

## God's Chosen People

Deuteronomy 7:1–16

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*“. . . 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. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him. . . .” (7:1–16).*

Moses turns now to the practical matters of how Israel would interpret the first commandment in dealing with the nations in and around Canaan. Chapter 7 calls for the radical treatment of both the people and their religion.

### NO COMPROMISING WITH IDOLATRY (7:1–5, 16)

To avoid identifying the Lord with false gods and combining one religion with another, Israel was to destroy any person or thing that might lead them from God. They were told,

When the Lord your God shall bring you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and shall 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, and when the Lord your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them, and show no favor to them (7:1, 2).

And you shall consume all the peoples whom the

Lord your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you (7:16).

These passages point to a threefold snare if Israel compromised with the Canaanites.

First, there was the threat of corruption from the people of Canaan. Israel was to be the sole occupant of the land. They were to make no covenants with the seven nations listed in verse 1. They would be tempted to become lax or careless in the carrying out of this command. Israel was to show no mercy unto the Canaanites. In the final analysis, the seven nations were destroyed, but not utterly destroyed. This became a snare unto Israel, eventually bringing about their captivity.

Second, there was the threat of intermarriages. Intermarriage was forbidden on the basis that the Israelites might turn away to serve other gods:

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. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you (7:3, 4).

They would have probably argued (like many today), “But we will make Israelites out of them. We will never serve their gods.” But God knew better! It was the marrying of foreign women that led Solomon’s heart away from God to other gods (1 Kings 11:1–4).

The Lord’s warning still applies to every child of God. Too many times, a Christian falls in love with someone outside of Christ. They become engaged, and the arrangements are final-

ized. The happy couple make all the usual decisions: "Who will sing at our wedding? What songs will be sung? Who will be the bridesmaids and groomsmen? Where will we have our honeymoon? What pattern do we want for our tableware?"

Yet in all their preparations, they overlook these penetrating questions of vital importance that need to be asked of every Christian marrying a non-Christian:

"Are you willing to accept the fact that it is highly probable that your mate may never become a Christian?"

"Do you want to place yourself in the position of being unable to share the most important thing in your life with the most important person in your life?"

"Are you prepared to keep on going alone whenever the church meets if your mate refuses to go with you?"

"Will your mate resent your being gone at the times of worship?"

"What about your children? Will they turn out to be strong, faithful Christians when one of their parents is not a Christian?"

"Do you realize that the statistics point out that the chances are slim that you will remain faithful to Christ?"

The Lord's exhortation remains the same; if we want to remain faithful to Him, intermarriage is too great a danger.

Third, the threat of idolatry from the shrines was to be destroyed. Idolatry was to be completely eradicated from the land: "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" (7:5). Moses gave them a four-point plan for the removal of idolatry: (1) break or tear down their altars; (2) smash or dash in pieces their sacred pillars; (3) hew down their Asherim; and (4) burn their graven.

Israel was to destroy all the nations Jehovah delivered unto them: "... your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you" (7:16).

The Hebrew word for "snare" means "bait, lure, bird trap." These bird traps were set with grain scattered around to attract the birds of that area. If they accepted the bribe and walked into the snare, they would be lost, entrapped. Israel

was to avoid such a snare.

## GOD'S OWN POSSESSION

(7:6-8)

The idea that Israel was specially chosen and thereby holy is central in the Hebrew's thinking and is one of the basic presuppositions in Deuteronomy as a whole. The Israelites had been set apart by the Lord for His own purpose.

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. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (7:6-8).

Israel was a "chosen" and "holy" people upon whom God had "set His love." God had chosen them to be His own people out of all the peoples of the earth. They were "holy," set apart, related to God in a way others were not.

Note that God had chosen them; they had not chosen God. Why of all the nations on His earth, did the Lord choose these Hebrews for His special purpose? Why did He not choose Greece, where philosophy flourished and men of giant intellectual stature lived? Why did He not choose a stronger nation with strong statesmen? Why not Egypt, with its scholars, astronomers, and mathematicians? Why not one of the mighty nations with a well-developed culture? Why this band of nomads wandering in a desert, poor in possessions, weak in military power, lacking great scholars and intellectual leaders? Man would never have chosen Israel, for they "were the fewest of all peoples."

Great numbers are not necessary for God to accomplish His purposes. God started with a childless man and woman and built a great nation. Their special role came as a result of God's great love for Israel and His faithfulness to Israel's ancestors (7:8). Though this passage does not say so, God's purpose in calling them was to bless not only Israel but all nations of the earth (Genesis 12:3; Luke 2:29-32). Their special role came as a result of God's great love for Israel and His faithfulness to Israel's ancestors, plus His eter-

nal design in bringing the Messiah into the world.

The choice of Israel was never to make them feel superior to others. God chose Israel before it became a nation. Had the choice been one of the powerful nations, such as the Egyptians or Assyrians, they might have been more tempted to believe that God's choice was because of human greatness or achievement. But Israel was "the fewest of all peoples." Only by God's grace was this insignificant people chosen for God's special task.

Israel had no reason to suppose that as a nation they were inherently better than other peoples. Their only superiority was in their relationship with God, and consequently in their worship and character. Without this they were as inferior as anyone else and as deserving of the destruction in 7:1–5.

A similar standard is appropriate today. God still seeks a people for His own, who glorify Him in worship, and in moral and ethical insights and practice. But such a people will possess humility and know full well that any merit they possess is not from their own inherent goodness but from God. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:26–31).

No nation or people is of itself inferior or superior. When we grasp this truth, we are well on our way to solving and conquering our prejudices. God accepts all men on the same basis.

### **THE LORD IS A FAITHFUL GOD (7:9–11)**

In verses 9 through 11, Moses returned to the essence of the first commandment. In a world of many gods, the Israelites must realize that Yahweh is God, not one of several, but the only

One. He could be depended on because He is faithful. He could not be bribed, nor would He go back on His word.

Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face (7:9, 10).

The sovereignty of God is also repeatedly emphasized in Deuteronomy. Jehovah alone is God. The Lord was not like the idols of the neighboring nations; His support would always be available, and His pattern for living would never change. "The faithful God, who keeps His covenant . . . with those who love Him." The covenant was a mutual agreement. The people promised to obey God's commands, and God promised that if they did this, He would make them a holy nation (Exodus 19:5–8).

At the same time, He would not hesitate to judge and punish those who turned against Him. God is not slack. He will keep both parts of His covenant. His love was combined with righteousness. It was not a halfhearted devotion; it called for obedience. Therefore, Moses called on the people who had accepted God's covenant to live by its requirements and remain loyal to the living God: "Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them" (7:11).

Such a selection by God carried with it special responsibility. God had chosen them to serve Him, to follow Him, and to live by His commands.

### **CONCLUSION**

God's response to Israel's obedience was overwhelming. God would love them (7:13) and bless them (with multiplication of human, animal, and plant life, 7:13, 14). He would heal them and protect them (7:15).

The promise of their being blessed above all people (7:14), was contingent upon their obedience. Our heavenly blessings are contingent upon our obedience to the heavenly Father (Matthew 7:21).