

Our Election in Love

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Date: 10 October 2021

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. The book of Deuteronomy 7.1 When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you the many nations, the, the, the, the, and the, oh one more, and, oh and another one.

Okay, that was seven I think, right? Seven nations larger and stronger than you. And when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally.

Make no treaty with them and show them no mercy. 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 children 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, come on help me, holes and burn their idols in the fire.

[1 : 43] For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the people on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

The Lord did not set his affections 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 you, your ancestors, that he brought you out with 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 faithful God, keeping his covenant to love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

But those who hate him, he will repay to their face and destruction. He will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him. Therefore, take care to follow the commandments, decrees, and laws I give you today.

The grass withers and the flowers fade. But the word of our God stands forever. Thanks, Gail.

[3 : 02] We should do that every week, huh? This week has been pretty crazy. I really resonated with Jonathan's prayer, just that prayer for strength.

You know, Jonathan's car broke down on our Presbytery retreat this week, and he got stranded out in Mount Hermon, and then my family had a possible COVID exposure, but we're all negative, and it's okay.

And yeah, I think we're just feeling it. We're in October, launching this ministry year, and we're getting winded, but that's why we depend on God. So that's what I want to do.

I want to go to God and ask for the Spirit to give us what we need this morning. Almighty and merciful Father, you've called us to be your people and have made us one body, yet we have not lived like we are one body.

We have not loved one another as we ought. Selfish ambition has gripped us, and we have failed to look out for others' interests above our own. Conceit has gripped us, and we have failed to associate with and care for those who are different from ourselves.

[4 : 21] We have not treated one another as those in whom Christ dwells. Forgive us, Lord, and subdue everything in us that is contrary to your purposes.

By the power of your Spirit, make us a community that shows forth your acceptance, kindness, and love through Christ our Lord. Lord, we thank you for your words of assurance to us as we confess our sins to you this morning, God.

Your prophet Isaiah said, In that day, you will say, I will praise you, Lord. Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me.

Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself is my strength and my defense.

He has become my salvation. With joy, you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Lord, we so want to drink from the wells of salvation this morning.

[5 : 26] With many of us feeling dry, and like we can't even raise a little cup to our mouths. So, would your Spirit fall upon us?

Give us what we need. Fill us in all the ways that you know we are lacking. And we pray that you would do so, not just for our good, but for your glory, so that your people might praise you for being the kind of God who shows up again and again to do beyond what we could ever imagine, for the good of this world, and for the glory of your name.

So, be honored in the preaching of your word, we pray. In the name of Jesus, amen. Well, Christ Church, we are continuing through our series in the book of Deuteronomy.

And Deuteronomy, it contains Moses' last words, right? I just want to keep reminding you of that. It contains Moses' last words to Israel before his death and before the people of Israel's entrance into the promised land.

And what Moses is doing here in the book of Deuteronomy is he's reiterating God's law to them. He's trying to prepare them to answer the very important question, what kind of people does God want us to be as we dwell in the promised land?

[6 : 39] What kind of people does God want us to be as we dwell in the promised land? And if you haven't been here long, you won't know, but I only got ordained just a couple months ago, so I'm pretty new as like an official pastor here.

And just thinking about that as an official pastor here, and also just thinking about this chapter that we're in, in the history of Christ's church, I have a very similar question on the forefront of my mind these days.

It's what kind of church does God want us to be? What kind of church does God want us to be? And I don't normally do this, but I want to get a little bit interactive, okay? I prepared our youth to help us maybe answer this question, but I want to ask, I want to go out on a limb, and I'm going to ask you just throw out one-word answers, okay?

Let's hear one-word answers. What kind of church do you think God wants us to be? John Kim started on our Discord platform. He said, inspiring. Anyone else? Loving. Faithful.

Brave. Brave. Brave. Joyful. Inclusive. Forgiving. United. All beautiful, good things that I pray that the Lord does amongst us.

[7 : 46] I really pray that God does this amazing thing in our church. But you know, in my prayer and in my meditation around preparing the sermon this week, there was one word that God put on my heart, one word I was pretty sure wasn't going to be mentioned, and one word that I previously wouldn't have chosen myself to describe the kind of church I thought God wanted us to be.

And you know what that word is? The word is holy. I think God wants us to be, most of all, more than anything, a holy church, a holy people.

And I know that sounds awkward and maybe even off-putting for many of us because, man, to want to be holy sounds so, like, pharisaical, right? And legalistic and judgmental and out of touch.

But what I want to do this morning is I want to interrogate all of our awkward feelings, all the awkward feelings that we have around the notion of being holy, around the notion of pursuing holiness.

And my hope is that as we submit ourselves to God's word, we'll actually come to marvel at how the holy God makes a holy people by his holy means. That's God's word to us today from Deuteronomy chapter 7, that the holy God makes a holy people by his holy means.

[9 : 06] I'm channeling my inner Jonathan St. Clair, right? So let's start with the holy God. Now, if you're paying attention to this passage read by Gail, you might have gotten distracted really, really quickly, right?

Let me read verses 1 and 2 again. This is the prophet Moses speaking on behalf of God, expounding and applying their law to them, the people of Israel. Verse 1. Did you catch that?

Destroy them totally? Show them no mercy? Does this make anyone else uncomfortable? Maybe for some of us, this even seems to, what, disprove the holiness of God.

Like, how could a holy and just God have his people do such a thing? Or maybe for those of us, for others of us, this actually proves that the holiness of God is itself the problem.

Like, oh, see, once you go down that holiness route, all you get is this angry God sanctioning the total destruction of other peoples, devoid of any mercy. Well, what I want to argue in this first point this morning about the holy God is that any problem that we have with this passage, any discomfort we might feel around this command for this total destruction without mercy, I want to argue that the tension we feel does not, it cannot stem from an insufficiency in God or his word.

[10 : 54] The problem is not an inconsistency in the holiness of God, nor the holiness of God itself. But what I want to say is that our modern, Western, supposedly enlightened discomfort around this passage truly stems from flaws and inconsistencies in our own fallible minds.

And ultimately, our discomfort at God's word comes from our underappreciation of God's holiness, of the holiness of God. And listen, I'm not trying to say, you know, if you're troubled by this passage, just suck it up and get over it.

No, no. We're not going to be insensitive like that here. But I want us to linger. I want us to linger over this passage. Spend some time here. But let's not just interrogate God's word.

That's not what we do. We don't sit above God's word. We sit under God's word. So we don't just interrogate God's word. We interrogate our feelings about God's word as well. Because you know what? It's actually when we come to these kinds of texts that so vex our spirits, that the spirit of God, honestly, he often uses these kinds of texts to show us surprisingly profound truths.

So my prayer is that we can discern that together today. Now, something that we need to remember as we're coming to a text like this, especially when we come to ancient texts like these, is we want to read them on their own terms.

[12 : 15] We want to read them in their own context. Rather than simplistically imposing our own modern Western sensibilities upon them and judging this text in Deuteronomy by maybe like the standards of the Geneva Convention, we want to address this text on its own terms.

If we don't read it on its own terms, then sure, what Moses says here, it does just sound like genocide and a command to invade another nation. But if we read this as the scriptures, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, in the context of redemptive history, if we read the scriptures as a story with the holy God as its main and ultimate hero, not Israel, then this is definitely not just some ancient account of some violent, primitive, violent culture.

Look again with me at verse one. When the Lord your God brings you into the land, you are entering and drives out before you many nations. Verse two, and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally and show no mercy.

See, this is not even about Israel. This is about God and what he's doing. He is the subject driving out nations, nations out of his land, land that belongs to him as God.

And the nation of Israel is merely invited to participate in the work of God as an instrument in the same way that God would later use nations like Babylon and Persia as his instruments to judge this same nation of Israel for their wickedness.

[13 : 45] If we have a problem here with Deuteronomy chapter seven, it shouldn't primarily be with Israel. If we have a problem with Deuteronomy seven, our problem has gotta be with the God who commanded Israel to do these things.

So that means that the question here is not, did Israel have the right and authority to exterminate these nations in and of itself? No, they didn't. God's word is clear. Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not murder.

But the question really is, did God have the right and authority in and of himself to command these nations to be destroyed and shown no mercy? Now for some of us, our first thought might be, well, God could not have truly commanded this because God cannot do what is unjust, right?

There's no way God would command the destruction of the innocent among these listed nations. And I wanna applaud you if you have these thoughts. I wanna applaud your insistence upon the justice and the holiness of God.

You're right. There is no way that God would destroy the innocent. He wouldn't do that. But the question is, were these nations, or even a single person in any of these nations, were they truly innocent before God and undeserving of destruction?

[15 : 00] Was God being unjust in his desire to totally destroy these nations and show them no mercy? Or was he actually being perfectly just, perhaps just sooner than we're used to?

Is the problem really that God was violating his holiness or is the problem that we have had too low a view of his holiness and too trivial a view of sin and its pervasiveness?

I want us to listen to the psalmist. The psalmist says, there is no one who does good. All have turned away. All have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one. The prophet Isaiah said, we all like sheep have gone astray.

Each of us has turned our own way. In Ecclesiastes, the Kohelet, the teacher, he says, indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous. No one who does what is right and never sins.

And the apostle Paul encapsulates all of this in Romans chapter three when he says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And these nations in Deuteronomy chapter seven, they are no exception.

[16 : 03] In fact, archeological findings reveal that these nations practice some pretty abominable things like incest and like child sacrifice. And as verses four and five indicate, they idolatrously worshiped other gods.

And listen, this is not simply the destruction of other people for picking the wrong religion here. It's destruction for turning one's back on and rejecting the one true God who gave them life in the first place.

I want you to also remember all these nations who God commanded Israel to totally destroy, all these nations had heard. They had heard of what Yahweh had done for Israel in Egypt and even in the wilderness.

That's why people like Rahab in Jericho, though her whole city trusted in their own strength, though her whole city, Jericho, refused to repent, she and her family, they sided with and they trusted only in the one true God of Israel.

And they were preserved. See, God was not commanding the total destruction of guiltless and innocent nations or even of guilty people willing to repent. He was commanding the total destruction of his enemies, his enemies who were dead set on their own self-destructive and idolatrous ways.

[17 : 18] But now some of us might also wonder, oh, but still, okay, I get that God is being just here. I get that these nations were sinful and deserving of destruction, but why couldn't God show them mercy?

Why couldn't God show these nations mercy? I mean, clearly God has withheld his wrath before. He's been withholding it quite a bit ever since day one of the fall, right?

He's been withholding his wrath from sinful humanity for quite a while. Why not here? Why not show more of this common grace whereby God preserves this world and he limits the evil and he allows life to go on and history to continue?

Why not also here? Why didn't God show mercy or at least restrain and delay his judgment upon some of these nations? And this is an understandable question if we wanna take seriously the compassion and the patience and the kindness of God.

But the truth is we ultimately don't know. God told Moses in Exodus chapter 33, he said, I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy.

[18 : 23] The reason lies completely in his often mysterious will. But just because we don't know the reason why God chose mercy to some and not to others, it does not make him unjust.

If we would just simply ask the question, does the creator and the moral governor of the universe, does he have the right to judge sin in a time and place and manner of his own choosing?

The only possible answer is yes. It's yes if we are to recognize that God is God, the one true and holy God. In fact, to presume that mercy is something that God owes and that he's obligated to show, it cheapens what mercy is.

It maybe even dispenses with the whole notion of mercy, not to mention God's holiness in the first place. See, the point of these commands to destroy all these seven nations was to communicate to Israel and the world the absolute holiness of God and the absolute sinfulness of sin and the fundamental incompatibility between God's holiness and what we might think to be even just the slightest of sin.

Sin is not just law-breaking. Sin is not just law-breaking. It's life-defying because it's God-defying. And it's God-denying. That's what sin is. The heinousness of Adam and Eve's original sin and every derivative sin to follow is our basic refusal to acknowledge God as God, to acknowledge his word and his character as holy, our basic refusal to trust in his goodness and his love and his power more than we might trust in anything else.

[19 : 59] And see, this is the point of these first few verses of Deuteronomy chapter seven for us. It's not just an interesting factoid from the ancient history of Israel. It's not just a hard-sounding passage that a preacher is supposed to come up here and try to smooth out so that you can calm down when you read your Bibles.

This is the word of God. This is the word of God confronting us with the holiness of God and our predicament as sinners before him. It's the word of God putting on display a destruction that we all deserve, a destruction that awaits all who insist upon worshiping other gods rather than the one true holy God of Israel.

I love how the author and poet Jackie Hill Perry puts it in her new book. I highly recommend this book, guys. Holier Than Thou, How the Holiness of God Helps Us Trust Him. She says, we are so used to the patience of God that we are more stunned by his judgments than we are by his forbearance.

And similarly, the pastor-theologian R.C. Sproul, he wrote, God is indeed long-suffering, patient, and slow to anger. In fact, he is so slow to anger that when his anger does erupt, we are shocked and offended by it.

See, the true mystery of Deuteronomy chapter seven is meant to communicate to us not how could God pursue the destruction of these nations. But why are any of us still here?

[21 : 23] Why is the United States of America still here? Why is the San Francisco Bay Area still here? Why is Christ Church East Bay still here? I mean, do we not practice idolatry? Do we not practice child or family sacrifice?

Do we not offer our children or our family members to the gods of our vocational ambitions or of human approval? Man, I do this all the time. I had to apologize to my three-year-old daughter just yesterday because I blew up at her so many times because the sermon just wasn't coming together and she kept distracting me and all I could see her as was an obstacle in my way to write a decent sermon so that you won't think badly of me.

Is that not child sacrifice? Am I not guilty along with the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Jebusites?

We're all bound for destruction. We're all fully deserving of this. And I think we all know this deep down. And I think that's the real reason why passages like this make us uncomfortable.

Psalms 130 verse three, if you, O Lord, should mark our iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? Who could stand? The total and merciless destruction of nations is a troubling truth because the holiness of God is a troubling truth for sinners like us.

[22 : 47] He's holy. God is holy. But lest we get distracted here by this command to totally destroy these nations without mercy, I also wanna point you to how God makes a holy people.

It's important to recognize God's intentions here are not simply to showcase his holy character, but to safeguard his holy community. The holy God makes a holy people. Verse two says, make no treaty or covenant with them.

He's saying, don't commit yourself, don't bind yourself, don't unite yourself with those who are gonna turn you away from me. Like in marriage, don't intermarry with people who don't know me. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons.

And listen to this, for, for because if you do that, verse four, they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods. See, the whole point of this unpalatable command to destroy is so that, verse four, the people will not turn from Yahweh and serve other gods.

This God in Deuteronomy chapter seven, he's not interested in ethnic cleansing. He's interested in cleansing his beloved holy people of the idols that would harm them.

[24 : 01] Verse five, 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. The main point here is not the holy God's anger against his idolatrous enemies.

It's actually the holy God's affection for his treasured people, his chosen people. And we cannot miss this, that the holy God is willing to destroy and go to battle on behalf of his people.

We're in a war. Now in the new covenant, we are not fighting other nations. We are fighting not flesh and blood, but the powers and the spiritual forces of evil and sin.

That's what Apostle Paul says in Ephesians chapter six. Do we have the same combative spirit to be this holy people of God? God, this is what our king wants from us.

And this is what our king exemplifies for us. He is a king who, when his children are threatened by death, he goes to battle. It is of the most important thing, it is of utmost importance to God to preserve his people, his holy people, Israel.

[25 : 05] But that begs the question, why Israel, right? Why Israel? Why was Israel in the words of verse six, a people holy to the Lord, their God, chosen out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession?

Why was it them that God chose to use as his instruments to destroy other nations? What made Israel so special? Was it their superior size and strength?

No. Verse one says that the seven nations were larger, far larger, far stronger. Well then was it their obedience to God's commands in verses two to five? Was it their obedience that made them holy in God's eyes?

Were they holy because they ended up exterminating all God's enemies and made no covenants with them and did not intermarry with them and tore down all their idolatrous shrines? Well no, verse six doesn't say, do all these things so that you will be a holy people.

Verse six says, do all these things for you are a people, holy to the Lord, your God. The basis for doing all these things was that they were already holy to God.

[26 : 10] It wasn't their obedience. Besides, Judges chapter three says that they actually didn't obey this commandment. They didn't wipe out all the nations. They left many nations there to live alongside them. In fact, one could argue from the history of Israel recorded in the scriptures that they were actually more wicked than these nations.

The people of Israel too engaged in child sacrifice and sexual immorality and idol worship and greed and arrogance and injustice. They disobeyed God time and time again before they had a king, when they had a king, and even when their one true king and Messiah came.

So what was it? What made Israel holy and set apart to the Lord? What made them chosen out of all the peoples on the earth as God's treasured possession?

And this is where we get to the final point. The holy God makes a holy people by his holy means. By his holy, distinct, set apart means. See, Israel's being set apart as holy to the Lord and chosen.

It had nothing to do with Israel herself, but everything to do with the gracious will of God. They were his chosen people, his treasured possession, just because he wanted them to be.

[27 : 25] Completely because of his grace. You know, whereas every other God over every other nation demanded some kind of payment, some kind of transaction for people to try to win its favor and to win its love, this holy God sought to make a holy people, not by making them jump through hoops or offer more sacrifices of their children or whatever it was that they held dear.

To make a holy people, this holy God utilized an absolutely distinct means unlike any other God. This holy God made a holy people through the holy means of his grace.

Of his grace. Verse seven, 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 ancestors 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.

Did you hear that? The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because of anything in you, Israel, but verse eight, because the Lord loved you. And this is the gospel.

This is the scandal of God's grace. Two months ago, I shared this passage with our middle schoolers and I asked, so what's the reason God gives for setting his affection on his people and choosing them as his beloved children?

[28 : 52] What does it say here in the text? And reading it, they got the right answer and they said with a question mark, he sets his affection on us and he chooses us because he loves us?

And one of them cried, but that doesn't make any sense. That doesn't make any sense. And I said, and that's exactly the point. That's exactly the point. I told them, this is the beautiful truth of Christianity because everywhere you turn in this world, you're gonna be offered various kinds of demanding conditional deals.

Do this and I will love you. Do that and I will value you. Do this and I will accept you. Do that and you'll be special and set apart in my eyes. Be smart and I'll respect you.

Be funny and I will admire you. Be attractive and you will have my affection. And I said, and maybe some of you will achieve some of these conditions and win the love of some.

You'll win the approval of some. Or maybe you might not. Or maybe you might not. Who knows? Who can guarantee it? But what I want you to know, middle schoolers, is that there is a better love.

[29 : 59] It's an unconditional love, a divine love that is always available to you from your heavenly father. And it's the fundamental need of all of our hearts.

It's a divine love without conditions that simply says, I love you because I love you, because I love you. And I know this sounds nonsensical and like circular reason.

Maybe you really want to be special on your own merits, loved and adored and chosen because of your own unique qualities and excellencies. But trust me, you don't want it any other way than the way of grace.

Imagine you're in a romantic relationship and you ask your partner, honey, why do you love me? Sure, you might want to hear them say, oh, because you're so smart, because you're so funny, because you're so good looking, kind, you're so amazing at this or that, fill in the blank.

But what if one day you lose some of these qualities? Or maybe your partner just no longer finds you that smart or that funny or that good looking anymore. On that day, will you not realize that you weren't loved for you, but for all that you once offered but can no longer deliver?

[31 : 09] See, the love of God is so much better. The love of God is so much better than this. The love of God says, I love you because I love you. Regardless of what you have to offer me, even despite how small and insignificant the world believes you to be, God's love is not a self-seeking love that takes.

It's a self-offering love that gives because he is a God who has no need. He is a God who has no need so he can offer this kind of unconditional love. John 3, 16, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish, should not be utterly destroyed like we all deserve, but have everlasting life.

And this is what Deuteronomy chapter 7 is about. The holy God making a holy people by his holy means of grace. He was saying to Israel back then and he's saying to us today, totally destroy all the idols around you.

Show no mercy to all these creaturely objects of worship who cannot deliver and yet always seek to enslave and subject you to their crushing laws and demands. Destroy them all.

Show no mercy for I am the one true God, the one true God of grace. Grace. The God who is simultaneously so holy and so committed to making a holy people that I sent my one and only son, the only one who is ever truly innocent, not at all in need of mercy.

[32 : 37] I sent him to face total destruction on a cross for your sins. Verse 9. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God.

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

Christ Church, in the light of Christ, Deuteronomy chapter 7 is saying to us, you can be a different kind of people because you have a different kind of God.

You can be a holy people whose distinctiveness is based on nothing other than your holy God's completely gracious covenantal love toward you. Christ Church, can you imagine, can you imagine what kind of holy, set apart and distinctive church that would be?

A church marked out by nothing other than the grace of God. Right? So humbled by this God who lovingly chose us just because he wanted to despite our shortcomings, so humbled that we set our affection on the humblest amongst us, the poorest and the weakest in our cities.

[33 : 46] So grateful for this unmerited favor of God that we live lives of self-sacrifice amongst those who will never be able to pay us back. It's only the holy grace of the holy God that can make a truly holy people for the good of this world and for the glory of God.

Will you pray with me? O holy God, would you continue molding us into your holy people by your holy means of grace into the image of your Son, the one who came full of grace and truth.

Lord, make the taste of grace so sweet to us, especially in light of your holiness. Help us to hold both and marvel at the amazing truth of the gospel, we pray.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.