

Deuteronomy 7

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 July 2012

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 0 0] which, honestly, may be one of the more challenging chapters of the Bible for us to understand this morning. As we read it, I want you to see that the passage is kind of structured like a sandwich.

Verses 1 through 5 and then verses 17 through 26 are one theme, sort of the bread of the sandwich, that's a little tougher to chew on, and then the middle from 6 to 16 is the center.

It's just to give you a little bit of a road map, so let's read it together, and then we will seek to understand it this morning. Deuteronomy chapter 7.

When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away the many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, and when the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction.

You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods.

[1 : 3 1] Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But thus you shall deal with them. You shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their ashram and burn their carved images with fire.

Four, you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession. Out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth, it was not because you were more in numbers than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

But it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers 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.

Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations and repays to their face those who hate him by destroying them.

He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today.

[2 : 5 7] And because you listen to these rules and keep and do them, the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love that he swore to your fathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you.

He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your wine and your oil, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock in the land that he swore to your fathers to give you.

You shall be blessed above all peoples. There shall not be male or female barren among you or among your livestock. And the Lord shall take away from you all sickness and none of the evil diseases of Egypt, which you knew will he inflict upon you.

But he will lay them on all who hate you. And you shall consume the peoples that the Lord your God will give over to you. Your eyes shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

And if you say in your heart, these nations are greater than I, how can I dispossess them? You shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the Lord your God brought you out.

[4 : 17] So will the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. Moreover, the Lord your God will send hornets among them until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed.

You shall not be in dread of them, for the Lord your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God. The Lord your God will clear away these nations before you, little by little.

You may not make an end of them at once, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you. But the Lord your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed.

And he will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their names perish from under heaven. No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them.

The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it.

[5 : 18] For it is an abomination to the Lord your God. And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it.

You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction. Please pray with me.

Lord, this morning we come and we plead for you to give us understanding. Lord, we want to know your heart. We want to know your ways.

We want to understand. And God, we confess that this morning some of the ideas in this passage may be hard for us this morning to understand.

And so, Lord, we ask that by your Spirit you would illuminate our minds. Give us, we pray, Lord, understanding. Give us trust in you.

[6 : 21] Help us to see what you are up to in this chapter and in this world. Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Genocide is a terrible thing.

It is defined as the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation. And in our last hundred years, this world has witnessed terrible incidents of this.

Among them, the Jewish Holocaust, the massacre of Armenians in Turkey, or more recently, ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia and the terrible civil war that happened in Rwanda.

To read about these things is a gruesome task. It makes your stomach turn, makes us sick, and it arouses in us a righteous indignation that this ought not to be so, and rightly so.

[7 : 41] Which makes our passage this morning problematic, does it not? For in this passage, we see God commanding Israel to do seemingly just this.

They are to enter into the land and, according to verse 2, devote to destruction all of the inhabitants. The nations are named so that we would know specifically that all the people living in the land are to be treated this way.

Their religious places of worship are to be burned. Like a swarm of locusts, Israel is to consume all the peoples. And what's more, in verse 16, they're to do so without pity or without tolerance or respect that we would expect today.

In fact, God says, I will fight for you. I will help you do this. I will be a great warrior in your midst to accomplish this. And after I do that, you Israelites are to make the names of these people perish from the earth.

God is commanding a total annihilation of these people and their religions. And I am sure that some of you are sitting there this morning thinking, how can anyone believe in a God like this?

[9 : 10] And I want to face this question head on this morning. I want to look at how we might understand this text and what God is doing in it. It is not an easy task and I do not promise to answer all of your questions this morning.

But what I hope to do is to frame our exploration and understanding of this text around three questions so that we might better understand God's actions and intentions.

These three questions are this. The first one is, how could God do this? How could God command this?

The second one is, what was God's purpose for his people in this? And then the last question is, how do we apply this today?

What does this mean for us today? So our first question, how could God command this? To understand this, we need to spend some time exploring this idea.

[10 : 13] What exactly is God doing and not doing with this command? The word here is harem and it means devoted to destruction, devoted to ruin.

Other translations say to destroy them totally or utterly. It is important to note as we begin to frame this, if you turn to Deuteronomy 20, you would see that God has different commands for his people about how to carry out different kinds of warfare.

This kind of warfare as they're entering into the promised land has this particular quality of destroying all of the inhabitants. There are other battles.

He says, when you are fighting other wars, that is not how you are to behave. But in this particular instance, it is.

We also must see that in doing this, what God is commanding is not simply heaping up the piles and the storehouses of his people Israel.

[11 : 22] Israel is not benefiting. A normal practice in this days would be to take all these people and make them slaves, to take all the wealth of the country and to make it your wealth. And God says, no, you may not benefit from it in this way.

Israel did not get the plunder that they might expect from war. Additionally, I want you to see this morning as you read through this passage that idolatry, not ethnicity, is actually the core issue.

You see this in verses 4 and 5. You see it repeated in verse 16. You see it repeated again in verses 25 and 26. The nations that Israel was going in to face, they all worshipped other gods.

Asherim, Baals. If you would go into their land, you would see stone pillars and posts of wood that they would bow down to. Carven images in the stone and the wood.

Faces. And this was God's problem with the Canaanites. Not that they were ethnically inferior or unpalatable, but that they worshipped other gods.

[12 : 39] And this offense and the danger of dragging Israel into the same was the reason that God commanded that they be devoted to destruction.

Finally, or thirdly, I want you to see that the Canaanites were sinful people.

They were not innocent natives who happened to live in the wrong place at the wrong time. If you look ahead of two chapters to Genesis, or to Deuteronomy 9, verses 4 and 5, God states that Canaanites were wicked people whose sins were offensive to Him.

And in fact, if you went all the way back to Genesis 15, as God is promising the promised land to Abraham, He says that the Amorites, that is the Canaanites, the people who lived in those lands were full of iniquity, but that the time had not yet come for God to judge them.

And in fact, God waited another 500 years before He brought judgment upon them because they worshipped other gods.

[13 : 54] So this is what God is doing. I actually haven't made it better, have I? I've probably made it worse for some of you. Why?

Why would God do this? Again, this is a question that is larger than I can fully answer. I want to take a brief time out. There's a great book out there, Four Views on the Canaanite Conquest.

Some of the views, I think, are terrible in the book. But Tremper Longman has an absolutely incisive and clear essay that I highly recommend. We actually, I believe, have some photocopies in the back, on the back table.

If you are interested, please come see me after the service. We can try to get you some more resources for you to explore it. But, if I can't fully give you a whole argument that probably would take multiple sermons, at least I want to give you a few anchor points.

For me, these are the anchor points that help me make sense of a chapter like this in view of the bigger picture of who God is and what He is doing. And I hope that as you see these anchor points, you will find it convincing or at least plausible that the God of the Bible is still worthy of our consideration and our faith.

[15 : 11] And the first anchor point is this. The whole Bible portrays the world as marred by sin starting in Genesis 3 and therefore under the judgment for that sin.

Genesis 1-3 establishes the story of the first people who rejected God who had created them, rebelled against Him, marred the perfect world that He had created.

Paul summarizes what happened in the book of Romans. In chapter 3, he says, all have sinned, fall short of the glory of God. Chapter 5 says, therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned.

finally declaring in chapter 6, the wages of sin is death. So I want you to see that the Canaanites were a wicked people who were sinners.

Moses highlights their idolatry as the primary sin, showing that they're following the pattern again that Paul says in Romans, that they, claiming to be wise, became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men and birds and animals and creeping things.

[16 : 38] God warns His people not to turn to idols. The Ten Commandments starts with, you shall have no other gods. The first three commandments are all about this.

You shall not turn from the true and living God to worship another one. You are to be faithful to Him and not worship idols.

And it is because if God really is the God that is revealed in Scripture, if He really is everything that is good and perfect and lovely in the world, if He is perfection in His moral uprightness, in His beauty, in His majesty, then to reject Him, to turn from Him, is to turn to something less, to something else.

And this is why it is offensive to God because the worship, the glory that God deserves from His creation is given unrightly to something else.

Now, I want to acknowledge that in our age today, the offense of idolatry is not one that sits well. We live in an age of tolerance and pluralism where we often downplay or deny that there's anything wrong with other religions.

[18 : 01] We often hold a view, whatever you believe, as long as it is good for you. Friends, I tell you this morning, the Bible does not allow us to hold that view.

To worship an idol is to rob the creator of the world of the glory that He deserves. It is sin and it leads to death. Now, just so you hear me, we'll get to this later, but we are not the ones to carry out that judgment.

God is. But you must see that God is right. I hope you will see that it is at least understandable that God would judge sin like this.

So, that's our first anchor. The second anchor is that God takes sin so seriously that He will not play favorites even for the sake of the covenant love of the people that He has called.

In verse 25, it says this very clear. If Israel, if God's chosen people, if God's special people take these idols into their homes and begin to worship them like these other nations, God will do exactly to them what He would have done to the other people.

[19 : 27] He will destroy them. And we see that this is true, that God comes in later with Assyria and Babylon and brings judgment on His own people for their idolatry, for their rebellion.

So again, we see again the concern of this passage is not ethnicity, but it is idolatry that incurs such extreme judgment from God.

So having seen that God is committed to judging sin and particularly idolatry because of its offense, let us consider how God carries out this judgment.

And this is our third anchor point. And I want to go back again to the Garden of Eden. God had promised Adam and Eve, if you disobey me, if you eat the fruit of this tree, you will die.

God would have been right in simply killing Adam and Eve right then and there. But He did not.

[20 : 39] As one theologian put it, it is only because of God's extraordinary grace that Adam and Eve were not killed on the spot when they ate the fruit of the tree. Indeed, it is because of the grace, that grace, that any of us breathe.

The Canaanites always deserve judgment for their sin. Israel always deserve judgment for their sin. You and I always deserve judgment for our sin.

There is no escape from it. And in light of God's right and even His obligation to judge, we should not be amazed that God orders the judgment upon the Canaanites.

Rather, we should be amazed that God lets anyone live anywhere, at any time. His patience does not remove His right to bring that judgment as He wills.

and yet, He does not bring immediate judgment, does He? He is gracious.

[21 : 57] He is patient, forbearing whenever He does not bring that final judgment for our sin. We actually see this in the story of the conquest itself. When the Israelites follow through with the commands in chapter 7 of Deuteronomy, in the beginning chapters of Joshua, do you know what happens?

The city of Jericho is devoted to destruction as God commanded except one Canaanite woman who feared God, believed that this was the true and living God.

And so Rahab, the prostitute, was delivered and was saved. The first in an ongoing pattern in the Old Testament of God, including people outside of ethnic Israel to be His people by faith.

We see this same thing brought to fruition in the passage that was read earlier this morning in 2 Peter 3. In a day when people were doubting whether God would ever come and judge the world, Peter replies, it will certainly come, but it has not come yet.

Why? 2 Peter 3.9, because God is patient, not wishing that any would perish, but that all should come to repentance.

[23 : 20] And so one of the anchor points, this third anchor point is to see that God rightly could judge our sin today and yet He does not because He is in the business of redeeming people for Himself.

And finally, the fourth anchor point is this. We see that God is so committed to judging sin that He takes His own Son and puts Him on a cross and pours out His judgment, His wrath on sin because He could not leave it unpunished.

But He was so committed to judging sin and yet showing love and grace and mercy to His people that He sent His perfect Son who did not deserve that judgment to take it for us.

And I tell you this morning, it is because Jesus took the punishment for my sin that I am willing to believe even in the God of Deuteronomy 7 who brings such harsh judgment on the Canaanites.

And so I hope you will see this morning that it's not merely a story about God's judgment on sin. It is in fact more than that and it leads us to the second question which is what is God's purpose for His people in this?

[24 : 55] Look with me. Look with me at chapter 7 verse 6. I want you to see this again. Why? For, for, this is an explanatory paragraph, for you are a people holy to the Lord.

The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. What is God's purpose for His people? They are to be a holy people.

And I don't know what you think of when you think about the word holy. I have sort of two in mind. One is that a holy person is usually a holier-than-thou prudish moralist who thinks he's really good and looks down and finds joy in pointing out where everyone else is wrong.

That's one version of holy that I think fills our minds today. The other one is a very different one. It's sort of being bathed in a warm, soft glow with little halo.

Oh, He's such a holy person or this is such a holy place because it has this numinous essence. Neither of these come even close to the real meaning of the word used in this context.

[26 : 13] It is to be separated out from common use, distinct, so that it might be devoted to the worship of the true and living God.

And so you see in the Old Testament even things like shovels and bowls could be holy unto the Lord because they were set apart from common everyday use to be used only in the temple, only for the worship of God.

We have to see that the word holy doesn't actually give moral character or uprightness but it means to be set apart. And how was Israel set apart to be God's?

Again, we have to go back to the storyline of the Bible. In Genesis 12, in the wake of the Tower of Babel, the rebellion against God and God confusing people and the creation of different nations with different languages, God chooses one man and He says, I want you to be separate from all of these nations and I want to make you the father of a great nation, a nation that I will bless and a nation that by my blessing I will intend that I will make you a blessing for the whole world.

He promised that He would establish a nation in a particular land promised to Abraham, a land where they would dwell and worship God so that the nations around them would know what kind of God they serve.

[27 : 49] And so, fast forward through the whole 400 years to the story of Exodus where God delivers His people out of oppression from slavery. This large nation now is freed from slavery and brought to the brink of this promised land where it seems the promise made to Abraham will finally be fulfilled.

And that brings us to the second half of verse 6. Look with me again. How did God become a holy people?

Because God chose them. Because He focused His covenant love upon them. He made them His treasured possessions distinctly out of all the nations of the earth.

They did not deserve it. They did not do anything right so that God would do this. Verse 7 is very clear on this. It is not because of what you have done or who you were but because God chose to set His love on you the way a groom sets His love on his bride and call him to be His.

how then are God's people meant to live this out? How then are God's people meant to live out this special set-apartness for God?

[29 : 11] That's what the law is. The law describes how they're to live in this covenant relationship. It gives them instructions about all sorts of details of their life. The clothing they will wear.

How they resolve disputes. The way they will worship. And in each one of these each of these distinctive things the part of Deuteronomy we won't cover verses 12 through 26 each detail is meant to display something about the character and the nature of the God whom this people serves.

Having experienced God's gracious deliverance they are to be completely committed to and loyal to the covenant relationship with God.

That's why chapter 6 says you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength so that they might display who this God is to the world.

And as you see the flow in verses 12 through 15 God chose not only to call them and set his love upon them but to bless them. And specifically here he promises blessings in the very areas where the idols of the Canaanite religion would have promised.

[30 : 29] Fertility in the fields and in the wombs freedom from sickness prosperity. God says I will bless you Israel so that you will know my love and care for you that you will know that I am greater than any of the gods around you so that the other nations will see how I care for you and will worship me.

And so Israel is meant to be a physical picture a political national social entity that he is setting apart so that he can display who he is distinct from all of the nations around him.

And this is why God is so concerned that they be ensnared by idolatry. You see it in verse 16 you see it in verse 25 he calls Israel to be separate and if they turn back and worship the idols of the Canaanites they would no longer be separate they would simply just be like the people around them.

He knows how easily they would forsake him and turn from the invisible God to a visible touchable idol. And when they did this as they did this it would destroy the purpose for which God had redeemed them out of Egypt and brought them into the promised land.

Friends I want you to see that this purpose for God's people being a place where the nature and character of God is displayed in this world is not only true of Israel. There are important differences that we will see in just a minute but I want you to see that it is fundamentally true of the church today.

[32 : 21] 1 Peter 2 9 says of the church you are a chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

So what have we understood then? God commanded Israel to do this because it was an expression of his right judgment against sin. God's purpose for his own people is that they might be a people set apart from the other nations to display the character and the nature of the God that they serve and to tell of his great need, great deeds as his covenant people.

So what do we do with this today? How do we understand what significance this chapter of the Bible has for us today? We need to start by seeing that there is discontinuity between Israel and the church as well as continuity.

On the side of discontinuity, Israel's role as a nation state is no longer God's command in the world. And so the command in Deuteronomy 7 is not a repeatable command.

It has no application today because what God was picturing in the Old Testament people translates into something different in the New Testament. The church in the New Testament is God's people not as a political nation state, but they are a transnational community of Jews and Gentiles without a land, without a political structure, without an army.

[34 : 17] Jesus' kingdom is not like the kingdoms of this world. And he regularly and rightly refused the efforts of those around him to make his kingdom like the kingdoms of this world.

world. And because of this, there is no warrant for the church or any Christian inspired national violence.

No nation, no church may claim God's instruction from Deuteronomy 7 to commit genocide or to eradicate another nation or another religion by force.

we need to see that God's judgment of Canaan is not analogous to the victory of the church or the so-called Christian nations over other nations and religions.

Rather, this analogy ultimately points to the reality of hell and God's final judgment over all sin and all evil and the establishment of his people, not in Palestine nor anywhere on this earth but in a new heaven and a new earth where all sin and all sorrow and all death are eradicated forever.

[35 : 38] So we must see that there is a strong discontinuity. And because of this discontinuity, one of the other implications of this passage is that the church must repent.

That we must repent for the ways in which in the history of the church we have have in the crusades or in other examples of church-sponsored or inspired or initiated violence, we must repent because that is not an appropriate application of this passage.

On the side of continuity, God still hates and judges sin. And he promises to judge it finally one day. theologian Meredith Klein says that the conquest is an expression of a pattern of judgment that will be finally fully realized in the future coming of God's kingdom and earth.

That is, what God did to the Canaanites is a preview that ought to make us tremble before a holy God. not only is that a continuity, but God is committed to raising up a people to be his own people, a people set apart for him, to live such distinct lives that those around them may glorify God because of it.

This is the church. And this is what we are called to be. God's people set apart. What does this look like? In closing, I have three points, three brief applications of what would it look like for us to be a people set apart in obedience to this passage.

[37 : 26] Firstly, we are to live, I believe, as aliens and strangers in the world. In the book of 1 Peter, which I quoted before, recalling how the church was called God's chosen people, his treasured possession, a holy people for God.

Right after that verse, he goes on and he says, Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles, that is, those who don't know God, honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

We must recognize that for us to be a people separate from the world so that we can be holy to God means that we will never truly fit in this world.

We will never be totally comfortable because we are called to love God more than anything, and that is at odds with the world that we live in.

What might this look like? What might a radical commitment to God and being holy for him look like? I urge you this morning, consider this.

[38 : 43] Be radical in your battle against idolatry and unrighteousness. As Jesus said, if your eye offends you, pluck it out. If your hand offends you, cut it off. If your various forms of entertainment arouse a lust for pleasure, power, or money in your heart, stop watching.

Stop engaging in those forms of entertainment. Cut them out. If your career ambitions arouse in you an ungentle spirit, a lack of love for your family, a workaholism, reshape your career investments.

If your tendency to gossip with a friend is unrestrained, address it, even if it means that you have to stop talking with them, or if you will only talk with them about the scriptures and the Lord.

If your schedule does not allow you time to be in God's word regularly, schedule time for it. Make it as inviolable as an appointment with your boss.

If you are unable to do your job with integrity, a clean conscience, and transparency before the Lord and before the law of the land. And change your work situation rather than corrupt your soul.

[40 : 09] My friends, these are all pictures. These are all possible applications of what it might look like to be radically committed to, as 1 Peter said, to be holy as God is holy.

My second application is the pinnacle, I think, of all of this, which is that above all, we are to put on love. Jesus said that in this world we will be known by the love that we have for one another.

And strikingly, in another place, he says that we are especially to love our enemies. enemies. Jesus says we are to reframe how we think about those who oppose God.

He says, you've heard it said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

How are we to be a people set apart, distinct from the Lord? Lord, try love, loving sacrificially, loving when it costs you something. Try loving your enemies.

[41 : 24] Pray for them. Seek for their good. Do not retaliate when you are slandered, but trust God who judges justly. And finally, look to the cross.

For there God poured out his wrath, his just anger, and his punishment for sin, not upon the Canaanites and not on us, but he poured it out on his son.

God is so committed to his justice and so committed to his covenant love for his people, despite our sin and our rebellion.

That he sent his son to take our place. That he offered up himself. He said, I will take the wrath upon myself so that I might love and be gracious to my people, so that I might forgive them of their sin and make them ours.

And so I plead with you this morning, run to the shadow of the cross. Find there the refuge from the wrath of God against sin.

[42 : 45] Because Jesus has died for us that we might be a people for God. Not a political nation state, but a people who have been changed from the inside out by the good news of the gospel of grace.

A people who display the character of their God by the way they live in and live out this gospel of grace every day. Let's pray.

Lord, we confess this morning that there is nothing lovely in us.

Lord, there is nothing righteous in us. There is nothing that would deserve your gracious love. Lord, if we asked you for what we would deserve, we would be under your wrath and your judgment.

Amazing love, how can it be that you, my God, would die for me? God, may we embrace this this morning. May we run to the cross and find, Lord, that you have satisfied your wrath that you might show us forgiveness and love and make us your people.

[44 : 16] Thank you, Lord. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. As the worship team comes forward, we will respond by lifting our voices to praise.

I want to acknowledge there may be some of you this morning who are still wrestling with some of what we have talked about, and that's okay. If you need to just sit and meditate rather than pretending to sing a song of praise when you can't with integrity, that's all right.

But I hope that you will continue to consider this God who has been so gracious and loving to us. We pray this, and I pray this will be true. Let's sing.

Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's stand. Let's sing. Let's sing. Let's sing to our desvolder. Let's sing. Cancadre?

Comecadre? Comecadre? Comecadre? Comecadre? Comecadre ooh Let's sing.
Comecadre? Comecadre. Comecadre? Comecadre? Pick a DIBND Comecadre I wichtige Für smellcadre?