

GERIZIM AND EBAL

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God promised to deliver the land of Canaan to the children of Israel as he had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But remaining in that land would be contingent upon Israel's obedience to God's commandments. Their obedience would be rewarded with numerous blessings from the Lord. But if they rebelled against God, they would be cursed. The specific blessings and curses of the Law of Moses were to be read before all the children of Israel from two mountains, Gerizim (the blessings) and Ebal (the curses), when they conquered Canaan.

God's commands concerning Gerizim and Ebal

Deuteronomy 11:26-32 says, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. *And it shall come to pass, when the Lord thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal.* Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh? For ye shall pass over Jordan to go in to possess the land which the Lord your God giveth you, and ye shall possess it, and dwell therein. And ye shall observe to do all the statutes and judgments which I set before you this day." In Deuteronomy chapter 27, God gave Israel the specifics to follow in obeying this commandment. God told them that "it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the Lord thy God gives 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 flows with milk and honey; as the Lord God of thy fathers has 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 plaster them with plaster. 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. And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly" (Deut 27:2-8). The tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin were designated to "stand upon mount Gerizim to bless the people" (Deut 27:11-12), while the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali were designated to "stand upon mount Ebal to curse" (Deut 27:13). Then the Levites were to speak all the curses and blessings to all the men of Israel (Deut 27:14-28:68).

Joshua's obedience to God's commands

After the defeat of the city of Ai in Joshua chapter eight, Joshua obeyed the

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(continued)

commandments given in Deuteronomy concerning mount Gerizim and mount Ebal. "Then Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in mount Ebal, 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. 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. 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. 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. 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" (Josh 8:30-35).

A better way for us

Of all the curses in the Law of Moses, perhaps the deadliest was the one found in 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.*" Disobeying even one of the commands of the Old Law would cause a man to be cursed. We should be thankful to God for sending his Son Jesus Christ to redeem us from that curse. Galatians 3:10-14 says, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*" But redemption from the curse of the Old Law does not in any way remove our obligation to obey the Law of Christ. In fact, we are warned of having even a greater requirement to obey the voice of God's own Son. Hebrews 2:1-4 says, "*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"* For this reason, it is good for us to remember Gerizim and Ebal. May we never neglect the eternal salvation that our Lord Jesus Christ is the author of unto all them that obey him (Heb 5:9).