

April 19, 2020 - Deut. 27:1-26 - Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim
Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 27:1-26 - Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim
Psalm 138-139 (repeat)
Haftarah: Isaiah 55:2-11

The Covenant Inscribed on Stones - Deuteronomy 27:1-8

Deuteronomy 27:1-4 - "And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day. 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 plaster them with plaster: 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. 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 rabbis understood that God told Israel to set up different sets of stones in three places:

Rashi - "you shall set up for yourself": in the Jordan, and after this, you shall take out other [stones] from there, and out of this [second set of stones], build an altar on Mount Ebal. Consequently, we find that there were three places [at which constructions] of stones [were set up]: a) Twelve [stones were put together] in the Jordan, b) the same [number of stones set up] at Gilgal [i.e., the Israelites' first stop in the land of Israel,] and c) the same [number of stones set up] at Mount Ebal. The above is taught in Tractate Sotah (35b) [where the Talmud, citing Chapter 4 of Joshua, proves the above].

(See **Joshua 4**)

An Altar of Rough Stones

Deuteronomy 27:5-7 - "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. 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: And thou shalt offer peace offerings, and shalt eat there, and rejoice before the LORD thy God."

Archaeologists believe they have discovered evidence of this altar just north east of Mt. Ebal, built with unhewn stones and a ramp rather than with steps like pagan altars.
(Exodus 20:25, Joshua 8)

Deuteronomy 27:8 - "And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly."

The rabbis interpreted "very clearly" in verse 8 to mean the Law was inscribed in the 70

known world languages, so the Gentiles" had no excuse" (Sotah, ib. & Bartenora in ib. Targum Jon. & Jerus. & Jarchi)

Josephus says that the blessings and curses recorded in these chapters were what was written on the stones: "when Moses was about to die, he ordered the blessings and the curses to be written on the altar, on both sides of it"

The stones served as reminder and a memorial - The covenant written on the very land itself. Spiritually, the New Covenant would be written on the heart:

- **Jeremiah 31:33** - "But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

- **2 Corinthians 3:3** - "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."

- **Hebrews 10:16** - "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them."

Instructions for the Covenant

Deuteronomy 27:9-10 - "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. Thou shalt therefore obey the voice of the LORD thy God, and do his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day."

Rashi - Every single day, it should seem to you as though you are today entering into a covenant with Him. — [see Ber. 63b]

Blessings and Cursings from Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal

The blessing was to be uttered by the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin, who sprang from the two wives of Jacob; and the curse by Reuben, with the two sons of Leah's maid Zilpah, and by Zebulun, with Dan and Naphtali, the sons of Rachel's maid Bilhah. It was natural that the utterance of the blessing should be assigned to the tribes which sprang from Jacob's proper wives, since the sons of the wives occupied a higher position than the sons of the maids - just as the blessing had pre-eminence over the curse. But in order to secure the division into two sixes, it was necessary that two of the eight sons of the wives should be associated with those who pronounced the curses. The choice fell upon Reuben, because he had forfeited his right of primogeniture by his incest (Genesis 49:4), and upon Zebulun, as the youngest son of Leah. "They shall stand there upon the curse:" i.e., to pronounce the curse. - *Gill's Exposition*

Rashi - As it is found in Tractate Sotah (32a): Six tribes ascended to the top of Mount Gerizim and [the other] six to the top of Mount Ebal; the kohanim, the Levites and the [holy] ark stood below in the middle. The Levites turned their faces towards Mount Gerizim and began with the blessing: "Blessed be the man who does not make a graven or molten image..." and these [the tribes on Mount Gerizim] and these [the tribes on Mount Ebal] answered "Amen!" Then [the Levites] turned their faces towards Mount Ebal and began with the curse, saying: "Cursed be the man who makes any graven [or molten] image..." and these [the tribes on Mount Gerizim] and these [the tribes on Mount Ebal] responded "Amen!" The Levites then turned their faces once again towards Mount Gerizim, and said: "Blessed be he who does not degrade his father and mother," [and the tribes on Mount Gerizim and those on Mount Ebal responded "Amen!" The Levites] would then turn their faces once again towards Mount Ebal, and say: "Cursed be he who degrades his father and mother," [and the tribes on Mount Gerizim and those on Mount Ebal responded "Amen!"]. Thus [it would continue] in this manner for all of them [the blessings and curses] until [the very last curse, namely (verse 26)]: "Cursed be the one who does not uphold [the words of this Torah]."

Mt. Gerizim was a fertile place of fountains and orchards, whereas Mt. Ebal was barren, rocky and dry. Josephus says that Gerizim was on the right hand, and Ebal on the left, which matches Jesus' picture of the judgment of the sheep and the goats.

- **Matthew 25:33** - "And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left."

The blessings were a grace gift to Israel as God's people. They did not *earn* the blessings, they were part of the fruit of living in submission to God.

The curses were what happened if Israel left that blessed position and rebelled. The curses were designed to bring them back to repentance. Obedience was not supposed to be a duty, but rather a response of gratitude to God.

The structure of this remarkable scene was a reflection of the common Ancient Near Eastern covenant or treaty ceremony. Usually an animal was sacrificed, which showed what would happen to the party who broke the covenant. Then the terms were read, to each of which the other party would verbally agree.

This recitation from Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal is what is referred to in the New Testament as "the curse of the law."

- **Galatians 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.' [quoting **Deuteronomy 27:26**] "But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith.' Yet the law is not of faith, but 'the man who does them shall live by them.' 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' that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Paul was emphasizing that since no one has kept the Law of the Torah perfectly, no one can be justified by trusting in it. Rather, only faith in Jesus, and in fact His faith working in us, can save.

He quotes **Habakkuk 2:4** - "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."

And faith is not our own, it is a gift from God.

- **Ephesians 2:8** - "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." "It" refers to "faith" in the Greek.

In fact, the rabbis linked the faith in the passage from Habakkuk to Abraham's faith in Genesis 25:6, i.e, God "reckoning" Christ's righteousness to Abraham.

- **Genesis 15:5-6** - "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

"This is the faith by which the Israelites inherit, of which Scripture says, "and the just by his faith shall live." (Shemot Rabba, sect. 23. fol. 107. 3.)

Rough and Unhewn

Because the stones were to be set up at Mt. Ebal (the "cursed" side), this further emphasizes the "curse of the law." But the altar was also set there, representing Christ, whose "unhewn" nature had no form or comeliness (**Isaiah 53:2**) with which we would desire Him. No human effort would go into this salvation - it would be completely God's doing. His sacrifice would free mankind from the curse.

- **Isaiah 53:2** - "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."

There are a lot more curses than there are blessings listed. Human nature being what it is, the compounding list of curses would have grabbed the attention of the Israelites, and "focused the mind" until they truly penetrated their understanding.

The 'Dodecalogue' - Deuteronomy 27:15-26

In **Deuteronomy 27:15-26** there follow twelve curses, answering to the number of the tribes of Israel. The first is directed against those who make graven or molten images or idols, and set them up in secret, that is to say, against secret breaches of the second commandment (**Exodus 20:4**); the second against contempt of, or "making light of" parents (**Exodus 21:17**); the third against those who remove boundaries

(**Deuteronomy 19:14**); the fourth against the man who leads the blind astray (**Leviticus 19:14**); the fifth against those who pervert the right of orphans and widows (**Deuteronomy 24:17**); the sixth against incest with a mother (**Deuteronomy 23:1**; **Deuteronomy 18:8**); the seventh against sex with an animal (**Leviticus 18:23**); the eighth and ninth against incest with a sister or a mother-in-law (**Leviticus 18:9** and **Leviticus 18:17**); the tenth against secret murder (**Exodus 20:13**; **Numbers 35:16**); the eleventh against judicial murder ("he that taketh reward to slay a soul, namely, innocent blood:" **Exodus 23:7-8**); the twelfth against the man who does not set up the words of this law to do them.

The Prohibitions

Besides the obvious meanings of these negative laws, spiritually they point to Messiah, and how He not only kept and fulfilled them, but countered them with positive actions, so that the cursings are transformed into blessings.

Idolatry

Deuteronomy 27:15 - "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."

Christ "knew what was in man" and He sees through our deceptions so that idolatry cannot stand, allowing us to "worship God in spirit and in truth":

- **Hebrews 4:12** - "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Deuteronomy 27:16 - "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother. And all the people shall say, Amen."

To "set light" is to treat with contempt, mock or disregard. In contrast, Jesus was "about his father's business" at age 12 (**Luke 2:49**), and represented his Father in that "if you have seen me you have seen the Father" (**John 14:9**).

Jesus treated this issue in **Matthew 15:4-6**, pointing out how the Pharisees were dismissing their duty to parents through false piety.

His perfect obedience is shown: **John 6:38** - "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."

- **John 17:4** - "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

- **Luke 22:42** - "...not my will, but thine, be done"

Preceding the coming of Messiah, the rabbis said, "sons will revile their fathers" - "Sons have no shame in front of their fathers; and on whom can one depend? Only upon our father in heaven" [Sotah 9:15].

Deuteronomy 27:17 - "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark. And all the people shall say, Amen."

The landmark was the measure of a person's field, but it also represents a demarkation of someone's rights which are not to be transgressed. Many of these laws are concerned with such demarkations, lines that should not be crossed.

Specifically it represents someones portion in the Promised Land. Are we doing something that could keep a person from salvation, putting unnecessary roadblocks or burdens on them?

Jesus not only protected the vulnerable from oppression, he is the Way into the spiritual Promised Land for us all. Faith in Jesus allows us to receive our spiritual inheritance. By Him we enter into the Rest!

Deuteronomy 27:18 - "Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way. And all the people shall say, Amen."

Jesus

- **Matthew 15:14** - "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

- **John 9:39** - "And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."

- **2 Corinthians 4:3-4** - " But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

In contrast, Jesus is drawing all men into the Way as He is lifted up:

- **John 14:6** - "I am the way*, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Deuteronomy 27:19 - "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. And all the people shall say, Amen."

- **Luke 4:18** - "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised"

Deuteronomy 27:20-33 - Illegal Marriages and Sexual Relations

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

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

- 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.

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

These are acts that stand in for all the various sexual and relationship prohibitions.

Along with adultery, fornication, homosexual acts and other sins, as well as laws about eunuchs, and damaging someone's testicles, these laws are designed to preserve each family's ability to have children and continue their lineage as well as to increase Israel's population.

Spiritually, they were there to assure that Israel would be the venue by which the Messiah, the Redeemer would enter the world. They were to safeguard the ability to verify and validate one's lineage, in order to know the Messiah when He arrived.

Christ - of the lineage of David, of the Tribe of Judah - fulfilled these by His birth.

(See accompanying notes on "Lineage.")

Deuteronomy 27:24 - "Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbor secretly. And all the people shall say, Amen."

The Jews included slander in this curse.

Targum: "Accursed is he who attacketh his neighbor with slander in secret"

Both forms were employed against Jesus:

- **Matthew 26:59** - "Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death"

- **Acts 6:13** - "They presented false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and against the Law."

Yet Jesus not only told the truth, He WAS the Truth:

- **John 14:6** - "'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Deuteronomy 27:25 - "Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen."

Jesus suffered this from Judas:

- **Matthew 26:15-16** - "And said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him."

Deuteronomy 27:26 - "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen."

"confirmeth" = *quwm* - to establish, perform, accomplish, to be raised up

Jesus, by being "raised up" on the cross, fulfilled and accomplished the Law.

Rashi - Here [in this final curse,] Moses included the entire Torah, and they accepted it upon themselves with a curse and an oath. — [see Shevuoth 36a]