

The Curse of Disobedience  
Deuteronomy 27  
Newton Bible Church  
March 8, 2020

On the boundary line between European and Siberian Russia there is a square pillar of brick bearing on one side the coat-of-arms belonging to the province of Perm in Europe, and on the other side the coat-of-arms belonging to the province of Tobolsk in Asia. That pillar is said to have more sorrowful associations than any other pillar in the world. For many years the exiles to Siberia had to pass it, and there bade a long farewell to home and country. Strong men wept; some pressed their faces to the loved soil they were leaving; some collected a little earth to take with them to their new abodes, and some passionately kissed the European side of the pillar. The plaster on the bricks was covered with inscriptions, plaintive and pathetic as the epitaphs in a graveyard.

As we come to the beginning of the next section in Deuteronomy, we will find Moses' instruction to build pillars, not on the boundary of the land they were about to enter, but at the very center of that land. These stones of remembrance would testify of God's past and present involvement in their lives and stand as witnesses as to whether they were keeping the covenant God had graciously given to them.

We find this instruction at the beginning of Moses' third message to the children of Israel assembled on the plains of Moab. That message begins in Deuteronomy 27:

**Deuteronomy 27:1-10 (ESV)**

**27** Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, "Keep the whole commandment that I command you today. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And there you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; <sup>6</sup> you shall build an altar to the Lord your God of uncut stones. And you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God, <sup>7</sup> and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God. <sup>8</sup> And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly." <sup>9</sup> Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, "Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the Lord your God. <sup>10</sup> You shall therefore obey the voice of the Lord your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today."

Moses' previous message had concluded with a call to complete obedience:

**Deuteronomy 26:16-19 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> “This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul.<sup>17</sup> You have declared today that the Lord is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice. <sup>18</sup> And the Lord has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, <sup>19</sup> and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised.”

At this beginning of the third message we also find:

1. The call to obedience

- Having just completed a ceremony to renew the covenant graciously provided at Mount Sinai, Moses now commands them to have a future ceremony after entering the land of promise. The details of his instructions provide valuable insight into the nature of the type of obedience to which God’s children are called.
  - a. The timing: immediate (1-2a)
    - Not only were the Israelites to heed all the instructions issued that day; they were to keep this commandment as soon as possible upon entering the promised land.
    - The specific command was to do this “on the day you cross over the Jordan.” However, the specific location stipulated for this ceremony was in the center of that land. Moving the entire nation to that spot and having sufficient control of that portion of land would not be accomplished in one 24-hour period. Consequently, the command must be understood to mean that obedience be as immediate as possible.
    - We know intuitively that delayed obedience is actually disobedience. The type of obedience God requires and deserves is immediate.
  - b. The object: remember (2b-3)
    - The pillars that were to be set up were to be covered with plaster (making them more legible and durable) and were to be covered with the words of the law.
    - This visible testimony would remind them of who they were; God’s children through His gracious choice and recipients of His instruction in how to live in that covenant relationship. They were not their own authority; they were not God!
    - This would also remind them of who God is; absolute authority over all that He had made and Who deserves to be obeyed. It would remind them of all of His promises and His faithfulness to do all He has said He would do.
    - This would remind them of the commands they were to obey in order to enjoy life in the land they were being given. It would also stand as witness against them when they failed to obey!
  - c. The place: the land of promise (4)
    - The specific place that these pillars were to be set up was upon Mount Ebal. The remainder of the chapter gives us more information about the significance of that placement, but the Israelites would have immediately recognized that this placement was in the land of promise and in a site specifically linked to that promise.
    - Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim flank the valley in which lies Shechem:
      - Shechem is the place where the promise of land was first given to Abram:

### Genesis 12:6-7 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup> 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.

- Shechem is where Jacob bought a plot of land:

### Genesis 33:18-19 (ESV)

<sup>18</sup> And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. <sup>19</sup> And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent.

- Their obedience was linked to God's faithfulness to His promises!
- d. The method: sacrificial worship (5-6)
  - After the pillars were established, an altar was to be constructed upon which burnt offerings were to be given. The altar was to be made from uncut stones, containing no mark of human craftsmanship.
  - When using this altar, the focus was to be upon God, not the people who constructed it!
  - The burnt offerings would require sacrifices. The obedience to which they were called involved sacrificial worship.
- e. The aim: fellowship (7-8)
  - The sacrifice of peace offerings was a celebration of fellowship. First, it celebrated fellowship with God, made possible by the burnt offerings that God allowed to cover their sins.
  - Then it was a celebration of fellowship with others, made possible by being in right relationship with God.
  - Roger Staubach who led the Dallas Cowboys to the World Championship in 1971 admitted that his position as a quarterback who didn't call his own signals was a source of trial for him. Coach Landry sent in every play. He told Roger when to pass, when to run and only in emergency situations could he change the play (and he had better be right!). Even though Roger considered coach Landry to have a "genius mind" when it came to football strategy, pride said that he should be able to run his own team. Roger later said, "I faced up to the issue of obedience. Once I learned to obey there was harmony, fulfillment, and victory."
  - The type of obedience required by God is aimed at fellowship!
- f. The prerequisite: grace (9)
  - Having completed the renewal of the covenant ceremony, Moses announced that God had graciously reaffirmed them as His people. The sequence of announcements here is significant.
  - The declaration of relationship precedes the command to obey; it was not Israel's exemplary obedience that resulted in it being selected to be God's people. Israel had demonstrated its propensity for disobedience while the covenant was being enacted on Mount Sinai!
  - Rather, it is God's grace that makes them His people in spite of their disobedience.

We must not miss this point; hope for Israel was grounded in God's grace, mercy and faithfulness to the Abrahamic promises; not in their potential to obey the law!

- Israel's status as God's people is the result of God's initiative and is independent of its obedience to the law. This is why pronouncement precedes command – obedience is not even possible unless grounded in the grace of God!
- g. The extent: total (10)
  - Moses instructed the Israelites to obey the voice of the Lord, keeping all of His commandments and statutes. Those commandments and statutes were detailed in the previous messages; now he was tying obedience to all of them to the ceremony they were to perform upon entry to the land.
  - This is the type of obedience that God deserves and requires. We know intuitively that partial obedience is actually disobedience. Elisabeth Elliot told of her brother Thomas Howard. Their mother let him play with paper bags she'd saved if he put them away afterwards. One day she walked into the kitchen to find them strewn all over the floor. Tom was out at the piano with his father singing hymns. When confronted, he protested, "But Mom, I want to sing." His father stated, "It's no good singing God's praise if you're disobedient."
  - The remainder of the chapter reveals that disobedience is really bad news!

### **Deuteronomy 27:11-26 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> That day Moses charged the people, saying, <sup>12</sup> "When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. <sup>13</sup> And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. <sup>14</sup> And the Levites shall declare to all the men of Israel in a loud voice:

<sup>15</sup> "'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.'

<sup>16</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

<sup>17</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor's landmark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

<sup>18</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

<sup>19</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

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<sup>20</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's nakedness.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

<sup>21</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who lies with any kind of animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

<sup>22</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who lies with his sister, whether the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

<sup>23</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who lies with his mother-in-law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

<sup>24</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who strikes down his neighbor in secret.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

<sup>25</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

<sup>26</sup> "'Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

## 2. The curse of disobedience (27:11-26)

- The mountains mentioned here themselves were pictures of blessing and curse. Clarke states, "On all hands it is allowed that Gerizim abounds with springs, gardens, and orchards, and that it is covered with beautiful foliage, while Ebal is as naked and barren as a rock."
- The assignment of the pronouncement of curses from Mount Ebal as well as the fact that no blessings are recorded in this chapter reveal that Moses' expectation in this chapter is that Israel will fail to keep the covenant stipulations. Multiple forms of disobedience are identified; all of which are cursed:
  - a. Disobedience of idolatry (15)
    - There is an element of secrecy here; that which is set up to oppose or take the place of God is hidden from the eyes of friends and neighbors. The family may know, but most people are unaware.
    - God, who sees what happens in secret, is not unaware! Accepting and embracing anything that steals the first place in the heart that belongs to God alone is instantly known to Him.
    - This tendency to value other things above God is a curse that always has consequences. When we value anything above our Heavenly Father, we too are caught in the disobedience of idolatry.
  - b. Disobedience of disrespect (16)
    - The specific example of disrespect given is that of parental disrespect. The forms this takes vary, but the heart of this disobedience is a desire to escape God given patterns of authority.
    - Rejecting these patterns of authority, whether in the home or in the public sphere is far more serious than one might think, for it is rejecting God's authority and right to order society according to the patterns He chooses. It is rejection of God's right to rule in one's life.
    - The tendency to reject God given patterns of authority is a curse that always has consequences!
  - c. Disobedience of theft (17)
    - Moving a neighbor's landmark was a blatant attempt to steal land that did not belong to the perpetrator. God would allot the land to certain tribes and within those tribal boundaries certain portions would go to families from that tribe; consequently, moving a landmark was attempting to overrule what God had decided.
    - Theft always considers only the desires of the thief and never that of the victim. Theft is the cold-hearted opposite of love. Whether it be theft of physical or intellectual property matters not. It is always disobedience.
    - The tendency to rejects God's provision as insufficient and demand more at the expense of someone else is a curse that always has consequences!
  - d. Disobedience of cruelty (18)
    - Misleading a blind man on the road may appear a harmless prank, but the so-called humor in such a situation is a false veneer covering a core of cruelty.

- Cruelty lets no vulnerability go unpunished. It preys upon the weak and defenseless to satisfy its own desire to feel powerfully in control. It is succumbing to the original temptation to “be like God.”
  - Cruelty takes many forms. Whether the blatant cruelty of the bully or the subtle “dig” of the teaser matters little. The tendency to reject God’s right to rule and take control into ones’ own hands is a curse that always has consequences!
- e. Disobedience of injustice (19)
- Perverting due justice to those who have little influence in society (the alien, the orphan & the widow) would most often have to do with control of land. The disenfranchised in society became easy prey. Their rightful properties would be turned over to whoever was clever enough to make a claim for them in court where they had little chance to receive justice.
  - Working the system to one’s advantage at the expense of those least able to afford loss is what is in view here. This is detestable to God because He is especially concerned about those who are least able to care for themselves.
  - The tendency to get ahead at the cost of those who cannot resist is a curse that always has consequences!
- f. Disobedience of God’s sexual standards (20-23)
- The particular violations of God’s standards that are cited here included the deviant sexual practices common to the nations Israel was commanded to thrust out of the land. Most of them had to do with cultic attempts to appease or influence the “gods” of these nations.
  - These practices were blatant disobedience of God’s clearly stated command that sexual relations take place only between husband and wife in the confines of marriage. Perverting this God given blessing has been the aim of Satan throughout the ages and one of his most effective tools in stirring up disobedience.
  - Disobeying God’s standards in this area wreaks all sorts of physical, emotional and spiritual havoc. The tendency to demand one’s way in sexual matters is a curse that always has consequences!
- g. Disobedience of murder (24)
- The fact that someone was struck down in secret is evidence of premeditated murder. This requires shrewd planning and careful execution of that plan.
  - Because God is the author of life, He is especially offended when humans take the life of another into their own hands. Even when society condones this (as in abortion), it is still murder.
  - Our Savior raised this to an even higher level when He said that despising another was violation of the commandment not to murder.
  - The tendency to wish that someone perceived to be in the way would be out of the way is a curse that always has consequences!
- h. Disobedience of corruption (25)
- The bribe to shed innocent blood is straight out of the judicial court setting. Whether it be a false witness who is paid to perjure themselves or the judge himself who accepts a bribe to make sure the trial ends in conviction matters little.

- This disobedience is particularly heinous when the judicial system is intentionally used to execute the innocent. The component that makes this different from the disobedience of injustice is greed. The cliché, “greed kills” is accurate in this case.
  - Greed left unchecked always leads to other disobediences whether it escalates to the level of taking life or not. The tendency to always want more regardless of the outcomes is a curse that always has consequences!
- i. The extent: total (26)
- The only way to confirm the words of the law is by doing them – all of them!
  - Since no one has or ever will (save One) do all of them, the extent of those who are disobedient is the totality of humankind.
  - The curse of disobedience has fallen upon everyone who has ever drawn breath. This final curse in the set of curses is all-inclusive; no one escapes. If that was the final word, this chapter would leave us with no hope. Fortunately, it is not!
3. Hope for the cursed
- a. The strategic position of the stones of remembrance (4)
- We saw in verse 4 that the pillars were to be erected on Mount Ebal. What we did not know at that point was revealed in verse 13; that Mount Ebal was the mountain of curse.
  - The placement of those stones of the law on the mountain of curse suggests that one function of the law is to expose Israel’s sinfulness, bringing it under the curse of the law.
  - The New Testament confirms that this indeed was one function of the law. It teaches that no one is or ever was saved by keeping the law:

**Galatians 3:10-12 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> 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.” <sup>11</sup> Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” <sup>12</sup> But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

- It teaches that the law was our guardian until Christ came:

**Galatians 3:19-26 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. <sup>20</sup> Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

<sup>21</sup> Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. <sup>22</sup> But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

<sup>23</sup> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. <sup>24</sup> So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, <sup>26</sup> for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

- Placing these stones of remembrance on the mountain of curse was meant to disillusion Israel from the false hope that they could somehow win God’s favor by

obedience. They were to be a constant reminder that apart from God's mercy and grace there is no hope.

- That mercy and grace was specifically illustrated by:
- b. The strategic position of the altar (5)
  - An altar was also to be assembled on Mount Ebal – how close in proximity to the stones of remembrance we do not know, but also on the mountain of curse.
  - Atonement was to be made by the burnt offerings on Mount Ebal, presumably for the very sins the inscribed stones exposed. At the very place of curse, God provided a means of avoiding such a sentence. The altar stood exactly where it was needed.
  - The renewal ceremony would show that Israel stood condemned under the law. But that same ceremony graciously provided the means for a future and ongoing covenant relationship with God through the altar and sacrifice on the mountain of curse.
  - That altar looked forward to another hill and another sacrifice that would allow God's grace to be poured out upon disobedient sinners like us. The stones of remembrance and the altar were but a foreshadowing of something so marvelous that it could have only come from the mind of God!
- c. The strategic intervention of the cross
  - The passage we looked at a moment ago in Galatians also revealed that Christ's sacrifice upon the cross broke the curse:

**Galatians 3:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> 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”— <sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

- This was nothing less than the appearance of God's grace:

**Titus 2:11-14 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup> waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup> who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

- It is through the cross that our sins are forgiven, and Christ's righteousness credited to our account.

**Romans 3:23-26 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

- There is hope because there is a Redeemer who gave His life as a sacrifice on another cursed hill. His sacrifice was that of a perfect life – He never once disobeyed – He kept the law perfectly.
- His sacrifice is accepted as payment in full for all who put their faith in Him. When the gift of faith is received, and trust placed in Him alone we are literally recreated, and the Holy Spirit takes up residence within.
- In the power of His Spirit we are finally able to obey. This side of heaven the flesh keeps demanding disobedience, but those who are in Him do not have to give in. Victory is possible in Him!
- Paul described the intensity of the struggle and the joy of victory in Christ:

**Romans 7:21-25a (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup> For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, <sup>23</sup> but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup> Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

- That victory is achieved when we allow His Spirit to take control; something Paul described as walking in the Spirit:

**Galatians 5:13-16 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. <sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Every single one of us here today is figuratively standing on one of two mountains. We are either standing on Mount Ebal feeling the weight of the curse of disobedience, or we are standing on Mount Calvary enjoying the grace of God poured out upon us through the sacrifice of His Son.

Are you stranded on Mount Ebal? If you are feeling the burden of your disobedience, this is the work of God’s kindly Spirit inviting you to look to Him who gave His life on another mountain and live! Please do not resist. Accept the gift of repentance and embrace Him who gave His life for you.

Are you standing on Mount Calvary? Rejoice in God’s unbelievable grace and His powerful Spirit’s ability to break the curse of disobedience in your life. Thank Him that He never leaves you or forsakes you when you give in to the flesh. When you do, quickly confess and rejoice in His forgiveness that restores the joy of salvation and enables you to have sweet fellowship with Him and His children.

The stones of remembrance and the altar on Mount Ebal were never meant to be God’s final word of grace. As grace filled as those provisions were, they merely pointed to His full provision in His Son. All of God’s grace dwells in Him. May He be magnified in us today!