

Deuteronomy 27:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife; because he uncovereth his father's skirt. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Analysis

Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife—This curse prohibits incest specifically with a stepmother, described euphemistically as **he uncovereth his father's skirt** (כָּלָה קְנָף אָבִיו). The "skirt" or "wing" (kanaf) represents covering, protection, and marital authority (Ruth 3:9, Ezekiel 16:8). To uncover the father's skirt violates paternal honor and household boundaries.

Leviticus 18:8 and 20:11 explicitly prohibit this, prescribing the death penalty for both parties. This wasn't theoretical—Reuben committed this sin with Bilhah (Genesis 35:22, 49:4), losing his birthright. Paul confronted a case in Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1-5), expressing shock that the church tolerated "such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles."

Sexual ethics ground covenant community health. The curses in verses 20-23 address various incestuous and bestiality sins, emphasizing that Israel's sexual standards must differ radically from Canaanite practices (Leviticus 18:24-30). Sexual purity isn't prudishness but covenant faithfulness reflecting God's holiness.

Historical Context

Canaanite religion incorporated ritual prostitution and fertility cults that blurred sexual boundaries. Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hittite, Assyrian) addressed incest but often with surprising leniency compared to Israel's absolute

prohibitions. Israel's strict sexual ethics testified to YHWH's moral character and created a distinct covenant community. The New Testament maintains these standards (1 Corinthians 5:6, Ephesians 5:3-5, Hebrews 13:4).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does contemporary culture's sexual confusion parallel Canaanite boundary-breaking that these curses addressed?
2. What does God's intense concern with sexual holiness throughout Scripture reveal about the connection between sexuality and covenant faithfulness?

Interlinear Text

גַּל הִנֵּה אֶרְזֶב שְׁכַב עִם אֶשְׁתِ אֶבְיוֹן כִּי אֶבְיוֹן כִּי
Cursed be he that lieth with his father's wife because he uncovereth
H779 H7901 H5973 wife H3588 because he uncovereth
H1540

אֶת-אֶתְרָה אֶת-אֶתְרָה כֹּל אֶת-אֶתְרָה כֹּל אֶת-אֶתְרָה אֶת-אֶתְרָה
skirt his father's shall say And all the people Amen
H3671 H1 H559 H3605 H5971 H543

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 22:30 (Parallel theme): A man shall not take his father's wife, nor discover his father's skirt.

Leviticus 18:8 (Parallel theme): The nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness.

1 Corinthians 5:1 (Parallel theme): It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

Leviticus 20:11 (Parallel theme): And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.

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