

July 19, 2026 Vital Decision Session 7 Joshua 24:14-24

Intro: Israel enjoyed a long time of peace after the conquest of Canaan, and the land was divided up to the sons of Jacob. Joshua was 110 years old and knew he was approaching his own death. In his final speech, he had assembled all the Israelites at Shechem. This was the first place Abraham had camped when he entered Canaan, and also where he erected the first altar on Canaanite soil. The beginning of chapter 24 gives a brief history of God's faithfulness and how God helped the Israelites conquer Canaan. **Joshua 14:13** *"I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant."* God won the battles and gave the land to the Israelites. It would be like being given a furnished house. Ownership requires responsibility—responsibilities of upkeep, repairs, replacements, and bills. Nothing is free. Everything costs. The Israelites were to continue worshiping and serving God.

Challenge (Joshua 24:14-18) p. 66

Joshua warned the people earlier about not being faithful to the Lord God of Israel. **Joshua 23:15** *"Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the Lord your God promised you, so the Lord will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the Lord your God has given you."* Why do you think Joshua told the people to "Get rid of the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt?" Many years may have passed since the conquest of Canaan. People tend to get complacent when they are not motivated to stay alert. I think the surrounding peoples and past practices were influencing the Israelites. Israel had a poor track record when it came to their faithfulness to the Lord. Now the Israelites were in a land where its populace, the Canaanites, worshiped more false gods. The gods of the Canaanites were part of a seductive fertility cult. This would tempt the Israelites with its materialism and immorality. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was being watered-down. Joshua commanded, "Choose for yourselves today: Which will you worship?" I ask God to help me choose Him every day. The Israelites' choices were: old ancestral gods of Mesopotamia, the new Canaanite gods of the Amorites, or Yahweh, the God of the Israelite ancestors. Do you know people who think that any god will do? As long as a person is good, the "whatever god(s)" will allow them to go to heaven. The Israelites needed to make the choice to worship the Lord alone and reject all other gods, or they would worship other gods and in so doing reject the Lord. They could not do both and neither can we. Indecision is a decision that leads to more wrong decisions. We cannot decide for other people what they worship or what they believe in. We can only speak for ourselves. It was Joshua who said so long ago, "As for me and my family, we will worship the lord."

Commitment to the Lord is either total commitment or it is not commitment at all. Just as the Lord had been unwavering in His faithfulness to His covenant people, He expected His people faithfully to be devoted to Him. The same is true today.

Vs. 16 The people replied, “We will certainly not abandon the Lord to worship other gods!” Understand that the word worship does not mean to attend a weekly service specifically to focus on God with other believers. Worship means, in this context and to me, a daily decision to obey God. Worship is having God in every part of my life: thanking Him, receiving His forgiveness, His help, and His fellowship. Worship is every day in all that I do. What motivates your/my worship? Moses and Joshua reminded the people of God’s commitment to them by sharing what God had done. The people explained why they promised to commit themselves in steadfast loyalty to the Lord. God’s deliverance of Israel in the exodus and His providence through the wilderness journey motivated their obedience. What motivates my/your obedience? God has given us a history with Him. Each of us here can testify to the loving God we serve and obey. Don’t you love to share how God gets us through the day? Each of us has/had a Red Sea, wilderness, or a defeated enemy experience, that we know God saw us through. Each of us has experienced the joy that comes from being close to God.

Warning (Joshua 24:19-24) p. 69

The covenant ceremony at Shechem testified to God’s faithfulness, and Israel was to respond by being faithful to the Lord their God. However, like Moses before him, Joshua lacked the confidence that Israel would be committed to living out their promise to follow the Lord. Joshua warned the Israelites that peace in the land was dependent on their faithfulness to the covenant. Moses predicted that the people would turn away from God. **Deuteronomy 31:29** *“For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands.”* How sad. After all that these people had seen with their own eyes. Joshua was there when Moses shared with the people what God had said.

Exodus 19:8 *“Then all the people answered together and said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord.”* Not much later, (chapter 32) the people made a golden calf to be their god. Joshua knew that it was easier to make a promise of devotion to the Lord than it was to keep it. God is holy. The holiness of God refers to the unparalleled majesty of God’s incomparable essence and His flawless moral purity. It is the root of His repudiation, or not to have anything to do with sin. God is jealous. The jealousy of God speaks to His strong desire for exclusive devotion and unbridled commitment to keeping His covenant. This is not petty jealousy but rather an expression of God’s divine nature. God simply will not tolerate sin or unfaithfulness. **Nahum 1:2-3** *“God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; the Lord*

avenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies; the Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.” ...He will not forgive their transgressions or sins.

If God is abandoned, how can He forgive? It is difficult to give someone something when they are not present. The people have left His grace.

This does not contradict who God is. **Exodus 34:6** *“And the Lord passed before and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth...’* God is also just, and He will not overlook the sin of unfaithfulness. There will be consequences.

Vs. 20 *“If you abandon the Lord and worship foreign gods, He will turn against you.”* There is theological tension between God’s love and God’s wrath. Both are expressions of God’s nature, not emotional feelings. This conditional clause highlights the severity of the Israelites’ own personal choice. Choosing to follow and serve God is not a simple matter like choosing what to eat for breakfast. Human choices bear consequences for good or evil. Personal decisions reflect our commitment to God or the lack thereof. Our choices are real and so are the consequences of our choices. The law warned that if the Israelites were unfaithful to the Lord, then they would experience drought, famine, disease, defeat, and ultimately exile from the promised land. Joshua knew this. God is not to be taken lightly. Believers today need to recognize that while we are secure in Christ, there is great blessing when we obey our Lord but loss of blessing when we sin against Him. **Galatians 6:7,8** *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the spirit reap everlasting life.”*

Vs. 21 The people cut Joshua off and vociferously declared, “No!...We will worship the Lord.” They professed they would worship and follow the Lord unconditionally. The book of Judges resets a seemingly never-ending cycle of sin, oppression, and deliverance, as Israel could not seem to help themselves from straying into the worship of other gods.

Vs. 22 Like the testimony of a single witness who changes the whole course of a trial, Israel’s testimony would go on record and be used for or against them. Israel’s own words attested to the importance of this binding covenant. They were not just witnesses, but were witnesses against themselves. Once again they affirmed, “We are witnesses.” Jesus used these words against the Pharisees to charge them that they were just like their ancestors who killed the prophets. **Luke 11:47,48** *“Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. In fact, you bear witness that you approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and you build their tombs.”*

Covenants are among the most important themes in the Bible. They are part of God’s mission to restore humanity to relationship with Him. God enters into

covenant relationships with human beings. There are five key covenants and each is associated with a particular person: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. In this case, the people promised to abide by the Mosaic covenant, and to remain faithful to the law that Moses received from God at Mount Sinai. The covenant boiled down to a choice. The power of personal choice is essential for spiritual growth. Freedom is found in making godly conscious choices. In spite of their emphatic promise, the Israelites needed to act on that promise by getting rid of the foreign gods among them. Did the people get rid of the foreign gods? Are there things in my life that interfere with my relationship with God? They had yet to truly turn their hearts toward the Lord. Their words said yes but were not supported by their actions. **James 2:26** *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”* An interesting circle of events comes to light. The patriarch Jacob, after he purchased a section of a field from a man at Shechem, built an altar and called it, “God, the God of Israel.” This was the exact same place where Israel was now renewing their covenant with God. **Vs. 31** *“Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the Lord which He had done for Israel.”* Throughout my life I have experienced the presence of God. This great country was built on a Biblical foundation. The Bible tells us what happens to a nation that abandons God. I will not surrender this Biblical heritage, nor will I abandon the God of my fathers.