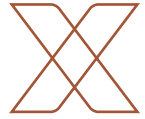


# Vital Decision

Session 7 • Joshua 24:14-24



## ENGAGE

**PREPARE:** Display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Conquest of Canaan*) and **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outlines of Joshua, Judges, Ruth*). Make copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: The Life of Joshua*).

**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 61. Encourage adults to use a scale of 1-5, with one being “completely tuned out” and five being “completely tuned in” to describe how they respond to the safety information before a flight. Affirm that it is easy to get distracted.

**ASK: Why are people tempted to ignore warnings of potential danger?** (p. 61)

**BACKGROUND:** Refer to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outlines of Joshua, Judges, Ruth*). Note that this week’s session wraps up the study of Joshua. Summarize this from **Understand the Context** (p. 61) to provide more background:

- “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.”

**TRANSITION:** *Joshua had led the people to do some incredible things as they moved into the promised land. His final words represent one last challenge for the people of God.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Joshua 24:14-18** as the group listens for the response of the people to Joshua’s challenge.

**RECAP:** Point out the location of Shechem on **Pack Item 1** (*Map: The Conquest of Canaan*). Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: The Life of Joshua*) and recount the significant moments from Joshua’s life. Highlight “Challenged Israel with a final covenant renewal.”

**SHARE:** Explain the nature of Joshua’s final message to the people:

- **(24:14-15)** *Joshua challenged the Israelites both to fear and to serve the Lord. The Hebrew verb translated fear conveys a reverence for God that moves*

people toward holy living. Such reverence came from learning the law and obeying it (Deut. 31:11-12). The Hebrew verb rendered worship can also mean “to serve.” The verb is closely related to a noun meaning “servant” or “slave.” Offering service or worship to God, however, is not bondage. To the contrary, it frees people. The Lord desires that we serve Him “in sincerity and in truth.” The wording suggests service that is “firm” or “complete.” Joshua commanded his listeners to demonstrate total devotion to God. God expects our commitment to Him to be absolute, holding nothing back.

**ASK: Why is it important to consciously choose whom you will serve?** (p. 63)

**DISCUSS: How does your decision to serve the Lord influence people around you?** (p. 63)

**HIGHLIGHT:** Affirm Joshua’s positive example and the people’s commitment to follow that example by serving God wholeheartedly.

- **(24:15)** Joshua made his personal stance clear. He and his family would “worship the LORD.” The Israelite leader did not attempt to manipulate the people or force them to choose God. He simply set a positive example they could follow.
- **(24:16-18)** The people rose to Joshua’s challenge. “We will certainly not abandon” conveys both will and emotions. “Abandon” also means “to leave” or “to forsake” and is used of the backsliding Israelites (Deut. 29:24-25). As a consequence of abandoning the

Lord, God’s people would experience the covenant curses (Deut. 28:20). They affirmed Joshua’s recital of God’s mighty acts. They knew who had rescued them out of Egypt, and they acknowledged the Lord’s “great signs.” This term likely designates the plagues on the Egyptians (Ex. 4:28-31), along with miracles like the parting of the Red Sea, providing manna, and bringing water from a rock. Joshua’s audience recognized that God had “protected” them during their journey to the promised land and in the conquest of it. Thus they declared their loyalty to the Lord. They would follow Joshua’s example of faithfulness and worship the Lord exclusively.

**READ: Call for a volunteer to read Joshua 24:19-24**, directing the group to listen for how many times the people affirmed their desire for the Lord.

**DISCUSS:** Lead the group to discuss why Joshua said the people would not be able to keep this commitment. Highlight that following God can be challenging at times.

**EXPLAIN:** Summarize what Joshua meant regarding Israel’s inability to worship the Lord and God’s refusal to forgive the Israelites’ sins:

- **(24:19-20)** Joshua had just passionately urged the Israelites to serve God alone. Yet when the people responded positively, he said that they would “not be able to worship the LORD.” Joshua seemed to be warning the Israelites against making a hasty promise that they had not considered thoroughly. He was urging

Israel to take God’s holiness seriously. It is similar to Jesus challenging followers to “calculate the cost” of discipleship (Luke 14:28-30). Further, Joshua noted that the Lord “will not forgive your transgressions and sins.” This 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.

**ASK: What kinds of idols or false ideas compete for your time and attention?** (p. 63)

**EXAMINE:** On the board, write *WORSHIP* vertically as an acrostic. Lead the group to suggest words or phrases that are related to worshiping the Lord. Encourage them to use these words to evaluate their own lives and to determine if idols are hindering their absolute commitment to God.

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## CHALLENGE

**SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from this week’s Bible passage:

- 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.

**REVIEW:** Call for the group to discuss some practical ideas that help believers live out their devotion to the Lord. Encourage them to

find specific ways they can express worship to the Lord each day.

**DISCUSS:** Lead the group to discuss the **Apply the Text** activity on page 63. Challenge adults to reflect throughout the week on what it looks like to be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord in their context.

**PRAY:** Lead the group in a time of silent prayer, encouraging the adults to ask God to reveal any idols in their lives that are keeping them from a true commitment to the Lord.

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## AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session by texting or emailing the group this message: *Just as Joshua challenged the people to choose the Lord over the gods of the Canaanites, I challenge you to choose the Lord over the idols of this world this week.* Encourage adults to reflect on the **Apply the Text** questions on page 67. Let them know that the next session begins a study of the book of Judges.