

Deuteronomy 27:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Cursed be he that lieth with his mother in law. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Analysis

Cursed be he that lieth with his mother in law—Leviticus 18:17 and 20:14 prohibit this as zimmah (זִמָּה, wickedness/depravity), requiring execution by burning. The severity reflects how such violation destroys family structure God ordained for human flourishing. The mother-in-law relationship created through marriage covenant makes this union a perversion of sacred kinship bonds.

The continuing refrain **And all the people shall say, Amen** reinforced communal accountability. Each 'Amen' was a corporate covenant renewal declaring, 'We agree with God's standards and will uphold them.' The New Testament similarly commands believers to have no fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness but rather expose them (Ephesians 5:11).

Historical Context

In the ancient Near East, marriage created extensive kinship obligations and protections. A man's relationship to his wife's mother was legally and morally defined—she was family, not a potential sexual partner. The public proclamation of these curses at Mount Ebal made clear that Israel's covenant community would not tolerate the sexual chaos common among Canaanite cultures, where temple prostitution and cultic sexual rituals were normalized.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does God's design for family boundaries protect human dignity and relational flourishing?
2. What modern 'redefinitions' of family and sexuality parallel the ancient violations these curses condemned?

Interlinear Text

אָר ווּר	שֶׁכֶּ ב	עִם	חֲתָנָת ו	וְאָמַר	כָּל
Cursed	be he that lieth	H5973	with his mother in law	shall say	H3605
H779	H7901		H2859	H559	
וְכָל הָעָם	אָמֵן:				
And all the people	Amen				
H5971	H543				

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 20:14 (Parallel theme): And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you.

Leviticus 18:17 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, neither shalt thou take her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; for they are her near kinswomen: it is wickedness.