

Session 10: Xenophobia, Genocide & Hell

Quite a lot of this session will be from the book, Is God a Moral Monster? By Paul Copan, specifically chapters 15-17.

Xenophobia

In today's America, it seems like nearly every "wrong" belief, according to society, is a phobia – a wrong opinion based on fear. In fact, "xenophobia," the fear of strangers, usually foreigners, is something that we hear in our culture today for a variety of situations.

In the Bible, the term is usually used as a complaint against God when he would send the Hebrews to war against countries or people around them. The conquest of Canaan is the most (in)famous example of this.

If God really was a racist I think I would have an issue following Him.

The good news is that He isn't racist or afraid of / against other ethnicities or nationalities. However, he is absolutely against those who pervert His creation and the image of God in humankind.

"God is concerned with sin, not ethnicity." – Copan

The Myth of Israel as an Ethnostate

An ethnostate is a nation that is made up of only one ethnicity. For Israel (and God) to be racist against other ethnicities, Israel would have to be only one ethnicity, and a different one from those around it. But it never was.

Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 11,12), which was in Southern Iraq. He would have been an idol worshipper, probably of a moon god named Nanna, who was the supreme god of the Chaldeans. In Gen 12:1, he was told to leave his country, people and household – everything, including his old religion.

How many times in the Bible does God condemn Babylon? Look where Ur is in the map.

Abraham was from _____. When God called Abraham he was told "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3). All.

In Gen 14, Abraham wins a battle and meets king priest Melchizedek of Salem – around the two blue lakes in Canaan. There is very little known about this person, but he was Canaanite, and Jesus is said to be in the priesthood of Melchizedek (Heb 7:17).

When Moses lead the Israelites (descendants of Israel/Jacob) from Egypt, many other people, including Egyptians went with them (Exo 12:38). In fact, Moses married a _____ – a dark skinned Ethiopian – from just below El Amama on the map.

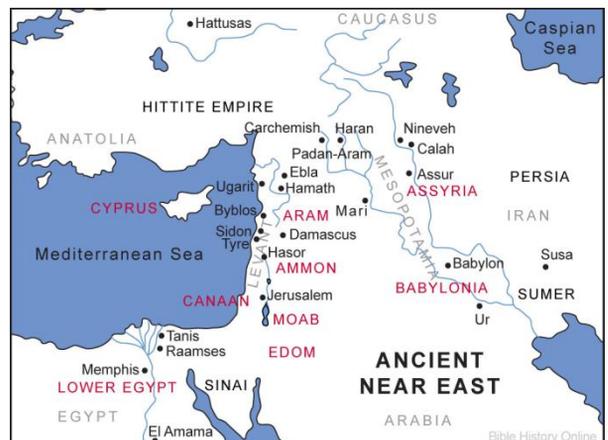
Rahab and her family joined Israel (Josh 6:23) and she was a _____. Rahab ends up the mother of Boaz who marries Ruth.

Ruth was from _____, and like Abraham, chose God over her cultural gods, "your people will be my people and your God my God..." (Ruth 1:16).

Jael, who killed Sisera in Judges 4, was a _____, a nomadic people who lived all over Canaan.

Bathsheba, as we learned last session, was married to Uriah the Hittite, who was one of David's mighty men. Hittites also lived in Canaan.

The list could go on. The key thing to remember is that Israel was never made up of only one ethnicity or people. It wasn't unified by what the people looked like, but who they worshipped.



The “Genocide” of the Canaanites

Now that we have established that God and His followers weren’t motivated by fear of foreigners or racism, we need to deal with how God could order His people to commit genocide against all the people in Canaan.

First, let’s discuss God’s problem with the Canaanites. We already established that God didn’t have a problem with all Canaanite individuals for simply being from Canaan (see last page). What he had a problem was with who the Canaanites worshipped and what the worship was.

Canaanite Worship

Leviticus 18 is a list of unnatural and immoral sins that Egyptians and Canaanites – both peoples that the Hebrews would be familiar with or coming into contact with – did as a part of their idol worship.

- Incestuous and adulterous sexual relations (6-20)
- Child sacrifice (21)
- Homosexuality (22)
- Bestiality (23)

The Canaanite gods:

- The Canaanite gods, **Baal** (supreme, fertility) and **Anath** (war) or **Asherah/Ashteroth** (fertility), were believed to be spurred on to *ahem* relations by temple prostitution and orgies. When they got it on, it would rain (semen) on the world. So all kinds of detestable sexual relations were encouraged in their worship.
- **Anath** was the goddess who drank the blood of her victims and sat surrounded by corpses. Similar to Kali in Hinduism (look at the map – it’s right there!)
- **Asherah** was the fertility goddess – represented by a pole – that Israel and Judah continued to worship on high places all the way through exile. Solomon fell into worship of Ashteroth.
- **Chemosh**, also worshipped by Solomon, accepted human sacrifice for favor.
- _____ (divine insight/favor) was worshipped by child sacrifice. *“It is believed that idols of Moloch were giant metal statues of a man with a Bull’s head. Each image had a hole in the*

abdomen and possibly outstretched forearms that made a kind of ramp to the hole. A fire was lit in or around the statue. Babies were placed in the statue’s arms or in the hole. When a couple sacrificed their firstborn, they believed that Moloch would ensure financial prosperity for the family and future children.”

(GotAnswers.org) The child – baby through even late youth – would be burned alive until their ashes and flesh could “pass through the fire.”

Josiah in 2 Kings 23, hundreds of years after Moses – 649-609 vs 1391–1271 – was still dealing with these false gods! When he instituted his reforms (and started worshipping Yahweh again,) he:

- Removed from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah (4,6,11)
- Removed the idolatrous priests who burned incense to Baal (5)
- Destroyed the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes and weavers to Asherah in the temple (7)
- Desecrated Topheth (in the valley of Gehenna,) so the people could no longer sacrifice their children to Molek (10)
- Destroyed the high places of Molech, Chemosh, Asherah (13)

God prophesied to Abraham in Gen 15, that after 400 years God would bring Abraham’s descendants back to the land because “the sin of the Amorites had not yet reached its full measure.”

For hundreds of years prior to Moses the Canaanites had worshipped these detestable gods. (And they would continue to do so for nearly 1000 years after Moses!)

When God sent Israel to conquer Canaan, His promise to Abraham was fulfilled – God would no longer allow Canaanite worship to be the dominant worship of the land. But is killing everyone really the only solution?

Hyperbole in Middle Eastern Language

Does it surprise you to know that the Israelites did not actually kill all the Canaanites?

A few examples:

- In Joshua 9, the Gibeonites tricked Israel into an alliance but even after finding out, Joshua still didn't destroy them all even though they were in the land.
- In Joshua 13, we find that as the wars wind down there are still large swaths of the land left to be conquered.
- In Joshua 16:10 we learn that "to this day" the Canaanites in Gezer still live.
- In Joshua 22, Joshua sends several tribes back saying that they had done everything God asked of them. Even though they had not wiped out everyone – wasn't that what God asked of them?.
- Judges 1 tells us that the Canaanites still haven't been destroyed.

And on and on. So what gives? _____.

When the Rams win the Superbowl this year, I will say, "The Rams completely destroyed them!" It will not be literally true – the other team will still exist. But this is how we still – to this day! – speak about conquest. Ancient writers did the same thing.

So when in Joshua 11:21-22, the Anakites were "utterly destroyed" and there were "no Anakim left in the land" this is language that describes a win in battle, like the Rams "annihilating" the other team. How do we know? In Joshua 14:12-15; cf. 15:13-19, Caleb asks to attack the Anakites!

In Numbers 31, Israel "fought against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and killed every man." If all the Midianites are dead, then how are they still fighting Israel in Judges 6:5, where there were so many Midianites that "it was impossible to count them or their camels?" The language of the win in Numbers exaggerated the victory. This is normal language.

In light of the fact that Israel did not actually go into Canaan with the intention of killing every single inhabitant – because they didn't, yet "Joshua obeyed all that Moses commanded" (Josh. 9:24; 11:12) – then the "conquest of Canaan" was actually more about taking over the land, rather than a genocide against the inhabitants.

God brought judgment against Canaan but He did not kill every person there.

The New Testament & Canaan

Interestingly, there isn't a single complaint by later Old or New Testament writers about the conquest of Canaan. No one is concerned that God ordered genocide or that He acted in an unrighteous or uncharitable way. When God is incarnated He names himself Joshua. ("Jesus" is the Greek version of the name "Joshua.")

Joshua lead an insurgency into a land of sin and darkness, and broke the power of those in charge. He set up worship of the true God and became the light to the nations around them. This sounds familiar.

Definitely doesn't sound like God is ashamed of His evil "genocide!"

What about Hell?

We don't have time to flesh out a full theology of Hell here. But what we can do is say with confidence that God is super patient with sinners – with the Canaanites (Gen 15) and with us (2 Peter 3:9) – and provides more than enough proof of His existence and expectations (Rom 1, etc).

We also know that God has the right to enforce His laws because He created and so owns everything (Ps 24, Ps 89, Acts 17:24, etc). God has the right to do whatever He chooses with creation (Is 29:16).

God expects us to reflect Himself – love Him and love others. If we do not, He has the right to punish as He sees fit. But what He does, in the words of C.S. Lewis is give us our way:

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it...No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened." (The Great Divorce)