

Joshua Chapter 23

Joshua 23:1 "And it came to pass a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old [and] stricken in age."

“Joshua waxed old”: A long time had passed since he led the conquest (ca. 1405 – 1398 B.C.); Joshua had grown very old, and was 110 when he died (24:29), ca. 1385 – 1383 B.C. (see note on 13:1).

More than 25 years had passed since the Israelites crossed the Jordan River. Joshua was probably about 80 years old at that time and was now “Stricken in age” (24:29).

This is speaking of Joshua being very old. In fact, he is so old he realizes he is near death. This is a time of peace for Israel.

Verses 2-4: The first of Joshua’s two farewell addresses was to the leaders, “their heads and for their judges, and for their officers” at Shiloh. Later, he would speak to the entire congregation at Shechem. He began his farewell address by reviewing the past and recalling God’s powerful work on their behalf (Exodus 14:14; Lev. 26:8; Deut. 3:22).

Joshua 23:2 "And Joshua called for all Israel, [and] for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old [and] stricken in age:"

The aged Joshua’s private counsel to the “elders” is reminiscent of that of his predecessor Moses (compare Deut. 31:1-13). In this chapter and the next, “Joshua” gives a similar threefold challenge:

- (1) To put God’s Word first in their lives (verses 6-7);
- (2) To live before God faithfully (verses 8-10); and
- (3) To love God supremely (verses 11-13).

(In 24:14-15), all of these will be included under the basic Old Testament charge to fear the Lord and serve Him willingly.

Joshua wants to give them some instructions before he dies. He calls them together for that purpose. These are the words of an aged leader. Joshua had done everything he knew to do to keep the commandments of God. It is not found that Joshua disobeyed God. He was faithful.

Joshua 23:3 "And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God [is] he that hath fought for you."

How he had destroyed them, and driven them out of their habitations to make room for them. Meaning the seven nations of the Canaanites.

"For the Lord your God is he that hath fought for you": Joshua does not attribute any of the things that were done to his own valor, nor theirs. Nor so much as mentions himself or them as instruments, but wholly ascribes all to the Lord, who fought their battles for them, and conquered their enemies, and subdued them under them. The Targum is, "the Word of the Lord fought for you;" the Captain of the host of the Lord (Joshua 5:14).

Sometimes when everything is running smoothly, we tend to forget that God has brought us where we are. These Israelites were no different. They must be reminded, that this land they are living in was a gift to them from their God. He had blessed them mightily and even fought for them in their battles.

Joshua 23:4 "Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward."

Who are unsubdued, not yet conquered, as well as those that are to be an inheritance for your tribes. To be possessed by them and their children for ever.

"From Jordan, with all the nations I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward": The phrase, "with all the nations I have cut off", is to be read in connection with "those nations that remain". Both those that were cut off by the sword of Joshua, and those that remained unconquered, being divided by lot to the tribes of Israel. And which reached from Jordan eastward, where Joshua and Israel entered into the land, to the Mediterranean Sea. Called the great sea in comparison of little ones in Canaan, as the Dead sea, and the sea of Tiberias. And which great sea lay west to the land of Israel, or where the sun sets, as the phrase in the Hebrew text is.

This was their Promised Land. The Lord had chosen who got what parcel of land, because they had cast lots. This inheritance is an eternal inheritance as long as they keep God's commandments.

Verses 5 and 10: Joshua also reassured the leaders that even though he would die, the same God who had helped them in all of their past exploits would help them in the future. God's workers change over time, but His work never does. He is always expanding His kingdom and rule in people's hearts.

Joshua 23:5 "And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you."

“The Lord ... shall expel them”: God was ready to help His people drive the remaining Canaanites out so that they could possess their claims more fully. Such moves needed to be gradual (Deut. 7:22), but determined, in obedience to God.

Israel had never really driven all of the enemies out. They were living peacefully with them. God was not necessarily angry with them about this, because He had said they would gradually move them out. We do know that God did not want the Israelites practicing the sins of these Canaanites. When they began to intermarry with them, it would be difficult to stay holy before the LORD. The worship of the Canaanites was of false gods. God would not allow the Israelites to worship false gods.

Verses 6-16: The words given in 23:6-8 to prepare the people for peace are very similar to the words given (in 1:6-8), to prepare them for war. God’s servants must keep His unchanging Word at the forefront of their lives. This is how they can withstand temptation in any season.

Joshua 23:6 "Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom [to] the right hand or [to] the left;"

To observe that which required spiritual strength, fortitude of mind, a holy courage, a firm and fixed resolution. And particularly to destroy the Canaanites required in that book, and to abstain from all communion and fellowship with them.

"That ye turn not aside therefrom, to the right hand or the left (see note on Joshua 1:7).

We remember from the study of earlier books that Moses had the law written down, so there would be no question what commandments they were to keep. It is so easy to get slack and stop keeping God's law. The path of righteousness for them, and for us, is narrow. Salvation is a daily walk through life. We cannot take a vacation from God. We must not wander to the right or to the left.

Verses 7-8: The dangers from being incomplete about possessing all the Land included that of intermingling with the godless, as in marriages (verse 12), and committing to their gods, thus drifting from worshiping the true God. The Canaanites would become snares, traps, scourges, and thorns, causing Israelites to eventually lose the Land (see 13:15-16).

Joshua 23:7 "That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear [by them], neither serve them, nor bow yourselves unto them:"

That remained unsubdued, or that were suffered to dwell among them, being tributaries to them. With these they were not to converse freely and familiarly, nor to carry on trade and commerce

with them. Nor enter into any alliances or marriages with them, and not even attend any of their feasts, and especially their idolatrous ones.

"Neither make mention of the name of their gods": Not in common conversation, and still less in any religious matters. Never with any reverence of them, or in any respectable manner. But always with indignation and contempt, calling them dunghill gods, and the like, as they often are in Scripture.

"Nor cause to swear by them": nor require nor compel the Gentiles to swear by them, as they used to do. Especially in leagues and contracts, which therefore the Israelites are here implicitly forbidden to make with them.

"Neither serve them": By offering any sacrifice or incense to them, or by praying to them. Or offering them praises on any account. Or by performing any religious service in any instance or form whatever.

"Nor bow yourselves unto them": Give them any adoration or worship, external or internal.

This is the problem of living with worldly people around you. The influence of these people can be very strong. They must stay separate from the worship of these false gods. Christians are very much like these Israelites. We are in a world with sinners who do not follow God's commands. We are in the world, but we must not be of the world. We must not practice the ways of the world. God wants His people to be holy, for He is holy.

Joshua 23:8 "But cleave unto the LORD your God, as ye have done unto this day."

To his word, worship, and ordinances. Externally, by close adherence to them, and strict observation of them. And internally, by strong affection to him, hope, trust, and confidence in him. Expectation of all good things from him, and constant application to him for help in all times of need. And a fixed dependence on him.

"As ye have done unto this day": That is, since they came into the land of Canaan, and had been under the government of Joshua. For otherwise, while in the wilderness, they frequently revolted from God, and murmured against him. And this is to be understood not of individuals, who doubtless were guilty of various failings and sins, but of the whole body. And with respect to any notorious offence, particularly idolatry, which they had not fallen into since they came into the land of Canaan, and had very lately shown great zeal against it. Not only the tribes on this side, but those on the other side Jordan, as the preceding chapter largely relates.

The following is how much we should love the Lord.

Luke 10:27 "And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

This is not an option. It is a requirement, if you are to belong to Him.

Joshua 23:9 "For the LORD hath driven out from before you great nations and strong: but [as for] you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day."

Especially as they were reckoned in those times, before any great monarchies had existed, as did afterwards. And indeed, these were, considering the land they inhabited, very numerous and populous, and were very stout and able bodied men, and some of a gigantic stature. And all dwelt in strong fortified cities. And were able to bring out large armies into the field, with chariots of iron, so that they were very formidable. But notwithstanding all this, the Lord drove them out of their strong holds, and put Israel into the possession of them, and of their land.

"But as for you, no man hath been able to stand before you unto this day": That is, of those that came out against them, and fought with them. These were all to a man cut off by them, or fled before them, and became tributaries to them. Otherwise there were many, who as yet were not expelled by them. This the Lord had promised, and now had fulfilled (Deut. 11:25).

It was not by their might that they drove out their enemies. It was in the power of God. The power of God working in them and through them that won them the victory.

Joshua 23:10 "One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he [it is] that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you."

Here Kimchi and Ben Melech observe, that the future tense is put for the past, and that the sense is, one of them had chased a thousand in their war with the Canaanites. But Abarbinel disapproves of this observation, and thinks it refers to time to come, what they should be able to do if they cleaved unto the Lord. This was fulfilled in Samson (Judges 15:15). Such a promise was made (Lev. 26:8).

"For the Lord your God he it is that fighteth for you": And no wonder then that a thousand should be put to flight by one man. The Targum interprets it of the Word of the Lord as in (Joshua 23:3).

"As he hath promised you": (see Deut. 1:30).

One man and God is a majority, regardless of how many there are on the other side.

Romans 8:31 "What shall we then say to these things? If God [be] for us, who [can be] against us?"

There is no limit to what God can do. It is the LORD within them that won the battle.

Joshua 23:11 "Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the LORD your God."

To be upon their guard, and to be watchful, were very necessary to them. That they might not be ensnared by the Canaanites, and drawn aside by them into idolatry. And so apostatize from the Lord and his worship, since their temptations would be many.

"That ye love the Lord your God": Which would the most strongly influence and engage them to serve and worship the Lord, and obey his commands. And be the best preservative against idolatry and false worship.

Jude 1:20-21 "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost," "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Verses 12-13: Joshua sternly warned the people of Israel that if they intermarried with the Canaanites, God would no longer fight for them. He was not talking about interracial marriage but marriage between believer and unbelievers. The Christian who marries an unbeliever marries the spouse's belief system, values, lifestyle and family foundation. And usually the unbeliever will influence the believer downward, when the Christian life is supposed to be one of growth (Exodus 23:33; Num. 33:55; Deut. 7:3, 16).

Joshua 23:12 "Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, [even] these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you:"

From the Lord and his worship, from his word and ordinances.

"And cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even those that remain among you": In cities not taken, or in several which the Philistines were in possession of. Or lived among them as tributaries to them, if they should take to them. And be free and familiar with them, which may lead on to nearer connections in civil and religious matters.

"And shall make marriages with them": Marry their daughters to the sons of Canaanites, or consent to the daughters of Canaanites to be married to their sons.

"And go in unto them, and they to you": Which is expressive of the consummation of marriage, and of the performance of the conjugal duty.

Cleave speaks of a very personal attachment. This is a warning not to marry with these people, because of their idolatry.

Joshua 23:13 "Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out [any of] these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you."

Or, "knowing ye shall know"; or "know ye"; this may be taken for granted, or the fullest proof. And clearest demonstration, and strongest assurance will be given of it. That in case of such bad conduct, and disobedience to the will of God, no more of the nations of the Canaanites will be driven out of the cities in which they are.

"But they shall be snares and traps unto you": Who by their bad examples would draw them both to idolatry and superstitious worship. And into all irreligion, profaneness, and immorality, as they did (Psalm 106:35).

"And scourges in your sides": Who either, by ensnaring them, would get an advantage over them, and distress them in their persons, families, and estates. Or would be the means of the Lord's correcting and chastising them with the rod and stripes of men. For the sins these would draw them into. The allusion is to scourges and lashes laid on the sides of men. Or to goads with which beasts are pushed on their sides and driven.

"And thorns in your eyes": Very troublesome and distressing. For even a mote in the eye is very afflicting. And much more a thorn (see note on Num. 33:55). Jarchi interprets this word by camps surrounding them. As shields do the bodies of men, and which is approved of by Gussetius.

"Until ye perish from off this good land, which the Lord your God hath given you": By sword, famine, pestilence, or captivity, which has been their case.

The possibility of them being drawn away from God to a false god would be truly great, in the event of them marrying them. Next to a person's relationship with God, the relationship of husband and wife is the closest. God will not smile on them, if they marry these people who have false gods. There would be a great falling away from God in the event of them intermarrying with them. Verse 13 says, God would send many problems to them. The Promised Land is theirs, only if they obey God's commands. If they do this terrible thing, God will take it away from them.

Verses 14-16: The Lord had faithfully fought to preserve the holiness of His people in this pagan land, providing them with an abundance of "good things". Now the people would have to work to preserve their holiness too. Avoiding intermarriage with unbelieving peoples, alliances with pagan nations, and disobedience to the words of the Lord were all ways to avoid His wrath.

Joshua 23:14 "And, behold, this day I [am] going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, [and] not one thing hath failed thereof."

That is, about to die. Not that precise day, but in a short time, of which the daily increasing infirmities of old age gave him notice. Death is a journey from this world to another, a man's going to his long home. A path trodden by all men, and but once. A way in which all men without exception must and do walk. And even the best as well as the greatest of men, such as Joshua. No man is exempted from death, be he ever so great or good, ever so wise and knowing, ever so holy or so useful (see 1 Kings 2:2).

"And ye know in all your hearts, and in all your souls": In their consciences; it was a glaring truth, which none could deny. It had a testimony in every man's breast.

"That not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God hath spoken concerning you": Particularly concerning the good land, and the Lord's bringing them into it, removing the old inhabitants, and settling them in their place. And putting them in possession of all temporal good things and spiritual privileges, as the word and ordinances.

"All are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof": (See Joshua 21:45).

Joshua is dying. He has been called to his reward in heaven. He re-emphasizes the blessings God has bestowed upon them. God kept His promises to them.

Verses 15-16: This actually occurred 800 years later, when Babylon exiled the Israelites ca. 605 – 586 B.C. (compare 2 Kings chapters 24 and 25).

Joshua 23:15 "Therefore it shall come to pass, [that] as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you."

Of which there was full proof, and it could not be denied.

"So shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things": Calamities and distresses, by his sore judgments of famine, sword, pestilence, and evil beasts, And captivity, in case of disobedience to his commands.

"Until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you": For as he is faithful to his promises, so to his threatening. And from his punctual performance of the one may be argued and expected the sure fulfilment of the other. And which has been abundantly verified in that people (see Lev. 26:1 and the notes there).

This is the same message throughout the Bible. God will greatly bless those, who keep His commandments. Those who disobey the commandments of God, will find curses attached to everything they do.

Joshua 23:16 "When ye have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you."

The law, so called, and the several precepts of it. Particularly those which relate to the faith and worship of the one only true God (see Exodus 24:7).

"And have gone and served other gods, and have bowed down yourselves unto them": Been guilty of idolatry, of having and worshipping other gods, which are no gods, with or besides the God of Israel (see Joshua 23:7).

"Then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you": Nothing being more provoking to him than idolatry. He being a jealous God of his honor and worship.

"And ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you": As they did at the time of the Babylonish captivity, and at the last destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

To transgress the covenant of the Lord brought the wrath of God upon them. God will not spare the unfaithful. He will destroy them from the earth. They are His wife, spiritually. They commit spiritual adultery, when they follow false gods. God will destroy them for this.

Joshua Chapter 23 Questions

1. Joshua waxed _____ and stricken in _____.
2. This is a time of _____ for Israel.
3. Who did Joshua call to him?
4. Why did he call them?
5. What kind of servant of God had Joshua been?
6. What does he remind Israel, they had seen?
7. When is it easy to forget that God has brought us this far?
8. This land, they were living in, was a _____ from God.
9. Who had chosen who got what plot of land?
10. Why was God not angry with them, that they had not completely driven the enemy out?
11. The worship of the Canaanites was of _____ _____.
12. What were they to be courageous to do?
13. The path of righteousness is _____.
14. What did Moses leave them, to help them?
15. We are in the world, but we must not be _____ the world.

16. How had they been able to drive their enemies out?
17. "Cleave" speaks of a _____ attachment.
18. What will these nations be to them, if they intermarry with them?
19. What is Joshua saying when he says, he is going the way of all the earth?
20. What does Joshua re-emphasize to them?
21. What are the two messages throughout the Bible?
22. To transgress the covenant of the Lord, brought what?