

The Book of Deuteronomy

Lesson 16: Blessings and Curses of the Covenant -- Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68

Imagine standing in a wide valley with a mountain rising on either side of you. On your right, Mount Gerizim, green and bright; on your left, Mount Ebal, bare and stony. Half the tribes climb one slope, half climb the other, and you are caught in the middle of the most dramatic worship service of your life. Voices roll down from Gerizim with blessing, and answering voices roll down from Ebal with curse, and after every solemn word the whole congregation thunders one word back: "Amen". You feel it in your chest. This is no quiet reading of fine print. God is pressing the weight of the covenant into the bones of His people.

We do not like to talk much about curses. We prefer the blessing mountain and would rather pretend Ebal is not there. But Moses will not let Israel, or us, look away. He knows that a people who hear only "blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field" and never hear the warning will drift into a careless faith that takes God lightly. So he lays both mountains before them, the sweetness of obedience and the bitterness of rebellion, and he tells them the truth: the God who keeps covenant means every word He says.

And here is where it gets personal. We live in an age that loves to promise that God exists to make us comfortable, healthy, and rich, that if we just have enough faith the bills will be paid and the body will be whole. Deuteronomy 28 will not let that lie stand unchallenged. These blessings and curses were covenant words to the nation of Israel, not a vending machine for our wants. Yet they still preach to us a truth we cannot afford to forget: sin has real consequences, holiness is not optional, and the God of love is also a God of justice.

So come and stand in the valley. Listen to both mountains. Feel the joy of the blessing and the dread of the curse. And then lift your eyes higher than Gerizim or Ebal, to a hill called Calvary, where the One who never broke the covenant took the curse of the law into His own body so that the deepest blessing of all could be ours. That is where this lesson is going. Let us begin at the foot of the mountains.

Group Discussion: Why do you think God gave Israel the blessings and the curses together, in such a vivid public ceremony, rather than simply telling them the rules and trusting them to obey?

Personal Reflection: Where in your own life are you tempted to take God lightly, to assume His patience means He does not really mean what He says about sin?

Read Deuteronomy 27:1-28:68

Study Questions

1. On Mount Ebal Israel was to set up great stones, cover them with plaster, write “all the words of this law” on them, and build an altar of uncut stones for burnt offerings and peace offerings (27:1–8). What does this combination of the written law and the altar of sacrifice reveal about how God meant His people to relate to Him?
2. The whole assembly was to answer “Amen” to each curse pronounced by the Levites (27:14–26). What does it do to your heart to imagine yourself saying “Amen” to God’s words about sin, agreeing out loud that He is right?
3. The tribes were divided, six on Gerizim for blessing and six on Ebal for curse (27:11–13), and the Levites pronounced the curses for the whole nation to hear. What does this carefully staged ceremony teach us about how seriously God takes the covenant relationship?
4. Deuteronomy 28 opens with “blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field” (28:1–6). When you read these promises of fullness and favor, what do they stir in you, and what do they tempt you to assume about how God works?
5. The blessings of 28:1–14 are tied directly to “if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God”. What does this if teach us about the nature of Israel’s covenant with God, and how does it differ from the unconditional promises God makes in Christ?

6. The curses of 28:15–68 are longer and heavier than the blessings, descending into disease, drought, defeat, siege, and exile. Why do you think God spelled out the consequences of disobedience in such painful, unsparing detail, and how should that sober you?
7. Throughout chapter 28 the same God is the source of both the blessing and the curse (28:8, 28:20). What does it reveal about God's character that His justice and His goodness are not two different Gods but one?
8. The siege curses of 28:49–57 describe a horror so deep that parents would turn on their own children. When you face the genuine ugliness of where sin leads a people, what does it do to the way you think about your own small compromises?
9. These blessings and curses were covenant words spoken to national Israel under the law given through Moses, not a guarantee that obedient Christians will be healthy and wealthy. Galatians 3:13 says Christ “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us”. How do the two mountains of Deuteronomy point us to the cross, and what timeless truths about God survive into the gospel even though the old covenant is fulfilled?
10. Looking back over both mountains, the blessing and the curse, the Amens and the warnings, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using this passage to form you, to make you take both His goodness and His justice more seriously.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Galatians 3:10–14, where Christ becomes a curse for us to redeem us from the curse of the law; Leviticus 26, the parallel covenant blessings and curses; Joshua 8:30–35, where Israel actually carries out the Ebal ceremony; Romans 2:6–11, God renders to each according to his works without partiality; Hebrews 12:18–24, the contrast between the terrifying mountain and the better mountain we have come to in Christ

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