

Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide. By C. S. Cowles, Eugene Merrill, Daniel L. Gard, and Tremper Longman III. Counterpoints. Edited by Stanley N. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003, 218 pp., \$16.99 paper.

Much of the "news" in American culture has for a long time been equivalent to "bad news," typically the reporting of violent crimes, including exceptional cases in which the violence was associated with some kind of religious motivation. But with the terror attacks of 9/11, and subsequent military action in Afghanistan and Iraq, the subject of religion and violence has dominated not only the news media, but to a great extent, the American conscience.

Thus the timeliness of the book under review. *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* is the thirteenth volume in the Counterpoints series. These volumes offer treatments of long-debated issues such as miracles, Law and Gospel, Hell, Women in Ministry, etc. The distinctive approach of these works is that in each one a number of scholars (typically four or five, but sometimes less) set forth their own perspective on a given subject in turn and then each of the other scholars writes a response to each position statement. So not only do readers get a number of well-reasoned views on a given subject, but they also get helpful critiques of each point of view by all the other contributors.

This particular volume contains a brief editorial Introduction, four chapters, reflecting the four views and responses, a Scripture Index, and a Subject Index. The book contains no separate bibliography, but citations within the chapters constitute a rich store of both classical and recent resources related to the subject.

Chapter 1, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," by C. S. Cowles, Professor of Bible and theology at Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, CA. Cowles set the tone for his perspective early on with the following statements: "To attribute such atrocities to the actual intention and will of God, . . . poses insuperable difficulties for Christian theology, ethics, and praxis"(15); Citing September 11, 2001 as a shocking example of "the way distorted concepts of God are being acted out in the religiously incited violence of our time," he then asserted that "evangelicals no longer have the luxury of defending genocidal 'texts of terror' as reflective of either God's 'moral being' or his 'will and activity.' Nor is there any need to do so." (18). His approach is set forth in a more formal fashion in the following: The way to deal with "conflicting divine commands regarding the treatment of enemies . . . is to acknowledge what is everywhere assumed in the New Testament, namely, that while there are vast and vitally important areas of continuity between Israel's faith and that of the church, there are significant instances of radical discontinuity as well, none more so than in reference to divinely initiated and sanctioned violence." (19) Thus he set forth a conviction which he consistently emphasized throughout the chapter—the idea that any positive acceptance or endorsement of the OT description of the destruction of the Canaanites as a true reflection of God's character or action is diametrically opposed to the real truth of God as revealed in Jesus. In fact, he eventually declared that the idea of such action "can only be described as pre-Christ, sub-Christ, and anti-Christ" (36)!

Although Cowles's contribution is passionate and thought provoking, it is a position that few evangelicals will embrace, primarily because of its negative implications for the authority of Scripture, particularly the OT. In addition, his perspective seems to reject any kind of active judgment by God, past, present, or future.

Chapter 2, "The Case for Moderate Discontinuity," by Eugene H. Merrill, Distinguished Professor of Old Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. Merrill set forth his purpose clearly: "to identify Yahweh war as distinct from war in general, to determine its characteristic features, to attempt to justify it in light of the character of God as a whole, and to determine to what extent such a notion is continuous or discontinuous with the New Testament and applicable to modern life." (65)

Merrill saw Yahweh war as part and parcel of the covenant relationship. God was acting through and with Israel, by means of Yahweh war, to establish and protect his unique people in the land of Canaan (67). Components of that activity included defending the sovereignty of Yahweh against the "imaginary gods of the world," (71) protecting the holiness of Yahweh (81), punishing sinners because of "irremediable hardness" of their hearts, and educating Israel and the nations regarding "the character and intentions of the one true God." (85)

Merrill's contribution is systematic and thorough, influenced by an expected dispensational point of view and producing assured conclusions. However it may seem somewhat sterile to those who believe that the subject under consideration does raise legitimate moral and ethical questions.

Chapter 3, "The Case for Eschatological Continuity," by Daniel Gard, dean of graduate studies and associate professor of exegetical theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN. The thrust of Gard's view is that the questions raised by the texts under consideration can be answered by recognizing that a "trajectory can be developed that leads from the earliest narratives of the Old Testament, to the warfare narratives of Chronicles, to the intertestamental apocalypses, and to the images of the victorious Christ in John's Revelation." (114) Gard asserted that this approach reveals that "the images of Old Testament genocide can be seen as types of an eschatological event," so that the continuity which exists between Old and New Testaments is an eschatological continuity. (115) Gard's argument centers on the Chronicles and is strongly influenced by Rudolph Mosis's reading of Chronicles as eschatological in its essence. (130)

One of Gard's main points was to assert that if "holy war" will be a reality in the future, then to suggest that it really happened in the past is not to set up a contradiction of the character or purposes of the God of the present.

In the end, Gard's presentation is challenging, but somewhat esoteric, with a major part of his argument being built on a vague association of historical eras with Saul, David, and Solomon.

Chapter 4, "The Case for Spiritual Continuity," by Tremper Longman III, professor of Old Testament at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA. Longman began the essay proper with the observation that *herem* suggests the idea of consecration, and thus worship. (163) He then added that at the heart of *herem* warfare is the presence of God, the presence of God demands worship, therefore "it is not too strong to say that *herem* warfare is worship. The battlefield is sacred space. To be involved in warfare is a holy activity analogous to going to the temple." (166) He then argued that all aspects of battle when properly understood, before, during, and after, undergird this view. (164-74)

In discussing the activities after the battle, Longman addressed *herem* again, asserting that in actuality, "it refers to the climactic aspect of divine warfare: the offering of the conquered people

and their possessions to the Lord," meaning that, typically, the plunder was turned over to the priests and the prisoners were killed. "The principle behind the latter practice appears to be that because they were unclean, these ungodly people brought into the presence of God had to be destroyed." (172)

Longman then dealt with the question of how the God who ordered *herem* relates to the God of the NT by suggesting a five-phase development. (180) In summary, that development is as follows: "The war against the Canaanites was simply an earlier phase of the battle that comes to its climax on the cross and its completion at the final judgment. The object of warfare moves from the Canaanites, who are the object of God's wrath for their sin, to the spiritual powers and principalities, and then finally to the utter destruction of all evil, human and spiritual."

Longman has written more extensively on this subject in other places, and his presentation here reflects continuing thorough analysis of the texts and subject. His focus on *herem* as worship is quite striking, but the whole, though helpful, seems vaguely troublesome, as if to suggest celebration of a severe aspect of the character and actions of God when sober reflection would be a more appropriate response.

One can easily see that the volume provides quite a diverse set of treatments of the subject that will be a valuable aid in struggling with a difficult problem in biblical interpretation and application. However the heart of the problem remains—the death of "innocents," a point that Cowles hammered incessantly and the other contributors never really addressed adequately. Though the views differ significantly, on one point, all contributors agree—that the texts being studied offer no warrant whatsoever for modern Christians to use violence in promoting their faith.

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