shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. 4 For they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods, and the Lord's anger will blaze forth against you and He will promptly wipe you out. Instead, this is what you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, smash their pillars, cut down their sacred posts, and consign their images to the fire.

6 For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God: of all the peoples on earth the Lord your God chose you to be His treasured people.

return for which they would be spared (20:11). According to Exod. 23:31–33, Canaanites were to be expelled from the land; here they are to be killed.

3. The intent behind the severe treatment of the Canaanites is the prevention of the intermarriages, which would certainly lure the Israelites to worship pagan gods and then to violate the first two commandments (see Exod. 23:32–33, 34:15–16; Deut. 20:17–18).

4. from Me Moses, when transmitting God's commands, often alternates between speaking of God in the third person and quoting Him directly.

He will promptly wipe you out Because the exclusive worship of YHWH was the fundamental condition for Israel's survival, leaving Canaanites alive who might entice the Israelites into idolatry was a matter of life and death.

5. tear down Even the physical objects of Canaanite religion must be eliminated. The common practice of taking them as booty or bringing them as offerings to the victor's deity is forbidden, because anything associated with the religion of the Canaanites is repugnant to the Lord (vv. 25–26).

altars Structures on which offerings of food, drink, or incense were made to gods. They might be simple stones or mounds of dirt, tables plated with precious metal, or platforms large enough to be ascended by steps or ramps.

pillars Cut or uncut stones that were erected for a religious purpose. Some contained engravings or reliefs showing a deity or its symbols, and others were plain. Apparently they were thought to embody the presence of a deity, either by representing the deity or by serving as its residence. Sacrifices were offered to them and they were treated as idols.

sacred posts Hebrew: asherah. Refers to a standing wooden object at a place of worship. According to 16:21, it was a tree planted near an altar. Some passages suggest that it might also be an image, an artificial tree, or perhaps a tree trunk or a pole. Others indicate that it was regarded as a symbol of the Canaanite goddess Asherah.

fire If burning is meant literally, the text must be referring to wooden images with metal plating (see v. 25). All the verbs in these commands, however, may simply mean “destroy.” In the excavations at Hazor a statue with its head chopped off was found in the remains of the stratum destroyed by the Israelites at the time of the conquest.

6. consecrated Hebrew: kadosh. Usually translated “holy,” here it has the sense of “set apart.”

God chose you Israel was the only people devoted to YHWH. The Bible considers this a special privilege for which Israel was chosen.

His treasured people Israel is God’s “treasure” (ṣ’gullah), meaning that it is cherished. The Hebrew word belongs to covenantal terminology. There is an account of a Hittite king who called his vassal, the king of Ugarit, his treasure. On a Syrian royal seal a king is called “the servant of Adad, the beloved of Adad, the stikium [ṣ’gullah] of Adad.”

HALAKHAH L’MA-ASEH

23. not intermarry Marriage is the basis of the family and the home in which religious identity is transmitted. The Torah commands us to marry within the faith to build a Jewish family (see Gen. 24:3, 26:35, 28:1).
It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that the Lord set His heart on you and chose you—indeed, you are the smallest of peoples; but it was because the Lord favored you and kept the oath He made to your fathers that the Lord freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Know, therefore, that only the Lord your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps His covenant faithfully to the thousandth generation of those who love Him and keep His commandments, but who instantly requites destruction those who reject Him—never slow with those who reject Him, but requiring them instantly. Therefore, observe faithfully the Instruction—the laws and the rules with which I charge you today.

AN APPEAL TO AVOID COMPLACENCY (vv. 7-11)

7. smallest of peoples This assertion contrasts with others that state that in Egypt Israel grew into “a great and very populous nation” (26:5) and that it is now as numerous as the stars (1:10, 10:22, 28:62). Unless the present assertion is a deliberate exaggeration for the sake of dismissing Israel’s size as a factor, it may reflect conditions of a historical period different from that of the other references.

9. Know, from God’s election and redemption of Israel, that He is reliable and steadfast.

10. Although punishment may extend to three or four generations of descendants (5:9), offenders themselves cannot hope to escape retribution if they violate God’s laws.

11. observe The verb שָׁמַע describes both Israel’s obligation to “observe” and God’s act of “keeping” the covenant (v. 9). The intent here may be to lend a moral dimension to Moses’ argument: Israel ought to respond to God’s faithfulness with its own sincere faithfulness—and not merely obey God to avoid punishment and receive a reward.

CHAPTER 7

9. those who love Him and keep His commandments This phrase actually refers to two groups; those who wholeheartedly love and serve God, and those who keep commandments only for other reasons—such as seeking to be admired for their ethical standards, or out of concern for their neighbors’ opinion (Rashi).

All flesh is grass This image underscores human mortality and transience compared to the eternal, supernatural word of God. The image recurs in Psalms 90:4-6; 119:15-17.