

September 28, 2025 (Lesson 4)

## JOSHUA'S FINAL CHALLENGE: COVENANT RENEWAL

1. **Mission Accomplished; Obedience Commanded** (Joshua 23:1-16)
2. **God Recalls His Faithfulness** (Joshua 24:1-13)
3. **Choose Whom You Will Serve** (Joshua 24:14-28)

**Central Truth:** God is always faithful to His covenant.

**Focus:** Recognize God's covenant faithfulness to His people and respond by faithfully serving Him.

**Evangelism Emphasis:** God calls individuals into covenant with Him.

**Golden Text:** "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord" (Joshua 24:14).

Last week, we considered Israel's treaty with the Gibeonites, and the subsequent battles against the Amorite kings who attacked Gibeon. This week we "fast-forward" to the end of Joshua's life and his final instructions to the children of Israel. First, let's consider what happened between these two events. Joshua had led Israel through a series of strategic campaigns that resulted in the conquering of most of the land. By and large, Joshua had accomplished the conquest of Canaan. He then oversaw the apportionment of the land to the various tribes of Israel. He was now an old man, ready to go to his rest in the Lord. But before he departed, one last task awaited him.

Several decades had gone by since Israel entered the Promised Land. As they had renewed their covenant with God before entering Canaan (Josh. 5:2-12), it was fitting to affirm their commitment to the covenant now, at the end of the military campaigns. So Joshua had one final act as the leader of Israel—to remind the people of God's historical faithfulness and challenge them to remain faithful to God in the future. The Book of Joshua ends on this high note—a renewal of God's covenant with His people.

### 1. MISSION ACCOMPLISHED; OBEDIENCE COMMANDED

#### A. Possessing the Promised Land (Joshua 23:1-5)

<sup>2</sup> And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old and stricken in age: <sup>3</sup> And ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is he that hath fought for you. <sup>4</sup> Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward.

This passage begins with establishing a time frame. The text says “a long time” had passed since the Lord had enabled Israel to conquer the land (v. 1). It probably took about fourteen years for the entire period of conquest. After that, there were about seven years of apportioning the land to the various tribes and their settling in. Thus, about twenty-one years had passed since Israel entered the Promised Land. Joshua had been born in Egypt, and was probably about forty years old when the wilderness wandering began. That would make him about eighty years old when the conquest began. So he is now over one hundred and sensing that his days on earth were ending. We know he was 110 years old when he died (Josh. 24:29).

It was time to challenge Israel to reaffirm their commitment to follow God and His covenant, so Joshua called the leaders of the nation to meet with him. This probably occurred at Timnath Serah, where Joshua lived as his appointed inheritance (19:50). Or, this meeting may have occurred at Shiloh, where the tabernacle was located (18:1) and which served as the worship center for Israel.

When the tribal leaders, priests, and judges had gathered, Joshua told them he was “a very old man” and knew his time as their leader was limited (23:2 NLT). Other great men remained robust until the time of their deaths, including Moses (Deut. 34:7). But Joshua had led a hard life. He had led many military campaigns for Israel as a senior adult. His life as a warrior, military commander, and spiritual leader had worn him out.

Joshua reminds these leaders of their recent history. After conquering most of the people of Canaan, he worked with them to divide the land among the various tribes (Josh. 23:3-4). This

division of the land is described in chapters 13-19. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh had elected to receive their inheritance east of the Jordan River (Num. 32:32). The other ten and half tribes received their inheritance in the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan. The descendants of Joseph were so numerous that they received two allotments—one for Ephraim and one for Manasseh. The tribe of Levi, being devoted to God and the service of the Lord’s house, received no tribal land. Instead, they were apportioned certain cities scattered throughout Israel (see Josh. 20; 21).

Even though the major cities had been conquered, there were still remnants of people living in Canaan to be conquered (Josh. 23:4-5; see Judg. 1). One reason the Lord allowed some areas for future conquest was to test the Israelites to see if they would be faithful to His decrees (Judg. 3:1-4). Another reason was so the land would not become a wilderness filled with wild beasts (Deut. 7:22). However, the Lord promised Israel eventual complete victory over all the Canaanites if they would be obedient (Deut. 7:23; Josh. 23:5).

§      *Why is it important for aging believers to testify to younger generations?*

## **B. Holding Fast in the Lord (Joshua 23:6-16)**

<sup>6</sup> Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left; <sup>7</sup> That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: <sup>8</sup> But cleave unto the Lord your God, as ye have done unto this day.

After reminding the tribal leaders about the faithfulness of God in the past, Joshua gives them instruction regarding the future. He urges them to be “very courageous” (v. 6). This echoes what the Lord told Joshua upon commissioning him to lead Israel (1:7-8). He passed God’s word to the leaders of Israel. They were challenged to boldly and diligently obey the law of God. In Hebrew, there is no word for *obey*. The word translated as *obey* in the Old Testament means “to hear or to

heed.” The people of God were told to hear, heed, and do the commands of God. That is Joshua’s direction here: “Do all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses” (23:6). *Heeding* implies “doing”; that is, obedience.

Complete devotion to God was expected. The Israelites were to have nothing to do with the gods of the nations around them. Not only were they not to worship their idols, they were not to even mention their names (v. 7). Adherence to God’s law requires absolute obedience, with no room for any other gods. Sad to say, as we read through the rest of the Old Testament, we see that Israel failed to heed Joshua’s instruction. The history of Israel is a repeated pattern of turning to other gods and rejecting the Lord’s commands. As Christ’s followers today, we must have complete devotion to God and His Word. As Joshua directed, we must “cleave to the Lord” (v. 8) and no one else.

The promise of God, as given through Joshua, was if they would do this, God would give Israel total victory over their enemies. Joshua reminded them God had driven out their foes, and He would continue to do so in the future. Indeed, they would see the supernatural hand of God at work, one man “chasing a thousand” (v. 10). How could this be? The reason was simple: God was the One fighting for them. This also is a powerful lesson for us. If we trust in God and obey His word, we can depend on His fighting for us (see Ex. 14:14; Deut. 1:29-30; 2 Chron. 20:17).

Joshua 23:11 gives us the primary motivation for obedience: We must love the Lord with all our hearts. God doesn’t want heartless obedience. He desires sons and daughters who follow Him because they love Him. That is why to love God with all our hearts is the “first and great commandment” (Matt. 22:37-38).

### **Giving Ourselves to God**

In our abandonment we give ourselves over to God just as God gave Himself for us, without any calculations. The consequences of our abandonment never enter our outlook because our life is taken up in Him.—Oswald Chambers

## **2. GOD RECALLS HIS FAITHFULNESS**

### **A. From Abraham to Moses (Joshua 24:1-7)**

<sup>2</sup> And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. <sup>3</sup> And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac.

<sup>5</sup> I sent Moses also and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to that which I did among them: and afterward I brought you out. <sup>6</sup> And I brought your fathers out of Egypt: and ye came unto the sea; and the Egyptians pursued after your fathers with chariots and horsemen unto the Red sea.

After Joshua met with the elders of the twelve tribes, he called all of Israel to gather at Shechem, located at the foot of Mount Ebal. There Joshua had led the people in committing to a covenant with God soon after they began the conquest of Canaan (Josh. 8:30-35). It is appropriate that they would renew their covenant in this location.

Joshua guided the entire nation of Israelites into a commitment to keep God's law and be faithful to their covenant with Him. We can understand the covenant language of this commitment by considering ancient treaties between a ruler and his vassals. Suppose a king were to offer protection to the people of a certain city, provided they offered him tribute. The treaty would follow a standard form. First, the king would identify himself and assert his authority. Then he would recount his history with them, outlining his beneficial acts toward them. This would be followed by the terms of the covenant, defining the requirements and obligations of both parties. Finally, there would be warnings regarding the breaking of the treaty. This covenantal pattern is seen in several

places in the Old Testament, including the Lord's covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. Here, Joshua followed the traditional model for such a commitment.

The covenant began with identifying the sovereign King proposing the covenant: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel" (24:2). The Lord then recounted the history of His dealing with Israel, beginning with Abraham and the patriarchs. He reminded them He had brought Abraham from a far-off land, from "the other side of the River" (v. 3 NKJV)—that is, the Euphrates River. He included the fact that their distant ancestors had worshiped "other gods" (v. 2). This foreshadowed the covenant requirement to never do this again. The rejection of idolatry was a key component of God's covenant with Israel. Then God spoke of His leading Abraham "throughout the land of Canaan" (v. 3). They were now standing in that land and enjoying the fulfillment of the promise given centuries earlier.

Next, there is a summary of the story of Moses and the Exodus (vv. 5-7). The Lord reminded them of the miracles attending their deliverance and the journey that followed. God himself had set them free and taken care of them. The Lord showed Israel's history with Him was full of examples of His mercy and goodness. They had seen with their own eyes what God had done (v. 7). Many of those standing at Shechem had been children in Egypt. They were eyewitnesses of the wonders of God's power.

§      *Describe circumstances from which God has brought you out, and thank Him for doing so.*

## **B. Enemies Captured (Joshua 24:8-13)**

<sup>8</sup> And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, which dwelt on the other side Jordan; and they fought with you: and I gave them into your hand, that ye might possess their land; and I destroyed them from before you.

<sup>12</sup> And I sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow. <sup>13</sup> And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.

The Lord now reminded the Israelites that they had faced dangerous enemies on the “other side” of the Jordan (v. 8); namely the Amorite kings Sihon and Og. Yet, they were nothing before God, and Israel defeated them both (Num. 21:21-35). The Lord then gave their lands to Israel, and they became part of their inheritance. God’s people would long sing about their victory over these pagan kings (see Pss. 135:10-12; 136:17-19).

The Lord, still speaking through Joshua, then reminded them of Balak, the king of Moab (Josh. 24:9). He recalled that Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel, but God refused to heed the words of Balaam (v. 10). Despite the king’s wishes, the Lord caused Balaam to bless Israel instead of cursing them. This blessing even included a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah (Num. 24:17). In this account, as in the rest of Israel’s history, the sovereign authority of the one true God was declared.

The Lord then reviewed their crossing of the Jordan River—a marvelous miracle comparable in many ways to the parting of the Red Sea (Josh. 24:11). They entered Canaan where they faced many opposing nations. But the Lord put fear into the hearts of these peoples, and Israel was victorious over each one. This happened from their first battle, the siege of Jericho. Yet, as powerful as Jericho was, conquering the city was easy for God. The Lord was saying to Israel, “I have been with you, fought for you, delivered you, and cared for you.”

God emphasized that all this was done by the Lord himself. It was not with the sword or bow that Israel defeated their enemies (v. 12). Yes, the men of Israel did fight battles, but God fought for them and gave them the victory. The Lord drove out their enemies before them, causing them to flee like a man running from attacking hornets. Ever stir up a hornet’s nest? That is the picture of Israel’s enemies being defeated. In the end, the land was “given” to the Israelites (v. 13). They just had to settle in it. They enjoyed the fruit of the land, provided for them by God himself.

### **Faith in God’s Provision**

An amazing example of God's faithfulness is found in the life of George Mueller. Mueller operated a number of children's homes in England. He was led by God to never solicit funds for his work. Instead, he simply trusted God. At times, the "pantry" was empty, and there was no food for the many children under his care. Mueller would pray until assured of God's provision. Repeatedly, God miraculously and faithfully supplied the need.

### 3. CHOOSE WHOM YOU WILL SERVE

#### A. The Holy and Jealous God (Joshua 24:14-24)

<sup>15</sup> And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. <sup>16</sup> And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods.

<sup>22</sup> And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses. <sup>23</sup> Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel.

"Now therefore" (v. 14) are the words the Lord used to begin to lay out the covenant's stipulations. The first requirement of Israel was to "fear the Lord." The Scriptures remind us many times that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10). To live *wisely*—that is, to lead a life full of harmony and holiness—begins with a proper reverence for God. Honoring, reverencing, and worshiping God is required to be faithful to His covenant.

Next, God expected Israel to serve Him faithfully, with integrity and sincerity. This is a sacred covenant between a divine King and His vassals. It was only right that the people of Israel should heed and obey their Master.

Service to God specifically requires a refusal to serve other gods. The Lord explicitly mentioned Israel's ancestral gods. Abraham was from Ur, where many gods were worshiped, especially the



moon god, Sin—the city’s patron deity. While enslaved in Egypt, the Israelites had witnessed the worship of Egypt’s many gods, even being seduced into worshipping them (Josh. 24:14). The tragic story of the golden calf was proof of this. Now they were living in a land full of idols. Above all things, they must avoid the idolatrous worship of these gods. Indeed, to reject the gods of Canaan was one of the most consistent warnings given to Israel by Moses (see Deut. 4:15-31; 12:1-3, 28-31).

Joshua then challenged the Israelites to declare if they were willing to abide by the requirements of the covenant. He said to them, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord . . .” (Josh. 24:15). In other words, would it seem like a bad thing? Would it be troublesome or too inconvenient? You can almost hear a taunting rebuke in his words. If so, then go ahead and pick your gods and follow them. “But,” Joshua declared, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” He was saying, “You do what you want. But I have served the Lord all my life, and I am not going to change now. I am going to serve God, and so is my whole family!”

The people immediately responded, essentially saying they would always serve God. Joshua responded, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy and jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. If you abandon the Lord and serve other gods, he will turn against you and destroy you, even though he has been so good to you” (vv. 19-20 NLT). Joshua’s words probably seemed harsh at the moment. However, as we consider the history of Israel that followed, they proved sadly true.

Once again, the people affirmed their intention to serve God and Him alone (v. 21). Joshua then used formal language common in such covenantal agreements: “Ye are witnesses against yourselves” (v. 22). In other words, God was going to hold them accountable for what they said. They agreed, “We are witnesses.” With that, the covenant was agreed upon and concluded. The Israelites had

heard the account of God's faithfulness. They had understood the requirements of the covenant. And now they had agreed to follow the covenant and all its obligations.

Joshua concluded his discourse with instructions to follow through with the covenant immediately. They were to "put away" all idols and false gods from "among" them (v. 23). Even as they were agreeing to worship the Lord alone, they had gods hidden away. Perhaps they were still holding on to idols brought from Egypt. Or maybe they had picked up some idols in their travels through Canaan. Whatever the source, Joshua told them to get rid of them now. But something further was required. They must "incline [their] heart unto the Lord God" (v. 23). God was not satisfied with just a rejection of false gods; He expected loving devotion toward Himself. He wants His people to serve Him with affectionate loyalty. The Lord desires a relationship, not heartless obedience.

### **We Must Surrender**

We must surrender ourselves so utterly that we can never own ourselves again. We must hand over self and all its rights into an eternal covenant, and give God the absolute right to own us.—A.

**B. Simpson**

#### **B. Renewal of the Covenant (Joshua 24:25-28)**

<sup>26</sup> And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. <sup>27</sup> And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.

Joshua now officially ratified the covenant. To ensure it would be remembered, he undertook two actions. First, he recorded the covenant in writing. As was noted when we studied chapter 1, beginning with Joshua, the people of God were bound by the written Word. God may occasionally speak personally, but the Scriptures are the standard for us to follow. Second, Joshua set up a stone

at Shechem. Setting up stones as a memorial was a common custom in ancient Israel. It was a permanent, visible reminder of an event or a covenant. This was the eighth time since entering the Promised Land that a stone memorial was erected. (For previous instances, see Joshua 4:9, 20; 7:26; 8:29, 32; 10:27; 22:27.) Since *seven* is the number of completeness, the previous memorials bear witness to the fulfillment of God's promise in giving the land to Israel. *Eight* can indicate a new beginning, appropriate for an event of renewing a covenant with God and preparing for a new era following the death of Joshua.

## **OUR COVENANT RESPONSIBILITY**

Joshua 24:15 is a key verse in this lesson: We must “choose” to serve God. The Lord does not force anyone to follow Him. This is our responsibility in our relationship with God. On His part, God will always be faithful to His covenant. We see this repeatedly demonstrated in Joshua. God fulfills His promises. He takes care of His people. He fights for them and gives them victory over their enemies. Sometimes He does this in spite of the behavior of the people themselves. That is because of His great mercy and goodness. Paul reminds us of this in 2 Timothy 2:13. Yet, we must not take His mercy for granted. To consistently enjoy the benefits of a covenant with God requires choosing to love, obey, and trust Him. Joshua 24:15 still rings true today.

### **Daily Devotions**

- M. Determined to Be Faithful (Genesis 39:2-10)
- T. Love God Wholeheartedly (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)
- W. Testimony in Song (Psalm 111:1-10)
- T. Serve One Master (Matthew 6:19-24)
- F. Count on God's Faithfulness (Romans 3:1-4)
- S. Love Fulfills the Law (Romans 13:8-10)