

• *Joshua's final words to the people at Shechem*

1. God's amazing grace – beginning with His choice of Abraham

• *Previous idolatry*

• *God's leading*

• *Their redemption*

• *Sustained in the wilderness*

• *Deliverance from all their enemies*

• *Canaan*

• *Confidence to face the future*

• *Radical commitment required*

2. Joshua's appeal for a determined decision

Joshua is still serving God in his old age. He knows he is soon to die, and wants to make use of the fact that people are likely to listen to his last words. He assembles them at Shechem. It was the place where Abraham had first received the promise concerning Israel ^{☞1}, the place where the covenant had been renewed ^{☞2}. They meet 'before God' – before the ark brought from Shiloh ^{☞3}.

1. **First, he puts to them the amazing grace of God.** Their story began with **God's unexplained choice of Abraham**. Joshua reminds Israel of how everything began. God chose Abraham (*'I took Abraham'*) without regard to anything in Abraham good or bad, without preparation, without the law of Moses, without circumcision. It was a choice that came purely from God's grace.

He reminds them of where they had lived (*'the other side of the river' – beyond the Euphrates*); and he recalls their previous idolatry (*'they served other gods'*).

He moves on to mention God's leading (*'I led him throughout all the land...'*) and God's gifts (*'I gave ... I gave . . . I gave'*). God was good to the whole family, including Esau.

Then there came their redemption. There was the sending of Moses and Aaron. At a time when they were in great distress in Egypt God sent messengers from Himself. The people were delivered amidst great judgements upon Egypt ^{☞1}. They were removed from their previous way of living, and were dramatically rescued at a time when their enemies were trying to drag them back into their old bondage ^{☞2}. Another aspect of their redemption was they way they *'lived in the desert for a long time'*. God sustained them in the barrenness of the wilderness.

Then there was their deliverance from all their enemies. There were many obstacles in the way of their getting to the land of promise but God overcame every obstacle to their inheritance. He defeated the Amorites ^{☞1}, and the Moabites with their king Balak ^{☞2}. When Balak called upon a professional preacher-and-prayer, Balaam, to get him to pray against Israel and prophesy against Israel, God did not allow it ^{☞3}.

Now they had been given Canaan. The fourth great blessing for the Israelites was their inheritance, the land of Canaan. This involved the crossing of the Jordan ^{☞1}, the defeat of Jericho ^{☞2} and many other Canaanite tribes ^{☞3} which were easily defeated ^{☞4}, and the easy acquirement of the land ^{☞5}.

The blessings of the past (election, redemption, victory, inheritance) should give them a great sense of confidence and responsibility as they face the future. Through Joshua, God is asking for their decisive commitment to obeying Him and serving Him. There is much to be done in God's world.

Joshua asks for the fear of Yahweh in their lives ^{☞1}, their utter rejection of other gods (*'throw away the gods...'*) and their radical commitment to Yahweh, the One who had redeemed them ^{☞2}.

2. **Secondly, Joshua appeals for determined decision** ^{☞1} (24:15). *'Choose today whom you will serve!'* As for himself he has already decided: *'As for me and my house, we shall serve Yahweh.'* There is no need for lengthy appeal for a decision. He has spent his time describing the grace of God. His way of getting 'decision' is to emphasise the grace of God.

^{☞1} Genesis 12:6, 7

^{☞2} Joshua 8:32-35
^{☞3} 24:1

^{☞1} 24:5

^{☞2} 24:6-7

^{☞1} 24:8

^{☞2} 24:9

^{☞3} 24:10

^{☞1} 24:11

^{☞2} 24:11b

^{☞3} 24:11b

^{☞4} 24:12

^{☞5} 24:13

^{☞1} 24:14

^{☞2} 24:15a

^{☞1} 24:15

3. The people's response

• God's high demand

• "We shall serve Yahweh"

• A covenant is made

• Joshua's death – Israel's heroes

• God's grace – redemption and the possibility of an inheritance

• The goal of life

3. **Thirdly, there comes the people's response.** They resolve to follow Yahweh. They promise to serve God ^{¶1}, and they repeat the story of God's graciousness towards them ^{¶2}. But Joshua warns them 'You are not able to serve Yahweh!' ^{¶3}. It is a way of emphasising the very high demand which God is putting upon them. He is 'holy' – pure and unique in His demands, beyond comparison, utterly unlike any other so-called 'god'. He is 'jealous' – a God who cannot endure a rival. He will act severely against any hint of idolatry in His people ^{¶4}. But the people insist that they have taken note of all this. 'We shall serve Yahweh' they insist ^{¶5}.

So a covenant is made. As with any covenant in the ancient world there has to be witnesses. At first, they themselves are the witnesses ^{¶1}. The basic command is repeated ^{¶2}; the promise is sworn ^{¶3}. A covenant is made; it will involve animal sacrifice ^{¶4} and the written record of the covenant is added to the books of Moses ^{¶5}. Another witness is made: a memorial stone ^{¶6}.

Then the people were dismissed ^{¶1}. Not long after Joshua died ^{¶2}. He was a great leader and Joshua 24:31 tells us what that leadership consisted of: it was keeping others in the habit of serving God. Joseph's bones were buried at the same place ^{¶3}. Eleazar the high-priest died and was buried honourably ^{¶4}. They were three heroes of Israel's early history.

This is what life is all about. It begins with God's grace towards us. He steps into our lives when we deserve nothing and gives us redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ, God's lamb.

But then He holds before us the possibility of winning an 'inheritance'. There is an area of life marked out for us, just as the Israelites had territory marked out for them. It involves conflict and battle. There are some failures along the way, but we keep going through thick and thin. Some of it is 'hill country'. Some of it is tangled forest. Some of it consists of pleasant pastures. In every part God is with us.

The goal of life is to achieve our inheritance. When life is all over it should be said: he served God in his generation. And even better: other people served God because of him, because of her.

¶1 24:16

¶2 24:17-8

¶3 24:19

¶4 24:20

¶5 24:21

¶1 24:22

¶2 24:23

¶3 24:24

¶4 24:25

¶5 24:26

¶6 24:27

¶1 24:28

¶2 24:29-30

¶3 24:32-33

¶4 24:34



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