

Deuteronomy 7:1-6

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God reemphasizes that Israel is set apart (holy) to their Suzerain (Ruler) God as a special possession. He instructs the Israelites to eliminate the people who live in Canaan as well as their corrupt culture. Then Israel must occupy the Promised Land.

In this section, Moses instructed the Israelites on how to behave in the Promised Land. He began by saying “*When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it.*” As Israel pressed on toward the land of Canaan, they needed to know what to do upon their arrival because the land was originally inhabited by other people groups. Moses told Israel God would clear *away many nations before* them. The nations God would *clear away* before Israel are outlined as follows: *the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.*”

The *Hittites* may have been the descendants of Canaan through Heth, according to [Genesis 10:15](#). They lived around Hebron ([Genesis 23:1-20](#)). The *Girgashites* are little known but are also mentioned in Ugaritic texts, a corpus of ancient texts discovered in 1928 in Ugarit (Syria). Some think the *Girgashites* originated in northern Syria or Asia Minor. The *Amorites* appeared as a group that covered five major kingdoms in the Ancient Near East: Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon, according to [Joshua 10:5](#).

The *Canaanites* lived “by the sea and by the side of the Jordan” ([Numbers 13:29](#)). The *Perizzites* were a group of people who lived in unwalled suburbs both east and west of the Jordan. The mention of this group of people extends from the time of Abraham ([Genesis 13:7](#)) to the postexilic times ([Ezra 9:1](#)). The *Hivites* (or Horites) were the peoples of Shechem in the days of Jacob ([Genesis 34:2](#)). Later, during the conquest by Joshua, they constituted the population of Gibeon ([Joshua 9:7](#)). The *Jebusites* were the occupants of the region later associated with the tribe of Benjamin, especially the city of Jerusalem ([Joshua 15:63](#)). All these *seven nations* living in Canaan were non-vassals because they did not have a covenant relationship with God.

Moses commanded Israel to eliminate them along with their religious artifacts. God's judgment upon the Amorites was foretold by God to Abraham in [Genesis 15:16](#), when God says, speaking of Abraham's descendants:

Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

God promised the return of Israel to the Promised Land, but also indicated that while the Amorites were storing up a great heap of iniquity, God was still allowing them ample opportunity to repent. Since God lumps all *seven nations* together in terms of their wickedness, we can presume that what was predicted for the Amorites applied to the other nations as well.

What was the nature of this wickedness that was so bad that God decreed them to be extinguished? God has already done this once with Noah's flood. In that case, God destroyed the earth and all the people but Noah and his family because the earth had filled with violence ([Genesis 6:5, 11-12](#)). In this case it seems the great wickedness is related to practices related to the worship of false gods. These practices involved rampant sexual immorality and human sacrifice.

One of the commands is that the Israelites must *hew down* the *Asherim* of the enemy inhabitants. The *Asherim* may have been phallic symbols, and involved cultic sexual practices ([1 Kings 14:23-24](#)). The practices of those in Canaan are forbidden to the Israelites, and specifically listed in [Leviticus 18](#). They include a broad array of sexual immoralities, including multiple forms of incest, adulteries, as well as sexual intercourse apart from biological norms, including intercourse with animals. This passage also forbade child sacrifice, which was another Canaanite practice. Speaking of these behaviors, God states:

For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. [Leviticus 18:24-25](#)

God describes the removal of the nations as the land spewing out its inhabitants, because of these behaviors. Child sacrifice is associated with

pagan worship practices throughout scripture (see [Lev 18:21](#); [Deut 18:10](#); [2 Kings 16:3](#), [17:17](#); [21:6](#); [23:10](#); [Jer 32:35](#); [Ezekiel 16:21](#); [20:26](#); [20:31](#); [23:37](#)). God instructs Israel to clear the land of wickedness, stating an intent to execute His judgement upon Canaan through Israel. God makes it clear that if Israel falls into the same behavior, they will also be spewed out, which ultimately occurs during the Babylonian exile.

As with Noah who escaped a general judgment, God spared Caananites who sought repentance and reconciliation. We will see this with the Gibeonites as well as Rahab the harlot, who became an ancestor of Jesus ([Joshua 9](#); [Joshua 2](#); [Matthew 1:5](#)).

Moses further told the Israelites that these *seven nations* were *greater and stronger than* they. However, the almighty God would deliver them into the hands of His people so that they could defeat them to occupy their land. Moses declared, “*When the LORD your God delivers them [the seven nations] before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them.*”

Israel was given a privilege to be in a covenant relationship with the LORD. They were chosen by God to be His “own possession among all the peoples” ([Exodus 19:5](#)). In obedience to God’s command, Moses commanded Israel to *utterly destroy* them. The verb translated here as “utterly destroy” refers to an act of obedience, which dedicates the enemies to God ([Numbers 21:2](#); [Deuteronomy 13:17](#)). Thus, Israel was responsible to obey God’s command to *utterly destroy* these nations in order to stomp out their corrupting culture and occupy their land.

That these nations were to be utterly destroyed is further confirmed by Moses when he said, “*You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.*” Furthermore, Moses noted, “*You shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.*” Their culture had apparently reached the point of being irredeemable. As previously mentioned, there were exceptions, as Rahab not only married into Israel but became an ancestor of Jesus. Rahab forsook her culture and committed to follow the One True God.

The Israelites were commanded not to *intermarry* with other people groups in order to remain holy to their Suzerain God. Quoting God directly, Moses explained why: “*For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods.*” The service of the pagan gods was an integral part of the forbidden behaviors, including child sacrifice. Such an act of disobedience carried its own risk as Moses warned the people saying, “*then the anger of the*

LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you.” God’s anger refers to His righteous judgment. When His vassals (Israel) violate the terms of His covenant, there will be negative consequences. It will not affect God’s election of Israel as His own. But the covenant is clear that obedience will bring blessings and disobedience chastisement.

After the command to destroy the seven nations, Moses asked Israel to “*tear down their altars, and smash their sacred pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire.*” The terms “altars,” “sacred pillars,” “Asherim,” and “graven images” speak of the nations’ articles of worship. The *altars* were structures such as tables plated with precious metal on which people offered food and drink to their gods. The *sacred pillars* refer to stones (either cut or uncut) that represented a male deity ([2 Kings 3:2](#)). The *Asherim* were objects which stood at the worship places. They symbolized the fertility goddess Asherah, and were associated with the sexual behavior God forbade in [Leviticus 18](#). All these objects were ordered to be destroyed by Israel, God’s own vassals. The reason for such a destruction is given to Israel in verse six: “*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 word “holy” means set apart. Israel was set apart to be an example to other nations ([Exodus 19:6](#)). However, the Israelites were not holy because they had greater intrinsic value, for they were “a stubborn people” ([Deuteronomy 9:6](#)). Rather, the Israelites were holy because a holy Suzerain God chose them as His vassals and set them apart for His special purpose, to be an example how best to live, what kind of community leads to human flourishing.

Israel had a covenant relationship with the LORD because He chose them as “*His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*” Israel’s priestly purpose was to bring all nations to God through their example. There are many examples of citizens of other nations being blessed through Israel throughout the Bible. Perhaps the clearest description of God’s purpose in this regard is found in Romans, where Paul describes the gentile believers in Rome as “being a wild olive” tree that was “grafted in among” the olive tree that is Israel, and accordingly “became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree” ([Romans 11:17](#)).

Biblical Text:

“When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears 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, ²and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them. ³Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. ⁴For 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. ⁵But 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. ⁶For 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.