

Damned if You Don't

Sidebar to: [Solomon's Temple in Context](#)

One of the cuneiform tablets discovered in Tayinat temple 2 was a broken but complete copy of Esarhaddon's Vassal Treaty (or covenant). A portion of the text graphically describes the many misfortunes that will befall the vassal, or subordinate party, if he should violate the terms of the treaty/covenant. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 28 Moses enumerates (in the first 14 verses) the blessings that Israel will receive for obeying God's commandments, followed (for more than 50 verses; 28:15–68) by the curses that will plague them if they fail to do so (a portion of these is reprinted below).

Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon

May Ninurta, leader of the gods, fell you with his fierce arrow, and fill the plain with your corpses, give your flesh to eagles and vultures to feed upon.

Just as this ewe is cut open and the flesh of its young placed in its mouth, so may he (Shamash?) make you eat in your hunger the flesh of your brothers, your sons, and your daughters.

Just as (these) yearlings and spring lambs, male and female, are cut open and their entrails are rolled around their feet, so may the entrails of your sons and daughters be rolled around your feet.

Just as a snake and a mongoose do not enter the same hole and do not live there, but plot of cutting each other's throat, so may you and your women not enter the same house, (not lie down in the same bed) but plot of cutting each other's throat.

Just as a honeycomb is pierced through and through with holes, so may holes be pierced through and through in your flesh, the flesh of your women, your brothers, your sons and daughters while you are alive.

Just as this bedbug stinks, so may your breath stink before god, king, and men.

Deuteronomy 28:25–32

The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out against them one way and flee before them seven ways. You shall become an object of horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

Your corpses shall be food for every bird of the air and animal of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away.

The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt, with ulcers, scurvy, and itch, of which you cannot be healed.

The Lord will afflict you with madness, blindness, and confusion of mind; you shall grope about at noon as blind people grope in darkness, but you shall be unable to find your way; and you shall be continually abused and robbed, without anyone to help.

You shall become engaged to a woman, but another man shall lie with her. You shall build a house, but not live in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but not enjoy its fruit.

Your ox shall be butchered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it. Your donkey shall be stolen in front of you, and shall not be restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies, without anyone to help you.

Your sons and daughters shall be given to another people, while you look on; you will strain your eyes looking for them all day but be powerless to do anything.

Reference for this article

"Damned if You Don't," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 37.2 (Mar/Apr 2011): 56. <http://members.bib-arch.org/publication.asp?PubID=BSBA&Volume=37&Issue=2&ArticleID=9> (accessed 9/21/2016)