

The Law's Blessing and Curse

Summary and Goal

In Moses' farewell address, his final instructions to the children of Israel, he explained how God had given them the law for their own good, and he also claimed that the requirement of the law was total perfection. Obedience to God's law would bring blessing, but disobedience would bring God's curse. As believers, we recognize the law as a good gift of God, but we rely on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to save us from the penalty for our disobedience.

Main Passages

Deuteronomy 10:12-22

Deuteronomy 11:1

Deuteronomy 11:26-28

Session Outline

1. The law is for our good (Deut. 10:12-22).
2. The law requires perfection (Deut. 11:1).
3. The law brings a blessing or a curse (Deut. 11:26-28).

Theological Theme

The law is God's good gift, but it cannot save us from the penalty of disobedience.

Christ Connection

Obedience to God's law brings a blessing. Breaking God's law brings a curse. Jesus is the One who took the curse of our law-breaking in order that we might experience the blessing of His law-keeping.

Missional Application

In response to the awesome works He has accomplished for us, God calls us to reflect His character in the way we treat others.

Session Plan

The Law's Blessing and Curse

Session 12

Pack Item 2: The Exodus Map

Use the map to show that the Israelites have left Mount Sinai and are on the edge of the promised land with a new generation of Israelites hearing afresh the law of God from Moses. He would soon die and the Israelites would enter the promised land under the leadership of Joshua.

? For Further Discussion

What role does God's rescue of us from sin play in our ability to live according to His commands?

? For Further Discussion

In what ways does the law reveal God's character?

Introduction

Start by mentioning TV shows and movies that tell stories of justice for those who have broken the law (leader p. 142; PSG p. 110). As an example, you might share the synopsis of *The Fugitive* (leader p. 142).

- ? What is your favorite movie that shows the "good guys" bringing the "bad guys" to justice? What circumstances might cause us to see the law as difficult or bad instead of good?

Set the context for this study of the purposes of God's law as a new generation of Israelites on the edge of the promised land perhaps wondering why God's laws were so important (leader p. 142; PSG p. 110). Then summarize the session (leader p. 143; PSG p. 110).

1. The law is for our good (Deut. 10:12-22).

Read Deuteronomy 10:12-22, and then address some truths this passage makes clear about God's law. First, communicate that the law reveals the greatness and goodness of God (leader p. 143; PSG p. 111). *Provide five volunteers with one bullet point each from the Leader content to share with the group about how God is spoken about by Moses* (leader p. 144; available on the Leader Pack DVD).

- ? What are the dangers of focusing on God's law apart from His goodness?

Second, show how the law was meant as an objective standard for restraining evil and protecting the people (leader p. 144; PSG p. 112).

- ? What are some aspects of Christian morality that people in our culture believe are joy-suppressing rather than joy-enhancing?

Third, identify ways the law helps us understand how we are to love God. *Group members can record their notes and thoughts on these ways in the space in their PSG* (leader p. 145; PSG p. 113).

- ? How would you respond to someone who doubted the idea that God gave the law for our good?

2. The law requires perfection (Deut. 11:1).

Make it clear the commands of the law were never intended by God as a way to earn salvation; rather, He gave the law to a people already redeemed. Yet the law requires perfect obedience (leader p. 146). Read Deuteronomy 11:1. Highlight the word “always,” allowing no room for coming up short (leader p. 146; PSG p. 114).

- What is your reaction to the comprehensiveness of the command to obey in Deuteronomy 11:1? Does it make you want to be more disciplined or make you despair? Why?

Illustrate the demand of the law with the image of a candelabrum and one weak link. Reference James 2:10 to support the expectation of perfect obedience for those who would live under the law (leader p. 147; PSG pp. 114-115).

- Why does understanding the demands of the law help increase our desire for and gratitude for grace?

3. The law brings a blessing or a curse (Deut. 11:26-28).

State that actions have consequences, and God’s law is no different: obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings a curse. Explain Moses’ illustration of this. Then read Deuteronomy 11:26-28. Emphasize God’s involvement in dispensing the blessing or curse, and highlight that the fundamental act of disobedience was idolatry (leader pp. 147-148; PSG pp. 115-116).

- What does our loyalty to God and our rejection of false gods communicate about our love?

Show how we are inclined to disobedience and therefore under God’s curse, but Jesus became a curse for us to free us from the condemnation of the law (*refer again to Pack Item 3: Seeing Jesus in the Exodus*). In gratitude, we now make it our aim to be pleasing to Him (leader pp. 148-149; PSG p. 116).

- How should Christians use the law in their pursuit of holiness?
- How should Christians use the law in their evangelistic efforts?

Conclusion

Clarify how the law brings only condemnation and yet helps us see our need for salvation by another means—by faith in Jesus—which works itself out in our reflecting God’s character in the way we treat others (leader p. 149; PSG p. 117). *Apply the truths of this session with “His Mission, Your Mission”* (PSG p. 118).

? For Further Discussion

If you grew up in a family with strong moral expectations and standards, did you try really hard to comply or were you a rebel? Why?

? For Further Discussion

What would we think of a God who didn’t care whether or not we were devoted to Him?

? For Further Discussion

How does understanding God’s moral laws help you understand His character?
How should understanding His character in this way shape the way you treat others?

Christ Connection:

Obedience to God’s law brings a blessing. Breaking God’s law brings a curse. Jesus is the One who took the curse of our law-breaking in order that we might experience the blessing of His law-keeping.

Missional Application:

In response to the awesome works He has accomplished for us, God calls us to reflect His character in the way we treat others.

Expanded Session Content

The Law's Blessing and Curse

Session 12

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

15. God Is Holy

God's holiness refers to His uniqueness in being separate from all He has created. The Hebrew word for "holy" means "separate" or "set apart." God's holiness also refers to His absolute purity. God is unstained by the evil of the world. His goodness is perfect, and the moral code we find in the Scriptures is a reflection of His holy nature. As people made in God's image, we are called to holiness.

Introduction

Many television shows and movies tell stories about seeking justice for those who have criminally broken the law. You probably have your favorite. From the Westerns of yesteryear to the sci-fi of today, we long for the good guys to win and the bad guys to get what's coming to them. As the saying goes, the arm of the law is long.

My personal favorite is *The Fugitive*, which began as a black-and-white TV series in the 1960s, starring David Janssen as Dr. Richard Kimble, wrongly accused of murdering his wife. Then in 1993, Harrison Ford played the role in a terrific big-screen thriller. Will the one-armed man ever be caught so that Dr. Kimble can clear his name? Was Deputy Samuel Gerard right to pursue Kimble relentlessly, following the letter of the law, even though there were reasons to believe Kimble was innocent?

The Fugitive illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of human laws. On one hand, the law seeks to stop evildoers and bring them to justice. On the other hand, the law can be seen as a cruel taskmaster. Sometimes the evidence is interpreted wrongly. While there is room for some leniency, the whole point of criminal law is to restrain evil and punish lawbreakers appropriately, not extend mercy. Gerard pursued Kimble with a single-minded passion.

 What is your favorite movie that shows the "good guys" bringing the "bad guys" to justice? What circumstances might cause us to see the law as difficult or bad instead of good?

This session draws our attention to the purposes of God's law, revealed to the Israelites by Moses. It came from the perfect Lawgiver; thus, it was perfect, unlike contemporary legal codes. Yet like today's laws, Old Testament law involved both a blessing and a curse.

The books of Moses also include extensive narrative about Israel's wilderness wanderings. At last there was a new generation. They were on the verge of entering the promised land under Joshua. Many were probably wondering, *What is the importance of all these laws? Why does God expect us to follow so many rules?*

Session Summary

In this study, we will take a closer look at Moses' final instructions to the children of Israel. In his farewell address, Moses explained how God had given them the law for their own good, and he also claimed that the requirement of the law was total perfection. Obedience to God's law would bring blessing, but disobedience would bring God's curse. As believers, we recognize the law as a good gift of God, but we rely on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to save us from the penalty for our disobedience.

1. The law is for our good (Deut. 10:12-22).

"Deuteronomy" can be translated "second law." The book is essentially Moses' farewell instruction manual for Israel, after he had led them for 40 years and was about to die. An example of this "second law" is that Deuteronomy 5 repeats the original Ten Commandments of Exodus 20.

The following passage from Deuteronomy 10 is part of Moses' longer discourse:

¹² "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,"¹³ and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?¹⁴ Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.¹⁵ Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.¹⁷ For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.¹⁸ He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.¹⁹ Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.²⁰ You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.²¹ He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen.²² Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

The law, said the apostle Paul, "is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). Paul must have had passages such as Deuteronomy 10 in mind. In this passage, we can see that Moses indicated a number of truths about the law. These aspects of the law are as valid for us as they were for the Israelites.

First, the law reveals the greatness and goodness of God. Notice how Moses spoke about God in these verses:

Further Commentary

"As Christians, we believe Jesus fulfilled all of the law in our place, and yet we recognize there are different kinds of laws in the Old Testament. For centuries, Christians have divided the laws into three categories: civil laws (dealing with the people of Israel within their theocratic context), ceremonial laws (the rules and regulations of temple observance and the sacrificial system), and moral laws (the laws explained in the Ten Commandments and the principles that transcend cultures). These categories are not explained in the Bible, and many schools believe them to be somewhat arbitrary in their distinction. They do, however, help us recognize the different kinds of laws and how some principles may apply differently in different contexts."¹

—Trevin Wax

Further Commentary

“In this first summary of the proper response to grace, the Lord was asking Israel to place him at the core of their lives. They should fear him, walk in all his ways...love him, serve him wholeheartedly, and observe his commands. In short, he was asking them for their hearts. Since Israel owed Yahweh their very lives, his requests seemed little to ask, especially since the commands he was giving them were designed for their good.”²

—Doug McIntosh

- He is the God of heaven and earth, as the Creator of all there is (10:14). Therefore He has ownership rights over His creatures.
- He is the God who chose a people out of His great love (10:15). The theme of God’s salvation flowing from His love is one of the great themes of Scripture.
- He is “God of gods and the Lord of lords” (10:17). Therefore whatever other powerful supernatural beings there are, whatever human rulers (lords) there may be, He is greater than all of them.
- He is the God of justice, especially for those often subject to injustice, such as orphans, widows, and foreigners (10:18).
- He is the God who has redeemed (10:22). Israel’s divine rescue from bondage through the exodus is assumed. Israel’s salvation preceded its reception of the law.



What are the dangers of focusing on God’s law apart from His goodness?

Second, God intended the law as an objective standard for restraining evildoers. It’s one thing to say, “Love your neighbor,” it’s quite a bit more demanding to say, “Love others by not bearing false witness against them.”

A more civil society results from people following laws designed with the wellbeing of the whole in mind. In this sense, the law’s threats of punishment help secure order and protect the innocent from the guilty. (Again, the apostle Paul was certainly aware of this; see Rom. 13:3-4.)

Note how these ideas are found in Moses’ discourse:

- The law was given “for your good” (10:13). God is no cosmic killjoy desiring to keep people from enjoying life. Rather, following God’s laws provided individual Israelites guidelines for the best way to live peaceably with their neighbors.
- The law provided principles for social justice which, if left alone, the Israelites might not take into account. Because widows, orphans, and foreigners were often “invisible,” God’s law took pains to provide justice for all.



What are some aspects of Christian morality that people in our culture believe are joy-suppressing rather than joy-enhancing?

Third, we see specific guidelines on what the Lord meant when He asked His redeemed people to love Him “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). Here are the ways that the law guided Israel’s understanding of what it means to love God:

- *Fear the Lord (10:12,20)*. God expects His people to be in awe of Him and to respect Him. Such fear includes commitment to please Him and a dread of disappointing Him in any way.
- *Worship the Lord (10:12,20)*. The first of the Ten Commandments is “You shall have no other gods before me” (5:7). God has exclusive rights on His people’s worship.
- *Walk in all His ways (10:12-13)*. God’s people do not get to pick and choose which of His laws to follow. All are to be kept, not only out of regard for Him but “for your good.”
- *Circumcise your hearts (10:16)*. This instruction is a reminder that physical circumcision was only of limited value, as Paul also emphasized in Romans 2:25-29. A changed heart is required, and heart circumcision suggests removing the stubbornness that keeps the heart from loving God rightly (see also 30:6, where God is the One who circumcises the heart).
- *Be just and loving to the marginalized (10:19)*. An important aspect of loving God rightly is loving one’s neighbor rightly. God reminded His people that at one time they too were marginalized.
- *Honor His name by fulfilling oaths taken in His name (10:20)*. God’s reputation is at stake in the way His people fulfill vows and other commitments they make.
- *Praise the Lord (10:21)*. Just as a lover has no trouble applauding his beloved, so God’s people are to honor Him constantly, whatever they say or do, because “He is your praise.”

The law of God, then and now, reveals His greatness and goodness. The law restrains evil in society and is “for your good.” The law provides specifics about how God desires for His people to express their love for Him. Truly the law was a great blessing. Thank God for His law.



How would you respond to someone who doubted the idea that God gave the law for our good?

Voices from the Church

“The demands of the law are not arbitrary or capricious. They stem from and reflect the character of God and his purpose for mankind in creation and redemption. They point to the nature of the reconstruction of the perfect relationship that God built into creation but which was disrupted by human sin.”³

—Graeme Goldsworthy

Further Commentary

The Law as a Demanding but Temporary Guardian

The apostle Paul drew on a first-century custom to illustrate that the law as a methodical approach to a relationship with God was intentionally temporary. He used the term “guardian” (*paidagogos* in the Greek New Testament, from which we derive “pedagogue”) in Galatians 3:24-26: “So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.” He was referring to the personal servant that accompanied a first-born son in wealthy families, exercising authority and discipline over him as a kind of baby-sitter. After reaching adulthood, the guardian was dismissed.⁴ The law as a system endured only from the time of Moses until the time of Christ. Similarly, the author of Hebrews spoke of old covenant laws as now fulfilled (Heb. 8:7-13). They had fulfilled their purpose of highlighting transgressions as well as foretelling the coming of Christ.

2. The law requires perfection (Deut. 11:1).

As noted throughout these studies on the Lawgiver and His laws, God gave the law to people whom He had already redeemed. The commands of God were never intended by God as a way to earn salvation. In fact, the laws about sacrifice were given to guide Israel in what to do when people broke the law. The law was meant as a blessing, for the good of God’s people, as we have just considered.

But what if the Israelite people misunderstood? What if they came to think that the way they related to God was essentially a matter of law-keeping? Even worse, what if they came to think that by doing the works of the law they earned favor with God, or even merited salvation? It is not surprising that many Israelites made this mistake. Unquestionably as sinful humans we suppose that by our own deeds we earn divine favor. (Only the gospel of salvation by grace through faith turns this upside down.) As can be easily observed, most of the world’s religious activities can be understood as an attempt to work one’s way to God.

The apostle Paul addressed this problem as he found it in his day, a time when many self-righteous Jews found themselves in bondage to the law. For example, he noted, “All who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’” (Gal. 3:10). Paul was quoting from Deuteronomy 27:26. But he might just as well have quoted Deuteronomy 11:1:

¹ *“You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always.”*

Here Moses noted the strictness of the law. He piled up a number of terms that considered the law from a variety of angles: mandate, statutes, ordinances, and commands. But the really important term here is “always.” The demands of the law were relentless. There was no time off for good behavior.

The essence of living under the demands of the law is that it requires perfection. And because no one is capable of perfectly obeying the law—the rules for sacrifice demonstrate that truth easily enough—then all have transgressed the law. In fact, by knowing the strict demands of the law, human beings actually become more and more aware of how far short of perfection they have come.



What is your reaction to the comprehensiveness of the command to obey in Deuteronomy 11:1? Does it make you want to be more disciplined or make you despair? Why?

Along these lines, Paul wrote the following to the Roman Christians: “Now the law came in to increase the trespass” (Rom. 5:20). Later on, he commented, “I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me” (Rom. 7:9-10).

An illustration from the laws of nature throws light on how the law demands perfection. As we know, gravity is at work all the time. So imagine a beautiful candelabrum (with real candles), suspended from a high ceiling with a golden chain. Suppose farther that the chain is made up of ten interlocking links. As long as all ten links are strong, the candelabrum will stay suspended, being more powerful than the force of gravity. But let only one link break, and it all comes crashing down.

So it is with humans and the law. Let the ten-link chain represent the Ten Commandments, and let the candelabrum stand for the person trying to earn favor with God by the works of the law. All it takes is a single slip up to be a lawbreaker, as James 2:10 notes. The law cannot save us from the penalty of disobedience.



Why does understanding the demands of the law help increase our desire for and gratitude for grace?

3. The law brings a blessing or a curse (Deut. 11:26-28).

Actions have consequences. This is true in the physical realm: serious, regular workouts and careful eating yields a buff body; years of tobacco use can lead to lung cancer. It is also true in the moral realm: learning self-control with anger issues leads to a happier home life; a life of robbery can result in prison time. Note the word “can.” Sometimes robbers get away with it. The one-armed man who murdered Dr. Kimble’s wife in *The Fugitive* almost escaped penalty.

After reviewing God’s laws for the Israelite people, Moses wanted to make sure they understood that there are consequences for obedience as well as for disobedience. With God’s law, there is no “can” when it comes to escaping penalty. The punishment goes beyond the ordinary cause-and-effect built into the moral universe. The results exist because of the Lawgiver who instituted the law. He is so committed to justice that, either in this life or at the last judgment, the distinction between those blessed in their obedience or cursed in their disobedience will be manifest.

In order to drive that principle home, Moses gave an unusual set of instructions for the Israelites for a one-time ritual (Deut. 27). At a designated time, the 12 tribes were to assemble near Shechem, near the center of the promised land. Six tribes were to gather at Mount Ebal, just north of Shechem. Six tribes were to gather at Mount Gerizim, south of Shechem.



Further Commentary

Moses urged his people to love (i.e., be wholly obedient to) the Lord, the proof of which must be the keeping of his requirements (cf. Lev. 18:30; Num. 9:19,23), his decrees, his laws, and his commands. That is, to love God is to obey him in every respect (cf. Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 11:13,22; 15:5; 30:6,16,20; Josh. 22:5; 23:11).



Voices from Church History

“As the sharp needle prepares the way for the thread, so the piercing law makes a way for the bright silver thread of divine grace.”⁵

—Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Further Commentary

“The general principles which were to characterize Israel’s approach to life have been carefully expounded in chapters 5 to 11. It is time to call for decision (cf. 30:15–20). Two ways present themselves—the way of obedience which will lead to blessing, and the way of disobedience which will lead to cursing. Neutrality on the issue is excluded. Israel is called to committal...The attitude of Israel to the covenant stipulations of Yahweh was crucial. These verses draw attention to the fact that Israel could give her allegiance either to Yahweh or to ‘other gods which you have not known.’ There may be some stress on the verb ‘know,’ which often connotes a more intimate relationship than mere intellectual acquaintance (9:24; Gen. 4:17,25; 19:5,8; Hos. 8:2; 13:4; Amos 3:2; Nah. 1:7; Pss. 36:10; 144:3, etc.). And, of course, it was Yahweh who had created Israel and nurtured her, not these other gods who were powerless to act. At the deepest level of her life it was Yahweh who *knew* Israel and who may be *known* by Israel.”⁷

—John Thompson

Voices from Church History

“Paul shows that the fulfillment of the law is found in love...So he who came to fulfill the law gave love through the Holy Spirit, so that charity might accomplish what fear could not.”⁸

—Augustine (354-430)

Those at Mount Ebal were to pronounce God’s curses orally on those who disobeyed any of His laws. The tribes at Mount Gerizim were to proclaim the blessings for obedience.

Deuteronomy 28 continues by describing blessings from Yahweh stemming from obedience (28:1-14) and curses from Yahweh stemming from disobedience (28:15-68). Joshua 8:30-35 describes the fulfillment of this ritual under Joshua’s leadership.⁶ In Deuteronomy 11, Moses anticipated this ceremony of blessing and cursing:

²⁶ *“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse:*
²⁷ *the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today,* ²⁸ *and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known.*

Two points are worth emphasizing. First, God put Himself on the line to see to it that obedience to Him would result in positive benefits and that disobedience would be punished. For example, if the Israelites kept God’s laws, He “will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated...the LORD will make you abound in prosperity” (28:7,11). If they did not obey, God “will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions...the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul” (28:59,65).

Second, the fundamental act of disobedience was “[going] after other gods that you have not known” (11:28). God longed for His people to be loyal to Him above all. Sadly, over the centuries, the Israelites were prone to disobey, resulting in the promised curse: captivity by a foreign nation (28:64).



What does our loyalty to God and our rejection of false gods communicate about our love?

Each of us is inclined to disobedience. We are rebels against God and therefore justly under His curse. In the fullness of time, Jesus came and took the curse for us. As Paul explained, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13).

All who are in Christ are set free from the eternal condemnation that the law decreed against us. We are liberated by faith in the One who took the curse on our behalf. We need not fear the curse, for “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1-2).

Yet in this life, “we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:9-10). Or, as James noted, “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty” (Jas. 2:12).

- ❓ How should Christians use the law in their pursuit of holiness?
- ❓ How should Christians use the law in their evangelistic efforts?

Conclusion

As we have seen, the law was God’s good gift to the people of Israel. Yet He did not give it to them in order to save them from the penalty of disobedience. The law—as an approach to God—brought condemnation, not salvation.

Because breaking God’s law brought a curse, salvation based on something other than the law has been necessary from the beginning. That “something” was salvation by faith (Gen. 15:6; see also Rom. 4:3,9,22; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23). We believe in Jesus Christ, who came to earth to take the curse of our law-breaking in order that we might experience the blessing of His law-keeping.

Further, as we have seen, as a systematic approach to God, the complex system of laws—sacrificial, moral, and civil—was designed by God as temporary. The law was a short-term guardian, and the guardianship ended with the completion of Christ’s saving work. This means that, as believers, we can focus on the blessings that come from reflecting God’s character as we follow the moral precepts of the law (for example, the moral guidelines given for Christians in the New Testament). As we respond to the awesome work of salvation He has accomplished for us, God calls us to reflect His character in the way we treat others.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Obedience to God’s law brings a blessing. Breaking God’s law brings a curse. Jesus is the One who took the curse of our law-breaking in order that we might experience the blessing of His law-keeping.

Further Commentary

Various forms of “bless” occur more than 500 times in the Bible (the most common Hebrew term is *barak*); forms of “curse” are found more than 250 times, the vast majority of which are in the Old Testament. To bless someone is to fill them with benefits, either as a goal or to make the blessed one a source of blessing to others. Usually God is the agent who blesses. In another sense to bless someone might mean to praise him; thus the Psalms exhort God’s people to bless the Lord (Ps. 103:1). To curse someone is to predict or wish trouble or misfortune on him or her.⁹

Voices from Church History

“Christ moves beyond the work of the law. He does not intend to abolish it but to enhance it by fulfilling it.”¹⁰

—Hilary (circa 300-368)

Additional Resources

The Law's Blessing and Curse

References

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10. Hilary, *On Matthew*, 4:16, quoted in *Matthew 1-13*, ed. Manlio Simonetti, vol. Ia in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 97.
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Study Material

- "Reading the Old Testament Laws: A Conversation with J. Daniel Hays"—Chapter 6 from *Read the Bible for Life* by George Guthrie
- "Making Sense of Scripture's Inconsistency"—Article by Tim Keller; find a link to this article at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources
- Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles, including "Curses and Blessings in the Old Testament," can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

Videos

George Guthrie with J. Daniel Hays: An interview about "How Do Christians Read the Law as God's Word to Us?"

George Guthrie with J. Daniel Hays: An interview about "How to Read the Old Testament Law Well"

Find a link to these at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

Tip of the Week

Participate in Existing Church Outreach

Does your church have a weekly outreach ministry or visitation ministry? Set up a rotation to ensure that your group is represented each week. Does your church provide evangelism training for members? Be sure that your group members are participating. If your church is sponsoring an outreach event for your community, then make sure your group is involved. If your church does not provide these avenues for outreach, then be proactive and make some, and invite other groups to be a part.¹¹