

Deuteronomy 27:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And these shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse; Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

Analysis

These shall stand upon mount Ebal to curse—The six tribes assigned to Ebal (Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali) included the sons of the concubines Bilhah and Zilpah, plus Reuben (who lost his birthright through sin, Genesis 35:22) and Zebulun. This arrangement wasn't about inherent unworthiness but liturgical function in a covenant ceremony emphasizing human accountability.

The Hebrew *qelalah* (curse) represents more than mere misfortune—it signifies divine judgment, covenant sanctions, and exclusion from blessing. Mount Ebal would later receive the altar of unhewn stones (Deuteronomy 27:5-6) and the inscribed law stones (27:2-3), making it paradoxically both the mountain of cursing and the place of sacrifice. This foreshadows how Christ became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13) to transform judgment into redemption.

The symmetry of six tribes on each mountain creates balance in the ceremony, but the content of the liturgy (verses 15-26) contains only curses, not explicit blessings. The blessings are assumed in covenant faithfulness; the curses require dramatic public articulation to establish accountability for secret sins.

Historical Context

Mount Ebal rises approximately 3,080 feet, while Gerizim across the valley reaches about 2,890 feet. The acoustics between these mountains are remarkable—modern experiments have demonstrated that a speaker positioned correctly can

be heard throughout the valley. The Samaritans later built their temple on Gerizim (John 4:20), claiming it as the true worship site, but Scripture consistently identifies Ebal as the altar location (Deuteronomy 27:4-8, Joshua 8:30).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the placement of the altar on the mountain of cursing (not blessing) prefigure the gospel message of atonement through judgment-bearing?
2. What does the public, communal nature of this curse ceremony teach about corporate responsibility for covenant faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵלֶּה	יַעֲמֹד וְ	עַל	הַקֶּלֶל הַ	בְּהַר	עֵיבָל	רְאוּבֵן
H428	And these shall stand	H5921	to curse	upon mount	Ebal	Reuben
	H5975		H7045	H2022	H5858	H7205
גָּד	וְאָשֶׁר	וְזִבְלוּן	דָּן	וְנַפְתָּלִי:		
Gad	and Asher	and Zebulun	Dan	and Naphtali		
H1410	H836	H2074	H1835	H5321		

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 27:4 (Parallel theme): Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister.

