Blessing And Curse

The blessing and the curse are very important and prominent concepts in both testaments. What is involved is much more than nice words or harsh words. The prayer for injury, harm, or misfortune was more than a mere wish that evil would befall them. It was believed to possess the power to bring about the evil the curser spoke. The prophetic element of the curse or the blessing was directly related to the spiritual power or authority of the person speaking the words. The curse or the blessing had the power to bring the words into reality.

In the Old Testament the verb “to curse” means to impose a ban or a barrier, a paralysis on movement or other capabilities. Such power belongs only to God or an agency endowed by Him with special power. Anyone could curse; but the curse is strongest when it invokes supernatural power. The curse involves separation from the place of blessing or even from those who are blessed.

On the other hand the verb “to bless”—being the great benediction word of the Bible—basically means “to enrich.” Here too God is its source, even when a person offers it. As used in Genesis, the promise of blessing is largely concerned with offspring in the land of Canaan. The promised blessing included prosperity with respect to fertility (of both the land and the patriarch). The blessing reflected divine approval; therefore it was ultimately spiritual. The contrast between blessing and cursing reflects humanities obedience by faith or disobedience by unbelief and describes God’s approval or disapproval in a graphic form.

We find the issuance of a blessing or a curse used in the accounts of the Old Testament from the creation story, where God curses the serpent (Gen. 3:14-15) and the ground (Gen. 3:17). Although the word “curse” is not used, we also see the woman sentenced by God to pain in childbirth and the man told that the care of the earth (human vocation as caregivers) will not be easy, but done with much labor. Cain is cursed because of his murder (Gen. 4:11-16.) As we continue with the accounts of the lineage of Adam, we find Noah pronouncing a curse on his son Ham (Gen. 9:25,) and Isaac pronounced a curse on anyone who cursed his son Jacob (Gen. 27:29.) The blessing is the counterpart of the curse and is often found as given by a patriarch when near death. Jacob is blessed by his father Isaac by mistake (Gen. 27:33) and in the next generation, Jacob pronounced the blessing on his sons (Gen. 49:1-8.)

Mark 11:13-14 records the cursing of the fig tree by Jesus, symbolic of his curse on the nation of Israel for not bearing fruit for God. Galatians 3:3 tells us that Christ was cursed since he was crucified, quoting Deut. 21:23.