

## **“Promised Land”**

**November 22, 2015**

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*Deuteronomy 20:16-18 (ESV)*

<sup>16</sup> *But in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, <sup>17</sup> but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded, <sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>*

Since September 11, 2001, many people have discussed the question of how violence is related to religion. This discussion is somewhat natural, since there have been many terrorist attacks that have been motivated by religious ideology. This discussion has also been driven by a number of outspoken atheists, who insist that religion only leads to bad things. Some atheists denounce Islam. It's a fact that the Qur'an has many violent verses, that Islam first spread into northern Africa through violence, and that Muhammad, the supposed prophet, said in his farewell address, "I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no god but Allah.'"<sup>2</sup> But some atheists prefer to attack Christianity. They observe that the Old Testament has some troubling commands, including the one just read in Deuteronomy 20. All of these commands concern the time when Israel would enter the Promised Land of Canaan and drive out the people living there. Richard Dawkins, an outspoken atheist if there ever was one, writes this: "The ethnic cleansing begun in the time of Moses is brought to bloody fruition in the book of Joshua, a text remarkable for the bloodthirsty massacres it records and the xenophobic relish with which it does so . . . [T]he Bible story of Joshua's destruction of Jericho, and the invasion of the Promised Land in general, is morally indistinguishable from Hitler's invasion of Poland, or Saddam Hussein's massacres of the Kurds."<sup>3</sup>

What are we to make of those comments? How do we think about Israel's conquest of the Promised Land? It's an issue that is hard to understand.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

<sup>2</sup> The quote is found in Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 4, quoted in Rodney Stark, *God's Battalions* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 4. For more information on Islam's violent origins, see Stark's book.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 247.

Well, today, I want to focus on the role that the Promised Land plays in the Bible. I'll discuss what it means, what God said of it before Israel went into that land, and what happened when they entered. I'll try to address the issue of violence in the Bible. I'll also show how all of this is related to Jesus and the New Testament.

Let's go back to the beginning of the Bible. Adam and Eve, the first humans, were in a special place, the garden of Eden. We might call it the original Promised Land. Why did they have to leave? Because they disobeyed God. They failed to trust him. Genesis 3:24 says, "He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life."

Every human being since—with one important exception—has been born "east of Eden." We start life outside of God's special presence. We start out life without a real relationship with God. We are not born God's children. We have the power of sin at work within us, and we do sinful things. That's true of everyone, whether they have read the Bible or not.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul makes this very clear. So we read this in Romans 1:18-23:

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Each one of us, deep down, knows that God exists. We know that because we live in the world that he has made. Yet we suppress that truth. Instead of worshiping God, we worship things in the created order. Paul very clearly alludes back to Genesis 1 here: instead of worship God, in whose image we are made, we worship things resembling created beings. Maybe we don't worship statues of people or animals, but we all tend to make something that is not God the ultimate thing, the most important, in our lives. Whatever that god-substitute is—that's our idol. Paul says we are without excuse: we should know who God is, but we ignore him. Therefore, we are deserving of God's wrath, God's punishment for sin.

Now, I hate to begin a sermon by jumping into the subject of God's wrath. That doesn't allow us time to ease into a difficult subject. But it's important to frame the discussion of Israel's entry into the Promised Land that way. How we frame an issue often determines how we view that issue. So we must remember that God made the world and none of us are innocent.

Now, back to the beginning. Even in the book of Genesis, we see that God has a plan to bring people back to himself. He has a plan to reverse the curse that was placed on creation when Adam and Eve sinned. As we have already seen in this sermon series, God starts this plan with a very unlikely man named Abram (and, later, Abraham). Genesis 12:1-2 says,

<sup>1</sup> Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

God tells Abram to go to the land that he will show him, the land of Canaan. And in verse 7, it says, "Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.'"

I think it's common for people to misunderstand the significance of the land within the story of the Bible. But we get a hint of it in Genesis 13. In that chapter, Abram is with his nephew, Lot. They are near Bethel, where Abram first worshiped God (Gen. 12:8; 13:3). Because Abram and Lot each had a number of people and cattle and possessions, they had to split up, because "the land could not support both of them dwelling together" (13:6). Abram gives Lot the choice of which part of the land to take. And Genesis 13:10 says this: "And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar." The land was like "the garden of the LORD," or the garden of Eden.<sup>4</sup> Now, how much this land was actually like that garden, I don't know. But here and a few other places in the Old Testament, this land is either compared to Eden or it's described in garden-like ways. Those descriptions are intentional, to help us to understand that entering into this land is like going back to the garden. And in the whole story of the Bible, this land anticipates a day when the whole earth will be restored and will be like one big garden of Eden.

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<sup>4</sup> "Israel's land is explicitly compared to the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 13:10 Is. 51:3; Ezek. 36:35; 47:12; Joel 2:3) and is portrayed as very fruitful in order to heighten the correspondence to Eden (cf. Deut. 8:7-10; 11:8-17; Ezek. 47:1-12)." G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 116.

After God promises land to Abram, he clarifies when this will happen. This is when God makes a covenant with Abram in Genesis 15. Here's the key part, verses 13-16:

Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. <sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

God tells Abram ahead of time that the Israelites would first be slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. They would enter into the Promised Land only after they were saved out of Egypt. Why this long delay? One of the reasons was this: the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet complete. What does that mean? Well, the Amorites are one of ten groups of people mentioned in the next few verses (Gen. 15:19-21). So "the Amorites" is shorthand for all the people living in the land before Israel would live in it. God told Abraham that their sins were not complete. That is, their evil hadn't reached a boiling point yet. God was giving them over to their sin, but their sin had not yet reached its worst level.

Think about it this way: Because all of us have sinned, God would be just to wipe out the whole human race. The fact that he didn't shows that he's patient and gracious. Grace is a gift that we don't deserve. It's something we can't earn. Because of our sin, we've earned death, but God doesn't give us over to death—at least not immediately. God was being patient with the wicked people living in that Promised Land. But there would be a point when he would no longer be patient with them.

You might wonder what their sins were. Let's look at a few passages. First, look at Exodus 34:11-16:

<sup>11</sup> "Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>12</sup> Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. <sup>13</sup> You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim <sup>14</sup> (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), <sup>15</sup> lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, <sup>16</sup> and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

All those people who lived in the land were idol worshipers. God warned Israel not to be like them. God wanted the Promised Land to be cleansed of all idols and idol worshipers. One of the main reasons why God wanted these people to be driven out was because if they stayed, they would lead the Israelites into idolatry. They would be a “snare.”<sup>5</sup>

But that’s not all. When we fail to worship God, other things follow. When we make lesser things our gods, we perform immoral actions. That was certainly true in the time of Moses. When God gave the law to the Israelites through Moses, he included Leviticus 18. The chapter begins this way:

<sup>1</sup> And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. <sup>3</sup> You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. <sup>4</sup> You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup> You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

God is clear: He doesn’t want Israel to live like the Egyptians live, or like the people in the land of Canaan live. That’s why he gives them these particular laws. So, what do the laws in Leviticus 18 forbid? Incest, adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality! God makes it clear that these things are the reason why he is going to drive the Canaanites out of the land. And if the Israelites do these things, they will be driven out of the land, too. We see that in Leviticus 18:24-30:

<sup>24</sup>“Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, <sup>25</sup> and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. <sup>26</sup> But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you <sup>27</sup> (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), <sup>28</sup> lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. <sup>29</sup> For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. <sup>30</sup> So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.”

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<sup>5</sup> “Just as Adam was to rule the garden for God’s glory, so Israel was to rule the land of promise for his glory. Adam was to remove the serpent from the garden, and Israel was to remove the Canaanites (the children of the serpent from the land of promise.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 119.

That's a very important principle: If someone performs such sinful things, they will be "vomited" out of the land. The issue is not one's ethnicity. It doesn't matter if the person is an Israelite or a Canaanite. The issue is a religious and moral issue: If a person worships the true God and acts accordingly, then he or she can stay in the land. It's not ethnic cleansing, it's ethnic cleansing.<sup>6</sup> That's what Moses tells the Israelites this in Deuteronomy 9:4-5:

<sup>4</sup> "Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you. <sup>5</sup> Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

God wasn't giving the Israelites the land because they were righteous, or good. But he was going to remove the Canaanites from the land because they were wicked. The fact that Israel is not good is shown many, many times in the Old Testament. I don't have time to talk about this today, but Israel had to wait forty years to go into the Promised Land after they left Egypt. The reason was because they disobeyed God. Therefore, God let a whole generation of Israelites die before they could go into the Promised Land (see Numbers 13-14).

But how wicked were the Canaanites? They weren't just idolaters and sexual sinners. They did something almost unspeakable. Let's look at Deuteronomy 12:29-31:

<sup>29</sup> "When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, <sup>30</sup> take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do the same.' <sup>31</sup> You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

"They even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods." They sacrificed their children.<sup>7</sup> It's hard for us to understand how anyone could do such a thing. Apparently such

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<sup>6</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Augustinian Inerrancy: Literary Meaning, Literal Truth, and Literate Interpretation in the Economy of Biblical Discourse," in *Five Views of Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 233.

<sup>7</sup> This is, sadly, something that Israel and Judah would later do: see 2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; Ps. 106:37-38; Jer. 7:31; 19:5.

sacrifices were somewhat common in ancient Near East religions.<sup>8</sup> But think about this: over one million unborn children are sacrificed each year in America. Sure, those children aren't sacrificed to gods like Molech and Baal. But they are sacrificed on the altars of money and convenience, which are false gods all the same.

God could not have people like that living in this land that he was giving to the Israelites. One of the reasons is that God was placing the Israelites in the middle of the known world at that time. The land of Israel was between superpowers such as Egypt to the southwest and Syria, Assyria, and Babylon to the north and the east. Trading routes between Egypt and Arabia, to the south, and Syria, Assyria, and Babylon to the north went through Israel.<sup>9</sup> The Israelites were supposed to obey God's laws. By living according to God's rules, they would reveal what God was like to the nations around them. They would show the nations that if they worshiped the true God, they would be blessed. That's why God said that if they obeyed his laws, they would be a "kingdom of priests." Israel was supposed to mediate God's blessings to the world, and they were going to do that in this land. But if the land was full of idol worshipers doing wicked things, then God couldn't bring blessings to the world through his people and the land he was giving them.

It would be like if God said to us, "I want you, West Bridgewater Baptist Church, to represent me in West Bridgewater. When the surrounding towns and cities see how you live, they'll know something about me." But what if we all were doing drugs and murdering people? What would people in the surrounding towns think of our God? God's reputation would be at stake. In order for God to draw the nations to himself, he needed to have an accurate representation of what it was like to live under his rule.

So that's why God told the Israelites that they had to "devote [the Canaanites] to complete destruction." There couldn't be impurity in the land.

After God told Abraham that he was giving him this land, and after God told the Israelites, through Moses, what to do when they got there, the Israelites finally entered into the land under the leadership of Joshua, Moses's successor.

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<sup>8</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 228.

<sup>9</sup> "Since Israel is located geographically on the one and only communications link between the great superpowers of the ancient world (Egypt and Mesopotamia), in this position she will show the nations how to have a right relationship to God, how to treat each other in a truly human way, and how to faithfully steward the earth's resources."<sup>9</sup> Peter J. Gentry, in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 303.

I want to point out just a few stories from the book of Joshua. First, before the Israelites entered into the land, Joshua sent two spies to check out the land. This is in chapter 2 of Joshua. In particular, they were supposed to check out the city of Jericho. So the two spies sneak into Jericho and stay in the “house” of a prostitute named Rahab. The “house” was probably a tavern or some kind of hostel.<sup>10</sup> And this Canaanite prostitute, Rahab, protects these spies when the king of Jericho comes looking for them. She hid them on her roof so they wouldn’t be caught and killed (Josh 2:1-7).

Why did Rahab hide these spies? We find out in Joshua 2:8-14:

<sup>8</sup> Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof<sup>9</sup> and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.<sup>10</sup> 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 devoted to destruction.<sup>11</sup> And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.<sup>12</sup> Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house, and give me a sure sign<sup>13</sup> that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.”<sup>14</sup> And the men said to her, “Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.”

Rahab hid these spies because she knew God had given the Israelites the land. She knew what he did in Egypt, when he rescued the Israelites. She knew how he gave the Israelites victory over foreign kings on their way to Canaan. She said their “hearts melted.” She knew that the God of Israel was the one true God over all the earth. In other words, she heard about God and she responded in faith. She was seeking salvation from God.

Why do I bring this up? Some people may wonder, “Why did God reveal himself to the Israelites but not the Canaanites?” Some people may think, “That’s not fair!” Well, this event shows that the Canaanites heard about what God had done in Egypt. They had time and opportunity to respond in faith, just like Rahab did. Rahab responded in faith and she was spared God’s wrath. The same is true today. Anyone who turns to Jesus and seeks salvation from God’s

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<sup>10</sup> Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 92.

wrath by finding refuge in him will be saved. It doesn't matter what country they are from, what skin color they have, or what they've done in the past.

After this episode, the Israelites cross the Jordan river and prepare to attack Jericho. But before they do that, an interesting thing happens. This is Joshua 5:13-16:

<sup>13</sup> When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" <sup>14</sup> And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" <sup>15</sup> And the commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Joshua sees a being that looks like a man. He has a sword in his hand. Joshua asks this man which side he is on: "Are you for us, or for our enemies?" And the man just says, "No." He's not on either side. He's on God's side. He identifies himself as "the commander of the army of the LORD." And Joshua worships him. That literally means he prostrated himself, or laid down before him. At the least, this man is a representative of God. It's possible he's the angel of the Lord. At any rate, this episode shows two things: One, it reminds us of the cherubim with the flaming sword guarding the way back to the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Remember, if Adam and Eve—or anyone else—was going to back to the garden, they had to pass through the cherubim. This shows that the Promised Land is supposed to remind us of the garden. Two, it shows that God isn't on the side of certain countries. What matters is not whether God's on a country's side. What matters is whether people are on God's side. Canaanites like Rahab could have put their trust in God. Israelites could have put their trust in God. God doesn't judge people by ethnicity.

After this event, the Israelites attack Jericho. The way they attack Jericho shows that they weren't some massive army beating up on the weak countries around them and using stories about their God to justify their violence. Instead, the whole episode shows that it is God who wins the victories for these people. God brings about victory through the most unlikely means. Here, God tells Joshua to march around the city once a day for six days in a row. They should take seven priests who have seven trumpets and also the ark of the covenant, which, as I said last week, represents God's throne. On the seventh day, they were supposed to march around the city seven times with the seven priests and their seven trumpets. And after they march seven times,

the priests would blow the trumpets and the people would shout, and the walls of the city would fall down, leaving the city vulnerable to attack (Josh. 6:3-5). In a way, that sounds kind of like a joke. They're simply supposed to march around the city, blow some trumpets, and shout, and that's it? The walls will fall down? It's preposterous. But the whole point is to show that God is the one doing the work.

Joshua and the people do what God commanded them. Joshua said, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city" (v. 17). Rahab and her family were spared, but everyone else was "devoted to destruction." That may trouble us, but I want to point out something important. When we think of Jericho, or some of the other cities that Joshua and the Israelites attacked, we might think of a city like Boston, having a large civilian population. But that's not what these cities in Canaan were like. These cities were where the government and the military were located, but the civilians would have been located in villages outside of the city. Paul Copan, a Christian philosopher, has written a helpful book called *Is God a Moral Monster?* He wrote the book to answer questions that people have about the Old Testament. He says, "There is no archaeological evidence of civilian populations at Jericho or Ai."<sup>11</sup> So the Israelites attacked the military of the Canaanites, not civilians. And Copan thinks the city was small, and had a hundred soldiers or less.<sup>12</sup> That's how the Israelites could march around the whole city seven times in one day.

In the rest of the book of Joshua, we see the Israelites subdue the Canaanites and claim the land. The twelve tribes of Israel are allotted their inheritance in the land. And toward the end of the book, we find this passage in Joshua 21:43-45:

<sup>43</sup> Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. <sup>44</sup> And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. <sup>45</sup> Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

God gave Israel the land and he defeated their enemies. God's promises came true.

Before I move on, I want to state why the Israelites were not wrong to attack the Canaanites.

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 175.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

First, as I said earlier, God had promised Israel this land.

Second, the Canaanites were not innocent. They were quite wicked.<sup>13</sup>

Third, the Canaanites had the opportunity to put their faith in God, as Rahab did. This was true of the Egyptians, by the way. When the Israelites left Egypt, Exodus 12:38 says, “A mixed multitude also went up with them.”

Fourth, the Israelites attacked military outposts, not civilian centers.

Fifth, though some passages talk about how the Israelites were to devote everyone to destruction, more often than not, the language used is of God driving out the Canaanites from the land. The purpose was to keep the wicked out, not to annihilate them.

Sixth, the language used is often hyperbolic. I don’t have time to explain this in detail, but sometimes in Joshua, it says that one group of people were “utterly destroyed.” And then a few chapters later, we hear about more of those people again. For example, in Joshua 11:21-22, it says that the Anakim were “cut off” and “devoted to destruction” so that, “There was none of the Anakim left in the land of the people of Israel” (v. 22). But then three chapters later, Caleb says he will drive the Anakim out of the land (14:12; 15:13-19). How could they be driven out if they were all dead? Well, they weren’t all dead. And this doesn’t mean the Bible is wrong. Rather, the language used there is the language used in that part of the world in that time in history. There are examples of other nations around Israel that used this same kind of language.<sup>14</sup> It’s kind of like when Celtics fans say, “We annihilated the Nets.” When you hear that, you think, “Oh, the Nets must have lost by fifty points.” But the score was 120-95. That’s a decisive victory, no doubt, but the Nets still scored a lot of points. The language used in Deuteronomy and Joshua is similarly over-the-top and the initial audiences would have understood that.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Enns, an Old Testament scholar who has shifted away from orthodox Christianity, claims, “God is their enemy for no apparent reason other than they are in Israel’s way” (Peter Enns, “Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013], 106n.34). This statement is wrong. The Canaanites were enemies of God because they rejected their Creator and worshiped false gods. They were without excuse. And their immoral actions further demonstrated their wickedness. Kevin Vanhoozer, in his essay in the same book, writes, “I believe that the difficulty we moderns have with the *herem* [devotion to destruction] stems from an anemic sense of holiness and an underestimation of the scandal of idolatry” (Vanhoozer, “Augustinian Inerrancy,” 234).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 172. Two examples: “In the Merneptah Stele (ca. 1230 BC), Rameses II’s son Merneptah announced, ‘Israel is wasted, his seed is not,’ another premature declaration.” (Obviously, Israel survived past this time in history.) “Moab’s king Mesha (840/830 BC) bragged that the Northern Kingdom of ‘Israel has utterly perished for always,’ which was over a century premature. The Assyrians devastated Israel in 722 BC.”

<sup>15</sup> For more on this, see Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*, especially 170-174.

Seventh, these commands were for a limited time and place. Once Israel was established in the land, they didn't keep killing their enemies. And Christians today are by no means supposed to be violent to our enemies (see Matt. 5:38-48/Luke 6:27-36; Rom. 12:14-21).

Much more could be said about that. If you have questions, please let me know. I would be happy to answer them. But we must move on.

Though we might get uncomfortable with the issue of judgment in the Bible, we shouldn't be. It's an important part of the story of the Bible. It shows that God is committed to justice. Without judgment, there is no final justice. We see various patterns of judgment throughout the Bible: we've already discussed the flood and the plagues on Egypt. Here, we have judgment on the Canaanites. Further in the story, we see various judgments visited upon Israel.

The truth is that all of us deserve to be devoted to destruction for our rebellion against God. We have all suppressed the truth for a lie. We exchanged worship of God for worship of false gods. We all deserve judgment, just like the Canaanites. Just like the Israelites. Just like everyone who has ever lived, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

All but one. Jesus, the Son of God, the true commander of the Lord's army, never sinned. Unlike the Canaanites, he wasn't wicked. Unlike the Israelites, he wasn't disobedient. Unlike you and me, he never failed to worship and honor God the Father. Yet something strange happened to Jesus: The wrath of God came upon him on the cross. Jesus was accused of blasphemy, though he did nothing wrong. He died a criminal's death on an instrument of torture. And when he was on the cross, his body was devoted to destruction. Isaiah 53, a prophecy about Jesus written hundreds of years before he came to earth, says this about him:

By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
and as for his generation, who considered  
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people? (v. 8)

Jesus was cut off from the land of the living, just the way the Canaanites were cut off from the Promised Land, and the way the Israelites were later cut off from the land because of their

disobedience. The judgment that we deserve fell upon Jesus, and because Jesus took that punishment for us, all who find shelter in him will not be destroyed forever.<sup>16</sup>

All who have a relationship with Jesus will live in the true Promised Land, a restored world, forever. That's what the land of Canaan foreshadows. In various ways, the New Testament shows that the land of Israel was just a foreshadowing of a renewed earth. That's why Paul writes that God made a "promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13).<sup>17</sup> But in order for God to restore the world, he will one day remove all the wicked from the earth. There will be a judgment. We see pictures of that final judgment in the book of Revelation. It's no wonder that in that book, there are seven trumpets and seven plagues, which remind us of Jericho and Egypt. And Jesus, the conquering king, reminds us of Joshua (Rev. 19:11-21), who drives out his enemies from the true Promised Land.

So, what does this mean for us? If you are a Christian, the Promised Land is a coming. It's not the world as it is right now. It's not a disembodied, ethereal "heaven." It's a renewed and restored world. But if you claim to be a Christian, know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Rev.21:8). We can't live like everyone else. True Christians will not turn from the true God and worship false gods. We won't fall into wickedness.

If you're still weighing the Christian faith today, I would encourage you to think about this: There have times in history when God has judged people. He has brought his just punishment for sin upon individuals and nations. For example, Jesus predicted that this would happen to Jerusalem within a generation of his crucifixion (Matt. 24; Mark 13), and it happened. In the year 70, the Roman Empire destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. Because God has judged in history, we know it will happen again. He has promised us that much. Will you respond to that knowledge like the king of Jericho, who remained God's enemy, or like Rahab, a prostitute who found shelter in God. Perhaps you may be surprised to know that that same prostitute is an ancestor of Jesus. It's true (Matt. 1:5). In fact, all Christians are a bit like Rahab: we're prostitutes (the Bible likens idolatry to spiritual adultery; see James 4:4, for example) who have been forgiven. We're idolatrous whores who have found shelter in the promises of the one true God. There's room in that shelter for you, too.

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<sup>16</sup> "The violence we see in the Old Testament, though real, is also typological, an anticipation of the bloody violence . . . directed to Jesus on the cross, and thence of peace for all the nations." Vanhoozer, "Augustinian Inerrancy," 233.

<sup>17</sup> See also Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16. These passages show that Abraham and the patriarchs knew that the promise of land pointed to a greater reality than a little strip of turf on the Mediterranean. They were looking forward to a "better country, that is, a heavenly one" (Heb. 11:16).