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Sparing the Mother Bird

22: 6-7

Sparing the mother bird DIG: What was the benefit of distinguishing between a mother hen and her young? Why take the young ones and not the mother hen?

REFLECT: How is your life bound up with how you treat the rest of creation? Do you sometimes exchange the long-term profit for immediate gain? How so? Why?

God provides food for mankind, but the greed of a few can destroy the supply for the many.

While several of the mitzvot grouped in **22:1-12** refer to mankind's relationships with our neighbors, there are also mitzvot about the care of animals and birds. The impression remains that **the Second Address: The Specific Stipulations of the Covenant (12:1 to 26:19)**, covers a wide range of topics. The present group of **eleven mitzvot** in **22:1-12** make it clear that the scope of **ADONAI's** concern for proper treatment in the covenant community was just as wide. There was to be a wholehearted application of the Torah. In these next **twelve verses**, much of them are concerned with the love that should be shown to other members of the covenant community (**Deuteronomy 15:1-18; Leviticus 19:1-37**). While the brief statement: **Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39)**, does not occur in **Deuteronomy**, it is implied here, and in many parts of the book. The covenant mitzvot was comprehensive in its demand for love. The love of **YHVH**, and the love for one's **neighbors**.⁴⁷⁶



6. If there happens to be a bird's nest in front of you along the road, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the hen sitting on the young or on the eggs, you are not to take the hen with the young. You must certainly let the hen go, but the young you may take for yourself so that it may go well with you and you may prolong your days (22:6-7). This statement is cited several times in **Deuteronomy** as a consequence of a wholehearted obedience to the Torah. Our own life is bound up with how we treat the rest of creation.

This mitzvah, which appears only in **Deuteronomy**, is briefly stated, so that the meaning is no longer clear to the modern reader. Many have suggested some kind of humanitarian concern. However, it is not clear how taking **the young birds**, but releasing **the mother** can be considered as a humanitarian act. It is more likely that the mitzvah has to do with the conservation of food supply. **The Israelites** were permitted to eat certain **birds (14:11)**. The obvious reason for taking **the young birds** would be in order to provide food for the family. Since **the birds** in this scenario would be found in the wild, **along the road, in any tree or on the ground**, this source of food would be accidental in nature. Given this context, the provisions for the mitzvah may become clearer. If the nest was found with a **mother bird** and eggs or **young birds** in it, the natural tendency would be to take all of them, thereby acquiring more food. However, in reality, the effect would be to exchange a long-term profit for an immediate gain. To take and kill **the mother hen** would be to diminish a potential future supply of food. To take **the hen** and leave **the babies** would only result in **their** death because **they** couldn't survive without **the mother**. As a result, by taking **the young birds**, or the eggs, but letting **the mother** go, food was acquired without the source of the food being destroyed.⁴⁷⁷

God loves animals, and so should we!



Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **Your** loving kindness extends even to animals. **You** care for everything that **You** created and **You** want people to be kind to animals also. From the roots of the shepherd David, **Isra'el's** Godly king, comes **the Messiah (Isaiah 11:1)**. **You are the Good Shepherd: "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11)**. You so graciously lay down your life for all to choose to love and to follow you as their Shepherd. **"I am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father. And I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not from this fold; those also I must lead, and they will listen to My voice. So, there shall be one flock, one Shepherd (John 11:14-16)**. Thank **You** for being such a fantastically wonderful **Shepherd!** In **Yeshua's** holy name and **His** power of resurrection. Amen