

**It's Time to Make a Choice!**  
**Joshua 24**

**Intro: If you have been reading the Bible through this year, then you have recently been reading in the Daily Bible from the book of Joshua. Our lesson tonight comes from that book that bears Joshua's name.**

**It was a critical time in the history of Israel. For the second time a great leader of Israel was about to pass from their midst. A few years before, Moses, in his final days, had gathered the people of God together to exhort them before departing this life (Deuteronomy). In his place, Joshua was chosen by God to lead the nation; but now he too is about to depart this life. And like Moses, Joshua now calls the people together for a departing word of exhortation.**

**If we could give Joshua's final words a theme it might be "it's time to make a choice."**

**Joshua's Farewell Words to Israel**

***A Call to Remember (Josh. 24:1-13)***

Joshua wanted the Israelites to recall their history from the beginning. He reminded them that their ancestors had not always known the true god; and they had in fact served the false gods worshipped by the people who lived beyond the Euphrates.

But God had chosen to reveal Himself to Abraham and brought him from Ur to Canaan and there promised him Canaan as his possession. From him the Israelite nation was formed and was delivered by God from bondage to possess the land God had promised, not through their might but through God's great grace and power.

But now in view of all that God had done, Joshua issues:

***A Call to Choose (Josh. 24:14-18)***

*Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:14-15)*

What Joshua wanted to make clear was that there was no room for compromise or divided loyalties! The Israelites could serve the Lord or they could choose to serve the false gods of Mesopotamia or Canaan; but they couldn't do both!

What is equally clear is that Joshua was testing the hearts of the people by his exhortation. It appears that they took umbrage at Joshua's suggestion that they would consider serving another god:

*And the people answered and said, Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for the Lord our God is He who*

*brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. And the Lord drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.” (Joshua 24:16-18)*

They Israelites affirmed that they also would serve the Lord. They did not think of themselves as having forsaken the Lord; and they seemed distressed by the suggestion that they should be challenged to choose between the Lord and the idols. However Joshua pressed them further to acknowledge the inner weaknesses that were already in evidence among the people and their consequences:

*Then Joshua said to the people, “You will not be able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you.” (Joshua 24:19-20)*

Again the people respond with resistance:

*And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:21)*

Again the people with their mouths suggest that they intend to serve the Lord. Clearly the people did not want to be considered unfaithful to the Lord; yet Joshua’s final words tell us the real condition of Israel’s loyalty:

*Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” (Joshua 24:23)*

Joshua’s message had come from a god who could see in their tents the various idols that they were already keeping in their possession; but in addition, He could see into their hearts and know that they were “inclined” in another direction. Thus they needed the call not only to choose, but .....

#### ***A Call to Commit (Josh. 24:25-28)***

Joshua urges them to declare their choice by making anew their covenant with God to serve Him only.

*So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said to all the people, “Behold, this stone shall be for a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us; thus it shall be for a witness against you, lest you deny your God (Joshua 24:25-28)*

This call by Joshua was a defining moment in the history of Israel. It was his way of soliciting from his own generation a lasting commitment to serve the Lord faithfully. Every time Israel saw that rock (matzah) they would be reminded of their pledge.

***In every generation, the Joshua's call is needed; and if Joshua were here today he might challenge us to make a similar choice!***

### **It's Time to Make a Choice**

#### ***We need to make a choice!***

Joshua's challenge is still a valid one. I've been amazed through the years at the astounding lack of conviction among people who profess to be Christians. It's like they are torn between serving the Lord and living in the world. They want to go to heaven; but they want to live like the world, just in case they don't make it to heaven! :-)

Some of them seem more committed to staying in good standing with the religious world than following the NT. And so they keep making change after change to their spiritual practice until you can't tell the difference between the church and the popular denominations of the day.

If Joshua were here, he just might say to some of those people who profess to be members of the church, make up your mind whether you want to be a Christian or not! Sometimes we can't tell!

#### ***We need to make the right choices!***

We can choose to serve God or we can make ourselves god; but we can't do both.

We can choose to follow the word of God or we can choose to follow the philosophies of men; but we can't do both.

We can choose to become a member of the Lord's church or we can choose to join a denomination established by men; but we can't do both!

We can choose to worship in spirit in truth or we can choose the worship that pleases us; but we can't do both!

We can choose the lifestyle of holiness or we can choose the lifestyle of the world; but we can't do both!

#### ***We need to see that whatever choices we make have consequences!***

Israel needed to understand that continued faith in God would bring abundant blessings from Him; but rejection of God would bring all the harsh consequences of punishment God had already decreed. Moses put those choices to Israel in the stark consequences of "blessings" and "curses".

It is the same with us. Today our choices too have consequences.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

*The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. (Matthew 13:41-43)*

*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Matthew 25:46)*

***We need to choose now!***

Joshua said, “Choose for yourselves today...” Sometimes people are willing to acknowledge the right choice; but not willing to make it now. God does not invite us to serve him “someday.” The operative word in his invitation is “today.”

*But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)*

God does not urge us to obey him “later”; the operative word in his invitation is “now.”

*And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—for He says, “At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you”; behold, now is “the acceptable time,” behold, now is “the day of salvation” — (2 Corinthians 6:1-2)*

**Conclusion: Many of you have made that choice; and I hope that you will always be true to it.**

**There are others who need to be challenged to make a choice! They need to be challenged to make the right choice! They need to be challenged to see the consequences of our choices! They need to be challenged to make the choice now! Will you make it now!?**