

The Troubling Acts of God: The Conquest of the Canaanites (Part 1)

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The Conquest of Canaan

Josh.6:21 They utterly destroyed everything in the city [of Jericho], both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

Josh.8:25 All who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000 – all the people of Ai. ²⁶ For Joshua did not withdraw his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

The Conquest of Canaan



Genocide?



Holy War (Crusades /Jihad)?



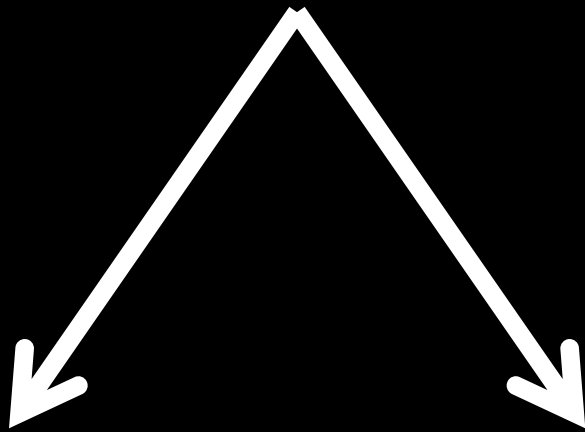
Manifest Destiny?



A Theological Problem?

If you think of God's wrath and love being equal and opposing attributes, then no.

God is arbitrary



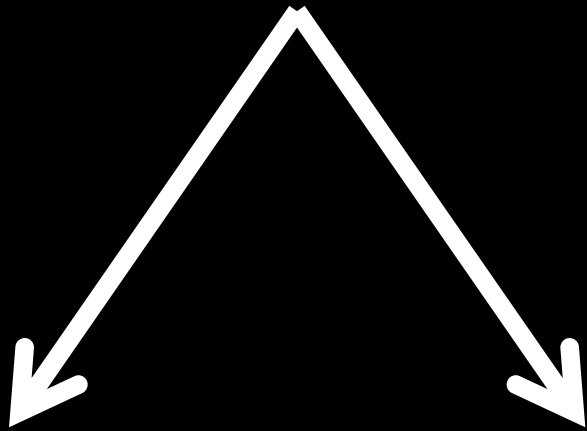
God
saves
some
(mercy)

God
destroys
others
(justice)

A Theological Problem?

But if you think of God's love being consistent and for all, then this raises big questions.

God is arbitrary



God
saves
some
(mercy)

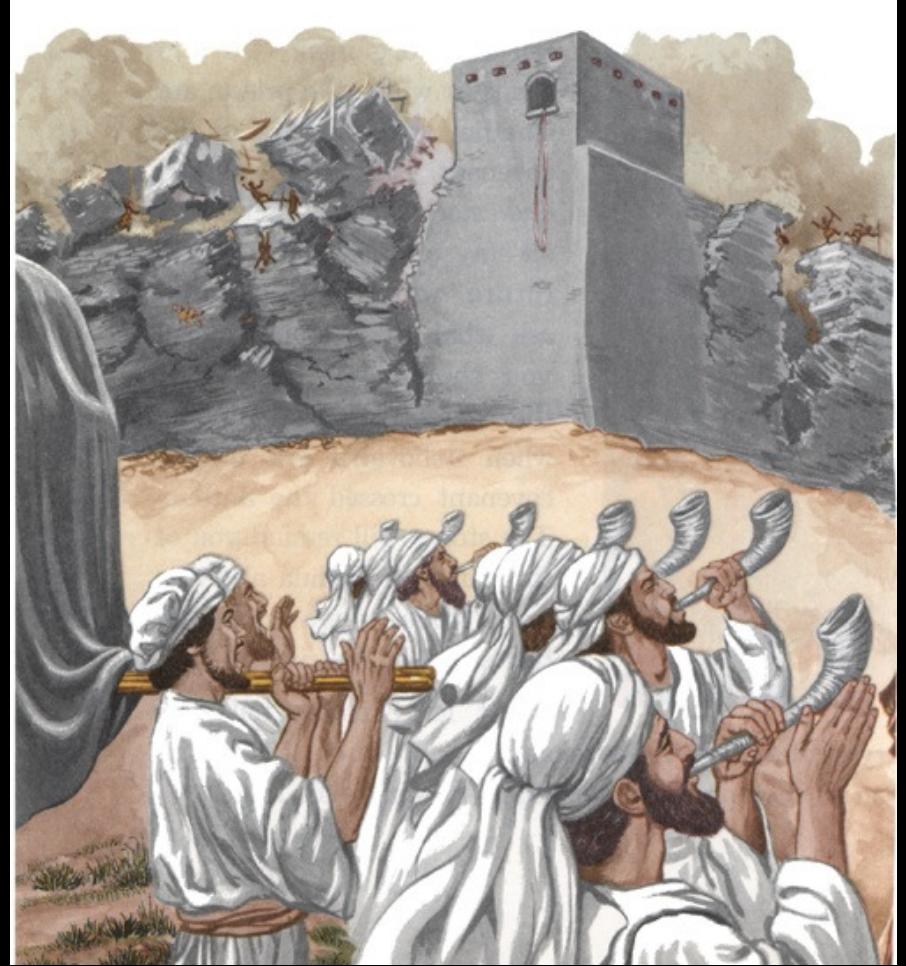
God
destroys
others
(justice)

God is loving
(Trinitarian)



???

Images of the Conquest



Realities of the Conquest

- ‘All the archaeological evidence indicates that **no civilian populations** existed at Jericho, Ai, and other cities mentioned in Joshua... According to the best calculations from Canaanite inscriptions and other archaeological evidence (i.e. no artifacts or ‘prestige’ ceramics indicating wealth/social status, as one would expect in general population centers), Jericho was a small settlement of probably one hundred or fewer **soldiers**. This is why all of Israel could circle it seven times and then do battle against it on the **same day**.’

(Richard Hess, *The Jericho and Ai of the Book of Joshua*; Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*)



Realities of the Conquest

- Israel attacked military fortresses
- No civilians
- Soldiers only



How to Explain This?

Josh.6:21 They utterly destroyed everything in the city [of Jericho], both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

Josh.8:25 All who fell that day, both men and women, were 12,000 – all the people of Ai. ²⁶ For Joshua did not withdraw his hand with which he stretched out the javelin until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.

Language of Victory: Now

- We kicked their butts
- We slaughtered them
- We wiped the floor with them
- We beat them down so hard they're never gonna get up

Language of Victory: Then

- Egypt's Tuthmosis III (later fifteenth century) boasted that 'the numerous army of Mitanni was overthrown within the hour, *annihilated totally like those (now) not existent.*' In fact, Mitanni's forces lived on to fight in the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries BC.



Language of Victory: Then

- The 'Bulletin' of Ramses II tells of Egypt's less-than-spectacular victories in Syria (around 1274 BC). Nevertheless, he announces that he slew *'the entire force'* of the Hittites, indeed *'all the chiefs of all the countries'*, disregarding the 'millions of foreigners,' which he considered *'chaff'*.



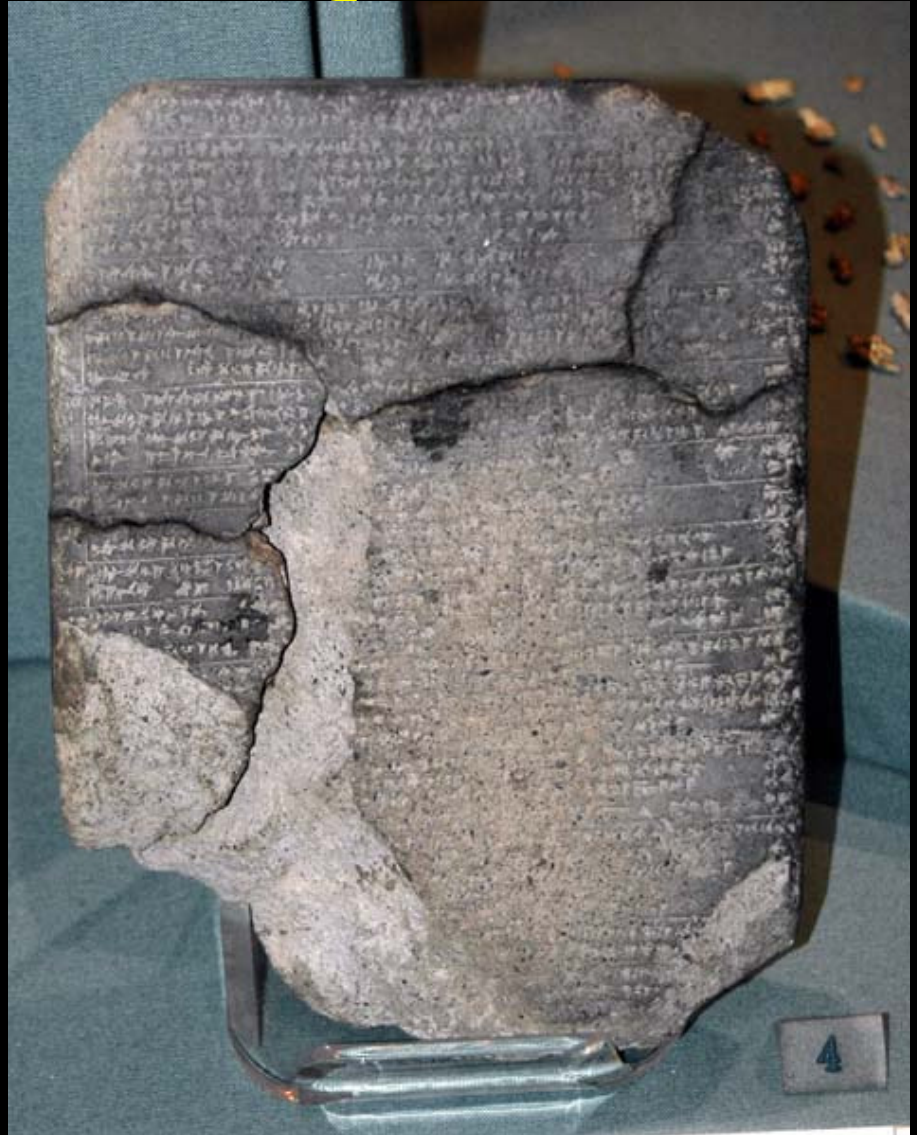
Language of Victory: Then

- In the Merneptah Stele (ca. 1230 BC), Rameses II's son Merneptah announced, 'Israel is wasted, *his seed is not*,' another very premature declaration.



Language of Victory: Then

- Hittite king Mursilli II (who ruled from 1322 – 1295 BC) recorded making ‘Mt. Asharpaya *empty* (of humanity)’ and the ‘mountains of Tarikarimu *empty* (of humanity).’



Language of Victory: Then

- Ashurnasirpal of Assyria (1050 – 1031 BC) detailed in stone, in one of his temple reliefs, his burning, mutilating, and hanging of captives, including boys and girls.



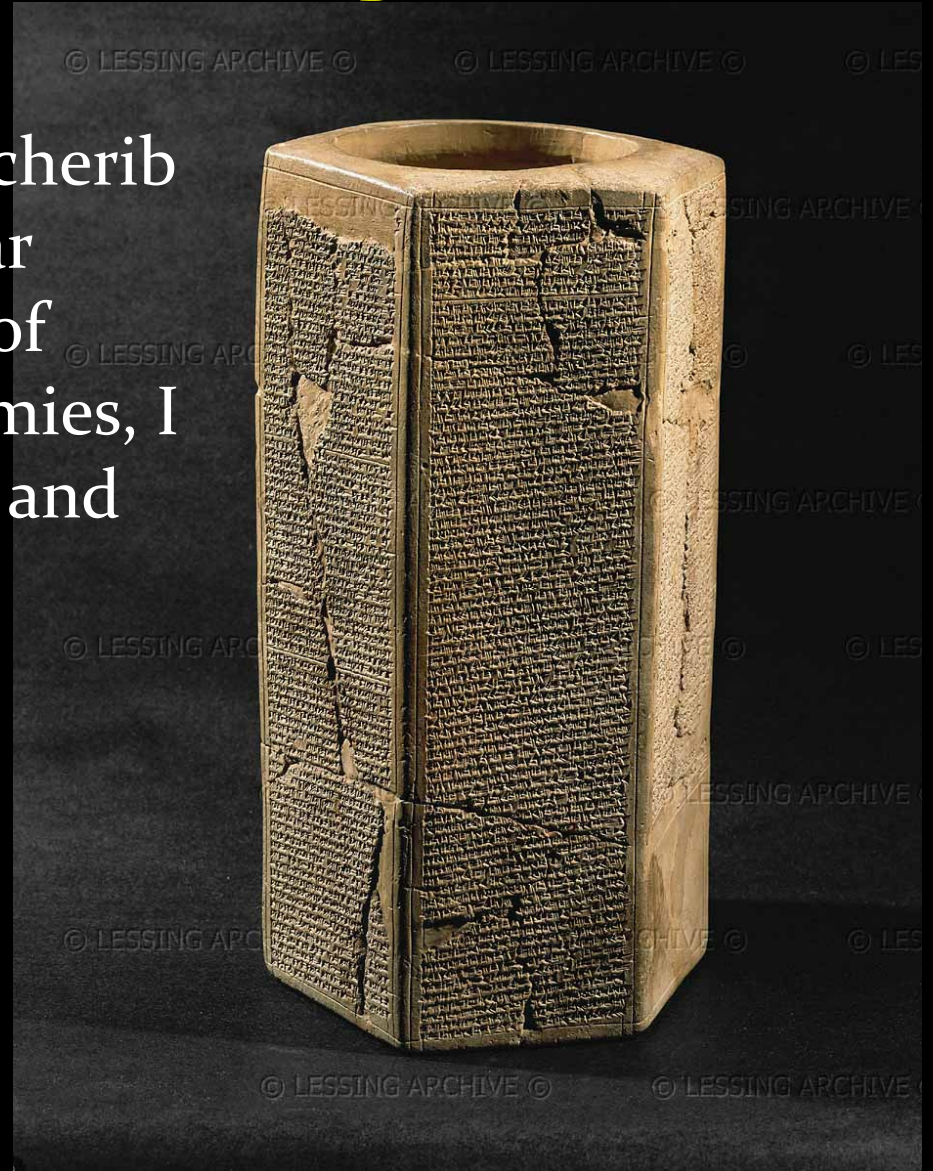
Language of Victory: Then

- 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. Also, when Mesha described his victory over two Israelite towns, **he boasted of killing women and girls.**



Language of Victory: Then

- The Assyrian ruler Sennacherib (701 – 681 BC) used similar hyperbole: ‘The soldiers of Hirimme, dangerous enemies, I cut down with the sword; and *not one escaped.*’



Language of Victory: Bible

- Josh.10:40 Thus Joshua struck all the land, the hill country and the Negev and the lowland and the slopes and all their kings. He left no survivor, but he utterly destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded. ⁴¹ Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea even as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen even as far as Gibeon. ⁴² Joshua captured all these kings and their lands at one time, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel.
- Josh.11:22 There were no Anakim left in the land of the sons of Israel; only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod some remained.

Language of Victory: Bible

- **But:** Josh.14:12 Now then, give me **this hill country** about which the LORD spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the LORD will be with me, and I will drive **them** out as the LORD has spoken.' (see also Josh.15:13 – 15)

Language of Victory: Bible

- **But:** Josh.23:12 For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, **these which remain among you**, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, ¹³ know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

Language of Victory: Bible

- **And:** Josh.13:1 Now Joshua was old and advanced in years when the LORD said to him, 'You are old and advanced in years, and very much of the land remains to be possessed...
- Josh.16:10 But they did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites live in the midst of Ephraim to this day...
- Josh.17:12 But the sons of Manasseh could not take possession of these cities, because the Canaanites persisted in living in that land.

Language of Victory: Bible

- God's original command:
- Deut.7:1 When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, ² and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and **you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them.** You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.

Language of Victory: Bible

- **But God and Moses also warn against assimilation with the Canaanites:** ^{Deut.7:3} Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. ⁴ For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you. ⁵ But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire.

Language of Victory: Bible

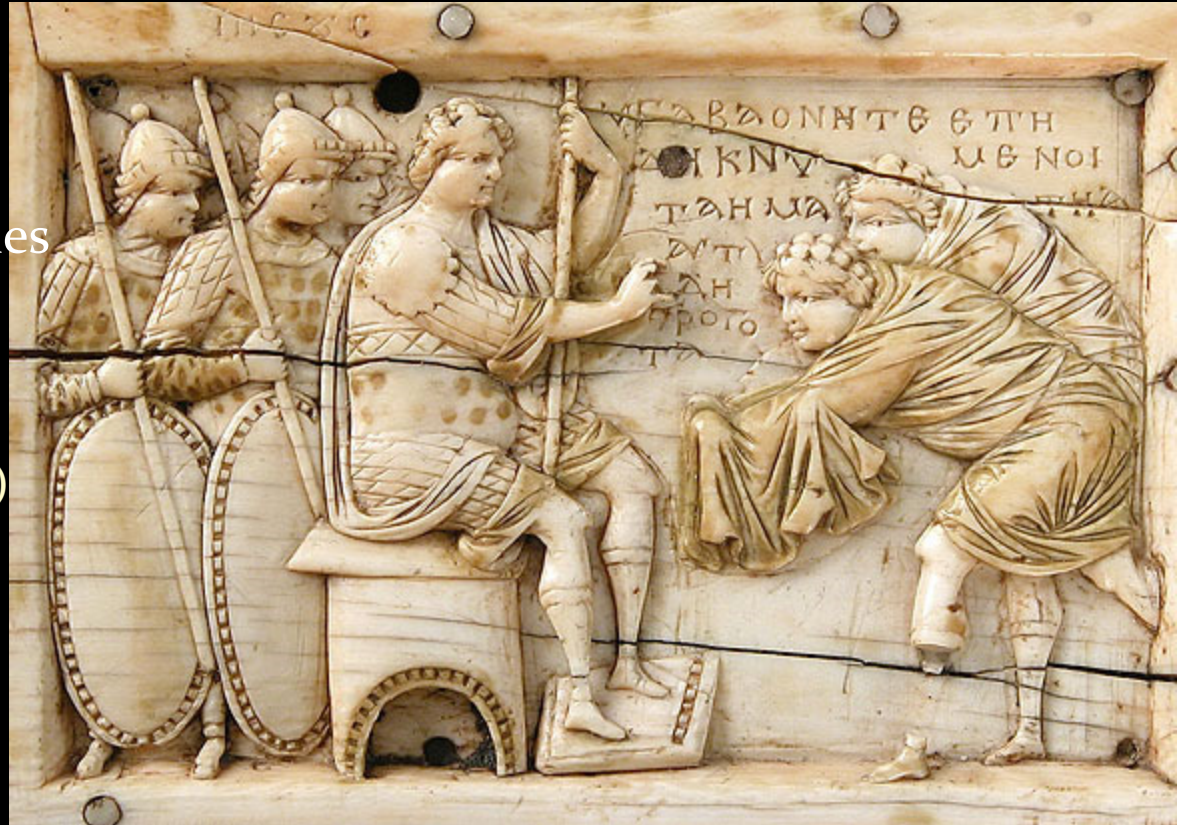
- Notice that God speaks of civilians areas being left intact, abandoned: Deut.6:10 Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, ¹¹ and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied...

Language of Victory: Bible

- Literary context
 - The whole book of Joshua
- Cultural-historical context
 - Idiomatic phrases must be translated idea-for-idea, not simply word-for-word
 - Example: “I spilled the beans; I let the cat out of the bag; my mom hit the ceiling.”
- Principle: What makes you a brilliant communicator in one culture is precisely what makes you hard to understand in another.

Language of Victory: Bible

- But literary structure should tell you something!
 - Joshua 9 – 11 is the high point, climax, of *Joshua*
 - Hivites in Joshua 9 – 11 become part of Israel
 - They became ‘servants of the sanctuary’
 - Israel defended them from other Canaanites
- Conversion was accepted and interpreted as enemies ‘destroyed’
 - Model: ‘Edomites’ incorporated under Davidic rule (Amos 9:12) and yet also ‘destroyed’ (Obadiah)
 - ‘No longer Gentiles’ in Eph.4:17; 1 Cor.10:1; Rom.6:1 – 11



Language of Victory: Bible

- This was a controlled military campaign against military fortresses and soldiers
- God and Moses never literally intended 'complete annihilation'
- Conversion was accepted and interpreted as enemies 'destroyed'
- The strategy gave maximum time for civilians to flee

Israel's Terms

- They accepted surrender and defection



- Josh.6:25 However, Rahab the harlot and her father's household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Israel's Terms

- They offered terms of surrender



- Josh.11:19 There was not a city which made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites living in Gibeon; they took them all in battle.

Israel's Terms

- Israel incorporated Canaanites, *so this was not about their ethnicity, and this was not genocide*
 - Judah married Shua (Gen.38:2)
 - Tamar (Gen.38:6) gave birth to Judah's children
 - Shaul (Ex.6:15)
 - A 'mixed multitude' joined Israel (Ex.12:38)
 - Caleb (Num.32:12; one of Moses' two lieutenants)
 - Rahab (Josh.6:17 – 25; became an ancestor of Jesus)
 - Hivites (Josh.9 – 11) incorporated and defended
- This was a controlled military operation to cut the nerve of the Canaanites' government and military power

Israel's Terms

- The theory that Israel was simply disobedient in not killing all the Canaanites at once is wrong
- Israel was open to accepting Canaanites through conversion, and content to peaceably displace them otherwise
- Israel was rejecting Canaanite religious beliefs and practices
 - What were those beliefs and practices?