

Test of Faith from the Outside  
Deuteronomy 7

Turn to Deuteronomy 7 please. Moses preached what we read in Deut 7 because he was worried. He was worried that when Israel entered Canaan, the promised land, Israel would turn away from the LORD and start worshipping the gods of the Canaanites.

Moses was sure that if the Israelites became friends with the Canaanite people, they would serve those gods, and follow those gods, not the LORD their God. We think it is bad to be **too** separate from the world, **too** insulated from the world. We don't want to protect ourselves from the world **too** much. Moses, for his part, does not seem worried about that.

Destroy the People and Destroy their Gods – Deut 7:1-5.

*When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—<sup>2</sup> and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. <sup>3</sup> Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, <sup>4</sup> for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. <sup>5</sup> This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire.*

Moses repeats this in 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.*

“Destroy” means kill men, women, and children, leave no survivors (Deut 2:34). What is the motive? What reason does Moses give? God says: These nations and their gods will turn you away from following me to serve other gods, they and their gods will be a snare to you, and you will turn away from me. Also in 7:25 – you will be snared by them.

How can God Command Israel to Leave No Survivors?

In Matthew 5 Jesus says we should love our enemy. Is that not what God really wants? How can God command this total destruction of people?

1, First of all, every believer should have an imaginary box in their mind that says on it, “things about God I do not like.” Just call it what it is. You can keep trusting and obeying God and have the box. Tell him you have that imaginary box in your mind, and tell him what's in it.

It will not trouble God, as long as you still trust him and obey him. If you do NOT have a box like this, or something like it, you will simply be making God in your own image. God will be just like you only bigger. That might feel better, but it is actually worse.

2, Five hundred years earlier, God told Abraham that his descendants were going to be mistreated and enslaved in Egypt for 400 years, “because the sins of the Amorites were not yet full.” Five hundred years earlier God was distressed by how these people were living, but he was still giving them a chance. (Gen 15:16)

Part of the reason Israelites were stuck in Egypt so long was that God had not yet gotten to the point where he could not stand Canaanite sin one more year. These Canaanites / Amorites had chances from God; and God will have been calling them in some way.

These were not good people. They practiced every kind of sexual deviation, including different kinds of incest. All the towns had walls, so war was regular. They offered their own children as sacrifices.

3, Leaving no survivors did not actually happen very often, 6 battles in all. Two of them already occurred, recorded in Deuteronomy 2-3, and four more towns: Jericho, Ai, Hazor, and Laish (Joshua 6:24; 8:18; 11:13-14; 19:47; Judges 18:27). So it was the exception not the norm, when it came to actual practise. (And in Deut 2-3, they first offered peace – Deut 2:26f.)

And the book of Joshua says repeatedly that Joshua did everything God had spoken through Moses, so we can't say that Joshua failed to carry out what Moses commanded. In Deuteronomy 7 it sounds like there should never be any survivors, but normally there were.

4, We should probably assume sadness on God's part. In Isaiah it says of God's judgment that God “will rouse himself to do his work, his strange work, to perform his task, his alien task.” Judgement is God's strange work, his alien task. It never comes naturally to God. (Isa 28:21)

And Ezekiel says several times that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they would repent and live (18:23,32; 33:11; Lam 3:33). God certainly knew this judgement to be necessary, and right, but he did not enjoy it.

5, This is not the whole story in Deuteronomy. Other places in Deuteronomy give quite a different flavour. Deut 20 gives rules for warfare, and says that Israel should always offer peace, and if they accept peace then make labourers of them.

And Deut 10:18-19 – *The LORD your God defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.*<sup>19</sup> *And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.*

I don't know how to put these different Deuteronomy texts together, and nor does anyone else. But the OT did NOT consistently tell them to leave no survivors, and in practise it happened only rarely, thought it did happen.

6, “Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you,” says Jesus in Matthew 5, but that's not the whole story in Matthew, either. In the same chapter of Matthew, Jesus says if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away, because that's better than being thrown into hell.

Elsewhere in Matthew Jesus speaks people thrown into the furnace of fire, or into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels, and weeping and gnashing of teeth. Out of Jesus' own mouth, there is severe eternal punishment for those who reject God.

So don't make harsh judgement an OT problem, or contrast the hard God of the OT with the kind God of Jesus. There is kindness and severity in both Testaments. God is **always** ready to forgive those who turn to him, and there are **always** severe consequences for those who refuse.

Back to Deut 7:1-5 – Destroy these nations, and destroy their gods, so you won't be turned away from God by them, so you won't be snared by their gods.

The reason Moses gives Israel next is the strongest statement of God's love for Israel that we find in Deuteronomy. So we'll go through the next verses carefully. The reason that Israel at all costs must not be turned away from God is that they belong to God and God loves them.

Love and Holy: What does it mean to be "holy" - <sup>6</sup> *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.*

We tend to think of "holy" as really clean, really pure, but that is not what it means. "Holy" always goes along with two other ideas. One is to separate. If you have three golden bowls, family treasures, and you want to give one to God, the first thing you do is *separate* that bowl from the other two.

The other is ownership, or possession. You give it to God, so that God now owns the bowl, it is his possession. Once you have separated the bowl from the other two, and given it to God so that it's his possession, then the bowl is holy, completely holy.

A thing is "holy" when it has been separated (or we could say "selected" or "chosen") from others, and then ownership changes so that now God is the owner. At that point it is holy.

Now let's read Deut 7:6 again. *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**.*

You, Israel, are a holy people. What does that mean? One, the LORD chose you out of all peoples on earth. "Chose" means selected or separated. In his mind, God separated Israel from other nations. That's step one. Step two, to be HIS people, HIS treasured possession. That's ownership.

Holy does not mean more clean or pure or righteous, not at the core. It means belonging to God in a special way. It is another way of saying "loved."

NT writers called Christians "saints" – that means "holy ones." "Holy" and "saint" come from the same word in Greek. NT writers call us "Christians" just a couple times. Twelve times NT writings call us "believers." But sixty times NT writings call us "saints" or "holy ones."

For some reason we don't like that word, but in the early churches it was a favorite. NT believers are saints, holy ones. That does not mean at its core that we're pure. It means that God chose US out of the rest, and we're HIS. God chose US out of the rest, and we're HIS.

The early Christians liked that, and outside of "brothers and sisters," "saints" was their favorite way of describing themselves.

Let's read the whole section now, Deut 7:6-13a

*<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. <sup>10</sup> But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction;*

*he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him.*

*<sup>11</sup> Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today.*

*<sup>12</sup> If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors. <sup>13</sup> He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers.*

There are three words for "love" in this text. The one in v7 means to cling to, or embrace. The NIV calls it "set his affection" on you, some translations say "set his heart on you," some just say "loves you."

V8 uses the common word for love, as in God to Abraham, "take your son Isaac, your only son, whom you LOVE" or "Jacob worked 7 years for Rachel and it was like one day because he LOVED her." This is in v8 and v13.

The third word is *hesed*, which means loyal love, faithful love. It has in mind a relationship like a family relationship, or a marriage, where people should be loyal and faithful to each other. *Hesed* is God's loyal kindness, his faithful kindness, which goes on and on. This is in v9 and v12.

I am going to read this again, and you understand this as God speaking to us who are listening to this right now, all who have put their trust in Jesus God's Son.

*<sup>6</sup> For you, here, now, 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. <sup>7</sup> The LORD did not set his affection on you, he did not embrace you, and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. <sup>8</sup> 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 sin and of*

death. <sup>9</sup> Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love, his loyal kindness, to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. <sup>10</sup> But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction;

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We love him because he first loved us. That's in 1 John, but it comes right out of Deuteronomy.

And this is why it is so important that we do not follow the gods of the world around us. We belong to God, he loves us, he chose us, he rescued us, he made us his treasured possession. We are his treasure.

Twenty-five times in the OT it says that God's people are his *inheritance*. Think of that. We are his treasure, his inheritance. There is absolutely nothing casual about God's love for us.

He has embraced us. He chose us. We are his treasure. He keeps old promises to be good to us. He bought us out of slavery, and it cost him the life of His Son to do this. He is the faithful God. He keeps his covenant love, his loyal kindness for a thousand generations, never gets tired of it, never drifts away, to those who love him and obey him.

But, if after all this, we drift away to some other god, our God is a consuming fire. Don't do that. If you think this is just an OT idea, read Hebrews. The whole of Hebrews in the NT makes just this argument to NT believers who were drifting away from Christ.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 6. Paul writes to the Gentile saints in Corinth in a way quite similar to what we've been reading in Deuteronomy 7.

But note that the strongest call in Deuteronomy to not be snared by the world comes right beside the strongest statement of God's love for his people. We are separate from the world because of how much God loves us. You can find that also in 2 Corinthians 6.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 - *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? <sup>15</sup> What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God.*

*As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

<sup>17</sup> *Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."*

<sup>18</sup> *And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*

*7:1 Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

What does it mean to be yoked together with unbelievers? I can think of three things: close friends, marriage, and business partners. Don't get into a position in which you are tied to a person that does not belong to God.

We would like to fit into the world as much as possible, it seems to me. Maybe we're reacting against saints who insulate themselves from the world, or are afraid of the world. The Bible does not tell us to be afraid of the world, or to insulate ourselves. But the Bible is not encouraging us to fit in, either.

In my younger days, when I had a girlfriend and was seeing her regularly, it happened to me more than once that my girlfriend left me for another young man, or at least did some serious flirting with someone else while our relationship was going on. Just to be clear, it was never Marilyn.

That is a special kind of pain, it seems to me. Those kind of relationships have different misunderstandings and troubles, but when the person you love takes up with someone else, that is a deeper cut. It is awful.

That's what God is talking about here. That's why Moses calls us away from the world on the basis of God's great love for us. We are in that kind of love relationship with God. God puts up with different shortcomings of his people. But when his people move to a different god, they put their trust in a different god, they worship and serve a different God, it is a BIG problem.

Through this Scripture, God wants to stir us up in two ways.

One, worship the true God and his Son Jesus, do not worship any other gods, do not flirt with other gods. Renew this in yourself. God is urging us to put ourselves in his hands again, to turn to him again with all our heart and soul and strength. **NO OTHER GODS!**

Two, be watchful, be alert, be on guard. It happens easily to God's people, that we get snared by other gods, that we get turned away. Don't be paranoid, don't let it take away the joy of having such a great God as we have. But don't go to sleep. There are lots of Scriptures in the NT that urge us to be watchful, stay alert, don't go to sleep, life is spiritually risky.

Let's resolve together - no other gods. And let's be on guard about this.

And the REASON we do this is: God loves us, and chose us, and embraced us, and he's made us his greatest treasure, and he's made us his inheritance, and he rescued us, and his loyal love lasts for a thousand generations.

And if we love him and obey him, one way or another he will pour out all his goodness to us, he will hold nothing back. The best thing we could possibly do for ourselves is to have no other gods. Amen.