

## Joshua 24 – “Choose This Day Whom You Will Serve”

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In Chapter 23 Joshua had rallied the leaders together to share some final words of exhortation with them. They were reminded of God’s goodness and faithfulness all through their journeys. They were told to hold fast to the Lord their God, to be strong in carrying out all that they were commanded in the Book of the Law of Moses. They were reminded that God was the One who fought for them, and all He has said has come to pass.

Now in Chapter 24 Joshua brings all of Israel together to share his last words of exhortation to all the people of Israel.

Last words can be very telling of what a person has lived for and where they are at at the moment of death.

- Louis B Mayer (film producer): “Nothing matters. Nothing matters.”
- Winston Churchill (Statesman): “I’m bored with it all.”
- Vincent van Gogh (painter): “The sadness will last forever.”
- PT Barnum: “How were the receipts today at Madison Square Gardens?”
- Leonardo da Vinci: “I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.”
- Frank Sinatra: “I’m losing.”

These are all rather some depressing thoughts and reveals the vain life many lived. But contrast that with some more encouraging last words of those who lived with hope in God.

- George Washington: ‘It is well, I die hard, but I am not afraid to go.’
- John Quincy Adams: “This is the last of earth! I am content.”
- DL Moody: “Earth is receding; heaven is approaching. This is my crowning day!”
- Mother Theresa: “Jesus I love you, Jesus I love you.”

What do you think your last words would be, or what would you like to communicate with your last breath?

- The Apostle Paul’s last words were certainly what I’d like to aspire to: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Joshua communicates a steadfast faith in the Lord and desire to serve the Lord. And in these last words he encourages all of Israel to follow his example.

In this farewell address, Joshua does what he did in Chapter 23 and shares what God has done, revealing His goodness and faithfulness.

Joshua then shares what Israel should do. The appropriate response to God's faithfulness is to remain faithful to Him ourselves.

## 1. Recalling God's Faithfulness – 24:1-13

**24:1-3 - *Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and called for the elders of Israel, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God. <sup>2</sup> And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods. <sup>3</sup> Then I took your father Abraham from the other side of the River, led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.***

Joshua brings all of Israel together at Shechem. Shechem was an important city in the history of Israel. It was the first place Abraham came to when he arrived in Canaan and he built an altar there after the Lord promised him that this land would be inherited by his descendants. Jacob also built an altar here. Shechem was an important place in the eyes of the Israelites.

And Joshua opens up reminding Israel that they were really nothing special. They were not chosen because they were so good or godly. In fact, Joshua reminds them that Abraham (the father of the Israelites) was chosen while he was on the other side of the river. That's speaking of the Euphrates River. Abraham was in Mesopotamia. He was serving other gods, he was in idol country. He was not seeking God. But God came and called him. Abraham coming into the land and becoming the father of a mighty nation was not about Abraham's prowess, it was all of God's grace.

Israel was not chosen because they were a special nation, they were a special nation because they were chosen of God. God was the one that came to Abraham and called him to a special role and relationship with Him.

Israel had nothing to boast in and of themselves. They should have seen the extreme privilege they had as being chosen of God and it should have motivated them to remain obedient to Him.

- Do we hold that same humble disposition? Do we recognize how blessed we are that God has chosen us and saved us? That He reached out to us

when we were far from Him? We certainly didn't deserve any of His blessing. We weren't worthy of salvation.

- John Newton expressed it well when he wrote: “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!”
- God's grace is huge! We didn't deserve it, couldn't earn it. He freely gives us salvation based on His good work toward us.
- Now this reveals the great sovereignty of God. Yes He chooses, but we must respond and receive. This is the great doctrines of election and free will which we'll get into a bit more later.
- Warren Wiersbe writes: “One of my professors in seminary used to say, “Try to explain election and you may lose your mind, but explain it away and you may lose your soul.” No matter what “school” of theology we belong to, all of us must admit that *God takes the first step in our salvation.*” <sup>1</sup>

Revealing that God led Abraham out of idol country is a repeated theme throughout this chapter as Joshua reminds the people that these things are to remain in the past. Idol worship is not to be tolerated anymore and the people are to commit themselves to worshipping and serving the one true God.

**...and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.**

Joshua then reminds the nation that after God led Abraham, He gave him Isaac. Isaac was such a foreshadowing of the promised Messiah that would come into the world through the line of Abraham. He was truly *given* by God. Abraham was 100 years old, Sarah was 90. This was a miraculously born child, just as Jesus would be. Isaac would be taken up to Mt. Moriah to be sacrificed, to where Abraham walked him for three days seeing him as dead. Isaac went willingly and then God delivered him, just as Jesus went willingly to Mt. Moriah where He was crucified, but three days later God delivered Him, raising Him up from the grave.

- The Bible is so incredibly and divinely put together to where you see God's fingerprints all through this wonderful story of redemption.

**24:4-5 - To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. To Esau I gave the mountains of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. <sup>5</sup> Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out.**

<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong* (p. 151). Victor Books.

It's interesting that Abraham's first son was Ishmael, but he was a product of the flesh, and God did not recognize him as the firstborn and rightful heir to the promises of God. God raised up Isaac. Then with Isaac, God once again chose the younger over the older in choosing Jacob over Esau. This was the divine sovereignty of God.

Esau became the father of the Edomites and Jacob became the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. God had Jacob and his family move down into Egypt which was a fitting place for a blossoming nation to grow. Things began well for the nation of Israel under Joseph's influence. The Egyptians didn't want much to do with these Hebrew people and so they could grow strong as a nation without the worldly influences of other nations.

But when a Pharaoh came onto the scene that did not remember Joseph, and began to see the strength of the Israelites, they began to be mistreated and put to hard labour. But this was needed to bring Israel out of Egypt. They had dwelt there for over 400 years and would have stayed there if they weren't being driven out. And God was giving the people of Canaan all that time to repent as well. So God then raised up Moses and Aaron to lead Israel out of their predicament and problems.

Keep in mind the amount of times it's emphasized in this passage that it's God who did the work: ***Also I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to what I did among them. Afterward I brought you out.*** God's the One that saves and He's the One that we praise.

***24:6-7 - 'Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. 7 So they cried out to the Lord; and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, brought the sea upon them, and covered them. And your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. Then you dwelt in the wilderness a long time.'***

God just sort of runs through the journey out of Egypt and what He did for Israel in such a nonchalant way. But all this has been so hugely significant and powerful. The plagues were incredible with what He did. And the fact that He split the Sea to allow Israel to walk through on dry ground and have it close up over Israel's enemies. That's significant.

And catch what God says here in vs. 7, they all **saw** the wonders that God did in Egypt and in delivering them out of Egypt. It was clear that God saved them powerfully and miraculously. But then they **dwelt in the wilderness a long time**. Why did that happen? Unbelief! They spied out the land of Canaan, the land God said He was giving them, and they saw giants, they saw problems, and they would not enter in. They disobeyed the Lord (Joshua 5:6).

The sad thing is their eyes saw all the great things God did in Egypt. But then they saw all that was awaiting them in Canaan, and they chose to let those obstacles outweigh the greater things God already did and said He would do.

- Similarly, we all have the choice of what we're going to focus on. We can all dwell on obstacles and problems in front of us, and when we do we quickly lose faith. And look at where unbelief leads – a wilderness. It's a barren wasteland that dries us up. This is why we're commanded to walk by faith and not by sight. God works in ways that go beyond the natural. That's typically what we focus on – the natural. But walk by faith.
- We have the benefit of already seeing the incredible things God has done. Don't limit Him. Don't settle in the wasteland when God wants to bring you into the land flowing with milk and honey. Live by faith. Our God is a big God who's already demonstrated His power to us.

**24:8 - *And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, who dwelt on the other side of the Jordan, and they fought with you. But I gave them into your hand, that you might possess their land, and I destroyed them from before you.***

Israel faced a lot of battles before coming into the land. But in every one God was more than faithful. As we saw last week in **Joshua 23:3**, "*You have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the Lord your God is He who has fought for you.*"

God brought them out of Egypt and He will bring them into the Promised land.

**24:9-10 - *Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose to make war against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you. <sup>10</sup> But I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he continued to bless you. So I delivered you out of his hand.***

Again, this was such a humorous account. Balak tried to hire Balaam to curse Israel that the Moabites could easily defeat Israel. But God said no. Every time Balaam tried to curse Israel, he blessed her instead. And it had no effect on Israel.



What man intended for evil, God uses for good (Genesis 50:20).

**24:11 - *Then you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho. And the men of Jericho fought against you—also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I delivered them into your hand.***

Israel came into the land with some pretty big seemingly, insurmountable odds. Look at all these nations they have to go against? But remember, God isn't expecting us to take them down, He's simply calling us to trust Him to take them down. God says, ***I delivered them into your hand.***

It's interesting that we read ***the men of Jericho fought against you***, but that's not what I recall. No clearer display is there that God fought for Israel than in causing the walls of Jericho to come down on its inhabitants. Israel gained a decisive victory that day but it was clearly a divine victory.

**24:12-13 - *I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, also the two kings of the Amorites, but not with your sword or with your bow. <sup>13</sup> I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.***

There's been varied ideas as to what God meant by the hornet. It could be that he sent literal hornets against some of these nations that drove them out. I mean if I had a swarm of hornets coming against me, I'd be running, I'll tell you that. Some have thought this was a figurative way of speaking of other armies that were sent into Canaan to drive out some of the people before Israel even set foot in there (Deut 7:20).

Some have wondered if this just spoke of a prevalent feeling of fear that swept over the inhabitants of Canaan like a swarm of hornets, to where they were completely demoralized and struck with terror even before Israel came in (Joshua 2:9).

Either way you interpret it, the lesson for us is that God was behind it and orchestrating it. They didn't even need to use their sword or bow. God brought the victory, God graciously brought Israel in and provided all they needed.

This is clarified in vs. 13, they didn't work for the land to build it up, they didn't build cities or plant vineyards. Yet, it's all there. God has provided and blessed them.

- He's done the same for us in blessing us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.
- **Ephesians 1:3–6**, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, <sup>4</sup> just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, <sup>5</sup> having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved."*
- This is absolutely wonderful that we have received this in Christ without doing anything to earn it or deserve it. We may feel unworthy of it (and we are) but this is the incredible grace of God.

We can beat ourselves up and sort of disqualify ourselves from receiving these things when we blow it and sin. But catch something here. In this whole review of Israel's history to this point, none of their sin is mentioned. Oh, I've mentioned it a lot because it helps me feel better with my shortcomings, but God doesn't mention it.

He says in Jeremiah that under the new covenant He remembers our sin no more (Jeremiah 31:34).

- **Psalms 103:12**, *"As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."*
- Hallelujah for that! We may allow our sins to get in the way of receiving what God has for us, but when we are in Christ, that sin is gone!

So Joshua now calls Israel to a place of faithfulness to be sure they remain in God's blessing.

## 2. Calling Israel to Faithfulness – 24:14-33

**24:14 - "Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord!"**

It is a healthy thing to have a right fear of the Lord. This is not so much about being afraid of God as it is to revere God. It's our desire to honour Him knowing that He is God. Our fear is more centered on not wanting to come up short of what He truly deserves in our devotion and praise.

So Joshua is calling the nation of Israel to serve Him in ***sincerity and in truth***.

These go hand in hand.

- In the N.T. that term sincerity spoke of being without wax. It meant that when you bought a bust or a sculpture in the market, it was made with pure marble. There was nothing added to it or blended in that would make it less pure. It wasn't compromised.
- God doesn't want us to have other things in our life that may compromise us. He doesn't want us worshipping Him and then thinking in the back of our mind about getting back home to our idols.
- He wants us serving Him and Him alone. Do so in truth. Don't be saying one thing and then living out something different.

**24:15 - *And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.***"

And now Joshua gives Israel a choice. There's always a choice in serving the Lord. He doesn't want a bunch of robots worshipping Him because there's no other option or because He has elected us apart from our will.

There's no authentic and loving relationship if there is no choice. That's why God put a tree in the garden that was restricted for Adam and Eve to partake of. God wanted their obedience to be a matter of their choice. And if there is no choice, you can't have a true loving relationship.

So Joshua says, ***choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve***. What a great call he gives, and it's a call we all need to answer ourselves. Who are you serving today? Everybody is going to serve something or someone. Nobody is exempt from this.

- Bob Dylan had this one right: "You're gonna have to serve somebody. Well it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody." There's no neutral ground here.
- People think the way to freedom and happiness is to unshackle ourselves from all authority and be no one's slave. But the path to true happiness is finding the right master.
- Joshua doesn't give an option to say these other gods are worthy options. He gives it to say if you're not worshipping Yahweh, then you're going to end up worshipping the false gods around you. Worship is innate within us.



And sadly we've seen throughout Israel's history that they fell prey to this sort of thing. They began to worship other gods breaking the very first commandment God gave them. He knew this was going to be a temptation.

But Joshua steps up and steps out with a bold proclamation, one that should be written over the front door of every believer's house (at least firmly written in our hearts). ***As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.***

Joshua is being a great leader and he's leading by example. Men need to step up and take responsibility as the leader and priest of their home. Their heart should be to be an example of one who is serving the Lord and modeling that before the whole family. That what goes on in the home is a demonstration of worship to the Lord. Lead your family in this.

Too often parents are more concerned with just keeping their kids happy and so they compromise in areas that should be non-negotiables. But don't surrender any area to the devil, the world, or idols. Stand your ground. And don't just speak it, live it! Live it personally, publicly, and live it when no one is watching. Because that's doing so in sincerity and truth!

***24:16-18 - So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; <sup>17</sup> for the Lord our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. <sup>18</sup> And the Lord drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God."***

The people respond positively, and rightfully so. They've seen God's goodness and that there's no better alternative than a life devoted to God.

***24:19-20 - But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. <sup>20</sup> If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."***

This sounds a little against the flow of what's just been said. But this wasn't Joshua trying to get all the glory in serving God alone. He wasn't persuading the people to not serve God, but was rather discouraging them from overconfidence

and making a light commitment to the Lord. Joshua wants them to see clearly that there are repercussions for sin and for breaking this covenant.

- Remember, Israel is under a covenant that promised curses for disobedience.

“Joshua was not talking about permissibility. He was talking about the nature of God and the nature of this people. God would not tolerate unholiness and insincerity because he is a holy and jealous God. Holiness is the essence of who God is. God is wholly other, righteous and just. He is wholly other, merciful and mighty. He is wholly other, forgiving and punishing. God is set apart from everything unholy, because he cannot tolerate sin. Joshua aims to prevent Israel from making an emotionally charged decision. Joshua knows how fickle Israel has been through the years. He is telling their story, His story, as a crucial part of his-story, and their past failure to obey and their failure to rid themselves of idols do not bode well for their future obedience.”<sup>2</sup>

**24:21-28 - *And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the Lord!”<sup>22</sup> So Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves, to serve Him.” And they said, “We are witnesses!”<sup>23</sup> “Now therefore,” he said, “put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel.”<sup>24</sup> And the people said to Joshua, “The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!”<sup>25</sup> So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.<sup>26</sup> Then 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.<sup>27</sup> And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God.”<sup>28</sup> So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance.***

Joshua sets up a stone to be a reminder of this day and the commitments made. It’s personified as hearing all these words, but it’s said to show Israel that everything has been put on the table. They’ve all heard of God’s faithfulness, but they’ve also heard of the consequences of their unfaithfulness. God has called us to be faithful to Him, and it’s in keeping our loyalty to Him that we truly experience the life and blessings He has for us.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, R., Jr. (2023). *Exalting Jesus in Joshua* (D. Platt, D. L. Akin, & T. Merida, Eds.; p. 242). Holman Reference.

**24:29-33 - 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. <sup>30</sup> And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. <sup>31</sup> Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel. <sup>32</sup> The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph. <sup>33</sup> And Eleazar the son of Aaron died. They buried him in a hill belonging to Phinehas his son, which was given to him in the mountains of Ephraim.**

As Israel had a faithful leader, they remained faithful. But this sort of sets the stage for what happens in the book of Judges. That Israel began to be unfaithful, they began to compromise with the world, and they were led into slavery.

It's sad how fickle our hearts can be. The only solution is to be committed to serving the Lord and Him alone.