

# Joshua

Lesson 19

## Chapter 24

### IV. The Great Farewell of Joshua's Command (24:1-28)

#### A. A Summary for Israel (24:1-13)

##### 1. Beyond the River – Abraham (24:1-2)

The book of Joshua started with the great beginning of Joshua's command. Following was the great command of Joshua's command. Then came the great encouragement of Joshua's command. Here we arrive at the last chapter of the book with the great farewell of Joshua's command. Late in his life, he called a meeting of all the tribes at Shechem. Once everyone was there, Joshua did not begin with what he wanted to tell the people; he started with what the LORD wanted to tell the people. The LORD began with the history of Israel's ancestors who lived beyond the River, and he focused on Abraham. Chapter 24, verse 1. *"Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel and for their heads and their judges and their officers; and they presented themselves before God."* <sup>2</sup> Joshua said to all the people, *"Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers lived beyond the River, namely, Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.'" (24:1-2)*

The words of the LORD should have been especially disturbing to the nation as they listened that day. The LORD started the story back across the River Euphrates. He does not mention the name of the town, but we know from the Book of Genesis that it was called *Ur of Chaldea*. The first name mentioned is *"Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods."* The LORD proclaims that Terah, along with his sons Abraham and Nahor, served other gods. You and I might gloss over this statement, but it is extremely important to the context of the future of the Nation of Israel. The LORD warned Israel to *have no other gods before Him* in the first of the Ten Commandments. Throughout the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the same is said with the turn of every chapter. The warning came with a promise of great trials and tribulations if anyone in the nation worshiped other gods. In the last three months with Moses, the nation saw the sin of some of Israel with the worship of false gods at Peor. Had it not been for Phinehas, the LORD would have destroyed the entire nation, and Israel would have never received the Promised Land as an inheritance. At the beginning of this book of Joshua, the LORD struck fear in the nation when Achan broke this command and took an idol from Jericho and buried it in the dirt in his tent. The LORD was serious then, and He is serious at this meeting with Joshua in Shechem. Remember, it was at Shechem, at the foot of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, that the nation repeated the blessings and curses of breaking the covenant and the commandments of the LORD. The people with Joshua knew the penalty of that sin.

Here we come to the problem with Terah. The town of *Ur of Chaldea* was just a few miles from the village of Babel, the place where the tower of Babel was built and from where the LORD scattered the nation across the world. Noah, and his son Shem, remained in the Babel area. Terah was a descendant of Shem. Noah and Shem, who rode on the Ark in the flood, both knew the LORD. Terah, Abraham, and Nahor lived in the same tribal area as Noah and Shem. Noah died when Terah was one hundred and thirty-three years old. No doubt, Terah knew Noah. Terah also knew Shem. Shem died after the death of Terah. Abraham was born during Shem's life. Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old. Shem did not die until Isaac was sixty years old, the year of

the birth of Jacob and Esau in 1988 BC. Terah was without excuse. How in the world did the descendants of Noah, who knew Noah, so quickly fall from the knowledge of the LORD and Savior of all creations and begin to worship the creations of their own hands? It happened fast.

The purpose of this word from the LORD is to warn the people of the Nation of Israel that they, too, can quickly turn from forgetting Him, forsake Him, and break His covenant and commandments.

## 2. Through Canaan Land – Abraham and Isaac (24:3)

From the LORD's trouble with Terah beyond the River, He moved Abraham and Isaac through Canaan Land. Verse 3. *“Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and led him through all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his descendants and gave him Isaac.”* (24:3)

Abraham did not leave the *Ur of Chaldea* on his own. The LORD took him from there and brought him to Canaan Land, where He blessed Abraham with many descendants and Isaac.

Most casual Bible readers know that Abraham gave birth to Ishmael with Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian maid. Then, when Ishmael was fourteen years old, Abraham, at age one hundred, had Isaac with Sarah. But what most Bible readers miss is recorded in Genesis 25:1-2. There we learn that after the death of Sarah, *“Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. <sup>2</sup>She bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah.”* Six more sons were born to Abraham, totaling eight. At the end of Abraham's life, he gave each of his sons a large gift and sent them east to establish their tribes and nations. The balance of Abraham's wealth was given to Isaac.

With all that we studied in Exodus and Numbers, you should recognize the name *Midian*. Mount Sinai is in the *land of Midian*. Moses' wife was a *Midianite*. Each of the sons of Abraham established great tribes of their own who are still living in the Arabian Peninsula.

## 3. In Seir and In Egypt – Esau and Jacob (24:4)

The LORD continues to trace the history through Isaac and his sons in Seir and Egypt – Esau and Jacob. Verse 4. *“To Isaac, I gave Jacob and Esau, and to Esau I gave Mount Seir to possess it; but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.”* (24:4)

Esau and Jacob were seventy-one years old when Jacob deceived Isaac for the blessing of the firstborn son. Jacob then ran to Haran on the Euphrates River. This important journey placed the feet of Jacob at the Euphrates River to fulfill the promise of the LORD that the Promised Land would stretch from the Euphrates River to the Nile, every place Jacob's foot had touched. Esau remained with Isaac in Beersheba and Hebron for twenty years until Jacob returned from Haran. At that time, Esau moved his entire large family to the Seir mountain range south of the Dead Sea. If you will remember, Esau, married when he was forty years of age. His family had been growing for sixty years. At the time, Jacob had only been growing his family for fourteen years; his family was small. Jacob continued to live with Isaac on his land. Jacob's son, Joseph, was born when he was ninety-one years of age. Joseph was sold into slavery when he was seventeen years of age. Isaac did not die until thirteen years later when Joseph was thirty years of age. Isaac lived his last thirteen years thinking that Joseph was dead. Nine years later, Joseph rose to second in command of all Egypt, and the famine came. Jacob and the rest of his sons moved to Egypt to be with Joseph. The LORD gave Esau the mountains of Seir. The LORD sent Jacob to Egypt.

## 4. Out of Egypt – Plagues and Red Sea (24:5-7a)

The descendants of Jacob spent four-hundred and thirty years to the day in Egypt. They entered Egypt on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan; they departed Egypt on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. Out of Egypt, they would go to safety, but not without the plagues and the Red Sea. Verse 5. *“Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt by what I did in its midst; and afterward I brought you out. <sup>6</sup>I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and Egypt pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. <sup>7</sup>But when they cried*

*out to the LORD, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them and covered them; and your own eyes saw what I did in Egypt.” (24:5-7a)*

Not all of those hearing this message saw the parting of the Red Sea; however, the leaders, the elders, the chiefs, the family heads had all seen it many years before as children and youth under the age of twenty years.

#### 5. In the Wilderness – Long Time (24:7b)

The LORD acknowledged that after crossing the Red Sea, the nation lived in the wilderness a long time. Verse 7b. *“And you lived in the wilderness for a long time.” (24:7b)*

The LORD did not see fit to expound on why the nation lived in the wilderness a long time. All those standing at Shechem knew the reason. They knew they were the reason it took so long. Had they been faithful to the LORD when the twelve spies returned, the Promised Land would have been their thirty-eight years earlier than it was, and all their parents would have enjoyed it too. But their parents sinned against the LORD, and He judged them by extending the time in the wilderness until everyone twenty years and older had died and was buried in the sands outside the Promised Land.

#### 6. At the Plains of Moab – Amorites and Balaam (24:8-10)

The LORD continues to state that He brought the people of the nation to the Plains of Moab, where they would encounter the Amorites and Balaam. Verse 8. *“Then I brought you into the land of the Amorites who lived beyond the Jordan, and they fought with you; and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land when I destroyed them before you.<sup>9</sup> Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel, and he sent and summoned Balaam the son of Beor to curse you.<sup>10</sup> But I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I delivered you from his hand.” (24:8-10)*

After defeating the Amorites, as seen in Numbers 21:21-35, Balak, the king of Moab, a cousin nation for the Israelites through Abraham’s nephew Lot, called for Balaam to curse Israel in Numbers 22 – 24. We have all heard the story of Balaam and his talking donkey, which is part of Balaam’s attempt to curse Israel. The LORD would not let Balaam curse Israel; instead, the LORD made Balaam bless Israel. However, the LORD still punished Balaam for his original intent. In Joshua 13:22, we learned that the LORD did deliver Balaam into the hands of Israel and it says, *“The sons of Israel also killed Balaam the son of Beor, the diviner, with the sword among the rest of their slain.”*

#### 7. Across the Jordan River – Jericho and the ...ities (24:11-12)

Then the LORD allowed Israel to go across the Jordan River on dry ground and take the city of Jericho and all the people of the ...ities! You will understand when we read verse 11. *“You crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho; and the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Girgashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. Thus I gave them into your hand.<sup>12</sup> Then I sent the hornet before you and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow.” (24:11-12)*

Notice what the LORD did to defeat these tribal ...ities. He *“sent the hornet before you, and it drove out the two kings of the Amorites from before you, but not by your sword or your bow.”*

We see this same promise in Exodus. *“I will send hornets ahead of you so that they will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you.” (Exodus 23:28)*. It is also in Deuteronomy, spoken by the LORD thirty-eight years after He first promised it. *“Moreover, the LORD your God will send the hornet against them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you perish.” (Deuteronomy 7:20)*

Wycliffe, in 1380 AD, translated the word “hornets” as *flies with venomous tongues*. Whatever, hornets or flies, with each battle, the LORD miraculously went before the Israelites in a visible way. What could be worse for the ...ities? It is challenging to deal with stinging insects and the threat of an oncoming army at the same time. These insects were the LORD’s divine equipment to defeat the

... ites for Israel. All Israel had to do was kill the afflicted and bury the dead. No real war labor is involved.

#### 8. In the Promised Land – The Tribal Gifts (24:13)

With the defeat of the ...ities came in the Promised Land, the tribal gifts. Verse 13. *“I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you have lived in them; you are eating of vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant.”* (24:13)

#### B. A Sermon for Israel (24:14-28)

##### 1. Joshua’s Question to Choose the God They Will Serve (24:14-18)

###### a) The People Challenged to Make a Choice Today (24:14-15)

The LORD gave the summary for Israel through Joshua. It was now time for Joshua to give a sermon for Israel. We will see Joshua’s question to choose the God they will serve. We hear in his message the people challenged to make a choice today. Verse 14. *“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”* <sup>15</sup> *If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”* (24:14-15)

Joshua’s challenge was to pick a god and stick with him. Be it Terah’s god, which he served beyond the River Euphrates, or Abraham’s God. However, you cannot serve both. The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Joshua will not allow you to serve any god besides Him. The people of the nation of Israel knew all the gods, but it was the LORD God Who had delivered them, fought for them, and gifted them the Promised Land. As for Joshua and his house, he chose the LORD God.

###### b) The People Unite to Make a Choice Today (24:16-18)

Continued, the people interrupted Joshua’s messages with an answer. The people will unite to make a choice today. Verse 16. *“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, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. <sup>18</sup> The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.”* (24:16-18)

In reality, it was a simple choice for the people standing with Joshua. They had seen the mighty work of the LORD in their lives. But what about their descendants? What about their children’s children who had not seen all the LORD had done for Israel? Joshua’s sermon comes with a warning.

##### 2. Joshua’s Prophecy to Choose the God They Will Serve (24:19-24)

###### a) The People Will Choose the Wrong God (24:19-20)

Consider Joshua’s prophecy to choose the God they will serve, knowing the people will choose the wrong god one day. Verse 19. *“Then Joshua said to the people, “You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression 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 He has done good to you.”* (24:19-20)

Moses knew the same thing about these people as Joshua did. The people of the nation of Israel had short memories and leaned toward sinful thoughts. Those thoughts would break the covenant and commandments of the LORD, and He would punish them for their sin.

###### b) The People Promise to Choose the Right God (24:21-24)

But we now hear the people promise to choose the right God. Verse 21. *“The people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.”* (24:21)

It is a promise by the people. Through Moses, the LORD warned about promises. They are always voluntary. Because they are voluntary, it is better not to make a promise than to break a promise. The people have just put themselves in jeopardy. They made a voluntary promise, and the LORD expects them to keep it always.

#### (1) Joshua's Verdict (24:22a)

So, we hear Joshua's verdict in verse 22a. *"Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him." (24:22a)*

No one at the meeting in Shechem was without excuse. They could look around to the hundreds of thousands of people there, and each one of them is a witness that all the others made the same choice. No one can deny it.

#### (2) Peoples' Verdict (24:22b)

But quickly, we hear the people's verdict in 22b. *"And they said, "We are witnesses." (24:22b)*

It is a second promise. The people have made it doubly worse if they ever forsake the LORD. He has two of their promises on the record, and His records are perfect.

#### (3) Joshua's Instruction (24:23)

And so, in response to the second promise, we hear Joshua's instruction. Verse 23. *"Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel." (24:23)*

Does Joshua know something we do not know? Did he hear some rumors or facts concerning the nation as they have lived for several years in the Promised Land? Did the LORD have Joshua call the meeting at Shechem because the people of the nation had already forsaken the LORD and begun to worship other gods? Did they have carved images of those gods in their midst? This verse cannot mean anything else but that some of the people of Israel had already forsaken the LORD and turned to graven images and other gods to worship.

#### (4) Peoples' Promise (24:24)

Then, in answer to Joshua's instruction, we hear the people's promise. Verse 24. *"The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice." (24:24)*

It is the third promise of the people on this same subject recorded in the perfect record of the LORD. All three are also in this record called the Book of Joshua for all the nation's people in the future to read.

### 3. Joshua's Covenant to Choose the God They Will Serve (24:25-28)

#### a) The Place of the Covenant (24:25)

As the sermon ends, we hear Joshua's covenant to choose the God they will serve, and he states the place of the covenant made that day. Verse 25. *"So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem." (24:25)*

The covenant of Joshua with the people in Shechem was not new. It is the same covenant promised at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:20. It is the same covenant promised in the Plains of Moab with Moses in Deuteronomy 29:1. It is the same covenant Joshua wrote on stone on Mount Ebal many years before in Joshua 8 and 9. However, the covenant was once again confirmed by the people with Joshua on that day in Shechem.

#### b) The Stone of the Covenant (24:26-28)

To make sure the people remembered, Joshua wrote the stone of the covenant in Shechem. Verse 26. *"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 oak that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. <sup>27</sup> Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, so that you do not deny your God."*

*“Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to his inheritance.” (24:26-28)*

Shechem was one of the six cities of refuge. As such, it was one of the forty-eight Levitical cities where a sanctuary was present in each city to receive offerings and tithes. This was not the Tent of Meeting or the Tabernacle complex; it was a different sanctuary. The word “sanctuary” simply means a holy place. All the Levitical cities had a holy place for the people to give offerings and tithes and where the priests could exercise their duties.

By the holy place in Shechem, Joshua wrote the whole covenant on a stone as a memorial to the renewed covenant between Israel and the LORD. Once Joshua was finished, he sent all the people to their homes in the Promised Land.

### C. A Conclusion for Israel (24:29-33)

#### 1. The Death and Burial of Joshua in Ephraim (24:29-30)

Finally, we come to a conclusion for Israel of Joshua’s testimony. It records the death and burial of Joshua in Ephraim. Verse 29. *“It came about 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 in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of Mount Gaash.” (24:29-30)*

We are thankful that the writer tells us of the age and burial place of Joshua. Moses’ body was buried by the LORD, and no one knows the exact location. However, with Joshua, his burial was different. A tomb has been built above his grave.



Tomb of Joshua

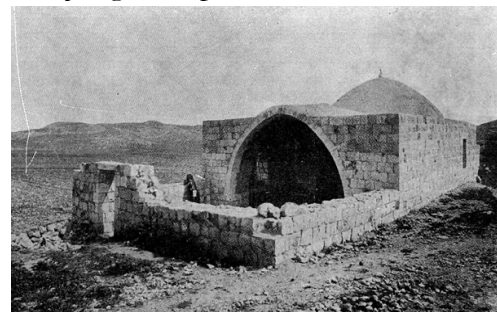
#### 2. The Faithfulness of Israel Under Joshua (24:31)

The writer then tells of the faithfulness of Israel under Joshua until all the elders who confirmed the covenant at Shechem had died. Verse 31. *“Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel.” (24:31)*

The keyword in this verse the word “elders.” The first meaning of the term is *an elderly person*. The second meaning of the term is *an elderly person with authority*. With the nation of Israel, not all older people had authority. The elders of the nation who had authority would be those who had acquired influence because of their natural abilities and wisdom. Because there were younger people who heard the covenant with Joshua at Shechem that day who would one day become an elder in their tribe, we can safely say the faithfulness of Israel lasted past the life of Joshua, but no more than about ten years. That would give time for the failure to rout out the remaining Canaanites. Israel begins its unfaithfulness at the end of this book and is proven with opening of Judges chapter 1 where they are rebuked by the LORD for the first time of sin in Judges chapter 2.

#### 3. The Burial of Joseph in Shechem (24:32)

Unfinished business still needed to be completed. It was the burial of Joseph in Shechem. Verse 32. *“Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph’s sons.” (24:32)*



Joseph's Tomb in Shechem

Upon leaving Egypt, the bones of Joseph were carried out in the casket he was placed in when he died in Egypt. The bones journeyed through the Red Sea crossing, remained at Mount Sinai for forty years,

and made the Jordan River crossing. The bones remained at Gilgal until the camp moved to Shiloh and were held there for more than five years until the land division occurred. The fields at Shechem became the property of the tribe of Ephraim upon the division, and the bones probably remained in Shiloh until Joshua released the camp to inhabit their new homes in their new inherited lands. Most likely, the bones of Joseph were buried at Shechem after the release of the tribes by Joshua. However, because this is written at the end of the book, after the meeting with Joshua in Shechem, the bones may have been held all that time at Shiloh and buried at the conclusion of the meeting after Joshua engraved the covenant on the stone in Shechem. Joseph's tomb is not a mystery. A tomb had been built over the grave of Joseph and can still be visited today.

#### 4. The Death and Burial of Eleazar in Ephraim (24:33)

Finally, the writer records the death and burial of Eleazar in Ephraim, the high priest who followed Aaron in the office. *“And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him at Gibeah of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the hill country of Ephraim.”* (24:33)

Eleazar became the high priest upon the death of Aaron about four months before the death of Moses. Eleazar was instrumental in helping Joshua divide the land for the inheritance of the tribes. As the high priest, his living quarters would have been in the vicinity on the east side of the Tabernacle complex no matter where it was situated. Upon the land division, the Tabernacle complex was stationed at Shiloh, where it would remain for many years. Shiloh was located in the tribal area of Ephraim between Shechem and Bethel. Because Shiloh was not a Levitical city, and because it was the home of Eleazar, he did not have a place donated to him for his family and burial. However, his son, Phinehas, did receive donated land in the Levitical city of Gibeah. All of Eleazar's family was there, and it was the appropriate place for Eleazar to be buried. Phinehas' descendants would always have a home in Gibeah as long as the people kept the covenant and commandment with the LORD. But when Israel breaks the covenant and the commandments of the LORD, Phinehas will lose his home when the LORD takes the Promised Land away from Israel in two phases. First, in the north in 722 BC by the Assyrians, and then, in the south in 586 BC by the Babylonians.

Before we leave the pages of this book, we must speak a eulogy about the man – Joshua. His first appearance came in the Exodus 17:9 when he was selected to be one of the spies to search out the Promised Land. In Numbers 13:16, we discover that his original name was *Hoshea* (salvation), but Moses changed his name *Joshua* (Jehovah is salvation). Upon return, he and Caleb voted to enter the land because they knew the LORD was with them. From then on, Joshua was the faithful and loyal servant of Moses. Until he is chosen and commissioned to be Moses' successor, not one unfaithful or derogatory word was ever recorded about him. In the book of Joshua, the character of Joshua continues just as it was when he was but a servant. The book does not record one unfaithful or derogatory word about Joshua until the day he died. He had chosen the LORD early in his life and he never strayed from that choice. Even in his last message to the nation he led for about fifty years, his message was *“As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”* We do not know about his life in Egypt. We do not know what he believed or worshipped in that sinful country. But we do know that once he met the LORD under Moses' direction, he never ceased from being devoted to the LORD God only. He served the LORD faithfully all the years that we know about Joshua. Can people say the same thing about you? If not, remember, Joshua probably started his journey with the LORD when he came out of sinful Egypt. That meant there was a beginning day for his change from his past life to his new life in the LORD. Today, can be the day you turn from your past life and enter your new life. Starting today, people can one day say, *“since that wonderful day in your life, for your house, you have served the LORD.”* Will you make that change today and begin serving the LORD today?