

Deuteronomy 28:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee:

Analysis

This verse introduces Deuteronomy's curses section, forming a dark parallel to verse 1's blessings. The Hebrew construction mirrors verse 1: *vehayah im-lo tishma* (וְהִיא אִם-לֹא תִשְׁמַע) ('but it shall be if you do not listen'). The negative particle *lo* (לא) makes the condition opposite—disobedience rather than obedience. The comprehensive scope remains: *la'asot et-kol-mitsvotav vechuqqotav* (לְעֹשֹׂת אֶת-כָּל-הַמִּצְוֹת וְהַקּוֹנְכִי) ('to do all His commandments and statutes')—covenant violation affects the entire relationship, not just isolated infractions.

The result is equally comprehensive: *uva'u alekha kol-ha'alot ha'eleh vehisiguykha* (וְבָאו עַל-ךָ כָּל-הַאֲלֹת הָאֱלֹהִים וְהַשִּׁגְוָה) ('all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you'). The verbs suggest relentless pursuit—curses don't merely happen but actively pursue covenant violators. The curse catalogue that follows (28:16-68) details agricultural failure, military defeat, disease, exile, and ultimate dispersion among nations—reversing every blessing promised in verses 3-13. Theologically, this demonstrates that covenant relationship has real consequences; God's justice is as certain as His mercy. The curses aren't vindictive but remedial, designed to drive Israel back to covenant faithfulness.

Historical Context

Moses warned the wilderness generation of covenant curses they would face in Canaan if they abandoned Yahweh for Canaanite gods. This wasn't theoretical—Israel's subsequent history tragically validated every warning. During the judges period, repeated apostasy brought foreign oppression (Judges 2:11-15). The divided monarchy experienced progressive deterioration—the Northern Kingdom fell to Assyria (722 BC) with survivors exiled and scattered. Judah persisted longer but ultimately fell to Babylon (586 BC), with Jerusalem destroyed, the temple burned, and the population exiled.

The curse specifics proved horrifyingly accurate: agricultural devastation (v. 38-40), military defeat (v. 25), disease (v. 27-28), siege and cannibalism (v. 52-57), and exile (v. 64-68). Josephus recorded that during Rome's siege of Jerusalem (AD 70), conditions matched Deuteronomy's warnings exactly—starvation, disease, family members betraying each other, even cannibalism. The curses weren't arbitrary divine cruelty but logical consequences of abandoning the covenant relationship that sustained Israel's national existence. Yet even in exile, prophets proclaimed restoration hope (Jeremiah 29:10-14; Ezekiel 36-37), demonstrating that God's redemptive purposes outlast His judgments.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the certainty of covenant curses demonstrate God's holiness and justice alongside His love?

2. What does it mean that curses 'overtake' covenant violators—can we escape consequences of persistent disobedience?
3. How should we understand Old Testament covenant curses in light of Christ bearing the curse for us (Galatians 3:13)?
4. In what ways might God use difficult circumstances as discipline to restore us to covenant faithfulness?
5. How does the historical fulfillment of these curses strengthen confidence in God's other promises and warnings?

Interlinear Text

בְּקוֹל	תִּשְׁמַע	לֹא אָמַרְתָּ	לְשָׁמֶר אֶלְךָ יְהִי הָ
H6963	H8085	H3808	H1961
unto the voice	But it shall come to pass if thou wilt not hearken	if thou wilt not hearken	to the voice
H4687	H3605	H853	H3608
all his commandments	to do	to observe	thy God
H2708	H6213	H8104	H430
and his statutes	which I command	I	and his statutes
H3117	H6680	H834	H595
shall come	thee this day	thy	and his statutes
H935	H3605	H5921	H3605
upon thee and overtake	that all these curses	that all these curses	that all these curses
H5381	H428	H7045	H428
!הַשִּׁיגוּב:	פָּא לָהּ	פְּקָלְל וְתָ	פְּקָלְל וְתָ

Additional Cross-References

Malachi 2:2 (Curse): If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.

Deuteronomy 28:2 (References God): And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.

Deuteronomy 29:20 (Curse): The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven.

Lamentations 2:17 (Word): The LORD hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied: and he hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries.

Joshua 23:15 (References God): Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

Galatians 3:10 (Word): For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

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