

**Josh 8:30-35**  
***Blessings and Cursings***

30 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.

33 Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them were in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

34 And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law.

35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

There tends to be a belief in our culture that worship is for the most part a rather unimportant event. Worship services like this one are nice, but a lot less important than say actually doing something. For instance, if you ask people what is more important, worship of the Lord God, or the war on terror, they'd probably answer *"The War on Terror of course"* almost instinctively. It would be interesting however, to have asked the same question to one of the Israelites at the time of the conquest, *"what is more important, the war against the Canaanites, or the worship of the Lord?"* because I suspect that their answer might have been slightly different.

If you'd asked Joshua for instance, I suspect he would have said, ***"The Worship of the Lord God, for the success of our conquest, depends not upon the strength of our arms, but upon our faith in Him. If we fail to worship him, to believe his promises, and keep his commandments, then we have no chance of winning that war, but he has shown us that if we believe and obey, then he will keep the covenant promises he made to our fathers to give us this land and bless us in it. Our Blessings, or our curses flow not from our works, but from our relationship to God and worship is the visible representation and constant renewal of that relationship."***

Israel had already been given an example of that principle in the last 2 chapters. They had been victorious at mighty Jericho not because they were the stronger army, but because they had believed the Lord and followed his commands, and He had kept his promise and delivered the city into their hands. But in the next chapter their initial attack on puny Ai had been a disaster because of the transgression of His commands. Achan and his family had not believed the word of the Lord, that to take from the plunder of Jericho would bring curses upon Israel, and had disobeyed and surely the curses had followed.

Israel had then repented of this sin, done the will of the Lord and once again success had followed. They had been shown then that success in the conquest, had far more to do with the state of their heart regarding the Lord than the might of their arms. Therefore worship was vitally important. In Hebrew the word for worship is *Shacah*, it means to bow down and prostrate oneself, to humbly submit acknowledging that God is not only the Lord, but ***your*** Lord and that He is the one who commands, that He is the one who orders all things and brings blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience.

So it is appropriate that Israel worship the Lord and be reminded of the Covenant, and go through a ceremony where by the Covenant promises are repeated and renewed in the hearing of the people. The intention being not to rebind God to His promises and His People, because God had always been faithful, but to remind the people of their calling and obligation and once again to renew their binding to their God.

Now this ceremony of Covenant renewal was not an invention of Joshua, it was done in compliance with the commands of the Lord given in Deut. 11 and Deut. 27

***Deut 11:29 "Now it shall be, when the LORD your God has brought you into the land which you go to possess, that you shall put the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal.***

***30 "Are they not on the other side of the Jordan, toward the setting sun, in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the plain opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinth trees of Moreh?"***

***31 "For you will cross over the Jordan and go in to possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and you will possess it and dwell in it.***

***32 "And you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.***

***NKJ Deuteronomy 27:1 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."***

***11 And Moses commanded the people on the same day, saying,***

***12 "These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin;***

***13 "and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.***

***14 " And the Levites shall speak with a loud voice and say to all the men of Israel:***

***15 'Cursed is the one who makes a carved or molded 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 the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'***

*17 'Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'*

*18 'Cursed is the one who makes the blind to wander off the road.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'*

*19 'Cursed is the one who perverts the justice due the stranger, the fatherless, and widow.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'*

*20 'Cursed is the one who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered his father's bed.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'*

*21 'Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'*

*22 'Cursed is the one who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'*

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

*24 'Cursed is the one who attacks his neighbor secretly.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'*

*25 'Cursed is the one who takes a bribe to slay an innocent person.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'*

*26 'Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'*

*NKJ Deuteronomy 28:1 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.*

*2 "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:*

*3 "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.*

*4 "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.*

*5 "Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.*

This was the first moment that Israel had to renew the covenant once they were in the land, and so as soon as they could safely worship the Lord, they did, they went up to Shechem for that was where the mountains were and fulfilled the command of the Lord by holding this service.

Now this must have been an awesome ceremony. Imagine it if you will, 2 mountains each with 6 entire tribes on them all the men, women, and children, with a valley in the middle occupied by the Levites and the Ark of the Covenant. The acoustics of the place are supposed to be incredible, and imagine thousands of voices calling out the blessings & cursings in turn with all of the people shouting out AMEN! At the end of every declaration. And then Joshua standing to read all of the Law of Moses in the hearing of the people, to remind them of all the essentials of their faith. If you ever get to thinking my sermons are long, keep in mind that what Joshua read that day was All the words of the TORAH, the first 5 books of the bible, while the people sat not on comfy chairs but stood on two mountains.

Can you imagine their thrill when Joshua reached Genesis 12 and they heard the words of the first covenant God had made with their forefather Abraham.

*Gen 12:5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.*

*6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.*

*7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.*

And they realized, hey we are standing in the same place that God made that promise to Abraham, and the same place where he built an altar and offered up a sacrifice. And now we see that God is faithful, that He keeps His promises. For here we are! Abraham's children in the land God promised to our Father. And look we have become the inheritors of that promise, in spite of our unfaithfulness. God has been faithful in spite of our unfaithfulness.

So what is the application of all this to us?

1) God has always been the Redeemer of His people, and worship is his by right. He was the one who made the covenant promises, He was the one who delivered on them. He told the people that he would give them a land, make them a mighty people, and from them one would come who would be a blessing to all the nations. He delivered on that promise, he brought his people out of bondage in Egypt, and in the fullness of time, he raised up that seed, Jesus Christ, to be a blessing to all the peoples of the world.

2) That worship is the most important thing we do. We are God's covenant people, he has bound us to himself by unbreakable promises, Gospel promises the most important being that  
***Romans 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.***

...

***8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):***

***9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.***

***10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.***

***11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."***

***12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.***

***13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."***

In Jesus the curses of the Law were spent, he soaked up the penalty of breaking them, the blessings are ours not because of our faithfulness but because of his. Let us face it, God's people have never kept their end of the Covenant, we have always failed, and therefore, in saving us God had to keep it on our behalf that we might become inheritors of the blessings.

But in worship we renew the great covenant binding us to Christ, which tell us that the blessings come by faith in Him, and reminding us to walk according to our calling.

In worship we have a reminder of these things, in worship we remember what is really important, not the things we do, but our relationship to the Lord. And that our blessings and cursings will flow from that relationship.

*Shall we not then worship the Lord and give him his due?*