

Under the Curse

March 19 — *Deuteronomy 26:18-29:1*

Day 78 — 287 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

After Moses instructed the Israelites to dedicate the first fruits of their new land to the Lord, he finished his long address on the laws of God. Then, in an effort to drive home those commandments in the hearts and minds of the people, Moses asked them to do something rather unique — to divide the tribes in half and stand atop two mountains in central Canaan, Ebal and Gerizim, there to raise up stones on which to inscribe the laws of God and to proclaim both the blessings and curses of those laws.

It seemed that Moses would do whatever it took to make sure that the people got the message, that *strict adherence to God's standards determined their eventual success or failure*. It's as if a parent, after giving instructions to a child, asked that the child repeat the instructions and the consequences for either obeying or disobeying them. Moses wanted to make it clear to the people of Israel that God took their covenant very seriously and so should they. **There were terrific blessings that would follow their faithfulness, but there were also tremendous penalties should they forsake Him.**

While there were many blessings that the Lord mentioned that would come as a result of Israel's obedience, my attention was sidetracked by the long list of curses. God did not spare any details regarding what would take place if His people disregarded His laws. In fact, He was forthright and very specific. I found myself wincing, at times, and even desiring to skip to the end of the list because of its length.

While the blessings sound delightful, the curses are dark and heavy. I would not have wanted to live under that cloud of judgment; it would have produced in me a tremendous uneasiness. This effect, of course, was God's intent, to put the fear of His wrath in the minds of His people.

Daily Reflection

What thoughts did you have while reading this long list of blessings and curses?

After reading the many dangers that lurked on the horizon for the Israelites, I felt sorry for them, in a way. They were certainly people "under the curse." However, once the reality of this list of curses set in, Paul's description of Christ's work on the cross came into focus. "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them...' But Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us..." (*Galatians 3:10-13*).

Because of your Savior, **you no longer have to fear the Law or live under its curse.** Since He became the curse for you, then you are free! What does this mean for how you are to live?

No doubt, you will still sin, but in Christ, **there is no more condemnation**, "for the law of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death" (*Romans 8:1, 2*). **You are no longer under the curse!** Live that way!

The One-Two Punch

March 20 — Deuteronomy 29:2-31:29

Day 79 — 286 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Moses gave his final words of instruction to the people of Israel. At 120 years old, he still had a great deal of fervor and passion in his heart, but it was time to pass the baton to Joshua. Thus, we read of Joshua's commissioning before the Lord at the tent of meeting. But the question is, what would Moses say to the people of Israel, if he knew that his days on earth were over and that he would not get to cross the Jordan River into Canaan?

First, Moses implored them to "be strong and courageous when fighting against the various Canaanite tribes. He reminded them that it was God who was going before them to defeat their enemies, so they should not be afraid (31:3-8). Second, Moses instructed Israel "to assemble every seventh year, to hear the words of the law read aloud, so that every person may hear and know the laws of God, and so that they may fear Him and be careful to observe all of His words" (31:9-13).

Moses' words to Israel are a good strategy for living the Christian life today. First and foremost, **God and His Word should be the foundation on which we build our lives**, on which we pledge our success, on which we determine the direction of our future. **The Scriptures should be the lens through which we view everything**. Thus, we are to take "every thought captive" to what the Bible says.

Second, in light of the confidence we have in God and His Word, we are to face life with all its worries, its "giants," and its trials with the strength and courage that only the Lord can provide. We should neither fear nor be dismayed, knowing that the Lord our God is always with us and is always for us.

Be strong and courageous! That is a fantastic one-two punch! We become strong through God's Word and His Spirit who indwells us and, because of our faith and confidence in Him, we are courageous. If God is for us, then who can be against us? His enemies will not succeed.

Daily Reflection

How are you doing with getting into the Word and letting the Word get into you? Are you, on a regular basis, reminding yourself of who God is, what He's done, and what He expects of you? Explain.

What "giants" cause you to fret and worry? Are you facing them with strength and courage? Why or why not?

If you rely upon your own strength, your own wisdom, or other sources, you will grow weak and lose confidence to face your circumstances. Only the Lord can provide what you need to live a life of victory. "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. Surely I will help you. Surely, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10 NASB).

Finish Well

Today In Your Reading...

Moses wrote a song for the people of Israel. The Lord said to him, "You are about to die and join your ancestors. After you are gone, these people will begin worshipping foreign gods, the gods of the land where you are going. They will abandon Me and break the covenant I have made with them... Now write down the words of this song and teach it to the people... that it may serve as a witness against them" (31:16, 19).

The song is not very heart-warming, to be honest; there's a somber spirit about the whole thing. Moses started out describing the greatness of God but, then, went on to tell of the unfaithfulness of Israel and the wrath and judgment that awaited them if they abandoned the Lord. This song could not have been easy for Moses to pen or recite. After all that he had been through the last 40 years with these people, you would think that there would have been a feel-good ending, but that was not the case.

After all of Moses' hard work, and after putting up with all of whining and unfaithfulness, he was told (just as he was getting ready to die) that these people would forsake God and worship idols. That news had to tear Moses' heart out of his chest! On top of it all, Moses was reminded that he wouldn't get to enter the Promised Land. Not a good day if you ask me.

But here's where we must take our hats off to this great prophet. **To the bitter end, he did what God commanded, no matter how difficult.** Moses would die knowing that he completed all that God had for him and that he did it in good fashion. Sure he made some mistakes along the way, but *he finished well*. He may not have entered the Promised Land of Canaan, but there was waiting for him another "Promise Land" that was even better. There would be his Lord waiting for him, to bid him "Well done."

Daily Reflection

Do you know what work it is that God has assigned for you to do in your life? If so, what is it? If not, how can you find out?

God is not too concerned about your happiness, your comfort, or your convenience. He is concerned about your obedience and your faithfulness to His purposes. How faithful have you been to do what He's given you to do?

When Jesus prayed with His disciples for the last time, He commented on His earthly purpose. "I have glorified You on the earth," He said, "having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). Herein lies your goal for life — **to glorify the Lord, no matter what comes your way, and to accomplish the work that He has given you to do**. In doing these things, your Heavenly Father will say to you, "Well done, My good and faithful servant." *No matter how you started, you can finish well.*

Strength and Courage

Today In Your Reading...

Moses pronounced his final blessings on the tribes of Israel, asking God to make them fruitful and strong. Then, God instructed him to ascend Mt. Nebo, in order to view the Promised Land before his death. "Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyesight was clear and he was as strong as ever" (Deut. 34:7). Someone after his death, possibly Joshua, added this comment, "There has never been another prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (34:10). The greatest leader of God's people was gone, and now his authority and leadership passed to Joshua.

Joshua would be the one to take Israel across the Jordan into Canaan, to conquer and possess the Promised Land. To start that process, we read about the two spies that went to Jericho and met Rahab, who protected them in exchange for a promise, a promise to protect her and her family when Israel attacked. We will see that promise fulfilled in tomorrow's reading.

I found it most interesting what God had to say to Joshua at the outset of his command. Here God had laid to rest the greatest leader to date (in fact, the greatest leader until Christ, in my opinion), so then what advice would He have to give to the next leader in line? "Joshua, good luck?" No. If we look carefully at what the Lord said, I think we'll find a challenge for us all.

"Be strong and courageous. Obey the laws that Moses gave you. Do not turn away from them, and you will be successful in everything you do. *Study this Book of the Law continually.* Meditate on it day and night so you may be sure to obey all that is written in it. Only then will you succeed..." (Joshua 1:7, 8). Basically, God said that, in order to be successful, Joshua had to know and do what He said.

Although, because of Christ, we are no longer subject to the old covenant laws, the principle still applies. **God's Word is paramount in the life of His followers!** Reading, studying, memorizing, knowing, and obeying His Book is vital to spiritual growth. It is how we know our God. It is how we understand what He has done for us in salvation. It is our source of wisdom. "It is a lamp unto our feet," as the psalmist said, "and a light unto our path" (119:105).

I can think of very few activities that are more rewarding to my Christian life than spending time in God's Word. That which I study, I learn. That which I learn, I remember. That which I remember, I apply.

Notice that the Lord opened His charge to Joshua with the words, "Be strong and courageous." **God's Word is a source of strength and courage for us.** He comforts us, enlightens us, inspires us, encourages us, and challenges us. His Word is truth. We can have confidence that it will not return void; it will prevail.

Daily Reflection

How important is God's Word to you? How would you describe its impact on your life?

How are you doing with memorizing Scripture? Find a systematic way to commit it to memory, so that you can meditate on it, meaning "to speak it under your breath." **Having Scripture in your heart and on your tongue is a step towards spiritual growth.**

Behind the Scenes

March 23 — *Joshua 3:1-6:27*

Day 82 — 283 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We witnessed Israel's incredible crossing into Canaan and the first victory on its war path. Of course, God did it all in His typical fashion — first class and awe-inspiring. First, He raised the waters of the Jordan, which were at flood stage, to stand like a heap, so that the people could cross over on dry ground. When the tribes of Canaan heard this news, "they lost heart and were paralyzed with fear" (5:1).

Then, after setting up memorial stones, to remind them all of this great occasion, Joshua was instructed to circumcise the men of Israel, because the next generation had not yet been marked by the covenant. Next, God gave the command to take the city of Jericho, although His instructions were a little unusual. They were to walk around the city for seven days, after which they were to blow trumpets and shout, and the walls of that mighty city would fall down, which would allow the army to attack.

Again, only God could do something like that, and it happened just as He said. Every inch of that great wall fell over, except for the house of Rahab, where she and her entire family resided. Their lives were spared because of the help Rahab offered the spies.

As I read today's passage, I was impressed with God's provision and protection. **He does so much for His people, for us, that we do not ever see or know.** Take for example, on the day when the Israelites ate from the fruit of Canaan, the manna that God had provided for 40 years ceased. I wonder if anyone stopped to thank Him for that provision, or were the people so glad to be done with it that they never considered it?

Another example of God's protection was when Joshua met the Commander of the Lord's Army

near Jericho. I can imagine that there had to have been a tremendous spiritual war that took place prior to Israel's advance. Satan would not have wanted them to displace all of his pagan tribes. Nonetheless, it was obvious, as Joshua met and honored this angelic being, that **God was doing things behind the scenes to protect His people**, in a way that no one recognized or considered.

Daily Reflection

So often we get caught up in all that is going on in our little world that we take for granted what happens behind the scenes. Since it is out of our sight, it is out of our minds. Meanwhile, the Lord is constantly working out the details for our provision and protection.

If you could see what truly happens "behind the scenes" in the spirit world, what do you suppose you would find? What would be surprising to you? What would be comforting to you?

While it is natural to only think about what you experience with your senses, it is important not to forget that there is a battle taking place in the spiritual world. "For we wrestle not with flesh and blood... but against spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places" (*Eph. 6:12*). **Don't forget to recognize and honor your Heavenly Father for His constant watch-care over you.** Your life depends on it! Be grateful for what He does behind the scenes!

The Deceitfulness of Sin

Today In Your Reading...

Israel followed their stellar victory at Jericho with an embarrassment at the little town of Ai. After Joshua heard the news, "he and the leaders of Israel tore their clothing in dismay, threw dust on their heads, and bowed down facing the Ark of the Lord until evening" (7:6). This loss took the wind out of their sails.

What happened? What was the problem? God had warned Joshua and the Israelites that everything inside the city of Jericho was under a ban, for it was to be dedicated to Him. The soldiers were to take nothing for themselves. However, once the city came down, a man named Achan was tempted by the treasures that he saw lying on the ground. Despite the ban, Achan took the items and hid them in his tent. He saw no harm in what he had done, and he believed that no one would ever find out.

Because of Achan's blatant disregard for the ban, He defied and disobeyed God. As a result, the Israelites were defeated at the town of Ai. When Joshua asked God why He allowed their defeat, the Lord revealed to him that there was sin in their midst. Upon investigation, Joshua discovered what Achan had done and quickly eliminated him, his family, and all of their belongings. **God hates sin and His justice demands punishment for it.** Once Israel purified itself from its wrongdoing, the soldiers returned to Ai; this time it was a breeze. Joshua and his men flattened the town and never looked back.

I found it interesting that, in the same passage, Joshua led the Israelites to the mountains of Ebal and Gerizim, to give testimony of the covenant the people were making before the Lord, to proclaim both the blessings and the curses of that covenant. To accomplish these objectives, Joshua "read to them all the blessings and curses Moses had written in the Book of the Law.

Every command Moses had ever given was read to the entire assembly..." (8:34, 35).

Shortly after this event, Joshua and the leaders of Israel made a treaty with the Gibeonites. They had just been reminded of all of God's laws, which included the command not to make peace with any of the tribes of Canaan (*Deut.* 7:2). Although they were deceived, none of them consulted the Lord. Now, because of their impatience, God's people would have to live in Canaan amidst idolatry and evil.

Daily Reflection

When flirting with sin, it is easy to be deceived. **Sin lies to you and tells you that it is harmless, that there are no consequences, or that no one will ever know.** The truth is that your sins will betray you. *You cannot hide them from the Lord, and there are always consequences.* Achan's sin not only led to the death of 36 soldiers, but it took his life and the lives of his wife and kids. Joshua's sin — the treaty with the Gibeonites — affected the entire nation for generations, as the Canaanite influence infected the people of God for decades.

You cannot expect the blessings of God when you reject the instructions of God.

You are not getting away with anything. You cannot hide from Him who sees and knows all things. You cannot be so naïve to think that there are no repercussions for having things your way. "If you sin against God, be sure that your sin will find you out" (*Numbers 32:23*).

What are your sins saying to you?

That's a Good Question

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March 25 — *Joshua 10:1-12:6*

Day 84 — 281 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

The Israelites continued their conquests of the kings of Canaan. From south to north, the people of God pounded and pulverized. Everyone was eliminated. We even read that God used a hailstorm to help Joshua and that He ordered the sun and moon to stand still during one of the battles. No matter the odds, with God on their side, the Israelites were victorious.

However, we are left wondering several things upon reading this account, such as why would a loving God command His people to annihilate everyone, even women and children? Could this be the same God of the New Testament? Would Jesus have commanded such a thing?

These are good questions. Answering them satisfactorily would take a lot of paper, but let me share some things to think about. First of all, **God is the same in the Old Testament as He is in the New Testament.** He never changes. People tend to focus on God's love in the New while only pointing out His wrath in the Old; but, quite honestly, *He's just as loving in the Old and just as wrathful in the New.* We just tend to gloss over those parts. Remember Jesus said that He was the only way to be saved, and that those who rejected Him would be condemned to hell for eternity. Or what about the part when He returns to destroy millions at Armageddon?

Second, God recorded a long list of abuses of which the tribes of Canaan were guilty. He had been merciful to them for centuries, but now it was time for His justice. We don't know all of the circumstances behind their judgment, but we can trust that God did. Besides, **who are we mortals to judge Him for His actions?** God is always right. He can do no wrong.

Third, all of creation is God's, to do with what He wills. We are not free to destroy others as He

did, because we cannot do with His what we wish; but God is free to do with His what He wants. He has the right as Creator and Sovereign to make or destroy whatever He desires.

Finally, when one pulls out a weed, he doesn't just cut off the stem. He pulls out the entire thing, roots and all. So it was with destroying cities and their citizens. God commanded the complete destruction of carnal civilizations, so that they would not plague His people and cause them to stumble or fall away from Him.

Daily Reflection

Hidden in this passage is perhaps the greatest miracle of the Old Testament — the day that the sun stood still. How is that possible? That's a good question. It is, of course, scientifically problematic. That's why it's called a miracle.

The exodus generation saw the Lord perform wonders in its midst and, yet, the people still did not trust Him fully. It was important for Joshua's generation to see that the Lord was with them as well. They chose to honor Him with their faithfulness. They believed that when they called upon His name, He would do great and mighty things. But make the sun stand still?

Scholars and skeptics have attempted to explain away this miracle as poetic or figurative speech, as an eclipse, or as a reflection in the sand. Why can't we take the Scriptures as they are and believe that the One who made the sun and moon can manipulate them for His good purposes? The truth is this — **we have a God who can move heaven and earth to give His people victory!** He is worthy of our trust.

"There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord; nor are there any works like Yours" (*Psalms 86:8*).