

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
5-24-23

Joshua 24

Joshua Speaks To The Nation Again, Through Its Leaders – Verse 1

¹ Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem: This was a dramatic last gathering of Israel before the passing of Joshua. It may or may not be part of the same farewell described in Joshua 23. No specific place of gathering is mentioned in Joshua 23, so it could have been part of this same meeting at Shechem.

God's Faithfulness To The Patriarchs – Verses 2-4

² Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. ³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, ⁴ and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt.'

24:2 Thus says the Lord God of Israel: We don't often think of Joshua as a prophet, but here he spoke as an inspired messenger of God. Prophecy is not necessarily a prediction of the future. It can simply be a uniquely direct and spontaneous word from God.

24:2 Your fathers... dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods: Through Joshua, the Lord reminded Israel that their forefathers came from the other side of the Euphrates (the River) and worshipped pagan gods there.

24:3-4 Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River: Before God challenged Israel, He reminded them of His faithfulness. His goodness was shown at the very beginning of His dealings with Abraham and Abraham's descendants.

God's Faithfulness In The Escape From Egypt – Verses 5-7

⁵ "Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. ⁶ When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. ⁷ But they cried to the LORD for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the wilderness for a long time.

24:5 Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt: God did not leave Israel in slavery in Egypt forever. When the time was right, He sent a deliverer to His people.

24:7 Your eyes saw what I did in Egypt: There were still many among the leaders and elders of Israel who were children when Israel came out of Egypt, and who saw God destroy the Egyptian army at the Red Sea.

God's Faithfulness In The Wilderness – Verses 8-10

8 “I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. **9** When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. **10** But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

24:8-10 Arose to make war against Israel: Numbers 22-25 makes it clear that the war Balak made against Israel was spiritual in nature. He wanted to destroy them either through Balaam's curse (which did not work) or through the seduction and idolatry of the Moabite women (which worked somewhat). Though it wasn't a war fought with swords and spears, it was a war nonetheless.

God's Faithfulness In The Land Of Canaan – Verses 11-13

11 “Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. **12** I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. **13** So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.’

25:11 You went over the Jordan and came to Jericho... But I delivered them into your hand: Speaking through Joshua, God linked the ancient history of Israel (all the way back to Abraham) to their current history. This is what God had done among them in their own lifetime.

25:12-13 Not with your sword or with your bow. I have given you a land for which you did not labor... vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant: There is a sense in which every blessing is undeserved, but some are more obviously so. When Israel enjoyed vineyards and olive orchards in Canaan, it should have made them especially grateful for undeserved blessings.

The Challenge: Serve God Exclusively – Verse 14-15

14 “Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. **15** But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

24:15 The people had to decide whether they would obey the Lord, who had proven his trustworthiness, or obey the local gods, which were only hand-made idols. It's easy to slip into a quiet rebellion—going about life in your own way. But the time comes when you have to choose who or what will control you. The choice is yours. Will it be God, your own limited personality, or another imperfect substitute? Once you have chosen to be controlled by God's Spirit, reaffirm your choice every day.

24:15 In taking a definite stand for the Lord, Joshua again displayed his spiritual leadership. Regardless of what others decided, Joshua had made a commitment to God, and he was determined to set an example of living by that decision. The way we live shows others the strength of our commitment to serving God.

Israel responds: they also will serve the Lord – Verses 16-18

16 Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods! **17** It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. **18** And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God.”

24:16-18 All the people boldly claimed that they would never forsake the Lord. But they did not keep that promise. Very soon God would charge them with breaking their covenant with him (Judges 2:2-3). Talk is cheap. It is easy to say we will follow God, but it is much more important to live like it. Yet the nation followed God through Joshua’s lifetime, a great tribute to Joshua’s faith in God and powerful leadership.

Joshua Cautions Against A Lightly Made Commitment – Verses 19-21

19 Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. **20** If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.” **21** But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the LORD.”

24:19 You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God: Joshua is not trying to discourage their faith but trying to discourage a light commitment to following the Lord. They need to be reminded that they are serving God under a covenant that promised they would be cursed for disobedience. Jesus expressed the same kind of warning, explaining that following Him took total commitment (Luke 14:25-33). It wasn’t that Jesus didn’t want followers, but He did not want lightly made and easily broken commitments.

A Covenant Renewed – Verses 22-28

22 Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD.” “Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied. **23** “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.” **24** And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.” **25** On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. **26** And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD. **27** “See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.” **28** Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

24:23 Joshua told the Israelites to destroy their foreign gods, or idols. To follow God requires destroying whatever gets in the way of worshiping him. We have our own form of idols—greed,

wrong priorities, jealousies, prejudices—that get in the way of worshiping God. God is not satisfied if we merely hide these idols. We must completely remove them from our lives.

24:24-26 The covenant between Israel and God was that the people would worship and obey the Lord alone. Their purpose was to become a holy nation that would influence the rest of the world for God. The conquest of Canaan was a means to achieve this purpose, but Israel became preoccupied with the land and lost sight of the Lord God.

24:24-26 The same can happen in our lives. We can spend so much time on the means that we forget the end—to glorify God. Churches may make this mistake as well. For example, the congregation may pour all of its energies into a new facility, only to become self-satisfied or fearful of letting certain groups use it. If this happens, they have focused on the building and lost sight of its purpose—to bring others to God.

A Beautiful Epitaph For Joshua – Verses 29-31

²⁹ After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ³⁰ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ³¹ Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel.

24:29-31 The book of Joshua opens with a new leader being handed a seemingly impossible task—to lead the nation in taking over the land of Canaan. By following God closely, Joshua led the people through military victories and faithful spiritual obedience. In 24:16 we read that the people were sure they would never forsake the Lord. The response of the whole nation during these many years is a tribute both to Joshua’s leadership and to the God he faithfully served.

The Burial Of Joseph’s Bones And Death Of Eleazar – Verses 32-33

³² And Joseph’s bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph’s descendants. ³³ And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim.

24:33 Joshua and Eleazar died, but not before laying before the people the fundamentals of what it means to have faith in God. We are to fear and serve the Lord alone (24:14). This is based on a choice: to obey him instead of following other gods (24:15). We are incapable, however, of properly worshiping him because of our rebellion and sins (24:19). By choosing God as Lord, we enter into a covenant with him (24:25) whereby he promises not only to forgive and love us, but also to enable us by his Spirit to do his work here on earth. This covenant requires us to renounce the principles and practices of the culture around us that are hostile to God’s plan (24:23). This is not to be done alone, but by binding ourselves together with others who have faith in God. (See Deuteronomy 30:15-20 for a similar message from Moses.)