

Joshua

November 29, 2009

Joshua 23-24

I. Joshua's Farewells

There is a lot of similarity between chapters 23 and 24. The first is apparently to leaders of Israel, while the second one appears to be to all of Israel. Many of the thoughts of these two chapters are found elsewhere in Joshua through the leaders. The biggest difference between chapters 23 and 24 is the covenant-renewal ceremony in 24.

II. Farewell to the Leaders: Josh 23

Is the "long time" after the events of chapters 22, 13, or since the Israelites came into the land? There is no way to tell. The reference to Joshua's age is often a reference to someone who is very old, getting close to death. Joshua dies when he was 110 years old (24:29). At least 25 years or so might have elapsed since the end of the battle in chapter 11.

Almost all this chapter is a reminder of earlier comments in Joshua, and also earlier comments from Deuteronomy, including:

- 4 Inheritance
- 5 Lord drive them out
- 6 Be very strong (see 1:7-8)
- 7 don't associate with the Canaanites
- 10 Great fighters
- 11 Love

"Ally" in verse 12 is a word play in Hebrew with "hold fast" in verse 8 as both are the same word in Hebrew. A contrast is being made as to whether the Israelites will hold fast to God or hold fast to the people of the nations.

Spread throughout this chapter, we see references to the curses and blessings. We saw the curses and blessings at the end of Chapter 8, also in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Interestingly, it is a simple formula. If we trust God, good will happen; if we do not trust God, evil will happen. So, since the equation is so simple, why is it difficult to trust in God?

III. Setting: Josh 22:9-12

24:1

1Then 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.

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The "presented themselves before God" implies a formality that was also not in the earlier chapter.

Shechem was a very important city in the Judges/kingdom years of Israel. (Also during the times of the Jacob and of Jesus). Abraham had built the first altar there:

Gen 12:6-7

6 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. 7 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.

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IV. History Review: Josh 24:2-14

In this section, we see a history review of the Israelite nation starting with Abraham and emphasizing the struggle with false gods. Throughout this section, we see the graciousness of God as He continues to work with the people despite their detours into sin and rebellion, the following after of other gods.

Throughout the OT and even into the NT (e.g. Acts 7 and Hebrews 11), we see these reviews of Israel's history. What value do such ancient events have for us today?

In verse 14, The Israelites are not to follow the gods of Mesopotamia or the gods of Egypt. Initially, that will be easy for them since they are far away. More importantly are the gods of Canaan as noted in verse 15 who are still all around the Israelites. As we see the post-Joshua history unfold, we will see that false worship of Canaanite gods will eventually pave the way by desensitizing the Israelites to false worship of other gods, including most notably those of Mesopotamia.

V. Choose This Day: Josh 24:15

Josh 24:15

15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

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Usually, in the OT, it is God choosing the Israelites; the Israelites are ordered to obey, and their "choice" of God becomes implicit in their obedience. This is one of the few times that an *explicit* "choice" is given to the Israelites. Throughout the OT, a similar choice is generally not offered; exceptions would include Elijah and the Baals.

As noted above, it will initially be the Baals and Astartes, the false gods of Amorites/Canaan, which will cause the Israelites to fail initially, but later the gods of Mesopotamia would become even a bigger problem.

Many would see this as the most important verse of the entire book of Joshua. It sets the stage for the rest of Israelite history.

As Christians today, we can really only assure that we follow God closely. While we might have a heart for others and might point out the way to the true God, we can ultimately only assure that we serve God fully ourselves. Indeed, even in our own families, we cannot force them to believe as each person must come to face individually with God. All we can do is to dedicate ourselves fully to the Lord, work hard to obey Him fully, and trust in Him to do the rest.

VI. Response of the People: Josh. 24:16-18

Josh 24:16-18

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 fathers 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."

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The response is entirely appropriate by the people. Unfortunately, as we have already seen in the individual tribes taking their inheritance, the Israelites will not do a good job on delivering on their words. The book of Judges, next in line in history, will show this inability even more.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to be “committed” to God while in church, but much harder when in the world? Why is this?

VII. Final Exhortations: Josh 24:19-28

We see Joshua giving his last words to help the rest of the nation to continue following God. The people all are quick and enthusiastically to respond that they will do all that the LORD commands and that they will not follow false gods.

Joshua points out that God is jealous. Why does he say this at this point?

Overall, Joshua gives an emphasis pep talk to the Israelites. Undoubtedly some were positively affected by it. Ultimately, the nation does not follow through.

Concerning verse 26, the tree and stone are probably referenced in:

Judg 9:6

6 Then all the citizens of Shechem and Beth Millo gathered beside the great tree at the pillar in Shechem to crown Abimelech king.

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Stones, such as this one, are apparently powerful reminders for the Israelites. We saw the stones by the Jordan early in the book and also the twelve stones

on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 24. We do not know what the “Book of the Law of God” is. It might have been an addition to the five books of Moses.

VIII. Last Times: Josh 24:29-33

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. **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.

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We have a parallel to this passage in Judges:

Judg 2:6-9

6 After Joshua had dismissed the Israelites, they went to take possession of the land, each to his own inheritance. **7** The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel. **8** Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. **9** And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

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Verses 29-33 form a short summary as the end for the book. Like a lot of this book, we see a parallel with Moses' life. This ending follows the same general format as the end of Moses' life in Deuteronomy 34.

Joshua's inheritance was in the mountains or hill country of Ephraim. The appearance is that he was very satisfied at the time of his death, and that God was very satisfied with his life.

Notice also the change in High Priest with the death of Eleazar and the ascension of Phinehas. (NOTE: The best known Gibeah is in the tribe of Benjamin. It is in the hills that are an extension of the “hill country of Ephraim” into Benjamin. So, Ephraim might refer to the name of the hill country as opposed to the tribe.)

IX. Question Concerning “Choice”

If people have a choice, is it ok for people to be punished by God if they do not choose correctly? If people do not have a choice, is it right for God to punish them if they go the wrong way?

If confused on this answer, please read Romans 1:18-32. The eventual descent of the Israelites into idolatry and then into total wickedness is clearly painted by Paul in this section as common to all idolatry.