

1. What does it really mean to only worship God? Does that mean God wants us to kill people who belong to other religions or destroy temples dedicated to other gods? Of course not. Yet in these two chapters, that's pretty much exactly what God tells the Israelites to do. They're also to put to death any Israelite that leads other Israelites away from God. As I read through these chapters, I pondered, what does this have to do with us? We all get the idea God wants us to worship Him and Him alone, which is essentially the first of the Ten Commandments. We will also learn these chapters here are in effect an expanded commentary on that commandment that the Israelites are to destroy anything "religious" that doesn't have to do with worshipping God or allow anyone in their midst to lead His people from worshipping Him.
 - a) The real question of these two chapters is how do we apply them? If God doesn't call us to kill nonbelievers or destroy churches of other religions, what's the application here? So glad you asked. The issue isn't what we tolerate among non-believers it's about what God wants us to do "in the church"? If we Christians are to be a witness to non-believers then to put it simply, our behavior matters. It's not a matter of being perfect, but we are called to live differently enough that people know we are (emphasis on "are") Christians.
 - b) To put it simply, if we we're on trial for being Christians, would there be enough evidence to convict us? With that thought in mind, these chapters are in effect a guide to how God wants us to live differently enough from nonbelievers and what we are to tolerate and are not to tolerate in our lives if we choose to live to make a difference for Jesus.
 - c) Therefore, as we read how the Israelites were to destroy the temples dedicated to deities and not use them to worship God, and as we read about dealing with those who want to lead believers away from God, the issue isn't "them", but us. To steal a line from a famous old carton, "I've seen the enemy and it is us". The key to studying these two chapters is to see them as how God wants to separate us practically, from nonbelievers. That word, by the way is my lesson title: Separation. It's about how we as Christians are to be a separate people so we can serve God as He desires.
2. With that speech out of my system, let me talk about the two chapters themselves. The first key thing God commands is for the Israelites to destroy anything in the land of Israel that was used to worship other gods. In ancient cultures, the conquerors would reuse old temples to worship the gods they worshipped. God's saying effectively don't do that. Destroy what's dedicated to other gods and only worship Me where and how I desire you to do so. In "Christian speak" it means to stop living any sort of lifestyle that isn't pleasing to God. I'm all too painfully aware that our old habits are hard to break. Such issues always come back of whether or not we love God more than we love whatever sin issue we battle or do we trust Him with "that" area of our lives. My point is simply that as we read about the destruction of "old temples", think of those as areas of our lives where God wants us to turn over to Him so we can have a closer relationship with Him.
 - a) Next we get a few words about "where". The text does not specify a specific place where the tabernacle is to be located. The idea is to not worship God any old place we choose. It doesn't mean we have to belong to a specific denomination or a specific church. The point is to not be a solo act for God. He wants Christians to work and worship Him together to encourage each other and make a difference for Him. That's why this text is effectively saying don't worship God any place we feel like it but gather regularly with believers.
 - b) Then we get a reference to eating meat. In ancient cultures, any animal eaten was almost always first offered up to a local deity. I like to quote an old Jewish expression that says, "The greatest purpose an animal can serve is to be food for humans." A related point here is what's required for dedicated to God can't be eaten anywhere because we're hungry.

- c) Let me explain that better: The Israelites were required to give the first of what they earn to God. That includes offering the first offspring of their animals. It was a way of feeding the priests as they would get those offerings as payment for their services. It was also for people to spend time with God by those Israelites giving the first of what they earn to the priests. As I like to point out, Christians aren't required to tithe their income, but the New Testament does say we should give and give generously. If living the Christian lifestyle is all about Jesus, others, and finally ourselves, then it should be our nature to be givers as to make a difference in the lives of others, especially others who have dedicated their lives to go make a difference for God.
 - d) Chapter 12 ends with a final warning that even after God destroys those who lived in that land, the Israelites are not inquire how the local gods "worked". The text even mentions how people would offer their children to these gods. It's a little like studying a history of a local culture: We may study to learn what they did, but never to repeat it's bad habits. The reason the text is so explicit here is that the Israelites for many hundreds of years after this text did fall into the habit of doing what they did and that's why God punished them for this act. This is God "pounding the point home" of not falling back into our old habits once we've committed our lives to serving Him.
 - e) Chapter 13 then warns us about people who try to lead us away from God. The text even says such people will have special powers in order to entice us to turn from God. This is the reminder that sin is tempting, because it is. If it weren't tempting we wouldn't desire it in the first place. God's telling us just because sin is tempting does not mean we have to be given over to it. The power He gives us to overcome a sinful temptation is greater than the power sin has to tempt us. It's not just a matter of us saying no, but literally to go run away from temptation. God promises us a way to escape our temptations if we're willing to look and pray for that we to escape. (See 1st Corinthians 10:13 on that topic.)
 - f) Next the text says whoever is tempted to turn from God is to personally kill the one who tempted them in the first place. The text implies there's to be a formal trial of those trying to turn others away from God, but the one being tempted is to "throw the first stone". The text even mentions that if the culprit is from our own family, we're not to have mercy on them. The issue is not about not caring for one's family, it's about putting our relationship with God as a priority over our own family. I'm not saying that if our sibling sins, we are to put them to death. I am saying, sin is to be avoided at all costs, even if it means turning from a relationship with those we love. Also, what may be a temptation for us may not be for another. The point here is simply the idea of having joy in our lives is about God first, then others and then ourselves. It's about God being first in our lives in all things.
 - g) All things considered, these are two tough chapters. They're mostly warnings about what to avoid in life so we can make a difference for God. Remember that my lesson title is the word "separation". That just means God wants believers to separate ourselves from non-believers in the sense we're to live differently. That doesn't mean we don't have contact say, with non-believing relatives or co-workers. It just means we do live in a way so that people realize we're using our lives to make a difference for God based on how we live.
 - h) With that tough warning to all of us, myself included given, time to start the lesson itself.
3. Chapter 12, Verse 1: These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess--as long as you live in the land.
- a) For the next 15 Chapters, (if I counted right), Moses is going to state to the Israelites some specific things they are to do as believers in God. Many consider all of these laws coming up as a "commentary" on the 10 Commandments. That's because a lot of the rules given here expand upon those commandments. For example, if the first commandment is for us to love God alone, it makes sense that these two chapters focus upon killing any influence in our lives that draws us away from worshipping God. If God calls upon us to separate our lives for Him, then these two chapters teach us how we are to do that.

- b) Speaking of "how", notice this verse talks about how long the Israelites are to keep these commandments: As long as they live in the Promised Land. As I love to state, the idea of the Promised Land is about trusting God with every aspect of our lives. Therefore, think of how long God wants us to separate ourselves from nonbelievers: As long as we live to make a difference for God, which hopefully is our whole lives. Remember the issue isn't salvation, it's about living as Christians to make a difference for Him. That's the purpose of these two chapters in a nutshell.
- 4. Verse 2: Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. ³ Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places.
 - a) As I said in the introduction, what was customary in that time, was when one group went to conquer another group and they were successful, instead of destroying buildings used to serve former gods, the conquering group would just take over those buildings and use them to serve the new gods. God doesn't want that. He wants us to destroy anything that is associated with the "old way". Think of this as destroying anything and everything that can turn us from worshipping God. To use another of my favorite cliché's, God wants to be "#1 on a list of 1". That means God wants to be involved in every aspect of our lives. If we do something that we realize would be embarrassing if we picture God watching us do it, that's a pretty good example of things to get rid of.
 - b) Need a more practical example? In Verse 3 the text says to burn their "Asherah poles". If you don't know, those were wooden statues cut into pornographic images. Notice Moses and the Israelites knew what it was before they entered the Promised Land. That's why he could say to cut them down without explaining what they are. Battling pornography isn't anything new, as it's been around even since those days. The reason God wanted that to be destroyed is so it won't be a temptation for their or our future.
 - i) So how do we do that practically? Remember the issue isn't the "world", but just in our lives. It means to remove anything from our homes or our churches that is causing us to turn from God to desire something else. The way to avoid sin is to remove it as much as possible from our lives so the temptation won't be around.
 - ii) Let me try this another way: Suppose we have a weakness for drinking. Then you need to avoid situations where the temptation is strong. The issue isn't what we're allowed to do or not allowed to do, the issue is are we using our lives to be a living witness for God or not? Christians can have hobbies and interests, the question is are we using our lives for God's glory. We're not "more saved" by living this way. The issue is whether or not we're living for God based on our lifestyle choices.
 - iii) Bottom line is just as God wanted the Israelites to clean the land of anything that can cause them to turn from God, so God calls on us Christians to clean "our land" of anything and everything that can cause us to turn from Him in our lives.
- 5. Verse 4: You must not worship the LORD your God in their way. ⁵ But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; ⁶ there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. ⁷ There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.
 - a) Notice the text does not say, "You shall go conquer a specific city named Jerusalem and there shall be where the tabernacle is located". If you study the history of Israel from the time they first entered the land until the time of King David many hundreds of years later there were actually several places where the original tabernacle (a portable temple) would be located before the first permanent one was built by David's son, King Solomon.

- b) The main point of these verses is that the Israelites were not to go worship God any place that they felt like it, but only the designated place that God wanted them to worship Him. That doesn't mean all Christians have to go to the same church or belong to say, the same denomination. The issue is still separating ourselves for God. The idea is not for us to go be one billion solo acts for God. It's about working together to make a difference for Him.
 - i) Let me explain this by giving the details for the Israelites back then. God wanted one of the tribes of Israel to be the priests. Those priests didn't get to own sections of Israel like the other tribes did, but they were to be scattered in that land to help the other Israelites worship God as He desires them to worship Him. That means for the priests to live, the other Israelites had to bring them the first of whatever it was they produced. That dedicated livestock and food was the income for those priests. If the Israelites worshipped God anyplace they felt like it and ignored the central system of worship, the priests would be out of job, let alone out of income.
 - ii) The point for you and me is that God calls some people into the professional full time ministry so they can make a difference in our lives. God wants us to support them as they support us in our spiritual needs. What if we say, I don't need them? What if we think we can worship God any old way we want to, where we want to and how we want to? That's what this text is warning us against. The reason God wants us to live "His way" is so that people know we are Christians by the way we live and the way we separate our lives for Him. The reason God gives us all these rules to follow is that God wants us to be a witness to the world for Him and the way people know we belong to Him is if we follow "these rules".
 - iii) Does that mean we Christians have to bring burnt offerings and tithes to church? The short answer is no. Without giving a major speech on what these things are, let's just say for these Israelites to show their commitment to God, first they would offer a burnt sacrifice to show they're full commitment to God. After that, they're to give a portion of what they earn to show that they trust God to provide for their future. Think of this as a bartering system to support the priests. The point for us as Christians is that God wants us to work as a team to support those who are on the front lines making a difference for Him. There's an old expression used in the ministry that "we're either to be on the front line firing the bullets for God or in the back line providing the ammunition."
 - c) Bottom line is that God desires we Christians work together in order to make a difference for Him in the world around us. If you get that, you get the point of these verses.
 - i) With that said, notice Verse 7 says God will bless us if we choose to live this way. That's here to remind us that not only is it God's desire we work together, but also that He'll bless our lives if we choose to live that way. What one learns is when we choose to use our lives to make a difference for Him, it becomes addicting in a way where one gets more joy from helping others than anything and everything we can do to just help ourselves. That's how we get blessed by living this way.
6. Verse 8: You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit, ⁹ since you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁰ But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety.
- a) Moses is continuing the lecture of "don't go do whatever you feel like doing, but work as a team in order to make difference for God and for each other. He's saying if we're willing to make a difference for each other, God promises to give us rest from our enemies so we can live in safety. Trusting in God is a promise of internal peace no matter what's going on in the world around us. Yes, I can give us a lecture on the history of the Israelites as to when they had peace and war in their land, but let's just say when they were collectively turning to God, foreign enemies were not an issue and vice versa.

- b) More importantly let me talk about how this affects us: Are you saying if we worship God we'll never as a country be attacked? Of course not. One of the greatest promises given to Christians is that Jesus said He came to bring us peace. See John 14:27 as an example. The point is if we're trusting in Him for the payment of all our sins, we never have to worry whether or not we're living a good enough life to be pleasing to God. The issue isn't if we are saved or not, but if we're using our time to make a difference for Jesus and relying on His power in order to do so. The peace and safety is knowing we can't disappoint God by not being "good enough" for Him. None of us are. What God says to us is since we know we can never be good enough for Him, have the peace of knowing He loves us just as we are, but still wants us to use our lives to make a difference for Him. God still wants us to go make an effort for Him, doing what we can and trusting that God will guide us as to do what is His will for our lives.
 - c) What does all of that have to do with these verses? The answer is God's protection. God promises to protect us as long as He desires we live to make a difference for Him. So who are the enemies we face? Those human and spiritual forces that try to prevent us as to go make a difference for Him. In other words, the power God gives us to make a difference for Him is greater than whatever forces exist to prevent us from doing His will.
 - i) That's why the text is saying once they (and us) live in the Promised Land, which again is about living as God desires, He protects us from the enemies, which are all forces that can prevent us from doing His will in the first place.
7. Verse 11: Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name--there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD. ¹² And there rejoice before the LORD your God, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own. ¹³ Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. ¹⁴ Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you.
- a) This section finishes with a reminder to do what God has commanded them to do, which is to bring all of their sacrifices and offerings to wherever the tabernacle is to be located. In other words, this is more of don't just go worship God any old place we feel like it, but only worship God the way we're commanded to and where we're commanded to.
 - b) Again, the issue is separation. If we're to be separated for God, we can't just go do what it is we feel like doing. If we belong to God, the goal is always to do His will. Ok, since we are Christians and don't have to literally bring offerings and sacrifices to a central temple, what's the application to us? Again, the idea is to not just go "do our thing" as if no other Christian or person is important but us. The reason God emphasizes the fact as working as a team, is together as teams we can make a far greater difference for God than going at it by ourselves. This doesn't mean for example we can't start our own church. The idea of these verses teaches against avoiding other Christians in order to seek God.
 - c) John MacArthur gives a great example on this: He describes a woman named Sheila. She didn't believe she had to worship God as He desires, but she created her own religion that he called "Sheilaism". She went to pray to God by herself and won't acknowledge Jesus as payment for her sins. She didn't think she needed to use her lives to make a difference in other's lives as she was getting her spiritual needs fulfilled by worshipping God "any old way she felt like it". Such a philosophy is all about her and nobody one else. If we choose to live that way, we're only living for ourselves and not making a difference in the world around us. Therefore, God wants us to work as groups to make a difference for Him.
 - d) The bottom line here is that God wants to use our lives to make a difference. That means we have to live God's way and not our own way. God's way is all about using our lives to make a difference in the world around us. I know I'm repeating myself, but I'm pounding the point home that to have joy in our lives requires living God's way and not our way.

- e) In fact, as we read these verses, notice the emphasis on community. The text talks about rejoicing with our sons and daughters and our servants. God wants us to have a life full of joy. We can't do that by doing our own thing, but only by working together in order to make a difference for the lives of others we collectively can experience far more joy than whatever we choose to do just for ourselves.
8. Verse 15: Nevertheless, you may slaughter your animals in any of your towns and eat as much of the meat as you want, as if it were gazelle or deer, according to the blessing the LORD your God gives you. Both the ceremonially unclean and the clean may eat it.
- a) In that ancient world, many believed that to eat any animal was to be god-oriented. This is not about giving thanks for a meal, but about having to dedicate all meat to their gods. What God is teaching here is simply that once those Israelites have given to God what is required of them, they're free to eat specific animals when they want to. It's like saying, if we're willing to dedicate our lives to God and make a difference for Him, we're also free to eat what we want when we want. Again this isn't about being thankful for God, it's to say, we don't have to give up meat in order to serve God.
 - b) This verse is also saying that eating meat is acceptable. The verses are singling out deer as an example, not as a "deer only" diet. It's acceptable for the Israelites to hunt if it's for the purpose of eating as well as eating of their own flock. As I said in the introduction, I hold the view that the greatest purpose animals can serve is as food for humans. I never had a problem with eating meat and neither does God. If one chooses to be a vegetarian, there's nothing wrong with it. I'm just pointing out that eating meat is biblically allowed.
 - c) As to the ceremonially clean and unclean, this was a big topic in the book of Leviticus. In that book there were many violations of God's laws and other circumstances that would cause one to be unclean for a specified time period. It usually meant to be isolation from society for a time period. The point here is simply that if one is unclean for the moment, that person didn't have to starve, but were still free to eat meat despite that condition. As to what it takes to be unclean, one can read of lots of examples in Leviticus, which I won't get into here.
9. Verse 16: But you must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water. ¹⁷ You must not eat in your own towns the tithe of your grain and new wine and oil, or the firstborn of your herds and flocks, or whatever you have vowed to give, or your freewill offerings or special gifts. ¹⁸ Instead, you are to eat them in the presence of the LORD your God at the place the LORD your God will choose--you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns--and you are to rejoice before the LORD your God in everything you put your hand to. ¹⁹ Be careful not to neglect the Levites as long as you live in your land.
- a) There is an old expression in advertising that the "Big print gives and the small print takes away". That just means the details of a good deal is the conditions. In Verse 15, the good news is the Israelites can eat meat whenever and wherever they wanted. In Verses 16 to 19, we get the exceptions. The basic idea is that since we have to eat to survive, keep God in mind when we take the time to eat. Here are the details:
 - i) The first rule is that when an animal is killed to eat, first the blood must be drained out as much as possible. That's a big aspect of a kosher (Jewish) diet even to this day. Does that mean Christians have to eat kosher food? No, but in the same way we honor God at meals, we realize the life of an animal or a human is in the blood. To spill out that blood was a way of remembering that God is in charge of all life. That's a reason why we show our gratitude to God for giving us those animals as food to eat. It's like the New Testament command that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22). The removal of the blood is a reminder to the Israelites that God's in charge of all life, period.
 - ii) The second key rule is that we can't eat what's to be given to God in the first place. The idea is God doesn't want our leftovers, but the first of what we earn in life.

- iii) Let me explain that a little better. From Exodus to Numbers, the text spends a lot of time talking about giving God the first of what we produce. Think of it as a tax on our increases. If we're self-employed, it's the net profit. If we get a paycheck it would be a part of that paycheck. It's like thinking, "I'm trusting God to provide for my future, so to put my money where my mouth is, I'm first going to separate part of my income to make a difference for God and the rest is what I live on."
 - iv) As I've stated many times, I don't believe the New Testament calls on Christians to tithe their income, but it definitely calls on us to be generous in our giving. Again it comes down to being a good witness for God and separating ourselves for Him.
 - b) From there, the text makes a big deal about what we do give to God, we give in a way that celebrates. In other words to give to God shouldn't be a miserable experience. We don't give thinking, "I have to give some of my income to God, here goes nothing." If that's the way we're thinking, literally keep the income. Notice the word "rejoice" in Verse 18. The point is when we give what God wants us to give, it should bring joy to our hearts as we use part of our income to make a difference for Him. That's why the text is emphasizing the idea that when those Israelites gave the first of their earnings, they took their families and their servants with them and also helped the local priests (Levities). The emphasis is also on the fact that the priests cannot live unless everyone else supports them through a system of giving. The idea of including one's family and servants is not to brag over how much we give, but for all to realize that we "put our money where our mouth is" to give.
 - i) Jesus made a big deal about not giving in order to show off. The Pharisee's at the time of Jesus "showed off" what they gave. I hold the view the amount we give is between God and ourselves. So how do we balance giving quietly with the idea of the text here that says we take our family with us? I think of it as privately writing the check so no one knows the amount. Then I think of it as inviting everyone to join me in coming to church as a way for all of us to have joy with God together. I never make a big deal of the actual giving of my income to God, but I do try to get others to come with me to worship God, that's the idea here.
 - ii) Meanwhile, back to eating food in the Promised Land.
10. Verse 20: When the LORD your God has enlarged your territory as he promised you, and you crave meat and say, "I would like some meat," then you may eat as much of it as you want. ²¹ If the place where the LORD your God chooses to put his Name is too far away from you, you may slaughter animals from the herds and flocks the LORD has given you, as I have commanded you, and in your own towns you may eat as much of them as you want. ²² Eat them as you would gazelle or deer. Both the ceremonially unclean and the clean may eat. ²³ But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat. ²⁴ You must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground like water. ²⁵ Do not eat it, so that it may go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is right in the eyes of the LORD.
- a) I tried to picture myself being among the multitudes of people who were listening to this speech. A few verses back Moses mentioned eating meat. I'm speculating, but I suspect at the mention of food, that got everyone's attention. I'm not saying Moses redirected his speech based on that thought. I'm saying since Moses brought up eating meat, and God knows the thought of something important to us "entices" us, the subject of eating meat is expanded in these next six verses.
 - b) All this means is simply if those Israelites get hungry, it's ok to eat meat when they want and where they want assuming what they eat isn't part of what's to be given to God. The text mentions eating from one's own flock as well as hunting animals. Then the text says that the blood must be drained out of whatever is killed to remind us blood represents the life of an animal as well as a human. The point for you and me is that God allows us to go eat meat, but let that meat be a reminder of what Jesus did for us by shedding His blood.

11. Verse 26: But take your consecrated things and whatever you have vowed to give, and go to the place the LORD will choose.²⁷ Present your burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD your God, both the meat and the blood. The blood of your sacrifices must be poured beside the altar of the LORD your God, but you may eat the meat.²⁸ Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the LORD your God.
- a) Remember the big picture here. The Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land. The local culture within that land dedicated all their killed animals to their gods. What Moses is saying is that God allows them to eat what they want when they want it, assuming they follow the simple rules of draining the blood first, and not eating what is to be dedicated to God by giving it to the priests for them to have as payment for their service. Again we are back to the idea of developing joy in our lives by sharing meals with those around us. In the case of these Israelites, it meant giving the first of what they had to God and then they can enjoy eating meat as part of any meal.
 - b) For us Christians it means to be willing to share in what we have with others. Yes it refers to giving to those who are of service to others and us. The idea is about our willingness to give to others as a witness for Jesus. Food is an example of that form of giving. It doesn't mean that every meal we eat has to be eaten with strangers. It does mean we care about others and are willing to give to others, especially those who are using their lives to help others grow in their faith in Jesus. These Israelites were required to give the first of what they had to the priests so they could do God's work. We should give of what we earn to others and to our "priests" so they can make a difference. As I said earlier, a Christians is to either be on the front line firing the bullets or be in the back providing the ammunition. Think of this text about giving as an example of "back line work".
12. Verse 29: The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land,³⁰ and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same."³¹ You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.
- a) Now that we've gotten "eating" out of the way, and how we make a difference for God by the way we think of food, the next issue is not to be ensnared by our curiosity of how the other gods are to be worshipped. The connection is the first of the 10 Commandments to love God and love God only. One way we do that is to dedicate the first of what we earn to Him. That's why there was such a big emphasis on food and animals as bartering with animals was a major part of that economy. Another way we obey the first commandment is not to focus on how others worship their gods.
 - b) Let me explain this better. One temptation for those Israelites would be, "Hey, we're here in the land of Israel and here is how the local people worshipped the gods of this land. As we're now here, shouldn't we do likewise to appease these gods?" One has to remember that in that culture, they associated gods with territories. It's like the old expression "Hey when in Rome, act like a Roman"! God is saying through Moses, yes you're in "Rome" but you Israelites are still to worship Me, and My way and not act like that local culture.
 - i) Remember the reason God is ordering the Israelites to wipe out the locals is due to their sins as they sacrificed their children to their gods as mentioned in Verse 31.
 - c) The principal for us is not to do what is "detestable" to God. A great reason to serve God is that He is a respecter of human life. That's why the draining of the blood of animals is required as a way of remembering that blood is a symbol of life itself. The locals living in Israel didn't have that respect as they put their gods as a greater importance than the lives of their children and offered them to their deities.

- d) OK, as far as I can tell, none of the modern religions require the sacrificing of children to their gods. So how does this verse apply to us? Does it mean for example, we Christians can't learn about Hinduism or Islam in order to study it? One thing I have learned is that most devout people of one religion are experts on all the weaknesses and faults of other religions. For example, many devout Christians can lecture you that Mormons must do "this or that" negative thing or Muslims do that bad thing. Living in our wonderful world of the internet, we can pretty quickly study the basics of another religion and learn both the good and bad of that religion. The issue isn't comparative learning. Many Christian apologists (the science of defending one's religion) have learned lots about other religions in order to make a better defense of Christianity. Lots of good video's available to watch on the internet if one is interested in the topic of Christian apologetics.
- e) With that said, I don't think the issue is learning the good and bad of other religions. The issue is to avoid changing our lifestyle from what God wants of us. Think of it this way: If we're chosen by God to be one of His, do you think He can un-choose us? Why do you think it's called being "born again"? How does something get "unborn" once it's born?
 - i) My point is if we're one of God's, He cares for us and wants us to stay and grow in a relationship with Him. That's what He desires of us. When we turn from Him to go after other "deities" is to reject what He desires of our lives, which is a close personal relationship with Him. What this text is warning against is the danger of rejecting the God who created us in the first place and wants us to grow closer to Him throughout our lives. That's the danger being presented in this verse.
- f) So does this mean I can study other religions or not? Yes you can if you want to learn if Christianity is true or not. However, one will find that God does what He can to keep us close to Him and draw us back to Him as He can't un-love what He loves. The warning in these verses is about the danger of turning from God and how it will hurt us (not Him) by not doing what God desires we do, which is to live to make a difference for Him.
- 13. Verse 32: See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.
 - a) The final verse of this chapter is essentially not to add or subtract from what God requires us to do. The point is to realize God knows what's best for our lives. To live as He desires we live is the best way to live. Some of His laws are obvious like to not steal or murder. Others require a little bit of thought like the importance of respecting life by sharing part of what we earn with those dedicated to the "full time" professional ministry. All of this is God saying to us He knows what's best, so study His word and trust that He knows best.
- 14. Chapter 13, Verse 1: If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, ² and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," ³ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul.⁴ It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.
 - a) An important principal to remember is that God loves to test us. It's not for His sake, but for our own sake. It's not like God's thinking, "I wonder if they'll pass this test". The idea is for us to grow in our own faith by allowing us to go through tests. I'm a big believer in that God allows Christians to go through tough times in order to draw and keep us close to Him by those situations. Let's be honest, we're much more likely to pray when our life is full of troubles then when things are going well. God's well aware of that, so He allows tests in our lives to see how we react to those tests and to draw us closer to Him.
 - b) So what does all of that have to do with these verses? Everything. The point here is God allows some power to "dark forces" in order to see whether or not we'll be drawn away by what those non-God fearing people say after performing those signs. The related point is the evidence for our faith should never be by miraculous looking signs can be deceiving.

- c) Some examples would be helpful here. I've never trusted the "signs and wonders" crowd. For example, there are shows put on by people who put their hands on people and then they claim they're instantly healed of all their ills because they believe. I suspect there is some legitimate healing in order for their appeal to be well, appealing. God does not give anyone the power to heal everyone and anyone at their fingertips. If He did give that gift, why aren't they out emptying hospitals? In my lifetime I have on rare occasions seen God work amazing miracles (technically I read about them or heard others give testimonies to the truth of those miracles.) However, for every one of those stories, there are multitudes of devout Christians who've had to suffer through horrible things even until their death.
 - i) My point is God works as God works. I can't explain why one gets a miracle and others do not. I know there is no magic formula to heal people of their diseases. I do know God's capable of such miracles so I do pray for such. However, I never live expecting God to work that way, and that's the point of these verses.
 - ii) In summary, God will work how God will work. Somebody performing special miracles are not always an indication of God's power. God tests us to see if we'll still follow Him despite "signs" that can turn us away from Him. The evidence of His existence is the world around us as well as all the accurate predictions made in the bible. Therefore special miracles do occur, but we shouldn't trust them as any sort of evidence that whoever did that miracle is "God ordained."
15. Verse 5: That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you.
- a) At this point we get a lecture on what to do with those who discourage us from following God. Bottom line is God pronounces a death sentence on those who want to turn us from following Him. So does this mean God wants us to kill nonbelievers? That's not it. What the issue is, is life among believers. It's about separating from our churches anyone that desires to turn us away from God. If you think about it, the New Testament spends a lot of space focusing on the danger of false teachers. One of the great faults of Christianity is we don't excommunicate from our churches those who turn us away from seeking God in the first place.
 - b) Let me explain this from the view of these Israelites first. They're to completely destroy whatever is associated with false gods so as not to be tempted by wanting to know more about those gods. (The Israelites suffered unnecessarily for centuries as they failed to do this.) Therefore, God, trying to protect those He loves, is telling these Israelites that if any person tries to draw you away from serving Me, those Israelites are to kill such a person even if they perform "miracles" in order to lead others away.
 - c) Does that mean Israelites are supposed to kill Christians in their midst? Of course not. I spent a lot of time in the last few lessons explaining how when God says "He is one", that "one" is a plural compound like "two or more things, become one when joined". To put it another way, there is a time for debate and a time to just worship God. When we come together to worship God, it's not time to debate, but to separate those who don't wish to worship God with us, the way God wants to be worshipped. The reason God's so tough on non-believers here as He wants us to collectively seek Him and not allow nonbelievers to be a part of that group worshipping Him.
 - d) For the rest of the chapter, we're going to get into specifics about how people who do turn us from God are to be tried. The point is we can't just say, "That person cursed God so we have to put them to death here and now." God is ordaining a formal way of applying the charges in such a crime and how it's to be handled. The related issue is that God is to be before any other relationship. That means even if one we love commits such a serious crime, we're to put our love for God as a priority over that relationship.

16. Verse 6: If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known,⁷ gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other),⁸ do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him.⁹ You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people.¹⁰ Stone him to death, because he tried to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.¹¹ Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and no one among you will do such an evil thing again.
- a) The first thing that popped in my head as I read these verses is Jesus' comment that unless we love Him more than our own family, (See Matthew 10:37) we can't be His disciples.
 - i) That does not mean we are to hate our own family. It means essentially the same thing as these verses, the idea that God comes first and our family is second. If a family member tells us to ignore God to go worship something else, what should be our response to that? Do we literally put them to death? Of course not. What is the issue is whether or not we make God a priority over our own families.
 - b) Most of us are aware that in some Muslim cultures, to turn away from Islam is a death sentence on one's life. In some Orthodox Jewish cultures, if a family member becomes a Christian they hold a funeral for them and treat them as if they no longer exist. I'm also aware that among Jehovah Witnesses, when one quits, they also treat them as dead. I'm not saying we have to be act like people of other religions. The issue is whether or not we are putting our relationship with God ahead of our relationship with family members. If a family member wants to turn away from Jesus, are we still going to be loyal to the God who created us in the first place, or do what our family member wants us to do?
 - c) In effect God's saying to us, do you trust Me as much as people of false religions trust in their beliefs? That's what God is asking us here. For these Israelites God's doing what has to be done in order to establish trust in Him as the primary issue. God's not asking us to go kill family members who turn from Him as He did back then. On the other hand, He's asking us, do we trust Him more than anyone around us if they are trying to lead us away from following the God who's giving us far more peace than we can ever have by trusting in one of these false religions.
 - d) Remember the key difference between Christianity and these other religions. They all say one has to work hard in order to prove our worth to God and earn our salvation. Most of us know that's not necessary as Christians as we can't prove our worth to God. He wants us to separate ourselves from nonbelievers not to earn salvation, but to be His witnesses in a world full of nonbelievers. If we are separated as believers to make a difference for Him, then we can't let anybody turn us from that truth that Jesus paid the complete price for our sins. Therefore, we reject any thought of turning from God. Again, that's what Jesus meant in Matthew 10:37 when He said we can't be His disciples unless we love Him more than our own family. That verse is essentially the same principal as this paragraph here in Deuteronomy.
17. Verse 12: If you hear it said about one of the towns the LORD your God is giving you to live in¹³ that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods you have not known),¹⁴ then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you,¹⁵ you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock.
- a) In the previous set of verses, the issue was whether or not a family member tried to get us to turn from God. The key point was we are to reject that thought even if it came from a person we loved. In these verses, we have the same principal, with the focus on strangers teaching us to follow other gods. In summary, whether we are tempted to turn from God based on what from a loved one says or what a stranger says, we're to reject that message.

- b) Remember that this chapter started by discussing miraculous signs done by people who want to turn us from God. Then we had a discussion about rejecting false teachers if they happen to be family members or people we care about. Finally, we get the same teaching on rejecting false teachers if such people are strangers to us. To state the obvious, we are not called to kill such people, but kill the thought of accepting false teaching.
 - c) So how do we know a true teacher from a false teacher? Remember that Jesus said we'll recognize them "by their fruit". That just means we'll know if someone is a true teacher of the bible versus a false teacher by what they say. The true teaching is believing Jesus is God, He did come into the world He created as human, He did die for our sins, He was raised from the dead and is God as He judges nonbelievers based on what knowledge is available to us about His existence. He judges believers not for salvation, but for rewards in heaven based on what we've done with the knowledge of His existence. If we believe the bible is the word of God and take it seriously, that's the key to being a true believer. A false teacher trusts in visions and signs more than God's word and that's how we can tell whether or not one is a true or false teacher.
 - d) That leads me back to "examining fruit". This paragraph here in Deuteronomy tells us to go examine what these false teachers say by examining their fruit. That doesn't mean we have to go listen to all false teachers. It just means if one is in our midst, we'll know if one is a true or false teacher based on what they say. Those Israelites were required to put a false teacher to death as to not pollute the Promised Land of false teachers. Since for us Christians the Promised Land is about trusting Jesus for every aspect of our lives, we have to kill the teachings of false teachers to live as God desires we live so we can live the way He wants us to live by doing what God wants us to do.
18. Verse 16: Gather all the plunder of the town into the middle of the public square and completely burn the town and all its plunder as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It is to remain a ruin forever, never to be rebuilt. ¹⁷ None of those condemned things shall be found in your hands, so that the LORD will turn from his fierce anger; he will show you mercy, have compassion on you, and increase your numbers, as he promised on oath to your forefathers, ¹⁸because you obey the LORD your God, keeping all his commands that I am giving you today and doing what is right in his eyes.
- a) The key point here is once we determine a false teaching, we are to eliminate not only the person from our thoughts of turning from God, but also their material. In Acts 19:19, is the story of false teachers with books teaching magic spells. The believers burned those books to show their loyalty to God. So does that mean for example, we go loot a Mormon temple and burn their books? Of course not. The issue isn't what the "world does". It is about what we allow and don't allow in our Christian fellowships. The same way we're to have a 0% tolerance of false teachers, so we're to have a 0% tolerance of materials that are associated with those false teachers in our Christian fellowships. Again, how do we know the false from the true teaching? By "examining the fruits", that is by comparing it to God's word to see if it is a true or false teaching.
19. The bottom line of the whole lesson is about making a serious effort to separate ourselves from nonbelievers not in terms of where we live, but in terms of how we live. If we're called to be His witnesses to the world, we have to be that witness and live in a way so people will know we are believers. It doesn't mean we act superior to others, but we are to show love to one another so people will know we are Christians. That's what Jesus taught and that's what Moses is teaching the Israelites here, to separate themselves to be witness for God and have no tolerance for anyone or anything that would turn us away from worshipping God.
20. Let me summarize this in my closing prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You that You've called us to live separately for You. That doesn't mean we're to harm nonbelievers, but only to live in a way where people know we are living witnesses for You. Help us to separate true teaching from false teaching as we use our lives to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.