

We have come to the conclusion of the book of Joshua.

It began “after the death of Moses”

when Joshua is commissioned by God to lead the people into the land:

“Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you.”

It ends with the death of Joshua,

after God fulfilled all that he had promised.

In chapters 1-5 we heard of the crossing of the Jordan,  
how God brought his people into the Land of Promise.

In chapters 6-12 we heard of the conquest of the land,  
how God went before Israel—through Joshua—and delivered their enemies into their hands.

In chapters 13-21 we heard of the division of the inheritance,  
how God gave to each tribe an inheritance in the land.

Joshua ends, then, with two stories.

The first, a story of how Israel nearly went to war against the eastern tribes,  
because they built an altar.

But the altar, it turned out, was innocent—an altar of witness,  
to remind Israel that the LORD, he is God.

But finally, there are two gatherings recounted in Joshua 23-24.

First, as we saw last time, Joshua summoned the elders and judges of Israel

### **Introduction: Joshua and the Elders (ch 23)**

We heard last time how God had done what he promised.

“When the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies”

Joshua spoke to a generation of elders that had seen with their eyes  
the great works of the LORD:

“You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations  
for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you.”

Because now they are the ones who must lead.

As Moses had appointed Joshua,  
now Joshua is handing over the mantle,  
but this time not to one man,  
but to the ordinary rulers of the people.

In a similar manner, Jesus will appoint the apostles,  
who will hand over their mantle,  
not to one, but to all the elders of the church.

And Joshua reminds the elders of their motivation for faithful leadership:  
“The LORD your God will push [your enemies] back before you  
and drive them out of your sight.  
And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you.”  
As usual, the indicative precedes the imperative.  
Because God will go before you,  
Because God will destroy your enemies before you,  
“Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do  
all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses”  
As Moses had spoken to him, so now Joshua speaks to the elders of Israel.

We would do well to heed Joshua’s warning.  
Not one word has failed of all that God has promised.  
God has given our great Joshua success,  
and he has triumphed over his enemies and entered his rest.  
Now we are called to live as a holy nation, a kingdom of priests.

And this starts with the elders.

But it includes the whole people of God as well.  
After speaking with the elders,  
Joshua calls all Israel together at Shechem.  
This is where the tabernacle had been set up,  
where the ark of the covenant was established.

And we are told in verse 1, that “they presented themselves before God.”

### **1. The history of the covenant (24:1-13)**

*24 Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God.*

Moses had told them to present themselves before God three times a year,  
at the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

And so they come.  
Again the focus is on the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel –  
namely, those who are responsible for leading and directing the people of God.

This is a common feature of covenant-making:  
legal representatives enter into binding agreements for those who come after them!

Are you required to abide by the Constitution of the United States?  
How is that fair?  
You didn’t have any say in drafting it!

(It's probably a better document for none of us having anything to do with it!)

But if you are born in the United States (or to parents who are US citizens),  
then you are legally required to abide by the Constitution of the United States –  
unless you formally “opt out” by renouncing your citizenship.

God's covenant works in the same way.

<sup>2</sup> *And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,*

Notice the way that Joshua starts:

“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel.”

Joshua puts all this in the voice of the LORD himself.

You'll notice that in verse 14, Joshua switches back into his own voice –  
but without hint of transition.

The effect of this is to identify the voice of Joshua and the voice of God,  
foreshadowing our Lord Jesus (the greater Joshua)  
who will say “the Father and I are one”!

And Joshua recounts the story of salvation thus far:

*‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates,<sup>[b]</sup> Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.*

Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldees –  
one of the ancient cities of Mesopotamia (beyond the Euphrates).

The story begins with Abraham's fathers serving other gods “beyond the Euphrates.”

In verse 15 the story will end with the question,  
will you serve the LORD?  
or the gods that your fathers served beyond the River?

Remember where you come from!  
Remember how far you have come!

Remember how (v3):

<sup>3</sup> *Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River<sup>[c]</sup> and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac.*

It sounds odd at first:

“I made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac.”

I gave him *one* son who would inherit the promise!

But think around the corners of the story!

Abraham had 318 trained servant warriors.

What happened to them? (and their families?)

What happened to the *thousands* of people who came in contact with the patriarchs?

Many of whom were part of their “people”?

<sup>4</sup> *And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.*

Israel has taken possession of Canaan –

but they are reminded that *God himself* gave Esau the hill country of Seir.

Think back to the story of Jacob and Esau.

We often think of Jacob as tricking Esau out of the inheritance.

But what did Jacob actually get?

And for that matter – what did Jacob *want* in the first place?

Jacob starts off by obtaining the birthright for a pot of stew.

Esau sold that pretty easily!

But then, when Isaac is about to bless Esau –

Rebecca, their mother, gets worried,

because God had promised that the older would serve the younger.

Isaac doesn't see things clearly.

His eyes are dim.

But Rebecca – and Jacob –

see that the blessing of Abraham is the thing that really matters!

But why is Jacob so set on getting this blessing?

After all, God told Abraham that his seed would be slaves for 400 years

before they would inherit the land.

Jacob wants a blessing that will have no practical usefulness in his lifetime!

Esau is miffed at the whole affair –

not because he cares tuppence about the blessing of Abraham! –

but because he still wanted the double portion of Isaac's stuff!

But when you read Genesis carefully,  
you realize that Esau wound up with a *triple* portion of Isaac's stuff!  
Esau got the double portion of the firstborn – and Jacob's portion as well!

When Jacob returns from Haran,  
he returns with great wealth.  
We never see him obtaining the double portion that he was entitled to.  
Having received the blessing of Isaac – the blessing of Abraham –  
he doesn't need the stuff!

Esau clears out – taking all the stuff with him to Seir!  
He has what he wanted: Abraham's stuff.  
Jacob has what he wanted: Abraham's blessing!

And so at the end of his life, Jacob will go down to Egypt –  
where Jacob *blessed* Pharaoh – and the blessing of Abraham came even to Egypt!

But then there arose a Pharaoh who did not remember Joseph (or Jacob)!

<sup>5</sup> *And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out.*

Now we start getting into the edges of living memory in Joshua's day!  
The Exodus was 70-80 years ago!  
Many of the greybeards had been children in Egypt –  
and would remember the death of the firstborn!

<sup>6</sup> *“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. <sup>7</sup> And when they cried to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt.*

I brought your fathers out of Egypt,  
*and you came to the sea.*

You were there!

Your eyes saw.

*And you lived in the wilderness a long time.*

That's a nice way of putting it!  
40 years in the wilderness – because of the rebellion of their fathers!

We often read the Bible in a way that leaves out the trauma and misery of the ordinary lives that were lived in those days.

The disruption – the chaos that characterized the plagues and the Exodus – and then spending your *whole childhood* – your teen years – in the wilderness.

You got married in a desert nomad camp.  
I suppose it was better than slavery in Egypt...

But it was a hard life – in a dry and weary land.

But now we come to the events that all the elders would remember (v8):

*<sup>8</sup> Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan.*

This was less than 30 years ago – just before the death of Moses!

*They fought with you, and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you.*

This is the land distributed to the 2 ½ tribes on the east side of the Jordan.

And in verse 9-10, he recounts the story of Balaam:

*<sup>9</sup> Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, <sup>10</sup> but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand.*

There are inscriptions in the Transjordan region telling about Balaam, the great wizard – the great prophet who knew the secret mysteries of the gods!

But as the book of Numbers tells us, Balaam was humbled by his donkey!  
And instead of cursing Israel – he blessed Israel!

And then verses 11-13 recite the events of the book of Joshua.

*<sup>11</sup> And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand. <sup>12</sup> And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow.*

Israel was sent as the angel of death to bring judgment against these nations.

The Conquest was a picture of the final judgment –  
an intrusion of the last days into the middle of history.

God had warned humanity in the Flood –  
but no one noticed.  
God had sent fire from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah –  
but the problem is that if God just destroys *everyone*,  
then there is no one left to repent!

So after demonstrating repeatedly that the wages of sin is death,  
God chose to make an example of *one* place –  
Canaan –  
in order to show all nations what his Kingdom looks like.

(sneak peak at coming attractions: Israel doesn't do so well...)

But Joshua's language reminds us of what Moses had said in Deuteronomy.  
Moses had said that this would happen.

*<sup>13</sup> I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant. '*

From Abraham to Joshua,  
the story of salvation is beginning to show God's purposes for history.

This recitation of God's covenant faithfulness is designed to remind the people of God  
what God has done for them.  
And because of what God has done,  
Israel is now called to live faithfully before God.

Think of Ephesians 2:8-10.

*<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Remember the gracious, mighty deeds of God –  
and therefore walk in the good works that God had prepared for you!

And that's where Joshua turns in v14-18

## **2. The Renewal of the Covenant (24:14-18)**

*<sup>14</sup> "Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> And if it is evil in*

*your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond 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.”*

Notice that in verse 14, Joshua tells them to ‘put away’  
the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt.

In other words, there are people in Israel in Joshua’s day  
who are worshiping the gods of Babylon and the gods of Egypt.

There is a certain measure of mockery here.

Really.

You are worshiping the gods from beyond the River?

Did the gods of Babylon give Abraham an inheritance?!

And don’t get me started on the “gods of the Amorites  
*in whose land you dwell*”!

How well did the gods of Amorites protect the Amorites?

*From you?!!!*

Don’t waste my time!

If you are going to worship them, then get on with it –  
but count me out!

As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

If all Israel will rebel – at least there will be one household that is faithful!

We read 1 Kings 18 a couple weeks ago in the morning –  
Elijah at Mt Carmel vs. the prophets of Baal.

Elijah had said, “How long will you go limping between two opinions?”  
Elijah remembered Joshua at Shechem.

And in Elijah’s day the people also responded well – for a day!

But in Elijah’s day, there was no renewal of the covenant!

In Elijah’s day, the people shouted “the LORD, he is God!” –

They killed the prophets of Baal –

but then – that very night –

Jezebel puts a price on Elijah’s head –

there is no renewal of the covenant...

and Elijah goes back *all the way to Mt. Horeb – the mountain of God* –  
and tells God that the people of Israel “have forsaken your covenant”  
and that he alone is left of all the prophets of God.

We often hear that God rebukes Elijah –  
but the text does not say that!

Elijah's complaint is right!

Perhaps Elijah had thought that he was to be a prophet like Moses –  
renewing the covenant and restoring the people of God!

But at Mt. Horeb Elijah discovers that his mission instead  
is to anoint the three destroyers who will bring an end to the house of Ahab.

Israel has become Canaan.

And the land of the Canaan must be conquered!

And so Elisha – the one whose name means “God saves” –  
very much like Joshua (Yahweh saves) –

Elisha will enter the promised land following the same route as Joshua –  
across the Jordan on dry land... (2 Kings 2)  
to Gilgal, to Jericho, and to Bethel.

That's where the story is going...

but for now, the people respond well!

*<sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, <sup>17</sup> for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. <sup>18</sup> And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.”*

They understand that they serve God because of who he is and what he has done.

Some theologians have suggested that we should love God purely for his own sake.

They suggest that it shouldn't matter whether God has done anything for us,  
we should love him because of who he is.

The problem is that you cannot separate who God is from what he has done.

And especially *you can't!!*

He made you!

So apart from what he has done – you wouldn't even exist!

In order to love God purely for his own sake,  
you would have to be God!

(And of course, that is precisely how the Father, the Son, and the Spirit  
love one another in the Holy Trinity!!)

But for us –

We love him *because* he loved us first.

### 3. The Witnesses of the Covenant (24:19-28)

But Joshua is not content with this profession of covenant loyalty.

(Verse 19-20)

<sup>19</sup> *But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or 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 having done you good.”*

What does this mean?

*He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins?!!*

It’s true.

You are not able to serve the LORD – for he is a holy God.  
He will *not* forgive you.

If you forsake the LORD – if you serve foreign gods –  
if you turn away from following the LORD –  
then he won’t forgive you!

But – pastor! – what about “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins!!!”????

Oh – sure – but you left out the key phrase!!

*If we confess our sins* – he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins!

He is merciful.

He is slow to anger.

He forgives iniquity and transgression and sin.

But if you don’t repent?

If you don’t turn away from your sin?

Then *no*, he will not forgive your sins.

He forgives *everyone* who repents!

If Israel had repented on Mt Carmel –

and if they had turned from the Baals to follow the LORD –  
then he would have forgiven them.

If *you repent*,

then God will forgive you!

You may be thinking, “but I’m not sure I like what God says I should do.”

That’s not the issue.

The question is *who is God?*

If he is God – then you need to trust him.  
Because he made you – and he knows what he’s doing!

So when the people reply,  
<sup>21</sup> *And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.”*

(v22)  
<sup>22</sup> *Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”* <sup>23</sup> *He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD, the 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 put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem.* <sup>26</sup> *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 terebinth 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 against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.”* <sup>28</sup> *So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.*

Why does Joshua do this?

Because there must be witnesses to the covenant.  
This is a regular part of ancient covenants.  
There must be witnesses that can be appealed to in a future breach of contract.

There are two witnesses given here.

First, “you yourselves are witnesses.”  
The people of Israel are witnesses  
(and their testimony – written down in this book – bears witness).

When it says that Joshua “wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God” –  
that probably suggests that at least a portion of the book of Joshua  
was written that day (at least the substance of chapter 24).

But the second witness is this large stone (v26),  
“for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us:”

The eastern tribes had established “Ed”–the altar of witness by the Jordan.  
Now Joshua sets up another “Ed”–the stone of witness at Shechem,  
as a witness that Israel is a witness against themselves.

The function of the witness is to testify if the people go astray.

### **Conclusion: The Deaths of Joshua and Eleazar (24:29-33)**

<sup>29</sup> *After these things Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being 110 years old.*

<sup>30</sup> *And they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash.*

<sup>31</sup> *Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel.*

<sup>32</sup> *As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money.<sup>[d]</sup> It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph.*

<sup>33</sup> *And Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah, the town of Phinehas his son, which had been given him in the hill country of Ephraim.*

Finally we hear of two deaths, sandwiched around a burial.

The first death is that of Joshua at the age of 110.

We are told that Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua –  
and all the days of the elders who outlived him –  
those who had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel.

The second death is the death of Eleazar, the son of Aaron – the chief priest.

He was buried at Gibeah of Ephraim – the town of Phinehas –  
(not the Gibeah in Benjamin – though if you know the last story in the book of Judges,  
the connection should sound ominous to you...)

But in between is the burial of Joseph's bones (v32).

I'm beginning to see all sorts of connections between Joshua and Kings...

Kings will have two boys raised from the dead –  
sandwiched around the ascension of Elijah.

The symbolism plainly showing Israel's hope to be the resurrection of the dead!!

The bones of Joseph play a similar role here at the end of Joshua.

Joseph had made his people promise that they would bring his bones back to the Land  
and bury him in the promised land.

He understood that his future – our future – depends on the resurrection of the dead!