

THE TYPOLOGICAL AND HERMENEUTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE
BIBLICAL COURSE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Key terms: curse, semantic, etymology, typology, hermeneutic, power of the spoken word, epic text, narrative prophetic text, poetic text, psalms, Job

Contents	2
List of Abbreviations	5
Thanks	7
Introduction	8
I. The semantic and etymological analysis of the word curse	23
I.1. Semantic examination of the Curse in Hebrew	23
I.1.1. אלה; אֱלֹהִים ala	23
I.1.2. אַרְרָר, אַרְרָה, אַרְרָה, arur, מְאַרְרָה möérah	32
I.1.3. קָלַל, קָלְלָה, קָלַל, qálal, qölála	44
I.1.4. נָקַב, קָבַב, זָעַם, קָב	54
I.2. Semantic examination of the curse in Greek – regard Septuaginta	58
I.2.1. ἄρα, ἄς, ἡ - אֱלֹהִים	58
I.2.2. ἐπικατάρατος, ἐπικαταράομαι, ἐπικαταράσσομαι, אַרְרָר, קָלַל אַרְרָר	59
and καταράομαι קָלַל אֱלֹהִים	
I.3. Etymological examination of the curse in Hungarian	60
Conclusions	65
II. Concept, typology and practice of curses in the Old Testament and around Israel	67
II.1. The first outline of the curse-the curse a spoken word	67
II.1.1. The power of the word in the Talmud, in Jewish tradition and folklore	67
II.1.2. The power of the spoken word in the interpretation of biblical scholars in 20th century	73
II.2. Curse Typology	80
II.2.1. Types of curses	80
II.2.2. The grammar of curses	84

II.2.3. The communication of curses – Spoken and written curses	86
II.2.4. Oath, vow, and curse	88
II.2.5. The prohibition of curses- blasphemy	93
II.3. Social function and the role of the curse	95
II.3.1. The purpose of the curse	96
II.3.2. The mode of action of curses - What is behind the curse?	101
Curse efficiency	
II.3.3. Agents of curses, trustees of curses-the self-expression of the curses	108
II.3.4. The effects of the curses	111
II.3.5. The curse, as a divine decree - the Lord be a judge between me and you	116
II.3.6. Casters of the curse	119
II.3.7. Curse neutralization methods	127
Conclusions	131
III. Hermeneutical analysis of curses	133
III.1. Curses in epic textures	133
III.1.1. The curse that strikes the serpent, the earth, which also affects Adam Genesis 3: 14-19	134
III.1.2. Curse on Cain-Genesis 4, 10-11,	142
III.1.3. Cursed Canaan - Genesis 9, 25	146
III.1.4. Curse of jealousy - Numbers 5, 11-31	150
III.1.5. The curse in the wilderness narrative, on the plains of Moab, Numbers 22-24	157
III.1.6. The renewal of the covenant at Shechem-the twelve curses, Deuteronomy 27, 11-26	165
III.1.7. A curse instead of blessing-or the consequences of Disobedience Deuteronomy 28, 15-68	174
III.2 The curses in the narrative prophetic texts	191
III.2.1. Joshua's curse -Joshua 6:26; 1Kings16, 34	191
III.2.2. The curse of Mica'h mother-Judges 17, 2-3	195

III.2.3. Saul's curse -1Samuel 14, 24, 35-37, 39	197
III.2.4. Shimei's curse -2Samuel 16, 5-14	200
III.2.5. Elisha's curse-2Kings 2, 23-25	204
III.2.6. The "flying" curse - Zecharia 5, 1-4	207
III.3. The curse in poetic texts	211
III.3.1. Curse and psalm-Psalms of curse-Psalms 7, 35, 69,109	211
III.3.2. Psalm 7 and self-curse	215
III.3.3. Psalm 35 and curses	219
III.3.4. Curses and Psalm 69 th	224
III.3.5 Curses and Psalm 109 th	229
III.3.6. Curse in the book of Job, instances when the blessing means blessing, but can mean curse	238
Conclusions-perspectives	259
References	267

INTRODUCTION

The present work discusses curses.

The topic of curses can be seen as being both interesting and scary. If curses refer to things or phenomena, which have faded into the past and distant past, with no connections to the post-postmodern people of our present, they might be intriguing for those who wish to explore this special “tool” of the past.

For those who view curses as an operating, existing, exercisable reality, the topic can also be scary, not just interesting.

What are curses?

Are they a wish, carrying the right charisma in order to turn desires into reality?

Are they things rooted in malevolence, jealousy and envy?

Should we suspect the presence of a curse when we detect a disease of unknown origin, when individuals experience unending loss, bad luck, just as their assets and family members?

Who exactly can identify the presence of a curse? If curses can be identified, can they also be placed or broken as well?

Curses in the ancient Middle East worked differently and had other roles than what we would assume today; this is the time we have to return to in order to understand their real meanings.

Curses were an integral part of religion and life, due to their effective nature, they were used to maintain social harmony and order, whether in a thoughtful and proactive way, or in a reflective and reactive way, but mainly as a form of defense.

Curses were able to excommunicate, to forbid, to condemn, to cause trouble, to force people to honor their oath or covenant, and sometimes they were complemented by a symbolic act or gesture.

They stopped the enemy, overwhelmed evil forces, but they could also bring illness, misfortune and misery to the cursed ones.

Everyone did and could use curses as they were ready to the hand, moreover, to the mouth; they were also considered to be the source of the evil. Despite the fact that they are contagious, they can be removed and neutralized.

After all, the question arises: how did curses even work?

What kind of power did they have? Was anyone - may it be human or divinity - capable of uttering a curse? If curses were part of worship service and cult in the form of hymns and gospels, can curses be seen as some kind of prayer?

Are or were there any social conventions, which “regulated” the use of curses?
Are they a matter of cult and religion or rather one of magic?

Curses are self-fulfilling and autonomous, but could they be even contagious?

Do they also affect those who came in contact with a cursed object, person or thing?

Can it be enough just to approach the topic of curses, and there would already be a risk of contagion? Do curses have a conditional or an unconditional effect, do they imply temporal or permanent dimensions?

What are the forms of curses? Can they be imagined perhaps as clouds: a formation filled with negative energy floating above one’s head?

What are the contents of curses and how can they be measured?

My hypothesis is that - contrary to popular belief - curses today are a form of individual, mysterious and magical power. They should not be considered as a demonic and invisible bond, which somehow is cast on people, their assets and family members, bringing them down all the time by generating defeat, loss, illness, misfortune, but curses should be seen as they are present in the Bible. Curse is a religious notion, a phenomenon empowered by God, who sovereignly allows or forbids the power and fulfillment of the curse.

The first Bible scholar I will mention is Johannes Pedersen, whose most widely known thesis is related to the power of the soul. He defines the soul as a resource for individual growth and enrichment, which also includes almost every area of life. Blessings increase the power of the soul, thus making enrichment possible, while curses are poisonous, they empty and consume the vitality of the soul.

Since the power of the curse is supplied by the power of the soul, Pedersen claimed that people with a stronger soul can cast stronger curses.

Johannes Pedersen’s study does have its own limits, yet his work has had lasting effects on several researchers. For that reason, I would first like to mention the names of Sigmund Mowinckel, Johannes Hempel and Claus Westermann.

Sigmund Mowinckel’s analysis on curses can be found in his outstanding exegetic book, the Book of Psalms. His primary interest is the effect of blessings and curses in a cultic environment, namely the ritual analysis of blessings and curses. He uniquely observed that curses do not function based on the power of the soul, nor on the way these interact, but their

basis is the cult. Moreover, he also stated that the effective word has creating power simply by being spoken. Along with the social anthropologists of his time, he claimed that behind curses - due to the cult - lies the power of the community.

The next Bible scholar, who concentrated his work on the phenomena of biblical blessings and curses, is Johannes Hempel. He concludes that the concept of curses in the Old Testament are based on magic and magic practice. Their main source is not the cult, but magic.

The third Bible scholar, who was influenced by Pedersen, is Claus Westermann. According to him, blessings and curses are rooted in primitive magic, but they both developed differently: the element of magic slowly disappeared from blessings, as Yahweh became the sole originator and source of blessings, while curses maintained their primitive state.

The next Bible scholar, who did not follow Pedersen's views, but those of Johannes Hempel, was Blank Haas Sheldon. He analysed the content of curses, and the expression of this content.

He identified three categories of curses, namely: simple curses, compound or composite curses and freely spoken curses. The fear of the power of the spoken word explains the total lack of blasphemy from the Bible. Blank also discusses the topic of oaths; he claims that biblical oaths are nothing but conditional curses.

Herbert Chanan Brichto examined all words and passages in which any forms of curses were used. He senses the basic power of curses in the expression אָלֶּה, and he points out again that this expression, whether in an implicit or explicit way, is present in the case of all oaths, therefore, every oath is a kind of self-cursing at the same time.

He also gives a thorough analysis of the expression אָרַר. He thinks that there is a connection between the word curse אָרַר and magic, thus, the derivatives of this root should be translated as magic.

After this overview, I examined both the Hebrew and Greek words denoting curses in the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament from a semantic point of view, then I also etymologically examined the Hungarian word átok ('curse') to find similarities and possible differences

I. THE SEMANTIC AND ETYMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE WORD CURSE

The semantic analysis of the word curse in Hebrew and Greek, and its etymological analysis in Hungarian

The first examined root is אלה

It appears more frequently in prophetic books and less frequently in narratives, it is basically a legal term, a lawful tool for protecting oaths, pacts and covenants, a form of legal vengeance against unknown thieves, those who have forsworn and their accomplices. It can denote a conditional curse for the ratification of a promise, which people cast on themselves or someone else, in order to protect their legal rights or the religious and moral order. Therefore, it was used at oath ceremonies followed by cursing sanctions, together with the finalization of contracts, or when subjugating other known or unknown people in order to ensure the execution of the order or the punishment of the guilty. It was occasionally related to oath and covenant in more than half of the cases in which it occurred, but it can also be interpreted as public accusation.

The second examined root is ארר

We know that this was often used as the opposite of blessing ברך, and uttering ארר meant casting a curse formula, which activated the desired evil. It had catastrophic effects on one's life due to the effectiveness of the word, however, this impact can intensify because of the presence of a person who is particularly talented in this sense. On the other hand, by uttering ארר a potential curse zone is formed, which captures those who are responsible for the named deeds. The person punished by the curse is subordinate to the one who uttered the curse, becoming expelled from the community, which once provided safety, success and legal remedies.

The curse formula ארר is also related to a curse standard of ten, which is applied in the following cases: shameful behavior with the parents, moving the neighbor's boundary mark, endangering the blind, upsetting and disturbing the truth of incomers, orphans and widows, sexual abuse (incest and bestiality with animals), murders, bribery of the judge or witnesses.

The clear purpose of the curse formula is to protect sacral, social and national regulations, therefore, it was allowed to be lawfully cast only by someone in powerful position. The Old Testament never uses it against a personal enemy in private situations. This is true even if we can meet several so-called personal or private curses.

There are persons, who apparently possess the power to cast forceful curses and who are accepted by others in order to curse the enemy.

The curse formula אָרַוֵּר also appears on epitaphs when it casts a curse on everyone or everything that desecrates the grave. This way, it also serves to protect an important legal material, a sacral and moral order, the peace of the dead.

In the literature of the Qumran community, the curse formula appears several times as the ratification enclosure of the community's regulation. It was especially valid for the apostates, as apostates were damned forever.

Damned people are the 'trap of the birdcatcher' for other people, since they would be trapped the same way if they became their companions, and the descendants of Israel should act under divine rules, so they do not become cursed.

The third root which can be translated as curse is קלל

Whether we consider its verbal or nominal form, semantically it has the basic meaning of 'easy' and 'little'. But when we examine its derivatives, we are faced with a wide range of meaning.

When it is preceded by the preposition בָּזַז , it always means 'faster than'. In other constructions, we find meanings such as: 'to reduce', 'to dry up', 'to be tiny' or even 'to jeopardize'. It can mean easiness close to triviality, irrelevance, relief and alleviation. In some cases, as the antonym of *respect* כִּבֵּד, it can mean the absence of respect and appreciation, or depriving one's importance and spiritual abilities. It means contempt, contemptuous speech, humiliation, disgrace.

It can be translated as *defamation*, *swearing* and *abuse* in several cases.

We can also find derivatives of the root meaning ‘curse’. Where it occurs with the root אָרַר, it denotes a stronger curse, while קָלַל is used to name a weaker curse.

In Rabbinic Hebrew documents, the noun קָלָלָה is used only with the meaning ‘curse’.

In the Old Testament we find other expressions, which occasionally are used or translated as curse, these being:

נָקַב, קָבַב, and זָעַם

As they are rare, I discuss them in one subchapter.

First, I analyzed the verbs נָקַב, קָבַב and concluded that both forms have similar roots, however, the second one is more of a supplementary form of the first one, and they have similar meanings as the previous קָלַל. The rare occurrence of the verb נָקַב makes defining its basic meaning almost impossible. The hypothesis, according to which it means curse, is based on its repeated occurrence in the story of Balak and Balaam.

The meaning of זָעַם can only be defined contextually. At first it appears as the parallel of אָרַר, then as the parallel of קָבַב, but זָעַם also means ‘deep ditch’, ‘the mouth of the strange woman’.

In the Greek Septuagint the words ἀρά, ἄς, ἡ, as well as ἐπικατάρατος, ἐπικαταράομαι, ἐπικαταράσσομαι, καταράομαι give back primarily the meaning of the mentioned Hebrew words that translate as ‘curse’. I concluded that the Hebrew words used to express ‘curse’ are not translated coherently and uniformly in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Regarding the etymologic analysis of the word ‘curse’ in the Hungarian language, the first apparent conclusion is that there is not another word to express curse than ‘átok’. Even if the word *rontás* (‘hex’) is widely known, it has a rather magic aspect, as mentioned above, a concept of oath curse or curse oath is connected to the root אָלַה .

The Explanatory Dictionary of the Hungarian Language gives three definitions, the first being: an imprecation resulted from hatred, rage or anger, used by the cursing to bring misfortune, suffering, misery or punishment to themselves or others.

According to the second definition, the curse is a mischief, misfortune or punishment originating from a supernatural force based on superstitions that seems impossible to be removed.

Finally, in the religious sense it means being ostracized, excommunicated from the church.

In folk poetry, curse is a synonym for unhappiness and homelessness, and in the poetry of János Arany *curse* and *lie* are synonyms as well, being the manifestation of lovelessness and hatred of siblings.

In Endre Ady's poem the Hungarian people's ignorance towards reasoning impersonates the curse, while one proverb says: "lé tartja a szolgát, átok, szitok a gazdát" (meaning that the poor only get the minimum, while the rich get curses and cusses). The phrase "A pálinkát azon átkok közé számítjuk, melyek a népen igen nyomasztón fekszenek" (The pálinka - a traditional Hungarian fruit brandy - counts as one of the curses that are a gloomy burden to the people) is attributed to Lajos Kossuth, the bad neighborhood is the Turkish curse according to Arany, while Zsigmond Móricz considers poverty to be the greatest curse.

Thus, the Hungarian word 'átok' is closest in meaning to the Hebrew word קלל, used as 'defamation', 'disparagement', 'ignorance', 'reproach' or 'swearing'.

We can find these in the following curse oaths - which are oaths empowered by self-cursing: "Úgy verjen meg az Isten" (So strike me God), "Úgy ne lássam a mennyeknek országát" (So I do not see the kingdom of heaven), "Vakuljak meg" (Strike me blind), "Nyeljen el a föld eleven" (Ground, swallow me), "Úgy segítsen az Isten" (So help me God).

II. THE CONCEPT, TYPOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF CURSES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND AROUND ISRAEL

The first outline of the curse and the power of the spoken word in the Talmud, in Jewish traditions and folklore.

Interestingly, it was believed that any intentionally or unintentionally spoken word would become reality. The question refers to why this approach appears so often in Talmudic times, emphasizing the creative and originator power of the word.

There is a phrase considered to be mysterious, which can be found both at Palestinian and Babylonian rabbis, which says: "...a covenant was made with lips." This "covenant" is necessary as lips cannot utter anything, opening the lips, saying words is not ineffective.

In the Talmud we read that there are three things that bring poverty to people: naked urination in front of the bed, recklessness when washing hands, and allowing one's wife to curse him in his presence, because he did not buy her jewelry. The explanation of this is that if the wife curses the husband, an uttered curse will manifest in the impoverishment of the husband.

The basic idea is that all earthly things are managed and approved in detail by heavenly governance, nothing can happen on the earth, which has not been ordered in the heaven. The mundane world and its matters are administrated by God, together with a legal and administrative council, through an angelic agency, which includes billions of angels with their own tasks and assignments.

The angels are eager to be called, so they can share their observations or fulfill their missions. They are the ones who accompany us (each person is accompanied by two angels: one of them is the good angel, the other one being the evil angel, one keeps track of the good deeds, while the other one keeps track of the bad deeds, one provides protection, the other one brings harm). If the angels on duty, who are assigned to execute the punishment, happen to be nice and merciful angels, they will be slow with implementing the order and they will delay the execution of the punishment as long as possible.

The most unforgivable negligence and sin is that they do not pay enough attention to the source where they orders come from, thus, they sometimes confuse human words with divine words.

Basically, there are two main groups of words and utterances, which should be considered even during conversations, so they do not bring peril to the speaker or the person the speaker is or was talking to.

a. Any utterance, any incriminating statement, which can be interpreted as accusation or implies the confession of any sin, should be strictly avoided.

b. Words with meanings related to the bad, illness, suffering and death, expressions referring to the upcoming catastrophe or just merely threaten with upcoming events, should never be spoken.

In case of emergency, when a word or utterance was spoken from one of the two above mentioned two categories, certain measures should be taken to prevent negative consequences. These measures can be of two types: one of them is a form of circumlocution. The expression denoting the evil should be included in an euphemistic form, or should not be directly indicated or completely suppressed without the justification of the consequence, or cast the sentence on a third person, while it was originally intended for the first or the second person.

Another form of precaution was adding so-called shield expressions or qualifying comments, which indicated that the disastrous utterances should not be applied for the speaker or the listener of the conversation. Saying a short prayer could also help, e.g. 'God forbid'.

Thus, in Jewish teachings the faith in the effectiveness of the spoken word is not connected to magic, and it is not incompatible with the Jewish teachings; on the contrary, it originates from the generally accepted Jewish teaching and orthodox beliefs. This is a logical consequence of the teaching about the divine providence and the way heavenly forces administrate the problems of this world.

According to the readings of most of the Bible scholars of the 20th century, the spoken word is never just a simple voice, but an operative reality, the effect of which cannot be revoked once spelled. Using military and strategic analogy, it is compared to a timed missile or mine, unexploded shell, torpedo. Some theologians of the New Testament adopted this kind of interpretation of the spoken word. According to von Rad, the language does not only convey ideas: the Hebrews and their neighbours are not able to differentiate the word from the object, the idea from actuality, and they see the language as a phenomenon made of sounds,

invested with creative forces in order to produce things. Following this set of idea, Israel believes that the word has creative powers and attributes.

Anthony Thiselton clarifies things when he proves that when talking about the effective word, at the level of the Old Testament, it means the word of God, kings or prophets. Then he applies J. L. Austin's speech act theory, according to which an utterance can be considered a performative, it becomes reality when, within a conventional process, in a conventional way, the right person spells what becomes reality. The effect of blessings and curses is mostly based on the status and power of the speller, as well as the receptivity of the taker, in other words, it does not act automatically.

Types of curses

Regarding the typology of curses, there are basically two kinds of curses: unconditional and conditional ones.

The unconditional curses ask the divine reality to do harm to a specific target.

The conditional curses ask the divine reality to do harm to specific persons only if they ignore certain provisions. This is the simplified base case, both types of curses can be extended.

The grammar of curses

Regarding the grammar of curses, it can be stated that the tense of the curse is future tense, while its mood is optative. Thus, these harmful wishes are future-oriented and predictive; their execution also depends on the divine world. The effectiveness of its power can be increased if the curse is uttered twice, the only difference being that in the first case the curse is expressed with an active verb, then with a passive verb form.

The communication of curses - Spoken and written curses

While analysing the communication of curses, I found it important to mention that not only the spelling of a curse, but also hearing one is important. Regardless of how quietly a curse is spoken, it counts as a verbal communication. In a mainly illiterate society, the verbal character of the curse made it easily understandable to everyone.

The first thorough and scientific analysis of the curse focused on the oath, examining its language and methods. Modern reasoning views oath as a narrow, legal concept, and tends to separate the oath from the divine "zone". However, in the ancient Middle East oaths

counted as religious acts. In conclusion, the violation of an oath is considered a religious offence, and sin is the most adequate word to describe it. There are two functions common for the pledge and oath curse: divinity and verbal statement.

Oath, vow, curse

There is a fundamental difference between oath and vow, this being the curse. A curse is connected to the oath, but not to the vow. The vow negotiates and makes a deal with the divine reality, while the oath does not. As during a vow one can make a deal, it can be suspected that people can avoid their pending punishment by fierce acts of penance, including ripping of garments, solitude, scattering ashes on the head, generous sacrifices and prayers. However, in the case of oaths, the divine and earthly reality almost always work together in order to carry out the curse cast in the case of the violation of the oath. Moreover, the violation of the oath has not only religious, but legal consequences as well.

The vow is a conditional promise, seeking to make a deal with the divinity, so that it will approve and support the desired and intended result. The oath is a conditional curse. It asks the divinity for the punishment of someone, who does not respect the conditions of the arrangement.

The prohibition of curses - blasphemy

The fear of the actual power of the spoken word can also be seen in the complete absence of blasphemy in the Old Testament. Despite the fact that we can often find references to the “possibility” of blasphemy, we cannot find curse words against God.

The social purpose and role of curses

When discussing the social purpose and role of curses it is not evident how curses can be recognized in society.

If the curse involves a schematic and rhythmic character, frequent and controversial parallels and repetitions or the use of certain objects, it points to magic. The irrevocability of curses is also related to magic, penance may postpone misfortune, but cannot prevent it. Curses also have a contagious character as a cursed person poses a threat to the entire community. The contents of the curse can involve death, illness, childlessness, sudden miscarriage, drought, injurious physical affections, twist of fate, slavery.

The purpose of the curse

What is the general purpose of curses, and how can this purpose be achieved? Is death the final purpose of curses? Yes, but the question remains: how can people reach this final purpose? Each curse depends on the level of damage, and there are three levels of causing damage: a difficult life leading to a difficult demise, painful and early death, and extinction, expiration.

The mode of action of curses - what is behind the curse? The effectiveness of curses

What does imply the effectiveness of curses, how does their mode of action function?

Even if the final purpose of curses are death and destruction, curses also have intermediate aims. In a great number of the cases, these aims are not even part of the original curse. God fully monitors the effectiveness of the curse, regardless of whether the curse was spelled by people or God. When God is the one to cast the curse, the order is executed surprisingly fast. Curses uttered by people work differently. The last word belongs to divinity, who also overwrites the request behind the curse of people.

Since curses are forceful, their effects are also thorough. Divine curses have the effect to cause distorting, physiological changes, thus, we can say that physical deformation is a result of the divine curse.

Agents of curses, trustees of curses - the self-expression of curses

Interestingly, there are some agents of curses and trustees of curses in the Bible. Personified harm becomes the legate of divine wrath, causing anxiety and damage. But we can also find the direct trustees of curses, certain animals, mostly bears that appear as the executors of curses.

The effects of curses

Regarding the effects of curses, it can be claimed that there are some expressions denoting the segregation and isolation implied by curses. The leprosy Miriam was stricken with was a result of God's wrath, a consequence of the curse, a punishment that removed her from her community, becoming expelled from the camp. God lives among his people, therefore, maintaining a certain state or order in the camp is necessary. If the cursed person stays in the camp, the divinity is forced to leave the community.

Castors of the curse

Who does and can cast curses?

Anyone could cast a curse, but it cannot be assumed that every curse was thought to be equally efficient or successful. Considering the power of the curse, the person uttering the curse, more exactly the difference between the lay and professional curse casters, had proven to be important. Thus, it can be concluded that there were professional and lay curse casters. The former were those who treated curses competently; the professional curse caster of Israel were the priests and Levites.

Can a curse be neutralized, and if so, how? Is there any chance to prevent the cast curse from happening, or at least, can it be slowed down?

Curses can be annulled, if their source is destroyed, namely the person who cast it, or the power of a curse can be neutralized by deception, for instance by the ripping of garments. Seemingly, through the ripping of the garments, the victim of the curse has already endured the punishment. However, the most effective way of destroying a curse is to apply the right antidote, which is the blessing.

III. THE HERMENEUTIC ANALYSIS OF CURSES

My first task is to analyse how the topic of curses appears in Biblical books of different genres, then examining the selected biblical texts, I will also review their hermeneutics.

By epic text I understand the five books of Moses, which are also known as the Greek Pentateuch and the Hebrew Tanakh.

The curse that strikes the serpent, the earth and indirectly Adam - Gen 3:14-19

The first curse that strikes the serpent, the earth and indirectly Adam, is related to God, since Yahweh is the one who casts the curse, which results in the differentiation and separation of the serpent. The result of the first curse cast on the serpent is crawling, the second consequence is eating dust, while the third one is hostility. This was not the original way of moving of the serpent, but it would be an overstatement to say that serpents would have had limbs originally, which disappeared as a result of the curse. The expression 'go flat on the earth' does not mean that the serpent was deprived of its skeleton, legs or wings - as the effect of the curse resulting in physiological changes -, but that, as a compulsory consequence of its hostile attitude towards people, it has to disappear snaking on its stomach. The serpent's movement was changed, but not its form. Eating dust does not refer to the sole food of the serpent, but the compulsory result of snaking, crawling in the dust. On the one hand, eating dust is consistent with the woman's desire to eat and the joint tasting of the forbidden fruit, on the other hand eating dust is a symbol of humiliation. Regarding the cursing of the Earth, the Earth will not be as cooperating as before, which means that people can benefit from the fruit of the Earth only with hard work.

Curse on Cain - Gen 4:10-11

The curse cast on Cain contains a reflection of punishment, namely: Cain works the ground, and the ground bears fruit, Cain gives his brother's blood to the ground, but the blood cries out from the ground, the ground keeps its fruits, and Cain is banned from the ground. His yield will be minimal, and he becomes a wanderer and a vagabond because of his agricultural failure. A similar word pair can be found only here and in verse 14: "fugitive and wanderer". The first denotes an internal trembling and anxiety, the second one denotes a restlessness manifested in external wandering. This does not mean that the curse condemns him to a lifestyle

similar to that of Bedouins, since this terminology is too exaggerated to describe this kind of lifestyle. It is more likely that the curse reflects that Cain has been expelled from the family, which was also the fate of those - in the tribal society - who murdered their close relatives. Cain's answer shows no repentance, the sin makes one selfish since he can only see his suffering, but not Abel's. There are a great number of theories and explanations regarding the mark of Cain; even if the nature of the mark is uncertain, its message is significant: Cain becomes expelled and isolated from others, while God forbids the increase of bloodshed by the curse itself.

Cursed Canaan - Gen 9:25

According to certain views, the narrative about cursing Canaan can be interpreted as an ethnologic tradition that is rooted in the story of Israel's conquest. This was the first time when a curse cast by a person was registered.

Noah does not refer to God when he curses Canaan. Why him?

The most plausible explanation points out that God has recently blessed Noah and his sons; in addition to this promised blessing, Noah himself could not cast the curse in the name of God. We know that one way to neutralize curses is not an opposite curse, but a blessing, however, it cannot be claimed that he did not cast the curse on Ham, because he was blessed, which already rules out the possibility of the curse. The cast curse concerns not only one person, but also the following generations.

The curse cast on Canaan can be understood within its context, since the story of Adam, the story of Cain and Abel and the story of Noah are related. The first common feature is that all three stories represent the first act of violation in the new world. All three of them are somehow connected to the earth and cultivating it, while the stories begin with planting. Comparing the stories of the original sin and Noah's drunkenness, it can be seen that in both of the cases tension rises when they eat the fruit. The two crisis situations are not equal, yet they could be reflecting each other. The role of Ham is similar to that of the serpent in Paradise. Following the original sin, a curse is cast on the serpent, its offspring will see an inferior and subordinated state. Ham's offspring, Canaanite inhabitants were doomed to be conquered by the brothers' offspring.

The curse of jealousy - Numbers 5:11-31

An unusual denomination - *the law of jealousy* - and an unusual situation are discussed. God presents a procedure that can treat the feelings of a jealous man. We are presented two cases: in the first one, the wife was unfaithful to her husband without being caught; in the second case, the jealousy of the husband is very real, although his suspicions have not been confirmed, and the woman is innocent. Both cases can and should be treated with the same method. Considering that the key elements are the oath and the curse, their executor is the professional person trusted with this duty, the priest. The sacrifice that will be presented to God is there, the woman says *amen* twice, leaving no doubt that this regulation is given by God, who makes the curse oath effective. The possible outcomes of the test are presented in two different definitions. If the woman is innocent, she will give birth to a child, but if she sinned, her womb will be swollen and she will have a premature delivery.

Calling this method an ordeal is unjustified.

The curse in the desert narrative, on the plains of Moab - Numbers 22-24

It is better known as the story of Balaam.

The opinions regarding Balaam can be generally categorized into two groups: some consider him a false prophet, a sorcerer, an idolater who was forced to bless Israel against his will. Others think of him as a true prophet whose fall was caused by ambition and greed.

Balak is the king who wants to curse Israel through Balaam. Balaam however is only a soothsayer, not a sorcerer. He can only do and say what God tells him to say and do. If Balaam accompanies Balak into battle, he is expected to prophesize, not to conjure or curse. And this is how it worked: while Balak was occupied with presenting his sacrifice, Balaam states twice that God wants him to bless Israel. On the third and fourth occasions he rises to the prophetic level: he does not need God "dictating" and, filled by the spirit of God, he creates the individual and completely specific form of blessing, the parable of the man whose eyes opened.

The story is based on the uttered word. In the ancient world whatever Balaam said was significant as they thought that whatever he says will happen as his words have power and might. Through the speech act theory even contemporary Western society admits that in the case of people part of a social convention, in a certain context, within conventional

circumstances, the uttered word has a power and creative force, similar to the blessing uttered by Balaam.

The renewal of the covenant at Shechem - the twelve curses - Deuteronomy 27, 11-26

It is also called Dodecalogy or the Twelve commandments based on the number of the curses.

These cursing statements are uttered in order to preserve social order, by God's command. Sexual sins are particularly pronounced, however orphans and widows are also under the "protection" of the curses, they cannot be taken advantage of, nor the disabled exploited. Respecting the parents is especially important as it can be found in the Ten Commandments as well. The curse not only involves the possibility and punishment of exclusion and expulsion from the community, but also divine examination that needs to be taken into account as well. If human justice or exclusion does not happen, God makes sure to examine whether the statements accepted by saying Amen were respected or not.

A curse instead of a blessing or the consequence of disobedience - Deuteronomy 28, 15-66

This is one of the most solemn chapters of the Torah. Orthodox Jews read it once every year together with the five books of Moses. When they come to this chapter, the rabbis read it in a low, quiet voice, thinking about the fact that the sad and sorrowful story of their people was written in advance here.

As a leader who cares about his people, Moses formulates this lengthy warning regarding the consequences of disobeying God. If we wish to group these curses, we can differentiate spiritual, mental, physical, material, objective, social and political ones.

It is definitely recognizable that God is the author of these curses, but also the fact that they are conditional: they will be fulfilled only if the people do not obey God's will. Covenant curse is not magical, but the accepted and previously formulated consequence of violating the law and the covenant.

A second significant hermeneutical subset is the analysis of curses in prophetic, narrative texts.

Joshua's oath - Joshua 6, 26, 1 Kings 16, 34

When a society realizes that a ruinous area is cursed, a socially bound border is placed around the given area. The purpose of this curse is to limit something hostile: destruction, infertility, death. Whatever is within the limits is against life, whatever is outside it supports life and enjoys God's benevolence. The curse delimits two opposite areas and differentiates the beneficial from the harmful.

The curse of Micah's mother - Judges 17, 2-3

Micah is a thief who steals from his own mother. He is an honourable thief as he gives the money back to his mother, however this might have been greatly influenced by the fact that his mother cast a curse on her thief and her son witnessed the utterance of the curse. It is still a very scary habit. They considered curses as asking God to serve justice. In Pagan cultures the fear from the consequences and effects of curses usually did not originate from faith but from superstition. The Greeks considered parental curses to be one of the most serious ones.

The public articulation of curses also has a social aspect: it causes fear and discourages the perpetrator. This is a lay casting of a curse and in order for it to have any effect, both the divine region and the human party needed to hear and acknowledge it.

Saul's curse - 1 Samuel 14, 24, 36-37, 39

Saul constrained his men with a curse not to eat until they have revenge on their enemies. It is a cruel demand in such a strenuous situation for soldiers to refrain from all food and drink.

In order for a curse to take effect, the given person needs to be present, needs to hear it and then the conditional curse is compulsory and it binds that person as well. This is an expressive example as it shows how the king had the right and power to curse a whole group of people, in this case the complete army.

Shimei's curse - 2 Samuel 16, 5-14

This is a section on dynastic succession - what happens is the ironic culmination of David's career: Absalom dishonours him and he is cursed by Shimei.

Abishai responds to Shimei's curse and calls him a dead dog. One of the usual responses to curses was calling the other descendants from dogs or dogs, while *dead dog*

means extreme wickedness and evil. As we all know, warding off a curse is possible by eliminating the source of the curse. Abishai wants to do this. We know that Shimei's curse is definitely without a contrast, as he never acted or spoke on God's behalf, as David thought he did.

Elisha's curse - 2 Kings 2, 23-25

As the words of the prophet can heal and give life, they also can cause death when they are curses. Elisha without doubt cast a curse, in God's name, on the boys who mock him. He asks for supernatural strength and help in order to stop them. Yahweh decides that his request is correct and He send the two mother bears to fulfil the punishment entailed in the curse. God uses bears as agents to fulfil the curse, and these "covenant" bears appear as the administrators and assistants of divine punishment.

The "flying" curse - Zechariah 5, 1-4

The image of the flying scroll is unique not only in the Biblical literature but outside it as well. It needs to be understood as symbolic due to several reasons. The issue of the meaning of the scroll is resolved by an explaining angel: the flying scroll is nothing else but a curse. The curse is embedded into the covenant and is supported and enacted by God's might. The curse destroys social order, the social context, and that is why it needs to be considered a proactive conditional curse.

The third hermeneutical subset is the analysis of the curses found in poetic texts, more exactly the presentation of a selection of imprecatory psalms and the curse-related issues at the beginning of the book of Job.

Curse and psalm

Imprecatory psalms are barely studied, they are hard to interpret and are usually avoided. Jews and Christians both appreciate Psalms, one aspect is however confusing for many readers and scholars, namely at least 28 psalms contain damnation, ask for and cast curses upon enemies. And although curses can be found in many of the psalms, some are built around the main element of the curse.

Psalm 7 and self-curse

It is an individual complaint, in which the Psalter, David prays to be freed from his enemies, especially from a companion who betrayed him.

David utters what he utters as a prophet and he entrusts himself and his cause to God believing and knowing that God could and would actually carry out both the curse and the salvation.

We need to keep two things in mind: David is king and when he hears this slander, - due to his sociological role - he is very deeply affected by it and it overshadows him and his leading role as well. As king he was the supreme legal and administrative agent, and this is an accusation that undermined his integrity, the moral basis of the kingdom.

A second aspect is the difficult handling of false accusations: what can David do while faced with these accusations? He takes them in front of God. With this curse David wishes to restore moral norms and to convey correct human values without any slanders.

Psalm 35 and curses

It is another imprecatory psalm: David calls countless curses to his enemies then looks forward to the moment when God punishes those who want him dead.

Does a believer have the right to ask for God's judgement on somebody else's life? If the request is personal and selfish, the answer is definitely a negative one. We cannot consider any revenge justified. However if it is about protecting God's name and his sacred nature, the answer is definitely yes.

Psalm 69 and curses

This psalm presents a vulnerable, sad, powerless, desperate man, who gives voice to his internal dissonant feelings as a result of his devastated frustrations.

It is the heated request and wish for divine judgment, regarding that God should direct the acts of his enemies just against them. The prayer of a representative person should be considered, especially the kings of the Davidic line thought that it is their duty and job to pray against oppressors.

This request has the form of a curs, however, God is asked and expected to provide retaliation. Actually, David speaks not for himself, but more in the name of God. He protects and strengthens the law of God, which casts concrete curses on those who violate it. He speaks as God's anointed king, enthroned by God, thus, a dethronement against him counts as a revolt against God.

He speaks as the prophet of God, he speaks through the Spirit of God.

Curses in the book of Job, instances when the blessing means blessing, but can also mean curse

In the ancient culture of the Middle East there are no limitations regarding the cursing of objects. Any kind of object could have been cursed, and anything could be cursed: person, place, object, animal, as well as the personified illnesses. However, cursing the divinity was something different. The problem of cursing God cannot be discussed in context of the Old Testament, since the ban of curses is so evident, it would be a waste time.

Though, in the prologue of the book of Job - Job 1:1-2:13 - there is a possibility that Job himself cast a curse on God. Or maybe not?

The reason of this might be the fact when looking for the word of *curse*, we find the word of blessing, five times in total. In four of such cases the word for blessing is translated to curse, while the concept of curse is described with the word of blessing. - Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9.

The most remarkable aspect is that Job's wife advises him to bless God and die. This can be interpreted as if Job's wife recommends Job to curse God, which would immediately end his suffering, or it can also be interpreted as a bitter taunt, the deep irony of his commitment to his faith and God, encouraging him to praise the Lord until he dies. This ambiguity, the tool of focusing the drama can be found here in the prologue, which follows the reader: Job will bless God in continue, or as a result of his suffering, the things the Satan predicted twice will eventually come true, as he will curse God directly.

The curse in the prologue of the book of Job, disguised as the word of blessing, can be connected to the chapter of blasphemy and ban of curses. Since cursing superiors and God is strictly forbidden, such thing cannot be even written, as the word of blessing should be written down instead of it, while the reader, understanding the regulations, should know what the given word refers to, whether blessing or curse.

