

What is the significance of Mount Ebal in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/mount-Ebal.html>

Mount Ebal is located in the Promised Land of Israel, near the middle of Samaria. It is one of a pair of twin peaks, the other being Mount Gerizim. Both mountains were designated by God for the reading of His blessings and curses Israel would incur for obeying or disobeying His law. Deuteronomy 11:26-29 records the Lord's words to Israel: "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God. . . . When the Lord your God has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses." The Bible identifies Mount Ebal as "near the great trees of Moreh, in the territory of those Canaanites living in the Arabah in the vicinity of Gilgal" (verse 30).

Today Mount Ebal is known as Sitti Salamiyah, so named for a female Islamic saint whose tomb stands on the eastern side of the ridge, just before the highest point. Tradition holds that the location of the twin peaks is such that people beneath the mountains could hear words being read on either. Over the centuries various groups have experimented with that claim.

God instructed Moses to build an altar of rough stones, covered with plaster, on Mount Ebal (Deuteronomy 27:2-3). The Israelites were to write the words of the law on this altar. However, God forbade Moses himself to enter the Promised Land because of his rebellion, so it was Joshua, his successor, who actually built the altar on Ebal (Joshua 8:30). God chose the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali to stand on Mount Ebal as the curses were pronounced as a warning to all Israel (Deuteronomy

27:13). The tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin were to stand on Mount Gerizim as the blessings on the people were pronounced (Deuteronomy 27:12).

After the battles of Jericho and Ai, Joshua led the people to Mount Ebal and did all that God had commanded Moses. He gathered the people together to read the law: "Half of the people stood in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had formerly commanded when he gave instructions to bless the people of Israel" (Joshua 8:33). With the children of Israel divided on the foothills of the two mountains, the Levites stood in the valley between them and read the words of the law. The reading was thorough: "Every word of every command that Moses had ever given was read to the entire assembly of Israel, including the women and children and the foreigners who lived among them" (verse 35, NLT).

The formal reading of the law in the people's presence and with their participation represented a renewal of the covenant. The curses that were read toward Mount Ebal as a warning to the Israelites in the Promised Land were a reminder that the Mosaic Covenant was conditional. Built in to the law were punishments for disobedience. Curses at Ebal were leveled against those who practiced idolatry, dishonored their parents, took advantage of the vulnerable, withheld justice, committed murder, took bribes, or committed various sexual sins. After each curse, the people were all to say, "Amen!" (Deuteronomy 27:15-26). This response showed that the people heard, understood, and agreed.

It is unknown why the Lord chose those particular mountains as symbols of His blessing and curses. Perhaps it was because they stood so close together that the people could hear all at once. God also wanted His people to understand that His blessings and curses

were separate. He did not even want them to be pronounced together. The Israelites were to be a holy people, set apart from the heathen nations around them (Exodus 19:6; 22:31; Leviticus 19:2). Mount Ebal stood as a warning that God takes sin seriously and that harsh consequences follow the breaking of His laws.