

## Deuteronomy Chapter 4 – John Karmelich

1. As I read this chapter a few times, I kept thinking about the concept of "separation". In Christian speak, that's the idea of separating our lives to be of use to God. In other words, for us to believe in Jesus means that we do what He desires, not to earn our way to heaven, but solely because we are grateful for what He has already done for us. My question is how do we do that practically? Do we have to move somewhere or ignore our families? Of course not. My point is if our lives are separated for God's use, right where we are at this moment, what does it mean practically?
  - a) Chapter 4 begins what many consider to be the "second section" of Deuteronomy. For the most part, we're done with the history lesson of the last two chapters. There's a little bit of it in this chapter, but it mainly focuses on how we are to separate ourselves for God's use. Back in Chapter 1, my lesson title was "I believe in Jesus, now what?" What I'm starting to realize is that is the book's theme. The idea is we accept the idea of being saved based on trusting Jesus for our salvation, but then what to we do next? The answer is we separate our lives for God's use. That just means it should be our desire at all times to do His will. In other words it's not about "earning points" with God, but out of gratitude for what He's already done for us, we do desire to live as He desires. That is what separating our lives for Him is all about. If you haven't figured it out by now, "separation" is my lesson title.
  - b) What about the practical aspects of life? Even if we believe Jesus is God and do desire to please Him with our lives, don't we still have to "do the dishes and take the trash out"? Of course. The idea of separation is not about ignoring the practical aspects of life, but living, as He desires. It's about setting time out each day to seek Him so that He can guide us to make a difference for Him through the practical aspects as well as whatever efforts we do projects that make to make a difference for Him. The point is the most valuable thing we own is our time. Yes the practical things have to get done, but we also want to use some of our time for things that matter for eternity. That's why we study all these God's rules for our lives, not to earn points with Him but simply out of gratitude for what He's done for us, we choose to separate our lives to glorify Him.
2. With that said, let me see if I can summarize some of the text of this lesson: The first few verses are in introduction saying effectively to pay attention to what I'm about to say to you. Don't add or subtract from them. It doesn't mean Deuteronomy is the only book of the bible one needs. It just means Deuteronomy teaches us how God desires we live as we separate our lives from how nonbelievers live. In other words, if you want to live, as God desires we live, you've come to the right place to learn how.
  - a) Then Moses reminds them of an incident that probably happened a few weeks prior to the reading of this book by Moses to the Israelites. In that incident some Israelites were killed as they turned to worship a false God. The key point is that once we make the decision to separate our lives for God's use, there's a big price to pay for disobedience. I'm not saying one has to be perfect. I'm saying as most of us realize that "sin hurts". That is, we suffer in this life when we willfully choose to ignore God's will for our lives. The reason we should live as God desires is also because it's the best way to live as we avoid the damage that we can do to our lives due to sinful actions.
  - b) Then we get a reminder of "who we are". Moses says to the Israelites how God has never separated any other nation from another one to serve Him. The Israelites were separated from the Egyptians for this purpose: To show the surrounding world that there is a God and here is how He desires we live based on the knowledge of His existence. That doesn't mean we Christians have to become Jewish. It just means as God separated that nation as a witness for Him, so He desires to separate ourselves from how nonbelievers live so that we can use our lives for His glory.

- c) Then Moses reminds the Israelites that God spoke to their parents effectively to give them the Ten Commandments. The actual commandments are restated in Chapter 5, but I'll get to that in the next lesson. The point here is simply that since God separated them (and us) to make a difference for Him, He expects us to obey those commandments. Again it isn't so we can earn our way into heaven, but only because it's the best way to live our lives.
  - d) Then Moses reminded them that none of them including Moses himself saw God in any physical form. They just heard the voice of God and the fact that God wrote for them the commandments on two tablets of stone. The reason we get that reminder, is at time it was customary for people to make images of what they thought their gods looked like. We do not make images of God because to put it bluntly, He's too big to be grasped by any type of physical image of Him. So for example, is the famous painting on the ceiling in Rome of God wrong? No, the idea is to not limit ourselves to what God looks like based on any image we can have of God. To quote one of my favorite expressions on this topic, "Every time I try to think about how big God is, all I do is get a headache". (David Hocking).
  - e) Then we get the third time in this book the reminder that Moses himself is not allowed to enter this land. I don't think that's here as a "pity party" for Moses. I think it's a reminder of the danger of not doing God's will for our lives. Again, the issue isn't salvation, but to live as God desires means we separate our lives for His use and like Moses, one has to pay a big price for turning from Him. To put it simply, "sin hurts". The reason the bible is full of examples of "do this and don't do that" (which we'll get to soon enough in this book) is God is telling us the best way to live so we can make a difference for Him. The point here in this paragraph is simply that just as Moses has to suffer so we'll suffer when we fail to do as He desires we do with our lives.
  - f) But since none of us are perfect, what do we do when we do mess up? That's the central point of the next set of verses. Moses predicts how God will kick the Israelites out of His land (Land of Israel) when they collectively turn from Him. Then Moses says that if they seek Him after that punishment, He will still be their God. The point for you and me is we do suffer the consequences of sin, but God can't "un-love" what He loves. The idea is that God demands obedience but wants a love relationship with us as well. We have to accept God on His terms, not ours. The 10 Commandments is a summary of His terms. The main point of these verses is that if we mess up and realize it, we are always welcome to return to God on His terms even after we suffer the damage due to our sins.
3. The chapter goes on from there to make a few more points including some of the ways in which the Israelites have cooperated so far in doing God's will. If you want a good summary of Chapter four in one thought it is: Be obedient to God's will because it is the best way to live out our lives. That leads me back to the idea of separation. To be separated for God's use is all about living as He desires we live and regularly seeking Him for both the guidance and the power so that we can live, as He desires. The rest as they say, is the details. Speaking of the details, it's time to start on the details of this chapter.
4. Chapter 4, Verse 1: Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. <sup>2</sup> Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.
- a) There are some who argue that Deuteronomy is a set of speeches given by Moses to the Israelites over several days. Others say it's all one continuous speech. My answer is, what difference does it make? I mention that because one can see the natural break between the last verse of Chapter 3 and the first verse of Chapter 4. We have Moses saying here that he's pretty much done giving the history lesson of how they got from Egypt to where they are now. It's now time to focus on the main purpose of this book: To understand how we are to live once we do believe in God's existence. Again, it's important to emphasize that this is not a salvation model, but a guide of how to be separated for God's use in this life.

- b) Time for another quick reminder of what the Promised Land means for us Christians. It is not about the physical land of Israel. It's about enjoying the rich, full life that He promises we can enjoy by trusting Him with every aspect of our lives. That doesn't mean we won't have problems in life. It just means He is there to guide us through whatever we have to deal with in our lives. To paraphrase one of my favorite bible teachers, "to worry is to not put God in the middle of any situation". (Dennis Prager). As my wife taught me, "If I am going to pray, why worry? If I'm going to worry, why pray?" I state all of that here, as in these verses Moses is reminding the Israelites not to add or subtract from any of the text of this book as it is a complete guide to itself as to how God wants us to live.
- i) I'm not saying other books of the bible are to be ignored. I'm saying Deuteronomy is in effect a complete list of God's rules that He expects us to obey as we live the type of life He desires we live. Yes, many of these rules are repeated elsewhere in the bible. However, Deuteronomy gives a lot of "why we should obey them" and not just list rules and regulations for us.
- ii) So if any commentary is describing this book, are we adding to this book? No that is just helping us understand how we are to live as God desires.
- c) Let me also comment on the accuracy of the book today. The oldest copy we have of this book is from about 1,000 AD. If Moses wrote this around 1,400 BC, how do we know if it is accurate? First, if one believes this is God's word, one copies it carefully. If Moses says not to add or subtract from it, that's motivation to copy it carefully. Realize in the original Hebrew language, "A=1, B=2, C=3" etc. My point is one can add up the numeral value of every page and make sure it's exactly the same on the new copy as well as the old. That's how the Israelites kept their new scrolls as accurate as the old ones. By the way, that same "alphabet equals their numbering system" is true in Greek as well as Hebrew.
- d) The bottom line of the first few verses are in effect, "Don't mess with what God wants us to obey. Just obey the laws as stated in this book as it's the best way to live."
5. Verse 3: You saw with your own eyes what the LORD did at Baal Peor. The LORD your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor, <sup>4</sup> but all of you who held fast to the LORD your God are still alive today.
- a) Ok, we interrupt Moses demand for "separation of our lives for God's use" to give us one more quick history lesson. To keep it simple, not too long before this speech by Moses, a lot of Israelites died as they literally performed sexual acts in order to honor a false god. This practice ended with the death of all who participated in that act. To understand this false god, the belief is that god had to be "turned on" in order for it to do good things for our lives. It's the false idea that we feel pleasure from sexual acts and the false god feels that pleasure and blesses us. Know that God is not anti-sex. None of us would be alive today if our parents didn't desire sexual acts. A key point here is that God does not need to be "turned on" in order to make a difference for Him with our lives.
- b) The idea comes back to the idea of us having to worship God "His way" and not our way. For us to have sexual intercourse with anyone anytime we want seems pleasurable at first, but then we suffer the consequences of unwanted children at the least. The point is God wants us to develop lifelong relationships with spouses, not just go "do it with whoever is convenient". Coming back to the text, the Israelites who did this were killed, just as in this false religion they sacrifice the unwanted babies from those sexual acts to honor that false god. My point is, "Just as this false religion kills innocent lives, so one will be killed if one continues to go down that path in life."
- c) Are you saying anyone who has an abortion will die for that sin? First, remember that no sin is unforgivable except the lifetime denial that Jesus is God and in charge of our lives. I am saying that sin is to be avoided as that is the best way for us to live. When we do sin, we are to confess it, but we still suffer the consequences of that action. That's why these Israelites had to suffer who died at this rebellion as told in Numbers Chapter 25.

6. Verse 5: See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup>Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." <sup>7</sup>What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? <sup>8</sup>And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?
- a) First notice the word "have" in Verse 6. Remember Deuteronomy means, "Second law". It does not mean second set of laws, but the second time Moses describes these laws for us. So is Deuteronomy in effect a repeat of laws as already stated in the first four bible books? Yes, but those laws are also expanded upon here for us to understand why they must be obeyed. My point is God commanded laws to be obeyed already in the first four books of the bible, and they're repeated and commented upon further in Deuteronomy.
  - b) All of that leads to the logical question of, "Why should I bother?" To state why I write all of these bible studies in the first place, "I've got bills to pay and my kids are sick, so why should I use some of my valuable time to study this stuff in the first place?" The answer is to learn to live, as God desires makes us wise, as stated in Verse 6.
  - c) God is saying to live as we desire makes others see us as wise people. God wants us and the Israelites to be a witness to the world around them that He exists, and also the fact He communicates to us what He desires of our lives.
  - d) Stop for a moment and consider the land of Israel this way: Why is it where it is? Why is the land of Israel located just north of Egypt? Why did God want the Israelites to go live at that particular location? If you look at a map, one can see that Israel is a "land bridge" between three continents. If you want to travel by land from say, Africa to Asia or Europe one has to travel through Israel. My point is God wants His people to be a witness to the world around them and the geography of that land makes it possible.
  - e) But if the Promised Land for Christians represents how God wants us to live, do we have to say, move to Israel? That's not the point. The point is if we live as God desires we live, then we become wise in that people will see it's the right way to live and want to join us. To use a simple example, if people see we're not suffering the consequences of say using bad drugs in our lives, they would want to join us to see how we can have joy in our lives without having to resort to other measures to "numb ourselves". When I hear the phrase, Christianity is a crutch, I respond, it is more than just a crutch, it's a whole way of living that is greater than any other way one can imagine.
  - f) You may think I have wandered away from the text, but I haven't. Moses is saying that a way we become a witness for God is that He responds to prayer. He's willing to guide us for His glory and He's willing to give us a set of rules to live by so we can use our lives to make a difference for Him in this world. I'm not saying that Christianity is the only way to live life. I'm saying that obedience to God's desire is the best way to live out our lives given the unknown amount of time that each of us have. Can one think of a greater use of one's time than to use it for the God who created us in the first place? Therefore, if we do desire to be thought of as wise, all it requires (a big and tough "all") is obedience to Him.
  - g) With all that said, what do we do practically? Does this mean we are to memorize, say all of Deuteronomy or all of say one of the Gospels and live according to what it teaches? It's actually simpler than that. It's about daily taking the time to study the bible, pray for His help and then make the best decisions possible based on that time given to God. But what about "Doing the dishes and taking the trash out" as I said in the introduction? Of course, the practical things of life still have to be done. As another of my favorite teachers put it, "God doesn't want to be #1 on a list of 10, God wants to be #1 on a list of 1. For example, if one goes shopping, take God with you." (Chuck Missler). The point is we make God a part of every aspect of our lives, including the practical as well as special projects.

7. Verse 9: Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.<sup>10</sup> Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children."<sup>11</sup> You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness.<sup>12</sup> Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice.<sup>13</sup> He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets.<sup>14</sup> And the LORD directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess.
- a) Time for one of my loose translations: Remember when God spoke to us at Mount Sinai and gave us the 10 Commandments? Even though it was almost 40 years ago, I (Moses) remember it like it was yesterday. Literally there was fire all around that mountain and God's voice was heard audibly so that you're parents and I heard it live. There those 10 Commandments were written down on two tablets of stone.
  - b) Before I get into the all important "why should I care" question, I admit I'm fascinated by a theory that the reason there were two tablets of stone, is that "God wrote two copies, one for each party to this agreement". I don't know whether or not it required 2 tablets to fit all the commandments or two copies were made. It just got me to think outside the box a little of how I traditionally picture this scene.
  - c) I assume all of us reading this lesson are already Christians and believe that God spoke to Moses thousands of years ago, and gave him those commandments. My question is why should we care enough to use our time to think about this now? In other words, why is Moses reminding this second generation of Israelites of the specifics of that event? Part of it is to understand how God communicates with us. It proves God cares enough about us that He wants us to live as He desires. God only communicated with them audibly as He is in effect "too big to comprehend physically".
  - d) OK John, forget about them, what about us? Why should we care about this stuff? It's to realize that God loves us so much that He desires to communicate with us how it He does desire we live our lives. Remember that we live in a world God created. If He created it, He must have a purpose in mind for creating it. If there is no God, then life ultimately has no purpose. If God exists, then He must have had a purpose for creating our world. That purpose is so that we can willfully chose to use our lives to make a difference for Him in this world. We can willfully choose to use our lives for the greatest purpose one can ever imagine, to make a difference for the God who created us in the first place. If we want to make a difference for God, it starts by living as He desires, and that's what His laws teach us: How to use our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - e) Bottom line time again: These Israelites are now about to enter the Promised Land. They need to know how to live as God desires in order to live in that land in the first place.
8. Verse 15: You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully,<sup>16</sup> so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman,<sup>17</sup> or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air,<sup>18</sup> or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below.<sup>19</sup> And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars--all the heavenly array--do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshipping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.<sup>20</sup> But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are.
- a) In effect, these verses are a commentary on the first part of the 10 Commandments: Don't worship other gods or make an image to represent Him. He's "beyond description".

- b) Understand that God we worship is too "complicated" to be compared to anything we see. That is one reason why this text says not to make an image of God based on anything we are aware of. Remember in that day, people commonly made objects based on what they believed their gods looked like. They were called "idols". They're statues that represent what their gods look like. Think of it this way: When you see a bird flying or see stars in the sky and wonder, "how can those birds fly or how did those stars get there?" we don't want to think they are "gods" because we don't understand how they function.
- i) Also remember in that culture, the worship of local gods was intermingled with all the other aspects of their lives. It's like thinking, "I want to catch fish, so I need to pray to a deity in charge of fish" or "I want to grow crops, I need to pray to a deity in charge of crops or make an image to represent my deity". God is saying to the Israelites, don't be like the other nations around us. Realize that I'm much bigger than that and as you are separated to worship Me realize that I want a relationship with you (us) as I (God) am the one who created you in the first place.
- c) OK, what if you say, I don't have any "idols" in my house? As I learned many years ago, if you want to find out what is someone's god, see where he or she spend their time and their income and you'll find their god. I'm not saying one can't enjoy a beautiful sunset or say a sporting event or traveling to a favorite location. I'm saying God should be viewed as greater than those things. If for example, we "live" for weekends, or to raise money to go to a certain place or event, my question is do we love those things more than God or do we see them as things we can do to be a witness for God? My point again is God wants to be #1 on a list of 1, which means we desire to make Him part of every aspect of our lives.
- i) The reason this is such a big commandment for both Jews and Christians is we can limit our view of what God can do if we see Him as being up there in the sky or say, as a living creature on earth. What Christians have to be grateful for, is that we learned through the Old Testament that God is bigger than what we can see.
- d) All of that leads me to Verse 20 of the text. That verse is the reminder that God took all of the Israelites out of Egypt to be separated (there's that word again) for His use. Notice in that verse, God refers to Egypt as a "furnace". The idea here is that a furnace was used to heat objects very hot so they can be shaped. That is how for example, one shapes gold.
- e) The idea is at that time, Egypt was the most powerful nation on earth. God took a nation of slaves and said in effect, "I'm shaping you to be my witnesses to the world around you. I separated you from a powerful nation by a show of force. Now that you are separated, I want you to do My will on earth." That will, is what God's laws are all about. Obeying them does not save us. We're saved by faith alone. However, if we are grateful for what God has done for us, then we should choose to live as God desires, and that's why we are called to study God's laws to learn how He wants us to live as one of His people. That in one paragraph, is how and why we are separated for God's use.
9. Verse 21: The LORD was angry with me because of you, and he solemnly swore that I would not cross the Jordan and enter the good land the LORD your God is giving you as your inheritance. <sup>22</sup> I will die in this land; I will not cross the Jordan; but you are about to cross over and take possession of that good land. <sup>23</sup> Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden. <sup>24</sup> For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.
- a) Time for another of my paraphrases to keep explaining this text: You want an example of why you should obey God? I (Moses) messed up once, so I'm forbidden from entering the Promised Land. It doesn't mean that God doesn't care for me (Moses), just that He's using me as an example of how not to live the type of life He desires we do live: To trust God in every aspect of our lives, which is what the Promised Land represents. The idea isn't to be perfect. It's about living in obedience to what He desires of us, as it is the best way for us to live. In short, it makes us a living witness for Him in the world around us.

- b) Let me explain the text another way: Why would one choose to not be guided by God? I believe it's because many people want to prove their worth to God by their deeds alone. I also observe many people who just want to live however they want and don't care at all about wanting to be pleasing to God. I'm not saying to be separated for God means we do think of ourselves as being better people than others. I'm saying to be separated for God's use is simply to use our lives for the greatest purpose one can imagine: To be used by the God of this world for His glory to make a difference for Him. That's what "separation" to be used by God is about: In effect, to willfully choose to obey Him means that we choose to be a slave to His desires for our lives, which again is what "separation" is all about.
- i) I'm not saying we have to ignore our non-saved relatives. To be separated is about how we choose to live. His laws are not here to lead us to salvation but to teach us how God wants us to live. That's why the bible is full of "do's and don'ts".
- c) Coming back to the text, is Moses angry that he can't enter that land? Don't know. This is the third time in four chapters that Moses mentions the fact he's not allowed to go into the land with the rest of the Israelites. I suspect is Moses is just using himself to illustrate the price we pay for disobedience. To put this in our vocabulary, we don't lose our salvation by sinning, but it still costs us. At the least it makes us a bad witness for God, and that is what He desires, to be a good witness for Him as He separates us for His glory, not ours.
- d) The other thing the text is saying effectively is, "Even though I (Moses) am not going with you into the Promised Land, don't forget to obey God's laws even though I'm not there to remind you to do so." I believe that's why Moses once again brought up the topic again of him not being there. It would be like a loving parent reminding us, "Even though I won't be with you to guide you, these laws are here to guide your life and God's love for you is greater than even a "loving parent" reminding us of how to best live our lives.
- e) From there we get another warning to not make an image of any other God. Then comes the comment that God is a "jealous God". Let me discuss that idea for a moment: If God is perfect by definition, how can He feel jealously? It's not like say, an angry spouse who is going to threaten divorce. It's more like the idea that God loves us so much, He wants to have an intimate relationship with us, and He doesn't want us to turn to other "gods". To say it another way, the best thing for our lives is to have the type of intimate relationship with God, which is what the Promised Land represents. When we turn from God to sin, from our perspective it feels like He's jealous as He's guarding His relationship with us.
- f) While I'm working on imagery, let me also discuss "consuming fire". If you didn't notice Verse 24 refers to God as jealous and a consuming fire. No God is not a ball of fire. The idea is God cares about His relationship with us so much He'll do what He has to do to drive us back to Him. The pain we cause ourselves from sin including turning from Him is like a "consuming fire" that burns all in its path. The point again, is we suffer when we sin, as we're turning from that loving relationship that God's called us to enjoy with Him.
- g) Bottom line of the last few verses: Don't mess with God. If we are to separate ourselves from those who don't believe in God, act accordingly. The good news is we get to spend eternity in heaven, not hell. The bad news is there is always a price to pay when we make the decision at any moment to turn from Him. Can't we confess our sins? Of course, God encourages us to do it. The idea of confessing is more than just realizing what we did was wrong. It's about making the effort to turn from it. I'm not saying I'm perfect. I just know when I mess up, I have to confess it, turn from sin and trust God to guide me back to Him so we can have the type of relationship that He desires to have with each of us.
- h) Let me back up to the more basic question: How do I know I'm separated for God's use? My answer is if you believe Jesus died for every sin you'll ever commit past, present and future, you are separated, period. (The usual assumptions that we believe He is God and in charge of our lives.) My point is if we said yes to that concept we are separated for His use. The key is then to live to please Him as He's in charge of our lives.

10. Verse 25: After you have had children and grandchildren and have lived in the land a long time-- if you then become corrupt and make any kind of idol, doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God and provoking him to anger, <sup>26</sup> I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you this day that you will quickly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You will not live there long but will certainly be destroyed. <sup>27</sup> The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and only a few of you will survive among the nations to which the LORD will drive you. <sup>28</sup> There you will worship man-made gods of wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or eat or smell. <sup>29</sup> But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>30</sup> When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. <sup>31</sup> For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath.
- a) I'm pretty sure it's time for another of my bottom line statements: If you (The Israelites) are living in the Promised Land for a long time and then your descendants decide to turn from Me to worship other false gods, I'll kick them out of that land. When they've come to their senses and turn back to Me, I'll take them back as I can't un-love what I love.
  - b) To make it easier, the idea is we do suffer for our sins, but God can never fully turn His back on those He loves.
  - c) OK I know that God kicked the Israelites out of that land several times in history, first by the Babylonians and later by the Romans essentially because they turned from Him. How is it they are back in the land now, from God's perspective? Well, I can't read God's mind, but here is a popular Christian perspective on that: First of all, God promised to give the land of Israel to the Israelites, no matter what. As I like to joke, Genesis doesn't say, "I will give you this land unless you reject the Messiah and then you're toast." God's promise to give the land to the Israelites is both unconditional and conditional: Let me explain: God can and has kicked the Israelites out of that land as collectively they've turned from Him in their history. However, when Jesus as the Messiah comes to rule over the world, He's going to rule from Israel. Therefore there has to be Jewish believers there in that land at the time He returns. That's how His promises are both conditional and unconditional to the Jewish nation. (By the way, that's Paul's main in point of Romans 9 through 11.)
  - d) OK, good and bad for them, what about us? What these verses are essentially teaching us is that we do suffer from sin, but when we confess and turn from that sin we can return to a relationship with Him. Does that mean God will punish us if we sin? The way I look at my problems is the first thing I consider is unconfessed (keyword) sin. Yes God allows us to go through things to teach us lessons. However, I'm positive not all of our suffering is due to our sins. Sometimes it's just due to misfortune or other reasons. The good news of these verses is despite our faults, God promises never (another keyword) to abandon us. Don't get the idea that "We didn't sin much today so God must bless me." It doesn't work that way. The point is God wants to bless our lives, because He wants too, period. Life is about trusting God through every situation. It's about realizing no matter what we have to deal with, God wants to use that situation for His (not ours, but His) glory.
  - e) Let me finish discussing these verses by getting more literal so you can understand what is the historical context. Back then, people would literally build little statues of the gods that they worshipped out of such materials as wood and stone. Even today many people carry little statues that represent the god's they worship. For example some people have a "Mary" statue on their car dashboard thinking it will protect them from injury. Some keep a "lucky rabbit's foot" and trust in it for protection and luck. The idea of not creating any images of God is about trusting in the God we can't see, but we know He's there based on faith that He's guiding our lives for His glory, no matter what.
  - f) The good news is if we have done things we're ashamed of, it's always a confession away. Just as God forgive them millenniums ago, so He forgives us when we turn from sin.

11. Verse 32: Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created man on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? <sup>33</sup> Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? <sup>34</sup> Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?
- a) I have to admit that as I go over this lesson, I'm worried that I'm not being literal enough. I could easily focus on the historical aspects of what the Israelites were going through as I prepare this lesson. Then I recalled again one of the most important things I ever read on the topic of bible teaching: "Who cares about the Amorites, and the Hittites I've got bills to pay and my kids are sick". (Haddon W. Robinson, paraphrased.) The point is it's better to focus on how the bible applies to our life today than to just teach history. That's why this lesson and hopefully all my lessons focus on how God wants us to live today given what He taught in here in the bible millenniums ago. OK, then back to the text.
  - b) Speaking of history, Moses gives a little history lesson here. The good news is that Moses isn't teaching history to memorize facts, but to put into perspective the privilege of being separated for God's use. To paraphrase: Since Adam and Eve, has God ever spoken to a nation through a "burning bush"? Has God ever separated one nation from another in a dramatic way so that the new nation can be separated for God's use? Has God ever done a bunch of dramatic miracles like the parting of the Red Sea and plagues on Egypt so that He can separate one group of people from another? The obvious answer is of course not.
  - c) Since we're discussing history, there's a neat little bit of American history I want to share: One of the suggestions for the "seal" of the United States, was to show the Israelites going from Egypt to Israel. The reason some wanted that image is it represents those who left Europe for freedom in the United States. It didn't make the seal, but it was a suggestion.
  - d) Meanwhile, back to the text: Moses is essentially asking a question to his audience. The idea is has God ever worked historically as He has with the Israelites to date here? No He hasn't and that's the obvious point. Remember that Moses through this speech is trying to encourage the Israelites to be brave and conquer the Promised Land. It's like saying, "God has done x and y so far, so why stop trusting Him now?" To put it in today's language, if God has gotten you this far in life, what makes you think that He's going to abandon us at this point? The idea is we can't sin too much to lose His love. We can't do anything to go earn His love. All we can do is appreciate it and use the gifts God has given us to glorify Him in all that we do. That's living the Christian life in a nutshell.
12. Verse 35: You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other. <sup>36</sup> From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire. <sup>37</sup> Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, <sup>38</sup> to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today.
- a) While I was given my own answer to Moses' question he posed in the last few verses, he has his own answer that he gives in these verses. The bottom line is God loves them and that's why He separated them from the Egyptians. The bottom line for us is God loves us and wants to use our lives for His glory. These verses remind the Israelites of the great miracles God has done in the last 40 years simply out of His love for people. All we have to do to appreciate that love is separate ourselves for Him, then we can know for sure that He loves us as much as He loved the Israelites that He has separated for His use. The idea here is we don't have to face whatever we have to face in order for us to accomplish what is God's will for our lives. We just have to trust Him to lead us to do what it is He wants us to do in our life. OK, then what do we do? Glad you asked.

- b) Let's be honest, God doesn't say, "OK, go here, now stop, now go here." What we should do is simply examine the situation (options) in front of us, and make the best decisions we can for our lives. This doesn't mean for example, God makes rich or famous all who want such things. It means we simply make the best decisions we can given our options. So if that is true, why do we need God? Why not just make the best decisions we can? Another great question. The answer comes back to our love relationship with God. The point is we can't make a difference for God based on our willpower. We need His power (think of the Holy Spirit) as well as His guidance as taught in His word. The key point again is that He wants to separate us for His use so we can use his life for His glory.
- c) Meanwhile, I left Moses on a role discussing how God has worked in their recent past: Verse 39: Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other.<sup>40</sup> Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.
- a) Here, we get the positive side of having a relationship with God. Earlier in this chapter we get some horrible warnings about the dangers of not trusting God. Then we got some verses that demonstrated God's power in the life of the Israelites so far in their history. If all of that is true, now Moses is reminding the Israelites, there is no other God. One has to realize how shocking that statement is. The Muslims today will state that Allah is not the god of the Jewish and Christian bible. The major eastern religions such as Hinduism deny that the God of the bible is the true god. So if the majority of the world's population does not believe in the God of the Jewish people (which is the same God Christians believe in), how do we know for sure that God is God?
- i) I was trying to think of ways God can prove to us He is God. Yes a giant 100-foot creature can walk around stating, "God is God", but it would only scare people. If God wrote in the sky He is God in a way that can't be erased, and we can't explain how it got there, some still wouldn't believe and even if it was that obvious, we're not coming to Him by faith, and others would ignore what is in the sky.
- ii) The best way I can think of to prove that God is God, is if "History was written in advance". That's why 30% of the bible is predictions. It proves whoever wrote it has access to information that can only come from outside of the human world. In this chapter alone, God through Moses prediction that Israel will be kicked out of the land for disobedience. Considering this was written in 1,400 BC (more or less) and the Babylonian Captivity was about 600 BC and the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem in about 70 AD, that alone is a pretty good track record and that is only one of hundreds of examples of accurate bible predictions.
- b) All of that leads me back to the text. God is saying here through Moses is essentially that God has separated the Israelites to be a witness for Him. Their gift for being that witness is their own country located as a "land bridge" between three continents. God wants them to be a witness for Him at that location and if they are obedient to Him, He will give them that land despite the obstacles they have to face to go conquer it in the first place.
- i) OK, good for the Israelites I suppose. How does that affect me? We Christians are called by Jesus to be a witness for Him to a lost and dying world. That means we have to "separate ourselves" for God's use. It's not about being perfect. It's about trusting in His power and His guidance through prayer and His word so we can use our time to make a difference in the world. As to the specifics, pray about it. Tell God, "OK, my time is Yours. What do You want me to do today to make that difference for You in the world around me?" I'm convinced He can't resist a prayer like that, because we're putting our life in His hands. For some, God calls them to go do missionary work elsewhere. For others, it's about being a good witness for Him right where we are living. It's all about letting Him guide our lives, period.

- c) Coming back to the text, the main point is that God will bless us if we're obedient to what He desires we do, which is to be a witness for Him. No that does not guarantee say fame or financial success. It guarantees that if we're willing to trust Him, it won't be a waste of our time or resources. Let me give an extreme example: What if we're too weak or sick to go make a difference? Then pray for others around you to make a difference. Prayer is a way God gets us involved in His program for the world. Prayer is about discerning what is His will and praying for it. I'm convinced that God allows suffering for those who trust in Him sometimes just to get us to trust Him to guide us through those such times.
  - d) For those of us who are not in bad health at the moment, yes we still pray, but we also use our time and our resources for His glory. As to the specific's, ask God for His guidance as to what He wants us to do today. Let's look at the situation in front of us to make the best decisions possible, knowing He can and will use our lives for His glory if we're willing to make the time to do so. Essentially that is what separating our lives for Him is all about and that's the blessing being described in these verses.
  - e) Next, Moses has one more topic to bring up before he starts on the 10 Commandments in the next chapter. Let me state those verses and then I'll explain why there here:
14. Verse 41: Then Moses set aside three cities east of the Jordan,<sup>42</sup> to which anyone who had killed a person could flee if he had unintentionally killed his neighbor without malice aforethought. He could flee into one of these cities and save his life.<sup>43</sup> The cities were these: Bezer in the desert plateau, for the Reubenites; Ramoth in Gilead, for the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, for the Manassites.
- a) Remember that at this point in Israel's history, they already conquered some land east of what we consider the land of Israel "proper". Moses is reminding them in the land they've already conquered they have set up three cities where a person can flee to if someone kills a person by accident. For those who haven't studied about these cities in the bible book of Numbers, the short version is three more cities will be set up like this in the land of Israel. Three more are outside of the land as described here. These 6 cities belong to the Levitical priests. The point is if someone accidentally kills someone, those priests are to be judges in their trial. If he or she is found innocent, then they have to stay there until the death of the current top priest for the Israelites. (This is all from Numbers Chapter 35.)
  - b) Time for the important question: Why bring this up here? Why should we care? I suspect the idea is that if they're about to go conquer more land, there has to be a system of justice set up if an Israelite accidentally kills another Israelite as war is about to start. It's a way of fairly judging soldiers at a time of war.
  - c) Now the fun part: Why should we care? (I love this part.) For nonbelievers in Jesus, they are all guilty of "second degree murder" whether they realize it or not. If you don't know "second degree murder" is a legal term to describe when you kill someone but you didn't realize it. In other words if we don't accept Jesus payment for one's sins, in effect we are rejecting Jesus for not accepting His sin payment. That's why the best "medicine" for any nonbeliever is to be around believers to learn of that "sin payment". That's why in these verses, those who commit second degree murder have to flee to cities controlled by priests (think you and me) who can share with them how living for Jesus and accepting what He did as one's payment frees us of the debt of accidentally killing someone.
    - i) Do you know when that murderer then no longer had to live in that city? When the current high priest dies. The book of Hebrews says, Jesus is our "High Priest". Therefore the death of Jesus on the cross frees us from the penalty of sin. My point is this "accidental murder" text is really a model of Christianity.
    - ii) My whole point is this story of the cities being set aside for those who accidentally kill someone is a great model of what Jesus did for us. It's another example of how Jesus is "all over" the Old Testament. Obviously Jewish people don't believe that. At the least, Moses is showing how to deal with murder at a time of warfare.

15. Verse 44: This is the law Moses set before the Israelites. <sup>45</sup> These are the stipulations, decrees and laws Moses gave them when they came out of Egypt <sup>46</sup> and were in the valley near Beth Peor east of the Jordan, in the land of Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon and was defeated by Moses and the Israelites as they came out of Egypt. <sup>47</sup> They took possession of his land and the land of Og king of Bashan, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan. <sup>48</sup> This land extended from Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge to Mount Siyon (that is, Hermon), <sup>49</sup> and included all the Arabah east of the Jordan, as far as the Sea of the Arabah, below the slopes of Pisgah.
- a) As I said in the introduction some debate whether Moses gave a series of speeches or one big speech of this entire book. Personally I don't care. The important point is God wants us read Deuteronomy as part of the bible to teach us how we are to separate ourselves for His use. Realize Jesus quoted Deuteronomy more than any other Old Testament book. If Jesus considers this book that important, I believe we should as well.
  - b) I state all of that to start these last verses, as it appears like Moses is wrapping up what He is saying in this book. In effect, Moses is just getting started.
  - c) OK, time for one last paraphrase for this lesson: Moses is saying, "I'm about to give you a set of instructions that God told me to give you on how to live as God has separated us to serve Him. So far, we Israelites have already conquered some land by God leading us. If God has gotten us this far in life, we must continue to trust Him as He leads us for the rest of our lives as we go conquer whatever giants we must face in the future."
  - d) Yes I can give you specifics of the territory the Israelites conquered just like I could have discussed the specifics of the three "cities of refuge" in the last set of verses. Yes the area is important if one wants to understand the geography of what God wanted the Israelites to do and did at that time. I'm much more interested in how this applies to us today. That's why I focus on what I focus upon in this lesson. The essential point is, God has separated us to be a witness for Him. He'll give us the power to be that witness and lead us to make a difference for Him if we're willing to let Him and we're willing to take the time to go be a witness for Him as Jesus commanded us to do. If you get that, you get the idea of how we are separated for God's use.
16. I want to end the lesson on another note. There are many Christians who wrongly think I don't have to obey say the 10 Commandments. They say, "I'm saved only by God's grace". Jesus said that the works of Christians is to trust in who He is. (That's based on John 6:29). My point isn't about the issue of salvation. My point is about how we are to be a good witness for Jesus. The idea in John Chapter 6:29 is about salvation and trusting in Jesus power to make a difference for Him. As we start to study God's laws, we'll realize that some things only applied to the Israelites living at that time, some apply to Israelites throughout history and some apply to all people. For example I'm pretty positive "To not steal" applies to all people today. We'll also study later in the book specific food laws that I'm equally convinced do not apply to Christians. As we start to go through the laws of this book I'll use the New Testament to explain Jesus' interpretation of those laws for Christians. My point is simply that as we study God's laws, they're there to guide us as how to make a difference for God in the world around us. They're not there to say, "We will go to hell if we do violate any of them." We're saved by faith alone. My response is then, "Saved to do what?" The answer is to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus. That's what the law will show us as we begin to study it over the rest of these lessons.
17. With that speech out of my system, let's close in prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to use our time and our resources to make a difference for You. Help us to remember that we're not condemned when we sin and we're not earning our way into heaven by doing good things. Help us to live as You desire not to "earn points", but because that's the best way to live out our lives. May we use our lives to make a difference for You and guide us as to how You want us to use our lives so we can make that difference. Guide us so that when we do see you "face to face" we can say we have used our lives for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.