

CHAPTER 24

This chapter concludes the life and reign of Joshua, in which we have,

I. The great care and pains he took to confirm the people of Israel in the true faith and worship of God, that they might, after his death, persevere therein. In order to this he called another general assembly of the heads of the congregation of Israel (v. 1) and dealt with them.

1. By way of narrative, recounting the great things God had done for them and their fathers (v. 2-13).
2. By way of charge to them, in consideration thereof, to serve God (v. 14).
3. By way of treaty with them, wherein he aims to bring them,
 - (1.) To make religion their deliberate choice; and they did so, with reasons for their choice (v. 15-18).
 - (2.) To make it their determinate choice, and to resolve to adhere to it (v. 19-24).
4. By way of covenant upon that treaty (v. 25-28).

II. The conclusion of this history, with,

1. The death and burial of Joshua (v. 29, 30) and Eleazar (v. 33), and the mention of the burial of Joseph's bones upon that occasion (v. 32).
2. A general account of the state of Israel at that time (v. 31).

◀▶ JOSHUA 24:1-14

JOSHUA'S FAREWELL ADDRESS TO ISRAEL

Joshua thought he had taken his last farewell of Israel in the solemn charge he gave them in the foregoing chapter, when he said, *I go the way of all the earth*; but God graciously continuing his life longer than expected, and renewing his strength, he was desirous to improve it for the good of Israel. He did not say, "I have taken my leave of them once, and let that serve;" but, having yet a longer space given him, he summons them together again, that he might try what more he could do to engage them for God. Note,

We must never think our work for God done till our life is done; and, if he lengthen out our days beyond what we thought, we must conclude it is because he has some further service for us to do.

The assembly is the same with that in the foregoing chapter, the *elders, heads, judges, and officers of Israel*, v. 1. But it is here made somewhat more solemn than it was there.

I. The place appointed for their meeting is *Shechem*, not only because that lay nearer to Joshua than Shiloh, and therefore more convenient now that he was infirm and unfit for travelling, but because it was the place where Abraham, the first trustee of God's covenant with this people, settled at his coming to Canaan, and where God appeared to him (^{<0125>}Genesis 12:6, 7), and near which stood mounts Gerizim and Ebal, where the people had renewed their covenant with God at their first coming into Canaan, ^{<0683>}Joshua 8:30. Of the promises God had made to their fathers, and of the promises they themselves had made to God, this place might serve to put them in mind.

II. They presented themselves not only before Joshua, but before God, in this assembly, that is, they came together in a solemn religious manner, as into the special presence of God, and with an eye to his speaking to them by Joshua; and it is probable the service began with prayer. It is the conjecture of interpreters that upon this great occasion Joshua ordered the ark of God to be brought by the priests to Shechem, which, they say, was about ten miles from Shiloh, and to be set down in the place of their meeting, which is therefore called (v. 26) *the sanctuary of the Lord*, the presence of the ark making it so at that time; and this was done to grace the solemnity, and to strike an awe upon the people that attended. We have not now any such sensible tokens of the divine presence, but are to believe that *where two or three are gathered together* in Christ's name he is as really in the midst of them as God was where the ark was, and they are indeed presenting themselves before him.

III. Joshua spoke to them in God's name, and as from him, in the language of a prophet (v. 2): "*Thus saith the Lord, Jehovah, the great God, and the God of Israel, your God in covenant, whom therefore you are bound to hear and give heed to.*" Note, The word of God is to be received by us as his, whoever is the messenger that brings it, whose greatness cannot add to

it, nor his meanness diminish from it. His sermon consists of doctrine and application.

1. The doctrinal part is a history of the great things God had done for his people, and for their fathers before them. God by Joshua recounts the marvels of old: "I did so and so." They must know and consider, not only that such and such things were done, but that God did them. It is a series of wonders that is here recorded, and perhaps many more were mentioned by Joshua, which for brevity's sake are here omitted. See what God had wrought.

(1.) He brought Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, v. 2, 3. He and his ancestors had served other gods there, for it was the country in which, though celebrated for learning, idolatry, as some think, had its rise; there *the world by wisdom knew not God*. Abraham, who afterwards was the friend of God and the great favourite of heaven, was bred up in idolatry, and lived long in it, till God by his grace snatched him as a brand out of that burning. Let them remember that rock out of which they were hewn, and not relapse into that sin from which their fathers by a miracle of free grace were delivered. "I took him," says God, "else he had never come out of that sinful state." Hence Abraham's justification is made by the apostle an instance of God's *justifying the ungodly*, ^{<[415]>}Romans 4:5.

(2.) He brought him to Canaan, and built up his family, led him through the land to Shechem, where they now were, multiplied his seed by Ishmael, who begat twelve princes, but at last gave him Isaac the promised son, and in him multiplied his seed. When Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau, God provided an inheritance for Esau elsewhere in Mount Seir, that the land of Canaan might be reserved entire for the seed of Jacob, and the posterity of Esau might not pretend to a share in it.

(3.) He delivered the seed of Jacob out of Egypt with a high hand (v. 5, 6), and rescued them out of the hands of Pharaoh and his host at the Red Sea, v. 6, 7. The same waters were the Israelites' guard and the Egyptians' grave, and this in answer to prayer; for, though we find in the story that they in that distress murmured against God (^{<[241]>}Exodus 14:11, 12), notice is here taken of their *crying to God*; he graciously accepted those that prayed to him, and overlooked the folly of those that quarrelled with him.

(4.) He protected them in the wilderness, where they are here said, not to *wander*, but to *dwell for a long season*, v. 7. So wisely were all their

motions directed, and so safely were they kept, that even there they had as certain a dwelling-place as if they had been in a walled city.

(5.) He gave them the land of the Amorites, on the other side Jordan (v. 8), and there defeated the plot of Balak and Balaam against them, so that Balaam could not curse them as he desired, and therefore Balak durst not fight them as he designed, and as, because he designed it, he is here said to have done it. The turning of Balaam's tongue to bless Israel, when he intended to curse them, is often mentioned as an instance of the divine power put forth in Israel's favour as remarkable as any, because in it God proved (and does still, more than we are aware of) his dominion over the powers of darkness, and over the spirits of men.

(6.) He brought them safely and triumphantly into Canaan, delivered the Canaanites into their hand (v. 11), *sent hornets before them*, when they were actually engaged in battle with the enemy, which with their stings tormented them and with their noise terrified them, so that they became a very easy prey to Israel. These dreadful swarms first appeared in their war with Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, and afterwards in their other battles, v. 12. God had promised to do this for them, ^{<0237>}Exodus 23:27, 28. And here Joshua takes notice of the fulfilling of that promise. See ^{<0237>}Exodus 23:27, 28; ^{<0171>}Deuteronomy 7:20. These hornets, it should seem, annoyed the enemy more than the artillery of Israel, and therefore he adds, *not with thy sword nor bow*. It was purely the Lord's doing. *Lastly*, They were now in the peaceable possession of a good land, and lived comfortably upon the fruit of other people's labours, v. 13.

2. The application of this history of God's mercies to them is by way of exhortation to fear and serve God, in gratitude for his favour, and that it might be continued to them, v. 14. Now therefore, in consideration of all this,

(1.) “*Fear the Lord*, the Lord and his goodness, ^{<0185>}Hosea 3:5. Reverence a God of such infinite power, fear to offend him and to forfeit his goodness, keep up an awe of his majesty, a deference to his authority, a dread of his displeasure, and a continual regard to his all-seeing eye upon you.”

(2.) “Let your practice be consonant to this principle, and serve him both by the outward acts of religious worship and every instance of obedience in your whole conversation, and this *in sincerity and truth*, with a single eye

and an upright heart, and inward impressions answerable to outward expressions.” This is the *truth in the inward part*, which God requires, ^{<4506>}Psalm 51:6. For what good will it do us to dissemble with a God that searches the heart?

(3.) *Put away the strange gods*, both Chaldean and Egyptian idols, for those they were most in danger of revolting to. It should seem by this charge, which is repeated (v. 23), that there were some among them that privately kept in their closets the images or pictures of these dunghill-deities, which came to their hands from their ancestors, as heir-looms of their families, though, it may be, they did not worship them; these Joshua earnestly urges them to throw away: “Deface them, destroy them, lest you be tempted to serve them.” Jacob pressed his household to do this, and at this very place; for, when they gave him up the little images they had, he buried them *under the oak which was by Shechem*, ^{<038D>}Genesis 35:2, 4. Perhaps the oak mentioned here (v. 26) was the same oak, or another in the same place, which might be well called the *oak of reformation*, as there were idolatrous oaks.

^{<0245>}JOSHUA 24:15-28

JOSHUA'S FAREWELL ADDRESS TO ISRAEL

Never was any treaty carried on with better management, nor brought to a better issue, than this of Joshua with the people, to engage them to serve God. The manner of his dealing with them shows him to have been in earnest, and that his heart was much upon it, to leave them under all possible obligations to cleave to him, particularly the obligation of a choice and of a covenant.

I. Would it be any obligation upon them if they made the service of God their choice? — he here puts them to their choice, not as if it were antecedently indifferent whether they served God or nor, or as if they were at liberty to refuse his service, but because it would have a great influence upon their perseverance in religion if they embraced it with the reason of men and with the resolution of men. These two things he here brings them to.

1. He brings them to embrace their religion rationally and intelligently, for it is a reasonable service. The will of man is apt to glory in its native liberty, and, in a jealousy for the honour of this, adheres with most pleasure to that which is its own choice and is not imposed upon it; therefore it is God's will that this service should be, not our chance, or a force upon us, but our choice. Accordingly,

(1.) Joshua fairly puts the matter to their choice, v. 15. Here,

[1.] He proposes the candidates that stand for the election. The Lord, Jehovah, on one side, and on the other side either the gods of their ancestors, which would pretend to recommend themselves to those that were fond of antiquity, and that which was received by tradition from their fathers, or the *gods of their neighbours*, the Amorites, in *whose land they dwelt*, which would insinuate themselves into the affections of those that were complaisant and fond of good fellowship.

[2.] He supposes there were those to whom, upon some account or other, it would *seem evil to serve the Lord*. There are prejudices and objections which some people raise against religion, which, with those that are inclined to the world and the flesh, have great force. It seems evil to them, hard and unreasonable, to be obliged to deny themselves, mortify the flesh, take up their cross, etc. But, being in a state of probation, it is fit there should be some difficulties in the way, else there were no trial.

[3.] He refers it to themselves: “*Choose you whom you will serve*, choose this day, now that the matter is laid thus plainly before you, speedily bring it to a head, and do not stand hesitating.” Elijah, long after this, referred the decision of the controversy between Jehovah and Baal to the consciences of those with whom he was treating, ^{<1182>}1 Kings 18:21. Joshua's putting the matter here to this issue plainly intimates two things: — *First*, That it is the will of God we should every one of us make religion our serious and deliberate choice. Let us state the matter impartially to ourselves, weigh things in an even balance, and then determine for that which we find to be really true and good. Let us resolve upon a life of serious godliness, not merely because we know no other way, but because really, upon search, we find no better. *Secondly*, That religion has so much self-evident reason and righteousness on its side that it may safely be referred to every man that allows himself a free thought either to choose or refuse it; for the merits of the cause are so plain that no considerate man can do otherwise but choose it. The case is so clear that it determines itself.

Perhaps Joshua designed, by putting them to their choice, thus to try if there were any among them who, upon so fair an occasion given, would show a coolness and indifference towards the service of God, whether they would desire time to consider and consult their friends before they gave in an answer, and if any such should appear he might set a mark upon them, and warn the rest to avoid them.

[4.] He directs their choice in this matter by an open declaration of his own resolutions: “*But as for me and my house, whatever you do, we will serve the Lord, and I hope you will all be of the same mind.*” Here he resolves, *First*, For himself: *As for me, I will serve the Lord.* Note, The service of God is nothing below the greatest of men; it is so far from being a diminution and disparagement to princes and those of the first rank to be religious that it is their greatest honour, and adds the brightest crown of glory to them. Observe how positive he is: “I will serve God.” It is no abridgment of our liberty to bind ourselves with a bond to God. *Secondly*, For *his house*, that is, his family, his children and servants, such as were immediately under his eye and care, his inspection and influence. Joshua was a ruler, a judge in Israel, yet he did not make his necessary application to public affairs an excuse for the neglect of family religion. Those that have the charge of many families, as magistrates and ministers, must take special care of their own (~~540B~~ 1 Timothy 3:4, 5): *I and my house will serve God.*

1. “Not my house, without me.” He would not engage them to that work which he would not set his own hand to. As some who would have their children and servants good, but will not be so themselves; that is, they would have them go to heaven, but intend to go to hell themselves.
2. “Not I, without my house.” He supposes he might be forsaken by his people, but in his house, where his authority was greater and more immediate, there he would over-rule. Note, When we cannot bring as many as we would to the service of God we must bring as many as we can, and extend our endeavours to the utmost sphere of our activity; if we cannot reform the land, let us put away iniquity far from our own tabernacle.
3. “First I, and then my house.” Note, Those that lead and rule in other things should be first in the service of God, and go before in the best things. *Thirdly*, He resolves to do this whatever others did. Though all the families of Israel should revolt from God, and serve idols, yet Joshua and his family will stedfastly adhere to the God of Israel. Note, Those that

resolve to serve God must not mind being singular in it, nor be drawn by the crowd to forsake his service. Those that are bound for heaven must be willing to swim against the stream, and must not do as the most do, but as the best do.

(2.) The matter being thus put to their choice, they immediately determine it by a free, rational, and intelligent declaration, for the God of Israel, against all competitors whatsoever, v. 16-18. Here,

[1.] They concur with Joshua in his resolution, being influenced by the example of so great a man, who had been so great a blessing to them (v. 18): *We also will serve the Lord*. See how much good great men might do, if they were but zealous in religion, by their influence on their inferiors.

[2.] They startle at the thought of apostatizing from God (v. 16): *God forbid*; the word intimates the greatest dread and detestation imaginable. “Far be it, far be it from us, that we or ours should ever *forsake the Lord to serve other gods*. We must be perfectly lost to all sense of justice, gratitude, and honour, ere we can harbour the least thought of such a thing.” Thus must our hearts rise against all temptations to desert the service of God. *Get thee behind me, Satan*.

[3.] They give very substantial reasons for their choice, to show that they did not make it purely in compliance to Joshua, but from a full conviction of the reasonableness and equity of it. They make this choice for, and in consideration, *First*, Of the many great and very kind things God had done for them, bringing them out of Egypt through the wilderness into Canaan, v. 17, 18. Thus they repeat to themselves Joshua's sermon, and then express their sincere compliance with the intentions of it. *Secondly*, Of the relation they stood in to God, and his covenant with them: “*We will serve the Lord* (v. 18), *for he is our God*, who has graciously engaged himself by promise to us, and to whom we have by solemn vow engaged ourselves.”

2. He brings them to embrace their religion resolutely, and to express a full purpose of heart to cleave to the Lord. Now that he has them in a good mind he follows his blow, and drives the nail to the head, that it might, if possible, be a nail in a sure place. Fast bind, fast find.

(1.) In order to this he sets before them the difficulties of religion, and that in it which might be thought discouraging (v. 19, 20): *You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God*, or, as it is in the Hebrew, *he is the holy Gods*,

intimating the mystery of the Trinity, three in one; *holy, holy, holy*, holy Father, holy Son, holy Spirit. *He will not forgive. And, if you forsake him, he will do you hurt.* Certainly Joshua does not intend hereby to deter them from the service of God as impracticable and dangerous. But,

[1.] He perhaps intends to represent here the suggestions of seducers, who tempted Israel from their God, and from the service of him; with such insinuations as these, that he was a hard master, his work impossible to be done, and he not to be pleased, and, if displeased, implacable and revengeful, — that he would confine their respects to himself only, and would not suffer them to show the least kindness for any other, — and that herein he was very unlike the gods of the nations, which were easy, and neither holy nor jealous. It is probable that this was then commonly objected against the Jewish religion, as it has all along been the artifice of Satan every since he tempted our first parents thus to misrepresent God and his laws, as harsh and severe; and Joshua by his tone and manner of speaking might make them perceive he intended it as an objection, and would put it to them how they would keep their ground against the force of it. Or,

[2.] He thus expresses his godly jealousy over them, and his fear concerning them, that, notwithstanding the profession they now made of zeal for God and his service, they would afterwards draw back, and if they did they would find him just and jealous to avenge it. Or,

[3.] He resolves to let them know the worst of it, and what strict terms they must expect to stand upon with God, that they might sit down and count the cost. “*You cannot serve the Lord*, except you put away all other gods for he is holy and jealous, and will by no means admit a rival, and therefore you must be very watchful and careful, for it is at your peril if you desert his service; better you had never known it.” Thus, though our Master has assured us that *his yoke is easy*, yet lest, upon the presumption of this, we should grow remiss and careless, he has also told us that the gate is strait, and the way narrow, that leads to life, that we may therefore strive to enter, and not seek only. “*You cannot serve God and Mammon*; therefore, if you resolve to serve God, you must renounce all competitors with him. You cannot serve God in your own strength, nor will he forgive your transgressions for any righteousness of your own; but *all the seed of Israel must be justified and must glory in the Lord alone as their righteousness and strength*,” ²³⁵³ Isaiah 45:24, 25. They must therefore

come off from all confidence in their own sufficiency, else their purposes would be to no purpose. Or,

[4.] Joshua thus urges on them the seeming discouragements which lay in their way, that he might sharpen their resolutions, and draw from them a promise yet more express and solemn that they would continue faithful to God and their religion. He draws it from them that they might catch at it the more earnestly and hold it the faster.

(2.) Notwithstanding this statement of the difficulties of religion, they declare a firm and fixed resolution to continue and persevere therein (v. 21): “*Nay, but we will serve the Lord.* We will think never the worse of him for his being a holy and jealous God, nor for his confining his servants to worship himself only. Justly will he consume those that forsake him, but we never will forsake him; not only we have a good mind to serve him, and we hope we shall, but we are at a point, we cannot bear to hear any *entreaties to leave him or to turn from following after him* (^{<R116>}Ruth 1:16); in the strength of divine grace we are resolved that we will serve the Lord.” This resolution they repeat with an explication (v. 24): “*The Lord our God will we serve, not only be called his servants and wear his livery, but our religion shall rule us in every thing, and his voice will we obey.*” And in vain do we *call him Master and Lord, if we do not the things which he saith,* ^{<L166>}Luke 6:46. This last promise they make in answer to the charge Joshua gave them (v. 23), that, in order to their perseverance, they should,

[1.] Put away the images and relics of the strange gods, and not keep any of the tokens of those other lovers in their custody, if they resolved their *Maker should be their husband;* they promise, in this, to obey his voice.

[2.] That they should *incline their hearts to the God of Israel,* use their authority over their own hearts to engage them for God, not only to set their affections upon him, but to settle them so. These terms they agree to, and thus, as Joshua explains the bargain, they strike it: *The Lord our God will we serve.*

II. The service of God being thus made their deliberate choice, Joshua binds them to it by a solemn covenant, v. 25. Moses had twice publicly ratified this covenant between God and Israel, at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24) and in the plains of Moab, ^{<D101>}Deuteronomy 29:1. Joshua had likewise done it once (^{<J831>}Joshua 8:31, etc.) and now the second time. It is here

called a *statute* and an *ordinance*, because of the strength and perpetuity of its obligation, and because even this covenant bound them to no more than what they were antecedently bound to by the divine command. Now, to give it the formalities of a covenant,

- 1.** He calls witnesses, no other than themselves (v. 22): *You are witnesses that you have chosen the Lord*. He promises himself that they would never forget the solemnities of this day; but, if hereafter they should break this covenant, he assures them that the professions and promises they had now made would certainly rise up in judgment against them and condemn them; and they agreed to it: *“We are witnesses; let us be judged out of our own mouths if ever we be false to our God.”*
- 2.** He put it in writing, and inserted it, as we find it here, in the sacred canon: He *wrote it in the book of the law* (v. 26), in that original which was laid up in the side of the ark, and thence, probably, it was transcribed into the several copies which the princes had for the use of each tribe. There it was written, that their obligation to religion by the divine precept, and that by their own promise, might remain on record together.
- 3.** He erected a memorandum of it, for the benefit of those who perhaps were not conversant with writings, v. 26, 27. He *set up a great stone under an oak*, as a monument of this covenant, and perhaps wrote an inscription upon it (by which stones are made to speak) signifying the intention of it. When he says, *It hath heard* what was past, he tacitly upbraids the people with the hardness of their hearts, as if this stone had heard to as good purpose as some of them; and, if they should forget what was no done, this stone would so far preserve the remembrance of it as to reproach them for their stupidity and carelessness, and be a witness against them.

The matter being thus settled, Joshua dismissed this assembly of the grandees of Israel (v. 28), and took his last leave of them, well satisfied in having done his part, by which he had delivered his soul; if they perished, their blood would be upon their own heads.

~~629~~ JOSHUA 24:29-33

THE DEATH OF JOSHUA

This book, which began with triumphs, here ends with funerals, by which all the glory of man is stained. We have here

1. The burial of Joseph, v. 32. He died about 200 years before in Egypt, but *gave commandment concerning his bones*, that they should not rest in their grave until Israel had rest in the land of promise; now therefore the children of Israel, who had brought this coffin full of bones with them out of Egypt, carried it along with them in all their marches through the wilderness (the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, it is probable, taking particular care of it), and kept it in their camp till Canaan was perfectly reduced, now at last they deposited it in that piece of ground which his father gave him near Shechem, ~~4822~~Genesis 48:22. Probably it was upon this occasion that Joshua called for all Israel to meet him at Shechem (v. 1), to attend Joseph's coffin to the grave there, so that the sermon in this chapter served both for Joseph's funeral sermon and his own farewell sermon; and if it was, as is supposed, in the last year of his life, the occasion might very well remind him of his own death being at hand, for he was not just at the same age that his illustrious ancestor Joseph had arrived at when he died, *110 years old*; compare v. 29 with ~~4516~~Genesis 50:26.

2. The death and burial of Joshua, v. 29, 30. We are not told how long he lived after the coming of Israel into Canaan. Dr. Lightfoot thinks it was about seventeen years; but the Jewish chronologers generally say it was about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years. He is here called the *servant of the Lord*, the same title that was given to Moses (~~4800~~Joshua 1:1) when mention was made of his death; for, though Joshua was in many respects inferior to Moses, yet in this he was equal to him, that, according as his work was, he approved himself a diligent and faithful servant of God. And he that traded with his two talents had the same approbation that he had who traded with his five. *Well done, good and faithful servant*. Joshua's burying-place is here said to be *on the north side of the hill Gaash, or the quaking hill*; the Jews say it was so called because it trembled at the burial of Joshua, to upbraid the people of Israel with their stupidity in that they did not lament the death of that great and good man as they ought to have done. Thus at the death of Christ, our Joshua, the earth quaked. The

learned bishop Patrick observes that there is no mention of any days of mourning being observed for Joshua, as there were for Moses and Aaron, in which, he says, St. Hierom and others of the fathers think there is a mystery, namely, that under the law, when life and immortality were not brought to so clear a light as they are now, they had reason to mourn and weep for the death of their friends; but now that Jesus, our Joshua, has opened the kingdom of heaven, we may rather rejoice.

3. The death and burial of Eleazar the chief priest, who, it is probable, died about the same time that Joshua did, as Aaron in the same year with Moses, v. 33. The Jews say that Eleazar, a little before he died, called the elders together, and gave them a charge as Joshua had done. He was buried in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which came to him, not by descent, for then it would have pertained to his father first, nor had the priests any cities in Mount Ephraim, but either it fell to him by marriage, as the Jews conjecture, or it was freely bestowed upon him, to build a country seat on, by some pious Israelite that was well-affected to the priesthood, for it is here said to have been *given him*; and there he buried his dear father.

4. A general idea given us of the state of Israel at this time, v. 31. While Joshua lived, religion was kept up among them under his care and influence; but soon after he and his contemporaries died it went to decay, so much oftentimes does one head hold up: how well is it for the gospel church that Christ, our Joshua, is still with it, by his Spirit, and will be always, even *unto the end of the world!*