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Isra'el's Enemies
33: 50-56

Isra'el's enemies DIG: Why did the resident nations in the Promised Land need to be exterminated? How would that protect the Israelites? How had they fallen prey to idolatry in the past? On what basis would the Promised Land be divided among the twelve tribes? Was that fair? Why or why not. What would be their punishment for rebellion? What was the outcome?

REFLECT: When Ha'Shem told Isra'el to utterly destroy the inhabitants of the Promised Land, does that seem unusually cruel to you? Why? Why not? Who are those in the world today that God doesn't want you to be unequally yoked with? Are you intermarrying with them? Are you having your children over to them? In what sense can you destroy them? What will happen if you don't?

If you don't drive out the inhabitants of the land from in front of you, then those you allow to remain will become like thorns in your eyes and stings in your sides.

Introduction (33:50-51): ADONAI spoke to Moshe in the plains of Mo'ab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, where the conquest would begin in the near future**. He said.**

Here is an example of chiasm with introversion (**to see link click Ac – Numbers from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Chiasm and introversion**). The first **A** is the opposite of the second **A**. But both **A's** speak of the decisions of the whole population. **The pivot, C, focuses on the criterion of the population.** Both are factors of **the land** distribution in **26:54-55**; they are summarized in this introverted, but symmetrical scheme.[757]

A. Reward for obedience (33:52-53): to tell the people of Isra'el, "When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, you are to expel all the people living in the land. You are to destroy all their stone figures, destroy

all their metal statues and demolish all their high places of idol worship**. Drive out the inhabitants of the land, and live in it, for I have given the land to you to possess."** The tragedy of **Isra'el's** history was that **they** failed to follow faithfully these commands from **the LORD**, so **their** demise at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians was largely due to **their** tendency toward idolatry.

> **B. The division of the Land (33:54):** Here is the theological climax of the book. **The Land** belonged to **ADONAI**, and it was **His** to grant to whom **He** desired. By **His** love, grace, and mercy **He** had promised and was now presenting the gift of **the Land** to **His people**. The distribution among **the tribes** was to be proportionate, based on the size of each **tribe** and through the casting of **lots**. Those **lots** were cast with the confidence in the providence of **God** to apportion justly and fairly among the different **tribes of Isra'el**. **You will inherit the land by lot according to your tribes. You are to give more land to the larger tribes and less to the smaller ones. Wherever the lot falls to any particular person, that will be his property. You will inherit according to the tribes of your ancestors** (see **Eq – The Division of the Land**)**.**

A. Punishment for disobedience (33:55-56): The reward for obedience is now contrasted with a stern warning and potential curse that would follow if **the nation** was not faithful to **the LORD** alone. **But if you don't drive out the inhabitants of the land from in front of you, then those you allow to remain will become like thorns in your eyes and stings in your sides — they will harass you in the land where you are living** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ca – Warning Against Idolatry**)**. And in this event, I will do to you what I intended to do to them.** The opposite to **the Israelites driving out the inhabitants of the land** would be that of being driven out **themselves** by the hand of **the One** who had given **it** to **them** in the first place. **Joshua** issued a similar warning to **Isra'el** in **his** farewell address to the nation before **his** death (see the commentary on **Joshua Cs – Joshua's Farewell Address**).[758]

In six short verses, we learn so much about **the enemies** which **Isra'el** would have to face when **they** entered **the Land**. **ADONAI** told **them** while speaking to **Moses** on the foothills of **Mo'av**, that **they** would have to totally **destroy** all the religious trappings of **the Canaanites** and dispossess the inhabitants when **they** entered **the Land**. **The LORD** told **them** while speaking to **Moshe** on the foothills of **Mo'ab**, that **they** would have to totally **destroy** all the pagan practices of **the**

Canaanites and utterly **destroy them** when **they** entered **the Land**. The consequences for disobedience to **His** commandment would be tragic. **Ha'Shem** declared: **But if you don't drive out the inhabitants of the land from in front of you, then those you allow to remain will become like thorns in your eyes and stings in your sides – they will harass you in the land where you are living. And in this event, I will do to you what I intended to do to them (33:55-56).**

Just like the plagues of **Egypt**, so also would be the battles in **Canaan** – a religious war! The religious systems of both civilizations were actually quite different although they had many common features. Some of these common features were idolatry, polytheism, demonization, and occult practices. Both societies (**Egyptian** and **Canaanite**) had **their** own version of these common features. So, one of the first instructions that **God** gave **Moshe** concerning **the Canaanites** was to **destroy** all **their** religious implements and worship places. Also, there are several teachings scattered throughout the Torah specifically directed toward **the Canaanites**.

Even though the religion of **the Canaanites** was spoken of rather frequently in the TaNaKh, nevertheless, it was not until relatively recently that scholars knew many details about **the Canaanite** religion. The latest information came with the discovery of the now famous Ugaritic tablets found in the late 1920's near the Syrian village of Ras Shamra, located close to the Mediterranean coast. Here for the first-time archaeologists found written documentation of the many religious practices about which the TaNaKh speaks. It is true that archaeologists have found many cult objects such as sanctuaries, deity figurines, incense burners, and altars in excavations scattered throughout **Isra'el**. However, the Ugaritic texts provide authentic **Canaanite** records that confirm firsthand expressions of **Canaanite** religious thought and practice.

What do we know about the religion of **the Canaanites**? The best summary is that **the Canaanite** religion is in part, "a human response to the environment." In other words, religion is expressed as a pattern of human behavior in the face of life's difficulties. To that end, nature is full of extraordinary power, such as storms or heat. **The Canaanites** thought that the forces of nature were personified. Thus, **they** created a deity for each of these forces. Interestingly enough, since the language of **Canaan** was a language very close to Hebrew, many of these gods or goddesses were called by common Hebrew names. For example, **the Canaanites** chief god was El, also a common Hebrew word for **God**; **Ba'al** was a second most

powerful **Canaanite** god and his name means lord; and Yam was the god of the sea, and the Hebrew word yam means sea. Another important **Canaanite** goddess was Asherah (or Athirath or Astarte) the wife of Yam.

These countless deities often fought each other. The evidence for this was observed in the cycles of nature in **the land of Canaan**. For instance, **Ba'al** was the storm god who brought the essential rains in the winter, the season for rain. But, in the summer, the god Mot (from the same Hebrew world which means death) overcame **Ba'al** for a time and killed him. In the fall, **Ba'al** was resurrected, and the rains resumed.[759]

Their religion often consisted in reenacting those dramas through the recitation of the myths that were invented to narrate those dramas. When **they** did, there would have been weeping and lamentation or joy, depending on what the drama was about. Moreover, scattered throughout those festivals was magic and sacrifices. Thus, by myth and ritual as festivals through the maintenance of temple, and through the power of magic, **the Canaanites** sought to survive in the face of the many forces that pushed in against **their** lives.[760]



This makes it sound like **the Canaanite** religion was rather morally sterile. However, things got rather complicated in their religious practices, depending on which god **they** were worshipping and by what myth. The worst scenes were when the fertility goddesses were worshipped. Since **the Canaanites** did not know or believe in **the One true God of Isra'el** (who is the giver of life), **they** resorted to appealing to false gods, goddesses, or even demons to help make **them** fertile. In addition to open sex, and bestiality, child sacrifices were also common so that **their** gods would bless the fertility of **their** soil, and consequently, **their** crops. **The**

people merely acted out what the myth said about **their** gods.[761] Molech was the god of fertility and the Canaanites sacrificed their babies to gain fertility of their crops.

To summarize the situation of **the Canaanites**, **they** were **a people** whose religion was polytheistic, mythological, ritualistic, and was centered to a large degree in a keen interest in the fertility of the soil, but also in the fertility of human beings. Hence, it was difficult for **Isra'el** to resist the attraction of **the Canaanite** cult and worldview, with its emphasis on fertility.[762] **The Holy One** knew full well the religious danger that **the Israelites** faced when **He** sent **them into the land of Canaan**. Consequently, **He** gave **them** the most appropriate instructions about how to handle the enemy. **They** were to **destroy the Canaanite** religious practices and **their** destruction was to be complete: every man, woman, and child was to be killed (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ag – The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh**). Just as a contractor must demolish buildings and clear land to make room for a new structure, so, **God** had to wipe out the pagan societies in **Canaan** so that **His people** might move in and build a nation that would glorify **YHVH**. During **their** wilderness wanderings, **the Israelites** revealed **their** appetite for the things of **Egypt**, and at **Ba'al Peor**, **they** succumbed to the seductions of **Ba'al** worship (see **Ea – Taking a Stand for God**). If the pagan shrines were left standing, it wouldn't take long for **Isra'el** to forsake **the LORD** and start worshipping idols. Unfortunately, **Isra'el** didn't obey **God's** commands and ended up being snared by the practices of heathen peoples left in **the land** (see the commentary on **Judges As – Cycles of Disobedience and Deliverance**).[763]

Today, we live in a world where we are surrounded by "Canaanites." We live in a **sex**-saturated society. Sins that used to be kept in the dark are now flaunted in public. Our sense of shame has been replaced with brazen defiance. Norms that used to be accepted are now being challenged; people living abnormal lifestyles now want to be accepted as normal. **Sex** sells everything today. It is in every industry, all the time, year after year, day after day, every minute, every second. We cannot escape it. Like Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah, we are swimming in an ocean of **sexual** excess and perversion while trying to stay clean. **Sex** crimes are at all-time highs, while infidelity, divorce, and perversion are now commonplace. We are obsessed with **sex** to a degree perhaps never seen before in the world. In addition, the worship of false gods is now the norm, and child sacrifice in the form of abortion has never been more condoned. In short, we are not much different than **the Canaanites**. The question for us is this. Can we be a light in the darkness and

resist the culture war that we are in, or will we succumb to **the world**?

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for **Your** wonderful, steadfast love that so mercifully provided the path to eternal joy and peace in heaven for all who choose to love and to follow **You**. How foolish it is to follow the god of sex. Just as **You** destroyed the inhabitants of the land of **Canaan** for their sinful living, so all who follow the path of selfishly living for themselves will also suffer the natural consequences of your wrath. **He who trusts in the Son has eternal life. He who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:36).** **Yeshua** paid the high price as **the Lamb of God (John 1:29)** to conquer death. The price has been paid, the gift has been offered; however, the gift only belongs to someone if they choose to receive it. The gift of salvation is a gift of relationship with **You** as their **Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9-11)**.*

*Thank **You** so much for **Your** fantastic love that offers **Messiah Yeshua** to dwell within the hearts of those who have faith in **Him**, **Your** abiding presence is such a comfort in these troubling times. What peace it brings that our **Lord** is the steadfast anchor of our soul, who has entered heaven as our high priest forever **(Hebrews 6:19-20).** How glorious it is that **He** saves all who draw near to **God** through **Him**. **Therefore He is also able to completely save those who draw near to God through Him, always living to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).** All praise, honor and worship belong to **You** our great and awesome heavenly **Father!** I look forward to praising **You** in heaven thru all eternity. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*