

Deuteronomy 20 Commentary

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Moses on Mt Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1+)

Listen to [Mt Nebo](#) as you Ponder How Moses' [May Have Felt](#)

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Source: Ryrie Study Bible

Deuteronomy

Dt 1:1-4:43	Dt 4:44-26:19		Dt 27:1-34:12	
Moses' First Discourse	Moses' Second Discourse		Moses' Third Discourse	
Historical Review	Legal Exposition		Prophetical Promises	
Looking Back 40 Years	Looking Up What God Expected of Israel		Looking Ahead What God Will Do for Israel	
Recapitulation of Wanderings	Rehearsal of Israel's Law		Ratification of Israel's Covenant	Historical Appendices
Remembrance of the past	Commandments for the Present		Dt 27:1-30:20 Blessing and Cursing	Dt 31:1-34:12 Death of Moses
Take Heed Don't forget	Ten Commands	Related Commands	Two Choices Affecting the Future	Moses' Parting Words

Dt 1:1-4:43 Looking Back	Dt 4:44-11:32 Exposition of Decalogue	Dt 12:1-16:17 Ceremonial Laws	Dt 16:18-20:20 Civil Laws	Dt 21:1-26:19 Social Laws	Dt 27:1-28:68 Ratification of Covenant	Dt 29:1-30:20 Terms of Covenant	Dt 31:1-34:12 Moses' Song, Blessing, Death
Plains of Moab							
ca. 2 Months Moses: Author (Except Dt 34)							

Deuteronomy 20:1 "When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you.

- **go out:** De 3:21,22 7:1
- **horses:** Jos 10:5-8 11:4-6,9 Jud 4:3-9 2Ch 14:11 20:12 Ps 20:7 Ps 33:16,17 Isa 31:1 37:24,25
- **the Lord:** De 2:7 Dt 31:6,8 Ge 26:3 Nu 23:21 Jos 1:5,9 Jud 6:12 2Ch 32:7,8 Ps 46:7,11 118:6 Isa 7:14 8:9,10 43:2 Ro 8:31
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Eccl 9:11 I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and **the battle is not to the warriors**, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.

Ps 33:17-18 A **horse is a false hope for victory**; Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength. 18 Behold, the eye of the LORD is on **those who fear Him**, On those who hope (rely on) for His lovingkindness,

Isaiah 31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, **And rely on horses**, And **trust in chariots** because they are many, And in horsemen because they are very strong, But they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the LORD!

Psalms 20:7 Some boast in chariots and some in **horses**, But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.

Pr 21:31 The **horse** is prepared for the day of battle, But victory belongs to the LORD.

Outline:

- **Principles Governing Warfare Dt 20:1-9**
- **Captured Towns Dt 20:10-18**
- **Conservation Dt 20:19-20**

MOSES' CHARGE TO ISRAEL: DO NOT FEAR THE ENEMY

Chapter 20 emphasizes principles of warfare or rules for waging holy war. **Utley** adds "Chapter 20 is a description of how Israel was to conduct holy war, which is a war done in the name of God, commanded by God, the rules controlled by God, for the glory of God (cf. 20:1–20; 21:10–14; 23:9–14; 24:5; 25:17–19)." ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

Grant helps set the background - Once the land of Canaan had been possessed there would still be enemies in the surrounding nations. Indeed, if the nation obeyed the word of God they would inhabit a land more prosperous than those round about. This would excite the cupidity of other nations and be a possible cause of conflict. Israel, therefore, must be prepared to do battle. They had to do so to possess the Land, and they must be prepared to do so to defend their territory. As Canaan speaks today of the heavenly blessings which can be enjoyed by believers, the lesson is clear. There is a battle to come into the good of them and there is also a battle to preserve that enjoyment. The Adversary seeks to prevent any joy in salvation and, should he fail, he will attempt to destroy any that develops. ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

Wiersbe - The Jews weren't entering Canaan as **sightseers** but as **soldiers** prepared for battle and expecting God to give them

victory. It's important to note that God gave the nation two different military approaches, one for the cities in the land of Canaan (vv. 1–9, 16–18) and the other for cities outside Canaan (vv. 10–15). After Israel had conquered the land and was settled down in their inheritance, they might have to attack a distant city, because there were always enemies to deal with; and they could always accept the challenge of claiming God's promise and enlarging the land (Dt 19:8–9). ([Be Equipped](#))

Coates - This chapter includes the only legislation on the conduct of war. The chapter follows after instructions regarding homicide (chap. 19), so it relates to the subject of when it is appropriate to take a human life. This section also seeks to clarify further the sixth commandment ("you shall not kill" or "murder"). This passage does not provide any information regarding the circumstances that justify when war should be waged on foreign soil. The verses only provide some general guidelines to govern it when it does occur. Elsewhere the OT does acknowledge that there is "a time to kill" (Ec 3:3), and throughout their nation's history, God commanded the Israelites to attack their enemies (i.e. 1Sm 23:4; 2Ch 20:15). Yet it was always with the recognition that peace (vv. 10–12) is the goal to be desired. (Moody Bible Commentary)

Deere - Similar principles for battle and legislation on holy war were given earlier (Dt 2:24–3:11; 7) and the subject was addressed again later in Moses' speech (Dt 21:10–14; 23:9–14; 24:5; 25:17–19). ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

POSB - Moses knew the importance of preparing the army mentally and emotionally; therefore, he encouraged the people to conquer their fears. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE AND POWER PROVEN BY DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT

When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots (cf Ps 33:17, Ps 147:10) and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them - Moses didn't minimize either the size or the strength of the enemy! **Forewarned is forearmed!** Don't look at their great numbers but look by faith at your great God! We are to walk by faith and we are to fight by faith, neither of these by sight! (2 Cor 5:7) Big problems are small problems when viewed in the context of our great God! It all depends on our perspective - our vision - vertical or horizontal! (See discussion of "Vertical Vision") Israel was not to fear their adversaries military might or prowess because they had a faithful God. He had promised them they would defeat their enemies and possess the land, so regardless of the size of the enemy they were to march forth in faith in their Commander in Chief, Yahweh.

The horse is prepared for the day of battle,

But victory belongs to the LORD.

-- Proverbs 21:31

Wiersbe - In the early days of the Great Depression, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said in his Inaugural Address, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." There is a fear that mobilizes a person, as when you hear the fire alarm go off; but there is also a fear that paralyzes a person, and that's the fear that Moses was addressing. When we fear the Lord and trust Him, we need not fear the enemy. Israel had nothing to fear, for the God who drowned the army of Egypt would defeat the armies of Canaan. ([Be Equipped](#))

Guzik observes that "Israel, a small nation surrounded by great empires, was rarely in a strategically superior position. In battle, they usually saw horses and chariots and people more numerous." Despite the clear danger, they also had a clear command from God to not fear. Israel was commanded to not fear what any logical military man would fear: superior numbers, superior technology, and superior equipment. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Deut 20](#))

Utley - do not be afraid of them" This VERB (Qal IMPERFECT) is a recurrent theme in holy war contexts (cf. Dt 1:21, 29; 3:2, 22; 7:18; 20:1, 3; 31:6, 8). They were not to fear the power or number of their Canaanite enemies, but they were to fear YHWH (cf. Dt 4:10; 5:29; 6:2, 13, 24; 10:12, 20; 13:4; 14:23; 17:19; 28:58; 31:12, 13), because He is an awesome God (same Hebrew term, cf. 7:21; 10:17; 28:58) ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

Keil - Horses and chariots constituted the principal strength of the enemies round about Israel; not of the Egyptians only (Ex 14:7), and of the Canaanites and Philistines (Josh 17:16; Judg 4:3; 1 Sam 13:5), but of the Syrians also (2 Sam 8:4; 1 Chron 18:4; 19:18; cf. Ps 20:8).

For - Term of explanation. Explains why Israel was to have no fear regardless of the "odds."

The LORD your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you - Israel's might had less to do with their military prowess than with their omnipotent God Who was on their side in the battle. Note that remembrance of what God had done at Egypt was to fortify their faith. He had done it before and He was fully able to do it again! In other words Moses was not telling them to have a blind trust, but a trust based on past evidence of God's power.

THOUGHT - How often believers fail to remember God's past great deliverances (and we all have some of

those experiences) when they encounter a new trial or adversity. The tendency of all of us is to forget how BIG our God and instead to see our problem as BIG. We need to continually renew our minds with His Word so that we develop a God sized perspective. We need to run this short race of life keeping our eyes continually on Jesus (Heb 12:2).

God's track record can always be trusted.

McIntosh - If Israel's **enemies** had **horses and chariots** and **greater** numbers than theirs, they were first to do battle with their own fears and recognize that the Lord would be with them in battle. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

THOUGHT - There are wars in which the Lord God (Jehovah, Yahweh)—the true and living God—is on one side. Because of this fact, before ever declaring a war, a nation should seek the Lord God to make absolutely sure that the war is God's will. If it is not God's will, the war should never be declared. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

Guzik - God did not deny that the enemies of Israel would usually have more horses, chariots, and people than Israel. But God asked them to recognize a greater fact: That the LORD your God is with you. As Paul said it in Romans 8:31: If God is for us, who can be against us? One with God makes an unbeatable majority. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Deut 20](#))

Deere - the outcome of a battle would never be determined by mere military strength (cf. Isa. 31:1–3; Hosea 14:3). ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Utley - See Ex 14:26–28 for a reference to God's deliverance of His people from Pharaoh. Israel's trust was based on: previous revelation to the Patriarchs, miraculous Egyptian deliverance, miraculous wilderness wandering provisions, victories on the eastern bank of Jordan. ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

Ryrie - Moses often used the deliverance from Egypt to encourage noble purposes in the lives of the Israelites (see also 4:20; 5:15; 6:12; 8:14; 10:19; 11:2-3; 24:18, 22; 26:5, 8).

THOUGHT - Spiritual challenges become manageable when we are reminded that God is present and active in the struggle. (McIntosh [Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

Deuteronomy 20:2 "When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people."

- Nu 10:8-9 Nu 31:6 Jdg 20:27,28 1Sa 14:18 30:7,8 2Ch 13:12
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries



Ark of the Covenant

Related Passages:

Numbers 10:8-9 "The priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations. 9"When you go to war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies.

Numbers 31:6 Moses sent them, a thousand from each tribe, to the war, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand.

**THE ENCOURAGEMENTS:
FROM THE PRIESTS**

NET Note - The reference to the priest suggests also the presence of the ark of the covenant, the visible sign of God's presence.

The whole setting is clearly that of “holy war” or “Yahweh war,” in which God himself takes initiative as the true commander of the forces of Israel (cf. Ex 14:14–18; 15:3–10; Deut 3:22; 7:18–24; 31:6, 8). ([Deuteronomy 20](#))

When you are approaching the battle, the priest shall come near and speak to the people- While this was war, ultimately it was holy war and it was appropriate to have the holy priest present. Although not stated here, other passages suggest that the priests would carry the **Ark of the covenant** and they would also speak the Word of the LORD to the men to encourage their trust in the faithfulness of Yahweh to fulfill His promises to give them victory. Israel needed to be reminded of words Moses had spoken earlier...

The LORD your God who goes before you will Himself fight on your behalf, just as He did for you in Egypt before your eyes (Dt 1:30+)

Do not fear them, for the LORD your God is the one fighting for you' (Dt 3:22+)

Coakley - Since war was not just a military issue but also a religious and theological one, priests had a major part in preparing the people for war. Priests were employed to encourage the troops just before battle by strengthening their will to fight, reminding them that the LORD would come alongside to fight against Israel's enemies and provide deliverance. The priest stood as a tangible reminder to the troops that the Lord was with them and that they could trust Him for a favorable outcome in battle. (ED: ONE IS REMINDED OF MOSES ON THE HILL AND JOSHUA BATTLING THE AMALEKITES - Ex 17:8-16+) (Ibid)

[IVP Bible Background Commentary](#) - priest addressing the army. Since warfare was considered a religious enterprise, it was expected that priests and other religious functionaries would accompany the army. Assyrian texts and reliefs depict the roles performed by priests accompanying the troops. They carried or attended the images and emblems of the gods (see Josh 6:4–5; 1Sam 4:4), performed religious rituals and sacrifices, and undoubtedly addressed the army in the name of the gods.

Grant - The presence of the priest with the armies was a token of Israel's dependence on the Lord....They would not be fighting alone; the Lord would be doing battle for them also. In such a battle the outcome did not depend on their overwhelming arms and skill in strategy, but rather on their obedience to the Lord. ...These verses must have been in the mind of David as he saw the fear in the armies of Israel as they faced the challenge of Goliath. His words, "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel" (1 Sam 17:45), as he stood before the giant of Gath, showed that his trust was in the Lord alone. King Asa, as he faced overwhelming foes, had the same confidence when he cried to the Lord, "... help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude" (2 Chr 14:11). The warfare in which believers take part today seems at times to be against a more powerful foe. The resources available to those who oppose the Scriptures appear to be so great that the battle is uneven. In such circumstances the words of Paul are encouraging: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (2 Cor 10:4). ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

Wiersbe - We shouldn't be surprised to hear a priest encouraging the army, because the wars in Canaan were holy wars, God's judgment against wicked nations that had rebelled against Him and sinned against a flood of light. The Lord had given these nations ample time to repent and turn to Him, but they refused to obey. Israel's miraculous deliverance from Egypt and crossing of the Jordan River were proof enough that Almighty God was with them and judgment was coming (Josh. 2). The Jews were God's people, fighting God's battles, and it was fitting that they hear from God's servant, a priest. The priests marched with the Jewish army around Jericho and blew trumpets (Josh. 6:4–21), and a Levite named Jehaziel gave a message of encouragement to King Jehoshaphat before the king went out to battle (2 Chron. 20:14–19). Benaiah, son of Jehoiada the priest (1 Chron. 27:5), one of David's mighty men, was leader of the king's bodyguards (1 Kings 1:38) and succeeded Joab as captain of the army when Solomon became king (2:35; 4:4). Priests could become soldiers! ([Be Equipped](#))

Guzik - Though the priests were not normally to go into battle themselves (they were not numbered among the fighting men of Israel, Numbers 1:47–53), the priests still had an important job when Israel went to war—to spiritually teach and encourage the soldiers! ([Enduring Word Commentary - Deut 20](#))

Utley - "The rabbis called this person “the anointed priest of battle.” Before battle, the priest admonished them to be brave because God was with them. Even if some died in battle, God would still take care of them and their families." ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

We have seen an example of Israel trying to fight without God in Nu 14:44-45 "But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither **the ark of the covenant of the LORD** nor Moses left the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah." Deuteronomy 1:43 adds "So I spoke to you, but you would not listen. Instead you rebelled against the command of the LORD, and **acted presumptuously** and went up into the hill country."

F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily - Deuteronomy 20:2 When ye draw nigh unto the battle, the priest shall approach.

When Abraham returned from the slaughter of the kings, the priest of the Most High appeared to welcome him, and to prepare him for the still more subtle encounter which awaited him with the king of Sodom. As Abraham drew nigh to that battle the priest approached.

Wherever a battle is imminent, look out for the Priest. — Do not go to the war at your own charges, you cannot stand against the mighty power of your arch-adversary. Look around, and see the Priest stand What Priest? The Apostle and High Priest of your confession. He will offer prayer for you, and anoint your shield with the precious oil, and put his hand upon your hand as you feebly draw the bow.

“What makes you so bold, my lad?” the captain asked of a stripling as he went into the fight. And the answer came quickly, “My mother put her hands on my head and blessed me ere I left our home.”

Whenever the Priest has been near, anticipate a battle. — The best hours come to prepare us for the worst. The dove descends that we may be able to stand for forty days against the devil. Do not be surprised at this. And whenever some experience of unusual radiance and helpfulness has visited you, say to yourself, “This is God’s sweet way of preparing me against coming trial. Let me walk warily, for danger is near. The Priest has been with me; I am drawing nigh to the battle. I know not what lies before me: but He is acquainted with the difficulties I have to face and the fierceness of the adversary I have to encounter. He alone can equip me for the fight.”

Deuteronomy 20:3 "He shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them,

- let not: Ps 27:1-3 Isa 35:3,4 41:10-14 Mt 10:16,28,31 Eph 6:11-18 1Th 5:15 Heb 12:12,13 Rev 2:10
- be afraid: Ps 3:6 Isa 8:12,13 57:7,8 Mt 8:26 Mk 16:6,18 Ac 18:9,10 27:24 1Ti 6:12 Heb 13:6
- tremble: Isa 28:16
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ENCOURAGEMENT BEFORE THE BATTLE

He shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today- Israel is commanded to hear and heed the four part exhortation to in effect be strong and courageous.

Deere - A lack of trust in God’s ability to fight for them (cf. Dt 1:30; 3:22) would affect the strength of their will, that is, they could easily become faint-hearted. If a weak will was not controlled by faith from the very first, it would lead to fear, terror, and even to panic before their enemies. So if the soldiers failed to listen to the priest they would become fearful and experience defeat. ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Do not be fainthearted - This indicates Israel lacks resolve and needs to be strong in the face of danger. Fainthearted is defined as lacking courage; cowardly; timorous, lacking conviction or boldness. This is not a good state in which to enter into a battle! Facing the enemy is no place for the faint hearted.

Do not be afraid - Do not fear men. Fear the Lord and you will not fear men. Pr 29:25 says "The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted."

Fear is what gripped Israel in 1 Sa 7:7 - "Now when the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered to Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. **And when the sons of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines**" In this case their fear caused them to cry out to God for help and He showed Himself mighty in their behalf - read the story in 1 Sa 7:8-11. "Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it [Ebenezer](#), saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.” (1 Sa 7:12). ([What does Here I Raise my Ebenezer mean in the familiar hymn?](#))

Be afraid (03372) **yare** to fear, to be afraid (Ge 3:10₊), to respect, to reverence, to be terrified, to be awesome, to be feared, to make afraid, to frighten. Uses of **yare** in Deuteronomy - Deut. 1:19; Deut. 1:21; Deut. 1:29; Deut. 2:4; Deut. 3:2; Deut. 3:22; Deut. 4:10; Deut. 5:5; Deut. 5:29; Deut. 6:2; Deut. 6:13; Deut. 6:24; Deut. 7:18; Deut. 7:19; Deut. 7:21; Deut. 8:6; Deut. 8:15; Deut. 10:12; Deut. 10:17; Deut. 10:20; Deut. 10:21; Deut. 13:4; Deut. 13:11; Deut. 14:23; Deut. 17:13; Deut. 17:19; Deut. 19:20; Deut. 20:1; Deut. 20:3; Deut. 20:8; Deut. 21:21; Deut. 25:18; Deut. 28:10; Deut. 28:58; Deut. 31:6; Deut. 31:8; Deut. 31:12; Deut. 31:13;

Utley - yare is the common term for fear:

- of enemies—Deut. 1:21, 29; 2:4; 3:2, 22; 7:18, 19; 20:1, 3; 31:6; Josh. 11:6
- peoples of the earth fear the people of God—Deut. 28:10 (cf. Josh. 4:24); Josh. 9:24
- Israel is to fear/awe/respect YHWH—Deut. 4:10; 5:5; 6:2, 13, 24; 10:12, 20; 13:11; 14:23; 17:13, 19; 19:20; 21:21; 25:18; 28:58; 31:12; Josh. 4:24 ([Deuteronomy 1 Commentary](#))

Or panic - Refers to hurrying away in haste or fear, as when fleeing a battle (1 Sa 23:26, 1 Ki 7:15) In short this word means to flee or hurry away, with the connotation of being afraid. 2 Kings 7:15 tells of a whole army fleeing in terror. When four lepers went down from Samaria to the Aramean army, which was besieging the city, the LORD caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and the marching of a large army. Hearing this, they ran away in haste.

Panic - 2648. רָחַץ ḥāpaz: A verb indicating to hurry, hurry away implying alarm (2Sa 4:4; 2Ki 7:15; nif 1Sa 23:26; 2Ki 7:15 K; Ps 48:6;), to fear, to flee. Be alarmed, be in fear (Dt 20:3; Job 40:23) It refers to hurrying away in haste or fear (2 Sam. 4:4) or in military flight (1 Sam. 23:26; 2 Kgs. 7:15). Leviathan does not react in haste and fear to anything (Job 40:23) nor become alarmed. It describes in figurative language how flood waters went down quickly at the Lord's command (Ps. 104:7).

Or tremble before them - To **tremble** means to be struck with dread and can mean literally to tremble.

Tremble (dread, cause terror, shock) ([06206](#)) **arats** means to cause to tremble, to be alarmed, to be terrified, to dread, to be struck with awe or dread. Isaiah says the splendor of the majesty of Jehovah make the earth tremble (Isa 2:19, 21). Deuteronomy and Joshua repeatedly reminded the Israelites before battle to not fear because God would be with them - Dt. 1:29; Dt 7:21; Dt 20:3; Dt 31:6; Josh. 1:9). Each time, Israel was admonished not to fear the nations who dwelt in the Promised Land, and each admonishment was followed by a reason for the maintenance of courage.

Wiersbe - The Lord's, "**Fear not**" is what every believer needs to hear when confronting the enemies of the faith. It's the message the Lord gave to Abraham after helping him defeat the kings (Ge 15:1) and to Jacob when he left home to go to Egypt (Ge 46:3). Moses gave that message to the Jews as they stood at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13), and the Prophet Isaiah repeated it several times to encourage the Jewish remnant (Isa. 41:10, 13–14; 43:1, 5; 44:2, 8). You find the phrase seven times in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:13, 30; 2:10; 5:10; 8:50; 12:7, 32). When we walk by faith and keep our eyes on the Lord (Heb. 12:1–3), (ED: See discussion of "Vertical Vision") He will give us the peace we need (Phil. 4:4–9). **You are heading for victory when you know that the Lord is with you and fighting for you.** ([Be Equipped](#))

Deuteronomy 20:4 for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.'

- **fight:** De 1:30 3:22 Dt 11:25 Dt 32:30 Ex 14:14 Jos 10:42 23:10 2Ch 13:12 2Ch 32:7,8 Ps 144:1,2 Ro 8:37
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Romans 8:37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

Deuteronomy 32:30 "How could one chase a thousand, And two put ten thousand to flight, Unless their Rock had sold them, And the LORD had given them up?"

Exodus 14:14 "The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent."

2 Chronicles 32:7; 8 "Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria nor because of all the horde that is with him; for the one with us is greater than the one with him. 8) "With him is only an **arm of flesh**, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people relied on the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

**THE REASON FOR
ISRAEL'S CONFIDENCE**

For - Term of explanation. Explaining the reason Israel could be confident against her enemies. In the thick of battle, they were to remember this one fact: victory was theirs through the presence and power of God.

the LORD your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you - Not only was Yahweh present at the battle, but He actively engaged in the battle! When Israel was obedient, and trusting in God, they could never lose. This truth should fortify their faith so that they would not grow fainthearted, not become afraid, panic or tremble. Note the 3 reasons Israel is not to fear, panic, tremble, etc - God is with them, God fights their enemies, and ultimately God saves them. **Save** is translated in the Septuagint with [diasozo](#) which means to bring safely though or to rescue from a hazard or danger. Earlier Moses had declared "No man will be able to stand before you; the LORD your God will lay the dread of you and the fear of you on all the land on which you set foot, as He has spoken to you." (Deuteronomy 11:25) So instead of Israel dreading their enemies, their enemies would dread and fear Israel because of Yahweh.

THOUGHT - The language of warfare is a picture of the believer's spiritual warfare against the enemies of this world. The war fought by the Christian believer is not an earthly war but a spiritual warfare. As the believer marches to the promised land of heaven, enemy after enemy attacks him, subtle temptations and trials. Some enemies are small and weak, amounting to nothing more than minor temptations or trials. Such enemies are easy to conquer, sometimes even by the arm of the flesh. But there are other enemies that are far more powerful and brutal in their attacks. These enemies could never be defeated by man, such enemies as a terminal disease, a paralyzing accident, the face of death, or the powerful seduction and lust of some sin that so easily entangles us (He. 12:1). Such enemies as these can be conquered only by the presence and power of God Himself. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

(**Read** 1 Co. 10:13 Ep. 3:20 He. 13:6 Ex. 14:14 De. 20:1 Ps. 28:7 Ps. 40:17 Is. 41:10 Is. 43:2).

Fight (fought, make war) ([03898](#)) [lacham](#) means to do battle, fight, engage in combat, wage war -- against Egyptians (Ex 1:10), against Israel (Nu 21:1, 23, 25, 22:11; Josh 9:2); against Israel's enemies (Josh 10:29). Of Yahweh fighting for His people (Ex 14:14, Ex 14:25, Ex 17:9-10, Dt 1:30, Dt 3:22, Josh 10:14, Jer 21:5, Neh 4:14, 2 Chr 20:29) In doing so, Yahweh often calls into His service not only Israel, but also the elements of nature (Josh 10:11; Josh 24:7; Jdg 5:20). Nevertheless, the Israelites must also join the battle and fight with the Lord. Even though their land has been deeded to them as an inheritance, they must conquer it in battle (Ex 23:27-33).

W E Vine - While the word is commonly used in the context of "armies engaged in pitched battle" against each other (Num. 21:23; Josh. 10:5; Judg. 11:5), it is also used to describe "single, hand-to-hand combat" (1 Sam. 17:32-33). Frequently, God "fights" the battle for Israel (Deut. 20:4). Instead of swords, words spoken by a lying tongue are often used "to fight" against God's servants ([Ps. 109:2](#)). ([Vine's Expository Dictionary](#))

Save (deliver, help) ([03467](#)) [yasha'](#) See also [yeshua](#) from which we get our word "Jesus") meaning to save, to help, to deliver, to defend. The underlying idea of this verb is bringing to a place of safety or broad pasture as opposed to a narrow strait, symbolic of distress and danger. The root in Arabic is "make wide" which underscores the main thought of [yasha'](#) as to bring to a place of safety or broad pasture in contrast to a narrow strait which symbolizes distress or danger. [yasha'](#) connotes protection that produces freedom from a present danger (2Sa 22:3, Job 5:4), salvation or deliverance in a religious sense (Ps 51:12), a title of God (Savior - 2Sa 22:47; 1Chr 16:35; Ps 18:46; Ps 24:5; Ps 25:5; Ps 27:9; Ps 65:5; Ps 79:9; Ps 85:4; Isa 17:10; 62:11; Mic 7:7 Hab 3:18), victory as an act or a result of conquering (2Sa 22:36; Ps 18:35) It is notable that almost 20% of the uses of [yasha'](#) are found during the dark days of Judges (dominated by the heart attitude of Jdg 21:25), which surely speaks of the undeserved lovingkindness of God!

Grant - the promise of the presence of the Lord on the day of battle, repeated in v. 4, was the guarantee of their victory. This was what made the difference, and there was no need to fear or to tremble with terror. In the crossing of the Red Sea the Lord used the waters to drown the Egyptians. The victory over Jericho was won by the walls of that city falling down (Josh 6:20). In the triumph of Joshua over the Amorites great hailstones fell on the enemy and the sun and moon stood still in the heavens (Josh 10:11-13). Gideon faced the enemy with a force of three hundred men and defeated them (Judg 7:12-25). The years that lay ahead were to prove that the Lord would keep His promise. ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

John Maxwell has an excellent statement dealing with the treatment of holy war. Holy war is marked by a number of distinctives which set it apart from other types of wars:

1. A holy war was not undertaken without consulting Yahweh (1 Sam. 28:5–6; 30:7–8; 2 Sam. 5:19, 22–23).
2. The men of Israel were consecrated to the LORD before (and during) battle (1 Sam. 21:5; 2 Sam. 11:11; Isa. 13:3).

3. Men that would offend God were removed from camp (Deut. 23:9–11).
4. Yahweh was present in the camp (Deut. 23:14), and He gave His leader special powers, although it was God Himself who was the Captain of the hosts of Israel and could alone deliver His people (Jdg. 4:14–15; 7:2ff; 1 Sam. 13:5, 15; 14:6–23).
5. At the climax of the battle God sent terror and panic into the midst of the enemy, thus bringing about their overthrow (Deut. 2:25; Josh. 2:9; 5:1; 1 Sam. 5:11; 7:10).
6. The spoils of war were under the ban of sacred consecration and were the exclusive right of God.

Deuteronomy 20:4 Our Field of Battle - Faith's Checkbook

“For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.”—**Deuteronomy 20:4**

WE have no enemies but the enemies of God. Our fights are not against men, but against spiritual wickednesses. We war with the devil and the blasphemy, error, and despair which he brings into the field of battle. We fight with all the armies of sin—impurity, drunkenness, oppression, infidelity, and ungodliness. With these we contend earnestly, but not with sword or spear; the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. (2 Cor 10:3-5)

Jehovah, our God, abhors everything which is evil, and, therefore, He goeth with us to fight for us in this crusade. He will save us, and He will give us grace to war a good warfare, and win the victory. We may depend upon it that if we are on God's side God is on our side. With such an august ally the conflict is never in the least degree doubtful. It is not that truth is mighty and must prevail, but that might lies with the Father who is Almighty, with Jesus who has all power in heaven and in earth, and with the Holy Spirit who worketh His will among men.

Soldiers of Christ, gird on your armor. Strike home in the name of the God of holiness, and by faith grasp His salvation. Let not this day pass without striking a blow for Jesus and

Deuteronomy 20:5 "The officers also shall speak to the people, saying, 'Who is the man that has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would dedicate it.

- officers: De 1:15 16:18 Nu 31:14,48 1Sa 17:18
- dedicated: Ne 12:27 Ps 30:1
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Luke 14:16-20 But He said to him, “A man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; 17and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ 18“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.’ 19“Another one said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.’ 20“Another one said, ‘I have married a wife, and for that reason I cannot come.’

EXEMPTION FROM MILITARY SERVICE

In vv 5-8 Moses tells Israel how to shrink an army so that more glory goes to Jehovah! The key phrase in this section is **Let him depart and return to his house** (3x). There is a logic to this for there is nothing worse than a soldier on the battlefield with his mind distracted by matters at home! The soldier was to be present in battle not just in his body but also in his mind (heart). If they would not give themselves wholeheartedly to battle, they would be discharge to return home just as with Gideon's ranks (Jdg 7:1-7). God was not interested in the number of men, but in the character (heart) of the men. And ultimately reduction of ranks would result in magnifying the glory to God. As Judges 7:2 says "the LORD said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying, ‘My own power has delivered me.’ This was the overriding principle for the army of Israel whenever they went to battle. One recalls the words in Zechariah 4:6 ‘Not by (YOUR) might nor by (YOUR) power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

POSB - The exemptions were allowed because of the need for total commitment by every soldier. Distractions could not be allowed.

Anything that might distract a soldier had to be eliminated. Commitment was an absolute necessity when marching into battle. Without commitment, the battle was lost even before it began. For this reason, the basic qualification for a soldier was personal commitment to the army and its purpose. It was not necessary to have the *largest* possible army but the *best* possible army. The best possible army was the army totally committed to God, and absolutely confident that God would give them the victory over the enemy. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

The officers also shall speak to the people, saying, 'Who is the man that has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would dedicate it- Building a new house and not having begun to use it qualified for an exemption. Note that there is no suggestion of censure for having to depart and return to one's house. The carrying out of the exemptions in this section would serve to assure high morale in the troops entering battle.

POSB - This exemption was necessary to maintain life in the promised land. Remember, as the Israelites conquered the land, they were to immediately settle down and begin to farm the land. Building homes, growing food, and marrying and having children—all these were necessary to carry on life in the promised land. Without these very basic functions of life, war would be pointless. There would be no need to conquer the promised land, no need to seek a full and victorious life in the land promised by God. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

NET NOTE on dedicate - The Hebrew term **קָנַח** (khanakh) occurs elsewhere only with respect to the dedication of Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 8:63 = 2 Chr 7:5). There it has a religious connotation which, indeed, may be the case here as well. The noun form (**קִנְיָה**, khanukah) is associated with the consecration of the great temple altar (2 Chr 7:9) and of the postexilic wall of Jerusalem (Neh 12:27). In Maccabean times the festival of Hanukkah was introduced to celebrate the rededication of the temple following its desecration by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (1 Macc 4:36–61 ([Deuteronomy 20](#)))

Ryrie - Dt 20:5-9 These liberal exemptions helped insure that victory would be ascribed to the Lord (cf. v. 4) and showed that military matters were not paramount. On verse 8, see Jdg. 7:2-3.

G Campbell Morgan - Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible -

The officers shall speak unto the people saying . . .Deut 20.5

These words introduce a paragraph, and they are chosen to draw attention to it. Let us first note the whole chapter. It contains that section of this discourse of Moses in which most particular instructions were given for the guidance of the people in the wars which they must inevitably be engaged in. They were being led, not merely to find a land for their own possession, but as a scourge of God against a corrupt and corrupting people. They were charged, first, that in the day of battle they must keep before them the vision of God, for that alone would free them from fear in the presence of the foe. Before actual conflict the priest was authoritatively to announce the fact of the presence, and authority, and power of God. Then we read our words, and the connected paragraph. It has to do with the grounds upon which men were to be exempt from military service. First, men who had duties and obligations, the fulfilment of which were necessary to the home-life of the nation were not to go to war. Men who had unfinished houses, ungathered vineyards, and men newly married, were to remain at home, at least until such times as they had discharged their obligations. Then also, men who lacked courage were to remain behind, because fear is contagious. It is impossible to read all this in view of much modern history without furious thinking! At least, we are driven to the conclusion that armies thus sifted would have a quality that is lacking entirely when they are made up of all sorts and conditions.

Deuteronomy 20:6 'Who is the man that has planted a vineyard and has not begun to use its fruit?Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would begin to use its fruit.

- **not begun to use its fruit**, De 28:1-30:20 Lev 19:23-25 Jer 31:5
- **die**: Isa 65:22 Zep 1:13
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

SECOND EXEMPTION PLANTING A VINEYARD

Who is the man that has planted a vineyard and has not begun to use its fruit?Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would begin to use its fruit - Note that the phrase **might die in battle** seems to imply that Israel while victorious would not be invincible and some would die. It is also interesting that a vine planted might

take up to five years to yield fruit (Lev. 19:23–25.) so this could be a lengthy exemption.

Brown writes, "For the first three years there would be no fruit on the vine and in the fourth year its fruit must be offered to the Lord. So, until the fifth year its owner has not begun to enjoy its fruit. If he lost his life in the conflict, another person might easily take his property and just at the time when he and his family were likely to benefit personally from it. What then would happen to his wife and children who relied upon its produce for their income?". The issue of maturity appears here also.

Coates states, "There would be a certain immaturity about a man who had not eaten of his vineyard; he had not tasted the joy of the inheritance as a fruit of his own cultivation of it".

Wiersbe - No officer wants to lead distracted soldiers whose minds and hearts are elsewhere, for "a double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). Paul may have had this scene in mind when he wrote 2 Timothy 2:4, "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier" (NKJV). ([Be Equipped](#))

Deuteronomy 20:7 'And who is the man that is engaged to a woman and has not married her? Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would marry her.'

- **engaged to a woman:** De 22:23-25 24:5 Mt 1:18
- **he might die in the battle:** De 28:30 Lu 14:18-20 2Ti 2:4
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

THIRD EXEMPTION: ENGAGED BUT NOT MARRIED

'And who is the man that is engaged to a woman and has not married her? Let him depart and return to his house, otherwise he might die in the battle and another man would marry her - The length of the exemption for a newly married man was one year, for Dt 24:5 says "'When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken.'" Similar to what was stated earlier, this was necessary to maintain life and families within the nation of Israel.

Deere makes an excellent point - These exemptions (Dt 20:5–7) bring one of the basic purposes of holy war into sharp focus. Though it was waged as a punishment for the wickedness of the Canaanite population (see comments on chap. 7), it was also fought so that Israel might have a land in which to live a stable and peaceful life—building homes, planting crops, and raising families under God's rule. Since God was fighting for Israel it was not necessary for the war to take total priority over all domestic functions. ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Grant writes "The grace of God in making such exemptions must not be misused. A man must not build a house, plant a vineyard, or enter into an engagement with a view to marriage for the sole purpose of avoiding the call to battle. That would be an act of cowardice and misuse of God's grace. .([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

TSK - It was customary among the Jews to contract matrimony, espouse, or betroth, and for a considerable time to leave the parties in the houses of the respective parents; and when the bridegroom had made proper preparations, then the bride was brought home to his house, and the marriage consummated. The provisions in this verse refer to a case of this kind; though the Jews extend it to him who had newly consummated his marriage, and even to him who had married his brother's wife. It was deemed a peculiar hardship for a person to be obliged to go to battle, who had left a house unfinished, newly purchased land half tilled, or a wife with whom he had just contracted marriage.

Wiersbe - These three exceptions suggest to us that God is more interested in our enjoying the common blessings of life—homes, harvests, and honeymoons—than devoting ourselves only to the battles of life. He didn't want any of the Jewish men to use their military responsibilities as an excuse to neglect their families, their vineyards, and their fiancées. Certainly military service was important, but the Lord was more concerned that the men have the right priorities in life. What good was accomplished for the Jewish people if their army defeated the enemy on the field but things were falling apart back home? **The priests asked the soldiers to look up and trust the Lord, and the officers asked them to look back and consider any unfinished business that would hinder them from doing their best.** ([Be Equipped](#))

Deuteronomy 20:8 'Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted? Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his brothers' hearts melt like his heart.'

- **afraid:** De 1:28 23:9 Jud 7:3 Lu 9:62 Ac 15:37,38 Rev 3:16 21:8
- **lest his brethren's:** Nu 13:31-33 14:1-3 32:9 1Co 15:33
- **melt,** De 1:28 Ex 15:15
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,

Philippians 1:28 in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

Deuteronomy 31:6 “Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you.”

Joshua 1:6 “Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

Joshua 10:25 Joshua then said to them, “Do not fear or be dismayed! Be strong and courageous, for thus the LORD will do to all your enemies with whom you fight.”

Joshua 23:6-8 “Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, 7so that you will not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them. 8“But you are to cling to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.

2 Samuel 10:12 “Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what is good in His sight.”

1 Chronicles 19:13 “Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what is good in His sight.”

1 Chronicles 22:13 “Then you will prosper, if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances which the LORD commanded Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and courageous, do not fear nor be dismayed.

1 Chronicles 28:20 Then David said to his son Solomon, “Be strong and courageous, and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished.

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.

Proverbs 23:26 Give me your heart, my son, And let your eyes delight in my ways.

Ephesians 6:10-11 Finally, **be strong** in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 **Put on** the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

Who is the man that is afraid and fainthearted?- Note that with the first 3 groups there was no mention of their not being willing to serve or of being too fearful to serve in the army. The problem with these men staying in that fear is infectious and one fearful soldier could spread fear throughout the ranks. This exemption is clearly to fortify the morale of the soldiers who stayed to fight with courage. The best army is an army wholeheartedly committed to the LORD. Thus potentially discouraging men were removed.

Wiersbe - But the officers presented another challenge and asked the soldiers to look within and see if they were too afraid to go into battle. Gideon lost 22,000 men when he issued this challenge (Jud. 7:1–3). Fear and faith can't coexist successfully in the same heart (Matt. 8:26; Luke 8:25). Furthermore, fear is contagious and could discourage the other soldiers. It was fear and unbelief that caused Israel's great failure at Kadesh (Num. 13–14). ([Be Equipped](#))

Deere - Cowardice here was reckoned to be a spiritual problem. Since there was no court-martial, the officers removed a faint-hearted soldier before he had opportunity to defect in battle and/or cause other soldiers to become disheartened too. ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Wiersbe - Claiming our spiritual inheritance will involve battles as well as blessings, for the hosts of evil are against us (Eph. 6:10–13). God's words to Israel help us understand how to defeat the enemies we face. Before the battle: courage. We walk by faith and not by sight (Dt 20:1) and must never judge the victory by our own resources or the resources of the enemy. God gives us the power to overcome, so take courage from the fact that God is with us and fights for us. Read 2 Chronicles 20:1–23 for an exciting example of this truth. (With the Word Commentary)

Let him depart and return to his house, so that he might not make his brothers' hearts melt like his heart- The problem was that the fearful and fainthearted might discourage other soldiers, so they had to be culled out. "In the spiritual army of God, He only wants willing, brave soldiers." (Guzik) This rule was used with Gideon's army

"Now therefore come, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, 'Whoever is **afraid and trembling**, let him return and depart from Mount Gilead.'" So 22,000 people returned, but 10,000 remained. (Jdg. 7:3)

Grant asks "But what was the cause of this fear? It was due to a lack of belief in the word of the Lord. Israel had been told that they need not fear the enemy and that trust in the Lord and submission to His word would gain them the victory." ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

POSB - A coward was a threat to the courage of the other soldiers. In the rage of battle, especially in a hard fought battle, fear and cowardice can spread like wildfire. Fear and cowardice in the rage of a battle can destroy morale and lead to a fatal retreat. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary to exempt the faint-hearted, the coward. **Note this fact: fear and cowardice were spiritual problems.** God promised the victory; victory was assured. Going into battle, a person was bound to feel some apprehension, but there was no need to allow the fear to conquer one's heart and cause panic and terror. **God promised His presence and power to help every soldier fight against the enemies of the promised land. Therefore, fear and cowardice were inexcusable.** Nevertheless, after all the encouragement, if a person was still faint-hearted, gripped with the spirit of a coward, he was exempt from service. (Ibid)

THOUGHT - Commitment, courage, and loyalty are absolute essentials in any warfare. This is true of earthly warfare and of spiritual warfare. No matter who the enemy is—man, temptation, or trial—we must be committed to God, loyal to Him, and courageous in order to be victorious. We can conquer the enemies of this life only by the presence and the power of God. Victorious courage—the kind of courage that gives a full and victorious life—can come only from God. Therefore, we must be committed and loyal to God. If we will give Him our hearts and lives, God will infuse us with enormous courage, enough courage to conquer all the enemies of this life. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

As **Utley** notes "It was not the size of Israel's army, but the power of Israel's God that made the difference! The smaller and less equipped the army, the more it magnified God's victory (cf. Judges 7)." ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

Guzik - To God, the size of the army wasn't important; the heart of the army was far more important. He didn't want people who might be distracted from the real battle by worrying about the cares of everyday life (their home, their vineyard, their fiancée); nor did He want people who were not really trusting Him. God could do more through a smaller army that was really committed to Him than through a bigger army that was full of compromise.. The story of Gideon (Judges 7) is a powerful illustration of this; Gideon started with an army of 32,000, but it was too big—so he sent home those who were afraid, and 22,000 left! But it was still too big, so God had him send home 7,700 more, so he only had an army of 300 to fight against a Midianite army of 135,000! Yet God gave him the victory. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Deut 20](#))

Deuteronomy 20:9 "When the officers have finished speaking to the people, they shall appoint commanders of armies at the head of the people.

- the people: Heb. to be in the head of the people, De 20:9
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMY

When the officers have finished speaking to the people, they shall appoint commanders of armies at the head of the people - NET = "Then, when the officers have finished speaking, they must appoint unit commanders to lead the troops." Having in effect removed the "chaff" from the "wheat," it was now time to organize the army. No matter how good the soldiers were, they needed to have good leadership. How officers were selected is not clear, but presumably they were head elders in each of the 12

tribes and would have been men know not just for their physical prowess but more so for their spiritual prowess.

Wiersbe - Once the ranks had been thinned out, the officers would appoint captains, so each man had to be ready to serve. At this time, Israel didn't have what we would call a "standing army" with an organized system of permanent officers. The major officers knew their best men and would assign leadership responsibilities for each campaign. When Saul became king, he formed the nucleus of a standing army and his successor David developed the organization even more. In fighting God's battles, faith and courage are important, but so are authority and order. ([Be Equipped](#))

Deuteronomy 20:10 "When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace.

- offer: 2Sa 20:18-22 Isa 57:19 Zec 9:10 Lu 10:5,6 Ac 10:36 2Co 5:18-21 6:1 Eph 2:17
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PEACE OFFER PROCEEDS WAR

Wiersbe - Moses has been instructing the people how to wage war in the land of Canaan, but now he deals with the battles they will fight outside the land. The Lord wanted to enlarge Israel's borders (Dt 19:8) and this would involve military engagements away from the Promised Land. ([Be Equipped](#))

Guzik makes a good point - It is important to note that God gave instructions to Israel on how to conduct war. There are, in God's way of doing things, rules for war. It cannot be conducted in any way conceivable or in any way that might bring victory. These principles are reflected in the ancient Christian teachings regarding just war. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Deut 20](#))

When you approach a city to fight ([lacham](#)) against it, you shall offer it terms of peace (lit - "call to it for peace") - The instructions in vv10-15 applied only to cities far away (some think far away but still in the bounds of the promised land, while others think it refers to only the cities outside the promised land). They are to first offer in essence the "absence of conflict and strife." This is interesting in light of the fact that Israel was to annihilate the Canaanites. Note that these instructions were general battle procedures prescribed for Israel but at times God would give other instructions that supersede these instructions (e.g., battle of Jericho or conquest of cities of Canaan).

THOUGHT - God is good, and He expects us to be good in our treatment of people. Israel was first to seek peace with distant enemies. God expects us to seek peace with our neighbors, whether distant or next door. We are to seek peace with all persons and do good to them. (Mt. 5:9, Mk. 9:50, Lu. 6:35, Ro. 12:18, Ro. 14:19, He. 12:14, He. 13:6, Jas. 4:17, Ps. 34:14, Ps. 37:3, Pr. 12:20).

Peace ([07965](#)) **shalom** from **salam/salem/shalom** = to be safe, sound, healthy, perfect, complete [1Ki 7:51, Neh 6:18] signifies a sense of well-being and harmony both within and without - Completeness, wholeness, peace, health, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, fullness, rest, harmony; the absence of agitation or discord, a state of calm without anxiety or stress. The root meaning of **shalom** is to be whole or sound and this leads to translations that speak of completeness, wholeness, well-being, welfare and peace. **Shalom** also includes the idea of vigour and vitality in all dimensions of life. In short, **shalom** speaks of holistic ("holy") health for our souls and spirits. Shalom in Deut - Deut. 2:26; Deut. 20:10; Deut. 20:11; Deut. 23:6; Deut. 29:19

Deuteronomy 20:11 "If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you.

- **forced labor:** Lev 25:42-46 Jos 9:22,23,27 11:19,20 16:10 Jud 1:28,30-35 1Ki 9:21,22 Ps 120:7 Lu 19:14
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

FORCED LABORERS AND SERVANTS

If it agrees to make peace with you (Heb = "if it answers you peace") **and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you** - In one sense this is a fulfillment of Noah's curse on Canaan, Noah

declaring ""Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brothers." He also said, "Blessed be the LORD, The God of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant. "May God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant." (Ge 9:25-27) **Forced labor** of a defeated enemy was common in ancient warfare. A conquered city would be made a **tribute** city to Israel, subservient to the nation of Israel. This indicated that Israel had control over the enemy.

NET Note on **become your forced labor and shall serve you** - Heb "become as a vassal and will serve you." The Hebrew term translated slaves (עַבְדִּים, mas) refers either to Israelites who were pressed into civil service, especially under Solomon (1 Kgs 5:27; 9:15, 21; 12:18), or (as here) to foreigners forced as prisoners of war to become slaves to Israel. The Gibeonites exemplify this type of servitude (Josh 9:3–27; cf. Josh 16:10; 17:13; Judg 1:28, 30–35; Isa 31:8; Lam 1:1). ([Deuteronomy 20](#))

Wiersbe - If the people accepted the terms, then the city and its inhabitants would be spared but the city would be put under tribute to Israel. This involved paying an annual levy to Israel and making their citizens bondservants to the Israelites (see Josh. 9:16–17; 16:10; 17:13). During King David's reign, there was a special officer in Israel who was in charge of the "forced labor" (2 Sam. 20:24). Because of his extensive building programs, King Solomon expanded this office and even included Israelites in the work force (1 Kings 5:13–18; 9:15; 2 Chron. 2:17–18). It was this burden that made Judah finally revolt against Solomon's son Rehoboam and secede from the kingdom (1 Kings 12). ([Be Equipped](#))

Grant - In that relationship the occupants would be servants of Israel, but they would also gain the status of being protectorates of Israel. There is no suggestion that the relationship between Israel and the city was one of equality. Israel would be the master. . ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

Forced labor is the Hebrew word **mas**, a masculine noun designating forced service or tribute. It refers to labor forced on someone or service demanded. The institution of tribute or corvée involves involuntary, unpaid labour or other service for a superior power—a feudal lord, a king, or a foreign ruler (Ex 1:11; Est 10:1; Lam 1:1). The Septuagint has two words to describe **forced labor** and **serve** - **phorologeō** an adjective describing levying, forced labor, conscription, or paying tribute to another and **hupekoos** which means obedient or submissive.

In Leviticus 25:44-46 Moses stated "As for your male and female slaves whom you may have—you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you. Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession.'You may even bequeath them to your sons after you, to receive as a possession; you can use them as **permanent slaves**. But in respect to your countrymen, the sons of Israel, you shall not rule with severity over one another."

POSB - Israel had to guard against deception and intrigue, for the enemy could accept the offer of peace in order to lull the Israelites into a false security and disarmament. The enemy could then stage an uprising, a revolt against Israel, and end up conquering them. For this reason, the citizens of a distant enemy were to become servants of Israel. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

Serve (enslave) (05647) **abad** means to work (to cultivate, till - Ge 2:5, 15 - Lxx = **ergazomai** before the fall! Ge 3:23 after the fall, Lxx = **ergazomai**), to serve (be enslaved or hold in bondage - Ex 6:6 - Lxx = **katadouloo** = make a slave; Lev 25:38, 39 Lxx = **douleuo**)(Ge 14:4, 15:13, 14 - Lxx = **douleuo**), worship. Labor (as when Israel was in Egyptian bondage - Ex 1:13,14 but same word **abad** translated worship after redemption Ex 3:12, 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, 9:1, et al where Lxx = **latreuo**).

Deuteronomy 20:12 "However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it."

- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

NO PEACE BUT LAY SIEGE

However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it- Cities in the ancient world were often walled ("the cities are fortified and very large" fortifications making the cities inaccessible - Nu 13:28) and were typically conquered by use of a siege. Israel was to surround the city and cut off all their supplies and contact with the outside and when the city was sufficiently weakened through hunger or thirst, they would either surrender or be conquered. However, at times a siege could last for years (cf the horrible siege of Samaria - 2 Ki 6:24-33).

Besiege (06696) צוֹר **tsûr/sur** A verb meaning to besiege, to lay siege, to bind. This root means to make secure a valuable object, such as money (2 Kgs 5:23), similar to šârar I (q.v.). Applied to military action it

means to relentlessly attack an opponent's stronghold. Every effort was made to shut off supplies (especially water, cf. II Sam 12:27) from the city and to prevent the people from escaping. The tactics included building a mound to reach the wall and using battering rams and towers to breach it (cf. II Sam 20:15; Ezk 26:8f.). The inhabitants of a besieged city were threatened by both sword and famine; therefore, some surrendered to the enemy in order to preserve their lives (Jer 21:9). Without great discipline, tension inside the city mounted as prices for anything resembling food soared (II Kgs 6:25). It took the Assyrians three years to capture Samaria (2Kgs 17:5). Sometimes armies lacked the capacity to move from victories on the battlefield to take a stronghold (II Kgs 16:5). It describes attaching a money bag to one's hand to transport it safely or to putting money into bags (Deut. 14:25; 2 Kgs. 5:23). It has the sense of gathering and agitating people to go against a city (Jdg. 9:31); or of setting up siegeworks or fortress outposts against a city (Isa. 29:3); of besieging a city, attacking it (1 Sam. 23:8; 2 Sam. 11:1; 1 Kgs. 15:27; 16:17; 2 Kgs. 5:23; Dan. 1:1). It is used figuratively of constructing a protective barrier around a young girl (Song 8:9).

Swanson - יָצַר (šûr): 1. (qal) lay siege, besiege, i.e., encircle and enclose a fortified area as an aggressive military strategy to defeat a city or nation (Dt 20:12, 19; 1Sa 23:8; 2Sa 11:1; 20:15; 1Ki 8:37; 15:27; 16:17; 20:1; 2Ki 6:24, 25; 16:5; 17:5; 18:9; 24:11; 1Ch 20:1; 2Ch 6:28; Ps 139:5; Isa 1:8; 21:2; 29:3; Jer 21:4, 9; 32:2; 37:5; 39:1; Eze 4:3; Da 1:1+); 2. (qal) put in a bag, take, i.e., place an object into a bag, as an extension of laying siege to a city (Dt 14:25; 2Ki 12:11[EB 10]; 2Ki 5:23+), 3. LN 16 (qal) tuck, i.e., make a non-linear movement of placing one object into another space (Eze 5:3+); 4. LN 79.110–79.113 (qal) enclose, i.e., to close off an area by constructing with paneling (SS 8:9+); 5. LN 39.42–39.44 (qal) stir up, formally, besiege, i.e., be in a riotous situation, as a figurative extension of besieging a city would cause social upheaval (Jdg 9:31+), ([Dictionary of Semantic Domains - Hebrew](#))

Sur - 31v - barricade(1), besiege(3), besiege*(1), besieged(1), besieged*(10), besieging*(5), bind(2), bound(1), enclosed(1), laid siege(1), lay siege(1), laying siege(1), set(1), stirring(1), tied(1). Deut. 14:25; Deut. 20:12; Deut. 20:19; Jdg. 9:31; 1 Sam. 23:8; 2 Sam. 11:1; 2 Sam. 20:15; 1 Ki. 15:27; 1 Ki. 16:17; 1 Ki. 20:1; 2 Ki. 5:23; 2 Ki. 6:24; 2 Ki. 6:25; 2 Ki. 12:10; 2 Ki. 16:5; 2 Ki. 17:5; 2 Ki. 18:9; 2 Ki. 24:11; 1 Chr. 20:1; Ps. 139:5; Cant. 8:9; Isa. 21:2; Isa. 29:3; Jer. 21:4; Jer. 21:9; Jer. 32:2; Jer. 37:5; Jer. 39:1; Ezek. 4:3; Ezek. 5:3; Dan. 1:1

THOUGHT - Though some well-meaning people don't like the military metaphors in the Bible, the church today is in a battle against the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and the [devil](#) (Eph. 2:1–3; 6:10–18; 2 Tim. 2:3–4). But we are also ambassadors of peace who wear the shoes of "the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15) and plead with rebellious sinners to be "reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18–21). Jesus brought His message of peace to His own people (Luke 2:14) and they rejected it (13:34–35; John 1:11), so He had to replace the offer of peace with an announcement of judgment (Luke 12:51–56). In A.D. 70 the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and killed, captured, or scattered the people, and there was no political nation of Israel until May 14, 1948. ([Be Equipped](#))

Deuteronomy 20:13 "When the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword."

- **strike**: Nu 31:7-9,17,18 1Ki 11:15,16 Ps 2:6-12 21:8,9 110:1 Lu 19:27 2Th 1:7-9
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

ISRAEL BESIEGES YAHWEH BESTOWS

When the LORD your God gives it into your hand- Israel besieges but Yahweh bestows the booty. God's sovereignty and men's responsibility is seen once again. It is never "Let go, let God," but "Let God, let's go!" **Hand** (yad) is often used figuratively as here and signifies power or possession of controlling influence as when something is in the grip of one's hand. **Yad** conveys not just power, but authority and right of possession. The corollary principle is that any war in which they were involved must be with His approval (true for Israel and true for us as believers! Choose your battles carefully...that is prayerfully!)

You shall strike all the men in it with the edge(mouth) of the sword - In this context the verb **strike** means to strike dead (first use Ge 4:15 "whoever kills Cain") all those of a certain age (children spared - see v14). In the ancient world surviving males would be perpetual enemies and must be killed. There was generally no such thing as POW'S, or prisoners of war, for it was easily to

simply kill them.

Strike (05221) נָכָה **nākāh**: A verb meaning to beat, to strike, to wound. The meaning of the vb. ranges from hitting to killing. ni. be hit, be struck down; pu. be battered, ruined, destroyed; hi. strike, hit, beat, strike dead, wound, batter, destroy; ho. be struck down (dead), be taken, be hit (#5782); nom. נִכְּהָ (makkā), blow, stroke, wound, plague, defeat. There are many instances of striking physically (Ex. 21:15, 19; Job 16:10; Ps. 3:7[8]; Song 5:7). Of Yahweh smiting the firstborn (Nu 3:13, 8:17), His own people (Nu 11:33). Of Moses striking the rock twice resulting in his not being allowed to enter the Promised Land (Nu 20:11). Frequently, nākāh is related to the Israelite conquest of Canaan. God used disease to smite the inhabitants of Canaan (Num. 14:12). This word is also used in a different sense, as when the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were stricken blind by the two angels (Gen. 19:11); when a priest stuck a fork into the kettle (1 Sam. 2:14); when people clapped their hands (2 Kgs. 11:12); or when people verbally abused Jeremiah (Jer. 18:18). God struck the Egyptians with plagues (Ex. 3:20); and struck people down in judgment (Isa. 5:25).

Swanson - 1. (hif) strike, beat, i.e., make physical contact with a blow (Ex 7:17); (nif) be struck (2Sa 11:15+); (hof) be struck, be beat, be wounded (Ex 5:14, 16; 22:1[EB 2]; Isa 1:5; 53:4; Zec 13:6+); **2. (hif) destroy, ruin**, i.e., cause the destruction of an object (2Ch 14:13+); (hof) destroyed (Eze 33:21; 40:1+); (pual) be destroyed, formally, be struck (Ex 9:31, 32+); **3. (hif) kill, slaughter**, i.e., take the life of another (Ex 2:12); (hof) killed, slain (Nu 25:14,15, 18; Jer 18:21+); **4. (hif) afflict**, i.e., cause one to become ill or sick (Dt 28:27; 1Sa 5:6); (hof) be afflicted (1Sa 5:12; Ps 102:5; Hos 9:16+); **5. (hif) defeat, conquer**, i.e., have a military victory over an opponent or enemy (Jos 10:10); **6. unit: אָגַרְךָ רָשַׁע נִכְּהָ בְּ- 'ēg-rōp rē-šā' (NJB, NEB, REB) vicious blow**, formally, strike in fist of wickedness, i.e., strike very hard (Isa 58:4+); **7. unit: לְ- נִכְּהָ פֹה חֶבֶר (nā-kā(h) l- pē(h) ḥě-rēb) kill**, formally, strike with the mouth of the sword (Jos 10:30); **8. unit: שׁוֹקֵי יַרְךָ (nā-kā(h) šōq 'āl yā-rēk) be vicious**, formally, strike them hip and thigh, i.e., to destroy or kill in a very violent and vicious manner (Jdg 15:8) ([Dictionary of Semantic Domains - Hebrew](#))

TWOT - The root is used about five hundred times. But one must not hastily infer that since nākā is such a common OT root, society as a whole was saturated with war and violence. That warfare and bloodshed did occur, sometimes with great frequency, must not be denied. Yet, the wide variety of ways in which the verb “to smite” is used throughout the OT is fitting evidence to warrant a somewhat different conclusion.

Nakah - 451v - attack(5), attacked(6), attacks(3), beat(3), beat down(1), beaten(5), beating(1), blows(1), bothered(1), cast(1), clap(3), clapped(1), conquered(5), defeat(5), defeated(44), destroy(1), destroyed(2), drove(1), indeed defeated(1), inflicted(4), kill(11), kill*(1), killed(36), killing(3), kills(10), made(1), overthrown(1), pin(2), ruined(2), shoot(1), shot(1), slain(11), slapped(1), slaughter(1), slaughtered(1), slaughtering(2), slay(5), slayer(1), slayers(1), slaying(1), slays(1), slew(8), smashed(1), smite(12), smiter(1), smiting(1), smitten(7), smote(13), stricken(3), strike(49), strike down(9), strikes(9), strikes down(1), striking(4), striking down(2), struck(120), struck down(54), stuck(1), surely strike(1), take(5), taken(2), takes(2), thrust(1), troubled(1), wounded(5), wounding*(1). Gen. 4:15; Gen. 8:21; Gen. 14:5; Gen. 14:7; Gen. 14:15; Gen. 14:17; Gen. 19:11; Gen. 32:8; Gen. 32:11; Gen. 35:24; Num. 35:30; Deut. 1:4; Deut. 2:33; Deut. 3:3; Deut. 4:46; Deut. 7:2; Deut. 13:15; Deut. 19:4; Deut. 19:6; Deut. 19:11; Deut. 19:13; Deut. 21:1; Deut. 25:2; Deut. 25:3; Deut. 25:11; Deut. 27:24; Deut. 27:25; Deut. 28:22; Deut. 28:27; Deut. 28:28; Deut. 28:35; Deut. 29:7; Jos. 7:5; Jos. 8:21; Jos. 8:22; Jos. 8:24; Jos. 9:18; Jos. 10:4; Jos. 10:10; Jos. 10:20; Jos. 10:26; Jos. 10:28; Jos. 10:30; Jos. 10:32; Jos. 10:33; Jos. 10:35; Jos. 10:37; Jos. 10:39; Jos. 10:40; Jos. 10:41; Jos. 11:8; Jos. 11:10; Jos. 11:11; Jos. 11:12; Jos. 11:14; Jos. 11:17; Jos. 12:1; Jos. 12:6; Jos. 12:7; Jos. 13:12; Jos. 13:21; Jos. 15:16; Jos. 19:47; Jos. 20:3; Jos. 20:5; Jos. 20:9; Jdg. 1:4; Jdg. 1:5; Jdg. 1:8; Jdg. 1:10; Jdg. 1:12; Jdg. 1:17; Jdg. 1:25; Jdg. 3:13; Jdg. 3:29; Jdg. 3:31; Jdg. 6:16; Jdg. 7:13; Jdg. 8:11; Jdg. 9:43; Jdg. 9:44; Jdg. 11:21; Jdg. 11:33; Jdg. 12:4; Jdg. 14:19; Jdg. 15:8; Jdg. 15:15; Jdg. 15:16; Jdg. 18:27; Jdg. 20:31; Jdg. 20:37; Jdg. 20:39; Jdg. 20:45; Jdg. 20:48; Jdg. 21:10; 1 Sam. 2:14; 1 Sam. 4:2; 1 Sam. 4:8; 1 Sam. 5:6; 1 Sam. 5:9; 1 Sam. 5:12; 1 Sam. 6:19; 1 Sam. 7:11; 1 Sam. 11:1; 1 Sam. 13:3; 1 Sam. 13:4; 1 Sam. 14:14; 1 Sam. 14:31; 1 Sam. 14:48; 1 Sam. 15:3; 1 Sam. 15:7; 1 Sam. 17:9; 1 Sam. 17:25; 1 Sam. 17:26; 1 Sam. 17:27; 1 Sam. 17:35; 1 Sam. 17:36; 1 Sam. 17:46; 1 Sam. 17:49; 1 Sam. 17:50; 1 Sam. 17:57; 1 Sam. 18:6; 1 Sam. 18:7; 1 Sam. 18:16; 1 Sam. 18:17; 1 Sam. 19:5; 1 Sam. 19:8; 1 Sam. 19:10; 1 Sam. 20:33; 1 Sam. 21:9; 1 Sam. 21:11; 1 Sam. 22:19; 1 Sam. 23:2; 1 Sam. 23:5; 1 Sam. 24:5; 1 Sam. 26:8; 1 Sam. 27:9; 1 Sam. 29:5; 1 Sam. 30:17; 1 Sam. 30:17; 1 Sam. 31:2; 2 Sam. 1:1; 2 Sam. 1:15; 2 Sam. 2:22; 2 Sam. 2:23; 2 Sam. 2:31; 2 Sam. 3:27; 2 Sam. 4:6; 2 Sam. 4:7; 2 Sam. 5:8; 2 Sam. 5:20; 2 Sam. 5:24; 2 Sam. 5:25; 2 Sam. 6:7; 2 Sam. 8:1; 2 Sam. 8:2; 2 Sam. 8:3; 2 Sam. 8:5; 2 Sam. 8:9; 2 Sam. 8:10; 2 Sam. 8:13; 2 Sam. 10:18; 2 Sam. 11:15; 2 Sam. 11:21; 2 Sam. 12:9; 2 Sam. 13:28; 2 Sam. 13:30; 2 Sam. 14:6; 2 Sam. 14:7; 2 Sam. 15:14; 2 Sam. 17:2; 2 Sam. 18:11; 2 Sam. 18:15; 2 Sam. 20:10; 2 Sam. 21:2; 2 Sam. 21:12; 2 Sam. 21:16; 2 Sam. 21:17; 2 Sam. 21:18; 2 Sam. 21:19; 2 Sam. 21:21; 2 Sam. 23:10; 2 Sam. 23:12; 2 Sam. 23:20; 2 Sam. 23:21; 2 Sam. 24:10; 2 Sam. 24:17; 1 Ki. 11:15; 1 Ki. 14:15; 1 Ki. 15:20; 1 Ki. 15:27; 1 Ki. 15:29; 1 Ki. 16:7; 1 Ki. 16:10; 1 Ki. 16:11; 1 Ki. 16:16; 1 Ki. 20:20; 1 Ki. 20:21; 1 Ki. 20:29; 1 Ki. 20:35; 1 Ki. 20:36; 1 Ki. 20:37; 1 Ki. 22:24; 1 Ki. 22:34; 2 Ki. 2:8; 2 Ki. 2:14; 2 Ki. 3:19; 2 Ki. 3:23; 2 Ki. 3:24; 2 Ki. 3:25; 2 Ki. 6:18; 2 Ki. 6:21; 2 Ki. 6:22; 2 Ki. 8:21; 2 Ki. 8:28; 2 Ki. 8:29; 2 Ki. 9:7; 2 Ki. 9:15; 2 Ki. 9:24; 2 Ki. 9:27; 2 Ki. 10:9; 2 Ki. 10:11; 2 Ki. 10:17; 2 Ki. 10:25; 2 Ki. 10:32; 2 Ki. 11:12; 2 Ki. 12:20; 2 Ki. 12:21; 2 Ki. 13:17; 2 Ki. 13:18; 2 Ki. 13:19; 2 Ki. 13:25; 2 Ki. 14:5; 2 Ki. 14:6; 2 Ki. 14:7; 2 Ki. 14:10; 2 Ki. 15:10; 2 Ki. 15:14; 2 Ki. 15:16; 2 Ki. 15:25; 2 Ki. 15:30; 2 Ki. 18:8; 2 Ki. 19:35; 2 Ki. 19:37; 2 Ki. 21:24; 2 Ki. 25:21; 2 Ki. 25:25; 1 Chr. 1:46; 1 Chr. 4:41; 1 Chr. 4:43; 1 Chr. 10:2; 1 Chr. 11:6; 1 Chr. 11:14; 1 Chr. 11:22; 1 Chr. 11:23; 1 Chr. 13:10; 1 Chr. 14:11; 1 Chr. 14:15; 1 Chr. 14:16; 1 Chr. 18:1; 1 Chr. 18:2; 1 Chr. 18:3; 1 Chr. 18:5; 1 Chr. 18:9; 1 Chr. 18:10; 1 Chr. 18:12; 1 Chr. 20:1; 1 Chr. 20:4; 1 Chr. 20:5; 1 Chr. 20:7; 1 Chr. 21:7; 2 Chr. 13:17; 2 Chr. 14:14; 2 Chr. 14:15; 2 Chr. 18:18; 2 Chr. 16:4; 2 Chr. 18:23; 2 Chr. 18:33; 2 Chr. 21:9; 2 Chr. 22:5; 2 Chr. 22:6; 2 Chr. 23:5; 2 Chr. 25:11; 2 Chr. 25:13; 2 Chr. 25:14; 2 Chr. 25:16; 2 Chr. 25:19; 2 Chr. 28:5; 2 Chr. 28:17; 2 Chr. 28:23; 2 Chr. 33:25; Neh. 13:25; Est. 9:5; Job 1:15; Job 1:17; Job 1:19; Job 2:7; Job 16:10; Job 19:21; Ps. 3:7; Ps. 69:26; Ps. 78:20; Ps. 78:51; Ps. 78:66; Ps. 102:4; Ps. 105:33; Ps. 105:36; Ps. 121:6; Ps. 135:8; Ps. 135:10; Ps. 136:10; Ps. 136:17; Prov. 17:10; Prov. 17:26; Prov. 19:25; Prov. 23:13; Prov. 23:14; Prov. 23:35; Cant. 5:7; Isa. 1:5; Isa. 5:25; Isa. 9:13; Isa. 10:20; Isa. 10:24; Isa. 11:4; Isa. 11:15; Isa. 14:6; Isa. 14:29; Isa. 27:7; Isa. 30:31; Isa. 37:36; Isa. 37:38; Isa. 49:10; Isa. 50:6; Isa. 53:4; Isa. 57:17; Isa. 58:4; Isa. 60:10; Isa. 66:3; Jer. 2:30; Jer. 5:3; Jer. 5:6; Jer. 14:19; Jer. 18:18; Jer. 18:21; Jer. 20:2; Jer. 20:4; Jer. 21:6; Jer. 21:7; Jer. 26:23; Jer. 29:21; Jer. 30:14; Jer. 33:5; Jer. 37:10; Jer. 37:15; Jer. 40:14; Jer. 40:15; Jer. 41:2; Jer. 41:3; Jer. 41:9; Jer. 41:16; Jer. 41:18; Jer. 43:11; Jer. 46:2; Jer. 46:13; Jer. 47:1; Jer. 49:28; Jer. 52:27; Lam. 3:30; Ezek. 5:2; Ezek. 6:11; Ezek. 7:9; Ezek. 9:5; Ezek. 9:7; Ezek. 9:8; Ezek. 21:14; Ezek. 21:17; Ezek. 22:13; Ezek. 32:15; Ezek. 33:21; Ezek. 39:3; Ezek. 40:1; Dan. 8:7; Hos. 6:1; Hos. 9:16; Hos. 14:5; Amos 3:15; Amos 4:9; Amos 6:11; Amos 9:1; Jon. 4:7; Jon. 4:8; Mic. 5:1; Mic. 6:13; Hag. 2:17; Zech. 9:4; Zech. 10:11; Zech. 12:4; Zech. 13:6; Zech. 13:7; Mal. 4:6

Hand (03027) **yad** is feminine noun meaning hand and figuratively meaning strength. **Yad** frequently appears in the Old Testament with literal, figurative, and technical uses. Literally, it implies the hand of a human being (Lev. 14:28; Jer. 36:14) and occasionally the wrist (Gen. 38:28). Metaphorically, it signifies strength or power (Deut. 32:36; Isa. 37:27); authority or right of possession (Gen. 16:9; 2 Chr. 13:16); location or direction (Num. 24:24; Ps. 141:6); the side of an object (1 Sam. 4:18); a fractional portion of the whole (Gen. 47:24; Neh.

11:1). In a technical sense, the word is used to identify the upright supports for the bronze laver (1 Kgs. 7:35, 36); the tenons for the Tabernacle (Ex. 26:17); and an axle (1 Kgs. 7:32, 33).

NIDOTTE - The metaphorical use of **yad**, יָד, covers a wide range of the concept of “power.” In this respect there is no essential difference whether the word is related to God or humankind. יָד is used about 200× in connection with God, in most cases combined with the name Yahweh, and rarely combined (about 13×) with a form of El or Elohim (1 Sam 4:8; 5:11; 2 Chron 30:12; Ezra 7:9; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh 2:8, 18; Job 19:21; 27:11; Ps 10:12; Eccl 2:24; 9:1). The theological metaphor of God’s hand (comp. arm) seems to have its roots in Israel’s experience of God’s redeeming them from slavery in Egypt. In the Exodus reports the outstretched arm of God and of Moses play a decisive role (Exod 3:20; 4:17; 6:1 [2×]; 7:19; 13:3). J. K. Hoffmeier has demonstrated that the OT idioms with “hand” and “arm” (#2432 ;יָדוּעַ) were already known in Canaan of the fifteenth century BC (Amarna letters), denoting the conquering arm of the pharaoh. Probably the biblical writers used expressions like יָדוּעַ נְטִינָה and יָדוּעַ חֲזִיקָה consciously and polemically against the Egyptian concepts that were concentrated on the pharaoh (Hoffmeier, 386). **2.** יָד can be used metonymically to describe God’s mighty acts, either for the salvation or for the judgment of his people: “the great power (הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה) [of] the LORD” (Exod 14:31; cf. Deut 34:12 with Moses as subj.; Ps 78:42). “God’s good hand” protected the Israelites returning from the Exile (cf. Ezra 7:9; 8:22; Neh 2:18). But God also swings his hand of judgment over his people or over other peoples (יָדוּעַ hi., e.g., Isa 19:16; Zech 2:9 [13]), lifts up his hand (רוּם hi., e.g., Isa 49:22; to swear, Deut 32:40; Ezek 20:5) or stretches out his hand (עָלָה hi., Exod 7:5; Isa 14:26–27; Jer 6:12; נָטָה only being used in a negative connotation). His punishing hand is heavy on Israel’s enemies (1 Sam 5:6, 11). **3.** “The work of his hands” testifies to God’s creating power (Ps 19:1 [2]; Isa 48:13; 64:8 [7]). The pl. of יָד in the formula יָדוּעַ מַעֲשֵׂה יְדָי, or מַעֲשֵׂה יְדָי, hints at God’s activity in creation, e.g., Isa 19:25; 45:11, 12 (60:21 4 ;יְדָי). Not to note or not to see God’s actions is a sign of deep spiritual darkness (Isa 5:12 and Ps 28:5 יְדָי). His hand is lifted up for punishment (יָדוּעַ), “but they do not see it” (Isa 26:11). People are capable of recognizing God’s deeds in creation and in history and are obliged to draw conclusions out of these: to praise, fear, and trust him.

5. God’s hand falls (נָפַל), is (הָיָה), or comes (בּוֹא) upon a prophet (e.g., 1 Kgs 18:46; 2 Kgs 3:15; Isa 8:11; Jer 15:17; Ezek 1:3; 3:14, 22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1). These expressions have their origin in prophetic traditions. Jeremiah experienced God’s hand, separating him from his contemporaries and their superficial lifestyle (Jer 15:17). Especially in the book of Ezekiel the formula יָדוּעַ יְהוָה means a special experience of God’s power upon the prophet, which is similar to the actions of God’s רוּחַ upon certain judges of Israel. Each of the four great vision-cycles of Ezekiel is introduced by this formula (Ezek 1:3; 8:1; 37:1; 40:1). God’s irresistible call not only reaches the prophet, but also during his lifetime the Lord seizes him on special occasions. He receives messages, but he also experiences on a physical, psychic, and social level that as a prophet he lives his life in bondage; Ezekiel grows silent for seven days (3:14–15); after receiving the message of Jerusalem’s fall, his mouth was opened again (33:22). In 2 Kgs 3:15 יָדוּעַ and רוּחַ are exchangeable.

Deuteronomy 20:14 "Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given you.

- **women:** Nu 31:9,12,18,35-54 Jos 8:2 11:14 2Ch 14:13-15 20:25 Ps 68:12 Ro 8:37
- Jos 22:8
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

PRESERVE THE WOMEN AND SPOIL

Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given you - Spoil is the wealth of others which is seized the only context in which this act is allowed is in the context of war. Since the soldiers received no salary, the spoil served as their compensation. Plunder would also underwrite the expenses of the war.

Utley - In Israel, especially “holy war,” the spoils belonged to YHWH to show that the victory was His victory and that the land was His land. These verses are exceptions because these cities were **outside** the Promised Land. ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

Regarding the **women** there are more instructions in Dt 21:10-14+ -

When you go out to battle against your enemies, and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take them away captive, 11 and see among the captives a beautiful woman, and have a desire for her and would take her as a wife for yourself, 12 then you shall bring her home to your house, and she shall shave her head and trim her nails. 13 "She shall also remove the clothes of her captivity and shall remain in your house, and mourn her father and mother a full month; and after that you may go in to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. 14 "It shall be, if you are not pleased with her, then you shall let her go wherever she wishes; but you shall certainly not sell her for money, you shall not mistreat her, because you have humbled her.

Deere adds "The **women** in the nations mentioned in Dt 20:10–15 (i.e., from the Aramean culture) were not as degenerate as those from the Canaanite culture. Also Aramean women adopted the religions of their husbands. Abraham, for example, insisted that his servant get a wife from the Aramean culture for Isaac and not a Canaanite woman (Gen. 24). Thus the women and children of those nations could be spared. But one only needs to remember the influence of Jezebel who brought her husband Ahab under the worship of Baal to see the destructive effects of marriage to a Canaanite wife." ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

God permitted Israel to take **spoil** in most battles (Deut. 20:14). This consisted of women, children, cattle and valuable goods. That a portion at least of the spoil was commonly dedicated to the Lord and used in connection with the tabernacle or temple service is evident from 2 Samuel 8:12 and especially 1 Chron. 26:27, in which David is said to dedicate part of the spoils of victory to the Lord. There were some occasions when the taking of spoil was not permitted, such as on the victory over Jericho or when an idolatrous Israelite city was to be destroyed (Deut. 13:17). Similarly when Saul was sent to exterminate the Amalekites, no spoil was to be taken (1 Samuel 15). The Scripture is very clear that the downfall and spoiling of cities is not an accident of military or political history, but that here also God is in sovereign control.

Spoil (07998) **shalal** is a masculine noun which means spoils, plunder, booty, all referring to what is taken by force or violence usually in the context of war and taking spoils was sometimes one of the principle motivations for going to war. Military raids were sometimes ill-disguised plundering expeditions, such as the ill-fated Amalekite raid against Ziklag described in 1 Samuel 30:16, 19, 20, 22, 26. Sometimes shalal was seized as an act of political aggression (Esther 3:13; 8:11). Taking plunder or spoil was an act of aggression by the wicked on the weak or righteous (Pr 1:13).

Take booty (0962) **בָּזַז** **bāzaz**: A verb meaning to loot, to plunder, to spoil, to rob. The word describes this destructive activity taken against cities or places (Gen. 34:27; 2 Kgs. 7:16), people and cattle (Num. 31:9; Isa. 10:2; 11:14). Its passive uses are similar with the meaning of be plundered (Isa. 24:3) or taken as spoil (Jer. 50:37). If Israel were obedient to God she would triumph over her enemies and would despoil them. This had been her experience during the latter part of the wilderness period and during the conquest of Canaan (Num 31:9, 32, 53; Josh 8:2, 27; etc.). God was pleased to give the spoil to them, only reserving to himself that which was designated herem, devoted to God. By the same token, it is promised that in the latter days she will once again despoil her enemies (Isa 11:14; Zeph 2:9; etc.). God will act so mightily on Israel's behalf that even the lame will take spoil (Isa 33:23). However, this will not happen simply because Israel is Israel, but because she will then be obedient and because the fruit of her enemies' arrogance will have come to its full term (Ezk 26:5; 36:4; Jer 30:16).

NIDOTTE - In common with the rest of the ANE, Israel practiced the taking of plunder in times of war (cf. Num 31:9–12; Deut 20:10–20). The plunder represented the wages of the soldiers (Ezek 29:19). In some cases the spoil was to be divided between the soldiers and civilians (Num 31:26–54; 1 Sam 30:24). Plunder might consist of women, children, cattle, clothing, material, and valuables like gold or silver (see Gen 34:27–29; Judg 5:30; Ezek 26:12). However, in particular cases of holy war, the practice of the ban (#3051 ;נֶחֱם) came into effect, and livestock was to be killed and all goods burned (Deut 13:16 [17]).

Swanson - (qal) plunder, loot, carry off spoils, i.e., carry off goods from a conquered people by force, after a battle (Ge 34:27); (qal pass.) be plundered (Isa 42:22); (nif) be plundered (Am 3:11); (pual) be plundered (Jer 50:37+), ([Dictionary of Semantic Domains - Hebrew](#))

Bazaz - 39v - booty(1), completely despoiled(1), despoiled(1), looted(3), pillage(1), plunder(11), plunder of those who plundered(1), plundered(6), plunderers(1), prey(2), seize(4), seize the plunder(1), seize their as plunder(1), take(3), take as booty(1), take spoil(1), taken booty(1), taking(1), took(3), took as our booty(1), took as their plunder(1). Gen. 34:27; Gen. 34:29; Num. 31:9; Num. 31:32; Num. 31:53; Deut. 2:35; Deut. 3:7; Deut. 20:14; Jos. 8:2; Jos. 8:27; Jos. 11:14; 1 Sam. 14:36; 2 Ki. 7:16; 2 Chr. 14:14; 2 Chr. 20:25; 2 Chr. 25:13; 2 Chr. 28:8; Est. 3:13; Est. 8:11; Ps. 109:11; Isa. 10:2; Isa. 10:6; Isa. 11:14; Isa. 17:14; Isa. 24:3; Isa. 33:23; Isa. 42:22; Isa. 42:24; Jer. 20:5; Jer. 30:16; Jer. 50:37; Ezek. 26:12; Ezek. 29:19; Ezek.

Deuteronomy 20:15 "Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby.

- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

CITIES THAT ARE TO BE VASSAL STATES

Vassal state - A vassal state is any state that has a mutual obligation to a superior state or empire, in a status similar to that of a vassal in the feudal system in medieval Europe. Vassal states were common among the Empires of the Near East, dating back to the era of the Egyptian, Hittite and Mitanni conflict, as well as Ancient China. The use of vassal states continued through the middle ages, with the last Empire to use such states being the Ottoman Empire. The relationships between vassal rulers and empires was dependent on the policies and agreements of each empire. While payment of tribute and military service is common amongst vassal states, the degree of independence and benefits given to vassal states varied.

Grant - Israel must never forget that it was the Lord their God who had given them the city and all that was in it. Note that there is no question of a foe overcoming Israel. What is in view is the triumph of an obedient people who had submitted to the word of God out of devotion to the Lord. ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

Thus you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby NLT = ""But these instructions apply only to distant towns, not to the towns of the nations in the land you will enter." These instructions apply to cities outside Canaan but within the extensive territory promised to Abraham and his descendants (Ge 15:18–21). These cities were subject to Israel and by default acknowledged the sovereignty of Israel's God.

Deere writes that "Apparently then the women and children had opportunity to be introduced to Israel's religion." ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Utley - These are surrender instructions about distant cities, cities on the periphery or out of the bounds of the Promised Land that God gave (i.e., outside Israel's inheritance, cf. v. 15). ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

Deuteronomy 20:16 "Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes.

- De 7:1-4,16 Nu 21:2,3,35 33:52 Jos 6:17-21 9:24,27 10:28,40 Jos 11:11,12,14
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 7:1-4; 16+ "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, 2 and 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. 3 "Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. 4 "For 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. (7:16) "You shall consume all the peoples whom the LORD your God will deliver to you; your eye shall not pity them, nor shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

ANNIHILATE THE ANATHEMA

Anathema describes a vehement denunciation as in this passage and speaks of detested persons or things. This was the divine dictate for the Canaanites (used generically of all the pagan peoples in the Promised Land). The need to remove the sinners from

their midst had been stated at Mount Sinai

Exodus 23:31-33+ "I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you. 32 "You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods. 33 **"They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me**; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

Note that in contrast to the verses above that provided exceptions for sparing lives of women and children because the cities were outside the Promised Land, Dt 20:16-18 deal with cities that are within the Promised Land and were to be shown no mercy or pity! Tragically Israel failed to obey God fully and the results are recorded in an entire book, called the Book of Judges, which might be subtitle the "Wages of Disobedience!" (For a good summary read especially Judges 2:1-23+).

Guzik - The previous commands regarding warfare did not apply to the upcoming conquest of Canaan. There, not only was Israel not to offer peace to the cities, but they were also to destroy everything, not only the adult males. This was a unique war of judgment, more than a war of conquest or defense. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Deut 20](#))

Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes - The cities in the Promised Land were totally under the ban of destruction (v17 "utterly destroy"). **Breathes** is all inclusive, signifying all women, infants, and animals! This is total annihilation! One might ask but why the innocent animals? While the text does not say, the likely reason is that some of the animals had been set apart to be sacrificed to idol gods and it would not be possible to know which ones had been so designated, so all had to be destroyed. I am a bit surprised that they were allowed to conserve the trees (vv 19-20), for groves of trees were common sites of their horrible pagan "worship" practices. Presumably these would be identifiable by Asherah poles and sacred pillars (cf Dt 16:21).

Grant - The city of Jericho was dealt with in this way (Josh 6:21), with the exception of Rahab and her family (showing that those who willingly acknowledged the Lord were spared), as was Ai (Josh 8:24–26) and other cities (see Josh 10:28–40). The Gibeonites realised that they would be overthrown also and they devised a scheme to deceive Joshua by approaching Israel and claiming that they were not inhabitants of Canaan, but had come from a long distance to enter into a treaty with them. Once this was done Joshua learned that they were Canaanites. The only course open to him was to make them subservient to Israel as "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (Josh 9:21) in an attempt to curtail their influence. ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

So the reasons for total obliteration include this is the command of God, because of their evil influence and because their cup of iniquity was full—beyond repentance - "the **iniquity** of the Amorite is (NOW) **complete**." (Ge 15:16+, cf Nu. 21:2–3) People can become so savage, evil, and corrupt that they are beyond repair or repentance, beyond hope or correction. This is what is known as the cup of iniquity being full—filled to the point that it overflows and continues to overflow with iniquities, the "**point of no return**!" History has shown that such behavior can be true of both individuals and nations. A person's or a nation's cup of iniquity can become full—well beyond repair or repentance, well beyond hope or correction. God declares this fact time and again as the following Scriptures show (Ge. 15:16, Lev. 18:24–25, Le. 20:23, De. 9:4–5, 2 Ki 21:2, 2 Chr. 28:3, 2 Chr. 33:2, Ps. 106:38, Isa. 24:5, Jer. 3:2, Je. 16:18).

Morris - save alive nothing. This commandment, repeated through Moses and Joshua in various ways and times during the exodus and conquest, has been the object of tremendous criticism by enemies of Biblical theism. Such critics have charged God with sadistic cruelty. The Lord, of course, does not need to defend His actions. Whatever He does is right by definition. There is a time coming, in fact, when all who have rebelled against Him, rejecting His righteousness and His love (as had these Canaanites), will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Inheritance (possession, heritage) (05159) **nachalah** from **nāḥal** = signifies giving or receiving property which is part of a permanent possession and as a result of succession) means Inheritance, heritage, possession. A possession is any piece of property that passes by law to an heir on the death of the owner. It also speaks of God's promises to His people, such as the promise of the land to national (redeemed **remnant**) Israel. In Dt 4:20 we read "But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, to be a people for His own possession, as today." **Nachalah** in Deut - Deut. 3:28; Deut. 4:20; Deut. 4:21; Deut. 4:38; Deut. 9:26; Deut. 9:29; Deut. 10:9; Deut. 12:9; Deut. 12:12; Deut. 14:27; Deut. 14:29; Deut. 15:4; Deut. 18:1; Deut. 18:2; Deut. 19:10; Deut. 19:14; Deut. 20:16; Deut. 21:23; Deut. 24:4; Deut. 25:19; Deut. 26:1; Deut. 29:8; Deut. 32:9;

THOUGHT (POSB) - God will judge every evil and brutal person upon the earth. A person will die; after that he faces the judgment of God. The Canaanites were an evil and brutal people, a people who had reached the point of no repentance, no return. They would never turn from their immoral, lawless, and savage ways, never turn back to God. Therefore, the judgment of God fell upon them. So it will be with every evil and brutal person

upon the earth: the judgment of God will fall upon him. He will face the eternal judgment of God and be separated from God forever. (Jn. 5:28–29, Ga. 5:19–21, Ep. 5:5, 1 Co. 6:9–10, He. 9:27, 2 Pe. 2:9, Jude 1:14–15, Rev 21:8) ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

POSB - Again, it is critical to note this fact: Israel as a people did not receive the promised land because of their merit or value nor because of some righteousness they possessed. The Canaanites were destroyed because they were evil and their cup of iniquity had been filled to the brim. They reached the point of no repentance; they were beyond correction. Moses himself declared to the Israelites:

a. It is not because of any personal righteousness within you, not because you have pure hearts, that you inherit the promised land (De. 9:5). The enemies of the land are to be conquered and destroyed for two reasons:

⇒ Because of their wickedness and because they are an evil people; their cup of iniquity is full

⇒ Because God is faithful; He fulfills His promise to the forefathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God has promised to give the promised land to their descendants, to all those down through the centuries who believe His Word, His promises.

b. Understand this warning: it is not because of your righteousness that God gives you the promised land. On the contrary, you are a stiff-necked, stubborn people (De. 9:6). You are a sinful people. You have no righteousness within yourselves that merits God's favor. Your hearts are not upright nor pure enough to make God accept you and give you victory over the enemies of the promised land. You are a stiff-necked, stubborn people. ([Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Deuteronomy](#))

James Philips makes an excellent statement on the justice and judgment of God that is well worth quoting in full.

God was using His people as the rod of His anger against peoples whose cup of iniquity was full to overflowing. They were being judged for their sins and their depravities. This is, of course, stated explicitly more than once in the Old Testament itself (cf. Gen. 15:16 and Lev. 18:24–30). The time of their destruction was ripe. This is why they were thus dealt with, and it was no arbitrary act of injustice that drove them out of their land. They had forfeited the right to live as nations in Canaan by the extremes of their debauchery and depravity, just as Sodom and Gomorrah had done (Gen. 19), and just as the Cainite civilization as a whole had done, bringing upon itself the judgment of the Flood (Gen. 6). Furthermore, it should be remembered that God dealt with His own people in similar fashion when they proved themselves unworthy to life in the land of promise, and He brought them into the captivity of Babylon in 586 B.C. To understand God's burning passion for righteousness in His creatures is to understand the basic reason for these judgments upon men and nations that refused to be righteous, and who rendered themselves incapable of being so by their continued sin. (Preacher's Commentary on Numbers)

Nelson Study Bible says this:

Of Israel's attacks on the northern part of Canaanite cities, the Bible states, "but they struck every man with the edge of the sword until they had destroyed them, and they left none breathing. As the LORD had commanded Moses his servant, so Moses commanded Joshua, and so Joshua did" (Josh. 11:14, 15). God clearly commanded Israel to annihilate the Canaanites, and that is exactly what Joshua did.

Headlines such as this have caused many people to question God's basic justice. How can a holy, just, and loving God command such extreme violence? Indeed, many have thought of this issue as the Old Testament's biggest challenge to modern readers. Some have gone so far as to allege that there is no connection between the "God of the Old Testament" and "God of the New Testament revealed in Jesus."

However, this stereotype breaks down under examination. The Bible gives reasons for the Canaanites' destruction—and these reasons are in concert with the whole tenor of the Bible in both Testaments.

The primary reason for the Canaanites' destruction was that they were guilty of gross sin. Abraham got a preview of this when God promised him the land. God said fulfillment of the promise would be delayed in part because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Ge. 15:16; the Amorites were the Canaanites). For many years, the Canaanites' sins would not justify annihilation. But that time would arrive, and it did arrive by the time of Joshua.

What were the sins of the Canaanites? The gruesome list in Lev. 18 gives some of the details, including incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality. Of course, every person has sinned in some fashion (Ps. 14:3). On this level, the Canaanites only received what all peoples deserved; others were spared only by God's grace. But Canaan was not a community of upstanding citizens. It was a thoroughly debased society, hostile to all God's ways (Deut. 9:4, 5).

To a lesser degree, God was merely protecting His people. God promised Abraham that He would curse anyone who cursed Israel (Gen. 12:3). The Canaanites sought to destroy Israel on at least two occasions (Josh. 9:1, 2; 11:1–5), and God would not allow that.

The stereotype also breaks down because it overlooks the highly localized nature of the judgment on Canaan. The Israelites did not have a license to kill. They had no right to do the same to whatever peoples they encountered, at any time or in any place. This destruction targeted the sinful Canaanites of that time only. As harsh as it may seem to us, the Canaanites brought God's judgment on themselves by their own sin.

The New Testament states that one day Jesus Christ will judge the wicked nations of the earth (Matt. 25:31–46). God once judged all the wicked with an overwhelming flood (Gen. 6–9), and the same God will one day again judge everyone who has ever lived (2 Pet. 3:10–13). The judgment against the Canaanites is merely one instance of His judgment on the wicked even as He extends forgiveness to others.

Warren Wiersbe gives an excellent statement on God's command to exterminate the Canaanite nations.

But wasn't it cruel and unjust for God to command Israel to exterminate the nations in Canaan? Not in the least! To begin with, He had been patient with these nations for centuries and had mercifully withheld His judgment (Gen. 15:16; 2 Peter 3:9). Their society, and especially their religion, was unspeakably wicked (Rom. 1:18ff) and should have been wiped out years before Israel appeared on the scene.

Something else is true: These nations had been warned by the judgments God had inflicted on others, especially on Egypt and the nations east of the Jordan (Josh. 2:8–13). Rahab and her family had sufficient information to be able to repent and believe, and God saved them (Josh. 2; 6:22–25). Therefore, we have every right to conclude that God would have saved anybody who had turned to Him. These nations were sinning against a flood of light in rejecting God's truth and going their own way.

God didn't want the filth of the Canaanite society and religion to contaminate His people Israel. Israel was God's special people, chosen to fulfill divine purposes in this world. Israel would give the world the knowledge of the true God, the Holy Scriptures, and the Savior. In order to accomplish God's purposes, the nation had to be separated from all other nations; for if Israel was polluted, how could the Holy Son of God come into the world? "God is perpetually at war with sin," wrote G. Campbell Morgan. "That is the whole explanation of the extermination of the Canaanites.

The main deity in Canaan was Baal, god of rainfall and fertility, and Ashtoreth was his spouse. If you wanted to have fruitful orchards and vineyards, flourishing crops, and increasing flocks and herds, you worshiped Baal by visiting a temple prostitute. This combination of idolatry, immorality, and agricultural success was difficult for men to resist, which explains why God told Israel to wipe out the Canaanite religion completely (Num. 33:51–56; Deut. 7:1–5). ([Be Available Judges](#))

Norman Geisler - DEUTERONOMY 20:16–18—Were the captives to be spared or killed?

PROBLEM: In Deuteronomy 20:11, 15, Moses commanded the Israelites to spare the lives of their captives and make them servants. But only a few verses later he instructs them to "let nothing that breathes remain alive" (v. 16).

SOLUTION: The general rule was to make captives of the people conquered. Only in the specific case of the "seven nations" of Canaan were they to exterminate them (see comments on Josh. 6:21). This was because of their "abominations" which were so obnoxious to God that the land "vomits out its inhabitants" (Lev. 18:25). (from [When Critics Ask](#))

Norman Geisler - Related to this same question - JOSHUA 6:21—How can the total destruction of Jericho be morally justified?

PROBLEM: This passage states that the Israelites "utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword." But how can such a ruthless destruction of innocent life and property be justified?

SOLUTION: First, the Canaanites were far from "innocent." The description of their sins in Leviticus 18 is vivid: "The land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants" (v. 25). They were cancerously immoral, "defiled" with every kind of "abomination," including child sacrifice (vv. 21, 24, 26).

Second, it must be remembered that God had given the people of Palestine over 400 years to repent of their wickedness. The people of that land had every opportunity to turn from their wickedness. According to Genesis 15:16, God told Abraham that in 400 years the descendants of Abraham would return to inherit this land, but that the iniquity of the people was not yet full. This prophetic

statement indicated that God would not destroy the people of the land, including those who dwelt in Jericho, until their sins were such that their guilt merited their complete destruction in judgment.

Third, as for the killing of the little children, several things should be noted. (1) Given the cancerous state of the society into which they were born, they had no chance to avoid its fatal pollution. (2) Children who die before the age of accountability go to heaven (see comments on 2 Sam. 12:23). This was an act of God's mercy to their souls to take them into His holy presence from such an unholy environment. (3) God is sovereign over life (Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21) and can order its end according to His will and in view of the creature's ultimate good.

Fourth, Joshua and the people of Israel were acting according to the direct command of God, not on their own initiative. The destruction of Jericho was carried out by the army of Israel, but the army of Israel was the instrument of judgment upon the sins of these people by the righteous Judge of all the earth. Consequently, anyone who would question the justification of this act is questioning God's justice.

Fifth, it was necessary to completely exterminate any trace of the city and its people. If anything had remained, except that which was taken into the treasure house of the Lord, there would have always been the threat of heathen influence to pull the people away from the pure worship of the Lord. Sometimes radical surgery is required to completely eliminate a deadly cancer from the body (from [When Critics Ask](#))

Related Resources:

- [What does it mean that "the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" \(Genesis 15:16\)? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- See more detailed discussion from several sources on God's command to Utterly Destroy

Deuteronomy 20:17 "But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you,

- **shall:** Isa 34:5,6 Jer 48:10 50:35-40 Eze 38:21-23 Rev 19:18
- **the Hittites:** De 7:1
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

TOTAL DESTRUCTION AT GOD'S COMMAND

But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you - Moses had previously given similar instructions in Deuteronomy 7:1-2 declaring that "'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, and 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.'" They were despicably evil and easily could teach evil such as Dt 18:9-12 to Israel (which in fact over time they did!)

NET Note on utterly destroy - The Hebrew text uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis, which the translation seeks to reflect with "utterly." Cf. CEV "completely wipe out." The Hebrew verb **charam** refers to placing persons or things so evil and/or impure as to be irredeemable under God's judgment, usually to the extent of their complete destruction. Divine judgment refers to God's designation of certain persons, places, and things as objects of his special wrath and judgment because, in His omniscience, He knows them to be impure and hopelessly unrepentant. ([Deuteronomy 20](#))

Utley on utterly destroy - The word here is **charam** (Hiphil INFINITIVE ABSOLUTE and Hiphil IMPERFECT, which was a grammatical way to show intensity), which is the idea of total and complete destruction because it has been dedicated to God (cf. 2:34; 7:1-5). ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

Canaanite cities were treated like contraband (Nu 21:2,3; Dt 7:2-6; 13:12-15; 20:17,18; Jos 6:21; 8:26; 10:28; 11:11 The lure toward idolatry was removed by devastating the sources. (Jdg 1:17 "utterly destroyed") If people were included (Lev 27:28, 29; 1Sa15:3), they were executed.

Wiersbe - complete conquest. Even in defeat, the enemy is still the enemy and can entice us into sin. Remember what happened to [Achan](#) (Josh. 7) and [King Saul](#) (1 Sam. 15). ([Be Equipped](#))

NET Note on the various people groups - See also Bob Utley's topic [Pre-Israelite Inhabitants of Palestine](#)

Hittite. The center of Hittite power was in Anatolia (central modern Turkey). In the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 B.C.) they were at their zenith, establishing outposts and colonies near and far. Some elements were obviously in Canaan at the time of the Conquest (1400–1350 B.C.).

Amorite. Originally from the upper Euphrates region (Amurru), the Amorites appear to have migrated into Canaan beginning in 2200 B.C. or thereabouts. These were hill dwellers.

Canaanite. general term for the inhabitants of Palestine. These were the indigenous peoples of the land of Palestine, going back to the beginning of recorded history (ca. 3000 B.C.). The OT identifies them as descendants of Ham (Gen 10:6), the only Hamites to have settled north and east of Egypt.

Perizzite. This probably refers to a subgroup of Canaanites (Gen 13:7; 34:30).

Hivite. These are usually thought to be the same as the Hurrians, a people well-known in ancient Near Eastern texts. They are likely identical to the Horites (see note on "Horites" in Deut 2:12).

The LXX adds "**Girgashites**" here at the end of the list in order to list the full (and usual) complement of seven (see note on "seven" in Deut 7:1). These cannot be ethnically identified and are unknown outside the OT. They usually appear in such lists only when the intention is to have seven groups in all

Jebusite. These people inhabited the hill country, particularly in and about Jebus, later known as Jerusalem (Josh. 15:8, cf. Num 13:29; 2 Sam 5:6; 24:16).

In Deut 7:1 they were called "**seven**" - This is an ideal number in the OT, one symbolizing fullness or completeness. Therefore, the intent of the text here is not to be precise and list all of Israel's enemies but simply to state that Israel will have a full complement of foes to deal with. For other lists of Canaanites, some with fewer than seven peoples, see Exod 3:8; 13:5; 23:23, 28; 33:2; 34:11; Deut 20:17; Josh 3:10; 9:1; 24:11. Moreover, the "Table of Nations" (Gen 10:15–19) suggests that all of these (possibly excepting the Perizzites) were offspring of Canaan and therefore Canaanites. ([Deuteronomy 20](#))

IVP Bible Background Commentary - holy war procedures. In unusual circumstances, an army chose to forego taking prisoners or spoils and dedicated it entirely to the god who had given them the victory. This practice is known as herem in Hebrew and is used very sparingly as a method of warfare. Only in a few instances is the total destruction of a city called for: Jericho in Joshua 6:17–24, Hazor in Joshua 11:10–11, Zephath in Judges 1:17 and the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15:3. There are several instances where some variation on utter destruction is allowed, as in Deuteronomy 2:34–35 and 3:6–7 (people killed, livestock taken as spoil). Outside the Bible, this perspective on war is attested as early as the ninth century B.C. in the war against the tribe of Gad by the Moabite king Mesha. A similar concept may be reflected in the annals of several of the Assyrian kings, who used total destruction as a psychological ploy to make revolting nations submissive.

See comments on rationale for such utter destruction.

Utterly destroy (destroy completely, devote)([02763](#)) **charam** to destroy, to doom, to devote. This word is most commonly associated with the Israelites destroying the Canaanites upon their entry into the Promised Land (Deut. 7:2; Josh. 11:20).

Surrendering something irrevocably to God = devoting to service of God, excluding it from use or abuse of man &/or putting it under a ban for utter destruction. [Dt 7:2, 20:17] Usually haram meant a ban for utter destruction, compulsory dedication of thing impeding or resisting God's work which is considered to be accursed before God. Thus the basic idea = setting something aside strictly for God's use. Whatever was set aside was considered most holy by God & could not be sold or redeemed by any substitutionary measure. Once invoked it was absolutely compulsory.

Walter Kaiser adds that "**Herem** (charam) is something devoted to God; however, it is not a voluntary but an involuntary dedication. It is now set apart to be banned from the earth and will totally come back to God. Thus a wall, as it were (cf. the king's wives, or harem, who were walled off from others), isolates the anathematized person, place, or thing from anyone touching, using, or benefiting from it ever again. Compare Achan's sin of taking the "devoted" items set apart for destruction in Josh 7:13." (EBC-Ex)

(hif) devote to God, give a gift exclusively to God

once given must be destroyed so there will be no human use made of it Lev 27:28

gift may apparently be voluntary or commanded by deity

with the associative meaning of a gift given for destruction

All such designated objects were to be given to the priests for the support of the religious ceremonies (Nu 18:14; Josh. 6:19; Eze 44:29).

(hof) be devoted Ex 22:19; Lv 27:29; Ezra 10:8

to be doomed; to be exterminated.

Deuteronomy 20:18 so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God.

- De 7:4-5 Dt 12:30-31 Dt 18:19 Ex 23:33 Jos 23:13 Jdg 2:3 Ps 106:34-40 1Co 15:33 2Co 6:17 Eph 5:11 2Th 3:14 1Ti 6:5 2Ti 2:17,18 Rev 18:3-5
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 7:4-5 "For 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. 5"But 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.

Deuteronomy 12:30-31 beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?' 31"You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

Exodus 23:33 "They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

Joshua 23:13 know with certainty that the LORD your God will not continue to drive these nations out from before you; but they will be a snare and a trap to you, and a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

Judges 2:3 "Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.'"

THE INHERENT DANGER OF PAGAN SURVIVORS

so that - Purpose. The purpose or rationale for utter obliteration of everything that breathes is now given.

Guzik - This explains why such a complete destruction was commanded. The culture of the Canaanites was so corrupt—socially, morally, and spiritually—that God considered it irredeemable, and ripe for judgment. In this unique war, the armies of Israel were to bring that judgment upon the Canaanites. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Deut 20](#))

They may not teach you to do according to all their detestable (abominable) **things which they have done for their gods** (Heb = "to do according to all their abominations which they do for their gods"), **so that you would sin against the LORD your God**-The Canaanites were unspeakably evil practicing horrible sexual perversions under the deluded guise of worship of their so-called gods! Human flesh being what it is would be naturally attracted to their sensual, sexual practices and the result would be the Israelites (like a "Wife" of Yahweh - Jer 31:32+ and Isa 54:5) would be ensnared and would be unfaithful, would "go a whoring" with the pagan idols and practices and would commit sins against their "Husband" Yahweh. And repeatedly Yahweh is described as "**jealous**" for this very reason (Dt 4:23-24, Dt 5:8-9, Dt 6:14-15, Dt 32:15-16, Dt 32:20-21).

THRUST - Beloved, we are the Bride of Christ and need to remember that God's character is immutable and so He is still a justly jealous God. Are you ensnared by any of the world's "idols" or their pagan practices which are lewd and licentious? If so, you need to "cut your losses" confess you sins and seek His mercy and grace to provide Spirit energized repentance and passionate pursuit of Him as the Lover of your soul! Don't procrastinate or prevaricate but pursue this godly course of action now, today while you still are a beneficiary of His magnanimous mercy and great lovingkindness. Remember that God in His infinite wisdom and knowledge may one day say "Enough!" None of His children want to experience that day! Can I hear an

"amen?" Amen!

Morris - This was the main reason for God's sweeping judgment on the Canaanites. In fact, when the Israelites failed to carry out God's command, they themselves were led into apostasy and finally into exile. It would have been better if these hopelessly apostate tribes could have been prevented from spreading their utter moral corruption to future generations. The immorality and cruelty of the Canaanite tribes has been confirmed by various artifacts and inscriptions found by archaeologists. Regarding the children who would be too young to choose right or wrong or to understand about God, we can assume such were safe in virtue of the future redemptive work of Christ.

Detestable (abomination, loathsome) ([08441](#)) **toebah** refers to an abominable custom or thing and is primarily used of things, persons or practices that are either ritually or morally offensive to the Lord. Toebah is an important word in Deuteronomy (Dt 12:31; 13:14; 14:3; 17:1, 4; 18:9, 12; 20:18; 22:5; 23:18; 24:4; 25:16; 27:15; 32:16). Abomination. Loathsome. Detestable thing. Something or someone who is loathsome and abhorrent. **Toebah** "is primarily understood in the context of the Law. It identifies unclean food (Dt. 14:3); the activity of the idolater (Isa. 41:24); the practice of child sacrifice (Dt. 12:31); intermarriage by the Israelites (Mal. 2:11); the religious activities of the wicked (Pr 21:27); and homosexual behavior (Lev. 18:22). In a broader sense, the word is used to identify anything offensive (Pr 8:7)." Tobebah in Deuteronomy - Deut. 7:25; Deut. 7:26; Deut. 12:31; Deut. 13:14; Deut. 14:3; Deut. 17:1; Deut. 17:4; Deut. 18:9; Deut. 18:12; Deut. 20:18; Deut. 22:5; Deut. 23:18; Deut. 24:4; Deut. 25:16; Deut. 27:15; Deut. 32:16

In Deuteronomy 20:18 the **Lxx** translates **toebah** with **bdelugma** (from **bdelusso** = emit foul odor, turn away from something or someone on account of the "stench". A loathing or disgust, abhor in turn derived from **bdeo** = to stink; cf **bdekluktos**) which describes something foul, that which is extremely hated, disgusted, detested or abhorred. The first NT use of bdelugma is in Mt 24:15+ which is fitting as it describes the "**Abomination** (bdelugma) of desolation" (the Antichrist) (cp Mk 13:14+). The other 4 uses of **bdelugma** are - Lk 16:15+, Rev 17:4, 5+, Rev 21:27+.

Utley - How can this be done by a loving God? One answer is found in v. 18—a theological reason. If you don't wipe them out they will theologically pollute you. Another answer is found in Deut. 9:4 and a third in Gen. 15:12–21. Human sins have consequences! ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

Deuteronomy 9:4+ "Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you.

Genesis 15:12-21+ Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. 13 God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15 "As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. 16 "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." 17 It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: 19 the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite 20 and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim 21 and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite."

Grant - Is there any lesson that can be learned today from these verses? **First**, it is a reminder that anything that is a danger to our devotion to the Lord must be dealt with in a relentless manner. No quarter must be given. Dealing partially with these dangers will but leave behind the **seeds** that can grow again and cause spiritual damage. There are enemies today that must be put to death. Paul's teaching is uncompromising, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col 3:5+). **Second**, just as no covenants had to be made with the Canaanites, so the believer must not enter into any unequal yoke (2 Cor 6:14–18). There may have appeared to be attractive reasons for doing so, if an apparently amicable agreement could be made that, on the surface, left the Canaanites and the Israelites free to pursue their lives in "peace". Such a policy, as has already been noted, led to the introduction of idolatry within Israel. (see 2 Cor 7:1+) ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

McIntosh - Stubborn and Rebellious - It is no accident that the expression used in verse 18 to describe a wayward son is elsewhere used of Israel, God's own wayward son. In Jeremiah 5:23, God describes the imminent destruction of Judah with the plaintive words, "But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away." Identical language

is used to describe the generation of the exodus: "They would not be like their forefathers—a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him" (Ps. 78:8). The Israelite parent whose child ignored all his instruction could know in a small measure the sorrow that Israel caused Yahweh. ([Holman Old Testament Commentary](#))

Deuteronomy 20:19 "When you besiege a city a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them; for you may eat from them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you?"

- **shall not:** Mt 3:10 7:15-20 21:19 Lu 13:7-9 Joh 15:2-8
- **trees,** De 26:6
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

NO CHOPPING DOWN THE FRUIT TREES

When you besiege a city a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe (lit - an iron) **against them; for you may eat from them, and you shall not cut them down** - Not "IF" but "WHEN" - They will besiege a city. Trees were needed for fuel and building siegeworks. But here the restriction is against destroying trees that gave fruit to eat (explained further in following passage).

Guzik - When an army surrounded a city during a siege, the army would forage around the countryside for supplies. Needing wood for building and fuel, it would be common for the besieging army to cut down trees in the area around the city. But they had to take a long-term view (one good for the ecology), and see that their immediate need for wood was less important than the long-term good of the area. ([Enduring Word Commentary - Deut 20](#))

Wiersbe - When the Lord really wanted to humble a nation, He commanded His people to destroy the good trees (2 Kings 3:15–17), but this approach was an exception. ([Be Equipped](#))

[IVP Bible Background Commentary](#) - **siege works.** To capture a walled city, it was necessary to employ a variety of siege works, including ramps (2 Sam 20:15; 2 Kings 19:32), towers (Is 23:13; Ezek 21:22) or perimeter walls to prevent escape (Ezek 26:8; Mic 5:1). Battering rams (Ezek 26:9) as well as supports for tunnels undermining the walls also required the use of timbers. This explains the dispensation allowed in Deuteronomy for the cutting of trees during a siege. The Assyrian reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 B.C.) at Nimrud portray many of these siege engines and simultaneous methods of warfare.

For is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you? **Deere** comments "In the ancient Near East military powers punished their enemies by indiscriminately laying waste to the land. This practice made no sense in relation to the land of Canaan for it was to become Israel's own possession. Why should Israel cut down trees whose fruit she could eat? And why should trees, that were not men, be besieged? Even in lands outside Canaan the practice was to be avoided because it showed a lack of respect for God's creation and an infatuation with the harsh and excessive use of destructive power." ([The Bible Knowledge Commentary](#))

Grant - The rhetorical question that is asked, "... for is the tree of the field a man that it should be besieged?" (v. 19, JND), indicates that the tree should not become involved in a war in which it has no part. This principle was true whether the siege took place in the land of Canaan or whether it was in other territory. ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))

Coates - The value of fruit trees is heightened by Moses' question, for is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you? This may seem hypocritical for God to command that fruit trees be spared and children and infants be exterminated, but Moses earlier had raised the concern about assimilation (7:3) with the Canaanites, hence the need for total annihilation (men, women, and children) of these nations. However, with trees there is no danger of assimilation or cultural transference, so they can and should be spared. Respect for God's creation was to be maintained even in a time of war. (Moody Bible Commentary)

Wiersbe - The NIV reads, "Are the trees of the field people, that you should besiege them?" God permitted the Jews to wage war against rebellious people but not against His creation. ([Be Equipped](#))

TSK - **For is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you** The original is exceedingly difficult. The LXX. has it, "Is the tree in the field a man, to enter the trench before thee?" The Latin Vulgate: "For it is a tree, and not a man, neither can it increase the number of those who war against thee;" Onkelos, "For the tree of the field is not as a man, that it should come against thee in the siege;" and to the same purpose the Arabic, Philo, and Josephus who say, "If trees could speak, they would cry out, that

it is unjust that they, who were no cause of the war, should suffer the miseries of it." However rendered, the sense is sufficiently clear: and it is a merciful provision to spare all the fruit trees for the support of both the besieged and besiegers.

Deuteronomy 20:20 "Only the trees which you know are not fruit trees you shall destroy and cut down, that you may construct siegeworks against the city that is making war with you until it falls.

- **construct:** De 1:28 2Ch 26:15 Ec 9:14 Isa 37:33 Jer 6:6 33:4 Eze 17:17
- [Deuteronomy 19 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

CONSERVATION OF THE LAND

Only the trees which you know are not fruit trees you shall destroy and cut down- Fruit-bearing trees were to be spared in a siege. Other trees could be cut for siegeworks, which may have included ladders, towers, and battering rams

Uttley - Walled cities in the ancient Near East were attacked by wooden siege machines. The wood was to be taken from non-fruit bearing tree, probably because this produce would be needed later by the Israeli inhabitants of the defeated city. ([Deuteronomy 20 Commentary](#))

That (Purpose) you may construct siegeworks against the city that is making war with you until it falls - NET Note - Siegeworks - Heb "[an] enclosure." The term מַצּוֹר (matsor) may refer to encircling ditches or to surrounding stagings. See R. de Vaux, Ancient Israel, 238. ([Deuteronomy 20](#))

Grant has some spiritual lessons from the conservation of trees, etc - Spiritual Lessons - **The spiritual provision** that has been made for believers must be passed on intact. The source of spiritual sustenance must not be destroyed. The Word of God in all its fullness has to be handed down to the following generation so that it will be able to enjoy what has been enjoyed by previous generations. To pass on a denuded spiritual landscape robs those who come after. **One other important issue** highlighted is that the long-term effect of actions must be considered. Where there are difficulties, the means of solving them must not leave problems to be faced by those who follow. Spiritual short sightedness is a failing, the consequences of which have to be faced by others. . ([What the Bible Teaches – Leviticus and Deuteronomy](#))