

Deuteronomy 27 - Alternatives for God-Related People

III. Third sermon: What God will do for Israel (Deut 27:1—34:12)

(1) Ratification of the covenant at Shechem: blessings and curses (Deut 27:1—28:68)

(A) Ceremony to be followed at Shechem (27:1-26)

(a) Establishment of the altar (27:1-8)

(b) Exhortation to obey (27:9-10)

(c) Half the tribesmen on Gerizim representing blessing and half of the tribes on Ebal representing curses (27:11-13)

(d) Recitation of the curses for individual sins (27:14-26)

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III. Third sermon: What God will do for Israel (Deut 27:1—34:12)

(1) Ratification of the covenant at Shechem: blessings and curses (Deut 27:1—28:68)

(A) Ceremony to be followed at Shechem (27:1-26)

(a) Establishment of the altar (27:1-8)

1 Then Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, "Keep all the commandments which I am commanding you today.

1 Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people, saying, "Keep all the commandments which I command you today.

1 Moses and the elders of Israel gave these orders to the people: "Observe all of the commandments that I'm giving you today.

1 And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day.

2 So it shall be on the day when you cross the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones and coat them with lime

2 So it shall be on the day when you cross the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God gives you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones and coat them with lime

2 On the day you cross over the Jordan River to the land that the LORD your God is about to give you, set up large stones and coat them with plaster.

2 And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, that thou shalt set thee up great stones, and plaister them with plaister:

- Covenant consecration must be an act of intelligent, informed faith and devotion. Therefore, the content of the covenant was to be published preparatory to its ratification by the people. That was one purpose of writing the covenant on the plastered stones, an Egyptian technique, as is confirmed by the fact that in the historical fulfillment Joshua read this law to the people (Josh 8:34). Comparable were Moses' reading of the Book of the Covenant to Israel at the ratification of the Sinaitic Covenant and the proclamation of the Deuteronomic Covenant in the plains of Moab. The fact that durable stones were selected invites comparison with the two stone tables of the law written by the finger of God and suggests that a further purpose was to provide a symbolic witness to the permanence of the covenant (Cf. Deut 31:26; Josh 24:26, For the historical performance of what is here prescribed, see Joshua 8:30-35:

Joshua 8:30-35:

30 Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal,

31 As Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.

32 And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel.

33 And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

35 There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.

- Predicted by Moses (Deut 27-30) 3x: "unhewn stones" (Ex 20:35; Deut 27:5; Josh 8:31)
- God's workmanship not to be polluted by man's additions
- Peace offerings: shared (Lev 7:15); communion (*koinonia*)
- Knowledge demands action (Deut 11:26-28)

The law is not read until there was an altar (first mention in Joshua). There must be a remedy present for your failure to keep the law! Notice that the altar is at Mt. Ebal, not Gerizim.

3 and write on them all the words of this Law, when you cross over, so 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, the **God of your fathers**, promised you.

3 and write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over, so that you may enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

3 Then inscribe on them all the words of this law when you've crossed over into the land that the LORD your God is about to give you—a land flowing with milk and honey—just as the LORD God of your ancestors promised you.

3 And thou shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when thou art passed over, that thou mayest go in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, a land that floweth with milk and honey; as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee.

- "...God of your fathers" - occurs 6x in Deut

4 So it shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I am commanding you today, and you shall coat them with lime.

4 So it shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall set up on Mount Ebal, these stones, as I am commanding you today, and you shall coat them with lime.

4 "When you have crossed the Jordan River, set up these stones about which I'm commanding you today on Mount Ebal, and coat them with plaster.

4 Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister.

The significance of this act was twofold:

- First, it commemorated God's faithfulness in giving them the land ("as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you")

— The stones were to be set up on Mount Ebal (about 35 miles north of Jerusalem) at the base of which lay the city of Shechem

- Second, the writing of the Law when they entered the Promised Land symbolized the nation's mission to bring Canaan under the dominance of the Lord's Word

5 Moreover, you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield an iron *tool* on them.

5 Moreover, you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield an iron *tool* on them.

5 Then build an altar there to the LORD your God, an altar of stones that hasn't been worked with iron tools.

5 And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them.

6 You shall build the altar of the LORD your God of uncut stones, and you shall offer on it burnt offerings to the LORD your God;

6 You shall build the altar of the LORD your God of uncut stones, and you shall offer on it burnt offerings to the LORD your God;

6 Build the altar to the LORD your God with uncut stones, then offer a burnt offering to him.

6 Thou shalt build the altar of the LORD thy God of whole stones: and thou shalt offer burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD thy God:

7 and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God.

7 and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God.

7 Offer a burnt offering there, then eat and rejoice in the presence of the LORD your God.

7 And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God.

- For the purpose of the sacrificial offerings, a special altar was to be erected on Ebal. It may be that the mount of cursing was selected because the Mosaic economy, in its distinctive emphasis, was a ministration of death and condemnation (Cf. 2 Cor 3:7-9), though, like a schoolmaster, conducting men to the grace of Christ. Or possibly the altar was to be erected on Ebal because the peace of the covenant was to come through the infliction of the curses on the Redeemer-Servant, sacrificed for the sins of God's people.

The altar was to be made of unhewn stones, in accordance with the requirement of the Book of the Covenant (Ex 20:25). Clearly the Deuteronomic law of the permanent central altar was not intended to be a repudiation of the altar law of the Book of the Covenant. Nor was the principle of the centralization of the altar so absolutely restrictive that there might not be the special altar for extraordinary occasions. [Denial of "iron tool" was not just to avoid dependence upon Canaanite monopoly.]

8 You shall write on the stones all the words of this Law very clearly."

8 You shall write on the stones all the words of this law very distinctly."

8 Inscribe on the stones plainly and distinctly all the words of this Law."

8 And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly.

(b) Exhortation to obey (27:9-10)

9 Then Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying, "Be silent and listen, Israel! This day you have become a people for the LORD your God.

9 Then Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying, "Be silent and listen, O Israel! This day you have become a people for the LORD your God.

9 Then Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to Israel. They said, "Be quiet and listen, Israel! Today you have become the people of the LORD your God.

9 And Moses and the priests the Levites spake unto all Israel, saying, Take heed, and hearken, O Israel; this day thou art become the people of the LORD thy God.

10 So you shall obey the LORD your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today."

10 You shall therefore obey the LORD your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I command you today."

10 Listen to his voice and carry out his commands and statutes that I'm giving you today."

10 Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the LORD thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day.

(c) Half the tribesmen on Gerizim representing blessing and half of the tribes on Ebal representing curses (27:11-13)

11 Moses also commanded the people on that day, saying,

11 Moses also charged the people on that day, saying,

11 Moses gave the people these commands that day:

11 And Moses charged the people the same day, saying,

12 "When you cross the Jordan, these *tribes* shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin.

12 "When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin.

12 "When you cross the Jordan River, these tribes are to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people—Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin.

12 These shall stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people, when ye are come over Jordan; Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin:

13 For the curse, these *tribes* shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

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

13 The tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali are to stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce the curse.

13 And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

- This ceremony was commanded earlier by Moses (11:26-32). After the altar was set up on Mount Ebal (27:1-8) six tribes were to assemble on Mount Gerizim to bless the people and six were to assemble on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses. Actually the people were to stand in front of the mountains (Joshua 8:33). A valley runs between these two mountains in Samaria, with Mount Gerizim to the southwest of Mount Ebal. Shechem is nearby in the valley.

- See [12 Tribes of Israel](#) for more information on how the 12 Tribes are listed in Scripture.

(d) Recitation of the curses for individual sins (27:14-26)

14 The Levites shall then respond and say to all the people of Israel with a loud voice,

14 The Levites shall then answer and say to all the men of Israel with a loud voice,

14 The descendants of Levi are to declare in a loud voice to every Israeli:

14 And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice,

15 'Cursed is the person who makes a carved image or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of a craftsman, and sets *it* up in secret.' And all the people shall reply and say, 'Amen.'

15 'Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten 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.'

15 "'Cursed is the one who makes a sculptured or cast image—a detestable thing to the LORD, the work of a craftsman—and sets it up secretly.'

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

15 Cursed be the man that maketh any graven or molten image, an abomination unto the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and putteth it in a secret place. And all the people shall answer and say, Amen.

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

16 'Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

16 "Cursed is the one who treats his father and mother with dishonor.'

Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

16 Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen.

- In Deut 28 there appear matching sets of six blessings (v3-6) and six curses (v15-26)

- Joshua apparently read Deuteronomy 28 before all the assembly of Israel as part of the entire renewal treaty (Cf. Josh 8:34-35)
- The Levitical priests were to be stationed between Ebal and Gerizim (Deut 27:14; Cf. Josh 8:33)
 - They must lead Israel in the oath of ratification, consisting in a series of twelve self-maledictions (Deut 27:15-26)
 - In the march Levi was divided into two parts—the Gershonites and Merarites going fourth with the tabernacle furniture, while the Kohathites went eighth with the ark and sanctuary. But they unite at Mount Gerizim.
 - Nothing could more clearly indicate the mercy and blessing embodied in the whole ceremonial law which the Levites represented
 - Exclusive devotion to God could under no circumstances include any toleration or recognition of other gods

17 'Cursed is one who displaces his neighbor's boundary marker.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

17 'Cursed is he who moves his neighbor's boundary mark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

17 "'Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's boundary stone.'

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

17 Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen.

18 'Cursed is one who misleads a person who is blind on the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

18 'Cursed is he who misleads a blind *person* on the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

18 "'Cursed is the one who misleads a blind person on the road.

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

18 Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen.

19 'Cursed is one who distorts the justice *due* a stranger, an orphan, or a widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

19 'Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

19 "'Cursed is the one who perverts justice due the foreigner, the orphan, or the widow.'
"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

19 Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen.

- The repeated "cursed be" identifies the covenant-breaker's fate with that of the serpent (Cf. Gen 3:14)

- The "Amen" response was the customary formula of assent (Cf. Num 5:22; 2 Kings 1:36; Neh 5:13; 8:6; Ps 72:19)

— The fact that only curses and not blessings are given in this passage indicates that this is not the detailed account of the curse and blessing proclamation by the two pairs of six tribes mentioned in Deut 27:12-13.

20 'Cursed is he who sleeps with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's garment.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

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

20 "Cursed is the one who has sexual relations with his father's wife, because he has disgraced his father.

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

20 Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen.

21 'Cursed is one who has sexual intercourse with any animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

21 'Cursed is he who lies with any animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

21 "'Cursed is the one who has sexual relations with any animal.

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

21 Cursed be he that lieth with any manner of beast. And all the people shall say, Amen.

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

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

22 "'Cursed is the one who has sexual relations with his sister, the daughter of his father or mother.

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

22 Cursed be he that lieth with his sister, the daughter of his father, or the daughter of his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen.

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

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

23 "'Cursed is the one who has sexual relations with his mother-in-law.

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

23 Cursed be he that lieth with his mother in law. And all the people shall say, Amen.

- A similar indication is the fact that v15-26 were to be addressed to and receive response from all the Israelites (v14)

- This section rather describes a separate feature of the covenant ceremony, the actual oath, which characteristically took the form of provisional self-maledictions, but not benedictions

In contrast to the curses in Deut 28, the several members of this series differ not in variety of curse but in kind of sin. The area of transgression covered is that of secret sins likely to escape human detection and punishment (note especially 27:15,24; Cf. Job 31:24ff) and, therefore, peculiarly the judicial province of God as divine Witness to the oath. Those are imprecated who secretly violate God's demands for respect to himself (v15), to rightful authority (v16), to truth (v17-19), to family (v20-23), to human life (v24,25), and, in sum, to God's covenant (v26). Sexual perversions: Lev 18:8-9,17,23

24 'Cursed is he who attacks his neighbor in secret.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

24 'Cursed is he who strikes his neighbor in secret.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

24 "'Cursed is one who strikes his neighbor secretly.

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

24 Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbour secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen.

25 'Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to attack an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

25 'Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

25 "'Cursed is one who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person.

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'

25 Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen.

26 'Cursed is *anyone* who does not fulfill the words of this Law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

26 'Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

26 "'Cursed is the one who doesn't uphold the words of this Law and observe them.

"Then all the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!'"

26 Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.

- This last curse demonstrates that the preceding list was representative
- The summary nature of the 12th curse (v26) indicates that God desired a wholehearted obedience to the Law both in public and in private
- Paul used this verse to teach that no one could find eternal life by obeying the Law (Gal. 3:10)
- Eternal life is received only through God's grace when one places his faith in Jesus Christ as his substitutionary Sacrifice for sin (Rom 3:24-25; Eph 2:8-9)