shall not intermarry with them: do not give your
daughters to their sons or take their daughters
for your sons. 4For 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. 5Instead, 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.

6For 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. 20:3–6; 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 com-
mon 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 rep-
resenting 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. Ac-
cording 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 com-
mands, however, may simply mean "destroy." In
the excavations at Hazor a statue with its head
chopped off was found in the remains of the stra-
tum 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 de-
vote to YHWH. The Bible considers this a special
privilege for which Israel was chosen.

His treasured people  Israel is God's "treas-
ure" (s'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 sklitum [s'gullah]
of Adad."

HALAKHAX L'MA-'ASEH
73. 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 with destruction those who reject Him—never slow with those who reject Him, but requiting 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.

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

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].

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 verbيمي 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.