

Bible Genocide & A God of Love

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | November 25, 2013



Can you please explain the genocide that occurs in the Old Testament. For example God orders the Israelites to go and wipe out certain nations. The reason held is because if they don't, then the influence on the Israelites will lead them away from God. How do you reconcile this order with the picture of a loving God?

Thank you for your question, one that has troubled many.

We have difficulty with these Old Testament events for a couple of reasons. One, we don't get as much information as is available about what transpired at that time and two, we have a restricted view of time.

God's intention for Israel was that they would be a nation of priests who ministered God's remedy, love and truth, to bring salvation (life, not death) to the world, including the nations around them.

Although the whole earth is mine, you [Israel] will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' (Exodus 19:5,6)

...For my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. (Isaiah 56:7)

God's plan was for Israel to be a source of truth, love, and life to all the peoples of the world, not an army that brings death. Remember how some who responded were brought into Israel, such as Rahab and Ruth?

Yet, when they left Egypt to go to the Promised Land, that land was occupied by others. How was Israel to possess this land without war and killing? God had a plan that did not require Israel to kill anyone:

I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way. But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. **Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.** (Exodus 23:28-30)

But the children of Israel did not trust God and did not follow His plan. *They* insisted on going to war. *They* insisted on attacking the nations around them. Knowing they were bent on conquest, conflict and war, God sought to limit the pain, suffering and damage – to both the enemies of Israel and Israel itself.

Consider for a moment soldiers returning from combat and how they suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. War is damaging, not just to those killed, but to those who survive – the victors as well as the conquered.

God wanted to minimize the damage to all His children, Jew and non-Jew. God wanted as few people as possible to experience the horrors of war. But how when you have people bent on war?

What is the best course of action if one wants to limit the number of people impacted by war, when dealing with a people who insist on going to war, and when dealing with a people who refuse to follow God's peaceful plan?

Would it not be to get it over and done with as quickly as possible? So God basically said, "If *you insist* on going to war, then don't get into a war that drags on for millennia in which every generation is traumatized and damaged by war and thereby multiply by the millions the number of people brutalized and killed. No, if you insist on doing this, then get it over with now, in one generation, so we can have generations of peace." Thus, God instructed them to wipe out entire nations. But even in this they refused to follow God's directions. Thus, they experienced the worst of all of it.

Their refusal to trust God to drive out their enemies without war brought pain, suffering, and conflict to their generation. Their refusal to wipe out entirely the nations that opposed them has resulted in perpetual war and conflict that has persisted for 4000 years, affecting every generation and is now encompassing the world.

Finally, we must remember, what we call death is not the final end. All people will be resurrected. God's ultimate goal is to destroy sin and death and restore His universe to perfect harmony with Himself where there is perpetual health, happiness, and eternal life. We have no idea how many from those other nations will ultimately be saved, even if they died in war. (Consider Naaman, an enemy soldier, yet one whom the God of Israel reached).

So my take is this: the genocide recorded in Scripture was an outworking of sin, rebellion, and distrust of God in the hearts of men, not the outworking of God's intent or plan.