

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 24

The Covenant Renewal at Shechem

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. 2 And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. 3 Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac. 4 And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. 5 And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out. 6 “Then I brought your fathers out of Egypt, and you came to the sea. And the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. 7 And when they cried to the LORD, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did in Egypt. And you lived in the wilderness a long time. 8 Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan. They fought with you, and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. 9 Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel. And he sent and invited Balaam the son of Beor to curse you, 10 but I would not listen to Balaam. Indeed, he blessed you. So I delivered you out of his hand. 11 And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the leaders of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And I gave them into your hand. 12 And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. 13 I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.’

24:1–33 Once more Joshua assembled the tribes at Shechem to call Israel to a renewal of the covenant (see 8:30–35). It was his final official act as the Lord’s servant, mediator of the Lord’s rule over his people. In this he followed the example of Moses, whose final official act was also a call to covenant renewal—of which Deuteronomy is the preserved document. (CSB)

24:1 *Shechem*. At the heart of the land; rich in salvation history (e.g., Gn 12:6–7). (TLSB)

presented themselves before God. Probably before the tabernacle and ark of the covenant, as divinely appointed vehicles of God’s presence. Scene recalls Ex 19:17, when Israel stood in covenant assembly before God at Mount Sinai with Moses as their mediator. (TLSB)

24:2–13 Records essentials of salvation history from Abraham to Joshua, accenting God’s grace. He does not choose people who are righteous in themselves. In His unmerited favor, He calls sinners. Full account appears in Gn 11:27 through Jsh 12. (TLSB)

24:2–3 *served other gods*. Abraham and his family were serving other gods when God “took” him and gave him His gracious promises. Later Jewish interpreters misread the idolatry as applying to Terah and Nahor but not to Abraham. They regarded Abraham’s purity as the reason for God’s choice of Abraham rather than His grace. Mel: “Not even Abraham, the father of all believers, along with his leading people, was immune to the abomination of idolatry, but when God wanted to keep him safe, He was compelled to call him from the deep mire of idolatry” (Chem, *LTh* 2:322). (TLSB)

24:2 *Thus says the LORD.* Only a divinely appointed mediator would dare to speak for God with direct discourse, as in vv. 2–13. (CSB)

Long ago. In accordance with the common ancient Near Eastern practice of making treaties (covenants), a brief recital of the past history of the relationship precedes the making of covenant commitments. Joshua here focuses on the separation of Abraham from his polytheistic family, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the Lord’s establishment of his people in Canaan. (CSB)

beyond the Euphrates. East of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia (“between the rivers”), where Abraham and his family first lived, specifically in Ur and Haran. (TLSB)

Nahor. Nahor and Haran were brothers of Abraham (Abram). Cf Gn 11:26. (TLSB)

other gods. People of Ur, from whom Abraham came, had invented some 4,000 gods. (TLSB)

24:3 *made his offspring many.* Abraham and Sarah’s many offspring include the hundreds of thousands who listen to Joshua speak here at Shechem. Cf Nu 26. (TLSB)

24:4 *down to Egypt.* Background to years of bondage, from which God, in grace and power, redeemed His chosen people. (TLSB)

24:7 *made the sea come upon them.* Cf Ex 15:4–5, 10. (TLSB)

your eyes. May be understood in the sense of “the eyes of the Israelites as a nation” (e.g., Americans might say collectively, “We landed on the moon in 1969”). Only the eyes of the oldest Israelites literally saw what the Lord did to the Egyptians (cf Nu 14:29–30). (TLSB)

lived in the wilderness a long time. The 40 years described in Ex 16–Nu 21. (TLSB)

24:8 *into your hand.* Graphic expression for “I caused you to defeat them.” (TLSB)

24:9 *Balaam the son of Beor to curse you.* Cf Nu 22–24. Under the influence of the Lord, Balaam instead blessed Israel with four beautiful oracles. He even saw the future advent of Jesus Christ as a “star” and “scepter” (Nu 24:17). (TLSB)

24:10 *I would not listen to Balaam.* Not only did the Lord reject Balaam’s prayers; he also turned his curse into a blessing (see Nu 23–24). (CSB)

Balaam’s plan to curse was not effective because God promised to bless Israel. Later, Balaam himself was killed by God’s people (Nu 31:8). (TLSB)

24:12 *the hornet.* Lower (northern) Egypt had long used the hornet as a national symbol, so Egypt’s military campaigns in Canaan may have been in mind. But “the hornet” may also refer to the reports about Israel that spread panic among the Canaanites (2:11; 5:1; 9:24). See note on Ex 23:28. (CSB)

Probably a colorful metaphor for the dread that gripped the Canaanites (2:11); cf Ex 23:27–28, where “terror” and “hornet” seem to be parallel. Alternatively, since the hornet was a symbol of Lower Egypt and since Egyptian raids into Canaan prior to Israel’s entry had weakened the Canaanites, Egypt’s army could figuratively be “the hornet.” Of course a literal “hornet” is also possible. The God who had summoned frogs, gnats, flies, and locusts to plague Egyptians could also gather swarms of hornets. (TLSB)

24:13 God's pure grace toward Israel is the message. Both the defeat of the Canaanites (v 12) and the life that Israel enjoyed thereafter came by God's unmerited favor, not by the power or merit of Israelites. Cf Dt 6:10–12 for Moses' exhortation, which uses much of the same thought and vocabulary as this verse. (TLSB)

24:1–13 At Shechem, Joshua summarizes for Israel the history of salvation by grace, from the call of Abraham to the victories under Joshua. Likewise, we deserve none of the good that God gives us. God Himself in Christ has defeated our great enemies: sin, Satan, and death. He calls us by the Gospel of Christ and gives us an everlasting heritage, kingdom, and life. • Dear Lord of grace, make me know through Your Word that real success is not by my effort but by Your cross. Cause gratitude, love, and loyalty to well up in me as I rehearse Your victories for me and Your blessings to me. Amen. (TLSB)

Choose Whom You Will Serve

14 “Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. **15** And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” **16** Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, **17** for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. **18** And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.” **19** But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. **20** If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” **21** And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.” **22** Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” **23** He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel.” **24** And the people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey.” **25** So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. **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 terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. **27** And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.” **28** So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance.

24:14–28 The Lord spoke in the first person through Joshua in vv 2–13. Now in v 14, Joshua himself speaks. (TLSB)

24:14 *fear the LORD.* Trust, serve and worship him. (CSB)

gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt. Joshua appealed to the Israelites to put away the gods their forefathers had worshiped in Mesopotamia and Egypt. In Ur and Haran, Terah's family would have been exposed to the worship of the moon-god, Nanna(r) or Sin. The golden calf of Ex 32:4 may be an example of their worship of the gods of Egypt. It was probably patterned after Apis, the sacred bull of Egypt; see note on Ex 32:4. (Jeroboam's golden calves at Bethel and Dan, on the other hand, probably represented mounts or pedestals for a riding or standing deity; see 1Ki 12:28–29.) (CSB)

Chem: “The Israelites in Egypt were accustomed to the practice of idolatry” (*LTh* 2:373). Although 23:8 and 24:31 emphasize Israel’s faithfulness, this verse speaks of idols their ancestors served and the temptation they caused. Not mentioned here are the immediate consequences of unfaithfulness, such as those that followed the sin of Achan. Instead, Joshua demands throwing away all false gods of the heart—anything that keeps Israel from serving the Lord alone. (TLSB)

24:15–16 If Israel rejects the Lord, she can choose between two groups of worthless gods—Mesopotamian or Canaanite. This is like saying to a hungry person: If you reject this banquet of delicacies, you may choose between garbage or dung. Joshua’s statement evokes holy horror from Israel. *we will serve the LORD*. Even if Joshua and his house have to stand alone against all Israel and the surrounding pagan nations, as he and Caleb did earlier (Nu 14:1–9), they will serve the Lord. This is a bold profession of faith in the Lord and commitment to His covenant. (TLSB)

24:15 *as for me*. Joshua publicly makes his commitment, hoping to elicit the same from Israel. (CSB)

24:17–18 A creedal statement based on the miraculous events of the exodus and ending with “he is our God.” (CSB)

24:18 *we also will serve the LORD, for He is our God*. People of Israel fashion their confession after the words of Joshua in v 15. Their commitment to the Lord is the same as his. (TLSB)

24:19 *You are not able*. Strong words to emphasize the danger of overconfidence. (CSB)

Joshua’s response to the people’s good confession is surprising. Here are some possible explanations: (1) He is testing the sincerity of Israel with the intent of strengthening their commitment; (2) he is trying to break down all ideas that sinful Israel can remain loyal by their own power so that they rest on the Lord’s power alone; (3) he may have been given a revelation of the idolatry that will bring God’s curse on Israel in the future; or (4) he may be addressing unbelievers hiding within faithful Israel. The second alternative seems most likely. (TLSB)

24:20 *He will turn*. Becoming justifiably hostile toward people who previously enjoyed His favor. *harm and consume you*. God is holy and thus never the source of evil, but the execution of His anger brings disaster upon sinful people. What God had done to Israel’s enemies, He will do to Israel if she forsakes Him. The threat is a warning against apostasy. (TLSB)

24:21 People seem to cut off Joshua midspeech with a holy no! Their resolve in vv 16–18 remains unshaken here. (TLSB)

24:22 *you have chosen the LORD, to serve Him*. The choice here is not made by unbelievers who are choosing the Lord for their salvation; this is impossible for unbelievers because of their naturally sinful condition (Rm 8:6–7; 1Co 2:14; Eph 2:1). This is the choice of believers who, like Joshua himself, are led by the Holy Spirit and are determined not to abandon the faith God has given them. (TLSB)

24:23 *foreign gods*. The other gods were represented by idols of wood and metal, which could be thrown away and destroyed. (CSB)

Temptations for Israel would be strong from the foreign gods among them and the thoughts about them lurking in their hearts. *heart*. In its abstract sense, the richest biblical term for the totality of the nonphysical part of a person. Most OT usages of “heart” refer to one or all of the personality features that we often call emotion, thought, and will. (TLSB)

24:25 *covenant with the people.* Consisting of the pledges they had agreed to and the decrees and laws from God. (CSB)

Renewal of the Mosaic covenant, which the Lord set in place at Mount Sinai. Renewed covenant will continue to serve as (1) a mirror for Israelites so that they know their sin, receive atonement in the sacrifices instituted by God, and trust in God's gracious covenant first given to Abraham; (2) a sanctifying hedge to set Israel apart from all other nations by its righteous ordinances; and (3) a shadow or prefiguration that pictures and previews the new and better covenant of pure grace in Christ. (TLSB)

statutes and rules. Hbr terms are singular. The idea is probably the one covenant pledge that Israel will serve the Lord alone, as the people just stated in v 24. (TLSB)

24:26 *wrote these words.* Author does not reveal which words. We can surmise that they include at least the terms, charges, and promises of ch 24 that will keep the conditional Mosaic covenant in force for Israel. Some think "these words" refers to the substance of Jsh, with the exception of 24:29–33. (TLSB)

the Book of the Law of God. Implies that these written words receive canonical status as the authoritative Word of God along with the Books of Moses. (TLSB)

large stone. Set up as a witness to the covenant renewal that closed Joshua's ministry, this is the seventh memorial in the land reminding Israel of what the Lord had done for them through his servant. To these memorials were added the perpetual ruins of Jericho (6:26). Thus the promised land itself bore full testimony to Israel (seven being the number of completeness)—how she had come into possession of the land and how she would remain in the land only by fulfilling the covenant conditions. The land shouted its own story. (CSB)

Archaeologists have found the remains of a temple at Shechem that included a huge upright stone (*massebah*). (TLSB)

sanctuary of the LORD. The tabernacle, which was now at Shechem, moved there from Shiloh (18:1). (TLSB)

24:27 *this stone shall be a witness.* The same term for "witness" appears in Gn 21:30 and Gn 31:52; in the latter verse it refers to a heap of stones and a stone pillar that attested to the covenant between Jacob and Laban. There is no hint in the OT of animistic ideas concerning stone witnesses and memorials, as though they housed spirits. (TLSB)

Joshua's Death and Burial

29 After these things Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being 110 years old. **30** And they buried him in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. **31** Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua and had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel. **32** As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money. It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph. **33** And Eleazar the son of Aaron died, and they buried him at Gibeah, the town of Phinehas his son, which had been given him in the hill country of Ephraim.

24:28 *every man to his inheritance.* Only a handful of individual allotments are recorded in Jsh (14:6–15; 15:16–19; 17:3–6; 19:49–50; 24:33). Usually the allotment is to each tribe, “according to their clans” (e.g., 18:28). (TLSB)

24:14–28 As the Mosaic covenant is formally renewed at Shechem, Joshua and the people boldly profess their faithfulness to the God who redeemed them and gave them victory. In our weakness and fear of the world, we may be hesitant to witness to the God who has given us our eternal inheritance. Pray for courage. His saving grace and His Spirit can enable us to boldly confess His name. • “All who confess Christ’s holy name, Give God the praise and glory. Let all who know His pow’r proclaim Aloud the wondrous story. Cast ev’ry idol from its throne, For God is God, and He alone: To God all praise and glory!” Amen. (LSB 819:5) (TLSB)

24:29–33 Three burials. Since it was a deep desire of the ancients to be buried in their homeland, these notices not only mark the conclusion of the story and the close of an era but also underscore the fact that Israel had indeed been established in the promised homeland—the Lord had kept his covenant. (CSB)

24:29 *a hundred and ten.* Joseph had also died at age 110 (Gn 50:26). Egyptian writings show that 110 was considered the ideal number of years on this earth. (TLSB)

24:30 *buried him ... at Timnath Serah.* Joshua’s burial in the Promised Land attests that the Lord is faithful to His promises. *Timnath-serah.* Cf Jgs 2:9. (TLSB)

24:31 The story told in Joshua is a testimony to Israel’s faithfulness in that generation. The author anticipates the quite different story that would follow. (CSB)

Those in leadership positions who were a generation younger than Joshua and Caleb, the two longest surviving men in Israel. (TLSB)

had known all the work that the LORD did for Israel. Some elders had experienced as children the Lord’s work at the exodus from Egypt and His care of Israel in the wilderness. More had observed His mighty victories over the Canaanites and His allotment of their inheritance in the Promised Land. The Lord’s acts of grace and power motivated a generation for faithful service. (TLSB)

24:32 *bones of Joseph.* Returning his bones to Shechem was significant not only because of the ancient plot of land Jacob bought from Hamor (Ge 33:19), but also because Shechem was to be the center of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph. Also, the return fulfilled an oath sworn to Joseph on his deathbed (Ge 50:25; Ex 13:19). (CSB)

Cf Gn 50:24–26. Joseph’s instructions concerning his bones (four centuries earlier) were an expression of his faith in God’s promises. Now, the burial of his bones in the Promised Land at Shechem stresses that faith in God’s promises is never misplaced (cf Ac 7:15–17). (TLSB)

buried them at Shechem. This is where Joseph was looking for his brothers before his abduction hundreds of years earlier (Gn 37:13). Now, he is returned to Shechem at the center of the Promised Land, also at the center of the land allotted to his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Culturally, burial on a piece of property indicated ownership. Maintaining the family tomb showed evidence of the family’s property rights. (TLSB)

hundred pieces of money. Not coins, but a common unit of weight. Term appears only in the oldest books of the Bible (cf Gn 33:19, Jb 42:11). Minted coins came much later. See note, Ezr 2:69. (TLSB)

24:33 *Eleazar*. The high priest who served Joshua, as Aaron had served Moses. (CSB)

Important in the pages of Jsh as the priestly officiant at the allotting of the land (14:1; 17:4; 19:51; 21:1). His name at the end emphasizes the theme of the fulfillment of the Lord's promises. (TLSB)

Gibeah. Not the Benjamite city, but a place in Ephraim near Shiloh.--

24:29–33 Three graves in the Promised Land (of Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar) attest to the faithfulness of the Lord in fulfilling His promises. “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rm 5:12). “If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rm 5:17). • We praise You, dear Lord, that when we lie buried in the ground, we also lie buried in Your sure promises of the resurrection to eternal life, through Jesus, the new Joshua. He lived, died, and rose so that after we die, we might be raised and live with Him forever. Amen. (TLSB)