**Deuteronomy 28:38-44**

[*https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-28/deuteronomy-2838-44/*](https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-28/deuteronomy-2838-44/)

*Moses tells the Israelites that their main agricultural products—grain, wine, and oil—will be destroyed if they fail to obey their Suzerain (Ruler) God.*

Moses continues giving a script to Israel for a ceremony they are to perform once they have crossed over into the Promised Land. The script contains blessings for obedience, and cursings for disobedience to the covenant. This followed the ancient form of a Suzerain-vassal treaty.

This section continues the cursings that were to be stated by six tribes standing on Mount Ebal once Israel had entered the land and conquered this part of Canaan. ([Deuteronomy 27:13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+27.13&t=NASB95)). Moses here continues the script for this ceremony, as a part of his instructions to Israel just prior to entering the land ([Deuteronomy 27:1-13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+27.1-13&t=NASB95)).

In this section, Moses told the Israelites that their main agricultural products would be wasted and nullified if they fell under God’s curse. He said to them, *You shall bring out much seed to the field but you will gather in little* (v. 38). This curse emphasizes the futility of working hard with little to show for it. The reason for this was that *the locust will consume it.*The term *locust* refers to a swarming insect capable of causing great devastation of vegetation ([Joel 1:4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Joel+1.4&t=NASB95)). The LORD often used locust swarms as instruments of His judgment ([2 Chronicles 7:13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=2Chronicles+7.13&t=NASB95); [Joel 1:1-4](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Joel+1.1-4&t=NASB95); [Revelation 9:3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+9.3&t=NASB95), [7](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+9.7&t=NASB95)). The Israelites might sow much seed but would reap just a few grains because those swarming insects would destroy the grains.

Similarly, the Israelites might *plant and cultivate vineyards, but* they would *neither drink of* *the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm* (insect larvae) would *devour them* (v. 39). In the same way, though the Israelites would *have olive trees throughout*their *territory*, there would not be enough to *anoint* themselves *with the oil* (v. 40)*.*In other words, God’s people would not be able to use olive oil to put on their bodies, as they used to do during hot and dry climate, *for* their *olives* would *drop off*. In light of this and the other failures mentioned earlier, Israel’s economy would fail.

As for the family, Israel would no longer have the privilege of enjoying their children, because at a very young age their *sons and daughters* would *not be* theirs, *for* they would *go into captivity* (v. 41). Israel’s adversaries would snatch their children from them and take them away to use them as servants or to sell them into slavery. Raising children would become a heartbreaking exercise as they watched them being taken into captivity by their enemies.

Israel would be frustrated because they would work the ground in vain. All their agricultural products would not benefit them. The *cricket*(Heb. “ṣelāṣal,” related to the word for cymbal, also translated “whirring locust”) would *possess all* Israel’s *trees and the produce of* their *ground* (v. 42). All of the plants and trees would be stripped of their foliage, leaving no fruit or grain. This would result in complete chaos.

Moreover, Israel’s disobedience to the covenantal laws would cause God to reverse the structure of the Israelite society and cause governmental chaos. The *alien* (v. 43), among the least fortunate in the Israelite society, would now *rise above* the Israelites *higher and higher*, while Israel would go down *lower and lower*.

Because of being elevated to a position of authority and affluence, the *alien* would be able to *lend to* the Israelite (v. 44). But the Israelite, being degraded and deprived, would *not lend to him*. The *alien* would then be *the head*. He would hold a position of leadership and authority, able to control what goes on in the nation. The Israelite then would *be the* *tail*. He would abide by the *alien*’s authority. This is the reverse of the blessing based on obedience in v. 12.

All this was set forth in a ceremony to be performed by the entire nation, so that they would understand the gravity of their choice whether or not to actually walk in the ways of the covenant into which they had entered with their Suzerain God.

**Biblical Text:**

**38You shall bring out much seed to the field but you will gather in little, for the locust will consume it. 39You shall plant and cultivate vineyards, but you will neither drink of the wine nor gather *the grapes*, for the worm will devour them. 40You shall have olive trees throughout your territory but you will not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives will drop off. 41You shall have sons and daughters but they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity. 42The cricket shall possess all your trees and the produce of your ground. 43The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. 44He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail.**