



Enemy or Ally?

Taking tribute from the Canaanites

Based on the outline of a sermon by Michael L. Overholt.

God had delivered the land of Canaan into the hand of the Israelites. The only requirement for keeping the land was obedience. I say “the only requirement,” but that one requirement involved their whole life. It involved their goals, their ambitions, and their dreams.

God had promised victory over the enemies. He had even promised to drive the enemy out with hornets if Israel was just faithful in their part of the covenant (De. 7:20).

Joshua, that great man of God, was dead. His work was finished. He had been faithful. He had led this rag-tag group, these sons and daughters of slaves, into battle. He had turned them into tough, seasoned warriors. He had been there, a strong figure, someone to lean on when things got bad. Now he was gone.

Joshua was gone, but the work was not done. There were still enemies around. The people whom God had commanded to be driven out were still living on the back doorstep. Their idols still hung over the doorposts in many homes. Their idolatrous practices were still being acted out in their pagan temples. Their lifestyle was still a threat to the people of God. The work was not finished; it had just changed hands, from Joshua to the next generation. It was now time for Deuteronomy 7:1-6 to become reality:

When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; 2 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, *and* utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: 3 Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. 4 For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. 5 But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. 6 For thou *art* a holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth.

What happened? How did it all play out?

Chariots of iron

Judges 1:16-36 tells us the story of the Israelites getting bested by their enemies on several fronts. Due to space constraints we will not print those verses here, but please familiarize yourself with them. What we want to focus on for the moment is verse 19. Judah could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because the inhabitants had “chariots of iron.” What did chariots of iron have to do with it?! We read in Joshua 17:18 that having chariots of iron was of no significance at all in the conquest of Canaan:

But the mountain shall be thine; for it *is* a wood, and thou shalt cut it down: and the outgoings of it shall be thine: for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, *and* though they *be* strong.

Our victory does not hinge upon the strength of the adversary; our victory hinges upon the promises of God!

Continuing on in Judges 1, we find in verse 21 that Benjamin did not drive out the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In verses 27-36 we also find the sad commentary that the Israelites had the upper hand on their enemies. They could have destroyed the enemy, but they didn’t. Why?

Perhaps Israel judged themselves to be strong in their own might. They had won battles. They knew how to fight. Maybe they had learned how to talk and reason as well. Why destroy all the enemies? Why not put them to

tribute? Could the enemy not serve us better in that capacity than if they were dead?

In many ways, they *were* strong. The men of Israel had experienced many things. They recalled hearing their fathers tell stories of Egypt, and of the Great Deliverance. (Those aged 45-65 had experienced it firsthand.) They knew of the plagues. They knew the stories of the crossing of the Red Sea. They had firsthand knowledge of the complaining ways of their parents and they knew of the awful punishment brought upon them. They had lived under the terrible desert sun and choked on the desert dust. They had held their fathers and mothers in their arms and watched them die in that horrible wilderness. With their last breath, many of those parents had once again recounted to their offspring the “why” of it all—“We disobeyed God.”

These men had seen the walls of Jericho come down. They had fought with the enemy and won. They were conquerors. They had come up from the bottom. Sons and daughters of slaves, they were now owners of their own vineyards and fields. Their fathers had felt the whips from the taskmasters in Egypt. (They had heard these stories around the campfire at night.) Now the whips were placed in their own hands. And it felt good. They were strong; they were in charge of their own destiny.

But they failed to reckon with one thing: The life of their posterity hung in the balance, and that life hinged upon their obedience to God.

That the land spue you not out

The Israelites should have taken heed to Leviticus 20:22:

Ye shall therefore keep all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out.

Sadly, that is exactly what happened. The original Israelite conquerors could survive in a land where the enemy dwelt. They were indeed strong enough to pull it off. But that did not stop the consequences. Their children had not had those same unique experiences that had made the original conquerors strong. They could not stand.

Judges 2:7 and 3:5-6 tell us “the rest of the story.” The children of Israel ended up with enemies living among them. The seed sown by the parents, by the strong conquerors, took root downward, and bore fruit upward. But

the fruit was not the desired fruit! They had planted the wrong seed!

And us?

That was them and then. But let’s talk about us and now. Do we at times make the same mistake? We have been brought into a land that flows with milk and honey. We have been given much. But the land which we have been given is never ours entirely by inheritance. Each generation is responsible to deal with the enemies that threaten this good land. Each generation is responsible to maintain the borders, because that is where the battle is fought ... at the borders.

But each generation is also tempted to make alliances with the Canaanites. And each generation faces the temptation to “take tribute” from the enemy instead of putting the enemy outside the camp. We are tempted to take of the forbidden

fruit and turn it into a tributary, something we can use for our personal satisfaction and, hopefully, for God’s glory.

God has called us to leave some things untouched. But God’s people are still afflicted with the same disease the Israelites had 3,400 years ago. It feels good to be in charge of our own destiny. It feels good to take that which is dangerous, hold it in our hands, fondle it, and eventually place it next to our bosom. It feels good to take the forbidden, hold it, and wring a little bit of tribute out of it—and hope it doesn’t bite our hearts.

Burnt with fire

Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Pr. 6:27

Too often we take what we should identify as our enemy and call it our ally. We take that which should be cast out of the camp, and instead of dealing decisively with the issue, we take it, hold it, and put it to tribute, trying to force the unholy to serve us in a holy cause. But those decisions make the life of our posterity to hang in the balance.

What am I talking about? Any example I give, I give at the risk of being a bit simplistic. There are seldom, if ever, single issues that turn the whole ship about. But so that you know where I’m coming from—what I believe to be happening—I’ll risk it and get a little practical. The following examples are areas in which I fear we’ve bor-



What did chariots of iron have to do with losing a battle?

rowed from the enemy camp. We've looked at the enemy, admired their organization, their way of doing things, and we've attempted—whether consciously or unconsciously—to bring those borrowed items into our camp. We have attempted to put to tribute that which possibly should be cast totally out of the camp. Many of these issues touch at the heart of my (and my parents') generation. I wish to be sensitive, but I also wish to be honest.

Canaanite Values

1. **More is better.** God has given us specific commands concerning our money and our wealth. We tend to ignore those commands. We are strong. We can handle it. It will be our servant. Can we take and hoard material possessions, wring a little tribute out of them, and come out on top? Are we aware that many of our children are walking out the door, disillusioned by what passes for Christianity? It worked like this for the Israelites. The parents had seen hard times. They had seen God at work in marvelous ways. They somehow survived in spite of their disobedience to God in certain areas. Our parents and grandparents went through hard times. Their testimony is always the same: "Those hard times were good for us." My generation grew up somewhere in the middle. We certainly didn't come close to the easy times of today. Our testimony is pretty much the same: "Those things we did without were for our good." Our children are growing up in good times. And we are trying our utmost to spare them of those very things that helped make our parents and grandparents strong!
2. **Retirement entitlement.** God forbid that we should seek to retire at 70, go to Florida, and while the time away playing shuffleboard! Life is a battle! We need all our soldiers! Consider Luke 12:19: "Thou hast many goods laid up for many years ..."
3. **View of education.** Is our education designed so that we make more money, or so that we make better servants?

Canaanite Lifestyle

1. **Life-owes-me-a-vacation mentality.** For example, thinking we need two weeks on the mountain regardless.
2. **High-stress/high-speed lifestyle.** Work hard, play hard. Ponder Is. 30:15: "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."
3. **Mobile lifestyle.** I remember as a boy keeping track of how many nights our neighbors were home. We'd watch the vehicles and count the nights they were home. They were home very few evenings. One year my wife and I kept track of our own evenings. At the end of the year I looked back and was shocked.

I was gone far too often. No, it wasn't to the ball games and such like. But I had taken the Canaanite lifestyle, accepted it, but just went to good places instead of the not-so-good. My neighbor's lifestyle ended in their divorce. I want my ending to be different. I'd better change my lifestyle!



God forbid that we should seek to retire at 70, go to Florida, and while the time away playing shuffleboard!

Canaanite Programs

1. **Insurance.** How about our mutual aid programs? Ga. 6:2 What has happened to old-fashioned deacon work and the idea of brothers hurting with each other? Do I really hurt when your house burns if you are just able to turn the bill in to some faceless mutual aid or insurance plan? How does my insurance affect the size of house I build, the kind of vehicle I drive? I propose that these plans are weak

substitutes for the real "bearing one another's burdens" for these reasons:

- * They operate with fees and dues. If you can't pay, you won't get help.
- * While the stated purpose is always to help others, the "help" comes through coercion, not free-will giving. Real scriptural giving comes from the heart, not from a forced you-pay-or-you-get-cut-off program. (2 Co. 8:12; 9:7)
- * Since many mutual aid programs operate largely like any commercial insurance, typically they foster the American insurance mentality: "I've paid, so I will collect when I can."

- * It hinders God's working in my heart through my finances. When financial losses occur, I'm not forced to reconsider my values and my accumulation of "stuff." Instead, I can pat myself on the back for having a good mutual aid or insurance plan, go out, and purchase the same "stuff."
- * It hinders the demonstration of God's people working together in times of disaster.
- * 2 Chronicles 31:10 lends support to the old saying, "God's work, done God's way, will never lack God's resources."

2. Government aid programs.

When it comes time for the draft, and you are called to give account, will you be glad you took everything from the government that you could, or will you be glad that you stayed clear of such programs?

3. Counseling methods.

God bless those who invest their lives in helping others. Let's be faithful to the Word of God in our counseling. Typically, the church should have within the brotherhood sufficient resources for the troubled. This is not to say that all "professional" counseling is wrong. This example is given merely to point us back to the Bible. We live in the age of "experts." The "expert" fixes the car. The "expert" fixes the leak in the sink. And, too often, we believe it takes an "expert" to offer a troubled brother lasting help.



The average American adult spends five hours online at home every day.

In her book *40 Acres and No Mule*, Janice Holt Giles describes the lifestyle and character of the Appalachians, those people in the mountains of Kentucky whom we often refer to as hillbillies. She has this to say about the advent of TV in those rugged hills (written in the prologue in 1967): "But the strangest change in the ways and habits of our people has come about through a strange medium—television. Almost every home has a television set nowadays, and its visible, tangible impact has been greater than a hundred years of preaching and teaching. Not all of its

impact is good, but it has helped change diet, habits of dress; it has brought new standards of beautification around and inside the homes, it has brought a different kind of speech and music into the homes, even a different concept of religion. **Bought for entertainment, television is a most subtle and powerful educator. In one decade, ten short years, I have seen our people changed more by television than by any other medium.**" (p. 29-30)

[Emphasis mine.]

Price tag: \$100. Fine print: This item will educate you in the ways of Sodom and Gomorrah. It will desensitize you to evil. It will cause you to call good what God has called evil.

b. Movies: God has given us commands concerning purity

in all our life. Can we use the movies, sort through the filth and vileness, and wring a little tribute out of them, or are those things better left untouched? Will we, against all odds, come out on top, with our families unharmed?

2. **Technology.** Tools for both sides of the battle. A tremendous tool. How are we going to deal with it? Some say "no" to anything newer than the 1900s. Some say yes to everything new. How can we find our way? These items take special grace and wisdom. I will merely say that we do well to order our lives by what is wise and unwise, not only by what is "right and wrong." Be willing to make personal choices and sacrifices even when it hurts.

Canaanite Stuff and Fluff

The bold print giveth, but the fine print taketh away.

Everything comes with a price tag. However, there are two price tags on every item we purchase. One is the price that goes to the clerk at the counter. The other is the price we pay forever. What is the fine print on our abundance of gadgets? After we read the fine print, *can we afford to purchase what our pocketbook can stand?*

1. Media (Ps. 101:3)

a. Television: Some Christians take the TV. "We can use it. We are strong. It can be our servant." And they take it. And they use it. And their children are walking out in droves.

a. Internet. The average American adult spends five hours online at home every day.¹ Every one of those hours is an hour that could have been spent with the people next to them. How many men must we lose before we say it is enough? How many boys must we help free from pornography before we are satisfied that some things are better left outside the camp? Sure, I know your business needs the Internet



Would Abraham feel at home camping on my grounds?

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob ...”

as a means of survival. I still ask the question:

Can you afford all that your pocketbook can stand?

b. Cell phones. How many phones does one family need? The average American household has three cell phones.² Where are we in this? Does every youth really need his own phone? Sure, the price from AT&T is \$55 per month. That is the bold print. Your pocketbook can stand it. If you were able to read the fine print, what might it say?

Warning: this gadget may cause your child to sit in the van riding to church with the family, but be in conversation with his distant friend.

Warning: this gadget may cause its owner to talk to his friend in Florida instead of telling his child a Bible story while on the way to town.

Warning: text messaging may cause the owner to tune out to the conversation at the supper table.

¹ *Reader's Digest*, March, 2011, poll conducted in October 2010, by Ipsos OTX MediaCT

² *Ibid*

Can you still afford what your pocketbook can stand?

c. Facebook. Can we really afford what that will do to me? Is it really okay to drop what I'm doing 10 times throughout the day just so I can read that my distant acquaintance has now potty-trained her toddler? Or that she baked a blue cake and put pink frosting on it?

I suggest that our obsession with distant contacts, those faceless individuals, has robbed us of the joy of real relationships. We have fallen in love with unreality. Technology can make us feel like we have 200 friends, when in reality we aren't able to relate properly to the friend at our elbow. **Can we afford everything that our pocketbook can stand?**

3. Big houses. Every decade sees the church with smaller families, but with bigger houses. Many families can all live comfortably under the same roof, but in virtual isolation from other family members. Consider:

- Forced air heating and cooling (and I'm not saying forced air systems are sin) has taken away the need of sitting in the living room together on a winter evening after supper. With the old pot-bellied wood stove, family interaction on a winter evening was mandatory.
- Each child has his own bedroom, so the need of working together in that arena is gone.
- Many times each child also has his own bathroom, so the need of give and take in that is gone.

Sure, I know your pocketbook can stand the price, but can you afford it? Can I afford to build a \$200,000 home when a \$75,000 home will suffice? If you could read the fine print, what would it say? Let me put it in question form.

- a. Will this house make it easier or harder for me to convince my neighbor that Christians are called to be strangers and pilgrims?
- b. Will this house make it easier or harder for me to teach my children the joy of placing little value on earthly things?
- c. If my house burns today, will I have lost my house or my identity?
- d. Would Abraham feel at home camping on my grounds? “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a

city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” He. 11:9-10

Canaanite Theology

1. **Accept the free gift of salvation vs. repentance and amendment of life.** While God’s gift of salvation is indeed a free gift, modern Christendom has taken that principle, divorced it from real Christian living, and sold it as the whole gospel. God does indeed care about how we live. Our emphasis needs to reflect the heart of God as revealed by Scripture.
2. **Emotion-packed evangelism vs. discipleship.** Perhaps we’ve been in reaction mode, reacting to some of what we perceive as coldness in some of our more traditional Anabaptist groups. Evangelism is good, but its goal is to make disciples, not merely to accumulate commitments.

Conclusion

These applications may seem stringent. Maybe you don’t agree with some of the applications I have made in this article. That is okay. Don’t let your quibbles with my applications stop you from seriously considering the principle at stake here. The principle simply stated is this:

Taking tribute from the Canaanites comes at a tremendous cost. That which God identifies as my enemy is my enemy, no matter if the enemy dresses in silk.

Lest we leave you with a bleak picture, let me show you two pictures from Scripture that give a different view on life. Judges 1:20 gives us a glimpse of the “other side” of this message:

And they gave Hebron unto Caleb, as Moses said: and he expelled thence the three sons of Anak.

The sons of Anak were giants. That didn’t stop Caleb. By this time he was an old man, 85 years old. The numbers of giants had increased since he had first offered to fight them. But he had no eyes for the enemy. He had only eyes for God. He didn’t stop to ask questions. He didn’t stop to reason this thing out. He didn’t stop to ask if he might not be better off to save them alive so they could work for him as slaves. (What muscles those guys must have had! They could surely be put to work ...) He knew the promises and commandments of God. He had a work to do. He simply got to work. His obedience profited not only him, but his posterity.

1. His daughter married a conqueror (Js. 15:14-17).
2. His son-in-law became the savior of Israel (Jg. 3:9).
3. Hundreds of years later, one of his posterity was one of the captains in David’s army (1 Ch. 27:15)

2 Chronicles 15:8-9 tells the story of another man who did what God said to do concerning idols:

And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that was before the porch of the LORD. And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and the strangers with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that the LORD his God was with him.

God’s people have always had to make hard choices. Dealing with giants and idols is nothing new. Let us, like Caleb, rise up with strength and courage to deal with current issues that threaten God’s kingdom. And let us, like Asa, deal decisively with the idols that threaten our hearts. When we do, we will see God’s kingdom grow and prosper, both now, and in our future generations. ~