

Deuteronomy 28:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field.

Analysis

Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field—The Hebrew *arur* (אָרוּר, cursed) appears repeatedly in verses 16-19, forming an anaphoric litany that mirrors the *baruk* (blessed) pattern of verses 3-6. This verse encompasses the totality of human activity: *ba'ir* (בְּעִיר, in the city) represents commerce, government, craftsmanship, and communal life, while *basadeh* (בַּשָּׂדֶה, in the field) covers agriculture, livestock, and rural sustenance. The comprehensive scope means no sphere of covenant life escapes judgment's reach.

The city/field polarity reflects ancient Israel's dual economy—urban centers like Jerusalem for trade and administration, rural areas for farming and shepherding. Under covenant blessing, both prosper (v. 3); under curse, both fail. This demonstrates that God's covenant governs all human endeavor, not just 'religious' activities. The curse reverses creation's blessing (Genesis 1:28) and Abrahamic promises of multiplication and land possession. Where obedience brings integration and flourishing, disobedience brings disintegration and futility across every domain of existence.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite society was organized around fortified cities (for protection and governance) and surrounding agricultural lands. Cities like Jerusalem, Samaria, and Beersheba served as administrative and religious centers, while most Israelites lived in villages and worked the land. The dual curse would mean

economic collapse in both sectors—no refuge in either urban or rural life. Israel's history validated this: the Assyrian invasion (722 BC) devastated both northern cities and countryside; Babylon's conquest (586 BC) destroyed Jerusalem while laying waste to Judah's farmland. The siege conditions described later in Deuteronomy 28 (vv. 52-57) show cities becoming death traps, while agricultural failure meant rural starvation.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the comprehensive scope of covenant curse challenge modern compartmentalization of 'sacred' versus 'secular' life?
2. What does it mean that God's blessing or judgment affects every sphere of existence, not just 'spiritual' matters?

Interlinear Text

אָתָּה ה' וְאָר וּר	בְּעִיר	אָתָּה ה' וְאָר וּר
Cursed	shalt thou be in the city	Cursed
H779	H5892	H779
בְּשָׂדֶה:		
shalt thou be in the field		
H7704		

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 3:33 (Curse): The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just.

Jeremiah 44:22 (Curse): So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed; therefore is your land a desolation, and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day.

Jeremiah 14:18 (Parallel theme): If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine! yea, both the prophet and the priest go about into a land that they know not.

Joel 2:3 (Parallel theme): A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.

Joel 1:4 (Parallel theme): That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten.

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.