

Deuteronomy 6 and Understanding Annihilation

This morning, I get the opportunity to talk with you about Deuteronomy chapter six and understanding annihilation. I will share some information I have gleaned from various apologetics classes over the years and what I have meditated on in this study.

We come to chapter six after having reviewed the Ten Commandments in Chapter five. Here the Israelites continue to be encouraged to follow the Lord's commandments wholeheartedly. It is important that we never forget the context of the ten commandments: they were given after the Lord delivered the Children of Israel from more than 400 years of slavery to the Egyptians with a mighty Hand. God displayed the awesomeness of His power – from the ten plagues, to the opening of the Red Sea, to meeting with Moses in their view. It was undeniable. He stayed with them as He led them through the wilderness in the form of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This same God had provided for their needs and, even in their grumbling, provided some of their desires. He has shown Himself to them; He allowed them to know much about Himself and dwell in the midst of them. This is the context in which the ten commandments were given. I am the Lord your God Who... Therefore, you shall...

We'll start in verse four and make our way back and then forward.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up.” Deuteronomy 6:4-7 NKJV

We learned during this lesson that that word for “hear” means to hear intelligently with the intent to obey. Again, the Lord has already set the stage. He has already delivered them. They have seen these things first-hand. That is the reason they would hear with the intent to obey. This is not some random god telling them what he might or could do or simply demanding obedience, but rather the God who had already shown Himself to them in powerful, merciful, loving, undeniable ways.

The Shema goes on to say in verse 4 “The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” Literally, the phrasing here is Jehovah Elohim Jehovah, where Jehovah is the name of God. Elohim: Damian Kyle explains that in the Hebrew, the singular word for God is the word “El”; the dual word for God is the word “Eloah” and the word for three or more is the word used here, Elohim. The word for one is “ehad”. It is the word for compound unity. There is another word for one in the Hebrew; that word is “yaheed”. It is an absolute one; there is no compounding at all in that word. Had He used the word “yaheed”, there would be no room for the Trinity, but instead, the Lord intentionally uses a word that points to His triune nature.

We contemplated in the lesson what things would look like if we had to worship multiple gods with competing, conflicting and contradictory priorities and competing, conflicting and contradictory rules. It would be confusing at best and get us killed at worst. We do not have that issue in the service of one triune God. He is not in competition, and He is completely and totally sufficient, not needing to borrow from another god to be what we need. He is the I AM.

In this forth verse of chapter 6, God shares with the Children of Israel an aspect of Himself that He wanted them to know – that He is “one” (ehad). I am going to take some time here and pivot to talk about another aspect of God that we will see more of later in Deuteronomy.

If you are like most people, you have struggled with the idea of annihilation that we see in scripture. Yes, we know all that we see in the Bible is not descriptive or demanded, but we find in these scriptures the command by God to, in some cases, annihilate a population to include men, women, children and animals.

I am going to talk about this often-troublesome topic reviewing five areas: 1. Accommodation, 2. Judgement, 3. Context and Timeframe, 4. Application, 5. His Heart

1. Accommodation is a theological principle and is the idea that God makes Himself knowable by us. He meets us on a level we are capable of grasping. We see this all the time in everyday life. Take, for example, an adult talking in a strange high-pitched dialect with strange sounding words using incomplete sentences, crawling on the floor, being “caught” by a wobbly baby. Is this a crazy person or a parent? That person is making him or herself knowable by that child. All throughout the old testament, we read the Lord say He does things “that you may know”. He demonstrates who He is. He doesn’t just tell us. He provides because He is a provider. He shows mercy; demonstrates His power over everything from animals, land, sky and sea even light itself; He demonstrates His Holiness;... He comes close. In annihilation, He makes known His wrath.
2. Judgement Judgement of evil is the overarching context with which to read about annihilation in the Old Testament.

“One of the means of His revelation of the reality of His judgement is war” and in this case annihilation.

“When there is intensive killing with God’s approval, the immorality of their enemies is cited as the reason why.” Genesis 15:13-16, particularly 16 “the iniquity of the Amorites is not complete”. God told Abraham that He would deliver his descendants after 400 years because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet complete. During this time, the culture of the Canaanites (the inhabitants of the Promised land that would be annihilated) reflected its deities’ activities including incest, bestiality, temple prostitution including prostitution involving children, child sacrifice, and gory violence. “The Lord had to judge, but Scripture makes it clear that this type of judgement – directly or indirectly – was a last resort. There was time given for repentance” (in this case 430 years) and, when there was repentance, God was merciful. For example, during the battle at Jericho, Rehab repented – fearing the Lord – and her entire household is saved. Not only that, but she ends up in the genealogy of Jesus!

Miroslav Volf, a Croatian theologian says, “I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God. Isn’t God love? Shouldn’t divine love be beyond wrath? God is love, and God loves every person and every creature. That’s exactly why God is wrathful against some of them. My last resistance to the idea of God’s wrath was a casualty of the war in the former Yugoslavia, the region from which I come. According to some estimates, 200,000 people were killed and over 3 million were displaced. My villages and cities were destroyed, my people shelled day in and day out, some of them brutalized beyond imagination and I could not imagine God not being angry. Or think of Rwanda in the last decade of the past century, where 800,000 people were hacked to death in one hundred days! How did God react to the carnage? By doting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion? By refusing to condemn the bloodbath but instead affirming the perpetrators’ basic goodness? Wasn’t God fiercely angry with them? Though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God’s wrath, I came to think that I would have to rebel

against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the worlds' evil. God isn't wrathful in spite of being love. God is wrathful because God is love."

I wondered why babies were included given their innocence in this judgement until recent years, when I watched my individuals and groups in my culture, for a number of reasons, return to the gods of our distant ancestors. And my culture is not alone, often individuals and groups return to their cultural practices and worship for a wide variety of reasons, to include honoring their family and ancestors. The earthly annihilation of babies and children saved these babies from this sin, carried out the judgement of God for sin, and prevented this group of unrepentant people from continuing such atrocities again.

3. Context and Timeframe.

First Context: "It is important that we understand the wider Old Testament revelation of God – that is, that God was revealing Himself to the Children of Israel – and to us. He was also fulfilling His promise to Abraham to 1. give his descendants land and 2. Bless *all* nations (Genesis 12). "

Second Timeframe: "The wars that are most problematic take place primarily under Joshua in an era of struggle to establish Israel as a nation in the land God promised them. Post Joshua, all God sanctioned battles with the exception of one – Saul and Amalekites – were defensive.... Of course, offensive battles took place in the times of the judges and David, but those were not directly commanded by God... God's overarching goal is to bring blessing and salvation to all nations including the Canaanites... But for a strategic relatively short period of time, He sought to establish Israel in the Promised Land with a view to fulfill His long-term plan for *global* redemption and in so doing, He would also punish a group of people with His judgement. God's difficult command regarding the Canaanites is a limited, unique situation."

4. Application Contrary to the criticisms of critics, "this was not about race or ethnicity." To whom was His judgement applied? His judgement was applied to everyone to include the Children of Israel. In Deuteronomy 6:15, God lets them know that they, too, could be destroyed if they did not obey. Deuteronomy 28 expands this thought. We see their punishment (via war and exile) played out later in the Old Testament. "The Children of Israel brought about God's will on the battlefield during this period, but they are also on the receiving end of God's judgement."

5. His heart. We have already reflected on the fact that God's motive was the revealing of His character and the punishment of perpetual unrepentant evil, but it is important to keep in mind his heart in the matter. Ezekiel 33:11a-b says "As I live, says the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways!" Krista Miller shared a few weeks back, a concept that I am going to reiterate: Lamentations 3:33 CSB, For He does not enjoy bringing affliction or suffering on mankind. Dane Ortland comments on this verse in his book, Gentle and Lowly, "The implicit premise that God is indeed the One who afflicts. The explicit statement is that He does not do it from His heart."

Let's continue.

This God who will not allow evil *done to* you or evil *in* you to go unpunished is this "one God" whom Israel was called to fear in Deuteronomy 6:2. Yes, they were to take Him seriously – His Power to carry out His will, His desires, His plans to bless and His plans to judge. This "one God" required not a life on

autopilot, but – having experienced who He is – one that was intentional about service to Him. They were to “hear”, “be careful to observe”, and “diligently keep” His commands. This was the “one God” they were called to worship - the Shema says - with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their strength. We reviewed the words hear and soul and learned the definitions include “inner man, mind, will, heart, seat of appetites, emotions, passions”... In other words, we are to love God with everything that we are and everything we have.

Verses six and seven read, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up.” One thing I have always loved about these verses is their practicality. I have thought, what a way to get something in us – by repeating it over and over, by meditating, by talking about it – processing it – throughout our days with our families.

Verse eight and nine says, “You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. The Hebrew word for “write” here is defined: describe, inscribe, prescribe, and subscribe. Genius...

- This writing would describe God’s law.
- Inscribe: Interestingly, an article published by Psychology Today in 2021 showed handwritten notes, when compared to digital note-taking, triggered more robust brain activity and is associated with stronger neural encoding and memory retrieval among other things. Turns out that God knows what He is talking about.
- God’s commands are prescriptive to a diseased, sin-sickened soul.
- The Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines the word subscribe, to sign with one’s own hand; to give consent to something written, or to bind oneself by writing one’s name beneath; as, parties subscribe a covenant or contract.

Again, this is not a life on autopilot, this is intentional living for and with an amazing and *present* God.

Verse 10 goes on to say, “so it shall be when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities which you did not build, houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, hewn-out wells which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant – when you have eaten and are full – then beware, lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage”... God in His generous provision, provides bountifully for a people, He knew would forsake Him.

Verse 14 reads, “you shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.”

Krista described the jealousy of God a few weeks back, but it serves as a good reminder as we see God’s jealousy again this week. She says, “One definition of jealousy is being fiercely protective of one’s possessions... It is NOT to be confused with covet, which we are told is a sin and commanded not to do it in Deuteronomy 5:21.... The Hebrew word for covet is a different word than the Hebrew word for jealous.” Krista says “the word ‘covet’ in chapter five is referring to desiring something that is specifically NOT yours.” She points us back to scripture quoting Isaiah 43:1 which reads, “But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I

have called you by your name; you are Mine.” 1 Cor 3:23 “And you are Christ’s” ... 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, which says, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s”. Krista says, “We as believers in Jesus, just like the Israelites, have been rescued by God and belong to Him. Therefore, he has every right to be jealous if something is taking us away from Him, if we are being unfaithful to Him. Just like a wife has every right to have a righteous jealousy if her husband is being unfaithful to her. He belongs to her. And we belong to God. He is a jealous God. Fiercely protective of His possessions.”

I can’t finish without coming back to annihilation. We just read that we were “bought at a price”. You see, annihilation was for a limited period of time in the Old Testament as a means of revealing the reality of God’s judgement, but in the New Testament, God poured out His judgement on His son – in ways that the Canaanites could not imagine and for sin that was not His own. Contrary to the popular crucifix depictions of Jesus on the Cross, His body was actually destroyed. We see a clearer picture in Isaiah 52 and 53... His appearance was described as appalling, “so disfigured that He did not look like a man, and His form did not resemble a human being”... He “bore our griefs and carried our sorrows... and the Lord... laid on Him the iniquity of us all”. We can imagine to a limited extent the physical torture, Jesus experienced for us on the Cross... We tend to focus less on the emotional and spiritual torment.... Jesus bore our griefs and sorrows. Having just come from the funeral of a woman who was in many ways like a mother to me, watching her children, my sisters and brothers mourn such great loss, I cannot begin to fathom what it was like to bear the earth-shattering grief of loss of the entire world from the beginning of time to the end of time.... Not just all significant loss, but every grief and sorrow – great and small. And then God laid on him the sin of us all with all of its guilt and shame... all in one moment... and then as the Gospels say, He was forsaken by One with whom He was One.... Some of us know the depth of loneliness we have felt when we have turned our hearts from God to other things... Others who don’t know Him may not know that loneliness, but most certainly know the loneliness of being left by those we love – the treachery of divorce, broken promises, being abandoned in times of tremendous need.... If annihilation in the Bible sickens you, this savage act on the Cross should certainly at least mirror that sickness... particularly when you recall that it was you and me who put Him there ... He endured the wrath of a Holy God directly to pay the debt for the sin of a “wretch” like me and a “wretch” like you... Feel the fury and confusion and Grace... Amazing, astounding Grace.

Verse 24 of chapter six, reads “and the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that He may preserve us alive, as it is this day.” His motives for the Israelites then and for us now are for good.

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
’Til on that Cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

Prayer: Lord, help us to see and understand what you accomplished for us on the Cross and let us, therefore, love you with all of our hearts, our souls, and our strength.