

# Curses and Blessings

Deuteronomy 27:1-20, 24-26 Galatians 3:10-14

Matthew 23 (*selected verses*)

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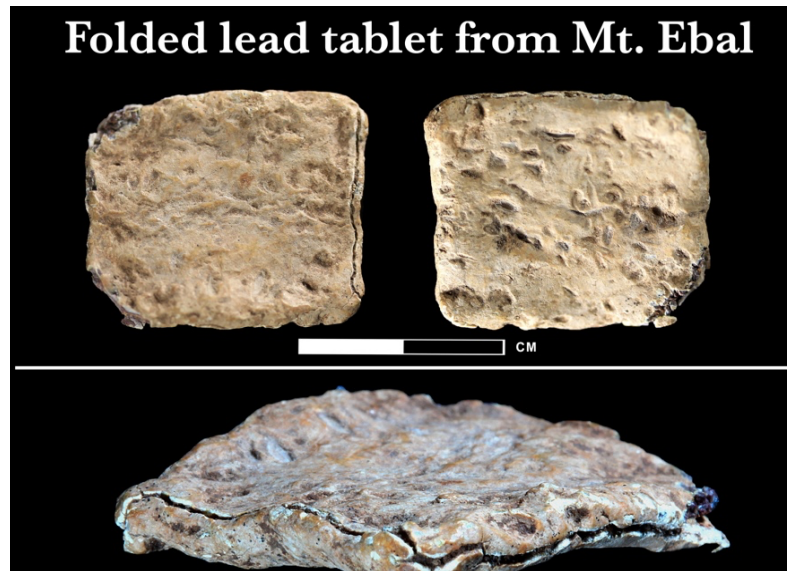
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About a year ago, there was a **HUGE** Biblical archaeological find in Israel<sup>1</sup>. Researchers announced that they found a folded lead tablet at the excavation site of Mt. Ebal in Israel. After extensive studies, they found 40 ancient Hebrew letters; and they discovered it was a “**curse tablet**.” On that folded lead tablet was written this curse:

Cursed, Cursed, Cursed  
Cursed by the **God Yahweh**  
You will die Cursed  
Cursed you will surely die  
Cursed by **Yahweh**  
Cursed, Cursed, Cursed

This was found in the same area where the *curses and blessings* of Israel were pronounced according to our Old Testament lesson in Deuteronomy 27<sup>2</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> If you enjoy history, then you will enjoy this topic! Type in “Mt Ebal Curse Tablet” in YouTube and see the videos of Dr. Scott Stripling talking about the “Mt. Ebal Curse Tablet” and its significance.

<sup>2</sup> The “blessings and curses” was a liturgical rite of the Israelites in the Promised Land – see Deuteronomy 11:26-32, all of Deuteronomy 27, and Joshua 8:30-35. This “curse tablet” is dated to that time period, as it was found in the excavation of an altar on Mt. Ebal! This is a significant archeological find; second only to the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is written in ‘Chiastic Parallelism’; and it contains the Name of God (= Yahweh) twice! This is the oldest Hebrew writing ever found in Israel.

According to Moses' instructions (Deuteronomy 11:26-29), Joshua had half of the people stand on Mt. Ebal, and the other half stand on Mt. Gerizim. There is a valley in-between them. From Mt. Ebal, curses were read aloud to the people; and from Mt. Gerizim, blessings were read aloud. The people responded with their "**Amen!**" --- signaling that they heard, understood, and would obey the Law of God. It was a grand ceremony that all the Israelites participated in. This **curse tablet** that was found could have been a part of that ceremony 3,500 years ago!

In the New Testament book of Galatians, St. Paul makes reference to this exact *curses and blessings* ceremony of Deuteronomy 27.

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."  
Galatians 3:10

St. Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27 and echoes the curse of the Old Testament on anyone who is trying to be saved by their own works, effort, or achievement. The Law of God pronounces a curse on anyone who does not **continually, perfectly, and flawlessly** keep the Law of God: every minute, every moment, of every day – from birth to death.

In St. Paul's day, there were false teachers who said that faith in Jesus was not enough for salvation, but that you also had to contribute to your salvation with your own work, effort, and achievement. The Galatian false teachers said that you had to obey the Law of Moses; *the very thing that is cursed in Deuteronomy 27!* In our day and age, there are many and various ways that false teachers claim that your good works help save you. Some call these good works *penance*; others call it *love*; some call it *acceptance, tolerance, and diversity*; and others refer to it as *morality, community involvement, social justice, or living a good life*. No matter what you call it, it is some form of work, effort, merit, or achievement that you yourself must do in order to be saved<sup>3</sup>. Those who fail to do these things will not be saved. If you do these things, then you will be saved. That is how "*works righteousness*" works.

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the easiest way to think about it is as a "checklist". People who are thinking in terms of "works righteousness" are following some form of a checklist of good works that they apply to themselves; and if they feel that they are living up to their self-made checklist, God will accept them. That "**checklist**" is **exactly what is condemned and cursed**. You cannot live up to whatever your "checklist" is continually, perfectly, and flawlessly, and so you are **cursed and condemned**. ONLY JESUS lived a perfect life according to the Will and Law of God, continually and flawlessly, every minute, every moment, of every day – in thought, word, and deed. His perfect life is credited to you through faith, and God considers you to be righteous and obedient because of Jesus.

**St. Paul CONDEMNS this kind of thinking  
in the book of Galatians, and he uses the  
Old Testament curses from Mt. Ebal to do it!**

The problem with trying to earn your own salvation is that you cannot perfectly do it. God is not going to accept a “C-“ effort; nor is He interested in a 96% performance rate. The “old college try” is not going to cut it. **God’s Law requires perfect, 100% obedience in thought, word, and deed every minute, every moment, of every day to His Word and Commandments.** Even just one failure, no matter how minor, eliminates you from earning your own salvation<sup>4</sup>. That's where the curse comes in: *cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law.* Or maybe to use the words of the curse tablet:

**Cursed, Cursed, Cursed  
Cursed by the God Yahweh  
You will die Cursed  
Cursed you will surely die  
Cursed by Yahweh  
Cursed, Cursed, Cursed**

The **CURSE** is God's divine verdict of wrath and judgment. Because of Original Sin, which leads to Actual Sins in our lives, we cannot live up to God's Law; we cannot perfectly obey His Word or His Commandments. No matter what checklist you may have formulated for yourself for salvation, you cannot fulfill it perfectly. That failure brings the curse of God.

St Paul is using this curse to warn us *not to even try* to earn your own salvation. **Rather**, St Paul teaches us that the curse of sin fell on Jesus so that it won't fall on us!

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” Galatians 3:13

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<sup>4</sup> This is where **ORIGINAL SIN** comes into play. Original Sin totally and thoroughly corrupts you. “There is no one who is righteous, not even one. (Romans 3:10-12, Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3).” **Original Sin makes it impossible for you to live a perfect life in the eyes of God.** The churches that teach some form of works righteousness either deny Original Sin, or soften Original Sin to just some form of a spiritual handicap, like a “bruise”; but it is not total and complete corruption and depravity that leaves you spiritually dead. They need you to be able to do something “righteous”; something ‘spiritual’, to do your part, say a prayer, make your decision, choose Jesus, make an effort, or do some good works.

The **cross** of Jesus is the sign that He was **cursed**. If Jesus was stoned to death, or put to death with the sword, it would not have signaled that He was cursed by God. The cross signals that He was cursed. In the Old Testament, God had already said, “*Cursed in everyone who is hung on a tree.*” So Jesus was crucified: He was cursed for you and for me.

**You are now redeemed from the curse!** Redeemed means a price was paid for you. The price to redeem you from the curse of God was that Jesus would take your place and be cursed for you. He paid the price – you are redeemed! You are set free!

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Peter 1:18-19

### **Christ has redeemed you from the curse of the Law!**

Your sin has been removed from you and put on Christ.

Your guilt has been cleansed by the death of Jesus.

The curse of your sin fell on Jesus when He died on the cross!

You are redeemed! You are set free!

- ➔ You never again have to think that you need to do something to earn God’s favor and goodness.
- ➔ You never again have to obey some checklist to get into heaven.
- ➔ You never again have to look to yourself and your own good works to merit salvation.

**Jesus has done it all! Every single bit of it. 100%!**

If I can take the liberty and flip that ancient curse tablet around that they found last year in Israel and make it apply to us today, it might say this:

Blessed, Blessed, Blessed,  
Blessed by the God Yahweh  
**Through His Son Jesus**  
You will live Blessed  
Blessed you will surely live  
Blessed by Yahweh  
**Through His Son Jesus**  
Blessed, Blessed, Blessed!

Amen!

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**God the Father,**

**we thank you for making Jesus a curse for us  
and in our place when He died on the cross.**

**We thank you for sparing us from your  
wrath and divine condemnation and  
judgment.**

**Help us to live as your redeemed people,  
completely trusting in your grace and  
mercy;**

**and loving, serving, and helping our  
neighbor.**

**We pray this in Jesus' Name, amen!**

# Deuteronomy 27:1-20, 24-26

Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people: “Keep all these commands that I give you today. <sup>2</sup>When you have crossed the Jordan into the land the Lord your God is giving you, set up some large stones and coat them with plaster. <sup>3</sup>Write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over to enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, promised you. <sup>4</sup>And when you have crossed the Jordan, set up these stones on Mount Ebal, as I command you today, and coat them with plaster. <sup>5</sup>Build there an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones. Do not use any iron tool on them. <sup>6</sup>Build the altar of the Lord your God with fieldstones and offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God. <sup>7</sup>Sacrifice fellowship offerings there, eating them and rejoicing in the presence of the Lord your God. <sup>8</sup>And you shall write very clearly all the words of this law on these stones you have set up.”

<sup>9</sup>Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, “Be silent, Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the Lord your God. <sup>10</sup>Obey the Lord your God and follow his commands and decrees that I give you today.”

<sup>11</sup>On the same day Moses commanded the people:

<sup>12</sup>When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. <sup>13</sup>And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali.

<sup>14</sup>The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice:

<sup>15</sup>“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!”

<sup>16</sup>“Cursed is anyone who dishonors their father or mother.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

<sup>17</sup>“Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbor’s boundary stone.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

<sup>18</sup>“Cursed is anyone who leads the blind astray on the road.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

<sup>19</sup>“Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

<sup>20</sup>“Cursed is anyone who sleeps with his father’s wife, for he dishonors his father’s bed.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

<sup>24</sup>“Cursed is anyone who kills their neighbor secretly.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

<sup>25</sup>“Cursed is anyone who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

<sup>26</sup>“Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.”

Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

## Galatians 3:10-14

10 For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: *“Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”* 11 Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” 12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

## Matthew 23 (*selected verses*)

Jesus said, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. 15 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are. 23 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. 24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. 25 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. 27 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. 37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate.

## The Mt. Ebal Curse Tablet

Discovered in 2019, and revealed in 2022, a 1" x 1" folded lead tablet was found in an excavation site on Mt. Ebal in Israel. It turned out to be an ancient Curse Tablet. What makes this unique is that it is found exactly where the Bible says there were "curses and blessings": and at the site of an Altar that had previously been dated to Joshua's time! This artifact could have been part of the **Joshua 8:30-35** and **Deuteronomy 27** story! After extensive scanning, researchers found 40 ancient Hebrew letters, which is the oldest Hebrew writing found in Israel, including the Name of God written twice! This Curse Tablet dates back to 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, and is considered a "10 out of 10" in Biblical archeological discoveries; it rises to the same level of significance as the Dead Sea Scrolls! Below on the left shows what the Curse Tablet's 40 letters read in its original "Chiastic parallelism"; the second rendering on the right is the text formatted in Hebraic Metter. Both extremely emphasize the "curse" nature of this writing.

Cursed, Cursed, Cursed -- Cursed by the God Yahweh  
 You will die Cursed  
 Cursed you will surely die  
 Cursed by Yahweh – Cursed, Cursed, Cursed  
 ORIGINAL "CHIASTIC PARALLELISM"

**Cursed**  
**Cursed**  
**Cursed**  
**Cursed** by the God Yahweh  
 You will die **Cursed**  
**Cursed** you will surely die  
**Cursed** by Yahweh –  
**Cursed**  
**Cursed**  
**Cursed**  
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 HEBRAIC METER OF 10

## The Galatians Connection

In **Galatians 3:10-14**, St. Paul uses the OT "blessings and curses" to teach justification by faith in Christ alone. Note the following ideas:

1. Paul, is intentionally using the OT "blessings and curses" as the background of his teaching. He quotes Deuteronomy 27:26 in Galatians 3:10, the very "blessings and curse" section of the Bible!
2. Note the somber, serious, forceful nature of the "curse" in the Curse Tablet.
3. The curse is pure Law: this is what we deserve because of our sin.
4. If you want to personalize this, and see the result of sin, add your name to the curse above after line 1:  
*Cursed, cursed, cursed – cursed by Yahweh is \_\_\_\_\_ (your name) \_\_\_\_\_*
5. If you try to earn your own salvation by your own works, this curse falls on you (Galatians 3:10)
6. Christ took this curse upon Himself for you and in your place (Galatians 3:13)
7. If you want to better understand the cross of Jesus, and see the result of salvation, add His Name to the curse above after line 1:  
*Cursed, cursed, cursed – cursed by Yahweh is Jesus*
8. In Galatians 3:10-14, Paul teaches that salvation by works leads to the **curse**; salvation by faith in Jesus leads to the **blessings** of righteousness, redemption, the Holy Spirit, and all the blessings of Abraham!