

Why Did God at Times Command Destruction of Men, Women, & Children in O.T.?

An Outline to Answer a Seemingly Difficult Question, By Corey Keating, May 2023

Examples of Issue Addressed Here

God's Command: Deuteronomy 20:16 "However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes."

Israelite's Action: Joshua 6:21 "They devoted the city [Jericho] to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old,"

Introductory Thoughts

- 1) God's knowledge and wisdom are beyond our understanding. (Romans 11:33-36; Isaiah 55:8-9; 1 Cor. 13:12)
- 2) We may not understand or agree with what God chooses to do, but we have a limited knowledge of the world and a narrow view of right & wrong based on our 21st century American morals.
 - a) Might it be arrogant to think we can judge what the eternal Creator God chose to do in His unfathomable wisdom, as if we understand what is best for the world? (Ecc 5:2)
- 3) God loves all the people of the world more than we ever could, including those nations existing in Old Testament times. He is a God of love (Eph. 2:4-5; Rom. 5:8; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8), yet also a God of righteousness who judges evil (Psa. 11:7 & 89:14; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rom. 3:21).
 - a) Do we really love those people & children or is it just that our morals are offended?

Why Did God Command This?

**** God only commanded for all people of a certain location to be destroyed during a specific time for a very specific reason, which He clearly stated many times.**

- It was not a random brutal act coming from an "angry God"; but was based in wisdom and a long-term view of what was best for all humankind.
- 1) **When & Where?** This destruction was only to be done when conquering the land God promised to Abraham (Canaan), as it was being taken over by his descendants after coming out of Egypt. (Contrast Deut. 20:10-15 with Deut. 20:16-18.)
 - 2) **Why?** God wanted to preserve a holy people (set apart for Himself) in the Land that he had given to them (Exo. 19:5-6; Lev. 20:22-24). (We will see the ultimate reasons for this below.)
 - 3) The land God was giving them had been desecrated by idolatry & child sacrifices; the nations were judged for defiling the land. (Lev. 18:21,24-28; Deut. 12:30-31; Deut. 18:10-13; Ezra 9:11-12)
 - a) There is no language of anger or hate toward the people but rather objective *judgment* for their wicked practices and sacrificing their children to so-called gods; they were already killing their children!
 - 4) God's command was to clear the land from idolatry; the only way to do that was to destroy the people who practiced it. (Exodus 34:12-14; Numbers 33:51-52; Deut. 7:4-6; Deut. 18:10-13; Ezra 9:1-2,11-12)
 - a) In those days, children were also judged as part of the whole family. (Exo. 20:5-6; Josh. 7:24-26; Num. 16:25-33)
 - 5) Otherwise, the Israelite nation would be led into worship of false gods, and they themselves would defile the land and thus be judged. (Exo. 34:12-14; Deut. 7:4; Deut. 20:17-18; Judges 2:3)
 - a) "Worshipping other gods" is contrary to the first 2 of the Ten Commandments: i.e. (1) do not follow false gods, only the one true God, & (2) do not make or worship an image/idol (Exo. 20:1-6, 22-23).
 - b) God made a covenant with His people, and made them holy, set apart for Himself (Lev. 19:1-4).
 - c) God said He would also destroy them if they broke the covenant and turned to false gods like those nations. (Exo. 22:20; Deut. 6:14-15, 8:19-20, 13:14-15, 29:14-18; Lev. 18:24-30)

Good summary of the entire matter: Deut. 7:1-6 & 8:19-20

What Actually Happened?

- 1) The Israelites disobeyed the Lord by *not* clearing the land of people who practiced idolatry (Judges 1:27-33) and thus were led astray and worshipped other gods. (Judges 2:1-2&10-13; 3:5-6; 1 Kings 14:22-24; Psalms 106:34-41; Num. 25:1-4, 31:14-15; Deut. 32:16-17; 1 Sam. 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:4-6; 2 Chron. 28:1-5; 33:1-7; Jer. 7:9-11; Ezra 9:1-2,11-12,14; Ezek. 16:20-21, 36:18, etc.! Entire book of Judges!)
- 2) The Northern Kingdom (Israel) was eventually carried away and destroyed; judged because of idol worship (2 Kings 17:6-8 [thru v.20]). It became syncretistic, of mixed religions, some Jewish, but many others (2 Kings 17:24-33). In N.T. times it was called Samaria (Luke 10:31-33; John 4:9).
- 3) **** God's Ultimate Purpose through the O.T.:** God ultimately preserved a remnant of the Southern Kingdom (Judah, including Jerusalem) to maintain knowledge of the only true living God. Thus, there existed the Jewish Nation, that was waiting for the Messiah, where God's Temple existed and that understood God's holiness, righteousness, His covenants, blood sacrifice for forgiveness, etc. Through this nation God brought forth **Jesus Christ as the Savior of humankind**. (Luke 24:26-27; John 5:39,46)
 - a) Through Jesus, God brought in the New Covenant for all peoples, Jews & Gentiles, no longer of Law [Mosaic Covenant], but of grace. (Heb. 8:6-13; Rom. 10:11-13; John 1:17; 1 Cor. 11:25; Jer. 31:31-34)
 - b) God fulfilled His promise to Abraham that through his offspring all nations would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3 & 22:18; Acts 3:25) [Abrahamic Covenant] (We are all blessed by having God's salvation available to us through Christ Jesus. Gal. 3:8,14,29; Rom. 4:9,16)
 - c) God fulfilled His promise to King David to establish an eternal kingdom with his offspring ruling on the throne. [Davidic Covenant] (That King is Christ Jesus; this could be a whole study!) (2 Sam. 7:16; Isa. 9:6-7; Luke 1:31-33; Psalm 89:3-4; Jer. 33:17; Daniel 2:44, 7:14; Hebrews 1:8)

Final Thoughts and Application

- 1) God is the same today as then. (Heb. 13:8, Mal. 3:6; James 1:17; Rev. 1:8, etc.) The God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New Testament, but under different covenants.
 - a) Yes, He is a God who loves us more than we can know, but also a God of righteousness, which includes judgment of evil, for all who don't acknowledge Him as Creator and Lord of the universe (Rom 2:7-10; Eccl. 12:13-14), and don't receive His salvation which is only found in Christ Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 3:23; 6:23; 1 Tim. 2:5-6).
- 2) There will be a great final judgment for those who refuse to believe in & obey God and take His way of forgiveness & salvation through Christ Jesus. (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5-6; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:11-15)
- 3) The great news is that God fulfilled His promises/covenants to preserve a people through which to bring salvation to all peoples, so that we can know Him and be in relationship with the Living God!

Some Online Resources for Further Explanation

- Why did God command the genocide of the Canaanites? www.gotquestions.org/Canaanites-extermination.html
- Judgment or Cruelty? Conquering the Promised Land: (Also see the video on this page; starting at minute 5:00 where this judgment is discussed.) bibleproject.com/blog/judgement-cruelty-conquering-promised-land

Footnote 1 - Amalekites: There was one other time when God commanded complete destruction of a nation (Amalekites). Not only was it for the purpose of removing idol worship from in and around the promised land, but also as judgment for their wickedness in trying to destroy God's people, who were in a weakened state coming out of Egypt. (Exodus 17:8-16; Deut. 25:17-19; Judges 6:3-5; 1 Sam. 15:1-3 compare with v.6)

Footnote 2 - Rahab: Even in the very first instance of destroying a whole town (Jericho, in Joshua 6:21) God's mercy and grace was shown as they spared Rahab and her family. This was because she believed in the true God and helped His people (Josh. 6:25; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25). She is in the lineage of Jesus! (Matt. 1:5)