

THEOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF DEUTERONOMY¹

1. **Consider:** a review of God's faithfulness (1.6–4.40)
2. **Covenant:** an exposition of the law (5–26)

5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	
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3. **Commence:** preparations for renewing the covenant (27.1–28.68)
4. **Commit:** an exhortation to obedience (29.2–30.20)

Deuteronomy 6: *Loyalty to God*

Chapter 5 gave us the Ten Commandments, one writer thinks that the rest of the “Covenant” sermon is a meditation on each of the Commandments in succession:

Major Issues	Godward	Manward
Authority	Commandment 1 Expounded in Dt 6-11	Commandment 5 Expounded in Dt 16.18-18.22
Dignity	Commandment 2 Expounded in Dt 12	Commandments 6, 7, 8 Expounded in Dt 19-21, 22.1-23.14, and 23.15-24.7
Commitment	Commandment 3 Expounded in 13.1-14.21	Commandment 9 Expounded in 24.8-16
Rights and Privileges	Commandment 4 Expounded in 14.22-16.17	Commandment 10 Expounded in 24.19-26.15

We move to Deuteronomy 7. Our title is “*Israel vs. the Canaanites*”

One of my commentaries gives the chapter this heading: “Israel’s Policy of War.” The chapter deals with the stance Israel is to take against the Canaanites and the theology behind it. Here, and in other passages, there are statements that trouble our consciences and we need to gain a reasonable understanding of it. Some solutions proposed by Bible teachers are wholly inadequate. We especially want Bible answers to this question, not just commentary guesses. Our study tonight aims in that direction.

¹ Adapted from an outline in Lawrence O Richards, *The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 117.

Recall the first commandment:

Dt 5.7 ¶ 'You shall have no other gods before Me.

The structure of Dt 7

A The command of Holy War (1-7) [Focusing on the nations: God's order]

B The theology appointing Holy Warriors (8-11) [Focusing on Israel: God's choice]

B' The results for Holy Warriors (12-16) [Focusing on Israel: God's blessing]

A' Reassurance for Holy Warriors (17-26) [Focusing on the nations: God's empowerment]

You will notice the chiastic arrangement of thought.

The problematic verses:

Dt 7.2, 23-24, and see also 2.32-35, 3.3 and 20.16-17

The Bible reasons for God's judgement:

1. _____
Dt 9.4-5 [they deserved it, because of their wickedness]
2. _____
Dt 7.10 see also Josh 6.17 [they persisted in their hatred towards God, if they repented like Rahab, God would receive them]
3. _____
Dt 7.4, see also Dt 20.17-18; Num 33.55; Josh 23.12-13 [they presented a great temptation to Israel, to draw them away from God]

A clue to their great wickedness: 7.5 – what did God tell the Israelites to destroy?

[their altars, their pillars, their Asherim, their grave images]

“The **sacred stones** (cf. 12:3; Ex. 23:24; 34:13) were possibly male fertility symbols and the **Asherah poles** were wooden poles in honor of the goddess Asherah, the consort of Baal.”²

“Having destroyed the idolaters, Israel also was to demolish the paraphernalia of their worship (v. 5). This included their altars, their sacred stones (*maṣṣēbôt*), their Asherah poles (*ʾāšērîm*), and their idols (*pēsîlîm*). The “sacred stones” represented the male procreative aspect of the Canaanite fertility religion; and the Asherah, the female. Asherah was also the name of the mother goddess of the Canaanite pantheon, the deity responsible for fertility and the productivity of soil, animals, and humankind. She was represented by either an evergreen tree or by a pole that also spoke of perpetual life. The cult carried on in their name was of the most sensual and sordid type, one practiced in the temples and also under the open sky at high places and in groves of trees. Prominent in its services was sacred prostitution involving priests and priestesses who represented the male and female deities.”³

Note: it is no credit to Israel that such sordid practices represented a great temptation for them.

A Mitigating Factor (7.22-23)

What does God say about the coming progress of their Holy War? [It would proceed gradually, “little by little,” as Israel was not numerous enough to fill the land completely. Their war would take time.]

What happened when they went into the land? Josh 21.43-45, but compare Jdg 1.33, 34-36; 2.1-5 [they didn’t wipe out all the Canaanites, leaving some in the land]

How do we explain this?

1. God indeed placed these wicked pagans under the “ban”
2. The initial conquest of the land established Israel in the dominant power in the land (and destroyed some city states, like Jericho and Ai)
3. Nevertheless, they did not utterly destroy all the Canaanites, though they were “under the ban”

² Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 276.

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, v. 4 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 180.

4. There is a sense that the Holy War language is hyperbole (exaggeration for effect), God did not intend for Israel to destroy all these people immediately [and some God received into the nation, like Rahab]
5. The Sovereign Lord has all authority, including the authority to pass judgement on every person in the world: he is not to blame for the sentence of death on sinners.
6. Only God's mercy spares any sinners

One additional comment on the difference between Muslim *jihad* and Israelite Holy War:

“whereas *jihad* speaks of both inner spiritual struggle toward the ideals of Quranic life and practice, as well as offensive warfare against all unbelievers (i.e., non-Muslims), חֲרָם [devoted, or banned] refers only to the militant, pro-active commands of Yahweh to single out his irredeemable, implacable enemies for annihilation. Moreover, חֲרָם was limited to only one historical era, that of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua as instructed by Yahweh through Moses. *Jihad*, it is argued, is not time-bound but must remain as a hallmark of Muslim identity until the whole world is either converted to the faith or destroyed because of failure to comply and become part of the *Umma*, or universal caliphate.”⁴

We will have to come back to Deuteronomy 7 next week to complete our look at the chapter.

⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, “Review of Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms with the Justice of God by Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan,” ed. Rob Smith, *Themelios* 40, no. 2 (2015): 272.