

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

Understanding the Destruction of the Canaanites

Max Lucado | Glory Days | March 29-30, 2014

The Book of Joshua is a bloody book. It does no good to pretend it isn't. Not only is something evil-sounding taking place (the killing of large hordes of people) but that evil is happening to women, children, the elderly, and even animals. For many readers, this violence is a barrier to embracing the Book of Joshua, even the message of God.

Some attempt to get God out of this straitjacket by claiming that he didn't actually command these things, but instead they were misinterpretations of God or misrepresentations by biblical writers. It is nearly impossible to go this route and retain any sense of the inspiration of Scripture, however. God's instructions are too clear.

So, what do we do?

Here are some thoughts that have helped me.

God knew the Canaanite people. He knew their evil. He knew their unbridled violence and, most of all, he knew it six hundred years before Joshua entered the land. Gen 15:16 supports this claim: "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." God gave the people six centuries to respond and change their ways. The fact that Rahab did, is proof that they could have. The fact that God accepted Rahab, is evidence that he would have accepted them.

But they did not turn. Apparently, they grew more evil with time. "They do all kinds of detestable things the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods." (Deut. 12:31) One scholar called the Canaan of 13th Century BC a "snake pit of child sacrifice and sacred prostitution, [people who were] ruthlessly devoted to using the most innocent and vulnerable members of the community (babies and virgins) to manipulate God or gods for gain."

God not only knew what they had done; he knew what they would do. His omnipotent eye saw the destruction they would wreak in the future. So, he punished them. Isn't it his right to do so? Don't we, at times, want him to do so? We struggle when God doesn't punish injustice. (Why did God not intercede at the Holocaust?) Then we struggle when he acts justly, like he did here with the residents of Canaan.

We must approach this question with reverence: God is God. As difficult as it seems to embrace, he does not have to fit within our system of response. We may not understand his scheme of protection.

I'm thinking of my friend whose teenage daughter questioned this. She had a toxic boyfriend. He darkened her thought-life and caused her to question all the values that my friend had taught. It was as if the boy had cast a spell over his daughter. So, my friend demanded that the two break up. When they refused, he decided to move the family. He resigned from his job and put his house on the market.

Can you imagine the tantrum his daughter threw? In her mind, this was an overreaction. In his, it was necessary protection.

Those who accuse God of an overreaction in Canaan might take time to remember. We were not there. We do not know the Canaanites. We are not omniscient or sovereign, but God is.

And, God is full of grace. What he commands the Israelites to do to the Canaanites is unique in the Bible. At no other time and in no other location is Israel instructed to conduct aggressive military action. The vast majority of the stories in the Bible describe a God who rescues, redeems, displays patience and love. Hasn't he earned our trust?

I know my answer.

It's up to you to determine yours.

By the way, God will do this again. On the Day of Judgment, he will once and for all judge all that is evil. The devil, his underlings, and all his followers will taste the final and just judgment of God. On that day, at that moment, no one will question his right to do so.