

SHOULD WE KILL MUSLIMS? DEUTERONOMY 20:16

This video will deal with one of the so-called “Bible Difficulties” which are often used to challenge and criticise the Christian faith. The “problem” we are concerned with is the “Canaanite Conquest”, commanded by God in the books of Deuteronomy, and executed by the Israelites in the book of Joshua. In Deuteronomy, God commanded the Israelites to remove a number of nations and peoples out of the Promised Land, by killing all the men, women, and children living there. The difficulty of vindicating God for commanding this and His people for doing it, was raised in a letter I recently received. And, as it gives us a clear summary of this difficulty, and the questions it provokes, I will quote a section of it:

I'm still left with the difficult problem of Jericho...My question would be why were the Israelites so aggressive? I'm sure in those days there was plenty of land for all, was it really necessary to butcher the whole city bar one family? Yes, I know that the penalty for sin was death, but couldn't they have tried to at least convert them? This [murderous attitude] is the attitude the Muslims had when Mohammed was trying desperately to start his religion. This kind of story is one which many people use to preach against Christianity, especially Muslims. How can we call Muslims bloodthirsty? How can we call ourselves peaceful? If we take the [Old Testament] Israeli example of their destruction of Jericho, do we cut the throats of those that don't believe?

The question, then, is, “Should we kill our spiritual enemies?” Or, in the context of our letter-writer, “Should we kill Muslims?”

Let me make three introductory points. Firstly, when faced with people asking you questions about the Bible, you should enquire, “Who is asking the question?” If it is a sceptical cynic simply out to trip you up or make you look foolish, there is not much point in trying to answer the question? Even if you supply a reasonable answer to such a person, they will just scoff and move on to the next cynical question. However, if the questioner is a genuine seeker after the truth, or is a sensitive Christian who is troubled by this problem (as is our correspondent above), then every effort should be made to supply an answer.

Secondly, let us remember that on this difficult issue we cannot give a complete answer, an answer which ties up every loose end, an answer which solves every part of the puzzle. God’s plans are too vast and long-term for us to figure out with our puny intellects. There are times when we just have to put our hands over our questioning mouths and say, we will submit, we will trust, even when we cannot understand or explain.

Thirdly, some negatives. The Canaanites were not killed because Israel were good. Israel were explicitly forbidden from coming to this conclusion.

Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee (Deut.9:4)

Neither were the Canaanites killed because God was bad. We must not think that God’s actions were arbitrary, capricious, or bad-tempered. As we shall see, there was wise, reasonable, and thoughtful purpose behind the command to kill the Canaanites. Finally, we must disagree with those who explain this policy by proposing that God changed between the Old and New Testaments – from angry to loving, from wrathful to gracious. As the catechism says, “God is unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.”

What then can we say in defence of God’s commands and the Israelite’s actions? We would like to make ten brief points.

1. The Canaanites were some of the most wicked people that ever lived

Over recent years, historians and archaeologists have uncovered numerous clues and artifacts which clearly portray the moral, social, and spiritual depths which the Canaanites had sunk to. They were indescribably, and almost unimaginably, depraved. By some reckonings, they were probably about the third most wicked race that ever lived – after Noah’s generation, and the people of Sodom and Gommorah. And, as such, far from being innocent victims of an unjust and cruel foreign policy, they were a moral cancer endangering the whole human race. The kindest thing that God could do for humanity, then, was to cut out every root and fibre of these wicked people, whose lifestyle invited widespread international divine judgment.

Moreover, God had given the Canaanites plenty of time to repent. Hundreds of years before, Abraham was told that though the Caannaites were evil, they would yet be given time to repent. Their iniquity was not yet full (Gen.15:16). God had given them time, but now God gave them up. Their iniquity was now full to overflowing, and so, therefore, was God’s anger and judgment.

Also, even in this display of God’s holy justice, we find mercy in God’s offer of peace to the more peripheral Canaanite cities (Deut.20:10-11). If they surrendered to Israel, they were to be spared. And, even if they didn’t, Israel were to spare the women and children in these cities.

Application

Do we not see here a picture of Gospel grace to evil and wicked men and women everywhere. God has announced the sentence of judgment on the whole human race. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." However, in the Gospel, terms of mercy and peace are whispered to those who have ears to hear. Have you taken this opportunity to surrender?

2. It impressed upon the Israelites the exceeding sinfulness of sin

On these killing fields the Israelites learned in a new and unforgettable way that, "The wages of sin is death." They saw the bloody and fatal consequences of sinning against God right in front of their eyes. But, some say, why was it necessary for hand-to-hand killing. Why did God not send a natural disaster – say, a plague or a flood? Well, by being God's personal executioners of wicked people, Israel would best understand God's hatred for sin. Instead of hearing the news of thousands of deaths in distant cities and lands, the deaths of the Canaanites were a daily, depressing, and exhausting experience. Imagine how awful to have awoken every day knowing that the cold-blooded killing of men, women and children was going to fill the day. Imagine what it must have felt like to go to bed after a day of such killing, knowing that many more days of this lay ahead. How fearfully and awfully suited to teach Israel the sinfulness of sin, which required such justice.

Application

One reason why people are unable to understand the need for the Canaanite Conquest, is the inability to understand how heinous and punishable sin is. The Canaanite Conquest was caused by their sinful rebellion against God. Is the Canaanite Conquest a cause of sinful rebellion in you? The more we leave behind our shallow views of sin, and understand more and more of its true nature, the more we will understand not just the Canaanite Conquest, but the grace that has spared and saved us who also deserved judgment and death.

3. The honour of God's attributes was at stake

One of the results of the Canaanite lifestyle, or should we say deathstyle, was that God's character was being impugned. People were looking at what the Canaanites were doing, without any apparent consequence and concluding, "God cannot be holy if he does not act against such behaviour." Or they would say, "If he is holy, he cannot be powerful, else we would see evident divine action." God's character was at stake.

So, the Canaanite Conquest helped restore the lustre of God's attributes. After it, onlookers would surely conclude, "Well, obviously God is holy and God is powerful."

But, it might be said, "Does not the killing of women and children put a stain on God's attributes?" Well, Israel's history reveals that it was often the heathen women who were a greater danger than the men. All the powers of Balaam and Balak could not touch Israel in Numbers 22-24, but in the very next chapter we read of the success of the Moabite women in making Israel sin (Numbers 25:1-5; 31:15-16).

The virtue of women is often one of the main restraints on immorality in society. But, when this is removed, women become more dangerous than men, and as we can see all around us, the degeneration of society accelerates.

What about the children, though? Was it really necessary for them to die? Well, it has been shown that very young children follow in the habits and morals of their parents, even if removed from them at a very early age. Even today, in parts of the Arab world, we can see the powerful effect of anti-Israel indoctrination at an early age. Any one of these Canaanite children could have grown into a Pharaoh or a Nebuchadnezzar.

Application

God is the potter and we are the clay. We must, therefore, be willing to be used and shaped by Him to show forth His attributes (Romans 9:21-23). "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another to dishonour?" God's honour is more important than ours. God's character is more important than our comfort.

4. It was God's way of saving the souls of some Canaanites

Terrible though the end of these Canaanite children was in this world, it is worth noting that they were probably spared something far worse – a lifetime of abuse and depravity followed by an eternity in hell. Canaanite children were often forced into temple prostitution, sodomy, sacrifice to idols, and other unspeakable practices. Early death spared them these traumas.

Also, if we believe that there is an age of responsibility in children, before which they will not be held accountable to God for their response to the Gospel because of their mental incapacity, then we can see that the Canaanite Conquest may well have been God's way of saving many Canaanite children not only from a traumatic life in this world, but also a from a

tormenting eternity in hell. Perhaps there are Canaanite children in heaven right now, thanking God that they were slain in infancy before they became culpable and answerable for their sins.

Application

You have perhaps lived a long and privileged life. Unlike these Canaanite children, you have been blessed with many temporal and spiritual blessings. But what have you done with them? Remember you will be held accountable.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. To whomsoever much is given, much shall be required (Luke 12:47-48).

5. The physical line of the Promised Messiah was under great threat

Occupation of the Promised Land was required to secure the continued existence of Israel as a nation. Abraham was promised a Seed and a land (Genesis 15), and the latter was necessary to secure the former. A land was required for Israel to be formed into a secure nation, and a secure Israel was required if the promised Messiah was eventually to come forth from it. This is why only the six or seven nations and peoples which occupied the Promised Land were to be exterminated, and the more distant peoples were offered peace.

Why though, it might be asked, could Israel not live side by side with the Canaanites? As our correspondent put it, was there not plenty of land? Well, Scripture records that the aggressors were often the Canaanites themselves. The Canaanite Conquest was based partly on the premise, "Kill or be killed. Exterminate or be exterminated." If Israel did not conquer, they would have been conquered, the Messiah's descent from Israel jeopardised, and with it the salvation of sinners everywhere. Out of love to humanity, physical threats to Israel's security had to be removed. It was "save none alive" so that, eventually, many might be saved alive (Dt.20:18). So, it was better that some lives perish than that God's truth, God's Messiah, and God's church disappear.

The subsequent history of Israel proved this very point. Israel's failure to root out the Canaanites resulted in the fulfilment of God's threat. "Those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land, wherein ye dwell" (Num.33:55).

Application

The whole of history leads up to, centres upon, and flows from the Messiah. God's plan for this world revolves around Christ. Everything else is secondary. Does your life lead up to, centre upon, flow from and revolve around the Lord Jesus? Is everything else secondary?

6. God commanded other nations to war against Israel at times

Old Testament wars were often judicial. They were God's way of punishing evildoers. As such, Israel was not exempt. There were times when God commanded other nations to go to war against Israel for their sins to teach Israel not to presume upon God's favour (Jer.4:19-31)

Application

"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor.10:12). Let us beware of presuming upon God's favour. Let us be warned that God will chasten those whom he loves, if they require it.

7. It was a temporary requirement at a unique time in redemptive history

There are once-for-all and unrepeatable events in the unfolding plan of God. For example, the Creation, the Exodus, the giving of the Law at Sinai, Christ's death, Pentecost, etc. To this we should also add the conquest of the Promised Land. The aggressive Holy War it required was limited to the seven named nations, at that one special period in history when God's people were being formed into a nation.

Application

Let us be careful about making exceptions our rules. Let us be aware of the danger of making a temporary one-off necessity a pattern for everyday Christian living. By so doing we "wrest the Scriptures" to our own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). The Charismatic Church's errors in the area of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are the result of failing to see Pentecost as a one-off unrepeatable event which was necessary to "kick-start" the New Testament Church by giving signs and wonders to confirm the "new" truths the Apostles were

preaching.

8. We should marvel at the longsuffering of God today

When we see the just judicial judgment which God visited on the Canaanites for their sins, we should marvel that He is not visiting us more severely today. Many of the evil Canaanite practices are among us. There is the blood-filled tidal wave of abortion sweeping away 200,000 British babies a year. There is the sodomy which is now not only tolerated but promoted in legislation, in our schools, and even in our national churches in Scotland and England. There is the false religion which is being given preferential treatment above the true religion of Christ. There is the blasphemy which fills the TV channels. There is the pornography which is destroying so many marriages.

Application

O, the longsuffering of God. O, the patience. O, the slowness to anger. However, perhaps in Islamic terrorism we are beginning to hear the distant whispers of divine judgment. Perhaps this is the new Babylon which, like the old, results in curtailed personal freedom and a captivity of national fear. Think of the terror which stalks us at home and abroad. Are these whispers of judgment not getting louder? Is the thunder getting closer? O that the longsuffering of God would lead you to repentance.

9. An idea of the final judgment is vividly set before us all

God is spoken of in Scripture as a “man of war” (Ex.15:3), and the Lord of hosts (“armies”). This war imagery is continued on into the New Testament when it speaks of the events leading up to and including the final judgment (2 Thes.2:5-10; Rev.16:16). In other words, the Canaanite Conquest is a foreshadowing of Christ’s Conquest.

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. ¹² His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. ¹³ And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (Rev.19:11-16).

Application

Are you ready for this final battle. Which side will you be on? Will you be with the Conqueror or the conquered? If only souls were more concerned with and interested in Christ’s conquest than the Canaanite conquest, how many more souls would be saved and safe. May consideration of the Canaanite Conquest save you from Christ the Conqueror.

10. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual

As we have already said, this period of conquest was limited in time. The weapons of that time must be sheathed, blunted and broken. The New Testament Church has no right to take the sword to advance the cause of Christ in an aggressive way. When Jesus came he said, “My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence” (Jn.18:36). But he has not left his people defenceless. He has provided them with both defensive armour and aggressive weapons.

Therefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; ¹⁵ And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph.6:13-17).

Should Christians kill Muslims, then? Of course not. But we should wage spiritual war against them with spiritual weapons.

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor.10:4-5).

They may come to us with bombs and bullets and terror. We come with the almighty power of words and love and peace. It may, of course, be necessary for a nation state to take military action to protect the citizens entrusted to its care (Rom.1:3-4). However, we are speaking here of the response of individual Christians on a personal level – and that is to love Muslims “to death” – love them till they are converted to Christ one by one and Islam dies out. Or, should we say, “love them to life.”

Let the whole world know that Evangelical Christians are the Muslim's greatest friends, the Roman Catholic's greatest friend, the secular State's greatest friends – even if they treat us as if we were their greatest enemies and wish to even kill us. We come to you, our enemies, with a crucified and risen Christ. We come to you with the Christ who said, "I am come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly". We come to you with the Christ who loved the very enemies who tortured him to death, "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do." We set Him before you and say, "Look and live." O false religions, look to the incomparable and all compelling Christ.

We bring you not terror, but the "Touch of the Master's Hand.

It was battered and scarred,
And the auctioneer thought it
Hardly worth his while
To waste his time on the old violin,
But he held it up with a smile.
"What am I bid, good people", he cried,
"Who starts the bidding for me?"
"One dollar, one dollar, Do I hear two?"
"Two dollars, who makes it three?"
"Three dollars once, three dollars twice,
Going for three", But, No,
From the room far back a grey haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow,
Then wiping the dust from the old violin
And tightening up the strings,
He played a melody, pure and sweet,
As sweet as the angel sings.
The music ceased and the auctioneer
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said "What now am I bid for this old violin?"
As he held it aloft with its' bow.
"One thousand, one thousand, Do I hear two?"
"Two thousand, Who makes it three?"
"Three thousand once, three thousand twice,
Going and gone", said he.
The audience cheered,
But some of them cried,
"We just do not understand."
"What changed its' worth?"
Swift came the reply.
"The Touch of the Masters Hand."
And many a man with life out of tune,
All battered with bourbon and gin,
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd
Much like that old violin.
A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,
A game and he travels on.
He is going once, he is going twice,
He is going and almost gone.
But the Master comes,
And the foolish crowd never can quite understand,
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
By the Touch of the Master's Hand.

1. I could almost wish that all the babies born into families of wicked influence might be slain in infancy, were it not for the hope that some concerned Christian will carry to them the saving gospel of the Son of God.¹

God's grace in dealing with sinners: though he might most justly and easily destroy them, yet, having no pleasure in their ruin, he proclaims peace, and beseeches them to be reconciled; so that those who lie most obnoxious to his justice, and ready to fall as sacrifices to it, if they make him an answer of peace, and open to him, upon condition that they will be tributaries and servants to him, shall not only be saved from ruin, but incorporated with his Israel, as fellow-citizens with the saints.²

¹Torrey, R. 1998, c1996. *Difficulties in the Bible : Alleged errors and contradictions*. Woodlawn Electronic Publishing: Willow Grove

²Henry, M. 1996, c1991. *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* . Hendrickson: Peabody