

### Joshua read the Law (Josh. 8:34–35).

The tribes were assigned their places in front of the two mounts, according to Moses' instructions in Deuteronomy 27:11–13. Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali were at Mt. Ebal, the mount of cursing; and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh), and Benjamin were at Mt. Gerizim, the mount of blessing. The tribes at Mt. Gerizim were founded by men who had either Leah or Rachel for their mother, while the tribes at Mt. Ebal were descended from either Zilpah or Bilhah, handmaids of Leah and Rachel. The only exceptions were Reuben and Zebulun, who belonged to Leah. Reuben had forfeited his status as the firstborn because he had sinned against his father (Gen. 35:22; 49:3–4).

In the valley between the two mountains stood the priests and Levites with the ark, surrounded by the elders, officers, and judges of the nation. The people were all facing the ark, which represented the presence of the Lord among His people. When Joshua and the Levites read the blessings of the Lord one by one (see Deut. 28:1–14), the tribes at Mt. Gerizim responded with a loud united “Amen!” which in the Hebrew means “So be it!” When they read the curses (see Deut. 27:14–26), the tribes at Mt. Ebal would respond with their “Amen” after each curse was read.

God had given the Law through Moses *at Mt. Sinai* (Ex. 19–20), and the people had accepted it and promised to obey. Moses then repeated and explained the Law *on the Plains of Moab* at the border of Canaan. He applied that Law to their lives in the Promised Land and admonished them to obey it. “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God” (Deut. 11:26–28, NIV; note vv. 29–32).

Joshua now reaffirmed the Law *in the land of promise*. Since the area between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim was a natural amphitheater, everybody could hear the words of the Law clearly and respond with intelligence. By shouting “Amen” to the statements that were read, the people admitted that they understood the Law with its blessings and curses, and that they accepted the responsibility of obeying it. This included the women, children, and the “mixed multitude” (sojourners) who had joined Israel (Ex. 12:38; 22:21; 23:9; Deut. 24:17–22; 31:12). If they wanted to share in Israel's conquest, they had to submit to the Law of Israel's God.

God's people today stand in a valley between two mounts—Mt. Calvary, where Jesus died for our sins, and Mt. Olivet, where He will return in power and great glory (Zech. 14:4). The Old Testament prophets saw the Messiah's suffering and glory, but they did not see the “valley” between this present age of the church (1 Peter 1:10–12). Believers today aren't living under the curse of the Law, because Jesus bore that curse “on a tree” (Gal. 3:10–14). In Christ believers are blessed with “every spiritual blessing” (Eph. 1:3, NKJV) because of the grace of God. For them life means the blessings of Gerizim and not the curses of Ebal.

However, because Christians “are not under the Law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14; 7:1–6), it doesn't mean that we can live any way we please and ignore the Law of God or defy it. We aren't saved by keeping the Law, nor are we sanctified by trying to meet the demands of the Law; but “the righteousness of the Law” is “fulfilled in us” as we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:4). If we put ourselves under Law, we forfeit the enjoyment of the blessings of grace (Gal. 5). If we walk in the Spirit, we experience His life-changing power and live so as to please God.

Let's give thanks that Jesus bore the curse of the Law for us on the cross and that He bestows all the blessings of the heavens on us through the Spirit. By faith we can claim our inheritance in Christ and march forth in victory!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong*. “Be” Commentary Series (102–104). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.