AN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S COMMAND FOR ISRAELITES "YOU SHALL NOT LEAVE ANYTHING THAT BREATHES ALIVE" IN DEUTERONOMY 20:16: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY

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Abstract

God's love is evident in all that He does. God's only actions were to demonstrate to the Israelites the wickedness of sin and to keep them living in righteousness. Chapter 20 of the book of Deuteronomy covers laws about the sixth commandment. The infallibility of the Bible is called into question in several places, most notably in Deuteronomy 20:16, when God commands the killing of all Canaanites, including women and children. God gives the order to exterminate every person living in the Canaan region. The term "עיר" solely refers to the cities that are part of the Canaan area, not all the places they will traverse. The phrase's common meaning also aids in understanding the village and all of its residents in addition to the city, which is a sizable area. In the end, human choice determines whether they live or not. In the context of this verse, Israel must either choose to disobey God's Word or learn to rely on God to enjoy the intrinsic, which is the Promised Land. God's love and justice are assurances of His concern for His people.

Keywords: *Israelites, Canaanites, Love, Justice, sixth-commandment*

Introduction

The unity and harmony of the Scripture is something that every God's people must pay attention to. However, without the correct method of interpretation, the reader may think that the Scripture does not have a clear unity. Several cases in the Bible have issues that attack the unity of the Scripture itself, one of which is God's command to kill every Canaanite including children and women in Deuteronomy 20:16. The question of why God gives the order to kill every living thing in this verse has been arising by the Bible Scholar and even laity. How could a truly holy

and loving God command and give instructions for the wholesale slaughter of an entire people?[1] In these verses, it seems that God shows his cruel and brutal order to eliminate everyone who existed. Isn't God is love like what is written in the New Testament (1 John 4:8). Such mass destruction activities seem to go against the principle of God's love.

Moreover, the Israelis themselves were the instruments of destruction. This may lead to a disunity of the Scriptures. Yet, it is an ingenious way of ensuring that God is portrayed as perfect.[2] Bible readers often misunderstand God's actions in this story. For that, we need a correct explanation for interpreting God's command to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 20:16.

Interpretation of Scholars

Some studies show a similar conclusion to this discussion. Engelbrecht, a Lutheran theologian mentioned that, instead of being allowed to submit, cities within the Promised Land were to be destroyed so they could not influence the Israelites to choose wicked lives.[3] The impact of Canaanite sin might cause Israel to turn away from the Lord. The sin of Canaanites cannot be tolerated anymore, thus, the destruction needs to be done just like what happened in Noah's time.

Another Evangelical theologian, Jon Courson, according to him, God promised Abraham that his offspring would spend a full 400 years in Egypt, while He gave the Canaanites a chance to turn from their transgressions and turn to Him.[4] In his commentary, mentioned that God gave a time of probation, yet, Canaanites never accepted the God of Abraham. Their choices had an impact on 'innocent' lives. The intensity of depravity even touched women and children. God did not intend for such tragedies to endure.

Ellen G. White mentioned that the inhabitants of Canaan had been granted ample opportunity for repentance.[5] It was essential to cleanse the country of what would unavoidably

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[1] John Currid. "Why Did God Command the Destruction of the Canaanites?" *Reformed Theological Seminary* (2016) accessed February 9, 2023, https://rts.edu/resources/wisdom-wednesday-in-class-with-dr-john-currid/#.

[2] Katharine Dell, *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament: God and Humans in Dialogue,* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 252.

[3] Edward Engelbrecht, *The Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009). p. 310

[4] Jon Courson, *Jon Courson's application commentary: Volume one: Genesis-Job* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005). p. 596

[5] Ellen Gould White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1890), 492

impede God's gracious plans from being fulfilled since the Canaanites had abandoned themselves to the vilest and most degrading heathenism.[6] From Ellen White's explanation, the Canaanites should have heard how God's power had led the Israelites but they still rejected the true God. Sin in the environment of the Canaanites is ingrained so it will become a big problem if it is not eliminated. The love and justice of God act as a strong breastwork against the rising tide of moral evil and prevent it from engulfing the entire globe, God had placed His people in Canaan.[7]

General Section

The book of Deuteronomy chapter 20 contains laws related to the sixth commandment.[8] There were many laws that the Israelites needed to know at that time, this section, is about civil law. The rules regarding the law not to kill need to be elaborated again considering the lives of the Israelites who will soon enter the land of Canaan. Moses explained in detail starting from chapter 19 what to do when a murder occurs and the consequences of this.

However, chapter 20 provides another pattern wherein there are orders and rules regarding war. This pattern arises because of the war situation so there are special rules for war. The covenant need in this case relates to homicide, but of a sort that the Lord has authorized as both defensive and divinely mandated offensive military actions.[9] Therefore the division of this section is divided into several points, which can be seen below:

The promise and permission (20:1-9).
God's promise of guidance in war and permission for certain reasons. God gave great inclusion to the Israelites not to be afraid when facing the enemy. Because when the priest stands and speaks, it indicates the power of God is present among them. However, when some of them feel unprepared, afraid, or have certain obstacles, they are allowed not to join the war. This is the first pericope from this chapter.

The commands (20:10-18).
God's command regarding how to deal with the enemy. God commanded Israel to defeat every one of their enemies and leave none. However, there are several categories of enemies

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ellen Gould White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1890), 544.

[8] Thomas Constable. "Notes on Deuteronomy" in, *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible: Volume I Genesis-Deuteronomy.* (Louisville: Tyndale University Press, 2010), 9.

[9] Charles Dyer, Eugene Merrill, Charles R. Swindoll, and Roy B. Zuck, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2001), 142

presented in this periscope. When they accept the Israelites and surrender, some get forgiveness, but if they fight, they must be annihilated. Some enemies must be eliminated from the start without leaving anyone alive. This is the second pericope from this chapter.

Agricultural property (20:19-20).

God's command when handling the enemy agricultural property. God commanded the Israelites not to plunder fruit-bearing trees and damage these trees. The fruit is edible but should not damage the tree because it does not commit any evil. However, trees that do not produce fruit may be used for war equipment for attack and defense. This is the third pericope from this chapter.

Unit

Deuteronomy 20:10-18 is a part of God's command regarding how to deal with the enemy. The boundaries of this pericope is focusing on the part where God commands the Israelites to kill all living things including the territory of Hittite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite. All of these pericopes were divided according to The New American Standard Bible (NASB). As a new pericope or section begins, the NASB bolds the verse number.[10] Moreover, it is clear to understand Deuteronomy 20:10–18 as a single pericope for the mark ס that appears at the close of 20:18 that set a *setumah* before inscribing to the next pericope.[11]

Section

The second pericope will be the aim of this research. As previously stated, this paper will exclusively address the question of God's fundamental love as it is indicated in Deuteronomy 20:16. Therefore, only a few keywords will be discussed in this essay rather than all of them. The verses will be divided into some sections that can be seen below:

Verse 16
Only in the cities of these peoples – **First Section**
that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance - **Second section**
You shall not leave anything that breathes alive – **Third section**

Genre

In General, the book of Deuteronomy is a narrative approach. The narrative use of a story demonstrates how biblical concepts apply to practical circumstances.[12] This aspect can be seen in

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[10] Teofilo Correa, 4 min,. Ketib Hebrew Scriptures – Part 1, 2022, youtube.

[11] Charles Hill. *The First Chapters: Dividing the Text of Scripture in Codex Vaticanus and Its Predecessors.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 35.

[12] Frank Hasel. *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach.* (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), 172.

the first passage of the book begins, "These are the words which Moses spoke," a claim that implies that Moses is responsible for the whole book as well as the paragraph that follows.[13] However, in some passages, it can be found prayers and hymns from Moses. In more detail, the pericope that will be discussed is a narrative because it contains commands that were conveyed by God through Moses.

Historical Background

The land's geographical location is when the Israelites were almost about to enter Canaan (Deuteronomy 34:1). According to the scriptural evidence in Deuteronomy 2:7 and Joshua 5:6, this itinerary's completion took place exactly forty years after the Exodus.[14] So it can be concluded that Deuteronomy was written when they were at the end of the wilderness and would soon enter the land of Canaan. Thus, in some sources, Deuteronomy was written in 1407 B.C. in the fortieth year, the eleventh month after Israel's exodus from Egypt[15]. To see in more detail, it needs to look back at the year of the exodus of the Israelites. First Kings 6:1 provides information on it by stating that Solomon started construction on the Temple in Jerusalem in his fourth year as king, which was 480 years after Israel departed from Egypt.

Religious Context

The Israelites at that time experienced a transition from the initial generation to the new generation, considering that they had been out of Egypt for forty years. The process of covenant reiteration and reaffirmation, which is consistent with the covenant connections testified to across the ancient Near Eastern civilization, was necessary for the next generation, which was ready to begin a conquest.[16] The introduction and reminder of the law given to Moses are necessary so that the new generation can truly maintain their relationship with God. With the passing of the generations, a covenant struck between a great monarch and a vassal people must be repeated by his and their descendants.[17]

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[13] Charles Dyer, Eugene Merrill, Charles R. Swindoll, and Roy B. Zuck, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2001), 123.

[14] Charles Dyer, Eugene Merrill, Charles R. Swindoll, and Roy B. Zuck, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2001), 125.

[15] Wilbur Fields. *Old Testament history: an overview of sacred history & truth* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company. 1996), 241.

[16] Charles Dyer, Eugene Merrill, Charles R. Swindoll, and Roy B. Zuck, *Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publisher 2001), 126.

[17] Ibid.

God wants every Israelite to be ready to enter the land of Canaan by holding the right covenant between them and God through their righteous life. the Israelitish nation was to show itself to be the holy nation of Jehovah[18]. Thus, the spiritual condition of the Israelites was not too ready to enter the land of Canaan. Moreover, Deuteronomy chapter 20 discusses war which is directly related to the sixth commandment. Since it cannot be said to apply to all wars, this mostly alludes to the conflicts they were to have with the Canaanites to take control of the promised land.[19] The fundamental cause of their banishment was their improper religious beliefs and actions, and only their repentance could make things right.[20] Therefore, they need to have the right spiritual life to understand God's intention in Deuteronomy 20 regarding war. the influence of other nations on their spiritual life could trigger the Israel nation to fail in fulfilling god's promise.

Socio-Cultural Context

The significance of loyalty to Yahweh could not be overstated as the Israelis were about to visit the land of Canaan, where Canaanite culture and religious rituals would have a tremendous allure to the less educated Hebrews.[21] is difficult for Israelis who are accustomed to living as nomads in the desert since they will wish to enter a new location to be occupied at that time. Cultural adjustments need to be considered to adapt well. Yet, God does not want the mixing of culture between Israel and Canaan, so the Canaanites must be eliminated so that the idol culture does not affect Israel. The Canaanites must be destroyed to uphold the Lord's command to punish them.[22]

Socially, the Israelites must pay attention to their social relations with other nations, especially with the Canaanites. Deuteronomy 7:3 clearly warns against interbreeding between the Israelites and the Canaanites. This is a strong warning against any type of friendship or fellowship with idolaters.[23] This preventive action was taken so that the Israelites would not be polluted through social influences. God did not want the Israelites to be affected socially like

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[18] Arno Gaebelein. *The Annotated Bible: Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 2009), Vol. 1, p. 412.

[19] Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary: Deuteronomy*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Clarke's Commentaries (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999), Deut 20:1.

[20] Karl Latvus. *God, Anger, and Ideology* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 87.
[21] David Payne, *Deuteronomy: The Daily Study Bible Series* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). 27.

[22] Paul House, *Old Testament theology* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 187.

[23] Matthew Henry. *Concise Commentary on The Bible.* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2009), 311.

what happened to some Israelis scraped together with the Egyptians in Numbers 11:4.[24] Furthermore, some studies mentioned that Egypt and Canaan shared a border, and it is well known that Egypt had a significant impact on the Levant, particularly during the Late Bronze Age.[25] Through this, it can be proven that the social influence from Canaan can have a bad impact on the Israelites, as happened with the social impact from Egypt on Israel because Canaan and Egypt are not very different and have a life of idol worship. Because of this, there is a need for a special re-emphasis on the law to avoid social problems. In chapter 20:18, the Canaanites must be eliminated so that the influence of their idol worship does not enter into the social life of the Israelites.[26] socially and culturally the people of Israel at that time were prepared so they could enter the land of Canaan and live righteously.

Literary Analysis

This chapter will be dealing with the literary analysis of the text. The analysis focuses only on Deuteronomy 20:16. Therefore, this study will not examine every word in the pericope, merely a few key ones in verse 16. The passage will be broken up into the sections below:

Verse 16

רַק מֵעָרֵי הָעַמִּים הָאֵלֶּה   First Clause

אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ נַחֲלָה   Second Clause

לֹא תְחַיֶּה כָּל־נְשָׁמָה: Third Clause

Grammatical and Semantical Analysis

Analysis of Deuteronomy 20:16

First Clause   רַק מֵעָרֵי הָעַמִּים הָאֵלֶּה

Morphological and Syntactical Analysis. This clause begins with the adverb רַק which shows an exception to a previous command in verse 9. It follows by a preposition מֵ that indicated a specific geographic name or place. And it ends with a noun construct עָרֵי הָעַמִּים הָאֵלֶּה which indicates the place of a specific group of people that will be mentioned later in the next verse. There are two nouns in this phrase, which are; עָרֵי common plural feminine construct and

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[24] Albert Banes. *Notes on The Whole Bible: Genesis-Deuteronomy.* electronic ed., Bible Portal (Washinton: Bible Portal, 2003). Num 11:4.

[25] William Hallo. *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Biblical World.* (Boston: Brill Leiden, 2003), 1113.

[26] Peter Craigie. *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 276.

עַמִּים common plural masculine. Its ends with the adjective אֵלֶּה which serves as a demonstrative adjective and alludes to an earlier noun.

Semantic Analysis. The noun עָרֵי comes from the root עיר. The root itself is also found in Hebrew outside the OT. For instance, it appears in the Ancient near east. In Mesopotamia, this word means "settlement", "city", or "open village". In Egyptian, it means "city", "village", family-based community". West Semitic region it means "city".[27] The conventional meaning of the word עיר means "city", "town", "village", "inhabitant"[28]. It can be also "district", "Population"[29].

The word מֵעָרֵי occurs 7 times in OT and 3 times, particularly in the book of Deuteronomy.[30] In the OT, the primary meaning of מֵעָרֵי is "cities".[31] Some examples of the general context מֵעָרֵי can be seen below:

Deuteronomy 20:15	אֲשֶׁר לֹא־ **מֵעָרֵי** הַגּוֹיִם־ הָאֵלֶּה
Torah	*from you, which are not of the cities of these*
2 Kings 23:8	כָּל־ הַכֹּהֲנִים **מֵעָרֵי** יְהוּדָה וַיְטַמֵּא
Nevi'Im	*the priests from the cities of Judah,*
Jeremiah 17:26	וּבָאוּ מֵעָרֵי־ יְהוּדָה וּמִסְּבִיבוֹת
Nevi'Im	*They will come in from the cities of Judah*

Moreover, the word מֵעָרֵי in the context of Deuteronomy 20:16 refers to the cities located around Canaan. The Lord made it plain that due to the Canaanite nations' tremendous depravity, He would drive them out of the promise land.[32] In the next verse, the inhabitants of that cities are mentioned; The Hittite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite.

אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ נַחֲלָה

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[27] Udo Rutersworden, "עיר","Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT), ed.G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 11:42-45.

[28] James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1997), s.v. "עיר"

[29] Ludwig Köhler, with Walter Baumgartner and William Holladay, *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), s.v. "עיר"

[30] Holladay, *HALOT,* s.v. "עיר"

[31] George Wigram, *The Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee concordance of the Old Testament* (electronic ed). Bible Hub. s.v. "מֵעָרֵי"

[32]Mark Braun, *The People's Bible Deuteronomy* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House, 2000), 2nd ed. p. 185.

Second Clause

Morphological and Syntactical Analysis. The second clause begins with the word אֲשֶׁר֙ that marks a relative reference to an entity, event, or state.[33] In this context, it marks the divine entity יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֔יךָ which explains the power of God the almighty giver. In this case, the action God has done refers to the word נֹתֵ֥ן which comes in qal participle singular absolute. This verb comes in qal participle that modifies directly the noun or pronoun that follows the participle and use as attributively.[34] In this clause, the phrase לְךָ֖ נַחֲלָֽה becomes the object of compliment. Thus, it is clear to see that cities in the previous clause are the inheritance that God gave to Israel.

יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֔יךָ	נֹתֵן	לְךָ֖ נַחֲלָֽה
Subject	Predicate	Complementary Object
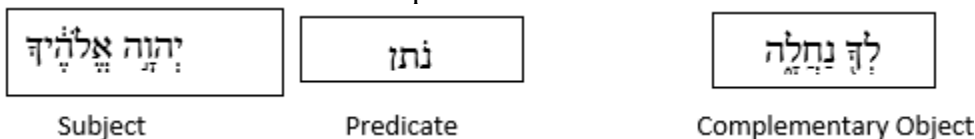
Semantic Analysis. The root word נַחֲלָה occurs 59 times in the OT.[35] It appears also in the Ugaritic and Amorite that has meaning, portion received", and "exclusive right to a portion".[36] The conventional meaning of these words is "possession", "property", and "inheritance."[37] It can be also "inalienable", "hereditary property"[38]

The word נַחֲלָה occurs 37 times in OT and 13 times, particularly in the book of Deuteronomy.[39] In the OT, the primary meaning of נַחֲלָה is "an inheritance".[40] Here are some examples of the general context of נַחֲלָה :

Numbers 36:8	בַּת יֹרֶ֣שֶׁת **נַחֲלָ֗ה** מִמַּטּוֹת֙ בְּנֵ֣י
Torah	*into possession of an inheritance of any*

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[33] James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1997), s.v. " אֲשֶׁר֙ "

[34] Gray Practico & Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.), 2nd ed. P. 304.

[35] Rutersworden, "נַחֲלָה " *TDOT*, 9:320

[36] Ibid

[37] Francis Brown, Driver S & Charles Briggs, ""נַחֲלָה", *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (electronic ed., Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000)

[38] Ludwig Köhler, with Walter Baumgartner and William Holladay, *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000),p.687.

[39] Holladay, *HALOT,* s.v."נַחֲלָה "

[40] George Wigram, *The Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee concordance of the Old Testament* (electronic ed). Bible Hub. s.v. "נַחֲלָה"

Joshua 17:6 *Nevi'Im*	מְנַשֶּׁה נָחֲלוּ **נַחֲלָה** בְּתוֹךְ בָּנָיו *received an inheritance among*
Psalm 136:22 *Ketuvim*	**נַחֲלָה** לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַבְדּוֹ *Even a heritage to Israel His servant,*

In addition, the word נַחֲלָה in this context refers to the land that they are about to enter and conquer it. The phrase "God will lead the Israelites to conquer or, occupy the country of Canaan" is a clearer phrase to convey what this implies.[41] However, the inheritance of the promised land was still occupied by the Canaanites and others nations. Thus, in this aspect, Israelites need to eradicate everything that interferes with the inheritance that God has given to them.

Third Clause. לֹא תְחַיֶּה כָּל־נְשָׁמָה:

Morphological and Syntactical Analysis. The third clause begins with the word לֹא which belongs to the negative particle. This negative particle is usually followed by a verb and translated as "not" and it negates the verb.[42] In this clause, the verb that comes after the negative particle is תְחַיֶּה which is Piel Imperfect 2nd person masculine and singular. When the verb is used in Piel form, it means to talk intensively to the object. Thus, the object that the verb is referring to is כָּל־נְשָׁמָה a construct noun. Syntactically, תְחַיֶּה function as a predicate of the sentence.

תְחַיֶּה	כָּל־נְשָׁמָה:
Predicate	Object

Semantic Analysis. The verb תְחַיֶּה comes from the root חָיָה does not meet with general approval for some difficulties between "stay alive", "revive", "recover", "to let live", "to keep alive", "to bring back life"[43]. It can also be translated as "alive", or "restored to live".[44] The word תְחַיֶּה occurs 3 times in the OT and 2 times, particularly in the book of Deuteronomy. In Torah, it refers to "to live" followed by a negative particle, but in Ketuvim, it refers to "Preserves the lives.

Exodus 22:8	מְכַשֵּׁפָה לֹא **תְחַיֶּה:** ס

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[41] Robert Bratcher & Howard Hatton, *A handbook on Deuteronomy* (New York: United Bible Societies. 2000). p. 41.

[42] Gray Practico & Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.), 2nd ed. P. 171.

[43]George Landes, "חָיָה", *Building your Biblical Hebrew vocabulary: learning words by frequency and cognate* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature. 2001), Vol. 41, p. 54.

[44] Holladay, *HALOT,* s.v."חָיָה "

Torah	*You shall not allow a sorceress to live.*
Deuteronomy 20:16	נַחֲלָ֑ה לֹ֥א **תְחַיֶּ֖ה** כָּל־ נְשָׁמָֽה:
Torah	you as an inheritance, *you shall not leave alive* anything
Ecclesiastes 7:12	דַּ֫עַת הַֽחָכְמָ֥ה **תְּחַיֶּ֥ה** בְעָלֶֽיהָ
Ketuvim	*is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.*

Therefore, since the verb תְחַיֶּה follow by a negative particle and it speaks intensively to the object כָּל־נְשָׁמָה , then in this context the word תְחַיֶּה implies an action of killing everything. This is a prevention to stop the Israelites from behaving "according to all their abominations," the Canaanites were brutally destroyed.[45] Thus, the context of the words in verse 16 refers to the annihilation of the nations around Canaan because that area is the area that God promised to the Israelites.

Textual Witnesses

About this verse, there is no notable disagreement among the LXX and Targum textual witnesses. Only one translation "inheritance" in the MT has a different translation in LXX. The LXX prefers to use "acquired" or "obtained"[46] In this context is suitable to use what the LXX is using because it pointed out the loving God of Israel who gave something to his nation. Since Israel need to conquer and occupy the Promised Land, then the nuances of inheritance are not suitable, the meaning of gifted land is more suitable in this case. The notion put out by MT that the Israelites should invade, exterminate everyone who lived in the cities surrounding Canaan, and then possess the Promised Land is supported by both Targum and LXX.

Literary Style

The Scene

Deuteronomy 1:1 mentioned the scene in this entire book. On the eastern bank of the Jordan River, given the land of promise, Moses addresses the gathering Israelites.[47] The covenant is reiterated in Deuteronomy, but it is done so in a much more comprehensive manner and in language that is suitable for the new generation that is about to enter the Promised Land. A process by covenant partnerships attested to across the ancient Near Eastern civilization was

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[45] Duane Christensen, *Word Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy 1–21:9* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2001). Vol. 6A, p. 448.

[46] Frederick W. Danker & Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,2000). 3rd ed., p. 242.

[47] Paul, Brown, *Deuteronomy: An expositional commentary* (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications. 2008). p. 14.

necessary for the new generation, which was poised to begin a conquest.[48] Thus the scene depicts a preparation for the Israelites to enter the Promised Land.

Character

In the general context, the main focus of the book of Deuteronomy is the renewal of the covenant on the plains of Moab.[49] Before entering the promised land, the covenant that was made at Sinai and sealed following God's tremendous triumph over Egypt in the Exodus had to be reaffirmed. In the context of Deuteronomy 20:16, the same scheme still applies between Moses and the Israelites. Therefore, there are two main characters in this verse, Moses and the Israelites.

The first character is Moses. God was the true leader of the covenant people; Moses served as a mediator and a successful leader from a human perspective.[50] However, in this general context, this is the last time Moses has since God forbade Moses from entering the Promised Land.[51] Both melancholy and acceptance may be seen in the depiction of Moses' final days as the leader of his people. Moses expresses his anguish in his prayer in Deuteronomy 3:23–28. Yet, in Deuteronomy 20, Moses had to deliver the command regarding war with certainty so that the Israelites could boldly and fearlessly enter the Promised Land. They need to prepare for military conquest with discipline[52] In verse 16, Moses highlighted the need for steadfast devotion to Jehovah. [53] That they need to follow the instruction to obliterate all things in the cities mentioned in verse 17. In this case, Moses stood as commander-in-chief and prepared his soldiers to enter the land of Canaan. The courage of Moses can be seen in verse 1 when he encourages them not to be afraid of fighting against other nations, because just as God had led them out of Egypt, the same God will also guide them to victory in war.

The second character is the Israelites. The condition of Israelites must be ready physically, morally, and spiritually to enter the land of Canaan. 38 years prior, more than 600,000 Israelite men had disobeyed by refusing to enter the promised land (Deuteronomy 1:19–

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[48] Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary: Deuteronomy*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Clarke's Commentaries (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999), 126.

[49] Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1976), p. 30.

[50] Ibid. 30
[51] Ibid.30

[52] Ibid. 30

[53] Francis. D. Nichol, (Ed.). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978). Vol. 1, p. 975.

40); all of those rebellious men had now perished.[54] The Israelites had witnessed the gifts that had lately been given to the present generation of Israelites due to their faith and obedience, as well as the curse that had befallen the previous generation of Israelites due to their disbelief and disobedience. [55] An earnest character determination must have.

In Deuteronomy 20, The Israelites are ready to battle the enemy's stronger forces. There are several things they should know about war, but specifically in verses 16-18, there are exceptions to the rule when dealing with the Canaanites. As Israel invades the Canaanite settlements, they need to follow the Lord's earlier commands and spare nothing that moves, lest the Canaanites who are spared convince the Israelis to imitate their pagan ways and thereby transgress God.[56] The mass destruction existed so that Israel would not be contaminated with the idolized lifestyle of the Canaanites.

Scenario

In general, the scenario of Deuteronomy 20 is located under the specific stipulations of the covenant (Deuteronomy 12:1–26:15).[57] Specifically, it is a part of civil law, since Structures are necessary for both individual and collective behavior in all structured civilizations.[58] The covenant need in this instance relates to killing, but of a sort that the Lord has authorized as both defensive and divinely mandated offensive military actions. Verse 16, points out the sequence of action that the Israelites need to do when facing the Canaanites.

Intertextuality

Deuteronomy 16 has some connection to the internal text of the Bible. The command of destroying every living thing is always associated with the Canaanites. God commands Israelites to utterly destroy the Canaanites and never makes any deal with them (Deuteronomy 7:2). Joshua follows the commands of God to kill every people in the area of the northern territory of Canaan when he occupies that place (Joshua 11:14). God has given the Canaanites in the hand of

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[54] Douglas Redford, *The Pentateuch* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard Publishing, 2008). Vol. 1, p. 289.

[55] Roy. E Gingrich, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Memphis, TN.: Riverside Printing, 2000). pp. 7–8.

[56] Ibid. 31.

[57] Charles Dyer, Eugene Merrill, Charles Swindoll, & Roy Zuck, (*Nelson's Old Testament Survey: Discover the Background, Theology, and Meaning of Every Book in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Word. 2001), p. 132.

[58] Ibid. 149.

Israelites (Exodus 23:31-33). In detail, men, women, and every child need to be destroyed (Deuteronomy 2:34).

The expression of takes anything alive is always referring to the Canaanites. God wants His people for not to have any relationship with the people in Canaan. For in Deuteronomy 20:18, the main reason is so that they cannot instruct Israelites to commit sins against the LORD God by teaching them to follow all other abhorrent practices that they have performed for their gods.

Theological Implication

This section will discuss what God meant by giving the command to the Israelites to destroy all the Canaanites. It also will show what principles can be taken in the discussion of this verse. Finally, how does this text should be understood today.

The Commands and Principle

The commands that God gave to the Israelites are clear and doable. Do not let any life in the cities that belong in Canaan. The noun all-breathes refers to the cities in verse 16 and it is explained more in verse 17. Not only in Deuteronomy but also in other books, this command exists. The first reason why they need to be fully destroyed is to show God justice and sin must be fully eliminated. Genesis 15:13-16 explain how the iniquity of the Canaanites will spread. The divine act of justice can be seen in the time of Noah and later in Revelations 21 and 22.

The second reason, this command needs to be seen in the history of Canaanites. From the time Abraham left Haran until Jacob reach Egypt, many people of God are living around Canaan, Yet, none of them converted and believe in the God of Abraham. The Canaanites' annihilation is a result of their decision to disobey God, their rise into so each wicked, and the inevitable conclusion of life without God. Deuteronomy 20:18 portrays the dangers of letting them still alive because they will teach the Israelites to sin.

The third reason, in verse 1 of Deuteronomy 20, Moses speaks up and said to the nation not afraid because the Lord will always be with there. Exodus 23 explain that if they will truly faithful to God then God will be an enemy to their enemies and an adversary to their adversaries. The notion of taking all that breathes is appeared also in Exodus 23, where one of the tasks of Israelites is to destroy the sacred stones of Amorite into pieces. When they faithfully follow what God orders for them, surely God will do the rest.

For Today

The God that we are worshiping is a living God who loves and cares for us. Yet, the love of God and His Justice cannot be separated. There will be a time when sin will destroy and those who are still attached to sin will be also destroyed. God is still waiting for his people to come back and repent. His hands are always open, waiting and longing for everyone to be saved. Do not become addicted to sin and become increasingly evil until you can no longer turn to the truth.

Not because the Israelites were great and strong or not because they would show their strength but because of God's power that enabled them to go through every challenge and trial. When we walk together with God, God can enable us to get rid of every temptation of evil. Just as the Israelites when they were about to get the Promised Land had to eliminate the Canaanites, so do we who have to eliminate every ungodliness that exists in our lives to be able to enter the Promised Land that God has provided, which is the kingdom of heaven.

Summary and Conclusion

The concept of the love of God is being challenged in this discussion and through the scope of exegetical studies, it can show more clearly the result of why God commanded Israelites to kill anything that lives in Deuteronomy 20:16. The background of the situation in Deuteronomy 20:16 depict how the Israelites should do when entering the Promised Land. Their current position which was close to their goal required them to prepare themselves. The biggest preparation they have to do is to rely on God's Word and be faithful to His Word.

One of God's commands is to destroy all inhabitants in the Canaan territory. The word עִיר refers not to all cities that they will pass, but only to the cities that belong in Canaan territory. The conventional meaning of the words also helps to understand not only the city which is a large territory but also the village and every inhabitant.

The verb תְחַיֶּה that appears in Piel which also comes after the negative particle emphasized intensively to the object which is כָּל־נְשָׁמֶה. This refers to total extermination without sparing any living. Several verses that have the same command also emphasize this because the Canaanites had a bad influence on the Israelites. On the other hand, this is part of the purification of the Canaan area so that the Israelites can enjoy the נַחֲלָה given by God.

God's love radiates in everything He does. What God did solely was to keep the Israelites walking in righteousness and to show them how evil sin is. It is the choice of humans that ultimately makes them perish or survive. In the context of this verse, Israel needs to learn to depend on God so that they can enjoy the inherent, namely the Promised Land, or instead choose to violate God's Word. Love and Justice from God are a guarantee of God's care for His people.

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