

~ Joshua's Challenge to Israel ~

Text: Joshua 24

Theme: The choice to serve God should not be taken lightly but once made should be committed to whole-heartedly.

Intro:

1. Joshua chapter 24 is the closing chapter of the book and contains one of the most memorable verses in the whole Bible, verse 15.
 - a. This is the second time that Joshua has gathered all the tribes together at Shechem and it is the second time that Joshua gave them a warning against serving other gods.
 - b. The previous chapter concluded with a warning about the consequences of serving other gods, and in chapter 24, we find Joshua wants to force Israel to make a concrete decision about which God they will serve.
 - i. I think Joshua knew just how prone Israel would be to going and serving other gods.
2. This chapter has two main sections in it from verse 1-28 followed by a brief summary of Joshua's death and Joseph's burial. Here are the two main sections we will look at today.
 - I. Israel's Past Blessings (Vs 1-13)
 - II. Israel's Present Responsibilities (Vs 14-28)

Main:

- I. **Israel's Past Blessings** (Vs 1-13)
 - A. Israel's Blessings Outside of Canaan (Vs 1-7)
 1. From Abraham to Jacob (Vs 1-4)
 - a. God called Abraham from among the heathens
 - i. Joshua traces Israel's history all the way back to the father of Abraham, whose name was Terah.
 - Joshua pointed out that Terah worshipped the false gods that were popular in Ur of the Chaldees at the time.
 - He was not a worshipper of the one true God.
 - ii. When God called Abram, he told Abram to leave Ur, to leave his kindred, and to leave his father's house. (Gen 12:1-3)
 - The reason Abram had to leave it all behind was because he had to separate himself from the worship

of the heathen gods and serve only the one true God, Jehovah.

- b. God called Abraham before he was a nation
 - i. Israel was, and still is, proud to be the descendants of Abraham, as though that makes them inherited recipients of Abraham's acceptance with God.
 - ii. Joshua pointed out that Abraham was chosen by God before he had any prospects of become a great nation and there is nothing special about being a descendant of Abraham apart from the worship of the God of Abraham.
 - iii. It was God's faithfulness to Abraham that made Israel the nation that they had become.

2. From Egypt to Canaan (Vs 4-7)

- a. Jacob's children went down into Egypt.
 - i. It was Jacob whose name was changed to Israel and from where we get the name by which the nation is now known, because they are the children of Israel.
 - ii. Jacob went down to Egypt during the famine in the days of Joseph, who had been used by God to save both Egypt and Israel from starvation.
- b. When Egypt made slaves out of the Israelites, God sent Moses and Aaron to command Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.
 - i. When he wouldn't let the Israelites go, God sent plagues on Egypt culminating in the death of the firstborn child in every household in Egypt.
 - ii. When Pharaoh finally let Israel go, he changed his mind and pursued them to the crossing of the Red Sea where God placed a darkness between Pharaoh and Israel until all Israel had crossed the sea, then Pharaoh pursued Israel through the Red Sea and God caused the waters to fall back into place on Pharaoh's chariots, killing Pharaoh and his men and saving Israel.
 - iii. This was followed by 40 years of wandering in the wilderness because of Israel's unbelief when it came time to enter the Promised Land. Despite that, God continued to preserve Israel in the wilderness, providing them with food and water and keeping their clothing from wearing out.

B. Israel's Blessings Entering Canaan (Vs 8-13)

- 1. God delivered their enemies into their hand and even fought for them. (Vs 7-12)
 - a. Upon leaving the wilderness, Israel came up on the east side of the Jordan river into the land of the Amorites.

- i. This is the area that the tribe of Ruben, Gad, and half of Manasseh now occupied east of Jordan.
 - ii. God destroyed the Amorites who were living in the land at the time and gave it to Israel.
 - iii. Balak was the king of Moab which was on the southern end of the land east of Jordan. When he wanted to destroy Israel, he hired a man named Balaam to curse Israel, but when Balaam tried to curse Israel God made him bless Israel instead.
 - b. Then Israel crossed the Jordan river, which God parted for them so they could walk across on dry land.
 - i. The crossing of Jordan was followed by a number of important battles and Joshua lists the enemies God delivered into Israel's hand.
 - The Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites.
 - ii. In verse 12 Joshua tells us that God sent hornets, a type of wasp, before Israel to drive their enemies, the two kings of the Amorites, out from before them.
 - He then makes it clear that their victory was not with their sword or with their bow but by the hand of Almighty God.
2. God gave them a land and cities that were already prepared for them to live in. (Vs 13)
- a. The land they received had already been cultivated and prepared for farming and raising herds of cattle and flocks of sheep.
 - i. It was a land that they hadn't even needed to work on in order to begin putting it to use.
 - ii. Even their oliveyards and vineyards were planted by the previous owners, but Israel reaped the rewards of another nation's labours.
 - b. They receive cities that were already built up and established so they could move in right away.
 - i. Much of the hard work of establishing themselves in a new land would have been in the need to search out the best locations to build cities, working out where water sources were and what the best land would be and what were the most strategic locations, and then gathering the resources to build the cities, but all of that was already done and the cities already built.
 - ii. I don't know about you, but I figure I wouldn't be too worried about the layout of my home if I got it for free and

didn't have to pay anything for it. I think I'd be really grateful and just make it work for me.

- c. Joshua uses all of these things to make Israel consider what God has done for them and whether or not he has been a good God for them.
 - i. As Joshua prepares to give them the challenge that we see in the next few verses, Joshua wants them to have a proper think about things and see just how blessed they have been while God was with them.

II. **Israel's Present Responsibilities** (Vs 14-27)

A. Fear the Lord, and Serve Him (Vs 14-15)

1. Joshua now commands Israel to fear God and serve only him.
 - a. The basis for this injunction to fear the Lord is Israel's understanding of God's goodness to them.
 - i. Joshua is basically saying, "Having considered all those things that God has done for you, from your father Abraham all the way down to today, make the choice today that you will serve the God of your father Abraham."
 - b. Joshua commands Israel to both fear and serve God.
 - i. To fear means, "to morally revere; to honour and respect."
 - It is in this sphere of moral reverence and respect that we ought to approach our service for God.
 - A right understanding of God's holiness will go a long way to producing this kind of fear of God which will help us to serve God in the right spirit and with the right attitude.
 - ii. "To serve God means to fear Him, obey Him, and worship only Him. It means to love Him and fix your heart upon Him, obeying Him because you want to and not because you have to."¹
 - This was a choice that was being presented to Israel. Even though God had done so much for Israel already, they weren't under some sort of obligation to continue serving God, but that would have to be a choice they made from the heart.
 - It is the same for us. We have been given so much because of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ through salvation, but the choice is still ours whether or not we will serve God from day to day or serve self.
2. Joshua challenges Israel to consider Jehovah vs other gods.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [Be Strong](#), "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 154.

- a. Does it seem evil to serve God?
 - i. The word “evil” here means, “to spoil, to make good for nothing, that is bad physically, socially, and morally.”
 - ii. I like to think that Joshua is being a little bit facetious here as he challenges Israel to choose their God. He has just explained to them all the reasons why Jehovah is a great and loving God and then he says, “But, if after considering all of these things, you still think serving Jehovah is somehow bad for you, either morally, physically, or socially, then choose you another god to serve and see if you can find a better one among all the other gods.”
 - iii. Look around you, Israel, and consider the gods that your fathers served before they learned of Jehovah, think about the gods of the Egyptians which Jehovah put to shame through the plagues he sent, and compare Jehovah to the gods of the nations you have conquered and in whose land you now dwell (what good did their gods do them?) and choose which god you will serve.
- b. The obvious choice for Israel is to serve Jehovah.
 - i. That Joshua openly planted his flag in Jehovah’s camp was a statement about what Joshua thought the right choice was for the nation.
 - iii. “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD – *Jehovah*” This phrase has been framed and hung in many homes in which the phrase was proved untrue by the behaviour of the inhabitants. Serving the Lord is not mere acknowledgement of his deity.
 - Again, “To serve God means to fear Him, obey Him, and worship only Him. It means to love Him and fix your heart upon Him, obeying Him because you want to and not because you have to.”²
- c. We need Christians today who will be like Joshua and plant their flag in the camp of Jehovah, the God of the Bible.
 - i. We all know that it really takes courage to publicly and boldly identify yourself as a Christian and to say, “I believe in the God of the Bible.”
 - ii. Why is it that you can take Buddha as your god and people say nothing, you can have money or real-estate as your god and people commend you, you can have

² Warren W. Wiersbe, [Be Strong](#), “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 154.

almost any other thing as your god and nobody cares but the minute you claim to have Jehovah as your god people get upset about it?

- That is because the Bible claims that there is no other god beside Jehovah. He is god alone and all other gods are false gods and that is too exclusive for most people.
- On top of that, the God of the Bible has some clear moral expectations of people that society has rejected, and it makes them angry to be told that they are wicked people.
- We need to make our stand as Christians clear anyway, even when we might offend someone.

B. Forsake Your Idols (Vs 16-27)

1. The people declared their willingness to serve Jehovah (Vs 16-22)

- a. Upon hearing Joshua's challenge, the people immediately declare that they will join him in serving Jehovah.
 - i. You and I might have thought, "Job done. We got the people to commit to serving God." But Joshua wasn't content to leave it there because he knows just how fickle people really are.
 - ii. It is easy for someone to say today that they will follow Christ but then change their mind by tomorrow and go on serving themselves.
 - That is one reason why people can sit under the preaching and be soundly convicted about something and decide to make a change, but by the time they get home from church they've decided not to do anything about it at all.
- b. Joshua told them that they couldn't serve God, because of their fickleness.
 - i. Joshua said, "He is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins."
 - What Joshua was saying is, if you make a commitment to serve God today, then there is no going back. And should you change your mind in years to come and go to serve other gods, Jehovah will not take it lightly and just let you go but He will punish you because he is a jealous and a holy God.
 - If they forsook the LORD and served other gods, then the LORD would turn against them, rather than continuing to bless them, and he would bring hurt upon them.

- Once again, we see that God's actions toward man are often in direct response to man's heart toward God.
- ii. The people chose the LORD saying, "Nay, but we will serve the LORD".
 - In effect they were saying to Joshua, no Joshua, we will be faithful to serve God and so your concerns about us going to worship other gods are no necessary.
- 2. Joshua commanded them to forsake their false gods (Vs 23-27)
 - a. Joshua's response to the people was to command them to get rid of their idols.
 - i. It almost seems stunning that Israel was already struggling with idolatry.
 - "*The strange gods which are among you*; those idols which you either brought out of Egypt, or have taken in Canaan, which I have too much reason to believe that some of you, contrary to God's command, do keep, whether for the preciousness of the matter, or rather for some secret inclination to superstition and idolatry."³
 - ii. The first step toward a true commitment to serving God was to get rid of the idols they were already hanging on to.
 - As Christians, we generally have to look at the Trojan horse already in our lives before we worry about the enemies outside. It is the idols that we have already begun entertaining that need to be dealt with before we can truly serve God.
 - iii. Joshua took a few steps to try and make sure the people would follow through on this decision.
 - He made a covenant with the people. In other words, he made them promise to keep their word.
 - He set them a statute and ordinance. In other words, he made it a matter of lawful obedience. Anyone who broke this ordinance would be breaking the law of the land.
 - Joshua wrote it all down in the book of the law of God.
 - Joshua made a memorial out of stone.
 - b. Israel failed to keep their end of the bargain.

³ Matthew Poole, [*Annotations upon the Holy Bible*](#), vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 455.

- i. Even though Joshua went to great lengths to emphasise the importance of this decision and the benefits of serving Jehovah, Israel continued to be drawn into idolatry for many years to come.
 - **The gods of the heathens - 1 Samuel 7:3** *“And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”*
 - **The calves of the northern kingdom - Hosea 8:5** *“Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces.”*
- ii. Be careful, because our hearts are so quickly turned away from wholly following God. We can be on fire for God one week and back-slidden the next.
- iii. Beware, “Lest ye deny your God.”

Closing Statements (Vs 28-33)

- I. The chapter concludes with a few historical observations
 - A. Joshua's Death
 - 1. Shortly after the events described at the end of this book, Joshua died.
 - a. Joshua finished his life well, still following the LORD his God and still exhorting Israel to do the same.
 - i. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance, in mount Ephraim.
 - ii. Joshua's burial in the land is the final step in the spiritual journey.
 - They left Egypt, which represents the believer who trusts in Christ and leaves the world behind.
 - They finally came up out of the wilderness, which represents the Christian who is spiritually defeated.
 - They conquered the land of Canaan, which represents the victorious Christian life.
 - Joshua died in his inheritance, representing his faithfulness until death and his victory even in death.
 - b. Almost ominously we are told, Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived

Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel.

- i. As long as they had their godly leaders there, Israel continued to serve Jehovah, but it didn't take long after the death of those leaders for Israel to go back to their idols.

B. Josephs Burial

1. Lastly, we see the burial of the bones of Joseph within the Promised land, and the death of Eleazar, Aaron's son.
 - a. The burial of the bones of Joseph was actually a testament to the faith that Joseph had in God.
 - i. Even while Israel was in Egypt, Joseph had eyes of faith to see that one day God would give them the land he had promised and Joseph wanted his bones to be carried into that land and buried there as a testimony of God's faithfulness.

Conclusion:

1. Who do you serve? Are you serving self and sinful pleasures or are you serving God? Think of all the ways in which God has blessed you and ask yourself if those other gods are worth anything when compared to Jehovah.
2. Make the commitment today, *"As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."*