

Joshua 8:33

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

Analysis

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This carefully orchestrated ceremony demonstrates the covenantal unity of the entire nation. The phrase "all Israel" encompasses every segment of society: "elders" (tribal leaders), "officers" (military commanders), and "judges" (legal authorities). The positioning "on this side the ark and on that side" places the ark of the covenant—representing God's presence—at the center, with the people arrayed around it. This spatial arrangement embodies the theological truth that God, not humanity, stands at the center of covenant community.

Significantly, the assembly includes "the stranger, as he that was born among them," indicating that covenant membership transcends ethnic boundaries. The Hebrew term *ger* (גֶּר, "stranger") refers to resident aliens who had joined Israel, including Rahab and likely others who witnessed God's mighty acts. This inclusive vision foreshadows the New Testament church where there is "neither Jew nor Greek" in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Reformed theology emphasizes that election and calling constitute God's people, not mere ethnic descent.

The division into two groups—half toward Gerizim, half toward Ebal—creates responsive liturgy for pronouncing blessings and curses. This dramatic presentation makes tangible the choice set before Israel: obedience leading to life, or rebellion leading to death (Deuteronomy 30:19). The ceremony transforms abstract law into experiential reality, engaging the whole community in covenant commitment.

Historical Context

The gathering of "all Israel" at Shechem recalls the patriarchal history of this location. Abraham received God's promise here (Genesis 12:6-7), Jacob returned here after his exile (Genesis 33:18-20), and Jacob's sons sold Joseph into slavery near here (Genesis 37:12-14). By conducting this covenant ceremony at Shechem, Joshua links the conquest to Abraham's original calling, showing that the possession of Canaan fulfills ancient promises.

The presence of "strangers" in the assembly indicates that Israel's forty years of wilderness wandering had attracted followers—a "mixed multitude" (Exodus 12:38) who witnessed God's provision and judgment. This demonstrates that God's covenant, while made with Israel, was never exclusivist. The prophets would later emphasize that the Gentiles would be included in God's salvation (Isaiah 49:6; 56:6-8), fulfilled ultimately in the gospel's universal offer.

The ark's central position recalls its role throughout the conquest—it preceded Israel through the Jordan (Joshua 3:14-17) and circled Jericho (Joshua 6:6-11). The ark, containing the tablets of the law, Aaron's rod, and manna (Hebrews 9:4),

symbolized God's covenant faithfulness, priestly mediation, and sustaining provision—all ultimately fulfilled in Christ.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does the inclusion of "strangers" in covenant ceremony challenge ethnic or cultural barriers we might erect in the church?
2. What does the spatial arrangement (ark at center, people surrounding) teach about proper ordering of our worship and community life?
3. How should the choice between blessing and curse, obedience and rebellion, shape our daily decision-making as believers?

Interlinear Text

בְּקָרְבָּן יְמִינָה וּמִבְּנֵית הָעֵדָה אֶרְזִים וְמִבְּנֵית הַמִּזְבֵּחַ H2088 H2088 on this side the ark H727 H5048 and on that side before the priests H3548

בְּלִי מ	בְּשָׂא י	אֶר וָי	בְּרִית	יְהִי ה
the Levites	which bare	on this side the ark	of the covenant	of the LORD

מ ול אל ובצוי ו פאזר ח בגר
against them over among them half as he that was born as well the stranger

עֵבֶל מִלְכֹרֶם וְפָחָזִים בְּרֵרָה יְמִינָה וְבְרֵרָה מִלְכֹרֶם עֵבֶל

רְאֵשׁ	צָרָה	מָשָׁה	שֵׁבֶד	הָרֶבֶת
H834	had commanded	as Moses	the servant	of the LORD

לְבָכָה גָּרָה	אֶת	בְּנֵי מִצְרָיִם	לִשְׁרָאֵל	בְּרָאָשָׁנָה:
that they should bless	H853	the people	And all Israel	before

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 11:29 (Blessing): And it shall come to pass, when the LORD thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal.

Deuteronomy 31:12 (References Lord): Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear,

and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law:

Deuteronomy 31:9 (Covenant): And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel.

Exodus 12:49 (Parallel theme): One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.

Deuteronomy 31:25 (Covenant): That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying,

Joshua 24:1 (Judgment): And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.

Joshua 4:18 (Covenant): And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

Joshua 3:3 (Covenant): And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.

Numbers 15:16 (Parallel theme): One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you.

Numbers 15:29 (References Israel): Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them.