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שֵׁם מִזְבֵּחַ
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מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים
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עֲלֵיהֶם
בְּרִזָּל

Deuteronomy 27:5

And there you shall
build an altar to the

LORD your **God**

an altar of **stones**; you shall not use an iron tool on them.

24 October 2009 YALLERSON

Deuteronomy 27:1-10

An Altar of Stones

October 24, 2021

Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: "Keep all the commandments which I command you today. ² And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. ³ You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you, 'a land flowing with milk and honey,' just as the LORD God of your fathers promised you. ⁴ Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. ⁵ And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. ⁶ You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. ⁷ You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. ⁸ And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law."

⁹ Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying, "Take heed and listen, O Israel: This day you have become the people of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ Therefore you shall obey the voice of the LORD your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today."

The day for typing this sermon started with some problems between a couple folks that I have some influence over in my life. Fortunately, by the time I got up, they were resolved. It's good, because you probably know what a disciplinarian I am. Oh my.

Well, the sermon passage today shows a problem exists among the people as well. It isn't perfectly evident. More than anything, it just looks like something Moses has planned for the people when they were to enter into the land of promise.

But that is just it. The first time the people didn't go in, way back in Numbers 14, it was specifically stated that they did not enter because of unbelief. That is confirmed in Hebrews 3 –

"For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? ¹⁷ Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? ¹⁹ So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." Hebrews 3:16-19

As this is so, it must be that entering this time would be because of faith in the Lord. But because the author of Hebrews clearly indicates that Israel did not receive what Canaan only anticipated, meaning entering into God's promised rest, what we will see when they do enter is only typical of what will happen to them someday future to us now.

This is certain from today's passage, because they will build an altar containing the words of the law on it, and they will sacrifice on it. But they already have a tabernacle and an altar to sacrifice on. Thus, this is a clear note that what we are seeing today is given in typology.

Sacrifices imply a need for a sacrifice. And words of law mean the imputation of sin for violating the law. Thus, there is a problem that needs to be corrected.

God is quite a disciplinarian. He will not tolerate sin. And so, He must judge and punish it. How will that be done? It depends on how one approaches Him. For His redeemed, it is anticipated in this passage today.

Text Verse: *"Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy; And on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God." Psalm 43:4*

Though the psalmist's words are referring to the altar in Jerusalem, the altar of God is ultimately wherever God meets with His people in sacrifice. As far as the passage, it is very complicated – even extremely so. I had to lay it out on a separate document to make it understandable to me just to keep track of what is going on.

As I put the extra time into that, I hated to just delete it with the completion of the sermon, so I included it in this introduction. That will make my introduction typing much easier as I will have to think of less after typing the sermon to fill up a page. Bonus.

Keep all the commandment (ha'torah) which I command you

* When you (p) cross over the Jordan

You (s) shall set up large stones and you shall plaster them with plaster

You (s) shall write on them all the words of the law

* When you (s) have crossed over

That you (s) may enter the land which the Lord your (s) God is giving you

A land flowing with milk and honey

Just as the Lord God of your (s) fathers promised you

* When you (p) have crossed over the Jordan

On Mount Ebal you (p) shall set up these stones which I command you (p) today

And you (s) shall plaster them with plaster

* And you (s) shall build an altar to the Lord your God

An altar of stones

You (s) shall not use iron on them

You (s) shall build with whole stones the altar of the Lord your (s) God

And you (s) shall offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your (s) God
You (s) shall offer peace offerings and you (s) shall eat there and rejoice
Before the Lord your (s) God

* And you (s) shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law (ha'torah)

As you can see, there is repetition in the passage, there are changes from the singular to the plural, and so on. Along with these, there is not much agreement by scholars on what several of the verses are saying. Oh my.

Monday started with a problem that was thankfully resolved, and it then continued on with problems that needed to be resolved. I hope and pray that the evaluation you will be given is correct, in line with what the Lord intends for us to see, and not stretching or abusing any point or precept. May it be so.

Great things are to be found in His superior word. And so, let us turn to that precious word once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. You Shall Set Up These Stones (verses 1-10)

Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people,

v'sav Mosheh v'zique Yisrael eth ha'am – “And commanded Moses, and elders of Israel, the people.” The words are unique in Deuteronomy. It is the only time that the elders are specifically said to join with Moses in commanding the people. The zagen, or elders, will be mentioned five more times in Deuteronomy, but never again in this particular way.

The reason for including them now is that what will be presented in the coming verses are words that do not include Moses in their performance, only in their direction. He will not accompany Israel into Canaan. As such, the elders are included to ensure that the duty will be performed accordingly.

It appears that these “elders” are referring to the priests as will be seen in verse 9. In this united manner, together they are...

^{1 (con't)} **saying: “Keep all the commandments**

The translation is incorrect. It is singular: lemor shamor eth kal ha'mitsvah – “to say ‘keep all the commandment.’” The verb is stated as an imperative. In essence, “You are certainly to keep all the commandment.”

Of this, John Lange states, “The whole commandment is the following command for the erection, plastering, and inscribing, etc., in all its compass.” Keil agrees with this, saying the imperative verb “indicates at the very outset the purpose for which the law written upon stones was to be set up in Canaan.”

I disagree, as will be explained as we continue. Rather, this is the same thought as has been repeatedly stated by Moses in Deuteronomy, such as –

“For, if keeping you keep all the command, the this, which I command you to do.”
Deuteronomy 11:22

Those words were in their own imperative form as well. It wasn’t just speaking of what he was about to state, but of everything he had and would continue to state in Deuteronomy. What is to follow now is a command, but it is only a part of the entire command that is to be kept. As such, it is a command...

¹ (con’t) **which I command you today.**

asher anokhi matsaveh etkem ha’yom – “Which I (singular) command you (plural: all) the day.” It is the first reason why it is referring to the entire command, and not just what is about to be commanded. Only Moses speaks to all of the people. As such, the words ha’yom, translated as “today,” refer to the entire time of Moses giving out this body of law on the shores of the Jordan as they so often have in Deuteronomy.

Included in that body of law comes another requirement which is set forth, along with the elders because Moses will not be present to see the task completed...

² **And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan**

v’hayah ba’yom asher taavru eth ha’yarden – “And it shall be in the day you (all, plural) cross over the Jordan.” It reads, “in the day,” not “on the day.” It is referring to the timeframe, not a specific day.

Israel was to cross the Jordan. But the act of crossing the Jordan doesn’t mean that they will be able to perform the actions commanded in the words to come. In fact, this will not come about until after the destruction of both Jericho and Ai, as is recorded in Joshua 8.

² (con’t) **to the land which the LORD your God is giving you,**

Now, the pronouns turn to the singular – “you, Israel.” Here, speaking of the general timeframe of crossing the Jordan, not the exact day that they cross, Moses again notes what

he has repeatedly said in Deuteronomy. It is the land the Lord is giving to Israel (the pronoun is singular) as a united people.

As always, the implication is that what the Lord gives, He has the right to take away, meaning the right to use it, as has already been clearly explained to them, and as will be explained again, quite clearly, in Chapter 28. The land is Israel's. When they are obedient, they may dwell in it. When they are not, they may not. But the land is given to Israel. To ensure that continues, Moses says to Israel...

² (con't) **that you shall set up for yourselves large stones,**

va'haqemota lekha abanim gedoloth – “and you shall set up to you stones large.” Again, the words are in the singular, “you, Israel.” The purpose of this is explained in the next verse, but the idea here is that a structure is to be built, and the stones should be large enough to endure and not simply fall apart with the changing of the seasons. Thus, they were to be large. After that...

² (con't) **and whitewash them with lime.**

v'sadta otam ba'sid – “and plaster them in the plaster.” Both the verb and noun form of the word are introduced here. The verb form will only be seen here and in verse 27:4. The noun will be in both verses and also in Isaiah 33:12 and Amos 2:1.

In Isaiah and Amos, it refers to burning, as by lime or into lime. Thus, many translations say, “whitewash them with lime.” That may be the case, but it seems more likely that the rocks will be plastered over to make a smooth surface.

To simply whitewash them would make the accomplishment of the words of the next verse much harder, and also less noticeable. That verse now says...

³ **You shall write on them all the words of this law,**

All of verse 3 is in the singular, “you, Israel.” As far as the words here, there are various views on what this means, such as –

“i.e. all the purely legislative parts of the Mosaic institute.” Cambridge

“i. e. all the laws revealed from God to the people by Moses, regarded by the Jews as 613.”
Barnes

“It might be, as some think, the Decalogue; but a greater probability is that it was ‘the blessings and curses,’ which comprised in fact an epitome of the law (Jos 8:34).” JFB

“Not the whole book of Deuteronomy, as some think, at least not the historical part of it, only what concerns the laws of God; and it may be only a summary or abstract of them, and perhaps only the ten commandments.” Gill

“I am fully of opinion that the (תורה torah) law or ordinance in question simply means the blessings and curses mentioned in this and in the following chapter; and indeed these contained a very good epitome of the whole law in all its promises and threatenings, in reference to the whole of its grand moral design.” Clarke

The words ha’torah, or “the Law.” Can be construed in various ways. The Ten Commandments are a short summary of the Law. Deuteronomy is called the Book of the Law of Moses in Joshua 8:31. However, “the Law,” is a phrase that includes all five books of Moses at times. This is perfectly evident from Paul’s words –

“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman.” Galatians 4:21, 22

What Paul refers to is found in Genesis, and yet he calls it “the law.” I would personally favor the meaning to be “The five books of Moses,” but that does not mean this is correct. However, without understanding what is said in Genesis and Exodus, the rest of the law lacks cohesion.

In understanding how sin was introduced, the consequences of a world living in wickedness, the grace of God towards Noah, the call of Abraham, and so on, one can then begin to understand what the law was intended to do, as least in the short term.

³ (con’t) **when you have crossed over,**

b’averekha – “in your (singular, Israel) crossing over.” Compare the words of this and the previous verse –

“in the day you (all, plural) cross over the Jordan.” (2)

“in your (singular, Israel) crossing over.” (3)

The idea is that as soon as it is possible, they are to do what they are instructed. It isn’t that they can just set a future day and plan on it, but they are to make a concerted effort to do it as soon as possible. This is so...

^{3 (con't)} that you may enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you,

l'maan asher tavo el ha'arets asher Yehovah elohekha noten lekha – “to end purpose which you (s) may enter into the land which Yehovah your (s) God gives you (s).” There is an end purpose, a designed intent, for doing as they are instructed. It is so that Israel may enter the land.

And yet, they are already in the land at the time they are to accomplish the task. This, then, is the second reason that what Moses said in verse 1 is referring to all of the Law of Moses, and not just to the command to build this edifice and inscribe the words of the law on it.

They are being told that in order to enter the land, a land that they have already entered, they need keep all of the commandment that Moses commanded. It would make no sense to have them build an edifice and write out the laws that they were instructed to obey if it were only a part of the commandment.

The words are instructional: “You have crossed over the Jordan. You are in the land. Here is what you need to do in order to enter the land.” It is...

^{3 (con't)} ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ just as the LORD God of your fathers promised you.

This is now the fifth of six times this particular phrase is used in Deuteronomy, but the last time it is actually spoken by the Lord to Moses. This time, Moses adds in the words “just as the Lord God of your fathers promised you.”

This takes Israel all the way back to Exodus 3 where twice in that chapter the Lord told Moses to speak to the people of Israel about how He would deliver them from Egypt and bring them into the land (Exodus 3:8 & 3:17). This was at the time of his commission, and since that time, the anticipation has been this land.

⁴Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan,

v'hayah b'averekem eth ha'yarden – “And it shall be in your (plural) crossing over.” Again, the words should be compared –

“in the day you (all, plural) cross over the Jordan.” (2)

“in your (singular, Israel) crossing over.” (3)

“in your (plural) crossing over.” (4)

4 (con't) that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today,

In verse 2, it said, “you (singular, Israel) shall set up to you (singular).” Now, it says, “and you (plural, you all) shall set up stones, the these, which I command you (plural, you all) today.”

As far as Mount Ebal, the name Ebal comes from an unused root meaning to be bald. Probably signifying the bald appearance of the mountain. Thus, it means something like Bare or Heap of Barrenness.

4 (con't) and you shall whitewash them with lime.

The words are identical to the final clause of verse 2, except the word otam, or “them” is spelled with an additional letter, a vav, even though it is pronounced the same. The words are in the singular, “you, Israel.” It is the last time the verb form of this word, whitewash, is used in the Bible.

5 And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God,

It is not agreed whether or not this is the same structure as has been described in the previous verses. Many scholars adamantly state they are not the same. However, Joshua 8 appears to combine the two as one –

“Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, ³¹ as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: “an altar of whole stones over 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 children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.” Joshua 8:30-32

It is hard to see how the two could not be the same based on these words from Joshua. But, because of seemingly different terminology now to be introduced, some find it to signify two things, not one. To them, that is seen in the next words...

5 (con't) an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them.

Nothing is said of the size of the stones as in verse 2. And these stones are specifically spoken of in accord with the law previously set forth by the Lord in Exodus 20:24-26 –

“An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. ²⁵ And if you make Me an altar

of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it. ²⁶ Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.”

The words of this verse, and the words they are based on from Exodus 20, do not negate that this is one thing rather than two. In Moses’ instructions, he specifies “iron.” In Exodus, it simply spoke of a cutting instrument. Moses, however, defines that with the word barzel, or iron. Rather than using any such instrument...

⁶ You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God,

The translation is not correct. It says “altar,” not “the altar.” By including “the,” translators will cause the reader to assume it is, in fact, a separate thing from what was previously stated. Without the article, it could just as easily be referring to the same edifice.

Either way, it is an altar, and it is therefore not to have the work of human hands to defile it. Rather, the stones are to be whole, meaning uncut in any way. As such...

⁶ (con’t) and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God.

v’haalita alav olot l’Yehovah elohekha – “And you shall cause to ascend burnt offerings to Yehovah your God.” The idea here is that of appeasing for sins. Though not at the tabernacle, the words of law written all over the stones are enough to demonstrate this.

The burnt offerings are those that are wholly burnt to the Lord. The instructions for them are predominately found in Leviticus 1. No part of them is eaten, but the entire animal ascends in smoke as an offering of appeasement to God. Only after the burnt offerings are noted are the next offerings then mentioned...

⁷ You shall offer peace offerings,

The law of the peace offering is predominantly detailed in Leviticus 3. It is an offering where a part is offered to the Lord and then the offeror participates in it as well. Thus, it signifies peace is established between the two. This is why it is also translated as “fellowship offerings.” It is also why Moses next says...

⁷ (con’t) and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God.

In the eating, there is a sense of fellowship and participation with the Lord God. Thus, there is to be a state of rejoicing before Him. These peace offerings are made for exactly this reason – communion and fellowship between the Lord and His people.

⁸ And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law.”

The words “very plainly” are baer hetev. They are very specific and direct. The first is a rare word, baar. It is a verb meaning to make distinct or plain. It comes from a primitive root which signifies to dig, and so by analogy, it means to engrave. The word was seen only once before, in Deuteronomy 1:5. It will only be seen one more time, in Habakkuk 2:2 –

“Then the LORD answered me and said: ‘Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it.’” Habakkuk 2:2

The second word, yataav, gives the sense of doing well, being good, pleasing, and so on. Both verbs are infinitives, and thus are being used adverbially. And so, “very plainly” will satisfy the translation. Though this has already been stated, it is restated at the end in order to highlight the importance of what is said.

The law is to be presented in a perfectly open, clear, and easily identifiable manner. With that stated, the account next says...

⁹ Then Moses and the priests, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying,

The words simply say, “And spoke,” not “Then spoke.” As such, it seems that the “elders” mentioned in verse 1 is now explained as, “the priests, the Levites.” It is these that jointly convey the words of the people, saying...

⁹(con’t) “Take heed and listen, O Israel:

Here is a word found nowhere else in Scripture, sakath. It comes from a primitive root meaning to be silent. Thus, by implication, it signifies to observe quietly, and therefore, to take heed.

Literally, it says “Be silent and listen.” Mouths are to be closed; ears are to be open. As such, attention is to be directed to what is said, and obedience is to be the result. Understanding this, they next say...

⁹(con’t) This day you have become the people of the LORD your God.

This takes us back to the end of Chapter 26 where the two thoughts were expressed by Moses in verses 17 and 18 –

“Today, you have caused Yehovah to say to you that He will be your God.”
“And Yehovah has caused you to say that you will be His special people.”

In this, they have become the people of Yehovah. Hence...

***10 (fin) Therefore you shall obey the voice of the LORD your God, and observe His commandments and His statutes which I command you today.**

Again, the thought returns to verse 17 of the previous chapter –

“...and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice.”

This verse also explains the thought expressed in verse 1. The commandment (singular) is to be kept. Moses’ words now, the commandments and the statutes, are the makeup of that commandment. Israel is to do these in order to keep the commandment.

An altar of stone you shall make for Me
You shall make it according to My word
Large stones and plaster, so shall it be
Follow the instructions just as you have heard

Make it on the mountain of the curse
And set it up just as I have commanded you
Not a point I have stated shall you miss, that would be perverse
Everything I have said, you are certainly to do

The typology must be maintained carefully
So that what it anticipates will be clearly understood
Do just what you have been instructed by Me
And you will have done just as you should

II. Pictures of Christ

Moses makes a point of three times saying, “when you have crossed over.” Twice, he specifies this as “the Jordan.” The words ha’yarden, or “the Jordan,” mean “the Descender.” It is consistently used as a picture of Christ. He descended from heaven to earth, and then even to death. He then rose from the dead and ascended back to heaven.

The Jordan is typologically a picture of Christ’s incarnation in His first advent. When one crosses over (or through) the Jordan, it is typologically a picture of passing through Christ from death to life. The words “cross over” are closely associated with the word Hebrew, or, one who crosses over.

There were carefully alternated uses of the singular and the plural in the passage. It is instructive in itself. This is to show that the same people (all) are the collective (Israel) that are being referred to. This is then a typological foreshadowing of the time when Israel as a people come to Christ, rather than as individual Jews do.

There is a time when the nation will realize who Christ is and will individually and collectively pass through Christ unto life. As an anticipatory picture of this, they are shown what that means in advance by building this altar.

I would argue, especially based on Joshua 8, that the stones set up with plaster, and inscribed with the law, are one and the same as the altar on which the offerings are made. To understand the significance of the altar, one should return to the Exodus 20 sermon entitled "The Earthen Altar."

Quite clearly, that altar pictures Christ in its every detail. The reason for building this altar without any tool is because the unhewn stone is something that God created.

If man were to shape the stone, then it would include man's efforts in it. Thus, it would lead to either idolatry of the altar which man had made in order to fellowship with God, or it would lead to idolatry of self because the man had erected the place where God and man fellowshiped.

Either way, it is a picture of works-based salvation. It is man attempting to reconcile himself to God by his efforts rather than accepting God's provision in the process of reconciliation.

Obviously, Israel had to build the altar, or no altar would be built. But the hewing of the stones provides the typology – it is God's work, not man's effort, that is the basis for the altar.

God made the stones. For man to add his effort into what He had made would then be contrary to the premise of the Bible. Man is saved by grace, not by works.

The erection of the altar itself cannot be equated to a work any more than the compilation of the Bible can be. God gave the words, man recorded the words, and through the words man meets with God. Likewise, God made the earth and the stones, man simply arranges them into an altar, and God then meets with man.

And more, that altar anticipates Christ in that God made man (the building block of humanity) without any human efforts, and humanity has then moved itself around in order to reproduce, eventually leading to Christ. The fact that Israel assembled the stones does not in any way damage the picture of Christ. Rather, it enhances it.

Using even, or stone, provides its own picture of Christ's humanity. He is the fulfillment of this altar where man comes to fellowship with God. Stone is used to speak of the Lord and of the Messiah in Scripture, such as –

“I will praise You, For You have answered me, And have become my salvation. ²² The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. ²³ This was the LORD's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴ This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.” Psalm 118:21-24

This verse is then cited six times in the New Testament when speaking of the Messiah by Jesus, or by Peter when referring to Jesus as the Messiah. In Isaiah 28:16, Isaiah says –

“Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation,
A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;
Whoever believes will not act hastily.” Isaiah 28:16

That is cited by both Paul and Peter when referring to Christ as well. It is God who fashioned Christ's humanity. Thus, to shape a stone for this altar would typologically be to fashion a false “christ” of one's own choosing. This is the reason for the specificity in the command. The earthen altar, or one of stone, pictures Christ who was alone fashioned by God.

To hew the stones would then say that the people were fashioning their own salvation, rejecting the only true Lord who is willing to meet with man.

The use of “large” stones provides its own picture. There are many stones, large and thus heavy. It anticipates the weight and burden of the law, of which Christ is the fulfillment. No person can carry that burden. Christ speaks of that several times and in several ways, such as –

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

John speaks of the same thing when he says of Christ that “His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). With that, we see that the plastering of the stones with plaster unites them as one, thus it is an altar of stone, even if it is an altar of stones. It is one law, even if made up of many.

Israel, meaning the people at the time of Joshua, will be in the land. They will build an altar while already in the land, and yet they are being told that the intent of the altar is “that you may enter the land which the Lord your God is giving you.”

Therefore, and as I noted, the words are instructional. They are intended for Israel, the people individually, and they are intended for Israel collectively once Messiah has come: “You have crossed over the Jordan. You are in the land. Here is what you need to do in order to enter the land.”

In this, the type, crossing the Jordan, entering the land, and building the altar, all anticipate the Antitype – coming through Christ and accepting His work in order to enter the true land “flowing with milk and honey.”

To further this, Moses again notes crossing over the Jordan, after which they were to set up the stones on Mount Ebal. Mount Ebal was noted in Deuteronomy 11 where its significance was described.

As a refresher to that, the name Ebal comes from an unused root meaning to be bald. Probably signifying the bald appearance of the mountain. Thus, it means something like Bare or Heap of Barrenness.

Of the two facing mountains, which will be noted again in next week’s passage, Gerizim is to the south and Ebal is to the north. Or, in reference to the layout of directions in the Bible, Gerizim is to the right, and Ebal is to the left. Thus, it matches the scriptural pattern of the right hand of blessing and the left hand of cursing. For example –

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. ³³ And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.” Matthew 25:31-33

Ebal is the mountain of curse, the bald mountain. Thus, there is metaphor being conveyed. After noting the name of the mountain, Moses again said that they are to set up the stones and to plaster them with plaster.

As I noted, the second time he says this, the words were identical to the final clause of verse 2, except the word otam, or “them” (meaning the stones) is spelled with an additional letter, a vav.

If that is what Moses truly penned and not a scribal error that crept in, I would suggest that this letter anticipates Christ as well. Vav is the sixth letter of the Aleph-bet. The number six is the number of man, fallen man. But it can form its own picture of Christ in that He took on the sins of fallen man, becoming sin so “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

This is what occurs in the atonement process. A Substitute takes the place of the sinner, and the transfer is made. Thus, the act of plastering the stones, on Mount Ebal – if the spelling reflects the original – appears to make its own picture of Christ.

So, the name and the location of the mountain, as well as the act of plastering the stones on the mountain, all anticipate Paul's words of Galatians 3 –

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’ ¹¹ But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’ ¹² Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.”

¹³ Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’), ¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” Galatians 3:10-14

And more, on this altar, Israel is then instructed to offer burnt offerings first. It is a typological representation of Christ as our sacrificial offering as was minutely detailed in the book of Leviticus in regard to this type of offering.

The altar of the law, meaning the altar of the curse, on the mountain of the curse – and everything else associated with this location and altar that we have seen so far, is the place where the sin is dealt with, anticipating Christ. Every single detail of it is so.

Once that sin is dealt with, and the transfer of the penalty of the law is made, only then are the peace offerings to be made. Restoration has been effected, peace between the warring parties is made, and fellowship through the meal is realized.

With this all stated, Moses then returns to the writing of the law very plainly on the altar. It is its own stress in the repetition, and it is its own stress in the use of the two verbs in an adverbial manner.

It is, in type, anticipatory of Christ who is the embodiment and fulfillment of the law. He clearly and plainly is shown to be this in the gospels. Thus, the altar pictures Christ in its makeup. It pictures Christ in the means it is fashioned. It pictures Christ in what is inscribed on it. It pictures Christ in where it is located. And it also anticipates Christ in what is offered on it.

Everything about the passage today is given to alert Israel to their need for Christ. Someday, they will pass through the Descender, they will put their faith in Him, and they will find that the law was only a tutor to bring them to Him.

What is being conveyed here is then summed up in the final two verses we looked at. The very fact that an offering had to be made upon the altar of the law tells us that the law has been violated and that a sacrifice is needed to atone for it.

Therefore, when Moses says that they are the people of the Lord God, and that they are to obey the Lord and keep His commandments and statutes, it is telling them that they will do so only through Christ's perfect obedience to the law. In every way, in Israel's building of this altar, it is an anticipatory type of their coming to Christ who fulfills the law for them.

As such, it is important for us in the church to remember the same lesson, and to not fall back on the law as a means of pleasing God. If you are saved, you are saved. But if you go back to law observance, you are setting aside the work of Christ.

How displeasing to God it must be when someone starts well and then trips up in his race to the end. Not only does he stop growing in Christ, he disgraces the very work of Christ that saved him in the first place!

Let us be wise and simply trust in the finished, final, and forever work of Christ on our behalf. When we are told to obey His commandments by John as we noted a few minutes ago, John was not speaking of the Law of Moses. He was referring to our obligations under the New Covenant.

It is a covenant that came at a high price to initiate. Christ gave His life up under the Old and in fulfillment of it so that we could have new life in Him. Let us remember this and be observant to His commands out of gratitude for such a great salvation.

Closing Verse: *"... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."*

-Galatians 2:16

Next Week: Deuteronomy 27:11-26 Remember all that you heard and you saw (and then do All the Words of This Law) (76th Deuteronomy Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you. He has a good plan and purpose for you. But He also has expectations of you as He prepares you for entrance into His Land of Promise. So, follow Him and trust Him and He will do marvelous things for you and through you.

An Altar of Stones

Now Moses, with the elders of Israel
Commanded the people, saying
“Keep all the commandments which I command you today
So to you I am relaying

And it shall be, on the day
When you cross over the Jordan to the land
-----which the LORD your God is giving you
That you shall set up for yourselves large stones
And whitewash them with lime, so you shall do

You shall write on them all the words of this law
When you have crossed over, so you shall do
That you may enter the land
Which the LORD your God is giving you

‘A land flowing with milk and honey, yes it is true
Just as the LORD God of your fathers promised you

Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan
That on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones at that time
Which I command you today
And you shall whitewash them with lime

And there you shall build an altar
To the LORD your God, can I get an “Amen?”
An altar of stones
You shall not use an iron tool on them

You shall build with whole stones
The altar of the LORD your God, so you shall do
And offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God
Just as I have instructed you

You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there
And rejoice before the LORD your God
And you shall write very plainly on the stones
All the words of this law, as an acknowledgment nod

Then Moses and the priests, the Levites
Spoke to all Israel, saying (words by which to applaud)
“Take heed and listen, O Israel:
This day you have become the people of the LORD your God

Therefore you shall obey
The voice of the LORD your God, as to you I say
And observe His commandments and His statutes
Which I command you today

Lord God, turn our hearts to be obedient to Your word
Give us wisdom to be ever faithful to You
May we carefully heed each thing we have heard
Yes, Lord God may our hearts be faithful and true

And we shall be content and satisfied in You alone
We will follow You as we sing our songs of praise
Hallelujah to You; to us Your path You have shown
Hallelujah we shall sing to You for all of our days

Hallelujah and Amen...