



Deuteronomy 27
Blessings and Curses

NKJ Deuteronomy 27:1 Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: "Keep all the commandments which I command you today.

2 "And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime.

3 "You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you, 'a land flowing with milk and honey,' just as the LORD God of your fathers promised you.

4 "Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime.

5 "And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them.

6 "You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God.

7 "You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God.

8 "And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law."

9 Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, "Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of the LORD your God.

10 "Therefore you shall obey the voice of the LORD your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today."

11 And Moses commanded the people on the same day, saying,

12 "These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin;

13 "and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

14 " And the Levites shall speak with a loud voice and say to all the men of Israel:

15 'Cursed is the one who makes a carved or molded image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.' And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen!'

16 'Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

17 'Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

18 'Cursed is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

19 'Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

20 'Cursed is the one who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's bed.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

21 'Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

22 'Cursed is the one who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

23 'Cursed is the one who lies with his mother-in-law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

24 'Cursed is the one who attacks his neighbor secretly.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

25 'Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

26 'Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

Here we read that on entering the Promised land the people were to hold a repeat of the Covenant ratification ceremony that had occurred at Sinai in Ex. 24, but this would be with the new generation that entered the promised land – a fresh renewal of the covenant.

We read in verse 1 that Moses and the Elders commanded that the people should perform it, this is unusual, usually Moses addressed the people by himself, but the elders were probably included because Moses would not be there when this ceremony was carried out, having died before they entered the land, and the people need to understand that their elders in the promised land would be conveying to them the commandments of God, as Moses the mediator of the Law had received them, and it would be the responsibility of the elders to see that they were carried out.

So too the responsibility of elders of the church has always been to convey the will of God to the people, as He revealed it, and when they do so faithfully, the people are to render obedience, not to the elders but to the God who declarations they are making known.

Site for the ceremony was Shechem which was probably chosen because of its association with the ancient patriarchs, Shechem was where both Abraham and Jacob had built altars. It would therefore be a potent reminder that God had delivered on the promises He had made to their forefathers. God is a covenant keeping God, even if His people are not.

It was also because there you had two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal, that lay near together, with a valley between, On the sides of these two mountains, which faced one another, all the tribes were to be drawn up, six on one side and six on the other, so that in the valley, at the foot of each mountain, they came pretty near together, so near as that the priests standing betwixt them might be heard by those that were next them on both sides

They were commanded to prepare huge stones on which the law was to be displayed, (Law was probably the Decalogue inscribed on ten stones, but we don't know for certain.) and An altar of sacrifice was to be constructed on Mt. Ebal, archaeologists discovered an altar on Mt. Ebal in 1980 without inscription that seems to fit the time and location, but we aren't absolutely sure

All Israel was drawn up silence was proclaimed, and attention commanded, one of the priests, or perhaps more at some distance from each other, pronounced with a loud voice one of the curses here following, and all the people that stood on the side and foot of Mount Ebal (those that stood further off taking the signal from those that stood nearer and within hearing) said Amen

We note that the Altar of Sacrifice uncut stones would not be graven, and thus have idolatrous pictures It would also be an altar that Yahweh Himself had made, and here we have a potent reminder –

Christ, our altar, the sacrifice by which alone our sin is atoned for, is a stone cut out of the mountain without hands (Dan. 2:34, 35), and therefore refused by the builders, as having no form or comeliness, but accepted of God the Father, and made the head of the corner.

God appointed which tribes should stand upon Mount Gerizim and which on Mount Ebal (v. 12, 13), to prevent the disputes that might have arisen if they had been left to do it themselves.

We are not sure why the tribes were selected as they were - Two sets of six tribes, one set on Gerizim as a symbol of blessing, and one on Ebal as a symbol of cursing. Not clear why the division is made we note that the Six tribes on Gerizim are the one's descended from Leah and Rachel, the six on Ebal are the four sons of their hand maids and the first and last born of Leah. Also the 6 on Gerizim are the ones from the south, and the six on Ebal are the northern tribes. (Being in the south is a blessing? ;-)

The tribes were to answer, answering Amen is the same as having pronounced the oath with your own mouth. It was an oath taking ceremony.

Would have been an amazing and impressive ceremony. The Law written Clearly on Giant Whitewashed Stones. And then ALL ISRAEL shouting their assent alternately from the mountains *“And if such a solemnity as this would not make a deep impression upon them, and affect them with the great things of God's law, nothing would”* – Matthew Henry

All of these commandments are tied together by being SECRET violations of the law, that is crimes that can easily remain undetected by men. Oath covers all breaches of the law whether known to men or not.

First law is a violation of the second commandment – violations against God, the rest are violations against fellow men. There are twelve in all just as there are twelve tribes.

Ceremony itself too place in Joshua 8:30-35. There we read that the Ark of the Covenant stood in the valley between the two mountains to symbolize the presence of the Lord as they took an oath to obey His commandments.

Applications: “Note, Ministers must preach the terrors of the law as well as the comforts of the gospel; must not only allure people to their duty with the promises of a blessing, but awe them to it with the threatenings of a curse.” – Matthew Henry

Though a sin occurs in secret yet the curse of the law still attends.

We learn also that there is only one remedy for the curses of the law - Where the law was written, an altar was set up close by it, to show us that we could not look with any comfort upon the law, being conscious of our own violations of it, if it were not for the great sacrifice by which atonement is made for sin; and NOTE which mountain also the ALTAR was set up on **the altar was set up on Mount Ebal, the mount on which those tribes stood that said Amen to the curses**, to tell us that through Christ we are redeemed from the curse of the law.

Paul in making this point quotes Verse 26 in Gal. 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

“Lest those who were guilty of other sins, not mentioned in these formal denunciations, should think themselves safe from the curse, this last reaches all; not only those who do the evil which the law forbids, but those also who omit the good which the law requires: to this we must all say Amen, owning ourselves under the curse, justly to have deserved it, and that we must certainly have perished for ever under it, if Christ had not redeemed us from the curse of the law, by being made a curse for us.” – Matthew Henry

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Gal. 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),