

212 Justifiable genocide?

People who were brought up as Christians turn away for a number of reasons. Here's the essence of one I met this week: "The final straw was a preacher who said that Israelites wiping cities off the map was really an act of self-defence against the diseases of the morally faulted; this read (and still reads) to me an awful lot like a narrative of righteous genocide."

Do you ever feel nervous about this aspect of the Old Testament? It was certainly part of the mix when I lost my faith 11 years ago.

Fast forward to last Wednesday, when the preacher at our Communion service asked a very interesting question – she's always very thought-provoking. "Did Jesus have to learn?" As a human baby he learned to walk and then he learned to use woodworking tools but did he have to learn about God?

We know little of Jesus' childhood, but Luke 2:46 tells us that, at age 12, "After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." I wonder if he asked them about passages like Deut 7 and 20, where God instructs the Israelites to completely destroy various tribes, lest they be polluted by their religious practices?

Jesus knew the love of his earthly mother and father and was totally secure in his heavenly Father's love, I'm sure. So what did he make of God as portrayed in Deuteronomy? How did he cope with the apparent clash between the Person he knew so well, and those passages?

He certainly didn't reject the Scriptures; his whole ministry was based on them. He said he had come to fulfil them, and after his resurrection "he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

So did he just ignore these difficult passages, as we often do? I wonder if he ever talked about this issue when "He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him." Lk 4:15?

In my allotted 500 words, I can do no more than express the problem, but being a very analytic sort of person, I have had to think it through for myself. The turning point was reading (several times, as it's not an easy read) *Cross Vision* by Greg Boyd, who originally tried to justify the preacher's view I started with here, but then he spent 10 years writing a massive tome to try to work out how Jesus would have interpreted Deut 7 & 20 (and many other difficult passages).

But don't worry, *Cross Vision* is the more accessible version (think Tom Wright style, as opposed to N.T. Wright), and for an introduction to the ideas of the book, you could try reading my excited ramblings^[124–129] in 2020 (4000 words).

Suffice to say that I no longer feel the need to justify my belief that God inspired all the Scriptures, and that, along with the young Jesus, we can understand how the Scriptures show us the amazing love of our heavenly Father.

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