



The Curse of the Torah

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Introduction

As a Torah keeping individual, one of the most difficult and trying conversations that I am faced with (by those who do not share my opinion on the validity of the Torah) is that because of Yeshua's death on the cross, I have been "set free" from "the curse of the law." Now I understand the position from which these individuals are coming from, and I respect the fervor with which they believe their convictions; but I do question their understanding of a few very critical texts pertaining to what exactly is this "curse of the law" that they feel they have been set free from, which I will discuss below.

The Curse of the Torah

The critical text in question is Galatians 3:13-14, which reads, *"But the Messiah has redeemed us from 'The Curse of the Torah,' and has been a curse for us— for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone that is hanged on a tree—' ¹* that the blessing of Abraham might be on the nations, through Yeshua the Messiah; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith." Those who ascribe to the theology that Yeshua's death on the cross absolves our responsibility to keep the Torah point to this verse as supporting their position, believing that *"the curse of the Torah"* is a reference to God's wrath poured out upon those who have proven themselves utterly unfaithful and unable to keep His divine commandments. But friends, I believe this position is in error, and I believe this error is easy to expose, as the Hebrew Scriptures give us a very clear definition as to what *"the curse of the Torah,"* which Paul was referencing here, actually is.

Now it is important to note that these verses are but a small excerpt from a much greater sermon which Paul is writing to the Galatians on the topics of Abraham, faith, and "works of the law." These are all topics which I am planning to address in my (soon to be finished) Galatians Commentary; so setting that aside, and using the Hebrew Scriptures as our dictionary, let's focus in on these specific verses, and decipher exactly what Paul means when he makes reference to *"the curse of the Torah."*

The Curse of the Torah... In Context

In the context of the Hebrew Scriptures, *"the curse of the Torah"* which Paul was referencing is fully laid out in Deuteronomy 28-30, a portion of text which I like to refer to as the "Gospel according to Moses." The discussion on the curse begins in Deuteronomy 28, two critical excerpts of which will be given as follows.

"But it shall come to pass, if you will not listen to the voice of YHWH your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command you this day, that all these curses shall come upon you, and shall overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your land, the increase of your kine, and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. YHWH will send upon you cursing, discomfiture, and rebuke, in all that you put your hand to do, until you are destroyed, and until you perish quickly; because of the evil of your doings, by which you have forsaken Me..."
(Deuteronomy 28:15-20)

¹ Deuteronomy 21:23.

“You shall be left few in number, although you were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because you did not listen to the voice of YHWH your God. And it shall come to pass, that as YHWH rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you, so YHWH will rejoice over you to cause you to perish, and to destroy you; and you shall be plucked from off the land into which you go in to possess. YHWH shall scatter you among all peoples, from the one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, even wood and stone. And among these nations you shall have no rest, and there shall be no rest for the sole of your foot; but YHWH shall give you there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and languishing of soul.” (Deuteronomy 28:62-65)

The Curse of the Torah in Light of Scripture and History

Now that we know what Paul was referring to by his use of the phrase *“the curse of the Torah,”* let’s revisit Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:13, that *“...the Messiah has redeemed us from ‘The Curse of the Torah...’ that the blessing of Abraham might be on the nations...”* To fully understand this, one must examine Scripture from the standpoints of prophecy and history, to see both *“the curse of the Torah”* and the Messianic redemption which followed of Deuteronomy 28-30 played out on a national scale. (What follows is an excerpt from my book, [*A Light to the Nations*](#), which covers this concept in much greater detail.)

After the reign of King Solomon, around 922 BC, the twelve tribes of the Kingdom of Israel were split into two separate nations: the southern kingdom, made up of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah, and the northern kingdom, made up of the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, and Joseph. (Manasseh and Ephraim) The southern kingdom became known as Judah, while the northern kingdom historically retained the name Israel, and is referred to in prophetic texts as both Joseph and Ephraim.²

During the course of events, both kingdoms disobeyed the Torah that God had given them, resulting in— as Deuteronomy 28 prophesied— both kingdoms of Israel going into captivity to foreign nations. The House of Joseph went into captivity to the Assyrians around 722 BC,³ while the House of Judah went into captivity to the Babylonians around 608 BC,⁴ an event which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. These captivities were a direct result of their disobedience to the commandments and precepts of God.

From Biblical and Historical reference, we know definitively that the Southern Kingdom of Judah was brought back from exile during the first year of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia.⁵ The people had begun to return to the land in 538 BC, exactly 70 years after Judah was sent into captivity. This 70 years of Babylonian captivity, followed by the punishment of Babylon, took place to fulfill the prophesy spoken by Jeremiah the Prophet.⁶ The southern kingdom, Judah, eventually became known as “the Jews,” as they are known to this very day. In fact, the modern nation of Israel would rightly be called the reestablishment of the southern kingdom of Judah.

Ezra 1:5 recounts the return of the tribes of the South, *“Then the heads of fathers’ households of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, even all whose spirit God had stirred to go up rose up to build the house of HASHEM which is in Jerusalem.”* It must be noted here that only two tribes of the children of Israel ever returned from captivity as a corporate whole. Yet the promises of God were made not to the three tribes, but to all of tribes of the children of Israel, at a time when Judah and Joseph were one kingdom. This is not by any means to downplay the promises that God made to the Jewish nation— rather, it is to put in perspective that these same promises were made to the House of Joseph as well.

2 Ezekiel 37:16, 19.

3 2 Kings 17:6.

4 2 Kings 25:21.

5 Ezra 1:1-4, 2 Chronicles 36:22-23.

6 Jeremiah 29:10.

The Messianic Redemption

Now remember that in Galatians 3:13, Paul says that “...the Messiah has redeemed us from ‘The Curse of the Torah...’” In addition to giving us specific details about “the curse of the Torah,” Deuteronomy 28-30 also tells us specifically what the redemption from the curse entails.

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you shall think of yourself among all the nations, to which YHWH your God has driven you and shall return to YHWH your God, and listen to His voice according to all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart, and with all your soul; that then YHWH your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion on you, and will return and gather you from all the peoples, to which YHWH your God has scattered you. If any of yours that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there will YHWH your God gather you, and from there will He fetch you. And YHWH your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will do you good, and multiply you above your fathers. And YHWH your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love YHWH your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live. And YHWH your God will put all these curses upon your enemies, and on them that hate you, that persecuted you. And you shall return and listen to the voice of YHWH, and do all His commandments which I command you this day. And YHWH your God will make you over-abundant in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your land, for good; for YHWH will again rejoice over you for good, as He rejoiced over your fathers; if you shall listen to the voice of YHWH your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the Torah; if you turn to YHWH your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.” (Deuteronomy 30:1-10)

This, again, is a national redemption of Israel, rather than an effect of personal salvation. If “the curse of the Torah” is God’s rejection of the covenant with His people, leading to an exile from His holy land, then most assuredly, the Messianic redemption Paul spoke about is a reversal of this decree, followed by a spiritual revival and repentance of the Israelite people, an eventual restoration and ingathering of the exiles from the four corners of the earth to which they had been scattered.

Now unlike the exile of the House of Judah, which was temporarily put away as a form of punishment, and brought back only seventy years later, the House of Joseph was placed under “the curse of the law” for their disobedience to God— just as the Torah prophesied they would be. Contrary to the common misconception, the House of Judah— that is, the Jewish people— have never been under “the curse of the Torah” outlined in Deuteronomy 28-30; rather, it was the House of Joseph— that is, the lost tribes of Israel, who were referred to as gentiles, goyim, or “nations” by the time the New Testament was written— who were under “the curse of the Torah,” and who were in need of Messianic redemption. So when Paul writes in Galatians 3:13 that “...the Messiah has redeemed us from ‘The Curse of the Torah,’” he must have been writing about the redemption of the lost tribes of Israel, who had been banished in 722 BCE for their widespread disobedience to the Torah on a national level, and were thus in need of national redemption.

It was this Messianic redemption— as prophesied in Deuteronomy 28-30— which was the very core of the Gospel message itself. This is what Yeshua came for! This is the “mystery of the Gospel”⁷ which Paul wrote of elsewhere, “the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret through long ages, but now is revealed, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known for obedience of faith to all the nations.”⁸ This is exactly what Yeshua was here to accomplish when He said that He was “not sent to anyone but the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel.”⁹ Yeshua came to redeem these lost sheep— the wayward House of Joseph— from “the curse of the Torah” which had been inflicted upon them, and who had been scattered to all the nations of the world, only to become as the nations (i.e. gentiles) themselves.

Now this is a topic which I have covered extensively in several other articles and teachings, specifically, [The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel](#) and my [Commentary on Galatians](#); but sufficed to say, it was Deuteronomy 28-30 which defines for us “the curse of the Torah,” so is it Deuteronomy 28-30 which prophesies of the exile of the lost tribes of the House of Joseph, as well as Yeshua’s Messianic redemption which followed.

7 Ephesians 6:19.

8 Romans 16:25-26.

9 Matthew 15:24.

The Curse of the Torah: What it is, and What it isn't

As can be seen in Deuteronomy 28-30, “*the curse of the Torah*” refers to a very real, tangible punishment which God would pour out upon those who would break His Torah— and it is not an individual punishment for individual transgressions, but a corporate punishment, dealt out upon a wicked and disobedient nation. It is not, contrary to popular belief, a curse brought down from attempting to keep the Torah, or from some slight transgression thereof. How can I say this with such confidence? Because all throughout the Torah, God instructed His people on both how and when to deal with individual transgressions, both intentional and unintentional, to be once again in right standing with Him. God’s intention in giving us the Torah is made very clear in Leviticus 20:26, “*You shall be holy to Me; for I, YHWH, am holy, and have set you apart from the peoples, that you should be Mine.*” The Father reiterates this by the mouth of the Prophet Ezekiel, who wrote, “*When the righteous man turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, he shall die for it; for his iniquity that he has done, he shall die. Again, when the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he has committed, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considers, and turns away from all his transgressions that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die... Therefore I will judge you, O House of Israel, every one according to his ways,’ says the Lord YHWH.*” (Ezekiel 18:27-29)

In Summation

Before concluding this article, there are two points that I must make abundantly clear, regarding “the curse of the Torah.” First is that no people group known as “the gentiles” or “the nations” has ever been placed under “the curse of the Torah,” which was an exclusive punishment upon the House of Joseph, the lost sheep of Israel which were scattered to the nations in 722 BC, and became as gentiles themselves. Second is that the House of Judah— that is, the Jewish people— have likewise never been under “the curse of the Torah,” but have retained their national identity and covenant with the Father. So where Paul writes in Galatians 3:13 that “*...the Messiah has redeemed us from ‘The Curse of the Torah...’ that the blessing of Abraham might be on the nations,*” he was not saying, contrary to popular opinion, that because the Jewish people couldn’t (or didn’t) keep the Torah perfectly, that God gave up, and decided to bless give Abraham’s blessing to all the nations of the world. Far from it! It was not through the downfall of the Jewish people that God brought salvation to the nations; rather, it was through the restoration of the House of Joseph. Not through Judah’s alleged transgression, but through Joseph’s real redemption from “*the curse of the Torah.*”

Further Reading

For more information about how the lost tribes of Israel carried out the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless Abraham’s seed as “a multitude of nations,” see my book, [*A Light to the Nations*](#), as well as the following articles:

- [The Lost Sheep of the House of Israel](#)
- [Commentary on Galatians](#)