

1. As I read through these chapters a bunch of times, at first, all I saw was a bunch of miscellaneous laws about how the Israelites were supposed to live once they were living in the Promised Land. It is as if Moses is roughly two-thirds the way through his speech and he was thinking, "OK, here is one more thing to do, and here's another rule to live by, and it continues that way for a number of chapters." Then it hit me: What Moses is saying here is he's giving us some practical ways that God wants us to live, as to keep our focus upon Him and not live like those who don't care about serving the God who created us. It's kind of like thinking, "You know those 10 Commandments I gave to you back at Mount Sinai? Well, here are some practical ways they apply to our lives as to keep our focus upon God and not live like the pagans living there now." That leads to my lesson title: "How will people know we're Christians, unless we can live differently enough from others around us so that people will realize we're living to make a difference for Him?"
2. To sum this up, let me highlight the topics of these two chapters and you can see how they all fit a common theme of living in way that shows nonbelievers around us that we're living to make a difference for God in our lives. That idea of "How God wants us to live" is my lesson title.
  - a) The first is about helping with a lost animal. When we think of the 10 Commandments we think of "Do this and don't do that". There is also a sin of "omission". That's the sin of failing to do the right thing. The first few verses on protecting a domesticated animal that belongs to someone else, is an example of omission if we help what we can do to help.
  - b) Next is about men dressing like women and women dressing like men. This is not about women wearing pants or forbidding men to wear skirts. In that culture, men and women both wore robes. Even with that said, men and women can dress in a way that purposely hides one's sexuality. The idea ties to God's law on adultery. To purposely dress like one of the opposite sex blurs the distinction that God designed for men and women.
  - c) Then we get a strange law about taking baby bird or eggs of that bird but not the mother. In an agricultural society like Israel back then, eggs were a diet staple. To preserve the life of the mother allows the mother to produce more children. It's a strange but honest way of remembering that God provides life for us and we're to respect God as source of life.
  - d) The next law requires a quick story. In the Middle East, it was and is common to build a house with a rooftop patio for people to go when it's too hot to be in house. We get a few verses that remind the Israelites to build a rail around the edge for safety. This ties to the law of "Do not murder" as it preaches safety in order to prevent murders from occurring.
  - e) After that we get a handful of laws about not mixing one kind of seed (for planting crops) with another or not mixing two types of cloth (say wool and linen) together or not using two types of animals together to work. The idea of these verses is to remind the Israelites how God has separated them from the world and these types of separations of things will remind them how they too are separated from the world around them.
  - f) Then we get a reminder for men to wear "tassel's" on their garments. The short version is this is a sign, by the way they are dressed that they are separated for God.
3. From Verse 13 to the end of Chapter 22, we then get into laws about sexual "no-no's". This would include issues about adultery, rape, discovering a bride is not a virgin and other acts that indicate one is not being "pure" toward God in sexual issues. This is obviously a complicated set of topics with lots of things to discuss here. To state a couple of obvious things, God is not anti-sex or else none of us would be alive today. Also, if one is single and not a virgin, that sin doesn't condemn us to hell. The only unforgivable sin in Christianity is a life-long denial that Jesus is God.
  - a) With those basics out of my system, the idea here is God wants His witnesses to live in as much purity in our lives as much as possible. Respecting human life and respecting what is meant for marriage is the underlying principal behind the laws stated here.

- b) There are times when one has to think, "Do I know what's best, or do I trust God that He knows what's best for my life?" Think of it this way: If you had sons or daughters, would not you want the best for them and for them to live a life of purity? Note that sex within a confides of marriage does not violate that purity. However, "fooling around" prior to any marriage is a form of adultery whether we realize it or not. I've had to learn the hard way that such lifestyle choices only end up hurting myself in the long run. Of course God will forgive us for our bad choices, but we still to suffer the consequences of those choices as it reminds us that God's will is what's best for our lives. For what it's worth the last half of this chapter is filled with discussion of consequences when we turn away from His desire for our lives.
- c) That leads me to Chapter 23: The text discusses ways one would be forbidden from being a part of Jewish "society". These actions don't mean one has to starve to death, but it does prohibit say one from running for public office. At this point Moses describes people who are from nations that live near them. Moses is saying, "these and those people" can join in our society as they helped us or they're related to us as fellow descendants of Abraham.
  - i) Then Moses mentions groups "A, B, and C" as to say they prevent us from entering the land of Israel to do God's will. We recall that by limiting their rights in Israel.
  - ii) My question is if an individual happens to be a descendant of one of these groups, why bother to accept them or reject them if they desire to live amongst us? This is not about preventing them from worshipping God, but about helping Israelites to recall their history of who helped them and didn't help them. By limiting roles in society for certain groups, it helps the Israelites to recall their own history of what God does and does not want to accomplish through them as witnesses for Him.
- d) Then of all things we get into the issue of "relieving ourselves" outside of where they were camping. If any of you have ever learned camping skills of being out in the woods, you'd know about carrying a small shovel to "bury one's poop". Did those Israelites understand about germs and diseases spreading? God is setting up rules that millenniums later we'll understand as being beneficial to our lives.
  - i) From here we get more practical laws dealing with lending money, foreign slaves, preventing prostitution from happening in Israel and having a welfare system for those less fortunate.
- e) Think of these chapters this way, if you think studying all of these miscellaneous laws are going to be boring, we're going to discuss sex, rape, prostitution, and poop. There's something "distinguishing" for every taste. This isn't a "rated G" lesson, but it does give lessons on how to deal with things we're going to have to face in life. If Moses audience is getting bored listening to topic after topic about how to live in the Promised Land, bringing up a bunch of miscellaneous, in effect Moses draws them back in by bringing up subjects that whether we want to admit or not, our "lower nature" wants to hear about. If nothing else, we can think of seeing controversial topics from Gods perspective and how He desires us to deal with such topics.
  - i) Therefore, as we go through this two chapter list of miscellaneous things to keep in mind as we live to make a difference for God, realize He isn't saying all of these things to prevent us from having fun or not enjoying our lives. He's giving us all of these laws for our benefits so that we do use our lives to glorify Him in all that we do, even in controversial topics and well, "things that are not polite to bring up in a public discussion.

4. With all that said, I invite you to join me as we go verse by verse through these two chapters. We are going to get a little "dirty" as we discuss many controversial topics, but I promise you we will come out all the "cleaner" at the end of this lesson as we see these topics from God's perspective of how He wants us to handle these issues as they all eventually do come up in life. OK enough of all of that, time to start the verse by verse commentary:

5. Chapter 22, Verse 1: If you see your brother's ox or sheep straying, do not ignore it but be sure to take it back to him.<sup>2</sup> If the brother does not live near you or if you do not know who he is, take it home with you and keep it until he comes looking for it. Then give it back to him.<sup>3</sup> Do the same if you find your brother's donkey or his cloak or anything he loses. Do not ignore it.
  - a) First, let me make it clear, the text is not talking about literal brothers and sisters. This is about their relationship with all Israelites. For us, it's about our relationship with people and especially with fellow believers. While most of us don't raise animals or have to deal with stray animals in our back yards, it's the principal that applies.
    - i) Ok, and that principal is: That God's laws are not just a bunch of do this and don't do that rules to follow. There is also a sin of "omission". That's the sin of failing to do the right thing in any given situation. It's like when we tell a half-truth about a situation in order to cover up for someone.
    - ii) The point as it applies to this text is if we find something that doesn't belong to us, we make the effort to return it or guard it until the proper owner shows up.
    - iii) Let me give a cute example: Some time back at our old home, while all of us were gone, a criminal was hiding from the police in our garage. The short version is he was caught and no one was hurt. Sometime later, my wife found his wallet where he was hiding. She gave it to the police, as it was the right thing to do and didn't keep any of the things within that wallet. My point is it's a simple example of not sinning by "omission" (that is failing to do what is right).
6. Verse 4: If you see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen on the road, do not ignore it. Help him get it to its feet.
  - a) It's one thing to find something near us and hold it until the owner shows up. It's another to be "going down the road" and get involved to do the right thing. To state the obvious, we have to have discretion as say, if someone needs medical help, we can do the wrong thing and make it worse. The point is a way we're a good witness for Jesus, is we make the effort to do the right thing and be willing to help strangers in need.
7. Verse 5: A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this.
  - a) First, let me state what this verse is not saying: It is not saying a woman can't wear pants or say a Scottish man can't wear a kilt. In the Middle East all people wore light robes, as it is hot weather. However, even with that stated, there were fashion statements where men dressed like men and women like women. What this text is warning against is a practice of acting like a transvestite where men dress like women and vice versa. (I told you we'll get into controversial topics in this chapter, and we're just getting warmed up.)
  - b) The basic idea is "men are to look like men and women like women". Most of us know at least one man who's very soft spoken, or a woman who's very rough. Just because we act that way doesn't mean we have to look like members of the opposite sex. Since this lesson is going to deal with controversial topics, let me get started here: I am not convinced that men or women are born homosexuals. My proof is to study identical twins. If one is born that way, it would be logical there'd be a 100% correlation with identical twins as both of them would act the same way. Yet, there have been multiple studies done with identical twins and no there is nowhere near a 100% correlation on that issue. There are also some wonderful ministries that help people leave that lifestyle. That's enough of that topic for the moment, and lots of things one can "Google" for more interest on those topics.
8. Verse 6: If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young.<sup>7</sup> You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life.
  - a) There are Jewish commentaries on this law that refer to it as the most trivial of all the laws given by Moses. Let me give my theories why Moses this law is at this point here:

- b) Let's face it, Moses just switched from discussing "cross-dressers" to not taking eggs and the mother of those eggs at the same time. Remember that the big issue is not acting like the "heathen" (non-believers) in God would act. Those who don't care about pleasing God don't care how they dress, act or what they eat in terms of whether or not it's offensive to God to act certain ways. It's like thinking, "Who cares what I do as long as I'm not hurting anyone else?" God is telling us here, "I know what's best for My people and I'm teaching all of you (us) how to live as to use your life to make a difference for Me".
    - i) You might say, I understand no a cross-dressing ban as it blurs the lines between men and women in society. Why care about not eating birds and their eggs at the same time? Think of it as a way of persevering life. If we just take those eggs for food, but preserve the mother, she can go on to produce more eggs. It's a way of continuing the cycle of life while feeding ourselves at the same time.
  - c) As to eating meat, I was taught a long time ago, that the greatest purpose an animal has, is to be used as food for humans to sustain our lives. God created humans for a relationship with Him and eating to preserve us and grow us is a great purpose for animals' existence. By not taking "the eggs with the chickens" we are allowing more food for our future.
  - d) OK, time for something a little less strange:
9. Verse 8: When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof.
- a) First thing to know about this law is that in the Middle East, it is very common to use the roof of one's home as a patio. Roofs were flat and people walked on them. Given the hot weather in that climate, the roof was a cool place to be in the heat of the day. Therefore, it is a practical thing to do to build a railing around the edge so no one falls off. That's what this verse is saying.
  - b) The big picture idea is to care about others. Just like laws about helping others in need or not taking mothers with their young, this law is about doing our best to preserve and help human life to grow by not doing something dangerous like not having a rail at the edge of our roofs especially if they're being used for a practical purpose like a patio. Since this law is pretty obvious, we can move on to the next one.
10. Verse 9: Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard; if you do, not only the crops you plant but also the fruit of the vineyard will be defiled.
- a) The word vineyard applies to grapes. This text isn't saying don't grow two distinct types of grapes, but it is forbidding for example, growing wheat and beans "intermixed" with each other. Visualize a field with a tomato bush, next to carrots, next to strawberries, next to some beans, and you get the idea. To state the obvious, it'd be a problem to work all of that as different plants require different amounts of water and are harvested at different times of the year. Therefore, there is a practical reason to not plant crops like this. I don't think this verse is condemning having one section of a farm for one purpose and another section for another. It's about intermixing in the same area.
  - b) The underlying idea is to keep our focus on what God desires for our lives. Just as we just read of a law that tells men to dress like men and women like women, so by not mixing a type of plant with another it's a visual reminder of how we've been separated for God in all that we do. Just as each plant is separated by section, this law reminds us that we too have been separated for God's use. Can different plants literally grow together, of course. By making the effort to separate different plant seeds, it reminds us how we too have been separated by God for His use.
11. Verse 10: Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together.
- a) If you're familiar with both animals, you'd know that practically they don't work together as farming animals. Some commentators mention how ox's are "kosher" and donkeys are not when it comes to eating them. I think the purpose is much simpler. Just as crops are to be separated to remind us how we're separated, so animals are also separated.

- b) There are stories in the bible of people riding donkeys, so that's not a problem. There are also stories of using oxen for plowing. The point of not mixing them is just here as another reminder of how God has separated us from nonbelievers so He can use our lives to make a difference for Him. Therefore, we have a bunch of examples here of how we can remind ourselves how we're separated for God as we go through our lives. Speaking of practical ways of separating ourselves, time for the next verse:
12. Verse 11: Do not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together.
- a) Once again we have an example that literally can be done (like mixing different plants in the same field), but we separate them to remind ourselves how we've been separated for God's use. Let's be honest, if we walked down the street wearing a cotton shirt and a coat made of wool, I doubt anyone would notice or care unless it was really hot out and people wondered why we're wearing a coat on a hot day.
- b) However, notice the text says "woven together". Now picture a shirt that is cotton on one side and wool on the other. Now people would notice. Again, the issue is separating our lives for God in practical ways and using practical aspects to remind ourselves how we've been separated for His use.
- c) Let me pause and remind ourselves of the Christians response to God's laws: Christians are free to sin all we want. The question is, how much do we want to displease God? If it is our role to use our lives to make a difference for Him, why would we want to displease Him by acting a certain way or dressing inappropriately? All of these laws are examples of "putting our money and our time where our mouth is", and are good examples of living as He desires we live. With that said, time for another strange law:
13. Verse 12: Make tassels on the four corners of the cloak you wear.
- a) I was trying to visualize, how do you find four corners on a robe or a pair of pants for that matter? Then it dawned on me: A cloak is like a blanket or a square cloth one wears over one's garment. OK, with that question settled, what's a tassel and why should I care?
- i) As to what it is, think of it as a piece of cloth hanging from the edge of a garment. It was discussed back in Numbers 15. The short version is the cloth reminds them to think of God. Kind of like the idea of tying a string around our finger to remind us to do something. Therefore, when that tassel tied to the corner of a garment as one is going through life, it reminds the Israelites to think about God.
- b) So does this mean I have to sew some tassels on my garments? No, however, developing habits to keep our focus on God is the idea behind this task. Examples would be a regular place where one prays or studies the bible that when we see that place, it reminds us to do those things for God. Therefore this is tucked in with all of these miscellaneous laws as a way to help keep our focus on God as we go through our day.
- c) With that relatively easy law stated, it's time once again for a tough subject:
14. Verse 13: If a man takes a wife and, after lying with her, dislikes her <sup>14</sup> and slanders her and gives her a bad name, saying, "I married this woman, but when I approached her, I did not find proof of her virginity," <sup>15</sup> then the girl's father and mother shall bring proof that she was a virgin to the town elders at the gate. <sup>16</sup> The girl's father will say to the elders, "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he dislikes her. <sup>17</sup> Now he has slandered her and said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin.' But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity." Then her parents shall display the cloth before the elders of the town, <sup>18</sup> and the elders shall take the man and punish him. <sup>19</sup> They shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the girl's father, because this man has given an Israelite virgin a bad name. She shall continue to be his wife; he must not divorce her as long as he lives.
- a) Back in the introduction to this lesson, I warned you that a lot of it has to do with the issue of "purity". God's ideal is that women marry as virgins. Couples I've known who've only had one relationship all of their married life, as a general rule live a happier life based on how God desires that they live.

- b) I'm not saying every couple will live this way, I'm saying that this is God's desire for our society that whenever possible, virginity be preserved for marriage. That idea leads me to this text, which discusses quite vividly, the concept of proof of virginity. In that culture it was common on a wedding night to have a cloth on the wedding bed for blood proof that is common for women the first time they have sexual intercourse. Realize in that society, women would often wed as young as 13 or 14, as soon as their first period started. This is done as big families were desired to work the farmland.
  - c) All of those cultural tests about virginity and tests lead me back to the text. I picture a lot of young people listening to Moses, "pay attention" as the subject is now on marriage and what is to be done in cases of one not being a virgin. The short version is if a man dislikes a bride after their wedding night and the bride was a virgin (as the parents brought blood evidence from the daughter's first period) then the husband has to pay a fairly significant fine and he's not allowed to divorce her.
    - i) There is a famous sign a lot of stores have that says, "You break it, you bought it". That's sort of the principal behind these verses. If the husband thinks that his new wife was not pure on their wedding night and her parents prove him wrong, then the groom is "stuck with her" for the rest of their life. In fact, if the accusation is false, the groom still has to pay the fine due to the disgrace caused by the whole accusation in the first place.
    - ii) What I suspect this law does in actuality is reduce the number of false accusations as the groom realizes if he's wrong, he pays a big fine and divorce is not allowed.
  - d) Keep in mind that a lot of the laws in this section were probably in response to how the locals acted. In ancient societies where women were pretty much "property" and divorce can occur for even a false accusation, such laws protect the honor of the brides' family.
  - e) OK, this is interesting I suppose, but what does it have to do with my life? Yes we get the idea that God wants purity in our sexual life outside of marriage. Consider the command to "not steal" or not make false accusations. These laws are examples of those commands as it applies to marriage and honor within marriage. The point is to "not steal" is not just for stealing, say physical items. It also applies to stealing one's honor or reputation. God laid out these laws to protect a family's reputation that lived to honor God.
15. Verse 20: If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the girl's virginity can be found,<sup>21</sup> she shall be brought to the door of her father's house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death. She has done a disgraceful thing in Israel by being promiscuous while still in her father's house. You must purge the evil from among you.
- a) So far, all we've discussed is what happens if the bride is innocent. What about if she is guilty of not being pure on one's wedding night? That's where these verses come in. To be promiscuous in that culture was a death sentence. It kind of makes me wonder how the Virgin Mary must have been treated by her extended family and the neighbors when she was pregnant. Even if she convinced her family it was true, imagine the disgrace she had to deal with among the neighbors and their accusations.
  - b) Coming back to facing the charges of being promiscuous outside of marriage, I'm sure a death sentence would help discourage people when they're just "in the mood". You don't read of any such stoning in the bible, outside of the woman being brought to Jesus, which I'll get to in a bit. The bottom line here is that two of the 10 Commandments is that a man shall cling to his wife and not commit adultery. To preserve our basic building block of a society, God ordained marriage and puts laws on the book to encourage marriage and to minimize promiscuous within a society.
  - c) But in the last lesson, we read where God allowed polygamy. As I stated in that lesson no case of polygamy in the bible has a happy ending. It violates God's command to Adam & Eve that a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife. (Genesis 2:24). God didn't forbid polygamy, but just gave examples of the problems it will cause in our lives.

- d) As to the actual charge, if a woman was found guilty of not being a virgin on her wedding night, she could be killed. There is no example of that in the bible. There's the story of the woman brought to Jesus for having an affair, but that's not a wedding night story. There's no other record in the bible for a woman being killed for that reason, but with the fear of a death sentence, I suspect such stonings were a rare occurrence.
  - e) Speaking of being in big trouble for fooling around sexually, check out the next verse:
16. Verse 22: If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die. You must purge the evil from Israel.
- a) Before I say anything else, remember that in Christianity, there's no unforgivable sin other than a lifetime denial as Jesus as payment for one's sins. If one committed adultery or had sexual relations prior to marriage, God does forgive. Remember what God desires of all of us: A personal relationship with Him. My point is it's never too late to start or renew a relationship with God no matter what one has done in one's life up to this moment.
  - b) If all of that is true, why kill someone here for sexual relations outside of marriage, be it as adultery or just two unmarried people? First, we have the issue that God desires purity in our society. Think in terms of the Christian church: God desires purity in our relationship with each other as well as in our relationship with Him. While we wouldn't kill someone for such a relationship, we would kick them out of our church as long as they're having an active affair on one's spouse.
  - c) I recently heard a pastor friend talking about his counsel to a young man who was having an affair with a married woman. The pastor said, "Have you considered, at the least, her husband might try to kill you if he found out?" That fear did get him to quit the affair.
  - d) The point for you and me is that just as God desired purity in our relationships with our spouses and he desired purity amongst His people, so we must strive as a society to turn from all sin and the desire to sin to keep our focus upon Him.
  - e) Just to warn you, the rest of the chapter does not get much easier:
17. Verse 23: If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her,<sup>24</sup> you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death--the girl because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you.
- a) The issue in these verses is rape. This is a hot topic in our culture now as issues such as date rape and when does "yes mean yes" are questions our society is wrestling with. Here in the text, this is "clear cut" rape where a man violated a woman using his strength. The question here is only if the woman being raped did scream for help. If she didn't that is an indication that she approved of the action. The obvious question is, what if he covered her mouth in that action? Then the case has to be tried. In any case, the man is declared guilty with the only question of whether or not the girl consented or not.
  - b) Notice the strong condemnation of rape as "evil". Notice God calls for stoning to death in this passage. There is no rehabilitation or "10 years in jail to learn one's lesson", but such a crime is to be put to death. Notice the rape is referred to as "another man's wife". For all we know the woman who was raped may have been single. However, God looks at every person as the beginning of a family, and those who do such things are not to be tolerated in a society that are called to live separately to make a difference for God.
  - c) Before I move on, I want to share one of my favorite bits of bible trivia. Occasionally I'll have someone say to me, "Why should I be against homosexual behavior?" After all, Jesus never said anything negative about homosexuality. My response is, "Jesus never said anything bad about rape either, but that doesn't mean Jesus condoned either action. Jesus did imply clearly that Moses was sent from God (See Luke 16:29-31 as an example). My point is if Moses clearly condemned rape as he did here and clearly condemn homosexuality as stated in Leviticus 18:22, and Jesus said Moses is from God, you can't say Jesus was pro or anti homosexuality or rape because he didn't comment upon it in the Gospels.

18. Verse 25: But if out in the country a man happens to meet a girl pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. <sup>26</sup> Do nothing to the girl; she has committed no sin deserving death. This case is like that of someone who attacks and murders his neighbor, <sup>27</sup> for the man found the girl out in the country, and though the betrothed girl screamed, there was no one to rescue her.
  - a) Before I discuss these verses, let me remind everyone we're dealing with a delicate topic. I've known people who've been scared for life based on rape done to them early in their lives. Of course, we need to mentally forgive crimes done to us so we can get on with our lives while pursuing justice of the criminal at the same time.
  - b) As to these verses, the point is pretty straightforward. If a woman screams and no one is there to hear her, she can't be accusing of cooperating if she fought off a stronger man and still lost the battle.
  - c) When you stop to consider that in many cultures, women are treated as property, it's nice to see that the bible respects women with no tolerance for men taking advantage of them in such situations. Remember that this book is a speech by Moses teaching us how to live as we use our lives to make a difference for God. Therefore, such evil acts are never to be tolerated in our society and must be properly dealt with by the authorities.
19. Verse 28: If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, <sup>29</sup> he shall pay the girl's father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the girl, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives.
  - a) In the last set of verses, the issue was rape of a married woman. In these verses the issue is a rape of an unmarried girl. Notice the penalty is not death, but in a sense it's worse for the criminal as he must pay a hefty fine and live with that girl the rest of his life. Usually when a man performs such a horrid act, he has a deep down hatred of the girl and doesn't want to see her again after that. By forcing him to marry her, he has to face her the rest of his life and daily realize what he did and live with the consequences.
  - b) Isn't this a horrible consequence for the girl? Yes it is. However, having to serve that man for the rest of her life forces her to "love the unlovable" and teaches her submission to God as being superior to being forced to submit to such a horrible act. The idea of this verse is to discourage men from doing this in the first place as then they'd have to live with her for the rest of their lives to remind themselves of what they did.
20. Verse 30: A man is not to marry his father's wife; he must not dishonor his father's bed.
  - a) Verse 30 seems like a strange transition after talking about something as horrible as rape. This verse is condemning a man who marries his stepmother. In 1st Corinthians 5:1, this exact incident is reported. The issue there was that church tolerated this, as they thought that as Christians we're free to do whatever we want. Paul uses that sin as a point that the church is never to tolerate sin within the church, even for saved people. Being a believer in Jesus is never an excuse to tolerate sin and the guilty party has to repent and turn from that sin before they could be allowed back in that church fellowship.
  - b) Coming back to this example, let's assume one's father is dead. Why would it be a crime for the son to marry that woman? The answer is she belonged to someone else. In a sense it's as bad as rape as she belonged to his father and not to him. That's why this is here as a transition to show that no evil is to be tolerated. We're never to steal what belongs to any other person, living or dead. The son is showing no honor to his father by performing an act like this and that's why it's considered a sin.
21. Chapter 23, Verse 1: No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD.
  - a) Remember that there are no chapter breaks in the original text. Moses switches from the delicate topic of rape which in effect is "stealing what doesn't belong to us" and now goes on to describing a way we can purposely hurt ourselves. Understand that in that culture it was common for people to be made celibate, as they would serve their gods that way.



- b) Consider that many religions require their priests to be celibate. The reason the Roman Catholic Church started that practice is they feared priests would give the wealth of that church to their descendants if they had children. That church never practiced any of these rituals of harming themselves, but just asked priests to live celibate.
  - c) Throughout history Jewish rabbi's (priests) and Protestant priests were always allowed to marry as God still wants priests to be witnesses to others by obeying His laws and having their own families to raise. I believe God considers every person can be the beginning of a family that is to be respected and bring more believers into the world.
  - d) Coming back to the verse, know that in ancient cultures a man was permanently made celibate by these methods. God is effectively saying, I want all men to enjoy the right to produce children through a family, and that includes priests to God and those of us who use our lives to make a difference for Him.
22. Verse 2: No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation.
- a) From Verse 2 through Verse 7 we're going to deal with descendants from different groups and their restrictions from being a part of Jewish society. Most likely, these verses weren't restrictions on descendants of issues from worshipping God, but just restrictions on them being a part of Jewish society. For example, they couldn't hold public office or an official of a city such as a judge or town elder.
  - b) So if my "great, great, great grandfather" did something horrible, why should I suffer for what they did decades or centuries earlier? First, the bible clearly teaches we are to judge people as individuals, and not condemn a child for parent's sins. See Deuteronomy 24:16. However, as we all know, children will often suffer the consequences of parent's sins, as stated in Exodus 34:7. The issue here is about society. We are to recall that God has no tolerance for sin, and by punishing one's descendants for a long time, it reminds a society to have that zero tolerance of sin. Hopefully it discourages someone from committing a sin as it affects their future descendants.
  - c) As to the "great, great, great grandson", yes God and society should still judge them as an individual. They are still allowed in church/synagogue. They were just forbidden from an office in society to remind the society (not them) of the evil committed in that location.
23. Verse 3: No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. <sup>4</sup> For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. <sup>5</sup> However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. <sup>6</sup> Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.
- a) The short version is these two groups are not among the people living in Israel, so they're not part of God's "wipe out" plan for being squatters in His land. Back in Numbers 22-24 we had the strange story of a foreign prophet hired by these people to curse the Israelites. Apparently this prophet could legitimately "channel" God for such predictions. Balaam would not violate his "power source" and even though he was paid to curse the Israelites he blessed them instead, as that's what God called this man to do.
  - b) That story was in the lifetime of most of the people listening to Moses give this speech. In that text in Numbers, we never find out how Moses heard of Balaam's speech. I suppose that as that large number of people crossed through that land, word got back to Moses of how famous this foreign profit was and how he blessed the Israelites when he was hired to curse them.
  - c) Bottom line here is that a descendant of these people who wants to serve God had to wait 10 generations before they are allowed to be part of a Jewish society. Again, why should a "great, great grandson" be punished for this act if he or she has nothing to do with it? The issue is for society to remember the act so they couldn't hold public office for all that time.

- d) Finally, notice that the Israelites were never to make peace with these groups. They were not required to go wipe them out as they weren't part of the Promised Land. (They lived east of the Jordan river in what is today the country of Jordan.) However, that hatred of the Israelites went on from generation to generation. It's as if God knew that these people would always resent the Israelites for worshipping the true God and therefore forbid any sort of peace treaty with them.
  - e) Remember again that if we believe God created this world, He has every right to do with it as He pleases. If He says never to make peace with a certain group, we may think it is an unfair statement, but it's His world. Notice there are exceptions for believers amongst that group. An individual convert was allowed to worship God, but as a reminder of the group they belong to, they couldn't be a "public official" for 10 generations.
24. Verse 7: Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as an alien in his country. <sup>8</sup> The third generation of children born to them may enter the assembly of the LORD.
- a) The Edomites were "cousins" of the Israelites. The common father of the 12 tribes of Israel was named Jacob. He had a twin brother named Esau. The Edomites were the children of Esau. They were forbidden for being a part of Jewish public life for three generations as a reminder that they are "cousins" but still not "one of us".
  - b) The Egyptians were the slave masters of the Israelites for 400 hundred years. Because the Israelites lived there, God wanted to remind the Israelites that they "hosted them" even as they were not kind to them.
  - c) OK, since none of us are Edomites and few of us are Egyptians, why should we care? The underlying issue is about having a zero tolerance for sin in our churches. If someone is a descendant of someone bad, we're to remember the bad act due to the harm it caused or is still causing our church while at the same time not punishing the descendants for the sins of the one who committed the act. Again the descendants can still worship God, they are just given limited rights as for that society to recall what their ancestors did to them.
  - d) The good news is we're done with the tough topics of rape, and bad ancestors. We'll now move on to other disgusting topics.
25. Verse 9: When you are encamped against your enemies, keep away from everything impure.
- a) If one is a soldier and they are about to battle an enemy, why care about what is impure? The idea is we're still to be a good witness to God during such times. So what is impure that the Israelites are to worry about? That's covered in the next four verses:
26. Verse 10: If one of your men is unclean because of a nocturnal emission, he is to go outside the camp and stay there. <sup>11</sup> But as evening approaches he is to wash himself, and at sunset he may return to the camp.
- a) Translation: If a man "wets his bed" (use your imagination) he is considered unclean for a 24-hour period until he can wash himself from that act. Of course, we know today about germs and their negative affect upon people, but it was not known back then. By Israelites doing ritual washings, they were actually helping each other live longer by not spreading germs to each other.
  - b) Now think about soldiers about to go into battle as stated in Verse 9. If they were nervous about the battle and "wet their bed" or had a "wet dream", they had to go clean themselves before being part of the battle. Again, one issue is bad germ protection. Another issue is that God wants us to be "clean" witnesses for Him, even in such tough areas as going into a battle against an enemy.
  - c) Think of these verses this way: If we're going to be a witness for God, wouldn't He want us to be as clean from sin as possible when we are such a witness? That's why we see here as an example, of having a clean body even in cases where we are battling an enemy. If we are "unclean" (think of an obvious sin someone can point back to us), then it's hard to share Jesus with someone as they're staring at the sin issue of our own lives.

27. Verse 12: Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. <sup>13</sup> As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement. <sup>14</sup> For the LORD your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy, so that he will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you.
- a) Just when you think, this lesson can't be disgusting enough, we now get into the issue of how to properly bury our "poop". Anybody who's ever camped in the woods or has been a boy scout, is familiar with this principal of burying our excrement. To state the obvious, we would not want someone else to step in it, so God required the Israelites to go outside of the Israelite camp to "do their business".
  - b) Most of us live in a world of bathrooms and sewer systems. How do we apply this to us? The idea again is about not living in a way that makes us a bad witness to others. If we're covered in the "poop of our sins" or we have evidence of our sins all around us, we're not a good witness for God in that situation. The underlying idea of these verses is not to be covered in a sin (e.g., dealing with a sin problem at the moment) so we can't be a witness to others around us while we're dealing with that issue.
  - c) I'm not saying we have to "clean up our act" in order to be saved. I'm saying we're not a good witness for Jesus when we're "covered in sin". Yes, Jesus wants us to come to Him just as we are, but at the same time, we're not a good witness to others when we have to deal with to put it in disgusting terms, "covered with poop" of our sins.
  - d) With that said, we're ready to move on to another tough topic:
28. Verse 15: If a slave has taken refuge with you, do not hand him over to his master. <sup>16</sup> Let him live among you wherever he likes and in whatever town he chooses. Do not oppress him.
- a) To explain this, I need to quickly talk about Israel and slavery. The bible never formally outlaws slavery, but it condemns it in an indirect way. To "not steal" would include the idea of stealing a human to become someone's slave. Israelites never allowed slavery of their own people strictly as a slave. With that said, there is the concept of "an indentured servant". That means if one person owes another a debt, they could work off that debt as a slave. In short, it was sort of allowed, and sort of not.
  - b) With that said, the issue here is the Israelites living in the land of Israel, and a "true slave" from another country takes refuge in the land of Israel. Once that person proves they're not running away from being an "indentured servant" but a true slave from another land the Israelites were to let that slave live where he wants in the land of Israel. It makes me think they would have been on the "Northern" side in the American Civil war. This also makes me realize that in the Roman world where two thirds the population were slaves they "dealt with it", but didn't approve of the slavery that existed at that time.
29. Verse 17: No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute. <sup>18</sup> You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the LORD your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both.
- a) The pagan gods that existed in Israel before it was conquered, often had male and female prostitutes (think homosexuality and heterosexuality) to honor and pay for their temples. Think of it as "sex for hire" to honor those false gods. If you know the history of Israel, a reason they were kicked out of the land centuries later by the Babylonians, is due to this law being violated as worship of "Baal" included this practice. Know that in the Greek city of Corinth at the time of 1st and 2nd Corinthians, they had temple prostitutes that did "their thing" as described here. God's effectively saying, He is never to be worshipped by this method and it's to be avoided at all costs.
  - b) If you ever wondered whether or not the bible forbids prostitution, here is your verse plus all of the talk we had earlier about purity in marriage adds to it. These verses also imply that one can't use prostitution money as payment for the priests, as to put it honestly the text says God detests "sexual selling" especially if it's done in His name!

30. Verse 19: Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest. <sup>20</sup> You may charge a foreigner interest, but not a brother Israelite, so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to in the land you are entering to possess.
- a) I have a client who's Orthodox Jewish, who's in the business of making private loans to people. He's a middleman between his "money sources" and those who need loans. It makes me wonder how he applies this verse: Does he only arrange loans to non-Jewish people? Don't know.
  - b) What I believe these verses mainly apply to is to not take advantage of those in need. For example, if one is living in the Promised Land and one encounters someone desperate and starving, don't lend them money at high interest so they can buy food. Think of this as a principal to be applied within our churches: We don't lend at interest to those who are in a need to survive, we help them when and however we can. The underlying issue is God wants us to care for those in need and not take advantage of those who are suffering.
  - c) So why does the text say the Israelites can lend to non-Israelites: The answer is it's a way for them to make money. Some centuries back, some European countries banned lending by Christians. Jewish people said, "Hey the bible says we can lend to non-believers" and there are cases of some families who became tremendously wealthy as they got into that business of being lenders. With that said, I believe the underlying principal here is simply to not taking advantage of fellow believers in need, but one can grow one's wealth by the practice of carefully lending to strangers.
  - d) Ok, two more tough topic's to go and we have it through these chapters.
31. Verse 21: If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the LORD your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. <sup>22</sup> But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. <sup>23</sup> Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth.
- a) Short version: We're not required by God to make oaths, but if we do, He requires us to keep our word. Think of that principal this way: How will anyone ever believe us when we talk to them about God if we don't have a reputation for being honest with what we've promised to do in other areas of our lives. Jesus effectively taught the same thing as He said, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no". (Matthew 5:37, NKJV). The point here we are to be men and women of our word. To swear something is true is also stating that we can't be trusted with our yes's and no's. But if we do swear to something, even if it's not a good decision, God expects us to honor that vow, as our trustworthiness is key to being a good witness for Him.
32. Verse 24: If you enter your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat all the grapes you want, but do not put any in your basket. <sup>25</sup> If you enter your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.
- a) Think of these verses as a form of welfare: It's saying if one is starving, one can walk into a farm and take what you can hold in your hands or eat at that moment, but you can't be any more greedy than that and carry off say, bundles of food to take home. For example, if one has an apple tree, a starving man can grab an apple off of that tree to eat, but he or she can't cut down a branch full of fruit to take home. You may recall, that Jesus had such little amounts of money, that's how He and His disciples ate. His accusers never said it's wrong for them to eat that way, they just said it was wrong to do on the Sabbath. Jesus reminded those accusers in effect that kindness to others is more important than obeying one's interpretation of the Sabbath. (See Mark 2:23-24.)
33. Let me summarize all of this fairly quickly: These two chapters had a whole bunch of very tough laws to be dealt with. Remember that most of Deuteronomy is a speech given to all the Israelites as they're about to enter the Promised Land. We're now about two-thirds the way through it. At this point Moses tackles some tough topics as to not act like the pagans act who lived there.

- a) The common thread of all these tough topics is to live in a way that people will know we are believers in Jesus by the way we act. While we're not required to obey these laws as a believer in Jesus, the underling principal behind these laws do apply as I've been teaching as I described each of these particular laws. In summary, think of these laws as receiving a set of guidelines as to how to live differently enough so that people will know by our behavior that we're living to make a difference for Jesus.
  - b) Let me also close by saying, that if you can make it through the tough topics listed in these two chapters, you can handle the rest of the book and the bible as a whole. I implied that these two chapters are "tough sledding" and if you can handle these, there is nothing left to fear anywhere else in this book or the bible for that matter. Since I'm now running long I'm overdue to close in prayer:
34. Heavenly Father, the greatest purpose we can have for our lives is to use it to make a difference for You with our time. Help us to use our time and our lives to glorify You through it. Guide us as we go through our lives to use our time for Your glory. As we consider some tough topics as laid out in these chapters, help us to realize that You know what's best for our lives and You've given us these laws as a guide to how we can make that difference for You. Therefore, let us use our lives to make a difference for You as we use your laws as a guideline for how You desire we do make that difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.