

Lesson 5 Article
Destroy the People (Josh. 6:21).

It disturbs some people that God commanded every living thing in Jericho to be killed. Isn't our God a God of mercy? After all, it's one thing for the Jews to kill the enemy soldiers; but why kill women, children, and even animals?

To begin with, this commandment was not a new one. The Lord had given it to Moses years before. In the "divine law of war" found in Deuteronomy 20, the Lord made a distinction between attacking cities that were far off (vv. 10–15) and cities in the land of Canaan where Israel would dwell (vv. 16–18). Before besieging a city afar off, the Jews were to give that city an offer of peace; and if the city surrendered, the Jews would spare the people and make them subjects. But the people in the cities *in the land of Canaan* were to be destroyed completely, and their cities burned.

Why? For one thing, the civilization in Canaan was unspeakably wicked; and God didn't want His holy people contaminated by their neighbors (7:1–11). We must never forget that God put Israel in the world to be the channel for His blessing (Gen. 12:1–3), which involves, among other things, the writing of the Scriptures and the coming of the Savior. Read the Old Testament record, and you will see Satan doing everything he could to pollute the Jewish nation and thus prevent the birth of the Messiah. When the Jewish men married pagan women and began to worship pagan gods, it was a threat to the purposes God had for His chosen people (Neh. 13:23–31). God wanted a "holy seed" (Mal. 2:14–15) so that His holy Son could come to be the Savior of the world.

"God is perpetually at war with sin," said G. Campbell Morgan. "That is the whole explanation of the extermination of the Canaanites."² Because the Jews didn't fully obey this commandment in later years, it led to national defilement and divine chastening (Ps. 106:34–48). The Book of Judges would not be in the Bible if the nation of Israel had remained true to the Lord (Jud. 2:11–23).

There is a second consideration: The people in the land had been given plenty of opportunity to repent and turn to the Lord, just as Rahab and her family had done. God patiently endured the evil of the Canaanites from the time of Abraham (Gen. 15:16) to the time of Moses, a period of over 400 years. (See 2 Peter 3:9.) From the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan was another 40 years in Israel's history, *and the Canaanites knew what was going on!* (See Josh. 2:8–13.) Every wonder that God performed and every victory that God gave His people was a witness to the people of the land, but they preferred to go on in their sins and reject the mercy of God. Never think of the Canaanites as helpless ignorant people who knew nothing about the true God. They were willfully sinning against a flood of light.

We should also keep in mind that these historical events were written "for our learning" (Rom. 15:4) as we seek to live for Christ today. In the destruction of Jericho and its population God is telling us that *He will tolerate no compromise with sin in the lives of His people*. To quote Campbell Morgan again: "Thank God that He will not make peace with sin in my heart! I bless His name for the thunder of His authority, and for the profound conviction that He is fierce and furious in His anger against sin, wherever it manifests itself."³

When I was a child in Sunday School, the superintendent often chose the song "Whiter Than Snow" for us to sing in general assembly. While we sang "Break down every idol/Cast out every foe," I confess that I didn't understand at the time what I was singing; but now I understand. *The Lord will not share my life if there are rival gods in my heart. He will not permit me to compromise with the enemy*. When you grasp this truth, you also better understand His admonition in 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1.¹

² G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1912), vol. 1, p. 104.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong*. "Be" Commentary Series (78–80). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.