

1. While the last lesson dealt with one's fears, this one deals with arrogance. Remember this book is written to a large group of Israelites about to enter the land of Israel for the first time. It would be easy for them to start thinking, "Our parents messed up, but God said we can go here and besides we know Moses is going to die pretty much after this speech, so we must be something special."
  - a) To put that in Christian vocabulary the easy thing to think is, "I'm saved and you're not so that's your problem." Another example is to believe: "I know my bible better than you so my reward in heaven is going to be better than yours." The general idea of arrogance is to think, "I'm something special" or to think I'm more special than you because of this or that reason. God nips that thought in bud here as He describes the danger of thinking we're of they're something special. God's effectively saying, I didn't pick all of you because you're something special, but just because I love all of you and want to have a relationship with you (and us) so I can guide your life for My glory.
2. Before I get into the specifics of these chapters, what if I don't think of myself as being anything special? What if my problem is a lack of confidence that God wants to use me? If you're feeling that way at this moment, ask yourself why did God create you in the first place? Even if you just think, I'm an average Christian and I haven't done much then ask, "How much does God love me anyway? The answer is so much He can't take His eyes off of you." Living the Christian life isn't about the size of one's ministry, it's about using our time to make a difference for Him and as we learn to live and think that way, I've watched God grow many a Christian's ministry when we're willing to start to live to make a difference for Him.
3. With that stated, let me summarize these two chapters: They are essentially one big sermon given to warn us of the danger of arrogance. If you haven't figured it out by now, arrogance is the title of this lesson. OK, here goes:
  - a) The first few verses read as if Moses is helping them with their fears. They discuss people who live in the land of Israel who are giants. Moses says God will be ahead of them like a devouring fire. The point is these Israelites shouldn't be afraid of who lives there as God's guiding them the whole time they are there. The arrogance aspect for us to remember we only win the victories we do win in life because God is guiding us even though we don't realize He is there the whole time.
  - b) Moses gets blunt in the next set of verses. He says in effect, "You don't get to have this land because you are something special. You get to have this land as I promised to give it to your common ancestor Abraham, and I (God) restated it to his son Isaac and restated it again to his son Jacob." The point is the game is fixed whether we realize it or not. God's telling them and us, realize if I'm perfect, and I know all things, including when our lives on earth will end and what we're going to do with our lives. Even if we realize this, we don't know ourselves what will happen, so God encourages us to go forward to lead us to victories in our life even though He's working in the background to make it possible.
  - c) From there we get into a "remember" sermon: Moses recalls when he went to go be alone with God for 40 days to receive the 10 Commandments. The Israelites back then gave up on Moses and built a model of an Egyptian god to turn from "the" God. Moses brings up this topic here as if to say, you don't deserve the privilege of entering the Promised Land, which as I love to state is all about living a life as a witness for God and trusting that He is guiding our lives for His glory. The underlying point is despite the fact it was the parents of this present generation did this, the only reason this present generation is still alive is that God forgave them of that sin after a long period of repentance. The reason you and I should care about this is to realize that we're no better than them and the only reason we are saved is just because God picked us and not due to any great ability we have.

- d) Even with that point made, there's much more to the "remember how we had messed up" sermon than that. God even tested Moses by saying in effect "I'll wipe them out for being disobedient and create a new nation through Moses". The underlying point is that Moses did pray for those people and the only reason they're alive here is because He's forgiven them of their sins. The point for us as Christians is to always be grateful that He has fully forgiven us of our sins, and we serve Him out of gratitude, not out of a debt repayment.
  - e) Then we get a related speech about Moses brother Aaron who was the original high priest for the Israelites. The point is despite Aaron's sins and those God calls to be priests, (think you and me as witnesses for Jesus) God still loves us just because He does and we are not separated for God because we are anything special. The idea again, is we're called to live a life to make a difference for Him. In effect all Christians are "priests" in that priests were called to be God's witness to the world and help others grow in their faith in Him. That's why this section about God preserving Aaron despite his sins is a lesson to us about how God has preserved us despite our sins so we can use our life for His glory.
  - f) Moses also recalls an incident where he purposely broke the 10 Commandment tablets as to show the Israelites they had broken God's commands by their sins. The point to learn here is that God made another set of tablets as if to say, "Yes you (plural) disobeyed Me, but My laws are still in effect for your lives as I've still called you all to be My witnesses."
  - g) The final part of this two-chapter section says in effect, "You're all called, deal with it". In other words once one truly believes Jesus is God and died for all of one's sins, know that we can't lose that salvation unless we spend the rest of our lives denying He did die for our sins. If He allows us to live, we should live a life pleasing to Him in all that we do.
  - h) It doesn't mean we won't mess up, or we can be lazy. The arrogance is to think that I'm something special so now I'm using my time for God. The text is here to remind us that we're called, so "get it at". When we do mess up, confess it, realize we're not perfect, but just because God wants to use us to make a difference for Him, so we serve Him not out of obligation, but strictly out of love for Him.
  - i) With that happy introduction completed, time for the verse by verse commentary:
4. Chapter 9, Verse 1: Hear, O Israel. You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. <sup>2</sup> The people are strong and tall--Anakites! You know about them and have heard it said: "Who can stand up against the Anakites?" <sup>3</sup> But be assured today that the LORD your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire. He will destroy them; he will subdue them before you. And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, as the LORD has promised you.
- a) Remember that Chapters 7-10 can be thought of as a series of "homilies" (speeches) given to the Israelites to remind them what to consider before they enter the Promised Land. As we approach the heart of the book (beginning in a few chapters) Moses will get into a list of specific commandments for the Israelites to obey once they are in that land. Before we get into the "do's and don'ts" of how God wants us to live in that land (i.e., how He wants us to live to make a difference for Him), first God wants us to have the proper attitude in our worship of Him. The last two chapters and these few verses focus on "fears". In other words, don't be afraid of entering that land. Chapters 9 and 10 focus on the opposite, that is to think, we're something special and deserve to be here. In summary, God wants us to live our lives to make a difference for Him by going forward, trusting He's working in our lives but at the same time realize we're chosen to serve Him, just because we are, and not because we deserve it.
  - b) With that said, God makes it blunt that the Israelites can't win without His help. Living in that land at that time was a group of strong and tall people called the Anakites. Here God is reassuring the Israelites that they'll defeat them not because the Israelites are anything special, but just because God wants it so. It's another reassurance that God will give them the power to win and the Israelites will not win because they are better people than them.

- c) Notice the phrase "this day". It does not mean the Israelites are to cross the Jordan River the moment the speech is over. If you read the first few chapters of the next book of the bible, (Joshua), the Israelites probably crossed within a short time of this speech. I bring this up simply to say that "this day" is an expression, like saying it's going to happen so soon from now, it's essentially "this day".
  - d) Coming back to who the Israelites will face, it's not only a group of tall and strong people but also cities with big walls around them. The essential idea is that the only way they're going to win is because God will lead them to that victory. The idea for them is to trust in the concept that God's leading them to victory, so don't be afraid and at the same time, do not think you are anything special in that we are better people than the one's to be beaten.
  - e) So if the Israelites were "nothing special" why did God do this? First, it is to teach us that God can be trusted when we have to face things bigger than we are. We may ponder at a problem in front of us and think, "There is no way I can win". To state the obvious, it does not mean we can jump off a cliff and fly for God. However, it does mean we can go on in life, face what we need to face to make a difference for Him and know that He will lead us to victory in those situations. God also picked the Israelites as God wanted a large group to be His witnesses to the world that He is in charge and one can live to make a difference for Him if we're willing to make the effort in the first place. I can also lecture you on those who were living in Israel in the first place, as archeologists have discovered that this was a culture "obsessed with sex" to a point where they sacrificed their children to honor their false gods and suffered from a lot of diseases due to their desire to have sex with whoever they wanted whenever they wanted. Bottom line is no matter how you look at this scene, it was necessary for God to carry it out and use the Israelites for His glory.
5. Verse 4: After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. <sup>5</sup> It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. <sup>6</sup> Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.
- a) Remember I said that the issue of this homily is about arrogance? Well these verses make that point blatantly clear. Notice the words "My righteousness" in Verse 4. That is God's way of saying we're not picked to serve Him because we're something special. We're just picked because we are, and we have to accept that. In other words God makes it perfectly clear the only reasons they're conquering this land is because the nations living in Israel at that time have grown so wicked (see my comments in paragraph "3e") that the only thing that can be done to stop this group is kill them and put them out of their misery. Also it is being done simply because God promised to give this land to the Abraham, (his son) Isaac and (his son) Jacob, the Israelites common ancestors.
  - b) These verses show that God knows history in advance. Back in Genesis 15:13, God made a promise to Abraham that his descendants would have this land after 400 years because the sins of those living in Israel were "not complete yet". The point is God gives a nation a specific amount of time to repent before it's too late. Didn't God know in advance those in Israel wouldn't change? Of course, but it's a model for us as nations that God is patient in His waiting for a group to do the right thing, but His patience is not infinite. It's a way of saying the 10 Commandments (or at least for example, to not murder or steal) is binding on all people and if a group isn't willing to change, God has every right to say, "Enough of that, you'll no longer exist as a nation", which is why some nations get wiped out from the history books from God's perspective. The point for us is we may see wicked people get away with stuff, but realize that at the most, it's only for this lifetime they'll get blessings.

- c) So if the Israelites were not to conquer the land because they were "anything special" and they were to do this to fulfill a 400-hundred year old promise to their ancestors, as well as wipe out a nation doomed to destruction for wickedness why bother? It's like thinking, I am comfortable with my life just as it is, why should I go forward to make a difference for God. In other words, why bother? I can see some of the Israelites pondering, "hey we're pretty comfortable here east of the Jordan River, and besides I don't want to be separated from my family to go conquer this group, just because God says I should. So why should I bother in the first place? Besides if God thinks I'm "nothing special" again why bother?
  - i) The question to ask is why use my life to make a difference for God? Jesus taught us to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. It's really easy to think, let someone else do that as I'm really comfortable in my life just as it is. It's easy to think, "I go to church most Sundays, I don't sin too much, why should I go take a risk that I'm not comfortable taking? The answer is that God wants to use us to make a difference for Him, faults and all. Yes, we are "nothing special", but at the same time God wants to use us, well just because He does and we need to accept that so we can make a difference for Him. I've yet to meet one person who took a risk for God and regretted it later. Is it hard work? Of course. Is it worth it? Yes.
  - ii) Bottom line is we can sit here and "be comfortable" or we can use our lives in ways we can't imagine and make a difference for the God who created the world in the first place by simply be willing to take a risk to make a difference for Him. OK, so what do we do? Pray about it. Talk to people in your church about how you can be used to make a difference. Opportunities are endless. One of the greatest ways to be used by God is to find something one enjoys doing anyway, and using what we love to do to make a difference for God.
- d) OK, while I'm lecturing all of us (myself included) not to get too comfortable by ignoring God's desire for us to make a difference for Him, God's still lecturing these Israelites that they too are "nothing special". In fact God refers to these Israelites as a stiff-necked group. That means they are stubborn in terms of not wanting to change. The key is to realize we are no better than they are. From here, Moses is going to give some examples of how they are "stiff necked" to show them why God hasn't wiped them out already. These examples are here to remind them not to think of themselves as anything special, as we should not think of ourselves as anything special if we also choose to make a difference for God.

6. Verse 7: Remember this and never forget how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD.<sup>8</sup> At Horeb you aroused the LORD's wrath so that he was angry enough to destroy you.<sup>9</sup> When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD had made with you, I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water.<sup>10</sup> The LORD gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. On them were all the commandments the LORD proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly.

- a) Let me make these verses simple: During the time period that Moses went to go be alone with God to receive the 10 Commandments, the Israelites thought, "Moses has been gone a long time and we don't know if he's coming back." Therefore, let's honor the main god of the Egyptians who we'll thank for leading us out of Egypt.
- b) There is a double emphasis in these verses: The first is that Moses survived alone being with God for 40 days even though he didn't eat or drink during that entire time period. Our bodies can go 40 days without food (but it's hard), but can't go that long without any water. The point to emphasize is that while God was performing a miracle in Moses' life, all of you (the Israelites) turned away from God at that time to honor a false God of Egypt. If the chief Egyptian god (represented by a cow) is that powerful, why did He lead you of Egypt in the first place by great miracles?

- c) The underlying point of these verses is that when we get our focus off of God, it's easy to get our focus on something else. Yes at that point in history, the Israelites didn't have the 10 Commandments yet, still they should have realized that if the God of Abraham did all of those miracles in Egypt as well as parted the Red Sea, God must have wanted to make them "separate" from the Egyptians and their gods, so to worship their gods was a sin.
    - i) The point for you and me is that when we get our minds off of making God part of every aspect of our lives is when we think about what's best for us and stop caring about anyone else. That's what the Israelites did here. Moses is bringing this up here is as an example of how the Israelite nation is "stiff necked" in that when their leader is gone for a period of time, they start to do things God doesn't approve of. It shows our own willingness to wander away from God when we don't keep our focus upon Him in the first place.
  - d) One more thing to notice as a pattern. Whenever you see the number "40" in the bible, it's associated with a time of testing. For example, for Noah's flood, it rained for 40 days and nights. When Satan tempted Jesus in the Gospels it was also for a 40 day time period. My point is Moses emphasized the fact he was gone for 40 days as a time to test the Israelites to see if they would still follow God. Yes they messed up that test, yet despite that failure God didn't wipe them out as a nation and start over again. There is more to this story as we'll see in the next set of verses.
7. Verse 11: At the end of the forty days and forty nights, the LORD gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant. <sup>12</sup> Then the LORD told me, "Go down from here at once, because your people whom you brought out of Egypt have become corrupt. They have turned away quickly from what I commanded them and have made a cast idol for themselves."
- a) After 40 days, the Israelites failed their test, but the test was just beginning for Moses. A test here was to see how Moses would handle that failure as we'll read coming up in this chapter. In the meantime, here in these verses, God is commanding Moses to go leave His presence to go see the damage done by the Israelites. The damage is they just violated a command to not make any image of any false god. Think about those 10 Commandments from His perspective: In other words, "Hey Moses, I just gave you 10 Commandments for the Israelites to obey, and the Israelites have already violated one of those commandments as we speak. Therefore, the issue isn't what I (God) am going to do about it, but what are you, Moses going to do about it? If you don't intercede for Me here and now, I (God) can do something (wipe them out), so get moving.
  - b) Remember why Moses is stating all of this. To remind the second generation of Israelites that they are just as "stiff necked" as their parents. The only reason they are alive to even hear Moses give this sermon (Deuteronomy) is because God didn't choose to wipe them out completely when they turned from God roughly 40 years earlier. The reason we are hearing this is remind ourselves how "stiff necked" we can be when we get our focus off of God at any moment of our own lives.
8. Verse 13: And the LORD said to me, "I have seen this people, and they are a stiff-necked people indeed! <sup>14</sup> Let me alone, so that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven. And I will make you into a nation stronger and more numerous than they."
- a) As I said, these verses are a test for Moses. As most of us know, God is more than willing to test us at any given time to see if we trust Him. To quote one of my favorite teachers on this subject, God says to us daily, "Do you trust Me now, even through this?" The test here is whether or not Moses will abandon the Israelites in order to start over. Notice God is willing to make Moses "the next Abraham" and start all over again with a new nation to follow Him. A reason Moses is given this test is to see whether or not he will be a leader or just "give up" and let God start over with him. It's also to show the Israelites how close they came to being wiped out as a nation. It's more proof that they and us are inherently "stiff necked" in our refusal to do God's will for our lives.

9. Verse 15: So I turned and went down from the mountain while it was ablaze with fire. And the two tablets of the covenant were in my hands. <sup>16</sup> When I looked, I saw that you had sinned against the LORD your God; you had made for yourselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. You had turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded you. <sup>17</sup> So I took the two tablets and threw them out of my hands, breaking them to pieces before your eyes.
- a) In these verses, we read how Moses handled the test. The first thing we read here is that the mountain where God spoke to Moses was ablaze with fire. We associate fire with His judgment as a fire consumes things. God is a "consuming fire" by judging eternally how we act and that's how He judges sin. In a strange way, it's also a model of God's grace, as I'll explain here: When Moses first heard God speak to him, He spoke through a burning bush that was not consumed. In the desert, a burning bush is rare, but does happen in the same way lightening occurs every so often. What made the site so unusual for Moses was that the bush wasn't being consumed by the fire. That is a model of how God "judges sin" but still lets the sinner live after the sin, just as the bush Moses saw didn't get consumed. My whole point is God's grace is shown by the fact He didn't wipe out that bush or these Israelites as they sinned even though He is a "consuming fire".
  - b) Meanwhile, back to the test God put Moses through. When Moses returned to the camp of the Israelites and saw the calf that the Israelites had made, Moses destroyed the copies of the 10 Commandments that God had made for Him. This story is given in Exodus 32. It is repeated here to emphasize the fact that the Israelites broke God's commandments and are still alive despite the punishment they went through for that incident. The reason that fact is restated here is to emphasize the fact that all of us are sinners by nature. God's willing to forgive us when we turn from that sin.
  - c) Some people wonder how did God write the commandments in the first place? As I state every so often in these lessons, the question of how God does stuff bores me. I figure that if I believe in a God who can create the stars and our planet, then He must have a way to write on stone tablets. If we believe in His existence, then how He actually created stuff is beyond our ability to figure out, so we accept by faith God can create from nothing.
10. Verse 18: Then once again I fell prostrate before the LORD for forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water, because of all the sin you had committed, doing what was evil in the LORD's sight and so provoking him to anger. <sup>19</sup> I feared the anger and wrath of the LORD, for he was angry enough with you to destroy you. But again the LORD listened to me. <sup>20</sup> And the LORD was angry enough with Aaron to destroy him, but at that time I prayed for Aaron too. <sup>21</sup> Also I took that sinful thing of yours, the calf you had made, and burned it in the fire. Then I crushed it and ground it to powder as fine as dust and threw the dust into a stream that flowed down the mountain.
- a) If you think about it, the test for Moses was accepting his role as a leader. Moses was not part of the act to make that idol, yet we read of Moses praying for 40 days and nights due to the sin committed. OK, so why pray for 40 days? Couldn't Moses confess that sin in a few minutes and be done with it? Yes we know the number "40" is associated with testing and we get the fact it was a miracle that Moses could go that long without food or water.
  - b) The question is what did Moses do for 40 days? Personally I'd be bored after 10 minutes of praying about it. First it shows Moses commitment to be the Israelites leader as he was told by God to do. It also shows for another 40 days the Israelites didn't repeat their sins to make another golden calf. It's much more than Moses just confessing this sin for a long time period, it shows the Israelites willingness to turn from that sin and not repeat it.
  - c) So what does this have to do with arrogance? The arrogance is the Israelites easily turned to sin when Moses wasn't around the first time. The reminder to this second generation is if their parents could turn that easily from God, so could they and us for that matter. I've learned over and over again, when bad moods are around in our household it's time for me to get on my knees and pray for God's peace before sin grows and spreads.

- d) In the meantime, Moses also said he prayed for his brother Aaron. Remember, Aaron was the first high priest and should have lead the people closer to God while Moses was gone. Instead he was intimately involved in building that idol. What I suspect is that when the Israelites left Egypt and they took gold and silver from the Egyptians, they got at least one "mold making idol device" as they were common in that culture. Therefore the Israelites did melt some of the gold they had and made it into a statue of an Egyptian god (a golden calf) using such a device. My favorite part of that story from Exodus Chapter 32 is when Moses broke the calf into tiny pieces, he threw it in a brook and made the Israelites drink of that brook. Someone said that making the Israelites drink from that water source made them pass the gold through their internal system as a symbolic act of getting that idol out of their system.
  - e) The point here is that Moses is recounting that story to say in effect, if your parents could have messed up that badly, so can all of us when we get our focus off of God's will for our lives. With that said, Moses is ready to move on to more examples.
11. Verse 22: You also made the LORD angry at Taberah, at Massah and at Kibroth Hattaavah.
- a) The short version here is the "golden calf" wasn't the only time the Israelites turned from the God who got them out of Egypt in the first place. Moses is saying I can think of three more times off the top of my head where some of you rebelled against God.
  - b) If you want more details of these three stories, the first and the third is from Numbers 11, the second is from Exodus 17. I'm not going to repeat the stories here. Let's just say they were all times where the Israelites lacked trust that God was going to work out their lives and they lacked faith. Before we say too bad for them, how often do we grumble, "I don't know how I will get through this problem", yet here we are today, past all of that because He has gotten us through that situation. It's just more examples of how God works in the background of our lives even though we don't see Him working or give Him the credit.
12. Verse 23: And when the LORD sent you out from Kadesh Barnea, he said, "Go up and take possession of the land I have given you." But you rebelled against the command of the LORD your God. You did not trust him or obey him. <sup>24</sup> You have been rebellious against the LORD ever since I have known you.
- a) After God got the Israelites out of Egypt, the most important instruction for them to do at that time was to go enter the Promised Land. Out of fear of what could happen to them if they entered that land, they rebelled against God. The point for this second generation is for them to realize "they're no better" in the sense that our natural instinct to rebel against His will is part of our nature. Both fear and arrogance can get us to turn from God's will for our lives and that's what Moses is trying to get across in this section of the text. Moses is not saying he's a better person than they are, He's saying it's part of our human nature to rebel against God and we have to regularly turn that nature over to Him in order to do what it is God wants us to do in the first place.
  - b) The reason some refuse to believe in God in the first place is the same reason we refuse to do His will at times: We think we know what's best and not God. A great quote on this idea is that, "When I disagree with the bible, I think "I'm wrong and God's right", for those who refuse to believe in Him disagree with the bible, they think they're right and the bible is wrong." (Dennis Prager). My point is it's human nature to question God's wisdom and His will for our lives. Overtime we realize His will is best for our lives and despite how we act, God's still working to work with us if we're willing to turn both our fears and our arrogance over to Him so He can use our lives to make a difference for Him.
  - c) Coming back to the text, notice Moses states how the Israelites have been rebellious over the entire 40 year period. The amazing thing to consider is God never wiped them out or gave up on them despite that rebellion. That too, is a model of God's grace for our lives. It shows that God's still willing to work through us despite our faults if we're willing to recommit our lives to let Him guide us whenever we have turned from Him.

13. Verse 25: I lay prostrate before the LORD those forty days and forty nights because the LORD had said he would destroy you. <sup>26</sup> I prayed to the LORD and said, "O Sovereign LORD, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. <sup>27</sup> Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin. <sup>28</sup> Otherwise, the country from which you brought us will say, 'Because the LORD was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the desert.' <sup>29</sup> But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm."
- a) When Moses found out God considered destroying the entire Israelite nation for their sin, he spent another 40-days and nights in prayer for that nation. Since we all understand 40 days is a time of testing, let me again ask, what did Moses do during all that time? What's the purpose of praying so long? I suspect it to think about things. Let me paraphrase his thoughts here, "Dear God, if you wipe out this nation, then you would be breaking your unconditional promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. You would have the reputation as a God who's untrustworthy. Thanks for the offer to start over with me (Moses). It is Your reputation that's on the line here, so stick with this group despite their sins."
  - b) Therefore, this period of another 40-day test was to see if the Israelites were truly sorry (as in repentant) for their sins. The good news is you don't read of them making another idol so that's a good start. Moses as their leader also showed in repentance that he's willing to accept God's will as their leader and pray on their behalf during this time.
  - c) OK, this is all interesting ancient history, what does it have to do with me? For starters, it shows that God is willing to forgive us of our sins if we repent. We don't have to spend a 40-day period on our knees, but I do think God wants us to think about what we did and the consequences of our actions. Most of us know we can't stop sinning by willpower. In periods where sinful desire come in for me, I've learned if I can get my focus on helping others, it gets my desire off of that sin as at that moment I'm using my life for God's glory.
  - d) As to the theme of arrogancy, this text reminds us that God's more than willing to take us "out of the ballgame" if we've committed our lives to Him, but then refuse to use our lives to make a difference for Him. I'm not saying we have to be perfect. I'm saying if we want to have joy in our lives, we think in terms of God, others and then ourselves. The negative side of that aspect is if we go on long enough wasting our lives only concerned with how we can benefit our own lives, the ultimate punishment is being "taken out of the game" or more likely, lose the opportunities we have to be a witness for Him. Think about how He destroyed the Israelite nation historically for disobedience. My point is God's willing to punish them, we should live with that same healthy "fear of His wrath" as well. As I also love to state, the issue isn't salvation, it's about being a witness for Him.
  - e) In the meantime, Moses prayed for them, kept them alive to the point where they're now just outside the Promised Land so Moses can finish his speech and they can enter it.
14. Chapter 10, Verse 1: At that time the LORD said to me, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to me on the mountain. Also make a wooden chest. <sup>2</sup> I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Then you are to put them in the chest."
- a) Speaking of spending time, thinking about our actions, God is telling Moses here that he is the one who broke the tablets that had the 10 Commandments. God is saying here to go make two new "blank" tablets so God can write on them. This action shows us that even if break the commandments, they are still in effect. The first time, God "dictated" those 10 Commandments to Moses and he wrote them down. This time, Moses is to provide blank tablets for God to write them. Again, it shows God is willing to work with us even we've broken those commandments and "they're still on the books" after we've sinned and after we've confessed the sin as being wrong. The reason for the two tablets is a symbolic way of saying, "one copy for you and one for me" to show this contract is between us both.



- b) OK, we get the fact that Moses had to bring "blank paper" for God to write on. What's the deal with the "wooden chest" to carry the stone tablets? If you've read the book of Exodus or seen the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark", you're familiar with the Ark of the Covenant which is a formal English title for that box. To make it simple, the Israelites were to make a box roughly 2 feet by 3 feet by 2 feet high, which was considered the most holy object in the Jewish temple. It represents God's presence. Some think this wooden box that Moses made here is a separate box, but I suspect it's the same thing, as "the" box held those two stone tablets just as "this box did. But wasn't "the" box gold? The answer is it was made of wood and then lined with gold inside and out.
  - c) I can get into a lot more details here about that box, but let's just say that God wanted the Israelites to have that box as a symbol of "how God works". Because it contained God's laws it reminds us those laws are in effect, even to this day. I'll spare you my lecture on observing the Sabbath for now, but just as stealing and murder is still in effect today for Christians. Those laws are always in effect in order to be a good witness for God remind us that to approach God requires reminding ourselves that He's forgiven us of all our sins so we can approach Him for our needs.
  - d) So why a wood box? It reminded Moses of how he encountered God, as a burning bush that was not consumed. It's a subtle reminder of how our sins "are burned up", yet that bush "still exists". Therefore it's a model of God's grace as He consumes our sins yet He forgives us as we still live on despite those sins. That's how God deals with our arrogance by reminding us that we haven't been "fully consumed" by our sins.
15. Verse 3: So I made the ark out of acacia wood and chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I went up on the mountain with the two tablets in my hands. <sup>4</sup> The LORD wrote on these tablets what he had written before, the Ten Commandments he had proclaimed to you on the mountain, out of the fire, on the day of the assembly. And the LORD gave them to me. <sup>5</sup> Then I came back down the mountain and put the tablets in the ark I had made, as the LORD commanded me, and they are there now.
- a) Here we get more "history repeated" as Moses states how God Himself wrote down those Commandments on the two tablets and Moses carried the box. The text here says Moses made the "ark" and if you read this in Exodus, someone else was in charge of making it. Remember that Moses is the leader. For Moses to say "I made it" can be the same as one who is a leader commissioning others to make it. The other possibility is Moses himself made the wood box and the "workers" made the gold that went around it. Either way, the box is real and it was made. (See Exodus 25:10 as a cross reference to that construction.)
  - b) Notice Moses mentions acacia wood. That's the same type of wood that the burning bush was made out of. It sort of solidifies my association of the ark with the idea of judgment of sin and "not being consumed" by God as being represented by this ark. The main point is that Moses is trying to emphasize the point that the Israelites about to enter that land of Israel are still bound by the 10 Commandments even though Moses isn't going with them in the conquest of that land, but those commandments are.
16. Verse 6: (The Israelites traveled from the wells of the Jaakanites to Moserah. There Aaron died and was buried, and Eleazar his son succeeded him as priest. <sup>7</sup> From there they traveled to Gudgodah and on to Jotbathah, a land with streams of water. <sup>8</sup> At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name, as they still do today. <sup>9</sup> That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their brothers; the LORD is their inheritance, as the LORD your God told them.)
- a) Speaking of the box carrying those commandments, the lecture now moves on to discuss those in charge of carrying that "box" around. The Israelites were divided into 12 tribes. One of those tribes were separated from the others in order to be priests to the rest of the Israelites. Those priests are the descendants of Moses' brother Aaron, mentioned here.

- b) Moses is recalling the time when his brother Aaron died. The history lesson here is that the Israelites traveled from one spot to another that had water. Then God spoke to Moses to say in effect, separate the tribe of Levi for me to be the priests. Aaron will be the first head priest and then his oldest son will be the next one. The office of "high priest" lasted all the way until the time of Jesus and died out when the Romans destroyed the temple in 70AD and then the family records were lost.
  - c) Speaking of history, the point being emphasized here is that the price the Levites had to pay to be those priests is that they didn't get a share of the Promised Land like members of the other tribes did. God wanted the Levites to be scattered throughout that land as to be priests to all the other Israelites. Stop and think, what is a priest? It is a representative of God to the people. OK, what are Christians called to do? Be God's representatives to a lost and dying world. Just as God called Christians to be His witnesses wherever we go, so God called the Levites to be scattered among the other Israelites so they can teach them how God's to be worshipped. My point is when you read of priests in the bible, stop and consider how you and I can be a good witness for God to other people.
  - d) The point is Moses is reminding this second generation of Israelites how some of them are separated from the normal duties of "making a living and being a part of society" to go be priests to everyone else, just as some are called today to be professional priests, while the rest of us are called to be a good witness for Jesus based on how we live out our lives.
17. Verse 10: Now I had stayed on the mountain forty days and nights, as I did the first time, and the LORD listened to me at this time also. It was not his will to destroy you. <sup>11</sup> "Go," the LORD said to me, "and lead the people on their way, so that they may enter and possess the land that I swore to their fathers to give them."
- a) In the meantime, Moses is back to talking about that second "40 day period" again. Moses is emphasizing that fact to remind this second generation that the only reason they're here today is God didn't destroy their parents roughly 40 years ago. In other words, you're not entering that land because you're something special, but only because God forgives us of our sins and still wants to use us to make a difference for Him despite those sins.
  - b) To say this another way, it's time to go use your lives to make a difference for Me, as that's the greatest purpose one can have for one's life. So do what I desire, which is to enter into my "rest", by trusting Me with every aspect of one's life as we use our lives for His glory.
18. Verse 12: And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?
- a) Let me ask a basic question: What does fear the LORD mean? Yes the word LORD in all capitals is referring to God's most holy name, often pronounced "Jehovah". But what does it mean practically for us to fear Him? The basic idea is to realize He exists and in charge of our lives and to fear displeasing Him has consequences in this life as well as in eternity.
  - b) It doesn't mean we walk around in fear all day of God "zapping us" dead. It means we do fear the consequences of sin as we know the damage we can do to our own lives as well as the lives of others around us. It's about realizing God is a "God of justice" who has a "zero percent tolerance" for sin. That's why we're eternally grateful for what Jesus did for us as we use our lives to make a difference for God out of gratitude and not fear of judgment.
  - c) That leads to the rest of the comments in these verses. God calls on us to obey those laws, to love and serve God based on our fear of punishment for disobeying those laws in the first place. It's saying the best way for us to live out our lives is by serving Him as we care about being a good witness for Him in all that we do.
  - d) But what about all the other laws? Most of Deuteronomy coming up is full of laws that we as Christians are not "under"? We'll get to all of that soon enough. For now, realize to serve God is about obeying the 10 Commandments even as Christians as His witnesses.

19. Verse 14: To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. <sup>16</sup> Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.
- a) Here we have Moses reminding the Israelites who God is. He's not just one god among in the vast array of things people worshipped, but He's "the" God who created everything.
  - b) Given the fact He's "The God", Moses is saying to stop and consider the fact that He has chosen you Israelites to be His witnesses to the world. This is a great privilege that all of us who trust in Jesus as our savior also get to enjoy. In other word's we're not picked, as we're something special or we deserve it, we're just picked, because we are. Accept it and start using the most valuable thing we own, our time for God's glory. I'm not saying we have to "quit our lives" to be a professional priest, I'm saying we are priests, if we accept the idea that God Himself has paid the complete price for all of our sins. The real issue is not so much have we accepted it, as much as it is what are we doing about it? I'm never impressed with people who claim to be born-again Christians. I'm impressed with those who do something about it.
  - c) Believe it or not, that little lecture leads to Verse 16 that has the phrase "Circumcise your hearts". To state the obvious, God is not saying to take that literally. The word picture is about having a heart for God where we choose to do something about our salvation. It is one thing for me to pound away on the keyboard and lecture all of us (myself included) on that issue. It's another to actually go do something about it? OK, so what do we do? The answer is different for each one of us. If you don't know where to start, do something as to make that difference. God can't lead us if we're not willing to move in the first place. That's the idea of circumcising our hearts: It's to care about pleasing God by avoiding sin as much as possible in the first place and confessing it when we do mess up, and then go use our lives to make a difference for Him. That's the Christian life in a nutshell.
  - d) Remember I said these two chapters are on the topic of our arrogance? Notice the last few words of Verse 16 says in this translation to not be "stiff necked" any longer. This is about turning from our will to do God's will. The arrogance is about living for what we think is best for us as opposed to living for what we believe is the best way God wants us to live at this moment. If I had to summarize this whole lesson in one thought, it would be when those moments come when we think we're better than the person next to us, give that idea to God to remind ourselves we aren't any better and we're only saved because God loves us and wants to us to use our lives for His glory. That is how we deal with arrogance.
  - e) Meanwhile I have a few more verses to go:
20. Verse 17: For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.
- a) This is that reminder that God is not one among many, but the only God who isn't partial to any person or group and can't be bought off.
  - b) First, let me discuss "God is God". When children ask, "Who made God?" the answer is if God is created, there has to be something greater who created Him. Since we can't get to something from nothing, so sooner or later one comes to an entity that must always exist that's greater than all we can comprehend. As one philosopher put it, "If there was a big bang, someone had to light the fuse." (Greg Koukl).
  - c) As far as partiality and "accepts no bribes", that's the reminder that we can't pay God off. In other words we can't earn our salvation by being good enough for God. That's why we Christians preach one can't get into heaven by having our good deeds outweigh our sins. The related point is that if we did have some arrogance at the moment, it won't do us any good as God isn't partial of one person or group over another and He can't be bribed off.
  - d) So if God is impartial, why did He order the Israelites to kill everyone living in Israel? It isn't that the Israelites are better, it's that the sins of those living there, reached their limit.

- e) The point is "this world only makes sense" if we believe that there is a God who created it and rules over it. We can't explain all evil and tragedies that exists, but He does expect us to be His witnesses to the world by dealing with evil and tragedy as best as possible as we use our lives to make a difference for Him. As I like to say every so often, if this life is all that there is, the world is a very unfair place to live. However if there is a heaven and God decides who gets to be with Him forever based on our trust in Him and turning from sin, then and only then can the world we live in be a fair place. Therefore, even if I'm wrong in my view of God, I'd much rather live my life on the belief of His existence and that He wants us to use our lives for His glory then to only live my life for myself and not care at all about anyone else as if this life is all that there is.
21. Verse 18: He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.
- a) We're still on the issue of whether or not God is "fair". Here in these verses God is saying He cares about orphans and those (older) widows who don't have anyone to take care of them. The issue is not about those specific groups as much as it is to get the concept that He cares about people and wants to help us if we're willing to let Him guide our lives. Is this world full of tragedies about people like that? Of course. However, I have seen many overcome those "setbacks" when God works through them and more importantly He tells us to help those who can't help themselves. In other words, get over our arrogance that we're picked to make a difference for God and just go do something about it by using our lives to make a difference for Him. Remember I asked earlier, what do we specifically do to make a difference for God? A good place to start is to find a way to be helpful for any person less fortunate than us. It doesn't mean we force our will upon them, but we ask if we can be of assistance to them.
  - b) Then we get the reminder that the Israelites themselves were "foreigners" in Egypt. That is the reminder that this world is not our home, but heaven is. Therefore, we shouldn't be arrogant about it, but use our lives to make a difference for God by being a living witness for Him. That's also the key point of these two chapters.
22. Verse 20: Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. <sup>21</sup> He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. <sup>22</sup> Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky
- a) This leads us to the conclusion of this "homily". If God did separate those Israelites as to make a difference for Him, and God did separate us Christians by the Gospel message to make a difference for Him, why are we sitting here reading this? If our time belongs to Him in the first place, then use it for His glory. Those Israelites got to witness the great miracles of the Egyptian plagues and parting of the Red Sea, so now that they know of His existence, they're ordered to use their lives for His glory. When we see the miracles of our salvation or others being saved, God expects us to use those miracles as the evidence of His existence and again, use our time for His glory, as that's the best way to live.
  - b) Finally let me talk about oaths. Jesus clearly taught on this principal and said in effect not to swear by anything in the sense of let our yes be yes, and no be no. (Matthew 5:33 to 37, paraphrased.) Jesus is not contradicting this command, but simply commenting upon it. What Jesus is saying is if we give our word, do it and don't say for example, "I swear in God's name that is true." Again, the issue is about being a good witness for Jesus in all we do in life and that includes when we take an oath (a promise) to do something for Him.
  - c) The idea is in effect, if we can't be trusted to keep our promises, how will anyone trust is if we use our time to tell others about God. In other words this is about being a trustworthy witness for God in all that we do. If we mess up, apologize if possible to those we've done wrong to and simply state we've been a bad witness to God at that moment in time.

- d) OK, hopefully, I've killed all of our arrogancy (mine included) for one lesson. Ok, time to close in prayer as we ask God to use our lives for His glory:
23. Heavenly Father, First, we thank you for the miracle of our salvation. We can't explain why You did pick us, we're just grateful that You did. Help us not to think of ourselves as anything special when we commit some of our time and resources so we can make a difference for you. Help us to realize how valuable our time is and the greatest purpose we can have for our time is to glorify You with our lives. Use us not because we're something special, but just because You want to as we volunteer to be used by You for Your glory. Make it obvious to us what You want us to do as we use our life for that purpose. Then give us the boldness to go do Your will as You clear away whatever obstacles prevent us from doing that will. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.