



Joshua's Farewell to the Nation Part 2 - Joshua 24

Introduction

Joshua's farewell address to the tribes and leaders of Israel concludes the account of his life and service to the LORD. His final call and challenge, "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:15) is surely as inspiring now as it was then.

Outline of Joshua 24

- I. Joshua's Challenge to Serve the Lord - Joshua 24:1-15
- II. Joshua's Covenant with the People - Joshua 24:16-28
- III. Joshua's Death and Burial - Joshua 24:29-33

I. Joshua's Challenge to Serve the Lord - Joshua 24:1-15

For the second time, the nation came together to hear Joshua's farewell. This time they gathered before God at Shechem, and once again the leaders are mentioned separately. Joshua began his message with, "Thus says the LORD." The LORD God of Israel spoke through Joshua as His inspired prophet. He began with a review of their extraordinary history.

A. Historical Review - Joshua 24:1-12

1. From Ur to Canaan - 24:2-10
 - a. Beginning with Abraham - verses 3-4,14

Israel's patriarch, Abraham, came from a family of idol-worshippers in an idolatrous nation. God took Abraham (who followed by faith) from the far side of the Euphrates River and led him throughout all the land of Canaan. His sons Isaac, Jacob, and Esau are also mentioned, along with the descendants of Jacob and his family who went down to Egypt (Genesis 46).

b. The Exodus - verses 5-6

Joshua continued by reminding the people about Moses, Aaron, and the exodus from Egypt. He mentioned God's protection and deliverance at the Red Sea, when *He put darkness between them and the Egyptians, brought the sea upon them and covered them, and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt.*

c. The wilderness - verse 7

"Then you dwell in the wilderness a long time." Because of unbelief, the Israelites spent forty years wandering in the wilderness.

d. Trans-Jordan and Balaam - verses 8-10

God's deliverance from the Amorites, the king of Moab, and the curses of Balaam were recounted. God turned attacking enemies and attempted curses into blessings for His people.

2. Crossing the Jordan and conquest of the land - 24:11-12

"I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you." The meaning of this verse is difficult and controversial. God sent a force ahead of Israel to weaken the enemy. Whether this refers to real hornets, a disease carried by insects, or terrifying reports of Israel's approach, is uncertain. However, it is a good rule to take the Bible literally except when it is unreasonable to do so. An example is Psalm 98:8 which reads, *the rivers clap their hands.*

B. Possession of their Promised Land - Joshua 24:13-14

1. Prepared places - 24:13

"I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build...vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant." The Israelites inherited a country that was already developed to a certain extent. There were organized cities and roads, cultivated vineyards, and olive groves. God gave the fruits of the Canaanites' labors to the Israelites.

Today we have inherited dwellings, businesses, schools, churches, government, and communications from previous generations, not to mention great advances in science and industry. We would do well to note these benefits and thank God for them. Have you thanked God for the advantages you enjoy from previous generations?

2. Preferred responses - 24:14

Joshua told the people there were two ways to show their gratitude for the benefits graciously bestowed

upon them by a loving God. First, Joshua said, *“Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth.”* Second, he said, *“Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River, and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!”*

Joshua called the people to fear and serve the LORD, reminiscent of what we read in the Psalms: King David wrote, *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits* (Psalm 103:2). Psalm 116:12 asks, *“What shall I render to the LORD for all His benefits toward me?”*

There are always two parts to responding to God’s call. There is a letting go of the old ways and the addition of new ways. When Jesus called His disciples they followed Him. However, following Jesus meant leaving their former way of life behind. *“Follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men.”* They immediately left their nets and followed Him (Mark 1:17-18).

As the apostle Paul wrote, *Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts and...put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness* (Ephesians 4:22-24). Many are delighted to put on the new man but struggle to put off the old. We grow strongly attached to old habits, to ungodly but cherished identities, and to all that was the former “us”. What old habits do you need to put off?

C. Choice of Whom to Serve - Joshua 24:15

1. *“The gods which your fathers served”*

“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.” This is a choice we all make whether we realize it or not. You may think you have no idols or false gods. But have you considered that such things as money, status, success, independence, power, tradition, and social media can all become gods. They are false gods to be sure, and they are gods of our making. What gods are you serving?

2. *“The gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell”*

Other false gods may be environmental or cultural such as intellectualism, materialism, education, possessions, rebellion, status-seeking, comfort, pleasure, and self.

3. Joshua’s choice

Joshua made his choice clear before God and the people. *“As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”* Are you this clear in your commitment to serve God and God only? Joshua’s choice is a challenge to every person and generation since. The American patriot Patrick Henry’s famous statement, “I know not what course

others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death,” seems to echo Joshua’s words.

II. Joshua’s Covenant with the People - Joshua 24:16-28

A. The People’s Choice - Joshua 24:16-18

Joshua’s compelling reminder of God’s hand in their history, as well as the consequences of wrong choices, convinced the people. They responded, *“Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods... We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.”*

B. Joshua’s Objection - Joshua 24:19-20

Joshua was not easily impressed nor convinced. *“You cannot serve the LORD”* seems like a harsh, even cynical, judgment upon the people. They were saying what he challenged them to say yet he did not totally accept it for three reasons:

1. God *“is a holy God”*

A holy God requires a holy people. Joshua was unsure the people would embrace holiness.

2. God *“is a jealous God”*

With people, jealousy is a negative characteristic, but God’s jealousy is for the benefit of His people. His jealousy is just and good and springs from His love and protective care of His people. Sin is harmful because it results in separation from God. Joshua knew the people needed to respond to His love with wholehearted devotion.

3. God’s forgiveness

“He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.” Does this mean God does not forgive? No, God forgives those who truly repent, but the people might assume God would overlook their rebellion because they were His chosen people, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God is a Father, not a grandfather who overlooks and excuses transgressions. Joshua feared they had a shallow commitment, with no depth of devotion or counting the cost. How deep is your commitment to the Lord? Have you counted the cost of following Him (see Luke 14:28)?

C. The Covenant - Joshua 24:21-25

Three times the people insisted they would serve the LORD, proclaiming they would forsake all other gods to serve and obey the LORD. *So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day.* God would be their God and they would be His people.

The covenant was kept for at least one generation (24:31). But sometime after Joshua and the elders died, the people forsook the covenant.

D. The Witness - Joshua 24:26-28

Joshua wrote the words of the covenant in the *Book of the Law of God* and set up a large stone as a witness to the commitment they had made. The stone would serve as a reminder of their promise to serve the LORD.

III. Joshua's Death and Burial - Joshua 24:29-33

The account of Joshua's death and burial may have been added by Phinehas, *as moved by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:21). Verse 29 reads like a eulogy and obituary. *Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old. He was buried in his own city of Timnath-Serah within his tribe of Ephraim.*

One task remained unfinished. The coffin containing Joseph's bones had been carried with the nation from Egypt, throughout the wilderness wanderings and the conquest of the land. At last, the patriarch, Joseph, could be buried. Joseph, who had believed God's promises all his life, had requested his bones be taken to the Promised Land for burial (Genesis 50:24; Hebrews 11:22). His father, Jacob, had also requested to be buried with his ancestors, *"Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah....in the land of Canaan* (Genesis 49:29-32). With the blessing of Pharaoh, Joseph and all the elders of Egypt had carried Jacob's body to Canaan to grant his request (Genesis 50:7-14).

At last, Joseph's bones were interred in the cave at Machpelah in Shechem with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac,

Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah (Genesis 23:19; 49:30). Shechem later became Samaria and today is known as Nablus, where the tomb remains. There is another tomb several miles away outside Jerusalem in a garden. However, it is empty. It had only one occupant who was dead only three days. No one has occupied His tomb from that day to this. He said, *"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, yet he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die"* (John 11:25-26).

Applications

1. What is your choice? What, or whom, do you serve? Do you serve self or God? On what basis did you choose to serve; family, society, or God's Word? Joshua's choice was and is the best choice anyone can make. It is also one which God will honor. The home where Christ is honored, known, and loved is the strongest home of all. Joshua was like the wise man Jesus mentioned who built his house upon the rock, whom Jesus said was hearing and doing *these sayings of Mine* (Matthew 7:24).
2. Have you put on the new man which was created by God in true righteousness and holiness? Have you also *put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts* (Ephesians 4:22,24)?
3. Do you believe God's promises as literally as Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Joshua? Joshua's name means "God is salvation" and is the Greek form of Jesus. Jesus is the Savior sent by God to lead us through the wilderness of life to victory over all our enemies. Is He your Savior? It is through Him you possess your inheritance, the promises of God. Will you embrace God's promises today?