

Joshua 8:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel.

Analysis

And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel.

Joshua's act of writing the law on stones fulfills the Mosaic command in Deuteronomy 27:3, 8, ensuring that God's word remains publicly visible and accessible. The Hebrew verb *katav* (כָּתַב, "wrote") indicates careful inscription rather than casual notation. This was "a copy of the law of Moses" (*mishneh torat Moshe*, מִשְׁנֵה תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה), likely referring to the core covenant stipulations found in Deuteronomy, particularly the blessings and curses of chapters 27-28.

The public writing "in the presence of the children of Israel" emphasizes transparency and accountability. God's law is not esoteric knowledge for an elite priesthood but public revelation for the entire covenant community. Every Israelite could witness the inscription and know the standards by which they would be judged. This anticipates Jesus' teaching that His doctrine was not spoken in secret (John 18:20) and Paul's insistence that the gospel message is publicly proclaimed (2 Corinthians 4:2).

From a Reformed perspective, this act demonstrates *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) as the foundation for covenant community. The written word, not human tradition or priestly innovation, governs Israel's life. The stones serve as permanent witness against covenant breaking, similar to how Scripture functions

as authoritative standard for the church. The law inscribed on stone prefigures the new covenant when God writes His law on human hearts (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures commonly inscribed significant texts on stone monuments (stelae). The Code of Hammurabi (c. 1750 BCE) was carved on a diorite stele, and Egyptian royal decrees appeared on temple walls. Joshua's inscription follows this cultural pattern but with crucial theological distinction—these stones record divine law, not human legislation or royal propaganda.

The practice of writing the law on plastered stones (Deuteronomy 27:2-4) was practical for creating smooth writing surfaces on rough field stones. Archaeologists have discovered various inscribed stones from ancient Israel, including the Gezer Calendar and Moabite Stone, demonstrating that stone inscription was standard practice for preserving important texts. The public nature of this inscription meant illiteracy would not prevent knowledge of the law—regular public reading ensured community-wide awareness (verse 34).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the public writing of God's law challenge the modern tendency toward privatized, individualistic faith?
2. What does this emphasis on written Scripture teach us about the permanent, unchanging nature of God's revealed will?
3. In what practical ways can we make Scripture as central to our community life as these stones were to Israel?

Interlinear Text

וְכָתַב	שָׁם	עַל	הָאֲבָנִים	אֵת	מִשְׁנֵה	תּוֹרַת
And he wrote	H8033	H5921	there upon the stones	H853	a copy	of the law
H3789			H68		H4932	H8451
מֹשֶׁה	אָשֶׁר	וְכָתַב	לְפָנַי	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל:	
of Moses	H834	And he wrote	in the presence	of the children	of Israel	
H4872		H3789	H6440	H1121	H3478	

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 27:8 (Word): And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly.