

# Deuteronomy 28:49-57

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-28/deuteronomy-2849-57/>

*Moses continues with the series of curses. He now tells Israel that their Suzerain (Ruler) God will send a foreign nation to besiege the walled cities and devastate the countryside, ruining their lives.*

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). 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).

After reminding the Israelites about the reasons for the curses (vv. 45-48), Moses returned to providing Israel with more curses that would fall on them when they disobeyed the LORD's covenant with them. In this curse, the people would be besieged by foreigners. He told them that the LORD would *bring* (Heb. "nāsa", "to lift up") a nation against them from afar, from the end of the earth (v. 49). The LORD would use a distant nation as His agent to judge His covenant people.

That nation coming from afar would appear as *the eagle swoops down*, meaning very aggressive, unhindered, unstoppable, and ruthless. To swoop means to fly swiftly or to dart through the air freely in search of prey. This is what eagles do. Thus, that foreign nation would come quickly and suddenly to attack Israel, as *the eagle swoops down* to catch its prey.

Also, since the conquering nation would come from afar, the Israelites would *not understand* its language. Therefore, they would be isolated, and their inability to communicate with them would only intensify their sense of alienation.

Moreover, it would be a *nation of fierce countenance* (v. 50). The phrase *fierce countenance* literally means “strong faces,” describing people that are merciless and brutal and *who have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young*. They would show no compassion for people who are the most vulnerable and defenseless, regardless of their ages. They would have no pity on anyone.

The goal of the invading nation would simply be to destroy Israel. It would *eat the offspring of Israel's herd and the produce of their ground until they were destroyed* (v. 51). They would take all of the food, leaving nothing for the Israelites. It would also leave them *no grain, new wine, or oil*, the three most important agricultural products in Israel. These represented the main produce of the three major harvesting seasons: the grain grew in the spring-summer, the grapes in the fall, and olives in the winter. Therefore, Israel would lack food and suffer starvation throughout the entire year.

This deprivation would become more intense when Israel would raise up their *herd or the young of their flock*; then the enemy would eat them. Thus, Israel would see no *increase of their herd or the young of their flock*, which would ultimately cause Israel to *perish*.

In addition to destroying the countryside and agriculture, the invading army would also *besiege Israel in all their towns* (lit. gates) *until their high and fortified walls in which they trusted come down throughout their land* (v. 52). The people in the cities *put their confidence* in the high walls and soldiers on the walls to keep them safe. Apparently they decided to trust the walls instead of trusting God by following the terms of the covenant into which they had entered. But nothing could protect them from the LORD's punishment. God would enforce the terms of the agreement, including the provisions regarding Israel's breach of contract.

This invading army would *besiege them in all their towns throughout their land which the Lord their God has given them*. This means that the cities and towns would be surrounded by the enemy, preventing anyone from entering or leaving. Eventually, this would allow the enemy to capture the Israelite town. The Israelites would thus be locked in their *high and fortified walls* and would live at the mercy of their enemies. Ironically, this would occur in the *land which the LORD their God has given them*.

Things would get so desperate that they would experience a heavy famine. This would cause parents to eat *the offspring of their own body, the flesh of their sons and of their daughters* (v. 53). Instead of enjoying the LORD's blessing of life with their offspring (Deuteronomy 28:4, 11), parents would need to kill and eat *the flesh of their sons and of their daughters whom the LORD your God has given them*. All of this horror would happen *during the siege and the distress by which their enemy will oppress them*.

The suffering would be so intense that it would cause even *the man who is refined and very delicate among Israel to become hostile toward his brother and the wife he cherished and toward the rest of his children* (v. 54). A man who is *refined* (Heb. "rak," "tender", "soft") and *very delicate* (Heb. 'ānōg, "dainty") refers to someone who was gentle, peaceful, and not prone to violence. Even this type of man would turn against his own family in order to survive. He would become very selfish. He would resort to cannibalism and *not give even one of them any of the flesh of his children which he would eat*. He would do this *since he had nothing else left, during the siege and the distress by which their enemy would oppress them in all their towns* (v. 55). The siege would turn an ordinarily peaceful, gentle man into a cruel, heartless barbarian.

The discussion then turned to how the *refined and delicate woman among Israel* would act during a bitter siege (v. 56). This described a woman *who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and refinement*. In other words, this kind of woman (possibly a wealthy woman—never lacking in footwear) would end up becoming a cannibal. Using the same words to describe the man in v. 54, this verse describes a woman who was ordinarily very gentle and sophisticated. However, the desperate conditions created by a siege would cause her to *be hostile* (Heb. "rah," "be evil") *toward the husband she cherishes and toward her son and daughter*.

This hostility would even cause this woman to be *cruel toward her afterbirth which issued from between her legs and toward her children whom she bore* (v. 57). This phrase *her afterbirth* seems to refer to a newborn baby. She, too, would consume her own *offspring* during the siege warfare. A mother who was supposed to be compassionate and tender toward her children would eat them *secretly for lack of anything else, during the siege and the distress by which Israel's enemy would oppress them in their towns*.

These horrific curses were literally fulfilled when the Syrians (Arameans) besieged the northern kingdom (2 Kings 24-29) and again during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Lamentations 2:20; Jeremiah 19:9). 1 Chronicles is clear that Judah's exile was due to breaking faith with God in their covenant relationship (1 Chronicles 9:1). This ceremony Moses prescribed for Israel was to make clear to Israel that their choice to disobey their agreement in this covenant would have severe and certain consequences.

All this was set forth in a ceremony to be performed by the entire nation, 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:**

**<sup>49</sup> The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, <sup>50</sup>a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. <sup>51</sup> Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish. <sup>52</sup> It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the Lord your God has given you. <sup>53</sup> Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and of your daughters whom the Lord your God has given you, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you. <sup>54</sup> The man who is refined and very delicate among you shall be hostile toward his brother and toward the wife he cherishes and toward the rest of his children who remain, <sup>55</sup> so that he will not give even one of them any of the flesh of his children which he will eat, since he has nothing else left, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in all your towns. <sup>56</sup> The refined and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and refinement, shall be hostile toward the husband she cherishes and toward her son and daughter, <sup>57</sup> and toward her afterbirth which issues from between her legs and toward her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of anything else, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in your towns.**