

The Curse

The Biblical record of the Fall opens with various curses being placed upon people, races, and things. The Gospel tells us of “redemption from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13), and the Revelation declares that “there shall be no more curse” (Revelation 22:3).

Through the years questions have often arisen as to precisely who is under what curse at this particular time, if anyone. There are wide ranges of opinions on these questions, usually based on some predisposition of the mind that rarely considers all the Biblical information on the matter. It will be our hope in this paper to shed some scriptural light in these obscure areas.

“Curse” is one of those generic words in the Bible, like “law”, and it has many uses and applications. Usually, it carries the status of an oath, and pronounces some sort of imprecation or execration toward an object. It differs from prophesies of evil in that prophesies have a fulfillment beyond which the evil does not continue. Curses, however, are in perpetual force.

Curses may have one of three sources: 1) God, 2) God-inspired men, or 3) Uninspired men. When God speaks a curse, it is unconditionally effective within its prescribed terms. No power in the universe may reverse it or set it aside. When men speak curses under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the curse has the same effect. The man is speaking in the place of the Almighty. Such curses as these are infallible, and must be taken seriously. To deny or to ignore them is no less insult to God than to ignore the gospel, or make it of none effect. When uninspired men curse, however, they speak vainly and emptily. However some may hope that their imprecations had force and power, they know them to be nothing but profane utterances of their frustrations or their wrath and hatred. In addition to these, there are sorcerers and idolaters who have a conditioned degree of effectiveness with their curses, *only* when the object of the curse rejects the truth of God and believes the lie. He then falls under the curse, not because of the power of the sorcerer’s curse, but because of the power of God’s conditional curse, which we will discuss later. Since the curses of uninspired men or demons are worthless, the only curses worthy of consideration are God’s. There are two categories, conditional and unconditional. Of these, some are temporal only, others are eternal as well as temporal. Sometimes a curse invokes a positive evil, and sometimes it is a mere deprivation or limitation which is effectively benevolent.

Of God’s unconditional curses recorded in the Bible, seven stand out and draw our attention above all others. We will consider these one by one and see if, and to what extent, they are yet in force. The criterion by which they will be judged will be: 1) Has the Bible recorded their retraction? 2) Can their phenomenon yet be observed?

1. **The serpent/Satan.** *“Thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life” (Genesis 3:14).* So far as the serpent is concerned, this curse invokes a positive evil. Generally speaking, snakes are loathed above all creatures, in spite of their beauty and grace. And though most are harmless and helpful, the first thing that comes to man’s mind on sight of a snake is, “Kill it”. It does no good to lecture and educate people on the value and virtue of snakes. Men have an inherent, God-given fear and repulsion of them. This curse is unconditional, temporal, yet still in force. The curse continues, however, to include the person behind the serpent, Satan himself. *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).* Hostility is made between Satan and mankind; and the ultimate triumph of the Seed (Christ) over Satan at the Cross is prophesied. This curse and prophecy invokes a positive evil, is unconditional, is primarily temporal, but has eternal consequences. It is yet in force.
2. **The Woman.** *“I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children’ and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Genesis 3:16).* A positive evil is invoked. The pain of childbirth is not envisioned by “sorrow”, but grief that will certainly accompany the bringing forth of depraved children into a depraved society. She will grieve and weep over her children as long as she lives. A deprivation or limitations is also invoked. Deference to the husband and subjection to him must not, however, be considered something to be endured. It is in itself a benevolent provision of our wise Creator which protects the woman (who was duped by the devil) in the guidance of her husband. That this temporal provision is still in force is attested to by 1 Timothy 2:11-14. The same passage asserts, however, that the child-bearing curse does not in any way interfere with her salvation. Nor does it give her any inferior position in the body of Christ where Jews, Greeks, slaves, freemen, male and female all stand on the same footing as heirs of God in Christ (Galatians 3:28). It should be pointed out that the terms of this curse are temporal only, and that it relates only to things of the flesh in this present life, e.g., grief in the bearing of children and a subordinate position to the man in the sphere of authority. It in no way demeans females or implies inferiority. Nor should it be considered a punishment greater than that borne by man. It is different, but in no way greater.
3. **The Earth.** *“Cursed is the ground . . . Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee” (Genesis 3:17-18).* A positive evil is invoked upon the earth. No longer will it bring forth good things in season only. It will bear weeds, brambles, briars. It will work contrary to man’s efforts to cultivate it. The whole order of created life falls under this temporal curse (Romans 8:20-22). Suffering, frustration, abuse and misuse abound everywhere in the earth, in mineral, plant and animal life. This curse continues in unabated force and will abound until that glorious day when God brings forth His redeemed sons in glorified bodies and cleanses His creation from the pollution it has been with since the Fall. Then, “No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow, Far as the curse is found!”
4. **Man.** *“In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee: . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; . . . for dust thou art” (Genesis 3:17-19).* The curse upon man is

tied directly to the curse upon the earth, and rightly so: Man was made its steward, and it is altogether appropriate that the sphere of his failure should be the sphere of his punishment.

This particular curse must be treated somewhat differently and more extensively than the others, because it involves, not just the male component of the race, but the whole of fallen mankind, male and female alike. Also, it speaks not only of literal and temporal considerations, but of spiritual and eternal things.

The first consideration of this curse, spiritual death, was already in force before Genesis 3:17. It is explicit in Genesis 2:17, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die". The moment of man's disobedience to God's condition of life was the moment he forfeited it and fell into total spiritual disability. The evidence of this is clear, from his feelings of guilt and aversion to the presence of God. This curse is still in force and is operative in all of Adam's posterity. Notwithstanding divine remedy, it is eternal as well as temporal. Unregenerate men shall be forever dead the their Creator.

Physical death, with all its attending mediate causes, is also a part of this curse. Bodily disease, disorder, deterioration, pain, sorrow, psychological suffering, are all included. Since these have to do strictly with the natural body and with the state of things in this temporal world, their durability parallels that of the natural body. They cease when it ceases. Spiritual redemption by regeneration and conversion does not lift this curse. It will only be lifted at the "redemption of the body" (Romans 8:23), when this "mortal puts on immortality". Only Christians have this hope.

"In the sweat of thy face" deserves special consideration. The two elements that comprise this literal phenomenon cannot be reasonably attributed to the Fall. The first is physical labor. That manual work was a blessing already engaged by Adam, is clear from Genesis 3:15. God did not put Adam in the garden and leave him to die of boredom, twiddling his thumbs all day. He gave him meaningful employment: "and put him into the garden of Eden to dress and keep it". It is a slander upon the goodness and wisdom of God to consider work a curse. It was intended to be a blessing, and should be considered and practiced with no other view. Nor can perspiration be considered a result of the Fall. It is simply God's wisely designed "air conditioning system" for the human body. As moisture evaporates from the skin, it absorbs heat and keeps the body cool. I think that it can be demonstrated that "in the sweat of thy face" refers to the broader spiritual application of "all the days of thy life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee". Surely the curse extends to men other than farmers who would be frustrated in their labors by thorns and thistles. And men sweat over many labors other than cultivating weeds out of their crops. "Thorns and thistles" more likely refer to the aggravating problems we encounter in our jobs, whatever they might be, the fruitlessness and emptiness of our bestowed labor. The "sweat of thy face" refers to the psychological frustration, the drudgery, the joylessness of empty, unfulfilling, meaningless work. "All the days of thy life" has reference to the tenure of the life of the Old Man, Adam, all the days of the Adamic life. With this perspective, this part of the curse is lifted at the application of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. When one becomes a new creature in Christ, the Old Man is reckoned dead. His objectives, values and principles (in which all the frustration, drudgery, empty meaninglessness of the life is rooted) no longer have any force in the Christian's life. He is free to do all his labor, whatever it might be, unto the Lord. He is no longer sweating to "make a mark", to achieve a goal, to impress someone, to get something significant done. Therefore, he can joyfully go about all his work, knowing well that his Creator expects nothing from him except single-hearted obedience and trust. "The sweat of thy face" extends only to the days of the Adam-life: They cannot intrude into the Christ-life. The priest is forbidden to "sweat" (Ezekiel 44:18).

5. **Cain.** *"And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (Genesis 4:11-12).* That this curse survives the one man upon which it was placed is seen from verse 14, "every one that findeth me shall slay me". Obviously, this man can be slain only once by one person, not "everyone.". The curse must, then, apply to either Cain's surviving ethnic race, or his spiritual race. Since the ethnic race cannot be identified as suffering this curse, and no record exists of God's lifting it, then we must conclude that it refers to his spiritual descendants.

Cain's spiritual descendants, broadly speaking, encompass all the non-elect, the Christ-rejecting multitudes who, though guilty of the blood of Christ, refuse to acknowledge their culpability and confess their sins. Their labors on the face of the earth will net them nothing. They bestow all their labors in vain, never enjoy the fruits of anything; and die, leaving it all behind. They are constant fugitives from the judgment of God, knowing His wrath against them, living in perpetual alienation, peaceless and miserable. They are vagabonds, running from place to place, ever seeking rest, never finding any; "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars" (Jude 13).

In a more particular sense, Cain's spiritual descendants are found in apostate Israel, who crucified their "brother", the Lord Jesus Christ, and have not to this day evidenced one whit of repentance. These are the only people on earth whom finding, "everyone hath slain". And also, it can be seen that everyone who has persecuted Israel has suffered the wrath of God. God has a mark upon her, for, "as concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, beloved for the fathers' sakes (Romans 11:28). This curse is unconditional, temporal, and yet in force. It is, however, lifted from anyone, Jew or gentile, at the application of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. We who are Christ's have found peace, fulfillment, joy and blessed rest. We have been permanently planted.

6. **Canaan.** *"And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant (Genesis 9:25-27).* Although this curse was spoken by a man, it must be considered God-inspired, because it is in no way refuted anywhere in scripture, and it can be observed yet in force. We shall demonstrate that its phenomenon is undeniable. To object to its validity merely to refute racial prejudice is to impeach the word of God and blindly ignore history. If the Bible is to be granted credence, then the whole of the human race certainly descended from the three sons of Noah. That there

are radical differences in the races that can in no way be attributed to environment, social circumstances or any outward causes, is certain. Let us first notice its more positive assertions:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Shem.” The Judeo-Christian God is Shem’s God. Shem is the progenitor of the Hebrew race. “God shall enlarge Japheth.” The Japhetic tribes are the empire-builders of this earth. They are the innovators, the accomplishers of this world. “And he shall dwell in the tents of Shem.” Japheth dwells in the spiritual tents of Shem. He has embraced Shem’s God. He is redeemed by a Jewish Saviour. His Bible, both New and Old Testaments, was written, to a man, by Jews. He joined Shem’s church. It was a Jewish household of faith that made up the first New Testament Church. Japheth also dwells in the temporal tents of Shem. The Jews are the landlords of this earth. If you will trace the owner of your home mortgage far enough, you will find Shem holding the papers on it. The nations of this earth are up to their ears in debt . . . every one of them, including the wealthiest, the United States of America. Who hold the collateral? I will give you one guess. Japheth gets things done, but he does it on Shem’s money, and Shem has the final say on ownership.

Now, Canaan is said to be a servant of the servants. Let us say at the outset, this passage is in no way a warrant for people with illusions of superiority to put other races “in their place”. In the first place, it will be impossible to identify, on outward appearance, a descendant of Canaan. If Ham were black, as it seems he was, Canaan was certainly not his only descendant. His other sons carried his color, but not his curse. In the second place, the accomplishments of a host of black people in the history of the race makes the charge that all blacks fit under Canaan’s curse ridiculous. In the third place, servile oriented people appear in colors other than black. In the fourth place, if a person is a bona-fide descendant of Canaan and belongs to a servitude-inclined race, it does not mean that he is inferior to anyone else. Different does not mean inferior. These have their own peculiar superior qualities as well as any other race.

But the denial that the earth bears record of a race of people starkly lacking in initiative, ambition and vision, is based on a blind prejudice which ignores the facts. Peoples who have had access to the finest cultures and technologies five thousand years ago, have nevertheless remained in primitive stagnation until visited by other peoples interested in developing their natural resources. Some of these still exhibit an inability to govern themselves and manage their new-found wealth.

This curse is unconditional, temporal, and yet in force. Galatians 3:28 no more abolishes the curse of Canaan than it does for the woman. A female is still a female with all the peculiarities of the distaff side. A Canaanite is yet a Canaanite, though he be a Christian Canaanite. This is why the Bible does not condemn slavery. There are people whose natural disposition renders them better suited to serve a benevolent master who can manage his affairs well. So far as the abuse of slaves is concerned, the same Bible that bids a slave serve his master well, enjoins the master to be kind and generous with those who serve him, be they hired free-men or owned slaves. Nor does servitude mean slavery in the bad sense. Indeed, the Lord proclaimed greatness in the Kingdom of God to be proportional to our servanthood, not our lordship. It is the carnal-minded peoples of this world who exalt the boss and belittle the vassal. Spiritual values do the opposite.

7. **Ishmael.** “*And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren*” (Genesis 16:12). This man, Abraham’s offspring “of the flesh”, not of promise, is declared to be an implacable, unreasonable warrior. The Arab nations which have descended from him do yet prove this unconditional, temporal curse yet in force. This hostile nature is aggravated by their deep and fanatical devotion to the false religion of Mohammed. They must constantly be at war, if not with non-Arab states, then among themselves. It is futile to try to negotiate peace with such a people. They cannot live with peace. And they will not change so long as the earth stands, unless they are regenerated by the grace of God and given a new heart. In that event, the curse experienced by natural Ishmael is lifted, and he becomes a “seed of Abraham by faith”.

Conditional Curses. Deuteronomy 27 gives a string of conditional curses which will befall anyone who commits the particular sin to which they are attached. Chapter 28 gives a long list of curses promised under the broad warning, “If thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day” (Deuteronomy 28:15). These curses, so far as the literal evil they promise, applied primarily to the Hebrew Theocracy in the land of Canaan. But their spiritual applications pass on to all peoples of all ages to whom the word of God comes.

Then there are those curses pronounced by sorcerers, witches and idolaters. For the person outside of covenant union with Christ, these imprecations may have serious results, especially if one believes in them and fears the evil power behind the sorcerer. It is manifestly true that peoples who traffic with these evil powers do dreadful things to each other by means of these curses. But let it be now understood that such curses have power only over those who reject the truth of God’s word and believe the lie. They then have power, not because of the demon’s power to curse, but because God has already cursed all those who “will not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God”. So the demon or the sorcerer has no real immediate power to curse. He only becomes an instrument to make the lie the unbeliever believes effectual in practical temporal evil.

This brings us back to Galatians 3:13. We have all, by our own wicked unbelief and sins, fallen under every curse and imprecation in God’s holy law. Natural fallen man, descended from Adam, is nothing but dust, and as dust, Serpent’s meat. Our Substitute, Jesus Christ, has gone to the Cross, been nailed to the Tree, and in His body has become a curse, and has borne the Curse on our behalf, taking it altogether out of the way. He has “redeemed us from the curse of the Law”. Therefore, we have nothing to fear from men, angels or devils. No one can curse whom God has blessed. And He *has* assuredly blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus!! With such a Saviour, we can praise God to the heavens and laugh all Hell to scorn!!!