



Joshua's Farewell Address to the Nation Part 1 - Joshua 23

Introduction

Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age (Joshua 23:1).

At least twenty-five years had passed since all the tribes had settled into their inheritances and become a nation possessing their possessions. Joshua had enjoyed well-deserved peace in his city of Timnath-Serah in the mountains of Ephraim and now knew his end was near.

Joshua was an old soldier, but he was still the commander of his country and a patriarch. In his farewell address he charged the people of Israel to keep their covenant with God after his death. He showed no sadness for himself, only concern for what he knew would happen if the people were unfaithful to God.

Outline of Joshua 23

- I. Call for Separation - Joshua 23:1-13
- II. Choice of Blessing or Cursing - Joshua 23:14-16

I. Call for Separation - Joshua 23:1-13

- A. Gathering the Nation - Joshua 23:1-2

1. The addresses

Joshua's farewell address was given in two parts, as divided by Chapters 23 and 24. The first part may have been spoken to the leaders, the elders, and officers (23:2), and the second part to the whole assembly, or both parts could have been spoken to all.

2. The occasion

Joshua began by stating the reason for the solemn gathering, "*I am old, advanced in age.*" Like the nation, he was born a slave in Egypt and became free through God's deliverance at the Exodus. He had faithfully followed Moses and trained under him. As a young soldier, he profited by Moses' example of prayer and dependence upon God (Exodus 17:9-13). He observed the people's rebellions and murmurings without participating in them and witnessed God's faithfulness in every crisis. Joshua led Israel from the day of Moses' death until the day of his own. Although his personality was much different from Moses', God's plan was contiguous and unswerving.

God works through all types of individuals to accomplish His plan, and He equips and enables those whom He calls into service (Philippians 2:13). *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).* What good works has God prepared for you? How have you witnessed His faithfulness in enabling and equipping you to serve Him?

As Moses' successor, Joshua had his own call from God (Joshua 1:11) and his own experience with Jesus Christ (Joshua 5:13-15). He was forty years old when he left Egypt and eighty when he took command and crossed the Jordan River.

3. Joshua's relationship with his Lord

Like the Israelites, all people are born slaves to sin (Romans 3:23; 6:6). We are freed only through deliverance by the death of Jesus Christ as foreshadowed in the Passover and the Exodus. We escape Satan's clutches and kingdom in the same way the Israelites escaped Pharaoh and Egypt, by deliverance into newness of life through faith in our Joshua, Jesus Christ. "It is interesting to note that Joshua's original name was Hoshea, which was changed by Moses to Jehoshua, or Joshua (Numbers 13:16). Hoshea means 'salvation'; Jehoshua or Joshua, 'the LORD's salvation'" (*Old Testament Studies*, William R. Newell).

Like Joshua, believers today need a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and an individual call from God to know where we fit into His plan. In serving God, we find both the meaning of life in general and the purpose and meaning of our own lives in particular. Can you say you have found both? Only through faith in Christ will you know your true identity as Joshua knew his.

- B. Remembering God's Faithfulness - Joshua 23:3-5

You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all those nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you.

1. Provision of promised inheritance - 23:4

Joshua recalled how God had provided land from the Jordan to the Mediterranean just as He had promised Abraham. Faithful to His word, God had dispossessed the pagan nations to make room for Israel.

2. Providing promised victory - 23:5

God had fought for Israel (23:3), and promised to *expel* the remaining Canaanites and *drive them out of your [Israel's] sight*, so they could *possess their land*. God had given the Canaanites four hundred years to turn from their evil ways, but they had not (Genesis 15:13-16).

a. God's promises today

God also promises believers a spiritual inheritance and spiritual victories. Our inheritance is mentioned in Acts 20:32; Galatians 3:18; Ephesians 1:11; Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4; and Revelation 2:10. Our victory is mentioned in John 16:33; Romans 8:37; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:10-13; 2 Timothy 4:18; and Revelation 5:10 and 12:11.

b. Experiencing victory today

Where do you need to experience victory today? Do you need victory in your marriage, your singleness, your parenting, your career, health, relationships, or finances? Are you enjoying the inheritance and victory that Christ has purchased for you by taking God's promises such as these and applying them to your life in daily situations? Are you following our great Joshua, Jesus Christ, as He leads you step by step to victory?

C. Calling the People to Faithfulness - Joshua 23:6-13

Joshua called the people to be faithful to God's Law and hold fast to the LORD their God.

1. Faithful to the Law - 23:6-7

Therefore, be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses. Here we see once again that the Book of Moses, (also known as the Law, the Pentateuch, and the Torah) was, as it was meant to be, normative for Israel. It was **the** Law for them to live by both as a nation and as individuals. It contained all they needed to know for living to please God.

Many years later Israel was conquered by the Assyrians (722 B.C.), and again by the Romans in 70 A.D.. The Jewish people eventually became scattered throughout many countries under different legal systems, but they continued to cling to their own law and tried to follow it even in foreign lands. As Jewish law evolved, they sometimes borrowed legal concepts from other civilizations as well as passing on their own ideas. The result was that God's Law, as given to the Jewish people, came to have a significant influence on western civilization.

Today in Israel, 3,500 years later, the Law of Moses still has predominant influence. The Sabbath is carefully observed, Hebrew is the national language, and the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) are revered.

2. Forbidden to mention pagan gods

As long as other peoples remained in their midst, Israel would be tempted to worship their gods. So Joshua warned the young nation not to *go among these nations, these who remain among you*. They were not even to mention their neighbors' gods, nor influence anyone to swear by them, serve them, or bow down to them. In other words, they were to avoid any contact with them, or even reference to them. This was necessary for survival.

3. Faithful to the LORD - 23:8-11

a. Holding fast - verse 8, 11

Joshua called the people to love and *hold fast* to the LORD. Their allegiance and commitment was to be first to the Person behind the Book. Likewise, Christians do not worship a book, though we love the Bible and are pledged to believe it and share its truth; we worship God who gave the Bible to us. Joshua knew that unless the people clung to God they would drift far from Him. The book of Hebrews warns of the danger of drifting: *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away....how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation* (Hebrews 2:1-3).

b. God's promises fulfilled - verses 9-10

The people were to be faithful because God was faithful.

- As He promised in Exodus 14:14, God Himself had fought for Israel.
- By staying close to the LORD, no one had been able to stand against them, as God promised Moses in Deuteronomy 7:24.
- Also as promised in Leviticus 26:8, "*Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight.*"

This promise also describes the actions of the Jews in the Six Day War of 1967 when they gained possession of new portions of Israel and took the Sinai Desert. At that time one million Jews were opposed by ten million Arabs. Young and old Jews who were non-military fought valiantly like so many Davids.

4. Call to separation - 23:12-13

a. Warning - verse 12

The Israelites were not to “cling to the remnant of these nations that remain among you and make marriages.” Intermingling, which results in intermarriage, is not necessarily bad or wrong, except in the case of believers with unbelievers. That is forbidden by God in both the Old and New Testaments (1 Corinthians 6:14). Joshua knew that socializing with the remaining Canaanites would lead to marriages with them, which would lead in turn to worshipping with them, bowing down to their idols, and ultimately serving their idols. Idol worship meant participation in sexually perverse and abominable activities, culminating in child sacrifice.

b. Consequences of disobedience - verse 13

By co-mingling and intermarrying, Israel would lose her strength and resolve and, *“the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you.”* God would cease to help Israel rout the remaining Canaanites. Israel would be powerless militarily and vulnerable to pagan influence culturally, losing their moral advantage. The pagan nations of the land would become *“snares, ... traps, ... scourges on your sides, ... and thorns in your eyes.”* The diversity of values and morals, not to mention the total ungodliness of the Canaanites, would mean temptations, trials, afflictions, diseases, and stumbling blocks for the Israelites. Tragedies, distresses, and misfortunes multiply when God withdraws His protection and blessing.

Similarly, in Matthew 24, Jesus prophesied of events that would follow His rejection and crucifixion, *“All these are the beginnings of sorrows”* (Matthew 24:8). Some people blame God for calamities, question God’s goodness, malign His loving character, and ask why He allows disasters and atrocities, but they ignore the real cause - mankind’s unfaithfulness, sin, and unbelief.

II. Choice of Blessing or Cursing - Joshua 23:14-16

A. Assurance of Fulfillment of God’s Word - Joshua 23:14

Joshua assured the people that just as God’s word had been fulfilled in the past it would be fulfilled in the future. We have centuries more to reflect upon than did Joshua. Yet it is still true, *“not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD God spoke.”* Despite all efforts to the contrary, God’s Word has never been disproved nor found to be in error.

“Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth.” Joshua knew this was his last opportunity to remind his people that they knew, *“in all your hearts and in all your souls”* that God had kept His word to the smallest detail. The apostle Peter wrote, *“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place”* (2 Peter 1:19). The fulfillment of God’s word in the past is solid evidence that it will be fulfilled in the future.

The argument for inerrancy maintains that individual words, as well as thoughts or concepts, are inspired by God. The apostle Paul wrote, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”* (2 Timothy 3:16). Scripture means “that which is written”. Thoughts and concepts can be stated only in words. It is inaccurate and misleading to say, as many do, that thoughts are inspired and not the words. If the words are not inspired how can the “inspired” thoughts exist?

B. Assurance of Consequences - Joshua 23:15

“As all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all harmful things.”

Just as many people readily accept the reality of heaven but deny the reality of hell, they like to believe that God blesses and sends good things, but refuse to accept that “a good God” will also curse, punish, and sanction evil in the world. However, as a sovereign and righteous God, He must punish evil as well as reward good. The facts of nature are examples for us. There are day and night, sweet and sour, north and south poles, positive and negative fields. Otherwise the world would be in chaos and nature would be incomprehensible. Opposites are logical. In physics we learn that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. So in life, God holds us accountable for our actions that affect life around us and He sanctions consequences for them.

Paul sums this up in the New Testament, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh, will to the flesh reap corruption. But he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”* (Galatians 6:7-8). This is still true.

C. Conclusion - Joshua 23:16

Sadly, Joshua was certain Israel would transgress the covenant of the LORD, serve the gods of the nations around them, and then go into exile. *“Then the anger of the LORD will burn against you until you shall perish quickly from the good land He has given you.”* God knows the natural rebelliousness of the human heart. Once God’s wrath fell upon them for their idolatry, Israel’s

ultimate punishment was exile - losing the land. Israel's blessings have always been tied to the land, and the land was tied to Israel's obedience. The nation did fall into idolatry and went into captivity because of it. See 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36.

Applications

1. Christians today are also surrounded with the gods and idols of an increasingly secular, materialistic and even pagan culture. Television projects the world's ungodly systems into our homes, changing the atmosphere. With "smartphones" we carry instant access to the world and its values in our pockets. Humanism and the occult pervade and influence society, education, government, and business. How do you separate yourself from it? How do you plan to overcome the influence of it all? Is the Bible your guide and standard? If not, what is?

2. God is patient and long-suffering. However, we must not presume on His patience. Will you stop testing His patience today in whatever area you know He is not pleased?

3. Will you thank God for His faithfulness to you in keeping His promises? Will you sing to Him from your heart with gratitude?

"Praise to the LORD

Who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth.

Shelters thee under His wings,

Yea, so gently sustaineth.

Hast thou not seen

How thy desires e'er have been

Granted in what He ordaineth?"

(from hymn "Praise to the Lord the Almighty"

by Joachim Neander, 1665).

4. Will you, like Joshua, pass along to others your faith in God and faithfulness to His Word? How will you begin? What will you do to begin today?