

1. Let's start with the good news: this is the last lesson on miscellaneous laws that God gave to the Israelites to learn and for us Christians to contemplate so we can make a difference for Him. The bad news is we still have to get through these two chapters that appear at first to be a whole lot of unrelated miscellaneous topics. This isn't the end of the book. After these two chapters, Moses is going to state the curses and blessings associated with obedience to these laws. From there He'll give a final history lesson to contemplate and then he discusses who'll be their next leader. The book will close with the death of Moses, which was probably written by his successor Joshua, or Moses himself in advance as God told him how he was going to die.
 - a) OK, that's the rest of Deuteronomy in a nutshell. All I have to do now is explain why we should study these next two chapters before you get bored reading what I'm writing.
 - b) Consider where we're at from Moses perspective. He knows he doesn't have long to live at this point in his life. He also knows he's wrapping up giving all the laws that he wants the Israelites to obey so they can trust God with every aspect of their lives. Let me put it this way: If you knew you're trying to tell people what's the most important things to do in one's relationship with God and you're down to your last few points, what would you want to emphasize at this point in your speech? What's left to say at this point? When I started to look at the last bunch of miscellaneous laws that way and the principals given behind the laws, they started to make a lot more sense.
 - c) With that said, let me go over the last bunch of laws in these two chapters, and how they apply to our live and more importantly, the principals behind them.
2. Chapter 25 opens with punishment for something less worthy than death. As a local policeman puts it, "Here's God's plan for a misdemeanor". For the sake of my foreign readers, that's a term, used in the United States and over English speaking crimes to describe a less serious crime than if one say, kills someone. The text does not say what the crimes are, just what's an appropriate way to deal with such a crime. The punishment was 40 strokes of the whip. I believe a reason Moses is giving this law here, is partially to show that punishment must fit the crime. It's also shows us that God does not consider every crime or sin, a death sentence. Moses spent a lot of time in the last few chapters dealing with serious crimes such as theft and rape. Here he's stressing that God wants punishment appropriate for the crime committed.
 - a) Then of all things Moses gives one line about not preventing an ox from eating while that ox is working on a farm. One principal here is about showing kindness to animals we use to help us accomplish our goals. In the New Testament Paul quotes this verse a few times to show that professional ministers deserve to eat as much as any other person. That just means we're to financially help those in the ministry. To muzzle an ox while it's working is preventing it from eating. To muzzle a Christian who's preaching the gospel prevents God's work from being done.
 - b) Then we get a strange law that effectively says if a married man dies young before he has any sons of his own, the brother of the married man is to take the widow as his own wife or as a second wife and bear that woman a son in the name of the dead brother or nearest living relative. Of course many families had only girls. Of course God's ideal is one man marrying one woman. The issue is God sees every couple as the beginning of a family. If a man dies without starting that family line, God wants that line to continue and asks that a family member "step in" to keep that family line going.
 - i) OK, that's both strange and sort of interesting. Why should we care? To state the obvious, we don't have to do that today. What it does show is that God cares for the continuation of the human race and sees every man or couple as the beginning of a new "nation". God's interested in His people growing in numbers.

- ii) Let me pause and explain the difference between God loving the whole world and how God loves the believers. Of course He loves what He created or He wouldn't have created it in the first place. For those who freely choose to love God and take His son's payment for their sin, God's love is focused on those of us who choose to love Him as He has loved us. I state that here, because the last verse focuses upon our obligation to create more of what God loves until He decides to "wrap it up".
 - c) Then we get another law about the importance of continuing the family line. It's another strange one so here goes: If two men are fighting, and the wife of one grabs the testicles of the opponent, she's to lose her hand for that actions. There is no recorded bible story of it ever taking place, so this is a law designed to scare people. The principal behind the law is that God's interested in continuing the human race and to do permanent damage to the parts of a body that can prevent that continuation of the human race is what Moses wants to teach us: That above all things, God's interested in the continuation of the human race especially with those who show love to God in exchange for the love He's shown us.
 - d) Then we get an obvious law about being fair in business dealings. The specific example is about not having one set of weights (think rules) for buying and then having another set of weights for selling. This principal is quoted a lot in the bible. The idea behind it is that God in working with believers wants us to be fair in all our dealings with them.
 - e) In the final verses of Chapter 25, Moses reminds the Israelites that they're to always battle against a group called the Amalekites. I'll describe who they are in this lesson. What's far more important is that this group represents "the flesh". There's a classic Christian phrase that goes, "The spirit is always battling the flesh". What that means is all our life we have to battle between doing God's desire versus our own desire. To make a long story short, in the Old Testament whenever there is a battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites you can study that battle as typologically, the desires for our self gain versus the desires to make a difference for God in the world. More on that later, but that's the basic idea.
3. Then we get into Chapter 26, the last of the laws Moses gives to the Israelites: The first law is the assumption that the Israelites will conquer the land of Israel. Then to show the gratitude for the good land God has given them, they're to offer up to God the first of the produce as grown in the land as a sign of gratitude for getting them "that far" to a point where there's no one to fight in the land and they're now free to grow crops under God's protection.
- a) The next discussion in that chapter falls along the same line. I mentioned a while back (a few lessons back) that the Israelites did more than tithe their income. They were required to give 23 $\frac{1}{3}$ % of their income to God. It's actually a double tithe and a third tithe in every third year. Hey if I only had to pay 23.33% of my income in taxes, I'd be more than happy to give that for God's purposes of my life. The underlying point of this section is they are to realize that God has blessed them. He's gotten them and us this far in our lives. God's given us victories over our enemies (and our problems) and has allowed us to grow food. Therefore, we're more than happy to do what He commands us to do so we can enjoy the great blessings of our lives due to obedience to Him.
 - b) The point for you and me is no matter what we have to pay in taxes, no matter where we are in life, the fact that we're breathing and can use our time to make a difference for God means that we should take the time to appreciate whatever blessings we do have in life so we can live a more joyful life by being grateful for what we do have.
 - c) Believe it or not, that's a wrap for the chapter and for this section of the book. From here, we get into a discussion of how we are cursed if we ignore God's principals for our lives as well as a discussion of how we're blessed for obedience. The final part of the book is a "wrap up" discussing who will be the next leader of the Israelites and the epilogue about the death of Moses.
 - d) Therefore, you're now a good way done with the book and the introduction. I ask you to join me as I explain the laws of these two chapters in more detail:

4. Chapter 25, Verse 1: When men have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty.² If the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make him lie down and have him flogged in his presence with the number of lashes his crime deserves,³ but he must not give him more than forty lashes. If he is flogged more than that, your brother will be degraded in your eyes.
 - a) These chapters start with the issue of someone brought to trial on charges that are not for murder or some other capital offense. No specifics are given about what the guilty might be charged with. It just says if a person is guilty, they're to be whipped a maximum of 40 times. In the New Testament, Paul talked about the fact he was guilty of being whipped a total of 39 times on several occasions for the crime of preaching the gospel in places where preaching different religions is illegal. Why 39? The traditional way this law was applied was to give 39 beatings in case someone miscounted. (See 2nd Corinthians 11:24.)
 - b) Remember that there were no prisons in the land of Israel. To publicly punish a man or a woman for a crime was designed to discourage that crime. This method might be thought of as cruel today, but I guarantee it would cut down crime as public shame is a great way to discourage criminal behavior in the first place.
 - c) Now for the important question: Why should we care? First it shows that God has mercy on us for sins and not every sin calls for the immediate death penalty. Remember that in the bible the number "forty" is associated with God's judgment. For example, the 40 years the Israelites spent in the wilderness, the 40 days Jesus spent being tempted by Satan. The point is these Israelites would associate "40" with God's judgment as their parents spent a total of 40 years wandering in the desert for their sins.
 - d) Moses has now been giving this speech for many chapters on "do this and don't do that" in order to live a life pleasing to God. This set of verses is reassuring the Israelites that if there is a non-death penalty issue, God ordains punishment appropriate for the crime and a limit to the amount of punishment that can be inflicted for that punishment.
 - e) Speaking of possible punishment, we now get a one line verse about not punishing oxen:
5. Verse 4: Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.
 - a) One has to recall that for many centuries, Israel was primarily an agricultural society. The way that farmers worked a field was by oxen teams. In this verse, God's saying when the ox is treading the grain, don't put a muzzle over its mouth so that ox can't eat and work at the same time. OK, and why is this here? First, it shows that God cares how we treat our animals. It argues against cruelty to animals. What about those animals the Israelites are allowed to eat? It's not cruel to sacrifice an animal for food. What is cruel is to not feed it when it is working for us.
 - b) Now for the important aspect of this verse. The New Testament teaches us that this verse also teaches an important principal for us Christians to live by: That is if a person makes a living preaching the bible, we're not to stop that person from earning a living doing so. In other words, it's ok to pay a preacher to preach the Gospel. Just as it'd be cruel to not let an ox eat while its working, it would be cruel to say to a pastor, you just go ahead and starve while you do what you're called to do. (See 1st Corinthians 9:9 or 1st Timothy 5:18 on this point.)
 - c) Remember that God's laying out all these principals for us to live by in order for us to be a good witness for Him. Most situations in life aren't exactly like any of these specific laws we've been reading about. Most decisions we make as Christians is God effectively telling us, "As long as we abide by the principals laid out here in God's word, we're free to make the best decision possible within those guidelines."
 - d) God wants us to make good decisions in life. I've talked to lots of people who struggled over what is God's will. My answer is usually the same: If we're abiding His laws we're free to make the best decision possible given whatever situation we're in and as long as the decision is within the guidelines as laid out in the bible for us.

6. Verse 5: If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her.⁶ The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.
- a) I stated in the introduction that God's interested in keeping the human race going on until He returns to wrap up life as we know it. God is especially interested in bringing in any new people in the world that are interested in having an eternal relationship with Him.
 - b) The point is if a married man dies without having a son, the brother of the married man is to also take that wife as his own and bear a son for that man. I'll be the first to admit, this law appears to be both sexist and against God's ordained ideal of a one man, one woman relationship. Is the text saying that having only daughters is a bad thing? Is the text also saying that a brother now has to have two wives here? Let me explain.
 - i) What also popped in my head is that if my brothers ever remarried, I'm going to check out their wives a lot closer knowing this obligation is "on the books". Yes we Christians are not under God's law, so the issue is the principals behind the law, not if we obey it to the letter. With that said, here we go:
 - ii) The first thing to get across is to think about human life from God's perspective: What He wants is people who are going to freely choose to love and obey Him as He cares for us. To continue the human race with new believers increases those who'll choose to be with Him forever. To not care about the next generation is a very selfish way to go through life.
 - iii) To state the obvious some more, God needs both men and women to be born as it takes one of each to have children of their own. Whether we like it or not, God has called men to lead. It's like one of my favorite little jokes, "If two women are slow dancing, who leads? Someone has to be the leader!" Therefore God decided that men are to be the leaders. If you don't like it, take it up with Him, not me!
 - iv) My point as it relates to these verses is that for a man's "name" to continue, a son in that culture is needed for that name to continue. In agricultural societies, having a lot of children means having lots of "farm hands" to help out. Therefore, it was a common thing to see a family produce a lot of children and then "odds are good" at least one boy would be born.
 - v) So is God saying it's a sin to have no children, or just one child or only girls? None of those things are a crime or a sin. The issue is the "ideal". As I also stated back in the previous lesson, most men don't mature until they get married and have kids. That's because they're now responsible for someone other than themselves in life.
 - vi) OK then, what about this law from the perspective of the brother? As we'll read in the next set of verses, this law was not a requirement, but a "duty". In other words it is considered a shameful thing to not do this, but it doesn't call for a whipping or something harsh if a brother turns down this request. In practicality, if the brother who died was named, say "Simon", the duty of the brother of the deceased would be to take the widow as his own wife and name the first born son "Simon" after the dead brother. I don't know if this law is practiced in Jewish communities today as it was in "biblical times" but there are a few examples of this in the bible.
7. Verse 7: However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me."⁸ Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her,"⁹ his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line."¹⁰ That man's line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandaled.
- a) Here we get the "shame aspect" of a brother refusing to do this duty.

- b) The most famous bible example where this was practiced is in the book of Ruth. To make it simple, Ruth was not an Israelite, but her mother in law was. Both women moved back to Israel after leaving during a famine. There was an Israelite man attracted to Ruth and he was somehow related to Ruth's mother. The point is he agreed to take her as his wife after a relative who was closer to Ruth by blood refused to perform this duty as described in the last set of verses. My point is the four chapter book of Ruth includes the story of a man being shamed because he refused to perform this brotherly duty of taking her as a wife. That book is a wonderful model of how we're "redeemed" by God even if we're an outcast of our society.
 - c) There is a second example of this in Genesis, but a little less obvious. One of the 12 sons of Joseph (the common ancestor of the 12 tribes of Israel) had three sons. The first one did die without having a son. The second son took the same wife to perform this duty and he too died. The story then talks about the failure of the third son to perform the same duty. My point is this law was in effect, "on the books" even before it was formally written out here in Deuteronomy. (That story is from Genesis Chapter 38.)
 - d) Coming back to the text, the main point to get from these verses, is that God considered it the duty of a brother or the closest living relative to do this duty for a dead brother to raise up a son in his name. A failure to do this duty would bring him shame, but it wasn't any sort of death sentence or public beating like mentioned in earlier verses. If nothing else it shows us that God does not consider every sin to be a death penalty or a public beating.
 - e) It just occurred to me that a common theme of this chapter so far is "public shame". In the first set of laws, a guilty person was publicly beaten as to shame him for that crime. Then we get a law about not letting an ox eat while working as if to say, it is a shame to treat a thing we own without any respect. Then we get this big ritual about helping out a family member who died without children. A failure to help him is a case of public shame. This goes to show that God's not above using shame as a motivation for us to do His will in a given situation.
 - f) Speaking of shameful things, notice the next verse:
8. Verse 11: If two men are fighting and the wife of one of them comes to rescue her husband from his assailant, and she reaches out and seizes him by his private parts, ¹² you shall cut off her hand. Show her no pity.
- a) Males, much more than females, like to fight as a form of competition. If you have doubts watch the way most boys play when left alone versus the way most girls play with other girls. With men, once the fight is over and they usually calm down, they move on. What God is concerned about is a wife getting involved in one of those fights, and to put this bluntly, harm the opponent's testicles so that other man can't have children. This comes back to our theme that God cares about the human race continuing even if we don't like the other person that our husband is fighting with.
 - b) Doesn't this seem like a cruel punishment, to cut off a hand for damaging the testicles of a man fighting with her husband? The point is that man now can't have any children of his own due to that damage. There are no bible stories of this put into practice. This is on the "books" to discourage women from doing this sort of action. In other words, God desires we think about the consequences of our actions. That includes getting physical involved in a fight involving our spouse and another man. Again, God's laying out principles as He desires the human race to continue as to produce more people that He can then have an eternal relationship with.
 - c) Another common theme of this chapter and a lot of the "miscellaneous" laws that Moses is laying out to finish this section of the book is to show that God not only cares about our relationship with Him, but with other people. He's not only concerned with continuing to have a race of people loyal to Him, but also that we minimize the damage due to death or even arguing so that this "race of believers" can continue in our society.

9. Verse 13: Do not have two differing weights in your bag--one heavy, one light. ¹⁴ Do not have two differing measures in your house--one large, one small. ¹⁵ You must have accurate and honest weights and measures, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶ For the LORD your God detests anyone who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly.
- a) These verses seem like a strange transition: We go from the subject of raising children of a dead brother to not preventing someone fighting with our spouses from having children, to the topic of being fair in our dealings in business. The idea of having different weights is all about cheating in our business dealings. For example, if someone was in the business of selling steaks. They would measure say one pound of meat by using an object of that exact weight. The idea is avoid having two sets of "measures" (one to buy and one to sell) as to cheat people in business dealings.
 - b) OK, that one is pretty obvious. What I'm more fascinated by is the "transition". Why did Moses jump from issues regarding theft, compassion and continuing the human race to an issue of fair business dealings? The common theme is about doing the right thing in any situation we get in. Think about the big decisions we make in life. Most of the time it isn't exactly any one of the situations as described in the bible. I'm convinced that when trying to decide what is "God's will", the answer is simply do what's logical given the situation in front of us as not to violate any of His principals to live by. In other words, we should care about continuing the human race, we should care about our family members, we also should care about the appropriate punishment for crime and as these verses teach, we're to do the right thing in our business dealings.
 - c) Think of the chapter this way: If people don't trust us to do the right thing in life, how do we be a witness for God, if we're not known for making good decisions either as a society or as individuals? Does this mean we have to be perfect? Of course not. At the same time when we mess up, we deal with it the best we can and we make the best decisions we can given the circumstances we face at the moment. That's sort of the underlying theme here in this chapter and this book: Make good decisions given the situation we face, and treat people as we'd want them to treat us: Kindness and mercy. That's why there are limits to punishments described in this chapter. That's why we read of kindness to animals. That's why we read of shaming criminals. That's why we read of not hurting people in a way, as they can't reproduce. OK, now that I've beaten that point to death, let's move on.
10. Verse 17: Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. ¹⁸ When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. ¹⁹ When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!
- a) Just when you think this chapter can't get any stranger, we get these three verses asking the Israelites to recall their war with the Amalekites. To recall a little Israelite history, as soon as the Israelites left Egypt, their first war encounter was with this group. This is told in Exodus 17, three chapters prior to the giving of the 10 Commandments. The Israelites who were listening to Moses speak, probably heard the story from their parents how they had to fight this group soon after leaving Egypt. What's interesting about that story is the Israelites were winning that war when Moses was praying for them and losing when the prayer stopped.
 - b) To state what should be obvious, there is a tie-in between prayer, fighting this group and what God wants us to learn about trusting Him. To explain that, first I need to remind all of us that Moses tells the Israelites here never to forget that battle. Further Moses says the Israelites are to "blot out the memory of Amalek" forever. Whatever this group did to the Israelites, it's pretty obvious God's pretty angry at them for trying to prevent His will for His people to go live in the land He promised to give to them.

- c) OK, that would be interesting if we were Israelites living thousands of years ago. Tell me why I should care about any of this? The secret is to realize that the word "Amalek" is in the bible is a "code word" for "battling our fears". Think about our faith in God this way: What's the biggest obstacle to having faith? It's not a lack of faith, it is fear. It could be fear that we're wrong about Jesus. It could be fear of being without money or a fear of losing one's family. The point is fears is the biggest drawback from drawing us to have a closer relationship with God.
 - i) Need proof? Why would Moses say that the Israelites from one generation to the next is going to have fight these guys. It's now been roughly 3,000 years since this speech was given. No Amalekites exist today, yet Moses is warning us that we're going to have to fight these guys from generation to generation. By the time of the Babylonian captivity, that's the last literal battle we read of the Israelites fighting against them, so why the big "from generation to generation speech?" I'm pretty positive it's about fighting one's fears.
 - ii) For example, if one studies 1st Samuel, much of that book gives a contrast between King Saul and King David. Saul was associated with fear of losing power. David is associated with giving his fears over to God. Saul would not. If you study the book of Esther, her enemy is a descendant of this group and the Israelites defeated them through the efforts of Esther (and others).
 - iii) Even if I'm completely wrong about that, I'm still convinced the greatest barrier to a lack of faith is fear. Our fears can paralyze us and get us away from our trust in God out of fear of what could happen to us. Fear can physically damage our body and make us a useless witness for Jesus. Therefore, fear is a thing to be avoided as it shows a lack of trust in God cares for us and that He'll lead us down the path He wants to go in life. A fear of God's judgment is a healthy thing as it makes us want to please Him with our lives. A fear of what could happen to us in this lifetime is a "death wish" whether we realize it or not. In times where we're overcome with a fear of what could happen to us, it's good to pray in "baby steps", where we pray a little at a time to trust that God's still there and He'll help us through our fears.
 - iv) OK, now that I've pounded the "do not forget" aspect of Amalek and fears into our heads, it's time to see what's the last group of things Moses wants us to know as to have a close relationship with God:

11. Chapter 26, Verse 1: When you have entered the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, ² take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name ³ and say to the priest in office at the time, "I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the land the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us." ⁴ The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God.

- a) To make this simple, Moses says here that after the Israelites have finishing conquering all of Israel, they're to perform a ritual where they take the first of the crops the Israelites will grow in that land and dedicate it to God. It is a ritual performed by the priest. Obviously God does not need a basket of food to eat. This ritual is not about God, but a way to show one's gratitude for God for giving us victory in life.
- b) It may help to realize that a practice of the pagan's who lived in Israel at that time was to dedicate food to them. God's trying to teach the Israelites that He and He alone made it possible for them to get to and conquer the land. Coming back to the issue of fear, we do overcome it, not by trying harder or "gritting our teeth" and going forward, but by a trust that God's in charge, He'll give us victory over our fears and He'll lead us down the path He wants us to go if we're willing to take the footsteps and trust Him to guide our lives.
- c) My point is simply to show God gratitude for the good things He's done for us in life.

- d) One of the things my wife makes me or the kids do when we're feeling sorry our self is to make a list of things we are grateful for. It gets our minds off of fears and makes us focus on what we are grateful for in life. That in effect is what these verses are about: To make an effort to show gratitude for the good things God's done for us. If you get that, the rest is historic details and shows the ritual of how the Israelites did it back then. Speaking of a ritual, that idea continues in the next few verses:
12. Verse 5: Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. ⁶ But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. ⁷ Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ⁸ So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹ He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; ¹⁰ and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. ¹¹ And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household.
- a) In order to understand what these verses mean and how to apply them to our lives, I need to give a little background here. All the Israelites listening to Moses speech live were part of the "twelve tribes" of Israel. Their common ancestor, about 400 years earlier, Jacob, did spend most of his adult life living in tents as a wandering shepherd. Jacob lived most of his life in what was known as Aramea, which to put it simply, was an area northeast of what is Israel today. Jacob, his 12 sons and grandchildren, all moved to Egypt near as told near the end of the book of Genesis. Then came the years of slavery in Egypt and then we read of God leading them out to the land of Israel. In short, this is the story of the Exodus as told in one paragraph from God's perspective.
- b) My point is even though the Israelites had not yet conquered the land of Israel from God's all knowing perspective, it's a done deal. After the land is to conquered, the Israelites are all to gather together along with the priests (Levites) and the strangers who live there at a time when this offering is to be made, and show gratitude to God for the victory.
- i) OK, if it's a "done deal" from God's all knowing perspective, why show gratitude to Him for that victory? It's not for His sake, it's for our sake. Showing gratitude gets our minds off our problems and makes us joyful when we are grateful for the good things we do have in our lives. It gets our focus off of our fears and unto the God who loves us, cares for us and wants to guide us to overcome those fears.
- c) Let me approach this issue from another angle. Suppose we're in a really bad mood and we are dealing with fear or anger over our situation. In these verses, God is telling future generations of Israelites to remember the great miracles He did to get the Israelites out of Egypt and lead them to this land. From the stand point of us Christians, we also need to be grateful for these events because if they didn't happen, Jesus could not have come into a world of "His fellow Israelites" in order to preach the good news and be crucified for our sins. In other words, the historical events as described here in Deuteronomy were needed in order to bring Jesus into this world. To put this even another way, if I can't trust God's unconditional promise of giving the land of Israel to the Israelites, how can I trust in His unconditional promise that Jesus died for every sin I'll ever commit in my life? My point is if we can't think of anything to be grateful for, we can always show gratitude for God's work in the world up to this point to lead us to the salvation that we all have.
- i) Suppose my fears are not that big an issue. Suppose we're just angry because we have been hurt in a situation or we fear what could happen to us. A reason God's called us to show gratitude for the big historical things, is it gets our minds off of our problems and shows us "history in advance" from God's perspective that all of this is done as to lead people like us into salvation. Gratitude overcomes fears.

13. Verse 12: When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied. ¹³ Then say to the LORD your God: "I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, according to all you commanded. I have not turned aside from your commands nor have I forgotten any of them. ¹⁴ I have not eaten any of the sacred portion while I was in mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor have I offered any of it to the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God; I have done everything you commanded me. ¹⁵ Look down from heaven, your holy dwelling place, and bless your people Israel and the land you have given us as you promised on oath to our forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey."
- a) To explain these verses, it's probably best to bring up the classic debate among Christian scholars on the issue of "One saved, always saved". To make it simple, people are afraid that if someone thinks that way, then they're going to think they're free to sin as much as they want and God won't care because they're "already saved". What I'm saying is that behavior matters, saved or unsaved. I'm convinced that God's far more concerned with what we do with our declaration of salvation, then any actual declaration we make in the first place. In short, our behavior matters to God, not to earn our salvation, but solely so we can use our lives to make a difference for Him with our changed lives.
 - b) I wanted to state all of that first, because in a sense, that's what Moses is trying to say in these verses. To paraphrase these verses briefly, they're saying, "If you've been obedient to all that I've ask you to do then I (God) will bless the fact you've been obedient." Does all that mean we have to be perfect? Of course not, but that also doesn't mean we do our best to live as God desires we live, which is based on principals taught through the bible.
 - c) That leads me back to the specifics of these verses. Moses is telling all the Israelites who are listening to speech, once you're living in the land of Israel peacefully, after killing all the people "squatting" there, once you've paid your 23.33% "taxes" without cheating in what I've required you to do, then and only then will I bless you tremendously.
 - d) So, does that mean if I do all I believe God's asked me to do and my decisions have not in any way, violated the principals stated in this book or the bible for that matter, God owes me, say a million dollars on the spot? Hardly. What He does promise, is that He'll never forsake us, no matter how bad we've messed up or what the situation. I've known strong Christians who've died in ways I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. What God promises is internal peace through whatever situation we're dealing with and eternal life in heaven in exchange for trusting Him to guide our lives in the first place. God doesn't expect us to be perfect, but He does expect us to make our best effort to live based on the principals as stated in this book. As to how we're actually blessed when we're obedient to God, that'll be a big topic in the next few chapters.
 - e) Let me approach these verses another way: Why doesn't the text say "If we only worship God the way He desires and not kill or steal, then God will bless us?" Why do we get the references to the tithing? I suspect because it's easy to think, "Yes I worship God and yes I haven't killed anyone, stolen or cheated on my spouse" is much easier than "putting our money where our mouth is" (so to speak) by agreeing to set apart a part of our take home income and not cheat in those aspects. My point is when we put our money and our time with what we claim to believe, then God will bless us. It's not about being perfect but our willingness to commit our lives to serving Him, then He'll bless our lives. As to how God will exactly bless our lives, we'll discuss that in the next lesson.
 - f) Now for the good news. We've made it through all of the laws and commandments given in this book. The last few verses of this chapter are a "wrap up comments" of the laws we have been covering for most of the book. As I said in the introduction, the rest of the book is about how we're blessed and cursed based on obedience or a lack thereof, and the book will end about the transfer of leadership and the death of Moses.

14. Verse 16: The LORD your God commands you this day to follow these decrees and laws; carefully observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹⁷ You have declared this day that the LORD is your God and that you will walk in his ways, that you will keep his decrees, commands and laws, and that you will obey him. ¹⁸ And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. ¹⁹ He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honor high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.
- a) What's implied by these verses is that the Israelites have agreed to keep all the laws as is stated throughout this book. When did they do that? When they agreed to keep the Ten Commandments. In effect, all the laws we've been covering in this book are an expanded commentary on those commandments. They are examples of how the laws practically do apply to our lives.
 - b) Either that or the large audience was yelling out their "Amen's" as Moses was giving this speech. For those who don't know the Hebrew word "Amen" means "I agree with what's being said." Either way the point is Moses has been giving his speech for 26 chapters now explaining how God wants us to live so we can make a difference for Him.
 - c) For us Christians it's time to come back to the basics: What the Promised Land represents is living life based on trusting God in every aspect of our lives and making life's decisions based on the principals as taught in this bible. As we all know, most of the big decisions we make in life are not exactly like any of the laws as taught in this book or the bible over all. What I'm convinced is, God wants us to make the best decisions possible given what we have to "work with" and not violating any of the principals as taught in the bible.
 - d) I'm stating that concept, because in effect that's what Moses is saying here. Live our lives by abiding by the principals as taught in the law and then make the best decisions we can under the guidelines as taught in this law. I'm not saying we have to perfectly obey all of these laws in order to be a good Christian. What I am saying is God's teaching us what is the best way to live based on the principals as taught in this book. If you get that, you've gotten the main concept this book is trying to teach us.
 - e) With that said, I'm ready to wrap up this lesson a little early. The next lesson will cover a lot of verses, so think of this lesson as the "break" before the long one covering the next 2 chapters of this book. With that said, thanks for reading and I'll wrap it up in prayer.
15. Heavenly Father, as we go through our life, there are always difficult decisions we have to make. Help us to keep your laws in mind and guide the decisions we make so that we'll be a witness for You in all that we do. Bless us this day, forgive us our sins, and help us to use our time and our resources to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.