



Church of God Ministries
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What Can We Learn From Bible History?

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God, from here in my mobile office in Mankato, MN. We're on a visit to family and scattered members for several days.

My wife and I pray and hope this finds you all doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

I sometimes watch on television late at night before retiring, what we call here in the United States "Tel-evangelists" to see what they are presenting to the world as their take on things.

There's a large church in a city where I used to pastor that is pretty famous for its attendance and messages. I am not surprised, but saddened as I listen to some of their viewpoints that are supposed to be "scriptural". The focus given does not always agree with what God has written, but they draw a large crowd with their enthusiasm and emotionalism.

Some of our religious leaders, and other critics of the Scriptures and the God of the Bible, sometimes turn to certain instructions in the Pentateuch and claim "those Israelites were directed to commit genocide and engage in colonialism and robbing the land of other peoples".

Some in our nation currently espouse this perspective, even applying it to the United States. It's a growing trend. What can we learn from bible history?

Lets' examine some of those Bible passages.

Going back to time during the Old Testament, a good question to start with is, who had the legal right to possess the land of Canaan?

If you believe the Scriptures, it is clear that the land of Canaan was given by the Lord, the God of the Bible, to Abraham and his descendants. God owns everything and was involved in originally assigning lands to certain nations. "*When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, When He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples According to the number of the children of Israel.*" (Deuteronomy 32:8).

God entered into a covenant with Abram and described the boundaries of the land he would be given. *"On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates." (Genesis 15:18)* God again spoke to Abram and made another covenant with him, promising the land of Canaan to be given to him. *"And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:8)* God appeared to Moses and told him that he would be used to bring the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan. *"Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:10)* *"to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites." (v.8)*

How were the inhabitants in the land of Canaan to be removed and why? The Lord said that He would drive the inhabitants from the land of Canaan, present when Israel left Egypt, provide Israel would be faithful and obedient. Notice this summary:

Exodus 23:28-33

28 *"And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you.*

29 *"I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you.*

30 *"Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.*

31 *"And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you.*

32 *"You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods.*

33 *"They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."*

The Lord, the God of the Bible and true God of the Universe said He would direct the expulsion of these various tribes from the land of Canaan. God did not instruct and/or empower Israel to take over other nations in the Middle East or beyond. God gave specific instructions concerning the boundaries of the land that he would give to Israel and had made the promises over a long period of time.

Even when Israel was poised to cross over the Jordan River and enter the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, we note God's instructions. "*The Lord your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the Lord has said.*" (Deuteronomy 31:3)

Some would ask, Why did God decide to remove and even destroy these nations that inhabited the land of Canaan? Were they innocent and peace loving people and victims of a sadistic, vengeful God of the Israelites? Some today would want us to believe that.

The various tribes that occupied the land of Canaan, before the Israelites arrived there from Egypt, had been there for some time. Did that give them "squatter's rights?" The true God, who interacted with the human beings He created, had given the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants as discussed in Genesis 15. Referring to Abraham's descendants, the Lord stated, "*But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.*" (v.16)

The Lord discerned the disturbing trend in the evil behavior of these tribes that inhabited the land of Canaan. Another reason that God allowed them to temporarily live in the land is to keep the dangerous predatory animal populations under control. "*And the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you.*" (Deuteronomy 7:22) This was also brought out in Exodus 23.

God warned Israel a number of times about the danger of being heavily influenced by the customs of the nations they would encounter in Canaan. God strongly warned them to reject idolatry and other evil religious practices. Again, what might we learn today from history?

One of the most significant warnings is: "*When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.'* You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods." (Deuteronomy 12:29-31)

Here we have a major reason why the Lord would drive these people out and even destroy many of them. The horrible practices were deeply embedded in their culture. God had warned

that any Israelite who would engage in these evil practices would be subject to being cut off and executed. *"Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: 'Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones.'" (Leviticus 20:2)*

One of the reasons why God sent Israel and Judah into captivity was their adoption of pagan idolatrous practices including the worship of Baal and Molech. *"And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger." (2 Kings 17:15-17)*

God brought His message to the prophet Jeremiah as He reviewed the history of Israel and Judah and warned of the impending attack of Jerusalem by Babylon. *"because of all the evil of the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah which they did to provoke me to anger--their kings and their princes, their priests and their prophets, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned to me their back and not their face; and though I have taught them persistently they have not listened to receive instruction. They set up their abominations in the house which is called by my name, to defile it. They built the high places of Baal in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin." (Jeremiah 32:32-35)* *Smith's Bible Dictionary* presents the following information about Molech:

"The fire-god Molech was the tutelary deity of the children of Ammon, and essentially identical with the Moabitish Chemosh. Fire-gods appear to have been common to all the Canaanite, Syrian and Arab tribes, who worshipped the destructive element under an outward symbol, with the most inhuman rites. According to Jewish tradition, the image of Molech was of brass, hollow within, and was situated without Jerusalem. "His face was (that) of a calf, and his hands stretched forth like a man who opens his hands to receive (something) of his neighbor. And they kindled it with fire, and the priests took the babe and put it into the hands of Molech, and the babe gave up the ghost." Many instances of human sacrifices are found in ancient writers, which may be compared with the description of the Old Testament of the manner in which

Molech was worshipped. Molech was the lord and master of the Ammonites; their country was his possession."

The Eternal was being consistent. He directed the removal and destruction of the various tribes in the land of Canaan. He also removed the tribes of Israel from the land for the same reasons. Various kings of Israel such as Abab and Ahaz were condemned for engaging in these practices.

The God of the Bible is God of judgment and mercy. He will bring back to life these people that He killed, at a time when there is no Satan around to deceive them and His Spirit will open their minds to understand His instructions and then live by them and be blessed. God proclaims, "*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.*" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Arms up friends! Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Please do pray for us as well.

-Scott Hoefker

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