

5784 – Deuteronomy 3-7 - V'etchanan (And I pleaded)

Hi! This is Daniel Loewenstein, and you're watching Aleph Beta. Welcome to *Parshat Va'etchanan*.¹

Towards the end of this week's *parsha*, the Children of Israel are reminded that they'll soon be entering the Promised Land, and when they get there, they'll have to drive out the seven Canaanite nations. And there's more.

The Relationship Between the Israelites and Canaanites

Beyond driving them out, Moshe details three additional prohibitions related to the Canaanite people:

לֹא־תִכְרַת לָהֶם בְּרִית (lo *tich-rot lahem b'rit*)—don't make any covenants with them (Deu 7:2).

וְלֹא תַחַנֵּם (v'lo *t'cha-nem*)—don't show them any special favor.

And finally,

וְלֹא תִתְחַתֵּן בָּם (v'lo *tit-chaten bam*)—don't intermarry with them (7:3).

In other words, these laws are basically saying, “Hey Israelites: you need to keep your distance from these Canaanite nations. You're a holy people, and we want to keep it that way.”

But then, Moshe follows these laws with a statement. A statement that seems like it comes completely out of *nowhere*! He says:

לֹא מֵרַבְּכֶם מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים חָשַׁק הִי בָכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בָּכֶם מִכּוֹל הָאֲמִיּוֹת (lo *mei-rub'chem mikol ha-amim cha-shak HaShem ba-chem v'yivchar ba-chem*)—it's not because of your vast numbers that God desired you and chose you ... (7:7)

כִּי־אַתֶּם הַמְּעַט מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים (ki *atem ham-at mikol ha-amim*)—because, you're actually the smallest of all the nations.

כִּי מְאֹד־אֶהְבֶּתָּ אֶתְּךָ (ki *mei-acha'vat HaShem etchem*)—rather, it's because of His great love for you (7:8).

Now, is *that* the next thing you'd expect Moshe to say? Don't make deals with the Canaanites, don't show them favor, don't intermarry with them, and, oh, yeah, you're really small, but that's okay—God doesn't care about that.

It's totally out of left field. Everything here is about the Israelites keeping their distance from the nations of the land. **What does the fact that the Israelites are small—and God loves them anyway—have to do with any of that?**

Well, I actually think that being small *does* belong. It *does* have something to do with making deals with foreign nations, and showing them favor, and intermarrying—we just don't see it yet.

Foreign Relations Between the Israelites and Canaanites

We need to dig a little deeper. And here's why I think that: there's another place in the Torah, a story, where we *also* encounter this idea of the Israelites being small. And **the crazy thing is, we also find all of these other elements in this story**. It's a story about making deals with Canaanite nations, about showing favor, *and* about intermarrying. So maybe, if we see how everything fits together in *that* story, we can understand what's going on here.

It's the story of Dinah. In Bereishit, chapter 34, we learn about the rape of Yaakov's daughter, Dinah, at the hands of a Canaanite noble, Shechem. Shechem falls in love with Dinah and decides he wants to marry her, so his father, Chamor, approaches Yaakov to ask for her hand. And then he adds something:

וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ אִתָּנוּ (v'*hit-chatnu o-tanu*)—let our families intermarry (Gen 34:9).

בְּנֹתֵיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ־לָנוּ וְאֵת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ תִקַּח לָכֶם (b'*no-teichem titnu-lanu v'et b'no-teinu tik-chu lachem*)—you'll give us your daughters, and you can take our daughters.

Did you hear that? Intermarriage.

Intermarriage Connections in the Bible

There's our first connection to D'varim: Chamor is proposing that his Canaanite tribe and the family of Yaakov intermarry. And the word the Torah uses is even the same: וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ (v'*hit-chatnu*) and תִּתְחַתֵּן (*tit-chaten*) (f. חָתָן [*chatan*])—which, by the way, are the *only* two places this word is used in the Torah. And that line about exchanging daughters: בְּנֹתֵיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ־לָנוּ וְאֵת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ תִקַּח לָכֶם (b'*no-teichem tit-nu-lanu v'et b'no-teinu tik-chu lachem*). Look at how intermarriage is explained in D'varim:

לֹא־תִתֵּן לְבִנְךָ וּבִתּוֹ לֹא־תִקַּח לְבָנֶךָ (lo *titen livno u-vito lo tikach liv-necha*)—don't give your daughter to his son, and don't take his daughter for your son

They're practically carbon copies of each other. So there definitely seems to be some connection between the prohibition of intermarriage in D'varim and Chamor's offer here. But what about all the other elements we saw in Devarim: the prohibitions against making deals and showing

¹ <https://members.alephbeta.org/playlist/israelites-canaanites-relations>

favor, and the idea of being a small nation? Are those here too? Let's keep going and see.

Chamor makes his intermarriage pitch, and then he tries to sweeten the pot by offering even more. He says:

וְאִתָּנוּ תֵּשְׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה לְפָנֵיכֶם (v'itanu tei-sheivu v'ha-aretz ti-h'yeh lif-neichem)—dwell among us—the land will be open before you (34:10).

שְׁבוּ וְסָחֲרוּהָ וְהֶאֱחִזּוּ בָּהּ (sh'vu us-charucha v'hei achzu bah)—settle it, trade, and acquire property.

And then Shechem pipes up and offers even more. He says,

אֶמְצָא-חֵן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְאֶשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֲתֵן (em-tza chen b'ei-neichem va-asher tom-ru elai e-ten)—I want to find favor in your eyes. Whatever you ask of me, I will give it (34:11).

הֲרָבוּ עָלַי מְאֹד מִהֵרָ וּמִתֵּן וְאֶתְנָה כְּאֶשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי מוֹהָר וּמָטָן (har-bu alai m'od mohar u-matan v'etna ca-asher tom-ru elai)—ask for a huge dowry, pile it on, and I'll give whatever you ask (34:12).

Did you notice what Shechem said he was trying to do? אֶמְצָא-חֵן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם (em-tza-chen b'ei-neichem)—he was trying to find favor in the eyes of Jacob and his family. So **there's our second connection**. Shechem is hoping to be shown *favor*, חֵן (chen), and in D'varim, the Israelites are told לֹא

תִּחְנַם (lo t'chanem) don't show *favor* to the Canaanites.

Intermarriage and Diplomacy Negotiations?

And if you take a step back, and think about what's happening here, the whole conversation, the offer of intermarriage, of living together and trading with one another—isn't that all a negotiation, an attempt to establish terms for an ongoing relationship?

In other words, Shechem and Chamor are trying to arrange a deal, to make a covenant. Which gives us a third connection. **Shechem and Chamor are trying to establish a covenant**, and **in D'varim, the Torah forbids us making covenants with the Canaanites**.

It's wild. So far, everything we found in D'varim seems to be showing up here in this story about Yaakov's family, all the way on the other side of the Torah!

And, by the way, we may not be the first ones to notice these connections. Because if you open up the Talmud, you'll find that the Sages actually interpret לֹא תִחְנַם (lo t'chanem), that phrase from D'varim, in a really interesting way.

They say that it means, “Don't show favor,” but that it also has two additional, more *specific* meanings: Don't offer land to settle, and don't offer gifts. And what were the two specific offers that Chamor and Shechem made to Jacob? אִתָּנוּ תֵּשְׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה לְפָנֵיכֶם (itanu tei-sheivu v'ha-aretz tih'yeh lif-neichem)—dwell with us and settle the land. And, הֲרָבוּ עָלַי מְאֹד מִהֵרָ וּמִתֵּן (harbu alai m'od m'od u-matan)—demand whatever bridal gifts you want. Land and gifts. The same things. **It almost feels like the Sages were reading these two sections together, the same way we are.**

But there's one thing that's still missing. We've seen how closely our laws in D'varim and this story in Bereishit are connected—but there's one connection we haven't seen yet. The one we came here to find. The idea of being small. Does the story of Dina and Shechem talk about how the Israelites are a small nation?

Let's go to the end of the story. Yaakov's sons agree to the deal, on one condition: Chamor has to convince all the men of his city to become circumcised. Chamor agrees, and all the men get circumcisions—but soon after, while the men are recovering and vulnerable, two of Yaakov's sons, Shimon and Levi, massacre them all, and rescue Dinah.

When Yaakov hears about this, he's incensed. He can't believe what they've done. He says to them, “Do you know what you've brought down upon us? Do you know the reputation you've given me? You've just made enemies of all the other nations in the land.” And listen to what he says next:

וְאֲנִי מְתֵי מִסְפָּר (va-a'ni m'tei mispar)—I'm so few in number!

וְנִאֲסָפוּ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי (v'ne-esfu alai v'hikuni)—they'll all gather against me and smite me

וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי (v'nish medti a'ni uvei-ti)—and my household and I will be destroyed.

Did you catch it? וְאֲנִי מְתֵי מִסְפָּר (va-a'ni m'tei mispar), Yaakov says. “I'm so few in number”—**he's afraid for his survival because his family is so small**. There's our fourth element. God, in D'varim, calls the very same family, now the Children of Israel, the smallest of the nations. So it all lines up. This story in Bereishit shares all of the elements we saw in D'varim.

So, we have all these parallels. But we still haven't answered our original question: What does being small have anything to do with all the prohibitions of getting close to the Canaanites? Is there something about the story of Dinah that can help us understand how they're connected?

I think there is. And you can see it, if you just put yourself in Yaakov's shoes. So let's do that. Let's imagine what this crisis with Dinah must have been like for *him*.

Considering an Offer of Inter-marriage

Here you are, living in the land of Israel, surrounded by foreign peoples: the Hivi, the Cena'ani, the Perizi. And your whole nation consists of you, your wives, and your 12 kids. You're tiny—and that makes you vulnerable. Now, for a while, none of those foreign neighbors have made any trouble. They've left you alone. But then, the unthinkable happens. A powerful local noble rapes your daughter, and decides he wants her for himself.

And yet ... he doesn't whisk her away. He doesn't demand her with a show of force. He doesn't even make any veiled threats. Instead, he comes with an offer of peace, and gestures of goodwill. And all he wants is to marry your daughter. So, what do you say?

Well, if we think about Yaakov the way we're used to, we'd all expect him to say no, without a second thought. After all, **we know that his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka, and his grandfather, Avraham, placed a lot of importance on marrying within the family, on not marrying their children off to the Canaanites.** And now, this foreign man, who forced himself on Dinah, wants to make a deal, where he'll get to marry her, and Yaakov's sons will marry his city's Canaanite women? Agreeing would be like spitting in Dinah's face, *and* in the face of family tradition. What's to think about?

And yet, I don't think it was that simple. Put yourself back in Yaakov's shoes, and ask yourself: What will happen if you say "no"? What will happen if you spurn these people, if you provoke them? All you are is one small, little family. Maybe they'll just take Dinah anyway. Maybe they'll take all the women. Maybe they'll go to war.

And this isn't just speculation. We know that Yaakov felt physically vulnerable. Remember how he responded after Shimon and Levi commit their massacre? He says:

וַאֲנִי מְתֵי מִסְפָּר (va-a'ni m'tei mispar)—I'm so few in number!

וְנִאֲסְפוּ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי (v'ne-esfu alai v'hikuni)—they'll all gather against me and smite me

He's afraid, because Shimon and Levi just provoked all the surrounding nations. He fears getting attacked; he fears retribution.

Yaakov knows how vulnerable he is. His small size *must* have been weighing on him. And that means that as much as he might have wanted to say no, it couldn't have been an easy thing to do. And maybe that partly explains Yaakov's behavior in this story.

Because Yaakov never gives Shechem and Chamor an answer. His children jump in and respond, but he doesn't say anything. The commentators all have different theories about what his silence means, but I wonder if part of it has to do with how conflicted he was over this dilemma?

And maybe that's the way all our elements connect.

The Temptation of Inter-marriage and Foreign Engagement

When you're small, when you're vulnerable, then making alliances—currying favor, creating ties through inter-marriage—can start to seem like the sensible thing to do. It can even become tempting. And if the opportunity to forge these ties comes along, how can you just pass that up?

And you know what? Yaakov wasn't the only person in our history to struggle with this issue—to have fears about his people's vulnerability, fears that could tempt him to get too close to his neighbors. It would also be an issue for the Israelites when they began their conquest of the Promised Land, and were again surrounded by nations who seemed more powerful than them.

And so, generations later, God comes along and gives the Israelites a set of laws governing how *they* are supposed to relate to foreign nations: "Don't make deals, don't grant favor, and don't intermarry." And He reminds them: "It's not because you are large in number that I chose you. That doesn't matter."

The laws in D'varim are telling us that whenever we face this dilemma, there can be only one answer. Yes, **there will be times when important concerns, like physical and political security, will make covenants and inter-marriage seem like great ideas. But they're not.** The price is too high.

The Price of Inter-marriage

Because you know what happens when we intermarry? The Torah tells us, and history bears it out:

וְלֹא תִתְחַתֵּן בָּם: לֹא-תִתֵּן לְבִנּוֹ וּבִתּוֹ לֹא-תִקַּח לְבִנְךָ (v'lo tit-chaten bam: bit'cha lo titen livno u-vito lo tikach liv-necha)—don't intermarry with the Canaanites. Don't give your daughter to his son, and don't take his daughter for your son.

כִּי יָסִיר אֶת-בִּנְךָ מֵאַחֲרַי (ki yasir et-bincha meia-ch'rai)—because if you do, your son will be led astray, away from God.

Our physical limitations, our vulnerability? God can deal with that. He didn't choose us because we're big enough to defend ourselves. He chose us to be holy, and as long as we're doing that, He can handle the protection.

But **when we bring corrupting influences into our lives—even for the best of reasons, even in the name of peace—when we let ourselves be led away from holiness** ... then we're giving away too much. We're jeopardizing our own souls.

1. *Shechem and Chamor are trying to arrange a deal, to make a covenant. Which gives us a third connection. Shechem and Chamor are trying to establish a covenant, and in D'varim, the Torah forbids us making covenants with the Canaanites.*

a. Joshua 23:9-13

⁹"The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. ¹⁰One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. ¹¹So be very careful to love the LORD your God. ¹²"But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you **and if you intermarry with them and associate with them**, ¹³**then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you**, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you.

b. 2Corinthians 6:14-18

¹⁴**Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?** Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵**What harmony is there between Messiah and Belial?** Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Lev 26:12). ¹⁷Therefore, "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you" (Isa 52:11). ¹⁸And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2Sam 7:14; Hos 1:10).

1) 1Corinthians 10:14-22

¹⁴Therefore, my dear friends, **flee from idolatry**. ¹⁵I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Messiah? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Messiah? ... ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; **you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons**. ²²Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

a) Acts 15:20

²⁰we should write to the (Gentiles) telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

2) 1Corinthians 7:12-14

¹²To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. ¹³And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. ¹⁴For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband ...

2. *But when we bring corrupting influences into our lives—even for the best of reasons, even in the name of peace—when we let ourselves be led away from holiness ... then we're giving away too much. We're jeopardizing our own souls.*

a. 1Kings 11:1-8

¹King Solomon ... loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter ... ²They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods" (Deu 7:3). Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. ³He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and **his wives led him astray**. ⁴**As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God**, as the heart of David his father had been. ⁵He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁶So **Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely**, as David his father had done. ⁷On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁸**He did the same for all his foreign wives**, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.

b. Deuteronomy 12:1-4

¹These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has given you to possess—as long as you live in the land. ²**Destroy completely all the places** on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, **where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods**. ³**Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of**

their gods and wipe out their names from those places. **You must not worship the LORD your God in their way.**

1) Deuteronomy 12:29-31

²⁹The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, ³⁰and after they have been destroyed before you, **be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same."** ³¹**You must not worship the LORD your God in their way**, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.

c. Your Guide to Celebrating Easter with Your Children²

Colorful eggs, rabbits, chicks, and candy! There are many fun and engaging activities to try with your child this Easter. **Enjoy the best the holiday has to offer!**

1. What is Easter?

Traditionally, **Easter is a religious holiday that annually celebrates the resurrection of (Yeshua), but in modern times it is also held to celebrate the joys of spring! Even if you're not religious, Easter can be an exciting holiday for you and your family!** With a little help from the article, **Easter will surely become a part of your annual traditions.**



Annual Easter Celebration at the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum Offers Fun for Families³

d. How Greenwich (CT) synagogues are celebrating Passover this year and where to find kosher food.⁴



(Kids making *matzah*) with other kids during a "Matzah Factory" field trip in Rockville, Md.⁵

² <https://www.redcatreading.com/2019/03/25/celebrate-easter-with-your-children/>

³ <https://brazosguardian.com/2023/03/27/annual-easter-celebration-at-the-george-bush-presidential-library-and-museum-offers-fun-for-families/>

⁴ <https://www.ctpost.com/news/article/greenwich-passover-seder-celebration-19415556.php>

⁵ <https://www.9news.com/article/news/nation-world/passover-2024-when-it-starts-when-it-ends-traditions-observances/507-94a987fc-74fa-4527-ac89-1493909a31d6>