

**Text: Dt 20.1-20**

## THEOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF DEUTERONOMY<sup>1</sup>

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)

## Outline by paragraphs

### I. Preamble: preparation for war (1-9)

- A. The call to fearlessness in God's cause (1-4) key words: "do not fear" 1, 3
- B. The exemptions from service (5-9)

### II. Legislation: rules of war (10-18)

- A. Conquering far nations (10-15)
- B. Destruction of nearby nations (16-18)

### III. Addendum: use of trees in war (19-20)

## Commentary:

"Obviously relevant to the subject of death and thus to the sixth commandment is the matter of warfare and its prosecution. War in the Old Testament was always viewed as a necessary evil in the defense of God's people from those who would seek their harm but also as an offensive measure in advancing their territorial interests. As the Creator and Sovereign over all things, the Lord had the right to bring them under his dominion, by force if necessary. And this he chose to do through the human instrument of his elect people. All war by Israel under divine protection is therefore 'holy war' (or 'Yahweh war') and as such was not only permitted by the Lord but initiated and carried out by him and his heavenly and earthly hosts.<sup>142</sup> The wicked nations as a whole were viewed as under hostile and even demonic leadership and so they had to either capitulate to

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

Yahweh's lordship or face his wrathful judgment. The peoples of Canaan in particular were to be eradicated, for they occupied the land of Israel's inheritance and, furthermore, constituted a never-ending threat to Israel's purity and separateness as a kingdom of priests. The biblical witness is univocal that the Canaanites were beyond hope of redemption and had to be placed under the merciless *ḥērem* of the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

*ḥērem*: "The basic meaning is the exclusion of an object from the use or abuse of man and its irrevocable surrender to God. The word is related to an Arabic root meaning 'to prohibit, especially to ordinary use.' The word 'harem,' meaning the special quarters for Muslim wives, comes from it. It is related also to an Ethiopic root, meaning 'to forbid, prohibit, lay under a curse.' Surrendering something to God meant devoting it to the service of God or putting it under a ban for utter destruction."<sup>3</sup>

The word occurs in our text in verse 17: "you shall **utterly destroy** them"

The biggest question we have about this chapter (and others like it) is the ethical quandary that leads some people to call the God of the Old Testament an "angry god" and different from the "loving god" of the New Testament.

Yet the Bible calls the God of the OT the same as the Father of the NT, and "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God" so we must reconcile our understanding with Biblical revelation.

1. God demanded absolute loyalty from Israel as well, condemning idolatry as spiritual adultery (see v. 18).
2. God prophesied the same punishments for Israel if (when) they abandoned him for idolatry.
  - a. Compare Dt 29.22-28
  - b. Recall the many warnings of the prophets, the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria, the deportation of the Southern Kingdom by the Babylonians

<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, v. 4 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 282.

<sup>3</sup> Leon Wood, "744 חָרַם," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 324.

3. God likewise brought judgement against nations like the Babylonians for their wickedness against Judah (see Isa 47.1ff. and other passages)
4. God provided many years for the Canaanites to repent, see God's word to Abraham, Gen 15.12-16

On this last point, who knows what prophets God could have sent among the Canaanites (Amorites). They certainly knew righteous Abraham, but did not embrace his God.

### Other curiosities in the passage:

The exemptions from combat: warriors needed single-mindedness; also victory was from the Lord, not numbers

The protection of fruit trees: Why more compassion for trees than men?

"The real thrust of the passage, however, is to contrast the tree with humankind (v. 19b). It is only humans, ironically the image of God and the crowning glory of creation, who sin against the Creator in such egregious ways as to call upon themselves divine judgment. The innocent tree, tainted as it is by the fall of humankind, is nevertheless not culpable and should therefore be spared. No more graphic depiction of the awful calamity brought by sin could be imagined."<sup>4</sup>

### Questions?

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<sup>4</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 287.