

Joshua Chapter 23: Joshua Recalls God's Faithfulness and Urges Israel to do Likewise

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INTRODUCTION

Joshua is at the end of his life. His final act as Israel's commander is to urge Israel to loyalty to the Covenant they made with God. Why? Because God has been loyal to them; He's fulfilled everything He promised. However, if Israel disobeys and pursues idolatry, God will fulfill the curses contained in the Covenant with as much vehemence as He fulfilled the blessings pertaining to the Land. As with Israel, God calls us to loyalty today. If we refuse to obey, we will reap the consequences.

ISRAEL'S HISTORY PRIOR TO THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

- God frees Israel from the land of Egypt (Ex. 12:29-41).
- God leads Israel to the Promise Land, but they refuse to enter (Num. 13:1-14:12).
- Israel is cursed to wander in the wilderness for 40yrs (Num. 14:20-35).
- Moses is not allowed to enter the Promise Land (Num. 20:5-12, 24; 27:14).
- Joshua is appointed by God to replace Moses (Num. 27:15-23; Deut. 31:14).
- God delivers two Amorite kings into Israel's hands. (Num. 21:21-35; Deut 2:24-3:10).
- God brings Israel back to the Promise Land (Num. 33:40-56).

JOSHUA CHAPTERS 1-11: *Conquest of the Promise Land*

Joshua Chapter 1: *Victory before Entering the Land*

Joshua Chapter 2: *The Two Spies Confirm God's Word about the Promise Land.*

Joshua Chapter 3 & 4: *The Parting of the Jordan River, Israel's Crossing, and the Stones of Remembrance*

Joshua Chapter 5: *A Tuning Point in Israel's History*

Joshua Chapter 6: *The Lord Delivers Jericho into Israel's Hands*

Joshua Chapter 7: *Israel's Sin and their Subsequent Defeat at Ai*

Joshua Chapter 8: *Israel's Victory Over Ai*

Joshua Chapter 9: *Failure to Seek the Lord's Counsel: Treaty with the Gibeonites*

Joshua Chapter 10: *"The Lord God of Israel Fought for Israel" (10:42)*

Joshua Chapter 11: *The Lord Fulfills His 600yr Promise Concerning the Land*

JOSHUA CHAPTERS 12-21: *The Division of the Promise Land*

The 12 tribes receive their Land: Reuben, Gad, Manasseh (East & West), Judah, Ephraim, Benjamin, Simeon, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan all get their individual portion of the Promise Land.

Joshua Chapter 22 *Civil War is Averted in Israel*

Joshua dismisses the 2 ½ tribes who've fulfilled their pledge to fight alongside their brethren. On their way home they build an altar, which is misinterpreted as idolatry. The 9 ½ tribes prepare for civil war and send a delegation to the 2 ½ tribes. The delegation discovers that the altar is not for idolatry, but a sign of unity for all 12 tribes.

Joshua Chapter 23: *Joshua Recalls God's Faithfulness and Urges Israel to do Likewise*

At the end of his life, Joshua Reminds Israel's Leaders of God's Faithfulness to His Covenant

23:1-5, Joshua knows that he doesn't have long to live; he's been leading this nation for 32yrs.¹ Like a patriarch who wants to ensure that his children remain on the right path, he reminds Israel's leaders² of God's faithfulness. By this time, Israel has enjoyed many years of peace in the Land, which is due to God's faithfulness in driving out the Canaanites (which He promised in the Covenant). Joshua wants the leadership to remember this and to know that God will continue driving out the nations that remain just as He promised.

In light of God's Faithfulness, Joshua Urges Israel's Leaders to Covenantal Loyalty

23:6-11, in light of God's faithfulness, Joshua urges Israel's leadership (three times) to remain faithful to the Covenant and he points to specific laws contained in the Covenant that deal with idolatry. Rather than chasing idolatry, they must continue clinging to God as they "have done to this day." Why should they cling to God and remain faithful? Because the Lord has been faithful to them in driving out the Canaanites. Thus, they must "love the Lord [their] God."

¹ Joshua was probably the same age as Caleb; they were both chosen at the same time, a leader among their tribe, to spy out the Land in Num. 13. Since Caleb was 85yrs old when Joshua divided the Land (Jos 14:10) Joshua would've been the same age. Since Joshua dies 25yrs later at age 110 (Jos 24:29) and led the nation in the 7yr conquest of the land, it means that he's been leading the nation for approximately 32yrs.

² Joshua calls for the leaders of Israel and not the entire nation as he does in 24:1-2—though this is similar wording, in 24:1-2 it's clear that the entire nation is called: Joshua "gathered all the tribes" and spoke to "all the people." And Joshua's got anywhere from a few thousand to approximately 262,000 leaders in front of him. We surmise this from the fact that the nation had 601,730 fighting men, Num. 26:51. When one factors in wives, children, and extended family, the nation was probably over 2 million people. Based on a 2 million population and Jethro's advice (Moses' father-in-law) of appointing judges over 1,000's, 100's, 50's, and 10's, Joshua has anywhere from a couple of thousand to approximately 262,000, i.e., 2,000 x 1,000, 20,000 x 100, 40,000 x 50, 200,000 x 10 = 262,000 judges appointed by Moses according to Jethro's advice.

If Israel breaks the Covenant, then God will use the Canaanite Nations to Drive them out of the Land

23:12-13, Joshua once again points to the Covenant, a law regarding intermarrying with the Canaanites, which will lead to idolatry (cf. Deut. 7:3-4). If Israel forsakes God and chases after the Canaanites, God will reverse His course of driving out the Canaanites that remain and use them to drive Israel out of the Land, i.e., to destroy Israel.

Joshua Reminds Israel's Leaders once again of God's Loyalty and Assures them of God's Wrath if they Break the Covenant

23:14-16, Joshua reminds them once again of his coming death.³ And for the third time he reminds the leadership of God's faithfulness to the Covenant (23:3-4, 9, and 14). God has fulfilled every word He promised. However, as good as God was in fulfilling the blessings of the Covenant, He will be just as good in fulfilling the curses of the Covenant (i.e., to destroy and uproot Israel from the Land) if they pursue idolatry.

CONCLUSION

Joshua three times reminds Israel's leaders of God's faithfulness to His Covenant and three times urges them to continue being faithful to God and His Covenant. He points back to all that God has done in conquering the Land for them and to the future conquering that God will do with the Canaanites that remain. However, if Israel's leaders pursue idolatry, then God will uproot Israel from the Land and they will perish. As awesome as God was in fulfilling the blessings of the Covenant, He will fulfill the curses of the Covenant and He will use the Canaanites to do it.

How does this relate to you today? God asks for your obedience, your covenantal loyalty and in return He will deliver you as He promised. But if you disobey, if you break the Covenant,⁴ you will reap its consequences, Pro. 29:1; Mtt. 7:24-27. It's not Karma that gets you; it's God's wrath, Rom. 1:18. Bad things happen to bad people because there are consequences for sin in God's universe.

³ "Going the way of all the earth" is an idiom which means that the individual is about to die, 1Kin 2:1-2.

⁴ God doesn't have a Covenant written in stone with us as He did with His nation Israel. However, God has given us many commands to obey. In Romans 12-16 alone there are 48 commands. These are not suggestions, but commands, i.e., as His children we are obligated to keep them. Not obeying them is tantamount to breaking His covenant.