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## **Generational Curses: Biblically Supported or False Teaching?**

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**Abstract:** A popular teaching in many charismatic and mainline Pentecostal fellowships is that of the “generational curse”, the idea that sin from a prior generation can be carried as a curse on successive generations, and thus, requires repentance in the present for sins of ancestors, deliverance from or release of the “curse”, and, according to some proponents, a “cleansing of the bloodline” in order to bring about a “release” from the “curse”. Since the term “generational curse” is nowhere found in the Scriptures, and since an examination of the attempt to justify the validity of the teaching will show either specious interpretation or special pleading, this paper will seek to demonstrate the idea of a “generational curse” is a falsely developed teaching which dangerously sidesteps the completeness of the finished redemptive work of Christ, and leads people into error.

**Curses and the Biblical evidence.** In the Old Testament, a curse “reflect(ed) a breakdown in relationships.”<sup>1</sup> In the Psalm literature, what are known as “imprecatory” psalms call for curses on enemies “as prophetic judgment proclamations.”<sup>2</sup> Curses in Old Testament theology are typically expressed against those who by their willful choice turn against Torah, the Law of God, when their actions might cause a collapse of God’s order for that people. The language of Deuteronomy 27:15-26

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<sup>1</sup> J. McKeown, “Blessings and Curses”, *Dictionary of the Old Testament (Pentateuch)* (T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds.) (Downers Grove, IL and Leicester, England, 2003), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Alex Luc, “Interpreting the Curses in Psalms”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42.3 (1999), 395.

prescribes divine curses upon various types of sinful actions, such as casting an idol, leading the blind astray, withholding justice from marginalized individuals, adultery, taking bribes to commit a crime, and failure to uphold the Law.<sup>3</sup> Exodus 21:17 echoes Deuteronomy 27:16 but with the addition of a penalty for the transgression. The absence of penalties in the Deuteronomy passage probably indicates that Yahweh sees what the people do, even if they think they are acting in secret, and while they may not come under any human forms of judgment, their sin will not allow them to escape God's wrath in judgment.

The word "curse" in the Old Testament typically comes from at least six different Hebrew words. A verb, *'ārar*, occurs 63 times in the Old Testament; the most widely used form is the passive participle (*'ārūr* and derivatives), used 40 times, the bulk appearing in Deuteronomy 27:15-26.<sup>4</sup> The early chapters of Genesis finds several instances of *'ārar*: a curse on Satan (Genesis 3:14-15), on creation because of Adam's choice to disobey the Lord (Genesis 3:17), on Cain for his murder of his brother (Genesis 4:11), and on Canaan because of his father Ham's indiscretion towards Noah (Genesis 9:25).

Another word, *qālal*, is "virtually synonymous" with *'ārar*, "except that it is more often used in the context of people being the agents of cursing".<sup>5</sup>

"Curse" as it is used in the Old Testament, particularly, is "an imprecation or an expressed wish for evil".<sup>6</sup> In the setting of the Old Testament, "the imagery of the curse relates to three

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy* (NIBC) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 277.

<sup>4</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, "'ārar - to curse", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce C. Waltke, eds.) (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1980), I:75.

<sup>5</sup> William Mounce, ed. *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 152.

<sup>6</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, "Curse", *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Walter A. Elwell, ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 290.

contexts in Scripture: the created order, interpersonal relationships and God's covenant relationship with Israel."<sup>7</sup> In those instances where the occasion is an act of disobedience to God, the consistent witness is God's full control over all aspects of the curse. Whereas pagan societies may have seen some magical powers at work in a curse, those which God pronounced in consequence of a person rebelling against the divine order were infused with divine power. Whether someone was to be cursed or not remained in God's sovereign choice and power. Man's actions could not force God to curse, whether those words were in some kind of formulaic incantation or through any kind of religious ritual. Divine curses with divine power could not, then, be used "capriciously as a weapon against one's personal enemies."<sup>8</sup>

Curses in the Old Testament were either *interpersonal curses* or *covenant curses*. Interpersonal curses were spoken against the land or against another human being; the source and the volition of the curse is strictly limited to humans, and the effect of the curse depends on the authority and standing of the person speaking the curse. At times a curse was uttered to enforce the severity of punishment (as in the case of Joshua and the deceptive Gibeonites; see Joshua 9). Other times the word "curse" was spoken but it was more of a taunt or an act of slander (e.g. Exodus 21:17, 1 Kings 2:8).

The unusually severe imprecations hurled at enemies in psalms such as 109 and 137 may be understood as cries of agony. They accurately record a stage of human development in people longing for the deeper revelation of love that Christ brought into the world. In some cases these enemies appear more than human and may represent demonic forces of

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<sup>7</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. White, and Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL and Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1998), 186.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Ferguson, "Curse, Accursed", *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Walter A. Elwell, ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 139.

evil. In any case these psalms do not contain divine approbation of the curses.<sup>9</sup>

Judges 17 is the account of an apparently very wealthy woman who, having discovered someone had stolen a large sum of money<sup>10</sup> from her, pronounced a curse on the thief. Her son, Micah, had taken the money; he returned it to her having heard the curse she had uttered. At least for him, there was a fear-response to the pronouncement of the curse.<sup>11</sup> The wording for “curse” in Judges 17:2 is a rare occurrence, indicating a “conditional curse, in this case some horrendous fate for committing a crime.”<sup>12</sup> When he returns the money to his mother, she responds with words of blessing in the name of Yahweh of Israel, thus effectively canceling the curse.<sup>13</sup>

Of note here is the absence of any remorse on Micah’s part; it is apparent his returning the stolen sliver was motivated more by a superstition and a fear of magic.<sup>14</sup> Nothing is said about the original curse being made into a generational malediction; the woman simply spoke it about the thief, and then effectively cancelled it by pronouncing a blessing (Judges 17:2). The curse/blessing exchange was more an example of ancient Near Eastern superstition than anything else.

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<sup>9</sup> Ferguson, “Curse, Accursed”, 139.

<sup>10</sup> “The size of the theft is extraordinary - 1,100 shekels of silver, which is equal to the amount each of the Philistine governors had given Delilah as a reward for delivering Samson into their hands (Judges 16:5)” (Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* [NAC 6] [Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 478).

<sup>11</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), II:1:429.

<sup>12</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 479.

<sup>13</sup> K. Lawson Younger, Jr., *Judges, Ruth* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 337.

<sup>14</sup> Younger, Jr., *Judges, Ruth*, 337; see also Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 479-480, who points out several other departures from the Mosaic Code in the handling of the returned money.

The other form of curse in the Old Testament was the covenant curse,<sup>15</sup> the prediction of punishment which would occur if Israel failed to remain faithful to the Lord God.<sup>16</sup> Deuteronomy 28 is perhaps the best example of the covenant curse. Verses 1-14 stipulate how God will bless Israel if they obey; verses 15-58 very pointedly describe how the people will be cursed if they fail to remain faithful.

The blessings are not to be earned or merited; they will be appropriated as God bestows them as they continue in obedience.<sup>17</sup> God is never obligated to anyone; His people “exist for Him, not Him for us”; since He is of unsurpassed sovereignty and supremacy, those who are His must “give our total loyalty and unstinting obedience” to Him.<sup>18</sup>

The curses, however, are not some act of fate from which there is no available escape. They serve as warnings as to the consequences of choosing rebellion over against the required fidelity to God and the covenant<sup>19</sup> He made with them. Rebellion against the covenant is an act of faithlessness and disobedience directed at God; a willful act of rebellion / faithlessness / disobedience caused a stepping away from the covering of blessing promised in the covenant. Being outside that covering of blessing meant exposure to the entire force of the sin-polluted world, and as is evident in the curses in Deuteronomy 28, what

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<sup>15</sup> “Curse”, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 187.

<sup>16</sup> John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981, repr. of the Harper and Brothers 1867 edition), II:610.

<sup>17</sup> Obedience to what God has commanded is never to be construed as meritorious; Luke 17:10 points out the best is to claim status as an “unworthy servant” who simply did his/her duty.

<sup>18</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (WBC 35B) (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 843.

<sup>19</sup> “Theologically (used of relations between God and man) (covenant) denotes a gracious undertaking entered into by God for the blessing and benefit of man, and specifically of those men who by faith receive the promises and commit themselves to the obligations which this undertaking involves” (Gleason L. Archer, Jr., “Covenant”, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 276.)

the world offers is nothing but pain, loss, and sorrow.<sup>20</sup> That which the world offers is to be understood as a curse compared to the bounty which comes to those who remain obedient to the Lord. Everything about this blessing/curse juxtaposition hinges on the singular issue of obedience; blessings come through full obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1), curses come from not fully obeying Him (verse 15). At its simplest, the curses are the reversal of the blessings.<sup>21</sup> Since the covenant God made with Israel was a statement of relationship, “any act that disrupted relationships was incompatible with divine blessing and must attract cursing.”<sup>22</sup>

**Generational curses: what they are purported to be.** Of the many who advocate for generational curses, perhaps none is more of a “trail-blazer” than televangelist Marilyn Hickey. Her basic thesis on generational curses is people inherit these curses from their ancestors through the bloodline. Using Exodus 20:5 as her key text, she concludes there are “hereditary traits or family weaknesses that are passed from generation to generation.”<sup>23</sup> This gives rise to the premise among some Christians that any generation marked by repeated rebellion against what God commands will enact a curse upon them and upon their descendants, even if those later born become Christians. In order to break the generational curse and cleanse the bloodline, then, these descendants must repent for the sins of their ancestors and be delivered, or remain under the effects of the curse. Wave E. Nunnally, an Assemblies of God theologian, explains in detail:

Those who teach generational curse interpret these verses (i.e., Exodus 20:5-6, Numbers 14:18, Deuteronomy 5:9-10) to mean that a person’s guilt

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<sup>20</sup> Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 280-281.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 651.

<sup>22</sup> McKeown, “Blessings and Curses”, 85.

<sup>23</sup> Marilyn Hickey, *Legacy of Faith* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2011), 43.

is genetically passed down to all his descendants. People not only inherit their ancestors' sin nature (the tendency to rebel against God) but they also acquire the accumulated guilt of their ancestors. As a result, God sees them as guilty, not only for their own sins, but also for their ancestors' sins as well. Furthermore, Satan has the right to continue to hold legal claim against Christians who have not effectively dealt with their generational curses, resulting in failure violence, impotence, profanity, obesity, poverty, shame sickness, fear and even physical death.

Generational curse proponents then take their teaching to the next logical step. They conclude that Jesus' blood was shed for the sins of the individual, but an additional step must be taken to remove the guilt a person inherited from his ancestors. This additional step is required for a person to be set free from the bondage that holds him captive to the sins of his forefathers. This procedure involves an elaborate ceremony that consists of the listing of one's ancestors up to four generations, confessing their sins for them, reciting the recommended prayers and declarations, and personally breaking these supposed curses.<sup>24</sup>

Hickey supports her ideas about generational curses with a strange interpretation of the word "iniquity". Her explanation is lengthy but it is important to understand her reasoning:

The word "iniquity" means to bend or distort (the heart) or "gross injustice or weakness." It also implies a certain weakness or predisposition towards

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<sup>24</sup> Wave E. Nunnally, "The Sins of Generational Curse", *Enrichment* 12:4 (Fall 2007), 115.

a certain sin. Isaiah says Christ as “bruised for our iniquities” (53:5).

If you commit a certain sin and repent of it and never do it again, then that’s the end of it. However, your sin becomes an iniquity when you keep committing that same act; it goes from being a sin to an iniquity, something that is practiced over and over until it becomes spontaneous. Given certain circumstances or the “right” environment, you will “bend” in that direction.

If sin is repeatedly committed, it becomes an iniquity that can be passed down through the bloodline. When a person continually transgresses the law, iniquity is created in him and that iniquity is passed to his children. The offspring will have a weakness to the same kind of sin. Each generation adds to the overall iniquity, further weakening the resistance of the next generation to sin.<sup>25</sup>

Another proponent of generational curse theology is Neil Anderson, a prolific author on things affecting the human spirit. He, like Hickey, refer to Exodus 20:4-5 to assert that demons are passed from one generation to the succeeding one, and that demons have their authority to go from generation to generation because of generational sins.<sup>26</sup> Derek Prince, a popular author in charismatic circles, uses the idea of weeds, that sin plants a “weed” in a person’s life, “linking” that person to “Satanic forces outside himself”. The tap root of the weed “represents the influence of ancestors who worshiped false gods.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Hickey, *Legacy*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1990), 201.

<sup>27</sup> Derek Prince, *Blessing or Curse: You Can Choose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1990), 64.



Essentially, generational curse theology class that sins committed by one's predecessors can infect the "family bloodline" and bring the curse of sin on succeeding generations until the curse is broken and deliverance is affected. As Hickey further explains:

If you are concerned about your family...and you see family iniquities wreaking havoc in your home, then take heart. Remember, it takes only one believing mate to sanctify a house. If you are that one believing person in your home, it's enough.. You can end the generational curse and establish blessing for your family tree, as we have already read in 1 Corinthians 7:14.<sup>28</sup>

Other authors promoting generational curses are Frank and Ida Mae Hammond. Like Hickey and Anderson, they refer to Exodus 20:4-6 as their foundational passage, claiming that one man's rebellion against the law of God will not only curse him but will cause that curse to be passed down to all his descendants.<sup>29</sup>

According to Anderson, removing the curse of demonic encampments or strongholds begins with identifying the strongholds, use certain "prayers" to break them, and even go to knowledgeable counselors for assistance if the stronghold is resistant and noncompliant.<sup>30</sup>

Neil Anderson teaches that demons have strongholds in our lives as Christians until we gain knowledge and command evil spirits to go. These spirits supposedly have their places in us because of ancestral sins. Let me point out a problem with this: if the cross is the basis of victory, which Anderson

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<sup>28</sup> Hickey, *Legacy*, 82.

<sup>29</sup> Frank and Ida Mae Hammond, *The Breaking of Curses* (Kirkwood, MO: Impact, 1993), 9.

<sup>30</sup> Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 203.

admits, then why would God leave us in demonic bondage after we have come to know Jesus through the cross?<sup>31</sup>

Another proponent of generational curse theology, Natasha Grbich, has written an extensive monograph demonstrating her understanding of the presence of such curses, their demonic and ancestral attachment, and the need to “cleanse the bloodline” in order to be free. She writes:

I need to agree that I do not want the inheritance from my mother’ and father’s bloodline because we do not know how many generations sinned and what they did. One sin can curse you for 10 generations (Deuteronomy 23:2), other sins can cut you off and some sins required death, which would mean the end of a bloodline or a name. The curse was attached to many sexual sins (read Leviticus 20:9-16). Although you may not have committed these sins, someone in your ancestry did and until it is repented of, the sin stands against you as an accusation. It stands against you because you are the person alive right now that is carrying the DNA of the one who sinned. While you are alive, you are able to repent and have the sin blotted out from your bloodline and the consequence of the sin reversed for yourself and your descendants to come.<sup>32</sup>

There are several problems raised in that short excerpt, along with additional ones as Grbich works through her thesis. While a deeper examination of Grbich, Anderson, Hickey and others follows, it is here necessary to make one salient point. If John

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<sup>31</sup> Bob DeWaay, “Generational Curses”, *Critical Issues Commentary* No. 68 (January/February 2002), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Natasha Grbich, *Repentance: Cleansing Your Generational Bloodline (Restoring the First Estate, Vol. 1)*, (Helderkruijn, South Africa: Ariel Gate International Kingdom Communications, 2009), n. p. (PDF file accessed digitally May, 2024).

8:36 is valid, and I believe it is, then generational curse thinking makes Jesus out to be a liar. If the Son sets free, then that person is “free indeed”. There is no hint or intimation that this freedom is somehow tainted by some issue in the past which has become the individual’s responsibility to confront and defeat. John 8:36 declares those who were once slaves of sin are through Christ given a new relationship with God, sharing in the divine inheritance reserved for those who are redeemed: “Slaves redeemed into *that* relationship *really* know freedom!”<sup>33</sup> Further, Romans 8:1 is unequivocal: “no condemnation” means a “repeal” of that which held people to the “law of sin.”<sup>34</sup> Christ’s finished work on the cross was not a partial release from the condemnation and bondage of sin; it was a full release, realized in its fullness by those who, as Romans 8:4 points out, walk according to the Spirit of God.<sup>35</sup> Further, the Old Testament (which many of the proponents of generational theology teaching are fond of using to establish their premises) is very clear: the person who sins is the one who will pay the penalty for that sin (Ezekiel 18:4). Ed Murphy, in his lengthy examination of spiritual warfare, argues that a curse is God’s action of releasing His power of judgment.<sup>36</sup> If that is the case, then the idea that some personal sin (iniquity) caused a curse to somehow affect a bloodline is untrue; that which is used by God for divine judgment is qualitatively different than someone sinning and somehow causing a curse to befall their family for generations. At no time does the Old Testament teach an ancestral inheritance which taints a person’s bloodline with

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<sup>33</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36) (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 134.

<sup>34</sup> Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God* (trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 172.

<sup>35</sup> David G. Peterson, *Commentary on Romans* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 304.

<sup>36</sup> Ed Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1992). Murphy’s detailed treatment of curses in the Bible connects them to divine judgment or attempts by others to gain spiritual power over another. He makes no mention of “generational curses”.

some curse of past sin.<sup>37</sup>

Marilyn Hickey and Neil Anderson argue along the same general lines, that a person needs a “revelation” as to the origin of the curse, followed by a breaking of the authority of that curse through a “binding” of Satan and the invoking of both the blood and the name of Jesus.<sup>38</sup> The Hammonds argue along the same lines, claiming the wide number of ancestors makes it necessary to have some kind of revelation as to which curses need to be broken.<sup>39</sup>

Generational curse theology has some very deep implications for Christians. It asserts that a person who would be afflicted with a generational curse “would be born already destined to commit certain sins, dominated by a force beyond human control.” Such a “curse” is presented as more than simple “parental influence”; it is a scenario requiring “some sort of

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<sup>37</sup> Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel* (NAC 17) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 188, explains the exile which Israel experienced was the result of sins committed long before; in effect, ancestral sins of persistent rebellion against God and His righteous law. Whereas the people of that day tried to blame God for their exile in an attempt to remove their responsibility for the harsh judgment. The wording of Ezekiel 18:4 corrects what the people erroneously thought: judgment was on the guilty; each person will be responsible for and will reap the consequences of his/her sin. Nevertheless, the consequences falling because of the guilty often affect the innocent. I would argue that consequences of the acts of the guilty affecting the innocent is not a “generational curse”; it is a reminder that sin is of such a heinous nature that it will reach beyond its participants to affect the innocent. William H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19* (WBC 28) (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 283, states: “‘Only the person who sins is condemned to die’ states a principle of jurisprudence instituted by King Amaziah of Judah (2 Kings 14:5-6) and prescribed by Deuteronomy 24:16. Literally, this reads: ‘Behold, the soul that sins, it shall die.’ ‘Shall die’ is legal terminology for the pronouncement of the death penalty.

<sup>38</sup> Marilyn Hickey, *Break the Generational Curse* (Denver, CO: Marilyn Hickey Ministries, 1988), 40.

<sup>39</sup> Hammond, *Breaking of Curses*, 10.

intervention” which has a greater authority than the so-called “curse”.<sup>40</sup>

DeWaay’s complaint about generational curse theology is timely:

Sadly, though the Bible everywhere teaches that faith and trust in God is the key issue, many Christians end up spending too much of their time talking to Satan instead of to God, as if he were the one who held their destiny in his hands. Do we not believe God is sovereignly in control of His own universe?<sup>41</sup>

### **Confronting the issues in generational curse theology.**

Nowhere in the Scripture is there any reference to “generational curse”. It is a theological construct which serves a particular point of view. At the core, it caters to those who seek to be absolved of any responsibility for their actions; they want to be understood as victims, not sinners, and they want a “quick fix” of what they perceive is an ancestral problem plaguing their life.<sup>42</sup>

I will begin with an examination of the apparent “anchor” text used by proponents of generational curse, Exodus 20:5-6, and with it, explore the meaning of the word “iniquity” to establish what the Scripture intends for it to mean.

Exodus 20:5-6 is part of the prohibition against making idols,

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<sup>40</sup> Opal L. Reddin, “Generational Curses, Strongholds, Binding and Loosing, Deliverance Ministry”, *Power Encounter: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Opal L. Reddin, ed.) (Springfield, MO: Central Bible College Press, 1989), 200.

<sup>41</sup> Bob DeWaay, “Are Christians Cursed? Exposing Marilyn Hickey’s False Teaching on Curses”, *Critical Issues Commentary* No. 40 (June/July 1997), accessed from <http://www.twincityfellowship.com>, February 26, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Reddin, *Power Encounter*, 200..

specifically which were meant to represent God.<sup>43</sup> To rebel against this commandment was to incur iniquity. Whereas Hickey sees “iniquity” as some kind of bending or twisting of the heart, it appears she is bending the meaning of the word to suit her thesis.

Robert Girdlestone’s study of “iniquity”, from the Hebrew *âval*, shows the word “is thought to designate the want of integrity and rectitude that is the accompaniment, if not the essential part, of wrongdoing”, and can remind of the English word “evil”. *Âval* is also rendered unjust (Psalm 43:1), unrighteous (Leviticus 19:15), ungodly (Job 16:11), perverse (Isaiah 59:3) and wickedness (Psalm 89:22). Girdlestone equates *âval* with the Greek *ádikía*,<sup>44</sup> understanding it “in its original senses a departure from that which is equal and right.”<sup>45</sup> Girdlestone also notes the Hebrew *âwôn* is most frequently translated as “iniquity”; he concludes the word is about the “nothingness or unreality on every departure from the Law of God, whether it consists of wrongdoing, evil devising, false speaking or idolatrous worship.”<sup>46</sup>

The root of *âwôn* is ‘*âwâ*, which means “to bend, to distort”, but more in the sense of what is done; for example, Proverbs 12:8 says a man of a perverse (bent, distorted) heart will be despised. It is about a perversion or a twisting of the Law.<sup>47</sup> The focus is more on the deed that is committed rather than any assumed state of the human heart.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> W. H. Gispen, *Exodus* (trans. Ed van der Maas) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan and St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada: Paideia, 1982), 190.

<sup>44</sup> “Injustice, wrong, falsehood, deceitfulness” (Mounce, *Expository Dictionary*, 1073).

<sup>45</sup> Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (3rd ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 94.

<sup>46</sup> Girdlestone, *Synonyms*, 98.

<sup>47</sup> Carl Shultz, ‘*âwâ*, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, II:650.

<sup>48</sup> Shultz, ‘*âwâ*, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, II:650.

Returning to Exodus 20:5-6, the NIV (2011) renders the verse:

You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those that hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“Iniquity” is a bending towards an act of sin. The Exodus passage does not indicate the creation of a “bloodline curse” but rather a judgment on those who continue to hate the Lord:

That they hold Him in contempt; upon them in result must come a deserved judgment, across four generations. The language of the covenantal threat may be present in these words; but even more, the insight that indifference to commitment is contagious, in a family or in a society.<sup>49</sup>

Two points from Durham are salient here. First, the judgment was not a curse but a threat of divine visitation on the sin across a limitation of four generations, and second, it was limited to “them that hate me”. Those who continue to hate the Lord do so out of their own freewill choice. They are by no means to be considered innocent. Peter Enns’ treatment of Exodus 20:5-6 concludes the text is less about specific generations being either visited in judgment or blessed for obedience, but that “both obedience and disobedience have far-reaching implications for Israel’s life as covenant people. If they disobey, the effects will be felt for a long time.”<sup>50</sup>

There is no evidence in Exodus 20:5-6 that the sin or iniquity of idolatry “bends or twists” the heart so that it affects the bloodline for generations. In fact, nothing is said about

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<sup>49</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 3) (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 287.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Enns, *Exodus* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 416.

“bloodline” at all. The witness of the Old Testament is, as was previously noted, that of individual responsibility for sin. The divine visitation because of sin in Exodus 20 is not for continual generations at all; it is limited to four generations and specifically of those who have chosen to continue in themselves a hatred for the Lord.

This verse does not teach that sinning fathers are not punished, nor does it state that the sins of the father are punished in the children and grandchildren, *without any fault of their own*. It is hardly possible that the children of wicked men could become innocent, therefore, “the children fill up the sins of their fathers so that the sinner then suffers punishment for both his own and the sins of his forefathers (cf. Leviticus 26:39; Amos 7:17; Jeremiah 16:11 ff.; Daniel 9:16).<sup>51</sup>

One suggestion about the nature of the “hate” is that the children of those who make idols are conditioned to themselves create and then worship idols.<sup>52</sup> Not one time is anything even remotely suggested about a curse infecting a bloodline, as if the curse becomes some kind of spiritual “DNA” that carries on through succeeding generations even in those who choose to remain faithful to the Lord.

The offender is the one whom God holds responsible for the sin. That person’s iniquity is laid at their feet and their feet alone. For example, Numbers 5:29-31 covers the “law of jealousy”, where a husband suspects his wife of infidelity. The priest would administer “bitter water” to her with verbal warnings about the possibility of her guilt (Numbers 5:11-28). If the woman indeed had sinned in this way, the text is very clear: she alone will bear the consequences of her iniquity. The sin of

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<sup>51</sup> John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986), 213. (Italics added for emphasis.)

<sup>52</sup> Gispén, *Exodus*, 191-192.



marital infidelity was taken as a serious one because of the possibility it would affect the life of the entire community. The “iniquity” is not about bloodline; it is about individual guilt and in the course of the priestly examination, seeking to protect the defendant from unjust accusations if in fact she had not been unfaithful.<sup>53</sup>

Leviticus 5:17 indicates the only one to be held responsible for an act of sin (iniquity) is the offender. The same idea is in a collective sense in Isaiah 30:12-13; Israel, as a people, committed iniquity against the Lord, and so the divine punishment will come upon them for their deeds. The consequences is laid upon those who sinned (committed iniquity), not on subsequent generations. It is evident that Old Testament use did not understand “iniquity” becoming the by-product or the result of a repeated sin; it refers to the consequences and / or the nothingness, the emptiness, of the committed sin.

Hickey’s claim that iniquity “bends” or “twists” the heart and therefore affects the bloodline has no Biblical support. Any “bending” or “twisting” has to do with the sin itself and the consequences for the sin.

Because what is right was ordained by God, and what is wrong is what was proscribed by Him, deviation from this paradigm constitutes what is evil. The most common term for cultic evil in the Old Testament (used over 200 times) is ‘*awon*, “perversion”, possibly related to the verb ‘*awah*, “to be bent, to twist”. As such it refers to what is theologically perverted in some way. ‘*awon* may be used to describe (1) the evil action itself (Psalm

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<sup>53</sup> Philip J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC 5) (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 66.

130:2); (2) the ensuing guilt (Leviticus 5:17); (3) punishment for the act (Genesis 4:13).<sup>54</sup>

No mention is made of the word for iniquity being understood or applied as something which carries on in the bloodline for generations. Despite Hickey's insistence that sin repeated becomes an iniquity which is then spontaneously practiced,<sup>55</sup> it is apparent she has made a false dichotomy between "sin" and "iniquity". As was previously noted by Girdlestone, "iniquity" is just another word for "sin".

The major problem with Hickey's thesis, as it has been demonstrated, is it has no Old Testament linguistic support. There is nothing in the Old Testament to indicate repeated sin becomes iniquity. "Iniquity" is sin; it describes the disposition of the heart to sin (Jeremiah 17:9) without any connection whatsoever to ancestral influence. Martens has written that '*awon* is simply another word for "sin" in Hebrew; whereas *hattat* (sin) refers to missing the mark of what God intended (the act), '*awon* is the ethical component, carrying an awareness of the culpability for what is done.<sup>56</sup> Hickey's thesis on sin becoming iniquity and iniquity referring to habituation fails on the following points:

(1) Nothing in the Old Testament supports the idea of some progression from "sin" to "iniquity". Hickey fails to give any solid Biblical or linguistic support for her position. It is plain, as Opal Reddin has argued, "All iniquity is sin and all sin in iniquity".<sup>57</sup>

(2) Nothing in the Old Testament connects "iniquity" to a pollution of a "bloodline" for generations. Hickey's employment

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<sup>54</sup> William C. Williams, "Evil", *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, 222.

<sup>55</sup> Hickey, *Legacy*, 45.

<sup>56</sup> E. A. Martens, "Evil", *Dictionary of the Old Testament (Pentateuch)*, 765-767.

<sup>57</sup> Reddin, *Power Encounter*, 201.

of Exodus 20:5-6 for justification of her position is a misapplication of the intent of the text.

If it were true that a sin from an ancestor would pollute the bloodline and cause that sin to find a root in a descendent, then narratives of the kings of Judah would have to be rewritten. Manasseh came to the throne at age 12, and reigned for 55 years (2 Kings 21:1). He chose to do evil, restoring the godless idolatry in Judah, overturning all the reforms his father Hezekiah had instituted. Of Manasseh, God said the man had “done more evil than the Amorites which had preceded him” (verse 11). For over a half-century, Judah was under the influence of this ungodly, idol-loving king. His son Amon followed in his father’s footsteps (verses 19-21) during his two year reign. At his death, Amon’s son Josiah, grandson to Manasseh, at eight years of age, was made king. The sin of Manasseh and of Amon should have become an “iniquity” by generational curse standards, infecting Josiah with those sins. But 2 Kings 22:2 says Josiah “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord”, and did “not (turn) to the right or the left”. God saw Josiah’s faith and promised the man he would not see the disaster which the Lord promised to bring on Judah because of their sin (2 Kings 22:15-20). The sin of Manasseh and Amon did not “infect” Josiah’s “bloodline”. He chose to follow the Lord of his own free will.

(3) Nothing in the Old Testament supports the effects of sin being inherited across generations. Scripture consistently points to individual culpability /responsibility for acts of sin against God. Such is made very plain in Ezekiel 18:4, for example. In the context of Ezekiel 18 as a whole, the issue is God’s justice on each individual generation for their own sin, punishing those who sin but forgiving and blessing those who turn to God’s grace for life (Ezekiel 18:31), giving them a “new heart” (Ezekiel 11:19).<sup>58</sup> Judgment would come solely on the guilty party (Ezekiel 18:20). This concept is not something

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<sup>58</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 238.

within the later prophets, either. Deuteronomy 24:16 prohibits parents being punished for their children's sin and children for the sin of their parents.

It is interesting to note that God gave Israel instructions on how to purge sin from their midst. Most who hold to generational curse theology attribute adultery / promiscuity to that sin being present in some ancestor and passed down into the present generation.<sup>59</sup> The word "purge" in Deuteronomy 22 comes from a Hebrew word that means "to burn, consume."<sup>60</sup> When God speaks of the punishment of those caught in the act of adultery, they are to be put to death to purge (burn or consume) the sin from in Israel. This is consistent with God holding people individually responsible for their sin and not visiting judgment on succeeding generations because of the actions of an ancestor.

The New Testament addresses the issue of repeating sins, the action which generational curse teachers say will (supposedly) cause "iniquity" to take root.

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God (1 John 3:9).

John is unambiguous; the genuine believer in Jesus Christ will not engage in habitual sin.

...the present tense verbs are significant. It is not that the Christian cannot commit a single act of sin as the KJV may seem to suggest, but he is continually unable...to engage in habitual sin. He may commit individual acts of sin, but it is not

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<sup>59</sup> For example, see Hammond, *Breaking of Curses*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> John N. Oswalt, "bā'ar" (1), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, I:121.

possible for sin to become the pattern of his life.... It is the new life principle implanted in the child of God by regeneration the keeps him from continually engaging in sin. Instead the new life principle provides motivation towards righteousness.<sup>61</sup>

I would argue that if any individual passage in the New Testament stands against the idea of a “generational curse” or some ancient ancestral sin polluting successive generations to cause them issues in their lives, it would be 2 Corinthians 5:17. In Christ, the power of the authority of sin has been broken; the world of sin and death has been set at nought by the new order brought in through Christ. Through His redemptive work on the cross, Christ becomes the “divider of history”; individuals are not “personally transformed” but find themselves “encompass(ed) (by) the eschatological act of recreating humans and nature in Christ”. The phrase “the old has gone” refers to whatever “controlled the individual’s pre-Christian experience.”<sup>62</sup> For the sake of argument, if Hickey was correct, that “iniquity” caused pollution of the bloodline from which deliverance was necessary, what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17 would end her argument. If whatever it was happened prior to the person becoming a Christian, it was made “gone” through salvation in Christ.

Nevertheless, to be in Christ, for Paul, is to be part of the newly created humanity which has received the grace of God and has been identified with the historical Christ; it is to have broken with that group which is identified with Adam, still in its sin and under the judgement of God.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Donald W. Burdick, *The Letters of John the Apostle* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1985), 248.

<sup>62</sup> David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC 29) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 287.

<sup>63</sup> Michael Parsons, “In Christ’ in Paul”, *Vox Evangelica* 18 (1988), 31-32.

In the believer's identification with Christ, the nature of Christ becomes by faith the nature of the believer, and the power of sin, even something allegedly coming through the bloodline, is broken (Romans 6:14). No additional deliverance is required; either Christ's sacrifice for sin is sufficient or it is not sufficient, and if it is not sufficient to fully break the power of all sin, then His death on the cross was for no advantage.

The arguments of generational curse proponents seem to indicate they do not believe that Christ's work in the cross was sufficient to break the hold of sin. For example, consider the following from Natasha Grbich, a strong advocate of generational curse theology.

The process of cleaning our bloodlines is a long one that requires diligence and perseverance. We must take every high thing that has exalted itself against the knowledge of God through all these generations and lay them at His feet so He can put His feet on them. You want Him to crush them for you. He has already done it at the cross but you are now working out your salvation with fear and trembling. You are telling God that this is what you have inherited, but it is not what you want to look like. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). From Adam through all our successive generations, we have made covenants with demons, raped, killed, stolen and offered sacrifices to other gods. We have inherited the consequences of these sins. We have to work through every sin, bringing it to the cross and choosing with our will to repent of it and give a testimony in the heavenly court that we no longer want any part of the sin. We must give up all benefits and inheritance that we received through these demonic contracts and declare we only want

what Jesus bought for us. We agree that we want God to choose our inheritance.<sup>64</sup>

The syncretistic tendency to add human effort to the grace of God in salvation is evident. While Grbich admits Jesus has crushed the demonic at the cross, she insists believers then have to work out their own salvation (quoting Philippians 2:12). In other words, what Jesus did was allegedly sufficient, but believers have to make it even more sufficient by their works. “Working out” one’s salvation is not adding to what Christ has done; it is an “active pursuit of the will of God, to the promotion of the spiritual life in himself”; it is living out the grace that Christ “worked in”.<sup>65</sup> It is not asking God to complete something that was completed at the cross. Grbich and other generational curse advocates insist that genuine spiritual freedom comes not from Christ alone but from Christ *and* human contribution. Paul’s exhortation in Philippians 2:12 is not about adding something to the gift of salvation in order to bring genuine spiritual freedom; he is calling on them to be obedient to what they have already learned: submission to the will of God, being in unity and demonstrating courage in the face of opposition.<sup>66</sup> If Christ has already brought a crushing defeat to sin and the demonic at the cross, then why is it necessary for some human effort to apply what Christ has done?

Grbich asserts that through “covenants with demons” and other sins done by ancestors that people today have “inherited the consequences of these sins.” She provides no Biblical references to support her claim; evidently it is to be received simply on her say-so. Referring again to Ezekiel 18:4, the consequences of sin are visited on the individual who committed the sin; a succeeding generation is not punished for something they did

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<sup>64</sup> Grbich, *Cleansing Your Generational Bloodline*, n.p.

<sup>65</sup> Jacques J. Müller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 91.

<sup>66</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 110.

not do. Grbich would hold people today responsible and culpable for things done by ancestors hundreds of years earlier. Further, where in the Scripture is there any justification for asserting demons have a right to harass and trouble a believer because of something done perhaps centuries before they were born?

How can a sin of someone's ancestors give the devil a right to carry on that sin, or a fruit of it, down to other generations, even though they are Christians?<sup>67</sup>

Grbich and others who advance generational curses assign far too much authority to the enemy over against the authority of Jesus Christ. The main sphere of the devil's operation today is in those who are willfully disobedient (Ephesians 2:2), blinding them so they do not see the truth of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). The temptation to sin is the result of giving in to one's evil desire (James 1:14). While the enemy as the tempter can attempt to persuade, deceive, and seduce a person to turn away from God and turn towards sin, the paradigm for believers is to be so turned towards Christ that those evil desires are not given opportunity to affect one's life (Romans 6:12-14). Generational curse teaching relieves people of their responsibility for their sin, giving them "a way out God never intended."<sup>68</sup>

Grinch insists Christians must give up whatever inheritance they had from their ancestors, and "to agree that we want God to choose our inheritance." Again, she offers no Biblical support for her contention. What we do find in the New Testament about the believer's inheritance includes:

- believers are made co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17);
- believers are heirs because of grace (Galatians 3:18);

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<sup>67</sup> Scot Riley, *Releasing the Curse* (Lafayette, LA: Huntington House, 1999), 12.

<sup>68</sup> Riley, *Releasing the Curse*, 14.



- believers are heirs through faith (Galatians 3:29);
- believers inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14);
- believers have the full rights of sons (Galatians 4:4-7).

Generational curse theology apparently ignores the promise of the Word of God that believers, through the new birth in Christ, have been given “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (1 Peter 1:3-4). Believers do not have to “tell God” what inheritance they want; it has already been given to them through their salvific relationship in Christ. Peter’s wording speaks less of some particular object passed through a family line but as that which is a “sanctioned and settled possession”.<sup>69</sup> While the inheritance of which Peter speaks is eschatological,<sup>70</sup> believers “can recognize it already by faith (Ephesians 1:18).”<sup>71</sup> The promised inheritance comes to believers through God’s sovereign power and choice; it is not something any believer needs to claim or tell God about wanting it.

It seems coherent to assert the key passages Hickey and other generational curse proponents use to support the idea of generational curses have nothing to do with bloodline-borne sins, guilt or effects. In the key proof texts for generational curse teaching (mentioned above), nothing is said in the texts about inherited curses or bloodline contamination as a result of sin. Such ideas are nothing more than the inventions of those who teach generational curse theology. No substantiation anywhere in the Old Testament is found to advance the idea of “iniquity” polluting a “bloodline”.

There is one “family unit” whose “bloodline”, so to speak, was

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<sup>69</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988) 20.

<sup>70</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 20.

<sup>71</sup> J. Eichler, “Inheritance”, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Colin Brown, ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), II:300. Eichler further notes Matthew 5:3, that the poor in spirit already possess the kingdom of God as an inheritance, even though the “full realization...is future.”

affected by sin, and that “unit” is the whole of the human race. Every child born on this earth comes with a sinful nature that is the result of the fall of in the Garden of Eden (Psalm 51:5). Referring to Acts 17:26 ("God has made of one blood all nations"), Reddin strongly objects to the idea of "generational curses' passing through the bloodline:

Human blood may transmit physical diseases, but it cannot carry spirits or iniquities. A blood transfusion from the vilest sinner could not defile one; likewise, blood from the most Christlike saint cannot make one holy.<sup>72</sup>

**The fallacies of generational curse theology.** While I have already covered some of this material above, here I will more specifically demonstrate that the so-called “doctrine” of the generational curse is nothing more than an invention which has absolutely no Scriptural support.

Of all the issues which confront generational curse theology, perhaps the most damaging is the absolute lack of any Biblical texts, whether in the Old or the New Testament, which point to either a “generational curse” or “pollution of the bloodline.”

If generational curses were a reality, God would have given appropriate instructions in Scripture regarding how to deal with the problem.<sup>73</sup>

Without specific references in the Scripture, the idea of generational curses fails to assume any authoritative position in the believer’s life. Generational curse teaching is unnecessary baggage that carries, at its very core, a denial of the sufficiency of the work of Christ on the cross. If the work of Christ on the cross for sin is insufficient, then salvation is changed from being an act of faith through God’s grace

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<sup>72</sup> Reddin, *Power Encounter*, 35.

<sup>73</sup> Nunnally, “The Sins of Generational Curse”, 117.

(Ephesians 2:8-9) to a works-righteousness that is ultimately more man than it is Christ. That being the case, generational curse theology runs counter to Titus 3:4-5, that salvation is through the kindness of God and not in any way obligated to or necessitated by man's righteous works.

A quantum leap by generational curse teachers can be found in Hickey's premise that Canaan's sin upon his grandfather Noah was a homosexual one, and that Sodom and Gomorrah were judged because of their rampant homosexuality. Since Canaan was the first homosexual, and since the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were Canaanites, it is therefore evidence, so it is claimed, that the sin of homosexuality passed through Canaan's bloodline to his descendants.<sup>74</sup>

Her interpretation reveals some serious exegetical issues. Nothing in the Hebrew text asserts either Ham or Canaan committed any kind of homosexual act on Noah. In fact, Genesis 9:20-21 is vague as to what Canaan actually did. It is reasonable to assert Ham's sin was one of not maintaining his filial obligation to honor his father, and instead of discreetly covering his father so as to hide the man's nakedness, Ham chose to gossip about it to Shem and Japheth (Genesis 9:22).<sup>75</sup> Historically, the Canaanites were known for their sexual aberrations, but this does not in itself give credence to the idea of a bloodline being polluted.

It is true that homosexual behavior is sinful. But jumping from the questionable premise that Canaan was a homosexual, which the Bible does not say, and considering him the source of Sodom and Gomorrah's behavior is problematic. The logical fallacy is to conclude, without warrant, that if one thing preceded another it must have been its cause.

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<sup>74</sup> Hickey, *Break the Generation Curse*, 19.

<sup>75</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 200-201.

This ignores the obvious fact that there is more than one possible cause for the same observed effect. The logic behind the blessing and cursing teaching goes like this: A) Curses are caused by sin. B) These things are listed in the Bible as curses. C) Conclusion: If any of these things are happening to you it is because you are cursed because of your sin — or that of one of your ancestors, or of some other person — thus giving the devil a right to put a curse on you.<sup>76</sup>

A further problem is the lack of evidence anywhere in the Bible that the devil has any power to curse anything or anyone. There are no examples of such a curse to be found in the Scriptures.

All we know is that Ham looked with apparent satisfaction on his father.<sup>77</sup> Whether he took any other action is a complete argument from silence. There is nothing concrete in the text to assume any action on Ham's part beyond the looking upon his father. It is further an argument from silence to assert whatever Ham did made him to be cursed as a homosexual or that he was a homosexual before entering his father's tent.<sup>78</sup> All which can be concluded from the text itself is that Ham had a sexually perverted heart; whether he was a voyeur (i.e., a man with a "dirty mind") or any other specific kind of squally-oriented

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<sup>76</sup> DeWaay, "Are Christians Cursed?", 3.

<sup>77</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972), I:346.

<sup>78</sup> Waltke notes that rabbinical sources think Ham "either castrated his father or that he committed sodomy." But he argues that the rabbis have added to the text. He believes Ham was a voyeur, perhaps a homosexual voyeur (i.e., one who looks without physical act) (Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001], 149). John Walton proposes the possibility the original author wrote this story with the knowledge of what his audience would already have known. Since Levitical law that to uncover the nakedness of the father is to uncover the nakedness of the mother, at is plausible that Ham saw his parents in their bed, perhaps making love, and scoffed about it to his brothers. Walton further argues that the lack of specific details in the text keep modern audiences from assigning to it more is there, and a charge of homosexuality is more than the text, as it is, can support (John H. Walton, *NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001] 348-349).

individual is just as much an argument from silence.<sup>79</sup> There is no basis, then, for interpreting Noah's "curse" as being some "generational curse" but as a word of prophecy that identifies what God in His foreknowledge knew would happen within the Hamite race. What Hickey does by reading homosexuality into Genesis 9 is an hermeneutical error called "eisegesis", the "reading into a text one's own presupposed or preconceived ideas as a substitute for careful exegesis to determine what the author meant to say."<sup>80</sup> I would argue that Hickey's assumption that Ham was homosexual and that he is responsible for bring the generational curse of sexual perversion into the entire Canaanite race is at best special pleading from silence and at its worst an eisegetical mistake which completely misuses the Genesis pericope in an effort to document her assertion. It is

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<sup>79</sup> It is interesting to read the comments on this section by the eminent Old Testament Scholars. C.F Keil and F. Delitzsch, who have postulated Canaan was allegedly already doing what his father was doing, which would have been living in impiety which included a preference for sexual issues. They believe Ham, Canaan's father, was a tyrant, based on the meaning of Canaan as "submissive one." They write, "In the sin of Ham 'there lies the great stain of the whole Hamitic race, whose chief characteristic is sexual sin (Ziegler); and the curse which Noah pronounced upon this sin still rests upon the race.'" (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989], 1:156-157). It is difficult to see a humanly spoken "curse", which has no divine power, as having a huge sway on the future of an entire race. Canaan was following his father's example, one that Ham had to have in him before entering into the ark; Noah was not of the same promiscuous inclination (Genesis 6:9), and nothing is said of the moral courses of either of the other two sons. But it is important to note that it was not Noah's curse upon Ham or upon his descendants that "locked" that race into the "generational curse of sexual sin." Ham lived a certain lifestyle and modeled it in his home; his family would be influenced by that same lifestyle and would find "permission" to live that way by their father's own apparently lascivious nature. Hartley, in taking into consideration the immoral nature of the Canaanites, prefers to see Noah's "curse" as a prophetic oracle over the whole Canaanite the whole Canaanite people (John E. Hartley, *Genesis* [NIBC][Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000], 114). He goes on to note that regardless of the of the "curse", the redemptive work of Christ freed humans from the curses found in the Old Testament (116). Aalders also sees the "curse" as a prophetic pronouncement (G. C. Aalders, *Genesis* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981], 205).

<sup>80</sup> James D. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics* (Springfield, MI: Gospel Publishing House, 2005), 19.

perhaps best to hear Walton's conclusion that modern audiences do not have the ability or the information to specifically indicate the nature of Ham's actions.<sup>81</sup>

But, in moving on from the issue of what Ham did to the fact that Noah uttered a curse about the situation, it is important to understand that a human curse does not necessarily obligate God to any certain or specific action.

A curse does not create a mandate. It is something for God to carry out, not humans (though he may use humans as his instruments). I do not know anyone who cultivates weeds just so the curse on the ground will remain reality. A final point would be found in reminder that this is Noah's curse, not God's.<sup>82</sup>

Generational curse theology establishes a false dualism between God and the devil, where God's sovereignty is diminished in that God is apparently either relegated to the sideline or made somehow helpless as He waits for a person to speak the right words in the right deliverance prayer at the right time.

If not (i.e., if the right deliverance prayer is not uttered), he (i.e., God) simply lets the devil put curses on us because hundreds of years ago, unknown to us, pagan idolaters had done their thing on the property we now own. Current faithfulness to God would not help in such a case. Likewise, if a great-grandfather was a notorious sinner, we may be under an unknown curse and the devil has every right to attack us, whether or not we are Christian. This view clearly gets us away from the central theme of the Old and New Testaments, which is our

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<sup>81</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 347-349.

<sup>82</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 356.

relationship with God.<sup>83</sup>

Core to the entire revelation of Scripture, and essential to the whole of Christian belief,<sup>84</sup> is the revelation of the sovereignty of God. He is shown in the Scripture to be “the Creator of the Universe and the Lord of history”.<sup>85</sup>

God is sovereign. That means that he makes his own plans and carries them out in his own time and way. To state it otherwise, this is simply an expression of supreme intelligence, power, wisdom and love. This in turn means that God's will is not arbitrary, but acts in complete harmony with his character.<sup>86</sup>

God's sovereignty is indicated in Scripture in several different ways. He is free to do whatever He wills to do (Psalm 135:6) and whatever He wills to do, He will accomplish (Psalm 33:11, Isaiah 14:24), and He is of greater authority than any other creature, material or immaterial (Psalm 95:3, Colossians 1:16). The enemy, the devil, is defeated through God's sovereign purposes as revealed in and through Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:15). God is shown to be the one who saves from death (Psalm 68:20), who is the refuge of those who seek Him (Psalm 73:28), and who protects from condemnation (Isaiah 50:9).

It is problematic, then, to assert God's ultimate sovereignty and in that sovereignty, His deliverance of those who flee to Him but then to insist curses can be imbedded in the bloodline of those who are the redeemed in Christ. This casts a shadow on the authority and the power of God to save, and calls into question

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<sup>83</sup> DeWaay, “Are Christians Cursed?”, 3.

<sup>84</sup> D. W. H. Thomas, “Sovereignty of God”, *New Dictionary of Theology* (Martin Davie, et al, eds.) (London, England and Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 858.

<sup>85</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (Peabody MA: Prince Press, 1998), I:25.

<sup>86</sup> Victor Sinclair, “The Sovereignty of God in Reconciliation with Karl Barth as Guide”, *Irish Biblical Studies* 18.3 (July 1996), 156.

His ability to do as He has promised. If a person who supposedly has a bloodline curse runs to God for protection and deliverance, then how can it be said that some additional formulaic “deliverance prayer” is necessary to bring release from the curse?

The idea of a “deliverance prayer” is similarly problematic, for it, like the idea of a generational curse itself, has no backing, no example, no substantiation anywhere in the Scripture. Neither the Old or the New Testament has anything even remotely resembling such a prayer.<sup>87</sup> That the devil or any malevolent entity can exercise authority over a person who has been redeemed in Christ ignores the structure of authority. In the spiritual realm, a level of authority will have power until displaced by a higher authority. Working from James 4:7, when a person submits to God, he or she is submitting to divine authority for which there is no peer. Submission to God in James 4:7 has a form of *hupotasso*, which refers to “Christian behavior in the context of recognized authority structures.”<sup>88</sup> Such submission to God is a “complete humble subjection, modeled on the pattern of Christ.”<sup>89</sup> Any “deliverance prayer” becomes moot, because once a person has submitted to the ultimate sovereignty and authority of God, then the enemy cannot maintain any kind of constricting authority, and no alleged “generational curse” can be theorized to exercise negative and malevolent authority.

The apostle James, after exhorting to submit to God, then instructs believers to “resist the devil” causing him to flee. Nothing is said about deliverance prayers or incantations or other formulaic sayings; resisting is opposing,<sup>90</sup> a refusal to

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<sup>87</sup> Nunnally, “The Sins of Generational Curse”, 117.

<sup>88</sup> Mounce, *Expository Dictionary*, 694.

<sup>89</sup> James B. Adamson, *James* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 174.

<sup>90</sup> Mounce, *Expository Dictionary*, 489.



entertain whatever the enemy might have to say or claim.<sup>91</sup> Resisting or opposing the devil is not in one's own might or wisdom, but following Jesus' example during the temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13), the believer must wield the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17).

James shows that though the impulse to sin may be internal, to give in to that impulse is to yield to the devil. The Gospels are clear on this point (e.g. Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 8:28-34, Luke 22:31, John 13:2, 27). But the devil has no power over the Christian except the power of seduction. When resisted, he must behave as he did with Jesus in the wilderness – he fled, leaving him. That will be the experience of the Christian as well if he/she learns to say no.<sup>92</sup>

Generational curse theology wants to place the responsibility for a sin in someone's life on some ancestor or pagan group who lived on the land millennia ago. Yet there is not one shred of Biblical evidence to show that sin, however it is manifested, is the fault of some progenitor and now the effects of that sin are being experienced. The reality is whether one gives in to sin or not is that person's choice, and it has to do with where one has his/her mind. To choose to live according to the flesh — according to the sinful nature — will desire only what comports with the flesh (Romans 8:5). Such a mind, governed by the flesh, abides in death (Romans 8:6), for the mind of the flesh is completely hostile to the ways of God (Romans 8:7, Galatians 5:17). There is nothing here about a generational “curse”; it is about the individual choice of living for the sinful flesh or living under the authority and power of the Redeemer.

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<sup>91</sup> Based on John 8:44, I have taught that if the devil's mouth is moving, he is lying. A “half-truth” is a “half-lie”; if the enemy speaks, nothing he says will ever ring true in the end.

<sup>92</sup> Peter H. Davids, *James* (NIBC) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 102.

Resisting the devil, his power of deception and seduction, is part of being free from sin; if the suggestion to sin is not there, then the desire to sin will be lessened, and from there, the believer, experiencing God's refuge, filling up the mind with the Word of God (see Psalm 19:9, 119:11), does not have to choose to sin!

Scripture pointedly assigns responsibility for the exercise of sin to the individual, not to the effect of the actions of some long-dead person. Sin is to be put to death (Romans 8:13, Colossians 3:5-8). "To put to death" a sin is to eradicate "any persisting marks of the old pagan lifestyle — its values, customs and practices."<sup>93</sup> That eradication comes through setting one's mind on Christ instead of on things of the earth (Colossians 3:1-2).

The identification of sexual sins as having roots in generational curses, because of the perversity or promiscuity of some ancestor, as Hickey does, fails under close examination of Colossians 3:1-11. Sexual desire is not an evil thing; it is part of the divine design, "hardwired" into every human being.<sup>94</sup> The inflammation of that desire into sinful activities is not the result of a generational curse (Paul mentions nothing about it in Colossians 3) but the influence of moral indifference that "fueled uncontrolled erotic passion, misdirected sexual desire, and bred sexual excesses."<sup>95</sup> A person who is beset with sexual promiscuity cannot blame some curse passed down through the bloodline. Each person is responsible for his or her actions, for the free-will choices they make.

It is true that curses come because of sin. Israel was told that if they sinned by not being obedient to the Lord in keeping the

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<sup>93</sup> David E. Garland, *Colossians/Philemon* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 204.

<sup>94</sup> Proverbs 5:15-20 is a rebuke of adultery, not a rebuke of sexual engagement on a wholesale basis. The Decalogue did not forbid sexual acts between married persons; it forbade adultery. Hebrews 13:4, when read in the Greek, speaks of *koitus* or sexual intercourse as pure and holy within the context of the marriage.

<sup>95</sup> Garland, *Colossians/Philemon*, 204.

Law which He had given them, they would find themselves under a divine curse (e.g., Deuteronomy 28:15). But simply because those specific curses are listed as sin does not then allow for the huge leap into claiming that if anything like sexual sin or greed, for example, affects a believer's life, that person is cursed because of sin in the bloodline, and the devil has some "right" to place a curse on such an individual. All of the divinely instituted curses in the Old Testament follow a specific pattern: God calls for obedience to the Law, and where that obedience does not happen, the result is a curse. What generational curse teachers ignore is the separation between the Law of Moses and the believer under grace. Where in Scripture does it say that believers in Christ are subject to obedience to the Law of Moses? Where in the New Testament does it say believers enter into relationship with God based on their obedience of the Law of Moses? And where in the Scripture can it be established that every time someone has adversity or trouble in life that source of that problem is some alleged ancestral, bloodline-borne curse? In fact, what the Bible does teach is that Law, having been superseded by the better covenant that is in Christ, is now old and is passing away into obsolescence (Hebrews 8:13). Believers in Christ are no longer subject to the dictates of the Law of Moses (Romans 6:14). All condemnation because of sin has been removed in relationship with Christ (Romans 8:1). Those who are saved in Christ will not suffer punishment for sin committed prior to salvation<sup>96</sup> — whether they committed that sin or some presumed ancestor may have committed it.

The dictates of the Law of Moses have been set aside by a life lived in faith to Christ.<sup>97</sup> What generational curse advocates need to address is how something grounded in an ancestor's apparent failure to adhere to an aspect of the Law of Moses can

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<sup>96</sup> Peterson, *Commentary on Romans*, 304.

<sup>97</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 174.

affect a person redeemed in Christ, when in Christ, a person is truly free (John 8:36).

**A brief word about bloodlines.** The presence of a blessing or of a curse has nothing to do with “bloodlines”. It further has nothing to do with the physical DNA each person has, despite claims from generational curse advocates that the DNA carries “memories” from past generations, including memories of past covenants made by ancestors.<sup>98</sup>

Whether a person experiences blessing or curses is dependent on their individual choices, not the choices of any ancestors. Scripture bears this out in very plain terms.

This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the *one* who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the *one* who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:5-8, emphasis added).

God’s curse for disobedience is not directed at a bloodline or the entirety of a family line; it falls on the *one* who chooses turning away from the Lord. The text is forthright: blessing and cursing falls on “that person”, not the generations which follow. It is true that from the first sin in the Garden of Eden “have come

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<sup>98</sup> For example, see Grbich, *Repentance: Cleansing Your Generational Bloodline*, (Section 1.4), n.p. It is interesting Grbich provides no reliable scientific resource to document her claims about DNA or memories, even though she claims that it is “according to science.”

all the rest of the sins of the human heart”.<sup>99</sup> But it is also true that God searches each person’s heart and deals with every person according to their ways (Jeremiah 17:10). Whatever “curse” might have existed was done away with in Christ (Galatians 3:13). Some generational curse advocates believe Christians who happen to be in contact with something “cursed”, such as cursed ground or cursed housing, have thereby given Satan some kind of legal right to affect the bloodline and the entirety of the family.

But if that is the case, then the sacrifice of Christ is far less potent than what the Bible indicates. Whatever power Satan might have wielded has been ruined through Christ’s cross (Colossians 2:15). Satan has no legal authority, right, or dominion over any person redeemed in Christ (Colossians 1:13-14). Sin canceled in Christ is no longer able to condemn (Romans 8:1), because “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

One family line traced through the Scripture creates significant problems for generational curse proponents and their advocacy of “tainted bloodlines.” The ancient Moabites were cursed for their failure to assist Israel during the wilderness wanderings, a curse which carried to the “tenth generation” (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). The wording “tenth generation” means “forever”, a total exclusion from the “assembly of the Lord”.<sup>100</sup> Ruth was a Moabitess who eventually married Boaz, an Israelite from the tribe of Judah. Ruth then became an ancestor of King David; as such, David had a tainted or cursed bloodline from the Moabite influence. Further, as Matthew 1:2-16 indicates, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was descended from David. If, then, Mary had

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<sup>99</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 280.

<sup>100</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (NAC 4) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 308.

a “tainted bloodline” because of her Moabite ancestor, Jesus was born with a generational curse, a tainted bloodline!

What generational curse advocates have to answer is how the Son of God, the *Logos* who is God (John 1:1), could be defiled with a tainted bloodline? As the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), Jesus could not Himself have been defiled or tainted in any way with any sin; the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that Jesus “had no sin.”<sup>101</sup>

If we were to assume Jesus did have such a generational curse in His human bloodline, it is bordering on the ludicrous to then assert He needed some kind of special prayer of deliverance so He could be released from that curse. I would argue that even if the Moabite curse was generational, it was broken in Ruth when she chose to worship the God of Israel instead of the idols of her native country.<sup>102</sup>

**Reasons to reject generational curse theology.** Here I present six Scripturally founded reasons to reject generational curse theology as any semblance of Biblical reality.

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<sup>101</sup> Christ had no “acquaintance” with sin, which enabled God to present His Son in “identification with the human condition in its alienation and lostness” as well as declaring that “believers might become righteous with a righteousness that is (God’s) own” (Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* [WBC 40] [Waco, TX: Word, 1986], 157-158). The perfection of the righteousness of God could not be present in a being who was in himself not “perfection” because of sin. If Jesus had some kind of lingering generational sin because of His descent from Moab, then He would have been disqualified as the One through whom God communicated righteousness to those who believe.

<sup>102</sup> It is possible the hospitality the Moabites showed to Elimelech and Naomi, and their two sons, when they fled to that country to escape the famine in Israel, enabled the Israelites to accept a Moabite into their community when Naomi and Ruth returned at the end of the famine. See Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 248. I find it interesting the Scripture gives no indication of anyone rejecting Ruth because she was an “accursed Moabite”.

Reason 1: *Generational curse teaching denies the sufficiency of Scripture, requiring humanly generated tests, rites and formulas be added to the Word of God.*<sup>103</sup>

Marilyn Hickey printed a formulaic prayer she claims is designed to be the breaker of the bloodline curse of alcoholism.<sup>104</sup> Yet, in John 8:36, Jesus said His freedom is a complete freedom.<sup>105</sup> Whatever slavery there was because of sin, Jesus has broken the entirety of that enslavement.<sup>106</sup> If, as the New Testament so adequately demonstrates, the work of Jesus brings complete freedom from sin for those who believe in Him, then any additional, man-made, formulaic “deliverance prayer” is extra-Biblical and unnecessary.

Reason 2. *Generational curse teaching denies the completed work of Christ on the cross.*

In his opening comments to the church in Colossae, the apostle Paul declared that it is through Christ that the alienation because of sin has been abrogated in favor of reconciliation affected by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (Colossians 1:19-23).

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<sup>103</sup> These six reasons were adapted from Nunnally, “The Sins of Generational Curse”, 118. The expansions on each reason are mine.

<sup>104</sup> Hickey, *Legacy*, 58.

<sup>105</sup> “Jesus Christ came into the world, died, and rose from death, to deliver all mankind from the power of sin and death. ‘So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’ (John 8:36). Not only did Christ set mankind free from the power of sin and death, He also sets us free from our lifelong enemy, Satan, who holds the power of death. ‘Since the children have flesh and blood, He, too, shared in their humanity, so that, by His death, He might destroy him, who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who, all their lives, were held in slavery, by their fear of death’ (Heb 2:14, 15). Jesus sets all who trust in Him free from sin (Romans 6:18; 8:2), so that they may live in the freedom He offers them (Galatians 5:1), and walk in freedom (Psalm 119:45). The freedom Christ offers is a costly freedom, which He bought by His blood (Rev 1:5)” - Joshua K. Daimoi, “The Christian View of Religious Freedom”, *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 10.1 (1994), 40.

<sup>106</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (NTC), (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1953/54), II:54.

Notice the words "free from accusation." Once a person comes into covenant relationship with Christ in salvation, there is nothing prior to that relationship that has any power to accuse or keep that person in bondage. Sin ruined, perverted and twisted the relationship man was intended to have with God, and sin had dominion over all who are not in relationship with God. In His work on the cross, through the reconciliation He effected, Jesus broke the cycle and power of sin and "healed the ruptured relationship with God."<sup>107</sup> Either Jesus' sacrifice did everything necessary to break any hold of any sin in a person's life, or it was not much of a sacrifice after all. Commenting on Colossians 2:13-15, Nunnally writes:

Paul asserts that the powers and the principalities that held us in bondage were not defeated and disarmed, they were also totally humiliated in the process. The death of Jesus accomplished both forgiveness of sin and deliverance from demonic oppression possession for those who appropriate that sacrifice to themselves.<sup>108</sup>

*Reason 3: Generational curse teaching creates a Jesus-plus gospel.*

Never in the New Testament is there any indication that the finished work of Christ on the cross is insufficient for all sin. All for which the believer is able to boast is the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14). Any alleged Christian theological position, if it does not find its source and its fulfillment in the cross, is not a true Christian position.<sup>109</sup> Generational curse theology runs

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<sup>107</sup> Garland, *Colossians/Philemon*, 96.

<sup>108</sup> Nunnally, "The Sins of Generational Curse", 119.

<sup>109</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 216.



diametrically counter to the Christian Gospel when it adds something of its own making to the sufficiency of the cross.<sup>110</sup>

Reason 4: *Generational curse theology denies the Biblical teaching of personal responsibility.* Scripture speaks often about individual responsibility before God. Generational curse theology runs counter to the Christian Gospel when it promotes lies which cannot find substantiation from the Word of God. Riley’s examination of generational curse theology is sharply critical of what proponents want people to believe.

If it’s the *Lord* passing it on down, you’re wasting your time. We just need to accept what we are, not try and change, not try and mature, not strive for perfection ... let’s just quit trying since it is the Lord that is passing the curse on and no one can stand before Him. If *He* has decreed it’s going to the fourth generation ... then it’s going *no matter* how much we yell, bind, loose, plead, pray or travail. We cannot fight God—let the curse just “play itself out” through the four generations, right? Wrong....

It’s God’s fault. I’m a victim of my past. Poor me. Just forgive me and live with me. I can’t change. I’m under a curse.

It’s a lie.<sup>111</sup>

I noted previously this denial of personal responsibility, using Ezekiel 18. Paul’s comments about spiritual slavery in Romans 6:16 emphasize the individual choices made whether to sin or to not sin. Generational curse teachers want people to believe

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<sup>110</sup> The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 confronted this very issue of “Christ plus something else” in the demands of the Judaizers for circumcision and Torah keeping in order to be saved. That position was ultimately dismissed in favor of “Jesus-alone”. Peter’s comments in Acts 15:10-11 were a rejection of “Jesus-and” anything else.

<sup>111</sup> Riley, *Releasing the Curse*, 21-22 (emphasis in original).

that if they are poor, overweight, sexually perverted, or wear glasses, they are suffering because of the sins of an ancestor. Marilyn Hickey, for example, refers to Deuteronomy 28:27-28 as her justification that some diseases are inherited family diseases. Her "theological explanation" is nothing short of incredible.

The "botch of Egypt" is boils and tumors; tumors are a form of cancer. Madness and astonishment of heart are confusion of mind and amnesia; these are mental illness. Blindness is glaucoma, cataracts, near-sightedness, farsightedness, and all other eye diseases. Have you ever seen a family in which every single one of them wears glasses? From the father and mother down to the littlest child, all wear glasses, usually those really thick lensed kind. These poor people are under a curse, and they need to be set free from it!<sup>112</sup>

The main failure in Hickey's argument is taking something meant for Israel in their covenant relationship with Yahweh and (falsely) applying it to Christians who are under grace. Israel, in hearing the material in Deuteronomy 28, would have been very aware of the need to not only remember the formation of God's covenant with them previously but their responsibility to keep that covenant in the future.<sup>113</sup> The context of Deuteronomy 28 is about "the fullness of Gods blessing, which Israel will receive when it walks in the way of obedience."<sup>114</sup> The New Testament parallels to Deuteronomy 28 do not speak of specific "curses" that befall people because of sin. For example, Colossians 1:21-23 speaks of "once" being "alienated" from God because of sin, but now being "reconciled" in Christ to be presented as "holy in

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<sup>112</sup> Hickey, *Legacy*, 64-65.

<sup>113</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy* (NICOT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 327.

<sup>114</sup> Jan Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy* (BSC) (tr. Ed van der Maas) (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency, 1984), 254.

His sight”, providing one continues in the faith “established and firm.” The blessing is union with Christ; the loss of that blessing (not a curse) comes through a failure to stay attentive to Christ and His Word. The same idea is found in John 15:1-4. The blessing is for the faithful; they remain in the vine, which is Christ. But for those who do not remain faithful, they are “cut off” - removed from active relationship with Christ.<sup>115</sup> The New Testament speaks of either being blessed or cut off; it says nothing about inheriting some physical, emotional or mental “curse” because of the sins of an ancestor. The language of Deuteronomy 28 is more about guarding against presumption in relationship with the Lord: “there is no eternal security for those who live in sin.”<sup>116</sup>

Wearing glasses is not being under a Deuteronomic curse. Neither is having cancer. Those who are “in Christ” are not subject to the requirements of the Mosaic Code. An overweight person has to take responsibility for poor health habits that has led to obesity. Placing all difficulties of life under the banner of “curse”, taking all acts of sin and calling them the fault of some ancestor, is contrary to the plain teaching of the Word God. The soul that sins is the one that will experience punishment for that sin (Ezekiel 18:4).

Reason 5: *Generational curse theology seeks to return to the paganism from which the saved were rescued in Christ.* Using special formulaic prayers designed to break the hold of some demonic force or the power exerted in a curse is no different than a pagan shaman chanting incantations to drive out a

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<sup>115</sup> The non-producing “branches” are cut off because they, by their own choice, are not drawing their life from their union with Christ; they choose not to remain in Christ (John 15:6), fail to bear fruit, and are cut off (confirmed in their choice to not be in vital union with Christ through being removed) from fellowship with Christ because their continued presence will “hinder the growth of fruit on the other branches) (Robert E. Tourville, *Gospel of John* [New Wilmington, PA: House of Bon Giovanni, 1986), 314.

<sup>116</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 668.

troublesome spirit-being.<sup>117</sup> Why are “deliverance prayers” such a necessity, as generational curse proponents insist, when nothing of the sort is found in the ministry of Jesus, Paul, Peter or any other disciple in the New Testament? What was God's answer to the curse of drought or plague or famine because of sin? Did He prescribe a certain deliverance prayer? No -- He called for something else: *repentance* (see 2 Chronicles 7:13-15).

A survey of Judges 1-16 shows whenever Israel was punished for their idolatry, usually ending up under the oppressive rule of a foreign, Gentile nation, they did not break some supposed “curse” with a formulaic “deliverance prayer”. They cried out to the Lord (e.g., Judges 3:9).

Reason 6: *Generational curse teaching puts undue emphasis on the works of men, causing a “flirting” with a works-based relationship with God.* As mentioned earlier, if Jesus sets free, then the freedom is genuine and it is a full freedom. That freedom comes through relationship by faith and through grace with Christ, and believers are exhorted not to allow themselves to once again become entangled with whatever comes out of the Law (Galatians 5:1).<sup>118</sup> While the sum of relationship with God

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<sup>117</sup> William Ramsey claimed: “Before glancing at the effect of the old paganism (i.e., the Greek pantheon and mystery cults) on the development of the Christian Church, it is well to point out that the influence is still effective down to the present day” (“The Permanence of Religion in Holy Places in the East”, *Expositor* (7th series) 2.5 (1906), 455. While the article is dated, it is hard to imagine the modern church having actually freed itself from these pagan influences. I would suggest the cry within the generational curse camp for “deliverance prayers” according to a certain formula is very much a continuation of ancient pagan practices. One recent example is John Ramirez, *Conquer Your Deliverance* (Minneapolis, MN: Chosen, 2021) who, throughout his material, provides pre-printed, formulaic “arsenal prayers” to “cancel” such things as Satanic attacks (e.g., 75-86). While the written prayers sound good and right”, they are a “one-size fits all” approach which tries to promise freedom using those specific words. It is nothing more than modern-day pagan chanting of incantations.

<sup>118</sup> The freedom includes any “curse” which is based in the Law. See Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistles of Paul to the Churches in Galatia* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 186.

has always been through faith (Habakkuk 2:4), in the Old Testament economy much emphasis was put on "doing" obedience. But in Christ, all that changed; Paul adamantly declared that through the works of the Law, no one will be justified before God (Romans 3:20 NASB) but rather by faith in Christ (Romans 3:22). The whole argument comes down to one central, crucial issue: is Christ enough or is He not enough? If He is enough, then nothing man can devise in the way of prayers or formulas or incantations will add anything to Christ.

The Acts 3 account of Peter and John's encounter with a crippled man in the Temple is a specific case in point to the sufficiency of Christ alone. This man was "lame from birth" (Acts 3:2), but nothing is said about the "why". It was thought in ancient Israel that the sins of a person's ancestors could cause disease and infirmity, something Jesus dispelled in His healing of the man born blind (John 9:3).<sup>119</sup> It would be easy for a generational curse proponent to argue from the silence of the text and from their own presuppositional thinking that the man at the Temple gate was lame because he had a generational curse.

When the apostles engaged the man in conversation they neither demanded a long and detailed list of "ancestral sin" nor did they employ some formulaic "deliverance prayer" to "free him from his curse". Instead, the apostle simply offered the man one thing — healing in the Name (power) of Jesus (Acts 3:6). The crippled man was immediately healed.

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<sup>119</sup> From Tourville, *John*, 204: "We must not take this to mean that neither the man nor his parents had sinned, but that their sin had not caused the man to be born blind. Obviously all men have sinned (Romans 3:23). Jesus denies that any particular sin had brought about this blindness. Many times a specific sin does cause diseases. However some maladies come to man because sickness is common to all men, since all men inherit the consequences of man's original sin (Romans 5:12). We must not say that a great sufferer is a great sinner nor that his parents are responsible for his condition. Yet it is true that personal sin often brings immediate penalty (though sometimes the penalty is deferred until the great judgment day: Acts 17:31; Hebrews 9:27)."

Since the generational curse proponents assume without question, apparently, that some malady or problem in a person's life is the result of some ancestral sin; consideration of some organic source for the problem is dismissed. One view of generational curses advocates problems in life may be the result of "unknown" issues resulting in an "unknown" curse which will only find resolution through "revelational knowledge".<sup>120</sup> Again, this is a case of wanting to go beyond what Scripture states. Every believer in Christ has been "seated" with Him (Ephesians 2:6); being "seated" indicates all the redemptive work which the Father intended to do in and through Christ has been done. Through Christ, every believer has been removed from the "dominion" (*exousia* - power, authority) of darkness (Colossians 1:13), without "blemish and free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22). It is a theological conundrum which the generational curse advocates cannot solve: how can a believer, according to the Word, be made "without accusation" in and through Christ and yet have curses — accusations and bondage because of some ancestral sin — still "attached and operative"?<sup>121</sup>

One more example is given here. Timothy Atunisse's ebook, *Breaking Curses and Evil Covenants*,<sup>122</sup> is a repeated case in point of human efforts to bring about a supposed "breaking" and a "curse". His "day 1" material on "Deliverance from Adverse Demonic Possession", is a pre-printed, formulaic series of "decrees" and "commands" directed towards various supposed demonic entities. The basis is in a skewed interpretation of Job 22:28.<sup>123</sup> Atunisse takes that verse as *carte blanche* to decree things which will "be established" for the user. Besides his methodology echoing what was written previously about pagan incantations and rites, his use of Job

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<sup>120</sup> Rebecca Brown and Daniel Yoder, *Unbroken Curses* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker, 1995), 18-19.

<sup>121</sup> It would be interesting to discover whether anyone who was "delivered" from the "curse" of wearing eye glasses was, upon being "delivered", immediately restored to 20/20 vision.

<sup>122</sup> Morrow, GA: Glovim Publications, 2016, accessed July 29, 2024.

<sup>123</sup> Atunisse, *Breaking Curses*, n.p.

22:28 to justify his (or any believer's) authority to "decree" things is suspect and an erroneous interpretation. The speaker in Job 22 is Eliphaz, who was specifically rebuked, along with the other two friends who had come" by the Lord for failing to speak the truth about Job (Job 42:7). Eliphaz the Temanite is hardly a qualified source of any ability of man to make "decrees" which are "established".

Eliphaz's list of assured blessings goes on. These wonderful promises are too good to be true, but it was the Temanite's habit to characterize Job a worse sinner than he was and to inflate the advantages of repentance beyond what is realistic. Zophar did the same in 11:17.<sup>124</sup>

Making "established" things such as "decrees", "commands" and "declarations" has no precedent in the New Testament, where freedom from sin and the effects of sin is founded solely on the finished redemptive work of Christ (cf. Romans 8:1, 8:31; 1 Corinthians 1:8-9, 2 Corinthians 5:15, Colossians 3:1-4). But as I have argued throughout, the major weakness of generational curse theology is their lack of Biblical precedent and their blatant disregard of the finished nature of the work of Christ. In other words, Christ redeems from sin, but not all sin; people then have to "decree" and "bind" and make "declarations" in order for the blood of Christ to be fully efficacious in its effect on the human condition.

I will argue the finished work of Christ is just that; a *finished* work. His sacrifice for sin was a *complete* sacrifice and its application to the sinner who, being wooed by the Holy Spirit, comes in repentance to seek salvation is a removal of all guilt, all blame, and all sin which had accumulated in the sinful flesh. There is nothing more to be done that can or should be done to make Christ's redemptive work any more beneficial than

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<sup>124</sup> Robert L. Alden, *Job* (NAC 11) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 238.

Scripture declares it to be. I find it interesting that in Atunisse's formulaic prayers he does not give any specific Scriptural foundations on which to base what he claims the believer is able to "declare".<sup>125</sup>

**The false doctrine of the generational curse.** The Old Testament is very clear the only entity able to place and enforce a curse is God. If God places a curse, then no one can do anything to remove that curse. Generational curse theology assumes the curse is there because of sin in ancestors, even though the record of Ezekiel 18, for example, is very forthright about individual culpability for sin, that a descendent will not suffer for the sin of an ancestor. There is not one verse in the Old Testament that specifically points to some sin committed years ago winding up transmitted through the "bloodline" to anyone else; instead, as was demonstrated earlier, the effect of sin upon succeeding generations through influence results in personal choice to yield to that influence. That said, it is vital to remember the truth from the New Testament that whatever

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<sup>125</sup> For generational curse advocates such as Atunisse, the finished work of Christ on the cross is the means whereby people can then decree, declare and demand things in the spiritual realm. For example, in the first chapter of Atunisse's work, he provides 76 formulaic prayers designed to bring deliverance from the demonic, and in the second chapter, he employs non-Biblical language of "arrest" in reference to demons:

"I come against principalities and powers that wrestle with me and my prayers, I arrest you today by the power in the name of Jesus Christ, and I bind you and cast down into the pit of hell. I come against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places, I arrest you all by the power in the name of Jesus Christ, and I bind you and cast you down into the pit of hell. I come against weakness and weariness, I arrest you today by the power in the name of Jesus Christ, and I bind you and cast you out of my life. I come against wondering spirit and distractions, I arrest you today by the power in the name of Jesus Christ, and I bind you and cast you out of my life."

The question is simple: where in the New Testament is there any precedent or permission to "arrest" and "bind" some demonic entity or an apparent "curse"? Apparently for Atunisse, Christ alone is not enough; "freedom" from sin "needs" the blood of Jesus *and* certain formulaic incantations which effectively assume the believer has more power in the spiritual realm than what is ever described in the whole of the New Testament.



curse may have existed because of Adam's sin, it no longer has power because of what Jesus Christ did in His redemptive mission. Galatians 3:13-14a is plain: whoever is in Christ has been set from all curses. Jesus' work on the cross is complete. What He sets free is truly set free (John 8:36), not "apparently" free until the curses are broken, but completely free. There would have been no argument here had there been one line, one text, one passage anywhere in the Bible conclusively identifying generational curses, bloodline tainting, and the need for deliverance formulas and prayers as genuine issues. Instead what generational proponents offer is twisted reasoning, quantum leaps of logic, erroneous interpretation of Hebrew and Greek words, and works-based additions to the gift of grace through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus I would conclude by arguing generational curse theology is false doctrine which diminishes the work of Christ in favor of the work of man.

### **Abbreviations**

ed., eds.	editor, editors, edited by
e. g.	<i>exemplo gratia</i> (for example)
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Version
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

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