

Joshua 07-06-08a

This is Friday, the 8th of June, 2007. We continue our study in the book of Joshua. We start a new chapter tonight, chapter 9. We're going to see the story of the Gibeonites.

We're also going to take just a moment to wrap up a few thoughts on the episode that we looked at last time at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. But as we approach the formal investigation of these things in God's Word, let's take a moment to go before the Lord in prayer, exercise the privilege of our priesthood, and ensure that God the Holy Spirit will find us ready pupils. Father, it is a source of great comfort and encouragement to know that we are sustained by your right hand, the right hand of your righteousness.

That righteousness has come to us exclusively because of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf. We are so thankful for him, for his life, his death, his resurrection, and his current ministry of intercession for us. We thank you for the hope for which we anxiously wait the return for us in the air so that we shall ever be with him.

We look forward to the day when we can, with an unfettered mind and with an untrammelled heart, pursue our understanding and our service before you. We know that this time in fallen condition, in a fallen world, beset with the forces of darkness that the scriptures tell us about, we know that this time is for a purpose, and we know that we can redeem that time and we can make the most use of it by ensuring that we are good students of your word, and that God the Holy Spirit can use those promises and principles and doctrines to lead us and to guide us and to enable us to grow in grace and knowledge. We pray that our study this evening will contribute toward that goal.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Last time in the latter portion of Joshua chapter 8, we saw this 30 mile march from Gilgal north to this very specific geographic location by the oak tree of Moreh, where Abram first built an altar and sacrificed to the Lord after coming down from Ur of the Chaldees via the northern area of Haran and coming down into the land.

His first altar, his first encounter with the Lord God is at this place. And this is where, in accordance with the command recorded by Moses back in Deuteronomy 11 and Deuteronomy chapter 32, I believe it is, this is where they were to come. So, what happened there? We talked about this last time and I'm not going to do an extensive review, but there are a couple of things we have not mentioned that I would like to draw our attention to tonight before we move forward into chapter 9. In chapter 8, I would like to point out something.

Look at verse 30. Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel in Mount Ebal, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron tool. Now, they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, sacrificed peace offerings.

There, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses which he had written. This verse 32 has led some uncaredful or incautious students of God's word to believe that Joshua actually wrote the words of the law on the altar. When it says he wrote on the stones, when he built an altar of whole stones.

And this is just a lack of familiarity with the way Hebrew works. When it says the stones, this is not a reference back to the stones of the altar. This is a reference back to, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, had commanded the children of Israel, written in the book of the law of Moses, the stones that that specifies.

Because they are two different sets of stones. You can't take uncut, unprepared boulders and write the words of the law. When we go back to Deuteronomy chapter 27, I think I gave the wrong chapter there a minute ago.

You find that there are very specific instructions for how this is to be accomplished. And we want to turn back there. But before you leave Joshua chapter 8 verse 30 and following, what is the sequence there? What is the first thing Joshua did? What does it say? Tell me out loud.

What did he do? He built an altar first, right? Then what did he do? He wrote the words of the law on the stones, right? Is everybody with me? What is the sequence? Build the altar, offer the sacrifices, then it is recorded that he wrote these words of the law on the stones. OK? Now, let's go back to Deuteronomy chapter 27. Let's start right at the top of the chapter.

Now, Moses with the elders of Israel. This is slightly unusual. Many times the word of the Lord came to Moses, speak to the children of Israel and say, and it is God to Moses to the people.

Here the elders of Israel are included. Why? Multiple points of reference. These elders are going to talk to their successors, who are going to be elders in the tribes and the clans and the families of Israel.

Everybody is involved here. This is not just Moses to the people at large. Moses with the elders of Israel.

Everybody in the leadership strata of Israel is familiar with this. Keep all the commandments which I command you today, and it shall be on the day, we talked about that, when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, that you shall do what? You shall build an altar, and offer there sacrifices, peace offerings and burnt offerings. What's the first thing they do? What's first in the sequence here? You shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime.

It's interesting, the Hebrew word here, it's spelled S-I-D. They're not real sure. This is either lime or gypsum.

Whatever it is, it's very white. But this is basically, your sheetrock is made out of gypsum. They call it gypsum board.

Basically, you can think of it in terms of Joshua sheetrocking some flat surfaces, and writing the law on the sheetrock, on the gypsum, on this whitewashed lime, this bright white coating. Then he would mix up ink. They had ways of making ink in those days.

They would often use a black carbon soot for the pigment, and they would have a carrier medium. They might use an oil base. They had plants that were capable of providing a binding agent, and so on.

They knew how to make glue, and there was sort of a glue-like medium, in which this pigmentation of different colors could be used. They found interior inscriptions in old buildings and tombs, and so on, just like the Egyptians. They knew how to make paint, basically.

So, this isn't something that would wash off with the first rain. That's my point. It was designed to be a permanent, long-lasting memorial.

This would be your weather beater, 30-year paint type of thing. Whitewash it. This is not just gypsum or lime, but also a binding agent, and then the ink that goes over this with the words of the law.

This would have been like a billboard that people could walk by. Of course, many people in Israel are going to be illiterate, but the Levites, Moses and Aaron, are literate. Joshua is literate, and there is a training program.

What do you think they did for 40 years, wandering around in the wilderness? There were classes. Let's teach people how to read and write. There is a large population.

The elders of the tribes are literate. So, someone could walk by and read it out to a group, read it out to their family, read it out to their clan, anytime they want. It's not locked away in the Ark of the Covenant.

It's not locked away in a vault. It's not chained to the pulpit. Remember the great pulpit Bible that they used to chain, and you had to go down there and read it.

This is open air. Anybody can walk by and get someone to read this or read it for themselves. But look at the sequence.

This is the main idea I want to get across here. On the day you cross over the Jordan, set up the stones, whitewash them, lime them, gypsum them, and write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the Lord your God is giving you. Now, when it says all the words of this law, there's some debate in these modern times, 3,400 years after the fact, as to now is this every word of

the Pentateuch? Probably not.

The Jewish scribes generally, it's sort of a truism in Orthodox Judaism and so on, that there are 613 commandments in the Torah proper. They have counted, you know how they count things, which is good. I don't mean that in any kind of a disparaging way, but you know, the Masoretes counted every word in a book, counted the words on a page, they had annotations, and it's great.

I approve that. It's a good thing. But they've gone through and methodically cataloged everything that passes for an imperative in the law, and they've counted 613 commandments.

Statutes, ordinances. So, I would guess, this is far more than the 10 words, the 10 commandments, but less than the entire corpus of Moses' literary output here. This is probably the statutes, the commandments proper, that were given.

These are the words to live by. I doubt that this is the history with Abraham and Isaac and Joseph and all that. That would be a lot of rocks to write all that down.

But you could imagine a set of 600 plus commandments could be conveniently located in a spot where people could come in. If you've been down to Dealey Plaza here in Dallas, near the Grassy Knoll and the bookstore and the book depository and so on that they've got down there, there is a plaza with large granite slabs, I think they're granite, maybe they're marble, set up. If you've been there, there's a fountain, and it's kind of a reflecting, you can sit down and think, oh, you can mourn JFK or whatever it is you want to do down there.

This is kind of what I picture, or something sort of like Stonehenge, where it was a location with these manifestly not natural rocks that have been whitewashed in and written on. Now, I'll tell you why this is important. We need to know this, and we need to have it in mind when we go forward to chapter 9, and I'll tell you why when we get to chapter 9. But it's there, it's a billboard, it's written down in a language that is understandable.

The ancient Semitic languages, there was Proto, the alphabet that precedes the Aramaic alphabet that we have our modern Hebrew things in, that was readable. Akkadian and Aramaic and Arabic and Hebrew all come from common stock, and there are related cognate languages in use in the land. Other people, strangers, could decipher this billboard.

That's important to understand. But look at the sequence. It fascinates me that in Deuteronomy it says, On the day set up the stones, whitewash them, and write out the law, so that when you have crossed over you may enter the land which the Lord your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Therefore it shall be when you have crossed over the Jordan that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. We're getting this typical Hebrew, I'm going to tell you what I'm going to tell you, I'm going to tell you, and then I'm going to tell you what I told you. And so again, what is the emphasis here? When God repeats himself, better pay attention.

The Ten Commandments are given twice. Here he says again, Now on Mount Ebal set up these stones, whitewash them with lime. There you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones.

You shall not use an iron tool. You shall build with whole stones the altar of the Lord your God, and offer burnt offerings on it, peace offerings, eat there, rejoice before the Lord your God, and you shall write very plainly on the stones, what? All the words of this law. A third time now.

What is the emphasis in this Mount Ebal thing? Get the billboard up. Write the words of the law on it. 613 statutes, ordinances, commandments.

Right? Three times God says this. Now, go back to Joshua 8. Verse 30. After they heap up the stones over the king of Ai, after he's been hung on a tree, curses everyone that hangs on a tree, Joshua built an altar to the Lord God of Israel on Mount Ebal, as Moses had commanded the children of Israel, as is written in the book of the law.

He got the construction of the right altar of whole stones. We'll talk about that in a minute. And they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings.

And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones. Now, it is possible that Joshua actually followed the sequence that's given over in Deuteronomy. But the way it's presented here in Joshua, it sounds like he reversed the order.

He built the altar first, offered the sacrifices first, and then wrote the law. It's recorded that way for us in the scripture. Now, is that significant? What do you think? God says three times, it's my word, it's my word, it's my word.

And with my word on display, build an altar and offer the sacrifice. So that when you enter the land, you can enjoy the blessings because you will be obedient. So the sacrifices and offerings are offered in the shadow, if you will, of these stones where God's word has already been broadcast, has already been written.

As it were, these sacrifices and offerings are a response and a gratitude and an expression of commitment to what is written on these stones. Is that a fair assessment? So what happens when you come to Joshua 8 and the order is reversed? Well, it's the ritual that we're focusing on. God said build an altar, God said offer an offering, and it's in God's word, and we're doing what God's word says in building the altar and offering the sacrifices.

Oh, and by the way, we've got to write those words on a rock. But here it appears as though the sacrifice and the offering and the altar building, scrupulously adhering to the instructions, is done, then the law is put up. Then all Israel with their elders and officers and judges stood on either side of the ark.

Half of them were in front of Gerizim, half of them in front of Ebal. And afterward, he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings. There was not one thing that he didn't read to everyone.

But you get the idea that the reading of the law came after. Now, I would suggest, I wouldn't die for this, but it strikes me that the order is reversed in Joshua. And I think this is a harbinger of things to come.

This foreshadows the problem that is going to plague Israel all through their history. The ritual comes ahead of the reality. The formalism, the legalism, the strict adherence to mechanical instructions trumps hearing and heeding the essence of God's word and God's will.

And it strikes me that God three times in Deuteronomy says it's all about those words. And with those words up, now you can respond. Now your obedience will flow out of what you see and what you comprehend and what you respond to in the word.

But as is so typical for Israel, let's get the altar up and the sacrifices and then we'll troop and stomp and we'll hear the law. I'm not criticizing Joshua, but I just think the way it's presented here suggests that this is going to be a problem in Israel later on. God's going to eventually say over in Malachi, you're defiling my altar, you're defiling my sacrifices, you're screwing with my... In what way have we done it? I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

It is not the blood of goats and bulls. It's a pure heart. It's a contrite spirit.

It is that understanding and response to the word that God is really looking for. And obedience is to flow out of that. Well, the second thing I want to talk about here is this idea of the uncut stones.

We addressed it briefly. But why the emphasis on that? Why does God even say that? Why can't they make a nice, smooth, polished, trapezoidal sort of an altar that slopes up gently and gleams in the sun? Why does God specify this? First of all, what is an altar? An altar elevates the sacrifice. You remember one of the early episodes in Genesis is the contracting of covenant between God and Abraham.

What does God tell Abraham to do? Split those animals in half? And Abraham sits there all day long with these flies. It's a warm climate over there, I'm telling you. And these pieces, all day long, Abraham sits and he waits and he waits and he waits.

Sun goes down, he's still sitting there with these halved animals. And then there's the

smoking lantern and God passes between the pieces. What are those animals laying on? They're on the ground.

And they are not sacrifices. They symbolize something else. They basically symbolize the curse.

They symbolize the destruction that has come from sin. They are laying on the cursed ground. What does an altar do for a sacrifice that is going to be offered to God as a sweet-smelling savor, as an *oli*, as a peace offering, or whatever it may be? What does the altar do? Gets the sacrifice up off the ground, right? Why didn't Israel just slaughter things on the ground? Why an altar? Gets it up off the ground.

But the altar is made out of the very same materials the ground is made out of. And even though it elevates it, it is still tied to it. It is of the earth.

What is man made of? God formed man out of stardust. This is what Crosby stills nationally. We are stardust.

We have to get back to the garden and all that. If you want to talk about some backward theology, listen to music lyrics. But that is what the whole Woodstock song is.

If you have ever listened to it, it is old now, I am dating myself. But if you listen to the words of that song, we are stardust, we are this, that, and the other, and we have to quit fighting wars and we have to get back to the garden. Well, we are not stardust from God's point of view.

We are mud. Merle Travis got it right. Some people say man is made out of mud.

And we are. Dust thou art, unto dust shalt thou return. Earth dust, cursed ground.

And the death is there. And the earth soaks up the blood of the sacrifice just as the earth soaked up the blood of Abel. And it is uncut stones.

It is unadorned earth of which the altar is to be raised. Now we get this over in Exodus chapter 20. Turn with me over to Exodus chapter 20 verse 24.

This is important because it is mentioned in Deuteronomy chapter 27. It is mentioned and emphasized in Joshua chapter 8. Joshua made the altar according to the word of the Lord, uncut stones, against which no tool has been wielded. God is in heaven.

In our earthly terms, he is pictured as being above us and over our heads. In reality, he is transcendent. He is eminent.

He is in a dimension that we do not have access to. It is not like you can get in a rocket and go far enough to find God somewhere in the distant galaxies. But for purposes of demonstration, God is up.

He is high and in the unattainable realms beyond what we can reach. So the altar is an elevation that is built up out of earth and stones. And this raises the sacrifice between heaven and earth.

And yet it still rests on that which is earthly. And this foreshadows the work of Christ. Christ takes on the form of a servant.

He takes on our flesh. He emptied himself and took on the form of a servant. He is of the same stuff of which we are made.

And he is not going to be sacrificed ultimately on an altar, but on a tree. But there is a link between altars and hanging on a tree in the Old Testament. Both of them partake of the curse.

The ground, the boulders, the soil is cursed. But cursed is the ground for your sake. God tells Adam in the garden.

Adam, by the way, Adamah is the word for dirt in Hebrew. Adam's name is basically Dirt Boy, Dirt Man. Hello, Dirt.

Adam, Adam, Adamah, it's all mud. So it's raised up, but it still rests on that. And that's because, why is there a sacrifice? It's because of the curse.

You wouldn't need a sacrifice if there was no curse. But, God turns cursing to blessing. God takes that curse and makes it a meeting place.

The altar is the meeting place. Look at Exodus 20. It says here that to make these altars of uncut stone, an altar of earth you shall make for me.

You shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings. Notice that's exactly the offerings that are specified for this Mount Ebal, Mount Gerizim thing. And you remember the significance.

From our Leviticus study, you know what the Olah, the whole burnt offering is, right? Remember the significance of the whole burnt offering? It's not a sin offering. What is the Olah, the whole burnt offering? Remember the symbolism of it? It's the ox, it's the bullock. This is the, as the Old Hymn title says, put your all on the altar.

This is the Romans 12, 1 and 2 idea. I symbolically dedicate all of myself. It's a whole burnt offering.

Present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. It's your reasonable service. The ox is the bulldozer, the tractor of the ancient world.

And it is the symbol of strength. I dedicate my strength. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and your strength.

All your strength. It is a dedication offering. And that's why it is offered here at Ebal and Gerizim.

In the shadow, ideally, in the shadow of these words of the law, I dedicate myself, I commit myself, because of what God has done, because of his deliverance, because of his great name, because of his grace, because of his glory. I dedicate myself. This is my reasonable service.

In the light of what he has done, in the light of what he has revealed, I dedicate myself. That's the whole burnt offering. How about the peace offering? Remember the peace offering? It's kind of a bracket there.

Remember when we went through Leviticus? You start with the whole burnt offering, you work through ascent and trespass, all that. And when you get to the peace offering, the fellowship offering, this is the one where you share a meal with God. It starts with commitment.

It starts with dedication. And it moves through. I stand at the door and knock.

You open the door, I will come in and we will share a meal, Jesus says. I will sup with that man who will hear my voice and open the door. And that's what the peace offering is.

This is the mature believer partaking, sharing a meal, like Abram did with God, back in Genesis. Remember Sarah laughing in the tent, that whole thing? Right before Sodom and Gomorrah? Sharing a meal with the Lord. And so it spans the gamut.

And this is fellowship. This is like-mindedness. This is intimacy.

This is, I will be their God and they will be my people. I will dwell with them. I will make their home my home with them.

This is what we experience when Jesus says, if you abide in me and I abide in you, my words abide in you. The abiding of Jesus Christ is exactly parallel. His personal presence is exactly parallel with the presence of God's work.

If any man loves me, the one who has my words, he keeps them. He is the one that loves me. I and my Father will come to him and make our home with him.

Christ formed in you the hope of glory. It's all tied up in that. That's the peace offering.

We studied that in detail. So, that's the two kinds of offerings specified. Notice, it doesn't say offer a sin offering.

It doesn't say offer a trespass offering. It doesn't say do the day of atonement thing here. This is all about relationship, commitment, dedication to the word of God written on the stones.

Notice in verse 24 here, burn offerings and peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record my name, I will come to you and I will bless you. God chooses the places where these altars are constructed.

It's not just any old where. God says, the place where I record my name. The place where I establish my name.

Literally, it says the place where I cause my name to be remembered. And you know how someone would achieve a great victory or experience a great blessing and they would build an altar to the Lord there? God has manifested his name in deliverance, in blessing, in protection, in salvation. And they would build an altar there.

God caused his name to be remembered in that place. If you make me an altar of stone, God says in verse 25, you shall not build it of hewn stone. For if you use a tool on it, you have profaned it.

You have defiled it. If you try to change... Who made the rocks? Why do those rocks have that shape? God has caused his name to be remembered in a particular place. So you're going to look around and build an altar to commemorate and to offer a whole burnt offering.

My response to the remembrance of your name, O Lord, is my commitment. My total dedication of myself. My heart, my soul, my strength.

And fellowship, peace offering. I share in the meat of the sacrifice. Some of it goes to God in the smoke, and some of it I eat.

And I celebrate. I share a meal. This is fulfilled ultimately in the kingdom.

Remember Jesus' parable about sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom? The parable of the householder who has the feast all prepared and people come to the door and he closes it and says, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity. Lord, Lord, in your name.

Sharing a meal. This is intimacy. This is reward.

This is closeness. Don't screw that up by... Think of it this way. If somebody invited you over for a meal, and they've gone to great pains, and they've prepared that meal, and they've done all the things, and you say, you know what this salad really needs is some paprika and some... I don't know what you put in salad.

I'm going to put some meats and some garlcs in this salad. That will really make it better. You're a guest.

At this place where God has caused His name to be remembered, God has made provision. God has linked heaven and earth. The sacrifice is going to be there,

suspended as it were between heaven and earth.

It's still resting on boulders and soil that God made. Don't think that you're going to somehow... Well, I will construct a great ziggurat here to commemorate God's name. It's not about you and your ziggurat.

It's not about you and your carving techniques and your stone masonry and how well you can mortar and construct. It's all of grace. It is all God.

And here's the most important thing. God turns cursing to blessing. God parlays the cursed stones of the ground, the soil of the ground.

He uses it to make a way of deliverance. And the focus, when you look at that altar, is not, boy, I really got a nice sheen on that granite block there. That thing really shines.

It is, look at how God has turned cursing to blessing. That's cursed earth right there. And yet, without it, I would not be able to offer this sacrifice of praise and of dedication and of fellowship.

It is because of the curse that I have an appreciation for God's saving grace. And what is the application of all of this? Why do you not use any... And I'll tell you one application, at least something to think about. To the extent that we build edifices.

You think about modern churches, megachurches, and the architecture, and the cathedrals. This is not necessarily new in the modern realm. You go back to the cathedrals and so on.

Cathedrals are monuments to what? Architects, and stonemasons, and stained glass makers, and gilders, and statue makers, and bi-relief carvers, and you walk around and it's stunning. And it's wonderful. But, did Jesus ever walk around in a cathedral? Did the early church meet in such settings? It doesn't mean that people are all cursed and wrong if they're going to meet in a really nice church.

I mean, I enjoy a nice church or chapel or whatever as much as the next person. But just think of the principle. The focus and the emphasis is God's word comes first.

And in its light and through its revelation, we respond to God's work, God's converting of cursing to blessing, God making a way and bridging the great gulf between heaven and earth, between righteousness and sinfulness. And it's all about God. Don't distract from that with human performance, human talent, human... Let me say praise God over and over, but I'm really kind of trying to dazzle you with my footwork here.

The humans involved in any sort of worship are to get themselves out of the way. Don't make an issue of yourself. Don't distract people from God and what God has done.

Don't chisel on the stones. And notice what comes next. This is always kind of puzzling at

first glance.

In verse 26, Nor shall you go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed on it. You think, well, that's kind of weird. Go up by steps.

Well, there's two things. First of all, in the land of Canaan, the contemporaries when God was dealing with His people and explaining about these altars, in this time and in this place, they were famous for stuff kind of like you see down in South America with Quetzalcoatl and the Aztecs and the Incas and these vast, ornate places of worship. And they were ziggurat-like.

It harps back to the Tower of Babel idea. We will build a great height of man's making. We will ascend.

We will rise. We will move up toward God under our own steam and by our own effort. And it speaks of that.

It symbolizes that. It manifests that whole idea. I will cooperate.

If you want to talk about the old Calvinist accusation against the Armenians, that, well, you're cooperating with God, that truly is, that there is such a thing. And people who think, well, it goes on in the Catholic Church and the offshoots from it that say, well, my efforts, my penances, my works, I'll do a bunch of things and that will add some righteousness. The saints have added righteousness that you can dip into.

A lot of us have a deficit, but they had a surplus, so it all goes into a big pool. You can dip out some of the righteousness of the saints. No.

No. It is all of grace. It is all of God.

And this nakedness idea, among other things. Remember, even the priests, if you go and look at the Levitical code for the garments of the priests, they had special trousers that started at the waist and went down below the thigh to make sure that their flesh was not exposed as they performed these duties. Why? You want to talk about a distraction when you're trying to worship and you get flashed.

This is the corruption. It's not about the priest. Don't get your eyes on the priest.

Don't be looking up the skirts of the priest. It's about God. It is what God has done.

And this altar of unhewn stones, it subtracts man out of the equation. All you can do is manipulate what is already here and is already cursed. It's God's acceptance of that sacrifice.

It's God's grace that you can even offer a sacrifice. Don't start gilding the lily here. And by the same token, I think it's a caution.

I think it would be a good thing for the modern day church to remember it's not how nice your building is. It's not how wonderful your multimedia presentation is. It isn't the works of righteousness which we have done.

It is according to His mercy that He delivers us, that He saves us. And it is the place where God causes His name to be remembered. Many modern day things that are done in the name of the church cause the church's name to be remembered, or cause an individual's name to be remembered instead of the Lord.

All of this goes back to Joshua 8. The application is, we tend to get bogged down and we think, I keep messing up. I've got a sinful nature. I can't seem to make any progress.

I've got to be setting sin. But the great thing is, God works all things together for good to those who love Him, to those who are called according to His purpose. Keep His purpose in view.

Set up the rocks with that bright whitewash that you can spot from a distance. Anybody from miles around, remember now, Mount Ebal is an elevation, right? Anybody walking anywhere through that valley, anywhere between those two mountains is going to see this bright flash of white and they're going to say, what the heck is that? Because remember, the Israelites have come 30 miles up and they're leaving. And they're going to be 30 miles away in a couple of days, right? And all that's left is this great flashing bright monument that gets hit by the sun all day long.

Because remember, Ebal and Gerazim are north and south. Sun's going to shine on this thing all day long. And this white reflector is going to be there.

And the Word of God, you know, people say, that is so cruel that God sent those Israelites in there to slay all of those harmless, hapless Canaanites and Amorites and Perizzites and Girgashites and all these other ites that are in there. The poor hapless people didn't know what was going to hit them. Come on.

There's a great monument with the Word of God, 613 of His commandments splashed all over it there. Anybody in the land is going to hear about that and say, boy, you know what it says on that rock? The Israelites came over and wrote that thing, and then they left. Anybody who says, you know, now there's a God worth worshiping.

I've heard what happened in Egypt. I've heard what happened in Jericho. I've heard what happened in Arab.

This is the real deal. And here's the Word of God. It's on a billboard.

That's what that excursion is all about. And God says, look, my people are the first ones who ought to be responding to this thing. I'm going to leave it here for everybody else to read, but Israel gets it first.

Israel is encamped. Six tribes on one side, six tribes on the other. There are blessings and cursings associated with this, and it's read out to them.

They get it first. Well, it's very important. But it's a reminder to us that even in the fallen nature, fallen world, prince of the power of the air, rulers of the darkness of this age, principalities and powers and so on, God works all of that together for good.

When we have manifestations of the curse in our life, when the boulders and the soil come up, you know, this is the curse because of man, right? When you look at a boulder and you look at dirt, why is that stuff cursed? It didn't start out cursed. God looked around on the earth and saw that it was good. Tov, right? Why is there a curse on the ground? Why is there a curse on creation? That's our fault.

We did that. We screwed up what was Tov. Now, think about the Jordan.

Think about the river. What does that represent? Flood tide, the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. This is the uncontrollable, too strong for man.

Today, with all of our wonderful technology, we can't quell a raging sea. We can't handle flood waters in California or the Mississippi or anywhere else. When that thing decides to flood, we're helpless.

It's beyond our strength. Powers beyond ours. And in particular, the forces of darkness are pictured as troubled water.

That's why God parted the Yom Suf for Israel to come out of Egypt. That's why God parted the Jordan for Israel to enter into the land. God makes a way through these powers that are too much for us.

And it's not our fault. We didn't have anything to do with the fallen angels. We didn't have anything to do with those.

But, notice, God didn't say, And behold, thou shalt take thy magic bucket and go scoop the water out of the river so that thou mayest go across. Those things were beyond our control and God deals with them. God stacked up the Jordan 17 miles upstream.

God parted the Red Sea before the Israelites when they were backed up against it by their enemies. God handled all of that, right? But when it comes to the cursed earth, it's the man who stacks up the stones. It's the man who gets the sacrifice.

It's the man who cuts the neck of the ox or the sheep or the lamb. It's the man who prepares and offers the sacrifice. Why? Because we did this to ourselves.

There's the angelic component, the conflict between the fallen and unfallen angels that has expressed itself down here in human history. And then there is the part that's all us.

And God will deal with the angelic.

We can trust Him. People say, Oh, the devil's after me. Demon oppression.

Don't worry about that. God's got them in hand. If He needs to part the sea, if He needs to speak and say, Peace, be still, that stuff's over with.

God's got the authority to handle that. People that worry about angels and worry about demons are worrying about the wrong thing. That is totally in God's hand and care.

But the earth, that's our responsibility. We take those boulders and stack them up. We bring the sacrifice and put it on the altar.

We avail ourselves of God's grace in the shadow, in the sight of, reading those words of the law. That's our part. That's our responsibility.

That's what you have pictured here. That's why this Mount Ebal, Mount Gerizim thing is so pivotal. That's why they do it in the day that they enter the land.

Because it is associated with possession of inheritance. Believers are going to be raised. Believers have eternal life.

But if you want to possess the land, if you want to enjoy the milk and the honey and the fruit of God's covenant blessings, Israel, you'd better write the word of God large and sacrifice and dedicate and fellowship right in the midst of it. But they kind of get it backwards. They do the sacrifice first.

Well, God said build an altar. God said don't hew any stones. Chapter and verse, dotting the i's, crotting the t's, you know, yodes and tittles.

We've got it all down. We've done all that. Oh yeah, we're supposed to read the law.

So we whitewash that and we've got it there and we're going to read it out and we're going to stand here all day and listen to it. We've kind of already done the sacrifice thing and there's no real sense of dedication having heard all that the Lord has said we will do. You don't get that here.

And that's their fatal flaw. We don't want to make that mistake. We'll pause here and take a break.

When we come back, we'll begin Joshua chapter 9.