

Holy People

HN 11/09/05 pm

Reading: Deuteronomy 7, Ephesians 1

Study Text: Deuteronomy 7:6-8

Sing Psalms: 102:15-19, 91:1-4, 91:9-13, 91:14-16

Moses told Israel they would conquer the seven nations of Canaan and utterly destroy them. They would be engaged in holy war. Why? Why were they told to act in this way? Many do not understand why they were given these rules of engagement, why this total destruction.

One reason was the wickedness of these nations (9:4). The Canaanites were ignorant and abominable idol worshippers, wicked people under the judgment of God. We also know that God promised this land to Abraham and his descendants, so his bringing them into this land at this time was in fulfillment of that promise.

But fundamentally the reason behind the holy war was the fact that the people Moses was addressing were holy people. *For you are a holy people to the Lord your God (7:6)*. ‘Utterly destroy the carved images and everything that has breath, do not intermarry, and make no treaty with them’. This verse then gives the reason why they were to occupy the land in this manner. They were holy people; they were a people like no other in the eyes of the Lord. They were *a special treasure above all people on the face of the earth*. They were covenant people.

The words of the apostle Peter to elect pilgrims come to mind. To encourage them during a time of persecution he reminded them that they were *a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people (I Peter 2:9)*. There was something different about the people of God in the Old Testament – and in the New Testament. Is this so today? Do you know that you are special in the eyes of God, his special treasure? Are you living as if you know this?

Holy is a word found throughout Scripture, yet a word we hear little of today. To speak of someone as ‘holy’ seems presumptuous. Yet here we have Moses telling the people of God that they are holy. What does this mean? There is a sense in which we are to become holy (I Peter 1:16), but here the sense is that we **are** holy now. The word translated ‘saints’ (e.g. Ephesians 1:1), as well as the word ‘sanctification’, are both based upon the Greek *hagios* or holy. It means separated, usually in the sense of separated unto God.

God is holy. He is separate from the creation and all that is. He is like no other. *Be holy for I am holy (Leviticus 19:44)*. Because God is holy so his people who would come before him must be holy. Just as *God is light and in him is no darkness at all (I John 1:5)* so God is holy and nothing unholy can enter his presence.

The question Moses addresses in the next part of this verse (7:6) and the following verses is ‘How then does a person become holy?’

God Chooses

In one word it is because of election, or God's sovereign choosing. *The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for himself.* 'You are a holy people because the Lord your God has chosen you and declared you to be holy'. God chose Abraham. He chose Isaac even as he rejected Ishmael. He said to Abraham – 'No! I will establish my covenant with Isaac not with Ishmael' (Genesis 17:19). God chose Jacob and rejected Esau (Malachi 1:2). He did this choosing before they were born, before they did anything good or bad (Romans 9:11). This is exactly what Moses tells these descendants of Jacob. *The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for himself (7:6).* He chose you for no other reason than that he set his love on you.

It was not because of who they were or because of anything they had done that God chose them. They were not a populous nation or a powerful people. They were the least of all peoples. They were slaves; they were in bondage in Egypt when the Lord revealed himself to them and brought them out. It was not that they were righteous or upright in heart that the Lord chose them – it was solely because he set his love upon them (9:5).

See to your calling brethren wrote Paul to the church at Corinth. *Not many of you were wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world* (I Corinthians 1:26). Think about the disciples whom Jesus called to follow him. Were any politically powerful, were any of noble birth, were any learned? No – they were fishermen or tax collectors.

God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are mighty (I Corinthians 1:27). But what do we see today? How often we see the church parading rich and famous people across the stage. How often we see the church seeking power and influence in the world through political alliances. God chose the least of all peoples to fulfill his purpose in this world, that **he** might be glorified in all the earth.

Because the Lord loves you (7:8). Are we really reading in the Old Testament! *Because the Lord loves you!* Love only comes with Jesus in the New Testament does it not? Many think like this. But here in the middle of Deuteronomy, in the middle of Moses telling Israel how to utterly destroy the Canaanites we find the word 'love'. We read *the Lord loves you.* Love and justice cannot be separated. At the same time as the Lord saves he judges (John 3:17-18).

It was because of love, divine love, unmerited love which we know as grace, that the Lord chose these people whom Moses was leading. The same God shows the same love in choosing a people for himself in the New Testament. *But God who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he has loved us, even when we were dead in sin, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)* (Ephesians 2:4).

Turn to Ephesians 1:4 and see how similar this verse is to the text before us in Deuteronomy 7 – it is quite amazing. We find the very same words, the very same truth. Paul was writing to believers, *to the saints in Ephesus.* He tells them they are *holy and without blame before him in love.* And why are they holy? Because God chose them, he chose them in Christ. Paul makes it very clear that it was not because of anything in themselves that they were chosen. Very clear! It was not just before they were born that God chose them, but *before the foundation of the world!*

The great truth of sovereign election is found in the writing of Moses, in the writing of the Apostle Paul and in the gospels (John 15:16). That God chose us in him before the foundation of the world is difficult for us to comprehend in our finite minds. May you be *able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and the length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with the fullness of God* (Ephesians 3:18).

This great truth comforts us and strengthens our hearts – but let it not become a matter of pride. Moses warned the people against boasting that it was because of their own righteousness that they were God’s elect (Deuteronomy 9:4). The Pharisees failed to heed this warning, and there are those today who follow in their footsteps. The Pharisee proudly prayed *God I thank you that I am not like other men...I fast twice a week and I give tithes of all I possess* (Luke 18:11). Election is not a label to be worn but a truth to be lived. *I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit* said Jesus (John 15:16, cf. I Peter 2:9).

God is Faithful

The Lord also chose these people because of the promise he made to their fathers – to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Remember the promise of land, of descendants and blessing to all nations. God does not forget his promises. He does not fail to fulfill them. ‘Has he said and shall he not do it’. The people provoked him greatly – they were disobedient and rebellious – but God remained faithful to his promise. *If we are faithless he remains faithful; for he cannot deny himself* (II Timothy 2:13).

So along with love, God was also faithful. It was because of his love and faithfulness that he chose them and brought them out of bondage. He redeemed them from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. To redeem someone means that they were held captive and that a ransom price was demanded. In the New Testament we find out how that ransom was paid – *the son of man came...to give his life a ransom for many* (Mark 10:45).

So again we have language here that we are familiar with from the New Testament. Paul speaks of predestination, of God determining beforehand those whom he would call (Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:11). Peter speaks of the death of Christ being *foreordained before the foundation of the world* (I Peter 1:20). God determined beforehand ‘according to the council of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass’ (Shorter Catechism 7). He made his will known in the heavenly places. It was known in the heavenly council from the beginning – but was made known to us in these last times (I Peter 1:20).

You who are ‘in Christ Jesus’, whose life is hid with Christ in God, were chosen because of the unmerited love of God and because God is faithful. God is faithful to his declared will, his will made known in the heavenly council from before the foundation of the world. What lofty thoughts are stimulated by meditating on this awesome truth! We know so little but we know what is sufficient for our salvation – to the praise of his glorious grace.

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