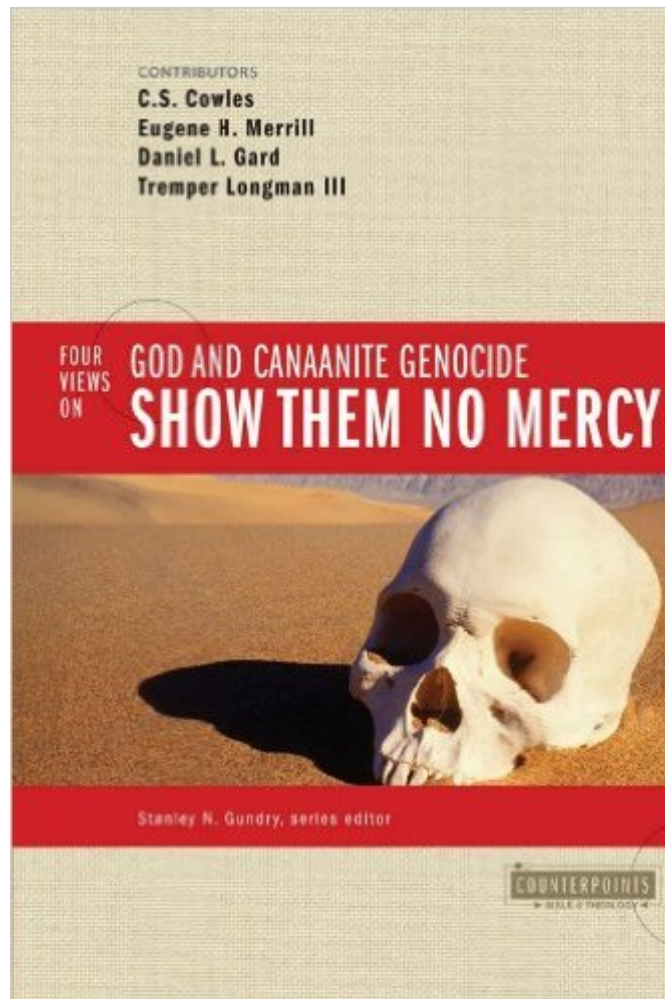


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Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views On God And Canaanite Genocide (Counterpoints: Bible And Theology)



Synopsis

A discussion of various contemporary evangelical views of genocide in the Old Testament.

Christians are often shocked to read that Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, commanded the total destruction of "all men, women, and children" of the ethnic group known as the Canaanites. This seems to contradict Jesus' command in the New Testament to love your enemies and do good to all people. How can Yahweh be the same God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? What does genocide in the Bible have to do with the politics of the 21st century? This book explores, in typical Counterpoints format, the Old Testament command of God to exterminate the Canaanite population and what that implies about continuity between the Old and New Testaments. The four points of view presented on the continuity of the Testaments are: "Strong Discontinuity" C. S. Lewis "Moderate Discontinuity" Eugene H. Merrill "Spiritual Continuity" Tremper Longman III "Eschatological Continuity" Daniel L. Gard The Counterpoints series provides a forum for comparison and critique of different views on issues important to Christians. Counterpoints books address two categories: Church Life and Bible and Theology. Complete your library with other books in the Counterpoints series.

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Customer Reviews

I'd give it 3 1/2 stars actually, if that were one of the options. This book, in a format of similar volumes, consists of contributions from four scholars who each give their point of view, followed by responses from the other three. Three of the authors more or less agree with one other in the reasons God commanded what the title dubs the "genocide" of the Canaanites (the reasons being those generally advanced by evangelical authors and given in the biblical text: to preserve Israel from idolatry, to judge the sins of the inhabitants of Canaan, etc.). Where they differ is in the meaning and application of "holy war" or "Yahweh war" for today. None believes we should engage in physical holy war, but for example, one author sees it as a model for spiritual warfare in the church. C. S. Cowles provides a lively counterpoint to the other three, as his position is essentially that God never did command the destruction of the Canaanites, nor would he; he was misconstrued or believed to have commanded it, but God is love and would never condone such a massacre. Unfortunately, his responses to each of the other authors, is simply along the same lines: God is love as revealed in Christ, and is not someone who commands the massacre of whole peoples. He chastises Eugene Merrill for a "clinical" analysis of the situation, as though there were no place for exegesis or philosophical analysis of ethics. He appears to believe in the reality of hell, and the same arguments he marshalls against "Yahweh war" could be extended to an all-embracing universalism. Recently I read the book "The Pianist," on which the recent movie was based. At the end, they include excerpts from the diary of a German soldier who had helped the author, Wladyslaw Szpilman, to hide and to survive.

This book deals with one of the more difficult questions arising out of the OT narratives: How could a God of love, as he is described in the NT, order the wholesale slaughter of the Canaanites in the OT? The answers and analyses in this book are certainly thought-provoking. I wasn't sure I appreciated the book's frequent use of the term "genocide" to describe the Israelite's warfare, as this word tends to produce a very emotional reaction in people and is often assumed to describe an inherently evil act which has no regard for the value of human life. (And all the contributors deny that God ever does evil or that he lacks respect for human life.) The word "genocide" seems more like an attempt to appeal to sensationalism and capitalize on the events of Sept. 11, than a completely

accurate term for what happened to the Canaanites. Also, each of the authors' chapters is heavily based on unproven presuppositions which he simply assumes to be true. Specifically:--C.S. Cowles assumes that parts of the OT (namely, those ordering the warfare) either are not inspired by God, or that they completely misconstrue God's true intent (Cowles doesn't specify which of these options he prefers), to the extent that they are of little if any value to modern readers.--Eugene Merrill assumes that a dispensational interpretation of the Bible is accurate. (While I understand that many people today are dispensationalists, Merrill simply assumes this scheme without proving it).--Daniel Gard assumes that an eschatological theme exists in 1-2 Chronicles (spending more time commenting on implications of this theme, and tracing it through the rest of the Bible, than establishing whether it even exists in the first place).

Show Them No Mercy is part of Zondervan's fantastic 'counterpoints' series that explores the deeply problematic topic of genocidal violence in the Old Testament. Each contributor explores the theme in light of the terrible display of religious violence executed on September 11th. How can we justify the religiously motivated violence in the Old Testament when we so clearly condemn it today? At the heart of the issue is how the New Testament relates to the Old. The four contributors take the following four positions in terms of continuity between the testaments: CS Cowles takes the view of "radical discontinuity" Eugene Merrill takes the view of "moderate discontinuity" Daniel Gard takes the view of "eschatological continuity" Tremper Longman takes the view of "spiritual continuity" Cowles's essay and responses are by far the most entertaining and impassioned as he unambiguously condemns the violence in the OT as "texts of terror" produced by fallible human authors. The result of such a view is that Jesus and the NT serves as a corrective to the deplorable ethics of Moses, Joshua and Samuel. Certainly he denies inerrancy, and this puts him in the awkward position of denying the full authority of the Old Testament. Cowles tries to show that Jesus had an ambivalent view of the OT arguing that while his message was ultimately contained in it, he rejected parts of it as unbecoming of God's character. The consistency of this position moves him towards the heresy of Marcion, though he takes time to defend himself from this charge. Merrill, Gard, and Longman's essays are relatively similar, though not without some important differences.

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