

The New Atheists insist that Christians want to force on all peoples everywhere the legal code of the OT, and they cite Jesus saying that the OT must be fulfilled to the letter (Matt. 5:17-18) as proof that this is what Jesus wanted. Who are they to tell Christians what the Bible means and how it should be interpreted? And when Christians answer that they do not believe this, the New Atheists say that we are picking and choosing which OT laws we like and want to enforce and which ones we don't. Again, what qualifies the New Atheists to speak with authority of how the moral, civil and religious ceremonial laws of the OT should be understood and applied by Christians in nations all over the earth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Interpretation & Application – “What does it mean and what am I going to do about it?”  
Is God a racist, genocidal killer of innocent children?**

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then shall you utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons." Deuteronomy 7:1-3

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdKD7qYsFQI> 2:37-4:19

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQcGXBo8HP8> :42-1:17

Nazi regime committed state-sponsored genocide of so-called “inferior races.” Jews, Poles, Soviets, gypsies, and people with disabilities.

Dawkins called God, a “racist, infanticidal, genocidal...capriciously malevolent bully” (2006)... critics of the God of the Bible are fond of repeating the allegation that, because of His instruction to the Israelites to kill people in their conquest of Canaan, the God of the Bible has (allegedly) shown Himself to be an unruly, shameful, offensive, genocidal, “evil monster” (Dawkins, p. 248; cf. Hitchens, 2007, p. 107).

**Was God’s Campaign Against Canaan Immoral?**

How could a supremely good (Mark 10:18), all-loving (1 John 4:8), perfectly holy God (Leviticus 11:44-45) order the Israelites to slay with swords human beings, letting “none remain” in Canaan? Is such a planned, systematic extermination of nations not equivalent to the murderous actions of the Nazis in the 1930s and 40s, as atheists and other critics of Christianity would have us believe? In truth, God’s actions in Israel’s conquest of Canaan were in perfect harmony with His supremely loving, merciful, righteous, just, and holy nature.

1. Expulsion from the land of Canaan was God’s [punishment](#) on the Canaanites. It was not ethnic cleansing, not racism, not genocide, and not repeated in Jewish history.

How could God command His people to do such a thing? This is not merely intolerant, but pure, unadulterated genocide! Men, women, and children, even the oxen, sheep, and donkeys were to be slaughtered.

- A. They were punished because of what they [did](#), not because of who they were. These seven people groups were very wicked and would have been a bad influence on Israel.

**The Wickedness of the Inhabitants of Canaan**

The Canaanite nations were punished because of their extreme wickedness. God did not cast out the Canaanites for being a particular race or ethnic group. God did not send the Israelites into the land of Canaan to destroy a number of righteous nations. On the contrary, the Canaanite nations were horribly depraved. They practiced “abominable customs” (Leviticus 18:30) and did “detestable things” (Deuteronomy 18:9, NASB). They practiced idolatry, witchcraft, soothsaying, and sorcery. They attempted to cast spells upon people and call up the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10-11).

As Moses wrote, the inhabitants of Canaan would “burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods” (Deuteronomy 12:30). The Canaanite nations were anything but “innocent.” In truth, “[t]hese Canaanite cults were utterly immoral, decadent, and corrupt, dangerously contaminating and thoroughly justifying the divine command to destroy their devotees” (Unger, 1988). They were so nefarious that God said they defiled the land and the land could stomach them no longer—“the land vomited out its inhabitants” (Leviticus 18:25).

<sup>24</sup> ‘Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. <sup>25</sup> For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. (Leviticus 18:24-25)

7 “When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, <sup>2</sup> and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show

no favor to them. <sup>3</sup> Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. <sup>4</sup> For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. Deuteronomy 7:1-4

B. Because of their idolatry, immorality and detestable practices, God used Joshua to drive the Canaanites out of the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. When a culture is beyond redeeming and is ready for judgment is [God's](#) call, not any humans.

C. What Joshua did ousting the Canaanites cannot and should not be equated with ethnic cleansing (it was not racially motivated, it was geographically motivated).

When someone says, "Well the Muslims say that their god told them to wage holy war", our answer to them is the same as the New Atheists answer to them: "No he didn't. No god told you to wage holy war." As Copan explains, "God's call to battle was unique to Israel's situation. Such a call, though, isn't an enduring, universally binding standard for all time and all cultures." He's right. Those who left the land of Canaan, Israel did not chase. They only cleaned out the land of Canaan. Joshua's battles are recorded in Joshua chapters 6-11, summarized in 12. See maps.

"The Canaanites are to be destroyed "that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God" (Deut. 20.18). God had morally sufficient reasons for His judgment upon Canaan, and Israel was merely the instrument of His justice, just as centuries later God would use the pagan nations of Assyria and Babylon to judge Israel." - William Lane Craig

D. They were not all killed.

Numbers 31:7 and 17 say that every male of the Midianites was killed, but later in Judges 6:5 it tells us that the Midianites (and their camels) were too numerous to count. So the killing of the Midianites in Numbers 31 refers to the Midianite population there in that town, locality, or region. This wasn't the ethnic cleansing and extermination of all Midianites.

2. "Drive them out" meant "kill them if they don't leave".

A. The goal was [expulsion](#), not annihilation.

"I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you. I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land" (Exodus 23:27-30, NASB).

B. They were free to leave, and many probably did.

What adds further interest is the language of "driving out" and "thrusting out" the Canaanites (Exodus 23:28; Leviticus 18:24; Numbers 33:52; Deuteronomy 6:19; 7:1; 9:4; 18:12; Joshua 10:28,30,32,35,37,39; 11:11,14). The Old Testament also uses the language of "dispossessing" the Canaanites of their land (Numbers 21:32; Deuteronomy 9:1; 11:23; 18:14; 19:1; etc.). "Driving out" or "dispossessing" is different from "wiping out" or "destroying." This provides yet further indication that utter annihilation was not intended.

Expulsion is in view, not annihilation.<sup>19</sup> And after examination, the "driving out" references are much more numerous than the "destroying" ones. How does this dispossessing or driving out work? It is not hard to imagine. The threat of a foreign army in the ancient Near East prompted women and children to remove themselves from harm's way — not to mention the population at large. They would be the first to flee. An attacked population would not wait around for the enemy to kill them. Only the defenders, who do not leave, would get killed.

C. Israel did not drive them all out and did not kill those who remained. (Judges 1:27- 2:23)

Israel did not follow God's instructions fully, and the result was exactly as He had said it would be.

"But Manasseh did not take possession... So the Lord allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua." Judges 1:27- 2:23 (a more detailed chronicle of Israel and its judges can be found in the rest of the book starting with chapter 3)

Israel's failure to dispose *all the Canaanites* ends up biting them in the end. Their moral collapse, which elicited God's judgment, began when they failed to drive out all the Canaanites from the land. So when read from the perspective of the rest of the Old Testament, we can at least see the logic of the command. As morally difficult as it is, God was right. Failure to drive out all the Canaanites would lead to Israel's ruin.

3. The New Atheists concern about the innocent children is not genuine, and it is groundless given their position.

"In his remarks concerning God's commandment in Numbers 31 for Moses to destroy the Midianites, Dan Barker stated: 'Maybe some of those men were guilty of committing war crimes. And maybe some of them were justifiably guilty of committing some kind of crimes. But the children? The fetuses?'"

- Is God Immoral for Killing Innocent Children? By Kyle Butt

- A. The New Atheists say that atheism would never approve of killing innocent children, so they argue for the moral superiority of atheism to the morality of the God of the Bible.
  - B. There may be an exception, but the New Atheists are rabid pro-abortionists. They argue aggressively for abortion (which kills over a million babies a year in the USA, and over 40 million a year worldwide) but attack God for killing innocent children during war against the Canaanites. So atheists think that they, not God, should be the ones who decide when the death of an innocent child is right.
  - C. Atheists have no absolute grounds for saying anything is right or wrong. Their basis is [arbitrary](#).
  - D. While this fact shows the New Atheists' inconsistency, hypocrisy and duplicity, it does not clear God of the charge. Why kill the babies?
    - There were no prisoner of war camps.
    - There were no international relief agencies.
    - There were no orphanages.
    - In the cultures of ANE, the line, the seed, passed through the male, so it was common to kill all the male descendants of an enemy, to cut off his name from the earth.
    - The sad fact is that children are blessed or cursed by the parents and the society that rears them. If the parents foolishly chose to stay with their children in the face of the approaching Israelite army, then they and their children faced the consequences.
4. Commands in one situation and historical context are not prescriptive for all situations and historical contexts.
- A. Differentiate between the moral laws, the civil laws and religious ceremonial laws of the OT.
  - B. The moral laws of the OT [are repeated](#) in the NT and are help up as standards by which people should live.
  - C. The civil and religious ceremonial laws are [not](#) repeated in the NT and are not help up as standards by which people should live.
  - D. For example, Jesus does not support the stoning of the woman caught in adultery in John 8, but He does tell her to "Go, and sin no more." So Jesus did not enforce the OT civil law (adultery should be punished by stoning to death) but He does call her to live the moral law, (You shall not commit adultery.)
  - E. The commands to war should be treated in the same way. And Israel understood the commands to be unique to and particular to that task which God gave them to drive the Canaanites from the land.

**We should no more look to the divinely mandated attack on Canaanites as a universal ideal for international military engagement than we should look to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac as a timeless standard for "family values."**

5. The New Atheists object that any nation or religion can claim that their deity has called them to Holy War and therefore justify their actions.
  - A. Muslims may claim that their god has called them to jihad (holy war) against all unbelievers (infidels).
  - B. Our answer on that point is the same answer that the New Atheists would give: "No he didn't. Your god did not tell you to kill people."
  - C. *"Israel would not have been justified to attack the Canaanites without Yahweh's explicit command. Yahweh issued His unique command in light of a morally sufficient reason — the intractable wickedness of Canaanite culture and the moral and spiritual danger it posed."* - Paul Copan

Message

It's ok to be sad when you see God judging sin.

#### **Action Points:**

- If you'd like to talk about this topic, I would love to discuss it with you.  
jtalone@fardaletrinitychurch.org or 201-825-1823
- When you don't understand why God does, commands or allows anything, trust His character as revealed in the entirety of Scripture.
- Be a true student! When you study the Bible, study the historical and cultural context.
- Read a book of the Bible this week. Pick a book, any book!