

Deuteronomy 28:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land,
the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.

Analysis

Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep—This verse reverses the Abrahamic covenant's core promises: offspring and land (Genesis 12:2, 7; 17:2-8). The Hebrew peri-vitnekha (פָּרִי־בָּטְנָךְ, fruit of your womb) parallels peri-admatekha (פָּרִי־אַצְמָתָךְ, fruit of your ground), linking human fertility to agricultural productivity—both proceed from God's blessing and both fail under curse. The mention of shegar-alaphekha (שָׁגָר־אַלְפֵךְ, increase of your cattle) and ashtarot tsonekha (עַשְׁתָּרוֹת צָנְךָ, flocks of your sheep) covers livestock reproduction, completing the picture of comprehensive barrenness.

The term ashtarot for sheep flocks is particularly striking—it uses the plural form of Ashtoreth, the Canaanite fertility goddess. This may be deliberate irony: Israelites who worship fertility deities will experience infertility as judgment. Only Yahweh controls reproduction and productivity; false gods are impotent. The curse attacks the three foundations of ancient agrarian wealth: children (labor, inheritance, legacy), crops (sustenance), and livestock (wealth, trade, sacrifice). Without these, covenant community cannot sustain itself generationally.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern peoples measured prosperity primarily through children, crops, and livestock—exactly what verse 18 curses. Childlessness was considered divine judgment (1 Samuel 1:5-6; Luke 1:25); crop failure meant famine; livestock

disease meant economic ruin. Israel's history repeatedly validated this curse: the exile decimated population and disrupted family lines; agricultural failures plagued disobedient periods (Haggai 1:6, 9-11); and livestock diseases appear in prophetic judgments (Exodus 9:3-6; Zechariah 14:15). The connection between human and agricultural fertility reflects ancient covenant theology where land and people exist in symbiotic relationship under God's sovereign blessing or curse.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the parallel between human fertility and land productivity reveal the interconnection between covenant obedience and creation's flourishing?
2. What does the ironic use of 'ashtarot' (related to fertility goddess worship) teach about the futility of false gods?

Interlinear Text

שׁגַּר	אַדְמַת	בָּ	רֹאשֶׁת	רֹאשֶׁת	בָּ	אַדְמַת	בָּ	שׁגַּר
Cursed	and the fruit	of thy body	and the fruit	of thy land	the increase			
H779	H6529	H990	H6529	H127	H7698			

צָאָתָבָן:	עַלְפָתָרְתָּ	אַלְפָתָרְתָּ	בְּ	צָאָתָבָן:	עַלְפָתָרְתָּ	אַלְפָתָרְתָּ	בְּ	צָאָתָבָן:
of thy kine	and the flocks	of thy sheep						
H504	H6251	H6629						

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 26:26 (Parallel theme): And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied.

Deuteronomy 28:4 (Parallel theme): Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.

Deuteronomy 5:9 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,

Habakkuk 3:17 (Parallel theme): Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

Lamentations 2:20 (Parallel theme): Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?