

## Lesson 13 - 22 January 2012

### Joshua's Farewell Address

#### Lesson Scope: Joshua Chapters 23 and 24

#### Lesson Focus

Israel was securely settled in the land of promise. God had given them rest from the enemy. As an aged leader, Joshua now called his people together. He rehearsed the outline of their history and highlighted the faithfulness of God. He did not attempt to magnify his own key role in the conquest of Canaan. Joshua now called their attention to the unfinished work of possessing the land. Together they had broken the power of the Canaanite nations. Now each tribe faced the task of driving out the remaining enemies in its own territory.

A major concern of Joshua was that Israel would become accustomed to the Canaanites yet dwelling in the land. This could lead to unwholesome relationships that would draw them into idolatry. Joshua emphasized that just as God had fulfilled His promise to aid them, so He would judge them as He had promised if they transgressed His commandments. Joshua issued a stirring call to faithfulness, and he motivated the people by his clearly expressed personal commitment.

God uses people to proclaim and perpetuate truth. Emphasize to your class the force of personal loyalty and steadfastness. Joshua's verbal testimony inspired such a positive response from his people because of the life he had lived. Call attention as well to the frailty of the generational links in the chain of faith. Each succeeding generation needs to make the faith their own.

Every generation faces the challenge "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." The only proper choice is to obey the Lord and to serve Him in sincerity and in truth.

**Lesson Aim:** To discover principles for maintaining and promoting truth.

**Theme Verse:** 1 Timothy 4:16. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

## Lesson Text:

### Challenge

*Joshua 23:2-3* <sup>2</sup> And Joshua called for all Israel, *and* for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old *and* stricken in age: <sup>3</sup> And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God *is* he that hath fought for you.

*Joshua 23:6-8* <sup>6</sup> Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom *to* the right hand or *to* the left; <sup>7</sup> That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear *by them*, neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them: <sup>8</sup> But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day.

*Joshua 23:11-13* <sup>11</sup> Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God. <sup>12</sup> Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, *even* these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: <sup>13</sup> Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out *any of* these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

### Commitment

*Joshua 24:14-16* <sup>14</sup> Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. <sup>15</sup> And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. <sup>16</sup> And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods;

*Joshua 24:19-26* <sup>19</sup> And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he *is* an holy God; he *is* a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. <sup>20</sup> If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good. <sup>21</sup> And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will

serve the LORD. <sup>22</sup> And Joshua said unto the people, Ye *are* witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, *We are* witnesses. <sup>23</sup> Now therefore put away, *said he*, the strange gods which *are* among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel. <sup>24</sup> And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. <sup>25</sup> So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. <sup>26</sup> And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that *was* by the sanctuary of the LORD.

*Joshua 24:31* <sup>31</sup> And 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.

## Questions for Study

### Challenge

1. Why was even the mention of the name of the Canaanite gods forbidden?
2. What is involved in cleaving to the Lord?
3. How does the passing of generations potentially imperil the continuity of faith?
4. What current pressures might cause us to turn aside from following God?

### Commitment

5. Why did Joshua seemingly attempt to discourage the people's desire to serve God?
6. What is the implication of Joshua 24:31?
7. How can jealousy be an attribute of a holy God?
8. What is the value of a public commitment to God?

## Analyzing the Passage

Chapter 23 records a meeting Joshua held with the leaders of Israel. Chapter 24 is a separate assembly of the people at Shechem. At this place God had told Abraham that his descendents would inherit the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:6-7). Also at this location, at the beginning of the conquest of Canaan, Joshua had built an altar and inscribed it with the Law of Moses. Idolatry presented a constant snare to God's people (Joshua 24:14-15). The

"other side of the flood" refers to the ancestral lands of Abraham to the east of the Euphrates River. Rachel had brought these gods along to Canaan when Jacob and his family fled from Laban. The sensual worship practices of the Canaanites would be a new allurements to the Israelites. Joshua challenged the people to worship God in sincerity. This is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 17:1, when God told Abraham, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." This was a call to wholehearted commitment.

By declaring that Israel was unable to serve such a holy God, Joshua attempted to elicit from the people a commitment from the heart, not just the head (Joshua 24:19). Yes, they knew that God had worked mightily on their behalf in the past and had brought them into this good land. But were they committed to meeting the requirements of this holy God to ensure His blessing in the future? Verse 23 gets to the point of Joshua's reprimand. Israel was not free from idolatry.

The public declaration of loyalty to God would stand as a condemning witness in the event of future departure from God. (Joshua 24:22).

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Challenge**

1. Truth is maintained as faithful elders teach and inspire the younger (Joshua 23:2-3). When Joshua called together the leaders in Israel, he spoke of God's faithfulness in the conquest of Canaan. In doing so, he sought to motivate them to trust in God for future victory. Elderly leaders today inspire the younger with their accounts of God's faithfulness throughout their lifetime. The wisdom accumulated in their walk with God is relevant even to new issues that arise.

2. Truth is maintained when God's workings are rightfully acknowledged (Joshua 23:3). The memory of God's faithfulness in the past is an aid to maintaining the truth. God's people have always been interested in history. We do not believe that blind forces have shaped the history of mankind. No, we see God at work accomplishing His purposes.

3. Maintaining truth requires unswerving fidelity (23:6-8). Because truth is eternal, we may unconditionally commit ourselves to upholding it. The requirements of truth do not change with man's fluctuating philosophies. An absolute faith in God and the infallibility of His Word is essential to maintaining allegiance to the truth. But fidelity to the truth means more than an intellectual assent. Courage is required to live out the truth in daily life.

This is finally the proof of our belief.

4. Truth is maintained by distinct separation from the world and its evil (Joshua 23:7-8). God's people are in the world, but not of the world. Jesus reminded us that we cannot serve two masters. As we adhere to the directives of God's Word, we will be separate from the world. We need to transact business with the world, but we may not imbibe its philosophies and values. The world may appear benign in our tolerant culture. Society may express appreciation for some of our practices. But make no mistake—the world is in the grip of Satan, and it faces certain doom.

5. A love for truth and a love for God are inseparable (Joshua 23:11). God is the source of all truth. There is no possibility of knowing the truth apart from God's revelation to us. All who are committed to the truth will love God. Those who seek for wisdom apart from God are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

#### **Commitment**

6. We promote truth by challenging one another to faithfulness (Joshua 24:14-15). Joshua challenged the people to consciously decide whom they would serve, and he led the way by firmly stating his personal commitment to serve the Lord. Each of us has an influence on others. The decisions we make and the level of our commitment will be noticed. An unswerving loyalty to truth in daily life is the best way to promote truth.

7. Parents and leaders must combine firm conviction with diligent teaching to maintain truth (Joshua 24:15). Firm conviction will enable a leader to live the truth and promote it rather than attempting to lead on the basis of opinion polls. Fidelity in a leader's life is vital to promoting the truth. Teaching that comes as a result of personal Christian experience is powerful.

8. Understanding the nature of God is essential for maintaining and promoting truth (Joshua 24:19). Joshua warned the people that God would not accept a halfhearted commitment. All of humanity belongs to God by right of creation. His chosen people also belong to Him by right of redemption. It is an affront to God to give any recognition to another god. The jealousy of God will not permit any divided loyalties. Our acceptance of the truth must be unconditional.

9. The consequences of failure give us incentive to maintain and promote truth (Joshua 24:20). The Israelites were well aware what had happened when they faced the enemy without God's blessing. We also see the con-

sequences of failing to maintain the truth. Those who do not appreciate practical applications of Biblical principles will adopt the world's practices. Eventually they will lose the understanding of those principles as well. In the end they will be found fighting against God.

10. Life's covenants are an aid to maintaining truth (Joshua 24:25). Joshua warned the Israelites that the covenant they were making would be a witness against them. And so it is for us. Public commitments we make etch a line to which we will be held accountable in the future. Baptized Christians have vowed eternal allegiance to Christ. Many also have vowed faithfulness for life to a marriage partner. God will hold us accountable for these vows. The knowledge that others have witnessed our vows should provide additional motivation to be faithful.

### **Important Teachings**

1. Truth is maintained as faithful elders teach and inspire the younger (Joshua 23:2-3).
2. Truth is maintained when God's workings are rightfully acknowledged (Joshua 23:3).
3. Maintaining truth requires unswerving fidelity (Joshua 23:6-8).
4. Truth is maintained by distinct separation from the world and its evil (Joshua 23:7-8).
5. A love for truth and a love for God are inseparable (Joshua 23:11).
6. We promote truth by challenging one another to faithfulness (Joshua 24:14-15).
7. Parents and leaders must combine firm conviction with diligent teaching to maintain truth (Joshua 24:15).
8. Understanding the nature of God is essential for maintaining and promoting truth (Joshua 24:19).
9. The consequences of failure give us incentive to maintain and promote truth (Joshua 24:20).
10. Life's covenants are an aid to maintaining truth (Joshua 24:25).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Why was even the mention of the name of the Canaanite gods forbidden?

To mention the name of these gods was to give recognition to the myth of their existence. Verse 7 shows the progression that would result from fa-

miliarity with the false gods of the land; the Israelites would swear by them, serve them, and bow down to them. God knew how powerful the lure of sensual worship would prove to Israel. Thus even the mention of the names of these gods was forbidden.

2. What is involved in cleaving to the Lord?

The word cleave means "to cling to or adhere to." This implies an intensity of purpose and commitment. All other allegiances must be subordinated to the demands of our God. It means an unquestioning loyalty even in the face of difficulty and trial.

3. How does the passing of generations potentially imperil the continuity of faith?

Each generation is confronted with the question of allegiance. The continuity of faith can be broken by a wrong choice. The choice that is made is largely influenced by the teaching and conviction of the preceding generation. A generational gap can develop and impede communication. Deuteronomy 6 gives valuable instruction for passing on the faith.

4. What current pressures might cause us to turn aside from following God?

Those who depart from practical Biblical obedience may deride us as legalistic and reactionary. The love of ease and prosperity has the potential to cause us to compromise truth for convenience. Successful business ventures sometimes move people toward the world. Information technology increasingly threatens to erase the line between us and the world. Readily available government subsidies beckon to us. Loyalty to Christ will necessitate some financially disadvantageous decisions.

5. Why did Joshua seemingly attempt to discourage the people's desire to serve God?

He feared that they were not wholehearted in their commitment. They had a history of mixed worship of God and idols. He sought to challenge them to a full and lasting commitment to God.

6. What is the implication of Joshua 24:31?

After the generation of leaders that had personally known Joshua died, the children of Israel departed from the Lord. This is a warning that the faith cannot be preserved as an artifact. It must be actively embraced by each succeeding generation.

7. How can jealousy be an attribute of a holy God? God as Creator and Re-

deemer has the undisputed right to man's allegiance. God's jealousy is never petty or suspicious; it is for the blessing of man.

8. What is the value of a public commitment to God?

A public commitment to faithfulness can reinforce a person's resolve. Others who have witnessed our vow will hold us accountable. It is required for salvation. "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

This lesson should represent the heartthrob of every godly leader, teacher, and parent. Each generation must choose for themselves. But their choice is greatly influenced by the values and commitment of the preceding generation. We face the pressure to acculturate just as the Israelites did. May we with Joshua staunchly declare, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

### **Research Guide**

1. Read the comments in Halley's Bible Handbook regarding the Canaanites. This section follows his comments on Joshua 24.
2. Compare the parting challenge of Joshua with that of the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 4. Note how both leaders express concern about the tendency to apostatize. Both were concerned that there would be faithful leaders to carry on the work.