

Joshua 24:1-33

As the book of Joshua comes to an end, Israel once again assembled at Shechem to hear Joshua rehearse their covenant history and, in light of that history, to call the nation to rededication and whole-hearted devotion to God.

Israel had a choice to make: would they continue to serve the Lord who had done so much for them, or would they follow and serve other gods?

Summary

Joshua 24:1–33 tells believers how to go on serving God and how to deepen our commitment to the Lord.

1. Rehearsed Covenant History vv. 1-13

Joshua gathered all the tribes to Shechem, where he surveyed Israel's history and summarized God's great acts to provide Israel with a redemptive basis upon which to make his subsequent appeal.

Joshua's summary of redemptive history begins with Israel's origins when God called Abraham to leave Ur and follow him. It then proceeds first, from Abraham's call to the exodus (**vv. 2-7**); secondly, Israel's time in the wilderness (**vv. 8-10**); thirdly, their experience in the land of Canaan (**vv. 11-13**).

Service to God includes obedience to his commands, a willingness to serve him and to worship him, honoring him with all of our actions and loving him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength (**Deut. 6:5; Josh. 22:5; 23:11; Matt. 22:37**).

Israel owed their existence to the gracious and saving interventions of God in history. God did not just make himself known in ages past; he also worked mightily and graciously for the recent and present generations: "I brought your fathers out" (**Josh 24:5**); I gave you a land (**Josh 24:13**).

Christians today are still part of that great spiritual heritage (**Rom 11:11-24**).

In Joshua's overview of Israel's covenant history, two points are clear: First, covenant history is the story of God's sovereign grace (**Gen 12:1-3; Mal 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13; Josh 24: 3, 4, 8, 11, 13**)

2. Recommitted Covenant Loyalty vv. 14-19

Having reconnected with our covenant history, we then need to recommit to our covenant loyalty.

The tone of Joshua's address makes a marked change with the words: 'Now therefore' (**24:14**). Israel stood at Shechem with a decision to make. Would they put away the gods that their fathers served beyond the river and the gods of Egypt from which they were delivered and serve the Lord? God's sovereign, saving grace calls for single-hearted service. Verses 14-28 is a dialogue between Joshua and Israel's representatives as he challenges them and they respond.

First, Joshua challenged the people to devote themselves whole-heartedly to the worship, obedience, and service of God.

He set out his challenge in a series of imperatives: fear the Lord, serve him, put away foreign gods, and, serve the Lord (**Josh 24:14**)

If this kind of devotion seemed wrong to them, then they can either serve the ancient gods of their fathers or the gods of the Amorites, both of which are bad choices.

Joshua then pledged his own devotion and loyalty to serve the Lord (**Josh 24:15**).

Secondly, how do the Israelites respond?

With a robust determination, they confirm their resolution to follow the Lord (**24:16**).

They also affirmed that the Lord is their God, who had redeemed them from the house of slavery to the new-found freedom of service (**Josh 24:17-18**).

The clear implication is that the gods of the fathers and the gods of Egypt had done nothing for them. The people determined that they would serve the God of Israel because he had done so much for them. They had experienced his saving grace, and whole-hearted service was the only right response they could make.

Service does not sound very liberating, but it is if you serve the right person.

You will serve either the Lord or an idol that you have made, but you have to serve someone, and if that someone is yourself, then you are a slave to your own self-seeking pleasure, and that is the worst bondage of all.

Thirdly, in response to Israel's affirmation, 'We will serve the LORD,' Joshua replied with a shocking retort, 'You are not able (**Josh 24:19**).

Why not? Because the Lord is a holy and jealous God. He is zealous for his own glory and name. He will not share his worship or fame with any other god.

He will not forgive Israel if they abandon him to serve another god.

He demands whole-hearted loyalty, and Israel had better know that when they vow to serve him. They must serve him and him alone.

The Lord is zealous for his own glory and for the good of his children.

If they turn from him they cannot enjoy his benefits.

Joshua's emphatic response was a stern warning to the Israelites of just how serious the promise was that they made? It is a serious matter for every believer.

When the Lord Jesus Christ calls us to follow him, he calls for complete devotion, for death to self, and for our lives to be dedicated and consecrated to him alone.

In light of all that He has done for us, is that too much for him to ask?

Paul makes the same point in Romans 12. After spending eleven chapters outlining the need for and the blessings of the gospel, he then calls for a response (**Rom. 12:1**).

Have you responded to that appeal and laid down your life, your dreams and ambitions, in order to take up the cross and serve the Son of God?