

Deuteronomy 27:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother.
And all the people shall say, Amen.

Analysis

Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother—The Hebrew *qalal* (קָלַל, "setteth light by") means to treat with contempt, dishonor, or make light of—the opposite of *kaved* (כָּבֵד, honor, make heavy), used in the Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12). This curse protects family order and parental authority as the foundation of social stability and covenant transmission across generations.

Honoring parents was the first commandment with explicit promise (Ephesians 6:2-3)—long life in the land. Conversely, dishonoring parents brought covenant curse and premature death (Exodus 21:17, Leviticus 20:9). The New Testament maintains this principle (Mark 7:9-13, 1 Timothy 5:4), showing that family obligations persist across both covenants.

The placement of this curse immediately after idolatry is strategic—rebellion against parents parallels rebellion against God. Family breakdown precedes societal collapse. Conversely, covenant faithfulness flows through generations when children honor parents who teach God's law (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures universally valued parental honor, but Israel's law uniquely grounded it in divine command rather than mere social convention. The death penalty for cursing parents (Exodus 21:17) shocked ancient audiences, as it does modern ones, but it emphasized the sacred nature of family relationships as

reflections of covenant order. During Israel's later apostasy, parental dishonor became epidemic (Ezekiel 22:7, Micah 7:6), confirming covenant breakdown.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do contemporary attitudes toward parental authority and elder respect reflect or reject biblical covenant values?
2. In what ways might you be 'setting light by' parents—treating them as burdensome obligations rather than honoring them with weighty respect?

Interlinear Text

אָר וֹר	מִקֵּל הֵ	אָב יוֹ	וְאִמּוֹ	וְאִמּוֹ רַ	כָּל	
Cursed	be he that setteth light	by his father	or his mother	shall say		H3605
H779	H7034	H1	H517	H559		
וְכָל	אָמֵן:					
And all the people	Amen					
H5971	H543					

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 19:3 (Parallel theme): Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.

Exodus 21:17 (Curse): And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.

Exodus 20:12 (Parallel theme): Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Ezekiel 22:7 (Light): In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow.

Leviticus 20:9 (Curse): For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he hath cursed his father or his mother; his blood shall be upon him.

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