



**present  
truth**

CURSED IS THE GROUND

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## EDITORIAL PREFACE

The message of this issue of **Present Truth** brings comfort by the reason it gives for the strange impotence of our endeavors. Our policies and promises, our blueprints and institutions, are all under a curse. Through His curses God is graciously hedging us and ushering us toward the judgment of the living. This is the only possible answer to our problems today.

Let us thank God and take courage that He has not sent a message to soothe and coddle and flatter us, but in the power of the Holy Spirit to convince us of sin and of righteousness and of judgment to come.

*Jack Zwemer, Editor*

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- No. 1 Original Sin and the Cleansing of the Sanctuary  
*Michael Marsh*
- No. 2 The Atonement in the Light of the Nature of Man  
*Robert D. Brinsmead*
- No. 3 The Outstretched Hand *Arthur S. Maxwell*
- No. 4 The Blotting Out of Sins  
*Collection of Pioneer Writers*
- No. 5 Original Sin (Sanctuary Institute Syllabus IV)  
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## CURSED IS THE GROUND

Robert D. Brinsmead

“. . . cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life” (Genesis 3:17).

The ground is God’s illustration of the human heart (Jeremiah 4:3; Hosea 10:12; Matthew 13:8). After the fall God saw that the perfect garden could no longer teach man the lessons he needed to learn. He must have a garden that would be a fit illustration of the changed condition of his heart. The ground was therefore cursed to bring forth thorns and weeds. As he battled with the hard soil and painful thistles, man would be continually reminded of the evil tendencies in the soil of his heart.

When God declared that Adam would eat of the ground with sorrow all the days of his probationary life, He meant that He would continue to experience the evil of his nature all the days of his life; i.e., he would continue to eat of the tree of the knowledge of evil (cf. *Story of Redemption*, p. 40; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 59; *Education*, pp. 26, 29).

“Cursed is the ground for *thy sake*.” The curse is for man’s blessing. There are flowers on the thistles and roses on the thorn bushes. The curse is God’s educating agent—His schoolmaster—to lead man back to his original state of holiness. Since the fall, character can be formed only by conflict: “A constant battle must be kept up with the selfishness and corruption of the human heart.”—*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 397. Conversion does not eliminate all the innate corruption of the human soul. Repentance and pardoning grace did not restore to Adam the lost state of Edenic holiness; and it

does not restore it to us. The holy prophets and apostles “confessed the sinfulness of their nature.”—*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 561. Luther said that sinfulness “is left in the spiritual man for the exercise of grace, for the humiliation of pride, and for the restraint of presumptuousness.”—*Lectures on Romans*, p. 212.

Left to bear it alone, we would be crushed by the curse. Behold now the Creator bearing the curse with us. See the crown of thorns upon His sacred head. If the curse of this fallen state wearies us, let us remember as we groan for deliverance that Jesus bears it too. It wearies Him, and He groans for deliverance with us (Isaiah 43:24). He still endures the agony of the cross in the sanctuary above (*Education*, p. 263). In all our afflictions He is afflicted (Isaiah 63:9). The great Head of the church feels all the imperfections of His spiritual body.

It is not the will of God that His Son and His people (the Head and the body) go on bearing the curse forever. The sanctuary is to be cleansed; the mangled Lamb (*Early Writings*, p. 79) is to be released; and the saints are to be perfected and sealed.

The curse is a blessing—a means to an end; and God has waited 6,000 years for His people to learn what is necessary from the curse so that they may enter the judgment for the final atonement (cf. Leviticus 16:30; Daniel 7:26; Acts 3:19-21).

## Adventism and the Curse

More than 120 years ago God gave to our forefathers the elements of the greatest truth ever given to mortals, the cleansing of the sanctuary. Discerning that this would be accomplished before the return of our Lord, those early Adventists clearly realized that the final generation would be what no other community of saints had ever been—a morally perfected and sinless people. This fact was underlined by the understanding that there would be a time of trouble wherein no Mediator would minister in the sanctuary above. Anyone who is acquainted with the faith of the Advent fathers knows that they believed in the perfecting of the saints prior to the coming of Christ.

But there is also definite evidence that the same people did not understand all that was involved in the way to perfection. They *did* set out in earnest to reach the goal of a finished work in their own hearts and in the world. The Bible and the clarifying light of the Spirit of Prophecy indicated only a short road ahead. No suggestion was made of further generations to follow.

All efforts to finish the work—in the heart or in the world—by the first generation failed. It went to the grave, and another generation of Seventh-day Adventists arose to complete the unfinished task. Their destination was also the grave instead of translation. A third generation went the same way. The fourth generation is now here. Have we nearly finished the work? Hardly! The task of finishing the work in America today is even greater than when James White was alive. This is where the message was born. The Orient is scarcely touched with the Third Angel's Message. Yet we believe that the

message must bring every man and woman on earth to the point of final decision. At last, it is dawning on our dull senses that we are not finishing the work.

I am reminded of a farmer who selected a raw piece of ground for \$3,500 when he was in the prime of life. More than forty years he watered the ground with his sweat—clearing it, grassing it, cultivating it. His methods were primitive and his efforts inadequate. Regrowth plagued him. Finally, when he was a broken old man, ready to fall into the grave, he sold the farm to my father for the same figure he paid for it originally. There was more work to be done on the farm at the end of that man's life than at the beginning.

If only we could get the organizational machinery oiled up better and the institutions functioning more smoothly. . . .! But as time goes on and the machinery of institutionalism gets bigger, there is more and more "friction" in the machinery. All our efforts to finish the work is cursed with imperfection. There is not one informed, sensible person who would contend that the educational, medical, and mission programs are functioning according to the pattern God gave to us. The curse of human failure and imperfection is seen upon all the work of the church. "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." Cursed is the educational work. Cursed is the medical program. Cursed are the missionary endeavors. Cursed are our best endeavors and holiest duties. Not one thing the saints do is free from the defilement of sin (Isaiah 64:6; *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 344).

The reaction to the curse is two-fold:

1. There is one class who says, "The reason for the curse of failure in our institutions and programs is that the Spirit of Prophecy is not strictly followed. I am a Spirit of Prophecy man. Let us follow the blueprint and see what flourishing institutions we shall have. And then we'll finish the work."

Some of these individuals have seen the curse of human imperfection and failure in the programs of the church and have then started "blueprint programs" of their own. Oh, we have all seen these zealous souls start blueprint schools or health institutions. Result? "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." There have been so many failures in these blueprint self-supporting institutions that the term "blueprint" has become odious. Some operating these self-supporting institutions may be loathe to admit the obvious shortcomings of their efforts, but the divine decree is certainly written upon their work—"Cursed is the ground for thy sake."

2. Another class has no time or patience for the blueprint anyway. These are the liberals who believe in progress even if they have to ride roughshod over the Spirit of Prophecy in order to obtain it. "Why," say they, "does not the Spirit of Prophecy say to do your best and Christ will make up for the deficiency with His own divine merit?"

The religious conservatives and liberals were not, therefore, a peculiar breed confined to the days of Jesus and the apostles!

Could it be that we Adventists have failed to make the right use of the Spirit of Prophecy even as the Jews made a wrong use of Moses and his laws? We need to consider this seriously.

If Israel had entered the experience that God had for them in the Abrahamic covenant, they would not have required the laws as given to them through Moses (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 364). Moses and his laws were "added because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:19). The Jews had no real occasion to glory in having the book of the law—it was a testimony to their own blindness and sin. The devout, conservative Jew thought that if he did all the things commanded him in the law, he would be justified. Instead, he was cursed, not because he kept the law, but because he did not keep it at all. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Galatians 3:10).

Paul perceived "the end of the law"—its object and fulfillment. "The law was our schoolmaster" he said, "to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). The law was designed to crush every ray of hope out of the Jew who was trying to be justified by keeping it—it was to hound him and goad him and curse him until, despairing of his attempts at righteousness, he would run in faith to Christ for justification. To use the symbolism of the sanctuary, Moses was given to Israel to cause them to run into the "first apartment" ministry of Christ and so find justification through faith in Him.

Paul was denounced by the Pharisees and Sadducees alike: by the Pharisees because they thought he was doing away with Moses; by the Sadducees because he built his doctrine on the fundamentals laid down by Moses. Paul the apostle was neither in the conservative party nor in the liberal party.

Now let us apply the lesson to the Israel of today. In 1844 the Advent Movement crossed the Red Sea in antitype (*Great Controversy*, pp. 457, 458). It was not the will of God that there should be a delay in the finishing of the work after 1844 any more than it was His will that ancient Israel wander forty years after their deliverance from Egypt. God gave to modern Israel the Spirit of Prophecy—we might say, Moses II. It must be remembered that if the Advent body had studied and understood the Bible as God intended, the writings of Ellen G. White would have been unnecessary. If the Advent body had profited fully by the early writings of Ellen White, then there would have been very little written. But as the Laodicean blindness settled more and more upon the movement, the Spirit of Prophecy writings increased more and more. After the rejection of the 1888 message, books were multiplied upon books, until God had caused His servant to write a fantastic quantity of detailed instructions to His people. If we think Moses gave many instructions to the Jews to carry out, what are we going to say about the instructions of Moses II?

So far there are about fifty published Spirit of Prophecy books. It is almost impossible to find an Adventist who has read it all carefully, even in the affluent society of America. What can we expect of the average Seventh-day Adventist?

Simply, that it is too much to expect that he can read it all. As for digesting it and remembering it, a super-egotist would hardly claim such a feat. But that is not all. It must all be put into practice—every jot and tittle of it!

Oh, we think again of those who are going to run a “blueprint” institution. They see the curse resting upon other institutions because, as they say, “they are not following the Spirit of Prophecy.” Now they may religiously carry out what the other institutions failed to carry out; but still the curse rests upon their efforts just the same. Why? “Cursed is every one who continueth not in *all* things which are written in the Spirit of Prophecy to do them.” “Moses” catches them failing somewhere!

It is commonly held by the conservative class in the church (those who regard themselves as sticklers for the Spirit of Prophecy) that if they can finally do or refrain from doing everything that “Moses” says to do or refrain from doing, then they will reach the state of perfection required to live in the great Day of God without an Intercessor. To such I would say, Go to now, and see if you may fulfill all things. Fifty books of it, remember; and when you have done that, there is enough unpublished material to fill another fifty books. Run your home as the blueprint says; grow a garden with fruits and vegetables free from diseases as the blueprint says (that takes a few years’ practice to accomplish it even only poorly). Carry out all principles and detailed instructions of child education. (This requires being an expert agronomist, psychologist, and educationalist). Meanwhile, do not neglect your neighbors or your duty in welfare ministry.

(There are books and books of instruction on how to do this). But you are not a missionary after the pattern unless you can handle sickness and disease without drugs. (There are books and books on this too).

When you do all this without default, not forgetting to carry out anything in those fifty published and fifty unpublished books, then you will be a candidate for the seal of God—that is, if you have not only carried it all out in the letter but have performed it in perfect love and for the perfect joy of doing it, without any disposition or inclination of the heart to do otherwise—else all the doing of it would be only glittering sin.

The conservatives who think that perfection will be achieved by doing all the things commanded in the Spirit of Prophecy are just as short of the mark as were the Jews who thought that justification would be achieved by doing all that Moses commanded.

Then what is the answer? Why did God give us fifty books? (We hope the work of God is finished before the other fifty are published). The Spirit of Prophecy “was added because of transgressions.” It is to show us our sins and shortcomings. Every honest believer who reads the powerful testimonies of Jesus will be convicted by sin. Even though he strives by the grace of God to obey all the precious counsel, its requirements are so many, so deep, so spiritual, that he will always bow before God, crying, “Be merciful unto me a sinner.” How, then, will it all be fulfilled?

Imagine that you had to send the needed nourishment to every part of the body by a conscious act of the will. There

are about 30 million, million cells to be cared for. So if you would eat the food, and say, “Nourishment, go to this muscle in this arm”; and while you did that a leg would suffer from lack of attention. So you turn attention to that leg, but in the meantime some other part is neglected. You could not possibly remember, let alone attend to, every part of the living machinery. There is a better way. All you have to do is ingest all the food the body needs, and all the various parts will be nourished.

So when we eat of Christ and “swallow” Him in all His fullness, the spiritual man will be nourished and so will all his parts.

The Spirit of Prophecy is our schoolmaster to lead us to run into the “second apartment” of the sanctuary that we may be perfected by the latter rain (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 506, 508). “Moses” is to teach us by experience that we will never reach the state of sinlessness unless we run into judgment with weeping, tears, and affliction of soul, and there appropriate the final atonement by faith. Until we learn the real purpose of the Spirit of Prophecy, we shall be cursed with failure upon failure in all our endeavors to have the work finished either in our hearts or in the world.

May the chastisement of “Moses” lead us to hasten to the sanctuary that we may find Jesus in judgment and receive from Him the full measure of His Spirit. Then we shall have the Spirit of Prophecy, not just in books, but where God wanted it in the first place—in the heart of every saint. Then at every turn, and in every experience, we shall hear a voice behind us saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it”—a voice so



## The Double Curse

distinct to the perfected conscience that it will be as the sound of a trumpet talking.

Will the saints be carrying fifty red books under their arm during the loud cry? Certainly not! These have been added only because of transgressions; i.e., Laodiceanism. But under the perfecting showers of the latter rain all the beautiful instruction, principles, and precepts will be carried out\*—and by many people who may not even have heard of Ellen G. White. Why is the Awakening message opposed by the conservatives and the liberals in the church today? Because the Awakening is neither conservative nor liberal!

“Cursed be the ground for thy sake.” Try as earnestly as we may, the curse of sin and of human imperfection rests upon all of our most holy duties. Cursed are all things that we put our hands to. Unless the merit of Jesus purifies our prayers, praise, and religious services, they are too defiled to be accepted by God. (Cf. *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 344). Cursed is our health reform program. Cursed are our medical missionary endeavors. Cursed are our educational enterprises. Cursed are our missionary thrusts. Cursed is the ground—everything that human nature depends upon for support, every work that man works on earth and offers to God. As Luther wrote from the Wartburg in one of his most famous writings, *Against Latimus*: “Every good work of the saints while pilgrims in this world is sin. . . . Apart from the mercy of God all the righteousnesses of all men are sinful, and all men are unclean.”†

A double curse rests upon some of the programs that Awakening believers undertake, for they should know better. The Lord has opened unto us the door to the most holy place and has given us the invitation to enter the judgment that the curse of “original” defilement may be blotted out of the human heart, as it is written:

“For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord” (Leviticus 16:30).

†Martin Luther, *Early Theological Works*, pp. 318, 330.

\*The latter rain will not be bestowed upon anyone who willfully or knowingly disobeys the Spirit of Prophecy, but upon those who long to see all of it carried out in all its beautiful fullness.

“But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end” (Daniel 7:26).

“And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment” (Zechariah 3:4; cf. *Testimonies*, Vol. 5, pp. 472-476).

We have been permitted to see that the Lamb of God must endure the pain of the cross until sin is blotted out in the investigative judgment. There is no other way to relieve the sufferings of Christ but to enter the judgment. Three hundred years of the “daily” experience will not remove the curse. It must remain all the days of our probationary life. We cannot attain to the full stature of perfect men in Christ unless and until our probation ceases (cf. *Testimonies*, Vol. 4, p. 367). The door into the judgment is open. The High Priest is waiting to make the final atonement.

Now, are we going to prolong His agony by pursuing our programs as usual? Must the Lord hang on His cross until we start up and perfect schools, sanitariums, health restaurants, etc.? Should we wonder why a double curse rests upon these works? It is for our sake and for His that He says:

“And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon

that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands” (Haggai 1:11).

Now that God has revealed His purpose for His people in His work of judgment, we can expect to find that the curse will rest more heavily upon His people, even the curse that will bring us into the necessary and painful experience of the shaking that must precede the latter rain:

“For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.

“Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth” (Hosea 5:14, 15; 6:1-3).

Notice that the Lord will manifest Himself to His people in two ways: To one class, represented by Ephraim who is joined to his idols (his golden calf programs), the Lord will be as an old lion. That is, as an old lion kills and eats his prey without delay, so God will make a full end of Ephraim.

## Children, Come Into the Judgment

Not so with Judah who has the sanctuary and gathers to it on the Day of Atonement. To this class the Lord will be like a young lion with his prey. The young lion deals with his prey like a cat with a mouse. God says: "I will tear and go away . . . I will go and return to my place [at the judgment bar of God] till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face [with affliction of soul]: in their affliction they will seek me early."

A little boy was playing on the seashore building castles of sand. He was so absorbed in his all-important task that he failed to notice that the sun was sinking rapidly in the west. He was far from home and alone—yet not alone; for, unknown to the little fellow his elder brother stood as a faithful watcher on the cliff high above the sandy shore. The tide was coming in too; but the lad did not know it, for he was engaged in a "great work." Inevitably the incoming tide brought a giant wave onto the shore, leaving no sign of the little boy's castles on the smooth, shining shoreline. He awoke as from a dream. A feeling of loss, futility and frustration swept over him. As he saw the last rays of the sun in the golden west, he was about to give way to loneliness and fear. Then his anxious eyes caught sight of the solitary figure on top of the rocky cliff. His ear was cheered by the finality of his big brother's voice: "Lad, come home."

So we dream of great things to do for God beside the sea of life. The closing up of the great Day of Atonement is stealing upon us. Even this does not interrupt our urgent task. Our Elder Brother waits and watches from the battlements of that place which is high and lifted up. Then the tide of coming events sweeps away our works and leaves us nothing but the righteousness of Christ. Our Elder Brother calls, "Children, come into judgment."

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