

Deuteronomy Chapter 11 – John Karmelich

1. As I read this chapter a few times, the one word that kept hitting me again and again is the word "commitment". Yes, that's my lesson title and I'll explain why that's important. First I need to say that Chapter 11 marks the end of a section: Deuteronomy from the opening of this book through Chapter 11 a set of reminders why the Israelites (and us for that matter) should obey God. Moses is explaining to them why they should trust God as they enter the land of Israel. To put this in our "vocabulary", we should trust God as He exists and wants to guide our lives to make a difference for Him. That's the greatest purpose we can have in this life, to be used by the God who created everything so He gets glorified by our lives.
 - a) That leads me to the lesson title: if we're going to make a difference for God we need to be committed to Him in the first place. Let's suppose we already believe in God and we can recite our good deeds that outweigh our bad deeds. That's great, but that's not what I'm talking about. To state the obvious, we're only saved because we Christians believe Jesus died for every sin we've ever committed or will commit, so this isn't a salvation issue. It is an issue of whether or not we're committed to use our lives for His glory in every aspect. The question is, are we relying upon His power to do what He desires of us to make that difference? Confused, that's ok, let me summarize this chapter and that'll show us what I mean by this commitment.
2. The opening seven verses say to effectively we're old enough to know better. Moses is speaking to the adults in his audience that they have first hand knowledge of the miracles God has done in the last 40 years between the miracles of providing food and water as well as the deaths of those who rebelled against God. The point for you and me is that we're old enough to realize that God does get involved in the world He created and uses those committed to Him to make a difference for Him. To put it another way, we're all old enough to realize that He exists and He created the world we live in. We may not have seen grand scale miracles, but we have seen lives changed as people learn to trust in God and use their lives to make a difference for Him. We should use our lives for Him based on our experience of seeing God work in the world we live in.
 - a) Then Moses says that as soon as he's done speaking (within a few days) the Israelites are going to start conquering the Promised Land. For those Israelites, the Promised Land is about literally conquering a piece of real estate that the God of the Universe says they can have if they trust Him and are committed to Him. The Promised Land for us is all about trusting God with every aspect our lives so we can be full of joy no matter what we have to deal with at any given moment in time. Moses describes the physical land as being a better place to live than the land of Egypt where they lived. The point for you and me is that living as God desires is a far greater way of living than any and all desires we have that are not His will for our lives. In other words, if we're committed to serving Him, He promises us a far greater life than any and all purposes we can think of that isn't His will for our lives. Then we study the bible as a guide of how God wants us to live.
 - b) In the next set of verses, Moses effectively repeats key points made earlier in this book. To paraphrase, we need to love God as much as we can and commit our lives to serving Him, as that's the best way to live our lives. Then God promises He'll bless us if we are willing to make that commitment. So what happens when we sin after that commitment? That's when we confess those sins by realizing what we did wasn't His will for us. We turn from those mistakes as we've made that commitment to serve Him.
 - c) The whole point is if we desire to make a difference for God, first we have to trust that He exists and then we need to do something about it. That "something" is our commitment to serve Him and our desire to let Him guide our lives. We don't obey His commandments to earn salvation, but because that's the greatest way for us to live out our lives.

3. From there, Moses states that God will provide the rain to grow food in the first place. This does require a quick explanation: The local deity worshipped in the land of Israel before they moved into that place was called "Baal". This deity was associated with the weather and providing rain for the locals if they worshipped Him. If you are somewhat familiar with the Old Testament, the Israelites still worshipped Baal for many centuries after this. The point for them is that God will provide the weather needed to grow good food, not the false deity that the locals believe in.
- a) The point for you and me is that when things are going wrong, it's easy to get our focus off of God and try to fix things based on our own strength. I'm not saying for example to avoid medical help if we need it. I'm saying "God's giving us an engine" which just means that He provides the ability to help us through whatever issue we're dealing with at any given moment in our lives. To put it simply, if you're an adult reading this lesson, then you've lived long enough to know God's gotten us through tough things before. The point is to realize it's by His power we can make a difference for Him. Even if we are a new believer, realize He's guided our lives to date and made it possible for us to make that commitment in the first place. If we have made the commitment to serve Him, then we should remind ourselves regularly that He's there and wants to guide us by His power. That just means if we want to commit our lives to serve Him, He promises to lead us where He wants us to go. How he leads us, is another story. The short version is God promises to guide us through whatever is His will for our lives.
 - b) Finally this chapter promises both blessings and curses. That means that if we're willing to make that commitment to serve Him, we'll get blessed if we do, and cursed if we turn from Him after making that commitment. The specific blessings and curses aren't listed until we get to Chapters 27-28. All we have here is a warning that they're coming. So if they're not listed here, why mention it? Because beginning in Chapter 12, we get a list of commands to be obeyed as part of that commitment. Before that list begins, God's saying to us, hey want to be blessed and not cursed? Great, do what's commanded of you.
 - c) If Christianity is all about Jesus fulfilling all of those requirements, why bother? First it is to show us by example what Jesus did for us. Second it teaches us God's standards as to how He is to be worshipped. Third, even if all the laws we'll read about over the next 14 chapters (more or less) don't apply directly to us, they still give us good guidelines as to how God is to be worshipped. In summary, believing Jesus died for all our sins is a good start. If we desire to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus, we need to be committed to Him. To understand a little more about that commitment, I invite you to follow along with me as I go verse-by-verse through this chapter. OK, let's get started.
4. Chapter 11, Verse 1: Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.
- a) It always helps to remember where we left off before we get into a new chapter. We last left Moses lecturing the Israelites about to enter the Promised Land on their attitudes and fears about entering that land. One issue is to not be afraid to go forward. Another issue is to not think they're picked because they're something special. With that realization we are chosen just because we're chosen, and God wants us to go forward in life trusting that He's guiding us, God says here in Chapter 11, Verse 1, "keep My laws in mind as one goes forward remembering that we're picked just because we're picked and trust Me as we use our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - b) I could give a nice little lecture on the technical differences between requirements, decrees, his laws and his requirements, but let's just make it simple and say what God requires us to do, God makes it possible for us to do. I'm a big believer that if we're willing to let Him guide our life, it won't be difficult for us to obey what He desires. As to what it is that He wants us to do, we'll be discussing that later as much of the rest of the book covers what is these rules God wants us to obey. In the meantime, this chapter focuses on the issue that if we're to obey Him, we have to be committed to Him in the first place.

5. Verse 2: Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; ³ the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; ⁴ what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and how the LORD brought lasting ruin on them.
- a) Let's start with a reminder of what this audience listening to Moses' speech directly has been through since they left Egypt. About 40 years ago, the parent's generation were told to go conquer this same land, but out of fear of what the spies told them, didn't enter that land in faith. Then God decreed anyone over 40 was not allowed to enter that land. Only their children could enter it. That means that the entire audience listening to this speech with two specific exceptions (Joshua and Caleb) was under forty at this time. However, many among that younger generation were able to see the miracles in Egypt as kids and see the parting of the Red Sea, as they weren't old enough to suffer the death sentence that their parents did. Bottom line is that Moses is saying you personally (most of them) got to see these great miracles first hand. Moses is saying he's speaking to those who've seen all of this first hand and not the "third generation" also around at the time of this speech.
 - b) The point for you and me is that if we're old enough to appreciate the fact that God works in our world, and old enough to see the miracles of lives changed after they've believed in Jesus, then we're old enough to be used by God. I admit, I love to be around those who've first given their lives to Jesus or are being lead in that direction. God will often allow cute little miracles to draw people closer to Him. However as we grow in our faith, I find then we get less of those little miracles, as He wants us to grow in our faith by trusting that He is guiding us and not the miraculous.
 - c) That leads us back to these Israelites. Many if not most of them saw God do great things when the Israelites left Egypt. Now it's time to ask them (and us) if they want to make a commitment based on the fact God exists. To put it simply, we can't obey His commands if we aren't committed to serving Him in the first place. Moses is saying here, you've all seen the evidence of His existence, so now I'm asking if you're willing to commit your life to serving Him based on what you've (them and us) have experienced.
 - d) Let me also address the non-believers or those who've never experienced any proof that He exists. Try something simple: Pray something like, "Jesus if you are God, please make it obvious to Me somehow of Your existence". As I also like to say, there is great evidence of God's existence that one can study. I like the acronym, MAPS. That's (M)anuscripts, (A)rcheology, (P)rophecy and (S)tatistics. My point is one can google or "Youtube" any of these subjects on the bible and be overwhelmed with the evidence of His existence. What you'll find is the evidence is there. The question becomes, what does one do with all that evidence, and that's the question Moses is asking in these verses.
6. Verse 5: It was not your children who saw what he did for you in the desert until you arrived at this place, ⁶ and what he did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab the Reubenite, when the earth opened its mouth right in the middle of all Israel and swallowed them up with their households, their tents and every living thing that belonged to them. ⁷ But it was your own eyes that saw all these great things the LORD has done.
- a) Speaking of things that the audience Moses is speaking to has personally seen, Moses also brings up a negative story told in Numbers Chapter 16. That story was about those who didn't want to be lead by Moses. God put that debate to an end by literally killing those people who rebelled against Moses. The issue again isn't salvation, but surrendering our will for God's will. These men didn't want to surrender that will, and died because of it.
 - b) The point is that we can see the positive examples of God intervening for our benefit like the Egyptian plagues and the parting of the Red Sea was for the Israelites, or we can also see what is the ultimate fate of those who refuse to do God's will for their lives here.

- c) Again, the issue comes back to our commitment to God. We've seen enough evidence so we "know better" about God, and now He says to us effectively, "OK, what are you going to do about all that evidence?" Do you want to eternally end up like these guys who don't want to do what God decrees or do you accept that God's in charge of our lives as we use our lives to make a difference for Him?
 - d) Suppose you think I already go to church most Sundays and I believe He exists. Why do I have to read any further? Ask yourself, does He want me to continue growing in my faith in Him, or just be comfortable as I am? Of course, God wants all of us to keep on growing in our commitment to Him. That's why Moses is lecturing them (and us) as we study this book. In the meantime, time to move on to the next few verses.
7. Verse 8: Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess,⁹ and so that you may live long in the land that the LORD swore to your forefathers to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey.
- a) Notice the word "giving" in Verse 8. Moses is not saying you already know all you need to know to be a believer in God. The specifics of these commands will be discussed in the next bunch of chapters. Again, what Moses is emphasizing here is the idea that before we can obey those commands, we have to be committed to serving God in the first place.
 - b) Remember that the entire book of Deuteronomy is effectively a "graduation speech" to all of the Israelites listening to Moses. We've now gotten past the point of discussing fears or arrogance the Israelites could have and now it's time to focus on their commitment to God before we get into the actual commands that cover from about Chapters 12 through 25.
 - c) The text also says they will "live long" in the land. This doesn't mean every single person listening to this speech will live to an old age. Moses is talking about the Israelites living for a long time in the Promised Land. Despite the Israelites disobedience in history, they did get to possess that land for many centuries, and even after both the Babylonians and the Romans kicked them out, they eventually came back. Even in modern times, that land is now theirs again as God works in the background to give them that piece of real estate as an unconditional promise that He will bless that nation if they're committed to Him.
 - d) Most of us know this, but let me quickly comment on "milk and honey". Neither of those things is a natural byproduct of plants. Milk is it's a basic staple of our diet and this land will be a good place to raise animals that produce milk. Honey is a "luxury" item. If the land is a good place for plants, then bees will be there. The point of calling that land one of "milk and honey" is we're willing to trust God, He's not only give us what we need to survive and "luxury" items we can enjoy as well.
8. Verse 10: The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden.¹¹ But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven.¹² It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.
- a) Here we get more geographical comments about the land of Israel. When those Israelites lived in Egypt, water had to be pumped from the Nile River. When the text says irrigated by foot, it's referring to foot pedaling devices used to pump water from that river to other parts of Egypt for farming purposes. Because the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, I'm sure many of them had to work those devices to spread the water around. Egypt is a very dry climate and overall averages less than an inch of rain per year.
 - b) On the other hand, the land of Israel is mostly mountains (big hills) and valleys. The rain will flow down from those mountains to naturally irrigate the valleys. For the Israelites to farm in that land is going to be a lot easier than it was in Egypt. The point for you and me is that living the life God desires we live, will be a lot less work than trying to live without His guidance in the first place. That's the underlying point of these verses.

9. Verse 13: So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul--¹⁴ then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil.¹⁵ I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.
- a) To paraphrase these verses, God is saying that if we're willing to commit our lives to serve Him, He'll provide what we need to survive as well as enjoy our lives.
 - b) The text mentions fall (autumn) and spring rains. I live in California, that has climate that is similar to Israel. When we do get rain, it's mostly in the fall to spring. Fall rain helps to soften the soil to make it better to plant crops. Spring rain helps crops grow. At this time, California is experiencing a water drought that happens every so often out here. I'm sure there are many Christian farmers out here praying for rain at this moment. Knowing that our economy needs to have both fall and spring rain, I also pray for that on occasions, as I understand how vital water is to our economy. Even for us living in big cities, realize that without our supply of food, none of us could survive very long. Just as God provides rain for Israel when they are obedient to Him, so we as Christians need to be obedient so He'll provide the things we need to survive as well.
 - c) So does this mean all droughts are God ordained? I haven't the foggiest idea and neither does anyone else. All I know is God promises to provide what His people need to survive as well as thrive (think the "milk and honey" reference), therefore, I do join those believers who do pray for God to provide the water we need in order for believers to survive so we can make a difference for God in our lives.
10. Verse 16: Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them.¹⁷ Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.
- a) I mentioned in my introduction that the local deity that is worshipped in Israel before the Israelites conquered that land was called "Baal". The point here is that Baal worship was associated with the weather. Those Israelites could easily think, "OK we're in the land of Baal, we better honor him too." That's why God is emphasizing the fact that He and He alone is control of weather and not to honor any other so-called deity. For those of you familiar with the Old Testament, the Israelites often disobeyed this command and turned to Baal worship. My point is the Old Testament records the Israelites have suffered many droughts in their history when they've turned from God.
 - b) I've always held the view that when it comes to God blessing our land, the issue is not the unbelievers, but the believers. There will always be those who refuse to trust God in their lives. However, the focus of most of the bible is on those who believe He exists and what we should be doing about it. My point is if we're suffering from a drought or "whatever" don't worry about the nonbelievers. The issue is what are we "believers" doing about it? If we realize that God's in control of our world, then we should seek Him to bless us with what we need to survive and thrive. OK what about Christians who are suffering at this moment? They too require God to bless them in the "big picture" such as rain so they can get the medical help they need to survive. I can't explain all tragedies, I just know that He exists and the only way this world would be a fair place to live is if we trust Him to guide our lives and yes, commit our lives to making a difference for Him in this life.
 - c) OK, time for another of my bottom line comments: Do we want God to bless us on both the micro and macro levels? Then don't worry about the person next to you. What God wants is a relationship with us personally. Be willing to confess sin and seek Him with a commitment of our lives and He promises to bless us both with what we need to survive as well as luxury items we desire so we can both survive and thrive for Him. The point is living for God gives us the greatest life we can imagine living out this life!

11. Verse 18: Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ¹⁹ Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ²⁰ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, ²¹ so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.
- a) As I implied in the introduction, these verses are a repeat of what's already stated earlier in this book. The key point is Moses said we should love God as hard as we possibly can and teach our children to do likewise. Yes I'm paraphrasing, but that's the main idea. As I said, Chapters 1-11 make up one section of this book. To sum up these chapters in one quick thought, it is "We're to love God and observe what He commands us to obey". The actual laws that He wants us to obey begin in Chapter 12. The point here is we've come "full circle" in this chapter as Moses wraps up this section of the book by repeating some key commands as stated in those early chapters of this book.
 - b) If one has ever been around an "Orthodox" community of Jewish people, one can see them take these verses very literally. There are leather boxes containing bibles scripture that is worn on their foreheads and their wrists. It's just my opinion, but I don't think God meant for us to take it so literally that we can't see where we're going because we have a leather box with a scripture inside of it on our foreheads. What is most likely intended is that we do take learning God's commandments so seriously, we think about them constantly. In these verses the text says to talk about them to your children, think about them when we are out and about and put reminders of what they are around our homes.
 - i) Does this mean Christians are in trouble if we don't think about God all the time? My answer is to remember the lesson title: "Commitment". The question is not if we're perfect, the question is whether or not we're committed to honoring God in every aspect of our lives. To give an example, if we're going shopping remember the fact God's interested in us being a good witness for Him while we're shopping. God cares about what we teach our children. If there are bibles around the house, they should be "well worn" not collecting dust on a bookshelf in our homes.
 - ii) Think about it this way: How central is Jesus to our lives? It doesn't mean every conversation we have has to be "religious". It just means we care about pleasing Him in every aspect of our lives. I like the "shine the light" analogy. Suppose we got a really bright spotlight on us at the moment. Would God be proud of what we're doing at that moment? That's the central idea of the commitment to keep God as the central focus of our lives.
 - c) That leads to the next logical question: What's the benefit of living a God-centered life? Why should we bother to live this way? The text says we will live long in the land. Since most of us are not literally living in Israel, we have to go what the "Promised Land" is for the Christian believer: It's about enjoying the full, rich relationship of using our lives to be a witness for God as we put Him first, others second and ourselves third. I've found that when we live that way, we enjoy life far more than any other activity we can do.
 - i) As to the literal, God said these Israelites would "live long" in the land. The point is they got to spend many centuries living there until God said in effect, "Ok, I've had enough of you turning from Me, out of there you go!" My point is if God can act that way with the Israelites, what makes us Christians think God won't act the same way if we turn our lives from Him? What does God kick us out of? In the New Testament a couple died when they lied to the Holy Spirit. While God rarely goes that far, most likely is we lose our opportunities to be a witness for Him.
 - ii) Considering that the greatest purpose we can have in this lifetime is to use our life to make a difference for God, the danger of no longer committing our lives to Him is we can lose the opportunities God gives us to make a difference for Him.

12. Verse 22: If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow--to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways and to hold fast to him--²³ then the LORD will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you.²⁴ Every place where you set your foot will be yours: Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the western sea.²⁵ No man will be able to stand against you. The LORD your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go.
- a) With all of my comparisons of how Christians should react to this text we shouldn't forget the original intent and the original audience: Moses is speaking to a large group of Jewish men who are about to risk their lives by attacking whoever's living in the land of Israel. In these verses, we have Moses reminding these men that there's no reason to fear. God will lead them to victory, not because the Israelites are stronger or better equipped. The point is the Israelites are going to win only because God will lead them to that victory.
 - i) Speaking of the literal, notice the size of "Israel" being promised to them. The text says the territory will extend from the desert next to Egypt, up north to Lebanon, and east to the Euphrates River, which is mainly in Iraq. When I hear a discussion of whether or not "the west river bank" belongs to Israel, I like to ask, "Which west bank river are you talking about?"
 - ii) Therefore, the size of the territory promised to Israel is actually larger than how it stands today. My question is, "Is this a conditional or unconditional promise that God made?" If it's conditional upon obedience, why isn't their territory as stated here in the text? If it's unconditional, why isn't it conquered? The answer is both. God promised all that land, all the way to the Euphrates when He promised it to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It's also conditional upon behavior. The short version is when Jesus returns, Israel has to exist so Jesus can have a place to rule from, and that territory will be as big as promised here in this text.
 - b) OK, good for future Israelites I suppose. How does any of this affect you and me? Just as God promised tremendous blessings to the Israelites both in their lifetime and the lifetime of their descendants, so God promises great things to those of us who trust Him with our lives here and today. The way I describe it is God wants to bless our lives far greater than we can ever imagine. I once used the illustration on a stage of filling a water glass until it overflowed on that stage. That's how much God wants to bless our lives. So if that's true, why don't I have a big mansion somewhere with more money than I can ever imagine?
 - i) The answer is God never promises all Christians all the material riches we could ever imagine in this lifetime. What God promises us, is what He promises them so many millenniums ago. It is that "no one can stand against us". The idea is that no argument or show of force can prevent us from believing in what is true, that God does exist, that His Son paid the price for our sins and we can live a more blessed life full of joy by serving Him which is a far greater life than can be bought by any material thing or by any amount of power or fame in this lifetime.
 - ii) Think about it this way: What would really make you happy in life? To have lots of power, money or fame? Or do you want to have a life full of joy. What God is teaching them and us is that committing our lives to Him will bring us far greater joy than anything and everything this world has to offer. Even when we meet a person who has a tremendous amount of stuff, realize that at the most, they'll only last for this lifetime. Living to make a difference for Jesus has eternal benefits for us that last far greater than all we can do for ourselves.
 - iii) But doesn't God want us to support ourselves and make a difference in the world? Of course He does. As I love to say, God gave us a brain and He expects us to use it". The question is are we using our time to make a difference for Him, or just so we can have lots of stuff or power or fame in this lifetime? It's our decision.

- c) All of that leads us back to the issue of a commitment to serve God. Anybody can claim to be a follower of Jesus. Those who've made that commitment as I've described through this lesson are those who are doing something about it. Think about it this way: If we do believe in the concept of demons, do you think they believe Jesus is God and heaven and hell are real places? Of course, which is why there are demonic spiritual forces that work to prevent people from becoming Christians in the first place, or work to make believers in Jesus ineffective witnesses for Him. One reason we rely upon His power is so that we can be stronger than whatever spiritual resistance we face. The idea of God's promise to His followers is that no man or demonic force is stronger than the protection God gives us when we do commit our lives to serving Him.
 - d) Coming back to my point about demons, yes they believe God is real. The point is such creatures want their will done versus God's will for our lives. They want us to turn from God as they don't believe we're (humanity) are worth redeeming. It's realizing that they (those dark forces) get to rule and have their will done when we Christians refuse at any given moment to turn from God's will to get our own will done. When we choose to live for anything other than God, whether we realize it or not, "They win" at that moment.
 - i) The problem of course, is that God will eventually win as He is in control. As the saying goes, "The game is fixed" as God knows the end from the beginning. That's why the best thing we can do with the unknown amount of time we have to live is give it to God for His use. That way we can use our lives to make a difference for Him. That's why we should commit our lives to Him in the first place. That's the key point of this whole lesson. That's what Moses is trying to get across to those Israelites sitting and listening to him lecture and that's what God's trying to teach you and me about the importance of dedicating our lives to serving Him.
 - e) Let me also address those of us who already have committed our lives this way. What do we have to do differently? I'm not here to lecture people who've committed their lives to Jesus to work harder. We aren't saved by how hard we work. If we're already using our life to make a difference for Jesus and we have the peace of knowing what we're doing is for God, I don't want you to panic that you're not doing enough. I believe that if we pray about what God wants us to do and live realizing our time here is limited, then if do what we're called to do, my job is to say, don't panic, and don't think we have to work harder. Our lives are between God and ourselves. If we know we are doing what God calls us to do, stick to it. We don't get "notches in our belt" for every person we lead to Christ. The results of the Gospel are God's problem. Our focus should be whether or not we're doing what we believe God's calling us to do. If we don't know, pray through it, and then do what we believe we're called to do. If God wants to change that commitment, He'll make it obvious to us over time what it is He wants us to do as He promises to guide our lives for His glory.
13. Verse 26: See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse-- ²⁷ the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today;
- a) My first question as I read this verse was "What blessings and what curses?" The answer isn't given until much later in the book. The reason Moses is bringing this up here is to remind all of us that God's giving us a bunch of commands to follow in life, and we will be blessed if we obey them and cursed if we don't. It would be like realizing we're free as Christians to do anything we want as Jesus paid the complete price for our sins. However why would we want to waste the life God's given us, once we realize that the purpose of this life is to glorify God with the time He's given us. The blessing comes down to the fact we get to enjoy a close and personal relationship with God as He guides our lives for His glory. The curse is essentially if we waste our lives just living for ourselves, God's going to do what He can to draw us back to Him and He's willing to make us suffer in order to draw us back to Him in the first place.

- b) Yes, the blessings and the curses will get more specific than that as hinted at earlier in the chapter and described in more detail later in the book. They are also more specific for this generation of Israelites about to enter the land of Israel. The point for you and me is God is doing what He can to draw us close to Him and He uses a "carrot and stick" approach as an incentive to keep us close to Him in the first place. If you don't know the reference to the carrot and the stick, that's used to motivate horses and donkeys to do as we desire. It's like saying to a horse, do what I want and I'll give you a carrot, but if you won't take me to where I want to go, I'm not above "hitting you with a stick" in order to motive you and me to do My will and keep our relationship close.
 - c) Remember God's motivation for all of this: What God desires is a close relationship with those He's called. If God is perfect by definition, then He doesn't need anything. The way I describe God is like someone who just loves to paint pictures or create music. They do it as they can't stand not doing it. Part of God's nature is love. Therefore, He wants to have a close relationship with those He ultimately created, that's us. Therefore God's willing to use that carrot and stick method being described in this verse to keep us close to Him so we can mutually enjoy that love relationship with Him that He desires to have with us.
14. Verse 28: the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.
- a) Just to prove that God wants that close relationship with us, I present Verse 28. This verse essentially says that if we disobey His commands and turn from a relationship with Him, we'll suffer for it as we've now turned from that loving relationship.
 - b) Let me explain this a different way: If God created us in the first place, then it's logical He knows what's best for our lives. God's saying He didn't give all of us all these rules just to keep Himself busy or out of boredom. I as God, know what's best for you and I'm aware of what's the best use of the time I've given you to live. Therefore, I'm doing what I can to encourage all of you not waste the time I've given you. However if we do decide to turn from Me, we will suffer curses as this verse implies.
 - c) So what are these other "gods" referred to in these verses? For those Israelites it was those deities worshipped in the land of Israel. In particular, the false god "Baal" and the belief that they'll have good weather to prosper in life based on their worship of Him. It would be like us thinking, "Yes I can have a good life just by working hard and making the effort without God's help to be successful at whatever we consider success". What God's telling us is that we can have a far greater life if we choose a close and personal relationship with the God who created the world in the first place! To put it another way, if we're going to live forever, why not start serving the God now who cares for us and wants to be with us forever? Isn't that a greater use of one's time than just say earn a living or achieve fame or power? The free will aspect is God gives us our lives. The choice is to use it for His glory.
 - d) The curse for us is the loss of that personal relationship. It will usually manifest itself in other ways, but a good sign that we may not be doing God's will for any moment in our life is when things are going from bad to worse. Not every bad thing means we've sinned in some ways. However, I have found that I pray the hardest when trouble is brewing. It does keep me close to Him when I have to deal with problems and I realize God's there to guide me through whatever I'm dealing with at that present moment.
15. Verse 29: When the LORD your God has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses.
- a) When you and I think of mountains, we picture the Himalayas or some other really tall peaks. In Hebrew, the word for hills and mountains are the same word. My point is the two mountains mentioned here is really what we would think of as "big hills". These two "mountains" mentioned are both located in the land of Israel. They were not that far from where the Israelites are currently sitting. It would be like us looking out at a distance and saying, "See those two mountain tops way over there? Let me tell you about them!"

- b) Since there are several million Israelites at that time, and let's say at the least, there will be about a half million fighting men crossing over the Jordan River to go conquer Israel then. Those two mountains are big enough where half the Israelites can sit on one of them as to recite God's blessings for obeying Him while the other half of those Israelites can go sit on the other mountain to recite God's curses. I'm betting that those mountains are situated in a way that if a large group of people stated the blessings and curses there, they could all hear what they're saying to each other. It's a like being a large gathering and the leader on stage says, "this half now say this, and then that half now say that!"
16. Verse 30: As you know, these mountains are across the Jordan, west of the road, toward the setting sun, near the great trees of Moreh, in the territory of those Canaanites living in the Arabah in the vicinity of Gilgal.
- a) Remember that the Israelites sent spies into the land of Israel some 40 years earlier. What we gather here is that they "mapped out" the land of Israel while they were there. That is why Moses can say in effect, these two mountains are in the east end of that land (that is what "toward the setting sun" just means). After God leads you Israelites to victory over those who currently live in that region, then you're to "park your behinds" on these two mountains and recite the specific blessings that I Moses will give you later in my speech.
- b) OK, why go through that specific exercise then and there? Why can't they just think God wants us to obey Him and there is consequences of turning from Him? Why go to these specific mountains and recite these upcoming blessings and curses? It's because that we easily forget what's important. The same reason God calls on us to pray regularly and go to church regularly is to remind ourselves who's really in charge of our lives and that we too can be blessed by sticking close to Him.
- c) Let me also explain this one other way: Why can't I just trust God is in charge of my life and then go do what I want? Why gather with other Christians who I don't really care for all that much anyway? Just as God wanted those Israelites to encourage each other as to remember the blessings and curses associated with a relationship with Him, so God wants to encourage us and encourage each other so that we too can be blessed and remind us of the dangers of turning from Him. In other words, we wander easy from what God wants us to do in life and encouraging each other keeps us on the path God desires for us to go so we can use our lives for His glory. To commit our lives to serve God, isn't just about our personal relationship with Him, it's also about using our lives to make a difference in the lives of other people around us. That's why the classical definition of JOY (all CAP's) is Jesus, others, and yourself.
17. Verse 31: You are about to cross the Jordan to enter and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you. When you have taken it over and are living there, ³² be sure that you obey all the decrees and laws I am setting before you today.
- a) The essential idea of a commitment is that if we agreed to make that commitment, we are to stick to it. That's why God is saying through Moses, once you (those Israelites) actually enter the land of Israel and actually conquer what I want you to conquer (overcome our fears) then once we are comfortable there, don't forget God. That's why it's after they get their victory, then they are to recite these blessings and curses as described here in these verses. In a way, it's similar to the concept of why we go to church. We're not more saved by going to church, but we go to encourage each other and remind each other of how God can bless or curse our lives based on whether or not we're doing His will at any particular moment in our lives. In other words, it's hard enough as it is to live to make a difference for God in every aspect of our lives. Getting together regularly with believers reminds of what is really important in life: To use our lives for His glory in all that we do. We don't go to church because we have to. We should go just because we want to use our lives for God's glory, period. That's what the commitment is all about.

- b) That's enough for one lesson. The next chapter begins the actual list of the ways you and I are to actually obey God. To state what I hope is obvious by now, all these requirements of how God wants have been fulfilled by Jesus. The reason for us to study them is to help us draw closer to God by realizing what He's done for us and to realize what God exactly wants us to do to live as He desires. With that said, I'll try to summarize how God desires that commitment of our lives for Him in my closing prayer:

18. Heavenly Father, the most valuable thing You give us is the time we have to live here. Help us to use that time for Your glory. Help us to remember what is really important in this life: to please You in all that we do. Make it obvious to each of us what it is that You want us to do today as we use that time for Your glory. Help us to remember we'll be blessed by having a close relationship with you and we can suffer when we turn from that relationship. If we made that commitment to serve You, help us by Your power to stick to that commitment as again, we use our time and our resources for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.