



St. Swithun's House groups

Deuteronomy 7

**You are a people holy to the
Lord your God**

Undoubtedly this is a challenging chapter, containing some hard teaching. However, when placed in its proper historical and biblical context, it yields precious and important truths and challenges.

Analysis of the passage

The same pattern occurs three times, in vv.1-6, 12-16 and 17-26:
grace received; a command to follow; the reason for the command.

vv.1-6

Grace received: vv.1-2a

Note the emphasis on God's initiative in driving out the nations.

A command to follow: vv.2b-5

Note: the Hebrew phrase translated 'destroy totally' is a technical phrase used in relation to the conduct of wars sanctioned by Yahweh. Its meaning is closer to 'renounce utterly'. Whilst, clearly, this involved killing, it does not appear to have meant the total destruction of every life, as vv.2c-4 make clear. The burden of vv.2b-5 is the command to Israel to remain totally distinct: politically, socially, religiously.

The reason for the command: v.6

Israel is to remain utterly distinct precisely because Yahweh has chosen them to be utterly distinct as his 'treasured possession'.

vv.12-16

Grace received: vv.12:15

A command to follow: v.16a and b

The reason for the command: v.16c

Notice the emphasis on religious purity.

The need to be distinct is implicit.

vv.17-26

Grace received: vv.17-24

The memory of grace received in the past (vv.18-19a) is to strengthen their confidence in grace for the future (v.17 and vv.19b-24)

A command to follow: vv.25-26

The reason for the command: vv.25-26

Again, notice the emphasis on religious purity and the implicit call to be distinct.

Summary

The message of the chapter is that Israel has been specially chosen and set apart by God and so should live accordingly - distinctive, obedient, God-centred lives.

vv.7-11 The basis of this call and command

i) The basis of Israel's call

v.7 Negatively, what the basis of Israel's call was not - Israel's superiority.

v.8 Positively, what the basis of Israel's call was - Yahweh's faithfulness.

v.9 The basis of Israel's call lies in the character of Yahweh: extravagantly faithful

(1000 generations is more than the whole of human history so far!)

ii) The basis of Israel's command

(to 'destroy them totally', v.2)

vv.9-10

v.10 God is holy and just and will destroy his enemies (cf. Dt. 5:9)

The justice of this judgment of the Canaanite nations: Genesis 15:16; Dt. 9:4-5

v.9 God is faithful and will keep his promises.
God's promise is that through Israel he will bring blessing to the whole world. Cf. Genesis 12:1-3
If the Canaanites defeat Israel or if Israel becomes absorbed into their way of life, they will not be able to fulfil their role of bringing blessing to the world.

Summary

Thus God's judgment of the Canaanites is an expression *both* of his holy justice towards those who choose to oppose him *and* of his glorious faithfulness to his commitment to bring blessing to *all* the nations.

Application

As Christians, we have been the recipients of God's grace. Complete separation is no longer necessary because since Jesus has come God's people are no longer one ethnic group but a worldwide community, and our homeland is no longer a place on earth but heaven itself.

God's enemies will still be destroyed but this will be on the last day and by God himself.

In the meantime, we are called by God to love our enemies and to bear witness to them to God, his purposes and his ways in the hope that they will turn to him.

We are to do this by telling them of God's grace and by living clearly distinctive lives in the community.

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Questions for Groups

1. Why did God choose Israel? Cf. vv.7-8
Why did he choose Christians?
- 2 What is the essence of the way in which Israel is to respond?

3. Why is this so important?

(Try and use what you know of the Bible's bigger picture to answer this. Cf. Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-6)

4. God commanded Israel to drive out the Canaanites and utterly renounce everything connected with them. From vv. 8-10, how does this command reflect (i) God's holiness and (ii) his justice?

(Try and also use what you know of the Bible's bigger picture to answer this.)

5. How would you answer someone who says, 'The God of the OT is a God of judgment; the God of the NT is a God of love.'? Has God changed? Cf. 2 Peter 3:3-10

6. Why are Christians neither to kill non-Christians nor to be completely separate from them?

(Cf. Ephesians 2:14-18; Romans 12:19)

7. How does the NT apply the language and ideas of Deut. 7? Cf. Colossians 3:5ff.

8. How are Christians to live among non-Christians?

(Cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 1 John 5:21 and any other verses)

9. Why is this so important? (Cf. Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12)

10. How can we do it better? Be as specific as you can.

11. What is the main thing you think this passage is asking you to put into practice?