

Deuteronomy 7:1-6  
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When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites [descendants of Ham; Gen 10:6] and the Perizzites [Gen 13:7; 34:30] and the Hivites and the Jebusites [who lived in the hill country near Jerusalem; Num 13:29; 2 Sam 5:6], seven nations greater and stronger than you [humanly speaking],<sup>2</sup> and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them [divinely speaking], then you shall utterly destroy them [חָרַם *charam* – devote to extermination]. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them [the time for grace had ended [cf. Gen 15:16] and their wickedness required judgment].<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them [a temptation which would violate God's command]; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.<sup>4</sup> For they will turn your sons away from following Me [as Israel's Ruler] to serve other gods [a treasonous act]; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you [i.e., God would judge Israel as He was judging the Canaanites].<sup>5</sup> But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars [which were regarded as tables of worship], and smash their *sacred* pillars [stone images of idols; cf. Ex 23:24; 34:13; Deut 12:3], and hew down their Asherim [wooden poles representing the Canaanite fertility goddess; Deut 12:3; 16:21], and burn their graven images with fire [i.e., purify the land and remove temptation].<sup>6</sup> For you are a holy people to the LORD your God [to be righteous and set apart from the nations]; the LORD your God has chosen you [elected to purpose] to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

**Summary:**

In this pericope, Moses tells his people that God would bring them into the land of Canaan and they were to annihilate all the inhabitants and show them no grace (Deut 7:1-2), and avoid the temptation to intermarry (Deut 7:3), which would lead Israel into idolatry (Deut 7:4). After defeating their enemies, Israel was to destroy all their places and symbols of worship (Deut 7:5), for God had selected His people to be set apart for holiness (Deut 7:6).

Moses opens his instruction with the promise that God would bring His people into the land of Canaan to possess it (Deut 7:1a), and would clear away “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 stronger

than you” (Deut 7:1b). Going into the land of Canaan was a collaboration in which God would lead them into battle and Israel would follow and serve as His instrument of judgment. The number seven in Scripture represents completeness, and the idea of listing seven nations was to reveal that Israel would face a full set of adversaries. It appears many of the residents listed are descendants of Canaan (Gen 10:15-19). Thomas Constable writes: “Moses mentioned seven nations that resided in Canaan here (v. 1), but as many as 10 appear in other passages (cf. Gen 15:19–22; Ex 34:11; Num 13:28–29; Judg 3:5). Perhaps Moses named seven here for rhetorical purposes seven being a number that indicates completion or fullness.”<sup>1</sup>

Moses then states, “and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them” (Deut 7:2). The reference to Canaan’s “utter destruction” derives from the Hebrew חָרַם *charam*, which here means the residents of the region were to be *devoted to extermination*. Here was a divine pronouncement of guilt upon a people and culture that had become extremely corrupt. God had been gracious to the Canaanite people for four hundred years (Gen 15:14-16), giving them ample time to turn from their sin. Though God is very gracious and slow to anger (Psa 145:8-9), the time for grace had ended and their guilt required judgment (Gen 15:16; Lev 18:24-30; Deut 9:1-5). As mentioned from a previous lesson, the Canaanites were by no means a sweet and lovely people who spent their days painting rainbows on rocks and playing with butterflies. Rather, they were antitheocratic and hostile to God and His people and comprised the most depraved culture in the world at that time. For centuries the Canaanites practiced gross sexual immorality, which included all forms of incest (Lev 18:1-20; 20:10-12, 14, 17, 19-21), homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13), and sex with animals (Lev 18:23; 20:15-16). They also engaged in the occult (Lev 20:6), were hostile toward parents (Lev 20:9), and offered their children as sacrifices to Molech (Lev 18:21; 20:1-5; cf. Deut 12:31; 18:10); much like modern day America. God told His people, “you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them” (Lev 20:23).

A similar command follows, as Moses states, “Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons” (Deut 7:3). Apparently, Moses knew there would be a temptation among the Israelites to take some of the Canaanite women as wives; and likely some of their sons and daughters faced this temptation as well. But God forbid

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 7:1.

it, saying, “For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods” (Deut 7:4a). God was Israel’s Ruler, and the danger of serving other gods was tantamount to treason. Such action would upset their relationship with God, and Moses said, “then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you” (Deut 7:4). If the Israelites became like the pagan Canaanites in their idolatry, values, and behavior, then God would treat them with the same judgment. Eugene Merrill comments:

This drastic action was taken as a form of immediate divine judgment upon those who had sinned away their day of grace (cf. Gen 15:16; Lev 18:24–30). It also was to preclude their wicked influence on God’s covenant people who would otherwise tend to make covenant and intermarry with them (Deut 7:3) and adopt their idolatry (v. 4), something that, in fact, did take place because of Israel’s failure to obey the *hērem* decree.<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, we know historically that Israel failed to obey the Lord (see the book of Judges), and the immoral culture spread among God’s people, who themselves began to practice all the evil things God hates (Deut 12:31), including idolatry and child sacrifice (2 Ki 3:27; 16:3; Psa 106:37-38; Isa 57:5; Jer 7:31; 19:5; 32:35; Ezek 16:20-21). Because Israel eventually became corrupt, God destroyed and expelled them from the land by means of military defeat from their enemies. This happened when the ten northern tribes of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC and the two southern tribes of Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC.

Not only was Israel to defeat their enemies, they were to remove the vestiges of their pagan culture from the land, lest it became a temptation to them. Moses said, “But thus you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, and smash their *sacred* pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire” (Deut 7:5). Eugene Merrill states:

The “sacred stones” represented the male procreative aspect of the Canaanite fertility religion; and the Asherah, the female. Asherah was also the name of the mother goddess of the Canaanite pantheon, the deity responsible for fertility and the productivity of soil, animals, and humankind. She was represented by either an evergreen tree or by a pole that also spoke of perpetual life. The cult carried on in their name was of the most sensual and sordid type, one practiced in the temples and also under the open sky at high

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 179–180.

places and in groves of trees. Prominent in its services was sacred prostitution involving priests and priestesses who represented the male and female deities.<sup>3</sup>

Moses then concludes this pericope, saying, “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). To be holy meant the nation was to be set apart to the Lord and be distinct from the pagan cultures around them. Israel was a chosen people with a special calling, and this required they know God and walk with Him, for they were His own possession. Jack Deere comments:

The basis for the command to destroy the Canaanites lay in God’s election of Israel. The word translated chosen means “to be chosen for a task or a vocation.” God had selected Israel as His means of sanctifying the earth. Thus, they were holy (set apart for God’s special use) and were His treasured possession (cf. Deut 14:2; 26:18; Psa 135:4; Mal 3:17). Since the Canaanites were polluting the earth, and since they might endanger Israel’s complete subordination to the will of the Lord, they either had to repent or be eliminated. And as stated, for 400 years they had refused to repent.<sup>4</sup>

God always calls His people to holy living, which means we are to be set apart for service to Him. It means conforming our lives to His righteous standards of thinking, speaking, and living. By living as God expects, we will not conform to the values and practices of whatever culture we live in. In contrast, we will call for others to know the Lord as well and, once saved, to conform their lives to Him, that they too might walk as children of light. As Christians, God “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him” (Eph 1:4; cf. 1 Pet 1:15-16). This means we are to “lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph 4:22-24). As we learn to walk with God, we will manifest the virtues of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control” (Gal 5:22-23).

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>4</sup> Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 276.