

# Old Testament Mass killings

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## Introduction: The problem

A number of cases of mass killings of people, apparently at God's behest, are recorded in the Old Testament:

1. The Flood (Genesis 6-8)
2. The cities of the plain, including Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18-19)
3. The Egyptian firstborn sons during the Passover (Exodus 11-12)
4. The Canaanites under Moses and Joshua (Numbers 21:2-3; Deuteronomy 20:17; Joshua 6:17, 21)
5. The Amalekites annihilated by Saul (1 Samuel 15)

The first three examples are similar in that there was no human agent involved – in each case it was God, or an angel of God, who carried out the mass killings directly. The mass killing of the Canaanites is the first of two cases in which the text claims that God's people, the nation of Israel, were commanded by Him to attack other nations. For this reason, this case will be the focus of this study.

The problem many people have with these stories of mass killings is that they do not seem to fit the popular conception of the Christian God. In particular, the question is asked how a God of love could allow or even command such brutality. Furthermore, it is suggested that the God described in these Old Testament books is a different character from the God described in the New Testament. The former is supposedly angry, vindictive and ruthless, the latter loving, patient and forgiving. Even for people who are convinced that the Bible is true and represents God's revelation of Himself these accounts can be deeply troubling, especially when one thinks about the death of innocent children.

## Did God command the mass killing of the Canaanites?

One way in which biblical scholars have attempted to resolve the problem of the mass killing of the Canaanites is to suggest that God never commanded it. This argument is advanced in one of two ways:

### a. The Israelites carried out mass killings but were mistaken in believing that God had commanded it

This argument suggests that the mass killings were a carryover from a pagan way of understanding God. It was not uncommon for kings in the Near East of Old Testament times to annihilate the populations of whole cities as an offering to their gods. For example, the 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC Moabite Stone records King Mesha's boast that he had destroyed all the inhabitants of Ataroth as a sacrifice to his god. The suggestion is made that Israel at the time of Joshua had a limited understanding of God and that they wrongly thought that their God, Yahweh, expected the same kind of sacrifice. This line of reasoning raises serious questions about the nature of God, in particular whether or not He is able to make Himself clearly understood and whether or not He would allow such blatant disobedience to go unchallenged. One attempt to overcome this difficulty is the suggestion that God allowed His name to be associated with these mass killings because His love for Israel was so great that He was willing to have His reputation tarnished for the sake of His relationship with them. This view, however, does not find any support in the relevant Old Testament texts, which clearly state that God commanded the mass killings (Joshua 6:17, 21; Deuteronomy 20:16-17). Later texts even criticise the Israelites for their failure to obey the command (Psalm 106:34-42). The only way to reconcile the Old Testament accounts with this view is to regard the Old Testament as simply Israel's record of their perception of their unfolding relationship with Yahweh. The Old Testament is reduced to being a human account of the evolution of monotheistic religion rather than a divine revelation of God's actions in history.

### b. The mass killings never actually happened

Proponents of this view suggest that the accounts of mass killings are not contemporaneous to the events themselves but were written later in the history of Israel, during the period of the kings, by scribes who were witnessing the ill effects on the nation of idolatry involving Canaanite deities. These scribes supposedly concluded that it would have been better if Israel had eradicated the Canaanites when they first settled among them and so included commands from God in their 'official history' of Israel. This view also necessitates an understanding of

Scripture as the opinion of human beings rather than the true word of God or even an accurate record of historical events. In addition, it says little for the honesty of the authors of the Old Testament, who become little more than 'spin doctors', and raises the question how God's people could have been so mistaken in their view of God. It actually creates greater problems in one sense than the preceding view since it places the concocted accounts of mass killings at a later stage in Israel's history when an evolutionary view of their religion should expect a more enlightened concept of God.

Therefore, the issue boils down to our view of the authority of Scripture. We cannot examine here the different views of Scripture among professing Christians or the arguments for the view of this author, which is that Scripture is the authoritative word of God, free from error as originally written and useful in its entirety to teach and challenge us. I do not argue for a mechanistic view of inspiration (as if God dictated the words of every Bible book verbatim), but I accept the view of New Testament authors that God guided the authors of the Old Testament so that their words were also God's words (2 Peter 1:20-21) and the resulting written Scriptures in their entirety (including the book of Joshua) can be described as God-breathed and useful for instruction and correction of false ideas (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The only way to explain away the problem of the Old Testament mass killings is to have a low view of Scriptural authority, whereas this study assumes a high view. This article, therefore, will attempt to take Scripture at face value and consider exactly how the mass killing of the Canaanites fits with our understanding of God as love.

## Why did God command the mass killing of the Canaanites?

### 1. God's judgement on a culture that was utterly pervaded by detestable religious practices

Passages like Deuteronomy 9:4-6 (*"it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you"*), Deuteronomy 18:12 (*"because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you"*) and Leviticus 18:24-25 (*"Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants"*) clearly claim that God was judging the Canaanites. The wrath of God against sin and His righteous judgement of sinners are important biblical principles. Without understanding that God must judge sin we cannot understand the wonder of God's forgiveness and grace or the amazing truth of the cross, where Christ endured the wrath of God for our sin. Although the ultimate judgement of God against human sin is reserved for the future day *"when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed"* (Acts 17:31), there are instances in Scripture where God intervenes in judgement during the lifetime of individuals (e.g. Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5), groups of people (e.g. Korah and his followers in Numbers 16) and even, as in the case of the Canaanites, against entire nations. Faced with another case of annihilation, God's judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham said, *"will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"* (Genesis 18:25). Abraham correctly understood that the key issue in judgement is the character of God, and his question expressed confidence in God's righteousness. Scripture consistently maintains that God is fair in His judgements, as Paul explains in Romans 2:1-16. The culture of the Canaanites was deeply sinful, to a degree that God decided to act in judgement against them. We must be careful to say that no individual or church today has the right to condemn an entire culture, although it is important in an age where the prevailing view is that all cultures are equally valid (philosophical pluralism) that we learn to be discerning about the differing values inherent in different cultures (including our own) and to be able to see their deficiencies when judged against the standard of God's righteousness. No culture is entirely righteous and no society completely sinful, but it is possible to distinguish between cultures and societies that reflect more of God's intention for humanity and those that are more distant from it. The extreme sin of the Canaanites was connected with their religious practices. Deuteronomy 12:31 says: *"You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshipping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates"*. Leviticus 18 gives details of many of the sinful religious practices of the Canaanites, which included child sacrifice to the god Molech, incest, bestiality, homosexuality and cultic prostitution.

### 2. God's desire to preserve Israel from the religions of the Canaanites

In Deuteronomy 20:16-18, when God commands the Israelites to kill everyone in the cities of the Canaanites, the reason He gives is that, *"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"*. The religious purity of Israel was not only important for their own sake, but because of God's intention that they would function as a witness to His power and goodness to other nations (see Genesis 18:18). This is why it was so vital to God that Israel start off their life in the Land without the influence of false religions that would lead them away from Him. Sadly, because of the failure of the Israelites to obey God's command they were indeed influenced to follow the false religions of the Canaanites.

This involvement in Canaanite religions is already evident in the book of Judges, but reaches its peak in the period of the kings. Although there were times when Israel was effective as a witness to God's power and goodness (examples include Rahab in Joshua 2 and the Queen of Sheba in the time of Solomon in 1 Kings 10), they ultimately failed in this responsibility for two reasons:

- a. Because of their lack of faithfulness to God, which meant that they lost their distinctiveness
- b. Because they developed a nationalistic sense of their own superiority, which led them to be disinterested in bringing truth about God to other cultures on the basis that God and His blessings should belong only to them. The book of Jonah provides a classic example of this.

Perhaps the church today can learn a lesson from these twin dangers that may lead to a failure to be effective in mission. We must ensure that we are distinctive but also that we do not retreat into a 'holy huddle' in which we are isolated from those who need to know about Christ. Effective mission depends both on distinctiveness and cultural engagement.

## Did the Canaanites have a chance?

An obvious objection to the idea that God was judging the Canaanites is that it would be unfair for Him to do so if they had no opportunity to repent and be saved. Based on the Biblical evidence, however, this objection dissolves away for two reasons:

### 1. God was patient with the Canaanites

This was no 'spur of the moment' decision by God. In Genesis 15:13-16, God tells Abraham that his descendants will be slaves in a foreign country for 400 years but that they will return to the land of Canaan after "four generations". The reason given for this delay is because "the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure". At the time of Abraham there is evidence that the Canaanites had some knowledge of the true God:

- The judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were close to Canaanite territory, and the deliverance of Lot were evidence of God's judgement against sin (Genesis 18-19).
- Abraham lived among them and was a wealthy and powerful man (he was even able to rescue Lot from the united forces of four kings according to Genesis 14). His faith in God should have been a witness to the Canaanites.
- The mysterious Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem and also "priest of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18). He must surely have taught his people about the true Creator God (Genesis 14:19).

It seems that over the period from Abraham to Joshua, the Canaanites had gradually rejected what they knew about God and moved deeper into sin. It was only when their sin reached a certain level of severity that God decided to use the Israelites to bring judgement on them. However, even at the time of Joshua, the Canaanites had heard about what God had done for the Israelites in delivering them from Egypt and giving them victory over the Amorite kings east of the Jordan (Joshua 2:8-12), yet they did not repent and turn to God.

### 2. There was salvation for those who converted to faith in God

Rahab the prostitute (whose story is told in Joshua 2) was able to discern from what she and other Canaanites had heard about Israel's deliverance from Egypt and victories over other Amorite kings, that God was giving the land of Canaan to the Israelites and, because of her faith in God demonstrated in her statement and her rescue of the Israelite spies, she was saved from destruction and included in the nation of Israel. She even became an ancestor of king David and, eventually, Jesus Christ! Sadly, she is the only Canaanite we read of coming to faith in God, although surely others had the opportunity.

## What exactly did God command?

This question comes to the heart of the matter by asking exactly what God commanded. Often the mass killing of the Canaanites is described as 'genocide', and critics of the Old Testament describe the Israelites as blood-thirsty, jingoistic psychopaths who were completely out of control. The Biblical accounts are quite different, however, both in terms of how God's command is framed and exactly what happened.

### 1. The command to annihilate was limited only to inhabitants of Canaan

In Deuteronomy 20 God makes it very clear that annihilation is only to be used in the case of inhabitants of the 'Promised Land' of Canaan. God gave the Israelites strict rules about proper conduct in war against other enemies who did not live in Canaan, including:

- That the priests were to bless the army before the battle (verse 3)
- That they were to trust God for victory (verse 4)
- That soldiers were to be excused for personal reasons if they had new land, a new house or a new fiancée, or if they were afraid (verses 5-8)
- That enemy cities must be offered the chance to make peace before being besieged (verses 10-12)
- That when a city was captured only the men were to be executed – the women and children were to be absorbed into Israel and the possessions to be kept (verses 13-15)
- That they were not to use a 'scorched earth' policy in siege warfare. They must leave the fruit trees belonging to the city standing (verses 19-20)

The restraint embodied in this code of conduct is remarkable for that period of history, and against this background the command to wipe out the Canaanites stands out as a special case. It was a focused, targeted campaign, not an uncontrolled rampage.

## 2. The judgement was intended to be expulsion from the land rather than genocide

There is a range of verbs used in the commands to Israel concerning how they should treat the Canaanites. Some of these clearly speak of extermination, but others speak of driving them out (see Deuteronomy 7). Deuteronomy 9:3 brings these two ideas together succinctly: *"you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, as the LORD has promised you"*. It seems from a careful reading of the related passages that God's intention was that the Canaanites would have a possibility of fleeing the land as the Israelites advanced. In the case of those kings and cities that refused to do so, there was no option but annihilation. There is no suggestion that Canaanites who left the land must be pursued; rather the commands to annihilate are connected only with people in the cities of the land. Presumably if Canaanites had left Canaan they would then have been treated like all other nations and the Israelites could have made treaties with them and would have been bound by the more general codes of conduct in warfare given in Deuteronomy 20 (see 1. above). So, this was not so much a case of *genocide* (the extermination of an ethnic group) but rather forced removal from the land of Canaan. God's judgement was primarily that the Canaanites would lose the land because of their detestable religious practices and in order to preserve the purity of Israel's worship of Him. As we read through Joshua and Judges this appears to be born out, as the extermination of the Canaanites is never fully implemented.

This understanding that the primary nature of the judgement was expulsion from the land helps us to understand Leviticus 18:24-29, where God says that, *"the land vomited out its inhabitants"* and that if the Israelites copy the religions of Canaan, the land, *"will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you"*. The judgement against Israel, when it came, was not annihilation but exile from the land. Joshua 12 lists 31 kings who were defeated by Joshua and whose cities were therefore wiped out (at this time the Canaanites lived largely in independent walled city-states). The average population of each walled city at the time was probably around 1000-3000, with many cities having no more than around 700 people. The 31 cities conquered by Joshua probably had a combined population of around 70,000. Many of these people may have fled before the Israelites attacked, but even if we assume they were all killed, this is only around 3.5 per cent of the likely population of Canaan (the Canaanites were more populous than Israel according to Deuteronomy 7:1-7, and the Israelites numbered around 1.6 million, so we can assume that there must have been at least two million Canaanites). The remaining 96.5 per cent either fled or were conquered after the time Joshua 12.

## 3. God is not 'racist' – he later judged Israel by removing them from the land

As already mentioned, when the Israelites adopted the religious practices of the Canaanites, God judged them just as He had done the Canaanites. He exiled them from the land to purify them, so that those who returned under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah would be a remnant of people who would worship only Him. God's judgement was not based on the ethnicity of the Canaanites, but on their religious practices and the extent to which sin pervaded their culture.

Undoubtedly these points are unlikely to remove concerns from the mind of the modern reader – after all is 'religious cleansing' any better than genocide and is it really justified to condemn a whole culture and wipe out a whole community based on their religion? At this point it is vital to say that this case in Scripture is quite unique and that there is absolutely no Scriptural basis for any justification of similar actions today. Christians are not promised an earthly kingdom or a land and Christ commanded mission to all nations rather than judgement on some. We are,

however, still left with the unavoidable fact that according to the Old Testament texts the God of Israel ordered the annihilation of a whole culture. Three further questions arise: Why did God use people as the agent of His judgement? What about the innocent Canaanites (especially children)? Is this God of Israel really the God Christians worship?

## Why in this case did God use the Israelites as agents of His judgement?

In the cases of the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah and the Egyptian firstborns, God acted directly or through the agency of an angel to bring judgement. Some people struggle with how He could have used sinful people to judge other sinful people and with how he could have expected people to be able to carry out an act of brutality, especially against innocent children. Were the Israelites somehow morally superior in God's mind? Deuteronomy 9, where God commands the annihilation, is helpful in this regard. In that chapter God makes it absolutely clear that the Israelites are not being used because they are better than the Canaanites or morally superior, but simply as agents of His judgement. In fact, He repeats twice that it is *"not because of your righteousness"*. Perhaps God wanted to use the Israelites in this way so that they would learn the seriousness of sin, the detestability to God of the Canaanite religions and the reality of God's judgement. These truths would be burned deeply on their consciousness as they remembered the annihilation they had been involved in.

This problem of how God could use sinful people as agents of judgement of other sinful people arises again later in the Old Testament. The book of Habakkuk focuses on this concern in the context of the impending invasion of Judah by the Babylonians. The prophet struggles with the fact that God's people, sinful as they were, are about to be defeated by an even more sinful nation (Habakkuk 1:13). Chapter 2 details God's response to Habakkuk as He vindicates Himself and assures the prophet that in due time he will judge the Babylonians by the same righteous standard that He was now holding against Judah. The book ends with a declaration of Habakkuk's faith as he praises God and expresses his trust in Him (Chapter 3).

## What about the innocent Canaanites?

Even if we accept that God was judging the Canaanites through the Israelites, the objection may be raised that some of the Canaanites were innocent victims since they were not involved in the detestable practices of the Canaanite religions. In particular, the thought of young children being killed is troubling. There are two things to say about this:

### 1. The means of judgement was merciful to the weak and young

Although the killing of children by the sword seems brutal to us, it was relatively merciful compared with the alternatives of abandonment and starvation. The sword is actually a quick and relatively painless means of execution.

### 2. Death is not the final judgement or destiny of people

It is always important to remember that death is not the end. In fact, the judgement faced after death (Hebrews 9:27) is much more serious than any judgement resulting in physical death because it determines the eternal destiny of the person. We can trust God to deal fairly with the innocent children who died in the invasion of Canaan, who could not be held responsible for the sin of their culture or religion.

Once again these points are unlikely to remove every concern from the mind of the modern reader, but we must add another dimension to this issue. If we ask whether it would be better for God to allow children to grow up in such a perverted culture and religious system or to bring their young lives to an end and gather them to Himself we begin to see that what happened to them may not have been the worst option. Even as we consider this, however, we are on dangerous ground. Only God can make this kind of judgement, since He alone possesses all knowledge and wisdom. Our finite minds are incapable of understanding every dimension of such a dilemma. Like Paul, we must acknowledge that God's judgements are unsearchable and His paths are *"beyond tracing out"* (Romans 11:33).

## Is the God of the New Testament the same as the God of the Old Testament?

Having considered the various questions above and seen what the Old Testament mass killings teach us about God's judgement we can now turn to the fundamental question of whether it is possible to reconcile the picture of God in the Old Testament with what the New Testament reveals about Him. Old Testament passages like those under consideration in this study even led some people in church history, such as Marcion of Sinope in the second century,

to conclude that the Old Testament Yahweh was a different deity from the Father of Jesus Christ depicted in the New Testament. Although few professing Christians today would go that far, these parts of the Old Testament surely cause significant discomfort and embarrassment to many. We maintain, however, that there is no genuine conflict between the Old and New Testaments in terms of their understanding of God, and that the suggestion that there is reflects a bad reading of both Testaments.

It is true that the revelation of God in the Bible is progressive, and our understanding of the nature of God becomes clearer as the grand-narrative of Scripture unfolds. This is particularly obvious when we look at the concept of God as three in one, commonly referred to as the doctrine of the Trinity. In the Old Testament the idea that God is three persons yet one is barely hinted at. In the New Testament, however, it becomes clear, although it remains a mystery that cannot be neatly explained or formulated. It was only with the coming of Christ that a profound truth like this could finally be made clear and that God's character and the extent of His love could fully be revealed. The key point to realise is that although progressive revelation means that the exact meaning of God's love and truth become increasingly clear and, most importantly, the cross of Christ reveals how these two qualities which appear so often to be in tension can actually be held together (how a holy God can make sinners right with Himself without acting unjustly by leaving sin unpunished), the Old and New Testaments consistently bear witness both to God's love and truth (or holiness). To suggest that God's love is unknown in the Old Testament would be completely false. In fact, God's love to Israel is a major theme of the Old Testament and His judgement of their enemies can even be seen as an expression of this love. Likewise, it would be equally wrong to suggest that the God of the New Testament is not capable of righteous judgement. The Old Testament presents God as the One who is both just and loving (see Exodus 34:6, Psalm 85:10 and Psalm 86:15 for example), and this perfect balance is also seen in the character of God as revealed in Christ (John 1:14). Even in the accounts of mass killings in the Old Testament we see both the justice and grace of God as His judgement falls on the rebellious but those who have faith are saved. This same pattern is continued in the teaching of Jesus, who spoke both of salvation and of judgement (see the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 for example). Throughout the New Testament epistles this perfect unity of justice and love in the character of God is consistently seen, so that John could say in his first epistle that God is both light (meaning truth) and love (see 1 John 1:5 and 4:16). Neither Christ nor His apostles seemed to have any concerns about the veracity of the Old Testament accounts of these mass killings, showing that they firmly believed that the God of the Old Testament was the same God in whom they trusted. In fact the teaching of Jesus and the apostles makes no sense at all without the background of the Old Testament – we cannot understand the significance of Christ's life, death and resurrection except "according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Jesus and the apostles taught that a future day of judgement is coming when sin would finally be judged by God's standard of righteousness. Until we understand the wrath of God against sin (Romans 1:18) and the fact that this wrath must find expression in judgement (Romans 2:5), we cannot appreciate the wonder of God's love displayed in the cross of Christ (Romans 5:8) or why His death was necessary to demonstrate God's justice and avert God's wrath from us (Romans 3:25). Without an understanding of God's wrath the cross becomes meaningless and grace becomes a weak and insipid thing. The mass killings of the Old Testament can teach us much about God's judgement.

## Lessons from the Old Testament mass killings about God's judgement

The mass killings recorded in the Old Testament are exceptional cases, and have certain factors in common, as the following table shows:

	Judgement (agent)	Time to repent	God's witness	Salvation through faith
<b>Flood</b>	Genesis 6:5-7 (the Flood)	While the ark was being built (1 Peter 3:20)	Noah	Noah and family built and entered the ark (Genesis 6:9; 7:8)
<b>Sodom &amp; Gomorrah</b>	Genesis 18:20-21 (fire from heaven)	Abraham pleads with God (Genesis 18)	Righteous Lot (2 Peter 2:7) and Abraham	Lot and family fled Sodom (Genesis 19:12-13)
<b>Egyptian firstborn</b>	Exodus 12:12 (angel)	Previous plagues, Moses speaking to Pharaoh (Exodus 7-10)	Moses and Aaron	Israelites marked by the lamb's blood (Exodus 12:12-13)
<b>Canaanites</b>	Deuteronomy 9:4-6, 18:12; Leviticus 18:24-25 (Israelite armies under Joshua)	Israel's 40 years in the desert (news reached Canaanites – Joshua 2:10)	Israel led by Moses and Joshua	Rahab and family – she tied a scarlet thread outside window (Joshua 2)

<b>Amalekites</b>	1 Samuel 15:2-3 (Saul's armies)	c..350 years since their sin against Israel (Exodus 17)	Nation of Israel	NONE RECORDED
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The four common features of these accounts are, then:

1. **Divine judgement** – they are all judgements of God against extreme sin.
2. **Time to repent** – they are all preceded by long periods of opportunity to repent.
3. **Witness to God** – during the time of opportunity there was knowledge available to the people that enabled them to know about God.
4. **Salvation through faith** – people who had faith in God and were innocent before Him were always provided with a means of salvation. Their families were saved with them just as the children of those who were judged died with them. Someone is saved in each case except (apparently) the Amalekites.

These same principles also apply to what the New Testament says about the final judgement:

- a. **God will judge fairly** – once again God initiates the judgement, but in this case the outcome will be more than physical death. The consequences will be either eternal punishment or eternal blessing (Revelation 20:11-15).
- b. **Time to repent** – God is now patiently waiting, giving people an opportunity to repent (2 Peter 3:9). When Christ returns, God's judgement will come and no one will be able to escape from it.
- c. **God's witness** – Christians are present now in the world as witnesses to God's truth and love (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).
- d. **Salvation through faith** – There is salvation for any who will repent and trust in Christ for salvation (Acts 2:21).

## Conclusion: Why are we troubled?

Despite all that has been said in this article, many readers are likely to remain deeply troubled by the thought of the mass killing of the Canaanites, as in fact this author is. The very thought seems so foreign to our experience of life in Western Europe in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and reports of massacres in recent decades in countries including Sudan and Bosnia are abhorrent to us. It is always worthwhile pausing when we feel such revulsion to ask why we feel it. Is it wrong for us to feel this way? Does it reflect a lack of faith in God? There would appear to be two possible origins of the concern that we feel, and that these two origins will lead to very different results:

- a) **Faith in God** – for some the struggle comes from a deep conviction that God is good and that He loves all people. For those who have come to know Him and to trust in Him through Jesus Christ this is an indisputable fact. If this is the origin of our disquiet then it will lead us to a deep concern for those who do not know God and a commitment to mission both at home and abroad. As we reflect on the judgement of God against the Canaanites in the time of Joshua, we will realise that a greater judgement is yet to come and that those who have not come to faith in God will face a worse fate than the Canaanites. How can we rest easy in our confidence in God's salvation while others have never heard of Christ? In the meantime we can bring our discomfort to God and confess that we cannot lay it to rest, confident that He does not reject our questions so long as they are motivated by a genuine desire to know Him more fully (again Habakkuk serves as a helpful example).
- b) **Rebellion against God** – for others, the struggle arises from a fundamental objection to the very idea that God can or should judge sinful people. According to Scripture, all sin must be judged and every person deserves death and eternal punishment. If we refuse to accept this truth then we are in grave danger, because we too are rejecting God and we will face His judgement. We must repent of our stubbornness and pride and call out to God for mercy. If we do, we will find it because of Christ.

So, then, the ultimate challenge of the Old Testament mass killings is to realise that God's judgement on sin is a reality, and that we are now in a period where the opportunity to repent and be saved is open to us. God's salvation has been made ready – Christ accomplished it on the cross and He rose again and is alive to save people. We would do well to heed the warning of the writer of Hebrews:

*How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? (Hebrews 2:3)*