

1. In the last lesson, I discussed practical ways we can keep our focus upon God as part of our daily lives. This lesson's a "Part 2" to the idea of keeping our focus upon God. Part 1 was how we keep our focus on God in our daily life. Part 2 is about how to keep one's focus on God when we get together in public settings. It's more than going to church or religious holidays although that's a big part of this lesson. It's also about how we deal with other people and be a witness for God. Let me quickly explain what's happening in these chapters and that'll explain why they're here:
 - a) The first part is a brief summary of the three times per year Jewish people are to gather as a people to honor God. It's more than just getting together because we have to. It's about expressing joy in our relationship with God and our relationship with other people. What is underlying the brief account of these holidays isn't "do this or that to avoid being struck dead". It's about having joy as we gather together as a group of believers. I'm convinced the greatest attraction that Christianity offers is our sacrificial love for one another. That's the type of joy God wants us to have as we get together throughout the year with others who share our common faith in God.
 - b) Then of all things, the topic switches to appointing judges in towns. OK, why switch from holidays to judges? Because in both cases, the issue is gathering together publicly. In the first case it's for holidays. In the second case it's for decisions to be made. Moses makes a few comments about appointing honest judges but again the underlying issue is about us being a good witness for God in public settings.
 - c) Then the topic switches to a few unacceptable issues when it comes to worshipping God. They have to do with worshipping false gods and making "leftover" sacrifices to the true God. The idea is if we get together publicly to worship God we do it "His way" and don't turn from Him to worship whatever and however we feel like it. The key phrase through this section of the text is to understand that God is to be worshipped as He desires we do so, and not "any old way we feel like it". I'll explain that more later in the lesson.
 - d) The final part of these two chapters deals with picking a king. These Israelites live under a king in Egypt (i.e., "Pharaoh") for 400 years. The other nations around Israel also have kings. It would be natural for the Israelites soon or later to want a king. Some "scholars" late-date when this book claiming it reads exactly like the mistakes King Solomon made, so it must have been written around Solomon's time. I hold the view as most conservative scholars do, that Moses understood that other kings are all around them and it would be a natural thing to want a king. Solomon simply failed to do what Moses instructed him to do as thus the mistakes. Jesus Himself quotes from Deuteronomy and claimed Moses was the author. So if you "late date" this book, you can take it up with Jesus.
 - i) So what does picking a good king have to do with getting together publicly to be a good witness for God? The issue is public gatherings. Choosing a new king or the ordination ceremony is a public event. Yes there is specific instructions in this text that explains how a king is to be God ordained and under Him, but the main point for the rest of us, the issue is being a good witness for God, even when we're in the presence of a king or any high official for that matter.
 - e) Want a short title for this lesson? How about "Public Witness" or being a good witness for Jesus when we gather in a public setting. That's what all the text in these two chapters has in common. While the topics jump from issue to issue, the common thread is about when we gather as a group (be it a Christian group) or a "public group" we always want to be a good witness for Jesus. These two chapters give great examples of how we are to do that as we study how the Israelites entering the Promised Land were to act as when they got together publicly. With that said, onto the text itself.

2. Chapter 16, Verse 1: Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover of the LORD your God, because in the month of Abib he brought you out of Egypt by night. ² Sacrifice as the Passover to the LORD your God an animal from your flock or herd at the place the LORD will choose as a dwelling for his Name. ³ Do not eat it with bread made with yeast, but for seven days eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste--so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt. ⁴ Let no yeast be found in your possession in all your land for seven days. Do not let any of the meat you sacrifice on the evening of the first day remain until morning.
- a) As I stated, these chapters open up with a quick summary of the holidays that all Jewish people are required to celebrate. There are a lot more details about these holidays in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. We get the "short version" here in Deuteronomy. Let me explain why these details are repeated. First, know that these four verses are focusing on the holiday of Passover. In order to explain Passover, first I need to talk a little about the Jewish calendar and then I can explain this holiday.
 - b) The Jewish calendar is a little confusing to understand as technically there are two times a year that are "New Year's". First, their calendar is a "lunar" calendar; meaning when there is a new month it's a new (no) moon. The half way cycle of the moon as visible in the sky is a full moon. The first new moon of the fall is the start of the year. However, they mark time beginning in the spring. To keep it simple, New Year's is celebrated in the fall, but in the spring is when they "mark" the calendar for the year. Remember there were no clocks in those days so watching the moon was the easiest way to keep track of time.
 - c) I gave this little lecture on time as Moses is starting by describing the first holiday on their "spring" calendar, which is Passover. Let me give the basics of what this holiday is for the sake of those not familiar with the story. When the Israelites were in Egypt, God said that the 10th plague would be the death of everyone's first-born son. That miracle is His way to prove to the Egyptians that God alone is God as there is no other explanation how just the first born of every family is killed. In order for the Israelites or any Egyptian family to avoid this disaster, each family is to put lamb's blood on their door and that way they'd be spared of that plague. God wanted the Israelites to always remember that event which is why the first holiday listed here is called "Passover" as death "past over" them.
 - d) By the way, the symbolism of what Jesus did on the cross ties heavily to Passover. Jesus was crucified on that date. He was like an innocent lamb killed so others could live just as lambs were killed by the Israelites so that death past over them. Passover ties to the idea of Jesus paying the death sentence for us so we don't have to.
 - e) To this day, most Jewish people still celebrate the holiday of Passover. While the majority of them don't think about the ties to Jesus, but only celebrate it to remind themselves that they were spared of that plague because of lamb's blood. As I love to tell other Christians, if you ever get a chance, visit the homes of your Jewish friends and celebrate Passover so you can see the historical ties to the holiday of what Christianity is all about. What's even better is if you can see how a Jewish-Christian "Fellowship" celebrates it. Christians aren't required to celebrate Passover as Jesus is our Passover lamb. At the same time if someone is both Jewish by birth and a professing Christian, I believe they should observe Passover not as a requirement for salvation, but to remember how God worked through that nation to bring them into that land and preserve them eternally as a nation.
 - f) Believe it or not, all of that background leads back to these verses. Here is this very large group of Israelites about to enter the Promised Land. We can assume they've celebrated that holiday in their tents the last forty years of being in the wilderness. Now they're told when they celebrate this holiday, they're to do it "collectively". That just means it's not a matter of staying home and cooking a lamb for dinner. They are to collectively organize to celebrate this holiday together. Remember that my lesson theme is about being a good witness for God "publicly". Therefore, we're describing this public holiday.

- g) At this point I need to discuss the concept of multiple holidays running together. It's kind of like the idea when we ask people today to come home for the "holidays"; we refer to the time of Christmas through New Year's. For religious Jewish people, these spring holidays are 3 holidays that run together. They are collectively known as the Passover holidays as they are in these verses, but technically they are three separate holidays that run together. The three spring holidays are explained in more detail in Exodus 12 and Numbers 9. The best way to explain it is simply that the Israelites were to collectively get together for over a week to celebrate this set of holidays. If you recall from the last lesson, I mentioned the Israelites actually tithed their income twice and one-third times per year. One of the three tithes was to pay the bills for these annual festivals.
- h) With that background given, let's focus on the specific points God makes about this feast as the Israelites are to gather together to celebrate them. First Moses gives the date. As I said, the date is the first full moon of spring in Israel, so that would be in March or April. If you don't know, that's how we calculate when Easter is celebrated: It's the first Sunday after the first full moon of the spring (in the Northern Hemisphere).
 - i) The second thing the text focuses on is what to eat and what not to eat. The short version is that all the Israelites are to gather and sacrifice an animal by eating it as they gather in groups. As I mentioned, while the Israelites wandered in the desert for the last 40 years, they ate this in their own tents if they celebrated this holiday. Now when they enter the land of Israel all men were required to travel to where the central place of worship was to collectively celebrate this holiday. Since there's no central temple in Israel today, they're back to celebrating it in their synagogues and homes in order to remember how God preserved them as a nation.
 - ii) The underlying point is that this was not meant to be a burden, but a time of joy, as they would gather together in large groups to remember how God spared them as He demonstrated His existence by killing the first born of every family in Egypt that didn't believe in His existence. The idea is to recall how we've been spared "permanent death" by God as we've been called to serve Him all through our life.
 - iii) The other item on the "eat/no eat" list was no bread with yeast. For those of us not familiar with how yeast works, a few words: Yeast is an ingredient added to bread to make it rise. By eating bread without yeast, it reminds all Israelites how their ancestors had to leave Egypt in a hurry. It's God's "word picture" of when we are called to serve God, we separate ourselves as quickly as possible from a word that doesn't care about serving Him.
 - iv) In fact, the Israelites were required to rid their houses of yeast for seven days. The Israelites made a game of this and hid some yeast in the house and asked children to find the missing yeast and get a prize for finding it. I suspect that the phrase of "Spring Cleaning" is based on the annual cleaning of one's house of yeast each year in preparation for this holiday. There may have been a practical reason to get rid of yeast as well. The way one made bread in those days was to take a piece of old bread and add it to the new batch so the yeast from the old batch would make the new one rise. By getting rid of old yeast once a year it may have health benefits to rid the house of something that gets moldy.
 - v) More importantly yeast is a symbol of sin. That's because sin, like yeast will rise if you leave it unchecked. Therefore, God uses yeast as a symbol for sin in the bible.
 - vi) Now that you know lots about yeast (also called leaven in many translations), we get one final point about eating for this holiday: Whatever animal is eaten as part of this holiday, the whole animal is to be consumed. That means one has to gather together publicly with enough people to consume a whole lamb or goat. Yes it is symbolic of accepting "all of Jesus" for the forgiveness of our sins, but the practical idea was about being a witness for God as we gather in public settings.

3. Verse 5: You must not sacrifice the Passover in any town the LORD your God gives you ⁶ except in the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name. There you must sacrifice the Passover in the evening, when the sun goes down, on the anniversary of your departure from Egypt. ⁷ Roast it and eat it at the place the LORD your God will choose. Then in the morning return to your tents. ⁸ For six days eat unleavened bread and on the seventh day hold an assembly to the LORD your God and do no work.
 - a) The short version here is we're not done describing the three spring holidays that together are called the Passover holidays. These verses focus on where and when. The "where" is essentially wherever the central tabernacle (later to be a more permanent temple) was to be located. The key point again is not to stay home and eat this fancy meal by themselves once per year, but for all the Israelites to gather together publicly in order to celebrate this annual remembering of what God did for their ancestors in Egypt. The essential idea is to force the Israelites to take time to gather together publicly with each other so together all of them can honor God as a nation.
 - b) So does this mean all Christians have to gather together once per year somewhere? There are too many of us to do that and it's not practical. As I once heard a long time ago, we as Christians don't have to gather all together to prove we're family, we just know it. Even with that said, God wants us to gather together on occasions with extended family or with our church groups in order to honor Him as God when we do gather together. Are there those people we're not crazy about? Yes, welcome to life. Part of having joy in life is for us to put the needs of others as priority over our own needs and yes that means letting a person we're not to crazy about having "their way" on such holidays assuming it doesn't violate one of the basic rules of how God desires to be worshipped as we get together. We show God's love to others sacrificially by putting other's needs as priority over our needs.
 - c) Coming back to these Israelites the key point of "when" is this eight day festival starts on the first full moon of springtime. The point is anyone could look up in the sky and know by the time of year, this holiday is coming, so they all traveled to where the tabernacle is located to celebrate this holiday together.
 - d) The text specifically mentions tents. Let me use the city of Jerusalem as an example as in most of their history as a nation, that's where they would gather. Let's suppose that the population of Jerusalem for non-holidays was say, 100,000. Now suppose that the entire population of Israel was 2 million. The point is people would have to pack their tents to go to Jerusalem for this holiday as that city doesn't have enough houses for everyone to dwell in that city for that holiday. Yes my numbers are way off, but you get the idea.
 - e) I've mentioned that the three holidays together last eight days. Besides the normal one day of the week of "no work" (i.e., a Sabbath or a Saturday today) God declared a special Sabbath to start and end this festival. The text says the seventh day was a Sabbath. I get eight days as the six plus one days starts the day after the Passover meal. Again we get a lot more details about this holiday in Exodus and Leviticus. The emphasis made here in the book of Deuteronomy is about how we should act when we gather as believers as we do seek God. OK, onto the next holiday at a different time of the year:
4. Verse 9: Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. ¹⁰Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you. ¹¹ And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name--you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you. ¹² Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and follow carefully these decrees.
 - a) The short version is there was another gathering of all Israelites 50 days (seven weeks as they started counting the day after the last holiday ended) and all Israelites as well as any person living with them were to gather to celebrate another holiday.

- b) The feast of weeks is what we Christians call Pentecost, which is a Greek word that means "50". The point of this holiday is that this is the time of the year when the barley crops are to be harvested. For anyone with a farming background, "harvesting" is a happy time as that's when everybody gets paid as the crops are sold in the market place. Speaking of the idea of "happy", notice the word "rejoice" in Verse 11. If everyone is in a good mood as it is payday, then we're to get together publicly to thank God for that harvest and have joy as we celebrate that harvest.
 - c) To state the obvious, we Christians don't celebrate "Pentecost" other than on occasions we may do something in church to honor that day. The idea is about being grateful for what good things we get in life that and joy should always be part of our worship life. Just as this holiday was designed to be a time of joy, so should our gathering with other believers also be a time of joy in our lives.
 - d) Coming back to the Israelites, the text specifies that "everyone" should come. The idea is that once the farmer's harvested the crops, all the people who worked together to harvest the crops should get together to celebrate this feast. It was also an opportunity for them to be a witness to God as they invited others to celebrate this holiday with them.
 - i) The final comment here about "Pentecost" is that the Israelites were to recall how they were slaves in Egypt. Why bring that up here? The literal idea was that God rescued them out of slavery so they could enjoy the harvest of their own land. For us Christians the idea is to remember how we were "slaves to sin" and as God has rescued us to serve Him, we can be grateful for the church growth as others have come into the "fold" of also being a part of His family forever.
 - e) As I stated, there were three times of the year for feasts. It's time for #3:
5. Verse 13: Celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. ¹⁴ Be joyful at your Feast--you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. ¹⁵ For seven days celebrate the Feast to the LORD your God at the place the LORD will choose. For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete.
- a) Personally, I always thought of the fall feasts as the most serious. That's because if you're familiar with the details of the fall feasts, it includes the "day of atonement" which is when the Israelites were to fast and confess their sins to God. I learned that the Jewish historian named Josephus (who lived shortly after Jesus was around) stated that the fall feasts were considered the happiest of the three times per year that the Israelites gathered together.
 - b) Remember that the purpose of describing these feasts here in Deuteronomy is not about understanding all the details of each of these feasts. That was already covered in Exodus and Leviticus. The emphasis here in Deuteronomy is about how we're to act as we gather together as a group of believers. That's why Verse 14 emphasizes joy as they got together to celebrate these holidays.
 - c) Time for a little background. Remember how I said there are technically two "new years" on the Jewish calendar? The actual new year is the first "no moon" of the fall. The first "no moon" of the spring was used to calculate the holidays while the New Year begins on the first "no moon" of the fall. Holiday #1 in the fall is New Year's Day. Holiday #2 in the fall group is the serious "day of atonement". Holiday #3 of the fall group is a seven day feast where all the Israelites are to live in tents (portable booths) to recall how God made their ancestors travel in the wilderness in tents for 40 years. You have to admit, all of this seems pretty serious and uncomfortable. Why is it a joyful time? It's collectively meant to remember how God had rescued them out of slavery as to be a good witness for Him.
 - d) Now back to harvesting crops. Barley is harvested around the time of the second festival. Wheat grain was harvested later in the year so this was another "pay day happy time" as they celebrated another year of God producing food for the year for them.

- e) If you haven't figured it out by now, an underlying point of this lesson is that God wants us to have joy as we gather together publicly to worship Him. I'm convinced a Christian requirement is to be joyful as we worship Him, no matter what's going on in our lives at the moment. Yes we can share with our loved one's what we're dealing with, but at the same time, I'm also convinced we have a duty as Christians to choose to be joyful when we gather publicly with other believers.
 - f) I heard a great example of this I want to share. Suppose you and your spouse are having a fight at the moment. All of sudden a guest shows up at the door, and you're instantly in a good mood to greet the guest. My point is emotions are a choice. We may go back to an argument after the guest leaves, but we choose our emotions at any given moment. What I'm getting at is despite how we feel at any given moment, we owe it to God to be a good witness for Him when we gather with other believers and have joy in our hearts. (I am grateful to the author Dennis Prager for this illustration.)
 - g) With that said, there are two more verses on "feasts" before we switch topics:
6. Verse 16: Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed:¹⁷ Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.
- a) This summary comment is essentially that all adult men were required to get together at these three occasions to worship God collectively. Yes women were welcome to come as well, but for men, it was a requirement. Why the men? It's a point how God's called men to be the leaders of the household and society. Of course exceptions exist, but as a general rule, God called men to lead, so we have this requirement.
 - b) Next the text mentions: bringing a gift. You may recall that one of the tithes that's required by all the Israelites was to pay for these three festivals. Even with that "tax" to pay, God still demands everyone to bring a gift in proportion to how God has blessed them. OK, why is that here? First, one should not see this is a tax or a burden, but as a way to make a difference in someone else's life. The requirement is to bring a gift based on how God's blessed them. If they've had a successful year financially, they're to bring a larger gift, if not, a smaller one. Believe it or not, this brings me back to the issue of joy. The true way to have joy in our lives is to be of service to others. Isn't it joyful when we receive a gift? Isn't it joyful to give a gift to someone that they know will enjoy your gift? No imagine if one gives a gift to God or the priests to bless their lives. It brings joy to the giver as well as to the "getter". The point is God wants us Christians to have joy in our lives. One way to have more joy is to make a difference when we gather together in groups. That's why God does not want us to come empty-handed.
 - c) As I've preached before, this is not a salvation requirement, but a way to have joy as we gather with other believers. For example, if you write a check to give money to church and absolutely hate the idea you have to do it, keep the money. If we have no joy in the giving, literally don't bother. Giving financially to a church is about wanting to bless the work of that church. It should be an occasion to show joy both as the giver and receiver. The reason Jesus calls on us to give "quietly" is that God's aware of the amount and He'll reward us for our giving. As for those in the church that receive it, let them be blessed their way and don't expect a "pat on the back" for one's gift. In other words let the joy be in the giving itself, not so we can be rewarded for that giving.
 - d) Before I leave the topic of the Jewish calendar and move on to "picking judges", I'd like to mention one more thing briefly about this section. As most of us know, the crucifixion of Jesus took place on Passover. In fact, all three "Spring" holidays are prophetic and tie to the events of that crucifixion and resurrection. The next holiday "Pentecost" was when the church was born (See Acts Chapter 2). Therefore, prophesy buffs suspect that the fall festivals someone tie to events of Jesus Second Coming. How? We'll have to wait to see.

7. Verse 18: Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly. ¹⁹ Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. ²⁰ Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.
- a) The text now moves from describing the holidays when all the Israelites get together to a concept about appointing judges in all the towns that the Israelites will live in after they have finishing conquering the Promised Land. Before I discuss the "how and why" of the judges, stop and consider what hasn't been mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy. How to win the war. There is no discussion of how to organize the army, how to attack, or any military comments for that matter. This book pretty much assumes that's a done deal.
 - i) The main focus of this book is on how to live in the Promised Land once all that's done. The idea is God will win the wars for them and this is how the Israelites are to attack given the fact that the victory is already won.
 - b) That positive thought leads me back to this text. The idea of the Promised Land for those of us who believe Jesus paid the full price for our sins is our "victory in Jesus" has already been won. Therefore, God's teaching us how He wants us to live in response to that fact. One way He wants us to live is to be joyful as we gather together as believers, which has been the text in this chapter up to Verse 18. The next issue we face beginning in this verse is what do we do with people who refuse to trust in God among believers? Part of getting together publicly is not just for "festivals" but also to make decisions on running local or national affairs. In other words, how does God want us to pick our local leaders? That is where these verses come into play, so let's get started.
 - c) The first thing to grasp is that the Israelites lived in "towns". Visualize a medieval town with walls around it. Farmland would be outside of the walls. My point is the town is a place where one could run to for safety. Those who decided who could enter or not enter that town were the city "judges". They would usually be located by the gates and decide who can and cannot enter that city. They also were in charge of deciding "court cases" if a law was broken. They'd be paid by those putting cases before them. I suspect there was also some sort of local taxes to pay their salaries. However that worked, the point here is God wanted honest people to be judges in each of the towns that the Israelites settled in. That's why we get these verses here to pick honest judges so God's laws will be upheld.
 - d) OK John, as you love to state the Promised Land for Christians is not a literal location, but a state of mind based trusting in Jesus for every aspect of our lives. How do these verses tie to that concept? Are you saying we shouldn't have police or a legal system and only have church people decide problems? Of course not. The bible ordains civil governments as well as church governments and we'll discuss both in this lesson. The point here is if one has a problem with say, someone else in our church, or if a Christian couple is having marriage issues, it's better to have the church handle it than "outsiders". If we're dealing with a moral issue, that's how the church staff is supposed to help us. I have a number of friends in the professional ministry. I'm continuously amazed of the stories they will tell of how God worked through some incredible difficult problems to handle.
 - e) My point is not that Christians in the professional ministry have to be perfect. In fact if we volunteer to be involved in church life in some sort of judging capacity, the key idea is about being honest in our judgments, trusting God to lead us to make decisions. It also implies that we as Christians must accept the decisions made in such cases. Paul spends a chapter in 1st Corinthians Chapter 6 dealing with the issue of "Christians judges". It's the same point essentially as what's taught here: The idea that the church should decide what is best for the church and we should not bring our disputes to the "world" to decide. I've always held the view that if we have a problem with another Christian, we bring it to the church to decide it, and not the public courts and live by that decision.

- f) What if our problem is with the church leaders? There are wonderful Christian judges for hire that are involved in dealing with such issues. In fact, Deuteronomy itself is going to deal with that issue coming up in the next chapter. Before we get there we have one verse left in this chapter:
8. Verse 21: Do not set up any wooden Asherah pole beside the altar you build to the LORD your God,²² and do not erect a sacred stone, for these the LORD your God hates.
- a) What's strange is the last set of verses in the previous chapter deal with judges. The next 13 verses in Chapter 17 also deal with judges. As most of us know, the original text does not have any chapter breaks. So why do we have this one verse here about Asherah poles (whatever that is) in the middle of this text about picking judges? Glad you asked. ☺
- i) Let's remember what Asherah poles are: They were pornographic images made from wood. They were associated with the worship of the false god Baal as these images were was designed to "turn him on". The sacred stone reference was also designed as part of that Baal religion. In context, the point here is that the function of these judges was to keep the Israelites collectively focused on God and practice any false religions.
- b) Notice that these false god idols were not to be built besides any altar that was erected to God Himself. The idea was not to mix any false teaching with what was supposed to be dedicated to God. The idea for us has nothing to do with us to destroy temples for other gods. This is about what we allow in our churches. This does not mean that for example, Christians are to go around being the church police. On the other hand, we do expect our church leaders to properly teach what's right as to avoid false doctrine. As you know by now, the main underlying issue of this whole section is about when we get together for the purpose of worshipping God. It would be logical that part of that focus would be to remove all things that keep our focus off of Him. That effectively is the key purpose of this verse. Therefore, even though there are no Asherah poles today, pornography is very much alive today and it's used as an example of not mixing our worship of God with any concept of doing things that would lead to a sinful lifestyle. Meanwhile, Chapter 17:
9. Chapter 17, Verse 1: Do not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep that has any defect or flaw in it, for that would be detestable to him.
- a) In effect, the chapter does not change topics. We're still on the issue of what God wants us and not wants us to do as we gather together publicly to seek Him. The last verse had the issue of not putting "idols" (i.e., worship of things other than God) with the worship of God Himself. Here we get the idea that when we gather to worship Him, we don't bring our leftovers to God.
- b) Think of this verse this way: If we had a really important guest coming to our homes, do we serve him or her leftovers, or make them a special meal? That should be our attitude when we gather together at church. The issue is about giving God the best (first) of what we have as opposed to "leftovers". In that ancient Israelite culture, to give God the best would be to sacrifice animals with no defects. In our culture, it would be giving God the first of what we earn as a sign we're trusting Him with our lives and we're "putting our money where our mouth is" when it comes to making a difference for Him.
10. Verse 2: If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the LORD gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God in violation of his covenant,³ and contrary to my command has worshiped other gods, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars of the sky,⁴ and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel,⁵ take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death.
- a) Again, the big picture here is about how we act when we gather together as believers in a public setting. The Promised Land is all about living the life where we're trusting God in every aspect of our lives. To worship any other God separates one from that concept.

- b) The text focuses on those who worship "other gods" or the sun or the moon or the stars. The idea is about those who care about this life and no other one. There are atheists who argue in effect, "Enjoy this life for all that you can, because when you're dead, that's it for our life". Yes historically there were people who considered the sun and the moon to be literal gods. The issue today is about those who only care about their own lives and not seeing the "big picture" of the God who created everything in the first place.
 - c) Again, one has to read this in context of both chapters. The focus here is on how we act as we gather together as a group of believers. If we are believers, then technically, all aspects of our lives should be dedicated to Him. I'm not saying people have to be perfect. I'm just saying that when we gather together as a group of believers in a public setting there is to be a "0% tolerance" of the worship of other gods.
 - d) Notice the penalty here for worshipping false gods was the death penalty. As those of us who trust in Jesus for the full payment of our sins realize, to turn one's back from Jesus for that complete payment is eternal separation from God, or simply: a death sentence. While you and I wouldn't kill someone for false worship in church, we would ask them to leave as to not be part of our group if for example, they were praying to Allah or practicing say Hinduism in a Christian church fellowship. The whole point here is to not mix what is displeasing to God (worship of false gods) in settings where we gather as Christians in order to worship Him in the first place.
 - e) Notice the text says one must "investigate it thoroughly". The Israelites were not to go kill someone on the spot if this type of action was occurring. It was to be investigated like if one was a policeman or a detective and then charges were to be brought against them.
 - f) Yes, if that person was guilty, they literally had to be killed. Let me put it this way: Does modern Israel allow people to practice other religions there? Yes, assuming they do it in a peaceful manner that isn't harming anyone else. Do they permit say the worship of Allah in a Jewish synagogue or vice versa? Of course not and neither should we. Ancient Israel was designed to be a place where one only worships God alone. Again, it's the idea of the Promised Land being a place where one fully trusts in God and Him alone. To allow any form of worship of any other God as part of that religion is mixing the worship of the true God with what is false. That's why we have to kill what is false in our worship setting.
11. Verse 6: On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.⁷ The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you.
- a) If one person accuses another of doing something wrong, and the accused denies it, then it's a case of "your word versus mine". That's why God set up a principal of two or three witnesses in agreement in order to be accused of a serious crime. That concept of more than one witness in agreement is a common theme found throughout the bible. When we read of the Jewish religious leaders in the Gospels accusing Jesus of false teaching, one of their arguments was Jesus needed to have "two more witnesses" to claim that He is who He claims to be. As an example in John 8:13-18, Jesus uses God the Father as His Second Witness that His claims are true. Without getting into a major discussion here about what is written in John 8, my point is Jesus understood and accepted the idea that more than a single witness is needed in order for a claim to be true.
 - b) Now notice the text says the one who makes the accusation must be the first to kill the one being accused of wrong doing. Think about that logically. That means if the one making the accusation of wrongdoing is wrong themselves then that accusing witness would be guilty of murder themselves if it was a false accusation. That's why in court even to this day, there has to be more than one person's word against the other in order for a person to be convicted of a crime, especially one of murder. Again, the big picture is how we act in a public setting. God's ordaining doing what's "fair" and in a provable manner.

- c) The focus is not just on punishing criminals and setting the innocent free. It's about how God wants believers to act when we get together. That's why these two chapters started a focus on getting together for holidays to worship God. Then these chapters focus on what to do with those who refuse to "do so". Yes the death penalty is a strong sentence for not believing in God. The way I view the world is that if God created it in the first place, then He gets to make the rules. One of His rules is in effect, "If you choose to ignore Me in this life, I'll give you what you want for all of eternity". Therefore, just as the Israelites were to have a 0% tolerance policy of sin when they gather to worship God, so we're to have a 0% tolerance policy of the worship of false gods as we gather together as Christians. The text in this section focuses on what to do practically when people who claim to be "one of us" do turn from God to worship other deities.
 - i) No we don't stone them to death today, but we do ask them to leave and if they refuse, then we have to take them away, as that is what the text is implying.
 - d) Meanwhile Moses is bringing up the issue of "tough cases". Let's suppose that a person is accused of the crime of worshipping a false God, and the local judges can't decide if that person is innocent or guilty. The solution is in the next set of verses:
12. Verse 8: If cases come before your courts that are too difficult for you to judge--whether bloodshed, lawsuits or assaults--take them to the place the LORD your God will choose. ⁹ Go to the priests, who are Levites, and to the judge who is in office at that time. Inquire of them and they will give you the verdict. ¹⁰ You must act according to the decisions they give you at the place the LORD will choose. Be careful to do everything they direct you to do.
- a) Short version: If a case is too hard to handle, bring it to the priests to judge. Think of it as the ancient version of appealing to the supreme court. While modern Israel has a system of court and appeals similar to the United States, a debate at this time is whether or not to bring back the "Sanhedrin" which is how the ancient Israelites would judge religious cases that were too difficult for the local judges to handle. My point is Israelites have always set up a system to deal with religious issues and how to appeal cases that were too hard to figure out if one was guilty back then.
 - b) As I stated earlier in this lesson, I have seen the churches I've been involved in work their way through some very difficult issues and disagreements. My point is when we pray for God's wisdom to deal with religious issues in our churches, having wise men and women in our churches who do trust in God is essential to working our way through tough issues that could potentially divide our churches. Just as the ancient Israelites had a version of a "court of appeal", so we as Christians should look to God and those who lead our church when it comes to issues that could potentially divide us.
 - c) Many of us who've "been around the block for awhile" have seen pastors fired and even seen churches split over issues that we may consider irrelevant now. This often comes down to everybody wanting to do things "their way". It often takes the wise council of those who've been involved in Christian debates for a long time to help in those situations that we'd consider too tough to handle. There are some church elders I've really admired over the years as God's given them the gift to make tough but necessary decisions. That in effect is what this text is saying. Moses is saying that God will ordain "priests" to help in the tough decisions. That was true back then and equally as true today.
 - d) So what do we do when we have a problem with a person in our church? We bring it to our leaders only if there are at least two witnesses to agree if a third person is a problem. Just as one witness is not enough to convict someone of a crime, so a pastor should not listen to a problem if it's one person's word against the other. If our pastor can't resolve such an issue, then we bring it to the elders of our church to resolve. Often, the case is a matter of people needing to be willing to give up their rights in order to get along with others. The intolerable issues is when we see a person or a group doing what God does not ordain us to do, which is to turn from Him in settings designed to seek Him.

13. Verse 11: Act according to the law they teach you and the decisions they give you. Do not turn aside from what they tell you, to the right or to the left. ¹² The man who shows contempt for the judge or for the priest who stands ministering there to the LORD your God must be put to death. You must purge the evil from Israel. ¹³ All the people will hear and be afraid, and will not be contemptuous again.
- a) John's rough translation: Let the bible be our guide as to what is right and wrong when it comes to how to worship God. If a person refuses to accept the decisions that our church makes, we are to have contempt for that person just as they had contempt for the decision made in that case. I recall many years ago, when I saw a church I belonged to, treating a wonderful bible teacher with contempt. I didn't leave that church over that issue, but I'm still convinced they were wrong in how they handled that decision. My point is we have to accept the decisions made by our "priests" even if we don't like their decisions. The one who I believed was treated badly, left that church and is now doing well at another one.
 - b) My point and the text's point is we have to accept the decisions that are made by "priests" (which refers to say, the elders of our church), and not have contempt for the process if we are on the losing side of a decision.
 - c) For what it's worth, "church politics" is not for everyone. I know a handful of people who quit a church because they couldn't stand the politics that come with every church. There are those who are called by God to make the tough decisions and I respect that they have been placed in those positions of leadership to make those decisions even if I disagree on the outcome of those decisions.
14. Verse 14: When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, "Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us," ¹⁵ be sure to appoint over you the king the LORD your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not a brother Israelite. ¹⁶ The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." ¹⁷ He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.
- a) The last seven verses of this chapter change topics again: In these two chapters we went from religious holidays to picking judges to make tough decision to the final topic here of picking a king to rule over us. As I've beaten over all our heads by now, the connection of all of this text is about how we act when we get together publicly to worship God. One of the issues that we collectively have to deal with is, who will be our leader? The specifics in this case are a king over Israel, but the principal of leadership can be applied to most situations where we have as we gather together as believers. However, since the text is focusing on kings, let's keep the focus on "kings".
 - b) First, let's get the specific's of the text out of the way: Moses understood the thought that all the groups around Israel had kings and sooner or later they'd want one as well. What Moses is saying is make sure the king is someone God wants, not someone they want. A great example is the first king Saul. 1st Kings (9:2 and 10:23) said he was taller than all the other Israelites. I'd bet he was good looking; as then he would fit the Hollywood image of a "leading man". If you know the story of King Saul he was a disaster as a king and was a great model of living in fear without God's guidance. King David, the second king was a good ordained king and was what God wanted. What God said to the Israelites centuries after this was written was in effect, "You sure you want a king? Besides the 23% tithe you each pay, the king will demand even more of you to run this place. (My paraphrase of the prophet Samuel's reaction to having Saul be their first king!)
 - c) Even with a king in place, the text says no large horse farms (so the king would only be dependant upon God and not an army on horses), no going back to Egypt (not living in the Promised Land) and not lots of wives or money that would lead us away from God.

- d) If you know the story of King Solomon, he pretty much violated all of these rules, as he probably thought, "I can handle this or that and I know better than the bible what is and what's not best for my life". He suffered for all those decisions to put it simply. Even his father King David had lots of wives and he too suffered for that desire to disobey God.
 - e) If you recall, I said in the introduction that some scholars late date this book as the text in this section reads too much like Solomon's failure. My response is God knows all things, including the future, which is why He dictated this to Moses many centuries before any of the kings ever came on the scene. Besides if Jesus says Moses wrote this, it's good enough for me!
 - f) Let me modernize this a little. Most of us don't live under a king. How does this passage apply to our lives? Think of the principal behind the text: Moses doesn't want those who have power to be corrupted by that power. "Horses" in that culture represented power as it refers to having a large army. "Multiple wives" in that culture meant one had plenty of money as one could afford all of those wives. The point is having leaders that would keep their focus on God and not turn to other things once they have that leadership power.
 - g) OK, enough said there, time to finish the text:
15. Verse 18: When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites.¹⁹ It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees²⁰ and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.
- a) The final issue of choosing a king is an "incentive clause" to keep them focused on God. The incentive is part of their job was to hand write a full copy of God's law, which would be the book of Deuteronomy and study it while they are the king. Remember that the key issue is being a good witness for God in public settings. Since most of a king's life or any leader for that matter is "public" it would be essential that such a king be of a high moral standing. The point is if one spends one's life studying God's laws, that helps to keep us on the "straight and narrow" as we're constantly being influenced by this book.
 - b) The text ends with a promise of a blessing. If the king does write and read this book, he's promised a long reign. That was literally true for David despite the fact that some of his descendants were "bad egg's". However, since David apparently kept this promise by his effort to seek God all of David's life, he was blessed with centuries of descendants that did rule as kings over all or parts of Israel.
 - c) In summary, if one is called to a position of leadership, be it civil or religious or even in a business setting, God wants us to be a witness for Him all the time. While we don't have to hand write a copy of the bible thanks to the printing press, it should be as much a part of our daily lives as it was for the kings back then. Consider that Revelation 1:6 refers to believers as kings and priests. That does not mean Christians 1, 2 & 3 are kings and 4, 5 & 6 are priests. It means that we're all called to be kings and priests.
 - i) We are priests in that God wants all of us to be a witness for Him as His disciples.
 - ii) We are called to be kings and we will rule with Jesus when He returns to rule over the entire world. We prepare for our kingly role by humbling ourselves before "The" King, and practically by obeying what God's laws require us to obey. As to how we'll reign in the next life, we'll have to wait until we get there to find out.
16. In the meantime, time to wrap up the lesson: Heavenly Father, we thank you that You've called us to be kings and priests in both this lifetime and eternally. Help us to be good priests as we do make a difference for You in the world around us. Help us also to be good kings in that You've given us the power over dark forces that want to make us ineffective witnesses for You. Help us to use that power and our gifts for Your glory as we use our time and talents to make a difference for you in our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.