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THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN.

(From Peloubet's Notes, 1895).

Before we enter upon the conquest of Canaan, which followed upon the fall of Jericho, it is well to place our scholars right upon the moral questions which necessarily arise. What right had the Israelites to drive out the Canaanites, to destroy them, and to take possession of their lands and homes?

FIRST. THE CANAANITES HAD FORFEITED THEIR RIGHTS. (1) Their destruction is always presented in Scripture as a judgment of God sent on them because of their wickedness. They had not only fallen into total apostasy from God, but into forms of idolatry of the most degrading kind. Their false religion cannot be regarded as a mere error of judgment; cruelty the most atrocious and unnatural crimes the most defiling were part and parcel of its observances (compare Lev. 18: 21, 25 sqq.; Deut. 12: 30 sqq.)—Cook. The heathenism of Palestine and Syria was so foul and degrading that there is no State, even at this time, which would not put it down, if necessary, by the severest penalties. Its spread to Rome was bewailed 1500 years later by the satirists of the day, as a calamity marking the utter decay of the times (Juvenal, *Satires*, III, 62).—Geikie. Nor did they sin thus through ignorance. They were not a savage race, but among the more cultivated ones of the time. They had commerce, coined money, iron chariots, probably books. (2) The Canaanites had received repeated warnings and instruction. Abraham and the patriarchs had lived among them. They knew something of God's dealings in behalf of his people. To them, as to all, shone the primitive revelation, and the voices of God in their consciences and in nature. God bore with them with infinite patience. (3) If God had not destroyed them they would have destroyed themselves by their own corruption, but not till they had injured many others by their example and influence. This very destruction was more merciful than would have been the sufferings which would naturally flow from their character and conduct. (4) It can make no difference to those who are thus destroyed whether the agent of their destruction be a natural catastrophe, like an earthquake, the flood, the overthrow of Sodom, the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea; or by an army divinely commissioned for the purpose; except that their gradual destruction by the servants of God, through marvellous miracles, was a continual invitation to them to repent, as well as a warning to the world against their sins.

SECOND. IT WAS WISE TO USE THE ISRAELITES AS THE DIVINE INSTRUMENTS. (1) This land was the best place in which to train up a peculiar and separate people in the true religion. It was isolated. It was small, yet it was centrally situated for the spread of truth over the world. It had every variety of climate and of soil. It required labor to cultivate it, but bore fruit generously in response to toil. All these things afforded special advantages for accomplishing the divine purpose as to this people. (2) The inhabitants must be destroyed, or they would destroy the kingdom of God in Israel. If the few who were spared contrary to orders exerted so baleful an influence, what would have been the result if a large body had remained? (3) What the Israelites did was not for themselves alone. "The Israelites' sword wrought a work of mercy for all the countries of the earth to the very end of the world"; on it "the happiness of the human race depended."—Dr. Arnold. "If the Jews had failed, the world would have been lost. The true religion would have vanished, the mission of Christ would have been impossible. In these contests, on the fate of one of these nations of Palestine, the happiness of the human race depended." Stanley. The nearest modern example is seen in the contrast between what this country is now in its influence upon the world and what it would have been had the Indians remained the sole inhabitants; and this without condoning a single injustice or cruelty to the native race. They should have been conquered to civilization and religion only by justice and love, as, in fact, was done in many cases. (4) The Israelites simply executed a lawful sentence against crime. It was no more cruelty than it is for the appointed officers to execute a criminal in our day. (5) "To employ the Israelites in the execution of the fearful sentence was adapted to inspire them with horror of the crimes thus severely punished, and to prevent their intimacy with the surrounding heathen and the contamination which intimacy would have produced."—Fr. Johnson. Thus it was that this conquest was necessary to the planting in the world and for the world the love and service of the true God and the purest morality and love toward men.