

1. Ever been in a situation where you knew the right thing to do was "Choice A" and your instinct is to choose "Choice B"? Remember that most of the book of Deuteronomy is Moses giving a speech to the Israelites as they're about to enter the Promised Land. The last few lessons focused on how to make the right decisions in private settings, group settings, and being a good witness to others. Now Moses is getting to a point where he's effectively asking, how do we deal with tough choices we have to make in life? That's the common thread of a whole bunch of topics that are covered in these two chapters. Let me go over them briefly and one can see how they tie together:
 - a) The first is the issue of warfare. This is not about literally conquering the Promised Land, as God promised the Israelites He would lead them to victory in that issue. This is about dealing with enemies outside of that land. Let me state again for the sake of newcomers, what the Promised Land represents: It's about fully trusting God with every aspect of our lives. Therefore, when one reads of warfare here, think of it as fighting issues that prevent us from having God's peace over every aspect of our lives. Is it literal? It will be for these Israelites living in that land for a very long time, as it is for us facing our own issues as we enjoy God's peace. Why? Because when we're trusting in God for every aspect for our life that's when we're a good witness for Him. My view is that neither sin nor demonic forces can take away our salvation if we trust in Jesus for that salvation, so they work to make us ineffective witnesses for Jesus. Fighting that type of influence and negative thinking is the underlying message of this text.
 - i) With that said, Chapter 20 makes it clear that the battle issues in this chapter have nothing to do with the literal conquering of that Promised Land, but in situations where the Israelites would have to fight outside enemies wanting to conquer them. Moses effectively says if the enemy is bigger in number or has better weapons, we don't have to worry because God's leading us to victory in that situation. The idea is to realize that if God wants us to live by trusting Him to have peace in our lives, then we have to trust Him to battle whatever enemies or situations we face even if what we face appears to be beyond our ability to handle. I'm not saying we can jump off a tall building because we're trusting God. I am saying if we're willing to trust God, He'll lead us through whatever it is we know we have to deal with, and have peace through that situation as well.
 - b) Next, Moses deals with excuses we can have to face whatever it is we have to face in life. In the text Moses lists in my opinion, a bunch of flimsy excuses one can make to avoid the actual battles the Israelites have to fight. The short version is if one has something else on one's mind, go take care of it as God can win any battle with few in number and God does not want anyone to fear enemies bigger or better equipped than us. Of course God wants all the Israelite soldiers to fight. Of course, fear is the biggest factor to prevent any person or army from winning a battle. Moses is reassuring his audience not to have fears as we make a difference for God. If one is afraid or has something else on one's mind, God will still win battles even without those who won't join that battle. In this lesson, I'll give some historical biblical examples where God reduced Israel's army size tremendously and they still won those battles with a much smaller army.
 - c) Then Moses gets into another "Choice A" versus "Choice B" scenario. (The first was about the choice to face a situation bigger than we handle and overcoming our fears of defeat.) He says when they deal with an enemy outside of the land of Israel, first they must offer peace terms: Specifically that the enemies must agree to be the Israelites slaves instead of being killed. Remember the issue is facing situations that appear like we can't win. God is saying, offer a chance for others to learn more about Him before literally killing them.

- d) The idea of offering slavery is that God wants us to be a good witness to those who don't believe in Him. That's why Moses says the Israelites are to offer slavery to their enemies instead of literally killing them. What such enemies would learn from being slaves is that the Israelites and us Christians for that matter, are to live as God desires we live which in effect makes us slaves to God. By making others slaves, they'll also learn to live as slaves to God, which is still a better choice than being literally killed.
 - i) After a few comments that this rule does not apply to the current residents of the Promised Land as in effect God's said it's too late for them as they've already lived for hundreds of years killing their own children in sacrifice to their false gods and God wanted to use the Israelites to wipe them out as if to say, there's a limit of My tolerance to sin and those in that land, have crossed that line. Then we get of all things, comments about using non-fruit bearing trees as weapons for war against outside enemies. Yes there are literal aspects to that idea, as those Israelites would need wood for fire and to build weapons to defeat a city.
 - ii) The underlying point is in "Christian speak" fruit bearing trees represent those of us who are making a difference for Jesus. Just as fruit bearing trees weren't to be cut down in these verses, so those that are bearing fruit for God are to be left alone as we deal the enemies we face as we make a difference for Jesus in our lives.

2. OK, I've just covered Chapter 20 in a little over a page. Chapter 21 then gets into other topics that also deal with doing the right thing or "Choice A" as I call it, when our instincts want "Choice B".

- a) The first issue is dealing with a body of a murdered person in the land of Israel. First we get the literal aspect, where the priests of the nearest city, must make a sacrifice to God as if to say, "no one in our town is responsible for this loss of life and we sacrifice this animal in order to prove our innocence. The "Choice B" is to think, there's a dead body outside of my town? Who cares, that's not my problem! "Choice A" is to get involved as a society as if to say, murder to never to be tolerated and we're going to deal with it as God desires all of us to work together to do the right thing in any situation.
 - i) To put this another way, how can we have peace with God when there's a problem in our midst? That's why unsolved murder as an extreme example, has to be dealt with even if we had nothing as a society to do with that murder.
- b) The next issue has to deal with capturing a beautiful woman in warfare. Choice B would be for a soldier to go take her home then and there and have sexual relations. Choice A is to shave her head so she's less attractive and let her moan for her dead family before she has to accept her new lifestyle as the wife of a stranger. Now think in terms of marriage. It's one thing to want a wife in the "heat of the moment" when she's really attractive. Do we still want to marry her or him when that spouse doesn't look so good and is in a very bad mood as he or she misses their now dead family? The point is about learning to love someone in the best or worse of situations before we commit to marriage with them.
- c) The next example of an "A or B" choice" is about former spouses or in this case one having two spouses. In every case of someone getting divorced and remarried, the children from the first marriage tend to get forgotten and not part of the new "loved" family. Yes the text is talking about a man marrying more than one woman, but if you think about it, having a second wife is because one is unhappy with the first one. The point here is "Choice B" is to not care about the children of the first marriage. That's why "Choice A" is about giving to the first born children of the first marriage what they're supposed to get as a firstborn son.
- d) The next "A versus B" story of all things is about dealing with a rebellious child (more like a an older teenager). The really bad "B" choice would be to kill them or make them suffer terribly. The "A" choice is to make our deeds public. That's to take that rebellious son to the town square and say, "You all know this kid is a drunk and a waste of life". Then the whole town is supposed to stone him. We never read this done in the bible. In reality this choice it works as a deterrent as it helps to keep our children on the right path.

- e) The final "A versus B" choice, is about putting a convicted criminal to death. The bad "B" choice is to let the dead body publicly rot for everyone to see for a very long time. God's "A" choice is to not let that body be displayed overnight. The reason stated is because He cares about the land of Israel. God wants justice, but not at the expense of making Israel "smell" of rotten corpses. Yes, there's a lot more to this picture and yes, it also ties to Jesus being hung on wood, as I'll get to in this lesson.
 - f) However, my summary is now over two pages long and I need to get started on the verse by verse commentary. For now, realize the common thread of these chapters is all about doing the right thing when our instinct wants us to do something else. With that said, it's time to go through these chapters, verse by verse:
3. Chapter 20, Verse 1: When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you. ² When you are about to go into battle, the priest shall come forward and address the army. ³ He shall say: "Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. ⁴ For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory."
- a) I was thinking about this large group of Israelites that are sitting on a hillside listening to Moses give this long speech about how to live in the land of Israel pretty much right after this speech is done. Part of me would be thinking, "When is he going to finish?" The other part of me would be thinking, "So I have to do this and that when I live there, what about the armies we have to face? How do we attack them?" That might get me to pay attention as Moses is describing having to go to war with against people, I would sit up and think, "OK, this is it, Moses is finally getting to the business of how do we actually attack when we get there!"
 - i) Then I (being someone in that audience) would realize, wait a minute, Moses isn't talking about fighting there, he is discussing fighting enemies outside of Israel. It would imply that once the Israelites are settled in that land, "It's not that's that" as they are still going to have to deal with outside forces that want them dead. That type of problem is the focus of these verses.
 - ii) As to actual battle strategy, Moses is specifically avoiding that topic as if to imply, God has that victory so assured, we don't even have to bring it up. Instead, what is important is what we (the Israelites) have to do once we're actually living within that land of Israel. One of the issues that is brought up, is what about anyone who wants to attack us once we are settled there? That's the purpose of this text.
 - b) With that stated, the first thing Moses brings up here is about having to face enemies that are larger in number or better equipped. The bad "Choice B", would be to run away as we would be afraid of the consequences. The text doesn't say, "Go back home, get more men and come at it again." Instead the text says the priests are to say in effect, "don't be afraid of what might happen, God's fighting for us, so we can't lose." If one reads through all of the Old Testament there are lots of wonderful stories about the Israelites being greatly outnumbered, and still winning when collectively they are setting their hearts to trust in God for their very survival.
 - i) So are you saying that if I trust God, I can go do something stupid and go charge into a bunch of soldiers? Hardly. The issue is dealing with those who'd threaten our trust in God to guide our lives. Think of the enemy as insurmountable issues that can prevent us from doing God's will for our lives. Let's say you volunteer to go on a mission trip, and you see a need to be accomplished. Let's also say we've got to face people there who are hostile to our work. I'm saying as God's will does get done in all situations, so if it is God's will for a specific mission project to get done, it will get done, no matter what the odds are against it.

- ii) Speaking of missionaries, there is a famous story that happened almost a hundred years ago of some Christian missionaries who wanted to witness to some "Indians" in South America. They killed those American missionaries. A child of one of the men killed went back there many years later. The one who did the killing met the son and offered his life to the son of the one he killed. The son forgave him of that deed and Christianity spread to that tribe. That story ties to these verses in that we shouldn't fear armies better than us, as in the end if we're willing to let God's plan work for our lives people would be lead to Him.
 - c) In the meantime, coming back to these Israelites, God is teaching a principal how we are always to be witnesses for Him, even when fighting enemies who want us to stop telling people about Jesus. My point is we're not to fear them as long as we're trusting God with our lives, He promises He will protect and guide us even in the face of such enemies.
 - d) Finally, notice it's the priests who are to encourage the solders. I know that chaplains have been part of the military since the revolutionary war. The point here is part of the job of a priest is to encourage the rest of the Israelites to do what they have to do. Just as it is our role as priests for Jesus to encourage others to make a difference for Him with our lives.
4. Verse 5: The officers shall say to the army: "Has anyone built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it. ⁶ Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it. ⁷ Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her." ⁸ Then the officers shall add, "Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too." ⁹ When the officers have finished speaking to the army, they shall appoint commanders over it.
- a) Notice the first words of Verse 5 says the "officers". Back in Verse 2, the text said a priest is the one to encourage the Israelites. Now here in Verse 5, an army officer says that if any person has built a new home, but hasn't used it yet, they should go home. Then in Verse 6 it describes if a man plants a vineyard but hasn't enjoyed the fruit or the wine from it yet, let him go home and do so. Verse 7 mentions if a man is engaged, but not yet married, let him go back home and start a marriage and get out of being in the army. Finally it says if anyone is afraid, let that soldier go home and not be a part of the army.
 - b) As I said in the introduction, all of these sound like flimsy excuses. If you knew an enemy wanted to destroy your way of life, and all you can think about is your new house or your new farm, or your new wife, or you're just plain afraid, you shouldn't be part of the army in the first place. We all know how fear can be contagious. We also know that if God says we'll win, we'll win. The obvious point is about eliminating any fear from whatever God is calling us to do in life so we can make a difference for Him.
 - i) There is a famous scene in the movie Patton where General Patton slaps a man in the face who was too afraid to fight in a battle. That incident became famous and he had to apologize publicly. While the slap may have been wrong, the general is right in the sense that fear had to be eliminated from spreading or else any army is no good to its leaders.
 - ii) The point as it applies to these verses is that God can win no matter how small an army of Israelites God can work a victory with them. As an example, there is the story in Judges Chapter 7 of God greatly reducing the size of an Israelite army and they still defeated a much larger enemy. The reason God does that is so when the Israelites win, they realize it was only possible as God lead them to that victory.
 - iii) What this means for you and me is 1) not to be afraid of what God's called us to do in life to make a difference for Him and 2) realize that God wants to work through ordinary people like you and me in order to make a difference for Him as we lead others to Jesus or closer to Him through ministry work. Finally realize we don't have to fear, as in a sense the outcome is already certain who'll win in the end.

5. Verse 10: When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace.¹¹ If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you.¹² If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city.¹³ When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it.¹⁴ As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies.¹⁵ This is how you are to treat all the cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby.
- a) As you read this text, remember that the issue is facing an enemy that wants you dead! It would be logical to say, "You want to kill me, come on out so I can beat you to the punch". What we get instead is "Choice A" is Verse 10. It says that the Israelites are to first make an offer of peace by letting those who wanted to kill us be forced labor. There's a story in the book of Joshua where a group called the Gibeonites lied to the Israelites about where they lived. However, because the Israelites gave their word they wouldn't kill them, they did apply this law and forced them to be servants to the Israelites.
 - b) So why spare someone who wants us dead? Why not do to them what they want to do to us in the first place? It's about being a good witness for Jesus! Just as God calls us to be a slave to His desire for our lives, so in such situations we can teach others how submission makes a better person to begin with. In effect, it is a form of witnessing. Yes they have to submit as they did want to kill us. At the same time, it's teaching others about living a life of submission is the best way to live and is what God desires of our lives.
 - c) OK, what if those who want to kill us refuse submission? Then comes "Plan B". We don't read of the Israelites saying, "OK, we're pacifists, go ahead and wipe us out." Instead, the text says the Israelites are to wipe them out in battle. Notice the text says to spare those not involved in the battle, that is, the women and children and the animals. Remember in this case, this is not about conquering the land of Israel or conquering more land in order to get more stuff, this is about enemies who want to wipe out the Israelites. In American football, there is a classic expression that "The best defense is a good offense" and that's what we effectively read here. That God wants the Israelites (and us Christians today) to be His witnesses to a lost and dying world. We share with others the good news of Jesus and tell them of the consequences of refusing to make that decision.
 - i) So are you saying it's ok today for the Israelites to go wipe out those who want to kill them? One day it may come to that, but in the meantime, the issue for them is to protect their own land and harm those who are doing harm to them. However, if a day arises where they have to fight against those who don't want that country to exist any more as a country, all I know is I'd never stand against the Israelites as God made an unconditional promise to give that land to the Israelites. That idea is not conditional upon their acceptance of Jesus, just their obedience to Him. If you have any doubts, study the wars Israel has fought in the last century since they've become a nation again, and see how they've won despite the fact they were greatly outnumbered and outgunned just like this chapter describes.
 - d) Even with that said, the Israelites were not to wipe out the innocent with the guilty. They were to spare the women, children and livestock. If you study modern Israelite history, it is amazing how they go to great lengths to avoid hurting the innocent even as they attack those who want to wipe them out from being a nation.
 - e) OK John, this is all interesting if I was an Israelite or am a soldier. How do I apply any of this if I'm just a person living in a home trying to make a difference for Jesus? The short answer is first, God wants us to be a witness for Him. That means if someone wants to prevent us from being a witness for God, we should offer terms of "submission to Him" before letting them suffer the ultimate defeat of an eternity in hell for an unwillingness to submit to God for one's salvation and one's life.

6. Verse 16: However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. ¹⁷ Completely destroy them--the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites--as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹⁸ Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God.
 - a) Remember the Israelites sitting listening to Moses speech? I bet many were thinking what about those living in the land of Israel. After all that's who we're going to face soon, not a bunch of men from a distant country. That's why Moses stresses again here that all of the rules of dealing with enemies don't apply to those living in the land of Israel.
 - b) For the sake of the newcomers, let me make this quick: Think of those people living in the land of Israel before the Israelites as "squatters" (or trespassers) upon God's land. God is saying I promised that piece of real estate to Abraham's descendants (Israelites) and what I (God) say can't be changed as I'm not capable of lying. The other point that archeologists have confirmed is that those people who lived there at time were so disgusting as they'd kill their own children as sacrifices to their gods. God said in effect, "I've given them 400 years to change their ways and "enough is enough", it's time to wipe them out as they're a bad influence for how I want people to live and I don't want my people to be influenced by how they live." Therefore God judged these people and wiped them out just as many centuries later God sent the Babylonians to destroy Israel for the exact same thing.
 - i) Let me explain how I view this world: If God created it, He has every right to do with it as He pleases, as it's His in the first place. Our function as His people is to be submissive to His will and lead others closer to Him so we'll live eternally with Him and avoid the destruction of a world that's corrupt beyond repair. That's the Gospel in a nutshell.
 - c) Believe it or not, all of that leads back to these verses. The point here is God is instructing the Israelites to wipe out those who live in the land of Israel and all of those rules that are about dealing with one's enemies don't apply to these particular people: Why, because in effect God's given them 400 years to repent and now it's too late. For support of that view see Genesis 15:16.
 - d) With that stated, we need to get back to dealing with "foreign enemies".
7. Verse 19: When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees of the field people, that you should besiege them? ²⁰ However, you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build siege works until the city at war with you falls.
 - a) In all this talk about warfare, killing and sparing of lives, it seems strange to interrupt this flow of thought to talk about what trees to spare and what trees to use in the attack of an enemy. First, let me give the practical reasons for these verses, and then I'll come back to how they apply to us. In the ancient world, many cities were protected by large walls that surround that city. A common way to defeat such a city was to surround it with an army and starve out that city. The bible speaks of many wars that were won and lost by using that method. During such a siege, wood was used to build a wall to surround that city or as weapons or as fuel for fires to keep warm. With all that stated, why would Moses state it's forbidden to cut down fruit bearing trees in such cases? An obvious reason is one can eat the fruit off those trees while doing damage.
 - b) To understand why this is here, know that in "Christian speak", to "bear fruit" is about our effort to make a difference for God. Even in non-Christian speak, that term is common in many languages about making a difference. That term is used many times in the Old and the New Testament to describe God making a difference for us or us making a difference for God in the bible. Jesus specifically used that term in the Sermon on the Mount to state how we to tell who's a good witness for God. (See Matthew 7:17-19).

- c) Ok, so bearing good fruit is a common biblical analogy for doing the right thing. What's that have to do with sparing fruit trees in dealing with an enemy? The point is in warfare to think in terms of making a difference for God: The underlying point of this text is how we're supposed to act in the "Promised Land" as we make a difference for God. There will be times when we have to deal with outsiders who to put it mildly, don't want us to make that difference. There are those who are hostile to the Gospel message and the majority of people who just want to be left alone and don't want to be bothered with "religious stuff". When dealing with those who are hostile, we're to defeat their arguments by the power of God's word and "lay siege" to their beliefs by the power of His word. However, when we are dealing with enemies of the Gospel, we should be aware of others who may also "bear fruit" for Jesus.
 - i) Let me give an example: Suppose we encounter someone who we know believes in Jesus, but say from a different religious background than ours. These are cases where we agree on the "major's" but disagree on the "minors". For example, I grew up in a Roman Catholic background. I know many Catholics who devoutly believe Jesus died for every sin they will ever commit. We disagree on other issues how to be a Christian, but we agree on the major, significant doctrines. My point is when we encounter a Christian who we disagree with on other issues we are to still let God work through them to "bear fruit" just as He desires to work through us so as to bear fruit for Him.
 - ii) Think of this whole section in terms of "picking our battles well". Don't spend our time debating with someone who trusts in Jesus, but differs from how we worship Him or other things we believe about Him. As witnesses for Jesus, there are times when we have to battle outside forces that don't want the Gospel to be spread. A great related passage on this is when Jesus told Peter in Matthew 16:18 that upon Peter (the concept of the Gospel being spread), Jesus will build His church and the gates of Hades (hell) will not prevent it. Consider that gates are for defensive and not offense methods. The point is the power of the Gospel message being taught is stronger than any argument thrown against it. That's why when we bear witness for the Gospel we have to be on the watch for others also "bearing fruit" for Jesus instead of debating other Christians over less important issues.
- d) Bottom line, when we're working to make a difference for Jesus, and we have to defeat an argument against such actions, beware of others "bearing fruit" and don't make them part of the group that we're fighting against. If you got that, you got the point about sparing fruit trees and you're ready to move on to the next point in this "Choice A vs. B" section:

8. Chapter 21, Verse 1: If a man is found slain, lying in a field in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess, and it is not known who killed him, ² your elders and judges shall go out and measure the distance from the body to the neighboring towns. ³ Then the elders of the town nearest the body shall take a heifer that has never been worked and has never worn a yoke ⁴ and lead her down to a valley that has not been plowed or planted and where there is a flowing stream. There in the valley they are to break the heifer's neck. ⁵ The priests, the sons of Levi, shall step forward, for the LORD your God has chosen them to minister and to pronounce blessings in the name of the LORD and to decide all cases of dispute and assault.

- a) Here, we move from attacking "outsiders" to dealing with a murder that's not far from us. One underlying point is that God wants us to respect all lives. That's one reason why He called for the destruction of the groups living in Israel, as they kill innocent babies for the sake of their religious rituals. With that said, suppose a dead body was found in the land of Israel. The elders (senior leaders) who were in charge of that city would inquire within that city if anyone knew that person who could be responsible for their death. Think of it as a police investigation to solve that murder. If no one could prove they were responsible for that murder, then they performed a ritual to declare their innocence.

9. Verse 6: Then all the elders of the town nearest the body shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley,⁷ and they shall declare: "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done."⁸ Accept this atonement for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, O LORD, and do not hold your people guilty of the blood of an innocent man." And the bloodshed will be atoned for.⁹ So you will purge from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, since you have done what is right in the eyes of the LORD.
- a) The ritual itself was about finding a nearby valley where water would flow down from a higher elevation and kill say an ox there and wash in that running water. It was a visual way of saying, "we (of this nearby town) are not responsible for this death and may we suffer the fate of this animal if it turns out someone from our town was guilty of killing a person found dead not far from our town. The idea of using running water was not only a way of cleanliness but symbolizes that just as this water "runs", so the Israelites "run" to say they claim no responsibility for the murder even though they're nearby.
 - b) Back in Verse 5, a priest was to be in charge of this ritual. As I stated in the last lesson, we are to think of Christians as "priests" in the sense that we're all called to be a good witness for Jesus in all that we do. The point here is that a priest isn't just someone saying we're to do this and that as believers in God but they're also supposed to enforce justice. It doesn't mean all Christians have to be in the police business, but at the same time, Christians are not suppose to ignore justice for the sake of spreading the Gospel. As I discussed in detail in the last lesson, we don't ignore justice for the guilty in exchange for telling others about Jesus. I used the example of the army minister at the trial of those top Germans after the Second World War, who ordered millions of Jews to be put to death. Did that minister try to do anything to stop that trial? No. At the same time, he tried to lead as many of those convicts as he could closer to Jesus before they were actually killed for their crimes.
 - i) The point as it relates here is that the priest is to be in charge (think recognize) that the guilty suffer for their crimes just as the innocent not be charged as well. What this means for you and me as Christians is to not ignore the process of justice as we be a witness for Jesus.
 - ii) Coming back to my "Choice A versus Choice B" lesson title, the bad choice is about ignoring a dead body and letting someone else deal with it. The correct choice for us is to deal with the problem by making sure justice is done and an innocent one isn't convicted for crimes. In other words, being a good witness for Jesus includes the idea of not ignoring justice for the sake of being a good witness for Jesus. With that said, we can move on to the next "Choice A versus B" scenario:
10. Verse 10: When you go to war against your enemies and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives,¹¹ if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife.¹² Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails¹³ and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife.¹⁴ If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her.
- a) Remember that Moses' "theme" through this section of the speech has to do with warfare in fighting nations outside of the land of Israel. Now suppose in such warfare, an Israelite kills a man who is fighting them in this war. That Israelite soldier can think, "Now I get whatever he owns as my prize for that victory. That prize may include a beautiful woman who was the wife of the one who was killed. In the heat of the battle, a soldier can think, she is now mine, I want her here and now and no one can stop me as I legally killed her husband as he was fighting me in this war. What Moses is saying in this text is effectively "Yes you can have that woman, but only after you've shaved her head, trimmed her pretty long fingernails and listen to hear moan for a month how much she misses her old way of life. If you put up with all of that, then and only then can you have her as a wife."

- b) In effect, anybody who's been married for a good number of years can relate to this verse. It's one thing to see our spouse in all their beauty when they first meet. It's another thing to say, I'll commit myself to you even if you're deformed and not attractive. A classic way to counsel people who want to get married is to tell them, if you two are at a point in your relationship where for all intents and purposes you're already married in that you're both willing to live with each other no matter what's the situation, then it's time to get married.
 - c) That leads us back to these verses. The idea is to say if a soldier desires a "war bride", he needs to see her "at her worst" and not just as a prize to quickly take and use. Of course, this applies to both sexes, but the point here is to think past heat of the moment as to think about what we're really getting into when we want to make such a commitment. There is a classic expression that goes, "Love is not a feeling, it's a decision". In other words, we're to make a decision to be committed to someone, and not marry someone just because we have feelings for them. I find that when we make that commitment the feelings follow.
 - d) All of this talk about rising above the heat of the moment to make the right decision leads to the next part of the text. What if that soldier sees this women with a shaved head for a month moaning over her dead family and says, "There's no way I want to put up with this for the rest of my life!" The text says the soldier must not treat her as a slave or sell her as he has "dishonored her" for the killing of her husband.
 - i) Think about women's rights here, compared to how other cultures treated women in those days and still do today. Many cultures still treat women as "property". In the case of Israelites, they were to treat foreign women with respect in that if they don't desire them, they are to let them go and not use them as slaves or trade them for other things. It's one of the best religious arguments for women's rights that I have seen among any of the sacred writings of major religions.
 - ii) The underlying point of this text is when we make the good "Choice A" versus the bad "Choice B" of doing the right thing, we're to respect the rights of others. Think about this whole topic in terms of being a good witness for Jesus. Warfare's a part of life throughout history. Often that call to warfare is from government decisions we must accept. The point is in the heat of the battle we must still do what's right as to be a good witness for Jesus in all situations. This is also a wonderful lesson that young people need to hear about choosing a spouse and seeing past the heat of the moment and seeing the long term aspects of a relationship.
 - a) I'm not saying a young couple has to shave their heads bald before they get married, but I am saying, spend enough time together seeing each other at one's best and worst before spending a life together. On that thought, it's time to move on the next "A versus B" choice as a witness for God.
11. Verse 15: If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love,¹⁶ when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love.¹⁷ He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.
- a) First, let me discuss polygamy quickly. That's when three or more people decide to be a "couple". Yes God desires a single man and woman be married. The way God puts down the idea of polygamy is that if you read any bible story of a man marrying more than one wife, that aspect of the man's life always ends up in disaster. When Jacob had multiple wives in Genesis, they fought. When king David has multiple wives, his lustful desire did lead to David effectively killing a man who was the husband of a woman he desires. Then we have Solomon, who's multiple wives lead him into committing idolatry against God in order to please his wives. My point is as I discuss dealing with a man with multiple wives keep in mind the bible has nothing good to say about such a relationship.

- b) Let me modernize this for a moment. While polygamy is rare today, it's very common for a man or woman to be married more than once and have children from multiple spouses. The point is a man will often ignore the children of the first spouse as it reminds him of an unhappy marriage with the first spouse and show more attention toward children of the second spouse as they're the one's he now sees regularly. My point here is "Bad Choice B" is about children who suffer from previous marriages because parents are divorced. I've heard from Christian pastors who say this is a common occurrence for men who've been married more than once.
 - i) That type of scenario leads us back to this text. When it comes to dividing up the estate of a man who's had more than one wife, the point is not to ignore the kids of a first marriage and just bless those from the current marriage. In ancient Israel a principal they had was in cases of multiple children, the oldest son got a "double blessing" in exchange for being the distributor of the family possessions.
 - ii) The classic example is in the story of Jacob near his death, told his son Joseph that his two sons are now effectively Jacob's two sons. What that means is simply that Joseph got the "double blessing" of being in charge of his father's estate as he was not guilty of trying to kill someone the same way Joseph's brothers had guilt when they sold Joseph into slavery as told in the book of Genesis. All I'm saying here is the bible shows us by example that one son of twelve of several marriages got the "double blessing" of being in charge of the distribution of the family inheritance.
 - iii) So what does all of that have to do with these verses here in Deuteronomy? The answer is the "first born" son of the unloved marriage (think the previous marriage in cases of divorce) still needs to be blessed by the father even though he divorced that woman. In other words, we don't punish the children of the first marriage if in cases we remarry again. Yes it did apply in polygamy cases, but as I said, such cases were rare and multiple wives due to divorce is much more likely to occur.
 - c) OK, two more "Choice A versus B" scenarios and we can wrap this up for a lesson:
12. Verse 18: If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, ¹⁹ his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. ²⁰ They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard." ²¹ Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.
- a) Imagine if one has an older child, who is wasting his or her life away getting drunk or is on bad drugs all the time. Assume everyone in town knows about the kid's reputation. At that point a parent has a right to say in effect to those in town, "This bad kid of mine isn't worth keeping alive as he or she is wasting their lives away". In the entire bible there isn't one case where we can read of this law being enforced. I seriously doubt this was ever a significant issue in Israel. Usually parents love children too much and encourage them at their worst hoping they mentally grow up someday.
 - b) At this point I need to explain what is a Jewish "Bar Mitzvah". It is commonly thought of as a "coming out party" for Jewish children. The actual ceremony is more for the parents. What is supposed to be stated by the parents is in effect, "We're no longer responsible for the sins of our children as they're old enough to know right from wrong. God now holds them accountable for their own decisions." While one cannot find any reference to a Bar Mitzvah ceremony in the bible, one can see the connection between these verses that deal with punishing older children with being a "waste of a life" with parents no longer being held accountable for the decisions that they make.
 - c) The reason God through Moses put this law on the books, is not to encourage parents to go kill their children, but to scare children enough to realize that if they're wasting away their lives, they can be killed if a town considers them a waste of a life.

- d) I can think in my own life of being around relatives who in their early years also acted in a way that one can consider a "waste of a life". The good news is the eventually grew up as well as suffered the consequences for those wasted years being "high" all the time. All we can do as parents or guardians is point to the right way to live by example and pray that such children do figure out what is the right thing to do before it's too late for them. OK, enough of that harsh reality, let me move on to the final two verses, that may be the most interesting of this lesson:
13. Verse 22: If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, ²³ you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.
- a) First let me explain the "bad choice B versus the good choice A". The bad choice is about after a criminal is killed, a body is left hanging overnight as a public witness to say what happens to such criminals. The good choice is to not let the body hang overnight. One has to understand that in the ancient world a curse worse than death is to let one's body be publicly exposed so that animals can pick at that dead body.
- b) The final sentence of this chapter states that it is a "disgrace to God's land" to have such a dead body hang overnight after it's been killed. There are two such instances in the book of Joshua where enemy kings are killed and their bodies were not left overnight as Joshua applied this principal to his own warfare incidents.
- c) OK, that was fairly straightforward. Here is where this law gets "fun". If you think about it, Jesus was also killed on a "tree" as the cross was made of wood. Let me quote Paul as he made that comparison: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."" That quote is from Galatians 3:13. The point is Paul is well aware that Jesus being hung on a tree ties to these verses in Deuteronomy about being cursed by hanging on a tree. Paul's point is that Jesus literally became a curse for us as He suffered for every sin we've ever committed or ever will commit. So does that mean I'm free to sin all I want? The better question to ask is how much sin do I want to commit? Am I interested in pleasing God by avoiding sin or hurting myself in this life by committing sin? My point is we as Christians are free to sin all we want, but how much do we want to? That's the underlying point of Christianity.
- d) My point is a reason God put this law on the books well over a thousand years prior to a day when Jesus would die for our sins, is so that we get the connection between a curse of being hung dead on a tree with Jesus literally being dead on a wooden cross. Did Moses realize this back then? Of course not, but it shows how bible prophecy does play out.
14. With that said, let me summarize all the "A versus B" choices and how it affects us as Christians:
- a) The first had to do with "spiritual warfare" and understanding that God gives us through the bible everything we need in order to battle those who don't want to accept the Gospel.
- i) The supplement to that first set of choices is to not make excuses as God calls us to go make a difference for Him in the world around us.
- b) The second point is as we make a difference for Him, we don't stop others who are also in their own ways "bearing fruit" for God even if their views on nonessential biblical issues differ from ours.
- c) The next point is about not ignoring justice in order to be a good witness for God. We get the example of sacrificing an animal to show one's innocence in an unsolved murder. The point is mainly about doing the right thing and caring about all life even as we are about making a difference for Jesus in the world around us.
- d) The next point was about respecting what we "capture" when we're make a difference for God. The specific example was about keeping a beautiful "war bride", but the underlying point is about thinking carefully about the decisions we make of what we keep and think about the long-term consequences of decisions we make using marriage as an example.

- e) The next point is also about respecting what belongs and use to belong to us. The specific is about still loving (treating well) children of an unloved (think former) marriage versus just showing love to children of the present (think current) marriage. The idea is about a sense of responsibility for "what is ours" even if what causes us to have what is ours is not in the picture anymore.
 - f) The final point is realizing that even if and when we mess up, Jesus has paid the full price for our sins, so we don't have to worry that we've "failed" God. Yes sin is to be avoided at all cost as we want to please God, but we don't have to fear not being good enough to be in heaven with Him forever because we're not perfect.
 - g) Let me summarize each of the key points briefly:
 - i) First we get to make a difference for Jesus in a world that outnumbers us.
 - ii) Next we don't work against others who are also bearing fruit for Jesus.
 - iii) As a witness for Jesus, we don't ignore justice in situations close to us.
 - iv) We make an effort to consider the long-term effects of the decisions we make.
 - v) We don't ignore the unloved for the sake of the loved.
 - vi) In our victories for Jesus we don't make the guilty suffer longer than necessary.
 - vii) That's the basic steps to how to be a good witness for Jesus in our daily lives.
 - h) Since we realize that God paid the full price for our sins so even when we mess up in one of these areas, God doesn't expect perfection, but that's not to be an excuse for not making an effort to be witness for Him in the first place. My point is I'm not perfect and neither is anyone else who wants to make a difference for Jesus. Still, God wants to use us mistakes and all, to be His witnesses to the world. This lesson gives us some practical steps in how we go about doing that as we go through our lives. If you get all of that, you get how God wants us to act in life. With that said, time to close in prayer:
15. Heavenly Father, we are all too aware that we're imperfect people who desire to be used by You, and the only way we can do Your will is through Your power. Give us the wisdom to see what is the long term consequences of the decisions we have to make in life, and guide our lives to make decisions that please You. Use our imperfect lives for Your glory, forgive us our sins and help us to turn from sin, as we choose to use our lives to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.