

A black and white photograph of a person's torso and arms. They are wearing a dark sweater and a necklace with a cross pendant. They are holding a dark book or folder against their chest. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with trees and water.

## Session 6

# CHALLENGED

Faithfulness grows through reflection, evaluation, and renewed commitment to God.

## JOSHUA 24:14-28

<sup>14</sup> “Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship Yahweh. <sup>15</sup> But if it doesn’t please you to worship Yahweh, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh.” <sup>16</sup> The people replied, “We will certainly not abandon the LORD to worship other gods! <sup>17</sup> For the LORD our God brought us and our fathers 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.”<sup>19</sup> But Joshua told the people, “You will not be able to worship Yahweh, because He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not remove your transgressions and sins.”<sup>20</sup> If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, He will turn against you, harm you, and completely destroy you, after He has been good to you.”<sup>21</sup> “No!” the people answered Joshua. “We will worship the LORD.”<sup>22</sup> Joshua then told the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you yourselves have chosen to worship Yahweh.” “We are witnesses,” they said.<sup>23</sup> “Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you and offer your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”<sup>24</sup> So the people said to Joshua, “We will worship the LORD our God and obey Him.”<sup>25</sup> On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people at Shechem and established a statute and ordinance for them.<sup>26</sup> Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God; he also took a large stone and set it up there under the oak next to the sanctuary of the LORD.<sup>27</sup> And Joshua said to all the people, “You see this stone—it will be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words the LORD said to us, and it will be a witness against you, so that you will not deny your God.”<sup>28</sup> Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance.

*Notice the challenges issued by Joshua. How did these statements reflect his personal commitment to God?*

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*Highlight promises and warnings given by Joshua. Notice how these are connected to each other.*

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# FIRST THOUGHTS

Several colleges and universities provide a last lecture series. This is an ongoing series of lectures where professors and other academics are asked to present a lecture as if it is their final “talk.” The intent is for them to think deeply about what wisdom they would impart if they knew that the presentation they were about to make would be their last.

***If you were asked to present such a lecture to a school or at work, what key points would you want to make?***

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At the end of the Book of Joshua, we find Joshua making his last public address to the Israelites. Joshua would soon die, and he challenged the Israelites to follow the Lord faithfully into the days ahead. Having personally witnessed many occurrences, he knew the Hebrews could be unfaithful to the Lord. He remembered many of them dying in the wilderness because of their unfaithfulness (see Num. 14:26-34). Joshua undoubtedly knew that faithfulness grows through reflection, evaluation, and renewed commitment to God.

Faithful living can help us become the people God wants us to be. Joshua challenged the people to move ahead in a dynamic relationship with God in light of all He had done for them. Today, God still uses the faithfulness of His committed followers to challenge and influence others. He expects His followers to be fully devoted to Him, with no divided allegiances.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### **JOSHUA 23:1–24:33**

Joshua 23 records Joshua’s farewell address, while chapter 24 records a renewal, led by Joshua, of the covenant between Israel and God. Joshua had lived for many years in the promised land (23:1). But the aging Joshua probably knew he would soon die. He “summoned all Israel” (23:2) and said to them, “I am now going the way of all the earth” (23:14), an indication that he recognized his death was near.



Joshua addressed more than his impending death. He reminded the Israelites of the miracle of the conquest. With each victory, they had witnessed the presence, activity, and blessings of God. Joshua told the Hebrews that, because of the presence of the Lord, a single Hebrew soldier routed a thousand enemy soldiers (23:10).

Joshua offered more than a history lesson; he encouraged the Israelites to continue to be strong and to obey the Lord's commands. He directed them not to deviate ("to the right or left," 23:6) from God's Law. He also called the Israelites to faithfulness in their worship of the Lord.

Joshua offered more than an inspiring oration; he offered a word of warning. If the Israelites proved to be unfaithful to the Lord, God's anger would burn against them. The gains of the conquest could quickly disappear. In disobedience, the Hebrews could no longer expect the Lord to bless and protect them.

In his final act (recorded in chap. 24), Joshua gathered the Israelites at Shechem [SHEK uhm] and renewed the covenant between them and the Lord. His farewell speech and covenant renewal complete, Joshua died at the age of 110. No greater accomplishment can be attributed to a follower of the Lord than "Israel worshiped Yahweh throughout Joshua's lifetime" (24:31).

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### THE EXAMPLE SET (JOSH. 24:14-15)

#### VERSES 14-15

**<sup>14</sup> "Therefore, fear the LORD and worship Him in sincerity and truth. Get rid of the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and worship Yahweh. <sup>15</sup> But if it doesn't please you to worship Yahweh, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh."**

Joshua summoned the Israelites to assemble at Shechem, a central location. He reminded them of their history. He reminded them that their ancestors once lived *beyond the Euphrates* [yoo FRAY tee] **River** and once worshiped gods other than the Lord (v. 2). But God had called Abraham and led him to the promised land (v. 3).

Abraham’s descendants eventually moved to Egypt, where the Lord delivered them through plagues (v. 4). Joshua reminded the Hebrews of God’s miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea (vv. 6-7). He reminded them of the time spent in the wilderness (vv. 8-10). He also reminded them of the conquest of the promised land, where God “gave you a land you did not labor for ... you are eating from vineyards and olive groves you did not plant” (v. 13).

The **therefore** of verse 14 connects this verse with the previous 13 verses. Because the Lord had been faithful to His people, Joshua challenged them to be faithful to God. He challenged Israel to **fear** and **worship** the Lord.

The Hebrew word for **fear** can be interpreted as deep reverence and awe. The verb rendered as **worship** can be translated as “serve.” Joshua challenged the Israelites to do more than simply respect, revere, and fear the Lord. He called on them to serve the Lord as well.

Joshua called on the Israelites to make a choice. They didn’t have the option of not choosing. To not choose would indeed be to make a choice. They could worship and serve other gods, or they could choose to worship and serve the Lord God.

Joshua set the example, saying: **As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh.** He knew the effect that an example could have and gave an example of an individual and a family dedicated to the Lord.

***Joshua’s faithfulness served as an example to others. How can one person’s faithfulness challenge and influence others for the cause of Christ?***

**BIBLE SKILL: Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation.**

Write Joshua 24:15 in your preferred Bible translation on one side of a card. On the other side, write the verse in your own words. Use the card to memorize and reflect on the verse. How does sharing the affirmation of Joshua 24:15 with your household provide a foundation for that household? How can you use that testimony to witness to others?





## THE PEOPLE'S REFLECTION (JOSH. 24:16-18)

### VERSES 16-18

<sup>16</sup> The people replied, “We will certainly not abandon the LORD to worship other gods! <sup>17</sup> For the LORD our God brought us and our fathers 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. <sup>18</sup> 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.”

The people confirmed their commitment to the Lord. They recalled the account of the exodus as told by Joshua and Caleb. They remembered that their ancestors had once been slaves in *the land of Egypt*, but that the Lord delivered them through many *great signs* as demonstrations of His power.

The Israelites also recalled that the Lord *protected* them *all along the way*. Part of that protection included His provision of food and water. He fed them with manna (Ex. 16:11-18) and sustained them through many difficult circumstances.

The Lord also gave the Israelites favor among all the peoples whose land they traveled through. The people recalled that *the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, including the Amorites* [AM uh rights]. The term *Amorites* seems to be a general term to designate the Canaanite population.

The people were grateful for God's provision and protection along their 40-year journey. The examples they remembered demonstrated God's faithfulness to them. Their reflection on His provision and protection motivated them to remain faithful to Him: *We too will worship the LORD*. Their further affirmation, *He is our God*, reflected their total allegiance to the Lord. They would fully commit themselves to the One who had delivered them from Egypt, provided for them in the wilderness, and given them the promised land.

***How has God revealed His faithfulness along your spiritual journey? How does God's past provision serve as motivation to remain faithful to Him?***

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## A SOMBER WARNING (JOSH. 24:19-20)

### VERSES 19-20

<sup>19</sup> But Joshua told the people, “You will not be able to worship Yahweh, because He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not remove your transgressions and sins. <sup>20</sup> If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, He will turn against you, harm you, and completely destroy you, after He has been good to you.”

After the people pledged to worship and serve the Lord alone, Joshua’s reply probably shocked them: “**You will not be able to worship Yahweh.**” Joshua’s words urged the people to sober reflection. He knew the Israelites had a history of making commitments they failed to keep. He reminded the people that the Lord **is a holy God**. *Holy* means set apart. God’s people are to be holy because of God’s holy nature: “Be holy because I, Yahweh your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2).

God is also **a jealous God**. He does not share His children’s allegiance with any other god. The temptation to worship and serve other gods would be strong for the Israelites, because those false gods made no demands on or had any expectations of the people.

With the words **He will not remove your transgressions and sins**, Joshua was not communicating that the Lord would never forgive Israel’s sins. God had described Himself as the One who forgives sin (see Ex. 34:7; 2 Chron. 7:14). Joshua was warning the Israelites to take their walk with God seriously.

God’s expectations have not changed. Jesus said to the crowds that followed Him: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14:27-28). Jesus stressed that individuals must understand the commitment—the cost—required to be His follower.

***What costs might a believer incur for remaining faithful to Jesus? What are the dangers of approaching our spiritual commitments lightly or with little thought?***

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## A PUBLIC DECLARATION (JOSH. 24:21-28)

### VERSES 21-22

<sup>21</sup> “No!” the people answered Joshua. “We will worship the LORD.” <sup>22</sup> Joshua then told the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you yourselves have chosen to worship Yahweh.” “We are witnesses,” they said.

Again, the people voiced their intentions to be faithful to the Lord, insisting that they would not abandon the Lord. They reaffirmed their commitment: “***We will worship the LORD.***” Joshua pointed out that everyone heard their public commitment; therefore, they served as witnesses against one another. The people accepted this responsibility by saying, “***We are witnesses.***”

### VERSES 23-24

<sup>23</sup> “Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you and offer your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.” <sup>24</sup> So the people said to Joshua, “We will worship the LORD our God and obey Him.”

Joshua’s tone may have changed abruptly. He told them: “***Then get rid of the foreign gods that are among you.***” Unfortunately, the disloyalty and unfaithfulness had already begun. From the time of the completed conquest to the present, some of the Israelites had already begun to worship and serve false gods. The Israelites themselves provided witness to the difficulty of being faithful to God (see v. 19).

Joshua instructed them: ***offer your hearts to the LORD.*** For the third and final time, the people committed themselves to the Lord and said, “***We will worship the LORD our God and obey Him.***”

### VERSES 25-28

<sup>25</sup> On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people at Shechem and established a statute and ordinance for them. <sup>26</sup> Joshua recorded these things in the book of the law of God; he also took a large stone and set it up there under the oak next to the sanctuary of the LORD. <sup>27</sup> And Joshua said to all the people, “You see this stone—it will be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words the LORD said to us, and it will be a witness against you, so that you will not deny your God.” <sup>28</sup> Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance.



Based on the commitments of the Hebrews, **Joshua made a covenant** between them and God. God had established a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 28:13). The Lord had further ratified that covenant at Mount Sinai with His people after He led them out of Egypt (Ex. 24:1-8). Now, **at •Shechem**, this covenant solidified the relationship between God and Israel.

We can substitute the word *relationship* for the word *covenant* and get near the meaning. This covenant served as a reminder of the relationship between the people and the Lord. As the Lord had promised to be their God (see Lev. 26:12), the Hebrews had to promise to be faithful to Him.

In addition to recording the covenant in a **book**, Joshua marked the momentous occasion with a **large stone**. This stone served as a witness to this generation as well as to future generations of the commitment the Hebrews made. While the Hebrews might change, the stone would not. The stone served both as a memorial of the covenant as well as a witness to remind the people of the consequences of breaking it.

All the events of Joshua 23–24 happened publicly. Joshua had summoned all Israel for his farewell address (chap. 23). He had gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem for the covenant renewal (chap. 24). The Hebrews had made a public declaration, and Joshua commemorated the occasion with a public marker.

Jesus calls us to take up our crosses and follow Him. Taking up the Christian cross, as well as attempting to be salt and light, cannot be done in a clandestine manner. Jesus taught His disciples: “Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him” (Luke 9:26).

***Why is a public declaration of our faith so important?***

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## **KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation***

Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Savior.



## IN MY CONTEXT

- God uses the faithfulness of Christians to challenge and influence others, both Christians and non-Christians alike.
- God will not tolerate divided allegiance but expects His people to be completely devoted to Him.
- Believers can and should hold one another accountable for being faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

***Evaluate your scope of influence and how you use that influence. Identify ways you can more readily influence others for the cause of Christ. What actions will you take to be a greater Christian influence in your family, your neighborhood, and your workplace?***

***Identify things that could divide our allegiance to God. What safeguards can you put in place to protect your allegiance to Him?***

***Discuss what your Bible study group can do to hold one another accountable in faithfulness to Jesus. Record actions the group agrees to take in light of the discussion.***

## MEMORY VERSE

But if it doesn't please you to worship Yahweh, choose for yourselves today the one you will worship: the gods your fathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. As for me and my family, we will worship Yahweh.  
—Joshua 24:15