

Into the Promised Land - Joshua's Story

Lesson #38

“The Special Altar” - Deuteronomy 27 & 28

•HANDOUT•

► Moses has now completed everything God gave him to impart to the Second Generation regarding God's Law and what was expected of Israel as God's Covenant people. The time for Israel to be led across the Jordan River into the Promised Land is almost upon them, and Moses encourages the people to learn from the past and be obedient for the future. It isn't enough for Israel to be hearers of God's Word; they must also become doers of the Word.

► Chapter 27 begins with Moses and the Elders commanding Israel to celebrate their crossing into the Promised Land by setting up a special Altar made of field stones covered with lime, and with the words of the law written on the stones. This Altar to be used for the burnt offerings and the fellowship offerings in celebration of Israel entering the Land God promised their forefathers.

► Deuteronomy 27:1-8 [NET] • Then Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people: "Pay attention to all the commandments I am giving you today. When you cross the Jordan River to the land the Lord your God is giving you, you must erect great stones and whitewash them with plaster-lime. Then you must inscribe on them all the words of this law, when you cross over, so that you may 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, said to you. So when you cross the Jordan you must erect on Mount Ebal these stones about which I am commanding you today, and you must whitewash them with plaster-lime.

Then you must build an altar there to the Lord your God, an altar of stones -- do not use an iron tool on them. You must build the altar of the Lord your God with whole stones and offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God. Also you must offer fellowship offerings and eat them there, rejoicing before the Lord your God. You must inscribe on the stones all the words of this law, making them clear."

Q: What is unusual about the opening statement of this Chapter?

Q: What is the purpose of this unusual opening statement?

Q: What were the specific instructions for the Altar they were to construct when they crossed over Jordan into the Promised Land?

Q: Was this Altar to take the place of the Bronze Altar in the Tabernacle compound?

Q: Why was there a prohibition against using an iron tool on the altar stones?

Q: What is meant by the phrase: "all the words of this law?"

► [Deuteronomy 27:9-10](#) • Then Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all Israel: "Be quiet and pay attention, Israel. Today you have become the people of the Lord your God. You must obey Him and keep His commandments and statutes that I am giving you today."

Q: Why does Moses and the Levitical priests begin with "be quiet and pay attention?"

Q: What are the ramifications of Israel becoming "the people of the Lord your God?"

Q: Why does it say "today you have become the people of the Lord your God?" God told Israel that when they were at Mt. Sinai when they agreed to obey everything God commanded.

MOSES GIVES SPECIFIC ORDERS FOR THE DAY THEY CROSS OVER:
• One group on Mt. Gerizim for blessings • Another group on Mt. Ebal for curses ...

► [Deuteronomy 27:11-26](#) • On the same day Moses commanded the people: When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali. The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice:

"Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol--a thing detestable to the LORD, the work of the craftsman's hands--and sets it up in secret." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or his mother." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who moves his neighbor's boundary stone." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who leads the blind astray on the road." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who sleeps with his father's wife, for he dishonors his father's bed." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who has sexual relations with any animal." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who sleeps with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who sleeps with his mother-in-law." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who kills his neighbor secretly." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

"Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out." Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"

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Q: What should the last curse listed make evident to anyone reading or hearing these curses?

Q: Where is the message of blessings in this passage?

Now to the Blessings for Obedience in Chapter 28 ...

► The word “if” looms large in this new section of scripture. Moses exhorts Israel with their freewill – their choice to obey or rebel. God lays out the consequences both ways. He makes it so clear no one will be able to say: 'I didn't know or I didn't understand.'

► [Deuteronomy 28:1-2](#) • *“If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God.”*

Everywhere they go they will know blessing. Everything they put their hand to will be blessed and succeed, if they are obedient. Their enemies will not prevail against Israel. And, the Lord will establish Israel as his holy people. Financially Israel would be successful; they would lend to other but borrow from none.

► [Deuteronomy 28:13-14](#) • *“The LORD will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.”*

Q: Of all these promises of blessing, which is the most compelling to you?

However if Israel does not obey ...

► Simply stated, if Israel chooses not to obey, every single one of the blessings will be turned into a curse. It will affect every aspect of Israel's life, including their marriage bed. The Lord said they would be driven mad because of the terrible things they saw. He told them that a nation from afar would overtake them and cause a famine so severe that the people would resort to cannibalism. The LORD would then scatter Israel among all the peoples of the earth – from one end to the other.

Q: Did these extreme things actually occur?

► The remainder of Chapter 28 is filled with imagery that nightmares are made of. Thus, this very brief summary. One of Moses' concluding statements summarizes Israel's future plight for choosing to disobey.

► [Deuteronomy 28:63](#) • *Just as it pleased the LORD to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess.*

Q: Does any of this apply to us today?

Q: What can we do?

Chapter 29 is the record of the formal renewal of God's Covenant with Israel. It is also a reminder of the wonders Israel experienced from the Hand of the LORD. “Remembering & Celebrating” becomes the theme of the Covenant people of God - not just here in Deuteronomy – but throughout all of scripture, including the New Testament. This is where we will pick up next time.



Next Time • Lesson #39
“Renewal & Wonder”

