

This last chapter describes Joshua's final words to Israel shortly before his death. He reminds the people of all that the LORD has done for them and presents them with a choice. They could serve the LORD or else abandon Him to serve other gods, such as the gods of their ancestors or the gods of the Canaanites that the LORD had enabled them to destroy. Joshua makes his own choice very clear.

1 And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.

Joshua is now old and knows that he will soon die (Joshua 23:1, 2, 14) and so he calls for the leaders of Israel – the elders and heads of each tribe as well as those in authority over the people. He calls them together for what would be his farewell address before he dies.

Verses 2-10: Joshua delivers a message from the LORD that briefly recounts the history of what the LORD has done for them. The LORD had called their forefather Abraham out of a life of idolatry and brought him to Canaan, promising to give it to him and his descendants. The LORD repeated this promise to Isaac and Jacob, and eventually lead Jacob to Egypt. Later He used Moses and Aaron to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt with mighty demonstrations of His power.

11 And ye went over Jordan, and came unto Jericho: and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand.

The LORD brought Israel across the Jordan river and gave them victory over every enemy they encountered. The LORD kept His promise that no one would be able to stand before them (**Josh. 1:5** “*There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*”).

12 And I sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, *even* the two kings of the Amorites; *but* not with thy sword, nor with thy bow.

“And I sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, *even* the two kings of the Amorites” – The LORD caused Israel's enemies to flee from them like men flee from a swarm of hornets, just as He had promised (**Deut. 7:20** “*Moreover the LORD thy God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left, and hide themselves from thee, be destroyed.*”).

“but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow” – The LORD is reminding Israel that their success in Canaan did not come through their own military strength. It was the LORD Who enabled them to defeat their enemies.

13 And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.

The LORD had promised to give them land that had already been developed and was ready to inhabit. **Deut. 6:10-12** “*And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.*” The LORD had kept that promise and now they were enjoying its benefits.

14 Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.

“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth” – Joshua points out that Israel should fear and serve the LORD out of gratitude for all that the LORD had done, and do so sincerely and in truth. They were not to go through the motions of serving Him only but to serve Him from the heart. Later Israel becomes guilty of not serving the LORD sincerely: **Isa. 29:13** “*Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:*”

“and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD” – The “flood” here refers to the Euphrates river (see v. 2). The LORD had called Abraham out of idolatry (v. 14) when he was living in Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 11:31) on the other side of the Euphrates. The children of Israel had apparently worshiped the gods of Egypt while they were in bondage there. Joshua is urging Israel to reject the gods that their ancestors had served and instead serve the LORD alone.

15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

“And if it seem *evil* [bad; displeasing; not worthwhile] unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve” – Joshua gives Israel a choice. If serving the LORD does not please or benefit them then they should pick gods they are willing to serve. **“whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell”** – Israel could return to the gods that their patriarch Abraham had worshiped before being called by the LORD, but by doing so they would be choosing the gods that Abraham had rejected in order to serve the LORD. Alternatively, they could serve the gods of the Amorites (the Canaanites), the people who had dwelt in the land before Israel arrived. However, to do so would mean serving the gods that could not prevent the LORD from enabling Israel to conquer the Amorites. The only sensible choice was to serve the LORD. **“but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”** – Joshua declares that he and his family have chosen to serve the LORD, regardless of what the rest of Israel chooses to do. Like Caleb, Joshua remained faithful to the LORD throughout his entire life.

16 And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods; 17 For the LORD our God, he *it is* that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: 18 And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: *therefore* will we also serve the LORD; for he *is* our God.

The people respond to the choice presented by Joshua by declaring that they also will serve the LORD. They point out that the LORD deserves their allegiance because of the things that He has done for them, rescuing and protecting them and giving them the land. He had been a God to them and so they will serve Him.

19 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he *is* an holy God; he *is* a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. 20 If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good. 21 And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD. 22 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye *are* witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, *We are* witnesses.

Joshua challenges the people's commitment to serve the LORD by declaring that they are incapable of serving Him. The LORD is holy (requiring righteousness of His people) and is jealous (will not tolerate His people serving other gods). If they turn away from the LORD to serve other gods then they will suffer the wrath of a holy and jealous God, which could end in their destruction despite how good He has already been to them. The people affirm their choice to serve the LORD and then Joshua declares them to be witness of the choice that they have made. They are now responsible for the consequences of their choice.

23 Now therefore put away, *said he*, the strange gods which *are* among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel. 24 And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. 25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

“Now therefore put away, *said he*, the strange gods which *are* among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel” – Because they have made the commitment to serve the LORD, Joshua calls on Israel to cleanse themselves of any strange (foreign) gods they may have in order to serve the LORD in sincerity and truth. After everything that Israel had been through with the LORD, did they still have foreign gods in their houses? It's quite possible. Rachel had stolen her father Laban's gods (Gen. 31:34) and Achan had desired the Babylonian garment which had likely been used for idolatrous worship (Josh. 7:21). How many of us Christians truly love God and yet we harbor secret sins? We also ought to put away our “strange gods” so that we may serve the LORD sincerely and in truth.

“And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey” – The people reaffirm their intention to serve the LORD. Their fathers had said the same thing to Moses at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:3, 7)

“So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem” – Joshua formalizes their commitment to serve the LORD into a covenant, which essentially was a renewal of the covenant they had made under Moses at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:3-8).

Verses 26-28: Joshua records Israel's new covenant as an addendum to the book of the law of God, and then sets up a monument as a perpetual reminder to Israel of the covenant.

29 And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, *being* an hundred and ten years old. 30 And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-serah, which *is* in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash.

Soon after the covenant was made, Joshua died at the ripe old age of 110. Being from the tribe of Ephraim, he is buried at the edge of his inheritance which is within the territory inherited by that tribe.

31 And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that he had done for Israel.

This verse testifies of Joshua's Godly influence as a leader. Not only did Israel serve the LORD during Joshua's lifetime, but also during the lifetime of the elders of Israel that had outlived him. They had been influenced by Joshua's faithful service to the LORD and were also witnesses to how the LORD had provided for them during the conquest of Canaan. The implication is that after the death of these men, Israel began to stray from the LORD. The book of Judges records this history after the death of Joshua, which is marked by periods when Israel strayed from the LORD and then periods when they returned to Him under the leadership of a Godly judge raised up by the LORD.

Verses 32-33: Israel keeps the promise made to Joseph (Gen. 50:25) when they bury his bones in a parcel of land that belonged to Jacob. Eleazar the high priest also died and was buried in a hill belonging to Phinehas his son.