

INTRODUCTION

Few subjects have generated more ethical controversy for the Bible than the commands for and descriptions of Canaanite genocide (e.g., Deut. 2:34; 3:6; 7:1-2; 20:16-18).¹ From at least the days of Marcion (second century A.D.), divinely sanctioned violence in the Old Testament has been perceived as incompatible not only with the loving God revealed in Jesus Christ, but even with common human moral instincts. For Marcion, this perceived incompatibility led him to abandon the Old Testament and posit the notion of an "alien God." Harold O. J. Brown explains Marcion's belief: The creator of this world is alien to the true God He is the Yahweh of the Old Testament, a wild god, one who can rage, make mistakes, and repent, one who knows nothing of grace, but only strict justice.²

The controversy has not subsided over the centuries. As one critic has recently put it, "Where the Bible both inspired me and seemed to fail me, then, is on ethics: a moving accountability for the widow, the orphan, and the poor and commitment to liberation from oppression is joined to obliterating the Canaanites."³

THE SUBJECT OF GENOCIDE

Of non-Christians who call attention to the genocide passages in the Old Testament, many do so not to object to the existence of God but to judge the Bible and Christianity itself, the core charge

¹The term *Canaanite* will be used as a general term for the non-Israelite inhabitants of the land of Canaan.

²Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 61.

³Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), xi.⁴These observations are made from several personal witnessing experiences.⁵Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 4 *A Christian View of the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1982), 70.

being that the Christian concept of God is immoral.⁴ Some Christians are disinclined to offer any defense against this charge because believers, they insist, should not attend to the business of making God more palatable to non-Christians. This statement, while true in itself, makes the false assumption that the non-Christian has a complete and accurate understanding of God (and has found him, still, to be less than palatable). But most non-Christians have a distorted view of God and reality.

The goal is by no means to whitewash the Scriptures or modify the biblical portrayal of God. It is to *correct* basic misunderstandings that non-Christians have regarding God and man. If there is anything to be learned from the enormous example of Francis Schaeffer with respect to cultural engagement it is that honest questions deserve thoughtful answers.⁵

Also, attention should be given to the non-Christian's misperceptions of the Bible. If, indeed, two totally opposing ideas are both celebrated in the Scriptures one could rightly question the value of revelation altogether. The Bible does not ever present God's love in such a way that it contradicts his holiness, or even his wrath. This needs to be demonstrated.

Finally, there is the Christian himself. It is true that Christians cannot, with logical consistency, denounce the morality of God's orders, for to do so would amount to insubordination to the authority of him whose sovereignty the Christian's faith must necessarily acknowledge. But it is a fact that many Christians are, themselves, genuinely disturbed over the genocide passages and there is a substantial difference between this and pointing a finger in the face of God.

⁴These observations are made from several personal witnessing experiences.⁵Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 4 *A Christian View of the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1982), 70.

⁵Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, vol. 4 *A Christian View of the Church* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1982), 70.

Some Christian scholars have attempted to circumvent the problem of what the Canaanite destruction might mean to the character of God through creative interpretation. Ironically, in doing so they adopt a lower view of the Bible than some of Christianity's critics who--at least in this case--accept its historicity. The undesirable effect, in the end, is substituting the destruction of the Canaanites with that of the Old Testament.⁶ For those who wish to release God from his part (a favor God never requested), Merrill sets the record straight, "Such war was conceived by God, commanded by him, executed by him, and brought by him alone to successful conclusion."⁷

The purpose of what follows is to show that the objection to the Christian concept of God based on genocide passages originates not out of logical necessity, but out of subjective reactions to troubling texts.⁸ The intensity of these reactions suggests that genocide passages are taken as historical. Some who doubt the historicity of the Conquest nevertheless object to the Bible because they believe it endorses violence (albeit by means of representing myth as history).⁹ For the sake of discussion it will be assumed (and not defended) that God exists and that the Bible is historical and gives a trustworthy account of the activity of God where it speaks to it.

⁶C. S. Cowles argues for radical discontinuity between Jesus and the Old Testament. He attempts to resist going the way of Marcion while maintaining that the destruction of the Canaanites in particular and violence in general never reflected God's will. Old Testament texts that directly state otherwise (e.g., Num. 21:2-3; Deut. 2:33-34; 3:2-6; 7:2; 20:17; Josh. 10:40; 11:20) are either unjustifiably allegorized or abrogated in classic Koranic style by the "Christocentric hermeneutic." Cowles states, "The God revealed in Jesus never has been and never will be party to genocide of any sort, for 'God is love.'" It is a mystery how Cowles might escape the charge of attacking the Old Testament. His approach solves the problem of humanity sitting in judgment of God but replaces it with the hardly less problematic alternative of sitting in judgment of God's Word. This could not be more obvious when he states, "The problem of partial and even distorted concepts of God in the Old Testament has never been on God's side but on the side of the human mediators of that revelation. . . . there was something terribly wrong with fallen humankind's light-gathering capacity." (C. S. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," in *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, Counterpoints Series, ed. Stanley N. Gundry [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 26, 38-39).

⁷Eugene H. Merrill, "The Case for Moderate Discontinuity," in *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, Counterpoints Series, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 80-81.

⁸This is not to suggest that such subjective reactions are unnatural or even unwarranted, only that they are insufficient in forming important conclusions about God.

⁹Craigie grants the validity of their objection, stating, "Still the problem remains. For although the historical reality of the wars of conquest may perhaps be removed in this manner, the theological ideal remains." (Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978], 50).

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However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them--the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites--as the LORD your God has commanded you. 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 (Deut. 20:16-18).¹⁰

The critic does not need to make a case that the command to kill "anything that breathes" is troubling. The problem is compounded by narratives revealing the fulfillment of the command. For example, Josh 10:40 reports, "So Joshua subdued the whole region He left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded."

There are at least two ways to defend the divine command and the actions that followed. The first is to make general statements about God's existence, the trustworthiness of the Bible in revealing his perfect character, and the inappropriateness of man accusing such a God. Another approach--that taken here--specifically addresses the charge of divine immorality.

The critic's position would be unreasonable if the following can be proven: 1) that the destruction of the Canaanites was a means to an end, 2) that the end was sufficiently righteous, and 3) that no alternative means to this end are known to have existed.

GENOCIDE AS A MEANS TO AN END

The most abhorrent form of violence is that which is gratuitous and shown to be unconnected to any purpose. It is perfectly clear from the biblical text that genocide was not an end in itself. There was a distinct purpose for it.

While it is sometimes alleged that the purpose of the Canaanite destruction was racial, only a very cursory reading of the Old Testament could yield such a conclusion. There is no indication that

¹⁰All Scripture verses are taken from the New International Version. ¹¹See Deut. 1:28; 2:10,21; 9:2.

the Canaanites were held in contempt for racial reasons. Observations were made as to the size of some of them but only to draw attention to their formidability.¹¹

Lest the Israelites be confused, God puts this damper on their pride, ". . . it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you." (Deut. 9:4). It was not about Israel being righteous nor was it about anyone's race.

From the time of Abraham, provisions were made for the assimilation of non-Israelites. It was commanded that foreigners were to be circumcised (Gen. 17:12). Aliens were later allowed to participate in the Passover (Ex. 12:48) and offer sacrifices (Lev. 17:8; 22:18). They were afforded special protection (Ex. 22:21). They even faced the same penalties for breaking the Law (Lev. 20:2). Anthony Phillips observes, ". . . anyone could have become an Israelite irrespective of earlier race or creed simply by undertaking to obey that law."¹² As great a figure in Israel as King David, whom God chose to replace Saul and serve as a lasting dynastic head, had Moabite and Canaanite blood in his veins.¹³ There was certainly enough assimilation to argue against any idea of Israel being a "pure" race of Jacobites or having any intentions to be.

If the motivation for Canaanite genocide was racial it would be very difficult to explain those instances when God fought *against* Israel and *for* her enemies.¹⁴ And it would be nearly impossible to explain why God judged Israel for the wrongful deaths of the Amorite Gibeonites (2 Sam. 21:1). Especially noteworthy is the fact that in Deut. 13:12-18, the terms for "utter destruction (*hrm*),

¹¹ See Deut. 1:28; 2:10,21; 9:2.

¹² Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy*. The Cambridge Bible Commentary, eds. P.R. Ackroyd, A. R. C. Leaney, and J. W. Packer (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 60.

¹³ David's grandfather, Obed's mother was a Moabite and his father was half-Canaanite (Matt. 1:5-6).

¹⁴ See Deut. 28:7; Josh. 7:4-5; 1 Sam. 4:10; Jud. 2:15; Is. 63:10.

smiting (*nkh*), and burning (*srp*)" are used to prescribe action against Israelite towns in the case of apostasy.¹⁵ So, if not racial hatred, what was God's motivation for the Canaanite genocide?

A Holy Nation

It stands to reason that if God truly is loving he would desire to have a relationship with his creation. This necessitates divine revelation. God's holiness, however, places certain stipulations on how a relationship with his unholy creation might be attained.

Universal covenants failed, on account of mankind's wickedness, to preserve the relationship of sinful mankind to a holy God. Therefore, a more exclusive and defined covenant was required both to reveal God's holiness to man and ensure the conditions for the ultimate revelation in the coming Messiah. Green explains,

The failure of both those primeval covenants [those of Adam and Noah] to preserve religion among men, and to guard the race from degeneracy and open apostasy, established the necessity of a new expedient, the segregation of a chosen race, among whom religion might be fostered in seclusion from other nations, until it could gain strength enough to contend with evil . . . and overcome it, instead of being overcome by it.¹⁶

Therefore, to the degree that such an outcome was worth pursuing, any obstacles (human or other) would need to be eliminated. The Canaanite destruction, far from being an end in itself, was motivated by the need for Israel to be preserved as holy and reflect God's holiness.

A SUFFICIENTLY RIGHTEOUS END

It is obviously not enough to justify the Canaanite destruction by merely showing that it was part of a means to an end. What was the ultimate objective for God in setting apart a people as holy?

¹⁵Eugene H. Merrill, "The Case for Moderate Discontinuity," in *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, 71.

¹⁶William Henry Green, *Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 20.

Blessing for All Nations

C.S. Cowles, in stating the tragedy of the Canaanite destruction, fails to observe any significant distinctions between the Conquest and, for example, modern Rwandan genocide.¹⁷ If one is unjust then so the other must be. This view is simplistic in that it fails to recognize the unique and entirely unparalleled circumstances surrounding the Canaanite destruction.

God promised Abraham concerning his descendants, "[T]hrough your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed." (Gen. 22:18). Though it is possible that Abraham did not understand the blessing, God's ultimate purpose and plan was that the Messiah would be delivered through Israel, a people set apart as holy.

The survival of that very holiness was dependent on removing the influence of idolatry. God, in his omniscience, knew that the certain outcome of shared habitation would be syncretism and idolatry. Judgment would follow. Moses warned that if Israel failed to destroy the Canaanites they would cause Israel to sin against God by teaching them "to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods" (Deut. 20:18). The prophecy was fulfilled even before the Israelites entered the land when they were camped on the plains of Moab east of the Jordan (Num. 25:1-3), proving that this was not mere paranoid jealousy on the part of God.

Preserving Israel's holiness as the covenant people of God was an indispensable part of God's plan to redeem mankind. This ultimate purpose was to resolve the alienation of sin through the redeeming work of the Messiah, thereby reconciling man to God. A threat to Israel was a threat against all nations in line for blessing. The battle, therefore, was not simply over land and resources; it was a spiritual battle, the outcome of which had immeasurable and eternal implications. Those implications tend to be overlooked in condemnations of Canaanite genocide.

¹⁷C. S. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," in *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, Counterpoints Series, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) 15-17.

THE QUESTION OF ALTERNATIVE MEANS

The critic naturally asks, "Could not an omniscient and all-powerful God have produced a plan for the redemption of humanity that did not include genocide?" No simple answer exists to that question. To what extent God has placed upon himself certain limitations and is constrained by those limitations is an inexorable mystery to mankind. The criteria for God's intervention into natural realities are known only to Him as is the line at which such intervention violates something intrinsic to human experience.

There is an inexhaustible supply of *Why couldn't God?* questions that turn out to be no help at all (e.g., "Why could God not have transplanted the Israelites into an uninhabited area?"). The answer is: Perhaps for a thousand unknown reasons.

It is not the burden of the Christian to show that alternative means to a sufficiently righteous end did not exist. Rather, it is the burden of the critic to prove that alternative means did exist, not simply hypothetically, but in reality. Until an alternative plan can be *proven* to exist it is hopelessly subjective to condemn God. In order for someone to say that God *should* have manipulated reality in a certain way it must somehow be shown that God was not already working at the very threshold of where his patience meets his holiness.¹⁸ It is inordinate pride that compels the human mind to bring its paltry tools to these mysteries. The point is that anyone who would dare berate God has made his own claim to omniscience.

While the Bible gives ample account of God's miraculous intervention, it is not his habit to go about tweaking every aspect of his creation. Most things run their natural course. Even where history is punctuated with dramatic intervention there is often remarkable deference given to things

¹⁸This is not to suggest a tension between the two. ¹⁹Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 72.

ordinary and human. God required Noah to build the ark himself. Jesus did not command the fish to appear in Peter's boat.

Therefore, in response to *Why couldn't God?* questions it may be enough to advise that God tends not to tamper excessively and unnecessarily with existing conditions. With that in mind, some observations can be made about existing conditions.

War as a Practical Necessity

Often criticism is delivered by those who do not adequately understand the context of the ancient Near East. Craigie notes, "[T]he fact that violence, and hence war, are so intimately related to the existence of the state is not simply an observation from history. . . . Violence, as necessity, is a part of nature (though it is not thereby good) and it forms the general rule for the existence of human societies, and hence of human states."¹⁹ And while Israel's methods and manners of war were undeniably brutal it cannot be said that Israel was unique in the use of them or that they somehow stood out from conventional war practices.²⁰

Indeed, the practice of *herem*²¹ or devotion was not limited to Israel though Israel is most notorious for employing it. Kang, in reference to a famous Moabite victory over Israel, explains *herem* as the final insult to the defeated god:

All of those taken were devoted to Chemosh, because until their capture they had belonged to YHWH. What was qodesh [holy] to YHWH was ban to Chemosh. Contrariwise, what was qodesh to Chemosh was ban to YHWH. One god's qodesh was another god's ban. The devotees of one god, therefore, destroyed all they could capture of the other god's property whether it was animate or inanimate.²²

¹⁹Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 72.

²⁰Ibid., 69,115; Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 80.

²¹Often translated "ban," referring to total destruction.

²²Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*, 82.

Thus, it is apparent how mercy in an ancient setting would have been perceived as nothing less than divine weakness.

To believe that Israel's existence could have been ensured under a domesticated military mentality is naive. Thompson speculates that "if Israel had been dominated by any more tolerant attitude towards her pagan neighbours, she might well have been swallowed up by them."²³ Even in modern warfare, a kind gesture is often regarded not as an occasion to reciprocate kindness but the perfect opportunity for attack.²⁴ Therefore, condemning the level of violence with which God commanded Israel to function in war is indirectly wishing the visitation of that same level of violence upon God's chosen people, as well as their probable extermination.

Another reality that necessitated the practice of total destruction, at least in the Conquest, was that Israel was severely outnumbered (Deut. 7:1). Under Joshua's initial campaigns Israel was not in the numerical position to take many captives. It is this disadvantage that may help explain why the first two cities to fall in the Conquest, Jericho and Ai, were left in utter ruin. Kaufmann theorizes that the "hidden reason for *the banning and cursing of Jericho*" was that Joshua was wishing to remove the temptation from any of the Israelites who might wish to abandon the army and take up residence.²⁵

MERCY IN THE MIDST OF CONQUEST

A calm and careful study of the Conquest reveals that it is not necessarily inconsistent with New Testament theology. As a rule, God is kinder than people perceive him to be in the Old

²³J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 223.

²⁴President Bush reported on this very phenomenon in a radio address during Operation Iraqi Freedom, "Some in the Iraqi military have pretended to surrender, then opened fire on coalition forces that showed them mercy." (George W. Bush, "Radio Address by the President to the Nation" [delivered from The White House on March 29, 2003], <http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/03032902.htm>).

²⁵Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Canaan* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1985), 139.

Testament and fiercer than people perceive him to be in the New Testament. But is there any love in the Canaanite destruction? As has been noted, God's loving purpose was to establish a people through whom he would bless all nations. But is his mercy limited to a grand utilitarian plan or can it be found in the minutiae of history, even perhaps in unlikely places?

It is highly significant that God was not willing to bring about the destruction of the Canaanites until such destruction was positively inevitable.²⁶ God delayed the fulfillment of his promise to Abraham until the Amorites became irreversibly depraved, and in the waiting his own people suffered in Egypt. This is hardly what would be expected of a battle-hungry God. Furthermore, there is at least some support for the belief that while judgment on the nations as a whole was decreed and unavoidable, God deliberately extended to individual Canaanites the opportunity to avoid destruction.

Consider that even in the Transjordan the reputation of the Israelites preceded them. The text in Num. 22:2-4 makes this unmistakably clear. The warning given to the king of Jericho and Rahab's testimony make it equally obvious that the inhabitants of the Promised Land anticipated and feared the Israelite invasion (Josh. 2:2, 8-11). Furthermore, the Gibeonites revealed that they were aware not only of the impending invasion but that God had ordered the Israelites to "wipe out" all the inhabitants of the land (Josh. 9:24).

That the invasion did not take anyone by surprise makes it difficult to argue against the inhabitants having the opportunity to flee rather than stay and fight, especially given what is known about the sequence of events from chapter five of Joshua.

Now when all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings along the coast heard how the LORD had dried up the Jordan before the Israelites until we had crossed over, their hearts melted and they no longer had the courage to face the Israelites (Josh. 5:1).

²⁶Gen. 15:16 states, "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." ²⁷Other purposes for the delay undoubtedly included the spiritual preparation of the Israelites and God's glory being manifested through fear (see Ex. 14:4,17-18).

"At that time" (vs. 2) God did a most unstrategic thing: He commanded that the Israelites be circumcised. The account of the destruction of the house of Hamor (Gen. 34) gives graphic indication that one's recent circumcision leaves him in no condition to defend himself, let alone take aggressive action against others. Verse 25 reveals that the healing process would have taken, at a very minimum, three days.

After Israel's circumcision at Gibeath-haaraloth they celebrated the Passover. It can be reasonably assumed that they also celebrated the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. Six more days were spent marching around Jericho and a seventh for battle. Add the time that it took spies to go into the region of Ai, do their work, and return and at a very minimum the Canaanites would have had twenty days to evacuate the land from the time that their hearts first "melted" and their courage failed.

With the element of surprise affording obvious advantages in battle it is at least possible to entertain the idea that one of the purposes of God in sacrificing those advantages was to offer escape to any who desired it.²⁷ It is true that an organized national evacuation was probably unrealistic. But the Bible records many occurrences of threatened individuals and families taking flight.²⁸ In one case a whole community is said to have relocated after flight (2 Sam. 4:3).

The notion of wanton destruction is further weakened by the fact that God does not even call for genocide in all cases. When possible, peace was to be pursued. God commanded the Israelites to make offers of peace to peoples who were not inside the Promised Land. If they rejected the offer, the Israelites were instructed to kill the men but spare the women and children (Deut. 20:10-15).

JUDGMENT AND DIVINE PREROGATIVE

²⁷²⁷Other purposes for the delay undoubtedly included the spiritual preparation of the Israelites and God's glory being manifested through fear (see Ex. 14:4,17-18).

The argument that the Canaanites were illegal squatters and therefore had to be destroyed to make way for the rightful possessors fails.²⁹ The reasons (as biblically stated) are that the continued existence of the Canaanites threatened Israel and the purity of her worship (Deut. 20:18) and for judgment of Canaanite wickedness (Deut. 9:4-5).

Those who acknowledge the value of justice to the governance of society should welcome the idea of a God who exercises impeccable judgment from above when earthly systems fail. But some will simply never be comfortable with a God who judges. Ironically, it is deemed more appropriate that they should sit in judgment over God. The critic is ever in retreat from the suppressing question: To what moral standard does one appeal in judging God?

A biblical understanding of God's holiness would produce surprise, not at God's hand of judgment, but at the extent of his merciful tolerance of sinful humanity. The fact is that humanity--all of it--is continually under the sentence of death. Life is lived and enjoyed only under a stay of execution. That God would lift his stay of execution from those who stand in opposition to his eternal purposes is no wonder at all. Nor can it be said to be in any way unjust.³⁰

The Canaanite culture was one of excessive immorality and violence. Deut. 12:31 testifies that the pagan nations, "do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods." To finite and sin-stained humans it may not seem so, but from the standpoint of a holy and omniscient God, judgment was imperative.

²⁸See Gen. 31:21; Ex. 2:15; Jud. 9:21; 1 Sam. 19:18; 22:18; 1 Ki. 11:40; 2 Ki. 14:19; Jer. 26:21; Matt. 2:14.

²⁹Eugene H. Merrill, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 4, *Deuteronomy*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 179, 286.

³⁰Hodge states, "He neither condemns the innocent, nor clears the guilty; neither does He ever punish with undue severity." (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995], 416).

Some are quick to ask, "How can the sixth commandment in Deuteronomy 5:17 be related to the laws of war and the injunctions to kill in Deuteronomy 20:10-18?"³¹ Many believe as Cowles does that in such a situation, "We have the odd circumstance of God's commands violating God's laws."³²

But Cowles mistakes the nature of a commandment. The command is that *man* should not murder. It is an absurdity to imagine that God would give himself a command. A father who instructs his son, "Do not jump off this diving board; you are too young" is not breaking the rules if he, himself, dives off. To charge hypocrisy reflects an under-appreciation for authority.

God has reserved his right to judge and when he does so the judgment is always just. Murder, by definition, is unlawful. Therefore, God could not break the commandment in Deut. 5:17 even if he somehow had imposed it on himself.

It is probable that some could find justification for the Canaanite destruction if only the children had been exempted. It is helpful to be reminded that "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." (Ps 24:1). The critic has an illegitimate sense of entitlement about life.

When one considers the many theoretical possibilities (none of which the critic can rule out) it is imaginable how deaths of the Canaanite children could have actually been in their best interests. The critic (who tends toward naturalism) wrongly believes that the story ends with death. Under such a false assumption it is expected that he would be repulsed. However, many, if not most, theologians believe that all children inherit eternal life. Were the children permitted to mature in such a corrupt environment their eternal circumstances would, in all likelihood, have been infinitely worse.

CONCLUSION

³¹Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, 57.

It is believed that because the mind of the skeptic conceives of no circumstances under which the destruction of an entire people is morally justified, no such circumstances could exist. The Christian concept of God is thought to be inherently flawed. This conclusion is arrived at by overlooking one's obvious intellectual and perceptive limitations. The critic disregards the burden that is his to show how the conditions that prevailed upon the ancient historical context did not stand in the way of God choosing an alternative course of action. He must as well prove that the dynamic character of God as loving, yet holy and just, did not in every way constrain God to order the destruction of the Canaanites. He must also positively demonstrate that the destruction of the Canaanites did not result in the betterment of the human condition in general (even, perhaps, for those who were destroyed).

The task of the Christian is not to justify God's actions but to show how--on so many levels--the condemnations fail. Having shown that the Canaanite destruction was a means to an end, that the end was sufficiently righteous, and that no alternative means are known to have existed, the possibility of the Canaanite destruction being justified is left open. Criticism of God based on the Canaanite destruction must therefore be understood as subjective and invalid.

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