

## God, the Israelis and the Canaanites

Christians stand accused by atheists and skeptics alike that the slaughter of people created by God, in particular the Canaanites, is condoned by the religion.

There is no easy answer, even for Christians. However the following points deserve more consideration.

1. Some of our ideas of ancient civilizations might be idealized to the point that we consider that they were all innocent cultures, each having its own distinctives. We should learn to tolerate such and not make demands on their conformity to, say, religious belief in one Creator God rather than the inclination to worship many gods.

However many are not aware of the historical records of the horrendously inhuman acts of the Canaanite tribes, such as child sacrifices. That is not the problem, they say. The problem is why a God of love should have the Canaanites exterminated.

2. But that is precisely the problem.

God does not spare us the description in the Bible of their deviant sexual acts of sodomy, bestiality, temple prostitution and their cruel child sacrifices. (Leviticus 18: 21-24, 20:3)

The command given to Israel concerning the Canaanite nations is explained:

“ . . . 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.” (Deuteronomy 20:18)

God commanded the destruction of the Canaanites to save Israel and the rest of the ancient world from being corrupted by their loathsome practices.

The reverence due to God as our Creator, especially of His holiness, has all but disappeared, even among Christians. God is no more than a benevolent fog who makes no moral demands on man's conduct while he behaves as badly as he likes.

3. We should be clear about something else. When Israel ignored God's clear command and yielded to the allurements of the loathsome Canaanite sins the LORD their God did not spare them their just punishment.

Both Israel and Judah were destroyed as nations and were delivered into the hands of foreign powers, Assyria and Babylon. God has even abandoned His Temple in Jerusalem in disgust.

There is no favouritism with God where persistent evil is concerned. This may be too offensive a point for modern multitudes to accept. We have become inured to similar cruelties in modern dress. Today, we have an international multi-billion dollar trade in illicit drugs, the trafficking of thousands of innocent children for paedophiles that destroy their young lives forever and the slaughter of millions of unborn babies through abortions.

4. Something else to note. Deuteronomy 20:10-15 clearly instructs Israel to offer terms of peace to nations other than the Canaanite tribes. God showed His grace and mercy to individuals.

Among these, we may count Rahab, a prostitute and a Canaanite, and her family. Their lives were spared because they acknowledged the greatness and righteousness of the God of Israel. (Joshua 6:22, 23)

From the above, it is abundantly clear that there was no wanton extermination of human life, precious because He created man. Equally plain, His holy character and love will not allow the desecration of what He had originally created as good. (Genesis 1:31)

5. God has provided His answer to the above accusation.

"I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob."  
(Malachi 3:6)

The extermination of a people, however wicked, is not something God likes to do.

In the words of Isaiah 28:21, punishment is His "strange work" ( NIV ). Literally " His work is alien ". ( NASV marginal reading )

More to His character is the following passage from the prophet Jeremiah:

" If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I have planned." (Jeremiah 18:7, 8).

#### **The Canaanite nations had 400 years to amend their ways! (Genesis 15:13)**

6. Therefore the charge that God's call to Israel to exterminate the Canaanite nations renders Him inconsistent in His loving character is one that overlooks the totality of what He has revealed of Himself in the Bible.

Intractable wickedness and wilful disobedience call for judgment from God - whether it is that of the ancient world of Noah (Genesis 6), or the barbaric cruelty of Assyria (Isaiah 10:33) and Babylonia (Isaiah 47:5, 6) or the outright rejection of God's mercy and grace by Jerusalem (Luke 13:34, 35)

Let it also be known, as Scripture warns us:

"But know this, that in the last days, perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters. Proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy . . . slanderous, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God . . ." (2 Timothy 3:1 - 4)

7. BUT there is hope. It is abundantly true that God is love.

"He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him." (Psalm 103:10, 11)

And for the remedy for our sin God has provided the Saviour in Jesus Christ.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

Thanks be to God for His indescribable Gift! ( 2 Corinthians 9 : 15 )