

LEADER GUIDE

DEUTERONOMY

A CHALLENGE TO A NEW GENERATION

GOD'S PROMISES DECLARED

BIG IDEA: God's faithfulness is revealed in the Spiritual Markers of our lives.

DATE: Sunday, July 19, 2026

SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 27:1-15; Johsua 8:30-35

OPENING QUESTION

What is the most impressive monument you have seen?

Maybe it was the Washington Monument, the St. Louis Arch or the Statue of Liberty. Have people share about a monument they have seen that was impressive.

What was most memorable about it?

Was it the size or scope? Was it what it stood for or symbolized? What makes that monument stick out to you?

What is one monument you have never seen but would really like to?

From Stone Henge to the Eiffel Tower to memorials all over Washington, D.C., humans have always wanted to create something impressive that would be remembered. This goes all the way back to the Tower of Babel in Genesis. Some monuments are meant to glorify a king or individual selfishly. Others are to mark an important event, battle, or location.

Today we're going to look at God's command to the Israelites through Moses to create memorials to His faithfulness. These were meant to serve a specific purpose—to remind them of the curses and blessings of following the Laws God had given them.

SETTING THE STAGE

In Deuteronomy 27, we find Moses commanding Israel to set up an altar of remembrance – one that communicated their history and identity; one that communicated they were under Yahweh's rule. He then calls out specific rules and calls on the community to obey. Chapter 28 continues with a detailed list of blessings for obedience and the curses that will follow for disobedience.

SCRIPTURE READING

Deuteronomy 27:1-15 (CSB)

Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, "Keep every command I am giving you today. ²When you cross the Jordan into the land the LORD your God is giving you, set up large stones and cover them with plaster. ³Write all the words of this law on the stones after you cross

to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. ⁴When you have crossed the Jordan, you are to set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I am commanding you today, and you are to cover them with plaster. ⁵Build an altar of stones there to the LORD your God—do not use any iron tool on them. ⁶Use uncut stones to build the altar of the LORD your God and offer burnt offerings to the LORD your God on it. ⁷There you are to sacrifice fellowship offerings, eat, and rejoice in the presence of the LORD your God. ⁸Write clearly all the words of this law on the plastered stones.”

⁹Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all Israel, “Be silent, Israel, and listen! This day you have become the people of the LORD your God. ¹⁰Obey the LORD your God and follow his commands and statutes I am giving you today.”

¹¹On that day Moses commanded the people, ¹²“When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. ¹³And these tribes will stand on Mount Ebal to deliver the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. ¹⁴The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice: ¹⁵“Cursed is anyone who makes an idol—a thing detestable to the Lord, the work of skilled hands—and sets it up in secret.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

DISCUSSION

PHYSICAL MARKERS OF GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

READ: Deuteronomy 27:1-10

What was Israel instructed to create? How, or with what materials, were they to create it? When were they to create it?

Setting up large stones conveyed the stability and permanence of the law. We don’t have their specific dimensions, but we do know they had to be whole and uncut, and we know they had to be large enough to chisel all the words of the law onto them. Archaeologists have uncovered the place where these stones were on Mt. Ebal. Excavations found a large altar (30x23 feet) made of uncut stones. The pottery dates back to the time of Israel’s settlement in the region.

When verse 8 states to write the words of the law clearly, the combination of Hebrew verbs conveys the idea of doing something well. This was a thoughtful, deliberate action. Not only would Israel be built upon the covenant expressed in the law, but the law was etched in stone. Papyrus scrolls can be burned up. Metal sheets can be easily transported. But rocks remain in place.

How can spiritual markers, such as these stones, serve as reminders of God’s faithfulness to keep His promises?

VERBAL REMINDERS OF THE RESULTS OF FOLLOWING GOD

READ: Deuteronomy 27:11-15

Next, Moses told the tribes to divide into two groups, one going to Mt. Ebal and the other going to Mt. Gerizim. These two mountains are at the north and south of a valley close to the city of Shechem. This location is far from random. Shechem is the first place Abraham stopped when he

entered the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:6-7). This is the same place where the Lord promised to give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan some 430 years earlier. From the days of Abraham, the Lord set apart this territory for the children of Abraham, and centuries later, here was Israel – Abraham's offspring – standing in the land God promised. This moment in Israel's history was a declaration that the Lord would do what He said He would do. Today the ancient city of Shechem is known as Nablus in the West Bank of Israel.

The Levites (priestly tribe) were to lead the people in a responsive reading of the law. As they recited the 10 Commandments, the people were to respond "Amen!" or "So be it!". The pattern of these statements reflects the entire theology of Deuteronomy. First, the Lord chose to be their God. Then, they chose to love and obey the Lord. Then they chose to love and obey the Lord. Obedience to the Lord's commands did not *create* a relationship with Him, but it did *reflect* a relationship with Him.

When was this ceremony to take place? What was the role of the Levites in it? What was the role of the people in it?

Why did God want to give His people a verbal reminder of His commandments?

COVENANT → RELATIONSHIP → OBEDIENCE

THE COVENANT RENEWED

READ: Joshua 8:30-35

Now look up and read Joshua 8:30-35. Remember, the book of Joshua gives the historical narrative of Israel crossing the Jordan and inhabiting the promised land. This passage is the fulfillment of the commands of Deuteronomy 27

What do you imagine it was like for the Israelites to hear "all the words of the law" read aloud to them in their new home?

What were they reminded of about God? About worshiping the Lord through exclusive devotion?

The Israelites' existence in the land bore witness to God's faithfulness. Should they ever question or doubt whether He would fulfill His promises to them, they needed only to look at the place they were standing and remember the miraculous and powerful words He did on their behalf, from the original covenant with Abraham on through the exodus and across the Jordan – all because he chose to set His love on them. The very ground beneath their feet bore witness to God's covenant faithfulness.

We who live in the covenant blessings now can benefit from looking back and remembering too. When you find yourself questioning God's faithfulness, look back at where He has brought you from and the faithfulness He has shown you. Your very relationship with Him is impossible apart from His miraculous intervention and His faithfulness to His promises to all generations.

OUR SPIRITUAL MARKERS TODAY

Henry Blackaby, the author of the famous Bible Study "Experiencing God", called these things "Spiritual Markers" based on the practice in the Old Testament of building stacks of stone to commemorate God's faithfulness. He said when we look back over our lives, we should see these

markers lining up reminding us of the past but also pointing to the future. The same way the Israelites needed physical reminders of God's character, we do too.

Today, what is our reminder of God's laws and God's promises to us? (The Bible; and under the New Covenant, the law is written on our hearts.)

"You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." (2 Cor. 3-2-3)

What are some physical or verbal spiritual markers God has used in your life to remind you of His promises and faithfulness?

Some people have verses displayed in their home or when they visit a particular place it reminds them of something God did for them there. Others may wear a cross or a Christian wristband. Some people have literally tattooed something on their body that reminds them of the Lord. Whatever it is, physical spiritual markers can be helpful. They point to who God is, what He has done, and what He will continue to do. The same is true of verbal reminders—they could be a song, reading a verse or hearing someone share their testimony. Be prepared to share an example from your own life.

RESPONSE

Reflect on God's faithfulness in your life. Picture each thing He has done as a spiritual marker or stack of stones like the Israelites used. As you look back on your life you will see these reminders of His faithfulness in the past. If you have never done it, you may want to write some of these down. You may want to build or buy something that reminds you and put it somewhere you will see it. Look for ways this week to incorporate spiritual markers into your life.

Close in prayer thanking God for His faithfulness throughout all generations. Thank him for His commands and ways that bring us life. Pray for your LifeGroup to see God's character revealed in what they see and hear this week.

COMMENTARY

In the days of Moses, Israel learned that much was at stake in the most serious commitment of all, the commitment to follow the Lord. In this section we see the blessings and curses associated with Israel's relationship with Yahweh.

Deuteronomy 27:1-8

As chapter 27 opens, it is clear that Moses was addressing Israel on an occasion that differed from the one chronicled in 5:1–26:19. Moses was joined by the elders of Israel (27:1,9), a group of respected leaders who played lesser roles in leading Israel's tribes, as he spoke to the holy congregation. The topic addressed in this chapter is not mentioned anywhere else in the book.

Israel's leaders gathered together to provide a final reminder to all the people of Israel (27:1) regarding life's highest and most important task—knowing God's will and doing it. At all times, but especially when Israel entered the promised land, they must be careful to keep every command

that Moses and the elders were giving God's people to follow (27:1).

Moses and the other leaders understood that making a commitment to follow the Lord's commands was not the same as actually keeping those commands. The Israelites, like all the rest of us, needed something to help them in the task of translating commitment into action. So Moses and the elders directed the Israelites to do two things that would help them in this task.

First, the Israelites were to create a physical reminder of the covenantal commitment that existed between the Lord and them. This project was to be started as soon as Israel entered the promised land—literally at the time Israel crossed the Jordan into the land the LORD their God was giving them (27:2). The reminder was to be prominent and permanent, consisting of large stones that were set up ... on Mount Ebal (27:4), a 3,100-foot-high mountain located in the central regions of the promised land. Israelite workmen were to cover these large stones with plaster in order to create a surface that could be engraved. A skilled craftsman was then to inscribe on the plastered stones all the words of God's law and to do it very clearly.

Second, the Israelites were to build the altar of the LORD and offer burnt offerings on it (27:6) along with fellowship offerings (27:7). This suggests that God expected the Israelites to return to this site on a regular basis—up to three times a year (see Deut. 16:16). Because the altar was to be situated close to the inscribed monument; that meant that everyone who came to Mount Ebal to make a sacrifice to God would have been confronted with a written copy of God's word. It seems that God wanted the Israelites to keep their knowledge of His laws fresh in their minds.

The sacred altar at Mount Ebal was to be made of uncut stones (27:6) on which the Israelites had not used any iron tool (27:5). Altars constructed in this way conformed to requirements Moses gave Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:25). Though the text does not give a reason why this type of stone had to be used, it may have served two purposes: to make Israelite altars look different from those of pagans, and to distinguish them from the altar Israel would construct at God's chosen temple site.

Deuteronomy 27:9-15

As the days drew near for the Israelites to cross the Jordan River and begin the sober task of conquering the promised land, Moses and the Levitical priests gave God's people a special affirmation and with it, a special task (27:9). Their words were especially important, so the leaders ordered the assembly to be silent and listen carefully to what Moses, and the priests were about to say. First came the affirmation: This day the Israelites had become the people of the LORD their God (27:9). The point of these words is *not* that Israel had never been the people of God before. Rather, the leaders' words are best understood to mean that Israel's identity as the people of God was now to be expressed in a dramatically different way. The nation that had lived quietly at the margins of human society for a generation was about to play a much more active role on the regional stage of history. No longer would nearby people groups think of the Israelites as nothing more than a band of former slaves wandering around the region. Henceforth they would be known as *the people of Yahweh*—an advancing army of holy warriors, blazing forth into Canaan as a purging fire of divine judgment.

Firmly attached to this huge new role that Israel was to play was an equally large responsibility. As the Lord's earthly representatives in their generation, Israel must be supremely careful to obey the LORD their God and follow His commands and statutes (27:10).

After Israel's leaders had spoken these words to the group, Moses gave the people an additional set of instructions as he expanded on something he had mentioned earlier, in 11:26-32. After the

Israelites had crossed the Jordan River and advanced to Mount Ebal they were to have a special one-time event at that location. It was to be a massive gathering involving all 12 of Israel's tribes. Six of the tribes—Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph (that is, Ephraim and Manasseh, which are treated here as one), and Benjamin were to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people (27:12). Opposite, them on the other side of a wide, shallow valley, stood Israel's remaining six tribes: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali (27:13). These were to stand on Mount Ebal and deliver the curse (27:13) that Moses was about to give them.

The intended purpose of this highly public event was not stated here, just as it was not given in the related instructions of chapter 11. However, we can make a reasonable guess based on what the Levites were told to proclaim in a loud voice to every Israelite present at that unique ceremony (27:14). The Levites were commanded to pronounce 12 curses in the hearing of the 12 tribes. It seems apparent that the event was intended to be a high-profile warning to the entire nation, reminding God's people of the dire consequences of disobeying God's commands.

The dozen curses to be spoken by the Levites cover a wide variety of topics. They touch on the subjects of religion, respectful treatment of people with a disability, property rights, sexual conduct, concern for justice, respect for life, and diligence in obeying God's law. These 12 curses were not intended to be the complete list of all behaviors that God hated. Rather, they were meant to serve as selective reminders—examples of types of behavior that were offensive to the Lord.

Joshua 8:30-35

When Joshua led the people into the Promised land, they first defeated Jericho and then took the city of Ai. Before moving any further, they stopped there to perform the ceremony Moses had instructed them to do. As soon as Joshua got to the mountains Ebal and Gerizim, without delay, and without caring for the unsettled state of Israel, or their enemies, he confirmed the covenant of the Lord with his people, as appointed by Moses in Deuteronomy 11 and 27. The peaks of these mountains are about 1.5 miles apart, but the bases of the mountains are only about 500 yards apart. This created a natural amphitheater between the mountains where all the people could gather and hear the Law of the Lord. They built an altar, and offered sacrifice to God, in token of their dedicating themselves to God, as living sacrifices to his honor. Every person in Israel participated from the richest to the poorest, from the youngest to the oldest, including those who were not Jewish but were living among them. This shows the inclusivity of God's faithfulness to all people. Six tribes were to stand at the foot of Mount Ebal facing six tribes standing at the foot of Mount Gerizim with the Ark of the Covenant (containing the Ten Commandments) sitting in the valley in between.

<https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/joshua-8/>

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