

## **A Biblical-Theological Understanding of Curse**

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### **Abstract**

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The Bible presents interconnected themes that contribute to the understanding of God’s redemptive mission. This paper examines the theme of curses as a theological motif throughout Scripture, highlighting the contrast between the original blessing and harmony in Genesis 1— 2 and the disruption caused by the Fall in Genesis 3. It examines how curses function in the redemptive storyline—whether as divine punishment, covenantal consequence, or instruments within God’s plan of redemption. It also looks at the portrayal of curses within the covenantal framework, where blessings and curses served as responses to Israel’s obedience or disobedience to the Mosaic Law. The prophetic literature anticipates the reversal of curses in the Messianic age, a concept affirmed in the New Testament through the person and work of Jesus Christ. This study also explores generational curses and examines scholarly debates regarding inherited consequences versus individual responsibility. The methodology employed is a redemptive-historical and biblical-theological approach to analyze key passages, including Genesis 3, Deuteronomy 27—28, Galatians 3:10–14, and Revelation 22:1–5. The study concludes that while sin introduced curses into the human experience, the redemptive work of Christ decisively reverses the curse. In Christ, believers are no longer under ancestral or covenantal condemnation but are recipients of abundant blessings and freedom, ultimately pointing toward the complete restoration of creation.

**Keywords:** Redemptive History, Blessings and Curses, Generational Curses, Covenants

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### **Introduction**

The biblical narrative begins with the blessings and harmony of creation in Genesis 1— 2, as God pronounces blessings on His creation. The blessedness of God encompassed fruitfulness, multiplication, dominion, and rulership for humanity, as well as the presence of God. However, the reality of curses emerged in Genesis 3 as a consequence of humanity’s



disobedience. It becomes a recurring theme throughout the Bible's redemptive history. It first appears in response to humanity's fall in Genesis 3, reemerges throughout Israel's covenantal journey, and is ultimately confronted and overturned through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Curses denote a lack of blessings, divine judgment, and an interrupted relationship between God, humanity, and creation.<sup>1</sup> A curse is "a ritual intended to invoke a deity to inflict harm or judgment," particularly within a covenant context.<sup>2</sup> Yet, in such a dark theme lies God's beam of grace and promises to reverse the state and restore the intended blessings.

The development of this concept begins in Genesis 3:14-19, as God pronounces consequences in response to Adam and Eve's disobedience. The response brings a scholarly debate on whether the statements constituted curses or should be understood as punishments and divine justice to humans.<sup>3</sup> Brueggemann argues that these statements bring an era of pain for humanity, but not a covenantal curse or maledictive sense.<sup>4</sup> However, G. K. Beale argues that the pronouncement in Genesis 3 presents the theological structure of curses revealed in the context of redemptive history.<sup>5</sup> The divergence poses a theological question for the church regarding the understanding of curses as a theme in the grand narrative of Scripture. The article approaches the question from a biblical-theological perspective. It examines its development from creation, the fall, and the progress of redemption and New creation to understand its functions within covenantal settings, prophetic anticipation, and Messianic fulfillment, with special attention to Galatians 3:10-14. The article also explores generational curses by examining their biblical foundation and theological implications, with the work of Christ on the cross serving as the central point of the discussion.

The study affirms that redemptive history culminates in profound hope, as the reality and effects of curses are entirely eradicated in the new creation, leaving no trace behind. Instead, the total reverse is done from curses to blessings through Christ. In Christ, the curse is confronted and broken, resulting in a new identity, a restored purpose, and full inclusion in the Abrahamic blessings, with the hope of a new creation where there will be no more curse.

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<sup>1</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2011), 124.

<sup>2</sup> David L. Petersen, "Curse," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1216.

<sup>3</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Faith*, Vol. 2, IVP Academic, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 190-92.

<sup>5</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 128.



## Blessing in Creation Account (Gen 1—2)

In the creation story, there is no mention of a curse. God bestowed blessings and fruition upon all creation. Blessings were first pronounced to the creatures in Genesis 1:22 before humankind was created, because creatures have a relationship with God.<sup>6</sup> In the eyes of God, creation was aesthetic and beautiful; He describes it as “good” (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). After the completion of creation on the sixth day, he looks at the whole creation and regards it as “Very good” (v. 31).<sup>7</sup> He pronounced blessings upon humanity and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:28–29, ESV). God declared blessings and fruitfulness to all living creatures. According to Walter Brueggemann, blessings in Genesis signify the power of fertility and flourishing that is embedded in creation.<sup>8</sup> Bruce Waltke notes that blessings were spoken over living creatures (v. 22), humanity (v. 28), and even the Sabbath (2:3), establishing a rhythm aligned with divine intention.<sup>9</sup>

## Curse As a Consequence of Sin

### *The Entrance of Curse through the Fall*

Amidst the blessings and freedom, God gave Adam a command that required the obedience of Adam, Eve, and all their descendants. The Bible says, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gen 2:16–17 ESV). The verb “Commanded” (וַיִּצַו – vayyetsav) is a direct, authoritative instruction from God, while “You shall surely die” (תָּמוּת מוֹת – mot tamut) is an infinitive absolute; the statement means “dying you shall die,” indicating the certainty and severity of the consequence. The ban is addressed to man directly; Westermann observes that “God himself discovers the transgression, conducts the trial, and pronounces judgment.”<sup>10</sup> He argues that prohibition is necessary when freedom is entrusted to humanity in command. Disobedience is

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<sup>6</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 47.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 80.

<sup>10</sup> Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Commentary*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 204.



like saying no to God, from whom life comes.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, the command was not kept. The serpent deceived Adam and Eve, and they ate the fruit. God spoke and declared the first curse in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:14–19 when humanity was deceived by the serpent and disobeyed God.

In the Bible, a curse is the opposite or reversal of a blessing. In Hebrew, the word curse is translated into three different words: *arar*, *alah*, and *qalal*. In Greek, the word ‘curse’ is translated into *akatapa*, *anathema*, and *kataraoimai*, which are expressions of wishing for evil.<sup>12</sup> Considering the verse, the word ‘bless’ בָּרַךְ (*bārak*) – *to bless, kneel, praise*, alludes to fruitfulness, multiplication, flourishing, and filling the land. In short, the blessing is when God shares with us his life-producing ability. If the term ‘blessing’ encompasses fruitfulness, dominion, and life, then the concept of ‘curse’ represents the opposite of these realities. Although the word curse is not explicitly used when God commands Adam not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden, the consequences of disobedience reflect the nature of a curse. The command amounts to a curse because its effect is certainly death. The outcome is death, which is the opposite of the outcome of blessing. The statement “you shall surely die” is unfolded when humanity falls, and God pronounces curses. To the serpent, woman, and the man, and through the man, all creatures are cursed (Gen 3:13–19, ESV).

From the creation and Fall story, God intended for the creation to be fruitful and multiply. God said, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31, ESV). And to humanity, he had created them in his image and likeness. Therefore, he placed everything under the rulership of humans. Unfortunately, humanity rebelled against God by disobeying his command. Disobedience leads to sin, and the wages of sin is death, which is the vital consequence of sin.

Therefore, the curse’s effect was on the human race and the entire creation, and the consequences were physical and spiritual. The curse pronounced by God became a generational curse that runs in the descendants of Adam and all creation. Adebayo states, “The pronounced curses go beyond the three disobedient parties and extend to their offspring.”<sup>13</sup> Genesis 3:14–19 plays a pivotal role in biblical theology, as it outlines the

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<sup>11</sup> Westermann, 235.

<sup>12</sup> Godwin O. Adeboye, *Can a Christian Be Cursed? An African Evangelical Response to the Problem of Curses*, Carlisle: Langham Creative Projects, 2023), 33.

<sup>13</sup> Godwin O. Adeboye, *Can a Christian Be Cursed*, 33.



consequences of humanity's disobedience. God pronounces the consequences to the serpent, Eve, and Adam and, by extension, to all creation. And these penalties are echoed in the redemptive history. Although there are different schools of thought, this has sparked a scholarly debate about whether the statements pronounced by God were intended as punishments or curses.

There are scholars such as Meredith G. Kline and Bruce who argue that God pronounced curses not only to the serpent and the ground but also to Adam and Eve. Kline observes the use of the Hebrew root *arar* in legal curses, such as in Deuteronomy and in the prophets' pronouncements, which indicate sanctioned divine wrath.<sup>14</sup> But for Walton, these were not curses but disciplinary pronouncements with an orientation to redemptive rectification but not eternal condemnation. His argument is based on the continued dialogue between God and Adam, even with the provision of the garment and the promise of redemption.<sup>15</sup>

Scholars who stand between the extremes, such as Gordon J. Wenham, emphasize that the text contains both curse-like elements and punishable consequences, not classifying the pronouncement made to Adam and Eve as an official covenantal curse.<sup>16</sup> Wehman adds that God's mercy plays out in this context of judgment, preventing a full-blown covenantal curse on humanity, even though the created order was disordered.<sup>17</sup> In this divergence of scholars, the thought about the cost of reversing and nullifying what happened in this text makes it more serious than mere disciplinary punishment. The mercy of God does not water down the curse's effect in Genesis 3. Therefore, I agree with the interpretation that Genesis 3:14–19 is a judicial curse that needed the person and work of Christ to satisfy the divine wrath of God, which comes to pass when Paul later writes, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13, ESV).

### ***Development of the Theme of Curses in the Old Testament***

Curses are pronounced judgment for disobedience and a punishment for sin.<sup>18</sup> In the Old Testament, covenantal disobedience brought curses. However, God revealed his intention and

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<sup>14</sup> Meredith G. Kline. *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview*, (Two Age Press, 2000)145–47.

<sup>15</sup> Waltke, *Genesis*, 94–97.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1 —15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1987), 82–84.

<sup>17</sup> Wenham, *Genesis*, 81–84.

<sup>18</sup> Adeboye, 37.



commitment to redeem and restore humanity from curses, as seen in the protoevangelium verse, which mitigates the impact of the fall (Gen 3:15). The theme of redemption runs through the Old Testament covenants and in the prophetic corpus.

In the Pentateuch, curses were integral to the covenantal framework, as exemplified in Deuteronomy 27—28. God gave Israel binary choices: either a blessing as a result of obedience or a curse for rebellion. The covenantal curses showed the seriousness of sin and the justice of God.<sup>19</sup> Even in this covenantal framework, God’s grace to restore from exile or slavery was contingent upon the repentance of an individual or a nation (see Deut 30:1–10). As Wright observes, “The curses are real, but they are not the end. The covenant itself includes the promise of restoration.”<sup>20</sup>

God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3) is a pivotal turning point in the redemptive narrative. This promise starkly contrasts the universal curse depicted in Genesis 3—11, where the human condition deteriorates progressively, from the fall to the flood and ultimately to the division at Babel. In response to this downward spiral, God initiates a new trajectory through Abraham, declaring that he will be blessed and that through him, all the families of the earth will be blessed. In the Abrahamic covenant, the promise encompasses land, descendants, and blessings, which appears to counter the curse in the fall that led to eviction from Eden, death, and a broken relationship. As Wright puts it, this covenant announces the missional heartbeat of redemption, where the blessing to Abraham is for the sake of all nations and will be fulfilled in Christ’s work.<sup>21</sup> Through Abraham, God will raise a nation that he will use as his vessel to bring other nations to himself. In the story of Abraham and the Israelites, covenants were made, and the blessings were the fruit of obedience to the covenant, and curses indicated the violation of the covenant. For the Israelites, the curses in Deuteronomy 28 indicated the effects of covenant defilement and also their broken devotion and allegiance to Yahweh. As the Israelites’ rebellion intensified, the curses intensified to include drought, famine, and exile. And this came to pass, and the Israelites went into exile for seventy years.

The Mosaic covenant was a conditional covenant summarized in Deuteronomy 28—30, in which the prosperity, abundance, and well-being of Israel were tied to their obedience.

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<sup>19</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Faith*, 195.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 125.

<sup>21</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 125



J. G. McConville observes that Deuteronomy 28 functions as the covenantal enforcement section, echoing ancient treaty formats. The blessings (vv. 1–14) reflect life under God’s rule, while the curses (vv. 15–68) serve as warnings against idolatry and social injustice. The curses are longer and more graphic, underlining the seriousness of apostasy.<sup>22</sup> However, in chapter 30, restoration is pronounced, and this emphasizes divine mercy.

The circumcision of the heart reflects internal transformation, foreshadowing themes later developed by the prophets and in Pauline theology.<sup>23</sup> God created a sacrificial system as a symbol of complete redemption from sin and the curse. The system of atonement through the Levitical priesthood enabled Israel to address sin and curse, thereby continuing in fellowship with God (Lev 16). However, the inadequacy and dissatisfaction with the blood of animals and burdensome rituals pointed to a great sacrifice and a great High Priest. The cause and effect of curses and disobedience of Israel were visible with many national defeats, social mayhem, and exiles.

In contrast, when they obeyed God and returned to him, he removed their calamities. Tigay puts it better when he says the appeal to ‘choose life’ (30:19) shows that even after failure, life remains possible through repentance. God’s offer of restoration is rooted in his faithfulness to Abraham.<sup>24</sup> The book of Judges describes how the people abandoned the covenant and forsook their God by bowing down to other gods. Disobedience results in a lack of divine protection from God and supernatural power to fight against enemies. Although God punished them for their sins, God was still faithful to restore them when they repented (Judg 2:10–20).

The book of Job challenges the assumption that all suffering and devastating loss is caused by sin. The book of Proverbs associates curses with moral folly and wickedness. For example, it says, “The Lord’s curse is on the house of the wicked” (Prov 3:33, ESV). God also points out the integrity of divine justice by stating that “an undeserved curse does not come to rest (Prov 26:2, ESV).” In all this, God had a redemptive intention through the sacrificial system and prophetic promises.

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<sup>22</sup>J.G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), 406–423.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 661–683.

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 264–275.



### *Curses and Prophetic Promises*

While the curses were pronounced upon Israel as a result of covenant unfaithfulness, God began to reveal his redemptive plan through the prophets. The prophetic literature stands at the intersection of judgment and hope, articulating both the consequences of rebellion and the promise of restoration. The prophets emphasized that curses were justly deserved due to Israel's idolatry, injustice, and disobedience; however, they were not the final word. Among the prophets, Jeremiah stands out for envisioning a new covenant in which God's law would be inscribed upon the people's hearts (Jer 31:31–34). Ezekiel prophesies a time when God will give his people new hearts and his Spirit (Ezek 36:25–27, ESV). Similarly, Isaiah foretells more about the Servant who will come and bear humanity's iniquities and take our pain and suffering (Isa 53:4–8), who is Christ Jesus in the New Testament, the one who will ultimately bear the curse on behalf of sinners (Gal 3:13). Goldsworthy observes that the whole Old Testament is the history of redemption unfolding in anticipation of the coming Messiah.<sup>25</sup>

The prophetic voices are not merely foretelling events but are proclaiming the progressive unveiling of God's redemptive plan.<sup>26</sup> Through the prophets, God's intention for humanity's restoration is crystal clear. Willem Van Gemeren highlights this, commenting that prophetic hope rests on God's faithfulness to His covenant and His sovereign grace in transforming the hearts of His people.<sup>27</sup> God planned to deal with sin and human disobedience, and this would only happen when he transforms human hearts to obey him. Thus, the plan was for the Servant in Isaiah 53 to be our substitute, taking away the sin and the curse and, additionally, to transform our hearts. Goldingay adds that prophetic literature interprets Israel's history theologically, pointing forward to a comprehensive reversal of exile, sin, and curse.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the Old Testament is used by God as a stage that helps us understand curses not as a final fate but as a redemptive narrative. God, being the main character, aims to restore

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<sup>25</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 52

<sup>26</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 39–43.

<sup>27</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, "Prophets, The Role of" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 649–652.

<sup>28</sup> John Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 33–36.





his creation. He uses covenants, prophetic promises, and his divine and merciful intervention to show that he is on the path of redemption. This prophetic trajectory finds its fulfillment in the New Testament through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### ***Development of the theme of Curses in the New Testament***

In the New Testament, curses are addressed in connection with Christ’s atoning work. The Greek term *kataraomai* (to curse) is closely linked to *katara* (curse) and shares a semantic relationship with the word *anathema*, which denotes something devoted to destruction or under divine judgment.<sup>29</sup> “Anathema is related to what is banned and separated for destruction or punishment.<sup>30</sup> The emphasis is not on the people being cursed but on how to bless others, including enemies (Matt 12:36; 15:10–11; Luke 6:45). The New Testament underscores that people are redeemed from the curse through the cross. The word curse as a noun appears six times; that is, in Galatians 3:10, 13; James 3:10; Hebrews 6:8; 2 Peter 2:14. It appears five times as a verb in Mathew 25:41; Mark 11:21; Luke 6:28; Romans 12:14; and James 3:9. In the New Testament curses are more of judicial actions of God or the consequences of human sin against God and no other people.<sup>31</sup>

The New Testament emphasizes the full redemption from curses brought about by Christ. The text that provides a crystal-clear and theological elaboration is Galatians 3:10–14. Showing how Jesus Christ bore and removed the curse in Genesis 3 after the disobedience. Paul’s theological argument is that all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; however, Christ took the curse upon himself on behalf of those he redeems. Thus, the cross is the turning point in the redemptive story, on which the curse was decisively broken, and blessings were restored to humanity, which believes in and trusts the redemptive work of Jesus Christ—his life, death, and resurrection.<sup>32</sup>

In Galatians, Jesus became a curse-bearer on behalf of humanity. Paul emphasizes that even those “under the Law and relied on the works of the law are under a curse (Gal 3:10, ESV)” He connects with the Old Testament verse, “Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out” (Deut 27:26, ESV). Thomas Schreiner expands that Paul is not saying the law is bad; rather, it exposes sin and brings a curse upon those who fail

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<sup>29</sup> Adeboye, 38 .

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>32</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 1002–5.



to uphold it entirely. The solution is not law observance but redemption through Christ's curse-bearing death.<sup>33</sup> Hence, Paul links Deuteronomy 21:22–23 and Galatians 3:13 to demonstrate that Christ's crucifixion fulfills the scriptural image of being "hung on a tree." This implies that failure to obey the law fully means you are under a divine curse. Though the law was good and holy, it had no power to justify it, which led to condemnation.<sup>34</sup> Dunn expounds on what Paul is stressing regarding the law's inability to provide salvation, meaning that the problem was not only human disobedience but also the powerlessness to fulfill the law's demands entirely.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Jesus becomes a curse-bearer when he is hanged on the tree. Paul refers to Deuteronomy 21:22–23, indicating that Jesus, on the cross, signified divine rejection, taking upon himself all the covenantal curse-bearing sin, judgment, and alienation from God. Wright notes that Christ was doing this to fulfill all legal conditions and to prophesy about the "suffering servant" (Isaiah 53). The inference is that the crucifixion was not merely a sentence but a substitutionary act of redemption that was paid and nullified.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Jesus was not a passive victim but a premeditated substitute, making redemption possible.<sup>37</sup> Wright adds that "the curse Jesus bears is not merely personal guilt but the larger covenantal curse placed upon Israel and humanity, now death with at the cross."<sup>38</sup>

Jesus did not just nullify the curses but reversed the state and restored the blessings. Galatians 3. Paul writes, "So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith" (Gal 3:14, ESV). The shift marks a profound exchange: the curse is replaced by a blessing, and alienation is overcome through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Hay and Thielman highlight that "the blessing restores the missional promise of Abraham (Gen 12:3) and opens up the universality of salvation, not just for Jews but Gentiles as well."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 214–222.

<sup>34</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 211–13.

<sup>35</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle of the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (New York: t&t clark, 1993), 176–79.

<sup>36</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. (Fortress Press, 2013), 800–805.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas J. Moo *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 967–70.

<sup>39</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed, The Biblical Resource Series (Dearborn, Mich: Dove Booksellers, 2002), 119–22; Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 152–54.



Therefore, Paul’s theology of redemption climaxes in Galatians 3:14. Christ became a curse, not only to remove condemnation but to extend Abraham’s blessings to the Gentiles. Moo observes that the verse outlines a twofold result: inclusion in the Abrahamic covenant and the gift of the Spirit.<sup>40</sup> Schreiner adds that this blessing transcends material inheritance—it is justification and Spirit-empowered life.<sup>41</sup> The gift of the Spirit marks the dawn of the new creation, showing that the reversal of the curse is not only forensic but transformational.<sup>42</sup> The Spirit is both the evidence of redemption and the beginning of restoration. The life of a believer is not one of surviving and struggling under the weight of a curse; instead, it is more of flourishing in the freedom of grace.

### *Generational Curse and Blessings*

Generational curses refer to the consequences of sin that pass on to successive generations. The generational blessings are for those who are from the Seed of the Son of God—those whom his blood has redeemed. According to Hickey, a generational curse refers to “an uncleaned iniquity that increases in strength from one generation to the next, affecting the members of that family and all who come into relationship with that family.”<sup>43</sup> Prince observes that “both blessings and curses are usually expressed in words, either spoken words or written words. However, those words are not ordinary; they are words charged with supernatural power. The power may be the power of God, or it may be the power of Satan.”<sup>44</sup> Curses and blessings are not mere words; they affect both the spiritual realm and the manifest physical. Curses and blessings are deeply spiritual, so they are naturally passed down from generation to generation, and they are very powerful because no one can resist them unless a spiritual action is taken. The common feature of both curses and blessings is the continuity from generation to generation. The implication is that there are no blessings out of Christ.

Generational curses stem from the fall of Adam. That is why all descendants of Adam are under the curse pronounced against humanity. Schreiner states that Adamic sin has a corporate and generational impact. Humanity is under condemnation for the birth of Adam,

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<sup>40</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, 211–213.

<sup>41</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 221–222.

<sup>42</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 162–164.

<sup>43</sup> Marilyn Hickey, *Breaking Generational Curses: Overcoming the Legacy of Sin in Your Family* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Harrison House, 2019).

<sup>44</sup> Derek Prince. *Blessing or Curse: You Can Choose*. Chosen Books, 2006.



but freedom is found in Christ, the second Adam.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, every manifestation of a curse—whether personal, generational, or societal—finds its root in the original curse resulting from humanity’s disobedience in Genesis 3. The sinful nature is the root of all evil, pain, death, murder, revenge, betrayal, and all the vices. Due to human sinful nature, humanity is separated from God. Paul lists the acts of the flesh in Galatians, “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Gal 5:19–21, ESV). By the fact that we are sinners by birth, we are all prone to do much if the Spirit of God is not in our lives. In addition to our internal struggles with personal desires, we also contend with spiritual forces of darkness—the ruler of the air and the powers of this dark world—against whom Paul urges believers to put on the full armor of God (Eph 6:11–12). These powers are conveyed through words spoken in our lives, covenants made, sacrifices made, divination, and witchcraft.

Generational curses cannot fall upon those who are faithful to God. Sometimes, people use the state of childlessness in the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as a curse. However, the temporary situation had a reason. God had chosen that issue to display his glory and power to his people. This can be compared to the account of the man born blind in John 9:2, whereupon seeing him, the disciples questioned Jesus, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Their question reflected the common belief that physical affliction was a direct result of sin. However, Jesus corrected this assumption in verse 3, stating, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” Similarly, the barrenness experienced by the wives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob served a divine purpose. In each case, God was actively demonstrating His power and sovereignty to the nation He was forming—a nation through which His glory would be revealed to the world, so that others might come to believe in Him. The Old Testament presents the reality of intergenerational consequences, as seen in texts such as Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9, and Numbers 14:18, where it is stated that the sins of the fathers may impact their descendants “to the third and fourth generation.” However, scholars collectively agree that the interpretation of these verses should not mean that their

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<sup>45</sup> Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, IVP, 2001, 155.



automatic face curses or the curse is inescapable. The continuous effects of generational sin occur when children continue in their ancestors' disobedience.<sup>46</sup> Walter adds that the scriptures stress the seriousness of sin and its implications to the community and nation but do not establish a deterministic law of hereditary judgment.<sup>47</sup> Goldingay notes that the scriptures expressed the corporate and covenantal nature of Israel's relationship with God, where their identity was communal, and this defined one's moral environment.<sup>48</sup>

However, in Ezekiel 18:2–4, the word refutes the proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge," and then states that "the soul who sins shall die." Even with this clarity, the theological debate still exists on whether generational curses are spiritual bondage passed through bloodlines or cultural and behavioral patterns shaped by sinful environments. Paul Hiebert and Craig Keener belong to a school of thought that, although the influence of sin spans generations, they emphasize the New Testament theology of personal responsibility and spiritual freedom in Christ.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, scholars such as Derek Prince and Neil Anderson, who are Charismatic and Pentecostal theologians, believe that generational curses are more spiritual realities that require deliverance and prayer to be broken.<sup>50</sup>

Amidst this scholarly divergence, Christ Jesus breaks the legal and covenantal curses and spiritual bondage that come with curses and creates a new covenant and a new family defined by blessings. As Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). The implication for a believer is that their identity is not dictated by ancestral failures or other covenants and sacrifices; instead, the righteousness of Christ defines their new identity. According to Paul in Romans 8:1–4, the Spirit empowers a new identity, helping Christians overcome and break free from sinful behaviors passed down through family or cultural systems and enabling them to walk and live in freedom. Thus, even though there are generational influences according to Scripture, the remedy is in the power of the cross, which is greater than any inherited pattern. The emphasis is on repentance, having faith in the work of Christ on the cross, and allowing the transforming power of the Spirit to work in your life.

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<sup>46</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 145.

<sup>48</sup> Goldingay, 344.

<sup>49</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> Prince, *Blessing or Curse: You Can Choose*.



### ***Curse Removed in the New Creation***

In the new creation, the curse will be completely reversed, resulting in a complete redemption. John writes, “No longer will there be any curse” (Rev 22:3, ESV). This eschatological hope affirms that the curse that began in the Garden of Eden will be removed forever in the new heaven and new earth. Complete redemption evokes the imagery of Eden as a restored garden featuring the Tree of Life, a never-ending relationship with God, and eternal life.<sup>51</sup> Keener highlights that the removal of the curse demonstrates the complete eradication of sin’s consequences, with God now dwelling intimately with His people.<sup>52</sup> Osborne expands this further, asserting that every manifestation of brokenness—death, alienation, rebellion—is now undone.<sup>53</sup> Though the redemptive work of Christ dealt with sin and our last enemy’s death, we also wait in the hope of inaugurating a new creation where the consequences of curses are eternally removed.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of curse is deeply rooted in the biblical story. It begins in Genesis 1–2, where God blesses creation, declaring it “very good,” and establishes a world marked by fruitfulness, peace, and an unbroken relationship between himself and humanity. However, this blessing is disrupted in Genesis 3 through human disobedience, which invites divine judgment and initiates a history marked by sin, toil, death, and alienation. Throughout the Old Testament, the theme of curses is associated with covenantal disobedience. Consistently, God presents blessings and curses with explicit outcomes, as seen in Deuteronomy 27–28, where obedience leads to blessings and rebellion leads to curses. The default sinful nature will often fall again and again, but God still proclaims hope, restoration, and revival through Israel’s repentance and obedience to the covenant and command. However, greater hope was proclaimed through the prophetic utterance that the curse would be reversed and blessings would be restored through God’s intervention in the person and work of Christ.

In the New Testament, this prophetic promise is fulfilled in Christ, who redeems humanity from the curse of the law by becoming a curse on our behalf (Gal 3:10–14). He fully fulfills the law’s requirement and satisfies divine justice by taking the full weight of sin

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<sup>51</sup> Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 1002–5.

<sup>52</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 500.

<sup>53</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 771.



and its consequences. Those who believe in his death and resurrection are no longer under the power of the fall or the bondage of ancestral sin but have entered the inaugurated new covenant through the righteousness of Christ Jesus and the ever-present, enabling, and empowering Holy Spirit.

This redemptive gospel of Christ changes our view and understanding of generational curses. While there is an acknowledgment of penalties for sin in the Old Testament, particularly in the context of families, nations, and societies, the gospel of Christ emphasizes that these patterns are not determinative of one's salvation. In Christ, believers become a new creation with a new identity (2 Cor 5:17), thereby granting them freedom from all the bondage of sin and oppression in the spiritual realm. Therefore, biblical theology offers a hopeful and transformative revelation, revealing that at the end of the redemptive story, the narrative will transition from curses to blessings, from alienation to homecoming, and from death to life. The biblical narrative concludes with a return to Edenic restoration, where the Tree of Life yields fruit for the healing of the nations. In this renewed creation, there will be no more curses. The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him and reign with him eternally (Rev 22:1–5).

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