

### The Covenant is Renewed at Shechem

#### Joshua 8:30-35

Joshua 8:30-35 - *“Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal,<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.”*

#### Background Notes

After Israel's victory over Ai, they took time out from their battles and renewed the covenant. This was in obedience with what God had commanded Israel to do when they came into the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 27:1-8 - *“Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: “Keep all the commandments which I command you today.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4a]</sup> just as the LORD God of your fathers promised you.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God.<sup>7</sup> You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God.<sup>8</sup> And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law.”*

The rest of Deuteronomy 27 gives the details. Half of the tribes were to go up on the slopes of Mount Gerizim and represent the blessings of the Law, and half of the tribes were to go up on the slopes of Mount Ebal and represent the cursings of the Law.

In Joshua 8 this renewal of the covenant took place right in the heart of the land, at Shechem. Shechem was the place where Abraham had built an altar and worshiped the Lord when he came into the land. Shechem was the place where Jacob had bought some land and dug a well. And, of course, this is where our Lord met the Samaritan woman. Jacob's well is there to this day. You can even drink water from Jacob's well -- and it's very deep, just as the Lord said! If you drop a stone into Jacob's well and count off the seconds -- 1001, 1002, 1003, 1004 -- and splash! That's how deep it is!

Mount Gerizim is the very mountain that the Samaritan woman referred to when she said to the Lord, "*our fathers worshipped on this mountain...*" The area between the Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal formed a natural amphitheater that was ideal for this ceremony. The priests with the ark would have been in the center of the congregation, while the tribes spread out on the slopes of the two mountains.

As Joshua read the words of the law of God, there may have been an antiphonal response from the two groups of tribes, especially as Joshua read the blessings and curses of the law. The tribes on the slopes of Mount Gerizim said "Amen" to the blessings, and the tribes of Mount Ebal said "Amen" to the curses.

Before the reading of the law, there were two significant events that took place in this renewal of the covenant. Joshua built an altar of natural stones on the slopes of Mount Ebal, and the people offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. Some archeologists believe that some stones that exist on Mount Ebal today are remains of that altar, but there's some debate on that subject.

The other significant event is that Joshua wrote the words of the Law on the stones. Verse 32 seems to be saying that Joshua actually carved the words of the Law into the stones of the altar, but a close reading of Deuteronomy 27 indicates that the stones were plastered over with lime and built into a monument. Maybe Joshua wrote on both sets of stones -- the monument and on the altar! It's a bit hard to put it all together to be precise, but in any case, an altar was definitely built and the words of the law were definitely inscribed on the stone!

In verses 33 and 35, we read about the "strangers" who were living among them. Who were these people? In Exodus 12 we read about a number of Egyptians who came out of Egypt with the children of Israel, so their descendants might constitute some of these "strangers," and when the children of Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness, a number of wilderness Bedouins might have joined the covenant community. These are likely the "strangers" who were living among the people of Israel.

## Doctrinal / Teaching Points

### 1. The Old Covenant was established with animal sacrifices, and was written on stones.

The covenant that was renewed and ratified in Joshua 8 is the Mosaic Law, which was given by God at Mount Sinai. That covenant was written on tablets of stone, and that covenant was maintained by animal sacrifices. Here in Joshua 8 that same covenant was renewed and ratified with animal sacrifices and, once again, inscribed on stones. We know that this covenant was not a lasting covenant because it was a “conditional covenant.” Israel broke the conditions of the Mosaic Covenant. The people didn’t keep the laws that God had written on stone, and they didn’t bring the required sacrifices when they sinned. But - praise the Lord! - that was not the end of the story. The Old Covenant was established with animal sacrifices and inscribed on stone, but the New Covenant is established with the sacrifice of Christ and writing on the hearts of God’s people!

### 2. The New Covenant was established with the sacrifice of Christ, and is written on hearts.

In Romans 10:4 we read that “*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*” The Old Covenant is no longer in effect, because we couldn’t keep it, but the old covenant did point forward to a better covenant, as Romans 4 indicates. All those animal sacrifices pointed forward to the one great Sacrifice to come -- the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins.

The writing on stones pointed forward to the New Covenant that God would write on hearts. I’m reading Hebrews 8:10 (which quotes from Jeremiah 31): “*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*”

In the context of Jeremiah 31, the new covenant was made with Israel, but we see here from Hebrews 8 that the new covenant is extended to all believers. The New Covenant is based on the sacrifice of Christ, and that’s what we remember in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Remember what the Lord said in the institution of the supper. Matthew 26:28, “*For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*”

Now God’s law is written on our hearts. What does that mean, “written on our hearts”? When we accept Christ as our Savior our hearts are changed, because we’ve been born again. The Holy Spirit indwells us and empowers us to do God’s will. Is the law of God written on your heart? Do you want to please the Lord in everything that you do and say? Have you been born again? If not, why not accept the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior right now, and come under the benefits of the New Covenant? You can have the law of God written on your heart. The New Covenant was established with the sacrifice of Christ and writing it is written hearts.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Let's take time out for worship.**

The conquest was not over in Joshua 8. There was still a lot of territory to conquer and possess. But Israel took time out from the fighting to worship the Lord and renew the covenant.

Do you see the application for us? We can get so busy in serving the Lord and fighting the good fight that we fail to take time out for worship. Wouldn't you agree? It's easy to do, right? Christian service and fighting the good fight are extremely important, but we need to take time out to worship the Lord. That's what we do at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. We take time out to worship and thank the Lord for what He has done for us.

Some Christians are so active in ministries and service projects that time out for worship takes a low priority. This is not a biblical balance for believers. We need to ask ourselves if we have a problem in this area. Let's take time out for worship.

### **2. Let's take time out for covenant renewal!**

We live in a day of little commitment and broken covenants. Even marriage commitments and covenants are treated lightly. This attitude is certainly not taught in the Bible. In the Bible, covenants were serious commitments. That's why the covenant renewal ceremony in Joshua 8 was important. In the same way, we need to take time out to remember and renew our covenants, especially in this day of little commitment and broken covenants.

Margie and I recently celebrated our fortieth wedding anniversary [1999]. (I should get a cheer on that statement, right?) Every anniversary for every married couple should be a renewal of the covenant that they made with each other, and that they made before God.

This weekend we had a family reunion. Family get-togethers are great times for remembering, and also for renewing and ratifying commitments and responsibilities towards one another. It doesn't have to be formal, but it's a great opportunity to reassure each other that we love and care for each other. That's family covenant renewal. Let's take time out for covenant renewal!