

The End of Joshua's Life – Part 1

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Joshua charges Israel to obey the Lord in a covenant renewal before he dies
2. aim – To cause us to begin a new year with an even greater resolve to follow and serve the Lord
3. passage – Joshua 23:1-24:33

b. outline

1. Joshua Charges Israel to Faithfulness (Joshua 23:1-16)
2. Joshua Covenants Israel to Obedience (Joshua 24:1-28)
3. Joshua Dies and is Buried (Joshua 24:29-33)

c. opening

1. the **opening** of Section #3 (the finale) of the book
 - a. **question**: if you knew that today was your *last*, what *final message* would you want to leave with your closest family and friends? what would you want them to *remember* from your lips?
 1. **e.g.** the portrayal of death scenes in movies *rarely* depicts any concern about the afterlife!
 - b. here is the **epilogue** of both the conquest and the life of Joshua
 1. **chap. 22**: completing the conquest in allowing the E tribes to return home
 2. **chaps. 23-24**: completing the life of Joshua in his charge, covenant renewal, and death
2. the **authorship** of Section #3 (the finale) of the book
 - a. **IMO**: the final three (3) chapters of this book were penned by *someone else* (**i.e.** loyal to Joshua)
 1. obviously, the last pericope of the book (**24:29ff**) was written by someone else (**i.e.** his obituary)
 2. and, Joshua “missing” from the narrative of **22:10-34** suggests a potential later inclusion
 3. and, the summary of **21:43-45** makes an excellent ending to the part *written by Joshua* (**i.e.** the final summary of his work in taking the mantle of leadership from Moses)
 - b. and, the phrase “*a long time afterward*” (**23:1**) also suggests (**IMO**) an *addition* to the original work
 1. **chap. 22** begins with “*at that time*” = immediately after the allocation of the land in **chaps. 14-21** Joshua gives the E tribes leave to go home – the *initial* conquest is *now* complete
 2. however, **chap. 23** is “*a long time afterward*” (**i.e.** a gap of time between **chaps. 22 & 23**)
 - a. *assuming* that Joshua was roughly the same age as Caleb, and Caleb was 85 when he received his allotment (**14:10**), Joshua would also be about 85 when the conquest ended
 - b. *assuming* that Moses would choose slightly older men to spy out Canaan; older than 20, but less than 50, due to the need for both wisdom and physical stamina
 1. **i.e.** sanctified speculation, given that no other record of Joshua's age exists
 - c. so, noting that Joshua lives to be 110 (**24:29**), the time from the end of the conquest (and the allocation of the land) to these events (close to the end of his life) is **~25 years**
 3. **IOW**: “*a long time afterward*” (**ITC**) was many years later – Joshua probably spent them “*rebuilding the city of Timnath-serah*” allotted to him (**19:49-50**)
 - a. and, the people remained faithful in their initial places during his lifetime (**Judges 2:7**)
 - b. **IMO**: Joshua was graced with the same strength that Caleb received from the Lord (**i.e.** **14:11**) throughout his life, for being faithful to the Lord as a spy
 4. thus, “*a long time afterward*” seems (**to me!**) like something written by someone else – **i.e.** his writing ended *many years earlier*, and a loyal friend added this epitaph after his death
 3. the **combination** in Section #3 (the finale) of the book
 - a. **note**: we will combine **chaps. 23-24** together as a two-part sermon to end our time in the book

I. Joshua Charges Israel to Faithfulness (Joshua 23:1-16)

Content

a. the question of Joshua's charge

1. Joshua is “*old and well advanced in years*” (**23:1**) and “*about to go the way of all the earth*” (**23:14**)
 - a. it is time for him to leave a final word to Israel, as they embark on their next chapter (without him)
 - b. **IOW**: just as the book *started* with Joshua giving instructions to Israel to *enter* the promised land, *now* he gives them **a final set of exhortations** as they *begin their new life* in the promised land

b. the audience of Joshua's charge (vv. 1-2)

1. **note:** the ESV titles this chapter "Joshua's Charge to Israel's Leaders" – however, the *audience* listed in **23:2** is the same as **24:1** (entitled "The Covenant Renewal at Shechem")
 - a. Joshua summons "all Israel" ("all the tribes of Israel" in **24:1**), along with its leadership: the elders, [tribal] heads, judges, and [military] officers
 - b. **IOW:** there is no reason to believe that Joshua's charge in **chap. 23** is limited to just its leaders
 - c. it seems *more likely (IMO)* that Joshua speaks *through* the leadership (in both cases) to the people as a whole (*i.e.* the covenant renewal of **chap. 24** is *preceded* by a great charge to the people as a whole in **chap. 23**)
2. thus ... the two chapters *belong together*: a charge to faithfulness and then a covenant renewal of it

c. the substance of Joshua's charge (vv. 3-13)

1. **vv. 3-5** – a *quick* summary of what has *already* taken place *during his leadership of Israel*
 - a. it is *the Lord* who has done the things you have seen to the nations in Canaan
 - b. thus, the land has been allotted as an inheritance to you *although the "nations" still remain*
 1. specifically, although the initial conquest did not *fully drive out* the Canaanites, the Lord has given you their land *and he will continue to fight for you in finishing the job*
 2. *i.e.* it is the Lord your God "who has fought for you" (**v. 3**) and he will continue to do so (**v. 5**)
2. **vv. 6-8** – a charge to *keep the Law of Moses* in relation to the Canaanite gods
 - a. a charge *specific* to the First and Second Commandments (**Exo. 20:3-4; Deut. 5:7-8**)
 - b. **#1:** to not have (or take) any other "gods" before (or besides) Yahweh – to never "mistake" a *fictional deity* for the one *true and living God*
 1. as in: *remember* what the true God has *shown* you through his power = the ability to overthrow the locals *even as a group of untrained former slaves* – his power *unleashed* demonstrates his *reality (i.e.* no "fictional" god of the Canaanites could do what they have seen)
 - c. **#2:** to not make any "graven" image the "source" of divine power – to never "mistake" an *image of a deity* for Yahweh, whose existence is "beyond" the scope of what can be formed by man
 1. as in: do not create a *cheap substitute* for what has been revealed = the power to overthrow the natives cannot be "bottled" in a wooden or metallic image (*i.e.* no image of the Canaanites could do what they have seen)
 - d. **IOW:** the primary temptation from the remaining Canaanites will be to draw the Israelites into their false religions, to lure Israel to "mix" with them *at the religious level* and be *compromised*
 1. **principle: a great temptation for the follower of Christ will be to "mix" into the thinking of the world – to be drawn into the "idols" of wealth, power, comfort, ease, etc. and to have our first love compromised, seduced into being "just like everyone else"**
 2. **reality:** the devil doesn't need you to apostatize – he only needs to steer you *slightly away* from Jesus as your primary focus in order to make you *useless to the cause of Christ*
 - a. **e.g.** the Israelites "mixing" a little Canaanite idol worship into their lives will cause them to *fail* in the task of completing what God had begun in them – us "mixing" a little worldly focus into our lives will cause us to *fail* in the task of completing what God has begun in us
3. **vv. 9-13** – a charge to *faithfulness* in not marrying into the Canaanite peoples
 - a. a charge *incidental* to the Seventh Commandment (**Exo. 20:14; Deut. 5:18**)
 - b. **#7:** to not commit *spiritual* adultery – to treat the *covenant relationship* you have with God similar to the life-long covenantal relationship God commands you to maintain with your spouse
 1. as in: do not "make marriages" (**v. 12**) with the natives, thus *compromising* the fundamental spiritual nature of the family, dragging such mixed households *away from true Yahweh worship*
 2. *i.e.* the nature of God (from which the commandments flow) is one of *absolute covenant commitment* – God *cannot* commit "adultery" in abandoning his covenant relationships
 - c. **IOW:** a secondary temptation from the remaining Canaanites will be to draw the Israelites into *marital* relationships, to lure Israel to "mix" with them *at the family level* and be *diluted as a nation*
 1. **principle: the household that is "mixed" between a follower of Christ and an unbelieving spouse will have the natural tendency to "pull" the believer away from a full-orbed life of sanctification and worship – it rarely (if ever) goes in the "other" (right) direction**
 2. **reality:** Paul *never specifically* prohibits a believer from marrying an unbeliever – however, *principles* of his teachings strongly suggest that he believed such would be *deeply* unwise:
 - a. he believed family is the bedrock of civilization (**1 Tim. 2:1-15**)
 - b. he believed *Christian* marriage is a picture of Christ and his church (**Eph. 5:25-33**)
 - c. he believed there are dangers in long-term commitments with unbelievers (**2 Cor. 6:14**)
 - d. **e.g.** such wives will become "snares ... traps ... whips ... and thorns in your eyes" (**v. 13**)
 - e. **never date anyone who does not prioritize Christ above all things, including you!**

d. the promise in Joshua's charge (vv. 14-16)

1. the **positive side (v. 14)** = God has kept all of *his* promises to you, and will continue to do so
 - a. or "not one word has failed of all the good words [things]... God promised" (see also **x2** in v. 15)
 - b. **IOW**: everything God said he was going to do, he did – and you know it to be true in your soul
 - c. **obvious**: what you have seen him do already he will continue to do (see above)
2. the **negative side (v. 15)** = God will destroy you if you transgress your promises
 - a. if you transgress the covenant (see above) then God will bring upon "all the evil words [things]"
 - b. **IOW**: everything God warned he would do (if you disobeyed), he will do – and you know it
 - c. **explicit**: fail God and "you shall perish quickly from off the good land" (v. 16b)
3. **principle: the Word of God is simple and one-sided – obey him and be blessed, disobey him and be cursed – the entirety of a relationship with God is built on this singular promise**
 - a. **i.e. Adam** heard this at the beginning of time (**Genesis 2:16**): obey and live, or eat and die
 - b. **the relationship all men have with God is based on this and on nothing else**
 1. contrary to the "secularized" Christianity of our day, God did not create the world for our happiness, our religiosity, our financial status, or our sense of what constitutes "justice" – God created us to serve him, in obedience to his revealed law, not in rebellion against it
 - c. **closing the Christmas season**: which is why the Son of God entered into this world – to bring this Word of God into the world, to "incarnate" this truth regarding God's relationship to mankind
4. **so ... what would you want to say to your friends if today was your last day on earth?**
 - a. Joshua told his friends: I charge you to remain faithful to the Lord – do not stray away ...
 - b. this is our very clear message to the whole world on this **last Sunday of 2021**