

p 83 WEEK 11: JOSHUA DIES IN THE LAND, THE PROMISE OF REST LIVES ON

Joshua 23:1–24:33

The Place of the Passage

Chapters 23 and 24 both begin with a parting speech from Joshua, who is now “old and well advanced in years” (23:1). The first speech is to Israel’s leaders, and the second to the nation. While Joshua’s speeches are optimistic in many ways, they also indicate much unfinished business and uncertainty concerning Israel’s future. Joshua is excited for all that God has done, yet frustrated by the superficiality of the people’s allegiance. This tension between God’s promises and Israel’s disobedience is a theme throughout the Old Testament. It is a problem for which the coming of Christ (and the new covenant) provides the only solution. As Joshua breathes his last, this chapter cries out for the greater Joshua to come.

The Big Picture

Joshua issues parting speeches to Israel’s leaders and the nation, each speech rehearsing God’s glorious promises and charting the way forward for the nation.

p 84 Reflection and Discussion

Read through Joshua 23:1–24:33, then study this section of Scripture utilizing the questions below. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 428–431; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Joshua’s Parting Speech to Israel’s Leaders (23:1–16)

The book of Joshua opened with God’s commission of Joshua, a charge filled with promises and commands. Now Joshua says to his leaders, “You have seen all that the LORD your God has done” (23:3). Paying attention to the verbs in Joshua’s speech, list what the Lord has done and will do.

As we’ve come to expect, mingled among these promises is a number of commands. List what Joshua commands the people to do.

What is at stake in Israel’s obedience or disobedience? Recall our study to this point—what is the covenantal context for this pattern?

p 85 If God makes promises contingent on obedience, how do you suppose those promises will ever be fulfilled, given human sinfulness?

2. Joshua's Parting Speech to the Nation (24:1–28)

Joshua's final speech begins with a rehearsal of Israel's history in 24:2–13. Again, paying attention to the verbs, list all that Joshua records concerning God's work on Israel's behalf.

Paying special notice to verses 12–13, note what point the Lord is making in this speech to Israel. What should Israel be feeling at the conclusion of this brief review of her history?

In verses 14–15, Joshua commands the people to “fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness” and to “Put away” their false gods, choosing whom they will serve. Why doesn't Joshua give these commands at the beginning of his speech?

p 86 Time and again Israel is warned against serving other gods. Using descriptions of God and his ways in this chapter, finish the following sentence in at least five ways: “When Israel serves other gods, she ...” (for example: denies, forgets, clings, etc.).

The exchange between Joshua and Israel in verses 14–28 is a bit of a surprise. Read Deuteronomy 31:21–29. What did Moses and Joshua know about Israel that God's people struggled to understand?

3. Joshua's Death (24:29–33)

The book of Joshua begins with the death of Moses and ends with the death of Joshua. With the death of every person, especially every leader, comes an important reminder for God's people. What is that reminder?

As the story of Joshua comes to a conclusion, we can be grateful that the story of the Bible is not over. Read Hebrews 3–4 and 11:1–12:2. List all the commands given to New Testament Christians on the basis of the Old Testament story.

p 87 Read through the following *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these reflections have for your walk with the Lord.

Gospel Glimpses

THE LORD GIVES REST. Through Joshua, the Lord gave rest to his people in the land. But this rest is neither secure nor complete. Enemy nations remained in the land because sin remained in Israel. Many years later King David would say to his people, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts,” reminding them of what God said concerning Moses’ generation: “They shall not enter my rest” (Ps. 95:7–11). Reflecting on this, the author of Hebrews draws an important conclusion: “If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:8–9). Joshua did not bring true rest, but Jesus does. Christians have entered God’s rest by means of abiding faith in the perfect obedience and sacrifice of our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:7–4:16), and we strive daily for the full realization and enjoyment of this salvation (4:3, 11).

THE LORD GIVES VICTORY. In Joshua’s final speech he sets the conquest of the land in the broader story of the nation, a story of the Lord’s making. God called Abraham, he sent plagues on Egypt, and he parted waters at the Red Sea. So, too, the conquest was his work. Twice the Lord says, “I gave them into your hand” (Josh. 24:8, 11). The message is plain: “It was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them” (vv. 12–13). In Christ, God defeats Satan and death, the enemies that stand behind all others. But he does so not by the sword, for at his arrest Jesus told Peter to put his sword away (John 18:11). Rather, he does so by means of his cross (Heb. 2:14–17). On the cross Jesus suffered the wrath both of God’s enemies and of God himself as a sacrifice for sin.

THE LORD GIVES LAND. The theme of land is the stage and subject for all the action in Joshua. Its possession was an installation in God’s fulfillment of his promise to Abraham (Josh. 23:14). For Israel it represented the place where everything would be right, their oppressors would be gone, and the presence of the Lord would be known. That sounds wonderful, yet Hebrews says that this and everything tied to Moses is but a “shadow” of our ultimate hope (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). Even Abraham expected more than mere Canaan, considering his people “strangers and exiles on the earth.” Instead, with him we seek a new creation, a city “whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:8–16).

p 88 Whole-Bible Connections

PROMISE AND FULFILLMENT, BLESSING AND CURSE. Joshua’s final speeches are rich with fulfillment: “Not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you” (Josh. 21:45). Yet some of God’s promises are not so good, as Joshua indicates that Israel’s story will get worse before it gets better. Exile is threatened (23:13–16) as a consequence of disobedience, and 24:19 essentially seals their fate: “You are not able to serve the LORD.” This echoes Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 31:29, where he predicted that the people would not actually obey, would go into exile, and would need God to regather them and give them new hearts (Deut. 30:1–6). They can commit to serve God all they want (Josh. 24:23–24), but Joshua agrees with Moses: their hearts will lead them astray (see Deut. 31:21, 27). How can God’s promises be realized when Israel’s obedience is only partial at best? The Sinaitic covenant is no solution. What is needed is a new covenant, as the prophets anticipate. Jeremiah 31 speaks of the full forgiveness of sins, the law written on the heart, and perfect communion with God

(see also Ezek. 36:22–32). Through his broken body and shed blood, Jesus brings this new covenant (Luke 22:19–20). Through Christ, God removes his wrath from us, for “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13), and through Christ the Lord has blessed us “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph. 1:3).

JOSHUA, SERVANT OF THE LORD. The book began by calling Moses the Lord’s servant. Fifteen times Moses has been called God’s servant (Josh. 1:1, 7, 13, 15; 8:31; etc.). Now, for the first time, Joshua is given the same title (24:29). Still, the author of Hebrews will contrast this honorable position with Jesus’ greater position as more than a servant: a son over God’s house (Heb. 3:5–6).

Theological Soundings

JOSHUA DIED BUT JESUS WAS RAISED. For all of our ambition and technology, humans have not solved the problem of death. It comes to the rich and the poor alike, to the just and the unjust (Eccles. 9:2), and even giants of the faith like Joshua “go the way of all the earth” (Josh. 23:14). Even Joseph’s bones, carried back into the land (24:32), remind us that the greatest men die. Thankfully, while there is no merely human answer to death, there is a divine answer in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without this the Christian faith is futile (1 Cor. 15:17–19). However, because Jesus has been raised from the dead, we too “will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). This is why we don’t grieve as those who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13) but can [p 89](#) say with the apostle Paul, “ ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ ... Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54–57).

CHOOSE THIS DAY. There is urgency in Joshua’s voice as he speaks to his people for the last time: “Choose this day whom you will serve” (Josh. 24:15). In his old age Joshua feels the shortness of life and the urgency of serving the Lord. David felt that same urgency when he wrote, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Ps. 95:7), and the author of Hebrews, quoting David, calls the church to exercise the same kind of daily urgency together: “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12–13). Repentance and faith are necessary for salvation, and *now* is always the time to respond to God (see 2 Cor. 6:2).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Joshua 23:1–24:33 for your life. How does this passage lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises? Write down your reflections under the three headings we have considered and on the passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

p 90 3. Theological Soundings

4. Joshua 23:1-24:33

As You Finish This Unit ...

Confess to God that you have not loved him or clung to him as you should; praise God for his provision of a greater Joshua and obedient Savior in Christ; and resolve to serve the Lord with your life as you rest in him and wait for your eternal and heavenly inheritance.