

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* (גֵּר, "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

וְכָל	יִשְׂרָאֵל	וְזִקְנָיו	וְשֹׁטְרָיו	וְשֹׁפְטָיו	עָמְדוּ
H3605	And all Israel	and their elders	and officers	and their judges	stood
	H3478	H2205	H7860	H8199	H5975
הַ	וּמִזֶּה	אֶרֶץ	נֶגֶד	הַכֹּהֲנִים	
H2088	H2088	on this side the ark	H5048	and on that side before the priests	
		H727		H3548	
הַלְוִיִּם	בְּשָׂא	אֶרֶץ	בְּרִית	יְהוָה	
the Levites	which bare	on this side the ark	of the covenant	of the LORD	
H3881	H5375	H727	H1285	H3068	
כְּגַם	כְּאִזְכּוֹ	וּבְחֻצֵּי	אֶל	מִן	
as well the stranger	as he that was born	among them half	of them over	against	
H1616	H249	H2677	H413	H4136	
הַ	גֵּרִיזִים	וּבְחֻצֵּי	אֶל	מִן	הַ
mount	Gerizim	among them half	of them over	against	mount
H2022	H1630	H2677	H413	H4136	H2022
					עֵבָל
					Ebal
					H5858
כְּאִשְׁרֵי	צִוָּה	מֹשֶׁה	עֲבָד	יְהוָה	
H834	had commanded	as Moses	the servant	of the LORD	
	H6680	H4872	H5650	H3068	
לְבָרֵךְ	אֶת	הָעָם	יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּרֹאשָׁנָה:	
that they should bless	H853	the people	And all Israel	before	
H1288		H5971	H3478	H7223	

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.