

1. In this lesson, we move into a new section of the book. We're done with all the laws saying what God expects from us. I can summarize these two chapters as "the bad news, the good news, and the really bad news". I'll come back to that. However, that phrase isn't my lesson title: This is it: Understanding from God's perspective what He expects of us. If you consider it, it's strange that the God who created everything wants something from us. What that is, is to live a life to make a difference for Him by leading others to Him or just making a difference for Him in our world. So God desires we be a good witness for Him, that's old news. What's in it for God?
 - a) As I state every so often, if God is full of love, He needs something to express that love on. He's decided that people are to be the recipient of that love. I've always argued that God by definition is perfect and doesn't need anything. However, if one loves to paint or play a musical instrument, one does it just because one loves to do it. God's the same way. He is so full of love, He desires to have people to share that love with Him for eternity.
 - b) That's why God's willing to do whatever it takes, for all people to freely choose to be with Him forever. He asks those of us who have committed our lives to serve Him, live, as He desires as to be a good witness for Him to the world around us. Because He knows we're not perfect, He designed a system where we could seek forgiveness for our sins as well as God Himself paying the price for our sins. That way we can choose to freely love Him as He's chosen us to serve Him for all of eternity.
 - c) To put all of this another way, if we live in God's world, He's free to do with it whatever He pleases as it's His world. Therefore, if God decides to harden some hearts and allow other's hearts to be open to Him, who are we to argue? Since I don't know who's hearts He has and hasn't opened to Him, I pray for the hearts of those I care about to be open so they'll too enjoy eternity with Him forever.
2. OK, for most of us, this is old news. We get all of that. What does all of that theology have to do with these two chapters? That's where we get back to the bad news, the good news and the really bad news. Most of the text in this chapters explains how we're cursed if we turn from God after we've committed our lives to serve Him. Those curses blanket a number of blessings we get if we do commit our lives to Him. So why so much emphasis on the bad news? One reason is to show that God knows history before it's written. We can read these curses and see how they've bared out over history in very literal ways. Another reason is to remind us how much we'll suffer if we do choose to turn from God once we've committed our lives to serving Him.
 - a) But aren't we Christians saved by trusting in Jesus for our salvation? Of course. However that is a separate issue from being a good witness for Him. If I can sum up the entire book of Deuteronomy in one phrase, it is that "behavior matters". It matters for the Christian as much as anybody trying to live to make a difference for Him. My point is we can claim we are trusting in Jesus for salvation, but are we committing our time and resources based on what we claim is our faith? Bottom line is if we say we believe in Jesus is God, we may be saved, but our life won't be a good witness for Him if we don't act like we should.
3. As to these two chapters themselves, they'll start with God commanding the Israelites to write all the words of Deuteronomy (either the whole book or the 10 Commandments) on plastered stones when they're in that land. They are also to build an altar to God to offer burnt sacrifices (to show our complete commitment to Him) and fellowship offerings (to show we're willing to do His will once we've committed our lives to Him). Then most of Chapter 27 and Chapter 28 list curses for disobedience, blessings for obedience and some really bad curses if we choose to turn from God. If you get that, you get these two chapters.
4. With that said, there is a lot of text to cover in these two chapters and as this will be a longer than usual message, so let's get started with the verse-by-verse commentary.

5. Chapter 27, Verse 1: Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people: "Keep all these commands that I give you today. ² When you have crossed the Jordan into the land the LORD your God is giving you, set up some large stones and coat them with plaster. ³ Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. ⁴ And when you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I command you today, and coat them with plaster. ⁵ Build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. Do not use any iron tool upon them. ⁶ Build the altar of the LORD your God with fieldstones and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. ⁷ Sacrifice fellowship offerings there, eating them and rejoicing in the presence of the LORD your God. ⁸ And you shall write very clearly all the words of this law on these stones you have set up."
- a) The short version is Moses is saying that after the Israelites have crossed the Jordan River and entered the Promised Land they are to take stones, plaster them and write the words of Deuteronomy at Mount Ebal. I'll talk about why Mount Ebal in a second. They are also to make sacrifices to God on an altar. Some commentators argue that there's just one altar that's to be plastered and then sacrifices be placed on it. Other commentators say there's a plastered wall with the law and a separate altar for sacrifices. Personally, I don't care who is right. Either way, there is an altar built to God and His commands plastered on rocks.
 - b) First, I took a few moments to look up how to make plaster. To save you the same trouble it is a mixture of flour, water and salt. I'm speculating the Israelites learned how to make it when they were in Egypt. I also suspect they got flour as the conquered Israel. Among Bible scholars, some argue that the entire book of Deuteronomy was written on this large wall of plaster. Others say it was just the 10 Commandments. Either way, the point is we are to remind ourselves how God wants us to live. Whatever way it was done, what God commands us to do as a witness for Him is written publicly for us and others to study.
 - c) Next, where is Mount Ebal? It's a barren mountain (a big hill) in Israel. It's adjacent to a valley where Abraham first built an altar about 500 years earlier when He was in the land of Israel. So why did God pick this mountain for this altar? Because it's barren. It shows what we have to offer God: Nothing. Later in this chapter, this barren mountain is also where the curses of turning from God are recited. The barrenness implies how when we sin we can come back to where these sacrifices took place to once again commit to God.
 - d) Speaking of barren, notice that the Israelites were also to make an altar out of uncut stones at this same spot. Again, some commentators think it's the same thing as what's plastered and others argue it's a separate item. Either way, the point here is that this altar is built of uncut stones. OK, why's that significant? It reminds us that we've nothing to offer to God in exchange for His outpouring of His love to us. It's our reminder that we can't earn His love so we just have to accept the fact God loves us as we are. Still He does desire that we modify our behavior as a witness to Him, which is why we just finished a large chunk of this book that focused on how God wants us to behave.
 - i) So does that mean that all the churches we build to God have to be of uncut stones in order for us to worship there? Of course not. To use a classic Christian joke, the church is not the building, it's the people who gather in the building. As I heard it said, "People aren't chewing gum in the church, the church is chewing gum". The point is we don't come to God showing how special we are, we come to Him just as we are and then modify our behavior based on what He wants us to do, not so we can earn His favor based on how we act.
 - e) I mentioned in my lesson introduction that there were two types of offerings to be given on this altar. They are "burnt offerings" and "fellowship offerings". To keep it simple, the first shows we are fully dedicated of our lives to serving God. The second shows that we can be with God and enjoy our lives with Him after we've fully committed our lives as to serve Him based on that commitment.

- f) Before we move on, I should also point out that in the book of Joshua, the Israelites did do as Moses commanded here and the Israelites performed the rituals as stated here in these two chapters. Joshua Chapter 8, Verses 30-35, shows that literal fulfillment. Those people listening to Moses speak agreed to be bound by God's laws as taught here and in Joshua.
 - g) So does all of this mean we as Christians are bound by God's laws? No, as we're saved by the blood of Jesus and that alone. With that said, the laws of this book give us instruction as how God wants us to live to make a difference for Him. As I said in the introduction to this lesson, all of Deuteronomy can be summarized by the phrase, "our behavior matters" to God. As Christians we are free to do whatever we want, but if we want to use our lives to make a difference for God, we are to live by the principals as taught in this book. Since these two chapters focus on the blessings and curses associated with either obedience or a lack thereof, that'll be my focus as we move through this lesson.
 - h) Speaking of moving on, time for the next set of verses:
6. Verse 9: Then Moses and the priests, who are Levites, said to all Israel, "Be silent, O Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ Obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today."
- a) Time for a quick reminder on who are the "12 tribes of Israel" and specifically the Levites as one of those 12 tribes. The joke is, "God has 13 tribes to work with when He desires to describe Israel as the 12 tribes". For example, when God wants to list the 12 tribes and not include the Levites, the tribe of Joseph is split into two tribes based on his two sons. Being adopted by their grandfather Jacob as being his own. The point is if the bible is listing the 12 tribes without including the priests (the tribe of Levi), they are listed with the two sons of Joseph listed separately. (The tribe of Manasseh and Ephraim are listed as separately.) If a list of the 12 tribes wanted to include the priests, then the tribes of Manasseh and the tribe of Ephraim are combined and listed only as the tribe of Joseph.
 - i) I state all of that here as Moses is about to instruct all the Israelites to sit upon two mountains and chant "Amen" (i.e., we agree) to the blessings and curses associated with the law. That means when the Israelites are in the land of Israel, they're to be reminded publicly that they are to obey God's laws or suffer the consequences.
 - ii) This involves the priests, as they're to assist in this process and lead the chant.
 - b) OK, that's interesting, I suppose. What does it have to do with us? Whenever you read of the "priests" (the tribe of Levi) in the Old Testament, think of Christians. God wants us to be a witness to Him to the world around us. No it doesn't mean we are to organize a big group to chant, "here's the good news and bad news associated with obedience". It means we're to be His witness to the world and we're to remind ourselves of our commitment to follow Him no matter what we're dealing with in our lives. To explain that some more, I should list the next set of verses:
7. Verse 11: On the same day Moses commanded the people: ¹² When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. ¹³ And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali. ¹⁴ The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice:
- a) Remember that Moses isn't demanding the Israelites do this now. He's commanding them to recite the blessings and curses coming up in the text when they enter the land of Israel and do this at a specific spot. That spot has two mountains facing the same valley where Abraham was first told of God's commitment to bless his descendants (Israel as a nation) about 500 years earlier. If the Israelites at this point in history had over 1,000,000 people to recite these laws, what we have here in these verses is a giant "chant session" with half of those Israelites on one mountain reciting God's blessing and the other half of them on a facing mountain reciting the curses. In other words, Moses is commanding that this large crowd "use itself" to remind each other that God demands obedience.

- b) What's a little confusing is the Levites are told to be one of the six tribes on the mountain associated with God's blessing. They are also told to lead the chant. In other words, they are to yell out the curses and blessings as stated in the rest of this chapter and in the first part of the next chapter. All the big crowd has to do is yell out "Amen" to them. It's like at a big function where a leader says to one half of the room, "OK, it's your turn to yell out Amen, and then the leader turns to the other half of the room to say "Amen" to another of the chants.
 - c) I don't believe the tribes on the "cursed" mountain are cursed or the "blessed" mountain is blessed. The idea is simply to split all the Israelites into two large groups, where they can hear the blessings and curses recited out loud and everyone can agree to be bound by the laws of God as recited in the Leviticus. What is interesting is that the mountain associated with God's blessing is full of trees and vegetation, while the cursed mountain is barren. It is a visual reminder of how we're blessed and cursed by our obedience or lack thereof for what God desires of us in our lives.
 - d) But John, Christians are not bound by the law. The New Testament makes that very clear in lots of places. Why should we care about any of this? The issue isn't salvation. It is the best way for us to live to make a difference for God. Again, "behavior matters". The point for us Christians is by God's power we can live in obedience to how He desires we live so we can make a difference for Him. The mistake we make is we try to obey these laws by using our willpower. What God says is let My power work through us (trust in His Spirit to guide us) so that we can make a difference for Him. In short Christians aren't bound by God's laws, but it is His desire we live as He desires as to be a witness to Him in the world around us. That's what we're called to do. As to the specific's, that's coming up next:
8. Verse 15: "Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol--a thing detestable to the LORD, the work of the craftsman's hands--and sets it up in secret." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"
- a) You may recall in my introduction that I refer to these two chapters as, "the bad news, the good news and the really bad news". From Verses 15 to 26, we get the first "bad news" list of those three. What we don't get here is the 10 Commandments listed, with the Israelites then saying, "We agree to obey these laws". What we do get instead is examples of how to disobey God's laws so we can think about the consequences. The reason the "bad news" is listed first is so the Israelites have it fresh in their minds the consequences of not living as God desires they, or we live. Most of these are pretty obvious and require little comment.
 - b) The first one given in Verse 15 is basic "idolatry". That's when someone makes an image to a false god in secret. One has to remember that the land of Israel at that time was full of such idols and idolatry is what led God to kick the Israelites out of that land much later.
 - c) It's time for a reminder of what are "idol's" in our society. To put it simply, it is anything that leads us away from trusting God for guidance. It can be as simple as putting a thing in our car for "good luck" to living for "events" and not Him. I've always loved what was said by Chuck Smith, many years ago, "Everybody has a god. Find out where someone is spending their free time or spare income and you'll find their god." My point is that this violation of God's command against idolatry is much more common than we think it is.
9. Verse 16: "Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or his mother." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"
- a) I find it interesting that the bible clearly teaches us to love God, love others and even to go love our enemies. Yet it never says to love our parents, but only to honor them. Of course we should love our parents as they count as others, but it never singles them out for love just to be honored. That just means we show them respect for raising us. If we want our children to respect us, they'll model our behavior of how we treat our parents. I know of people who've had some really bad parents. They may not care for them as people, but they still must honor them as the one's who raised them and pay them respect.

10. Verse 17: "Cursed is the man who moves his neighbor's boundary stone." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" ¹⁸ "Cursed is the man who leads the blind astray on the road." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" ¹⁹ "Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"
- a) The next three curses are all examples of treating people unfairly. Verse 17 starts out by talking about treating our neighbors unfairly. Verse 18 focuses on the less fortunate, as it uses the blind as an example. Verse 19 gives more examples of the less fortunate in life as to say in effect, "treat other people as you want to be treated, not based on who they are or how they've treated you". In effect we have the "Golden Rule" in these verses. The way I describe that rule is it's about treating others, as we desire they treat us, not based on how they've actually treated us. It's also about not taking advantage of those less fortunate in our society.
 - b) Let me put it this way, if you struggle to recall all of the 10 Commandments off the top of your head, think in terms of honoring God as God and treating others as you'd want them to treat you. If you get that, you get the essence of God's laws. If we can learn to think in terms of "how would God want me to react in this situation" we get the essence of what is being communicated not just in these three laws, but in all of them.
 - c) Speaking of things God wouldn't approve of, I present the next four curses:
11. Verse 20: "Cursed is the man who sleeps with his father's wife, for he dishonors his father's bed." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" ²¹ "Cursed is the man who has sexual relations with any animal." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" ²² "Cursed is the man who sleeps with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" ²³ "Cursed is the man who sleeps with his mother-in-law." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"
- a) The first thing to catch here is that God cares about who we sleep with (sexual relations). To state the obvious, God is not anti-sexual intercourse or else none of us would be alive today. The issue in these verses comes down to respect for the family structure. If we do have sex with our moms, our step mom's, our siblings or even an animal, we're saying in effect we don't respect the family structure that God has set up.
 - b) If you think this is just an Old Testament thing, remember that Paul's biggest complaint to the church in Corinth was that it allowed a man to remain in their church who was having sexual relations with his stepmother. (1st Corinthians 5:1). Remember the issue isn't who is and is not saved. The issue is being a good witness for God and how He desires we live as to make a difference for Him. Behavior matters among Christians. When we discover a person in our church living with a blatant sin, we're to confront them. Jesus in Matthew 18: 15-17, lays out the method of a confrontation when we're aware of sin in our church.
 - c) Whenever I teach on this passage, someone always brings up "incense" when Adam and Eve first populated the world. To make it brief, Genesis 5:3 says Adam and Eve had sons and daughters. Obviously if those children were to populate the world they had to have marriages with each other. Yet in Verse 22, God forbids sexual relations with one's sister. My point is when the human race started it was necessary to allow brothers and sisters to marry. Once the world population had grown significantly, God wanted us to respect the family structure, which is one reason why incense is forbidden here.
 - d) It may also help to remember that God's not calling on us to "fix the world". We never do read of God saying to nonbelievers, no animal sex or homosexuality for that matter. What God does desire is that His people (you and me) be a good witness for Him to the world around us. If we live as He desires, He promises to bless us. If we don't, then we'll suffer the types of curses as listed in this book.
 - e) The reason God forbids certain types of activity is not because He doesn't want us to have fun in this life. This is God saying in effect, "I know what's best for you." I (God) created you and my purpose for creating you (us) is to be a witness to others as to how it is I want you to live to be a good witness for Me. Ok, with that obvious point made, lets move on.

12. Verse 24: "Cursed is the man who kills his neighbor secretly." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" ²⁵ "Cursed is the man who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"
- a) These next two examples of things that displease God appear pretty obvious. Let's face it, if we kill someone secretly (i.e., it is not part of warfare, but just murder) or if we accept a bribe in order to kill someone, we're not respecting human life. From God's perspective we're reading God saying over and over again, I created human life and I want you (us) to respect the life I created. To state what should be obvious, that's why Christians preach so hard against abortion. It shows a lack of respect for what will be human life.
 - i) If that's true, why do most Christians believe in capital punishment? For starters, because God does. All five books written by Moses call for the death penalty in cases of murder and other crimes leading to murder. It's another way that God is showing respect for human life by taking the lives of those who've taken away the lives of other people.
 - b) I have to admit, I love the expression, "When I disagree with the bible, I admit to myself, that God is right and I must be wrong in this situation". When you meet people who say, it's ok to sleep with whoever we wish, whether they realize it or not, they're thinking, "if I disagree with the bible, I'm right and the bible is wrong".
 - i) OK, what if we've messed up in our past? Welcome to the club. We can't change what we've done in the past. God wants us to learn from it, admit He was right in that situation (and we were wrong) and turn from that behavior. Remember that the only unforgivable sin from the Christian perspective is a lifelong denial that God Himself (through Jesus) paid the complete price for every sin we've ever have committed or ever will commit. God never expects us to be perfect. At the same time, He does desire we live by the principals laid out in this book as to be a good witness for Him with our lives. That's what He desires of us and that's why He did create us in the first place.
 - c) OK, one more "curse" left and then we're ready for the blessings of Chapter 28.
13. Verse 26: "Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"
- a) If you think that these curses don't cover all of God's law or there must be a loophole in it somewhere, I present Verse 26. There are a couple of things to take away from this verse: The first is the reminder that we can't be saved by keeping the law. Nobody is capable of keeping it perfectly, which is why God set up a system of blood sacrifices in Leviticus and that's why Jesus had to pay the price for our sins.
 - b) However, I know I'm preaching to the choir on that point. Now let me tell you how Verse 26 does apply to us. The issue again is being a good witness for God. For example, if we say we've never stolen anything our entire life, or never killed anyone, but we did have a sexual relationship outside of marriage, we're guilty. One can apply their own example of how no one can keep the law perfectly. The good news is we're not going to hell if we've accepted Jesus payment for our sins. The additional good news is that this is a set of rules in order for us to be a good witness for God. When we mess up, and we will, we confess it as sin make the effort to turn from it and then God can bless us.
 - c) Let me try this another way: Do I believe God wants to bless my life today? Sure I do as I believe He loves me just because He does, not based on any good deed I have done. He is blessing me by leading me to provide for my family. He is blessing me by providing food and shelter. Blessing is not about how much stuff we have. Blessing is that we get to use our lives to make a difference for Him. Blessings are the opportunities we have to serve Him in the first place. Yes there are good Christians who are really hurting now. We get the opportunity to serve them by praying for them and ministering to them. My point is we don't have to fear these curses, if we choose to live, as God desires we live.

- d) If we do mess up, ok when we do mess up, ask God to forgive. I find the hardest part is forgiving ourselves as we think we should have done better. If we accept the idea that the God who created the universe has forgiven us, why are we so tough on ourselves? Accept the idea that we're imperfect creatures called by God to make a difference for Him and it's only by relying upon His power that we do so. With that said, it's time to start Chapter 28 which begins by listing the good news of this lesson.
14. Chapter 28: If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ² All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God: ³ You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.
- a) The first dozen-plus verses of Chapter 28 explain how God will bless us. I've read a bunch of commentaries that state that the curses at the end of Chapter 27 are not matched by any blessings and they are omitted from the text. I believe as do many other bible scholars the blessings of the first part of Chapter 28 are to be recited along with the curses when all the Israelites reach those two facing mountains. Remember there are no chapter breaks in the original text so I see the last part of Chapter 27 and the first part of Chapter 28 as one big lesson on how God will bless us for obedience and curse us for disobedience.
- b) The important point is God wants to get across to us how our lives will be blessed based on obedience to His laws. Again, not to earn points with God or get us a better place in heaven, but so we can make a difference for Him here and now. With that said, let's read how we're blessed based on trusting God to guide our lives.
- c) Notice the word "fully" in Verse 1. It shows there's no such thing as partial obedience and it again reminds us how impossible it is based on human efforts to fully obey His laws. So do we even try in the first place? Yes, but again, not for salvation sake, but by asking for His help to guide us. Part of my daily prayer is for God to use me to make a difference for Him in the world around us. It's that simple. Then we trust He's guiding us as we live by the standards He set for us in His laws so that He can bless us. How He blesses us is next:
- d) The first way we'll be blessed is God will separate us from other nations of the world. It was first done through the literal nation of Israel. It is also the privilege of any believer in Jesus to enjoy this if and only if we're trusting God to guide our lives. So what are these specific blessings? We'll get to them in a moment. What I want all of us to grasp first, is the idea that the God who created everything we can think of, is in effect looking at us to say, "You are special, I created you with a purpose, and that purpose is to glorify Me with your life, now go live out your life with that purpose in mind."
- i) The next time we think that we're nothing special consider that the God who made us, made us with a purpose. Our purpose is to use those gifts God has given us to glorify Him. As long as we live within the framework of the laws as laid out in the bible, we are glorifying Him by living that way. Others will soon realize we don't live like non-believers around us as we've separated our lives for His glory. I can't think of a greater life purpose than to have our lives used by the God who created us in the first place.
- ii) Need more specifics? Start with Verse 3. To give my loose translation, we will get His blessing if we live in the big city or the open country. Let me share an old joke used by real estate appraisers. There's a question on the residential appraisal form that effectively asks, is this property in a rural, suburban, or urban location? How I was taught to know the difference is the Naked Test: That is, if one is standing in the open naked, and nobody is there to notice, it's a rural location. If one is naked and the neighbors call the police, it's a suburban location. If one is standing there naked and people look the other way and pretend not to notice, you're in an urban location. As silly as that is, it helps me get the question answered right.
- a) My point as it applies to this verse is God will bless us wherever we go.

15. Verse 4: The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock--the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. ⁵ Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.
- a) The first blessing listed here is that God will give us children. I can think of a handful of bible stories where God "closed a woman's womb" for some purpose. The most famous of those cases is a woman named Hannah in the opening chapters of First Samuel. There's a fairly famous ministry in the United States called "Hannah's ministry", which help women deal with the fact they can't get pregnant no matter how hard they try. My point's that the specific blessing is a general rule. Sometimes God has exceptions and He knows why that is so. If we do desire to please Him and we want children, God will bless us that way.
 - b) Keep in mind the Israelites lived in an agricultural society and lots of children means lots of "free labor" to help with the crops. Speaking of those crops, the next two blessings are for that purpose. It says the land will grow crops and that lots of livestock will reproduce in that land. The final one is Verse 5. The basket and kneading trough refer to items used to make food. Notice the bible never says it will bless us with great riches so that work is not needed. What these verses imply is that we'll be blessed while we work at things.
 - i) One thing that's fascinated me to consider is that God never does for us what He expects us to do ourselves. The miracles we read of in the New Testament aren't things we can do for ourselves. For example, when God raised Lazarus from the dead in John Chapter 11, people had to roll away the entrance themselves. The miracle took place after that entrance was open. When the blind saw or the lame were walking, they still had to do the "footwork" to get on with their lives. God never does for us what we can do for ourselves. The way He guides us He gives us direction through His word. Once in a rare while He intervenes in our lives in ways to guide us to where He wants us to go. Most of the time, it's up to us to do the footwork. That's what these blessings imply as crops still have to be planted and food still has to be prepared. OK, enough on that, time for the next few:
16. Verse 6: You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.
- a) My first thought is "in and out" of where? It could refer to our home or work for example. The point is we can't get away from being blessed by God if we tried. Consider this law from God's perspective. He wants to bless those of us who are using their lives to make a difference for Him. God loves us, because He does. The point is we can't get away from His love because that's what He is. No matter where we go, He's watching us and wants to guide us to make a difference for Him.
17. Verse 7: The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.
- a) The first thing to notice about this verse is despite the fact God wants to bless us, we still have to deal with enemies. To be honest, if we're living to make a difference for God, we will have to face people who want us to live like them. They will hate the guilt they feel if they see others not joining them in activities that don't glorify God. Jesus taught that if we trust in Him, "the gates of hell" can't stop us. (See Matthew 16:18.) What's implied in that statement is "gates" is a defensive weapon, not an offensive weapon. If we are using our lives to make a difference for God we can expect demonic resistance as Jesus taught here.
 - b) The next thing I'm fascinated by here is "seven ways". Since there are four directions on a compass and let's assume the other four points are in between (southwest, southeast, etc.). If an enemy comes to us from one of those eight points, and has to flee by the other seven, God is protecting us from that enemy. The Old Testament has a good number of victory war stories where enemies have fled away from them. I also see it as spiritual application as God's promising to protect us if we agree to use our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - c) The point here is we don't have to fear those who want to attack us either verbally or in a more literal aspect. God promises to protect us as we make a difference for Him.

18. Verse 8: The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.
- a) The term "blessing on your barns" is a colorful way of expressing the idea that God will bless us if we're willing to make a difference for Him. In an agricultural society like it was in Israel at that time, to "bless one's barns" means the livestock will reproduce or the crops that one produces will fill the barns. Again, notice the combination of us making an effort to work and then trusting God is blessing what we do by noticing over time how we have become financially better off. The blessing does not guarantee if we work hard we'll then be rich. Most people I know who make the effort to make a difference for themselves and trust God to provide by hard work, make enough to get by, but don't get rich that way.
 - b) I've meet financially successful people who are and who are not believers. What they all have in common is to be demanding of themselves and of others around them. Wealth is not created by being lazy and waiting for it to happen, but by applying a skill one has to one's life and developing one's talents in unique ways. I state that here, simply because it is not the type of wealth God is guaranteeing in this verse. What God is guaranteeing is if we're willing to trust Him with our lives and live by the principals stated in the bible He's promising never to abandon us and guide us to provide for ourselves and our loved ones.
 - c) Think of it this way: In the previous few lessons, I discussed how the Israelites were told to pay 23.33% of their income in "tithes". In order for them to live and survive in the first place, they had to make enough money to live and be able to pay that fee. All I'm saying is if we're to be active members of our society and assuming we're not dealing with say a health tragedy at the moment, God promises not to abandon us financially if we're willing to make a difference for Him in the world around us.
19. Verse 9: The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. ¹⁰ Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will fear you. ¹¹ The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity--in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground--in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you.
- a) One of the fascinating things is that if you study the history of the Jewish people, they've had some tremendous success stories mixed in with the tragedies they've had to suffer in all of history. For example, in the United States, they make up a very small percentage of the population. Yet if you look at the number of United States Senators and Congressmen who are Jewish by birth, it is far greater than their national percentage. One can also find a great number of successful Israelites by birth in the sciences, arts and business world. I am not saying this to put them down, just the opposite. It is great current and historical evidence that God has blessed them as He's promised He will do. My point is the Jewish people are admired around the world as successful despite the world-wide hatred they've had to suffer as a nation and all the horrible suffering they had to endure over the last few millenniums.
 - b) What all this means is simply that God promised to bless them and set them apart. If you ever want proof that God is real, consider the Jewish people. Consider they've existed as a separate group for millenniums despite their persecution and long lengths of time with no homeland. In times when they've existed in the land of Israel and when they've shown their collective trust in God, He has blessed them in ways of being prosperous despite all they've had to endure as a people.
 - c) Most of us reading this are not Jewish. Why should we care? The issue for us is if we do promise to trust God to guide our lives, He does promise us non-Jewish people He'll also guide our lives for His glory as well. What all this comes down to is the idea that if we're willing to use our time and our talents to glorify God with them, He promises He'll never forsake us and guide us so we can make a difference for Him. God's not capable of every forsaking us if we're willing to trust Him with our lives. That's the underlying idea here.

20. Verse 12: The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. ¹³ The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. ¹⁴ Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.
- a) Let me start here with the topic of rain. Remember that in a dry hot climate like in Israel where water can be scarce, rain is a good thing as it is needed to make the crops grow as well as provide for our thirst and for the animals. For those of us who've lived through a drought, it's not a fun thing. My simple point is to see rain as a blessing from God and as a necessity for life to continue. That's one way God blesses us by providing us water.
 - b) Another sign of a blessing that we can all recognize is if one has enough money they can lend to others and not borrow in order to survive. I've taught my children at an early age, the most valuable thing they own is their time. The only reason people will lend us any money is they're counting on our ability to work over time to pay it off or they assume we have the assets to offset that loan. The obvious point is a sign of God blessing our lives is if we're at a point in life where we can lend to others.
 - i) A related point here is that God does not forbid lending. As one who's spent most of my adult life in the financial profession (as an appraiser) the concept of lending and borrowing is allowed by God.
 - ii) The other point here is the world will respect Israelites as being blessed by God in spite of all the persecution they've suffered. Proof of their blessing is to watch all of their success despite all the suffering they've had to endure.
 - iii) So does all this mean that if we obey all the principals as taught in this book, we'll be guaranteed financial success? Of course not. The idea is that if we're trusting in God to guide our lives, He does promise never ever to forsake us and guide us so we can make a difference for Him in the world around us.
 - c) What all the blessings come down to is God promising us that if we'll obey Him by living in a way that doesn't violate His commands for our lives, He promises us we will make a difference for Him and our efforts won't be wasted. God's using the promise of blessing as a motivation tool for us to obey Him.
 - d) With all that good news, comes the bad news. I said these two chapters are the bad news, the good news and the really bad news. OK, time for the really bad news:
21. Verse 15: However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ¹⁶ You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. ¹⁷ Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. ¹⁸ The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.
- a) The first thing to catch as one reads these curses is how similar they are in the "opposite sense" to the blessings. For example, the first blessing essentially said we're blessed in the city and the country. The first curse says we'll be cursed in the city and the country. The second blessing was about how our farmlands will produce well. The second curse also is coving the same issue. My point is we can see many of these curses as being opposites of the blessings stated earlier in the chapter.
 - b) Let me tackle the tough question now: If God loves us as much as we think He does, why would He allow all of this to occur? The answer is God calls us to be a witness for Him. If we choose to ignore that calling, after making a commitment to serve Him, God's willing to do whatever it takes, to drive us back to Him. In other words, God loves us too much to every leave us alone. My point is all the suffering as described here and through the rest of the chapter, is a motivational tool to drive us back to God when we have messed up to sow the consequences of turning from Him.

22. Verse 19: You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.
- a) Here's a good summary of all the curses in one short verse. The point is if we're willing to use our lives to make a difference for Him, we can't help but be blessed by God. If we are also willing to turn from that commitment, we're in big trouble wherever we go.
 - b) However, God through Moses is just get warmed up on the curses:
23. Verse 20: The LORD will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. ²¹ The LORD will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. ²² The LORD will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. ²³ The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. ²⁴ The LORD will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed.
- a) OK, why list all of this horrible stuff? Why not just say God's going to make our lives as miserable as possible if we turn from Him? One big reason is to show that God knows all of human history in advance. If God is perfect by definition, He can't learn. There is also a bible verse that states God knows the end from the beginning. (Isaiah 46:10) meaning He knows all things as He can't learn. My view is if God created all things, He must have created time as well and He exists outside of time, as we know it. As we read through the rest of the chapter, realize there are bible passages that support these curses and historical references that show how these curses have literally come true.
 - b) For example, 1st Kings 17:1 describes a severe drought in Israel at a time when the kings over that land have turned from worshipping God. The concept of the sky being bronze and the ground being iron as stated in Verse 23 refer to bad weather conditions so that no food will be able to grow. My point is the events in 1st Kings 17 were centuries after this speech by Moses exist. Even if believe Deuteronomy was late dated, we have examples later in this chapter that occurred to the Israelites relatively soon after Jesus was crucified.
 - c) Bottom line, want an incentive to stick close to God's desire for your lives, we can watch our lives (as a society) go downhill quickly when we've collectively abandon God.
24. Verse 25: The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. ²⁶ Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. ²⁷ The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured. ²⁸ The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind. ²⁹ At midday you will grope about like a blind man in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything you do; day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you.
- a) Ok, if a lack of food isn't enough to get us to turn to God, maybe warfare and disease will do the trick. If you recall in the blessing section, I talked about the enemies fleeing seven different ways. In Verse 25, the Israelites flee "seven ways" as they'll lose wars badly. It even says that bodies will not be buried. One can look to the times of the Babylonian or Roman conquests to discover how thorough was the Israelites' destruction.
 - b) If fear of war isn't enough to drive us back to God, then we get illness, disease and even madness. The idea is if this text here scares us, that's the idea. This doesn't require much commentary as the sheer horror of this text is meant to drive us back to/close to God.
 - c) Now for the really bad news. It doesn't get any easier for the rest of this chapter. It does end with this chapter as the next chapter is a new topic. The reason why God wanted all of this text here is literally to scare us into sticking close to Him. It also predicts parts of Israel's literal national history as they did suffer again, literally like the ways described in this chapter. Bottom line, we have a few pages to go, so bear with me as to understand that God knows history in advance and it shows the consequences of a life without Him.

25. Verse 30: You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and ravish her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit.³¹ Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will eat none of it. Your donkey will be forcibly taken from you and will not be returned. Your sheep will be given to your enemies, and no one will rescue them.³² Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand.³³ A people that you do not know will eat what your land and labor produce, and you will have nothing but cruel oppression all your days.³⁴ The sights you see will drive you mad.³⁵ The LORD will afflict your knees and legs with painful boils that cannot be cured, spreading from the soles of your feet to the top of your head.
- a) Well, if the big picture ideas of losing warfare, famine, drought and disease doesn't scare us into sticking close to God, this text "gets closer to home" where it describes losing one's spouse, or losing crops we grow or animals we raised. If that's not enough to scare us, it then talks about losing one's children being to a conquering nation. Even if that doesn't scare us, then text talks about more disease even after suffering all of this.
 - b) I have to admit I'm tempted to list all of this negative text as one big chunk, just so we can see it as a whole. I decided to break it down into digestible pieces as it gives us more of a chance to grasp the horror of this. Let me ask the classic question here: If God truly loves us, why would He describe all of this horror of turning from Him? Recall again, the issue isn't salvation, but about being a good witness for Him once we've committed our lives to Him. Once we know our bible, God's saying to us in effect, I'm describing for all of us the benefits of using our life for His benefit and at the same time we're equally as troubled (to put that as mildly as I can) when we turn from Him. So why's there so much more really bad text than positive text? Truthfully, that's usually what it takes to drive us back to and close to God in our lives.
 - c) Meanwhile, it's going to get worse before it gets better in the next chapter:
26. Verse 36: The LORD will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone.³⁷ You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the LORD will drive you.
- a) All of us who know our history know that the Northern Kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians (think Iran, roughly) while the remaining Israelites who lived in the area of Israel called "Judah" was taken into captivity roughly a century later by the Babylonians (think Iraq). My point is reading this over the past few millennia we see how literally true this came about. By the way, that's why some "scholars" argue that the book of Deuteronomy was written after the Babylonian captivity due to the accuracy of its predictions about the captivity. As I state every so often, "Jesus claimed Moses wrote this book. Moses lived many centuries before that destruction. If you don't believe Jesus is God, then you have a much bigger problem then when Deuteronomy was written."
 - b) A quick word on "wood and stone". One has to understand that for the nations where the Israelites were taken captive, they believed their gods literally dwelt in those temples that are built for those gods.
27. Verse 38: You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it.³⁹ You will plant vineyards and cultivate them but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them.⁴⁰ You will have olive trees throughout your country but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off.⁴¹ You will have sons and daughters but you will not keep them, because they will go into captivity.⁴² Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land.
- a) To put it simply, things will get worse and worse if one decides to continue to turn from how God desires we live. Here we're describing famine as locusts eat up the crops. This is also described in the book of Joel as it literally came true in the land of Israel.

28. Verse 43: The alien who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. ⁴⁴ He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, but you will be the tail. ⁴⁵ All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the LORD your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. ⁴⁶ They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. ⁴⁷ Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, ⁴⁸ therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.
- a) Isn't the text getting redundant at this point? Obviously by now, God's made His point if we turn from Him, we'll suffer. Why the "worse and worse" aspects of the text? All this is here to drive the point home of the danger of turning from God. We'll suffer collectively as well as individually.
 - b) A couple of phrase to catch. Verse 45 says, "Until you are destroyed". To state the obvious Israelites are still around today. The idea is "collectively" not completely. There'll always be a Jewish remnant as the New Testament states. (Romans 9:27.) However disobedience means the Israelites will be few in number. Verse 27 mentions "joyfully and gladly". It's not enough to do as God commands us, but He requires a good attitude about it. What's the point in living life if we're not doing it joyfully? Obvious, we're not talking about the times we're we're physically suffering, but the main idea is to appreciate the life God has given us and make the best of the time God's given us to live. To make the best of it, is to use it to glorify God.
 - c) Also catch the idea of prosperity and suffering. The text implies both come into our lives. If we fail to be joyful during the good times, we'll suffer even more during the bad times.
29. Verse 49: The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, ⁵⁰ a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. ⁵¹ They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. ⁵² They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the LORD your God is giving you.
- a) At the time of both the Babylon invasion and many centuries later when the Romans came in and conquered Israel, it was mostly walled cities. However, that didn't help either time as both times the conquering armies starved out cities or overcome those walls. My point is one can read these verses as history written in advance. In both cases Israelites of all ages were killed and everything else destroyed by the conquering armies.
 - b) I'd like to thank you for hanging with me while I run long. There's some interesting facts coming up of how literal these verses are as you bared with me while I finish this chapter.
30. Verse 53: Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the LORD your God has given you. ⁵⁴ Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, ⁵⁵ and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. ⁵⁶ The most gentle and sensitive woman among you--so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot--will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter ⁵⁷ the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege and in the distress that your enemy will inflict on you in your cities.
- a) The short version here is things will be so bad, the Israelites will be forced to eat their own young. This exact thing is recorded in 2nd Kings 27-29 of a woman eating her own son.

- b) While all of this is a reminder of how bad things will be, imagine living in a famine so bad one is forced to eat one's own children. Much more than the fact this is history written in advance is the scary reality of what we face when we turn from God. We're almost there:
31. Verse 58: If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name--the LORD your God--⁵⁹ the LORD will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses.⁶⁰ He will bring upon you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you.⁶¹ The LORD will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed.⁶² You who were as numerous as the stars in the sky will be left but few in number, because you did not obey the LORD your God.⁶³ Just as it pleased the LORD to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess.
- a) After pages and pages of bad news, I'm hard not repeat myself. What's unique here is we read God saying in effect every disease you'll read of in the bible or ever heard of, will be inflicted upon them. What's also unique is Verse 63. It says He will be pleased to destroy the Israelites if they're disobedient. My question is if God is full of love, why is it pleasing to Him to destroy the Israelites for disobedience? Part of the answer is that God is a god of justice as well as a god of love. Next, remember to separate the idea of a being witness for God as opposed to just being called to be one of His. My point is we can be a great or lousy witness for Jesus and still be saved if we believe Jesus died for every sin we've ever committed or ever will commit. The curses listed in this chapter teach us the inevitable consequences for disobedience to God's desire for our lives.
- b) Verse 63 says that bad disobedience means being "uprooted" from the land. That gets into the classic debate of "Is the land given to Israel conditional or unconditional"? When God first promised to give that land to Abraham's descendants, it is an unconditional promise. Here it is conditional upon obedience. The correct answer is both. Eventually there has to be a Jewish remnant to live there when Jesus returns as the reigning Messiah. At the same time, it's conditional upon them being a good witness for God.
- c) If you want a bottom line to take away from this lesson, it is "don't mess with God, our behavior matters". With that said, it's time for the final group of verses.
32. Verse 64: Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods--gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known.⁶⁵ Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the LORD will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart.⁶⁶ You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life.⁶⁷ In the morning you will say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!"--because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see.⁶⁸ The LORD will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.
- a) Speaking of being scattered for disobedience, we get the final verses here. Let me quickly describe a little history of the Roman destruction roughly 40 years after the time of Jesus. The Romans killed millions and at times ran out of places to hang bodies for crucifixion. They also took young women and children to be slaves and were sold in Egypt. So many of them were offered for sale, there weren't enough buyers. My point is simply that Verse 68 came literally true at the time of the Roman conquest.
- b) My final point is that despite the fact that the Israelites failed to obey God and had to be kicked out of that land first by the Babylonians around 600 BC and then by the Romans around 70AD, that desolation was not permanent. While Israelites by birth have lived in that land for the land 2,000 years, it wasn't until 1948 when they became an independent nation for the first time since the Babylonians. God's not done with them as a group.

33. OK, this lesson was ridiculously long. However, there were lot of verses to cover and it is best to read these two chapters as a single entity. Thanks for bearing with me this long and hopefully I'll be much briefer in the next lesson. Time for a quick closing prayer: Father, help us to realize that we're not only called to salvation, but also to be a good witness for You. Help us to realize that if we desire you to bless our lives and not curse it, we should live as You desire and use our lives to make a difference for You in the world around us. Help us to live as You desire and make good decisions that are pleasing to You as we live to be of service to You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.