

Vital Decision

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

Joshua 24:14-24

14 “Therefore, **fear** **A** the LORD and worship him in **sincerity and truth**. **B** Get rid of the gods your ancestors worshiped **beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt**, **C** and worship the LORD. 15 But if it doesn’t please you to worship the LORD, **choose for yourselves** **D** today: Which will you worship—the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the **gods of the Amorites** **E** in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, **we will worship the LORD.**” **F** 16 The people replied, “We will certainly not **abandon** **G** 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.” 19 But Joshua told the people, “You will **not be able** **H** to worship the LORD, because he is a holy God. He is a **jealous** **I** God; he will not forgive your transgressions and sins. 20 If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, he will **turn against you**, **J** 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,”** **K** 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.”

Exploring Key Words

- A** The Hebrew word (*yare*) expresses terror or awe. In this context, Joshua was calling for Israel to show reverence and respect for the Lord.
- B** The Israelites needed to live with integrity before the Lord. Superficial devotion—or lip service—would not be sufficient.
- C** Abraham lived in a pagan society before God called him to Canaan (Gen. 11:27-28). Israel’s previous generation apparently struggled with Egyptian idolatry even after God rescued them from slavery.
- D** God had chosen Israel, and He longed for them to choose Him. However, He would not force them to worship Him.
- E** Under Moses, Israel defeated the Amorites (Num. 21:21-35). Yet, the Israelites continued to worship Amorite idols throughout their history (1 Kings 21:26; 2 Kings 21:11).
- F** Joshua declared his choice. The Hebrew word for “worship” (*abad*) also can be translated “serve” (ESV; KJV; NIV). Worship and service are like two sides of the same coin.
- G** “Forsake” (NIV; ESV; KJV). Israel vowed to remain loyal to the Lord because of what He had done for them in the past (see vv. 17-18).
- H** A superficial commitment to Him would not sustain them. Israel needed to understand the weight of its choice.
- I** God would not stand for idolatry. He demanded the Israelites’ full commitment (see Ex. 20:5; Deut. 32:16-21; Nah. 1:2; and Zech. 8:2).
- J** God’s favor depended on Israel’s faithfulness. If they refused to serve Him alone, they would suffer curses instead of blessings.
- K** The Israelites placed themselves under an oath to serve the Lord and reject false gods.



Challenge (Josh. 24:14-18)

- After reviewing the evidence of God's faithfulness to the Israelites through the years (Josh. 24:1-13), Joshua exhorted the people to fear and worship only the Lord. He further declared that he and his family would serve the Lord.
- The Israelites responded with their own words of commitment to remain loyal. They recalled what God had done for them in the past, delivering them from slavery, protecting them in the wilderness, and driving out the people in the land. As a result, they would not "abandon" the Lord (v. 16).

Warning (Josh. 24:19-24)

- Joshua warned them that serving only God would not be easy. The Lord would deal with them harshly if they abandoned Him to worship other gods.
- They repeated their earlier claim to worship the Lord alone. Joshua urged them to get rid of any foreign gods among them. Again, they declared their devotion to obey God.
- On that day, Joshua made a covenant signifying their commitment.

Summary Statements

In his farewell address, Joshua challenged the people to choose the Lord over the gods of the Canaanites.

- 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.

Memory Verse

Joshua 24:23-24

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.)



For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at goExploreTheBible.com.

ENGAGE

Bonus: When did you last fly? What do you recall about the flight attendant's instructions?

- Crash landings of commercial jets are extremely rare. Yet, before any plane takes off, flight attendants provide instructions for emergency landings 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? (PSG, p. 64)

EXPLORE

CHALLENGE (JOSH. 24:14-18)

Bonus: What are some decisions that require a commitment in your life? Why were you willing to make that commitment?

- Joshua 24:1-13 records how Joshua gathered Israel at Shechem. This place was already significant because it was where God first promised Abraham that He would give his descendants the land of Canaan. So as Joshua was about to die, he stood before the nation at Shechem and proclaimed that they were evidence of and witnesses to the truth that God had kept His promise to Abraham.
- Joshua reminded the people how the Lord had destroyed their enemies and brought the nation out of Egypt. God led them into the promised land and handed Israel's enemies over to them. Based on these truths, Joshua exhorted the people to fear the Lord and worship him in "sincerity and truth."
- Joshua challenged the people to make a choice between the one true God and the false idols their ancestors had worshiped through the centuries. They could not wallow in indecision. Just as the Lord had been unwavering in His faithfulness to His people, He expected them to follow Him without wavering.

Why is it important to consciously choose whom you will serve? (PSG, p. 69)

- Boldly, Joshua left no doubt the choice he and his family would make. Considering what God had done, the decision seemed obvious to him. He was going to serve the Lord, and he urged all of Israel to follow his example.
- With the most emphatic language possible, the people affirmed there was no way they would "abandon" God to worship idols. They promised to do what Joshua had challenged them to do, to cling to the Lord. Like Joshua, they recounted all the great things God had done for them. His faithfulness was the motivation for their faithfulness.

How does your decision to serve the Lord influence people around you? (PSG, p. 69)

WARNING (JOSH. 24:19-24)

Bonus: How do you feel when you're told you can't accomplish some task?

- Joshua's response to the people might seem harsh, but he knew it is easier to make a promise than to keep one. He also had witnessed earlier generations of Israelites make commitments to the Lord that did not last.
- The statement that God would not forgive the people's sins was not absolute or eternal. We serve a God of mercy and grace. Yet, God is not to be taken lightly. He would not overlook Israel's unfaithfulness. They would experience consequences for their sin (see Deut. 28:15-68). This is still how God views sin today (1 Cor. 3:13-14; Gal. 6:7-9).
- Israel doubled down on their commitment, emphatically denying the possibility they would reject the Lord and serve other gods. So, Joshua put them under an oath and made them witnesses against themselves.
- Apparently, some "foreign gods" already had snared the Israelites. So, Joshua challenged them to get rid of those idols and follow through on their promise to serve God alone in the promised land.
- As a conclusion, Joshua recorded the covenant and set up a stone as a reminder of the people's commitment to it (vv. 26-27). Joshua later died at the age of 110 and was buried within the territory of Ephraim. The Israelites remained faithful to God throughout his lifetime (vv. 29-31).

What idols or false ideas compete for your loyalty and attention? (PSG, p. 71)

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss ways to encourage one another toward wholehearted devotion to the Lord.

What does it look like in your context to be wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord? (PSG, p. 72)

Urge adults to consider the consequences of allowing idols to remain in their lives.

Who might you influence this week to encourage their devotion to the Lord? (PSG, p. 72)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 71)

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?***

Direct adults to work in pairs to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 71 of the PSG. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their discoveries. Highlight the new covenant established by Jesus.

OBJECT LESSON: WATER

Before the session, prepare two clear glasses of water. You will also need a small amount of food coloring.

During the session, display one glass of water. Explain that God wants our worship of Him to be pure and fully devoted to Him alone. Say: *However, we often find ourselves embracing the idols of the world.* Put some food coloring into the water. Say: *Just a little contamination ruins the whole thing.* Share that the Israelites believed they could trust God fully, but they ran into trouble when they tried to mix idolatry into their worship of the one, true God.

Display the second glass of pure water. Emphasize that God calls His people to worship with “sincerity and truth.” Encourage them to spend some time in the coming days examining their lives for any idols that might be “coloring” their walk with God.

COVENANT RENEWAL

God’s covenant with Israel folded into every episode of their lives as they followed Joshua into the promised land. Generations earlier, the Lord made a covenant with Abraham regarding the land that his family would receive (Gen. 15). After, He liberated the Israelites from Egyptian slavery and directed them to Mount Sinai. There, He initiated the covenant with them through His law (Ex. 19-20). Under God’s leadership, Joshua guided Israel to obey the law as they settled in Canaan.

Guiding them involved taking possession of the land and settling in the allotments given to the twelve tribes. It also meant pointing them to God’s law along the way. As Joshua encouraged the Israelites to honor their covenant with the Lord, he led them in two pivotal worship experiences related to covenant renewal.

The first event took place at Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim (Josh. 8). Joshua gathered the people there in keeping with Moses’s instructions (Deut. 27:1-8). Joshua offered sacrifices on an altar that

he constructed. He also copied and read God’s law to everyone. After the Israelites renewed their covenant with the Lord, they continued to conquer and settle the land He had given to them.

The second worship experience happened toward the end of Joshua’s life. He gathered the people again, this time at Shechem (Josh. 24). Because the Israelites would be moving into a future without him, he urged them to renew their covenant with the Lord. He challenged them to give themselves to God wholeheartedly and sincerely.

When they responded by pledging their exclusive loyalty to the Lord, he documented their covenant renewal. Then he set a large stone before them and told them that it would serve as a memorial to what happened there. It would also be a constant witness to them. In a way, it would remind them of their vow and be a witness to their covenant pledge.