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GROUP STUDY GUIDE

Answering Atheists: Does God Command Genocide in the Bible?

TEACHING SUMMARY

This teaching examines the tension readers perceive between God's compassion and the biblical accounts of judgment on the Canaanites. It approaches the passages within a theistic framework that assumes God's existence, sovereignty, justice, and knowledge. Its argument seeks to explain the ancient accounts in that framework rather than establish a general rule permitting religious violence.

The first part argues that God has authority over human life and that his goodness includes judgment against evil. The teaching distinguishes that claimed divine authority from the authority of ordinary human beings. It also emphasizes patience before judgment, citing the delay described in Genesis 15. Israel's role is interpreted as an instrument of a particular divine judgment, comparable to other biblical accounts of judgment.

The teaching next describes the wrongdoing for which the Canaanites were judged, especially child sacrifice and other abusive practices discussed in the transcript. It argues that the command concerns removal from a specified land rather than the pursuit of every person of a particular ancestry. Rahab's awareness of Israel's approach is used to support the view that people had warning and an opportunity to flee.

Another major argument concerns literary form. The teaching presents the view that descriptions of complete destruction use ancient warfare hyperbole. It points to peoples who appear again after accounts describing their destruction, including the Amalekites. On this reading, the language communicates decisive defeat and dispossession rather than a literal account of every individual being killed.

The teaching also addresses questions about innocent adults and children. It appeals to Abraham's conversation with God about Sodom as a reason to trust divine justice and argues that limited human knowledge cannot establish all the circumstances of the judgment. For children, it appeals to passages about innocence, limited knowledge, and Yeshua's welcome, drawing hope from future resurrection. These answers depend on the theological premises the teaching establishes.

The conclusion stresses that this was an exceptional command for a particular people and time. The teaching rejects using the account to excuse modern acts of religious violence or unsupported claims of divine instruction. It connects Moses' authority with the public signs confirming him and insists that the conquest command was not intended as a general model for conduct today.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The teaching acknowledges the difficulty of the conquest passages for readers.
- Its explanation assumes God's existence, justice, sovereignty, and knowledge.
- It distinguishes divine authority over life from ordinary human authority.
- Genesis 15 is used to emphasize patience before judgment.
- Canaanite child sacrifice and other wrongdoing are central to the teaching's judgment argument.
- The command is interpreted as dispossession from a specified land rather than worldwide pursuit of an ethnic group.
- Ancient warfare hyperbole is offered to explain language of complete destruction.
- Later appearances of the Amalekites are used to test a strictly literal reading.
- The treatment of innocent people is discussed through divine justice, limited human knowledge, and resurrection hope.
- The teaching explicitly rejects turning the exceptional ancient command into permission for violence today.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK

Basic

1. The people whose removal from the land is central to the teaching are the _____.
2. The woman who described the fear of Israel's approach in Joshua 2 is _____.
3. Exaggerated language used for rhetorical effect is called _____.
4. The king commanded to act against the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15 is _____.
5. The man who asked whether the Judge of all the earth would do what is just was _____.

6. The prophet whose authority the teaching connects with signs such as the divided Red Sea is _____.

Challenging

1. The ethical theory discussed as grounding moral duties in God's commands is Divine _____ Theory.
2. Genesis 15 says the iniquity of the _____ was not yet complete.
3. The teaching points to later appearances of the _____ as evidence against reading total-destruction language strictly literally.
4. The command's primary purpose is described as driving out or _____ the Canaanites of the land.
5. The children's hope in the world to come is connected with a future _____.
6. The teaching calls the conquest an _____ event rather than a general rule for all people and times.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which theological premises does the teaching say are necessary for understanding its explanation of these passages?
2. How does the teaching connect judgment with both divine justice and patience?
3. What distinction does it draw between dispossession from the land and the extermination of an entire people?
4. What textual observations support its proposed reading of warfare language as hyperbole?
5. How does the teaching use Abraham's appeal to justice and the passages about children when addressing innocence?
6. Why does the teaching reject using these ancient accounts to justify modern religious violence?

ANSWER KEY – GROUP GUIDE

Basic

1. Canaanites
2. Rahab
3. hyperbole
4. Saul
5. Abraham
6. Moses

Challenging

1. Command
2. Amorites
3. Amalekites
4. dispossessing
5. resurrection
6. exceptional