

***Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric?***  
*Wrestling with Troubling War Texts*

Available December 3, 2019 | \$45, 452 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5249-9

Christians cannot ignore the intersection of religion and violence. In our own Scriptures, war texts that appear to approve of genocidal killings and war rape raise hard questions about biblical ethics and the character of God. Have we missed something in our traditional readings? Identifying a spectrum of views on biblical war texts, Webb and Oeste pursue a middle path using a hermeneutic of incremental, redemptive-movement ethics.

## "A Landmark Publication"

"First you have to face and admit there's a moral problem in the Bible about God's relationship to war and violence. Then you have to believe in the Bible enough to think the Bible ought somehow to provide light at the end of this moral problem's tunnel. But how does one resolve some of those violence texts? This problem is for me a career-long vexation, and among the many studies that have brought me at least some relief, this new book by William J. Webb and Gordon K. Oeste is one of the finest because it cares about the Bible and method and results. Webb is well-known for his redemptive movement hermeneutic, and he applies it in this book with finesse and sensitivity and provides, at least for me, more relief than I've felt in a long time."

—**Scot McKnight**, professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary

"The events of 9/11 brought Christians a new level of concern, even anxiety, about the pervasive divine violence found in the Bible. How can a God of love be involved with and, even worse, bring harm against his human creatures? Webb and Oeste have thought long and hard with great biblical insight about this question. Everyone who struggles with the ethics of divine warfare needs to read *Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric?* in order to gain a biblical perspective on this difficult subject."

—**Tremper Longman III**, Distinguished Scholar and Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, author of *Confronting Old Testament Controversies*

"The authors provide an important survey of the theological implications of this, the most difficult of biblical and theological issues in our world, and move the question beyond what books such as this often do. Read this work for a better understanding of the different views. Read it even more to benefit from the fruitful connections between the God of reluctant violence in the Old Testament and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in the New Testament."

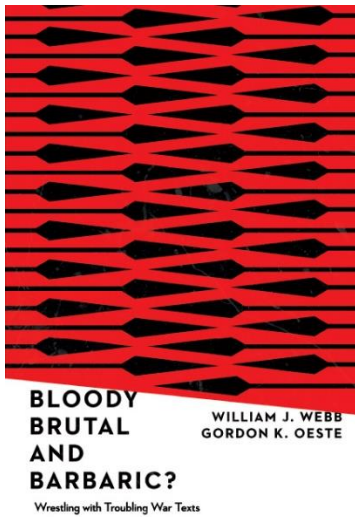
—**Richard S. Hess**, distinguished professor of Old Testament, Denver Seminary

"Reading the Bible well involves asking questions of the text. In probing some of the ethically troubling passages of the Old Testament, Oeste and Webb show that we not only need good questions, we must also learn to ask the right questions. Doing this helps us to place the text more carefully in its own time, while also helping us to understand more clearly how it speaks to ours. Anyone who has struggled with the issue of violence in the Bible will therefore find this volume to be a helpful and constructive guide that shows how to ask the right questions and so understand the Bible better."

—**David G. Firth**, Old Testament tutor, Trinity College Bristol



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“Webb and Oeste have undertaken a daunting task. They have tackled a host of moral and theological questions related to the challenging, emotionally charged topic of Old Testament warfare. They have digested a large and ever-growing literature on the subject as they articulate their redemptive-movement approach. Their book not only offers a comprehensive assessment of the issues. It also adds important layers to the discussion—for example, the contrast between Israel’s more humane, far-less cruel warfare practices compared to the rape and dehumanizing atrocities of other ancient Near Eastern nations. And in contrast to the work of some recent ‘functional Marcionite’ scholars, Webb and Oeste’s judicious, nuanced, and insightful treatment of this subject recognizes the inescapable reality of *divinely* commanded warfare. They are to be congratulated on significantly advancing the discussion.”

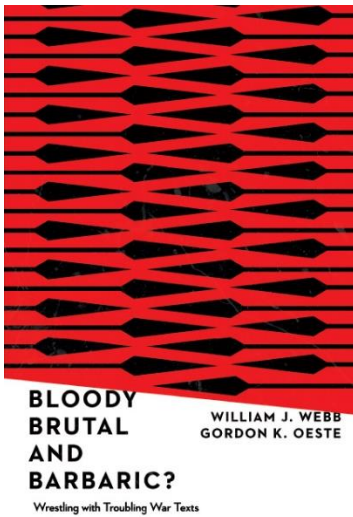
—**Paul Copan**, Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics, Palm Beach Atlantic University, author of *Is God a Moral Monster?*

“William Webb and Gordon Oeste have written a courageous book dealing with some of the most challenging ethical questions about war, rape, and violence in the Old Testament. They approach it with ethical sensitivity and a high regard for biblical authority, explaining ancient war practices, and advocating what I regard as a convincing thesis about an incremental redemptive ethic. A landmark publication on a perplexing subject!”

—**Michael F. Bird**, lecturer in theology at Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia



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## ***Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric?*** *Wrestling with Troubling War Texts*

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**William J. Webb** is an adjunct professor of New Testament and biblical studies at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, Ontario. He is the author of *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* and *Corporal Punishment in the Bible*.

**Gordon K. Oeste** is adjunct professor of Old Testament at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto and teaching pastor at Cedar Creek Community Church, Cambridge, Ontario. He is the author of *Legitimacy, Illegitimacy, and the Right to Rule*.

# Violence, Religion, and What It Means About God

What makes a book about Old Testament war texts relevant for today?

**William Webb and Gordon Oeste:** We began to struggle deeply with what seems to be genocide in the Old Testament war texts, particularly in view of questions about violence and religion that have arisen in the shadow of 9/11. The biblical conquest accounts, particularly on a cursory reading, relate a series of bloody and brutal battles portraying the total annihilation of the Canaanites. In addition, biblical war texts seem to condone postbattle forced marriages (coercive marital sex at best, but a kind of war induced rape in any number of cases). These tensions raise ethical, hermeneutical, theological, and exegetical questions that Christians must come to grips with. Our book places these war texts within their ancient and canonical contexts so that we can acknowledge their ethical liabilities while (even more importantly) emphasizing their redemptive elements, which often go unseen. The trajectory of these redemptive elements (limited and incremental in their original war context) find far greater extension in Jesus, Paul, and John's Apocalypse.

How is *Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric?* Different from other approaches to these texts?

**Webb and Oeste:** Traditional approaches to the issue of biblical holy war provide helpful answers to the questions an ancient audience may have, but they do not satisfactorily address contemporary questions about this topic. We present a number of key arguments using a redemptive-movement hermeneutic that can bridge this gap. We argue: (1) that the total-kill language of the conquest accounts reflects the use of hyperbole; (2) that God has accommodated himself to Israel's ancient world war-ethic; (3) that God incrementally moves Israel toward a less violent and more redemptive approach to warfare; (4) that the depiction of Yahweh as a highly reluctant war-God helps reduce the tension between the Old Testament and what we discover about Jesus in the New Testament; and (5) that the injustices of our fallen world are fully addressed in the cross of Jesus and in the eschaton. This approach falls in the middle between traditional views that see all of God's holy war instructions as having no real ethical liabilities (only perceived ones) and antitraditional approaches that emphasize, and at times overinflate, ethical problems in the text, while overlooking their redemptive side.

What are some key takeaways readers will have once they've read *Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric?*

**Webb and Oeste:** Compared to traditional and antitraditional alternatives, our approach better handles the tensions between the portraits of God in the Old Testament and New Testament. We apply a redemptive movement hermeneutic (and its incremental ethic) to the biblical war texts and make the most extensive case to date for hyperbole in the genocide language of the conquest accounts. We show how the war rape texts, not unlike the genocide texts, contain both ugly and redemptive elements.



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