I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

The war texts of Scripture often trouble contemporary Christians and serve as stumbling blocks for unbelievers. Why would God command genocide of the Canaanites? How could God possibly be pleased with slaughtering babies or taking virgins as trophy wives? Do the traditional answers about the evil of the Canaanites and God’s absolute justice/holiness resolve these ethical dilemmas? This course will look at the unfolding theme of holy war throughout Scripture from the sword-wielding angels outside the garden (Genesis) to the final apocalyptic battle (Revelation) and examine better ways of untangling the complex issues of hermeneutics, ethics and storyline.
II. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through taking this course, the student should be able:

- To demonstrate an understanding of the sword/war theme from Genesis to Revelation and how it fits with related concepts such as “sacred space” and land possession—first Eden, interim Eden(s) and the apocalyptic final Eden.
- To appreciate how a reader’s horizon impacts the assessment of biblical texts and articulate the pros and cons of viewing the holy war texts from the radically different horizons of (a) contemporary Hague and Geneva war conventions and (b) the ancient-world war context.
- To evaluate critically whether the traditional answers (e.g., the evil of the Canaanites) actually answer the disturbing questions about military ethics and, correspondingly, show an awareness of pastoral sensitiveness and strategies for handling difficult topics.
- To evidence a sufficient understanding of the interplay between the hermeneutics, ethics and storyline that enables them to appreciate a range of more nuanced answers for difficulties within the war texts.
- To further improve his/her skill of suspended-judgment listening that enables an accurate presentation of and some measure of appreciation for “diverse voices” along a spectrum ranging from the polarities of fundamentalist/militant-type Christians to the ultra-critical voices of new atheism.
- To explain the one-sided analogical or metaphorical nature of theological language in the “Yahweh/Jesus as warrior[-like]” portraits and embrace with joy the more abstracted storyline components of justice and reward, even if one laments the problematic particulars within the biblical war texts.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. REQUIRED TEXTS


*Note: major sections treating holy war texts are required reading (not the entire book).
B. SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS


[Note: Bloody, Brutal and Barbaric is a pre-publication draft manuscript of a forthcoming book. The professor will lecture from this material for certain portions of the class and will provide an at-cost photocopy for interested students (optional).]

C. ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

1. Reading the War Texts: The Biblical Storyline (15%)

We want to work our way through the war/sword texts of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Before each class (or before the course as pre-course preparation) students must read through the biblical texts for the day. A list of texts will be provided for each canonical section. Students will be part of a group who will take us through these war passages in summary fashion (oral overview) and with occasional reading of specific texts of choice in order to assist in our understanding of the theme and its ethical tensions within the whole Bible. ¹ After the canonical section of readings and summary of texts is finished, there will be a time for reflection and meditation on the question: What troubles your/my soul as we read these texts?

Grading will be based upon a cumulative assessment of three components to this assignment: (a) the private reading of the biblical texts before each class—a quantity and quality report, (b) participation in the presentation of the various biblical texts in class—summaries and readings, and (c) participation in the reflection time after the readings.

Students will choose the day and canonical section for presentation on the first day of class. Once within in a canonical section, the various OT/NT passages can be divided up for presentation.

2. Diverse Voices: Five-to-Ten Minute Book Summaries (10%)

Each day we will take some time to hear summaries of various authors who have written about the war texts of the Bible. The perspectives are extremely diverse and often quite fascinating to ponder if we permit ourselves to climb inside another person’s shoes for the moment. Our objective in this assignment is simply to listen and understand various authors’ positions in order to explore the spectrum of views on the war texts in the Bible. We will allow a brief time of “what do you think” (in response) but it is more important for us to learn how to express a writer’s position as accurately and convincingly as possible whether we adopt their position or not. Smaller/shorter books can be handled by one person; larger ones may be split between two or three presenters.

¹ In case you are wonder where “holy war” fits into our present-day NT theology, simply look at Rev. 2:16 (the sword aimed at God’s covenant community) and think about what are comparable texts in Paul.
Aside from hearing your professor’s views and proposals (Webb) and the perspectives reflected in the required readings (Cowles, Merrill, Gard, Longman III; Seibert offers a much stronger development of Cowles; Nugent/Yoder), listening to a number of other voices will help us appreciate the diversity of perspectives on this challenging issue:

- Douglas S. Earl
- K. Lawson Younger Jr.
- Richard Dawkins
- Walter Brueggemann
- Richard Hess
- Susan Niditch
- Millard Lind
- Willard Swartley
- Etc.

Students will choose the day and author/work for presentation on the first day of class. The professor will provide a box of books for the “diverse voices” assignment—no library time or secondary research is required. You are welcome to check “Coles Notes” type summaries found online but be careful that the summaries are accurate.

3. Research Paper (75%)

For the major course paper students may choose to write on any one biblical text or group of texts that relate to the topic of war in the Bible. Alternatively, students may wish to critique a particular view or address a particular problem—ethical, interpretive, historical, canonical, genre, theological portrait, etc.—within the war texts. Especially towards the end of the week we will devote some time within class to talk about topics/texts for the final paper.

The paper must strive for excellence in three areas: research, writing style and argumentation. A discussion of these three areas along with a grading-rubric handout will be provided during the course/class week. The paper should be 15-20 double-spaced pages (bibliography not included) and conform to Chicago style.

Due date: Sept. 4th 2012

4. Grading Summary

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<td>Reading the War Texts</td>
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<td>Diverse Voices</td>
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<td>Research Paper</td>
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D. GUIDELINES FOR THE SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK

Kindly email all written assignments to the professor directly (bill.webb@sympatico.ca or bwebb@tyndale.ca). As itemized in the grading summary above, the course has three assignments. The due date for the first two assignments is during the class time itself with the exception of the course textbook readings, which can be completed (if necessary) by two weeks following the class/course week. The due date for the research paper is Sept. 4th, 2012 (the Tuesday after Labor Day).

Students should consult the current Academic Calendar for academic polices on Academic Honesty, Gender Inclusive Language in Written Assignments, Late Papers and Extensions, Return of Assignments, and Grading System.

For proper citation style, consult the Chicago-Style Quick Guide (Tyndale e-resource) or the full edition of the Chicago Manual of Style Online, especially ch. 14. For citing scripture texts, refer to sections 10.46 to 10.51 and 14.253 to 14.254

IV. COURSE SCHEDULE

Monday
AM: Syllabus
   Why this course?
   Hermeneutics Overview: Horizons for Reading Scripture
   Movie clip: Saving Private Ryan
   Modern War Conventions: Geneva & Hague

PM: The War-Rape Texts: Grabbing Virgins as Trophy Wives
    Contemporary War Rape
    Rape in Ancient War Reliefs: ANE/GR War Art

   Storyline: Pentateuch
   Student Reflections

Tuesday
AM: The Genocide Texts: Total Kill
    The Traditional Answers (e.g., evil Canaanites)
    Why the Traditional Answers Do not Work for Military Ethics
    Where the Traditional Answers Do Work

PM: Storyline: Historical Books
    Student Reflections
    Diverse Voices: Presentations
Wednesday
AM: The Genocide Texts: Better Answers, part I
PM: Storyline: Prophets [and some Poetry/Wisdom]
Student Reflections
Diverse Voices: Presentations

Thursday
AM: The Genocide Texts: Better Answers, part II
PM: Storyline: Gospels/Jesus and Paul
Student Reflections
Diverse Voices: Presentations

Friday
AM: The Genocide Texts: Better Answers, part III
PM: Storyline: Revelation/Apocalyptic Closure
Student Reflections
Diverse Voices: Presentations

V. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


