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Canaanite Genocide and Amalekite Genocide and the God of Love

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CANAANITE GENOCIDE AND AMALEKITE GENOCIDE AND THE GOD OF LOVE

Dwight Van Winkle

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CANAANITE AND AMALEKITE GENOCIDE AND THE GOD OF LOVE

by

Dr. Dwight Van Winkle

Introduction

According to Deuteronomy 7:1-2, Moses, speaking for Yahweh, commands the Israelites,

When Yahweh your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you ... and when Yahweh your God gives them over to you and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them.

According to Matthew 5:43-45, Jesus, God incarnate, states, You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

There is at least an apparent conflict between these two passages and others like them. This tension leads C. F. Evans to remark that it is "...easier in the long run to show the doctrine of the Trinity as latent in Genesis than to bring Samuel hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord in connection with the Christian virtue of agape."¹ Furthermore, Yahweh's commands for the Israelites to commit genocide conflict with our sense of morality.

This conflict creates problems for Christians and non-Christians, students and faculty, laity and clergy. P. D. Miller notes that every minister at some time has heard questions such as these: How can the divine Warrior of the Old Testament be

¹C. F. Evans, "Difficulties in Using the Bible for Christian Ethics," Modern Churchman, N.S., 26 (1984): 28.

reconciled with the God of love so forcefully presented in the New Testament? What kind of God would order the wholesale slaughter of groups of people?² This conflict keeps some from reading the Old Testament at all and others from reading it as sacred Scripture. For example, Madalyn Murray O'Hair in a lecture she delivered to the University of Calgary with the rather provocative title "Has Christianity done anything for anybody at any time?" noted that while still a young girl, she resolved to read through the Old Testament during the course of a weekend. She said that she was shocked by the content, the killing, the brutality, the war, and so on.³ Her reaction to the Bible contributed not only to her atheism but also to her forceful critique of Christianity.

Canaanite genocide makes it difficult for us to use the Bible in general and the Old Testament in particular as a guide for both theological and ethical reflection. It poses a problem to anyone who wants to find a coherent Biblical view of violence. It creates difficulties for anyone who wants to view the Old Testament as revelation. It also calls into question the goodness of God. How could a good God command the destruction of Canaanite infants? Surely the resolution of this conflict is important for the formulation of a Christian world view. Resolution of this ethical conflict might provide a paradigm for ethical and theological reflection.

Throughout its history, the church has interpreted these passages in various ways. There is no monolithic Christian perspective. This should warn us against condemning as heretical

²Patrick D. Miller, "God the Warrior," Interpretation 19 (1965): 40. Peter Craigie, Problem of War in the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978) p.106, complains that the academic study of the Old Testament ignores the theological problems posed by the Old Testament. He notes that those who are engaged directly in the preparation of men and women for Christian ministry cannot avoid their responsibility of relating the Old Testament to contemporary thought and ministry.

³Craigie, pp. 13-14.

alternatives with which we may not agree. While the church rejected Marcionism as a heresy, has permitted a variety of other alternatives. As I present these various alternatives, I will provide examples of the way the church has interpreted and used these passages. While the church has often been offended by Yahweh's command to carry out genocide, at times in its history it has found these passages to be downright useful. These passages were used to justify the crusaders' murder of the Turks, the Puritans' execution of the Catholics and the Catholic's execution of the Puritans as well as the New England settlers' slaughter of the American Indians.

In this paper I will present, analyze and evaluate the various possible ways of resolving the problem of Canaanite and Amalekite genocide. I want to examine under what conditions, if any, God⁴ could command his followers to commit genocide. My interest is not historical. At least for this project, I am not interested in determining if God actually commanded the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites. Of course if we determine that God could not command genocide, it logically follows that he did not command genocide. However, if we determine that God could command genocide, it does not necessary follow that he did command genocide. In this survey it is not my goal to use historical criticism to reconstruct the history of Israel. While I am not opposed to such an endeavor, it does not seem to be the most appropriate way to deal with the theological problem of Canaanite and Amalekite genocide. Craigie rightly remarks that a reconstruction of Israel's history will not

⁴I use the term "God" to indicate a being who is a person without a body (i.e. a spirit), present everywhere, the creator of the universe, a free agent, able to do everything (i.e. omnipotent), knowing all things, perfectly good, a source of moral obligation, immutable, eternal, a necessary being, holy and worthy of worship. I am indebted to Richard Swinburne's (The Coherence of Theism [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977] p. 2) definition of God.

solve the theological problem.⁵ Miller observes, "The answer that 'in actual fact' the ban or slaughter of the enemy was rarely carried out is not only historically questionable, but it begs or avoids the question. Yet this answer is often given by reputable Old Testament scholars."⁶

Survey of Old Testament Texts

I think that it is best to begin with a survey of the passages from the Old Testament which directly address the problem of Canaanite and Amalekite genocide. In this survey I will try to place the problem of Canaanite and Amalekite genocide in the broader story of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament. In this survey I will use the term "Canaanite" to refer to any non-Israelite living in the promised land. The terms "Hebrews" and "Israelites" will be used interchangeably.

In order to frame these passages in a broader context, I would like to give you the bare bones outline of the story of Israel. According to Genesis 1-11, God attempted to work with all humankind. However, since humankind continually rejected him, he chose Abram and his descendants to be his agent of blessing for

⁵Craigie, p.50, remarks "And even if it is argued that the Biblical 'historical' narratives have legendary character to them, and that the wars of conquest described therein did not actually take place, still the problem remains. For although the historical reality of the wars of conquest may perhaps be removed in this manner, the theological idea remains. That is, if in fact there were no real wars of conquest, it seems clear enough on the surface that the Old Testament writers intended to convey to us the impression (albeit ideal) that there were, and in the last resort it is the written word, rather than the historically vague event lying behind the word, which constitutes Holy Scripture."

⁶Miller, p. 41. Paul Hanson, "War and Peace in the Hebrew Bible," Interpretation 38 (1984):348-49 and John Goldingay, Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) p. 164 to my mind exhibit the fault of which Miller complains.

all people. God promised Abraham that if he put his faith in God,⁷ God would give him land, descendants and a special beneficial relationship.

In Gen. 15:16 we see that God promises the land of the Canaanites to Abraham but notes that Abraham's descendants will have to wait four hundred years (v. 13) or until the fourth generation (v. 16) because the sin of the Amorites is not yet complete. This text is important because it shows that one justification for the Hebrews taking the land from the Amorites was that God was using them to punish the Amorites. By the end of the book of Genesis, the Hebrews were down in Egypt.

While the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, God promised Moses that he would liberate them from Egypt and bring them to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey (e.g. Exod. 3:8, 17). After the Israelites were freed from Egypt they were attacked in the wilderness by the Amalekites. After the Hebrews were victorious over the Amalekites, God promised, "I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." Moses adds that Yahweh will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. According to the story of Exodus, God entered into a covenant relationship with the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. This covenant guaranteed that Yahweh would be Israel's God and that Israel would be God's people. If Israel kept covenant stipulations set forth in the law, they would be God's special possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

In the book of Deuteronomy which according to the story of the Old Testament contains Moses final instructions to the Israelites before they cross over the Jordan River to take possession of the promised land, Moses instructs the people in Deut. 7:1-5. He states,

⁷I argue that the Abrahamic covenant is a conditional covenant in "Christianity and Zionism" Journal of the Irish Christian Study Centre 2 (1984):38-46.

When Yahweh your God brings you into the land which you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you and when Yahweh your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall not make any covenant with them, and show no mercy to them. You shall not make marriages with them For they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods; then the anger of Yahweh would be kindled against you and he would destroy you quickly. But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their alters, and dash in pieces their pillars and hew down their Asherim and burn their graven images with fire.

Moses continues by reminding them that they are Yahweh's holy people and in verse 16 adds, "You shall destroy all the peoples that Yahweh your God will give over to you, your eye shall not pity them; neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you." Several points in this passage deserve further attention. The justification for the merciless destruction of the Canaanites is the threat that they might contaminate the Israelites. Furthermore, if the Israelites succumb to Canaanite culture and religion, Yahweh will destroy his own people.

In Deuteronomy 9: 4 ff., Moses states,

Do not say in your heart, after Yahweh your God has thrust them out before you, "It is because of my righteousness that Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land"; whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that Yahweh is driving them out before you. Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land; but because of the wickedness of these nations Yahweh your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. Know therefore that

Yahweh your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people.

Moses continues by reminding the Israelites of their sins in the wilderness. This passage reiterates that God uses the Israelites as his agent to judge the Canaanites.

In Deuteronomy 20 Moses imparts laws governing holy war. He reminds the people that Yahweh fights for them. He instructs the people to offer peace terms to a city. If the city accepts all of the city's inhabitants are pressed into forced labor. If the city refuses and if the Israelites take the city, all of the males are to be put to the sword but the women and children are to be taken as booty. However in verse 16 Moses reminds the people,

But in the cities of these peoples that Yahweh your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as Yahweh your God has commanded; that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices which they have done in the service of their gods and so to sin against Yahweh your God.

This passage reminds us that even though the Israelites knew of a more humane form of warfare, they were forbidden by God to engage in it lest they be infected by Canaanite religion.

In at least parts of the book of Joshua, the Israel's conquest of Canaan is complete. Led by Joshua, they conquer the land of Canaan and destroy the Canaanites. For example, the narrator tells us in Joshua 6: 21 without any apparent remorse that the Israelites utterly destroyed all in the city of Jericho, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and asses, with the edge of the sword.

The final text I would like to look at is 1 Sam. 15: 1-3 which states,

And Samuel said to Saul, "Yahweh sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore hearken to the words of Yahweh. Thus says Yahweh of host, 'I will punish what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way, when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, infant and suckling ox and sheep, camel and ass.'"

According to this passage, Yahweh orders Saul to mercilessly destroy the Amalekites as punishment for a crime committed at least two hundred and fifty years earlier.

Having reviewed the Old Testament passages that are directly relevant to the problem of Canaanite and Amalekite genocide, we are now in a position to survey how these passages have been interpreted by both Jews and Christians.

Judaism

Judaism affirms that God justifiably commanded Israel to kill the Canaanites and the Amalekites. However, at least as set forth in the Talmud and Mishnah, it believes that this command cannot be universalized. Both the Canaanites and the Amalekites have lost their national identity already in ancient times. Since Amalekites and Canaanites cannot be identified, they cannot be the objects of genocidal war. Even if the Amalekites could be identified as the embodiment of sheer evil, the battle against them should be postponed until the immediate pre-messianic struggle. Rabbis further limited these mandatory wars by extending to the Canaanites the more humane form of warfare that was denied them by Deuteronomy 20.⁸

⁸Reuven Kimelman, "Judaism and the Ethics of War," in Nuclear and Conventional Warfare Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly 1987, p. 8.

Crusades

While the Christian church often insisted that the passages concerning Canaanite and Amalekite genocide could not be universalized, at times it argued that these passages can be universalized. The earliest expression of this position that I came across was Pope Urban II. According to Baldric of Dol's version of the speech of Pope Urban the II, he justified the crusades and encouraged the crusaders. Urban II proclaimed that the children of Israel prefigured the crusaders in the crossing of the Red Sea, in taking that land by their arms, in driving out the Jebusites and other inhabitants and in inhabiting the earthly Jerusalem. Furthermore, Urban II said,

Under Jesus Christ, our Leader, may you struggle for your Jerusalem, in Christian battle-line, most invincible line, even more successfully than did the sons of Jacob of old-struggle, that you may assail and drive out the Turks, more execrable than the Jebusites, who are in this land, and may you deem it a beautiful thing to die for Christ in that city in which He died for us.

Urban II adds that it is the duty of those who stay behind to pray for the crusaders but it is the job of the crusaders to fight against the Amalekites.⁹

The first hand account of the crusades preserved by Fulcher of Chartres indicates the influence of Canaanite and Amalekite genocide. Fulcher writes,

On the top of Solomon's Temple, to which they had climbed in fleeing, many were shot to death with arrows and cast down headlong from the roof. Within this Temple about ten thousand (Albert of Aix says three hundred, and Hagenmeyer accepts this number, not Fulcher's) were

⁹Edward Peters, The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971) pp. 8-9.

beheaded. If you had been there, your feet would have been stained up the ankles with the blood of the slain. What more shall I tell? Not one of them was allowed to live. They did not spare the women and children.¹⁰

When I first read this text, I thought that Fulcher was complaining about the cruelty of the crusades, but as I read further I was forced to conclude that he was actually proud of the Christian army's accomplishments. Fulcher continues,

After they had discovered the cleverness of the Saracens, it was an extraordinary thing to see our squires and poorer people split the bellies of those dead Saracens, so that they might pick out besants from their intestines, which they had swallowed down their horrible gullets while alive. After several days, they made a great heap of their bodies and burned them to ashes, and in these ashes they found the gold more easily.¹¹

Puritan Revolution

During the Puritan Revolution, we once again see the influence of the passages condoning Canaanite and Amalekite genocide. James Turner Johnson chronicles the growth of the holy war doctrine during this period. In his sermon "On War" which enjoyed wide circulation, Henry Bullinger argues that,

...the magistrate of duty is compelled to make war upon men which are incurable, whome the very judgment of the Lord condemneth and biddeth to kill without pity or

¹⁰Ibid., p. 77.

¹¹ Ibid.

mercy. Such were the wars which Moses had with the Midianites, and Josue with the Amalechites.¹²

He adds that those whom God condemns are to be killed "without pity or mercy" by the servants of righteousness.¹³

Johnson notes that besides implying the removal of the limits of the jus in bello, this provision takes away the need for penance on the part of soldiers for the evils they have committed in wartime.¹⁴

Johnson points out that not only the Protestants, but also the Catholics, were involved in the formulation of the doctrine of holy war. He notes that in his sermon "A True, Sincere, and Modest Defence of English Catholiques", William Cardinal Allen, an exiled English Catholic bishop promoted the cause of holy war far more forcefully and explicitly than did Bullinger's comparatively cautious sermon. Johnson notes,

Like Bullinger, Allen would prosecute such war to the limit. If all the unfaithful are to be slain 'without exception' then that most powerful restraint present in the just war doctrine of jus in bello - noncombatant immunity - is irretrievably lost. Women, children, clerics, the aged, the infirm - all those and other classes as well who according to just war doctrine and accepted practice of war up to this time are to be spared from the ravages of war -all are now to be subjected to a "sharpe and zealous pursuite of extreme revenge," as Allen puts it.¹⁵

¹² Cited by J. T. Johnson, Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War: Religious and Secular Concepts 1200-1740 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975, p. 111.

¹³Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 115.

Johnson notes that William Gouge's "The Churches Conquest Over the Sword," is a kind of climax in English attempts to rewrite the Christian doctrine of war. According to Johnson,

...when Gouge sets out to define "what warres may be counted just and lawfull," at the top of his list is all those wars "extraordinarily made by expresse charge from God." "No question must be made of them," he continues, "because they had the best warrant that could be, Gods Command."¹⁶

Johnson continues,

...the uppermost cause for offensive war is in Gouge's words, "Maintenance of Truth, and purity of Religion." "This moved the Israelites in Canaan to think of making warres against their brethren on the other side of Jordan," he explains. "In this respect the warres of the Kings of the earth against Anti-Christ are commended...."¹⁷

Johnson notes that Gouge was far more concerned with those who outwardly profess the Christian faith than he was about fighting the Turks or the Indians of the New World.¹⁸ Johnson quotes Gouge as saying,

..."Papists profess the Christian Faith, yet are Anti-Christians, the directest and deadliest enemies that Christs (sic) true church ever had." Or in another place, "papists are to Protestantes as Amalekites to Israelites."¹⁹

¹⁶Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 120-21.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁹Ibid., emphasis added by Johnson.

New England Settlers as the New Israel

As a final example of those who found passages commanding genocide to be very useful, Bainton notes that Cotton Mather in his Soldiers Counsell'd regarded the Puritan colonist as the New Israel of God which was commissioned to subdue the Indians as the Amalekites. Bainton adds that Herbert Gibbs in 1704 thankfully commemorated "the mercies of God in extirpating the enemies of Israel in Canaan," and that in the eighteenth century the feeling against the Indians was intensified because these "Amalekites" came to be allied with the minions of the Antichrist, the French Papist.²⁰

Marcionism

Having discussed the views of those who maintain that God could command his followers to commit Canaanite and Amalekite genocide, I would now like to focus our attention upon those who deny that God could have issued such a command. Marcion argued that the Old Testament was the revelation of an inferior god who created matter, who leads people in battle, who orders entire populations to be slaughtered, who is best described as "a jealous God visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation" (Exod. 20:5). Far above this vindictive god there is another, the "unknown god" who is loving, peaceful, and infinitely good.²¹ The orthodox church rejected him as a heretic. Marcion's understanding of the Old Testament was

²⁰Roland H. Bainton, Christian Attitudes towards War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960) pp. 167-168.

²¹Justo L. Gonzalez, A History of Christian Thought: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970). p. 139.

revived by Adolf von Harnack and Friedrich Delitzsch. Concerning the Old Testament von Harnack wrote,

To reject the Old Testament in the second century was a mistake the church rightly repudiated; to retain it in the sixteenth century was a fate which the Reformation could not avoid; but to continue to keep it as a canonical document after the nineteenth century is the consequence of religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.²²

Delitzsch argued even more forcefully for the rejection of the Old Testament. Delitzsch confesses that he feels a sense of revulsion at the murderous mentality reflected in the Book of Joshua. He thinks that it would be more merciful of God to send a plague to destroy the Canaanites than to command the callous murdering of captive men, women and children.²³ While the Orthodox Christian church has disagreed over how to handle God's commands for the Israelites to genocide the Canaanites, it has agreed that merely lopping off the Old Testament is not an acceptable alternative.

Evaluative Reading of the Old Testament

Clement of Rome has been credited with the introduction of an evaluative reading of the Old Testament. Concerning the Old Testament, Clement reportedly writes²⁴ that while some sinned because they thought there would be no judgement, others

...took an opposite course. For supposing the expressions of the Scriptures which are against God, and are unjust and false, to be true, they did not know his real divinity and his power. Therefore in the belief

²²Adolf von Harnack Marcion. Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1921) pp. 248-49.

²³Friedrich Delitzsch, Babel and Bible (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co, 1906) pp. 106-107

²⁴The consensus of scholarship holds that the Clementine Homilies are wrongly ascribed to Clement of Rome.

that He was ignorant and rejoiced in murder, and let off the wicked in consequence of the gifts of sacrifices ; yea, moreover, that He deceived and spake falsely, and did every thing that is unjust, they themselves did things like to what their God did, and thus sinning, asserted that they acted piously. Wherefore it was impossible for them to change to the better, and when warned they took no heed. For they were not afraid, since they became like their God through such actions.²⁵

Regarding the Old Testament Clement adds,

... every man who wishes to be saved must become, as the Teacher has said, a judge of the books written to try us, For thus he spake: "Become experienced bankers." Now the need of bankers arises from the circumstance that the spurious is mixed up with the genuine.²⁶

Thus according to Clement, an evaluative reading of the Old Testament was necessary.

Radical Reinterpretation of the Old Testament

I find it intriguing that while Origen opposed Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament in theory, he agreed with it in practice. Whenever he found an embarrassing text, he interpreted it allegorically. For example, after Origen complains that the heretics have been troubled by the problem passages in the Old Testament, he remarks,

Now the reason of the erroneous apprehension of all these points on the part of those whom we have mentioned above, is no other than this that holy scripture is not

²⁵Clement, Homily XVIII, chap. XIX.

²⁶Ibid., Chap. XX.

understood by them according to its spiritual, but according to its literal meaning.²⁷

Elsewhere Origen offers a spiritual interpretation of problem texts. For example, Origen engages in a radical reinterpretation of Psalm 137:9 which states "Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock." Origen explains, the little ones of Babylon (which signifies confusion) are those troublesome thoughts which arise in the soul; and he who subdues them by striking, as it were their heads against the firm and solid strength of reason and truth, is the man who dasheth the little ones against the stones.²⁸

While not engaging in the allegorical method of interpretation, Kant advocates a radical reinterpretation of the Old Testament. Kant remarks,

Frequently this interpretation may, in the light of the text (of the revelation), appear forced-it may often really be forced; and yet if the text can possibly support it, it must be preferred to a literal interpretation which either contains nothing at all [helpful] to morality or else actually works counter to moral incentives.²⁹

²⁷Origen, De Principiis, Book IV, Chap. I sec.9.

²⁸Origen, Against Celsus, Book VII, Chap. XXII.

²⁹Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, Harper Torch Books, (New York, Evanston, London: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1960) pp.100-01. Kant, p. 101, illustrates his point in a reference to Michaelis's interpretation of Psalm 59:11-16, where as Kant describes it, we find a prayer for revenge which goes to terrifying extremes. According to Kant, Michaelis approves of this prayer and adds, "The Psalms are inspired; if in them punishment is prayed for, it cannot be wrong, and we must have no morality holier than the Bible." Kant responds, "Restricting myself to this last expression, I raise the question as to whether morality should be expounded according to the Bible or whether the Bible should not rather be expounded according to morality." When faced with the

After quoting 2 Tim. 3:16-17, he notes that since scripture has as its end the moral improvement of men, it will comprise the highest principle of all Scriptural exegesis.³⁰ He notes that this is the way scriptures have functioned among the Greeks, the Romans, the Jews, the Christians, the Moslems, and the Hindus.³¹ In general the liberal church has followed either Marcion's exclusion of the Old Testament or Kant's Moralistic reinterpretation of the Old Testament.³²

Cannot be Universalized

Many Christian scholars agree that God's command to genocide the Canaanites and Amalekites cannot be universalized but differ on the basis for this conclusion. Kidner remarks that to draw valid conclusions from the Old Testament we must first remember that in ancient Israel, church and state were one; whereas now the two have had their spheres and functions and appropriate means of action differentiated within God's over-arching rule and furthermore civil powers cannot apply these passages as military

conflict between the curses contained in this Psalm and the New Testament's admonition to bless those that curse you, Kant states "I try, as a first alternative, to bring the New Testament passage into conformity with my own self-subsequent moral principles (that perhaps the reference here is not to enemies in the flesh but rather to invisible enemies which are symbolized by them and are far more dangerous to us, namely, evil inclinations which we must desire to bring wholly underfoot). Or if this cannot be managed, I shall rather have it that this passage is not to be understood in a moral sense at all but only as applying to the relation in which the Jews conceived themselves to stand to God as their political regent.

³⁰Ibid., p. 102.

³¹Ibid., pp. 101-102.

³²Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928) p. 608 states that the Old Testament scriptures do not share the same normative dignity or the inspiration of the New Testament.

precedents since the Israel of the Old Testament stood in a unique relation to God.³³ Kidner's remarks make good sense in a Western secular state but beg the question of the proper relationship between church and state. Brevard S. Childs argues that the effect of the canonical shaping of the conquest material is that the book of Joshua has been assigned a specific but time bound role in God's economy and that while the conquest was acknowledged throughout the Old Testament as an integral part of the divine purpose for Israel, it was never again to be repeated.³⁴ This too begs the question. What is it about the canonical shape that indicates that these commands were given and were never to be repeated? If it is so clear in the canon, why have interpreters misunderstood it for so long?

Of course, those who deny that God could command genocide would argue that the purported commandments of God could not be universalized. Finally, those who argue for some type of progress between the Old Testament and the New Testament would restrict the applicability of these commands. This progress might be a progress of revelation in which God reveals more of himself over time. It could be a progress of realization in which the moral perception of God's covenant partner improves and progresses even though the revelation of God remains constant. Or conceivably it could be due to God's progress in which God undergoes moral development.³⁵ We

³³Derek F. Kidner, "Perspectives on War," Evangelical Quarterly 57 (1985) 107.

³⁴Brevard S. Childs, Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) p. 78.

³⁵I do not think that process theology's doctrine of dual transcendence permits this type of moral evolution. David Pailin, "Process Theology" The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology (1983), p. 469 explains, "As for God's perfection, it is understood as a state of 'dual transcendence', where God is unsurpassable by everything other than himself but in which later states will exceed in incremental value his earlier states - e.g. in terms of the perfection of God's awareness: at time t_1 , God as perfect will be aware of all that has been and is then the case, but at a later time, t_2 , his awareness will embrace more since it will then

need to determine whether we are able to universalize these commands only if we determine that God could have issued such commands. This raises the major question of the paper: Could God have commanded his followers to commit Canaanite and/or Amalekite genocide?

Divine Command Theory

The divine command theory of ethics is an alternative which justifies God's command for Israel to mercilessly destroy both the Canaanites and the Amalekites. The most plausible form of the divine command theory of ethics is that moral duties, rights, wrongs, and other aspects of moral obligation are in some way logically derived from God's commands.³⁶ Actions are morally obligatory because they are commanded by God. It is not that God commands something because it is right. It is right because it is commanded by God. Put into its simplest terms, all right actions have only one morally relevant quality. They are commanded by God.³⁷ Proponents of the divine command theory of ethics would

additionally include all that has come to the case between t_1 and t_2 . At no time, though, will God's awareness be in any way deficient. " Process theology would not allow this type of moral development since God's moral awareness would be deficient when he commanded Canaanite and Amalekite Genocide. Furthermore, we at t_2 would have better moral sensibilities than God had at t_1 .

³⁶Glen C. Graber, "Divine Command Morality" The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics (1986) pp. 159-160.

³⁷Philip L. Quinn, Divine Commands and Moral Requirements (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) presents three versions of the divine command theory which are as follows:
 p. 32, "It is necessary that, for all p, it is indifferent that p if and only if it is not the case that God commands that p and it is not the case that God commands that not-p."
 p. 33, "It is necessary that, for all p, it is forbidden that p if and only if God makes the universe and God commands that not-p."
 p. 35, "It is necessary that, for all p, it is forbidden that p if and only if God makes the universe and God commands that not-p."
 He notes, p. 38, that he is unable to determine which of these theories a theist should prefer and that he is not able to say

apply this to the problem of Canaanite and Amalekite genocide by maintaining that obedience to this command is proper simply because it is commanded by God.

There are several standard objections to the divine command theory that convincingly point out its shortcomings. If divine command theory were correct, morality would be arbitrary. If it were not, there would be another morally relevant quality apart from its simply being commanded by God and thus divine command theory would be false. In addition, divine command theory erodes the meaningfulness God's goodness. As J. L. Mackie points out,

... the description of God himself as good would reduce to the rather trivial statement that God loves himself, or likes himself the way he is. It would also seem to entail that obedience to moral rules is merely prudent but slavish conformity to the arbitrary demands of a capricious tyrant.³⁸

Furthermore divine command theory also runs into the problem of the recognizability of divine commands. As I will point out, other theories also run into this difficulty.

How could we recognize divine commands if the only morally relevant quality was that they were commanded by God? Surely miracles would not suffice since according to the Old Testament false prophets might be able to successfully predict the future (Deut. 13: 1-5).³⁹ Surely a divine appearance would not suffice

which of them he prefers.

³⁸J. L. Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 230.

³⁹J. L. Mackie, The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 23 argues that if someone is reliably recorded as having prophesied at t_1 an event at t_2 which could not be predicted at t_1 on any natural grounds, and the event occurs at t_2 , then at any later time t_3 we can assess the evidence for the claims both that the prophecy was made at t_1 and that it cannot be explained either causally or as accidental, and hence that it is probably miraculous.

since according to the New Testament even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). Thus it seems that Kant is correct when he insists that a moral agent must employ his own antecedent moral criteria of judgment to evaluate whether a command really has divine origin.⁴⁰ The divine command theory does not allow for this. Even consistency with previous commands of God could not provide such a criteria since presumably God would be free to change his mind.⁴¹

I realize that some may object that I am giving reason too large of a role to play, but I think that John Locke is right when he remarks,

Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything. I do not mean that we must consult reason and examine whether a proposition revealed from God can be made out by natural principles, and if it cannot, that then we may reject it; but consult it we must, and by it examine whether it be a revelation from God or no; and if reason finds it to be revealed from God, reason then declares for it as much as for any other truth, and makes it one of her dictates.⁴²

In view of all of these difficulties, divine command theory does not really provide an acceptable alternative.

⁴⁰Immanuel Kant, Der Streit der Fakultäten (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1959), p. 62.

⁴¹We have an example of God's changing his mind about his commands. In the Old Testament God commanded that the Israelites refrain from eating unclean food. In the New Testament, God declares that all foods are clean and actually commands Peter to eat of the unclean food (Acts 10: 9-16).

⁴²John Locke, An Essay concerning Human Understanding: Complete and Unabridged (New York: Dover, 1959), Book IV, Chapter xix, section 14.

God as Creator

Some have argued that since God is the creator, he has the right to do with his creation what he wishes. For example, J. B. Mozley argues that God is the author of life and death and he has the right to deprive any number of his creatures of their lives at any time. This includes the right to commission someone to do this. It cannot be denied, he continues, as soon as the divine command to exterminate a people becomes known to another people they have the right and the obligation to exterminate the people of whom God ordered their extermination.⁴³

Metaphors which liken God to the potter and his creation to the clay would argue that God as creator has some rights over his creation. However, I must confess that it seems to me that these rights are not unlimited. If scientists were to succeed in creating life, we would not grant them the unlimited rights over their creations. For example they would not have the right to torture sentient creatures. In my opinion, R. Swinburne has taken the right tack when he argues that certain actions are wrong and that God can no more make them right than he can make a man both married and a bachelor. For example, torturing children is always wrong and would remain so regardless of whatever commands anyone might issue. God's infinite power does not give him the right to issue such a command. While some actions are right or wrong independently of what anyone commands, others are made right or wrong by divine command. The reason we should obey God so long as his commands conform to natural law is that we have an obligation to please our benefactors and because God is the owner of the

⁴³ Mozley, Ruling Ideas in Early Ages (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896) p.83-85. A similar position is taken by William Brenton Greene, Jr. "Ethics of the Old Testament" Princeton Theological Review 28 (1929) pp. 313-66 reprinted in Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation ed. Walter Kaiser Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972) p. 207-235, esp. 216-22, and Thomas Hartwell Horne, An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, 9th ed, enl., 2 vols, (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1846) 2:593-595.

universe since he brought us into being and keeps us in being by his free choice.⁴⁴

Therefore, although God might have certain rights over his creation, he would have to deal justly with his creatures. This raises the question: Could God justly order Israel to commit genocide against the Canaanites and the Amalekites?

⁴⁴Richard Swinburne, Coherence of Theism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) p. 203-205. In a conversation I had with him September 20, 1988 at his rooms in Oriel College, Oxford University, he indicated that he had changed his mind about God's inability to command genocide. He explained that life was a gift from God. Therefore God does no wrong when he takes someone's life. Since life is a gift, no one can complain if God gives them a smaller gift than he gives others. God can take a person's life directly through natural causes or accidents. God can also commission an agent to deprive a person of life. Furthermore, God can impose it as an agent's duty to take away someone's life. This is similar to person A lending something to person B and then commissioning person C to take it away from person B. A does B no wrong when he commissions person C to take it away from person B since it was a gift in the first place. According to Swinburne, God has only a few obligations. He agrees with Aquinas that God has the obligation of keeping his promises and telling the truth. Swinburne adds that God is obliged not to cause endless pain. God is forever producing good to everyone. Good acts are like infinity, they are inexhaustible. Subsequent to my conversation with Swinburne, I read his Faith and Reason (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). On p. 147 he notes that an argument could be made that God would wrong no one by giving heaven only to those that pursue the Christian way. This seems similar to the argument that since life is a gift from God he wrongs no one when he deprives them of life. However, p. 147, he notes that this answer does seem rather shallow. This admission is somewhat surprising since the argument for God's ability to command genocide rests upon the same grounds as the argument that God could send all non-Christians to hell. Of course, there may be an evolution in his thinking so that God as the creator and giver of life has almost unlimited rights over his creation. It would seem inconsistent, however, if he were to argue that God, as creator, could order genocide of his creatures but, as creator, he could not consign them to hell, especially since Swinburne (p. 171) believes that hell could not involve endless torment. The argument that as creator God enjoys almost unlimited rights over his creation seems rather shallow. Indeed, if God were considered to be the father of humanity, we might well ask: As our father, does God owe child support?

God as Judge

T. H. Horne represents a group of scholars who argue that God has the right to judge the world.⁴⁵ This right includes the deputizing of an agent to carry out his judgment. In theory this seems quite reasonable. We have already seen in our survey of Biblical texts dealing directly with Canaanite genocide some passages explicitly indicate God used Israel's conquest of Canaan as a means of bringing judgment upon the Canaanites. According to the Old Testament the Canaanites were notoriously wicked although Craigie admits that historically speaking they were not any worse than other nations of the Ancient Near East.⁴⁶ While the Old Testament concedes God's right to judge the world, at least some passages limit this right. When Abraham haggles with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, he declares that surely the judge of all the earth will do right. He will not mingle the blood of the innocent with that of the guilty. C. S. Rodd notes that at least in this passage sets up a moral standard which can be set up over against God's decrees.⁴⁷ According to John Barton, there are

⁴⁵While not necessarily subscribing to this view, Robert M. Good, "The Just War in Ancient Israel" Journal of Biblical Literature 104/3(1985): 385-400 points out that modern scholars have down played the aspect of Yahweh's judgment as a part of Yahweh wars.

⁴⁶Craigie, p. 74, notes that the wickedness of the Canaanites can only be based on revelation and not history since the Canaanites were not necessarily more morally corrupt than the Assyrians or some other people. G. Ernest Wright, in G. Ernest Wright and Reginald H. Fuller, The Book of the Acts of God (Garden City: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1957) p. 108, disagrees noting, "Now we may know not only from the Bible but from many outside sources as well that the Canaanite civilization and religion was one of the weakest, most decadent, and most immoral cultures of the civilized world at that time." However the evidence better supports Craigie's conclusion.

⁴⁷C. S. Rodd, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just? (Gen. xviii. 25)," Expository Times 83 (1972), pp. 137-39.

other passages that make a similar point.⁴⁸ Perhaps Abraham stops bargaining with God when he gets God to agree to spare the city for the sake of ten righteous men because he realizes that judgment in this world is imprecise and corporate judgment will always involve some innocent suffering. Even if Abraham did not realize it, we recognize this to be the case. So long as God chooses to work through nations to accomplish his purposes, individual justice will be imprecise. The question remains however if Canaanite and/or Amalekite genocide involve(s) too much innocent suffering.

Neither Canaanite nor Amalekite genocide can be justified by an appeal to God as judge since they both involve too much innocent suffering. Surely as judge, God would be free to punish the guilty Canaanites. This could explain the command for Israel to kill all of the Canaanite men and women since conceivably all Canaanite men and women might deserve punishment. It more difficult to explain God's demand for the just execution of the Canaanite children unless it is supposed that Canaanite children did something deserving of death which seems unlikely. The only other grounds for the execution of the Canaanite children would be that Canaanite adults would be necessary to care for the Canaanite children and that it is more just that many innocent Canaanites children should die so that punishment might fall upon guilty, namely, the Canaanite adults. This however seems unlikely since we have good warrant for believing that God places a high value on innocent life.

Amalekite genocide is even more difficult to justify than Canaanite genocide. In 1 Samuel 15, Saul is commanded to kill Amalekite men, women, infants, sucklings, ox and ass, every thing that breathes since the Amalekites harmed the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. This would involve God's holding later generations responsible for the sins of generations long ago since

⁴⁸John Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," Journal of Theological Studies, N. S., 30 (1979): 1-14.

at least 250 years separate the Amalekites who harmed Israel when it came up from Egypt from the Amalekites whom God reportedly ordered destroyed. Surely such punishment is unjust. Ezekiel 18 insists in no uncertain terms that God does not hold children accountable for the sins of their parents.⁴⁹ While Canaanite and Amalekite genocide cannot be justified on the ground that God is judge, perhaps it can be justified on the basis of Israel's moral weakness.

Israel's Weakness

Canaanite genocide has been justified on the basis of Israel's weakness. According to this justification, if God left the Canaanites in the land, they would corrupt the Israelites by leading them into Baalism and this would have destroyed God's plans for the world. T. Arnold expresses this view well when he comments, ...if we are inclined to think that God dealt hardly with the people of Canaan in commanding them to be so utterly destroyed, let us but think what might have been our fate, and the fate of every other nation under heaven at this hour, had the sword of the Israelites done its work more sparingly.⁵⁰

He adds,

But had the heathen lived in the land in equal numbers, and still more, had they intermarried largely with the Israelites, how was it possible, humanly speaking, that

⁴⁹Early Church fathers reconciled this passage with Exodus 20:5 which indicates that God will punish children for the sins of their parents by positing that Ezekiel refers to the new covenant. Of course, there is nothing in the context of Ezekiel to justify this interpretation. Ezekiel's use of the apodictic legal form which was common to the ancient Near East indicates that he thought this was the way God dealt with all people.

⁵⁰Thomas Arnold, Interpretation of Scripture (London: B. Fellowes, 1845), p. 35-36.

any sparks of the light of God's truth should have survived to the coming of Christ?⁵¹

Although this argument may appear to be a strong one, it too encounters problems.

According to the Old Testament, the Canaanites were not the only ones who practiced polytheism, child sacrifice and cultic prostitution. If the Israelites did not learn pagan religious practices from the Canaanites, they could have learned them from other nations surrounding Israel. Nevertheless, it could be argued that when Israel came into contact with these surrounding nations, their faith would have been sufficiently strong to withstand such temptation. According to this argument, it was only in the earliest stages of Hebrew religion that it need to be incubated in a germ free environment. It is essential for this argument to succeed that the Israelites living in the land of Palestine without the Canaanites would have been in a germ free environment. This is not the case since even immediately after the conquest, Israel would have come into contact with nations who both practiced Canaanite religion and engaged in Canaanite social practices.

In any case, the genocide of the Canaanites due to Israel's weakness entails certain characteristics of God. Of course, these characteristics of God may be true independently of this solution to the problem of Canaanite genocide. This solution, however, demands that God did not and does not have the ability to control free decisions for if he did, he could have eliminated the Canaanite threat in a much more cost efficient manner by controlling the beliefs and behavior of his covenant partner. It also suggests that God does not know the outcome of future contingent conditionals.⁵² If God were to foreknow that the

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²J. W. Mackie, The Miracle of Theism, pp. 150-176 points out that the free will defense entails the rejection of compatibilism and God's knowledge of the outcome of future contingent conditionals. R. Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism p. 167-178 argues on other grounds that God does not know the outcome of

Israelites were not going to eliminate all of the Canaanites and that they would adopt Canaanite religious practices, it seems reasonable that he would not have ordered the merciless execution of Canaanite men, women and children. At least, he could not make such a command on the basis of Israel's moral weakness.

Reformed Theology

Reformed theologians maintain that God could have ordered Canaanite and Amalekite genocide and that the Israelites acted righteously by carrying out this commandment. While Reformed theology makes use of the justifications provided by divine command theory, God's role as judge and God's role as creator, it provides its own twist. In his commentary on the book of Joshua, Calvin writes,

The indiscriminate and promiscuous slaughter, making no distinction of age or sex, but including alike women and children, the aged and the decrepit, might seem an inhuman massacre, had it not been executed by the command of God. But as he, in whose hands are life and death, had justly doomed those nations to destruction, this puts an end to all discussion. We may add, that they had been borne with for four hundred years, until their iniquity was complete. Who will now presume to complain of excessive rigour, after God had so long delayed to execute judgment?⁵³

He continues,

By this fact, then, not only are all mouths stopped, but all minds are also restrained from presuming to pass censure. When any one hears it said that Joshua slew all

future contingent conditionals.

⁵³John Calvin, Commentaries of the Book of Joshua, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1854), p. 97.

who came in his way without distinction, although they threw down their arms and suppliantly begged for mercy, the calmest minds are aroused by the bare and simple statement, but when it is added, that so God commanded, there is no more ground for obloquy against him, than there is against those who pronounce sentence on criminals. Though, in our judgment at least, the children and many of the women also were without blame, let us remember that the judgment-seat of heaven is not subject to our laws. Nay, rather when we see how the green plants are thus burned, let us, who are dry wood, fear a heavier judgment for ourselves. And certainly, any man who will thoroughly examine himself, will find that he is deserving of a hundred deaths. Why, then, should not the lord perceive just ground for one death in any infant which has passed from its mother's womb? In vain shall we murmur or make noisy complaint, that he has doomed the whole offspring of an accursed race to the same destruction; the potter will nevertheless have absolute power over his own vessels, or rather over his own clay.⁵⁴

Ronald Goetz argues in favor of Calvin's position noting, Our incapacity for understanding God's ways, our actual abhorrence in the face of the apparent monstrosity of some of these 'divine' demands, is emblematic of a failure from our side - not God's. 'Whate'er my God ordains is right.' Therefore given such a premise, no justification of God is needed; indeed, it is presumptuous.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 163-64.

⁵⁵Ronald Goetz, "Joshua, Calvin, and Genocide," Theology Today 32 (1975):267.

There are several objections that can be raised against this position. If it is improper for us to apply our moral standards to God, why do proponents of this position seek to justify God's commands based upon appeals to human standards of righteousness. If God's standards are simply transcendent, why offer any explanation beyond this statement since any further explanation undermines this position? For example, why explain that God had overlooked Canaanite sin for some four hundred years? The only reason for offering such an explanation is that there must be at least some rough correspondence between what God and humans conceive to be good. Furthermore if there is no such correspondence or if there is only an insufficient correspondence, we humans cannot reasonably be held culpable for not having faith in such a God since there is no way that we could recognize such a God to be good. The justification for Canaanite genocide provided by reformed theology comes at too steep a price since one of its costs is free will. Personally, I think that the free will defense is the only one that can reasonably explain the presence of evil if God is both omnipotent and wholly good. If Canaanite and Amalekite genocide cannot be justified on the basis of reformed theology, perhaps it can be justified on the basis of progressive revelation.

Progressive Revelation

Progressive revelation has been used to justify Yahweh's command for Israel to genocide the Canaanites and the Amalekites. According to this alternative both the Old Testament and the New Testament bear accurate witness to the revelation of God. The difference between the Old Testament's and the New Testament's perspective on issues is the difference between a penny and a dollar rather than the difference between a counterfeit penny and

a genuine dollar.⁵⁶ J. Orr is a good example of the solution afforded by proponents of progressive revelation. Orr begins by rejecting what he describes as the critical solution which denies outright that God could command his followers to commit genocide and then reprove them for not executing it with sufficient thoroughness. He notes that this critical solution ascribes the mistaken notions of God's participation in evil to the Biblical writers themselves. Orr argues that this critical method would free God from the responsibility for anything in the record which appears morally objectionable but it would do this at the expense of the reality of revelation. Orr proposes that progressive revelation solves the problem of genocide.⁵⁷ According to progressive revelation, although God knew that genocide was wrong, he accommodated himself to the moral sensibilities of the Hebrews by commanding them to genocide the Canaanites and the Amalekites. In addition to general objections to the justification provided by progressive revelation, there are specific objections.

As a general objection, it can be observed from even a cursory reading of the Old Testament that there is nothing like a linear evolution from lowest theological value to highest theological value. As James D. Smart points out, there is, of course, development in the Old Testament, but this development follows a zigzag line in which insights are lost as well as gained.⁵⁸ Specifically, in order for the progressive revelation justification

⁵⁶John Bright, The Authority of the Old Testament (London: SCM Press, 1967) p. 142 argues that an evaluative reading of the Old Testament ought not dismiss parts of the Old Testament as a worthless. The difference between the "peaks" and the "valleys" is the difference between the a \$1 bill and a \$100 bill rather than the difference between a \$1 and a Confederate note.

⁵⁷James Orr, The Problem of the Old Testament: Considered with reference to recent criticism (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937, pp.465-468.

⁵⁸James D. Smart, The Interpretation of Scripture (London: SCM, 1961) p. 250.

to work, the offensive passages would have to be early and the more enlightened passages would need to be late.

Both the canonical and the historical critical arrangement of the texts indicate there is no such progression. In Gen. 18, Abraham complains that God's plan to destroy Sodom violates the principle of innocent suffering. In Deut. 22, Israel is forbidden from holding a child responsible for the deeds of the parents. In the light of this canonical background, how do we see Joshua's genocide of the Canaanites and Saul's genocide of the Amalekites expressly for the sins of their ancestors as an improvement? Resorting to historical criticism will not rescue progressive revelation. Gen. 18 is generally regarded as coming from the Yahwistic source which was written c. 950 B.C. Deut. 22 comes from the Deuteronomic source which was written c. 650 B.C. Joshua and Samuel would be part of the Deuteronomistic history which would date from early in the exile (c. 587).

Proponents of progressive revelation argue that God uses the best that an age has to offer and then improves upon it.⁵⁹ This raises specific problems for the progressive revelation's justification for Canaanite and Amalekite genocide. According to Deut. 20, Yahweh war was not the most humane form of warfare that Israel knew. It was not the most humane form of war of which the nations surrounding Israel knew. According to Gen. 14 when the foreign nations captured Lot, they did not execute him and his family. According to 1 Samuel 30:19-20, the Amalekites not only knew of, but also practiced a more humane form of warfare than that demanded by Yahweh since the Amalekites spared the women, the children and the animals from destruction when they destroyed a Hebrew village. In view of the general and specific problems

⁵⁹Mozley, p. 222 argues for progressive revelation noting that God may adopt for its present use the highest imperfect moral standard and yet may contain inner movement and principle of growth in it, which will ultimately extricate it as a law out of the shackles of a rudimentary age.

facing progressive revelation's justification of genocide, it ought to be rejected.

War Is Both Commanded By God and Evil

Craigie represents those who provide a rather confused alternative. He states,

It could also be said that the wars of Israel could be "justified" by divine command, for such a right pertains only to God. But any such statement must be prefaced by the understanding that the divine activity takes as its stage the world as it is[emphasis his], namely the world of sinful men and activities, and this understanding is the primary condition for understanding war: war is always evil[emphasis his].⁶⁰

After arguing that Yahweh has the right to command Israel to kill the Canaanites, Waldemar Janzen adds that like murder and the killing of animals, war belongs to the Fall of man; it does not characterize the God-intended state of man.⁶¹ I must confess that I find this thinking to be confused. If it were wrong for the Israelites to obey God by killing the Canaanites, what ought they to do instead? Would disobeying God be right? The pessimistic doctrine of the Fall's making all human actions evil is foreign to the Old Testament. For example, Deuteronomy insists that the law is good and Israel has the power to keep the law (whether they did it is another matter). Psalms of lament insist upon the innocence of the sufferer as does the book of Job.

⁶⁰Craigie, p. 42.

⁶¹Waldemar Janzen, "War in the Old Testament" The Mennonite Quarterly Review 46 (1972), 159.

Old Testament as a witness to revelation

The alternative which views the Old Testament as a witness to revelation is the final alternative which I would like to present and for which I would like to argue. This alternative parts company with Marcionism since it asserts that the Old Testament bears witness to the revelation of God. We have already seen that in addition to other considerations, the problem of Canaanite genocide leads Delitzsch to deny that God has revealed himself in the Old Testament. He argues that even as Ashur did not tell his followers to commit genocide, so too Yahweh did not command his followers to commit genocide. Furthermore, even as Assyrian religious texts are not revealed by God, so to Hebrew religious texts are not revealed by God.⁶²

Delitzsch's alternative may adequately account for the texts in which Yahweh commands Canaanite and Amalekite genocide, but it fails to account for the distinctive features of Hebrew religion. Yahweh's requirement of exclusive worship and for his cult to be aniconic stand in sharp contrast to the polytheistic religions of the Ancient Near East which permitted both the worship of many gods and the manufacture and use of images of these gods. I think that revelation best accounts for these unique elements in Hebrew religion.⁶³ In view of the significant distinctive features of Hebrew religion, dismissal of the Old Testament is unacceptable. In addition to being unorthodox, Marcion and his disciples are surely guilty of throwing out the baby with the bath water. For example, even in such "offensive" chapters as 1 Sam. 15 where God commands Saul to kill the Amalekites since they harmed the Israelites on their way up from Egypt, there is the wonderful insight that to obey is better than to sacrifice.

⁶²Delitzsch actually argues that Babylonian religion is superior to Hebrew religion.

⁶³As it stands this is a sheer assertion. I plan to make good this claim in a future publication.

The alternative which urges that the Old Testament is a witness to God's revelation also rejects the radical reinterpretation of the Old Testament. These interpretive methods lack internal controls. This is especially true of the allegorical method. This method turns the Bible into a wax nose that can be moved anywhere upon the face. This led Luther to complain that the allegorical method was a "beautiful harlot" which seduced men into supporting "popish" errors that were entirely contrary to both the letter and the spirit of the Scriptures.⁶⁴ The Protestant Reformation demanded an authoritative interpretation of scripture which was not dependant upon an external control.

The moralistic interpretation of the text is scarcely more convincing than the allegorical. Both are improper⁶⁵. Surely if a cult engaged in allegorical or moralistic readings of the Scriptures to justify their positions, orthodox Christians would quickly point out that their hermeneutics were invalid. In my opinion we ought to let the texts speak for themselves rather than sanitizing them. We need to take the literal sense of the texts seriously. Furthermore, I assert that our goal as interpreters of the Bible ought to be the reconstruction of intention of the human

⁶⁴Alan Richardson, "The Rise of Modern Scholarship and Recent Discussion of the Authority of the Bible," Cambridge History of the Bible, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963) 3:303.

⁶⁵Kant, p. 102, defends the morally correct interpretation noting that even though it may not be the one intended by the authors, it is a possible interpretation. Kant's defense is inadequate since he needs to demonstrate the morally correct interpretation is probable rather than simply possible. Kant, himself, p. 103 complains that Scriptural scholarship "...settles no more than that there is nothing in the origin of Scripture to render impossible its acceptance as direct divine revelation...". Thus it appears that Kant is not really satisfied with interpretations that are merely possible.

author who bears witness to the revelation of God.⁶⁶ When we take the authorial context seriously, we should not use radical hermeneutics to make less out of the passages where God commands his followers to kill the Canaanites than is warranted. Neither should we make more out of the text than is warranted by making God's command for Abraham to kill Isaac into an ethical dilemma for Abraham.

The grounds for denying that God could command his followers to genocide the Canaanites and Amalekites are many. We have already seen that God's role as issuer of commands, as creator, and as judge would not necessarily justify Canaanite and Amalekite genocide. We have also seen that Israel's moral weakness does not excuse genocide since both history as it is presented in the Old Testament and as it is critically reconstructed agree that the nations surrounding Israel engaged in religious beliefs and practices and social beliefs and practices which were very similar to those of the Canaanites. If the Israelites did not learn of Baalism from the Canaanites they could learn it from others.

Those who deny that God could command Canaanite and Amalekite genocide seriously doubt that Jesus would hold children responsible for the sins of their parents. How could Jesus who invited the little children to come unto him because to such belongs the kingdom of God order his followers to genocide Canaanite and Amalekite children for the sins of the parents?

The problem of the recognizability of a divine command to commit unjustifiable genocide makes it difficult to believe that God would make such a demand. If an individual or a group were to claim that God had instructed them to commit genocide, would we believe them? I seriously doubt it. Our grave reservations would stem from our understanding of the nature of God and his purposes

⁶⁶Meir Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) pp. 8-57 argues persuasively for the importance of authorial intent.

for the world as set forth in the Old and the New Testament and in his son Christ Jesus. Our reservations would also stem from our understanding of and use of reason.

When we apply reason to determine if a command is revealed by God, we recognize that by definition, God would not command his followers to do evil. Goodness is a mini-essential characteristic of God. As our ethical sensitivities improve, the number and type of divine commands which could be recognized as such decreases.⁶⁷ While we cannot believe that God would command us to commit genocide, we can understand why the Israelites thought God commanded them to do so. The complete destruction of an enemy was at least one standard practice of warfare in the ancient Near East. God's command for Israel to commit genocide would not have violated Israel's sense of natural law. It was consistent with the way that the Israelites perceived Yahweh. As with other ancient Near Eastern peoples, Israel conceived of their God as a warrior. This solution, however, raises questions about the authority of scripture that must be addressed.

The more I study the Scriptures, the more convinced I am that they are a human response to divine revelation. Sometimes the response is to praise God or to lament to God.⁶⁸ Most often the

⁶⁷John W. Rogerson, "The Old Testament and Social and Moral Questions," The Modern Churchman, N.S., 25 (1982):32 points out that there is no doubt that as mankind has grown older, there has been development of moral attitudes. The abolition of the institution of slavery provides a good example. He adds, "On the other hand, if there has been moral progress in mankind on one level, it does not follow from this that mankind is getting 'better'. No one can suppose that mankind is getting 'better' who lives in a century in which techniques of mass murder, human degradation, ill-treatment of animals and destruction of the environment have been brought to levels of 'effectiveness' of which our grandparents would have had no inkling."

⁶⁸Surely the dictation model of inspiration or the semi-dictation model of scripture known as verbal plenary inspiration reduce psalms of praise to love letters God writes to himself and psalms of lament to letters of complaint God writes to himself. In an earlier paper, "1 Kings 20-22: True and False Prophecy" I point out that the dictation theory does not adequately account

human response is to bear witness to what God has said or done. Much of the Old Testament is a witness to the work and words of God. I believe that as wonderful as this witness is, it is an incomplete witness. I know God best because he became a person in Christ Jesus. We must evaluate the Old Testament by the standard of Jesus.

Christian theology asserts that we who live after the coming of Jesus have a tremendous advantage over those who lived before his coming. Nonetheless, this does not render the Old Testament obsolete. As I pointed out earlier, even the "offensive" 1 Samuel 15 is profitable for our salvation and our sanctification since it indicates that obedience is more pleasing to God than sacrifice. Nonetheless, when the witness of the Old Testament conflicts with the testimony of Jesus, we must give priority to the teaching of Jesus.

H. H. Rowley gives a good analogy for the revelatory role of scripture. He said that scripture is like colored glass that refracts beautifully but imperfectly the clear light of God's revelation. Perfect revelation demands a perfect personality. Jesus's perfect personality allows God's revelation to clearly shine through so that in the midst of the colored glass, we can see the white light clearly shining through the transparent pane which

for the variation between what God commands Elijah to say in 1 Kings 21: 19 and Elijah's actual proclamation in 1 Kings 21: 21-24. This contradicts the dogmatic assertion of B. B. Warfield, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 86-87, in which he states, "The process of revelation through the prophets was a process by which Jehovah puts his words in the mouth of the prophets, and the prophets spoke precisely these words and no other." Randall and David Basinger, "Inerrancy, Dictation and the Free Will Defence," Evangelical Quarterly 55 (1983): 177-180, point out that the lack of Divinely controlled free actions argues against the inerrancy of the Bible based on anything else than a dictation theory of inspiration. William Abraham, The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) points out other problems with both the dictation and the semi-dictation models of inspiration.

is Jesus. This transparent pane shows us God most clearly and allows us to evaluate the lesser light afforded by the other panes.⁶⁹ You may well ask: What implications does this have for the authority of the scriptures? It shows us that the Scriptures are authoritative in their entirety. When taken together, they give us a more than adequate understanding of God. They accurately record the various witnesses to the revelation of God. This explains their diverse theological perspectives. They also accurately record the works and the words of the Word made flesh.⁷⁰ It is the Word made flesh we worship. It is words and deeds of the Word made flesh that most clearly reveals God's nature. We must use his life and teachings to evaluate the other witnesses to God's revelation.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that it is legitimate to ask the question: Under what conditions could God command Canaanite and Amalekite genocide? There are several justifications for making such an inquiry. Some things are right or wrong independently of a divine command and a divine command to do evil is unrecognizable. Creators have only limited rights over their creations. Finally, in order for us to make a responsible choice whether to serve God, there must be an adequate correspondence between God's goodness and our conception of his goodness.

In response to the problem of Canaanite and Amalekite genocide, I have concluded that God could command his followers to commit genocide upon evil doers as an act of judgment. He could

⁶⁹H. H. Rowley, The Relevance of the Bible (New York: Macmillan Company, 1944) p. 25.

⁷⁰I am indebted to Eugene Lemcio's An Appropriate Idiom, A Sense of Time. Representing the Past in the Gospels, (Cambridge: University Press, forthcoming) Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, for this conclusion.

command genocide in order to protect his covenant partner from contamination. He could command genocide if this was the most humane form of war known at the time. However, I pointed out that the commands for Israel to genocide the Canaanites and the Amalekites do not meet these conditions.

If God were to order genocide as an act of judgment, innocent suffering would have to be minimized. Canaanite and especially Amalekite genocide do not meet this requirement. If God were to command genocide in order to protect his covenant partner from contamination, he could neither know the outcome of future contingent conditionals nor could he control the free beliefs and actions of his covenant partner. Furthermore, he would either have to command his covenant partner to remove all sources of contamination or he would have to do it himself. Neither Canaanite nor Amalekite genocide meet this condition. If the Israelites did not learn Baalism from the Canaanites they would have learned it from the surrounding nations with whom they had contact from the beginning of their national existence. Amalekite genocide is never justified on this ground. If God were command genocidal war, it would have to be at least the most humane form of war known at that time. According to Deuteronomy 20, although Israel knew of a more humane form of warfare, it was prohibited from using it. Since the reputed divine commands of Canaanite and Amalekite genocide do not meet these conditions, we must conclude that God did not command Canaanite and Amalekite genocide.

As we have seen this has implications for the way we interpret and understand the Old Testament. The Old Testament should be interpreted in order to ascertain the intention of the human author. When we interpret the Old Testament in this manner, we recognize that it is an adequate but occasionally inaccurate witness to the revelation of God. We must judge the witness to the

words and works of God by the witness of the Word of God made flesh. Jesus testifies that God is love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

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