



Vital Decision

IN HIS FAREWELL ADDRESS, JOSHUA CHALLENGED THE PEOPLE TO CHOOSE THE LORD OVER THE GODS OF THE CANAANITES.

JOSHUA 24:14-24

Crash landings of commercial jets are extremely rare. Nevertheless, one of the normal routines before a commercial jet takes off is flight attendants giving passengers instructions on what to do in case of an emergency landing on land or water. Most passengers seem to ignore the flight attendants. People might get away with that on a plane, but it is always costly when people ignore warnings in the Word of God.

 **Why are people tempted to ignore warnings of potential danger?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOSHUA 22:1–24:33

Chapters 22–24 contain Joshua’s farewell message to Israel. This last section can be divided into two subsections. Chapter 22 describes how Joshua summoned the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh that had requested to have their tribal allotments in lands east of the Jordan River. Moses had promised them these allotments if they helped the rest of the tribes defeat the Canaanites (Num. 32:1-32; Josh. 1:12-18). Now that the fighting was done, Joshua commended them for keeping their oath. Before pronouncing a blessing on them and sending them to their homes, Joshua instructed them to obey God’s Word and to remain His faithful servants.

When the Reubenites, Gadites, and half-tribe of Manasseh reached the Jordan River, they built a large altar on the western side, Israel’s side. The other tribes, thinking that this action would bring God’s wrath on all of Israel as they had experienced in the past, prepared to wage war with them. However, before commencing their attack, the nine and a half tribes west of the Jordan sent a delegation to speak with the two and a half tribes to the east. The eastern tribes appealed to God and said they built the altar as a memorial of their solidarity with the other tribes even though they were separated by the Jordan River. This pleased the delegation and averted hostilities.

Chapters 23–24 contain Joshua’s last words to Israel. He challenged the people to remain faithful to the Lord and stay away from the false gods of the peoples still remaining in the land. Joshua warned them that if they worshiped these idols, then the Lord would destroy them. The people insisted they would remain faithful. Consequently, Joshua made a covenant for the people and set up a memorial stone as a witness to the oath they made to the Lord. Israel worshiped God as long as Joshua and their elders who served beside Joshua lived. Finally, the book concludes with the burials of Joshua, Joseph’s bones, and Eleazar the high priest.



Read Joshua 24:14-24. Highlight all the ways Joshua encouraged the Israelites to be faithful to the Lord.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

CHALLENGE (JOSH. 24:14-18)

¹⁴ **“Therefore, fear the LORD and worship him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship the LORD.**

¹⁵ **But if it doesn’t please you to worship the LORD, choose for yourselves today: Which will you worship—the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, we will worship the LORD.”** ¹⁶ **The people replied, “We will certainly not abandon the LORD to worship other gods!**

¹⁷ **For the LORD our God brought us and our ancestors out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery, and performed these great signs before our eyes. He also protected us all along the way we went and among all the peoples whose lands we traveled through.** ¹⁸ **The LORD drove out before us all the peoples, including the Amorites who lived in the land. We too will worship the LORD, because he is our God.”**

VERSE 14

Verses 1-13 record that Joshua gathered Israel at Shechem. Even though this is the first time the book of Joshua mentions Shechem, it would become an important political and religious center in Israel. Shechem was already significant to the nation because it was there that God first promised Abraham that He would give Abraham’s descendants the land of Canaan. So as Joshua was about to die, he stood before all of Israel at Shechem and proclaimed that they themselves were evidence of and witnesses to the truth that God kept His promise to Abraham.

As Joshua began his final address to Israel, he told how God had provided for His people. He reminded them how the Lord brought Abraham to the land of Canaan and multiplied his descendants. He reminded the people that God had been with them in Egypt, how He destroyed their enemies, and brought the Israelites out of Egypt. Next, Joshua reminded his audience how, after spending time in the wilderness, God brought them into the promised land. Even though the inhabitants of the land fought against Israel, the Lord handed Israel’s enemies over to them and gave them the land. God had given them every good thing they now possessed.

Based on these truths, Joshua brought his challenge to the nation. He exhorted the people to ***fear the LORD and worship him in sincerity and truth.*** This means they were to have a deep-seated reverence and awe for God that would cause them to hate evil and reject all other gods including the gods that their ancestors worshiped ***beyond the Euphrates River*** and in Egypt. In this way, the Israelites could avoid the Lord's loving but painful discipline. It meant desiring to honor and worship Him above everything else. It meant living unto God with ongoing acknowledgment, dependence, submission, obedience, consideration, attentiveness, wonder, admiration, and love, inspired by His salvation, provision, eternal attributes, and all-encompassing authority.

***Indecision is a decision that leads
to more wrong decisions.***

VERSE 15

Joshua challenged the people to ***choose*** whom they would worship. They could not wallow in indecision. Indecision is a decision that leads to more wrong decisions. It is clear that Israel had a poor track record when it came to their faithfulness to the Lord. Their forefathers worshiped other gods in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and now the Israelites were in a land where its populace, the ***Amorites*** (Canaanites), worshiped more false gods. The gods of the Canaanites' seductive fertility cult would tempt the Israelites with its materialism and immorality.

Either the Israelites would worship the Lord alone and reject all other gods, or they would worship other gods and in so doing reject the Lord. They could not do both, although going forward, many of them would try and pay a price for having done so. The Lord requires undivided devotion. Rahab had provided a perfect example for Israel at Jericho when she rejected the gods of her people and placed her faith in the "LORD," the "God in heaven above and on earth below" (Josh. 2:9-11). Joshua's challenge was that it was now time for all the people of Israel to declare their loyalty to the Lord.

Commitment to the Lord is either total commitment or it is not commitment at all. Just as the Lord had been unwavering in His faithfulness to His covenant people, He expected His people faithfully to be devoted to Him. The same is true today.

At this point, Joshua did not warn them of the dire consequences that would result if they chose to reject the Lord. Instead, he demonstrated the godly leader he was by displaying before them his own example. He stood before the entire nation and declared that he and his family were going to **worship the LORD**. Boldly, Joshua left no doubt where he and his family's allegiance lay and what they were going to do. Joshua's decision did not depend on what those around him would or would not do. After all that the Lord had done for Israel since the time of Abraham up until this moment, it was an obvious choice for Joshua. In so doing, Joshua communicated that the decision to worship the Lord should be an obvious one for all of Israel too.

VERSES 16-18

We should never underestimate the influence a godly example can have on others. Joshua provides an example of how a man devoted to the Lord had a positive influence on a multitude of others. When Joshua had addressed the people earlier, he instructed them to literally “cling” to the Lord their God because of what the Lord had done for them (23:8-9). Now, with the most emphatic language possible, the people replied to Joshua, exclaiming that there was no way they would **abandon the LORD to worship other gods**. They promised to do what Joshua had challenged them to do, to cling to the Lord. This means they were promising they would stay away from the influence of pagan gods, obey the Lord, cultivate love for and devotion to Him, and worship Him alone. This is the commitment of everyone who truly loves the Lord.

Joshua had recounted the good things the Lord had done for Israel in verses 1-13. Beginning in verse 17, the people recounted God's history of blessing them as well. By doing so, they were indicating that they realized they had good reason to cling to the Lord and reject all other gods. They identified themselves with their ancestors as they recounted how God saved them out of Egyptian slavery and **performed these great signs before our eyes**. This is likely a reference to the ten plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea. The people also remembered how God protected them from their enemies as they made their way through the wilderness to the western shore of the Jordan River, enemies such as the Amalekites (Num. 14; 24), the king of Arad (21:1-3), king Sihon of Heshbon (21:21-23), the giant king Og of Bashan (21:33-35), and king Balak of Moab (Num. 23-24). Finally, the people recognized that beginning with their first battle at Jericho, it was the Lord who defeated and

drove out before them all of the Amorites they had faced in the land of Canaan.



Why is it important to consciously choose whom you will serve?



How does your decision to serve the Lord influence people around you?

WARNING (JOSH. 24:19-24)

¹⁹ But Joshua told the people, “You will not be able to worship the LORD, because he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions and sins.” ²⁰ If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, he will turn against you, harm you, and completely destroy you, after he has been good to you.” ²¹ “No!” the people answered Joshua. “We will worship the LORD.” ²² Joshua then told the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you yourselves have chosen to worship the LORD.” “We are witnesses,” they said. ²³ “Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you and turn your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.” ²⁴ So the people said to Joshua, “We will worship the LORD our God and obey him.”

VERSES 19-20

Joshua’s response to the people in verse 19 may appear harsh. However, he had witnessed their parents give a similar response of commitment to the Lord at Sinai. It was not long after they declared their loyalty to the Lord that they made a golden calf and worshiped it (Ex. 19:8; 32:1-4). Joshua knew that it was easier to make a promise of devotion to the Lord than it was to keep it.

The statement, *he will not forgive your transgressions and sins*, was not an absolute, eternal statement for the Lord’s covenant people. The remainder of the Scriptures demonstrates this (see Rom. 11:11-24; Eph. 2:11-22). Nevertheless, it did mean that God would not overlook their unfaithfulness and there would be

consequences for their sin. The law warned that if the Israelites were unfaithful to the Lord, then they would experience drought, famine, disease, defeat, and ultimately exile from the promised land (Deut. 28:15-68). Joshua knew this.

God is not to be taken lightly. Believers today need to recognize that while we are secure in Christ, there is great blessing when we obey our Lord but loss of blessing when we sin against Him (1 Cor. 3:13-14; Gal. 6:7-9).

KEY DOCTRINE: *God's Purpose of Grace*

Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. (See John 5:24; 10:27-29.)

Joshua was present when the Lord told Moses that the Israelites would “turn to other gods and worship them, despising me and breaking my covenant” (Deut. 31:14-20). Breaking a covenant was seen as an act of treason, so there would be severe consequences for what Israel would do. After that, God gave Moses a prophetic song to share with the Israelites. It described God’s holiness and declared His jealousy for His people. The Lord also promised that His judgment would not last forever. He would have compassion on His people when He saw their suffering because the Lord is a merciful and gracious God. When the Lord finished dictating this song to Moses, Joshua helped him recite it to Israel (Deut. 32:1-44). Therefore, Joshua knew that after all the good things God had done for Israel up to that point, they would be unfaithful to Him.

VERSES 21-22

After hearing Joshua say they would break their covenant with the Lord by worshipping other gods, the people of Israel doubled down. They emphatically denied the possibility they would reject the Lord and serve other gods, insisting that they would be faithful servants who would **worship the LORD** just as they had vociferously declared already. With that said, Joshua commenced to put them under oath. He made the people responsible to be witnesses against themselves that they had **chosen to worship the LORD**. Having a witness or witnesses was part of the ceremony of making

an ancient covenant. Verses 26-27 indicate Joshua recorded their covenant and erected a stone to memorialize it to serve as a visual witness to the promise they made that day.

VERSES 23-24

Verse 23 reveals that what God had previously predicted had already begun. Some of the Israelites had possession of idols and were worshiping these *foreign gods*—even after all the things they had seen the Lord do and after everything He had given them. Notwithstanding, one more time they emphatically insisted, ***We will worship the LORD our God and obey him.*** In the final comments of the book, verse 31 indicates Israel worshiped the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the elders of his generation who had witnessed all that the Lord had done for Israel.



What idols or false ideas compete for your loyalty and attention?



BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible study resource to learn more about a biblical principle.*

Joshua 24 highlights a renewal of the covenant between the Lord and His people. Use a Bible atlas to locate Shechem on a map of ancient Israel. Look up the word “covenant” in a Bible dictionary. Read and reflect on the following Scripture passages to learn more about ancient covenants: Genesis 9:8-17; 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-27; Exodus 19:1-8; 2 Samuel 7:1-17. Consider how the Israelites responded to God’s covenants through the years. Why was a new covenant sealed by Jesus’s death and resurrection necessary for God’s people?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Each person must consider how he or she will respond to the Lord.
- + We're to put away any idols that might demand our devotion that rightfully belongs to the Lord.

As a group, discuss ways you might encourage one another to respond rightly to the Lord when He challenges you to be wholeheartedly devoted to Him. What does it look like in your context to be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord?

What are some of the consequences for failing to put away idols in your life? Who might you influence this week to encourage to strengthen their devotion to the Lord?

Memorize Joshua 24:23-24.

Prayer Needs



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.