

Dr. David Howard, Joshua - Ruth, Session 13, Destruction of Canaanites Excursus Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 13, Destruction of Canaanites Excursus, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David Howard's lecture addresses the biblical account of the Canaanites' destruction, exploring the difficult question of God's commands for their extermination. He presents **biblical passages** from Deuteronomy and Joshua detailing these commands, alongside **counterarguments** that question the morality of such actions. Howard then offers **several justifications**, including the land's belonging to God, the Canaanites' extreme wickedness, the need to protect Israel's worship, and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Finally, he argues that these commands were **context-specific** and conditional upon the Canaanites' lack of repentance, highlighting God's ultimate desire for redemption, not annihilation.

2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 13 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Historical Books → Joshua-Ruth).



**Howard_Josh_Ruth
_Session13.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 13, Destruction of Canaanites Excursus

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Howard_Josh_Ruth_EN_Session13_Canaanites.pdf":

Briefing Document: The Destruction of the Canaanites in the Book of Joshua

Introduction:

This document summarizes Dr. Howard's lecture on the challenging topic of the Israelite destruction of the Canaanites, as commanded by God, in the book of Joshua. Dr. Howard acknowledges the unease and discomfort many feel when confronting this issue and aims to provide a more nuanced understanding within the larger theological context. He addresses the apparent conflict between a God of love and a God who commands destruction, and he seeks to justify the harshness of these actions in the context of the time and the specific situation.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Problem of Divine Command and Destruction:

- The lecture begins by highlighting the troubling nature of God's command to completely destroy the Canaanites, as detailed in Deuteronomy and Joshua. Dr. Howard acknowledges that it's a question that often arises when studying these books: "I usually get one of two questions. One was, what's going on with that long day and the sun standing still? And then the other question was, what about the mass destruction genocide of the Canaanites here?"
- He emphasizes that such commands should indeed "disturb us and should make us uncomfortable," and that we should not take "delight in the death of the wicked."
- He rejects the argument that this is unique to the Old Testament, noting that "Jesus himself got angry and even violent on occasion. He certainly, you know, threw out the money changers in the temple...it was righteous anger". Dr. Howard also points out that the concept of hell and God's wrath is more pronounced in the New Testament, not less.
- The lecture aims to provide a balanced theological perspective, acknowledging the issue's complexity rather than dismissing it.

1. **God's Ownership of the Land:**

- Dr. Howard argues that the land is not the inherent right of either the Canaanites or the Israelites. He states: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." (Psalm 24:1). He emphasizes that God, as the ultimate owner, has the right to determine who occupies the land and when.
- The Canaanites were not dispossessed of something that was rightfully theirs. God allowed them to live there temporarily.

1. **The Sinfulness of the Canaanites:**

- A central argument for God's command is the extreme wickedness of the Canaanites. Dr. Howard states: "God commanded this complete destruction of the Canaanites because of their sin."
- He points to Genesis 15:16 where God tells Abraham that the "iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete," suggesting that their sinfulness would eventually reach a tipping point.
- Dr. Howard cites Leviticus 18 as a graphic depiction of Canaanite sexual perversions, including incest, adultery, bestiality, and homosexuality: "Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean." (Leviticus 18:24). The text also describes the land itself becoming "unclean" due to their practices.
- He reinforces this point from Deuteronomy 9:4-5, stating that the Canaanites are being driven out "because of the wickedness of those nations," not because of the righteousness of Israel.
- Extra-biblical archaeological evidence supports the Canaanite culture's depravity including the worship of Baal and Asherah, cultic prostitution ("sacred prostitute" "kedashah" relating to the word "kadosh" meaning holy), and the practice of child sacrifice.

1. **Protection of Israelite Worship:**

- God's command was also to ensure the spiritual purity of the Israelites. Dr. Howard introduces the concept of "haram," which means complete destruction or annihilation, often translated as "the ban." This was to keep Israel's culture distinct from the Canaanite religion. He states that "this practice seems to be pretty much exclusively limited to Israel".
- The command to cleanse the land was not just a military action, but also a religious one. The idea is that "the city itself was going to be Israel's sacrifice to the Lord."
- He notes that Israel, having just been liberated from slavery and being a very fragile nation, needed to develop its own distinct identity free from the contamination of Canaanite practices.
- He notes that Israel's failure to drive out all the Canaanites as commanded, as described in Joshua chapters 13-21, led to their own moral decline as detailed in Judges.

1. **Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant:**

- Dr. Howard also suggests that the destruction of the Canaanites, who opposed the Israelites in Joshua 9 and 11, can be seen as fulfilling God's promise to Abraham. He says, "I will bless those who bless you, the flip side, I will curse those who dishonor you."
- By fighting against the Canaanites, the Israelites were essentially acting as an instrument of God's judgment, fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant's promise of protection and blessing.

1. **Temporal and Conditional Nature of the Command:**

- Dr. Howard argues the command to utterly destroy the Canaanites was limited in time and place, not a blanket policy for all future interactions with foreigners. "The default mode, I would say, in how God wanted Israel to relate to the enemies or to the foreigners is rooted in the Abrahamic covenant...what God really wanted was for the Gentiles, for the nations to embrace him, not to reject him."
- He suggests that it was specific to the time of the initial conquest of Canaan, under Joshua.

- He emphasizes that even seemingly absolute commands have implicit conditions. Drawing on the story of Nineveh in the book of Jonah, he argues that had the Canaanites repented, their destruction could have been averted. He says, "if they had truly repented, not in a false way, but if there was true repentance, those commands would have been withdrawn."

1. Distinguishing from Modern Jihad:

- Dr. Howard addresses the modern concern of whether this mandate is similar to Jihad. He cautions against drawing direct parallels, stating that while there may be superficial similarities, there are "profound differences" which he hopes the lecture has outlined.

Conclusion:

Dr. Howard's lecture seeks to provide a comprehensive theological understanding of the destruction of the Canaanites. He acknowledges the inherent difficulties and troubling nature of this issue while placing it within the broader context of God's sovereignty, the depravity of the Canaanite culture, the need to preserve Israel's distinctiveness, and the overall purposes of God's covenant with Abraham. The lecture highlights the idea that divine commands, even harsh ones, have a specific context and purpose, and that God's ultimate desire is for all nations to embrace him.

4. Study Guide: Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 13, Destruction of Canaanites Excursus

The Destruction of the Canaanites: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What were the two common questions Dr. Howard received when working on his commentary on the book of Joshua?
2. According to Deuteronomy 7, why were the Israelites commanded not to intermarry with the Canaanites?
3. How does Dr. Howard address the argument that the Old Testament God is one of wrath, while the New Testament God is one of love?
4. According to the text, who does the land of Canaan ultimately belong to?
5. What does God tell Abraham in Genesis 15 that explains why the Israelites had to wait before entering the promised land?
6. According to Leviticus 18, what specific practices of the Canaanites made them unclean in God's eyes?
7. What does the term *kedashah* refer to, and what was its connection to Canaanite worship?
8. What is the meaning of the Hebrew word *haram*, and what is unique about its usage in the Old Testament?
9. Why was the command to destroy the Canaanites important for the spiritual well-being of Israel?
10. Besides the destruction of the Canaanites, what example does Dr. Howard use to show that God's pronouncements of destruction are not always absolute?

Answer Key

1. The two common questions were about the long day when the sun stood still, and the mass destruction or genocide of the Canaanites.

2. The Israelites were commanded not to intermarry with the Canaanites because it would lead them to turn away from God to serve other gods, thus incurring God's wrath.
3. Dr. Howard points out that Jesus himself displayed righteous anger and violence (e.g., clearing the temple), and that the concept of hell and God's wrath is present in the New Testament as well as the Old.
4. The land of Canaan ultimately belongs to God, who is the creator and owner of the earth, and who graciously allowed the Canaanites to live there for a time.
5. God tells Abraham that the iniquity of the Amorites (Canaanites) was not yet complete, and that when it reached a tipping point, God would bring the Israelites back to Canaan and use them as an instrument of punishment.
6. Leviticus 18 lists various sexual perversions including incest, adultery, bestiality, and homosexuality, stating that these practices made the Canaanites unclean and were the reason God drove them out.
7. *Kedashah* refers to a sacred or cultic prostitute associated with Canaanite shrines, and this was a perversion of the concept of holiness (*kadosh*) as it was connected to fertility rites and the worship of Baal and Asherah.
8. *Haram* means complete destruction or annihilation, often translated as “the ban,” and is used to describe the practice of devoting people or things to the Lord through destruction, and its usage is unique to the Old Testament, with a single exception.
9. The command to destroy the Canaanites was essential to maintain the purity of Israel's worship and to prevent them from adopting the Canaanites' abominable religious practices that God warned against.
10. Dr. Howard uses the story of Jonah and Nineveh to illustrate that even seemingly unconditional pronouncements of destruction were contingent on repentance; when Nineveh repented, it was spared.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Answer each question in a well-organized essay.

1. Discuss the theological implications of God's command to destroy the Canaanites, considering the concepts of divine justice, mercy, and the nature of God in the Old Testament.
2. Analyze the role of sin in the narrative of the Canaanite destruction, exploring how the text portrays the wickedness of the Canaanites and the function of this portrayal within the story.
3. Examine the concept of *haram* (the ban) and its significance in the context of Israel's conquest of Canaan, including its religious and military dimensions, and discuss its uniqueness in ancient Near Eastern warfare.
4. Compare and contrast the command to destroy the Canaanites with other instances of divine judgment in the Old Testament, identifying patterns and themes of divine response to human sin.
5. Assess the relevance of the historical context in understanding the Israelite conquest of Canaan, considering both the biblical evidence and the archaeological findings related to the Canaanites.

Glossary of Key Terms

Abrahamic Covenant: The covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis, which included promises of land, descendants, and blessing, and it is a foundational concept in understanding God's actions in the Old Testament.

Amorites: A term used in the Old Testament, sometimes as a synonym for Canaanites, referring to the various peoples inhabiting the land of Canaan.

Asherah: A Canaanite goddess often depicted with exaggerated feminine features and associated with fertility, often worshiped alongside Baal; also, pillars honoring her that the Israelites were told to destroy.

Baal: A Canaanite storm and fertility god, believed to bring rain, and was often worshiped with ritualistic practices that included sacred prostitution.

Canaanites: The inhabitants of the land of Canaan, known for their religious practices and perceived wickedness, whose destruction is commanded by God to the Israelites.

Ger: Hebrew word referring to a foreigner, stranger, or alien, who took up residence in Israel.

Haram: A Hebrew word meaning complete destruction or annihilation; the "ban" placed upon the Canaanites; implies something devoted to God through destruction, and it has a religious and military significance.

Iniquity: A term referring to the moral wrongdoings or sin, especially egregious or wicked behavior.

Kedashah: A Hebrew term referring to a female sacred or cultic prostitute associated with Canaanite shrines and fertility rites.

Kadosh: A Hebrew term meaning holy, from which the term kedashah was derived, but this was a perversion of the concept of holiness in Canaanite worship.

5. FAQs on Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 13, Destruction of Canaanites Excursus, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Okay, here's an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source, formatted with markdown:

FAQ: The Destruction of the Canaanites in the Old Testament

- **Why is the destruction of the Canaanites in the Old Testament considered a difficult and disturbing topic?**
- The command to completely destroy the Canaanite people, including men, women, and children, is a difficult moral question to grapple with. It appears to be an act of mass genocide, which contradicts the idea of a loving and merciful God. Many struggle to reconcile this action with their understanding of God's character, which includes love, grace, and justice. Some even use this to reject the Old Testament, or even the idea of God all together. Even those who hold to the Bible will question if this shows the sub-Christian nature of the Old Testament.
- **What were the specific instructions given to the Israelites regarding the Canaanites, according to Deuteronomy and Joshua?**
- God commanded the Israelites to completely destroy the Canaanites, make no covenants with them, and not intermarry. This was to prevent the Israelites from adopting the Canaanites' religious practices and turning away from God. They were commanded to destroy their altars, pillars, Asherim, and idols. These instructions are found in Deuteronomy 7, Deuteronomy 20 and Joshua 6.
- **Was the land of Canaan rightfully owned by the Canaanites?**
- No. The Bible clearly states that the earth and everything in it belong to God. Thus, the land of Canaan was always God's, and God was not unfairly taking it away from the Canaanites. God allowed the Canaanites to live there for a time, but when their iniquity reached a certain point, God acted against them and placed his chosen people in the land. The land is not inherently the right of any nation or people, it is God's land.

- **What was the primary reason given for God commanding the destruction of the Canaanites?**
- While all people are sinners and deserving of punishment, the primary reason given for God's command was the wickedness and abominable practices of the Canaanites. Their sins included a wide array of sexual perversions such as incest, adultery, bestiality, homosexuality, and sacred prostitution. They also practiced child sacrifice. These were not simply generalized sins; God specifically identified them as the sins of the Canaanites, leading to the land itself being seen as unclean.
- **How does extra-biblical evidence support the idea of Canaanite depravity?**
- Archaeological discoveries have revealed the widespread use of idols depicting Baal and Asherah (often presented in a sexually charged manner), the practice of sacred prostitution associated with Canaanite shrines, and evidence of child sacrifice in locations like Carthage. These findings align with the Bible's descriptions of the Canaanites' immoral and sinful practices, and help to validate the Bible's claim of how truly vile and depraved the Canaanites were.
- **What was the concept of "haram" and its significance in this context?**
- The word "haram" translates to "complete destruction or annihilation," and is sometimes referred to as the "ban". It carries a religious significance that goes beyond military conquest. It was not merely about defeating the enemy, but also about devoting them to the Lord as a kind of sacrifice. The practice seems to be exclusive to the Old Testament and the unique context of the Israelites and Canaan.
- **Why was it important for the Israelites to drive out the Canaanites, even beyond God's command?**
- The driving out of the Canaanites was not only a command from God, but was also necessary for the spiritual survival of Israel. The Israelites were coming out of slavery in Egypt and their identity and faith were still fragile. By cleansing the land and settling in an environment free of Canaanite influence, they were to grow as a nation and spiritual community in a way that was pleasing to God. When the Israelites failed to do so, their worship was contaminated and a moral decline, as seen in the book of Judges, followed.

- **Was the command to destroy the Canaanites an absolute and unconditional decree, applicable to all nations at all times?**
- No. The command to completely destroy the Canaanites was limited to a specific time and place – when the Israelites first entered Canaan under Joshua. It was not intended as a blanket instruction for the Israelites to always treat foreigners. The default mode was that God wanted the nations to come to Him, not be destroyed, and the command to destroy the Canaanites was to only happen when they did not repent of their sins. Additionally, there was always an implicit condition of repentance. If the Canaanites had turned to God, as Rahab and the Gibeonites did, or if they had responded to God in the way that the Ninevites did, the destruction would not have happened.