



Exodus 23:20-33

(23) For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off. (24) Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images. (25) And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. (26) There shall nothing cast their young, nor be barren, in thy land: the number of thy days I will fulfil. (27) I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee. (28) And I will send hornets before thee, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite, from before thee. (29) I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. (30) By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land.

King James Version

Some people draw a careless assumption from a surface evaluation of [Exodus 23:20-33](#), leading to a shallow conclusion: that if the Israelites had just obeyed [God](#), they would have marched into the land and taken it over without a fight. Such submission would have undoubtedly made their course easier and produced better results.

However, many other contexts show that God tests His people because He is preparing them for future responsibilities. Israel failed many tests. The march through the wilderness and the conquest of the Promised Land was a school, a vast, almost fifty-years-long training ground, for appreciating,

using, and governing the Promised Land. This "schooling" included tests by which the Israelites could measure their progress, and at the same time, prove to God their growth and readiness.

We concluded that God's promises in Exodus 23 were indeed conditional. Their fulfillment depended on Israel's obedience, and part of that obedience was confronting their enemies, the people of the land, in warfare. The episode recorded in Numbers 13-14 reveals that the Israelite spies fully expected to have to fight the Canaanites, Hittites, Jebusites, etc. They did not understand Exodus 23 as a free pass, as many do today. Their responsibility was to drive them out in cooperation with God, as He promised to be with them, enabling them to drive the people out, which they were incapable of doing without His involvement. But they refused to do their part.

They were to drive out the inhabitants even as we, in cooperation with God, are to confront and drive out old habits, attitudes, and loyalties. These are negative characteristics left over from our pre-conversion days. Christian living parallels this [Old Testament](#) instruction. This is one reason why the New Testament has so many illustrations and exhortations regarding Christian warfare.

Our warfare is in many ways different. It does not involve bloody engagements featuring swords, spears, or rifles with bayonets. It is a spiritual warfare, one that takes place primarily within ourselves. Nonetheless, it requires qualities such as loyalty, patriotism, courage, self-denial, vision, understanding, and sacrifice for us to be victorious overcomers.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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