

Zechariah 5:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it.

Analysis

Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth—The scroll's content revealed: zō't hā'ālāh hayyōtsē't 'al-penē kol-hā'āretz (זֹאת הַעֲלָה הַיּוֹצֵאת עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאֶרֶץ, 'this is the curse going forth over the face of all the earth/land'). The term 'ālāh (עֲלָה) denotes a covenant curse—the penalties invoked for breaking covenant stipulations (Deuteronomy 27-28). The scroll contains not abstract law but active curses seeking violators.

For every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it—Two representative sins: theft (8th commandment) and false swearing (3rd commandment, taking God's name in vain). The scroll has two sides, each side bearing curses for a category of sin—sins against neighbor (theft) and sins against God (false oaths). Yinnāqeh (יִנָּקֶה, 'shall be cut off/purged') promises purifying judgment. Theft violates property rights and stewardship; false swearing misuses God's name for personal gain. Together they represent all covenant violations—vertical (toward God) and horizontal (toward others). The vision warns that moral laxity will face divine judgment.

Historical Context

Post-exilic economic hardship tempted theft (Nehemiah 5:1-5), and commercial dealings involved frequent oath-taking where perjury was common (Malachi 3:5). The curse targets sins that undermine community trust and God's honor. The scroll's two-sided curse encompasses the entire law, summarized by loving God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). Violation brings 'cutting off'—exclusion from covenant community, possibly physical death, or ultimate separation from God.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. Why do theft and false swearing represent the full range of covenant violations?
2. How does recognizing God's law as containing active 'curses' change your view of sin's seriousness?
3. In what ways does Christ bear the covenant curse for us (Galatians 3:13)?

Interlinear Text

עַל	הַיּוֹצֵא אֶת	הַאֲלָה	זֶה אֶת	אֵל יְיָ אָמַר
H5921	H3318	H423	H2063	H413
that goeth forth	he unto me	This is the curse	Then said	
			H559	
הַגֵּן בְּ	כָל כִּי	הָאָרֶץ	כָּל	פָּנֵי יְיָ
H1589	H3605	H3588	H3605	H6440
for every one that stealeth	of the whole earth	over the face		
	H776			
וְכָל	נִקְהָה:	כִּמּוֹה	מִזֶּה	
H3605	H5352	H3644	H2088	
shall be cut off	as on that side according	to it and every one that sweareth		
			H7650	
נִקְהָה:	כִּמּוֹה	מִזֶּה	הַ נִּשְׁבַּע עַל	
H5352	H3644	H2088	H7650	
shall be cut off	as on that side according	to it and every one that sweareth		

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 20:15 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not steal.

Isaiah 48:1 (Parallel theme): Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness.

Isaiah 24:6 (Curse): Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left.

Isaiah 43:28 (Curse): Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary, and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches.

Jeremiah 5:2 (Parallel theme): And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely.

Jeremiah 26:6 (Curse): Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.

Zechariah 5:4 (Parallel theme): I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with the timber thereof and the stones thereof.

James 5:12 (Parallel theme): But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

Leviticus 19:12 (Parallel theme): And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

Malachi 4:6 (Curse): And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.