

Deuteronomy 22:6-7

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-22/deuteronomy-226-7/>

Moses trains the people to recognize the sanctity of life by encouraging them to care for a lower form of God's creation—a mother bird along with its young. Though possibly designed to preserve a source of food supply, it serves as a principle to care for and preserve life, both human and animal.

This section spells out what was to happen *if you happen to come upon a bird's nest along the way* (v. 6). The nest could be *in any tree or on the ground*, and the nest was *with young ones or eggs, and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs*. The bird was in the process of raising her younglings or hatching her eggs.

When an Israelite traveled and by chance came upon a bird's nest in which a mother bird was sitting on either its eggs or its young, the person was not allowed to *take the mother with the young*. Instead, they were to *certainly let the mother go* (v. 17). This is emphatic in the Hebrew text, stressing to the people that releasing the mother bird was very important and should not be ignored under any circumstances. They were to leave it alone so that it might continue to produce eggs and chicks to supply food in the Promised Land.

However, the person was told that *the young you may take for yourself*. The Israelites were free to take them for food. Eggs were an important source of food for the Israelites, and by taking the eggs and freeing the mother, it allowed them to enjoy the eggs and to protect the future supply of eggs. In doing this, God advocates for the people of Israel an investment mindset. They are to let the mother go, to ensure there is adequate food in the future. "Eat the eggs, not the chickens," so to speak.

Finally, Moses attached two rewards to this command. He told the Israelites that obeying this command was necessary *in order that it may be well with you and that they may prolong your days*. Like the commandment to honor one's parents ([Deuteronomy 5:16](#)), this law contains two rewards. First, the protection and preservation of the life of the *mother* bird would guarantee well-being for the Israelites. Second, it would guarantee a long life. God's people would live long in the Promised Land, enjoying the benefits given to them by their Suzerain (Ruler).

This law parallels the law given in [Deuteronomy 20](#) in which the Israelites were asked to protect the trees when they besieged a city. There, non-fruit bearing trees are to be cut down and be used in building siege works, but fruit bearing trees are to be left intact in order to produce food for the Israelite army ([Deuteronomy 20:19-20](#)). Similarly, here in [Deuteronomy 22](#), Moses warned the Israelites that taking the mother bird along with its young would be to cut off one of the means of obtaining food which could result in a lack of food supply.

This mindset associated with investing in the future would cause things to *be well with you*. It would *prolong* their days. Living a consumptive lifestyle leads to poverty, and destroys well-being. Having the self-discipline to defer today's pleasure for a future benefit is a big key to Israel's blessings.

In addition, there is perhaps a greater reason why Moses discouraged the Israelites from taking the *mother* bird. As some have observed, the command to release the *mother* bird was likely to show respect for motherhood and respect for the relationship between parents and children.

It was also designed to emphasize the preciousness of life. If the life of a mother bird was to be protected, how much more so was the life of a human to be considered valuable and worthy of protection. This is highlighted in the statement in [Leviticus 22](#) where Moses boldly said to Israel, "When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be accepted as a sacrifice of an offering by fire to the Lord. But whether it is an ox or a sheep, you shall not kill both it and its young in one day" ([Leviticus 22:27-28](#)).

Biblical Text:

6 If you happen to come upon a bird's nest along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; 7 you shall certainly let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, in order that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days.