

God Commands Israel to Drive Out the Canaanites

Deuteronomy 7

Deuteronomy 7:1-5 - *“When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, ² and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. ³ Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. ⁴ For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. ⁵ But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire.”*

Background Notes

Deuteronomy 7 is a continuation of the second sermon that Moses gave to the children of Israel on the plains of Moab, as they prepared to cross the Jordan River and possess the Land that God had given them. God had already given this land to Abraham and his descendants, but his descendants had not been living in the land since the time of Joseph. They had been living in slavery in Egypt, but now they were coming to claim what was theirs by divine right. God was leading them back to their Promised Land.

To this day, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have a divine right to the land of Israel because God, the owner of everything, gave it to them. The present Jewish people are not “occupiers” of land that does not belong to them. And by the way, the present day Palestinian people are not the descendants of the ancient Canaanites (or other ancient inhabitants of the land). These nations were all wiped out at the time of the conquest. So no people group in existence today has a prior claim to the land of Israel - other than the Jewish people. They have more right to having their homes in that land than Americans do, to having our homes on land that was taken away from the Native Americans. We are more occupiers of land in America than Israel ever was.

Israel has a divine right to the Land as well as the prior claim to the land. The Bible makes it very clear that blessing will flow out to non-Jews in the land as well as but it will be through accepting the Jewish people, not through eliminating the Jewish people.

Doctrinal Points

1. Israel's conquest of Canaan brought God's judgment on the Canaanite people.

Seven different nations lived in the land of Canaan at that time (v1). They were all greater and stronger than Israel - but God promised to help His people to utterly destroy these nations! Israel was not to make covenants with them or intermarry with them, but utterly destroy them.

Why would God command His people to do that? Why not just live and let live? Why utterly destroy all of them? There are a couple of good reasons:

a. They were wicked pagan peoples. Archaeologists have discovered that these Canaanite nations were one of the most idolatrous and immoral pagans of the ancient world (see Deuteronomy 9:4-5). God had given these Canaanite nations hundreds of years to repent while the Israelites were in bondage in Egypt, but they would not repent. Now the axe of judgment was about to fall. God was about to use Israel as His "axe" to cut down and remove the wicked practices that were rampant throughout the land.

We may not like to think that God commanded the utter destruction of all the Canaanites. It is certainly not a pleasant thought. But God is holy, and so He must judge wickedness. In the long run, it is better from all perspectives when wickedness is removed, even if its removal is ruthless. The removal of "little Canaanites" before they grew up to be idol-worshipping big Canaanites was actually the grace of God in action for the Canaanite children.

b. God didn't want His people to be contaminated with the idolatry and immorality of these wicked people. Intermarriage would surely result in idolatry and immorality making its way into Israel. And that's exactly what happened when Israel failed to utterly destroy and remove the pagan nations from the Land.

God had good reasons for His judgment of these wicked people. Israel's conquest of Canaan brought God's judgment on the Canaanite people.

2. Israel's conquest of Canaan brought God's blessing on His chosen people.

Deuteronomy 7:6-24 - *"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. ⁷ The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; ⁸ but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe*

them. ¹² “Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. ¹³ And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you. ¹⁴ You shall be blessed above all peoples; there shall not be a male or female barren among you or among your livestock. ¹⁵ And the Lord will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay them on all those who hate you.” Also you shall destroy all the peoples whom the Lord your God delivers over to you; your eye shall have no pity on them; nor shall you serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you. ¹⁷ “If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’— ¹⁸ you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt: ¹⁹ the great trials which your eyes saw, the signs and the wonders, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out. So shall the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. ²⁰ Moreover the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until those who are left, who hide themselves from you, are destroyed.”

Israel was God's chosen people - not because they were such great people, but because of God's **sovereign choice**, and because of the **unconditional covenant** He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v6-8). God not only blessed His people by redeeming them out of Egypt, but He promised to bless them with His loving-kindness for a thousand generations - a figurative expression for **unending blessing!** “Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments” (v9).

What a contrast to the Canaanites, who hated God and were about to be destroyed! “He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face” (v10).

In verses 11-14, notice all the blessings that God promised to His chosen people if they would just follow and obey the Lord. God promised to bless their families, their land, their flocks, and their herds.

God promised that His people would be preserved from the harmful diseases of Egypt: “And the Lord will take away from you all sickness, and will afflict you with none of the terrible diseases of Egypt which you have known, but will lay them on all those who hate you.” By the way - on our recent Bible Lands study tour, some of our group got sick from drinking the water in Egypt. Is that a contradiction to this verse? No! The promise in verse 15 was made to ancient Israel - not to Christians in the Church today!

In verses 16-19, the blessing of an undefeated conquest was promised to Israel **if they would trust the Lord completely**. The hornets (v20) should probably be taken literally. God can certainly use His creatures, including insects, to accomplish His purposes. God said that He would strategically drive the enemies out little by little: “And the Lord your

God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you”(v22). God can use the same principle in spiritual warfare in our lives today. Some problems are best handled little by little - gradually.

God would even use confusion within the ranks of the enemy to defeat them. Verses 23-24 (from the New American Standard Translation): *“But the Lord your God shall deliver them before you and will throw them into great confusion until they are destroyed. And He will deliver the kings into your hands so that you shall make their name perish from under heaven. No man will be able to stand before you until you have destroyed them.”* The story of Gideon and the defeat of the Midianites in Judges 7 is certainly an illustration of this promise. In spiritual warfare today, can the Lord send confusion into the ranks of the opposition, whether the opposition is human or demonic? You know the answer. Of course God can do that!

Israel’s conquest of Canaan brought God’s blessing on His chosen people.

Practical Application

Don’t play with fire!

Deuteronomy 7:25-26 - *“You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. ²⁶ Nor shall you bring an abomination into your house, lest you be doomed to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest it and utterly abhor it, for it is an accursed thing.”*

In verses 25-26 God warned that Israel was to burn all idols and images and occult objects. They were not to keep them as souvenirs or sell them to museums. They were to burn them. Why? They were to be utterly destroyed because these images were an abomination to the Lord. In addition, there was a risk that the people could become ensnared in idolatry. They were not to play with fire, or they would be burned!

Neither should we play with fire. It’s dangerous. We must be ruthless in removing anything in our lives that begins to take over our hearts, and gradually erodes our commitment to the Lord. Idols come in various shapes and sizes and variety.

Don’t play with fire!