

Destroy You From Off This Good Land

The ominous threat of our title is the warning given by Joshua to Israel should they “*ever go back*” and commit the atrocities of the dispossessed nations of the Canaanites, cf. Josh.23:12-16. Though Israel vowed that day to never “*forsake the Lord to serve other gods*” and to “*serve the Lord, for He is our God*” (Josh.24:16,18), they did; and they were- that is, they *perished* and were *destroyed off the good land* which God had given them. But what sins did they commit that prompted the God of love and provision to do them “*harm and consume*” them after having done “*good*” to them, v.20? It’s worth consideration to note that, among other things, **they**:

- **Disregarded God’s laws regarding marriage.** Though such was specifically forbidden, they *intermarried with idolatrous peoples*, cp. Josh.23:12-13 with Neh.13:23-27. As is well illustrated with King Solomon, these unions with *idolaters* “*turned his (and their) heart away after other gods,*” 1Kings 11:1-10. As a result, Solomon’s family lost the dynasty, but Israel eventually lost the kingdom.... just as Joshua predicted.
- **Corrupted the worship of God.** The nation of Israel had struggled with idolatry since its inception. Even the patriarch, Abram, was *called out* of idolatry (cp. Gen.12:1 and Josh.24:2). After the exodus, the fledgling nation brought *the gods of Egypt* with them, and reverted back to familiar habits from time to time (cf. Ex.32; e.g.). During the time of the Judges, seemingly endless cycles of *idolatry, oppression, repentance*, and then *faithfulness* prevailed until the next generation fell back into *idolatry* (usually after the previous delivering Judge died). After the kingdom divided, the corruption of worship (see 1Kings 11:25-33) signaled the “beginning of the end” for Israel in the north. The southern kingdom of Judah also struggle with idolatry, cf. 2Kings 21:1-9, e.g. Even during the time of Christ, the so-called “worship” of God had become so corrupted by the idol of *national politics* that such took precedence over the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, John 11:47-48.
- **Sacrificed their children to idols.** One of the chief reasons God judged, dispossessed, and destroyed the Canaanites was the idolatrous practice of *child sacrifice*, cf. Deut.12:31; 18:9-13. Unfortunately, Israel did not heed God’s warnings and eventually not only intermarried with the heathen Canaanites, but worshipped their idols to the extent that they, too, committed the abomination of sacrificing their own children to these false gods, cf. 2Kings 17:15-17. “*So the Lord was angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight,*” 2Kings 17:18.
- **Attempted the impossible of “serving” God and Mammon.** Toward the chronological end of Israel’s history in the Old Testament, and largely because of the sins list above, they viewed their relationship with God as *quid pro quo* system. That is, if they gave at least some pretense of worshipping and serving Jehovah, then *physical* blessings could be expected. This pitiful condition is highlighted throughout the book of Malachi. Note some examples wherein they: offered *defiled (lame, sick, blind, or even stolen) sacrifices* to God, keeping the best for themselves, Mal.1:6-14; the *priests* abandoned their role of *preserving the knowledge of God* and *caused many to stumble* and thereby *corrupted the covenant of Levi*, Mal.2:1-9; *married foreign women* contrary to the Law, and even *dealt treacherously with the wives of their youth* by breaking the *covenant of marriage by divorce* to do so, Mal.2:10-16; *robbed God* by withholding *tithes and offerings*, Mal.3:7-8; and yet, they had concluded that it was “*vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His*

charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the Lord of hosts?" Mal.3:14. There we have it: They only served God (to the degree they did so) for the *physical* blessings and benefits they could get out of doing so. They "served" God only for Mammon's sake, cf. Matt.6:24!

For all these reasons, God *destroyed them off the good land He had given them* just as Joshua predicted (see again Josh.23:12-16).

Now, think not of ancient Israel but present America. We are not, as a nation, "God's chosen people" as was Israel, but there are remarkable similarities that spell our common doom unless we repent...

- **We have disregarded God's laws regarding the covenant of marriage.** For roughly 70 years, *adultery* has become commonplace and divorce rampant. Marriage vows made before God and man are discarded as easily as rubbish. God-appointed roles and responsibilities are disregarded as "archaic" and even "oppressive" or "sexist." We've corrupted "marriage" into what God calls *degrading, depraved, indecent, and unnatural* (cf. Rom.1:26-27), homosexual unions. Does America still honor marriage as ordained of God?
- **We have corrupted the worship of God** by turning it into secular entertainment that caters to the whims of all-too human *appetites*, cf. Phil.3:18-19. Churches of "our" choices have replaced the blood-bought church of "His" choice. We've sacrificed *the knowledge of and obedience to* the one true God on the idolatrous altar of "what I think," "what I believe," and "what I like." Does America even "believe" God anymore, let alone "*worship Him in spirit and truth*"? Or, are we doing our best to remove Him from as many parts and places of "our" culture and county as possible?
- **We have sacrificed our children to the god of convenience.** No, we don't *pass them alive through fire* to the idols Molech or Chemosh. We sacrifice them *in the womb* to the idol of "Personal Choice" and "Convenience," or leave them die unattended after birth. Even if we grant them "the right to life," we often do so only to the extent that they don't inconvenience "my life/career/freedom." How many innocent lives have been "sacrificed" in this country since we made it legal in 1973? Surely it must be more than the ancient Canaanites and Israelites combined.
- **We have attempted the impossible serving of God and Mammon.** Though some still profess to "love God," let Him stand in the way of our job, wealth, life-goals, or retirement and see who reigns supreme. We even consider ourselves "blessed" when we have all or most of the *physical* things we desire. What happens when one, several, or all of those things are lost? Would we still be "blessed" and content with only a *spiritual inheritance*? As a nation, does America serve *God* or *Mammon*?

Joshua *warned and pled* with Israel to "*fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth*" and "*put away*" their false gods, Josh.24:14. They said they would- but Joshua didn't believe them, Josh.24:19ff. Will America likewise *put away* our *false gods* to *fear and serve the Lord in sincerity and truth*? I hope I'm wrong, but I doubt it. Remember what happened to ancient Israel and why, else surely God will *destroy Us from off this good land which the Lord has given us...* and would be "just" in so doing.

(Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)