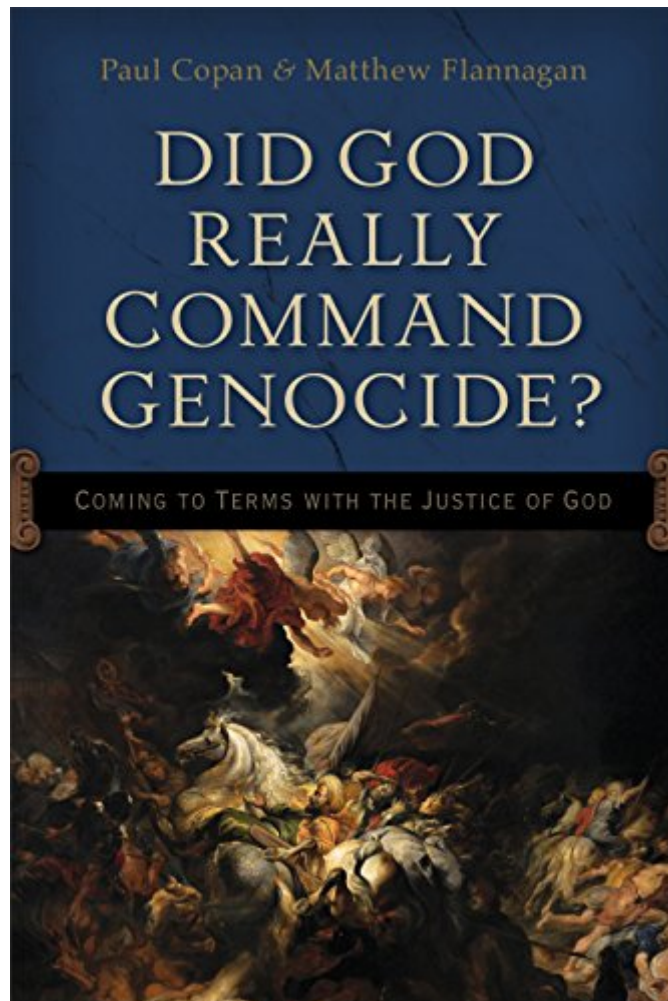


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Did God Really Command Genocide?: Coming To Terms With The Justice Of God



Synopsis

A common objection to belief in the God of the Bible is that a good, kind, and loving deity would never command the wholesale slaughter of nations. Even Christians have a hard time stomaching such a thought, and many avoid reading those difficult Old Testament passages that make us squeamish. Instead, we quickly jump to the enemy-loving, forgiving Jesus of the New Testament. And yet, the question doesn't go away. Did God really command genocide? Is the command to "utterly destroy" morally unjustifiable? Is it literal? Are the issues more complex and nuanced than we realize? In the tradition of his popular *Is God a Moral Monster?*, Paul Copan teams up with Matthew Flannagan to tackle some of the most confusing and uncomfortable passages of Scripture. Together they help the Christian and nonbeliever alike understand the biblical, theological, philosophical, and ethical implications of Old Testament warfare passages. Pastors, youth pastors, campus ministers, apologetics readers, and laypeople will find that this book both enlightens and equips them for serious discussion of troubling spiritual questions.

Book Information

File Size: 4477 KB

Print Length: 354 pages

Publisher: Baker Books (November 11, 2014)

Publication Date: November 11, 2014

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00OY906CA

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #298,866 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #115

inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Criticism & Interpretation > Old Testament #175 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Judaism > Sacred Writings > Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) #313 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Apologetics

Customer Reviews

Copan and Flannagan argue that God didn't really command genocide. And they marshal some intriguing evidence in favor of this thesis. To begin with, they note that only a minority of the biblical texts that reference the occupation direct the Israelites to kill the Canaanites. The majority direct the Israelites to drive the Canaanites out of the land. This suggests that the primary focus is to dispossess the Canaanites of land rather than to wipe them out. As for the texts which do refer to mass killing (e.g. Deut. 20:16-17a; Josh. 6:21), Copan and Flannagan argue that these passages are best interpreted as hyperbolic war rhetoric (i.e. exaggeration for effect) and they provide multiple examples from ANE literature to make their point. Finally, they point out that a careful reading of Joshua and Judges shows that the Canaanites remain very much in the land, with no sense of irony, even after they are supposedly eradicated. In short, if we read the text as a unified work of a capable editor who would have been aware of glaring inconsistencies, we should conclude that the hyperbole thesis is confirmed by the texts themselves. Of course, even if the texts don't depict genocide, they do portray the Israelites as forcing the Canaanites off the land and killing at least some non-combatants in the process. While this still is a problem, it certainly appears more tractable than outright genocide. But a more tractable problem is still a problem. Is there more that can be said? Indeed, there is. Copan and Flannagan argue vigorously that the Canaanites were squatters on land that was really the property of the Israelites.

Non-Christians have always pointed out that God of the Old Testament is angry and vengeful. And that He ordered a genocide to massacre the entire population. So what is the Christian's response towards such a statement? Paul Copan and Matthew Flanagan attempt to answer this thorny question in this book. Copan and Flanagan are no strangers to these questions and has showed that Christians do have a very good answer against these questions. First, Copan and Flanagan helps the readers understand the question at hand, which centers around the Crucial Moral Principle, "It is morally wrong to deliberately and mercilessly slaughter men, women, and children who are innocent of any serious wrongdoing." Which Copan and Flanagan distills into 4 clauses: 1 Any act that God commands us to perform is morally permissible. 2 God is the author of the Bible. 3 It is morally impermissible for anyone to commit acts that violate the Crucial Moral Principle. 4 The author of the Bible commands us to perform acts that violate the Crucial Moral Principle. Having allowed the reader understand the question at hand, Copan and Flanagan then skillfully moves to explain each of the clause. And how the crux of the question lies mainly in the third and fourth clause. Having done that, Copan and Flanagan then moves on to discuss about the

bible text itself. This, I thought was where the book really excelled. Copan and Flanagan helps the readers to see that what might be read as "every single one", might not mean literally "every single one".

First off, I wish to thank Dr. Copan for sending me a copy of this Baker book for review purposes. I will state up front that I see Flannagan and Copan both as good friends, but I earnestly desire to avoid allowing any bias to cover my review. It will be up to the reader of this review to determine if I have done so. The book starts with a question of what atheist Raymond Bradley calls the Crucial Moral Principle. This principle goes as follows: It is morally wrong to deliberately and mercilessly slaughter men, women, and children who are innocent of any serious wrongdoing. Most of us would in principle have no problem with that statement. In fact, in principle, neither would Copan and Flannagan. Yet that is the statement that must be dealt with as it looks like the text does have commands from God to do just that. Now of course it could be that some might say those events are just a made-up history, but in the book, Copan and Flannagan do take the task of assuming for the sake of argument that this is a real historical narrative. In fact, so do the atheists they interact with in the book. It is a way of saying "Let's assume that there was a conquest of the Promised Land as the Bible declares. How do we reconcile that with the idea that God is a God of love?" Some people reading the start will be wondering about the beginning. Why are we having a discussion on inerrancy? Why a discussion on what it means for the Bible to be the Word of God? All of this is important, because it is about how we are to process the information in a text and too many people have an idea that if the Bible is the "Word of God" then somehow the ordinary rules of language don't apply and everything must be applied in a "literalistic" reading.

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