Joshua 8:30-35 | Sunday October 25, 2026

At this point Israel has walked in God's victories and defeated both Jericho and Ai. This has not been without stumbles, yet Israel's conquest of the Promised Land is starting to take shape. Then something interrupts the conquests and battles right at the end of Chapter 8. Before Israel is to conquer another city, they are to be reminded of how important God's Word and their faithfulness to it is.

Joshua 8:30-35 ESV

> (30) **At that time** Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal,
> (31) **just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the people** of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, "an altar of uncut stones, upon which no man has wielded an iron tool." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings.
> (32) And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.
> (33) And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, half of them in front of **Mount Gerizim** and half of them in front of **Mount Ebal**, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel.
> (34) And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law.
> (35) There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.

After defeating Ai, we would expect Israel to set their sights on the next city to conquer. Instead, Joshua leads Israel over **20** miles north to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim with **the city of Shechem in between them**. We are not told if Shechem surrendered to Israel or were conquered by them. The emphasis is on why Israel was called to go there. Israel is to be reminded of God's Covenant with them. Shechem is where God first brought Abram into the Promised Land.

Genesis 12:1-3; 6-7 ESV

> (1) Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house **to the land that I will show you.**
> (2) And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.
> (3) I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, **and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**
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> (**6**) Abram passed through the land **to the place at Shechem**, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. (7) Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "**To your offspring I will give this land."** So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Joshua brought the nation of Israel back to the very place that God promised to give to Abram's descendants. God was reminding His people that no matter how many years had

passed, He had been faithful to keep His Word. God wanted to remind the people of how important His Word is.

Joshua 8:32 ESV

> (32) And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, **he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.**

Joshua followed exactly what God commanded back in Deuteronomy 27. God wanted His Word to be presented before His people.

Deuteronomy 27:1-4; 8 ESV

> (1) Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, “Keep the whole commandment that I command you today.
> (2) **And on the day you cross over the Jordan to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster.**
> (3) And **you shall write on them all the words of this law**, when you cross over to enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you.
> (4) And when you have crossed over the Jordan, **you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster.**
>
> (**8**) And you shall write on the stones **all the words of this law very plainly.”**

God has Joshua set up large stones and cover them in plaster. Then he was to write out the words of the law **so that the people can see them very plainly**. This was a time before God’s Word was readily available in every translation and binding imaginable. God had His people make this giant billboard so that they could plainly see His Word and come back to it to remind themselves of His truth. Here God is setting up **another monument** to remind His people. This has been a consistent theme of the book of Joshua. Our need to have constant reminders of who God is and what He has done for us. This shows our need to come back to His word, over and over again.

Psalm 16:8-11 ESV

> (8) **I have set the LORD always before me**; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
> (9) Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.
> (10) **For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol**, or let your holy one see corruption.
> (11) **You make known to me the path of life**; **in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

We are to set the Lord before us continually. **We have short memories and need reminders to come back to His truth. It is the path of life**. When we walk according to His truth, we are in His presence and in the fullness of joy. We need His truth when we feel shaken and feel like we have been abandoned to remind us that we have not been. We have to come back to the path of life. **God knew Israel needed all these monuments to remind them of His truth; why would we be any different?** As Israel was just getting established in the Promised Land, God wanted them to remember what would lead to a life of blessings and conversely what would lead to curses.

Joshua 8:33-34 ESV

(33) And all Israel, sojourner as well as native born, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on **opposite sides of the ark** before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, **half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded at the first, to bless the people of Israel.**
(34) **And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law.**

The two mounts served as a natural amphitheater. Israel followed all of God's instructions. This was not Joshua's idea but a ceremony that God laid out in detail.

Deuteronomy 27:12-17 ESV

(12) "When you have crossed over the Jordan, **these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people:** Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin.
(13) And **these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse**: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.
(14) And the Levites shall declare to all the men of Israel in a loud voice:
(15) "'**Cursed be the man** who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.' **And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.'**
(16) **"'Cursed be anyone** who dishonors his father or his mother.' **And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'**
(17) "'**Cursed be anyone** who moves his neighbor's landmark.' **And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'**

Half of Israel was on Mount **Gerizim to represent the blessings,** and the other half of Israel was on **Mount Ebal to represent the curses**. **The Ark was right in the middle**. The Levites were to call out "cursed" to anyone who did, and then give a command of God. The people of Israel were to respond, Amen. This was a public declaration that this curse was true and real. Israel was agreeing to what type of behavior would make the Promised Land full of curses. Later on in the ceremony they would also recite all the specifics of these curses, which involved famine, pestilence, and even confusion.

Deuteronomy 28:1-6 ESV

(1) "And **if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments that I command you today,** the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.
(3) **Blessed shall you be in the city**, and **blessed shall you be in the field.**
(4) **Blessed** shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.
(5) **Blessed** shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.
(6) **Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.**

God did not want Israel just to hear the punishments of curses but also to hear all the various ways He wanted to bless them. Whether in the cities or in the fields, He wanted to pour His goodness out to them. This meant the blessing of large families, large herds, and food in abundance. No matter where they went, they were to be blessed. **This ceremony was to**

present Israel with two options for their future.

Deuteronomy 28:2; 15 ESV

> (2) **And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God.**
>
> (15) "**But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments** and His statutes that I command you today, **then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.**

Israel would be overtaken either by the rich blessings of God or the various curses from Him. This was a **conditional covenant** and was entirely contingent on Israel's faithfulness to obey the Word of God. What a tremendous moment this would have been for Israel. Disobedience was costly and yet God desired to show so much goodness to them. Unfortunately, we know how many times Israel failed **and experienced the curses from Mount Ebal.** Israel showed time and time again the true weakness of our sin nature. When presented with blessings and curses, we pursue the curses instead of walking in the blessing of God's Word. **The law is holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12), yet the problem is that we are sinners and choose to disobey God**. When the path of life and the path of death are presented, we choose death. Yet, God in His amazing grace knew this about us; **He was using the law to reveal it to us.** Notice which mountain the altar was set up on.

Joshua 8:30-31 ESV

> (30) **At that time** Joshua built an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, **on Mount Ebal,**
> (31) just as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, "**an altar of uncut stones**, **upon which no man has wielded an iron tool." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD and sacrificed peace offerings.**

God in His sovereignty placed the altar on Mount Ebal, the mount of curses. God knew that Israel would fail at this covenant and be in need of redemption. The altar was placed to deal with the curses of the law. **The altar had to be made of uncut stones because humanity could not take care of our own problem. This altar would not be a result of our work but of God's**. The altar pointed to the amazing news that we would be redeemed from the law of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, but Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:5-14 ESV

> (5) Does He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you **do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—**
> (6) just as Abraham **"believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"?**
> (7) Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.
> (8) And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "**In you shall all the nations be blessed."**
> (9) So then, **those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith**.
> (10) **For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse**; for it is written, "**Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."**
> (11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "**The righteous**

> **shall live by faith.”**
> (12) **But the law is not of faith**, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”
> (13) **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—**
> (14) **so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.**

Works of the Law are put in direct comparison to hearing with faith. Works of the law and living by faith are opposites of each other. Abraham was saved because he believed in God’s promise of a messiah. **Everyone who has ever been saved is by faith and not by works of the law.** If you rely on works, then you are under a curse. Works will show our consistent failures and shortcomings. **Noone except for Jesus Christ has been able to perfectly follow the law and not experience the curses that it brings**. His obedience to the law made it possible for Him to become our curse. **He redeemed us from the curses of Mount Ebal by giving His blood on the altar and becoming the curse so that we could have God’s blessing.**

Ephesians 1:3 ESV

> (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,**

Instead of experiencing the curses of the law, we now experience every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places **through Jesus**. Do not cheapen this to earthly blessings, but exalt it to the **eternal heavenly blessings that are described**.

Romans 4:7-8 ESV

> (7) “**Blessed are those** whose lawless deeds **are forgiven**, and **whose sins are covered;**
> (8) **blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”**

As believers we are truly blessed in Jesus because our sins are fully forgiven and completely covered. Our sins will not be counted against us because we have been given the righteousness of Jesus. **This blessing is far greater than any earthly blessing**. **In this world we should expect tribulation, suffering, sickness, grief, and pain.** This is why we need to come back to the amazing truth of how eternally blessed we truly are. We need the reminder of God’s Word just as Israel did.

Joshua 8:35 ESV

> (35) There was not a word of all that Moses commanded **that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.**

This ceremony was not just for the military. Everyone was to be there and be reminded of God’s Word. Everyone of Israel heard these blessings and curses from the old, to the foreigners who had joined Israel, all the way down to the little ones. **At no age do we mature from our need for the Word of God.**

Psalm 119:9-12 ESV

> (9) Beth How can a **young man** keep his way pure? **By guarding it according to Your word.**
> (10) With my whole heart I seek You; **let me not wander** from Your commandments!

> (11) **I have stored up Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You.**
> (12) Blessed are You, O LORD; teach me Your statutes!

The Word of God brings us to a closeness with Him and away from sin. The Word convicts and draws us back to walking in His light. When we are young, we need the Word to guide us from wandering off to our own desires.

Psalm 71:17-18 ESV

> (17) O God, **from my youth You have taught me**, and **I still proclaim** Your wondrous deeds.
> (18) **So even to old age and gray hairs**, O God, do not forsake me, **until I proclaim Your might to another generation,** Your power to all those to come.

Then in old age, the Psalmist declares that God has faithfully taught him from the Word all these years. He knows how important the Word of God still is. **He wants to proclaim God's Word and His great deeds to the next generation.** God had Joshua put up these large stones with the Word plastered on them, so Israel could continually come back to His Word. We need to keep coming back to His Word. **We need to be reminded of how truly blessed we are in Jesus, redeemed from the curse of the Law.**