**Exodus 23:24-33**

*The LORD promised that His people would see His blessings while living in the Promised Land. These blessings and successes, however, were contingent on the people’s unwavering obedience and faithfulness to the LORD.*

Verse 24 includes another statement similar to the first commandment. The LORD warned Israel to *not worship* foreign *gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds*(v. 24). Israel was about to conquer several pagan peoples. It would be easy to allow the Canaanites’ faith (the worship of Canaanite gods such as Baal) to pollute their faith in the LORD. But they were warned not to (1) *worship*, (2) *serve*, or (3) build their lifestyles around the gods and goddesses in Canaan. On the contrary, they were to *utterly overthrow them and break their sacred pillars in pieces*. The phrase *utterly overthrow* is very emphatic, meaning that the Israelites were to completely eradicate Canaanite religion from the Promised Land. They were also to completely destroy *(break…in pieces*—once again, emphatic in the Hebrew) their *sacred pillars*, which were places of pagan Canaanite worship. Not even a trace of pagan worship or pagan practices of any kind was to be associated with the worship of the LORD.

Pagan worship was intertwined with self-seeking and tyranny. It included child sacrifice and what might be called in modern terms, “sex trafficking.” The underlying approach was based on manipulating pagan gods to fulfill human desires. This approach is completely incompatible with the self-governing system God set up for the Israelites, which was based on mutual service and care for your neighbor. God is making clear that Israel is to have nothing to do with these Canaanite practices of self-seeking. Self-seeking is a toxic poison that kills self-governance. God commands Israel to remove all the poison from the culture.

In v. 25, He commanded them to *serve the Lord your God*. Such single-minded service would have many benefits. The LORD told them that He would *bless your bread and your water*, meaning that He would provide the necessities of life in abundance. It is clear there was a supernatural component of God’s blessing. But much of this blessing would be a direct consequence of obedience; mutual cooperation brings prosperity, and God’s commands all involved mutual cooperation and service. He also promised good health by removing *sickness from your midst*. Much of this would be due to good hygiene from obeying God’s commands.

He even promised fruitfulness because there would *be no one miscarrying or barren in your land* (v. 26). Along with this, the LORD proclaimed that He would *fulfill the number of your days*, meaning that a person would live out the time that the LORD designated and not die prematurely. Much of this would be due to the prosperity that stems from mutual cooperation. When there is tyranny and oppressive taxation, there is much less incentive to be productive. Good health and good nutrition are key elements in human fertility.

In verses 27 – 31, the LORD promises both protection and victory when they enter the Promised Land. There are several places where the phrase *I will* is used in these verses. This makes clear that God intended to intervene directly on behalf of Israel to take the land, if they would walk in obedience:

*I will send My terror*(or “dread”)*ahead of you,* which would *throw into confusion all the people among whom you come* (v. 27). The LORD will confuse and demoralize the peoples of Canaan to ensure that there would be no organized resistance. It is clear that Israel will still have to fight. But God would secure the victory.

*I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you*(v. 27). This is a picture of the Canaanites in a hasty retreat. Their confusion and dread will result in them running away.

*I will send hornets*(sing. “hornet” in Hebrew)*ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you* (v. 28). The reference to “hornets” is unclear. The word is found only here, [Deuteronomy 7:20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+7.20&t=NASB95), and [Joshua 24:12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Joshua+24.12&t=NASB95). It is likely not to be taken as a literal hornet; rather, it might be a picture of the panic that happens when trying to escape a hornet’s sting. The people of Canaan would do a panic-stricken retreat as if they were trying to avoid being stung by the invading Israelites.

*I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you*(v. 29). In this verse and the next, the LORD spelled out the timing of the conquest of the Promised Land. It certainly would not take place in one year. In fact, it took Joshua seven years (1406 BC – 1399 BC). The reason given was that there were not enough Israelites to cultivate all of the land, which would result in some of it becoming *desolate* and overrun by *beasts of the field*. In this instance, God explains His reasoning. God is setting expectations so Israel remains courageous.

*I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land*(v. 30). Notice here that it was the LORD that would *drive them*(the enemy)*out,*not the Israelites. He would drive them out *little by little* over an extended period of time. However, God will expect the Israelites to take up arms and fight. Even though the results are in the hands of the LORD, He will expect His people to walk in obedience and engage in the battle.

*I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River Euphrates*(v. 31). In this verse, the LORD specified the boundaries of the Promised Land. Its boundaries would be from the *Red Sea* (the Gulf of Aqabah) on the southeast, the *sea of the Philistines* (the Mediterranean Sea) on the west, the *wilderness* (probably the Sinai Desert) on the southwest, and the *River* (the Euphrates) on the north. Throughout history and to this day, Israel’s boundary did not reach the full extent of God’s given border. Surely the fulfillment of this promise will come during the second coming of Christ, when He will conquer mankind’s ultimate enemy, Satan, and rule over the entire earth ([Revelation 20](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+20&t=NASB95)).

*I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you*(v. 31). Though the battle was the LORD’s, He would include His covenant people in the process by *delivering* the inhabitants *into your hand* (the Israelites’) and they would engage in the battle that the LORD would win for them.

With the frequent use of the phrase *I will* in this section, the LORD is stating that He will fight the battles into which He leads them, and He will gain the victory when they enter and conquer the Promised Land. God demonstrated His power to fight on their behalf at the Red Sea. The Israelites did not have to fight a battle with the Egyptians—the LORD did all of the fighting. He won the victory over the most powerful military at the time. Here, He promises to create the same result, but in this instance God will ask the Israelites to fight.

When the second generation entered the land, they fought, God helping and creating victory for them. It is likely that this was God’s intention with the first generation as well, for their benefit, that they might learn to walk by faith firsthand. God will in fact cause this generation to fight in [Numbers 21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Numbers+21&t=NASB95), with His promise of victory supporting them.

In the New Testament, God asks believers to get up each morning, to put on their spiritual “centurion uniform,” take up their spiritual sword and shield, and go out and engage in a spiritual fight each day ([Ephesians 6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+6&t=NASB95)). And, similar to this Exodus passage, God promises victory for believers who are faithful ([Revelation 3:21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+3.21&t=NASB95)). Also, similar to this passage, in order to experience the blessings of obedience, believers must walk faithfully, setting aside the world’s idols. At the end of the New Testament, the LORD repeats His mode of engagement in Egypt, when He fights the final battle of this earth while His people are bystanders and do not “fire a shot” ([Revelation 19:11 – 21](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+19.11+%E2%80%93+21&t=NASB95)). All of the above promises were contingent upon the people’s obedience to the LORD and Him alone, as vv. 32 – 33 demonstrate. Along with the prohibitions mentioned earlier in this section, the LORD stated that His people were banned from making *any covenant with*the enemy tribes*or with their gods*(v. 32). This is similar to the teaching in the New Testament to love God and remain separate from the things the world wants you to love ([1 John 2:15-17](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1John+2.15-17&t=NASB95)).

Furthermore, v. 33 states that the enemies*shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you*(v. 33). The LORD knew that Canaanite religion, with its emphasis on sexual promiscuity and promise of control (to get what you desired) would be extremely tempting for the Israelites to adopt, so He repeatedly warned them against allowing even the presence of the Canaanite religion or the people that practiced it. This was the means provided by God of escaping temptation ([1 Corinthians 10:13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=1Corinthians+10.13&t=NASB95)).

So, the provisions of the covenant are clear—disobey and be judged harshly, or obey and be blessed abundantly. This is the foundational principle of the conditional portion of God’s covenantal stipulations with His vassals (Israel), as outlined in [Exodus 19:4-6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+19.4-6&t=NASB95). God made clear what was expected. The people will soon agree to enter the covenant and comply fully ([Exodus 24:3](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+24.3&t=NASB95)).The unconditional portion of God’s covenant is unchanged by the behavior of the people. They are His chosen, and God loves them and will keep His promises to them irrespective of their choices ([Romans 11:29](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Romans+11.29&t=NASB95); [Deuteronomy 9:4-6](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+9.4-6&t=NASB95)). These commands were for their good ([Deuteronomy 10:13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Deuteronomy+10.13&t=NASB95)).

**Biblical Text:**

**24You shall not worship their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their deeds; but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their *sacred* pillars in pieces.25But you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water; and I will remove sickness from your midst.26There shall be no one miscarrying or barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. 27I will send My terror ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people among whom you come, and I will make all your enemies turn *their* backs to you.28I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you.29I will not drive them out before you in a single year, that the land may not become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you.30I will drive them out before you little by little, until you become fruitful and take possession of the land.31I will fix your boundary from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River *Euphrates*; for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out before you.32You shall make no covenant with them or with their gods.33They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for *if* you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.”**