

**SPEECH 2B—SERMON ON THE FIRST COMMANDMENT (DEUT 6–11):
The Foundation of & Response to Israel’s Election (Deuteronomy 7b)**

Setting the Scene

We are currently working through Moses’ second speech (Deut 5–26), which includes (a) the Ten Words (Deut 5), (b) a sermon on the first commandment (Deut 6–11), and (c) specific application of the Ten Commandments (Deut 12–26).

Today, we continue to unpack Moses’ sermon on the first commandment (Deut 6–11), picking up in Deut 7.

Election: Foundation & Response (Deut 7)

Structure of Deuteronomy 7:

- Response: The Command (vv. 1–6)
- Foundation: The Grounds of Israel’s Election (vv. 7–11)
- Response: The Fruit of Obedience (vv. 12–16)
- Foundation: God Fights Israel’s Battles (vv. 17–26)

Last week, we considered the first response and foundation (vv. 1–11). Having been given the land by God, Israel was called to respond to this gift with total commitment. The command to devote the Canaanites to destruction is rooted in this call to faithfulness. Israel was to be holy and set apart for God. Their election wasn’t grounded in anything special about them, but in God’s sovereign love, illustrated through his redemptive acts.

Today, we continue in chapter 7 by considering the second response and foundation, both of which flow from the first.

Response: The Fruit of Obedience (vv. 12–16)

Having reminded the people of the grounds of their election, Moses implicitly issues another response to this sovereign grace in vv. 12–16—another charge to be faithful to the covenant.

However, Moses isn’t shy in these verses about motivating the people by holding out the blessings associated with faithfulness to the covenant. He says,

[12] ... *because y’all shema¹ these judgments and keep and do them, YHWH your God will keep with you the covenant and the steadfast love which he swore to your fathers.* Remember, the people didn’t earn their way into the covenant with obedience. This was rooted in God’s oath to

¹ Remember the semantic range of *shema*, “hear, listen to, understand, obey.”

the fathers. However, Israel's ongoing maintenance and enjoyment of the blessings within the covenant was, in a sense, dependent on an obedient response.²

What fruit does Moses say is associated with covenant obedience (see esp. v. 13)?

- Love; blessing; multiplication
 - Love—divine love grounds the election of Israel in God's relationship with their ancestors. His sustaining love, however, is both “the source and substance of all the covenant blessings listen here for their descendants.”³
 - Blessing—generally refers to providing offspring (1:11), protection (2:7), expansion of land (14:24), and agricultural abundance (12:7).⁴
 - Multiplication—i.e., God would make Israel *increase* in every way...⁵
- Fertile wombs, land, and flocks
 - God opens the womb; the new wine and fresh oil described here require societal stability over time. The Lord is sovereign over all of this.
 - Note that this was precisely what several key Canaanite gods were supposed to provide...Interestingly, the terms used for grain (*dagan*), new wine (*tirosh*), and animal offspring (*seger* and *asteret*), are all linked with the names of pagan deities: *Dagon*, *Tirash*, *Sheger*, and *Astarte*. This is “de-deification,” i.e., “demoting them from the category of divinity to common nouns, and granting to YHWH control of their previous functions.”⁶
 - **Point:** destroying those pagan gods shouldn't cause any fear about losing out.⁷ It is YHWH from whom all blessings flow, not false gods.

Moses goes on...

- Israel will be blessed over all peoples, with no barrenness among man or beast (v. 14).
- The Lord will rid Israel of the maladies they knew in Egypt, inflicting them on Israel's enemies instead (v. 15). Cf. Exod 15:26.

What do these blessings remind you of?

- Abrahamic promise! Here, we see a vivid description of what the full extent of this promise could look like.⁸

Is this advocating a prosperity gospel?

- No...this must be understood as a general principle even in the OT context, not a mechanistic promise. Prosperity *in itself* doesn't indicate faithfulness, and poverty doesn't inherently imply unfaithfulness. Even in OT context, the wicked often prosper; the righteous often suffer.⁹

² See Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, UTB (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 117.

³ Bill T. Arnold, *The Book of Deuteronomy Chapters 1–11*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 465.

⁴ Arnold, *Deuteronomy*, 465.

⁵ Arnold, *Deuteronomy*, 465.

⁶ Arnold, *Deuteronomy*, 467.

⁷ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 117–18.

⁸ See Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 117.

⁹ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 118–19.

- However, there is an element of physical blessing associated with the fulfillment of the promise in the OT context. This should serve as a corrective against ascetism and hyper spirituality.¹⁰

Finally, Israel is assured that they will *consume* their enemies (v. 16a). There is also a reminder to show no pity nor serve their false gods *because that would be a snare to you* (v. 16b). “Snare” could denote the trap itself, or the bait attached to it which lures the victim. The point is that the Israelite must be on guard to avoid being lured and entrapped by idolatry.¹¹ There is a seductive pull to the entire idolatrous system of Canaan.¹²

Foundation: God Fights Israel’s Battles (vv. 17–26)

The final foundation of Deut 7 presents another not-so-hypothetical scenario.

[17] *If you say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?’*

This language reminds us of v. 1. Moses is keen on not repeating the events of four decades earlier. While Israel was certainly smaller and weaker than Canaanites by comparison, they were not to revert to a sinful fear or lack of trust.¹³

The chapter concludes with the prescribed response to such concerns (vv. 18–24), and a final word of warning (vv. 25–26).¹⁴

Moses combats the people’s potential fear by calling them to remember two things:¹⁵

- (1) Remember what the Lord has done for them *in the past*.
 - Again, not saying that the Canaanites aren’t formidable foes. He is saying that if the Lord rescued his people from Egypt, he is more than able to save them from these petty kingdoms.
- (2) Remember that the Lord is with them *in the present*.
 - As if the typical tools of redemption weren’t enough, hornets are added! The word usually refers to a species of wasp/hornet whose sting may be fatal—especially if attacked by a swarm. **Point:** even those who escape Israel will be chased down by hornets, proving the Lord is with them (see Josh 24:12).

It is the Lord who fights for Israel. Remember what he did to Egypt, remember that he will fight for you now. It is he who will “clear away these nations before you” in his own sovereign timing, and “give their kings into Israel’s hand.” All Israel was to do was carry out the task of making “their name perish from under heaven,” a statement about their legacy.

¹⁰ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 118.

¹¹ See Arnold, *Deuteronomy*, 468–69.

¹² See Daniel I. Block, *A Commentary on Deuteronomy Chapters 1–11*, Hearing the Gospel According to Moses vol. 1 (Hong Kong: Inspirata, 2023), 266.

¹³ See Arnold, *Deuteronomy*, 470; Block, *Deuteronomy*, 270.

¹⁴ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 270.

¹⁵ See Block, 270–71.

Block suggests that vv. 17–24 offer three important Christian applications:¹⁶

- (1) Recognize *God's past grace* in salvation. If he can rescue us from death (Eph 2:1–5), he is able to defeat the enemy in daily skirmishes.
- (2) Recognize *God's present power* in you, i.e., remember 1 John 4:4.
- (3) Recognize *our own responsibility* to engage the enemy by remaining distinct from the world (Eph 6:10–18; 1 Pet 5:6–11).

[25] The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God. [26] And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction.

Moses' final word of warning returns to the initial concern of the chapter. Israel was to remain "unimpressed, untempted, unensnared, and uncontaminated" by the idolatry of the Canaanites.¹⁷

Here, however, Moses seems more concerned with the potential to hang on to the idols because of their monetary value (gold & silver). He draws from the Ten Words, using the term "covet" (*chamad*; cf. 5:21), dismissing any attempts to rationalize salvaging the precious metals.

In fact, he calls this an "abomination" (*to'evah*). This is the strongest condemnation of Canaanite idolatry, referring to "that which is alien or ... a distancing or alienating character, most especially that which alienates one from YHWH."¹⁸

Thus, they were not even to bring it into their household, i.e., the extended family unit. Remember, this was the center of religious, social, and economic life in ancient Israel. The home was the ideal locale of discipleship and Torah instruction (cf. Deut 6). Bringing an abomination into that context makes all vulnerable to the consequences. The call is to remain as far removed from the poison as possible.¹⁹

The second response to Israel's election speaks to the real fruit that comes as a result of obedience. This is not to suggest a prosperity gospel. But it does remind us of the blessing that comes from holiness, whether now or in the life to come (Rom 2:6–10).²⁰

The second foundation reminds the people of Israel of the need to remember who it is that fights their battles. They didn't need to fear because the one who redeemed them from the clutches of Egypt will continue to fight for his people. Is this not true of us, as well?

¹⁶ See Block, *Deuteronomy*, 278.

¹⁷ Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 119.

¹⁸ Arnold, *Deuteronomy*, 475.

¹⁹ See Arnold, *Deuteronomy*, 475–76.

²⁰ Under God's sovereignty, there are also practical benefits to holiness. See, e.g., 1 Pet 3:8–11.