

Religion & Violence

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Old Testament Violence

The Amalekites

Battle between Joshua & Amalek:

“I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.” “The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” (Exod 17:14-16 ESV)

“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God. Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.” (Deut 25:17-19)

Samuel said to Saul, “... Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction (*h̄rm*) all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (1 Sam 15:1-3). But Saul spared King Agag.

Esther: Haman the Agagite plotted to annihilate the Jews, but the tables were turned → Purim.

Phinehas

And the LORD said to Moses, “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous [or zealous] with my jealousy [or zeal] among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy.” (Num 25:10-13)

Canaanite Genocide

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction (*h̄rm*). You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.” (Deut 7:1-2)

Joshua said to the people, “Shout, for the LORD has given you the city. And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction (*h̄rem*).”... Then they devoted (*h̄rm*) all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword. (Josh 6:16-17, 21)

Christian Responses

- OT God ≠ NT God, e.g. Marcion c. 140.
- Moses & Joshua were wrong; they misunderstood God’s purposes.
- God can do whatever he wants. Any decision of his is beyond questioning.
- Preview of final judgment.

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Hērem

vb. *ḥrm*, noun *ḥērem*. Often translated “devote to destruction” (e.g. ESV).

Better: The Hebrew term refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them (NIV mg).

- Creation: original state: Non-order, into which God speaks order: “Let there be light” etc.
- Promise to Abraham: a people and a land.
- Covenant at Mt Sinai: the gift of order: ethics (law), space (tabernacle), time (Sabbath). Israel is holy, set apart for God.
- Entrance into the land: The land is holy, set apart to God. The Canaanites who inhabit the land have rendered it unclean. *Ḥerem* transfers the unclean land and inhabitants into God’s realm.

Monotheistic Religious Violence

Christian Violence

- Byzantine Empire: Church & State, beginning with Constantine.
- Persecuting the heretics: Nestorians (431), Monophysites (451).
- The Crusades: Fighting Amalek.
- European Wars of Religion (1522-1648): Christians fighting one another.

Jewish Violence

Memories of Amalek.

Muslim Violence

Jihad

What is the Christian Narrative?