

# THORNS AND SNARES

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God tells us that Christians need to study and know the Old Testament scriptures. Only the New Testament serves as our law to follow (Col 2:14; Gal 5:1-4). But the Old Testament contains many, many examples for us to learn from (Rom 15:4). Similarly, 1 Corinthians 10:11 instructs us concerning the things that happened to the Israelites: “Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” Hebrews 4:11 warns us to “fall not after the same example of unbelief.” Let us therefore consider how Israel was corrupted by the world.

## **Abominable customs**

In Leviticus 18, God forewarned Israel before they ever entered the land of Canaan not to become like the current inhabitants of that land by following their ways. In verse 3, God said, “After the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances.” In verses 24-30, the Lord said, “Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for *in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.* Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (for all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) *that the land spew not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spewed out the nations that were before you.* For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye *commit not any one of these abominable customs*, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the Lord your God.” In this passage, the Lord specifically mentioned fornication, adultery, incest, homosexuality, and human sacrifice as examples of the “abominable customs” of the Amorites, who occupied the land of Canaan before Israel. In Genesis 15:13-15, God had foretold Abram that his seed would sojourn in a strange land (Egypt) for 400 years, and then would inherit Canaan. This period of time would have to pass “*for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.*” When their wickedness did become complete, they were worthy of the judgment which God pronounced against them, which was utter destruction.

## **Israel’s instructions**

Deuteronomy 7:1-6 says, “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 Hitites, 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; 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 show mercy unto them: 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. *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.* But

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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. *For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God.*” God was clear about what Israel was to do with the wicked people of the land and why. They were to be utterly destroyed because of their wickedness. In Deuteronomy 9:3-5, the Lord again told the Israelites to quickly and completely destroy those Canaanite nations, and that Israel would inherit their land *not* for Israel’s righteousness, but for the wickedness of those nations, and for God to fulfill His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## **Israel’s disobedience**

From the time the Israelites entered Canaan, they began to disobey the Lord’s instructions. First, they did not utterly destroy the wicked people of the land as God had commanded, but left a remnant among them (Judg 1:19,21,27-36). Therefore, God said those people would *“be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you”* (Judg 2:1-3). Indeed, Judges 3:5-7 says that Israel, *“took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves.”* This problem persisted for the rest of Israel’s history. God finally fulfilled what he had warned them about in Leviticus 18, and spewed them out of the land of Canaan. At that time, 2 Kings 17:15 gave the reasons: *“And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them.”* As Hosea 7:8 summarizes, *“Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people.”* After Israel was destroyed, Judah was all that was left of God’s people in Canaan, but they become worse than their brethren who had been destroyed (Jer 3:6-11; Ezek 23:11). In fact, 2 Chronicles 33:9 sadly records that *“Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel.”*

## **Come out from among them**

The New Testament commands Christians to come out from this world (2 Cor 6:14-18). Since the word for the “church” (*ekklesia*) literally means *“the called out ones,”* by definition, Christians have been called out of the darkness of this world into God’s marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9). God desires that we be here among the people of this world to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13-16; Php 2:14-15). But Jesus said we are to be *in* the world but not *of* the world (John 17:11-17). Pure religion and undefiled before God our Father includes keeping ourselves unspotted from the world (Jas 1:27). Romans 12:2 says, *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* If we are *of* the world and become conformed to it, then we become God’s enemy as Israel did (Jas 4:4).