

When Blessings Become a Curse

By Mark Mayberry
9/27/2009

Introduction

Sometimes, a curse can become a blessing (Deut. 23:3-6; Num. 23:7-10). Alternatively, a blessing may at times become a curse (Mal. 2:1-2; 1 Cor. 1:22-25).

Deuteronomy 23:3-6 ... 3 “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, 4 because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. 5 “Nevertheless, the Lord your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the Lord your God loves you. 6 “You shall never seek their peace or their prosperity all your days. (NASB95)

Numbers 23:7-10 ... 7 He took up his discourse and said, “From Aram Balak has brought me, Moab’s king from the mountains of the East, ‘Come curse Jacob for me, And come, denounce Israel!’ 8 “How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced? 9 “As I see him from the top of the rocks, And I look at him from the hills; Behold, a people who dwells apart, And will not be reckoned among the nations. 10 “Who can count the dust of Jacob, Or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright, And let my end be like his!” (NASB95)

Malachi 2:1-2 ... 1 “And now this commandment is for you, O priests. 2 “If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name,” says the Lord of hosts, “then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 ... 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (NASB95)

The Jews Require a Sign

Down through their history, the Jews were blessed with signs from heaven; however, they allowed this blessing to become a curse. During the ministry of Christ, they repeatedly demanded, “Show us a sign...” (Matt. 12:38-42; 16:1-4; John 2:18-22; 4:48; 6:30-33; etc.).

Matthew 12:38-42 ... 38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39 But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40 for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42 "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (NASB95)

Matthew 16:1-4 ... 1 The Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Jesus, they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 But He replied to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3 "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? 4 "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them and went away. (NASB95)

John 2:18-22 ... 18 The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (NASB95)

John 4:48 ... 48 So Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe." (NASB95)

John 6:30-33 ... 30 So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? 31 "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.' " 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 ... 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (NASB95)

The Greeks Seek after Wisdom

Down through history, the Greeks were blessed with intellect and wisdom; however, they allowed this blessing to become a curse. Trusting in their own understanding, they scoffed at the wisdom of God (Acts 17:18-34; cf. Prov. 3:7; 26:12; Isa. 5:21; Matt. 11:25-27).

Acts 17:18-34 ... 18 And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. 19 And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? 20 "For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean." 21 (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.) 22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. 24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; 25 nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; 26 and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, 27 that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.' 29 "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. 30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." 32 Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, "We shall hear you again concerning this." 33 So Paul went out of their midst. 34 But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. (NASB95)

Proverbs 3:7 ... 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. (NASB95)

Proverbs 26:12 ... 12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (NASB95)

Isaiah 5:21 ... 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight! (NASB95)

Matthew 11:25-27 ... 25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have

revealed them to infants. 26 “Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 27 “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. (NASB95)

We May Pursue Possessions

Material possessions are indeed a blessing; however, if we trust in riches, this blessing becomes a curse. Those who are covetous and complacent forsake the Lord (Deut. 8:11-14; 31:19-22; Prov. 30:7-9; Neh. 9:24-29; Rev. 3:15-21).

Deuteronomy 8:11-14 ... 11 “Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; 12 otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, 13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (NASB95)

Deuteronomy 31:19-22 ... 19 “Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, so that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel. 20 “For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant. 21 “Then it shall come about, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the lips of their descendants); for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.” 22 So Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the sons of Israel. (NASB95)

Proverbs 30:7-9 ... 7 Two things I asked of You, Do not refuse me before I die: 8 Keep deception and lies far from me, Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, 9 That I not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or that I not be in want and steal, And profane the name of my God. (NASB95)

Nehemiah 9:24-29 ... 24 “So their sons entered and possessed the land. And You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, And You gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, To do with them as they desired. 25 “They captured fortified cities and a fertile land. They took possession of houses full of every good thing, Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, Fruit trees in abundance. So they ate, were filled and grew fat, And reveled in Your great goodness. 26 “But they became disobedient and rebelled against You, And cast Your law behind their backs And killed Your prophets who had admonished them So that they might return to You, And they committed great blasphemies. 27 “Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them, But when they cried to You in the time of their distress, You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors. 28 “But as soon as they

had rest, they did evil again before You; Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion, 29 And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, By which if a man observes them he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen. (NASB95)

Revelation 3:15-21 ... 15 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. 20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. (NASB95)

We May Follow Friends & Family

Friends and family are indeed a blessing; however, if we allow them to pull us away from God, this blessing becomes a curse. Many compromise their convictions in an effort to follow the crowd or please their family (Prov. 1:10-19; 13:20; Matt. 10:34-39; 1 Cor. 5:6-8; 15:33-34).

Proverbs 1:10-19 ... 10 My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent. 11 If they say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait for blood, Let us ambush the innocent without cause; 12 Let us swallow them alive like Sheol, Even whole, as those who go down to the pit; 13 We will find all kinds of precious wealth, We will fill our houses with spoil; 14 Throw in your lot with us, We shall all have one purse," 15 My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your feet from their path, 16 For their feet run to evil And they hasten to shed blood. 17 Indeed, it is useless to spread the baited net In the sight of any bird; 18 But they lie in wait for their own blood; They ambush their own lives. 19 So are the ways of everyone who gains by violence; It takes away the life of its possessors. (NASB95)

Proverbs 13:20 ... 20 He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will suffer harm. (NASB95)

Matthew 10:34-39 ... 34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. 37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not

worthy of Me. 39 “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 ... 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 15:33-34 ... 33 Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” 34 Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame. (NASB95)

Conclusion

In His grace and mercy, God sets before us a blessing and a curse: a blessing if we obey, and curse if we rebel (Deut. 11:26-28; 30:19-20). How are you responding to the blessings of God (1 Cor. 1:18-31)? God has blessed us with credible evidence of His existence. How do you respond to the recorded signs of Scripture? God has blessed us with intellect and understanding. How do you react to the revealed wisdom from above? God has blessed us with material provision. How do you view such bounty? God has blessed us with friends and family. What sort of influence are they having in your life, and what sort of influence are you having in their lives?

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 ... 26 “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known. (NASB95)

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 ... 19 “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.” (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 ... 18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.” 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness

of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (NASB95)