

Show No Mercy

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Date: 17 January 2007

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we thank you that you've caused all Holy Scripture to be written to make us wise for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that your word to us throughout the Scriptures teaches us, rebukes us, corrects us, and trains us in righteousness so that we may be equipped with every good work and word.

And we pray this, Lord God, tonight that your word's purpose will be fulfilled within us so that we may bring you and your Son great glory in our lives. Amen. Well, what a world we live in. Since September the 11th, 2001, we live with some real fear of terror, some real fear of Islamic jihad in our world.

Radical Islam's holy war, or jihad, is a frightening prospect. And many lives, of course, have been lost in many countries already in those last five years, and even before that as well. Of course, we also live in a world over the last 100 years in which there have been several genocides, notably the Turkish genocide of Armenia about 1915, and then, of course, the Holocaust of the Jews during the Second World War.

[1 : 33] In more recent years, we've seen genocide attempted in the Balkans, and, of course, so frighteningly and terribly in Rwanda 12 or 13 years ago.

We might argue that the period of the Crusades in the 1100s, the 1200s AD, was, rightly argued, an aberration on what Christianity is meant to be like.

But for many of us, how on earth do we defend, in our scriptures, passages like Deuteronomy 7? Verse 2 of chapter 7 says, To what extent should we, as Christians, try to defend such a verse morally?

Is this, or could this be, really, in some... How could this be the same God as the God of the New Testament? The God who reveals himself in his son, the Prince of Peace?

[2 : 52] Surely we find in these verses something morally obnoxious and somehow abhorrent to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Where Jesus teaches love of enemies, how can we hold, as Holy Scripture, words that say, utterly destroy them, show them no mercy? Well, Deuteronomy 7 is not alone in teaching what it teaches in the Old Testament, but it's a good passage to deal with, as it's a legal passage that is prescribing what should happen, and that's very distinct from the narrative passages that describe what did happen.

For there are many who would come to the narrative passages that show some utter destruction of people or cities or nations and say, well, that's what happened, but it shouldn't have happened. Here in Deuteronomy 7, we deal with a legal text which ostensibly comes from God describing what ought to happen. And therefore we're dealing actually, in some senses, with an even harder passage to grapple with tonight.

I want us to look through this passage and see what it does teach so that we understand what it's saying. And then we will try and grapple with how do we, as Christians, living in the light of the gospel of Christ, how do we deal with a passage like this?

[4 : 20] And not least in our own day and age, where the Islamic jihad and the threats of genocide rear their ugly head, and we so often claim that Islamic jihad is so morally reprehensible, and yet our own scriptures, some would claim, teach much the same thing.

So Deuteronomy 7. Remember that the context is that Israel is on the verge of entry into the promised land. It's not any land. It's a land that was promised 500, 600 years earlier than Moses to Abraham back in Genesis chapter 12 and a promise reiterated and confirmed with an oath in various sections of the book of Genesis during the life of Abraham and then reiterated to Isaac and then to Jacob after Abraham.

It is a land that God himself will bring Israel into. That's how it's termed in verse 1 of chapter 7. When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you.

The land that's promised to Israel is not terra nullius. It's not an empty land. It's an inhabited land. Indeed, we saw last Sunday night in the sermon on chapter 6 that it's a land with cities that you did not build and water systems that you did not hew and vineyards and olive groves already planted and bearing fruit that you did not plant.

That is, it's very much an occupied, inhabited, settled and civilized land that God is giving to ancient Israel. It's not an empty land.

[6 : 04] It's not an uninhabited land. And therefore, the promise of the land has repercussions, of course, for those who live in it. That is, the fulfillment of the promise means that somehow the current inhabitants have to be dealt with.

And that's what this passage is all about. Indeed, it's inhabited by seven groups of people as listed in verse 1. Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

We don't know much about some of them. The Jebusites lived in Jerusalem. The Hittites had been, or maybe even to this point, was still a vast world empire and maybe just stretching into the boundaries of the promised land.

Canaanites, often used as a term sort of generically for the people who lived in the land. It may have been a strictly defined ethnic group, but it may also have been used more generally, a bit like we might say the English, whereas technically we might properly say English, Scots, and Welsh, and maybe the Northern Irish as well, if we want to be particular, but often we might use a generalisation.

That's how Canaanites are used, as both a generalisation, but maybe more specifically a people group. Now the details of these seven people groups or nations need not detain us at this point.

[7 : 30] The chapter begins when the Lord your God does this. So it's looking forward to a certain future event that God has promised will happen, and Moses is reassuring Israel that it indeed will happen in the future.

When the Lord your God clears away the many nations, and then verse 2 continues the when, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and technically speaking it goes on, and when you defeat them, that is, that's the presupposition in effect that leading to the first command, the presupposition is God will clear them away, he'll hand them over to you, and you'll defeat them.

Then come the commands. The commands at the end of verse 2 are threefold. You are firstly to utterly destroy them.

Secondly, make no covenant with them. And thirdly, show no mercy to them. That's actually the emphasis in these opening couple of verses.

That is, it's when God does this, and God does this, and you do this, then, here comes the command, you must, these three things that follow at the end of verse 2. You must utterly destroy them.

[8 : 55] That is, totally. It's the language of what in the Old Testament is sometimes called Yahweh war, or some people would say holy war. It's a specific war.

It's commanded in various places. Here, notably, Deuteronomy 20 in a little bit of detail as well. It is war that's confined to the area of, and within the boundaries of, the promised land.

That is, it's not a war that Israel is to fight outside the borders, and to utterly destroy the means, basically, to kill everything alive. The men, the women, the children, the animals.

And indeed, often to burn the cities, or burn the spoil of the war as well. So it's a very severe command. Utterly destroy them.

Secondly, make no covenant with them. At one level, that could be, if we're wanting to push this literally and sequentially, a bit logically inconsistent. If you've already destroyed them, then there's nobody left to make a covenant with.

[9 : 58] Well, later on, it's clear in verse 22 that this is not going to happen sort of absolutely immediately. All the nations will all of a sudden be destroyed. That is, in the process of destroying the nations and the peoples within the promised land, you will actually interact with them at different levels before the conquest is totally complete.

And in verse 22, it talks about, God says, well, we will clear them away little by little so that you can get established and so that wolves won't come in all the desolate areas where you've had victories

but have not had time to sort of settle and get established.

Make no covenant with them. Well, that's a little less obnoxious, perhaps, to us, Israel is already in a covenant relationship with God. And the covenant relationship that Israel has with God is to be an exclusive covenant relationship.

That is, you can't be in a covenant relationship with one person and then be in a covenant relationship with somebody else. It's a bit like a marriage relationship, really. It's the closest analogy, I suppose.

And so, if you're in a covenant relationship with God, you can't make another covenant with another people group. Of course, Israel failed at this when you get to Joshua 9 and the Gibeonites, most notably and significantly.

[11:11] So, they're not to make a covenant relationship. Thirdly, they are to show no mercy. That is, God has said, you must utterly destroy them.

You're not to show mercy by sparing any of them alive. You're not to show mercy by making a covenant with them. You're not to show mercy by cohabiting the land with them. You're not to show mercy by a treaty of peace with them.

Show no mercy to them. Well, how on earth can we accept this when so fundamentally God is a God of mercy in the New Testament, but not absent in the Old?

If you remember chapter 4 that we looked at on Sunday week ago at night, God is a God of mercy, chapter 4 verse 31 said. Although that's held together with chapter 4 verse 24 that God is a jealous God, a holy fire as well.

The question is, why these laws are so strict? If we understand some of the purpose behind them, that will help us determine the application of them or the non-application of them for us as Christians.

[12:30] There are a number of points that can be made. The first and clearest one in this passage is that the existence of those nations in the land after Israel enters the land is a spiritual threat to Israel, the people of God.

See how verses 3 and 4 for now say, do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons.

For that would turn away your children from following me to serve other gods. See the issue? If you cohabit a land with another people group, inevitably there will be some intermarriage.

And where there is intermarriage, note, it won't be that your sons and daughters will lead their sons and daughters to worship Yahweh. Rather, their sons and daughters will lead your daughters and sons to worship their gods.

Doesn't look balanced. But actually, typically, that's how the Bible views it. That is, you put unbelief or immorality alongside belief and faith and godliness following Yahweh, following other gods.

[13:48] You mix the two together and you end up with unclean, not clean, by and large. Why is that? Well, the Bible says in another place, people love darkness more than light.

It's a reflection of the biblical view of humanity. humanity. We are weak and vulnerable to sin. And when we get cohabiting, in effect, with gross sin, we are very vulnerable to slip and drift, in this case, ultimately, to idolatry.

Less likely the other way. It's probably not universal, but it's certainly the general trend. So, intermarriage, the covenants, the coexistence is prohibited because God wants to preserve Israel as a holy people.

That is, the model that God has got in mind is that within the boundaries of the promised land are to exist only the people of Israel and, we should say, from bits and pieces here and there in the Old Testament, people from other nations who come in and willingly accept the God of Israel and, in effect, worship Him, the sojourners or the resident aliens, depending on your translation, they are to live under God's law in God's land a holy existence and that as they live that holy existence as we saw in chapter 4 on Sunday week ago at night, early on, other nations will say, what a righteous people, what a great God that they have and they'll be drawn to that God.

That is, the model or paradigm that God is setting up for the universe is that Israel in its own land cut off from other nations in effect will become a beacon and a light to attract other nations to their God.

[15:44] For that to happen, the nations already in the land, pagans they all are, are to be utterly destroyed. No intermarriage, certainly, for that would be a snare for you, a trap for you, an enticement to fall into their ways and ultimately to worship their gods.

That is, intermarriage, just like making covenants, coexistence in general, will be a theological compromise for the people of God.

I guess the closest we get in the New Testament along those lines is in 2 Corinthians 6, you shall not be yoked with an unbeliever. The Christians ought not to marry unbelievers.

Inevitably, I think, where that happens, the faith, service, ministry, practice of the believer is compromised. Sometimes, of course, it disappears altogether, sadly.

But inevitably, at least, I think, it's compromised. So therefore, they are to destroy all the inhabitants of the land. And that includes all the paraphernalia of their worship.

[16:50] Verse 5 of chapter 7. This is how you must deal with them, break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire.

That is, even the existence of their worship paraphernalia will itself be a snare. Later on, in chapter 12, Israel will be prohibited from worshipping where the Canaanites worshipped, where they worshipped their Baal gods, on every mountain, under green trees, and so on.

Just because the association of those places will be an enticement to worship their gods in their way and not to worship God in his way. That's chapter 12, which I think we look at in two Wednesday's time.

So the destruction of all their bits and pieces, the pillars, stone pillars probably, probably reflecting Baal, the male god of the Canaanites, maybe phallic-type pillars, and the wooden pillars or poles, most probably the Asherah poles to represent the female deity, the wife or the consort of Baal, the male god, and they also would have been, if not phallic, fertility-type symbols, usually wooden poles with lots and lots of breasts because the Baal worship, the Canaanite worship, was fundamentally a fertility worship.

And it was a promiscuous, immoral practice as well. It was abounding in temple prostitutes because as you would engage temple prostitute, male or female, it didn't seem to matter sometimes, you were trying to provoke the gods to bring you rain, crops, animals, or children, or a combination of all of those things.

[18:29] They were fertility gods. They are to be destroyed. They too are a snare for a fallen people in the land. The section climaxes, you see, with the positive statement.

Verse 6 says, At its base level, the idea of the word holy is simply to be set apart or separate. That is, we might say, distinct. Israel belongs to God is in effect what holy is at its basic level meaning. It's set apart for a relationship with God.

It's separate to God exclusively. Just like, technically speaking, in an Anglican church, what's behind me is a holy table.

That's never an altar. Holy table. And that is not because it's wood comes from Israel or something like that. It's because it's a table set apart for the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

[19:41] So, the idea of holy has got that set apart idea. That comes to have moral connotation because God is moral. God is himself holy in a moral sense.

So, therefore, being set apart for God carries with it great moral connotations. It's about holy or godly living reflecting the holy godly character of God himself.

for Israel in the Old Testament their holiness was to be expressed by a geographical separation, a geographical set apartness from other nations.

So, they were to live within the boundaries of the promised land. They were to get rid of all those who lived there before they went there and therefore geographically set apart was to become a holy kingdom in effect.

Not for the shunning of other nations outside the boundaries. But as I said from chapter 4 and in a whole range of places in the Old Testament for missiological purposes.

[20:46] That is, in the Old Testament the motion or direction of mission is, now let me get this right, centripetal. That is, towards the center. I hope I got it the right way around.

And, whereas in the New Testament the motion or direction of mission is centrifugal. That is, to go out to the nations, to the world. You don't find that in the Old Testament fundamentally.

It's more of an attraction in. So, the people of God were to be holy, set apart geographically, not with closed borders but to welcome people who wanted to come and ultimately to worship their God as well.

As well as that in verse 6 it talks about Israel as God's treasured possession. It's the language of other ancient Near Eastern treaties as well but it's a fairly special term.

It's something that is prized above all. It's something that belongs in effect to your personal belongings. There's a sense in which the whole earth is God's as we've just sung in the first song of course and as the scriptures make clear but Israel is his special treasured possession.

[21 : 59] The example that I've used before and I was going to check this and I'll no doubt be corrected at the end. The Queen of England owns I think Sandringham Castle where she sometimes lives.

She doesn't own Buckingham Palace in London. That is she lives there by virtue of being the Queen but her personal possession is I think Sandringham or maybe Balmoral maybe both I'm not sure one of those two.

So there's a distinction. Israel is the personal possession of God. Everything belongs to God but there is a sort of treasuredness about Israel.

So verse 6 is quite striking about the place of Israel. It's not new it's there in Exodus 19 when Israel arrived at Mount Sinai as well in verses 5 and 6 of Exodus 19 and it's there occasionally elsewhere in the Old Testament this sort of idea.

So that's the first sort of point. the reason for the destruction of the nations is the preservation of the holiness of Israel to protect the people of God and their relationship with God.

[23 : 07] Related to that is the point that what God is trying to do is not to obliterate all the nations but is actually ultimately for the blessing of nations and the way that works is as I said through Israel being holy in its place attracting others to God as well and we've seen that in chapter 4 in various other places.

Thirdly and now we go in one sense we go beyond Deuteronomy 7 although it's there implicitly as well the nations that are being destroyed or are commanded to be destroyed as listed back in verse 1 they are not innocent nations they are idolatrous nations they don't worship God they refuse to worship the true living God they bow down and worship things that are physical in form but have no ears can't hear can't taste or see that is they bow down to man-made statues and images that are no gods at all and that's a sin and an offence to the God who made all people that idea is picked up in general terms way back in the time of Abraham in Genesis 15 where God said not yet basically about the promise of the land for the sins of the Amorites are not yet complete what that verse is saying is that when 400 or 500 years later the Israelites do arrive in the land and are commanded to destroy the nations in the land it is

God punishing them for their sins chapter 15 verse 16 of Genesis also implies an element of patience on God's part that is those nations are already sinful in his eyes their sins are not yet complete so that he delays the punishment now though we're not told explicitly it could well be not just for their sins to be complete and then that'll happen that's inevitable I think but there's an element of God staying his hand for a while maybe to see if they will repent and turn to him which of course they don't and so in its proper time God executes his judgment and justice against them using Israel as the agent of that judgment to destroy those sinful nations now we might well think this still doesn't quite look fair we might well think well what about the women and the children and others and that's a fair question morally to ask one of the things that we ought to keep in mind though is the high value is not quite the right word the opposite in a sense but the high place God places places on the sin of idolatry you see for us and in our society murder rates pretty highly child molestation rates pretty highly we probably find a few other things that rate pretty highly but at least in our society and therefore in part it infiltrates our thinking idolatry doesn't rate that highly the worship of other gods is that really that bad yes it is it offends the maker of the universe I'm not necessarily saying that we've got to run out now with a sword we'll come to the application for us but my point is that the worst sin of all certainly in Deuteronomy's perspective is idolatry the first commandment the second commandment of the ten remember that last week I said there's an element of hierarchy here in these commandments the infringement of the first two commandments is in effect idolatry the worship of other gods the worship of other gods is the worst thing that a human being can do the worst or grossest or most terrible sin we live in a society that's so humanistic in its outlook that it actually sidelines entirely whether the worship of any other god is a sin or not so we need to have a biblical perspective on this sort of hierarchy if you like idolatry is the worst sin these are people who are guilty of that and therefore under god the creator of all the judge of all deserving indeed of his judgment not only that but canaanite religion was immoral as I said the temple prostitutes the sexual licentiousness and promiscuity that it allowed and actually encouraged and that there shows us another reason why these words are so strong going back to

the first point people are attracted to spirituality without morality we see it in our own day and age the spiritualities that are attractive in our society the ones that are weak morally christianity is not weak morally properly speaking and therefore it's unattractive in our society and of course because we're fallen human beings we are in one sense attracted or drawn towards some form of worship or spirituality or gods that are low in their morality hence they are a snare for ancient Israel what more can we say about these points it is also important to keep in mind something that we see a number of times in Deuteronomy and we'll see it hinted at at least in the verses following here

God is not just racially biased that is it's not just a sort of blinkered view of Israel Israel Israel forget the rest it's not a it's not a view of Israel in rose-colored glasses and it's not a Israel whatever Israel does is okay sort of view you know like doting parents and grandchildren grandparents on their grandchildren you know always biased about who are the best so when Israel sins or if and when Israel sins in the future in one sense it's gross sins if it commits idolatry an Israelite or an Israelite family or city places itself in effect as a Canaanite personal city in chapter 13 if a city or family of Israelites is duped and goes to worship other gods the punishment given back to them is in effect the punishment here in chapter 7 against the Canaanites destroy them totally capital punishment absolutely there's a sense in which what I'm trying to say is this is

[30 : 05] God's punishment against idolatry wherever a person's racial background comes from yes it's true that God chooses Israel but he doesn't choose that in a sense in a totally blinkered view and say well whatever Israel does they'll be treated more leniently not at all if Israelites end up committing Baal worship Canaanite worship going to the Canaanite places committing idolatry they place themselves in effect as a Canaanite what I'm trying to say by this is that there is in that sense a fairness across the races in Deuteronomy it's not just Israel can do what they like and God's going to protect them and keep them all alive and so it's not just a racial prejudice or bias that God is exercising here at all that is at the bottom line these are moral laws about the God who is the judge of all punishing immorality and idolatry whoever commits it now we see my point that I've just made in the verses that follow in verses 7 and 8 God then says it was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you a few in fact the fewest of all peoples I mean the choice came when it was just Abram and Sarai two people so that's certainly the fewest of all peoples it was because the Lord loved you the only place in Genesis through to Deuteronomy that we read that God loved Israel we read a couple of places God loved Abram or the patriarchs the only place

I think where God loved Israel the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt the basis of election is in a sense inscrutable we can't penetrate the motive behind it that is God didn't choose Israel because there was something inherently good about Israel he didn't choose Israel because he knew that they would have faith in him they didn't we saw that in chapters one to three God doesn't choose people because he knows they're going to respond to the gospel by trusting in Jesus that's how often people try and understand the doctrine of God's election but in the end if that's your thinking about it God only chooses people whom he knows in advance are going to respond to him that actually he's not God God chooses and we don't know why he chooses he just decides we can't penetrate underneath that sovereign but inscrutable choice that God makes of

Israel and exactly the same doctrine of election in the New Testament where God chooses you and me that is there's nothing in you or me that warrants God's choice he doesn't choose us because we're going to be good Christians he doesn't choose us for anything about ourselves at all it's a sovereign free choice that God makes of us as it was indeed for ancient Israel that choice is reflected in love that love is demonstrated in redemption the word for redemption in verse 8 is about a payment of price to liberate from Egypt the price is not specified but we know in the New Testament what it is the price of his only son that costly price that is the doctrine of election here is exactly the same as the doctrine of election in the New Testament but it's not a racially bound doctrine as Paul makes clear in say Romans 4 it's and Romans 9 to 11 it's the election of those who believe like Abraham believed and not racially bound as a result of that election because we see that it's not dependent upon

Israel's character that God elects we then go on and read in verse 9 know therefore that the Lord your God is God the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations and who repays in their own person those who reject

him see how humanity is divided in that verse it's not Israel and the nations though we're in a chapter dealing with Israel destroying nations the real fundamental division is those who love him and those who reject him and in verse 9 it's in the more immediate context of talking about those of Israel that that in a sense is the point that I was making God in commanding such severe punishment on these Canaanite nations is not racially biased if an Israelite rejects God they will suffer the same fate that is it's in the end the distinction between humanity is not Israel versus the rest it's about those who love God and those who do not that's the dividing line through humanity now how on earth do we apply these laws Christians debate this there are many who would say tear it out of your Bible when I gave a Bible study on Deuteronomy to a group of clergy not in the Melbourne diocese last year or the year before before I got more than five or ten minutes in I was being held down by one clergy person for even dealing with

Deuteronomy whereas I should have torn it out of my Bible and he wasn't alone how do we apply these laws I want to give you a model and demonstrate that model here it's a model that applies I think for lots of Old Testament laws if not all and indeed probably even beyond the laws for that matter as well you can see a little diagram of the model in my little book and I'm sorry I'm not technically competent enough to have worked out how to do it up on the screen tonight but it's simple enough if you sort of watch my hands like a Bruce Petty cartoon every law that we read or more or less every law that we read in the Old Testament is in a sense anchored in a particular circumstance or situation or society so what you find in a law is often a law but embedded with circumstance historical particularity agrarian societies for example and so on what we then do is lift that law and say what's the principle within the law so if it's a look after your neighbor's ox or ass the principle is the care of your neighbor's property it's not actually whether it's an ox or an ass that's not you know ox ass it could be their car or their house or something else so the principle is sort of care for your neighbor's goods significant goods so what we do is you've got the law here lifted up to the principle behind the law there may actually be a number of principles within the law there are here this is quite a complex one the laws of warfare take then the principles or principle and see what does the New

[37 : 27] Testament do with it so in my model you lift it up to the principle and you go across the page to the New Testament principles but it's reflected or refracted through the prism of the cross and resurrection of Christ or the New Testament package if you like that is some principles will just go straight through unchanged but some will be deviated a little bit I'll give you some examples and show you what I mean and then having come with the modified perhaps principles we reapply them in our own circumstance now what are some of the principles here in Deuteronomy 7 and in the laws generally about Israel conquering other nations and destroying them utterly etc one principle clearly that I've already seen is the holiness of God's people is at stake it's about preserving the holiness of God's people that's one clear principle a second principle is that it is also the judgment and justice of God against sin that was clear from Genesis 15 but it's clear here in 7 1 to 5 because the people to be destroyed are worshipping all sorts of wrong gods so it's the punishment and justice of God against sin a third principle is that Israel is the agent of

God's judgment or justice that is they are commanded by God specifically to conquer these people they're not told go and kill whoever you want to kill they're told specifically these people that is God is actually the one who is driving this as chapter 7 verse 1 made clear Israel is to be his agent of judgment against these sinful nations there are a couple of other principles or in a sense parameters in here that we need to just comment on one is that the people of God in the Old Testament is to be geographically distinct from other nations they are a nation that's a related point but they are a nation of God's people and and and and the the last one I want to comment on we can probably find a few more but I'm trying to pick out the key ones to simplify it a bit the other one is this is the land God promised a land of blessing a land of promise to Abraham the land where they in a sense would find ideally the blessed life under God and his word where do those principles take us in the light of

Christ in the New Testament God's people are still to be holy there's no change to that principle we are to be holy as ancient Israel was holy indeed the statement in Exodus 19 you are a holy people etc is actually applied quoted by Peter in 1 Peter 2 of Christians we are a holy people that principle is therefore unchanged however it's refracted a bit differently because we are not to be geographically distinct we are in fact commanded 1 Peter 2 goes on to say to live holy lives scattered like exiles and aliens amongst the pagans of the world that is we're not to gather into a

holy huddle of all of God's people like ancient Israel was we are to live holy lives but scattered so the principles been modified I hope you see sort of what I'm trying to say now in this model related to that of course is the fact that the people of God in the New Testament is a church and not a nation and even though we gather as church locally and so on we are not a geographically separate entity like ancient

Israel was meant to be the second key principle of the Old Testament laws is that God is the judge and he brings judgment and justice against sinners that principles unchanged God is still a judge of all the world and he still promises to bring his judgment and justice against all sinners again there's a slight refraction and change though for in the New Testament the people of God are not the agents of God's judgment and justice as ancient Israel here was meant to be it's a fair thing to say that by and large Israel was not to be an agent of God's justice against the other pagan nations round about by and large you know the Egypt and Babylon and so on just the ones within that border the laws of warfare applying to other nations were very different for ancient Israel outside the border of the promised land but in the New Testament we are not the agents of God's judgment and justice against sinners in this world with perhaps one exception and that is through the preaching of the gospel that as we preach the gospel where hard hearts refuse it we have in some sense acted as an agent of God's judgment as they harden themselves against God but we're not actually inflicting the judgment all the judgment is in the hands of God's

God's ideal son he is the agent of judgment when he comes again at the end of time thirdly we also see that the principle of land changes Israel was inheriting a promised land but the New Testament transforms that promise very thoroughly in fact so our inheritance is a heavenly land one Peter one that's kept in heaven for us and we see that in in the way in which the promise of land is taken upside by Paul in Romans 4 when he expands it to talk not just of the geographical land but beyond we see it in the ways the idea of temple is changed in the New Testament so the temple being the sort of prime focus of the land is is changed into the people of God being the temple wherever they may be where two or three are gathered there I am not located in a land not located in the heart of the land in a temple and so on Jesus kingdom is not of this world he said all that sort of language and idea shows that the the promise of land in the Old Testament is is uh superseded fulfilled by a greater and better promise the color TV compared to the black and white TV if you like the new Jerusalem not the old so we find then that as ancient Israel was to take the promised land the equivalent for us as believers is to arrive in heaven in effect and we don't need to fight with swords and guns and planes into buildings and stuff to to claim that if you see what I mean so you see how the principle is modified in the New Testament now um what I've tried to do there in in a simpler way as I can for this particular law is show how that model works what it means is that we don't just tear this out and throw it out and take it out of our Bibles because we find it too morally obnoxious that God would punish people but what we also see is that we don't have to go and fight against the people you know over the Murray or in the island south of Victoria and stuff like that that is there is actually no justification for any holy war physically really ever since the time of

[45 : 09] Jesus it seems to me that whole idea has been transformed yes the New Testament still uses military language it still uses spiritual warfare language we are fighting against the enemy who is still real and still manifest physically but not at the level of sort of human destruction in a sense so Paul uses the language of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 don't don't see too much of a dichotomy between spiritual and physical either because the spiritual is manifest physically the work of Satan is manifest physically in our world so there is still that element of tension and struggle but it's at a different level in a sense from what we find here in Deuteronomy 7 if I may say I think the people who find the most difficulty with these sorts of warfare laws in the Old Testament are those who have the most difficulty with the fact that God is judge in the end because qualitatively there is little difference between the destiny or the the end of life in a sense for the Canaanites in the land here as it will be on the day of Jesus return there's no big in my opinion qualitative difference between the outcomes of those two events and if we find too much problem within the end the punishment of sinners in the old even at the hands of God's people then I think we probably find trouble understanding or believing that God will judge and punish sinners at the end of time well

I've gone longer than I had hoped let me try and wrap up a couple of these things the warning part of the similarity for us is that the warnings about holiness still remain that is the rigor of holiness is not weakened in the New Testament by the fact that we don't have to live geographically separate the danger of sin that's left unattended in our own lives and in our own midst and in our own

church's lives is just as significant as it was in ancient Israel's time in ancient Israel and in later chapters in Deuteronomy frequently you get the refrain you must purge the evil from your midst dealing with capital punishment in effect of sinners who are Israelites same sort of idea is picked up in the excommunication of believers from the church in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6.

so on and we see it of course in that very radical language of Jesus if your eye causes you to sin cut it out etc. holiness is as uncompromising in the New Testament as it is in the old the added demand in a sense is that we're to live such rigorously holy lives but in the midst of pagans and sinners in our world but 1 Peter 2 puts all that together best of all.

holiness is as it is in the last chapter 2. The next paragraph goes on to make a couple of points. It's a paragraph that describes great blessings that will come from obedience in the land.

It's a paragraph of incentive to holiness in the land. Come in and live blessed holy lives and reap this abundant fertility in your crops and animals and children and rainfall and everything in the land. [48 : 29] But at the same time as being an incentive to obedience one of many in Deuteronomy it's part of its style. It is also a polemic against Canaanite worship.

The Canaanite worship was in at its heart a fertility worship and here this rich promise of blessing this very striking promise of blessing coming immediately after the laws of destroying the Canaanites and all their religious paraphernalia.

It's surely a polemic to remind us just where real fertility comes from. The God of Israel not Baal not Asherah. Deuteronomy is full of passages that could be interpreted to support a prosperity gospel this being one of them and there are many others later in the book as well.

Again we've got to think well do we simply lift out these verses and apply it that if we live obedient Christian lives we'll be rich. We'll have lots of children lots of money and so on.

Well I think that breaks down very quickly. The same sort of model that I gave you in effect applies. What are the principles here? How are those principles dealt with in the New Testament and then how do we reapply them?

[49 : 41] And the promise of land and blessing is transformed into a heavenly promise and the spiritual blessings that are already ours in Christ according to Paul in Ephesians 1 verse 3 and so on.

I don't think we can sustain a doctrine of a prosperity gospel from passages like this. I think that's naive and simplistic and to be honest ultimately spiritually deceptive as well.

That's not to say that when things go wrong that when people are barren or we're suffering in the middle of a drought we don't turn to God and pray and plead.

Not at all. But on the other hand the reason for a drought or the reason for barrenness or the reason for a lack of job or something may not be in the end due to our disobedience.

It may be but it may not be. Finally fear is addressed. If you remember back two Wednesday nights ago in chapter 1 the big problem for Israel in the previous generation was fear of the enemy.

[50 : 39] Their fortification, their size and number and so on. We come back to that issue being addressed in verses 17 onwards in chapter 7. Don't say to yourself, literally don't say in your heart, These nations are more numerous than I, how can I dispossess them?

The problem of fear is a fairly rampant one in ancient Israel. And here again Moses returns to it. It's a foolish fear because if God promises to fight for you, victory is assured.

We see the folly of fear exposed for example in verse 21. Have no dread of them for the Lord your God who is present with you is a great and awesome God. And the only thing that Israel is to fear, constantly reiterated in this book, is God himself.

If you fear God, there is no reason or cause to fear anyone or anything else at all. So how do you address fear? Remember.

Verse 17. Remember. Was it verse 17? No, it was later. I've written down the wrong verse I think. But anyway, remember your past history. Remember what God has done in the past.

[51 : 50] What he did with the, verse 18 is the remember. What the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. The great trials and so on. Remember. See how the Bible comes into play.

For ancient Israel, go back to your Bible and remember what God has done. Keep reading the passages of scripture. We saw this actually in Deuteronomy 6, its importance, last Sunday night as well for different reasons.

For us, of course, we've got more of the Bible to read than ancient Israel. And we've got more things to remember and more reasons not to fear anybody else. So when we are in the midst of a

world where we're tempted into idolatry and immorality, remember what God has done. Remember the cross. Remember his victory over the cross. His victory over death. The sure promises that he keeps reiterating and fulfilling through the course of history and so on. The chapter ends with a return to the anti-idolatry in verses 25 and 26.

Reminding us yet again of how insidious this threat was for ancient Israel. And how, if you keep reading the pages of the Old Testament, of course, how frequently they fell into it and ultimately lost their land because of it.

[53 : 01] Well, it's easy for us, I think, to be too dismissive of these laws. But hopefully, as I've tried to expound it and the model, whilst we recognize nowhere not to pick up a sword and fight as ancient Israel was, there are principles here that we do well to remember and heed.

Not least the rigor of holiness that is to apply to us as it was to ancient Israel as well. Holiness is no less demanded of Christians.

Indeed, it is more demanded of Christians even than it was for ancient Israelites. And we must have no less rigor in dealing with it in our own lives, in our churches' lives as well.

It's always tempting to compromise holiness. But ironically, it's the compromise of holiness by the Christian church and the Western world that actually most offends Islam, of course, sadly and oddly.

There's an added incentive then to be rigorously holy. For as ancient Israel was to be rigorously holy, set apart, reaping the blessings of God to attract the nations, if we, the people of God, are truly holy as we ought to be, then maybe in God's mercy, he will bring many from outside the fellowship of his people to bow down to the knee at the name of Jesus Christ.

[54 : 34] For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession. Well, let's pray.