



Heath Thomas, Jeremy Evans, and Paul Copan, *Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality and an Old Testament Problem* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic), 2013

Thomas, Evans, and Copan have assembled a stellar cast to discuss a fascinating topic which has serious relevance for Christians struggling with the entire topic of God's supposed orders to exterminate entire peoples.

Indeed, this supposed order is used by atheists and agnostics and others as a cudgel against Christians as though 1) Christians were responsible for the deaths of ancient Canaanites (whilst, curiously, Jews are usually left out of the aspersions); and 2) Christians are asked such things as 'how can you worship a God who orders people to kill others?'

The volume at hand does a very, very good job of assessing the issues and setting forth sensible and responsible answers to the most important and basic of questions.

The essays, as is always the case in any collection of essays, are varied in both usefulness, cogency, and power of presentation. To put it another way, all are good; some are very good; and some are fantastic.

Space and time prohibit individual examinations of each of the essays. Instead, what I'll do is rate the essays on a 1-3 star basis. * = good. ** = very good. And *** = fantastically well done.

- **1. Orientation Amidst Diversity: An Introduction to the Volume, Geth Allison & Reid Powell
- *2. Joshua and the Crusades, Douglas S. Earl
- *3. Martial Memory, Peaceable Vision: Divine War in the Old Testament, Stephen Chapman
- *4. A Neglected Witness to 'Holy War' in the Writings, Heath Thomas
- **5. Vengeance, Wrath, and Warfare as Images of Divine Justice in John's Apocalypse, Alan Bandy
- *6. The Rhetoric of Divine Warfare in Ephesians, Timothy Gombis
- ***7. Compassion and Wrath as Motivations for Divine Warfare, David Lamb
- **8. Holy War and herem: A Biblical Theology of herem, Douglas S. Earl
- *9. Crusade in the Old Testament and Today, Daniel Heimbac
- *10. The Ethics of 'Holy War' for Christian Morality and Theology, Paul Copan & Matthew Flannagan

- *11. The Prophets' Call for Peacemaking Practices, Glen Stassen
- *12. 'Holy War', Divine Action, and New Atheism: Philosophical Considerations, Robert Stewart
- **13. The Unholy Notion of 'Holy War': A Christian Critique, Murray Rae
- *14. 'Holy War' and the New Atheism: A Dogmatic Response, Stephen Williams
- *15. Old Testament Holy War & Christian Morality: Where do We Go from Here?, Jeremy Evans & Heath Thomas

By and large each essay has strengths and weaknesses, except David Lamb's which, in my estimation, is all strength and no weakness. In his essay Lamb does something quite clever and turns the discussion in a direction which it seldom takes: compassion and wrath and their interconnection and interconnectedness. Divine anger and compassion are the themes herein and after assessing a little bit of the literature on holy war Lamb discusses compassion and wrath in Exodus and focuses specifically on

The songs that celebrate deliverance at the sea (Ex 15:1-21)
 Covenant Code: Laws that protect the marginalized (Ex 22:20-26)
 The Revelation of Yahweh's Name (Ex 34:5-12)

Next of course he tackles Joshua and Judges, noting

In the book of Judges, YHWH fought against Israel in anger against their evil deeds and for Israel in compassionate response to their cries for help (p. 144).

Throughout Lamb makes the point that covenant mercy is what moves YHWH to act in punishment and deliverance and when he wars, he wars for a gracious purpose.

He next examines Isaiah, Psalm 78, Psalm 106, Mark, and Acts 7. His concluding section titled *Warlike Behavior Worthy of Praise* ties up all the loose ends and gives readers a great deal to think about (as does the essay as a whole).

... warfare motivated by compassion and anger is less problematic than warfare motivated by other motives (p. 151).

Though a truism, Lamb's point stands. The God of the Bible isn't the capricious monster that atheists (who, curiously, don't believe in God and yet are never unwilling to comment about the behavior of a God they profess they don't believe in- which is rather akin to complaining about the behavior of leprechauns when one doesn't believe they exist) would portray him to be and upon which skewed portrait go on to base their hatred of the concept of God.

I heartily commend the essays of this volume to readers interested in the thorny issue of the God of the Old Testament as he expresses wrath at unrighteousness and wars against the human proclivity to destroy itself.

Jim West
 The Philippines Baptist Theological Seminary