



Joshua - Chapter Twenty Three

IV Joshua 22:1-24:33 - Serving the Lord in the Land (continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Three

In many respects this episode mirrors the opening episode in the Book of Joshua. The book began with the passing of the mantle of leadership to Joshua, after the death of Moses. Joshua, now old and well advanced in years, and so the next generation of leaders is charged in terms reminiscent of Joshua's own commission in Chapter One.

IV.b Joshua 23:1-16 - Joshua Exhorts the People

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ A long time afterwards, when the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies all around, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, ² Joshua summoned all Israel, their elders and heads, their judges and officers, and said to them, 'I am now old and well advanced in years; ³ and you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the Lord your God who has fought for you.

Joshua 23:1-3

A long time afterwards. Specificity is not possible, but probably more than a quarter century has elapsed since Israel first crossed the Jordan into the land, assuming that Joshua was similar in age to Caleb at the beginning of the conquest, who was nearing 80 (refer to the comment made on Joshua 11:16-20), and in view of Joshua's age of 110 at death (Joshua 24:29).

The Lord had given rest to Israel. The reference in Hebrews 4:8 does not deny this, but rather clarifies the truth that life in the earthly Promised Land does not automatically bring one to participate in God's own 'rest.'

Joshua summoned all Israel. Joshua, in his old age, gathers the leadership of Israel together to give them a farewell address, to communicate to them the things that are, to his heart, the most important for them to hear. Joshua cannot, as a practical matter, speak to the whole nation, so he speaks to the leaders: elders, heads, judges, and officers. He can reach the entire nation by communicating well to its leaders.

You have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the Lord your God who has fought for you. Joshua begins his address by giving glory to God. It would have been easy for Joshua to focus on what he had done as a military leader, especially because it was impressive. However, he is far more interested in glorifying God than talking about himself.

⁴ I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The Lord your God will push them back before you, and drive them out of your sight; and you shall possess their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

Joshua 23:4-5

I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain. Joshua has obeyed the mandate he received in Joshua 13:1-7, in essence passing it on to the next generation of leaders (v.6). With respect to these remaining peoples, Joshua reminds Israel's leaders of the Lord's promise to drive them out, i.e. dispossess them (13:6), and their responsibility to possess their land (13:1).

Under Joshua's leadership, the army of Israel broke the back of the Canaanite military occupation. Now it remains for each individual tribe to fully possess what God has given them. In the same way, God gives every believer an inheritance. Christians have been blessed: <<*in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*>> (Ephesians 1:3b), and God has a definite part for them to play in coming to possess that inheritance.

⁶ Therefore be very steadfast to observe and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right nor to the left, ⁷ so that you may not be mixed with these nations left here among you, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear

by them, or serve them, or bow yourselves down to them,⁸ but hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.

Joshua 23:6-8

Joshua charges the leaders who are to succeed him to be very steadfast or **strong** just as he had been charged three times in Joshua 1:5-9. Here he highlights only the central, key point: their greatest duty and challenge is to live and lead according to all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses (1:7-8).

They must not turn aside from it neither to the right nor to the left, because Satan does not care which extreme people go off to. Either legalism or licentiousness pleases him.

The key question facing the generation following Joshua is whom they will serve: the gods of the nations left or the true God of Israel (v.16). Allegiance to the gods of other nations continued to be the primary threat Israel faced while living among, i.e. mixed with the nations: <<*They did not destroy the peoples as the Lord commanded them, but they mingled with the nations and learned to do as they did. They served their idols, which became a snare to them*>> (Psalm 106:34-36).

You may not make mention of the names of their gods. Joshua tells Israel to not even make mention of these false gods of the Canaanites. Instead of learning about them, they should hold fast to the Lord their God. An old Mafia saying says something to the effect of, 'Keep your friends close, but your enemies even closer' but this is exactly what Christians are not to do. Most Christians are not called to become an expert in the cults or in heresy, but to become an expert in Jesus Christ, to hold fast to him.

⁹ For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations; and as for you, no one has been able to withstand you to this day. ¹⁰ One of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the Lord your God who fights for you, as he promised you. ¹¹ Be very careful, therefore, to love the Lord your God. ¹² For if you turn back, and join the survivors of these nations left here among you, and intermarry with them, so that you marry their women and they yours, ¹³ know assuredly that the Lord your God will not continue to drive out these nations before you; but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land that the Lord your God has given you.

Joshua 23:9-13

For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations. As Israel abided in the Lord, they saw God do great things through them. As they continued to abide, they would continue to see great things as God fights on their behalf. Jesus promises to take it to a whole new level for his followers: *<<Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father>>* (John 14:12).

Love the Lord your God. This is what they must be careful to do. They must, as Jude puts it: *<<keep yourselves in the love of God>>* (Jude 21a). Continually loving the Lord takes diligence. There are many things both within a Christian heart and outside of it to draw them away from that love. This call to love God is an appeal to the human will. A person first decides to love God, even if the feelings do not come first. Yet, always remembering: *<<We love because he first loved us>>* (1 John 4:19).

For if you turn back, and join the survivors of these nations left here among you. Continuing in God's love will mean that they keep themselves separate from the ungodly influences around them; the command is: *<<to keep oneself unstained by the world>>* (James 1:27b). As Jesus once said: *<<As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing>>* (Matthew 13:22).

They shall be a snare and a trap for you, a scourge on your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until you perish. If they do not separate themselves from the ungodly influences around them, those influences will become to them instruments of torture, leading to their destruction. These ungodly influences never advertise themselves as instruments of torture; they present themselves as wonderful things, but believers must see past all this: *<<Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect>>* (Romans 12:2).

¹⁴ ‘And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you; all have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed.

Joshua 23:14

And now I am about to go the way of all the earth. Joshua knows that his earthly life is coming to an end, just as the apostles did in their day: *<<As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has*

come>> (2 Timothy 4:6), and: *<<I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to refresh your memory, since I know that my death will come soon, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things>>* (2 Peter 1:13-15).

You know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed. Joshua requires that every person probe deep within, and see if there is ever a time in their lives when they could rightly accuse God of unfaithfulness to them: *<<They shall be my people and I will be their God, in faithfulness and in righteousness>>* (Zechariah 8:8b).

All have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed. If any of God's people think there could be such a legitimate accusation, it shows they know little of the God they claim to know. Paul demonstrates that he knows the truth about God even though he had suffered much in proclaiming that very truth: *<<Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness, in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began>>* (Titus 1:1-2).

¹⁵ But just as all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the bad things, until he has destroyed you from this good land that the Lord your God has given you. ¹⁶ If you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he enjoined on you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land that he has given to you.'

Joshua 23:15-16

Just as all the good things that the Lord your God promised. The same God who is true to his word in keeping his promises of blessing will be true to fulfil his threats, i.e. all the bad things, if Israel breaks covenant with him and decides to serve other gods. Key Mosaic expositions of blessings and curses are found in Leviticus 26:14-46 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

Joshua merely repeats the principle of blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience that was a specific part of Israel's covenant with God. He emphasises that God will be just as faithful to judge as he had been to bless. Christians relate to God under a different covenant, a new and better covenant: *<<But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted*

through better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one>> (Hebrews 8:6-7), by which Jesus has redeemed them from the curse of the law: <<For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.’ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’ But the law does not rest on faith; on the contrary, ‘Whoever does the works of the law will live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ – in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith>> (Galatians 3:10-14). Therefore, in Jesus Christians no longer can experience God’s ‘faithfulness to curse us’ as Israel knew it. Yet they do experience God’s faithfulness to correct them as a loving Father: <<Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline?>> (Hebrews 12:7), and they do experience a lack of appropriated blessing if they do not abide in Jesus: <<Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing>> (John 15:4-5).