

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
10-19-22

Deuteronomy 27

The Command To Set Up A Special Altar On Mount Ebal – Verses 1-8

¹ Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people: “Keep all these commands that I give you today. ²When 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. ³Write 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 ancestors, promised you. ⁴And when you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I command you today, and coat them with plaster. ⁵Build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. Do not use any iron tool on them. ⁶Build the altar of the LORD your God with fieldstones and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. ⁷Sacrifice fellowship offerings there, eating them and rejoicing in the presence of the LORD your God. ⁸And you shall write very clearly all the words of this law on these stones you have set up.”

27:1 Moses finished his preaching to the people of Israel, so there was nothing more to say, other than the simple encouragement to do what God commanded. It isn't enough for Israel to be hearers of the word; they must also be doers of the word.

27:5-6 The Lord had specified an altar made of natural, uncut stones (fieldstones) so that the people would not begin worshiping the altars as they would an idol. To use a iron chisel or other shaping tool on a stone of the altar would profane it (Exodus 20:24-25). Additionally, because the Israelites did not have the capacity to work with iron at this time, using iron tools might mean using the cooperation and expertise of other nations.

Curses From Mount Ebal – Verses 9-10

⁹ Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, “Be silent, Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God. ¹⁰Obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today.”

27:9 Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel: Much of the book of Deuteronomy is written after the same pattern as ancient agreements between kings and their subjects. Here, the idea is clear: God is the king, and the people of Israel are His subjects. He has told them what He expects of them, and what they may expect from Him.

27:9 This day you have become the people of the LORD your God: Now that the agreement was settled, and it could be said to Israel, “you have become the people of the LORD your God.” The contract was signed, and Israel willingly submitted itself to the Lord God, recognizing Him as their king.

27:10 You shall obey the voice of the LORD your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes: If the LORD is our king, then it is fitting that we obey Him this way. Moses, and all the leadership of Israel simply declared a fact that was obvious to everyone.

27:9-10 Moses was reviewing the law with the new generation of people. When we decide to believe in God, we must also decide to follow his ways. What we do shows what we really believe. Can people tell that you are a member of God's family?

The Division Of The Tribes Between The Two Mountains – Verses 11-13

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.

27:11-13 These shall stand on Mount Gerizim... and these shall stand on Mount Ebal: When Israel came into the Promised Land, they were to separate the tribes according to these two groups. One group would gather on Mount Gerizim, and they would bless the people. The other group would stand on Mount Ebal and they would curse those who disobeyed the law of God.

27:12 To bless the people... to curse: This dramatic scene was fulfilled in Joshua 8:32-35. In Joshua's day, it happened after a bitter defeat, then a dramatic repentance and recovery at Ai (Joshua chapters 7 and 8). After the victory at Ai, Joshua wanted to do everything he could to walk in obedience, so he led the nation in obedience to this command in Deuteronomy 27.

27:12 These shall stand on Mount Gerizim... and these shall stand on Mount Ebal: God commanded this "open-air-audience-participation-sermon" to happen at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal for several important reasons.

- i. This would be a beautiful place to do this. The whole nation could hear this reading of the Law because the area has a natural amphitheater effect because of the contour of the hills.
- ii. Because Gerizim and Ebal were in the geographic middle of the Promised Land, Israel had to control the middle of Canaan and the highlands to have the luxury of such an assembly at these mountains.
- iii. Finally, the mountains themselves were pictures of blessing and cursing: "On all hands it is allowed that Gerizim abounds with springs, gardens, and orchards, and that it is covered with a beautiful verdure, while Ebal is as naked and barren as a rock."

The Declaration Of The Curses – Verses 14-20

14 The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice: **15** "Cursed is anyone who makes an idol—a thing detestable to the LORD, the work of skilled hands—and sets it up in secret." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" **16** "Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" **17** "Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor's boundary stone." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" **18** "Cursed is anyone who leads the blind astray on the road." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" **19** "Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!" **20** "Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his father's wife, for he dishonors his father's bed." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

27:14 The Levites shall speak with a loud voice: This would make a remarkable impression. The Levites declared curses upon those who break the covenant, and people answered Amen! to every

declaration. It is good to remind ourselves that the word Amen! means something. It means “so be it.” Every Amen! was a conscious agreement with the declaration of a curse.

27:15-20 It is important to recognize that we, in Jesus Christ, do not have an Old Covenant relationship with God. We expect to be blessed, not because of our obedience, but because of our position in Jesus. The curse we deserved was laid upon Him (Galatians 3:10-14). Though there may be an inherent curse of consequences in our disobedience, or even the correcting hand of God, under the New Covenant, He does not punish us or curse us — because all that we deserved, past, present, and future, was poured out upon Jesus.

The Declaration Of The Curses – Verses 21-26

²¹ **“Cursed is anyone who has sexual relations with any animal.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”** ²² **“Cursed is anyone 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 anyone who sleeps with his mother-in-law.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”** ²⁴ **“Cursed is anyone who kills their neighbor secretly.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”** ²⁵ **“Cursed is anyone who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”** ²⁶ **“Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”**

27:21-26 These curses were a series of oaths, spoken by the priests and affirmed by the people, by which the people promised to stay away from wrong actions. By saying Amen, “So be it,” the people took responsibility for their actions. Sometimes looking at a list of curses like this gives us the idea that God has a bad temper and is out to crush anyone who steps out of line. But we need to see these restrictions not as threats, but as loving warnings about the plain facts of life. Just as we warn children to stay away from hot stoves and busy streets, God warns us to stay away from dangerous actions. The natural law of his universe makes it clear that wrongdoing toward others or God has tragic consequences. God is merciful enough to tell us this truth plainly. Motivated by love and not anger, his strong words help us avoid the serious consequences that result from neglecting God or wronging others. But God does not leave us with only curses or consequences. Immediately following these curses, we discover the great blessings (positive consequences) that come from living for God (28:1-14). These give us extra incentive to obey God’s laws. While all these blessings may not come in our lifetime on earth, those who obey God will experience the fullness of his blessing when he establishes the new heaven and the new earth.