

## ***Power War Redemption Ethics #2*** ***You Want it Darker***

### *1. The Problem - A Divine Mandate of Genocide*

**G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (quoted in Said, "Exodus and Revolution: A Canaanite Reading")**

I do not wish to give the impression that the Romans were habitually the most cruel and ruthless of all ancient imperial powers. Which nation in antiquity has the best claim to that title I cannot say, as I do not know all the evidence. On the basis of such of the evidence as I do know, however, I can say that I know of only one people which felt able to assert that it actually had a divine command to exterminate whole populations among those it conquered; namely, Israel. Nowadays Christians, as well as Jews, seldom care to dwell on the merciless ferocity of Hashem, as reviled not by hostile sources but by the very literature they themselves regard as sacred. Indeed, they continue as a rule to forget the very existence of this incriminating material.

#### **1a. Sadly, De Ste. Croix wasn't Wrong - Deut 20:10ff**

When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it responds peaceably and lets you in, all the people present there shall serve you at forced labor. If it does not surrender to you, but would join battle with you, you shall lay siege to it; and when the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, the livestock, and everything in the town—all its spoil—and enjoy the use of the spoil of your enemy, which the LORD your God gives you.

Thus you shall deal with all towns that lie very far from you, towns that do not belong to nations hereabout. In the towns of the latter peoples, however, which the LORD your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive. No, you must annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you, lest they lead you into doing all the abhorrent things that they have done for their gods and you stand guilty before the LORD your God.

### **1b. The Jews Dissent - but G!?!d Doubles Down - Judges 1-2**

Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath and annihilated it. So the city was called Hormah. Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory. The Lord was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country but could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron. Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had said, and he drove out from it the three sons of Anak. But the Benjaminites did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem; so the Jebusites have lived in Jerusalem among the Benjaminites to this day...

Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of[d] Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages, but the Canaanites continued to live in that land. When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labor but did not in fact drive them out.

And Ephraim did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, but the Canaanites lived among them in Gezer. Zebulun did not drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol, but the Canaanites lived among them and became subject to forced labor. Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Mahalab, or of Achzib, or of Helbah, or of Aphik, or of Rehob, but the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, for they did not drive them out. Naphtali did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth-anath but lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; nevertheless, the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh and of Beth-anath became subject to forced labor for them.

The Amorites pressed the Danites back into the hill country; they did not allow them to come down to the plain. The Amorites continued to live in Har-heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim, but the hand of the house of Joseph rested heavily on them, and they became subject to forced labor...

Now the angel of the Lord went up from Gilgal to Bochim and said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I had promised to your ancestors. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you. For your part, do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of this land; tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my command. See what you have done! So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become adversaries to you, and their gods shall be a snare to you." When the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the Israelites, the people lifted up their voices and wept.

*Power War Redemption Ethics #2 - You Want it Darker - 2/28/24 - p. 2*

2. *Three Solutions (but only 1 works, I think)*

2a. *Solution #1: There are no Instances of that Category - or, Getting off on a Technicality -*  
**Mishna Yadayim 4:4**

On that very day, Yehuda, an Ammonite convert, came and stood before them in the Beit Midrash, and said to them, "What is my status - can I enter [via marriage] into the congregation [of Israel]?"

Rabban Gamliel said to him, "You are prohibited."

Rabbi Yehoshua said to him, "You are permitted."

Rabban Gamliel said to him, "The verse says, ([Deuteronomy 23:4](#)) 'An Ammonite and a Moabite may not enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation.'"

Rabbi Yehoshua said to him, "And are the Ammonites or Moabites still in their own place? Sancheriv, king of Assyria, already arose and mixed all the nations, as it says, ([Isaiah 10:13](#)) 'I have removed the borders of nations, and I have plundered their treasures, and like a great warrior laid low the inhabitants.'"

Rabban Gamliel said to him, "It also says, ([Jeremiah 49:6](#)) 'And afterwards I shall return the captives of the children of Ammon' - and they are already returned."

Rabbi Yehoshua said to him, "It also says, ([Amos 9:14](#)) 'And I shall return the captives of my nation Israel' - and they are not yet returned."

They permitted him to enter into the congregation.

2b. *Solution #2 (#1 wasn't good enough, because it left the normative force intact): A New Biblical source alongside J, E, P, and D - Bad Men - Benjamin Sommer, **Revelation and Authority***

[T]he modern critical study of the Bible poses several challenges to the idea that the Bible is sacred. These challenges are largely literary, philological, and historical in nature... But another, even more important challenge to the status of scripture requires our consideration... biblical passages that cannot be reconciled with a God who is merciful or just... The Bible appears to be all too human not only because it has trouble deciding whether Noah took two or seven of the clean animals onto the ark, but more importantly because it describes a God who sweeps away the innocent along with the guilty - if not in



the Noah story (which tells us that all humans other than Noah were blameworthy), then surely in the Exodus narrative, in which God slays firstborn Egyptians who had no say in Pharaoh's labor policies. Even more disturbingly, the Bible commands humans, if only in a few specific cases, to imitate God in disregarding justice and mercy: all Amalekites, even children, are to be slaughtered (Deuteronomy 25:17-19); genocide or expulsion is the fate of all Canaanites who do not submit to Israel.

It matters only a little that rabbinic commentators through the ages have ruled that the laws regarding Canaanites applied only to the time of Joshua and not in perpetuity, so that nobody living after Joshua's era has the right, much less the obligation, to apply them... Similarly, a person who wants to regard the Bible as scripture receives only a little comfort from the suggestion that these laws don't mean what they seem to mean but are to be construed metaphorically... The fact remains that the Torah at the very least gives the appearance of encouraging cruelty and injustice in these verses... These texts diminish the ability of many religious people to accept the notion that the Bible in its entirety was composed by God: a just and merciful God would not write a Torah that seems unjust, even in a small number of passages, even on a surface level...

It is the presence of texts such as these, more than the existence of the contradictions noticed by source critics, that precludes me from believing in the traditional Jewish and Christian view of the Bible's revelatory origin. Moral issues rather than historical-philological ones pose the most disturbing challenge to the Bible's status as scripture.

An influential resource for answering these questions can be sought in the stream of twentieth-century Jewish thought associated with Franz Rosenzweig and Abraham Joshua Heschel. These thinkers have suggested that the Bible, along with all of Jewish tradition, is a response to God's act of revelation. The content we find in the Bible mixes divine and human elements.



*2c. Solution #3: (#2 Wasn't Good Enough, because it's just projecting my commitments onto historical claims): I Know G!?!d, and G!?!d Would Never Have Meant That*

**Mishna Bava Kamma ch 8, end**

One who says,

"Put out my eye," "Cut off my hand," "Break my leg," he [who did the act] is liable.

"On the condition that you will be exempt," he is liable.

"Tear my clothes," "Break my vessel", he is liable.

"On the condition that you will be exempt," he is exempt.

**Bavli Bava Kamma 93a**

Rav Assi bar Hama asked Rava: What is the difference between the first case and the second?

Rava said to him: A person does not give up his limbs.

*2c-I. So, Why did G!?!d say that, if It didn't mean it? (the hermeneutic chaser to Solution 3)*

**Judith Plaskow, "Reading Against the Text" in *The Coming of Lilith***

Remaining silent about the negative aspects of tradition not only leaves them to do their work in the world, it also deprives us of an important spiritual resource. In congregations, in Hillels, and in other places rabbis serve, many Jews are in pain. Sometimes they are in pain and feel they have been wounded directly by some aspect of Jewish tradition. More often, they have been hurt by injustices or abuse described and sometimes reinscribed by tradition... In either case, what they frequently need and seek are not simply spiritual ideals they can counterpose to the bitterness of their experiences, but places to name and explore the contours and causes of their pain... we turn and grapple with ambiguity and ugliness, and force them to yield up meaning.