



[Exodus 23:22-24](#)

(22) But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. (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.

[Exodus 23:27-33](#)

(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. (31) And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river: for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee. (32) Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. (33) They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee.

King James Version

[God](#) fully intended for Israel to go to war and drive out the inhabitants of the Promised Land. God spoke this on the heels of giving the Ten Commandments and the terms of the covenant. These instructions, then, were spoken on the same occasion that God said, “Thou shalt not kill,” or to be more precise, “You shall not murder” ([Exodus 20:13](#), NKJV).

At first glance at Exodus 23, it may appear that God would do all of the work: “I will cut them off”; “I will send My fear before you”; “I will cause confusion”; “I will send hornets”; “I will drive them out.” However, verse 31 also shows that God fully intended that Israel play a part: “I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into *your* hand, and *you shall drive them out* before you.” God is not directing the Israelites to escort a friendly populace gently out of their territory. The literal translation says that Israel should *cast* them out. Strength of arms would be required.

God did not promise to change their nature; these carnal people would fiercely resist and defend their land and their religion. Israel would have a fight on their hands—which God fully intended. He would be leading the fight against the inhabitants, which is why Israel would prevail. However, they were still responsible for cleansing the land of the Canaanites and other peoples.

[Exodus 23:22](#) (“if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak”) shows that God's promises are conditional, but it is important to understand exactly what the conditions were. If Israel were obedient, God would be an enemy to their enemies. The implication is *not* that if Israel disobeyed they would have to go to war, but rather that, if Israel disobeyed, they would have a much harder time when they *did* go to war. But whether or not they were faithful, Israel was still responsible for removing the paganism and pagans from the land.

Verse 33 stipulates that the inhabitants *shall not* dwell in the land. This was not conditional on Israel's obedience—this was God's edict to His people so they would understand their responsibility. But if the Israelites were faithful, they would have God on their side, blessing their efforts. It is the same way with us: God gives us responsibilities, and if we are faithful to Him, He supplies the help we need to carry them out.

It was Israel's responsibility, then, to marshal an army to subjugate the people of the land. This is seen in Numbers 1, which takes place while Israel is still at Sinai about one year later. In between Exodus 23 and Numbers 1, the Israelites had transgressed with the Golden Calf ([Exodus 32:1-35](#)). Yet, even after their unfaithfulness, God still says twice that He would drive out the inhabitants ([Exodus 33:2](#); [34:11](#)).

Therefore, Israel's unfaithfulness did not nullify God's promise. Instead, Numbers 1 records God telling [Moses](#) to take a census and determine the number of men who were able to go to war. Fourteen times in that one chapter God repeats the instruction to number the men who were able to “go to war”—even though He had just recently confirmed His promise to fight on their behalf! God would be driving out the inhabitants, but He was also preparing the Israelites to engage the enemy. Clearly, it was still God's intent that Israel do its part within the fight.

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:

[Why Did God Command Israel to Go to War?](#)

Related Topics:

[God Intended Israel to "Bear the Sword"](#)

[God Preparing Israel to Engage the Enemy](#)

[Israel Given Authority to Enforce God's Laws](#)

[Sixth Commandment](#)

[Why did God Command Israel to Go to War](#)