

## Notes on Joshua 24

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### B. Joshua's Parting Speech and Death – Chap. 24

Verses 1-4

1. Where did Joshua meet the people in 24:1? For whom did he speak? (Think: What does this prove about Joshua?)
2. How did Joshua begin his speech?

#### *Joshua begins a record of Israel's history*

Joshua's time to die drew near. He sought to give a final admonition to the people before his death. So he called the people to him along with all their officers and judges. They met at Shechem. Shechem was located the middle of Canaan between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal. This was the area where Joshua had the people hear the blessings and the cursings from the law in 8:30-35.

Joshua spoke as a prophet for God and revealed to the people a message from God. He began by summarizing the history of God's dealings with Israel. This became a common approach for dealing with the nation (cf. Acts 7).

He began with Terah, father of Abraham and Nahor. Terah had lived beyond the river (Euphrates) and there had served other gods. This implies that Abraham also served other gods, but perhaps not necessarily.

In any case, Abraham surely became a follower of the true God. God called him and he followed God's command to move into Canaan. There God gave to Abraham his son Isaac and to Isaac his sons Esau and Jacob. To Esau God gave the land of Seir or Edom, but Jacob and his descendants went down into Egypt where they became slaves.

Verses 5-8

3. Describe the captivity and exodus from Egypt.

#### *The exodus from Egypt*

God then described how He had sent Moses and Aaron and brought plagues on Egypt, so as to compel them to let Israel leave. Then he brought Israel to the Red Sea, pursued by the Egyptians. There the people cried to the Lord and He separated Israel from the Egyptians by darkness and eventually caused the Egyptians to drown in the sea.

Israel had seen God's great miracles in Egypt and at the Red Sea, yet they had sinned against God and been compelled to wander in the wilderness. Finally God brought them to the land east of Jordan. The Amorites fought with them, but God gave Israel victory so they could possess the land.

All this history was clearly known to the Israelites, yet God reviewed it to remind them of His great blessings to them.

Verses 9-13

4. How did Joshua describe the conquest of the land?

#### *Further events in the conquest of the land*

God then described how Balak, king of Moab, had called Balaam to bring a curse upon Israel so Moab could defeat Israel. However, God did not heed Balaam's desires but instead made him pronounce blessings on Israel. So God delivered Israel from Balaam's intentions.

Then God brought Israel into the promised land itself, west of Jordan. There the people of Jericho and other people of the land fought against Israel, but God gave Israel the victory. He fought for Israel, even sending the hornet to demoralize their enemies before Israel physically attacked them. This is not mentioned directly elsewhere in Joshua, but it had been predicted in

Ex. 23:27,28; Deut. 7:20. Here Joshua confirmed that it had happened. So ultimately the victory was not achieved by the power of Israel's weapons but by God's power.

The land was then given by God to Israel. They were enabled to live in cities they had not built and eat crops they had not planted. God richly blessed them by bringing them into the land and giving them the fruits of other people's labors. They had not done the work to build up the land, and in many ways they had not done the work to conquer it (God had). Though they were required to meet conditions which involved work and even hard work, yet they had not earned the blessings God gave. This is the essence of grace.

Verses 14,15

5. What choice or challenge did Joshua put before the people in vv 14,15? What choice had Joshua himself made?
6. What can we learn here about man's free will power of choice? Give other *passages* confirming man has this power.
7. What can we learn here about parents' duty in leading their families? Give other *passages* confirming this duty.

### **Challenge to serve God**

Having described God's goodness and blessings to Israel, Joshua challenged them to fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and truth. They should put away all other gods and serve the Lord.

He identified the gods they should put away as: (1) The gods their fathers served on the other side of the river (vv 14,15). This appears to refer to the gods served by Terah and the family when they lived across the Euphrates before God called Abraham (as described also in v2). (2) The gods of Egypt that some served when they were there. (3) The gods of the Amorites who dwelt in and around Canaan. All these gods were false gods, had not blessed Israel, and should not be served. They should serve the true God, the God of Abraham, who had brought them out of Egypt and into Canaan.

They ought to serve the true God, so Joshua challenged them to make up their minds to do so. If they would not serve God, then which of these other gods would they serve? This appears to contrast God to these false gods, to help Israel see that the other gods were surely a poor choice.

Finally, Joshua stated the choice he and his family had made. They would serve the true God. Of course, this was the choice he was urging all Israel to make.

Note that people do have the power to choose for themselves religiously. We are not robots having no power to choose for ourselves. Nor are we predestined by unconditional election, so God has made the choice for us and we can do nothing except follow the compulsion where His Spirit leads us, as Calvinism teaches. Rather, we are creatures with the power to choose for ourselves, because God has granted us that power. We may choose incorrectly, but God will allow us to make that choice. He will ultimately punish us for such a wrong choice, but He will grant us the freedom now to make it. See also Genesis 2:16,17; 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15; 11:25; 1 Kings 18:21; Psalm 119:30.

**For further information about man's power to choose, see our articles about individual responsibility in salvation and about election (predestination) at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).**

However, as parents, we are responsible to make the best choice for ourselves and then teach it to our children. We cannot, of course, ultimately decide for them. When they are on their own, they will exercise their power to choose for themselves. But we can forbid all evil in our own homes, whether the evil of idolatrous worship or any other evil acts. And we can insist that those subject to us learn about the true God and be urged in every possible way to serve Him.

This was the choice Joshua made for his family. See Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; Titus 2:4; Genesis 18:19.

Verses 16-18

8. What choice did the people profess to make? Why?

### ***The people affirm their desire to serve the Lord***

The people responded to Joshua's challenge, as he had hoped they would, by committing themselves to serve the true God. They sought to put far from them the service of other gods or the forsaking of the true God.

They recognized the Lord as the God who had brought them from slavery in Egypt, had done great miracles before them, and had cared for them and met their needs as they had traveled through the wilderness. Furthermore, God had driven out before them the people of the land and had given the land to them. So they ought to serve the Lord as the true God.

This is exactly what Joshua had taught them. It was the correct response, and it was the response Joshua sought. The people recognized God's blessings to them and their obligation to serve Him, not other gods. We should do the same.

Verses 19-24

9. What did Joshua say to lead them to see the seriousness of their commitment (vv 19-24)?

### ***The people promise to serve the Lord and put away other gods***

When the people stated their commitment to serve the true God, Joshua warned them of the seriousness of the commitment. He went so far as to tell them they could not serve Him, because His requirements were so high. He is a holy God, who requires holiness of His people. He is a jealous God, who would not forgive their sins and unfaithfulness. If they left Him to serve other Gods, He would consume and destroy them, despite all the good He had done them in the past.

Surely these statements are hyperbole – exaggeration for purpose of making a point, like verses such as Luke 14:26ff. Surely God is willing to forgive. The animal sacrifices they had then could not effectively remove sin (Heb. 10:1-17), but they offered forgiveness and actually obtained it provisionally until Jesus' death gave the permanent forgiveness (Heb. 9:15). God is a God of love who had done many wonderful things for them and now has sent His Son as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. So, He is a holy and jealous God, but He is also willing to forgive and surely He wanted them to serve Him. So Joshua must have been making a point so they would realize their need to commit themselves truly to His service.

Clearly the people did not believe serving God was impossible, for they proceeded to affirm their determination to serve God despite Joshua's statement. And Joshua himself surely did not mean that serving God was impossible, for He then accepted their choice.

He reinforced their commitment by calling upon witnesses to ratify it, much like legal contracts today may require witnesses to verify the transaction. But in this case the witnesses were the people themselves. Joshua called on them to serve as witnesses that they really intended to make this commitment. Of course, the point of all this was to solemnly emphasize the seriousness of this decision, so they would realize they should not back out or violate it.

The people then persisted in the commitment. They agreed that they were witnesses to one another's commitment. They affirmed that the Lord would be their God and they would obey His voice. So Joshua called upon them to put away other gods.

Verses 25-28

10. Where did Joshua write a record of this? What is the significance of this?

11. Describe what else Joshua did to give a future reminder of their commitment (vv 25-27). Where else have similar reminders been mentioned?

### ***The covenant recorded and witnessed by a stone***

This agreement made by the people is here called a covenant or solemn agreement. In reality it was just a renewal of the covenant the people had made with God when the law had been given at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:1-8). But it is here called a covenant, a statute, and an ordinance.

Joshua recorded it in the Book of the Law of God. This is the term used for the Book Moses had written (see Deut. 31:24-26 and cf. Ex. 24:1-8 above). This shows that Joshua continued to write by inspiration in that Book.

Joshua then took a large stone and set it by an oak near the sanctuary. He said the stone would serve as a witness to the people's covenant, because it had heard what the Lord had spoken. Of course, it had not literally heard, but it had been there and now served the purpose of a permanent witness that the people had committed themselves to serve God. If they thought to deny Him, the stone would testify of their covenant.

Joshua then let the people return to their homes.

Note again how stones were used as witnesses to confirm commitments. See notes on chap. 4 for a similar example and notes there about other examples. This helps us see why God chose to write the 10 Commands on tables of stone. This was the formal way in that day of confirming a covenant, at least among Israel.

Note also that this verse implies that the sanctuary of the Lord was at this time at Shechem, whereas earlier (and again later) it was at Shiloh (see on 18:1-10, etc.). Note on the map that Shiloh and Shechem were quite close to one another. Perhaps the covenant was made at Shechem, but the stone was then moved the short distance to Shiloh and set up by the sanctuary there.

Verses 29-31

12. Describe the death and burial of Joshua. How old was he?

13. Explain the significance of v31.

### ***The death of Joshua***

After this Joshua died at the age of 110 years old. He was buried at the edge (border) of his inheritance at Timnath Serah in Ephraim on the north side of Mt. Gaash. This inheritance had been given him as recorded in 19:50.

Israel had served the Lord all the days of Joshua and of the leaders (elders) who outlived him but had been alive to see all that the Lord had done for Israel in bringing them into the land. This shows that the generation who made the covenant was willing to keep it. In doing so they were at least better than the previous generation.

The implication is that the people did not remain faithful in following generations. This is borne out in the book of Judges.

Here again we read the death of a great man of God. Death is the common lot of all mankind, no matter how good. Yet it is sad when we read of it. Joshua had done great work for God and for the people. He had led them into the land, defeated the enemies, and led them in faithfulness throughout his lifetime. In a sense even Moses had not accomplished that.

Verses 32,33

14. What promise was fulfilled in v32? Where was this promise originally recorded?
15. Where did this burial occur? Explain the history of this place.
16. Where does the New Testament refer to this event? Explain how this was an act of faith.
17. Who else died and where was he buried?

### ***The burial of Joseph and the death of Eleazar***

Other interesting notes about great men of God are recorded to close the book.

Joseph had made the people of Israel swear that they would take his bones with them when they left Egypt to go back to Canaan (see Gen. 50:25). Heb. 11:22 speaks of this as an act of faith, because it showed that Joseph was convinced the people would really return to receive the land as God had promised. Exodus 13:19 had recorded that the people did take his bones with them when they left.

Here we are told that his bones were not only brought into Canaan but were buried in Shechem in a plot of ground which had been bought by Jacob from the father of Shechem as recorded in Gen. 33:19. This area was included in the territory that Joseph's son Ephraim had inherited.

Finally, we are told of the death of Eleazar the high priest. Just as Joshua had succeeded Moses, so Eleazar had succeeded his father Aaron as high priest. See on Num. 20:22-29. He had served during Joshua's period as leader. Here we are told also of his death. He was buried in a plot land belonging to his son Phinehas also in the mountains of Ephraim.

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