

Holy War

HN 4/09/05 pm

Reading: Deuteronomy 20, Ephesians 6

Study Text: Deuteronomy 7:1-6

Sing Psalms:

John Dunne was right to remind us that no man is an island. We are all influenced by others – either for good or for bad. A friend sent his son away to university. He got into bad company and started drinking. One night the father got a phone call. It was the police. His son had been arrested for brawling. Christians need to remember that their walk with Lord and their witness for him can be marred by wrong relationships.

Relationships with pagans will not be for the good. At least this is how Moses saw things. The people of God, the people whom he had brought out of Egypt were poised to enter the land of Canaan. This land, first promised to Abraham, was rich and fertile – but there was a problem. People inhabited this land.

These people were numerous and strong. Some lived in fortified cities. Some were giants. There were *seven nations greater and mightier than you* said Moses (7:1). The names and number of these nations or tribes differs somewhat from that given in Genesis 15 :10 and Exodus 34:6. There may have been real territorial changes due to warfare or wanderings. But the point is there was a formidable enemy, an enemy *mightier than you*. Such a revelation was not calculated to give the people confidence – not in themselves anyway. Moses wanted their confidence to be in the Lord.

The other known fact about these inhabitants was that they were idol worshippers (7:5). These people worshipped Baal and other gods and goddesses. They had carved images all over the place and they engaged in obscene sacrifice and worship rituals. They presented a danger to the people of God spiritually as well as physically. God had made a covenant with his chosen people, his holy people – an exclusive covenant. They must worship only the Lord and worship him according to his rules and regulations. They must not make any carved images.

How would the people of God overcome their enemies? How would they maintain purity of worship?

Victory is the Lords

There would be battles, there would be conflict, but Moses assured them that the Lord would give them victory. Actually the Lord had already by his grace given them the land. *When the Lord your God brings you into the land...when the Lord your God delivers them (Canaanites) over to you* (7:1, 2). Notice he says ‘when’ not ‘if’. There are no ‘ifs’ in this passage. There are never any ‘ifs’ where the will of God is concerned.

You shall conquer them (7:2). There was no doubt they would defeat the enemy. The Lord had already won the war. The outcome was certain. Still however they had to go and fight battles. The Lord gave them rules of engagement for these battles. As the people of God they would be engaged in holy war.

It seems somewhat strange to say ‘here is your enemy; I have already defeated him but you must fight to conquer him’. Yet this is what Moses was saying. And this is what the Lord says to us today. We enter into the victory that Jesus obtained for us by his death and resurrection. Jesus has destroyed the devil, he has won the victory over Satan, sin and death (Hebrews 2:14). *Thanks be to God who gives the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:57).*

But the Lord also says in his word ‘resist the devil and he will flee from you’. *Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare gets entangled in the affairs of this life (II Timothy 2:3-4).* We fight against our own sinful flesh. We wrestle against spiritual powers of darkness. We are engaged in a spiritual battle against the enemy of our souls. *Therefore put on the whole armour of God (Ephesians 6).* Stand firm in the truth and righteousness that in Jesus Christ. Take up the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God – and pray -and pray.

Are you holding the ground? We shall conquer the enemies of our souls. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. The victory has been won by Jesus Christ.

Utterly Destroy

Moses spoke of holy war, a war ordained by God. One of the rules of engagement in such a war was defined by the Hebrew term ‘charam’. This means a total giving over to the Lord of all that was taken in battle – all people and all property. This was a solemn command, as Achan found out. He sinned by keeping for himself some of the things taken in the battle against Ai. God judged him severely.

What was this holy war all about? There were two aspects from the divine perspective – grace and judgment. God told Abraham he would judge the Amorites for their sin (Genesis 15:16). He gave them plenty of time to repent but that time was now up. The time for God’s judgment had come. This judgment would come at the hands of Joshua and the people of God. This holy war was God’s judgment on the wicked inhabitants of this land.

At the same time God in his grace told Abraham that *in the fourth generation they shall return here* that is his descendants (Genesis 15:16). He promised to give Abraham and his descendants all the land of Canaan as their own possession. This was the promise God gave to Abraham when he called him out of Haran to live in Canaan. That promise was passed on to his descendants and now with Moses the time had come for the chosen people of God to enter in and possess this land.

It would be their own possession; they would not be slaves again. They would live in this land, enjoying its bounty and worshipping the Lord under the terms of the covenant he made with them at Horeb. The altars, the carved images, and the sacred pillars set up by the Canaanites were an

abomination to the Lord. They would have to be smashed and burned (7:5). And idol worshippers could not stay on in this holy land. They were to be destroyed along with their idols (20:16). (Rahab was saved because she turned from idols to the God of Israel).

No Treaties

Usually in war when an army came upon a city and besieged it the inhabitants would be offered terms of peace. If they agreed to become slaves they might escape with their lives – at least the women and children (20:10f). But this was not the rule of engagement in the holy war against the inhabitants of Canaan. They were not to be offered any peace treaty. Men were not to be taken as slaves, nor the women. Moses said *you shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them* (7:2).

Having seen the people of God utterly destroy Jericho and Ai, the Gibeonites (Hivites) decided to make a peace treaty with Joshua. They pretended to be from a far country and offered to become slaves (Joshua 9). Joshua was deceived. He made a treaty with them and let them live.

Touch no unclean thing, go out from the midst of her and be clean. Paul quoted the words of Isaiah 52:11 to warn the Corinthian Christians against being unequally yoked with unbelievers (II Corinthians 6). He warned them not to have anything to do with idols and pagan worship. He told them they could not sit at the Lord's Table and the table of demons also (I Corinthians 10:21). Flee idolatry!

We often hear a different message from church leaders today. Many join in the call of pagan leaders for unity and harmony with all people, godly and ungodly. They call for Christians to overlook little differences like idol worship. Carved images here and there mean nothing! 'What harm is there in Yoga – it is just exercise?' they say. ~~What~~ What harm is there in an inter-faith religious dialogue? Is this what Moses was telling the people of God? Is this what the apostle Paul told the New Testament church?

No Marriage

The newspaper reported that a few hundred converts had joined the Islamic community in our city. You would probably find many of these were women who had married into the community and the religion. Marriage is a recognized way of getting converts in some religions – sadly even some Christians think this way.

To Balaam is attributed the doctrine of causing believers to stumble through association with pagans, through eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality (Revelation 2:14). You can read this amazing story in the book of Numbers. The upshot of it all was that the women of Moab invited the Israelites to join them in their pagan sacrifices (Numbers 25:2). Many entered into idolatry and sexual immorality – 24,000 died in Gods judgment upon them.

Idolatry came into the home of Ahab, the king of Israel after he took a pagan wife, Jezebel (I Kings 16). Solomon married many foreign women in disobedience to this command of the Lord. They led him to do evil in the sight of the Lord (I Kings 11:6). This problem continued into the

New Testament church it seems, from the letters written to some churches in Revelation. The Nicolaitans probably taught that compromise with the pagans was okay.

The chosen people of God are holy people. They are called to be holy as the Lord himself is holy. *What agreement has the temple of God with idols? What communion has light with darkness* (II Corinthians 6:16). Make no covenant with the ungodly, least of all a marriage covenant, *for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods* and the terrible anger of the Lord will be aroused (7:4).

Those whom God has chosen and made holy in Jesus Christ must remember that they are citizens of heaven. They belong to Christ and have entered into his kingdom. They must not be partners in idolatry; they must not become entangled in the affairs of the world. They are engaged in a spiritual battle for souls of men and women.

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