

DID GOD COMMAND GENOCIDE?

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"Sanctify them
by the Truth.
Your Word is Truth"

Deuteronomy 20:16-17; 7:1-2

Key points to the discussion:

1. War was standard fare in the Ancient Near East – if you didn't participate in war, you didn't live.
2. Not all commands are alike in the Scriptures – God is reluctant to bring judgment.
3. Many commands in the Law of Moses were meant to address some very inferior conditions in the culture and to begin the process of eliminating those inferior and immoral conditions.
4. How do God's commands to destroy the inhabitants of the land of Canaan differ from anyone today saying God has told them to wipe out an entire group?
5. Prior to giving this command, God had already given them many outward signs that He was God, and that He was able to make the right moral judgment concerning these wicked people – Moses was proven to be a credible prophet and representative of God.
6. The Canaanites were more than just people who had disagreements with the Israelites about religion and how they should live their lives – they were evil.
7. God's primary command was to drive the Canaanites out. Exodus 23:30-31; Deuteronomy 9:3. Only as they refused to leave did they open themselves up to being put to death. Joshua 23:5
8. There is a difference between Prima Facie duty (acting based on first glance or first appearance) and acting based on extreme emergency. There are some circumstances when deception is morally permissible and when the killing of innocents would be permissible though not desirable. (Rahab protecting the spies and helping them escape; Shooting down a commercial jetliner piloted by terrorists before it flies into a football stadium filled with 60,000 people watching a football game.)
9. If God who has proven to be good, compassionate, faithful, just and loving, commands the killing of the Canaanites, then He must have a morally justifiable reason for doing so.
10. When God makes a covenant with the Israelites, He is binding Himself to them and they are binding themselves to Him. Deuteronomy 7:6-11

11. God is concerned with redeeming all, including those who rebel against Him, but they must want to be redeemed.
12. God is more concerned with destroying Canaanite religion than with destroying Canaanites. Deuteronomy 7:5
13. God's command to drive the Canaanites out went back to God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give the land of Canaan, but there would be a 400 year delay until the Canaanites had become so evil that they deserved to be driven out. In other words, God would not judge the Canaanites until they had become so evil that it was obvious they would never repent. It took 400 years from the time of Jacob to the time of Moses for that to happen.
14. According to known ancient Middle Eastern tradition and practice, the command to utterly destroy everything alive was meant as hyperbole and was never to be taken literally.
15. The raids Israel conducted as they came into the land were of military citadels and not civilian centers.
16. In the case of Moses and the Midianites, it's obvious all the male Midianites were not killed. Numbers 31:7; Judges 6
17. Saul was to kill all the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15), but it was only those Amalekites who were responsible for ambushing the Israelites. They had remained enemies from the time of the Exodus to Saul's time. But not all the Amalekites were killed since they were still around during the time of David. (2 Samuel 30)
18. In Jeremiah 25:9, the phrase "utterly destroy them" obviously does not refer to the genocide of Judah since all of Judah was not killed by the Babylonians. It was hyperbole intended to signify a very great punishment that was to be brought upon Judah for their repeated atrocities and idolatry and their refusal to repent.
19. We're told that Joshua did all that Moses commanded (Joshua 11:15, 23). But Joshua left lots of survivors. So Moses' command in Deuteronomy 7 and 20 was not something to be taken in absolute literalness but was meant to be taken as hyperbole, again to signify a very great punishment to be brought on the Canaanites because of their repeated and unrepentant wickedness.