

Covenant Renewal

LESSON 13



Topic

Following the Lord

Theme

Following the Lord involves a clear, personal choice.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will know that the Lord honors those who choose to honor Him; desire to get rid of everything that vies for the worship and obedience that only God deserves; choose to follow the Lord all the days of their lives.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 15
- Assortment of fresh foods

Scripture Focus

Joshua 24

Summary

The book of Joshua ends with Joshua's challenge to Israel to choose to follow the Lord and to discard false gods. He rehearsed the Lord's goodness to Israel and identified the bitter consequences of turning away from the Lord.

Outline

- I. Cherish the Past (24:1–13)
- II. Choose Now (24:14–18)
- III. Capture the Future (24:19–28)
- IV. Celebrate Victorious Lives (24:29–33)

Memory Verse

*"If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve;
... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).*

GETTING STARTED

Take the Pledge

ASK: When have you committed to a lifestyle change, like eating healthy or fertilizing your yard, because you watched a stirring presentation on the importance of making the change? (Q1)

ASK: What happened once it came to living out that decision? (Q2)

Stirring speeches can get people to sign up to do almost anything. But once the speech is over and the routines start again, the decision becomes real and sometimes seem too hard to keep.

Joshua presented Israel with a decision. He then questioned their response. Was it emotional, or was it real? This lesson considers Joshua's last address to the nation of Israel.

I'm Inclined to . . .

Have an assortment of fresh foods such as mushrooms, broccoli, and cauliflower. Present them to your learners one at a time. Have them raise their hands according to how inclined they would be to eat the food, raising their hands all the way to indicate very inclined and only part way to show degrees of being less inclined.

ASK: What affects a food's appeal? *Texture, smell, taste, bad past experiences with the food, allergies.*

This lesson covers Joshua's last appeal to the children of Israel to incline their hearts to the Lord and serve Him.

ASK: What might affect how inclined a person is to serve the Lord?

Joshua presented Israel with a challenge to incline their hearts toward God. This lesson will cover his stirring speech and challenge us to examine the inclinations of our own hearts.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Cherish the Past (24:1–13)

Joshua 24:1 reports, *Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.* This was not the first meeting in the amphitheater at Shechem, with bald Mount Ebal rising tall into the sky on one side and Mount Gerizim pushing heavenward on the other. A previous meeting had taken place when sacrifices were offered unto the Lord and the blessings and the curses of the law were read.

For the final convocation that the aged warrior would address, Joshua had

asked that God's people assemble at a place of many precious and holy memories. It was the site where Abraham had pitched his tent when he was sojourning in Canaan; it was the site where the first altar to Jehovah was built; and it was the place of worship and spiritual instruction after Israel's first two victories in the Land of Promise. Thousands of Israelites had gathered in the valley of Shechem to hear their revered leader for the last time.

At age 110, Joshua was no gloomy skeptic who approached the grave with question marks. Filled with spiritual vigor he stood on the edge of eternity, voicing his concern for his people and exhorting them to continue in the way he had been walking. There was not a single note of doubt in his farewell address, not the slightest questioning of God's faithfulness—just a fearfulness lest the people fail to follow Him. That was all. Joshua was confident in Jehovah and wanted others to be too.

Notice that God spoke through Joshua in the recounting of Israel's history. Joshua 24:2 reports, *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel*. The pronoun *I* appears seventeen times in this recounting of Israel's history. God revealed Himself to the Israelites in His mighty works on their behalf. The record of Joshua's address intentionally included the first person references to God.

ASK: What affect might the first person references to God have on future generations as they read Joshua's address? (Q3) *They would be struck by the personal nature of God and His overwhelming example of faithfulness.*

Joshua reminded the Israelites of their remarkable history from the time of Abraham to the present (24:2–11). God had chosen Abraham from a family of idol worshipers in a pagan culture and had moved him from the city of Ur to the land of Canaan. From Canaan, Abraham's grandson Jacob went down into Egypt, where the Hebrews were a captive people for approximately four hundred years. However, God miraculously rescued them from Egypt and sent them on their way to the land He had promised to Abraham and his descendants. He gave them victory over the Amorites who had tried to bar their way to Canaan, and He foiled the plot of Balak and Balaam to curse them. They were blessed instead.

After their wilderness wanderings, God brought the Israelites over the Jordan River, gave them victory at Jericho, and delivered the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites into their hands.

ASK: Which event in Israel's history from the Exodus to the Conquest impresses you most about God's power? (Q4)

ASK: Which event in Israel's history from the Exodus to the conquest impresses you most about God's grace? (Q5)

The victories God brought to Israel would have been unrealized without God's power and grace. God even said that the battles were won neither by Israel's sword or bow (24:12). So if Israel wanted to brag about the victories, they had to brag on God.

READ: Joshua 24:13. **ASK:** What is emphasized in this verse? Notice the change in the pronouns from the previous ten verses. (Q6) *The pronoun you*

The *hornet* in Joshua 24:12 could be actual hornets God used to chase Canaanites. They might also be symbolic representations of the havoc Pharaoh caused in the Promised Land before Israel arrived, the panic-inducing reports of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, an angel, or some sort of plague.

is used with negative verbs to emphasize that Israel did not deserve any of the credit for the Promised Land. It was a gift from God.

God gave Israel a land upon which they had bestowed no labor, and they ate of vineyards and olive groves that they had neither planted nor cultivated (24:13).

II. Choose Now (24:14–18)

Because God had delivered the Israelites from a land of bondage, had led them across a wilderness, had settled them in the Promised Land, and had blessed them with things they never could have imagined, it might seem inconceivable that they would turn away from Him. But Joshua knew better. So he challenged the Israelites, *Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord* (24:14). Israel could not have too many admonitions to avoid wandering from God.

To *fear the Lord* means to have a high respect for Him. It includes the idea of taking God seriously and believing His word. When God warns of the consequences of sin, those who fear Him pay close attention.

To serve the Lord in *sincerity* (24:14) means to serve God for real. It is not a show or a performance for others people and certainly not for God. To serve God in *truth* means to serve God according to what He says is true. A true servant of God wants to know what *God* says is true. He doesn't try to live by his own opinion on the truth. Neither does he attempt to adapt the truth to his own liking.

ASK: Why does the command to fear the Lord form the basis for serving God in sincerity and truth (Josh. 24:14)? (Q7) *It would be impossible to serve God sincerely without first taking Him seriously.*

Pressing for a decision, Joshua gave the Israelites a clear choice. They would have to decide to serve either the Lord or the gods Abraham and his family had served in their pagan days or the gods of the Canaanites. In other words, they were to choose to serve the one true God or false gods. Joshua left no doubt in the Israelites' thinking about his choice. He proclaimed, *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord* (24:15).

RESOURCE: Display resource 15 as a review of Joshua's challenges to the people.

The Israelites responded to Joshua's call for a choice by saying, *God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods* (24:16). They credited the Lord with delivering them from Egypt and preserving them all along their pilgrimage (24:17, 18). But head knowledge of the Lord's power and goodness is insufficient to keep the heart focused on the Lord. Israel's subsequent history shows how prone the nation was to wander from God and to pursue false gods.

TESTIMONY: Share a time when your good intentions weren't good enough in your walk with God. (Q8)



III. Capture the Future (24:19–28)

Israel's pledge of loyalty to the Lord was only an expression of the confidence of the flesh, as Joshua's next words indicate. He said, *Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins* (24:19). He warned: *If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good* (24:20).

Joshua's words were not intended to persuade the people that they could not possibly serve the Lord; he simply wanted them to avoid making an uncalculated emotional decision. Serving the Lord is serious business and demands careful consideration of all that is involved. If we weigh the cost against the privilege of serving the Lord, we can make a choice that lasts a lifetime. After Joshua's warning, the people again promised, *We will serve the Lord*. Perhaps their second answer included some introspection. If so, that was what Joshua wanted them to do.

ASK: What could the Israelites expect if they wandered away from the Lord (Josh. 24:20)? (Q9) *God would do them hurt and consume them.*

Israel couldn't get away with forsaking God. He had chosen them to be His people. Whether they thought that was a good thing or not was beside the point because as God's people they were required to serve Him. Obviously to be God's chosen people was a tremendous opportunity for Israel. To think otherwise was to believe that God was less than He said He was.

Joshua alerted the Israelites to the fact that they had covenanted with the Lord to serve Him. Therefore, he issued an appropriate command. Once again the people agreed to serve and obey the Lord (24:22–24).

READ: Joshua 24:23. **ASK:** What evidence of a covenant with the Lord did Joshua demand? (Q10) *Negatively, he demanded a putting away of foreign gods. Positively, he demanded they incline their hearts toward God.*

How does a person incline his or her heart toward God? By first considering where his loyalties lie and then taking steps to strengthen his loyalty to God. God's Word and the direction and power of the Holy Spirit are the keys to building loyalty to God.

ASK: What are you doing to incline your heart toward God? (Q11)

Responding to the people's covenant with the Lord, Joshua constructed a memorial of their covenant. He wrote their promise in the book of Law and placed a great stone under a tree in Shechem to remind the people of their commitment (24:25–27). He put it there for them and their posterity to see. He remarked, *Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God* (24:27). A rock essentially does not change. It remains the same no matter what goes on around it. If anything was going to change, it would be the Israelites.

After hearing Israel's pledge to remain loyal to the Lord and constructing a memorial as a reminder of that pledge, Joshua dismissed the assembly, sending each tribe to its own inheritance (24:28). Each tribe had received a specific territory and,

with it, the responsibility to drive out the enemy. How loyal each tribe was to God would be evidenced by how much they emptied their territories of Canaanites.

IV. Celebrate Victorious Lives (24:29–33)

The book of Joshua closes with a record of three burials. First, Joshua died at age 110 and was buried at Timnath Serah, in the hill country of his inheritance (24:29, 30). Second, Joseph's bones were buried at Shechem in the territory occupied by Ephraim and Manasseh (24:32). In Egypt, Joseph had requested that his bones be carried to Canaan, the land of his youth and the Promised Land, and be buried there (Gen. 50:24, 25). Moses had faithfully honored this request by carrying Joseph's bones from Egypt to Canaan. Many years later Joseph's bones were laid to rest in Canaan. Had he hoped to be resurrected from the Promised Land? Third, Eleazar, Aaron's son and successor, died and was buried in Ephraim near Shiloh (24:33).

These burials in the Land of Promise celebrated the lives of great men of faith. Each had honored the Lord and had triumphed over adversities and foes. Each had found a resting place for his body in the land God had promised to His people.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Encourage the learners to honestly evaluate the inclination of their hearts.

ASK: What is pulling your heart away from full inclination toward God? (Q12)

ASK: What will you do to increase the inclination of your heart toward God? (Q13)

ASK: What two or three statements of allegiance to the Lord would you be willing to sign that would represent an increase in the inclination of your heart toward the Lord? (Q14)

Applying the Message of Joshua

The learners' study of the book of Joshua must be more than an academic exercise that they relegate to the past. They must implement the book's spiritual principles and allow lessons learned about God to make a difference in their lives.

ASK: What have you learned about the nature of God through this study? (Q15)

ASK: How has this study of Joshua affected your trust in God? (Q16)

Summary and Memory Verse

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. Add the following statement about God's faithfulness: God's faithfulness makes serving Him a pleasure.

Encourage learners to memorize Joshua 24:15. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

● God's Faithfulness	
1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.
7.	