

TOPIC XVI

THE SLAUGHTER OF THE CANAANITES DURING THE CONQUEST UNDER JOSHUA'S COMMAND

Those who would categorically deny that God loves the world and cares about the eternal destiny of people often point to the slaughter of the Canaanites as proof of the fallacy of this proclamation. We will discuss this in detail in a moment and the discussion will bleed over into next week.

But to further illustrate the viewpoint of the world and the confusion of many Christians, I quote novelist David Baldacci who writes these thoughts about his female protagonist. She is thinking historically about evil rulers and their hideous acts and says, "She had long since given up notions of a higher power guiding them all. She had done so for a simple reason. An all-knowing, all powerful, benevolent god would never allow the monsters to roam the earth, killing whomever they desired. So for her, their mere presence in the world ruled out any possibility of a benign supreme being."¹

In a like manner, novelist J.A. Jance, a woman who had just lost her small child to a heart transplant said to her friend, "How could God do something like this to us. How could He make my baby so sick that the only way to save her is for some other mother's baby to die? That's not right. That's not fair."²

Emotionally I am very sympathetic to people who are so saddened by the evil and tragedy in the world. Biblically, I understand the answer to these questions, but still in distress over all of it. But most Christians, or even theologians or philosophers do not have any kind of real answer to these plaguing questions. Some of the responses are just awful.

For example, in a twisted way of trying to defend their point of view about God's love, Christian teachers and preachers often propose the theme that tragedy and disaster are God's way of waking people up. No matter they sugar coat it, bottom line, they teach that God kills, maims or inflicts terrible pain on multitudes of people so He can save others. This may sound blunt, but that is what it amounts to. I will categorically declare that this is not the truth at all and anyone who says or even suggests this is in terrible confusion, fails to understand scripture and is more

¹ David Baldacci, "Deliver Us From Evil", Grand Central Publishing, April, 2010, pg. 69

² J. A. Jance, "Rattlesnake Crossing", Avon books, 1998, pg. 177

likely in ignorance or deception. We answered the question about the cause of evil and natural calamity in the world last week.

Unfortunately, this afore mentioned teaching is so prevalent we hear it every time some catastrophe occurs. It is a belief so difficult to abandon and held by so many that my objection to it could well fall on deaf ears. There is no question that tragedy can be used to focus a person's attention on His mortality and spiritual condition before God. But I am here to declare that:

Our God is love and in Him is no darkness, evil, or wickedness at all. (I John 1:5) I believe that God takes no "pleasure in wickedness" and that, "no evil dwells with Him." (Psalm 5:4) I believe the Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward all, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9) I believe, "God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked person turn from his way and live." (Ezekiel 33:11) I believe it is the kindness of God leads to repentance along with the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience." (Romans 2:4) I believe that those that teach that God causes evil and tragedy, clash with the goal of our God and Savior, "who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (I Timothy 2:3-4) I believe The Lord is so intent on this goal and so loves the world that, "He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." I believe that, "Jesus did not come into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him should be saved." I believe these beliefs of mine have scriptural support. Perhaps you recognized that all I did there was quote the Bible.

But I get objection after objection to the point I am currently engaged in a lengthy written dissertation on the subject. (See: footnote 3 below)

The issue is simply this. Too many preachers and teachers have no idea what to do with either the problem of evil or natural disasters so they draw an erroneous conclusion placing it all at the feet of God using some platitude such as, "God has a reason for everything", or "God did this to strengthen you", or "God took your loved one or your child because He needed him more than you did", or the classic, "God is in control and has a purpose in all of this". This is a tricky one.

First, if He is in control, how come He didn't prevent this horror and incredible pain in the first place? This is a legitimate question. During the years of Hitler, Stalin, and Khrushchev alone, some fifty million people were tortured, murdered,

and mutilated and it was all permitted apparently by our loving God who did nothing to stop it. If He is in control, how could these things happen? Don't you ever wonder about this????

On the other hand, many Christians realize that it is the entire redemptive plan and its glorious outcome that God is in control of in spite of what man or Satan tries to do to dismantle it. Still, we need to be careful when we use that phrase around those who are suffering or have suffered such great loss and pain or look at the world's monsters and wonder where God is in the midst of it all.

But too many Christians have no idea about God's purposes in what happens, why it happens or why God does not prevent it. So, they try to find a way to justify God's doing all this evil or defend God and His love in the midst of it. They mix a little theology, philosophy, their own personal opinion which they think so highly of, as well as ideas from others who also have no clue and come up with some sort of spiritual sounding stew they pass off as truth. And Christians eat it up. If you have a big name, it would be far too embarrassing to say, "I honestly do not know." How refreshing that would be.

Now I readily admit that the issue about the problem of evil and human suffering and what role God plays amidst it all is not easy or simple to figure out. But it takes more than guesswork, personal opinion, cursory assumptions about scripture or foolish platitudes to get any kind of a handle on it. But it can be discovered.³

I have selected one of the dozens of objections about the truth of God's love for the world to illustrate my point. That would be the question about the slaughter of the Canaanites during the conquest of Palestine under Joshua's command. Men, women, children and animals all slaughtered. I doubt you hear much taught about this. Historically the church tends to avoid this discussion. I think it doesn't know what to do about it. Can't answer it. Critics often bring this up as proof of an unjust God full of hatred, vindictiveness, vengeance and wickedness. A God upon whom one cannot trust or rely. A God which the scripture itself claims to be love on the one hand, but is often angry and vengeful on the other. Some well meaning Christian teachers sugar coat this by claiming that the Canaanites were an awful and vicious people - little more than animals I suppose - who deserved to be destroyed because they were vermin in the earth or some sort of blight on

³ See: www.bibleclassroom.org - "Topical Studies" for expositions on the problem of evil.

humanity and shook their fists in God's face leaving Him little choice but to destroy them, how sad and tragic, bless their hearts.

Well, when I hear this kind of nonsense, as I am sure you have also, I think of Paul's constant reminders that none are righteous, not even one. He writes in I Corinthians 6:9-11 to believers,

“But you yourselves wrong and defraud--and believers at that. Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers--none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

So a legitimate question is, were all the Canaanites unredeemable? Well let's look at the truth about the Canaanites. In so doing we must consider two largely ignored facts about the conquest of the promised land.

First, Israel owned much of the land outright and had for centuries. Before Jacob and his children went to Egypt because of the famine and subsequently became enslaved there, who do you think owned the land they inhabited? They did. And they had lived there for over two hundred years, about the same length of time we have inhabited this country. How did they come to possess this land? The answer is it was legally settled upon or purchased by Abraham and his descendants fair and square.

The story begins in Genesis 13 and transpires throughout the book. In Genesis 13, Abram and Lot settled in the land as homesteaders. They were both quite wealthy as verses 2-6 tells us. 2: “Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold. 3: He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bethel, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, 4: to the place of the altar which he had made there formerly; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. 5: Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6: And the land could not sustain them while dwelling together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to remain together.”

There was no resistance to their settling in these places. In fact, they were welcomed. In due time, Lot headed East toward Sodom and Abram settled near

Hebron in Canaan. The relationship between Abram and the Canaanites was quite cordial. This is proven in an account in Genesis 23. 2: Sarah died in Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. 3: Then Abraham rose from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, 4: "I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me a burial site among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight." 5: The sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, 6: "Hear us, my lord, you are a mighty prince among us; bury your dead in the choicest of our graves; none of us will refuse you his grave for burying your dead." 7: So Abraham rose and bowed to the people of the land, the sons of Heth. 8: And he spoke with them, saying, "If it is your wish *for me* to bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and approach Ephron the son of Zohar for me, 9: that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he owns, which is at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me in your presence for a burial site." 10: Now Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth; and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the sons of Heth; *even* of all who went in at the gate of his city, saying, 11: "No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you; bury your dead." 12: And Abraham bowed before the people of the land. 13: He spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, saying, "If you will only please listen to me; I will give the price of the field, accept *it* from me that I may bury my dead there." 14: Then Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, 15: "My lord, listen to me; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between me and you? So bury your dead." 16: Abraham listened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver which he had named in the hearing of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, commercial standard. 17: So Ephron's field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over 18: to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. 19: After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field at Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. 20: So the field and the cave that is in it, were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth."

The word "field" is somewhat misleading. It is clear from the Hebrew that this was a large tract of land, even possibly a territory. Notice also, the deep respect between the Hittites or Canaanites and Abraham. Further, there is no mention of a dispute over the territory in which Abram or Lot settled. Even after being offered the land for free, Abraham insisted on buying it and the deal was set. One gets the

idea that the land was sparsely settled in those days and largely open to new arrivals. In fact, The Lord had told Abraham few years back that He would give the land to Abraham and his descendants.

Now again, decades later in Genesis 33:17-20, we have another account of legal settlement. 17: “Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth. 18: Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city. 19: He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. 20: Then he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.”

We will find later that the people of Shechem were exempted from being run out of the land as well as were many others. The why of this is simple, they were the legal residents, many descendants of Jacob who also recognized and worshipped God.

So first, Israel owned the land legally and when made captive in Egypt, tribes of foreigners came in and took it over. Happens all the time. Even the descendants of the Hittites who were so cordial to Abraham fought against Joshua over the land sold to Abraham by their ancestors. This would be much like you taking a lengthy trip or world tour or service in missions or the military over several years only to come home and find that your house and property had been confiscated and inhabited by squatters who refused to give it back or clear out. What would you do? Call the authorities? Well, in Joshua's day, who did he have to call upon? The land was given to Abraham and his descendants forever by God. We will see in a moment that the Canaanites were quite aware of this fact.

Following the exodus from Egypt, you will recall that Israel spent enough years in the wilderness to see the death of a generation of its own people. During this forty years, it became clear to the Canaanites, who had had full knowledge of what transpired, that only the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could have done the parting of the Red Sea and helped cause the defeat of the Amalekites, Amorites and other opposing peoples. They also knew that the land they now inhabited did not belong to them and that the God of the Israelites was returning them to the land.

How do we know this? Well, when Joshua finally brought the Israelites to the shore of the Jordan, you will remember that when Jericho was about to be attacked Rahab told the Israelite spies, (2:9) “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” Joshua 2:9-11

She and her household were spared because of her faith and clear understanding about God and His intentions for His people. The rest of the citizens could have chosen likewise, but decided to hold out even against what they apparently all believed to be true according to Rahab’s testimony. Here is what Exodus 15:14-18 tells us, 14: "The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. 15: "Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. 16: "Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone; Until Your people pass over, O LORD, Until the people pass over whom You have purchased. 17: "You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, The place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. 18: "The LORD shall reign forever and ever."

In addition, Joshua chapter 9 gives us a wonderful account about some of the Canaanites who sought protection from what they knew to be a sure slaughter of their cities if they didn’t relinquish the land to the proper owners. In verses 1-2, we have one decision by some Canaanites and in verse 3 and following we have another.

Let’s look at 9:1-2, 1: “Now it came about when all the kings who were beyond the Jordan, in the hill country and in the lowland and on all the coast of the Great Sea toward Lebanon, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, heard of it, 2: that they gathered themselves together with one accord to fight with Joshua and with Israel.” That is, against Joshua and Israel. What this resistance amounted to was a battle of the gods, the Canaanites trusting in their gods in battle against the God of the Israelites. That was one response to the homecoming of the Israelites. But there was another one.

3: When the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, 4: they also acted craftily and set out as envoys, and took worn-out sacks on their donkeys, and wineskins worn-out and torn and mended, 5: and worn-out and patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes on themselves; and all the bread of their provision was dry *and* had become crumbled. 6: They went to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us." The men of Israel said to the Hivites, "Perhaps you are living within our land; how then shall we make a covenant with you?" 8: But they said to Joshua, "We are your servants." Then Joshua said to them, "Who are you and where do you come from?" 9: They said to him, "Your servants have come from a very far country because of the fame of the LORD your God; for we have heard the report of Him and all that He did in Egypt, 10: and all that He did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and to Og king of Bashan who was at Ashtaroath. 11: "So our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spoke to us, saying, "Take provisions in your hand for the journey, and go to meet them and say to them, "We are your servants; now then, make a covenant with us." 12: "This our bread *was* warm *when* we took it for our provisions out of our houses on the day that we left to come to you; but now behold, it is dry and has become crumbled. 13: "These wineskins which we filled were new, and behold, they are torn; and these our clothes and our sandals are worn out because of the very long journey." 14: So the men *of Israel* took some of their provisions, and did not ask for the counsel of the LORD. 15: Joshua made peace with them and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the leaders of the congregation swore *an oath* to them. 16: It came about at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were neighbors and that they were living within their land." (*Emphasis mine)

The outcome was that these Gibeonites were spared and allowed to remain within Israel and subject to them in spite of their deception. A promise had been made in the name of the Lord and Joshua stood by it. Joshua 9:27, "But Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD, to this day, in the place which He would choose." The remainder of the Canaanites who chose to fight over the land were vanquished but there were tens of thousands who relinquished their claim on the land and fled to establish new habitation elsewhere. These latter peoples are known today as the "smart people."

But there is more. One of the Canaanite tribes that gathered together to fight against Israel were the remainder of the Hivites. They were very unhappy that

some of their fellowmen from Gibeon had made this covenant with the Israelites.

Further spared were the Shechemites. Centuries before, a bond had been forged out of a conflict between Jacob and these people and Shechem became loyal to Israel and to the God of Israel and remained so for some 400 years. They were still loyal when Joshua invaded the land. They were exempted from destruction or ousting from the land. The rightful owners of the land were able to resettle without hassle. This was the case of many of the Canaanites scattered here and there in the land.

But the remainder, in spite of their knowledge of who really owned the land, and in spite of their knowledge and fear about the power of the God of Israel made the decision to band together and fight for a land that they had essentially robbed and refused to give back to the proper owners. They chose poorly. Religion, greed, pride, darkness and blindness possessed these remaining peoples and they suffered terribly. Not only did they lose the land they took over, but also the land they legitimately owned. There is more to the story, but these peoples are known today as the “stupid people” and they are still with us today.

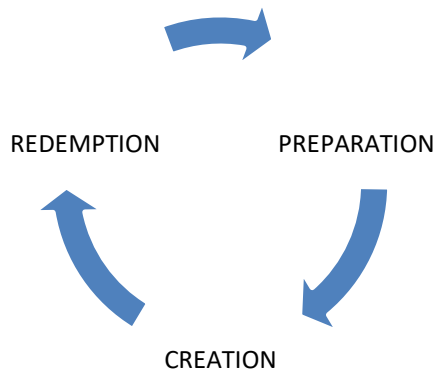
So, the cruel viciousness of a God is hereby dismissed as is the need to defend God for these events by a simple understanding of the facts. But there is more.

The question has been raised, “But why did the Israelites have to kill all the women, children and animals as well”? The answer is that unlike our western culture, the mid and far eastern peoples possess a sense of family oneness or unity. Theologically this is called the “solidarity of the family”. Simply put, a man, his wife and children as well as his property, and possessions including his flocks and herds, relatives and his ancestors and his descendants are all seen as an inseparable unit. For example, as the Patriarch goes, so goes everything and everyone. Even today, eastern religious practice, including Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism and all the rest will disavow and disinherit any family member who turns to another faith. They are dead to the rest of the family and rejected as heirs. In our culture, we are fiercely independent. We encourage individual religious choice. In one family you can have Catholics, Athiests, New Agers, Christians, and Buddhists and we applaud this expression of individual rights. Unheard of east of the Rock of Gibraltar. But it is spiritually disastrous. On the other hand you might remember Paul telling the Philippian jailer, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved you and your....” You know the rest.

You can find more about all of this in my controversial work on my web site entitled, “And What of the Children”.⁴

Thus, when Joshua attacked the Canaanites, it was a package deal and everyone involved were quite clear on that. But in spite of the stakes, the majority of Canaanite cities decided to fight against Israel and its God.

Secondly, in everything God does or does not do, He has an Irrefutable, unstoppable, inexorable, invincible intent and objective. This is revealed in the first chapters of Genesis and threads its way through the book until the end of Revelation. To summarize, I have placed a diagram below suggesting three key themes of God’s intent and objective. There is no order as they are inextricable from each other and explains God’s purpose in it all and recognizing that nothing in heaven or on earth can keep it from being accomplished.



In Genesis three, God promises redemption. The theme of redemption flows all through the entire Scripture. Redemption is simply God purchasing back people from their sin and their ownership by Satan. Those wishing to return to Him through faith are called, “The Redeemed”.

This redemption, however, was already planned, prepared and completed before creation. Let’s view these two together. Remember, the Lamb of God was crucified before the foundation of the world and Jesus existed, not just prior to Abraham, but prior to the creation of the universe and John states He, as the Word of God was the creator. Everything God did in creation was in preparation of man’s creation upon the earth and for his redemption. The first six days in the creation account are all preparation for the arrival of man and his life on this

⁴ www.bibleclassroom.org

planet.

Preparation is a major theme in Scripture. God is always ahead of man in preparing the way before man arrives, whether it be for Israel in the wilderness, or John the Baptist preparing the way of the Lord on man's behalf as prophesied all through the Old Testament, or in Jesus' declaration to His disciples that He goes to prepare a place for them so that where He is they may be also. In Revelation, John says, "And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

These three themes are central to God's purpose in creating the universe in the first place. His motive in doing so is love, not some eager desire to destroy the wicked. Remember, He takes no delight in the death of the wicked and does not wish any to perish. So much so, He gave his only Son to die for the sins of the world.

Nevertheless, He does not interfere with man's free choice, having given man full dominion and rule over the earth and a free choice to either place himself under God's care and love or not. He has never rescinded this gift nor does He override it to accomplish His purposes and promises to His people. From before creation, God determined that Jesus the Savior would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, be the descendant of David the king and of the seed of Abraham. Nothing would prevent this from occurring and every strange and impossible twist man could place upon His purpose in the history of God's people, God used to bring about man's redemption and fulfill His purpose and promise. It couldn't be thwarted and the glorious culmination promised to all that are His will not be thwarted either.

In regards to the Canaanites and all the others who would seek to blot out God's person, plan and purpose by acts of their own choices and mindsets, they will not have success and if they persist, they will suffer the consequences of such choices.

Thus it is incumbent to us to teach the truth in love and do all we can to bring others into the kingdom of God.