

Hearing Gods Grace: Our Awesome God

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[0 : 00] Deuteronomy chapter 7, page 186. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons.

For they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods. And the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. This is what you are to do to them. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire.

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples.

For you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers. That he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God. He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

[1 : 40] But those who hate him, he will repay to their face by destruction. He will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him. Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today.

If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love with you as he swore to your forefathers. He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers.

He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land, your grain, new wine and oil, the calves of your herd and the lambs of your flocks in the lands that he swore to your forefathers to give you.

You will be blessed more than any other people. None of your men or women will be childless, nor any of your livestock without young. The Lord will keep you free from every disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but he will inflict them on all who hate you.

You must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you. You may say to yourself, these nations are stronger than we are.

[2 : 48] How can we drive them out? But do not be afraid of them. Remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. You saw with your own eyes the great trials and the miraculous signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm with which the Lord your God brought you out.

The Lord your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear. Moreover, the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors who hide from you have perished.

Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God who is among you is a great and awesome God. The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you.

But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, throwing them into great confusion until they are destroyed. He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven.

No one will be able to stand up against you. You will destroy them. The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the Lord your God.

[4 : 01] Do not bring a detestable thing into your house, or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Do not bring a detestable thing into your house, or you will be set apart for destruction.

Do not bring a detestable thing into your house, or you will be set apart for destruction.

Do not bring a detestable thing into your house, or you will be set apart for destruction. Thanks very much, Ralph, for leading. Thanks there, Simon, for reading. A long section. So keep your Bibles open, please, at Deuteronomy chapter 7 and chapter 8.

Those are the two sections we're going to be looking at this morning. Again, if there are questions that we come up against that you want to be able to talk through or ask, then please do that afterwards.

And as you're turning to the section there in Deuteronomy, just to remind you about the missions conference, which is happening next weekend. Friday evening is for younger people.

[5 : 11] Saturday morning, for all ages, there's a children and a creche programme as well. And then Saturday evening, again for all ages and college-age students as well.

So do come along. It will be a great occasion meeting with other people from other churches, those who are concerned about seeing the good news of Christ go to all the world.

And so try and be there if you can. Let's pray together and ask for God's help. For the Lord, your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God.

Father, our desire is that we get to know you better, the awesome God.

As we read your word, as we seek to understand it, that we would meet with you and hear from you. And we pray that everything that you are would shape us and transform us.

[6 : 29] That we would not try and fit you into our own box or understanding. But that we would be people who love you and follow you.

As the great and awesome God that you are. So please help us this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if there was one section of the Bible that I could rip out and throw away, this would be it.

In fact, I would say it's the most controversial issue that has caused so many people to question and ultimately reject Christianity.

So what is the big issue? Well, if you listen carefully to the reading, you'll see it is all about the destruction of the nations.

And the difficulty is God commands it. Look at chapter 7, verse 2. And when the Lord your God has delivered them, that's the nations over to you, and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally.

[7 : 52] Make no treaty with them and show them no mercy. Or look at verse 16. You must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives to you.

Do not look on them with pity. But not only does God command it, He actually threatens it. So look at chapter 8, verse 19.

Chapter 8, verse 19. If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.

Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God. If you don't do what I say, I'm going to destroy you.

Now this, it seems, is nothing less than what we would call ethnic cleansing. Now according to the UN, here's the definition of what ethnic cleansing is.

[9 : 08] It is the process of eliminating unwanted ethnic or religious groups by deportation, forcible displacement, mass murder, with the intent of creating a territory inhabited by a people of pure ethnicity, religion, and culture.

It is the most horrible and evil of crimes. It's the sort of thing that was attached to the Holocaust. So what is God doing, commanding, and threatening the total destruction of these nations?

Richard Dawkins, the popular atheist, writer of the God delusion, came to this conclusion.

He says, God is a vindictive, bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser, a capriciously malevolent bully.

Now in the light of what we have just read, we can understand why somebody like that would come to a conclusion. And we too can understand why we would begin to think that God could be charged with ethnic cleansing.

[10 : 32] So what are we to make of this God who commands and threatens the destruction of peoples, men and women and children?

Well, first of all, God's terrible judgment. This is not about God who has lost his temper and who has it in for a particular people group.

This is about God's just, fair, controlled, and settled response to all sin and evil. So let's try and unpack that under three things.

First, a place without sin. From the very beginning, God had promised his people a place, a land that would be good and beautiful.

We're told what that land is going to be like in chapter 7, verse 12. He says, if you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant, the promise of love with you as he swore to your forefathers.

[11 : 45] He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers. He will bless the fruit of your womb, the crops of your land, your grain, new wine and oil, the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks in the land that he swore to your forefathers to give you.

You will be blessed more than any other people. None of your men or women will be childless, nor any of your livestock without young. The Lord will keep you free from every disease.

He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt, but he will inflict on them, he will inflict them on all who hate you.

This is the most, if you like, perfect place to live. It's described as a land of blessing, without sickness or disease, a place where they are protected from their enemies, where their borders are secure and where they enjoy a full and prosperous life.

It's the kind of land and home that we would want. It's a place without sin, without harm or danger, without evil or crime.

[13 : 00] It's a beautiful and a good land. It's all about protection and blessing. Look at chapter 8, verse 7. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills, a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey, a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing.

A land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. This land that is being described here is a kind of paradise.

It's not unlike the Garden of Eden before the curse. And this is what we all long for. And this is what God had promised to his people, a place without sin or evil.

But to make this land a reality, God must first deal with sin. You see, the place that God's people were to live in was occupied by nations that were utterly sinful.

Look at chapter 7, verse 1. He says to them, look, when the Lord your God brings you into this land, remember this good land, that you are entering to possess, and he drives out before you the many nations, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, the seven nations that are larger and stronger than you.

[14 : 51] These were nations that for centuries had lived in rebellion against God, had destroyed other people, had ruined people. Keep your finger there in Deuteronomy 7 and flick back to Genesis chapter 15.

Genesis chapter 15. In Genesis 15, we read about God's initial promise to his people about the good land, the promised land, the beautiful land that they were going to go to.

But before they get into this good land, there's going to be a long, long delay. And we're given the reason for that delay.

Chapter 15, verse 16. God says, in the fourth generation, your descendants will come back here.

That's back to the promised land. But the reason why it's going to take so long, we're told, is for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.

[16 : 07] Go back to Deuteronomy chapter 7. You see, God is displaying incredible patience with the Amorites and it's implied with all these other nations too.

God was giving them four generations. That's over 400 years to sort themselves out. But now the time has come and their lives are no different.

So God punishes them for their continued and their persistent sin. He commands their complete destruction.

Look at Deuteronomy 7, verse 2. He says, when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and when you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally.

You see, sin is very destructive. It wrecks what God has made beautiful. It ruins lives and it breaks all that is good.

[17 : 12] So God in His response deals with these sinful nations by destroying them. and to be sure, the only way to be sure that you have dealt with sin is to destroy the sinner.

Otherwise, it just keeps coming back again and again and again. So what God is doing here is He's removing the sinful nations from the land so that His people can live in a place that is full of peace and prosperity.

In fact, it must go further than just that. They must go a step further because God knows what a danger it will be if the people are remain, if the people are allowed to stay in the land.

So, they must cleanse the land from those who persistently rebel against God. Look at verse 3 of chapter 7. He says, do not intermarry with them.

Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Why? Verse 4, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods.

[18 : 34] In fact, He tells them they are to cleanse the whole land of anything that will pull them away from God. Verse 5, this is what you are to do. You are to break down the altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down the Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire.

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. You've been rescued by God. You now belong to God. You've been set apart for God to love Him, to enjoy Him, to obey Him.

So you must remove every possible thing that is going to pull you away from God. verse 16, He says, you must destroy all the peoples the Lord your God gives over to you.

Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods for that will be a snare to you. They could entice you away. Verse 25, the images of their gods you are to burn in the fire.

Do not covet the silver and gold on them and do not take it for yourselves or you will be ensnared by it for it is detestable to the Lord your God.

[19 : 53] To leave any hint of sin would be dangerous. Like a deadly cancer, it would only grow back again and it would take over, ruining and destroying and breaking everything in its path.

you see, this is not about a God who, as Dawkins claims, is a vindictive, bloodthirsty, ethnic cleanser.

This is a God who is fair and just and is rightly angry with all the sin that causes so much pain and damage in our world.

Let's try and think about something that's been fresh in our news this week. I'm sure you've all heard about Fiona Doyle, now an older lady.

But when she was a very young girl, for ten consistent years, she was raped and abused by her father. now when you saw that item on the news, how did it make you feel when that happened?

[21 : 16] He got twelve years, nine years of that was suspended, another three years he was let off on bail. Okay, they went back to it and now he's back, but still it doesn't fit the crime, does it?

What does it make you feel when you see something like that? it made me very angry and I'm sure it made you very angry. You're wanting justice, you want the innocent to live without fear in peace and safety and security and you want the guilty punished.

Now if that one event could make us angry, multiply that the world over, of all the crimes, of all the wars and all the violence and of all the damage that is done to so many children and of all the injustices that there are in the world and God sees and he feels every single bit of pain and now we can only begin to sense what God feels with the brokenness and the hurt and the damage that people do to one another.

But you see, let's not just be looking at other people. take a magnifying glass and pass it across your own heart and across our own lives.

Because we too have done and said things to people that has caused hurt and damage. We've broken relationships.

[22 : 53] We've done things we shouldn't have done. and God is rightfully angry at the things that we have done. You see, God longs that we would all live in peace and prosperity.

God desires that we would all live in a beautiful and good land, a land without disease and sickness, a place where there's no evil and no crime and no injustice.

And so he must remove all those who are intent on causing harm. And he must remove all those who are set in opposition to him.

He must cleanse the world of sin. And the only way to get rid of sin is to destroy the sinner. Now, what God does here in Deuteronomy is very specific and very unique.

It is not an example for us or for anybody else to go and do likewise. However, this does show us that God takes all sin seriously and that just as he judged sin then, so a day is going to come when Jesus Christ will return and he will judge the whole world.

[24 : 18] Every person and every nation, including you and me, will stand before God and we'll be judged. You see, the real question is not, why did God do this to the nations?

But why has God not done this to me? Because the reality is we have all caused hurt and upset to other people.

We've all ruined and wrecked the good things that God has given us. So the question is not, why did God destroy the nations? But why does he not destroy you and me?

That's the real question. God destroy some people is because some people are better than other people.

Well, no, that's the wrong answer. Because the big surprise in this chapter is God's people are actually no different from the other nations.

[25 : 32] Let's just have a look through verses 7 through to 8 here. First, they were specially chosen. Verse 6, he says to them, for you are a holy people to the Lord your God.

The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. Now, God could have chosen another nation.

He could have chosen the Hivites or the Perizzites instead. He could have chosen more than one nation. But God says, no, I choose you.

Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, I have chosen you to be my treasured possession. They have become to God like a king's personal treasure.

the greatest possession that he has, that is beyond value. That is what these people are like to God. But again, we ask, if God chose them, then he must have seen something in them that made them stand out as better and greater than all the rest of the people.

[26 : 45] No. God does not choose us because of who we are. Verse 7, the Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples.

For you were the fewest of all peoples. You know, the way to assess a nation's value in those times was by its size.

The bigger you were, the more powerful you were, and the more respect you had. These are the kinds of nations that hold status and privilege. But that is not the basis of his choice.

He tells them the end of verse 7, he says, you were the fewest of all peoples. In other words, you were a nothing, you were a nobody, in the world's eyes you were completely insignificant.

God does not choose you because of who you are. Third, God chooses you because of who he is. Verse 8, but it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

[28 : 07] God set his affection on you. The Lord chose you and he made you his treasured possession for the simple reason that he loved you.

God loved you not because of who you are but because of who he is. If we thought of it in this way, if we thought of all the nations kind of lined up before God in some kind of talent competition and they all did their party piece and God had to pick the best one to be his treasured possession, well there was nothing that made them better or superior or greater.

They were no less sinful than the other nations. They were no different to the other nations. In fact as we read through the Bible we'll see we could actually make the claim that they were worse than the other nations.

They didn't earn God's love. They didn't deserve God's love. the big surprise is that God even bothered to love them. They deserve to be treated like the rest of the nations.

And the only reason why they are not destroyed like the other nations is because God chose to make them his treasured possession.

[29 : 42] Do you see what God is saying here? the only way to escape being destroyed, the only way to be a part of the good and beautiful land that I want to give you is if you experience my grace.

Don't ever think that you can escape God's judgment because you are better or greater or superior. If you think for one moment that you earn God's love or that you deserve God's love because of something that you've done because of your heritage or your background you have not understood God.

Look at chapter 8 verse 17 you may say to yourself full of pride as it were my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me look at what I did no verse 18 but remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms his covenant which he swore to your forefathers as it is today God's people only get what they get because God loved them because he promised things to them because he was committed to them and it's absolutely no different for us today God deals with us in exactly the same way now as he did with his people then have a look at this quote here it comes from 1st

Corinthians chapter 1 Paul is writing to the church in Corinth and he's getting them to think back so he starts off he says brothers and sisters think of what you were when you were called just stop for a minute there think about it when God chose to love you when he put his affection on you what were you like well he goes on not many of you were wise by human standards not many of you were influential not many of you were noble birth in other words you were nobody's you were nothing's you were insignificant there was nothing in you that attracted me to you but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him the only reason

God would set his love upon us is because we're foolish because we're weak because we're despised because we're nothing you see the real question in all of this as well is it's not why did God choose this nation over that nation we get our minds bogged with that one why did God choose this one and not that one here's the real question why would God bother to choose you or me there is nothing in us to attract us to God he simply loves us because he loves us and he wants to shower us with his blessings it's unconditional it's based on who he is not what I am so third then what's what's it going to be for us is it going to be

[33 : 48] God's terrible judgment or is it going to be God's incredible grace well look at chapter 7 verse 9 know therefore that the Lord your God is God he is a faithful God keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands but those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him now where does that put us the point is we all deserve the judgment we all deserve to be destroyed not one of us manages to keep his commandments and love him wholeheartedly the reality is we all need his grace and we all long for this promised good land that is beautiful and good without evil and injustice and sin and crime so how is it possible for us to know

God's grace day to day but not his judgment well two things first we must run to Christ you see as we follow the story through we come to this climax where God would put his judgment and his grace side by side on display for the world to see before the nations and before all the people God would demonstrate his terrible judgment and his incredible grace all in one combined concise moment take a look at the cross in your mind's eye Jesus and his death what do we see going on on the cross we see a man being beaten we see somebody being spat on somebody being punched whipped and scourged we see a man being torn his back lacerated ripped apart we see somebody being nailed to a cross we see someone with a spear being thrust up into their side what's going on with this violent image

Jesus is being destroyed physically and spiritually for us the judgment of God that should rain down on all the nations and on all people the judgment of God that should be for my sin and your sin is falling on God himself and so the cross stands before all nations of the world today before all peoples no matter what nation what people group what tribe what language it is the cross stands before it all to say look God took the terrible judgment that we all deserve for himself why why would he do it so that we might experience his incredible grace

Jesus didn't die for you because there was something beautiful or good about you God didn't set his affection on you because you were better or greater to your neighbor or to the person in some other country God died for you because he loved you God was destroyed for you broken for you so that he could redeem you and bring you into the ultimate land the new creation to bring you into the home and the place that we all long for a place where there's no sin and no evil and no sickness and no disease and no abuse and no rape and no injustice and no crime to bring you into the land that is beautiful and good of protection and blessing he did it so that you would experience his grace so run to Christ every day run to his cross and enjoy his grace but second and we finish with this we must also be ruthless with sin if we have run to Christ and if we see how he was destroyed for our sin and what he's bringing us to then we will want to destroy the sin in our lives not to look outwards at other people turn your eyes around and look into our own hearts we will want to root out the destructive patterns and the destructive behaviours that cause so much hurt to other people and to ourselves and to

God we need to be ruthless with sin we need to clean out the attitudes in our lives where we have the mask on and we pretend that well no it's actually all okay but it just keeps on growing back wrecking relationships and breaking the good things that God gives to us so we must run to Christ run to his cross experience his grace day to day and allow the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit to be at work in our own lives in our own hearts dealing with the sin that is there changing us and transforming us removing our hearts of sin and instead giving us a heart of love for this is what God calls us to run to

[40 : 38] Christ and be ruthless with the sin in our lives and experience his incredible grace day to day let's pray I'm just going to read a poem you can meditate on the words as we just listen i saw one hanging on a tree in agony and blood he fixed his loving eyes on me as near his cross i stood my conscience felt and owned the guilt and plunged me in despair

I saw my sins his blood had spilt and helped to nail him there a second look he gave which said I freely all forgive this blood is for thy ransom paid I die that thou might live thus while his death my sin displays in all its blackest hue such is the mystery of grace it seals my pardon too oh can it be upon a tree the saviour died for me my soul is thrilled my heart is filled to think he died for me father thank you that you have not destroyed us as we deserve but that Christ was destroyed for us that we might know your incredible grace every day that we might know you and enjoy you and we pray that this would sink deep into our hearts and that we would bring to the nations the seriousness of your judgment but your incredible grace and please would you empower us by your holy spirit to go on rooting out the sin in our own lives please continue to cleanse us so that we become more beautiful that we become more like Christ so that the broken image would be restored so that we reflect God in all his beauty and all his kindness and all his goodness please help us we pray we thank you for your mercy your grace and your love in Jesus name

Amen Amen Amen