

Message #40**Joshua 24:1-15**

Back in the 1700's, there was a British statesman and member of Parliament, whose name was Edmund Burke. Edmund Burke took the position that Christianity was critical to social progress. He condemned Atheism and Deism and he said that Christianity was not only good for the soul, but it was good for any political development.

Edmund Burke was known for many things and one of them was his famous statement: "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it."

When we study the Bible we see the wisdom of that statement. Time and time again many in the Scripture reminded the people of what God had done in history. Moses did it; the Psalmist did it; Nehemiah did it; and so did Joshua.

Joshua was a man who had walked with God for many years and he had seen God do many things. He faced one enemy after another and fought battle after battle. Yet when we come to the end of his life, we find him thinking about all God had done over the years and he wanted the people to remember all God had done. He is an old soldier for God with a final message:

GOD'S PEOPLE NEED TO THINK CAREFULLY ABOUT ALL GOD HAS DONE IN PAST HISTORY AND THEY NEED TO FEAR HIM AND SERVE HIM IN THE PRESENT BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT CONTINUES GOD'S BLESSINGS.

Notice carefully the emphasis on what God had done. We may see it with the use of the first person pronouns: "I took" (v. 3); "I gave" (v. 4); "I sent" (v. 5); "I brought" (v. 6); "I did" (v. 7). God is reminding the people of what He had done for them. If they would maintain a fear of Him and a service for Him, those blessings would continue. But if they didn't, those blessings would stop. It was critical they remember history so they would not be doomed by repeating that which took away the blessings of God.

Now Joshua is nearing his death and he was intent on people remembering what God had done and how He worked in the past, so they could continue to experience the blessings of God.

There are three main observations we may make about what Joshua does here:

OBSERVATION #1 – Joshua gathers all the people at Shechem. **24:1**

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem. Now this gathering spot is no coincidence. Shechem was a very important ancient city in the Promised Land, which was located in the middle of the land of Canaan.

Abraham, on his migration to the Promised Land, pitched his tent and built an altar in Shechem (Gen. 12:6-8). Years later, Jacob purchased a parcel of ground from the Shechemites and he also built an altar here (Gen. 33:18-20). We may remember that Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, actually killed all of the Shechemites for raping their sister Dinah (Gen. 34).

Now this city was one of the cities that had been given to the Levites (Josh. 21:21). It became a key refuge city. **Sometimes a person or place known for something shameful can become that which is honorable.**

Now because of the rich history of this city, specifically in patriarchal times, this was a fitting place for Joshua to gather the people together to speak to them. Just being in this city was rich in Biblical history.

What Joshua did was he called all the tribes, the Elders, the Heads, the Judges and the Officers to come to Shechem to present themselves before the Lord.

Sometimes it is good to go back and remember the past and all God has done. Shechem would be a good place to do that.

When we were in school in Grand Rapids, sometimes I would get very tired. I was working full time, going to school and carrying out a full-time ministry in our local church. Sometimes I would get very tired. Every now and then, we would come to Kalamazoo and more than once I would take a drive by the place I used to work. I would remember all God had done in my life just by physically looking at an old place of employment.

Shechem was an old place where God had done much and Joshua called them there.

OBSERVATION #2 – Joshua reminds God's people of past history. **24:2-13**

What Joshua decided to do was to carefully set forth a chronology of things God had done in past history for Israel. He gives the events in chronological order. There are seven historical episodes that Joshua presents:

Historical Episode #1 - God chose Abraham when his family was in idolatry. **24:2**

God did not choose Abraham because he came from a God-honoring family. He chose Abraham because of His own elective purposes. Abraham's family lived far east of the Jordan. His dad's name was Terah and his family was an idolatrous family, who worshipped false gods.

Joshua is reminding Israel that she came from a lousy idolatrous family that worshipped false gods.

Sometimes it is good for us to remind ourselves that we were not chosen by God because we were such a prized catch. God, in His amazing grace, chose us "while we were yet sinners."

This thought is great impetus for serving God and remaining faithful to Him for the grace He has shown to us.

Historical Episode #2 - God chose Abraham and led Abraham. **24:3** (Gen. 12:6, 8-9; 13:17)

God chose Abraham before the foundation of the world, but He specifically started leading Abraham in Genesis 12. He took him from his homeland, through the Promised Land and gave him a family and a son, Isaac. It was God who did all of this.

Isaac's birth was miraculous (Gen. 17:17; 18:10-14). So was ours. Your birth was miraculous. Remember that and serve God. Abraham turned his back on his idolatrous home and followed God and he was richly blessed for it.

Historical Episode #3 - God gave Isaac his sons and specific lands. **24:4**

God sovereignly gave Isaac, Jacob and Esau and He also sovereignly directed them so that they would live in different areas. Esau lived in Mount Sier from the Dead Sea south and Jacob and his sons, ultimately through Joseph, ended up by sovereign decree of God in Egypt (Gen. 50:20).

God has sovereignly chosen us and has brought us to where we are right now. He may use a job, a school, a problem, a sin or a church to direct us, but He uses all of these things to bring us to where He wants us to be.

When Jacob first went to Egypt, he could not see the future plan of God. We may not see the future plan of God, but we may know that it is operative. The sovereignty of God is at work at all times.

Historical Episode #4 - God sent Moses and Aaron to lead Israel out of Egypt. **24:5**

Carefully observe that God takes full credit for the plagues. What Joshua is doing is laying a foundation of a historical sketch so that the people of Israel will realize that it is God who has sovereignly done all things connected to her. Things were not pleasant in Egypt, but God was still sovereign. He directed her into Egypt and He would direct her out of it.

Historical Episode #5 - God brought Israel to the Sea and destroyed her enemies by the Sea. **24:6-7**

The Egyptians came chasing after Israel when she left Egypt, but when Israel cried out to God, He miraculously intervened and delivered her. It took terrible oppression to get Israel to cry out to God. Her back was to the wall, or literally to the sea, but God preserved her, protected her and destroyed her enemies. It was God who led Israel into the wilderness for many years.

What Joshua is doing is carefully laying out a story about the sovereignty of God. Israel was not where she was by chance. God had sovereignly led her to Shechem.

Historical Episode #6 - God brought Israel to land east of the Jordan and defeated her enemies.
24:8-10

No matter who the enemy or how powerful the enemy, God intervened. Israel always came out on top. God delivered her time and time again.

Balak rose up to try and make war against Israel. The most powerful soothsayer was Balaam, who could deliver powerful curses (Num. 22:2, 5-7, 12; 23:7-11). But those satanic forces were no match for God.

Historical Episode #7 - God brought Israel to land west of the Jordan and defeated her enemies.
25:11-13

Israel could not boast of her conquests because God did it all. They did not have victory because of their military prowess; it was God who gave them victory and gave them the wonderful land.

Dr. Alan Redpath said Israel owed everything to the intervention and power of Almighty God. They got cities they did not build. They got vineyards and groves they did not plant and grow. They received land in which they did not have to labor. God gave them all of the blessings.

OBSERVATION #3 – Joshua challenges God’s people to future obedience. **24:14-15**

This had been some rehearsal of history that Joshua had given Israel. Joshua wanted Israel to remember all of the wonderful things He had done. He wanted her to remember these key historical episodes.

There were four challenges that Joshua gave to Israel:

Challenge #1 - God’s people need to fear God. **24:14a**

God’s people need to reverence God and fear God. God’s people need to stand in awe of God. Somehow this point is being lost today among people who claim they are the people of God. There is no reverence for God.

Challenge #2 - God’s people need to serve God. **24:14b**

Do not overlook what is said here. We do not serve God any way we think; we must serve Him in sincerity and truth. In order for service to be acceptable to God, it is exclusive to Him and it must be done in truth. No one can serve God and live a lie.

Challenge #3 - God’s people need to put away false gods. **24:14c**

God had brought Abraham out of idolatry and he did not want Israel back in it. God challenges His people to always keep their focus and worship on Him and to Him.

Challenge #4 - God's people need to make a concrete individual choice. **24:15**

Joshua ended this by saying they needed to make a choice as to whether they wanted to serve God or idols.

Joshua says for him and his house he chose to serve the LORD, who had done so many wonderful things for him and the nation.

It is interesting to me that Joshua does not beg people or try to emotionally manipulate people. He simply says make a choice.

Centuries later, Elijah gave basically the same challenge to God's people (I Kings 18:21). Actually, the Apostle John gave about the same challenge to God's people (I John 5:21).

In view of all that God has done, we leave us all with the same challenge Joshua gave: "Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve."