

Deuteronomy 28:25

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

Analysis

The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies—This curse reverses the military victory promises of verses 7 and 10. The Hebrew yittenka Yahweh nigaf lifne oyevekha, *וַיִּתְגַּבֵּה יְהוָה נִגְּפָה לְפָנֶיךָ* (the LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies) makes Yahweh the active agent handing Israel over to defeat. The phrase bederekh ekhad tetse elav uveshiv'ah derakhim tanus lefanav, *בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶחָד תֵּצֵא אֲלֵיכָו וּבְשְׁבָעָה דְּבָרִים תָּנוּס לְפָנָיו* (you shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them) depicts complete military rout—unified advance collapsing into scattered, panicked retreat. Seven ways indicates comprehensive disarray, the perfect number suggesting total defeat.

The final clause vehayita leza'avah lekhhol mamlekot ha'arets (וְהִיָּת לִזְעָה לְכָל מָמְלָכֹת) *בָּאָרֶץ*, and you shall be a horror to all kingdoms of the earth) uses za'avah (horror/object of trembling), meaning Israel becomes a cautionary tale—other nations view their fate with terrified revulsion. This fulfills the curse potential in Deuteronomy 28:37 and reverses the blessing of verse 10 where nations would fear Israel due to God's presence. Now they fear Israel's fate, not Israel's God. The military defeat curse connects to exile (verses 64-68), showing that lost battles lead to lost land and dispersed people.

Historical Context

Israel's military history validated this curse repeatedly: defeats during the judges period when they abandoned Yahweh (Judges 2:14-15), Saul's disastrous loss to the Philistines (1 Samuel 31), the northern kingdom's collapse before Assyria (2 Kings 17), and Judah's destruction by Babylon (2 Kings 25). The 'seven ways' fleeing describes actual battle routes: soldiers scatter in panic, unable to regroup. The phrase 'horror to all kingdoms' was literally fulfilled—surrounding nations viewed Israel's and Judah's destruction as divine judgment, sometimes mocking (Lamentations 2:15-16), sometimes fearing their own gods might similarly judge them. By the Roman period (AD 70, 135), Jewish suffering became proverbial, fulfilling this curse on an international scale.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the contrast between unified advance and scattered retreat illustrate the consequences of losing God's presence in spiritual battles?
2. What does it mean to become a 'horror to all kingdoms'—how does covenant violation affect witness and testimony to surrounding peoples?

Interlinear Text

דָּבָר יִם אִזְבַּח לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה תִּפְנַח	נָגָף	לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה תִּפְנַח	שְׁנָאָתֶיךָ תִּפְנַח	אִזְבַּח לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה תִּפְנַח	דָּבָר יִם אִזְבַּח לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה תִּפְנַח
shall cause	The LORD	thee to be smitten	before	thine enemies	way
H5414	H3068	H5062	H6440	H341	H1870
אָקֵד	תִּפְנַח	אַל יְהִי בְּשָׁבֵעַ הַזֶּה	אַל יְהִי בְּשָׁבֵעַ הַזֶּה	פָּנָן וְס	פָּנָן וְס
one	thou shalt go out	H413	seven	way	against them and flee
H259	H3318		H7651	H1870	H5127
לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה תִּפְנַח	לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה תִּפְנַח	לְכָל מְמָלָכִים וְתִּפְנַח	לְכָל מְמָלָכִים וְתִּפְנַח	לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה תִּפְנַח	לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה תִּפְנַח
before	H1961	them and shalt be removed	H3605	into all the kingdoms	
H6440		H2189		H4467	
בָּאָרֶץ					
of the earth					
H776					

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 30:17 (Parallel theme): One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill.

Ezekiel 23:46 (References Lord): For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will bring up a company upon them, and will give them to be removed and spoiled.

Jeremiah 24:9 (Kingdom): And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them.

Deuteronomy 28:7 (References Lord): The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.

Deuteronomy 32:30 (References Lord): How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?

Leviticus 26:17 (Kingdom): And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.

Jeremiah 29:18 (Kingdom): And I will persecute them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be removed to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse, and an astonishment, and an hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations whither I have driven them:

Jeremiah 34:17 (Kingdom): Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.

Luke 21:24 (Parallel theme): And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.