



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



JOSHUA 21 - 24

Joshua 21

21:13 - "And to the descendants of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron, the city of refuge for the manslayer, with its pasturelands, Libnah with its pasturelands,"

The distribution of cities for the Levites follows chapter 20 in which the six cities of refuge were set aside throughout the Promised Land. In this chapter, the cities of refuge are also designated as Levitical cities. There were a total of 48 Levitical cities in Israel and six cities of refuge. The wisdom of the Lord is displayed in the connection between the two. The law establishing the cities of refuge required the elders of the city to evaluate and discern the claims of the person that fled their home following the inadvertent death which they had caused. By choosing the cities of refuge from among the Levitical cities, the Lord insured that Levites would be present in each of those cities. The Levites were the keepers of the Law of God. The Word of God as revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures was not nearly as accessible to the average person in Israel in those days like it is today. Only the king of Israel and the Levites had access to even read the Law. This law wisely placed the Levites in the position at the six refuge cities to help discern and apply the requirements of the Law with wisdom.

21:19 - "The cities of the descendants of Aaron, the priests, were in all thirteen cities with their pasturelands."

The Lord ordained that Aaron and his descendants among the Levites would settle in a specific group of 13 cities. The Lord's providence situated this key leadership family exactly where they would need to be in future generations. These 13 cities were located in southern Israel in close proximity to what became the city of Jerusalem later in Israel's history. This is a critical placement of the family of Aaron, because his was the family from which all high priests that would ever serve in the tabernacle and later the temple would descend. Once the tabernacle was moved to Jerusalem, it became the permanent home to the house of God. The high priest's home would always be situated where it belonged; close to the house of the Lord.

21:41 - "The cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the people of Israel were in all forty-eight cities with their pasturelands."

This chapter completes the account of the distribution of the land to the tribes of Israel. The concern in this chapter is where the tribe of Levi would settle. The Lord's plan for Levi was distinct from all the other tribes. They each received a specific territory that became their tribal home. Levi was given no territory for themselves, but assigned to designated cities scattered throughout the other tribal territories. This was done originally as a judgment of the Lord upon Levi for his sin in the destruction of Shechem. "Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and

their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel." (Genesis 49:7). Levi forever lost for the tribe of his descendants the right to their own tribal territory. However, in this judgment, we also see evidence of the amazing grace of God.

What began as a judgment upon their lives and a loss of privilege, the Lord redeemed and transformed into a greater opportunity for kingdom service than they would ever have had otherwise. By scattering Levi throughout the other tribes of Israel, the Lord gave them the special opportunity to be a greater influence for good among the tribes of Israel than any other tribe. Levi was given the unique responsibility to teach the Law of God to all the other tribes and to represent the Lord as spiritual leaders to them. "They shall teach Jacob your rules and Israel your law;..." (Deuteronomy 33:10). This displays one of the most glorious attributes of the Lord. He is able to take what is most broken in our lives because of our own sin, and redeem it to such an extent that we are able to serve Him in an even greater way because of that failure or weakness.

This is what the Lord did with Saul of Tarsus. He took a man who was the most legalistic opponent of Christianity and transformed him into the staunchest opponent of legalism, and most fruitful servant of the Lord. Saul's greatest weaknesses and failures before he knew the Lord became the exact areas in which the Lord used him the most. This does not mean that we are to go out and sin so that we can become better servants of the Lord, but it does mean that by the grace of God, even our failures can be redemptively transformed into something that ultimately brings glory to God.

21:43-45 - "Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass."

This statement brings to a conclusion the story of the conquest of the Promised Land. It is a story over 400 years in the making. Since God had first spoken His word of promise to Abraham until now, He had worked to bring this moment to pass. The testimony of Joshua is a testimony not of the faithfulness, resourcefulness, the greatness of Israel in conquering the Promised Land. This testimony is 100% a story of the faithfulness of God to His promise. At the end of our lives, we will see that this testimony applies to our personal story as well. "Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass."

Joshua 22

22:1-6 - "At that time Joshua summoned the Reubenites and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and said to them, "You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you and have obeyed my voice in all that I have commanded you. You have not forsaken your brothers these many days, down to this day, but have been careful to keep the charge of the LORD your God. And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as he promised them. Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan. Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments and to cling to him and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul." So Joshua blessed them and sent them away, and they went to their tents."

Following the completion of the distribution of the land to the twelve tribes, and the designation of both the cities of refuge and Levitical cities, Joshua officially disbands a portion of the people to go and settle the land they were given. This marks a significant transition for the nation. Since the day they left Egypt together the tribes of Israel have traveled together, fought together, and lived together. Now, in the Lord's purpose, Israel was to divide into their tribal territories while remaining unified as a nation. Joshua releases Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh to return to their new homes. These were the tribes that had asked for permission to settle outside the Promised Land on the eastern shore of the Jordan River. The Lord granted their request, but required that the men of those tribes travel across the Jordan to help the other tribes in the conquest of the Promised Land. For seven years, these tribes had faithfully kept their promise and had fully participated in the battle for Canaan. Now that the conquest was complete, they had fulfilled their obligation to the Lord and to their brothers.

Joshua releases them from further responsibility to help the nine and one half tribes that will remain in the Promised Land. However, he releases them with both a word of commendation for their loyalty and a word of exhortation as they depart. Joshua's exhortation names the key concern for their future. As they cross back to the eastern side of the Jordan River, their physical separation from the other tribes, and most importantly from the tabernacle of God must not lead to a spiritual separation from the Lord and His ways. Joshua urges them to "be very careful" to pay close attention as they go to the Law of God revealed through Moses. He reminds them that the one most important thing is that they continue to love the Lord, to walk in His ways, to keep His commandments, to cling to Him, and to serve Him with their heart and soul. If they remain close to the Lord with this whole hearted level of devotion, then they will be blessed into future generations. If their hearts drift away from the Lord and His ways, then there is no guarantee of continuing in the blessings they are currently enjoying.

This exhortation by Joshua to the eastern tribes summarizes the essence of our own responsibility as Christians. It is possible to make our spiritual life more complicated than it actually is. What God desires for us and of us is whole hearted devotion to Him and His ways. If any believer today were to love the Lord, obey His commands, walk in His ways, cling to Him and serve Him with their whole heart and soul, then that person will have lived the Christian life in the way that God intends.

22:10-16 - "And when they came to the region of the Jordan that is in the land of Canaan, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by the Jordan, an altar of imposing size. And the people of Israel heard it said, "Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel." And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them. Then the people of Israel sent to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the clans of Israel. And they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and they said to them, "Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, 'What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the LORD by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the LORD?'"

No sooner had the eastern tribes returned to their territory than a major controversy erupted between them and the nine and one half tribes west of the Jordan River. This was no minor misunderstanding between tribes. The newly settled nation of Israel was on the brink of civil war between the tribes. The eastern tribes constructed a large copy of the altar of the Lord from the courtyard of the tabernacle of the Lord. They built this altar on the western side of the Jordan. As soon as the other tribes received word that this altar had been established they gathered together in a solemn assembly at Shiloh, the location of the tabernacle of the Lord. From there, they formed a leadership delegation consisting of Phinehas, and a chief from each of the tribes of Israel. They sought out the leaders of the eastern tribes and confronted them with the report of the altar.

The concern of the western tribes was that the existence of this copy of the altar of the Lord was an indication that the eastern tribes had turned away from the Law of God and from the Lord. In the Law, there was only to be one altar, and it was to be in the courtyard of the tabernacle. No other altars and no other sacrifices were allowed. Other altars and other sacrifices usually meant that the people who built such alternative altars used them to worship other gods. What

was significant about this response of the western tribes is the seriousness attached to covenant faithfulness among the tribes of Israel. They were of the same blood and same heritage as the eastern tribes, but if the eastern tribes had built this altar to worship other gods, then they would be considered enemies of the Lord and enemies of Israel in spite of their natural connection. The principle here is that faithfulness to the Lord takes priority over even family connection.

These tribes had just concluded seven years of war for the conquest of Canaan, yet they were willing to go to war again over this issue. This tells us that there are some issues so important that we should not and cannot compromise. Yet, at the same time, the western tribes showed wisdom and restraint in their response to this troubling news. They did not immediately attack the eastern tribes, but sent a trusted delegation of leaders to investigate this report. If the delegation learned that there was indeed a turning away from the Lord among the eastern tribes, then war was inevitable. However, they did not assume this was the case even with the evidence of the copy of the altar. They first asked the eastern tribes and gave them the opportunity to explain their decision to build this altar.

22:13-19 - "Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the LORD, that you too must turn away this day from following the LORD? And if you too rebel against the LORD today then tomorrow he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the LORD's land where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us. Only do not rebel against the LORD or make us as rebels by building for yourselves an altar other than the altar of the LORD our God."

The appeal of the western leaders called to mind the incident years before with Balaam and the national compromise at Peor. That was a situation in which the men of Israel engaged in spiritually and morally sinful contact with the Canaanite gods through the influence of the Canaanite women. The compromise of the men of Israel brought about the severe judgment of the Lord which affected the entire nation. Many people in Israel lost their lives in a plague which swept through the people. The delegation of leaders mention this incident as an example of the danger this altar represents to the entire nation. Their concern was that the judgment of the Lord for the unfaithfulness of the eastern tribes would affect, not just them, but all the tribes of Israel. They appeal to the eastern tribes to not rebel in this way against the Lord.

The leaders then make a gracious offer to the eastern tribes. They tell them that if their territory east of the Jordan River is unclean (meaning spiritually corrupt), then they should move west over the Jordan River and join the other tribes in the Promised Land where the tabernacle of the Lord stands. In other words, they tell them that if they need to move closer to the tabernacle of the Lord in order to remain spiritually right with the Lord, that they will accommodate the eastern

tribes in that move. It is a gracious offer, because it would mean every tribe on the western side of the Jordan giving up some of their own territory to make room for the eastern tribes to settle on their land. In this, the western tribes show an admirable generosity and a healthy respect for the priority of the spiritual welfare of all the tribes of Israel.

22:24-29 - "No, but we did it from fear that in time to come your children might say to our children, 'What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel? For the LORD has made the Jordan a boundary between us and you, you people of Reuben and people of Gad. You have no portion in the LORD.' So your children might make our children cease to worship the LORD. Therefore we said, 'Let us now build an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you, and between our generations after us, that we do perform the service of the LORD in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and peace offerings, so your children will not say to our children in time to come, "You have no portion in the LORD." And we thought, If this should be said to us or to our descendants in time to come, we should say, 'Behold, the copy of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifice, but to be a witness between us and you.' Far be it from us that we should rebel against the LORD and turn away this day from following the LORD by building an altar for burnt offering, grain offering, or sacrifice, other than the altar of the LORD our God that stands before his tabernacle!"

As it turned out, the eastern tribes had not turned away from the Lord at all. They did not build this altar at the Jordan in order to provide for themselves an alternative location for making sacrifices to other gods. In fact, they had not intention of using it as an altar for sacrifice at all. They built it as a witness. They intended it to serve as a visible reminder to the western tribes of the commitment of the eastern tribes to the Lord. Their decision to build this altar was not wise, but it was not based in evil motives either.

They admitted to the delegation of western leaders that they decided to build the altar out of fear of the future. They were concerned that their location on the eastern side of the Jordan would lead to the western tribes considering them disconnected from the Lord and from Israel. They feared that future generations would ignore the unity of the twelve tribes and that their children would be considered second class citizens of Israel or even worse.

This controversy could have been avoided completely if the leaders of the eastern tribes had communicated up front to the western tribes their concern and their consideration of building a witness between the tribes near the Jordan River. They should have sought the wisdom of the Lord first by having their leaders ask Phinehas, the high priest at the tabernacle for the Lord's input on their intention. How often do we create problems for ourselves when we fall into

the error of the eastern tribes and act before seeking the wisdom of the Lord, and then have to scramble to explain ourselves after we set problems in motion with others?

Joshua 23

23:1-6 - "A long time afterward, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua was old and well advanced in years, Joshua summoned all Israel, its elders and heads, its judges and officers, and said to them, "I am now old and well advanced in years. And you have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake, for it is the LORD your God who has fought for you. Behold, I have allotted to you as an inheritance for your tribes those nations that remain, along with all the nations that I have already cut off, from the Jordan to the Great Sea in the west. The LORD your God will push them back before you and drive them out of your sight. And you shall possess their land, just as the LORD your God promised you. Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left,"

Between the end of chapter 22 and the beginning of chapter 23 many years have passed. Joshua died at age 110, and he was in his later eighties when the main campaign for the conquest of Canaan ended. Sometime toward the end of his life, between 20-25 years after his military leadership had ended, Joshua sent word throughout the tribes of Israel and called for the leaders of the nation to gather. Joshua was aware that his life was coming to an end, and his intention was to address the leaders of Israel to have a final influence on their hearts and minds before his death. The final words of significant leaders in the Bible are often recorded for us and are well worth our special attention. Their words, shared with an awareness of their own end are summaries of what was most important to them in their own lives. These final two chapters of Joshua contain a double portion of final words from Joshua. First, in this chapter, Joshua speaks his heart to the leaders of the nation, and in the next chapter, Joshua addresses the entire nation on last time. His words here are his spiritual legacy for the generation of leaders that will carry on after his death.

The first concern on Joshua's heart was to rehearse for the leaders what the Lord had done for all of them. It establishes a good pattern for us to notice. Joshua will give specific words of exhortation to the leaders of their responsibilities, but Joshua does not start with them. His focus is first on the Lord and all the many ways and times that the Lord had blessed them, cared for them, protected them, and fought for them. Their responsibilities must be fulfilled in the remembrance of the Lord's goodness and faithfulness to them. Joshua calls them to be obedient and faithful to the Lord because of all that the Lord had done for them. Our

obedience to the Lord is always based in our obligation to respond to His undeserved goodness to us.

Joshua reminds the leaders, that while the Lord had already given them possession of the Promised Land, that the possession of the land was still a work in process. They had followed the Lord and obeyed His command to possess the land, but they had not completed the work. There were areas of the land which were still controlled by Canaanites. Joshua gives the leaders the assurance that the Lord would show His faithfulness to them in the future by continuing to push the remaining Canaanites back and drive them out, but this was a conditional promise. There remained the danger that Israel would never fully complete the assignment the Lord had given them to possess all of the land. Their success going forward would be based on the same spiritual principle that the Lord had spoken to Joshua as they first began the conquest of Canaan. When they first crossed the Jordan River into Canaan, the Lord had spoken this word to Joshua and made it clear that the success of Israel in the campaign for Canaan would depend completely on their response to this. "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua 1:7-8).

Joshua took those words to heart and lived according to them. His faithfulness to the Lord and His Word were the true story explaining Joshua's exceptional success. Now, through Joshua, the Lord speaks a very similar word to the leaders of Israel who will succeed Joshua as the shepherds of Israel. Joshua's exhortation to the was to "be very strong to keep and do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses", and their future success or failure would be gauged by their response to this word. There are two elements to this exhortation that speak to our own life success or failure as believers. The first element is that God's Word is the standard for our lives. Standards in society are a constantly shifting sand, but God's Word is an unchanging rock. To the degree our lives are shaped by His standards as revealed in His Word, they are a success. What will matter in the end is whether we lived in a manner pleasing to God and that honored Him.

The second element in Joshua's word to the leaders was the necessity of strength and courage to live by God's standards. Since the standards of society are continuously changing, there is constant pressure exerted by the society upon the believer to influence us to conform to those changing standards. It takes real strength of character to go against the flow when most everyone around you is in that flow and they are all flowing together in the wrong direction. It requires courage to say no when God says no, but the society says yes. Leadership in particular faces the ongoing temptation to lead in a way that

pleases the most people. Joshua's word to the leaders of Israel was a pointed reminder that true leaders lead in a manner that pleases God, not necessarily the people.

23:7-13 - "that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day. For the LORD has driven out before you great and strong nations. And as for you, no man has been able to stand before you to this day. One man of you puts to flight a thousand, since it is the LORD your God who fights for you, just as he promised you. Be very careful, therefore, to love the LORD your God. For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you."

Joshua anticipates by the Spirit of God, the great temptation that Israel will face once he dies and his strong leadership over the nation passes to these leaders. The failure to finish the task of driving out the remaining Canaanites will create dangerous opportunities for Israel to mix socially, culturally and spiritually with the Canaanites. Joshua places two possibilities before them for the future. In the generations to come Israel will either cling to the Lord and remain faithful to Him alone, or they will learn to cling to the Canaanites. The danger will lead to unhealthy associations and intermarriages with the Canaanites. This was not a racial concern, but a spiritual one. The problem with Israel marrying Canaanite would be in the effect those marriages would have on the hearts of the Israel. They would become a snare and a trap for Israel. Marriage was designed by the Lord to be a physical union of two people which produces a heart to heart relationship. When the hearts of both people in a marriage are committed to the same right standards, then their shared influence on each other is a mutual benefit. However, when one in a marriage rejects the truth and the right ways of the Lord, the other is affected to their detriment. Each man and women in Israel was called to marry a person that shared their heart's commitment to the Lord and His ways. This principle is described in this New Testament passage. "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (II Corinthians 6:14-16).

23:14-16 - "And now I am about to go the way of all the earth, and you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one of them has failed. But just as all the good things that the LORD your God promised concerning you have been fulfilled for you, so the LORD will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the LORD your God has given you, if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you, and you shall perish quickly from off the good land that he has given to you."

In his final words to the leaders, Joshua gives them a word of warning. He has rehearsed the faithfulness of the Lord and He promised that they would be assured of the continuing faithfulness of the Lord as long as they remained faithful to Him. The warning consisted of this; if Israel was to turn their back on the Lord, His Word, and His ways, that the Lord was promising to be as diligent to judge them in their unfaithfulness as He was to bless them in their faithfulness. This warning was aimed at destroying the common misconception of what is called the unconditional love of God. The concept is repeated so frequently that it has taken on a kind of official authority, even though it violates the clear declarations of God Himself. If we mean that God's love is unconditional in the sense that we did not earn His love, then yes, He loves us unconditionally. But, if we mean that His love is unconditional in the sense that He will continue to treat us the same no matter what we do and how we respond to Him and His Word, then no. The Lord was not promising to always bless Israel in the future no matter how they lived. Instead, He promised to judge them for their ignoring Him, and refusing to walk in His ways. The Lord would not treat Israel lovingly when they turned from Him to worship the false gods of Canaan. This is a simple spiritual concept, but one which has a costly lesson attached to it. The Lord rewards the faithfulness and obedience of His people, even though they do not deserve it. He also disciplines and punishes their disobedience and unfaithfulness which they most certainly deserve.

Joshua 24

24:1-5 - "Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac. And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it, and afterward I brought you out.'"

Following his meeting with the leaders of Israel at Shiloh, at the tabernacle of the Lord, to give them a final exhortation, Joshua now gathers all the tribes of Israel to Shechem. It is interesting that Joshua chose Shechem as the location for this great gathering rather than Shiloh. Shechem was a site with its own great history for Israel. It was the place, where hundreds of years before, the Lord spoke to Abram and first gave him the promise of the land of Canaan. "Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him." (Genesis 12:6-7). By choosing this place, Joshua was calling attention to the faithfulness of the Lord to His original promise to Abram. They now stood at this same spot in the fulfillment of the Lord's promise.

Joshua addressed all the leaders of Israel and all the people and he began by rehearsing their history. He did not begin with their recent history, but reminds them all of how they got from where they began to where they now stood. Joshua tells the story of how their fathers were once pagan idolaters who worshipped false gods. It was the sovereign hand of God that chose Abraham for a special purpose, opened his eyes to see and understand the one true God, and to transform him into a man of true faith. We have seen this pattern unfold before as God renews the covenant relationship with His people. It is necessary for the people of God to remember that they were not always people of truth and faith. The reminder of the darkness from which the Lord saved us is intended to strengthen our deep appreciation for the Lord's mercy and grace in our lives and inoculate our hearts against the dangers of presumption and pride. In whatever good place we currently stand, we should always remember that we only arrived here by His amazing grace and constant faithfulness.

24:13-15 - "I gave you a land on which you had not labored and cities that you had not built, and you dwell in them. You eat the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards that you did not plant.

Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Joshua reviews some of the many tangible blessings that Israel currently enjoyed because of the Lord's work on their behalf. He had given to them beautiful land, cities, homes, vineyards, and orchards and reminded them that they had earned none of these blessings, or produced them for themselves. The point was that all credit for these things should be assigned to the Lord. He then calls the people to respond appropriately to all of these abundant blessings which had been showered on their lives. The appropriate response would be for Israel to serve the Lord in sincerity and faithfulness. The concept here in Joshua's call is not for Israel to serve the Lord in order to pay back the Lord for what He had done for them. The Lord's blessings were so extensive that there was no way for Israel to ever pay back to the Lord what they owed to Him.

Rather than pay back, the call to serve Him in response to His blessings is based on a sense of obligation that cannot be repaid. The concept is that Israel owed everything to the Lord. If not for His intervention they would never have arrived here and would not be enjoying any of these things. Even though they could never repay Him for His goodness to them, they nevertheless owed Him their lives, their hearts, and their sincere service for the remainder of their lives. Their faithful service to the Lord could not cancel the debt they owed Him, but anything less than their wholehearted service would be like robbing God of what He deserved from them.

Joshua then issues a surprising challenge to the people. He calls them to put away the gods from their origins in Babylon, from their slavery in Egypt, and now from the worship of the Canaanites around them. In three places now, Israel had been exposed to the religious expressions of people who were lost in darkness. They had been deeply influenced by what they saw in those pagan worship practices and even after all they had seen, heard, and learned of the Lord through Moses and Joshua, the nation remained a mixture of religious elements. Israel was called to be the Lord's holy nation. The Lord required the undivided purity of Israel's worship and He demanded 100% of it from them. Yet, at this late point, some in Israel continued to mix the worship of the gods of Babylon, Egypt and Canaan in with their worship of the Lord. This would be the single greatest danger for Israel in the years to follow.

The Christian community is not above this same danger. The names and details are always changing, but believers regularly encounter subtle mixtures of error with truth. God's Word provides us with the only trustworthy revelation of Who God is, what He is like, what His ways are, and what He requires of us. In spite of this, there is always some new teacher, preacher, or prophet who comes along and introduces other spiritual elements to mix with the Bible resulting in the same kind of poisonous mixture against which Joshua warned Israel on this day. Joshua's declaration to Israel was that they would not be allowed by the Lord to continue to mix truth with error and the worship of God with the worship of false gods. God would bring His people to a decisive moment of choice. They must choose whom they would serve. This is not a choice that produces salvation. It is a choice that follows salvation. It is not our choice that saves us, but once saved by the grace of God, He calls us to choose to serve Him alone with our whole heart and life.

Joshua declares his own commitment in the most famous words from this book. "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." Joshua could only exhort and encourage Israel to follow the Lord as they should. He could not cause them to serve the Lord. However, he could and did set the right example for them to follow in his own response to the Lord on behalf of both himself and the family which he led. The implication of Joshua's words was that even if no other person, and no other family in Israel remained true to the Lord, he and his family would. We affect and influence one another for either good or evil, but ultimately we make our own commitment to follow the Lord or drift along with the world around us.