testament scholar Matt Lynch in his book *Flood and Fury*, to say this; **this should warn us off as purely human reading of the Canaanites. There is a superhuman, supernatural quality to these opponents' Israel faces. There is some overlap with the kinds of warfare Jesus wages against demonic forces in The Gospels.**

Then God makes it clear that any success for the Israelites is due to God and not any righteousness of their own. **Hear, Israel: You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. ² The people are strong and tall—Anakites! You know about them and have heard it said: “Who can stand up against the Anakites?” ³ But be assured today that the LORD your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire. He will destroy them; he will subdue them before you. And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, as the LORD has promised you.**

⁴ **After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, “The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.” No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. ⁵ It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ⁶ Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people. Deuteronomy 9: 1-6.**

With this verdict of ‘stiff-necked’ Moses pricks Israel’s balloon of inflated self-esteem and sets the stage for his portrayal of the Israelites fundamentally flawed character. They really have nothing to commend them to God. No physical greatness, ⁷ **The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were**

the fewest of all peoples. Deuteronomy 7:7. Their election, occupation of the land and prosperity are all gifts of God granted to them inspire of their lack of merit.

Centuries later with this text ringing in everyone's ears Stephen accused the members of the Sanhedrin of being stiff-necked and uncircumcised oof heart. ⁵¹ **"You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Acts 7:51.** I like the comment of Daniel Block in his commentary on Deuteronomy, **Moses demonstrates that the Israelites had been undeserving of the mission to which God had called them; from the beginning they had demonstrated that they were fundamentally depraved and if they had been rescued from Egypt and would be handed the promised land as their grant, these were privileges a granted by grace alone. By Grace, not Merit.**

As Paul reminded Titus, ³ **At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. Titus 3:3-8.**

Then in the New Testament we see God in human form deeply committed to non-violence, justice and peace. Jesus suffers extreme violence to be with his people and suffers what they deserve. Jesus calls his people to put away the sword and choose the way of suffering love with himself as the supreme example. God does not change from Old Testament to New Testament. He's just as committed to protecting the vulnerable and those in need. ³⁷ **"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25: 37-40.**