The Animals and the Nations

A 15-minute class — Pleasant Springs Church, Discipleship School

The full study online: ps-church.com/deep-research/deuteronomy-7-20-22

Before you start — notes for the teacher *(not read aloud)*

Timing. About **15 minutes** at a normal teaching pace. The bracketed times are cumulative. The **[9:30] section on the clean and unclean animals is the one to cut** if you are short — it adds about two and a half minutes, but close point Three, remember-item 3 and the prayer's "called common" line depend on it — if you cut it, read Acts 10:28 aloud at point Three. **Never cut the close** — it is where the lesson tells people what the sword in this chapter is *not*.

What this lesson is. Deuteronomy 7 is one of the hardest chapters in the Bible, and this class does not pretend otherwise. It reads two verses most people have never noticed — the hornet (7:20) and the wild beasts (7:22) — and follows the animals through the rest of Scripture to the wolf and the lamb. It is a class about **how God works** (by small things, and slowly) and **whom we may call common** (no one).

The hard part, read plainly. Verse 20 says the hornets are sent "until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed." **Read it as written. Do not soften it and do not skip it.** The lesson says three things about it, briefly, at [13:30]: it was bounded (seven named peoples, one land, one moment, a direct command); its stated reason was worship, not ancestry (7:4); and it is **no warrant for anyone to harm anyone today.** If someone wants to go deeper on the conquest itself, send them to the full Deuteronomy 7 study online rather than opening it up in the last two minutes.

What not to say. *"God hated those people"* — the chapter's reason is idolatry (7:4), and Rahab and the Gibeonites lived · *"This shows Christians may use force for God"* — Jesus rebuked exactly that (Luke 9:54–55) · *"The hornet was definitely [an insect / Egypt / panic]"* — we do not know, and the lesson says so · *"Peter's sheet was only about food"* — Peter himself says what it meant (Acts 10:28).

Scripture. All English, ESV. The Hebrew and Greek work behind this lesson is real — where the Greek Old Testament adds or differs, it is said in English here and shown in full online.

Time of day. The script is deliberately time-neutral, so it reads correctly in any service.

THE SCRIPT

[0:00] Open — a verse nobody underlines

Here is a verse I would bet nobody in this room has ever underlined.

> **Deuteronomy 7:22** — "The LORD your God will clear away these nations before you little by little. You may not make an end of them at once, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you."

Israel is standing at the edge of the promised land. God has promised to give it to them. And here he tells them: **it will not happen all at once.** And the reason he gives is not their weakness, or their sin, or the strength of the enemy.

The reason is animals.

Fifteen minutes. Two small creatures in one chapter — a hornet and a wild beast — and then where the animals go in the rest of the Bible. By the end I want you to see three things about how God works: he fights with small things; he works

slowly on purpose; and in the end the animals and the nations come home together.

[1:30] The hornet

Two verses earlier:

> **Deuteronomy 7:20** — "Moreover, the LORD your God will send hornets among them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed."

That is a hard verse, and I am not going to soften it. We will come back to what it does *not* mean before we finish.

But notice what God sends. **Not an army. A hornet.**

The Hebrew word for hornet appears exactly **three times** in the whole Old Testament. Here. In the first promise, in Exodus 23. And in Joshua 24, when the conquest is over and Joshua looks back:

> **Joshua 24:12** — "And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow."

Not by your sword. Not by your bow. That is the point of the hornet.

Now — what *was* it? Honestly, nobody knows. Some read it as real insects. Some think it is a picture of panic, because the verse just before it in Exodus says "I will send my terror before you" — and it is the very same verb, *send*. Some have even guessed it means Egypt. I will not pretend to settle it.

Whatever it was, it was small, and God sent it. The Lord of hosts goes to war against seven nations "more numerous and mightier" than Israel — and the first thing through the door is something you could swat.

That is how he works. The prophet Zechariah said it to people who were discouraged that the rebuilt temple looked so small:

> **Zechariah 4:10** — "For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice…"

Never despise the small thing God sends. It may be the hornet.

[4:00] Little by little — and why

Now back to the wild beasts. Here is the first time God made this promise, at Sinai, nearly forty years earlier:

> **Exodus 23:29–30** — "I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land."

Picture it. Israel is small. If every town in Canaan emptied overnight, the fields would go to thorns, the vineyards to weeds, and the lions and bears would move in **faster than Israel could fill the land.**

So God does something astonishing. **For a while, he uses the very nations he is removing to hold the land for his people** — farming it, keeping it, holding back the wild — until Israel has grown into it.

And do not think this was only a theory. Turn to 2 Kings 17. The northern kingdom has been carried off by Assyria. The land is half empty. Foreigners are moved in. And this is the next thing the Bible records:

> **2 Kings 17:25** — "And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD. Therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them."

An emptied land goes wild. Deuteronomy 7:22 was not a figure of speech.

So why "little by little"? **Not because God is weak. Not because he is reluctant. Because he is careful.** He was protecting his people from a danger they could not even see yet.

Now — let me be clear that the next sentence is an application, not what the verse is about. The verse is about land. But **the God of that verse is the same God who is at work in you.** And Paul says he works the same way:

> **2 Corinthians 3:18** — "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."

From one degree to another. Not all at once. If you have been frustrated that some old enemy in your life is still standing — **that is not proof God has stopped. It may be proof he is being careful with you.**

> **Philippians 1:6** — "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

[7:30] The same little word

One more thing hiding in this chapter, and you cannot see it in English.

The Hebrew word behind "little by little" is the word for **few** — said twice. And it is the same word used fifteen verses earlier, in the most famous sentence in the chapter:

> **Deuteronomy 7:7** — "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples..."

You were the few. So I will go little by little. God's pace matches his people's size.

And there is a third place that word appears, and this one is sobering. In Leviticus 26, God lists what will happen if Israel turns away from him:

> **Leviticus 26:22** — "And I will let loose the wild beasts against you, which shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock and make you few in number…"

Make you few — the same little root again. And in the Greek translation the early church read, this verse and 7:7 share a word for "few" as well.

So here is the whole picture. God promises, if you keep covenant, "I will remove harmful beasts from the land" (Leviticus 26:6). In Deuteronomy 7, he holds the beasts back by keeping the nations in place a little longer. And if Israel walks away, he will **send** the beasts — the same verb as the hornet.

Whether the wild stays in its place turns out to be a covenant matter. The animals are never just scenery in the Bible.

[9:30] When animals stood for nations — (cut this section first if short on time)

And sometimes, in the Bible, the animals stand *for* the nations.

Listen to how God explains the food laws in Leviticus:

> **Leviticus 20:24–25** — "I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean…"

Did you hear the *therefore*? **I separated you from the peoples — therefore separate the animals.** Every meal on an Israelite table was a picture: clean and unclean, Israel and the nations.

Now jump more than a thousand years. Peter is on a rooftop in Joppa, praying, and he sees a sheet let down from heaven:

> **Acts 10:12–13, 15** — "In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'... 'What God has made clean, do not call common.'"

And then three men knock on the door — sent by a Roman officer, a Gentile. And Peter goes. And when he walks into that Gentile's house, he tells us himself what the sheet meant:

> **Acts 10:28** — "God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean."

Any person. The animals were about the nations. The picture that had kept Israel and the nations apart at every meal for more than a thousand years — God used that very picture to send the gospel through a Gentile's front door.

So here is the discipleship question, and I want you to sit with it: **whom have you been calling common?** Not out loud, maybe. But in what you expect of them. Whom have you decided the gospel is not really for?

[12:00] Where the animals end up

Here is where the story goes. Isaiah sees a king from the family of Jesse — and look what happens to the animals:

> **Isaiah 11:6** — "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them."

And four verses later, in the same breath:

> **Isaiah 11:10** — "In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire..."

The animals make peace, and the nations come. Same chapter, same king. Paul quotes that verse in Romans 15 from the Greek translation, which reads "in him will the Gentiles hope" — part of his case that the Gentiles were always meant to praise God.

And Hosea says the same thing even more sharply:

> **Hosea 2:18** — "And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field… And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety."

The wild beasts and the sword end together. Deuteronomy 7 is the long road. Hosea is where it goes.

And there is one quiet line in Mark. Jesus goes into the wilderness for forty days:

> **Mark 1:13** — "…And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him."

Mark does not explain that line, and we should not overload it. But notice the word: **with** the wild animals. Many readers today have heard Isaiah 11 in it — the king Isaiah saw, already walking among them in peace.

[13:30] Close — what this chapter does not hand us

Before we go, the guardrail. Deuteronomy 7 was **bounded** — seven named peoples, one land, one moment, by direct command. Its own reason is worship, not ancestry: "they would turn away your sons from following me" (7:4). And it is **not a weapon anyone may pick up.** When James and John wanted to call down fire on a village that rejected Jesus, the Bible says simply:

> **Luke 9:55** — "But he turned and rebuked them."
>
> **2 Corinthians 10:4** — "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds."

So take three things home:

One — God fights with small things. A hornet did what Israel's sword could not. Do not despise the day of small things.

Two — God works little by little, and the slowness is care. He held back the beasts for a people too small to hold the land. He is not hurrying you either.

Three — call no one common. The animals were about the nations, and in the end the wolf lies down with the lamb and the nations hope in Jesse's son.

Let's pray.

> *Father, you sent a hornet where we would have sent an army, and you went slowly where we would have rushed. Thank you for every small thing you have sent ahead of us, and for every enemy you have not yet removed because we were not yet ready. Forgive us for the people we have quietly called common. Make us patient with your pace, gentle with the nations, and hungry for the day when the wolf lies down with the lamb. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

If you only remember three things

1. **The hornet appears only three times in the Old Testament** — and the last one says "it was not by your sword or by your bow."
2. **"Little by little" is care, not weakness.** God kept the nations in the land to hold back the wild beasts until his small people could fill it.
3. **"I should not call any person common or unclean."** Peter tells us himself that the animals in the sheet were about the nations.

The full study — ps-church.com/deep-research/deuteronomy-7-20-22

The study online has the Hebrew, the Greek Old Testament and the ESV side by side, and it goes further than fifteen minutes can:

	Topic	What it covers
1	**The Hornet**	All three occurrences, the three ways it has been read, and that the Greek of Joshua 24 says *twelve* kings where the Hebrew says two
2	**Little by Little**	Exodus 23 and Deuteronomy 7 side by side; the clause the Greek adds to 7:22; the lions of Samaria
3	**The Beast of the Field**	The phrase from Genesis 2–3, the word "few" in 7:7, 7:22 and Leviticus 26, and the verb "send"
4	**Animals for Nations**	Leviticus 20, Daniel 7, Peter's sheet, and a verse where the Greek of Joshua 23 adds the wild beasts
5	**The Peaceable Kingdom**	Isaiah 11, Romans 15, Hosea 2, and Jesus "with the wild animals"

The full chapter study is at **ps-church.com/deep-research/deuteronomy-7-1-26**.

Discussion starters — if you have time after

1. What "hornet" — some small thing — has God sent ahead of you that did more than your own effort could?
2. Is there an old enemy in your life that God has not removed yet? Does "little by little" change how you see that?
3. Why do you think God tied the food laws to Israel's separation from the nations (Leviticus 20:24–25)?
4. Peter needed a vision before he would walk into a Gentile's house. What would it take for you to walk into the house of someone you have quietly called common?
5. Isaiah puts the wolf and the lamb in the same chapter as the nations coming to Jesse's son. Why do you think those two belong together?

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