



# War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence

*Susan Niditch*

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Texts about war pervade the Hebrew Bible, raising challenging questions in religious and political ethics. The war passages that readers find most disquieting are those in which God demands the total annihilation of the enemy without regard to gender, age, or military status. The ideology of the "ban," however, is only one among a range of attitudes towards war preserved in the ancient Israelite literary tradition. Applying insights from anthropology, comparative literature, and feminist studies, Niditch considers a wide spectrum of war ideologies in the Hebrew Bible, seeking in each case to discover why and how these views might have made sense to biblical writers, who themselves can be seen to wrestle with the ethics of violence. The study of war thus also illuminates the social and cultural history of Israel, as war texts are found to map the world views of biblical writers from various periods and settings. Reviewing ways in which modern scholars have interpreted this controversial material, Niditch sheds further light on the normative assumptions that shape our understanding of ancient Israel. More widely, this work explores how human beings attempt to justify killing and violence while concentrating on the tones, textures, meanings, and messages of a particular corpus in the Hebrew Scriptures.

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