

April 21: 27:1-26

Verses 1-8: The alter

Verses 9- 10: The Covenant, Obey the Lord

Verses 11-13: Standing on the two mountains

Verses 14-26 curses

I. Verses 1-8: The alter

Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people, saying, "Keep all the commandments which I command you today. 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 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. 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. 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. 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; ⁷ and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. ⁸ You shall write on the stones all the words of this law very distinctly."

- a. This is now the beginning of Moses' third speech and we are rounding the end of the Deuteronomy.
- b. The ESV Study Bible shares: *Blessings and Curses. A new section begins here, the laws having been completed. Along with [11:26–32](#), this passage brackets the laws of [chs. 12–26](#). Ancient covenant treaties had sections of blessings (the consequences of keeping the treaty stipulations) and curses (the consequences of not keeping the covenant stipulations). [Chapter 27](#) details a ceremony and the fact of curses for lawbreakers. [Chapter 28](#) details the content of the blessings and curses.*
- c. Further: *Moses looks ahead to a covenant ceremony upon arrival in the land. **Significantly, this ceremony is conducted at Shechem (see note on vv. 4–5), the place where God first made the promise of land to Abram (Gen. 12:6–7).***¹
- d. The Lord tells Moses and the elders what to charge to the people.
- e. Keep all the commandments. Verse 2 begins instructions on setting up an alter. This anticipates the time when they cross the Jordan and the build an alter.
- f. They are to get large stones and coat them with lime. Some translations say with plaster.
- g. They are to write all the words of the law on these large stones. They are to setup these stones at Mount Ebal. These stones are to be uncut.
- h. I was wondering what constitutes the "words of the law." Moody Bible Commentary: *Scholars debate what constitutes "the words of this law." Because of the length of the entire Pentateuch or even the book of Deuteronomy some have suggested that it refers to the book of the covenant, that is, Dt 12–26, or even just the Ten Commandments (Dt 5:7-21). If these stones were erected out of doors, the*

¹ <https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+27/>

*intention may have been for this inscription to be used solely for this ceremony, since rain and other weather elements would quickly wash the plaster away.*²

- i. The Moody Bible Commentary points out that these are 2 different alters between verses 1-4 and 5-8. *In addition to the plastered inscribed stones, the Israelites were to build an altar of uncut stones for making burnt and peace offerings (vv. 5-8). The stones were to be uncut, either to emphasize that the Israelites were not to depend on the technology of pagan craftsmen in building such an altar, or simply because the use of any tool would profane an altar dedicated to the Lord (Ex 20:25-26).*³
- j. Verses 6-8 tell us that they are to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings. They are to rejoice. Writing on the stones all the words of the law is repeated again in verse 8. This is in addition to the permanent written law.
- k. Joshua 8:30-32 records this alter being built.
- l. The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary of the OT shares: *Gerizim and Ebal are the mountains that flank the town of Shechem in the central hill country, Gerizim (elevation 2,849 feet) to the south, Ebal (3,077 feet) to the north. The altar spoken of here is actually constructed in Joshua 8. Some archaeologists believe that the remains of this altar have been found. [the Archeological Study Bible believes this finding is not the same alter] It is a structure on one of the peaks of Mount Ebal about twenty-five by thirty feet with walls about five feet thick and nine feet high made of fieldstones. The fill is dirt and ashes, and what appears to be a ramp leads up to the top. The structure is surrounded by a courtyard, and animal bones litter the site. Pottery on the site goes back to 1200 B.C.*⁴
- m. These instructions parallel those found in Exodus 20:25.⁵

Renewing the Covenant at Mount Ebal

c. 1406/1220 B.C.

Looking ahead to the day when the Israelites would occupy Canaan, Moses commanded the people to renew the covenant after they entered the land by placing a new copy of the terms of the covenant on Mount Ebal and reciting the blessings and curses to each other on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal.

² The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Locations 11684-11687). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

³ The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Locations 11688-11689). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 27:4.

⁵ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 27:5.



II. Verses 9- 10: The Covenant, Obey the Lord

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

- a. Notice the reverence here: “be silent”
- b. Deuteronomy is very much about the covenant and notice how here it says that this day they have become a people for the Lord. They already were, but now it is being formalized in this covenant. Obey the Lord... do His commandments... His statutes.
- c. The ESV Study Bible: *The covenant relationship is being renewed rather than initiated. The covenant of Horeb is renewed at Moab through the words of Deuteronomy, especially [chs. 29–30](#). Then, after the conquest, it will be renewed at Shechem ([Joshua 24](#)).*⁶

III. Verses 11-13: Standing on the two mountains

¹¹ Moses also charged the people on that day, saying, ¹² “When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. ¹³ For the curse, these shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

- a. Now, we see Moses’ further charge. There are 2 mountains and there will be blessings on one side and curses on the other. Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin are giving the blessings on Mount Gerizim.
- b. Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali stand on Mount Ebal for the curse.
- c. Remember these are all the tribes of Israel.
- d. The Moody Bible Commentary points out about the tribes: *The tribes that represent the blessings were all born of Leah and Rachel (Ephraim and Manasseh being combined under Joseph), and the tribes announcing the curses were born of the handmaids, in addition to Reuben and Zebulun, sons of Leah. Reuben, though the eldest, was probably selected to announce the curses because of his having defiled his father’s bed by sleeping with Bilhah (Gn 35:22; 49:3-4). Zebulun was listed with the tribes that pronounced the curses probably because he was the youngest of the sons of Leah and six tribes were needed for each grouping. Although certain tribes announced the curses does not mean that God had cursed their tribe. The Levites of v. 14 were probably Levitical priests (cf. Jos 8:33) since the rest of the tribe of Levi was standing on Mount Gerizim.*⁷
- e. The ESV study Bible: *These verses describe a ceremony in which Israel hears blessings and curses concerning the law. In this chapter, however, there are only curses read by the Levites (cf. [ch. 28](#)). See [Josh. 8:30–35](#) for the carrying out of these instructions (cf. [Joshua 24](#)). On Gerizim, see [John 4:20](#).*⁸

IV. Verses 14-26 curses

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

⁶ <https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+27/>

⁷ The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Locations 11700-11702). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁸ Ibid

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.'

¹⁶ *'Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother.'* 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.'

¹⁸ *'Cursed is he who misleads a blind person on the road.'* 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.'

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.'

²¹ *'Cursed is he who lies with any animal.'* 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.'

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

²⁴ *'Cursed is he who strikes his neighbor in secret.'* 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.'

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

a. Breakdown: curses for:

- i. Idols, Dishonors father or mother, Moves a boundary which is stealing, Leads blind astray on the road, withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow." Sleeps w father's wife, Bestiality, Sleeps w sister, daughter of mother or father, Sleeps w mother in law, Kills neighbor who is innocent, Accepts a bribe to kill someone innocently, Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out."

b. These are cross referenced throughout the Old Testament

c. In verse 14, the Levites must refer to the Levitical priests since the rest of the tribe of Levi are on Mount Gerizim.

d. About verse 25 the IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary of the Old Testament gives insight: *What is uncertain in this context is whether the curse concerns a payment made to an assassin (thus giving a variation on the previous verse) or a bribe made to a judge or witness in order to condemn an innocent man of a capital crime and thus have him executed (cf. 1 Kings 21:8–14). The temptation for judges and government officials to accept bribes is found in every time and place (see Prov 6:35; Mic 7:3). Taking bribes becomes almost institutionally accepted in bureaucratic situations as competing parties attempted to outmaneuver each other (see Mic 3:11; Ezra 4:4–5). However, at least on the ideal level, arguments and penalties are imposed to eliminate or at least lessen this problem. Thus Hammurabi's code (law 5) places harsh penalties on any judge who alters one of his decisions (presumably because of a bribe), including stiff fines and permanent removal from the bench. Exodus 23:8 forbids the taking of bribes and the perversion of*

justice as an offense against God, the weak and innocent, and the entire community (see Is 5:23; Amos 5:12).⁹

⁹ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 27:25.