

**GOD WITH US**  
**Part 2: Conquest and Chaos**  
**Joshua – Judges – Ruth**

**Message 5 – Joshua’s Farewell Speech**  
**Joshua 23,24**

**Introduction**

Having conquered the Canaanites and divided the land among the 12 tribes of Israel, Joshua now delivers his final charge to the nation, prior to his death. This speech is a stirring call to faithfully love God, so that His favor might continue to rest upon them. They had *inherited* the land; but to *enjoy it* and *remain in it* they must remain faithful to the terms of the covenant made at Mt. Sinai. Joshua will challenge the people using his own personal example of faithfully loving and serving God all the days of his life. His final charge will contain solemn notes of warning, since Joshua saw evidence indicating that the people were already compromising their faith in and commitment to Yahweh.

**The Charge to Israel’s Leaders: 23:1-16**

Joshua was “old and advanced in years” (roughly 110 yrs). He first called the leaders of Israel together (elders, heads, judges, officers, v.2), and charged them to be faithful to walk with God. He began by reminding them about God’s consistent faithfulness His people:

*“You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you. Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain - the nations I conquered - between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. The Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you” (23:3-5).*

Joshua challenged the leaders to finish claiming their full inheritance of land with faith and confidence, because they had already seen God fight for them up to this point. Then, Joshua called them to fulfill their part of the covenant with Yahweh:

*“Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the*

***left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now” (23:6-8).***

The charge Joshua gave to Israel’s leaders here, at the end of the book, mirrors the charge God gave to Joshua at the beginning:

God to Joshua: ***“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left . . .” (1:7).***

Joshua to leaders: ***“Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left” (23:6).***

These bookend charges reflect the central message of the entire book of Joshua: Strength arises within us as we cling to our God and walk in His ways. This, and this alone, is the path that leads to experiencing God and His will for our lives.

God breathed courage into Joshua’s spirit (chapter 1), and Joshua in turn breathed courage into other leaders’ spirits (chapter 23). But WHY do we need constant encouragement to trust God? Why is it so hard for us to believe that God will be our strong rock and defender in the future, even when we have seen Him work on our behalf in the past? Because FAITH FADES WITHOUT REGULAR ENCOURAGEMENT. New situations present themselves every single day, forcing us to choose between FAITH and FEAR. The admonition from the book of Hebrews is a great reminder to us all: “But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). This is why community is so important. We need one another to maintain a strong faith-life!

As Joshua concluded his admonitions to the leaders, he appealed to their hearts.

***“Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed” (23:14).***

He warned these leaders that just as God had brought them *into the land*, so He would also evict them *out of the land* IF they failed to cling tightly to Him. Note the 3x repeated use of the phrase, “*OFF the good land*” (vv.13,15,16).

***“When you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you” (23:16).***

“You know in all your hearts and in all your souls . . .” Joshua was not just an “intellectual follower” of God; he was a “heart and soul follower.” There is a HUGE difference. Pastor Dave Hughes pointed out to me the difference between “informational discipleship” (accumulation of knowledge about God) and “transformational discipleship” (seeing heart and soul transformation in our lives, and other’s lives, as a result of our knowledge of and experience with God). The apostle Paul wrote: “Knowledge puffs up; but love builds up” (1Corinthians 8:1). Paul demonstrated transformational discipleship as he poured his own walk with God into the lives of others (1Thessalonians 2:7,8). How do we move from information to transformation? Through prayer, pondering, reflecting, meditating and discussion IN COMMUNITY . . . the truths we know about God will make the 18-inch journey from our heads down into our hearts and souls, where they become convictions. This is where a real relationship with God thrives.

### **The National Gathering at Shechem: 24:1-28**

Having addressed the leaders, Joshua then called the entire nation to a solemn, covenant-renewal ceremony at Shechem. How fitting that Joshua would gather the nation to Shechem. This was the very place where, some 600 years earlier, God first told Abraham that He would someday give his descendants the land of Canaan.

***Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him (Genesis 12:6,7).***

Joshua gathered the nation to this sacred, historic spot and invited them to renew their covenant with Yahweh, their God. They had *received* the land as their inheritance. Now, in order to *retain* the land, they must renew their commitment to love and serve Yahweh exclusively. This final speech from the lips of Joshua, one of Israel’s greatest leaders, begins with a historical overview.

### **Historical Review: 24:1-13**

A lot had happened since the call of one man, Abraham, back in Genesis 12. Now, Joshua gives Israel a review, hitting on the

highpoints of their roughly 600-year history as the people of the promise. The focus is on the major acts of God that have brought Israel to their present position as occupants of the Promised Land.

- The call of Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates (v.2,3)
- Abraham's descendants: Isaac>Jacob>12 sons>into Egypt (v.4)
- Moses & Aaron; God delivers Israel from bondage in Egypt (v.5)
- Red Sea crossed; Pharaoh's army defeated – Israel is free (v.6,7)
- Moses defeats the trans-Jordan opponents (v.8-10)
- Joshua defeats the Canaanites in the Promised Land (v.11,12)
- Summary: ***“I (God) gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant” (v.13).***

### **Joshua's Final Charge: 24:14-28**

This charge is powerful, emanating from the heart of a man who, because of his own faith, had earned the right to issue such a strong, forthright challenge to his people:

***“Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (24:14,15).***

CHOOSE YOUR GOD! Joshua challenged his people to make their choice to follow either the gods that Abraham left behind in the land beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites (Canaanites) in this land.

***But as for me and my house, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD!***

*If you are the head of a household, you must set the spiritual direction of the home. Create the environment for others to experience the one, true God. Lead the family in Bible reading and prayer; participate fully in the work, worship and life of the Church; set the example of what it looks like to have a real relationship with the living God. Don't let your family drift spiritually. Be like Joshua: point the way to loving and serving God!*

The nation immediately declared that they WOULD remain faithful to serve the Lord exclusively.

***Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! 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. 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).***

Yet, Joshua did not seem to receive their answer very well. In fact, he made them *repeat their commitment three times!*

***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. 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.” But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.” Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.” “Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied. “Now then,” said Joshua, “throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the Lord our God and obey him” (24:19-24).***

Why did Joshua press them so hard on their sincerity? Because he had already seen clear signs of wavering. Many of the tribes had failed to trust God for the full occupation of their designated lands. Canaanites were allowed to remain in the land, with their idolatrous practices. In fact, he knew that many of the Israelites were keeping pagan idols with them at that very moment! ***“Throw away the foreign gods that are among you . . .” (24:23).***

As his final act, Joshua formalized the people’s commitment by setting up a stone monument at Shechem:

***So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a***

***witness against you, so that you do not deny your God.” Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance” (24:25-28).***

Spiritual compromise is always costly. The tendency to mingle idolatry with the worship of Yahweh had a long history in Israel: Rachel, Jacob’s wife, brought her father’s household idols with her when she and Jacob returned to Canaan (Genesis 31:19). Israel worshipped the golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 32). All through the 40-year period of wandering in the wilderness, the Exodus generation carried idols with them (Amos 5:25,26 and Acts 7:42,43). Here, at the end of Joshua’s life, he was calling them to “throw away the foreign gods that are among you” (24:23). How costly was Israel’s compromise with idolatry? The book of Judges will begin to tell that sad story. Suffice it to say that idolatry became Israel’s complete downfall for the 700 years following Joshua, leading God to repeatedly cast them out of the good land that He had given to them. It was not until after the cruel Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.) that Israel was finally cured of her constant compromise with idolatry!

How do we, today, compromise with idolatry? You may not have a metal shrine to some foreign god in your house; but you still might worship other gods: the god of money, the god of pleasure, the god of sex, the god of status, the god of possessions, the god of comfort, the god of success, the god of self, the god of beauty. Take some time this week to go before God and search your heart. Ask Him to point out to you any idols that may be compromising your walk with Him. Remember, idolatry (spiritual compromise) will always be costly in the long run. Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matthew 6:24). Choose THIS DAY whom YOU will serve!

### **Epilogue: The death of Joshua: 24:29-33**

Joshua’s death and burial is recorded. Also, the burial of Joseph’s bones is noted (see Genesis 50:24,25). The death of the high priest, Eleazar son of Aaron, is also noted. A generation is dying off - the generation of those who were familiar with God’s mighty deeds in bringing Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. The torch is being passed to a new generation - those who are IN the land. Will they remain faithful to the covenant? Will they serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Joshua? That question will be answered in Judges, the next book!

***“Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the Lord which He had done for Israel” (24:31).***