

## **Joshua: Reconsecration**

By [Dr. J. Ligon Duncan](#)

*May 26, 2002*

In Joshua 24, we come to the end of our studies in the book of Joshua. In the text this evening, verse 15, we find the well known words, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," and that gives me a wonderful opportunity for me to say that this chapter serves as beautiful bridge between the studies of Joshua and what we begin next week, our study of marriage, home and family.

We've been following Joshua as he has been building the kingdom of God. In this Old Testament period, the kingdom of God has very definite, this worldly, physical, geographic dimensions to it. But lying behind everything that Joshua has been doing, have been spiritual principles that are valid in every age, in our age, today. God has redeemed the land that He had promised in Genesis 12 to give to Abraham and to his descendents, and now Joshua is giving his final words, like Moses, David and Paul, and for that matter Jesus Christ in chapters 13-17 of John's Gospel. At the end of this chapter, at 110 years of age, Joshua is going to die, and Joshua is going to be buried, but before he dies he gives these very solemn words of great love and concern for the people of God.

Now the key to the whole chapter, it seems to me, lies in verse 25, when it says to us, "On that day, Joshua made a covenant with the people." He is summoning his friends to a solemn and binding ritual of rededication and a re-consecration to the Lord and His word. Characteristically, this was often done in the Old Testament by the forging of a covenant. And that word, covenant, occurs somewhere between 200 and 250 times, and it is a word used to describe the relationship of God to His people. As we look at this chapter, Christ has entered into a covenant with us. "This is the blood of the new covenant," Jesus would say.

### **I. Love's story.**

What is a covenant? In the Bible a covenant is a bond of permanent commitment. And covenants in bible times have very definite forms and shapes, and it seems that Joshua, in compiling this final chapter, is actually compiling it in the very shape and form of a covenant. I want us to try and pick up several of those features of the form of a covenant that Joshua is making with the people,

and the first is this: that every covenant is forged with history in mind. There is, what we might call 'a history to the making' of a covenant. Now in the first 13 verses of chapter 24, that's precisely what you have. In verses 2,3, and 4, we have the history recorded of the promise that was given to Abraham. In verses 5, 6, and 7 we have that period when God's people were in Egypt. Then, in verses 8, 9, and 10, we have the account of the battle that was fought against the Moabites and the Amorites. Then in verses 11, 12, and 13, we have for us described the entrance into and the taking possession of the land of Canaan. Now it's interesting that all this took place at Shechem. And back in genesis 12, it was at Shechem that the Lord had first appeared to Abraham and said to him that that piece of land on which he was standing would become the possession of his descendants.

And what is taking place in these verses is the story? It's the story of how that promise has now been fulfilled. It's as though Joshua is saying, "Look at the ground upon which you are standing. It was here that the Lord God made a promise to Abraham that this land would be ours, and today it is ours." When God makes a promise, and He made that promise, you remember, in a life and death bond, that He would be faithful to that promise, so what we have in then in these verses is an account of what has happened since. God has forged a covenant of love with His people, and He's reminding them, Joshua is reminding them, how marvelous a story that covenant love has been.

It's a bit like when you speak to your wife or husband. Do you remember that time when I proposed to you? Do you remember where it was? Do you remember the words that I uttered? Do you remember that little incident?" And don't tell me, and please, please don't tell me that you get tired of that story. Please don't tell me that you ever ever get tired of hearing that story told over and over and over. You know how it is. You children, you've heard your parents talk about when they got married and when you were born, and the little things that you did, and those embarrassing things, and they love to tell those stories of how little things happened to you. And you wish they wouldn't tell those stories but they do tell the stories because that's their story. That's the story of their covenant love and commitment. And that's exactly what's happening in these opening verses. A covenant of love has been forged. God has led them all the way to this day, and history is important. The little details are important. Tell me the old, old story, of Jesus and His love."

It's what we sing isn't it  
Tell me the story slowly, that I may take it in,  
That wonderful redemption, God's remedy for sin.  
Tell me the story often, for I forget so soon;  
The early dew of morning has passed away at noon

Now, I know for some of you, that is history is dull. It just doesn't do anything for you. But you know history is so vitally important in the Bible's story. I often think

on Sunday mornings, when people are standing outside the Heritage Room, and inside that room is a glass panel, behind which are all sorts of artifacts, books, and pictures. Some on the wall are framed. I wonder, have you ever gone into the Heritage Room? Have you ever gone in and stood and looked at the photos of some of those people standing, way down State Street where First Pres used to be, all dressed up in clothes that belonged to the 1910s? They are extraordinary pictures. And you say to yourself, "This is my story. This is where I've come from." Do you know that a Welshman is responsible for Presbyterianism in America? Do you know that? You know, you can't get away from history. And that's precisely what is happening here.

But there's a little twist in the story. It's not just emphasizing the wondrousness of the story, but it's also emphasizing the unpredictability of the story. Do you notice in verse 4, as an example, "To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, to Esau I gave Mt. Seir to possess it, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt." This is the story of the possession of the land of Canaan, but this unpredictable event occurs in the story when Jacob and his sons end up outside of Canaan and in Egypt. And that's just a little indication that the telling of the story of God's redemption, whether it's this particular story or in the story of God's redemption as it unfolds in your life, there may well be a circumstance, in the telling of your particular story, where difficulties and problems and trials and incomprehensible providences come into that story that you cannot make sense of. And you see what this covenant story is saying to us, that even when we cannot understand the story, even when we cannot predict which way the story will go, we must trust Him, because God has made a bond. He has made a bond of permanent commitment with us. God is saying to you, my brother and sister, God is saying to you, "I have loved you. I have loved you. No matter what twists or turns or caveats, will you not trust Me to finish the story." But there's a second aspect of the covenant that is seen in this particular chapter, and that is

## **II. Covenant Commitment.**

There is covenant history but there is also covenant commitment, because what Joshua is doing here is calling upon the people to a fresh commitment to their covenant Lord. And that commitment takes several forms. In the first place, he says to them in verse 14, that they must fear the Lord. There is something about Joshua at 110 years of age that wants to say something deeply, deeply significant to the people. Now, what would that be? What's the most significant thing that Joshua can say to the people about the character of God, and it's this: you must fear Him. That there is something about God that is so wonderful, that is so extraordinary, that is so beyond our grasp and fathomability, that it produces within us a sense of holy awe. That there ought to be, as we think about God and as we sing, "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand," peering across at Canaan, there ought to be goose pimples on the back of our necks as we think about how extraordinary God is. That God has saved you, that God has rescued

you, that God has brought you to this point in your lives. And I wonder tonight, if that is at least a part of the message that you need to hear. Something of the awesomeness of God needs to be rekindled in your heart.

Do you know why our Christian lives are so often the way that they are? It is because we have lost sight of God. It is because we have brought God down and made Him after our image, and we have tried to conform Him to our standards. And Joshua is saying, and these are his final words, he is saying, "whatever else you do, make sure, make absolutely sure, that your soul is filled with the awesomeness of God."

But then, notice again in verse 14, that there must be a desire to serve Him: "Fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth." Embrace Him, Joshua is saying. Come before God with a willingness and a desire and a longing to say to God, "Anything, anything, Lord, whatever You ask of me. Whatever trial you ask me to bear, whatever road you ask me to traverse, whatever obstacle to overcome, whatever difficulty to embrace, whatever pain, whatever joy, anything, I want to serve You. I want to be out and out for You."

But notice that as Joshua says that, as he urges the people of God to serve Him, Joshua feels compelled to say, "Throw away the gods." Did you notice that in verse 13, "Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped." Give yourselves to God carefully, without any reservation and put away anything that might get in the way of your relationship with Him.

The dearest idol I have known  
Whate'er that idol be  
Help me to tear it from my breast  
And worship only thee.

That's what Joshua is saying. I have to ask you tonight, what are the idols in your life, that are preventing you from serving the Lord with a fullness of heart? Maybe, maybe, it is the idol of covetousness that we heard about today in Exodus? I don't know about you, but somehow the pews were very uncomfortable this morning. Somehow, I just couldn't get myself comfortably into that pew this morning. And as the applications were made one after another, maybe, maybe, that's the very idol that's preventing us from saying to God, "Anything, anything, Lord."

And do you notice that Joshua says at the end of verse 15, remember now he's 100 years old, "As for me and my house," you've got to make a choice, he says. You can either serve the gods that your forefathers served, or, you can serve the Lord. You can't have both. It's either the old way of life or the new way of life, but it cannot be both, "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

And I find that extraordinary, that at the end of Joshua's life, his vision of the

kingdom of God and the way the kingdom of God is advanced, has this familial, corporate dimension to it, that he and his house will serve the Lord. Do you know what the great secret of youth ministry is? Allow me to make this application at this juncture. Do you know what the great secret of youth ministry is? Fathers. It is fathers like Joshua taking upon themselves the responsibility of rearing their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. It is the responsibility of fathers in the household of God saying, "This family will worship God this way on this occasion." My friends, you cannot escape this from this passage. It is as clear as the noonday sun, as it shines from Joshua 24. His parting words, isn't it beautiful, that Joshua's parting word to the people, is a word about the responsibility of fathers in the family.

And then something extraordinary happens. The people say, "Of course we will serve the Lord." And you notice what Joshua says: "You cannot." And you know, there is something timeless about what Joshua is doing here, because until we come to an appreciation of our inability, we can never do anything for the Lord and His kingdom, until we appreciate what Jesus says, "Without Me you can do nothing." You will advance the kingdom of God, you will advance it in your home and in your family, not by your might, and not by your ability, and not by your dreams, and not by your aspirations and your goals, but by you casting yourself entirely on Me.

You know, I find that double-edged, but let me draw out the edge that's comforting, because I think Joshua wants these people to understand people who are anxious and eager to make this covenant commitment to the Lord. He wants them to understand that without the help of God, they can do nothing. It is only as God comes in to our homes and to our families and to our children, that the kingdom of God is advanced. What a challenge, what an extraordinary challenge that is.

I was reading a sermon this week by John Wesley on this particular text. He says, "And suppose after you have done this, after you have taught your children from their early infancy in the plainest manner you could, omitting no opportunity and persevering therein, you did not presently see any proof of your labor, you must not conclude that there will be none."

But there's one more thing that I want us to see here, and that is covenant witness.

### **III. Love's Witness**

Right at the end of the chapter, right after they've made their commitment to the Lord, they plant this stone, and they plant it beneath a tree that is enormously significant, if you remember the Old Testament story in Genesis 35. For it was there that the idols of God's people were buried beneath that oak. And it's there

that this large stone is now erected as a witness to what they have promised to do for God.

And you say to yourself, "How can a stone be a witness to words that people utter?" Well, almost every week at this spot, in this church, words are uttered of covenant commitment, "in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, til death us do part." And a piece of gold, or it may be a piece of silver, is often brought forth and placed on a finger, as testimony of words of covenant commitment that have been uttered. And think of the stone that's planted beneath this oak tree in the same way that you think of a wedding ring, or in some strange way, in the same way that these stones of this building are, to words of covenant commitment that have been uttered in this very church. Isn't it very solemn, that the very last words in verse 27 of Joshua are, "lest you deny your God."

The book ends with the burial of three faithful people: Joshua, Joseph and Eliezer. But by the time we come to the end of the next book of the Bible, we are going to read, "and every man did that which was right in their own eyes." You see the very question that hangs at the end of Joshua 24, "Will we be true to God, or will we not?" And if you're going to be true to God, you must throw away your idols, and you must trust in Christ who has bonded Himself to us in the new covenant and you must live without reservation for Him.

Jonathan Edwards in 1722 had the habit of writing down some words of covenant commitment as a witness to the promises that he would make to the Lord. One of them goes like this, the very first one, "Resolved that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory." May God grant that we might make such resolutions in our own house and in our own lives. Let's pray.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

*This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.*

*Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.*

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

**Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).