

## Joshua 12:1-24

### List of Victories of Moses and Joshua

This serves as the conclusion of the history of the wars of Canaan, to survey all that they had gotten; but also as a preface to the history of the dividing up of Canaan among the Israelite tribes.

**Joshua 12:1-2** - "Now these are the kings of the land, which the children of Israel smote, and possessed their land on the other side Jordan toward the rising of the sun, from the river Arnon unto mount Hermon, and all the plain on the east: Sihon king of the Amorites, who dwelt in Heshbon, and ruled from Aroer, which is upon the bank of the river Arnon, and from the middle of the river, and from half Gilead, even unto the river Jabbok, which is the border of the children of Ammon;"

There are 31 kingdoms listed that the Israelites conquered. We just read about these in the previous chapters - so why repeat all this here?

### The Canaanite Nations

Let's look one more time at why the Canaanites/Amorites were being driven out of their land.

- **Genesis 15:16** - "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."

Like Sodom, the Canaanites were iniquitous not because they were breaking God's law given at Sinai (they didn't even know about that). They were breaking the Noachide laws that all peoples on earth were obliged to obey.

Jews trace the Noachide laws, a sort of natural law meant to govern human relations, to **Genesis 9:9**, when God speaks to Noah and his children as they exit the ark: "Behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you."

Their "seed" would become all the peoples of the earth. Humans - the "children of Noah" - were to establish laws to govern their societies, and are prohibited from cursing God, worshipping false gods (idolatry), and are bound to keep themselves from adultery and sexual immorality, murder, robbery and eating the flesh of a living animal.

The Talmud lists them like this:

- the positive injunction to set up courts that justly enforce social laws
- the prohibition of blasphemy, i.e. intolerance of worshipping the one God of the universe
- the prohibition of idolatry
- the prohibitions of grave sexual immorality, such as incest and adultery
- the prohibition of murder

- the prohibition of theft
- the prohibition of eating the limb of a live animal, which is a paradigm for cruelty in general

The rabbis claimed these original laws were given to Adam first:

- **Genesis 2:16** - "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat..."

i.e. "commanded the man" includes not just the rule about the tree, but all the other prohibitions included in the Noachide laws.

These seven laws are really categories, so many things are implied under each. The idea is that these are known by natural human reason and don't require divine revelation to understand. In fact, God must have given these commands originally to Adam, or otherwise he would not have punished humanity with the flood, when He saw that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (**Genesis 6:5**).

See [https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research\\_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/sourcebook/Noahide\\_covenant.htm](https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/sourcebook/Noahide_covenant.htm)

(The Apostolic Decree for Gentile believers recorded in **Acts 15** is commonly seen as a parallel to these Noachide Laws)

- **Acts 15:20** - "But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood."

The scriptures seem to indicate the Amorites (Canaanites) were especially grievous breakers of these universal moral laws.

The Canaanites were morally bankrupt and incorrigible in their wickedness. They engaged in acts that would be considered criminal in any civilized society - incest, child sacrifice, ritual prostitution, bestiality. Also, God waited more than 400 years for Canaan to hit moral rock-bottom before commanding they be driven out:

In addition to their personal and religious sins, Canaanite government represented a city-state system based on ruthless exploitation of outsiders and the poor living on the social periphery. With idolatry came the denigration and downfall of human dignity. Canaanite kings imitated Egyptian and Babylonian practices and claimed to be gods or pretended special relationships to the gods, and treated their subjects as inferior beings.

It's appropriate we're studying this now.

Spiritually, the historical judgment on the Canaanites pictured here in the Book of Joshua was a picture for us of the end of time - "judgment day" - when God will bring a final reckoning and judgment on all who do not turn to Him.

This judgment is reflected in Jewish tradition by the High Holy Days. We would normally be celebrating Rosh Hashanah today, the Jewish new year. It begins the 10 Days of Awe, during which the three books are opened -the book of life, of death and of those in between. The 10 days are granted as a time to reflect and to repent before Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

This chapter lists the Canaanite tribes, kings and cities conquered by Joshua.

There is no new information in this chapter. These Canaanite kingdoms and cities are listed to remind Israel of what God had done for them.

### **Seven Canaanite Nations = A Type of the Seven Deadly Sins**

Spiritually the five kings of the south stood symbolically for the five senses as the avenues through which temptation comes.

Here, the seven Canaanite nations stand for the seven deadly sins, which eventually became a major focus of Catholic devotion and study.

See Traditional Jewish source for the “Seven Deadly Sins” By Chaim Sunitsky  
<https://seforimblog.com/2016/03/traditional-jewish-source-for-seven/>

In Christianity and in western culture there is a well known concept of the “Seven Deadly Sins,” usually enumerated as: pride, covetousness, lust (understood as illicit sexual desire), envy, gluttony, anger and sloth.

Even though there is no clear biblical source for this particular list of sins, in general the number seven plays a major role in the Bible and in particular the concept of some “seven sins” is thought to come from Proverbs 6:16.

**- Proverbs 6:16-** - "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."

In traditional Jewish literature the number seven certainly plays a very important role. The Talmud (Sukkah 52a) mentions seven “names” (or types) of the *Yetzer Hara* (the evil inclination) and in a different place (Eruvin 19a) seven names of Gehinom are listed.

The Zohar (Hechalot in Parshat Pekude) speaks of each level in Hell ruled by a different aspect of the Satan/opposer. One would therefore expect some list of “seven deadly sins” in Jewish literature as well. In fact, an almost identical list does exist.

The 18th century rabbi Elijah of Vilna, known by his Hebrew acronym HaGra (“HaGaon

Rabbenu Eliyahu" or "The sage, our teacher, Elijah"), comments on the Agada in Berachot (4b) that the Angel of Death flies in eight steps (מלאך המות בשמונה):

Because there are eight causes of death, one due to the sin of Adam and seven due to the seven main transgressions that cause all other sins and they are the תאוה (desire for gratification which can in our case mean gluttony) קנאה (envy), גאווה (pride) that is also כבוד (honor), כילות (stinginess) that is a "bad" eye, זנות (illicit sexual desire) that is *Yetzer Hara*, שנאת הבריות (hatred of others) and בטלה (sloth). And this [sloth] is the seventh – feminine "to sit at home" and it includes as it is known, like it says "childish conversation etc and sitting [with] ignoramuses."

And there are seven known names of the *Yetzer Hara*, and seven "heads" of the snake and seven bridges of the "*Sitra Achra*" (the side of impurity), and seven of the rotating sword that turns from hyena... etc. and seven types of punishments: four types of execution by *Bet Din*, death at the hands of Heaven, *Karet* and flogging. Regarding his words "seven of the rotating sword that turns from hyena" he is referring to an Agada in Baba Kama (16a) about six species turning into one another every seven years and the person not bowing down at *Modim* (morning prayer) turning into a snake:

(The Hebrew word *modim*, translated as "thank," is from the same root as *Modeh Ani*, the first prayer Jews traditionally recite upon awakening in the morning)

"The male hyena after seven years turns into a bat, the bat after seven years turns into an *arpad* (possibly a species of bat), the *arpad* after seven years turns into *kimmosh*, the *kimmosh* after seven years turns into a *choach*, the *choach* after seven years turns into a demon. The spine of a man after seven years turns into a snake if he doesn't bow when reciting *Modim*."

HaGra's comments on this Agada in *Baba Kama* are similar to his comments in Berachot: the six animals are hinting to 6 active (masculine) sins and the seventh – to the passive (feminine) sin of laziness:

"They are seven knots of the snake of the "rotating [sword]" etc and therefore they turn into each other and the seventh one is the feminine and therefore he [who doesn't bow at Modim] becomes a snake (fem) while the first [six] are masculine and therefore he turns to a demon (masc)".

R. Avraham, the Vilna Gaon's son, explains the words of his father as follows: The seven knots of the snake of the "rotating sword" meaning the "rotating sword" turns into seven types of the seven major sins that are a cause of all other sins .

The correspondence of HaGra's list of seven deadly sins and the non-Jewish list is almost exact with the exception of שנאה (hatred) being used instead of anger (כעס), and even these two are closely related. The main question becomes: what is HaGra's source for this specific collection of transgressions?

It seems that HaGra's source is Mishnayot in Pirkei Avot.

The first three sins are mentioned in 4:21 "which take a persons out of this world." The next three sins are in 2:11, and they also "take the person out of this world." The last of the seven sins includes the four types of time wasting mentioned in Avot 3:10. These four also said to "take the person out of this world" (i.e. sloth includes 4 different types of empty wasting time).

These sins are said to correspond to the qualities of students of Balaam (see Avot 5:19).

Some scholars propose that the Jewish idea expressed here entered into early Christianity to eventually become the Seven Deadly Sins known in the West.

### **The Seven Deadly Sins in the Early Church**

The Latin Christian poet Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348-405 A.D.), whose *Psychomachia*, was the first entirely allegorical poem in Latin, was the first to compare the Canaanite nations to the seven deadly sins.

The names of the seven nations mentioned here by Prudentius occur in **Deuteronomy 7:2** and **Joshua 11:3**, though in different order.

"Alas, with what armed forces does the ruthless enemy press upon the race of men, with what attendant rains under his command does he wage his iron wars, with what dominion triumph over the conquered! The Canaanite rises up to his aid with close-set columns and daunting helm, shaking the weight of bristly beard on his chin and waving the hand that grasps his heavy spear. On another side in burning rage stand the army of the king of the Amorites, and the Gergashites in their thousands pour out in array and come flying over the field. Some smite from a distance, others join in close combat. See, the squadrons of the Jebusites are hot for battle; their golden weapons, dipped in serpent's blood, with death-dealing lustre glitter and gleam and slay. It is thy pleasure too, O Hittite, to arm dread companies with javelins. But the tribe of the Perizzites come at us with arrows, their courage like thine, though their weapon is unlike. Last of all the king of the Hivites brings up his regiment, wearing a scaly breast-plate of snake-skin.

"With these warriors to support him the perverse prince of evil overcomes weak souls, which in artless ignorance, unused to warfare, trust in a false treaty of ill-starred friendship and at first take them for allies, and so become subjects of Mammon through their love of peace. Then they are carried away to bondage, easy victims, who willingly surrender their necks to the hard yoke and of their own choice obey the insolent commands of the ne'er-do-well spirits."

The text in Joshua presents the nations as attacking Israel, an attack that Joshua repels and that ends with the *herem* of their cities (11:12). The language of entering into a "false treaty of ill-starred friendships," on the other hand, resonates with the prohibition of making treaties with the seven nations in Deuteronomy 7. A misplaced "love of

peace” would lead Israel to show mercy, which in Prudentius’ presentation would result in bondage to vice.

Philo was an early advocate of seeing Joshua's campaigns against the Canaanites as spiritual warfare within the individual believer.

The desert monk Evagrius Ponticus (345–399 AD), influenced by Philo, proposed eight patterns of evil thought. "The first thought of all is that of love of self; after this, the eight."

His pupil, Christian theologian John Cassian (360-435 A.D.), when speaking about the command in **Deuteronomy 7** to drive out the seven nations in the land, also saw it as a metaphor for seven deadly sins that have to be conquered in the spiritual life.

Cassian links this spiritual battle plan to **Deuteronomy 7:21-23**, which he quotes, ending with the promise that “the Lord your God will deliver them over in your sight, and he will slay them until they are completely destroyed.”

[https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:7ee28f70-12fd-464a-a373-6f0f795f88ec/download\\_file?file\\_format=pdf&safe\\_filename=THESIS01&type\\_of\\_work=Thesis](https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:7ee28f70-12fd-464a-a373-6f0f795f88ec/download_file?file_format=pdf&safe_filename=THESIS01&type_of_work=Thesis)

### Wait! What Happened to the Girgashites?

<https://www.etzion.org.il/en/parashat-ki-tisa-nations-canaan-and-girgashites>

- **Deuteronomy 7:1** - "When the Lord your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and He dislodges many nations before you – the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you..."

The list of nations appears another six times in Joshua and the beginning of Judges, and the Girgashites are missing from four of these lists. They only appear three times, in celebratory lists that intentionally include all original seven nations.

The Girgashites are not mentioned anywhere in connection to a city or any particular place in the land. In the two verses that detail the regions throughout the land where each Canaanite nation resided (**Numbers 13:29** and **Joshua 11:3**), the Girgashites are not mentioned.

The Sages cite a surprising tradition that provides a historical-geographical solution to the omission of the Girgashites from most of the lists:

This is in line with what R. Samuel bar Nahman said, “Joshua sent three proclamations to [the Canaanites in] the land of Israel prior to the [Israelites’] entry into the land: ‘Whoever wishes to emigrate should emigrate; [whoever wishes] to make peace should make peace; [and whoever wishes] to wage war should do so.’ The Girgashites

emigrated, for they believed the Holy One, Blessed Be He, and they went to Afrike. [This is in line with **II Kings 18:32**] 'To a land like your own' – this refers to Afrike. The Gibeonites made peace. [This is in line with **Joshua 10:1**] 'The people of Gibeon had come to terms with Israel.' Thirty-one kings waged war and fell [in battle]." (Yerushalmi Shevi'it 6:1)

Rashi confirms this idea in his commentary on **Exodus 33:2**: "They were six nations [listed here], and [this is because] the Girgashites rose and emigrated because of them [the Israelites] of their own accord"

At the time, "Afrike" referred to what is known today as North Africa, in particular the Tunis region. There were Canaanite towns scattered all along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea throughout the entire first millennium BCE and apparently even earlier. The capital of these towns was Carthage (today a suburb of Tunis). In 146 B.C. Carthage was destroyed by the Romans.

Procopius of Caesarea, a Byzantine writer who was a member of the court of Justinian I in the sixth century A.D. in his 'History of the Wars' mentions the Moors, early Semitic residents of North Africa, and relates that they are descended from the Girgashites, the Jebusites and "some others with other names by which they are called in the history of the Hebrews" (book IV, chapter 10). They also built a fortress in Numidia [the Atlas Mountains region], where now is the city call Tigisis. In that place are two columns made of white stone near by a great spring, having Phoenician letters cut in them which say in the Phoenician tongue: "We are they who fled from before the face of Joshua, the robber, the son of Nun!"

This same story about Canaanites who fled from Joshua appears, with minor changes, in excerpts from the work of Christian historian John of Antioch, as well as in the Suda, a Byzantine encyclopedia written around 1000 CE.

The archaeological findings from Carthage serve to support the rabbinic tradition that commentators and scholars had written off as an imaginative homiletical interpretation. The votive inscriptions for pagan temples in Phoenician-Carthaginian inscriptions from Qart-ḥadašt in Tunis, or Carthage, feature the names of donators to the temple, including Baalyaton ben Girgash, Girgash ben – – – and Matan ben Girgasham.

Spiritually, these three responses by the Canaanites reflects how sometimes we deal with sin and temptation.

I liken this to when I used to smoke cigarettes. It was an addiction. In college God took away that desire almost instantaneously, in one night. Like the Girgashites, it fled, "emigrated" somewhere else and was never heard from again.

Some temptations are like the Gibeonites, they "make peace" with Israel, are turned to good and become submitted to God. The Jews believe that the inborn human "evil inclination" includes sexual desire or lust. But, because without it there would be no

children or societies, it is tamed within legal marriage and "makes peace" with Israel.

Most of the Canaanite nations must be dispossessed through our inner warfare, sometimes "little by little" (as in **Deuteronomy 7:22**). But some hang on until - like the Jebusites- they are vanquished only by King David/the Messiah.

### **The Landscape of the Promise**

The list in Joshua 12 offers a view of two realities at the same time.

First, it is a list of the many-faceted aspects of temptation and rebellion offered by the seven Canaanite tribes and their 31 distinct cities and manifestations, all opposing God within our hearts and minds. These would correspond to the Jewish idea of "the seven main transgressions that cause all other sins."

On the other hand, by delineating the boundaries, it also shows us the complete, magnificent vista of the Promised Land that God has prepared for us, formerly occupied by the Canaanites. All the different areas of the spiritual Rest that are available to believers are described on a granular level. All the various ways God has brought victory into our lives over self-seeking, rebellion, fear and pride are brought to our minds. This description of the boundaries of each section of land is showing us that - like the high places once used for idolatry - the land can be cleansed and turned to fruitfulness and service to God.

And in some special cases, like the land of Araunah the Jebusite that was sold to David for the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple, these past evils and failures and weaknesses can be transformed by the Holy Spirit into the very highest service and sacrifice (**2 Samuel 24:18-25**).

That's the promise and hope of the Gospel!