

Why did God command His people to utterly wipe out the nations in Canaan?

Let's listen to the command God gave to the Israelites as they were about to enter Canaan:

(Deuteronomy 7:1–4)¹ “When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out 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 mightier than you,² and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them *and* utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them.³ Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son.⁴ For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly.”

(Deuteronomy 20:16–18)¹⁶ “But of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive,¹⁷ but you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the Lord your God has commanded you,¹⁸ lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the Lord your God.”

There are two primary reasons for destroying the nations:

1. God was protecting His people. They were stronger nations and would have destroyed the Children of Israel if He didn't destroy them first.
2. To keep them from adopting the cultural and worship practices of these nations.

A few more things to consider:

- The Children of Israel did not destroy these nations by themselves. God used them to destroy these nations. It was one way God stayed the progress of evil in the world.
- It's God's prerogative to judge these nations before the final judgment at the end of the world. It's yet another example of the principle of engaging in a pre-advent judgment, which is then followed by carrying out the sentence rendered for the protection of His people.
- In His foreknowledge, God knew these nations were unredeemable. They were not open to repentance nor to obeying the true Creator God (as revealed in their worship of Satan).

This was the state of the entire world before the flood:

(Genesis 6:5–7)⁵ Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.⁶ And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.⁷ So the Lord said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

What was taking place in these nations that was so terribly disturbing to God?

(Deuteronomy 12:31) You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

(Deuteronomy 18:9–11)⁹ “When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. ¹⁰ There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or* a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, ¹¹ or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.

- They offered child sacrifice and practiced witchcraft, which was an abomination to God.

What were the consequences when God’s people did not obey the Lord? The following text is what occurred when the northern kingdom of Israel became like the nations around it.

(2 Kings 17:16–18)¹⁶ So they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, made for themselves a molded image *and* two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. ¹⁷ And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger. ¹⁸ Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone.

- First, the northern kingdom of Israel followed the practices of the surrounding nations and God forsook them.

Then the southern kingdom of Judah did the same:

(Jeremiah 7:28–31)²⁸ “So you shall say to them, ‘This *is* a nation that does not obey the voice of the Lord their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth. ²⁹ Cut off your hair and cast *it* away, and take up a lamentation on the desolate heights; for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath.’ ³⁰ For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight,” says the Lord. “They have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to pollute it. ³¹ And they have built the high places of Tophet, which *is* in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.

- The nation was being “cut off” from God, which is the language used for high-handed sins. Their rebellion had reached the point where they had also become unredeemable.

If you continue in this passage, God’s makes reference to the second coming when the “the corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth” (v33) and “the land shall be desolate” (v34) [see also Revelation 19:17–21]. There are times when God brought judgment early because wickedness had become so great that the only way to stop it was to destroy the nations. Sometimes God did it directly (consider Sodom and Gomorrah); other times He used His people to do it.

Why did they also kill the children? Because the entire culture was completely corrupt. They had turned themselves over completely to follow Satan.

OT stoning for disobedience. What does this say about certain sins? About God?

God is holy and righteous, and no sin is acceptable to Him. Yet there are certain sins that are more egregious. These more egregious sins are in direct rebellion against God.

(Numbers 15:30–31)³⁰ ‘But the person who does *anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people.*³¹ Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.”

- The words *yad* (yawd) *ruwm* (room) means literally “hand exalted” or “with a high hand.”
- This is a kind of rebellious sin that is directly with God in mind.
- There was no sacrifice for this kind of sin.

(*Song for the Sanctuary*, Dr. Richard Davidson) In Numbers 15:30-31, Moses refers to a class of defiant or high-handed (Heb. *beyad ramah*, lit. “with a high hand”) sins for which no sacrifice could atone, and for which the sinner must be put to death and/or divinely “cut off”... Three such sins are explicitly said to “defile” (using the Heb. word *tame’* “to defile”) the sanctuary. These included: (1) murder (Num 35:30–33), which polluted the entire land, including the sanctuary; (2) idolatry involving child sacrifice (Lev 20:3; cf. Ezek 23:37–39, 29; Ps 106:38); and (3) contamination by touching a corpse and defiantly refusing to follow the divinely-prescribed rituals for purifying oneself (Num 19:13, 20). For these high-handed sins, the sinner must bear his own culpability: “his guilt [‘*awon*, ‘iniquity, culpability’] shall be upon him” (Num 15:31). The culpability of these sins is not born by the priests, since they bare culpability for confessed sins for which atonement is made (Lev 10:17), nor are these sins which have defiled the sanctuary dealt with on the Day of Atonement.⁴ When the defiant (“high-handed”) sinner is put to death for his sins, the sanctuary is cleared of its defilement from these sins of “illegal defilement.”

An example of the attitude behind these “high-handed” rebellious sin:

(Numbers 15:32–36)³² Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.³³ And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation.³⁴ They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him.³⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.”³⁶ So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.

- The key issue here is presumptuous high-handed sin (v30), meaning that there is no sacrifice for a person committing this kind of sin. By their own actions, they are cut off from God and the people.

The NT describes this kind of willful high-handed sin:

(Hebrews 10:26–27)²⁶ For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

(1 John 5:16) If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.

- Presumptuous sin is rebellious defiant sin, with full knowledge that it defies the living God. A person committing this kind of sin could care less that it goes against God’s will. Not only do they refuse to repent, they have given themselves over to commit only evil.

God can forgive the worst of our sins if we are sorry for them and then confess and repent.

(2 Corinthians 7:9–11)⁹ Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.¹¹ For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what* clearing of yourselves, *what* indignation, *what* fear, *what* vehement desire, *what* zeal, *what* vindication! In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

- Notice that godly sorrow is a precursor for confession and repentance.
APPL: Worldly sorrow is being sorry that you got caught. It doesn't care how much it has hurt someone else.