

Deut 7:1-11 No Compromise for Conquerors

The nation of Israel is perched on the east side of the Jordan River, just across from Jericho. They are nearly ready to cross over into the PL and begin the conquest. So Moses wants to tell the people what to do and how to live in the land when they arrive.

As we do when we approach any text of Scripture, we must consider what the original author—Moses—meant and how the original audience—the nation of Israel—would have understood these instructions. Only after we understand what these words originally meant can we begin to consider what they mean to us today.

Some of the commands in this passage apply specifically to the Israelites and not to us. We are not conquering the PL. We have no commands to destroy our enemies and take over their land. We don't use violence to stamp out other religions.

However, many of the principles we see in this passage do have an application to us today. Like the Israelites, we have to be very careful about how we live in this world. The Bible describes us as foreigners and sojourners in this world. We must avoid learning the corrupt habits and false religions of our ungodly neighbors.

This part of the chapter is a warning against the dangers of compromise. Moses' primary concern here is that Israel must not compromise with the nations it's about to conquer—there is No Compromise for Conquerors." Israel must not learn the ways of the heathen. God's people must be radically distinct from other nations. In order to preserve the covenant with God, they must not compromise with the pagan people in the land they are about to conquer.

Likewise, Christians today need to beware of compromise. We must keep our distance from ungodly people and influences in our world. We must avoid unequal yokes and alliances that would lead to spiritual compromise. We must not learn the ways of the heathen. We must be distinct and uncompromising.

How do we live in this sinful, pagan world without compromising? Here is what Moses told the Israelites to do to avoid compromising with a depraved culture.

- I. .1-2 Conquer the nations greater than you.
 - A. Moses mentions seven Canaanite nations that had been in that land for centuries. They had walled cities and valiant soldiers protecting them. Remember that the giants were in that land—the Nephilim, the sons of Anak. These were great and powerful people and cities.

B. .2a Trust God to deliver this land to you.

When the Lord your God brings you into the land and casts out these nations—the assumption is that Israel will conquer these people.

Moses is confident that Israel will go over the Jordan and “cast out many nations.” They will succeed because God will go with them and insure their victory over the Canaanites.

C. .2b God’s intent is that Israel “utterly destroy (חָרַף) them.” The word *herem* means “to ban, devote, completely destroy, dedicate for destruction, exterminate.”

God’s intent is that Israel would exterminate these Canaanite pagans. They are ripe for judgment, and Israel will be the instrument for God’s wrath falling upon them.

Why did these people incur the wrath and judgment of God? Why were they worthy of utter destruction?

Deuteronomy 9:4–5 Do not think in your heart, after the LORD your God has cast them out before you, saying, ‘Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land’; but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out from before you. 5 It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The reason God intended to wipe out the Canaanites was their wickedness and particularly their evil idolatrous practices. He mentions it twice in this passage—“the wickedness of these nations.”

Deuteronomy 12:31 ... every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

Quote: Studies of [Canaanite] religion, literature, and [archeology] reveal that they were the most morally depraved culture on the earth at that time.¹

One scholar mentions that Canaanite [Baal-worship] was much cruder and more debased than the religions of Egypt and Mesopotamia.²

The destruction of the Canaanites by the Israelites was God’s judgment on them for their depraved behavior and debased religion. It was God’s wrath falling on very deserving people. God had given these people plenty of time and opportunity to repent, and they had not. Now they were ripe for judgment.

As it turned out, Israel was not very good at practicing *herem*—total destruction of the Canaanites. Many of them were not destroyed. The Bible records only four cities that were totally destroyed and all their citizens killed—Jericho (Josh. 6:24); Ai (Josh. 8:28); Hazor (Josh. 11:13–14); and Laish (Judges 18:27).³ Although God called for the absolute eradication of these people, Israel failed in this mission. Some of the Canaanites were driven out of their land, but many of them persisted in the land because Israel failed or refused to drive them out.

Some of the Canaanite people were absorbed into Israel, and that caused all sorts of problems.

The conquest of Canaan by Israel was not a genocide or ethnic cleansing. That’s the common criticism from skeptics and critics today. But Israel was not trying to wipe out an ethnic group. Ethnicity had nothing to do with it. The Israelites were destroying a group of utterly wicked, depraved, debased idolaters. God was clearing them out to give the land to Israel. It was a spiritual or holy war, not a genocide.

¹ 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.

² Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 70.

³ Matt Fuller, *Teaching Deuteronomy: From Text to Message*, Teach the Bible (Ross-shire, Scotland; London: Christian Focus; PT Resources, 2022), 130.

Further, if God determines to wipe out a group of people for their despicable behavior, that's his prerogative. Cf. Sodom and Gomorrah.

App: Sadly, the depravity we see in our culture is not far different from the Canaanite culture. I'm sure that we abort more children here than the Canaanites ever killed in worshipping Molech. (About 73 million per year worldwide; around 1M here in the US) The entire western world today is morally bankrupt, debased, and depraved. Our culture deserves God's judgment, and I would not be surprised if it falls on us at some point.

Trans: The first thing required to avoid compromise with pagans, for the Israelites, is to conquer the nations in the PL. And God promises that they will.

II. .2c Make no covenant with them; show them no mercy.

A. God prohibited Israel from social interaction with these pagan Canaanite nations.

B. They cannot make any covenant with them—no contracts, no agreements, no treaties. God's covenant with Israel prohibits them from making covenants with those nations destined for destruction. Making a covenant with the Canaanites would violate Israel's covenant with God. They could not have both.

Make no covenant and...

C. .2end Israel must show them no mercy.

Certain occasions call for mercy, and other occasions call for judgment without mercy. From God's perspective, the Canaanites deserved no mercy at this point. The time for mercy had elapsed; there was no more room for mercy. God's intent was their utter destruction.

This command pertained to Israel as a nation, not to individuals in their personal lives. Normally, Israel did show mercy to strangers and foreigners, but not in this case.

Trans: God told Israel to make no covenants with the Canaanites and to show them no mercy.

III. .3-4 Make no marriages with them.

A. God prohibits intermarriage with the pagan Canaanites. Why?

B. .4 They will turn away your sons from following me—the potential for idolatry would be great if Israel intermarried with the pagan Canaanites.

C. .4end If pagan spouses influence the Israelites toward idolatry, the anger of the Lord will be aroused; God would destroy them suddenly. So this was a serious threat; idolatry would cause their destruction.

Quote: Intermarriage would tend to compromise faithfulness to the covenantal relationship of Israel with the Lord by the [blending] of Canaanite life with that of Israel. Only by total commitment to the Lord and to the covenant-treaty could the unique status of Israel with the Lord be preserved.⁴

That total commitment to the Lord meant that they must avoid making commitments with those who were so corrupt in their behavior and in their religion.

App: A direct application of this principle is that a Christian must not marry an unbeliever. The NT tells us that we must not be unequally yoked to unbelievers.

.4 Note the reason—“they will turn away your son.” Spouses have a profound influence on one another. A Christian might think that he could persuade an unbelieving spouse to become a Christian—sometimes that happens. But often the influence of the unbeliever is greater than that of the believer. The unbeliever has a negative impact on the believer. Or the unbeliever remains in his unbelief. Raising children becomes a problem in a mixed marriage. All kinds of problems develop when you marry a non-Christian. Those who do so usually live to regret that decision.

More often than not, it’s the Christian woman who marries a non-Christian man. Who do you suppose has the most influence in that relationship?

It’s best to marry a person of like faith and practice. In fact, I would suggest that you marry a person who agrees with you widely on spiritual values. You don’t want to argue about how to live the Christian life; you want consistent, thorough agreement on spiritual and moral values. Avoid marrying someone with whom you conflict spiritually.

And refuse to compromise on that issue. Sometimes when people get desperate, they compromise. But they usually end up regretting that decision.

⁴ Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 70.

Our children need to understand and adopt this important principle. Do not marry an unbeliever; marry someone of like faith and practice, someone who shares your values and spiritual commitments. Don't compromise in this important area. Compromising in this area could lead to destruction--.4end.

IV. .5 Destroy their religious images/objects.

God commanded Israel to destroy the entire Canaanite culture and society. He did not want anything remaining especially of their pagan, idolatrous, depraved worship system.

A. Destroy their altars. The pagans had sacrificial altars, usually made of earth or stone. One of the most notorious and disgusting altars was that used in the worship of the false god Molech....

B. Break down their sacred pillars. Pagans often erected stone or wood pillars at their worship sites.

The Bible mentions Asherah poles—live trees or wooden poles dedicated to Ashera, Baal's supposed wife/consort.

C. Cut down their wooden images. Burn their carved images with fire.

Idols were images often carved into wood or engraved in metal. When Israel conquered the land, they must destroy all these images—cut them down and burn them.

Cf. Deuteronomy 7:25 *You shall burn the carved images of their gods with fire; you shall not covet the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it; for it is an abomination to the LORD your God.*

Quotes: [It is not] possible that the polytheism of altars to Baal and Asherah poles can coexist with Yahweh.⁵

Everything—even the Canaanites' religious objects—which might arouse the slightest curiosity about false worship, was to be totally eradicated.⁶

⁵ Matt Fuller, *Teaching Deuteronomy: From Text to Message*, Teach the Bible (Ross-shire, Scotland; London: Christian Focus; PT Resources, 2022), 129.

⁶ 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.

Commands like this protected Israel from the influences of paganism. They must not assimilate the Canaanite religion; they must destroy it.

App: This is one way in which the church is utterly distinct from Israel. We are not obligated to destroy other religions. We don't go to non-Christian places of worship and destroy their religious buildings or objects of worship.

However, there is a sense in which we are trying to destroy false religion.

2 Corinthians 10:5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

Part of the Christian task is to expose the errors and faults of non-Christian religions. We go on the offensive against error and fraud. We want to cast down these false religions; we want to expose their error. We don't do it through violence or physical destruction. We do it through argumentation and persuasion. We do it through exposing the errors and faults of non-Christian religious ideas. That's part of the apologetic task—both defending the faith and attacking/exposing error.

I would be very happy if all the false religions were destroyed—not the people or the properties, but the religion itself—the false ideas and claims should be “cast down.”

Our goal as Christians is to lead others to leave their false religions and to submit themselves to Christ. That's evangelism. But we do that through words and through love and mercy, not through violence. Cf. Rom 10:17.

1 Thessalonians 1:9 ... you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, – That's what we are trying to do—get people to turn from falsehood to the truth, from idols to the true and living God.

In the history of Christianity, we find that some groups of people who claimed to be Christians have used violence to stamp out their religious enemies. E.g., the Crusades of the middle ages, Reformation wars. The RCC in particular, but other groups as well, have historically used violence against their spiritual enemies—including people like us—nonconformists. When the church thinks of itself as the new Israel or as God's kingdom on earth, it tends to use violence against its enemies.

We are the church, not the nation of Israel. Christ's glorious kingdom has not yet come. In the church age, we use words and arguments to tear down non-Christian religions. We preach the Gospel; we never use violence against our spiritual enemies. As Paul said, "We persuade men." We are engaged in a spiritual battle against error, not a physical one.

We expose error, falsehood, and fraud. We must at times attack error and falsehood. We play both offense and defense. We try to prevent the other team from scoring.

Further, we do not engage in ecumenism—cooperating with those *not* of like faith and practice. We don't cooperate with them. We do not engage in spiritual endeavors with other religions or with people claiming to be Christians who are not of like faith and practice. In that regard, we are separatists, not ecumenists. We must not compromise spiritually. We cooperate with people and organizations of like faith and practice. We expose the errors of false religion and warn people against false teachers.

We do not conquer through assimilation or infiltration. Some Christians think that they will have the most influence through infiltrating the world and assimilating the practices of unbelievers. They'll become like the world and become appealing to the world so as to attract the world to Jesus. But that strategy is exactly wrong. That's the kind of compromise we must avoid.

Can you imagine Moses telling the Israelites to cooperate with and enter into religious dialogue with the pagan Canaanites? No; he tells the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites, not enter into cooperative fellowship with them.

We don't infiltrate and assimilate; we separate from error; we don't coexist with it; we try to tear it down; we expose it for the fraud that it is.

Ephesians 5:11 *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.*

Trans: We are engaged in a great spiritual battle, and our objective is to cast down and destroy those false religions that contradict Christianity. We don't coexist with them; we conquer them. And we do that, primarily, through proclaiming the truth and by exposing error and fraud. Rom 1:16

There is no excuse for spiritual compromise. We don't enter into dialogue with the idolaters. We must have no fellowship with false religion. Our goal and task is to lead people to denounce idolatry and false religion and to believe in the true and living God—to turn to God from idols. An in order to do that, we must not compromise spiritually. We must maintain our commitment to truth and our opposition to error. The key to avoiding compromise is to love what God loves and hate what God hates.