

HOLY WAR

Part 14 of Foundations 260 - OT. Deuteronomy 7:1-11.

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. May 24, 2026.

Dismiss the Middle School

GRATITUDE & HONOR

It's Memorial Day weekend, so it's fitting that we take a moment to thank and honor those who have served in our Armed Forces.

Thank you for your sacrificial service.

We honor you for protecting the freedoms we enjoy here, specifically the freedom to preach the Gospel, to gather as the church, and to live faithfully for Jesus without persecution by the authorities.

STUDY GUIDE

As you came in this morning, you should have received a bulletin. Inside, you'll find a simple study guide you can use in a few different ways: to follow along with today's teaching, to reflect on during your personal devotions this week, or to spark conversation in your small group.

More resources are available online. See the slides. Go to famousGod.com and scroll down to the link to our Small Groups. Click on that, and it will bring this ... **(see slide). Today's small group questions are also there.**

Let's get started on today's teaching ...

WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

Today's teaching passage is focused on a concept called "holy war." It is a controversial idea, and you may be uneasy with it.

How can we reconcile our ideas of a loving, gracious God with a God who destroys nations?

I believe we can bring those two ideas about God together, but first we must know what God is like. What is his nature?

I'm asking us all to think like theologians and explore God's nature. Then ...

When we know what GOD is like, we'll be in a better position to understand what God does.

So, what is God like?

DEUTERONOMY 7

Last week in our Foundations 260 OT reading plan, we read Deuteronomy, chapter 7.

This chapter gives us insights into God's nature.

Some context: The nation of Israel was gathered at the border of the Land God promised to give them. Moses gave them last-minute instructions so they could enter the Land and prosper under God.

The instructions reveal three insights into what God is like.

Let's read part of Deuteronomy 7 now ...

DEUTERONOMY 7:1-11 (CSB)

When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess, and he drives out many nations before you — the Hethites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and powerful than you — 2 and when the LORD your God delivers them over to you, and you defeat them, you must completely destroy them. Make no treaty with them and show them no mercy. 3 You must not intermarry with them, and you must not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, 4 because they will turn your sons away from me to worship other gods. Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will swiftly destroy you. 5 Instead, this is what you are to do to them: tear down their altars, smash their sacred pillars, cut down their Asherah poles, and burn their carved images.

6 For you are a holy people belonging to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be his own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7 “The LORD had his heart set on you and chose you, not because you were more numerous than all peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors, he brought you out with a strong hand and redeemed you from the place of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

9 Know that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps his gracious covenant loyalty for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commands. 10 But he directly pays back and destroys those who hate him. He will not hesitate to pay back directly the one who hates him. 11 So keep the command — the statutes and ordinances — that I am giving you to follow today.

WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

So, what did we learn? What is God like? Very briefly, three insights:

1. GOD IS JUST - verses 1-5.

The Promised Land was occupied by people who had rejected the true God and replaced him with false deities. Their religions demanded the most outrageous, sinful practices, such as child sacrifice, bestiality, and ritual prostitution. These are all dehumanizing, godless, evil things that deserve judgment.

And God instructed Israel to **“*completely destroy them*” - verse 2**. That phrase points to this being an offering to God - an act of holy war. The Lord told them to remove every sign of idolatrous religion (verse 5).

Then, we see two reasons why Israel could not co-exist with those people:

- Verse 4: *“They will turn your sons away from me to worship other gods.”* Is there a greater sin than turning away to counterfeit gods?
- Verse 6: *“For you are a holy people belonging to the LORD your God.”* They were God’s *chosen possession* (verse 6), so he wasn’t about to let them mingle and marry and walk away.

So, because God is just, he commanded destruction. God’s patience ran out, and he acted to judge evil-doers and set things right.

If you think this is harsh, ask yourself, “Would I want a passive or unjust God who winks at evil?”

2. GOD IS LOVE - verses 6-8.

How did Israel become God's holy, chosen possession?

By love - *Deuteronomy 7:8 (CSB) But because the LORD loved you...*

God's love created Israel and rescued them from Egypt and brought them to the Land He promised to give them.

Why didn't he love the other nations? Well, I think he did love them, but not in the unique way that he loved Israel.

God **IS** love - it's what he is, he can't be unloving, so everything he does is loving.

But ... why did he love Israel in this special way? I don't know. He just did. He did it because he wanted to.

Even today, while it's true that God loves the world, it is also true that his special love and favor are on his church. Ephesians 1 reminds us that God has blessed his church with every spiritual blessing and, out of his pure love, has adopted its members into his family.

Why? I don't know.

There is one final insight into God's nature and character in Deuteronomy 7.

3. GOD IS FAITHFUL - verses 9-11.

God is faithful, so he keeps his promises. He promised them the Land:

Exodus 6:8 (CSB) I will bring you to the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.

So, here in Deuteronomy 7, with the nation massed at the border and the invasion imminent, Moses declared:

Deuteronomy 7:1 (CSB) When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess, and he drives out many nations before you ...

They could count on God keeping his promise.

It's his nature to be faithful. Nothing and no one can derail God's purposes in the world.

Numbers 23:19 (CSB) God is not a man, that he might lie, or a son of man, that he might change his mind. Does he speak and not act, or promise and not fulfill?

**So ... what is God like? What is his nature? He is just, loving, and faithful.
Now ...**

THE “PROBLEM” OF HOLY WAR

So, how can we reconcile a Holy War that destroys nations with a just, loving, and faithful God? The answer is: Who God is explains what God does:

- Because God is loving and faithful, he withheld judgment against the seven nations for hundreds of years (Genesis 15:16) before keeping his promise and giving the land to Israel.
- Because God is just, he took action against an evil culture and drove out the seven nations.

It’s challenging to think of God this way. Does he really destroy nations? Here are some perspectives that might help us work through our unease:

Real quick - some perspective:

1. It was war. Nations fight - that’s the way of things. God worked his good plan through awful, messy, human actions.
2. The command to “*completely destroy*” was hyperbolic. It was a common way to describe conquest in the ancient world. The historical reality was that the seven nations were dispossessed, but never destroyed.
3. The people were so wicked that they deserved what they got. The conquest protected the vulnerable. What’s the right thing to do to a person who throws their baby into the fire? It’s remarkable that God waited so long to judge them. And Judgment Day is coming for all of us.
4. Clearing the Land of evil cultures preserved Israel and paved the way for Jesus Christ, the Savior. No Israel, no Jesus.

God commanded war. He favored one nation over another. He executed judgment in a way that should sober us all. All because he is just, loving, and faithful. Would you want him to be any other way?

ONE MORE THING

Back in the day, when Steve Jobs was CEO of Apple Computer, he often concluded his keynote presentations with this phrase, ***“One more thing ...”*** Then, he would announce something amazing, such as the Apple TV.

Well, I have one more thing, and it is amazing.

1400 years after Israel crossed into Canaan, God waged another Holy War.

- It wasn't a war for land; it was a war for the entire universe.
- It wasn't fought against people; it was against sin and the devil who enslaves and destroys people.
- It wasn't fought with swords and spears; it was fought by Christ on the Cross.
- It wasn't fought for Israel; it was fought and won for the worldwide church - people from every nation; everyone who turns to Jesus in faith.

And this Holy War reflects God's nature:

- God's love sent Jesus into the world (John 3:16).
- God's justice was satisfied at the Cross (Romans 3:21-26).
- God's faithfulness saved us and gathered us into the church, his loved, holy possession (1 Peter 2:9-10).

When we know what God is like, we understand what God does.

PERSPECTIVES ON HOLY WAR

Written with AI assistance.

Why did God command the destruction of the Canaanites?

If you've ever read Deuteronomy 7 and felt troubled, you're not alone. God commanded Israel to destroy the Canaanite nations completely — and that's a hard thing to sit with. So what do we do with it?

First, remember that this wasn't random violence. It was in line with God's nature. The Canaanites had practiced child sacrifice, sexual immorality, and idolatry for centuries. God had actually waited 400 years (Genesis 15:16) before bringing judgment — a remarkable display of patience.

Second, this was God's judgment, not Israel's personal war. Just as God judged Sodom and later judged Israel herself through Assyria and Babylon, Canaan's destruction fit a consistent biblical pattern: when a society's wickedness reaches its full measure, God acts.

Third, it served a bigger purpose. God was protecting the family line that would eventually bring us Jesus. Without a clear separation from Canaanite religion, that mission could have been derailed.

Finally — and this is crucial — this command was never meant to be repeated. Christians today don't fight physical holy wars. Our battle is spiritual (Ephesians 6:12), and our weapon is the gospel.

These were unique, historically bounded events pointing forward to the final judgment that Christ himself will one day bring (Acts 17:31; Romans 2:5-8; Revelation 20:11-15). How will we survive that Day? By taking shelter in Christ, the Savior. Don't delay; turn from yourself and your sins, and turn to Jesus in faith. "Jesus, forgive me, remove my guilt, and restore me to the Father."

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Review

- Review Peter's May 24th teaching and study guide.
- What were the main insights of Peter's teaching?
- What questions do you have about the passage or Peter's teaching?
- What were the main applications or takeaways for your life?

Discuss

1. What was your initial emotional reaction to the idea of "holy war" in Deuteronomy 7? What specifically makes it difficult or unsettling?
2. Do you think people tend to emphasize one of these attributes (justice, love, faithfulness) over the others? What problems can that create?
3. How do you respond to the idea that God used war and human conflict to accomplish His purposes? The language of "complete destruction" may be hyperbolic. Does that help resolve tension for you, or not? Why?
4. What do you think about the claim that removing these nations protected the vulnerable and preserved Israel's faith?
5. How does the cross reframe the idea of "holy war"? What's similar and what's different compared to Deuteronomy 7? In what ways do you see God's justice, love, and faithfulness all meeting at the cross?

Prayer Focus

- 247: "Lord, please add daily to the Cornerstone those who are being saved."