

## Between the Mountains of Blessings and Curses – *Deuteronomy 27:1-26*

**Introduction** – The exposition of the Ten Commandments is complete and we come now to the renewing of the covenant with the people of God (Deut 27-30). Sitting in the valley of the covenant, mountains of blessings and curses are on either side. This is where Abraham had built an altar in the ancient town of Shechem (Gen 12:6-7), and there the descendants of Abraham, returning to the Promised Land, would again attest to Yahweh's covenant promises and stipulations in all of its mountainous weight of glory. Joshua 8:30ff records that this is what they did when they came into the land.

**The Word of God and Covenant Renewal** (vv1-10) – When Israel crossed over the Jordan, they were to whitewash large stones, write all of the law of Moses plainly upon them, and set them on Mt. Ebal (vv1-4, 8). God's law was to have a permanent, openly displayed, unchanging nature over the people as they lived in covenant with God. An altar was to be set up and ascension offerings and peace offerings were to be offered up with great rejoicing before Yahweh (vv5-7). The Word declared that they were the people of God (v9) and obedience was the necessary result (v10). The order is important.

**A Covenant Renewal Service** – All sacrifices were sacrifices to the Lord, but they didn't all have the same emphases. The order of the service, described in summary here, does not mention the sin offering but the order of the ascension offering followed by the peace offering follows the pattern established by Moses in Leviticus. Our covenant renewal service follows the same pattern. They became the people of God that day (v9) although they already were the people of God, hence the idea of "renewal." The burnt offering was vertically-oriented, and the peace offering was horizontally-oriented. And if our New Covenant is more glorious, and it is, this means that our covenant-renewal, and especially our Lord's Supper, is to be a place of greater peace, rejoicing, and fellowship. Then they were to remind themselves that they should never want to leave such joy...

**Two Mountains** (vv11-13) – As you faced east, Mt. Gerizim would be to your right, the mount of blessing, and Mt. Ebal would be to your left, the mount of curses. The tribes are divided. Most of the tribes of the freewomen, Rachel and Leah, stand on the mount of blessing. Those on the mount of curses were sons of the handmaiden, except for Reuben (who had slept with his father's wife) and Zebulun, the youngest.

**Twelve Curses, Secret Sin** (vv14-26) – The sins are representative of those either explicitly done in secret (v14, 24), or are of the nature that the sin itself would indicate secrecy. Curse the secret idolater (v15). Curse the man who mistreats his father or mother (v16). Curse the man who rearranges boundaries to his benefit (v17). Curse the man who causes the blind to stumble (v18). Curse the man who exploits the societally vulnerable (v19). Curse the man who sleeps with his stepmother (v20). Curse the man who mates with a beast (v21). Curse the man who sleeps with his sister (v22). Curse the man who sleeps with his mother-in-law (v23). Curse the man who strikes his neighbor secretly (v24). Curse the man who slays someone for a bribe (v25). Finally, curse the man who does not do all the words of this law (v26). All of the people were to call out these damnations upon themselves, and all of them were to agree with the oath, "Amen" calling curses down upon themselves if they were in any secret sin. Whether or not they were found out by human authorities, they were acknowledging that God would eventually bring everything to light ("*...be sure, your sin will find you out*" – Num 32:23).

**The Final Curse (v26) and Galatians 3:10** – The law was obviously placed on Mt. Ebal, the mount of cursing. You had to climb up the mount of cursing to read it. If you are standing on the works of the law, you are standing on the mount of cursing. This was the memorial of Mt. Ebal: if that is where you are for your justification, you are on the wrong mountain. Paul makes just this point in his attack against justification through the works of the law in Gal 3, quoting Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10. Having climbed the mountain of damnation, we need Someone to receive and become our curse for us (Gal 3:11ff), and this is just what Jesus did for us, moving us by faith to the mountain of blessing.

**The New Covenant is Better...and Worse** (Heb 10:26-31) – Some wrongly teach that there are no curses in the New Covenant. Rather, the blessings and curses are greatly heightened. If we despise the Day of Grace, "*of how much worse punishment*" will we fall under? This is not teaching that the true elect can ever lose their salvation. It is teaching that it is possible to be in the New Covenant, reject and truly fall away from the grace in that covenant, and find yourself having fallen into the hands of the living God in all His vengeance. But assurance is ours today for the taking...

**Repent of Secret Sins** – God sees it all. Stop thinking you have gotten away with anything. The work of the Holy Spirit is never limited to what other men know about.

**Pursue Blessing and Life** – This is done by grace through faith in the power of that same Spirit (Gal 3). While the mount of cursing is real, by faith in Christ, you reside on the mount of blessing. This mountain, also known as the New Jerusalem, has no summit and we will spend the rest of eternity finding higher and deeper and more glorious blessings. We have only tasted righteousness and glory. Let His Word and this covenant renewal service make you hungry for righteousness – more and more righteousness.