

Bible Study – Deuteronomy Chapter 27 – Renewing the Covenant

In our last study, we finished up the last of the statutes and ordinances that were given to the Israelites by God through Moses. Chapters 12-26 are an exposition of the Ten Commandments, given in specific laws, statutes, and ordinances that were to govern how the Israelites were to live, specifically with God and their fellow man. This was not only a path to righteous living and a way to obey God, but also a means to glorify Him. It was also to be a testimony to the surrounding nations so they could see the one true and holy God who is worthy of worship and praise. With these laws, we see the blessings that come with obedience and the curses and punishment that come with disobedience.

In our study tonight, we look at the next steps Israel is to take to 'seal' the covenant promises and to commit their lives to it.

Read Deuteronomy 27:1-8

Moses and the elders of Israel command the people to keep the entire commandments that were given to them today and to set up large stones, plastered with plaster, and to write the words of the law on them in the town of Shechem. They are also to build an altar to the Lord God, where they were to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings to Him.

Q. (1-4) Read Deuteronomy 11:29-30. How are these verses connected with our passage today? What was the purpose for erecting these monuments on Mount Ebal (hint: think about signs)?

- Chapter 11 instructs that the Israelites were to go to the town of Shechem and talks about the blessing and curses on the two Mounts.
- This portion of scripture now goes into detail as to how it is to be done and gives additional instructions on what else should be done here.
- Mount Ebal is the mountain north of the town of Shechem. Mount Gerizim is on the south side of Shechem.
- One purpose for the monuments is that this was a common way to posting important public announcements in Canaan.
- Another purpose was to declare to all people, Canaanites as well as Israelites, that the Mosaic law was Israel's standard of faith and practice, which is its national constitution.
- It is also a way to remind the Israelites of who God is and the laws and commandments that they were to follow.

Q. (5-8) What do you think the purpose of the altar was at Mount Ebal (cf. Exodus 24:4-8)? What is the purpose of using uncut stones for the altar (cf. Exodus 20:24-25)? What is the significance of building an altar in this city (cf. Genesis 12:6-7)?

- Exodus 24:4-8 – It was to confirm the covenant between God and the nation of Israel.
- Offering burnt and peace offerings of worship to Yahweh, thereby committing themselves to Him as "the Lord (their) God".
- It creates a 'link' or a 'relationship' between Horeb (Sinai) and Mount Ebal
- Exodus 20:24-25 – It is a command from God to use uncut or whole stones as anything else (e.g. the use of a tool or hewn (or cut) stones) was considered an abomination to God.
- Since the Canaanites used cut stones to create their altars, this was a way to distinguish how Israel worshipped their God.
- It may also represent God's "holiness" (e.g. perfect and unaltered).
- Genesis 12:6-7 – Abram received God's promise of the land, and he built his first altar in the land at this site.
- Jacob also buried his idols there.
- This was also the center of the Promised Land.

- This is also God's promise coming back full circle, from the initial giving of the promise and the fulfillment of it.

Read Deuteronomy 27:9-26

Moses confirms the covenant with the people of Israel and then proceeds to separate the people of Israel into two groups, to be gathered on both Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. Those on Mount Gerizim would stand for the blessings and those on Mount Ebal were to stand for the curses. There are 12 curses that are pronounced, which are based on specific acts. These are the beginning of the curses that Moses lays on the people should they be disobedient.

Q. (9-10) How is oath taking by this current generation of Israel like the previous generation (cf. Exodus 19:8)? Why do you think this is significant for the current generation? How can we put this in context for Christians today (cf. Romans 10:9-10)?

- Exodus 19:8 – Their fathers had done this at Mount Horeb (Sinai) and so the current generation is now doing it at Mount Ebal.
- This was a public display of Israel's commitment to follow God's commands and laws.
- It is significant for this generation as they had not previously made a formal commitment to follow God (though their fathers had, the generation before).
- This was a way for them to 'own it', to make their own commitment to follow God and all His commands.
- Almost similar to Christians that even though we may be born in a Christian family, it doesn't make us a Christian. We need to make our proclamation of faith in Christ and God.
- Romans 10:9-10 – The profession of faith that is in these verses, that it should be done in a very public way. This is usually done via baptism.
- ** The point of the last question is to have people think about their own faith and if they make it known to others, especially those who are non-believers.
- Make people consider that it is important to proclaim your faith to others rather than hiding it or being 'subtle' about it (e.g. "I will show my faith through good works and hopefully people will see the difference in me and know that I am a Christian")

Q. (11-13) Read Joshua 8:30-35 – When reading both passages together, what does this show us about God and Israel? What do you think the significance (if any) of the separation of the tribes of Israel to the two mountains (cf. Genesis 46:8-25)?

- Joshua 8:30-35 – Shows the fulfillment by the Israelites, under Joshua, of all the commands that are given in this chapter.
- It also shows how God has protected the Israelites for them to be able to fulfill their commands as this does not happen just over the Jordan river, but rather, they defeat Jericho and Ai (two of the larger cities in the Promised Land) before they make it to Shechem.
- The tribes that are placed on Mount Gerizim are those of Leah and Rachel. The tribes on Mount Ebal are the maidservants of Leah and Rachel. Also, Reuben is included in that group, perhaps for the sin of fornication with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22). As a result, he lost his first-born right to a double inheritance. Zebulun is also included here (the youngest of Leah's children), but not too sure why (perhaps to even out the tribes?)
- It is interesting that the distinction, for the most part, are made between those whom Jacob married and those who were 'given' to them by their wives.

Q. (14-26) As you read the curses in these passages, identify each one to the corresponding Ten Commandment. Why do you think these acts were chosen? What do you think the unifying theme is amongst these violations?

- V.15 – 2nd commandment (Not to carve or make an image of God)
- V.16 – 5th commandment (Honour your father and mother)
- V.17 – 9th commandment (Bearing false witness against your neighbour)
- V.18 – 9th commandment (Bearing false witness against your neighbour)
- V.19 – 9th commandment (Bearing false witness against your neighbour)
- V.20 – 7th commandment (Do not commit adultery)
- V.21 – 7th commandment (Do not commit adultery)
- V.22 - 7th commandment (Do not commit adultery)
- V.23 - 7th commandment (Do not commit adultery)
- V.24 – 6th commandment (Do not murder)
- V.25 – 6th commandment (Do not murder)
- V.26 – does not correspond directly to any of the Ten commandments, but an instruction that was repeated several times in the book of Deuteronomy.
- These acts may have been chosen as these were things the various tribes were struggling with and so they were called out on it
- The unifying theme amongst these curses is they can be done in secret without anyone (but God himself) knowing about it.
- This is a warning that even those done in secret will still be punished by God.

Q. In verses 15-26, as the curses are read, the people of Israel say “Amen”, as a way of acknowledging the law to be followed and the punishment for disobedience. As Christians, can we say “Amen” to all the commands that God has given us to live by? Which ones are the hardest to say “Amen” to?

- ** The purpose of this question is to make people think if they truly follow all of God’s commands and statutes or only ‘cherry’ pick the ones that are easy to follow or feel it is applicable to them.
- Israel said yes to all, knowing that obedience to all was necessary.
- Do we as Christians, know that we need to follow all the laws?
- This is shown by Paul’s writing to the Galatians (Galatians 3:10-14) how no one can obey God perfectly, though we are commanded to obey them.

God is refreshing his covenant with this generation of Israel. The monuments and altars are not just a symbol for the other nations around them, but also as a memorial for the people of Israel, to remember what was promised on this day. God, through the Levitical priests, pronounce curses to Israel, 12 in all, presumably one for each tribe of Israel. Though not specifically assigned to any one tribe, it is given as a reminder that all of Israel is to live in obedience to God’s word. As we look at these acts of disobedience, whether we are alone or in public, the people of Israel (and to us Christians) are to live holy lives because God always sees how we act, and nothing is hidden from him.