

# THE CANAANITE CONQUEST AND VIOLENCE

1 Samuel 2:1–10 • Char Brodersen

**Introduction:** Good morning, church! We are continuing our series this morning looking at the Story of the Nation. And we need to consider the Canaanite conquest.

Reading the Bible, especially the Old Testament, you come across some really difficult passages, specifically around sanctioned violence. There are difficult things for us to get around, not just culturally, but also theologically. But even in the story of Israel itself, we find some hairy stories and sordid characters. Reading the Old Testament is startling—there is a whole lot of BLOOD, a lot of SEX, and a whole lot of VIOLENCE. And for many reading it for the first time, or maybe the first time in a while—it can be disturbing and disillusioning. And especially so when we remember that this is God’s Word, his revelation, his story of the world.

It’s no wonder why many Christians just want to stick to the New Testament. In fact, many pastors and Christian leaders talk about doing away with the Old Testament altogether.

So now that you’ve been adequately reminded of the disturbing nature of the Bible—I want to talk about what you do with those *scratch your head at, what the heck is this doing in the Bible?* passages.

(Disclaimer—for those who have settled these things in their hearts—it’s good to talk about these because this is what your friends and colleagues will want to talk about when you bring up being a follower of Jesus. So now you can help them understand a little better.)

I think for the first time maybe ever—people are leaving the church—not only because of scandals, spiritual abuse, hypocrisy, or personal issues they had with their particular local church community being unloving—but plainly because they could no longer feel safe with the Bible and belief in the God of the Bible, and consider the teachings of Christianity and the God of the Bible as morally reprehensible.

Much of these modern issues with the Bible have been highlighted by individuals like the well-known and outspoken atheist, Richard Dawkins. He famously said:

*“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”*

—Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

Some, in order to reconcile this portrait of God in the Old Testament with God in the New Testament, have gone so far as to return to an early church heresy called Marcionism—teaching that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are actually two different Gods—one of judgment and one of grace. In this view—we don’t have to seriously deal with the Old Testament. Just be thankful that is not your God.

Though the church condemned this teaching long ago as heresy (totally and completely antibiblical), let us be honest, it is not that hard to see how someone could get there or why they would want to. This is difficult stuff to grapple with.

And if there is even an ounce of truth to what Richard Dawkins said about the God of the Old Testament—we are all in trouble. There are many currently who are leaving the church over these questions. Christians are rocked by this stuff and don’t know how to answer it.

This is a big problem in the church at this moment. And it really is a question having to do with the character of God. Is God really loving? Is he truly just? Is he good, and can I trust him to not only be good to me, but to all, to anyone and everyone who will sincerely come to him?

I think a big contributing factor to this is, we have a biblically illiterate culture that is using the Bible to critique a biblically illiterate Church. Most Christians, if anything, have a very general understanding of what the Bible teaches, so they simply ignore these things or try to put them out of their mind and pretend they're not in Scripture. But with our deconstructionist culture, you can't do this anymore. And that's actually a good thing. It's time for the church to recapture the authority and beauty of Scripture and to rediscover the incredible story of God—the Most High God who redeems humanity at the cost of his own life—and to find our story in that story.

So let's talk about violence, and particularly this idea of God-commissioned genocide—holy war—or ethnic cleansing, particularly found in the conquest of Canaan.

## 1. **With God on Our Side**

- A. Holy war is as old as time. Inca and Aztec. Chinese and Mongolians. Greeks and Romans.
- B. One of my favorite songs by Bob Dylan is his protest song—With God on our side.
- C. *"Oh the history books tell it, they tell it so well. The cavalries charged, the Indians fell. The cavalries charged, the Indians died. For the country was young with God on its side. Oh, the first World War, it came and it went. The reason for fighting, I never could get. But I learned to accept it, accept it with pride. For you don't count the dead when God's on your side. And then the second World War, it came to an end. We forgave the Germans, and now we are friends. Though they murdered six million, in the ovens they fried. The Germans now, too, have God on their side."*
  - i. Dylan exposes this self-righteous American savior complex commonly referred to as Manifest Destiny. The idea is that, "America's cause is God's cause." We deified our nation so we can justify our blood guilt—God is on our side, and so he is for our cause. The thing is, this is not unique. Every nation thinks and speaks this way. It is the good guys versus the bad guys. Every country paints itself in this positive light, as holding the moral high ground. And this same mentality has led to holy war, genocide, and ethnic cleansing again and again in the history of the world.
- D. **The Question is—is this what is happening in the Bible and particularly in the Canaanite conquest?**
- E. And the answer from Scripture is a resounding NO. In the story of Scripture, it is not that the nation of Israel is taking the name of God up to justify their cause, the conquest, or wars. Rather, they are God's instrument of judgment on the continual evil, wickedness, and injustice of the nations who have occupied the land of Canaan for hundreds of years. In the story of Israel, it is not the strong using God to justify their conquest of the weak; it is God rising up on behalf of the weak, the oppressed, the trampled over to judge the tyranny of the strong when it has raged, oppressed, and destroyed for far too long.
  - i. As we open up the book of 1 Samuel, we find a prayer by the prophet Samuel's mother, Hannah. This prayer serves as a kind of lens through which we are to read what is happening in the rest of the book. God is toppling the proud and powerful oppressors, and he's using weak and beggarly people like a shepherd boy named David to do it. But this isn't unique in the biblical story. In fact, this is always how God works—God's upside-down kingdom where the weak throw down the strong, the fools are revealed as wise, the good *losers* win in the end, and so on.
  - ii. **Read Hannah's Prayer (1 Samuel 2:1–10)**
  - iii. "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides

you; there is no Rock like our God. Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the Lords; on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness. It is not by strength that one prevails; those who oppose the Lord will be broken. The Most High will thunder from heaven; the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.” 1 Samuel 2:1–10

- F. You may remember that the nation of Israel begins as a nation of slaves—430 years of slavery in Egypt. This is all they have known for generation after generation—oppression, brutality, the continual murder of their babies. They are at the bottom of the caste system, and as they are freed from slavery in Egypt, wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, they are now inheriting the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. But the land is occupied by the superpowers of the day, and these brick layers, shepherds, and farmers (not warriors) are the ones that are to overthrow and disinherit these nations.
- G. In fact, when they come into the border of Land of Canaan, God reminds them of how small and weak they are. “When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you.” —Deuteronomy 7:1
  - i. It is the giants, the powerful fortresses, the warrior peoples that are often talked about when referencing Canaan—this is what Israel is up against.
  - ii. The people of Israel are not bullies; they are not powerful; they’re not warriors—they are a bunch of farmers, shepherds, and carpenters, etc. And they are going up against warrior nations.
  - iii. *(I’ve added an appendices to the notes today that lists out Israel’s bizarre warfare policy as given by YHWH—which supports the idea that Israel is not a tyrannical bullying nation, wiping out the underdog—but weak, pitiable, even comical; and only by the power of God are they able to bring about God’s judgment on these nations.)*

## 2. What about the Canaanite Conquest?

- A. Israel did not say—*God is on our side; we can do whatever we want.* Rather in these stories—like in Joshua—The angel of the Lord’s army says he is not on anyone’s side. Kind of scary right? The question is—whose side is Israel on?
- B. God does not give Israel the green light to holy war—to kill the “infidel” anywhere and everywhere. This is not the way of God’s kingdom. What happens in the Canaan conquest is specific judgment of the inhabitants of this land—the land that YHWH says belongs to him—it’s where his presence dwells, and it has been polluted by violence, bloodshed, and wickedness.
  - i. The first thing we must note is that the Bible teaches that God is both Creator and Judge over all he has created. He is the one who gives life, and he has authority to take life. He is the avenger of all evil and wrongdoing and the one who deals out true justice. And we believe with Abraham that the judge of all the earth will do what is right and just (Genesis 18:25). We trust in God’s righteousness—his rightness and his perfect moral character as revealed in Scripture.
  - ii. Next thing to note is the character of God—this is most clearly stated in Exodus 34 and then this verse is reiterated again and again in Scripture.

- a. “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.” —Exodus 34:6–7

(i) Though we often leave off the second half of this revelation of God’s character, God doesn’t pull any punches. He is extremely patient and kind, and yet there is a limit to God’s patience. For those who do not repent and turn from their evil, God will bring his judgment.

- b. Now the Canaanites are doing all their evil in the equivalent of God’s living room. God says again and again that this land is his land, and the Canaanites have forfeited their right to occupy it. On top of that, God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love for thousands (Exodus 34), and he shows the Canaanites incredible mercy and patience. Listen to Genesis 15. Here God is speaking to Abraham about the land—the land he is promising to Abraham’s descendants:

*Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”*

—Genesis 15:13–16

- c. (Just to clarify, the Amorites is another name for the Canaanites.) God gave these nations, even at this time, 430 years to turn from their wickedness ... to do righteousness and justice. But they don’t. I wonder how patient you are? 430 years patient?
- iii. Both the New Testament’s and the Old Testament’s picture of YHWH is one of grace, patience, compassion, and forgiveness against sinners. Our God is not a God of violence who delights in vengeance and bloodshed. Have you ever noticed that when Cain kills Abel, God responds not by killing Cain—meeting violence with violence—but by placing a mark on Cain so that no one else will take vengeance on him? God responds to the first murder with grace—a visible preservation of the *shalom* that was in the garden. God seeks to preserve, as long as possible, the Edenic state. This is God’s consistent character with sin and sinners—God reveals himself to people in order that they would turn to him; he shows them grace, patience, and offers them repentance and forgiveness, but if they continue in their evil and rebellion, God will judge their unrighteousness (Exodus 34:6–7).
- a. And so God brings judgment on these nations because their sin has reached maximum capacity—not because God hates them, not just because they aren’t his special people like Israel, but because they continued to rebel and reject God and do incredible evil in his presence.
- (i) (Great biblical example is Jonah and Nahum.)
- iv. Sometimes we think of the anger or judgment of God like a divine temper tantrum—God being hot-headed and just ready to blow people away. That is a gross caricature of the God of the Bible. Instead, we should see God’s wrath/anger as “God’s (*wrath is his*) steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations.” —John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*

- a. In light of all of this, the conquest of Canaan is not “holy war,” ethnic cleansing, or genocide, but judgment—God’s judgment on persistent and unrepentant evil.
- b. Theologian and Old Testament Scholar, Christopher Wright, says, *“There is a huge moral difference between arbitrary violence and violence inflicted within the moral framework of punishment. The conquest, like the flood, was divine capital punishment after hundreds of years of spurned grace.”* Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*
- c. Associate professor of Old Testament at Regent College, Matthew Lynch, writes, *“God’s mercy towers over his wrath or judgment. It might sound like cherry picking to say so. However, when Scripture steps back to reflect on God’s character, one thing becomes clear. God isn’t fifty-fifty angry and compassionate. Violence doesn’t balance out his love. Instead, the Old Testament sets God’s deliverance, mercy, and love at the center of its portrait of God’s character. Wrath and judgment have their place, to be sure, but they sit outside the center of the Old Testament’s picture of God.”* —Matthew Lynch, *Flood and Fury*

### 3. “Devoted to Destruction”

A. But what about the Devoted to Destruction passages?

- i. God gives a command concerning the Canaanites in Deuteronomy 20 that no matter who you are, it is disturbing.

**“In the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the Lord your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God.”**

Wow, God, everything? children, babies, the elderly?? non-combatants and the innocent? Yes, this is what the text says—keep nothing alive.

- a. What do we do with this? I want to bring clarity to some of these passages, but let me just say—**though these things might soften the blow, there is still a blow.**

#### ii. Drive out and Dispossess

- a. If you look at most of the passages where God commands the conquest of Canaan, the words are—“Drive out and dispossess the Canaanites” (Drive out: Ex. 34:24, Num. 32:21, Deut. 4:38; Dispossess: Num. 21:32, Deut. 9:1, 11:23, 18:14, 19:1)
- b. Drive out does not mean slaughter—it means to force them out of the land. This is the most commonly used language when God refers to the Canaan conquest. Dispossess means that these nations are no longer to rule or be in charge. They are no longer the dominate influence and culture-makers in the land—but rather Israel is to be the influence under God’s rule and reign.

#### iii. Hyperbolic Language

- a. It records again and again in the book of Joshua that Joshua devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the Lord God of Israel commanded, BUT then records many times that the inhabitants of these very nations are still in the land. So either the Bible is contradicting itself (within the span of a few pages, and no one caught this and specifically the author of Joshua is contradicting himself) OR *devote to destruction and kill everything that breathes* is actually more like hyperbole. We use language like this all the time in sports—We completely annihilated the visiting team; that game was total slaughter. Hyperbole was very commonly

used by near eastern cultures in their accounts of wars, and there are numerous historical accounts that show this.

- b. It is undeniable that the children of Israel did not completely slaughter these nations. In fact, in one passage, it says that Saul the king completely wiped out the Amalekites—he left none of them alive. YET, Amalekites keep showing up in the story of Israel (even hundreds of years later during the Babylonian captivity). So which one is it? Is this literal or is it hyperbole?
  - (i) It seems to me what is going on here is that God is commanding Israel to drive out, dispossess, rendering inoperative the power of any further authority or influence of these people groups. The people of Israel are to rule the land and be the influencers, setting and defining the culture, not the other way around.
  - (ii) But still, women and children are specifically listed in these accounts of slaughter. Most scholars agree that the cities that are being destroyed by Israel are most likely military outposts and not vibrant cities. Think of a fortress like Helms Deep from Lord of the Rings and not San Francisco or Los Angeles. So the amount of women, much less children, would be minimal. An example is Jericho—Hagar is there because she is a prostitute and a prostitute would be in proximity to soldiers for business, not necessarily as a regular inhabitant of a metropolis.
  - (iii) Lastly, God commanded the removing and destroying of the Canaanites—women and children included, because he says if they don't, these will become a snare and lead Israel into all their evil. It wasn't just the leaders, the whole of these nations and cultures were saturated in perversion, injustice, violence, and idolatry. Just as God warned, this is exactly what happens—these nations are not driven out and become a snare to Israel, and soon enough, they are practicing all of these acts of unrighteousness and injustice as well.
  - (a) It seems that through hyperbole and merism [sp?], the Canaan conquest is less barbaric than a first read might suggest. But no matter how you slice it, it's gruesome, and women and children were killed in the Canaanite conquest.

#### 4. How Evil are the Canaanites?

##### A. They are particularly evil.

- i. They are not one nation but many tribes engaged in continual violent civil war and bloodshed. Think of ISIS or Hamas, warring drug cartels in Central and South America, communities and culture that are bent on terror and violence.
- ii. Their cities and culture are filled with incest, bestiality, rampant religious prostitution, both male and female, and child sacrifice. These are a part of everyday life. These acts of wickedness were not the headlines of the evening news. They were common, accepted, and boasted about. (Lamech boasts of murdering a child for hurting him.)
- iii. God said that the land had become defiled, so God punished their iniquity, and the land itself vomited them out. But listen to what God says to Israel lest they think they are different or special—**“Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws ... And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you. Everyone who does any of these detestable things—such persons must be cut off from their people. Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs**



**that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God.” —Leviticus 18:24–30**

- iv. Sadly this is exactly what happens to Israel—eventually they become a militaristic state—depending on their military might and their political alliances rather than the Lord. Filled with violence, they practice and perfect the art of violence and war, and they boast in it. They make alliances with the other nations for power and wealth. They worship all the pagan deities from the nations around them. They give themselves to the same perverse oppressive and objectifying sexual practices as the Canaanites, and they even burn their children in the fire as an offering to idols.
- v. In short, Israel becomes Canaanized—and God is good on his word. Assyria and Babylon come and bring God’s judgment on them as well. The land vomits out Israel and Judah—they go into captivity.
  - (i) Theologian Preston Sprinkle writes, *“God did not bully the Canaanites because of their ethnicity nor did he coax Israel into a bloodthirsty massacre carried out with xenophobic relish. Rather God’s holiness (His goodness) demands sacred space for him to dwell with human beings. This is why the Canaanites had to be driven out.”* —Preston Sprinkle, *Fight*
  - a. It also needs to be pointed out that those who repented—turned toward God—God brought them in and made them a part of his people, his family, and blessed them. Rahab, the prostitute; Ruth, the Cursed Moabite (both are in the lineage of Jesus the Messiah); the Gibeonites. All of these turned when they heard of the amazing acts of YHWH while the other nations, doubled their efforts to fight and resist YHWH. Could these nations have turned to YHWH even at the eleventh hour? That doesn’t seem contrary to our God’s character. But sadly, they do not. They resist and double down and receive their judgment.

## 5. How Evil Are We?

- A. The last 100 years have been called the most violent century in the history of the world. Over 187 million have been killed in war, most of whom were civilians. Around 170 million have been killed by their own governments. This century has witnessed seven genocides. In Rwanda alone, 800,000 people were slaughtered in just 90 days.
- B. Currently, there are 12,100 nuclear warheads in the world—each eight times more powerful than the Atom Bomb of Hiroshima.
- C. There’s been an escalation in violent crimes: homicide, rape, torture, and human trafficking. Lest we forget, the millions of babies who have been murdered in the name of freedom and equality for all.
- D. Violence is everywhere, and it’s learned, it’s cultivated, and it’s celebrated—from music, to art, movies, video games. Do you remember the mass shooting that happened in New Zealand a few years back? Do you remember that the government and news sources blocked any viewing of the New Zealand shooters filming of his mass shooting? Yet hundreds of thousands of people searched for it online. Our world craves violence. Not only that, we love to imagine violence. The Internet is filled with chats of people threatening the most gruesome and violent things that they would like to carry out on other human beings.
  - i. So what is the difference between Canaan and our current culture? Honestly, I would say not a whole lot. And sadly, the rhetoric around violence is not just in the culture, it’s in the church as well. Churches having gatherings where those on stage holding their automatic rifles and lifting their voices in praise to God. What a gross misrepresentation of the God who is so committed to righteousness, goodness, and justice that he comes to earth as a human to take on humanity’s sins and bear our just judgment!!

- a. The American Church is in danger of being Canaanized as well.
- ii. Remember Pharaoh? God came to this tyrant oppressor of his people, and like Cain, God doesn't just blow him away for enslaving his people and murdering the children of Israel—NO—God presses upon Pharaoh—Let my People Go! He makes known his power, his wisdom, and his wonders to Pharaoh and all of Egypt. And yet Pharaoh hardens his heart again and again, and finally God brings judgment on him, his house, and his people. Just like the Canaanites, just like Israel. And I would say just like the nations today.
- iii. God has not changed; he is still the same God of grace and justice. What has changed is we are living in a era of grace. God is not repaying the world for its sins, but he has laid the judgment of sin on Jesus—the Father and the Son have made a way that any who would trust in Jesus—oppressor and oppressed, captor and slave, abused and abuser, sinner and sinned against—can find both forgiveness and justice, repentance and healing, grace and peace through the work of Jesus' cross.
- iv. And in this era of grace, we, the people who have come to Jesus for rescue, are sent out as non-violent ambassadors, peacemakers of God's kingdom to make known his righteous rule and his just and righteous king—pleading, compelling anyone and everyone to run to Jesus! BUT there is coming a day when God will judge everyone for what they have done. He will settle all debts, judge all unrighteousness, repay all wickedness, and reward all faithfulness, goodness, and righteousness. We are to compel all to receive the body and blood of Jesus, the Passover Lamb, as a covering for their sin and to live under that blood against the day of judgment.
  - a. Come and receive the love, forgiveness and acceptance that God gives us through the substitutionary death of his Son, Jesus Christ. He is able to cleanse all unrighteousness, heal all ailments, forgive all wrongs, banish all worthlessness, and fill us to overflowing. This is God's offer for our sin and evil that we commit against one another and against him—forgiveness, the removing our sin and guilt.

#### **Closing: 2 Peter 3:9–14**

**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

**But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.**

**Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.**

**So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.**

#### **Communion**



## Appendix

### Listen to a few examples of Israel's bizarre warfare policy.

#### 1. No King except for YHWH.

A. At this time, tribal kings were the ones who led a nation into battle. They were responsible for the success and expansion of their people group. The king protected the land because it belonged to him, and it was his prerogative to acquire more land for his people and the recognition of his might. Kings like this had a standing army—warriors, heroes, champions, captains, generals, different rank and file. But again, Israel has none of this. The land has been allotted to the whole nation, split between the various tribes. There is no king and therefore no standing army. At least not for hundreds of years.

#### 2. Israel's army is untrained and volunteer based. No taxation for an army—God wants taxes and excess wealth to be given to the poor, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, not to fund the military according to Deuteronomy 14:28–29.

A. Deuteronomy 17 strictly forbids the king (when Israel does appoint one) from multiplying horses and having a professional army. Not only that, but they are not to make military alliances with other nations. As the psalmist later writes, **“Some may trust in horses and some may trust in chariots, but we will trust in the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7).**

i. It is God, YHWH, the covenant God of Israel who is their protector. He is the one who fights for Israel as the other verses of this Psalm declare.

B. When Israel goes to war, the captains are appointed at the time, and then they are to say: is anyone afraid? Go home. Has anyone recently been married? Go home and enjoy your life. Has anyone planted a vineyard and not enjoyed it? Go home and enjoy it. Bizarre right?? I mean, just think of Gideon's army—300 men versus like 100,000, AND Gideons men are armed with torches and pots. Yet the Lord throws the Midianite army into confusion, and they destroy one another.

i. Picture **David and Goliath**—David has a sling and is teenage shepherd. Goliath is a warrior from his youth. He has learned the art of brutality and violence. Oh, also, he is nine feet tall!

ii. Remember David words to Goliath, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands.”—1 Samuel 17:45–47

iii. So many stories of the Bible have to do with God's people being outmanned and outgunned—and yet God is the one who defends, protects, and prospers this weak and vulnerable people. And this is really a picture into the heart of YHWH. YHWH is not a violent bully; he is the defender of the weak; he cares for the small, overlooked, unjustly treated, and trampled over of this world. He fights for them, and he brings the tyrants to justice.

#### 3. Peace negotiations preceded war.

A. Another clear indication that God is not into violence and bloodshed is shown in Deuteronomy 20:10–11, which teaches if Israel goes to war against a city, they are first to offer peace to it, and only if the treaty is denied can Israel then go to war.

- i. Also, in war, noncombatants / civilians are not to be killed, and also they were not to destroy the land or the fruit trees. God has deep care for his creation

#### 4. **No acquiring weapons or preparing for war.**

- A. Not only that, but they are commanded to hamstring the war horses and burn the chariots. This is the equivalent of saying: disarm all missiles and burn the tanks. Horses and chariots were superior weapons of strength in the ancient world. If you had these, you were bound to win any fight. Winning battles would be an opportunity to better arm themselves and become a stronger people. God, however, commanded the people to destroy horses and chariots of other nations, their potential usefulness to Israel in further battles.
  - i. Superior weaponry was rejected in order to demonstrate trust and dependence on YHWH as King and Protector of his people.

#### **Conclusion**

In comparison to the surrounding nations, Israel's military policy is comical. The army and the weapons of that army are what made you what you were, and what kept you on the top of the proverbial food chain. But not so with Israel. It was trust in YHWH that protected and preserved Israel, and he proved that again and again. This is Israel's policy of war, and whenever they are truly following YHWH, God fights for them, though they are out gunned and outmanned—and their enemies scatter before them.

All of this is a foreshadow of the incarnation and the cross—where God himself will become the ultimate underdog and will triumph over the powers of the world in the work of the cross.

Insert Isaiah 52/53 question—who would have believed that this was the mighty arm of the Lord??—Nailing the principalities and powers to the cross.

#### **Resources**

*Is God a Moral Monster?* by Paul Copan

*Flood and Fury* by Matthew Lynch

*Fight* by Preston Sprinkle

*Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* by Christopher Wright