

Deuteronomy 7

- **Read** Genesis 15:12-19

Gen15v16

- "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

400 years later the Israelites were on the verge of entering Canaan, the Promised Land

The Israelites having fled Egypt then wandered in the wilderness for 40 years

Moses addressing the Israelite nation in Moab, east of the Jordan, as they prepare to enter Canaan

- **Read** Deuteronomy 7

A challenging passage

Points to draw from it:

1. Addressing the perception of a wrathful God of the Old Testament
2. God's hatred of idolatry
3. A holy people, called to be different (v6)

1. Addressing the perception of a God of anger, wrath and judgement in the Old Testament and a God of grace and mercy in the New Testament

This argument, to some, may best be seen here.

Deut 7 calls for – at best – the displacing of the Canaanites – moving them at force outside of Canaan; at face value, this is God calling for genocide

There is no doubt that this is a shocking chapter.

How does this fit in with the image we have of the God that we worship?

How does this fit in with our understanding of:

- **Matthew 5:** "blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."
- **Luke 23v34:** "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."
- **John 3v15-16:** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

How does this passage fit in with our understanding of God?

Three possibilities:

1. God is fickle and His nature and his character does change thru the Bible
2. The Bible is inaccurate in its portrayal of God; Bible writers misinterpreted God? Perhaps mistranslated?
3. The fault is with us – we fail to correctly understand God as He is correctly depicted in the Bible
That the church has, over time, built up an inaccurate picture of God by focusing too heavily on some passages of Scripture whilst neglecting others (which are of equal value) to their detriment

- The fault is surely with us – in our understanding of scripture.

The God of Israel is not the fickle, unpredictable, unsatisfying, demanding of gods Canaan – an unpredictable pantheon which demanded vile acts of fornication and human sacrifice (see Lev 18).

The Canaanite pantheon had no moral character whatsoever and brought out the worst traits in their devotees, including debasing practices such as sacred prostitution and child sacrifice

Unlike this, the true God – the God of Israel – is moral, stable, reliable, constant and just

Throughout the Bible, we see a God who is at all times both a God of anger and wrath, justly judging sin and disobedience and a God of grace and mercy towards His wholly undeserving yet forgiven people.

Like both sides of one coin – both heads and tails but one coin

We see this throughout the Bible:

<u>Wrath & Judgement</u>	<u>Grace & Mercy</u>
Flood	Noah (Gen 6-8)
Sodom	Lot (Gen 19)
Canaanites	Israelites
Goats	Sheep (Matt 25v31-46)
Weeds	Wheat (Matt 13v24-30)
Damned	Saved (Rev 20-21)

Grace & mercy are shown to people who do not by any logical rights deserve it.

We can see it in the people Jesus chose to be his apostles:

- 'The Sons of Thunder', **James** and **John**
- **Peter** and his anger issues
- The social traitor, **Matthew**
- The revolutionary zealot, **Simon**
- **Saul**, the vigorous accuser of the early church, becomes **Paul** – Christ's missionary apostle to the early church

None of these people by any right deserve God's grace and mercy, yet they receive it all the same.

And we see the same undeserving grace and mercy here:

Deut 7:7-8:

- The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Grace & mercy are shown to a people who do not by any logical rights deserve it.

They are 'undeservedly redeemed' – another word for this is grace!

Grace & mercy are shown to us who do not by rights deserve it!

One thing is for sure:

- God does not change...

Deut 6:4-5

- Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Mal 3v6

- "I the LORD do not change."

Heb 13:8

- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

As we saw earlier,

400 years before Deuteronomy:

Gen 15v12-19 – God to Abram: 'the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure'

When the Amorites sin had reached its full measure, the Israelites would be God's tool to punish Canaan for its sin and to purify the land

- In the time of Noah, God used floodwaters to punish the Earth and wash it of its wickedness
- In the time of Abraham, God used fire to purge Sodom and Gomorrah and obliterate its great and grievous sin
- During the conquest of Canaan God used the Israelites – for the Sin of the Amorites had now reached its full measure – it was God's chosen time to take the land
- And later God would use the Assyrians to exile the idolatrous Northern Kingdom of Israel, and Babylon to exile the idolatrous southern kingdom of Judah (both were worshipping the same idols and false gods for which the Canaanites are judged here)

The Conquest of Canaan should be understood in the context of the history of redemption unfolding in the Pentateuch, with its interplay of divine grace and judgement. It is the story of how God – to whom the whole world belongs – at one stage in the history of redemption reconquered a portion of the Earth from the powers of this world that had claimed it for its own, and would seek defend their claim by force of arms and reliance on their

false gods. Thus the Conquest of Canaan was both an act of redemption (for Israel) and of judgement (for Canaan). The Promised Land was for the people who acknowledged and serve the Lord.

God warns the Israelites:

Remember:

Deut 9:5-6

- It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this is a challenging passage for us.

Lastly, I might be wrong in my understanding of this! But for certain, God does know what He is doing!

Who are we to question God?

Isaiah 55:8

- “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways”, declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Thankfully, we worship a God of wrath and mercy, of justice and judgement – and of grace and mercy to us, His undeserving but wholly forgiven, embraced and glorified church.

As Abraham said of God whilst pleading for Sodom:

Gen 18:25

- “Will not the judge of the Earth do right?”

Remember:

Mal 3v6

- “I the LORD do not change.”

2. God's hatred of idolatry

Israel was told to completely destroy Canaan

Deut 7:2

- When the LORD your God has delivered them [that is, the Canaanites] over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.

Deut 7:24-26

- He will give their kings into your hand, and you will wipe out their names from under heaven. No one will be able to stand up against you; you will destroy them.²⁵ The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the LORD your God.²⁶ Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Regard it as vile and utterly detest it, for it is set apart for destruction.

What did Israel look like after the conquest?

- **Show** – Map of conquered Canaan – much of it left unconquered

Israel didn't do the job God instructed them to do!

Northern Canaanites stayed in place and pretty quickly Israel succumbed to the Canaanites Baal idolatry

What did God command the Israelites to do?

Deut 7:16

- You must destroy all the peoples the LORD your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you.

Two possible reasons for God calling for the driving out of Canaanites?

1. To punish Canaan's sin (see Gen 15 & Lev 18)
2. Because God knew the attractive power of idolatry to the Israelites
(However, 'His ways are not our ways...' Of course there may be another divine reason unknown to man)

God is no fool!

God recognises mankind's attraction to idolatry – to following false gods

Entry into Canaan: what all started so well (a miraculous invasion: a ragtag nomadic militia defeating well positioned, better trained, better armed cities) ended disastrously for the nation. After a single generation one could see little difference between the Israelites and the Canaanites. (see the entire Book of Judges)

It's astonishing!

That, after witnessing the miraculous power of God in the Exodus, through the wanderings in the wilderness and the conquest (or at least partial conquest) of Canaan, the Israelites should come to follow the idolatry of Canaan.

Yet how different are we when, after witnessing the power of Almighty God in our own lives, to then get drawn away to following other 'gods'?

How attractive must Canaanite idolatry have been for Israel – who had so recently seen miraculous power of God – to have been drawn into their vile religion?

(What we know of Canaanite religion was particularly unpleasant)

How easily we drawn into embracing attractive idolatry, despite the fact that we have experienced the miraculous power of God?

What are our idols today? What monopolises our lives?

- Work, fame, money, popularity, car, spouse, children, family? Something else – something more normal?
- Films, some geeky collection, football?

What takes the supreme position of God in our lives?

Our God will not be shared!

If Israel had done as God commanded they would not have been drawn into Canaanite idolatry. They would have stayed worshipping God and – following the covenant promises of God – would have stayed blessed!

How different would Israel have been had they obeyed God and purged Canaan of the idolatrous Canaanites and their vile Baal worship?

- A holy people are called to be different!

Following God, the Israelites were something special – a Godly people, a light to the nations, powerful, successful in battle and blessed

When not following God – when idolatrous – the Israelites were truly awful. No different to the evil Canaanites; if anything they were worse!

God called for the Israelites to purge Canaan of its idolatrous people, yet God knew they would not purge Canaan and that they would too fall into idolatry.

God knew best! Despite how shocking the command was. How different would Israel have been had they obeyed God and driven out the Canaanite peoples?

So...

3. A holy people: followers of God are called to be different (v6)

Deut 7:6

- For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

A holy people: Israelites were called to be different (v6) in a land of sin

A beacon of light in the surrounding darkness

And in exactly the same way, we are called to be different in a land of sin

Final questions:

- Are we holy people?
- Are we different?
- Or are we like the Canaanites, blending into Canaan, trying to be both followers of God and practitioners of some popular, modern, normal idolatry, naively trying to share an unshareable God with the trappings of this world?

Finish with:

1 Peter 2:9-12

- You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Map of the Promised Land after the conquest of Canaan:

