

1. The cursing of the ground for Cain after he sins as well as Romans 5's discussion of a pattern both support the conclusion that before the Flood the ground was cursed in response to each individual man, when each man sinned individually. (See Genesis 3, Genesis 4, Genesis 8 above.) (The language of these passages and the particular language of Genesis 8 indicate individualized curses upon the ground rather than a singular curse issued when Adam sinned and which subsequently affected all of his descendents.)
2. God stopped this procedure of cursing for every man in Genesis 8, after the Flood, even in a manner indicating that he would never curse the earth again as he had done to Adam, Cain, and the other individuals before the Flood (the statement parallels his promise not to Flood the earth again).
3. Yet, the earth may seem to still be under a curse today. Additional passages may need to be considered in relation to the passages above, particularly concerning the curse that resulted from men's sin and to what extent (if any) that curse persisted after the Flood. For instance, even today (as it has been for thousands of years) the earth doesn't produce easily or abundantly but requires toil. Likewise, Paul's statement that "creation groans and waits for liberty from corruption" needs to be considered regarding its possible relevance to this topic (Romans 8:22). We also have the declaration that "There shall be no more curse." (Revelation 22:3) This verse indicates the presence of a curse at least during the millennial period (or perhaps up to the millennial period). And lastly, what about any statements in the Old Testament about the land being polluted?

Genesis 3, 4, and 8 all prove that earth was not "federally" cursed for all man in Adam. Yet there seems to be some need to explain how "cursing for every man" and "no more cursing" (from Genesis 8) reconcile with the earth still being under a curse as mentioned in Revelation 22:3 (and possibly Romans 8:22 as well). If the curses before the Flood were upon individuals not the earth in general and if these curses stopped after the Flood, then what is the source of the curse in these latter periods?

There are two main models for how to explain these scriptural details.

The first model is that the curses of the earth before the Flood were both general and individual. Each one affected the earth more and more and so it was cursed incrementally. This model is untenable. While it works fine in theory, it is hard to imagine it working practically. Adam was told the ground would be significantly unresponsive to him and require intense labor to bring about produce. If his children (all men) were in the same situation already, then would they even notice the ground getting incrementally worse? If Adam's curse has a general effect, then each individual's curse would have to be presumed to likewise have a general effect for everyone. Consequently, there would be a cumulative effect of all the curses of all men compounded over time before the Flood. The similar language of each curse shows no basis for distinguishing between Adam's, Cain's, and others. Either Adam's original curse would have to be fairly minimal

in impact in order to allow enough potential for future curses to each have a noticeable impact of their own (unnoticeable curses are pointless), or if Adam's curse was significant enough, then there would be very little damage left available for subsequent curses. With the vast amount of sin before the Flood, either the impact at Adam's sin or the impact at every subsequent man's sin would have been very slight and affected a curse upon the ground in only a few degrees of the whole potential until the earth becomes utterly incapable of production. This seems incompatible with scripture, which nowhere indicates that productive capability was lost altogether before the Flood, which would have been significant enough to note. Nor is it compatible with the fact that the curse rendered upon Adam is described as being of a significant impact rather than just a few incremental degrees.

A second and working model would hold that the curses of the earth before the Flood were not general but entirely individual. Each one affected only the way the earth responded to that individual man. Those curses were removed at the Flood when those men were removed from the earth. The current subjugation of the earth including the carnivorous nature of animals and the limited productivity of the soil is a result of the Flood itself, which impacted earth's climate, seasons, and food chain. The lack of plant life is even anticipated by God after the Flood, who allows men to eat meat. In this regard, the promise never to again curse the earth is connected directly to the promise never to send another Flood to destroy the earth, as can be seen directly in chapter 8:21 (compare to Genesis 9:11-17). In fact, God's comment limiting the production of the earth to an annual cycle of seedtime and harvest comes right after God's promise not to curse the productivity of the soil individually for each man from that point forward. The two are clearly directly related. Instead of an individual cursing of the soil for each man's sin, the Flood brought a change upon the climate that would generally limit the earth's productivity to an annual cycle. The individual cursings that caused limited production for each man before the Flood were replaced by the general limitation created by the Flood, which in contrast would affect all men. That is the clear picture presented by the immediate juxtaposition of these statements in Genesis 8:21-22.

Moreover, the depictions of the millennium as a time when meat eating will cease (such as Isaiah 11 and 65:25) potentially further demonstrate that the millennium is a reversal of the Flood and its impact on the productivity of the soil. At that time, there will be the lack of any kind of general curse or limitation on the earth's productivity. However, it is possible to consider that the ground will be cursed individually for particular men who sin during the millennium just as it was before the Flood. Zechariah 14:18-19 and Revelation 12:5 both provide some indication of punitive plagues upon nations who don't obey Christ's commands during the millennium. It is therefore not difficult to imagine similar measures being initiated against individuals during the millennium as a means of discipline just as it was before the Flood as well. In fact, during the description of the millennium found in Isaiah 65, verse 20 states, "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be

accursed.” The last line of this verse suggests the idea of individualized curses resuming for sinners during the millennium.

It should also be stated that when Noah is born, his father Lamech seems to anticipate (perhaps even prophetically) that the events of Noah’s life will bring an end to the cursing of the soil. Lamech even uses the phrase “toil of our hands,” a phrase that reflects the sentiment of Genesis 3:17, 19, concerning “the sorrow” and “the sweat of thy face” with which Adam would henceforth eat the produce of the ground.

Genesis 5:28 And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son: **29** **And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed.**

This further demonstrates 3 facts. First, it demonstrates that the type of cursing of the ground that took place before the Flood would indeed come to an end at the Flood. Consequently, the present limitation on the earth since the Flood is not the same as the cursing which took place upon the antediluvian patriarchs before the Flood. In short, although also limiting to productivity, the general limitations upon production created by the Flood are lesser limitation than (and consequently a relief from) the cursing of the soil before the Flood. Second, the fact that the cursing of the ground as it occurred before the Flood would end (at the Flood), demonstrates that this punishment upon Adam was understood even from the time of Lamech not to be federal upon all of Adam’s descendants. The type of curse that was issued as a result of Adam’s (and other men’s) sin would cease in the days of Noah, meaning that descendants after Noah would not receive or continue to be affected by that type (Adam’s type) of curse. Third, the fact that Lamech’s statement negates a federal understanding of Adam’s curse itself affirms that the curse upon the ground was individualized (occurring for each individual man when that man himself sinned) rather than generalized (occurring universally for all men at once.)

Below we will turn to assessing key scriptural passages that might be relevant to this topic. We will start with Romans 8.

Romans 8:19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. **20** For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected *the same* in hope, **21** Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. **23** And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.** **24** For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

This text does not mention the curse specifically, although it has been interpreted to refer to it. The “hope” in Romans 8 is clearly the immortality and incorruption that our bodies and eventually all creation will enjoy. This hope is contrasted to the present corruptible and mortal condition of the earth. But these things did not result from sin. The earth was not made incorruptible and immortal and became corruptible and mortal as a result of man’s sin. Instead, it was made corruptible, although pristine, and mortal, although alive. It was God, not man, who made the earthly part of creation subject to corruptibility and mortality. It was made this way “in hope” not in punishment. From the context, the concept here is that the earth was made corruptible and mortal, subject to potential corruption and death, in order that God might set before mortal man the hope of immortality and incorruptibility so that men might pursue righteousness. As such, Romans 8:22 does not attest to the persistence of a curse in the New Testament period, but only to the corruptibility (mortality) of earthly creation as it was made by God from the beginning ever before Adam sinned.

Next we will consider Revelation 22.

Revelation 22:1 And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of **the throne of God and of the Lamb.** 2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life, **which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.** 3 **And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:** 4 **And they shall see his face;** and his name *shall be* in their foreheads. 5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

The pre-Flood cursing of men had multiple aspects, even as presented in Genesis 3. It included such items as the difficulty of producing from soil, a woman’s labor in childbearing, expulsion from God’s fellowship (spiritual death), and physical death through the removal of access to the tree of life. As we saw from Genesis 3, Genesis 4, and Genesis 8, these curses were individualized, not general or “federal.” The only part of the individual curse that God promises never to do again in Genesis 8 is the part concerning the cursing of the soil. There are no comments made concerning the other aspects ceasing.

And no doubt, the other aspects continue upon sinners to this day (and all men sin). Women have trouble in labor. All men die for sinning (Romans 5), including being denied access to the tree of life. And all men spiritually die when they sin, being cut off from God. Consequently, it stands to reason that when Revelation pronounces there will be “no more curse” it is referring to the lingering aspects of the curse that, unlike the curse upon the soil, continued to be dispensed after the Flood. And it is no surprise that indeed the context of the passage reveals this very fact. The context describes access to God being restored and access to the tree of life being restored as well.

In addition, we might also note that any additional conceptualization of a curse in terms of limiting the soil's productivity again seem to relate to the impact of the Flood. In verse 2, we read that the tree of life will produce fruit every month. This is most likely a direct contrast to the Flood, after which the earth would only produce seasonally, after seedtime and harvest.

(As a side note, the continuance of difficulty in child birth is indicated directly in 1 Timothy 2:15. In that passage, Paul states that the remedy for this difficulty is faith, charity, and holiness and that this remedy is applied individually to those women who exhibit these traits. This in turn demonstrates that this curse upon women is individualized just as in Romans 5, when Paul states that death comes to every man because of that man's own sins. It is also clear from the context of 1 Timothy 2 that Paul has the curse upon Adam and Eve in mind as this model for this individualized punishment and remedy, just as he did in Romans 5.)

Below we will discuss the curses mentioned in Deuteronomy 28.

Deuteronomy 28:1 And it shall come to pass, **if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God**, to observe [and] to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: 2 And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. 3 Blessed [shalt] thou [be] in the city, and blessed [shalt] thou [be] in the field. 4 **Blessed [shall be] the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.** 5 **Blessed [shall be] thy basket and thy store...** 11 **And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground**, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee. 12 The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven **to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand:** and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow... 15 But it shall come to pass, **if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God**, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: 16 **Cursed [shalt] thou [be] in the city, and cursed [shalt] thou [be] in the field.** 17 **Cursed [shall be] thy basket and thy store.** 18 **Cursed [shall be] the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep...** 21 **The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land**, whither thou goest to possess it. 22 The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. 23 **And thy heaven that [is] over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee [shall be] iron.** 24 **The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed...** 38 **Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather [but] little in; for the locust shall consume it.** 39 **Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress [them], but shalt neither drink [of] the wine, nor gather**

[the grapes]; for the worms shall eat them. 40 Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint [thyself] with the oil; for thine olive shall cast [his fruit]. 41 Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity. **42 All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume.** 43 The stranger that [is] within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low...50 A nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor shew favour to the young: 51 **And he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which [also] shall not leave thee [either] corn, wine, or oil, [or] the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee.**

This purpose of this study is to demonstrate that after the Flood, the earth has not been under the same individualized limitation on soil productivity that is pronounced on sinners before the Flood. Instead, limitations are general (and involve limitations created by seasons). But do the curses in Deuteronomy 28 indicate a continuation of the individualized land curses? Likewise, do the curses of Deuteronomy 28 indicate a “federal” system of condemnation such as Calvinists suggest was the case concerning Adam and all his descendants?

First, this land is described as being a “land flowing with milk and honey” when the Israelites take possession of it. This clearly shows that at this point in history, the earth was not still under the curse that pervaded before the Flood, including any Calvinistic “federal” curse from Adam.

Second, it must be noted that this “land” curse upon the Israelites is a general curse, rather than individualized. It is based upon a preponderance of the behavior of the population as a whole. Consequently, it does not constitute proof of individualized land curses continuing as they did before the Flood.

Third, while God does declare that the Israelites won’t be able to produce much fruit, the context specifies how this will happen and it is not from a degradation of soil quality or productivity as seems to have been the case before the Flood. Instead, the curse is described as resulting from locusts, worms, lack of rain, disease among the livestock, trees casting fruit before it ripens, and foreigners who will steal the Israelites’ bounty.

Fourth, one of the factors described as causing the land not to produce is the lack of rain in due season. This lack of rain causes the ground to become hard like brass. Consequently, this obstruction to soil productivity seems to be based on seasonal limitations, which is the very model that has been proposed for limiting soil productivity in general after the Flood.

A few additional points can also be made concerning Calvinist doctrines.

First, the entire system described here in Deuteronomy is conditional and begins with the Israelites not being under a land curse from Adam. If the land were

already under a curse from Adam, there would be no potential to threaten them with the future occurrence of such a curse.

Second, while these curses are applied to the nation as a whole, there is an enormous difference from the “federal” curse that Calvinists suggest resulted immediately from Adam’s first sin. Adam was an individual who acted before any children were born or other men existed (except for Eve). Consequently, the Calvinist view of Adam’s judgment is preemptive, unconditional, and universal with regard to an entire non-existent future human population. In contrast, the curse in Deuteronomy is conditional and dependent upon a preponderance of the collective behavior of the entire Israelite population (arguably after generations of review). Lastly, although the collective judgment affects all Israelites uniformly in terms of physical consequences, the judgment does not automatically or universally condemn all Israelites concerning salvation or their spiritual status before God. For example, just as Adam and Eve were physically exiled causing their children to be born outside of Eden, righteous Israelites (such as Daniel) suffered physical exile based on the collective guilt of their fellow Israelites even though Daniel was regarded as righteous, rather than spiritually condemned. Spiritual judgment remained individual rather than “federal” or “collective” despite the collateral damage of physical exile as in the case of the Babylonian exile. As in the example of Daniel, the shared physical consequence does not imply shared spiritual condemnation. The same would be true concerning Adam and Eve’s children.

Having discussed Deuteronomy 28, we will now proceed into chapter 29.

Deuteronomy 29:7 When you reached this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out to fight against us, but we defeated them. 8 We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh. 9 Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do...16 You yourselves know how we lived in Egypt and how we passed through the countries on the way here. 17 You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold. 18 Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison. 19 When such a person hears the words of this oath, he invokes a blessing on himself and therefore thinks, "I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way." This will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry. 20 The LORD will never be willing to forgive him; his wrath and zeal will burn against that man. All the curses written in this book will fall upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven. 21 The LORD will single him out from all the tribes of Israel for disaster, according to all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law...23 The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur--nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in fierce anger.

Verse 21 clearly conveys an individualized curse upon the man who sins. This favors the Freewill view that God does not judge men federally, contrary to what Calvinists suggest regarding Adam. However, does this verse suggest that individualized land curses continued after the Flood? As seen in verses 19-20, the curse is phrased in terms of a curse upon the land. The curses on Adam and Cain in Genesis 3-4 are clearly a curse upon the productivity of fruitful soil. But here the curse is not upon soil productivity. Four factors demonstrate this conclusion. First, the curse here is described as something that will affect not just watered, fruitful soil, but also soil that is already dry and unproductive. The inclusion of the dry, unproductive soil makes it unlikely that this is a curse upon soil productivity. Second, this curse is depicted as the opposite of the “safety” the sinner envisions for himself. Third, verses 7-9 remind the Israelites to keep God’s commands by reminding them that God attacked and displaced the previous disobedient inhabitants of the land. Fourth, in verse 23, the disaster on the land is described in terms of God’s burning destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. These four considerations lead to the conclusion that this curse upon the land comes in the form of an attack from enemies or from God himself. Yet, despite this difference, the punishment is clearly conveyed in terms of the language of Genesis 3-4. And third, in verse 21 the curse is individualized. God “singles the man out” applying the curses only to him rather than to all.

The last passages we will look at is Jeremiah 44.

Jeremiah 44:22 So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, *and* because of the abominations which ye have committed; **therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day.**

The curse upon the land in this passage is that it is left without inhabitants. There is no mention of its productivity being affected, as was the case with Adam and Cain and other men before the Flood.

As we conclude we will also consider the concept of the pollution of the land which is found in several places in the Old Testament.

All of the passages that speak of the land being polluted by sin use language that is indicative of the land becoming “unholy” or “defiled” from its previous holy status before God. The language is not indicative of a curse upon the soil or its productivity. (The vocabulary words for “polluted” are cited below the following passages.) To the contrary, the conclusion that the defiling of the land refers to it becoming “unholy” before God, not with its productivity being diminished, is demonstrated by the fact that although defiled and polluted by its former inhabitants, the Promised Land was a land flowing with milk and honey at that time (Exodus 3:8, 17, 13:5, 33:3, Leviticus 20:24, Numbers 13:27, 14:8, 16:13-14, Deuteronomy 6:3, 11:9, 26:9, 15, 27:3, 31:20)

Leviticus 20:22 "Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. 23 **You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you.** Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. 24 **But I said to you, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey."** I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations.

Leviticus 18:24 "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. 25 **Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.**

Psalms 106:38 And shed innocent blood, *even* the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: **and the land was polluted (2610) with blood.**

Jeremiah 3:1 They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that **land be greatly polluted (2610)?** but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 3:2 Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lien with. In the ways hast thou sat for them, as the Arabian in the wilderness; and thou **hast polluted (2610) the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness.**

Ezekiel 20:9 But I wrought for my name's sake, **that it should not be polluted (02490)** before the heathen, among whom they *were*, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt.

Ezekiel 36:18 Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed **upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted (02930) it:**

Amos 7:17 Therefore thus saith the LORD; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; **and thou shalt die in a polluted (02931) land:** and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.

02610 chaneph

a primitive root; TWOT-696; v

AV-pollute 4, defile 4, greatly 1, corrupt 1, profane 1 ; 11

1) to be profaned, be defiled, be polluted, be corrupt

1a) (Qal)

1a1) to be polluted

1a2) to be profane, be godless

1b) (Hiphil)

1b1) to pollute

1b2) to make profane, make godless, cause to be defiled

02490 chalal

a primitive root [compare 02470]; TWOT-660,661; v

AV-begin 52, profane 36, pollute 23, defile 9, break 4, wounded 3, eat 2, slay 2, first 1, gather grapes 1, inheritance 1, began men 1, piped 1, players 1, prostitute 1, sorrow 1, stain 1, eat as common things 1; 141

1) to profane, defile, pollute, desecrate, begin

1a) (Niphal)

1a1) to profane oneself, defile oneself, pollute oneself

1a1a) ritually

1a1b) sexually

1a2) to be polluted, be defiled

...(definition continues but abbreviated to conserve space)

02930 tame'

a primitive root; TWOT-809; v

AV-unclean 74, defile 71, pollute 14, uncleanness 1, utterly 1; 161

1) to be unclean, become unclean, become impure

1a) (Qal) to be or become unclean

1a1) sexually

1a2) religiously

1a3) ceremonially

...(definition continues but abbreviated to conserve space)

02931 tame'

from 02930, Greek 5090 Timaiov and 924 bartimaiov; TWOT-809a; adj

AV-unclean 79, defiled 5, infamous 1, polluted 1, pollution 1; 87

1) unclean, impure

1a) ethically and religiously

1b) ritually

1c) of places

Study Conclusions

An investigation of the biblical descriptions of the curse indicates the following general conclusion. Curses issued before the Flood were individualized rather than federal. Difficulty in soil productivity was limited specifically to particular men after those individual men sinned. There was no universal curse conveyed to all of Adam's descendants as a result of Adam's sin in Genesis 3. This is further substantiated by the fact that Lamech indicates that the pre-Flood curses were discontinued at the time of the Flood after which soil productivity was hindered by seasonal issues, seedtime and harvest, as opposed to curses. Passages which occur after the Flood do not speak of the continuance of the cursing of the soil issued before the Flood. Rather, they report on the mortality (i.e. decay, etc.) of the earth (Romans 8) and either the persistence of other aspects of the curse (difficulty in childbearing, death as a result of inaccessibility of fruit from the tree of life) or the possible reinstatement of aspects of individual cursing during the millennium as punitive measures perhaps in a manner resembling the way things were before the Flood.