

# The Book of Joshua

LESSON  
FOUR

Covenant Loyalty  
Discussion Forum



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# The Book of Joshua

## Lesson Four: Covenant Loyalty

### Discussion Forum

With

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Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

Dr. Charles L. Quarles

Dr. Mark Saucy

Dr. Seth Tarrer

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

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Dr. Peter Walker

### Question 1:

#### What is the significance of the covenant warnings given in Joshua 23?

##### **Dr. Richard L. Pratt Jr.**

Lots of evangelical Christians have a hard time with the fact that Joshua warns the people of Israel that God is going to punish or discipline or even curse them. And the reason they have a hard time with that is because they don't want that to be true for themselves. They don't see any relevance in that, in fact, because many of us believe that because Jesus took the eternal curses that we deserve on ourselves, that there's no place for discipline, there's no place for curses, there's no place for *bad things* — just put it that way — bad things to happen to us. And so, we have a hard time, sometimes, dealing with chapters 23 and 24 of Joshua because we believe that God has removed all possibility of bad things happening to us in his plan, because Jesus has taken the eternal curses on himself. But what we have to remember as we read those chapters in Joshua, about the warnings of covenant curses on Israel, is that the same kinds of things appear in the New Testament. You think about Hebrews 6, or Hebrews 10, or think about Revelation 3:19, where Jesus says, "Those whom I love I reprove and discipline." The fact is that the way God shows his love for his true people is by disciplining them in this world. So, while Jesus removes the *eternal* curses from us by his death on the cross, by taking them on himself, he does not remove every bad thing or every trouble or every trial that God sends our way or God permits to happen in our lives in this world. In fact, the book of James, in chapter 1, tells us that the trials and the problems that we have in this world are given to us as gifts from God that sanctify us and build us up... And this was the purpose of the words behind Joshua in chapters 23 and 24. For true believers in Israel, even in Old Testament days, the threat of curse revealed the reality that God would send bad things — punishments, discipline, hardship — to his true believers in Israel to sanctify them. And that was the way it was in the Old Testament, and it's the way it is even in the New Testament today.

**Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

The significance of the covenant warnings given in Joshua 23:1-16 are directly related to us as Christians... I say that this is important to *us*, because many times we rely on the grace of the Lord in a way that makes us apathetic about obeying the Lord's commands and requirements... In these warnings, Joshua reminded the people of their commitments to the Lord, the fundamental commitments and their applications. For example, they were not to worship other gods, not to build altars for other gods, not to mix, through marriage, with the gods of the other nations surrounding them. Simply put, they were to obey the law and the commands that the Lord had given them through Moses. The warnings presented by Joshua are covenantal warnings because they follow the general framework of biblical covenants. Covenants in the Bible have three main elements. The first element is divine benevolence where God reminds the people of his kindness, blessings and grace to them. The second element is the required human loyalty. Since the Lord has dealt bountifully with you and his grace overflowed for you, there is a human role, which is the role of loyalty, obedience, and faithfulness under the covenant. The third element is the consequences of the covenant. Obedience has its consequences — the blessings of the covenant. Disobedience and rebellion have their consequences, which are the curses of the covenant.

**Rev. Michael J. Glodo**

In Joshua 23, Joshua issues what we could call covenant warnings to the elders of Israel to be faithful, to win the land fully and completely, not to intermingle, intermarry with, or tolerate the presence of the idolatrous Canaanites among them, because if they did, it would be disastrous. Joshua is giving this speech because he is coming to the end of his life, and it's critically important that the next generation not only remember and know about how God's promises have not failed — “not one of them,” it says in that passage — but how they must continue to prosecute God's covenant as faithful covenant vassals in order to fully secure the Promised Land as their inheritance. Deuteronomy 7, for example, as well as other places in Deuteronomy, have these warnings that they shall not make treaties or settle with the inhabitants of the land because it would lead their hearts astray. They would intermarry, but not just intermarry; this intermarriage and making of peace with the inhabitants of the land would eventually corrupt their worship and would lead their hearts away from the Lord. And so, that's the main thing that Joshua is concerned about, that Israel not let their hearts be led away from the Lord by the presence of the peoples who inhabit the land when they got there.

**Question 2:****What was the purpose of Joshua's farewell speech in chapter 23 of the book of Joshua?****Rev. Sherif Gendy, translation**

In Joshua 23, we see that Joshua gathered all the people together, the entire nation of Israel, because he was very old, or as he said about himself, he was “about to go the way of all the earth,” which means that he was about to die. So, Joshua gathered the people and started to give them his farewell speech, which included important warnings to the people within the context of the covenant... That was Joshua's goal when he gathered all of Israel. He wanted to remind them that they had to be loyal and obedient and devoted to the Lord within the context of the covenant. They were not to take for granted the victory the Lord had accomplished for them and live as if the Lord's commands did not exist and worship other gods. That's why these warnings were so important. Joshua was reminding the people about the covenant the Lord had cut with them.

**Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

Joshua 23 is Joshua's farewell speech to the nation of Israel. At that time, Joshua began by reminding Israel about their history, how the Lord had brought the nation of Israel out of the land of Egypt, reminding them again of how good the Lord is. So, the goodness of God is remembered again, professed again by Joshua, and taught again to the entire nation of Israel that was listening at that time. The purpose was so that they would not forget the covenant that was made between God and the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel, at that time, was in a situation where the surrounding nations were still there, and these nations worshiped other gods. It would have been very easy for the nation of Israel to forget God, and reminding them of the covenant was very important. That's why Joshua reminded them again of the history of God's goodness, so that those in the nation of Israel that had not experienced it beforehand — because they were the second generation — would remember it and always keep it in their hearts. Then they could feel it and they could use it in their lives to resist all influences that were around them, the influences from the other nations in Canaan. Because of that, in the second part of the speech Joshua reminded them of the snares or of the influences of the surrounding nations so that they could avoid them.

**Dr. James M. Hamilton**

Well, what we find at the end of the book of Joshua is really reminiscent of the blessings and the curses of the covenant back at the end of the book of Deuteronomy. And the burden of the message in both places is really the same message, and that is that if Israel will keep the covenant in the land, then they will have long and good life in the land. But if they break the covenant, eventually what's going to happen is the Lord is going to scatter them among the nations, which is what he warned would happen in the curses of the covenant, and it's what Joshua warns the people is going to happen. But in particular, in Joshua, it's almost like the book of Judges is being set up. There's even the statement in Joshua 23:12-13 where the Lord speaks of the

nations being a snare and a trap to the people of Israel if they don't thoroughly drive them out, and this is exactly what we find... At the beginning of Judges, at first, the people would not drive out the Canaanites, and then eventually they *could* not drive out the Canaanites, and that was because they were disobedient to the Lord, and the Lord was now using the Canaanites as instruments of discipline against them.

### Question 3:

#### How do the final chapters of the book of Joshua emphasize Israel's need for exclusive loyalty and devotion to the Lord?

##### Dr. Seth Tarrer

In chapter 23 and chapter 24 in the book of Joshua, Israel is called to this exclusive worship of the Lord, and with this call comes a warning. Throughout the book of Joshua, Israel's enemies have been devoted to destruction. However, here in chapter 23, Israel, this same destruction Israel is warned of, should they violate this exclusive loyalty or exclusive worship to their God, the saving God, Adonai. Now, when we look at this exclusive loyalty there's two components of it. The first is how is Israel to be exclusively loyal? Well, the Hebrew uses this fantastic word, "*dabaq*," right? And it means, "to cling to." And in 23:8, Israel is told to "cling to the Lord." Another way to translate this would be to "hug." It could be used in the same way. Israel is told to grasp tightly to the Lord, figuratively, literally. In all components, Israel is to not let go of their warrior God, the one who has saved them and brought them into this land. And then four verses later, in 23:12, Israel is told do not "hug" the gods of your nation, the nations around you. Do not *dabaq* the nations. So, there is the "how." How is Israel to remain exclusive? Cling to their Lord. And secondly, to whom is Israel called to be exclusive? Well, this is a question of choice. This is a question of who will Israel decide to follow? When Israel looks back through the aid of memorials and the aid of recitation of the law, the aid of the recitation of the covenant requirements and the renewal of the covenant that Joshua institutes at Shechem there in 23 and 24, this all causes Israel to cast its gaze, once again, on the God who not only brought them through the Sea of Reeds but through the Jordan River and into the land that they now inhabit.

##### Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation

In Joshua chapters 23 and 24, we find Joshua's final speech before the end of his leadership. And it was given to the people of Israel, which, at that time, had already settled in the land of Canaan and were living among other nations that worshiped many gods. Because of this, in his farewell speech, Joshua emphasized, again, the importance of worshiping the one true God exclusively. It was very important that they looked to the God who, historically, had brought them out of the land of Egypt and then made a covenant with them exclusively to be, "a chosen race," "a holy nation," "a people for [God's] own possession," "a royal priesthood." And this was a covenant that no other nation received. God is not like the other gods that were known to the nations around Israel. And this is what Joshua emphasized, that they

must look to this one God only — the God who was great, the God who created the entire world, the God who transcended all other gods, the God who took the initiative to relate personally to the nation of Israel, the God who had lifted them out of slavery and redeemed them, the God who blessed them and made them, from one man, into a great nation, giving them the land, the only God who fought for them. So, to worship God — Yahweh — exclusively was very much emphasized by Joshua, because the nation of Israel lived in the midst of a society that very easily influenced them. And this is proven in history in the way that, after Joshua left them, not long after that, the nation of Israel abandoned the Lord. They worshiped other gods, and the consequences were that the Lord punished them and allowed many bad things to happen to the nation of Israel. And in our society now, I think the church must also be reminded of this. It's very important to worship the one true God exclusively, because this world offers us many things as well. Maybe the forms are different than they were in Joshua's day, but we are very easily influenced to turn to other gods. And because we are God's people, bound by God's holy covenant, we inherit this agreement, this faith, and we also must worship God exclusively, because we too can experience the consequences of disobedience. But, if we exclusively worship God, and him alone, then the blessings that God has promised, indeed, will be given to us.

#### Question 4:

**What would the book of Joshua have taught its original readers about the importance of obedience to Mosaic law?**

#### Dr. Carol Kaminski

Obedience to Mosaic law is really central throughout the whole Pentateuch and then going forward. And it's interesting because the book of Joshua begins, as Joshua becomes the new leader to take the people into the Promised Land, there's this central place that the word of God has, that he's not to depart to the right, to the left. And in fact, it's his obedience that is going to grant him success as they enter into the land. So, it's given a central place at the beginning of the book. But you also find right at the end of the book, in Joshua 24, as he gives his farewell address — he's about to die and so forth — he also talks about the warnings for God's people to follow God's laws, and he says, again, he gives that same instruction to them, that you're not to turn from the right, to the left. And the question is, well, why is God's law so important to do with conquest of the land? And this goes back to passages like Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 27 and 28, which gives this list of blessings. One of them is entrance into the land *if* they obey the commandments — Mosaic covenant — *if* they obey the commandments. But there's also, if they disobey those commands, then there is this promise by God for the curses, including being exiled from the land. So, under this period of the Mosaic covenant through Joshua, their entrance and holding onto the land is contingent upon their obedience. So, it's central to the book, and it's important throughout the whole narrative. Unfortunately, the Israelites will not obey the command of God, and so what you have in 722 B.C., the northern kingdom, they'll end up being exiled, and then 586 B.C., the southern. That has all kinds of



theology to teach us about the whole role of obedience, and especially, we could even look forward to the whole role of the new covenant, Jesus' own obedience, who fulfills the covenant. So, they're the big questions, but certainly within the book, where we are in the narrative of Joshua, obedience, both beginning and end, is central to the book.

**Dr. T.J. Betts**

I think that the book of Joshua teaches its original audience about obedience to the law, first of all by its introduction. We see the emphasis on Joshua and his keeping God's law, and he has the promise that, if you'll not turn from the right or left but truly stay true to God's law, that he will have success and prosper in what God has called him to do. I think that translates, then, into teaching all the people that this is God's purpose for them. As they had this leader, Joshua, they are to follow in his footsteps and to understand that this is what God's people are about. And so, this is extremely important to them, I think. As we look at, also, the law as Moses gave it, the law was meant as the nation especially got into the Promised Land — and that's what Deuteronomy really speaks to — and so, as they've gotten into the Promised Land, and Joshua has finally brought them here, it's the law that is to govern their government, how they act as a nation. But it also restrains them from sin. It also helps them understand how they are to be involved with each other and do business with each other and to understand property rights and understand what it means to be a holy people from all the other nations. And so, really, it's at the core of Israel's identity, and the book of Joshua just says, okay, this is what Moses gave us, now this is what we are, so let's be what God has called us to be.

**Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation**

Obedience to God and his law brought blessings and earthly promises for the nation of Israel. This was clearly seen when they conquered the enemy and won Canaan. Disobedience, on the other hand, brought God's punishment and the curses that accompanied the nation of Israel during the acquisition of Canaan. And later, these consequences were evident in the loss of freedom when the nation fell into slavery to neighboring nations that bordered Israel. This happened because the nation was continually disobedient to God. This led to the nation losing their land and being taken captive. They found themselves in slavery, as we know, first by the Assyrians for the northern kingdom and then by the Babylonians for the southern kingdom.

**Question 5:**

**What would the people of Israel have learned from the covenant renewal ceremony in Joshua 24?**

**Dr. James M. Hamilton**

You know, it's fascinating. In Joshua 24, we really see some things that are similar to the end of the book of Deuteronomy, particularly Deuteronomy 29, where, in the early verses of that chapter, Moses tells Israel, "Down to this very day the Lord hasn't

given you the heart that you need.” And then, as he continues through that chapter, eventually he gets into chapter 30 where he begins to speak of the new covenant, the latter day time when the Lord is going to circumcise the hearts of his people. And here in Joshua 24, in a similar way, Joshua is telling the people, “You’re not *able* to serve the Lord your God; you don’t have the *ability*,” this volitional spiritual capacity to serve God. And I think this is intended to have two functions for the people of Israel. On the one hand, I think they’re intended to say, “Lord, if I don’t have the ability, I need you to give me the ability.” And there has been a reference back in Leviticus 26 to the uncircumcised heart of the people being humbled when they are ready to confess their sins, and the Lord will then forgive them of their sins. And then, Moses had commanded them in Deuteronomy 10 to circumcise their hearts to the Lord. So, I think that they’re intended to say to the Lord, “I can’t do this to myself. I can’t do this for myself. I need you to circumcise my heart and make me an obedient person.” And then, on the other hand, I think this is also intended, like Deuteronomy 30, to make them look forward to the day when the Lord will circumcise their hearts and enable them to keep the commandments. So, on the one hand, it’s teaching them their inability. On the other hand, it’s pointing them forward to a new day when the Lord is going to do this work in them that will enable them to obey. And John and the other apostles in the New Testament are claiming that that’s precisely what the Lord has brought about through the Lord Jesus in the giving of the Holy Spirit.

**Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

The covenant renewal ceremony led by Joshua at Shechem, in chapter 24, is very important in this book. After Joshua gave his farewell speech, it was followed with a covenant renewal where, as in chapter 23, Joshua reminded Israel again of their history — how God had redeemed the nation of Israel and brought them out and blessed them and covenanted with them. But then Joshua also reminded them that within the covenant was the law that must be obeyed. And Joshua wrote down the law, as the law of God, to be remembered by the people of Israel and obeyed. In the context of the covenant, there are two things to remember here. First, they would receive blessings, but also, they must obey the law. And then, Joshua gave sanctions, or consequences: “If you do not obey, then the Lord will allow the other nations that are around you to become a snare, to become a threat to the nation of Israel.” And this was a reminder, from the beginning of Joshua’s farewell speech, before he passed the responsibility of leadership on to others. And Joshua then also said to them, “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” and he challenged the nation of Israel to make a decision as well. So, in truth, this became an important milestone. At the end of Joshua’s leadership, Joshua reminded Israel, by renewing the covenant, that although their leadership changed, they would not forget that they remained under their true leader, the Lord himself. And I think this is a good lesson for the church today. We must always remember the history, once again, of the goodness of God in our lives. And we must — at the end, perhaps, of our own leadership, or when we move on to the next stage — we must bring those under our leadership to God, not to ourselves, reminding them that all of this is God’s work. And there is a law, and things that we must obey, and there are consequences for not obeying, and there are

blessings if we are willing to obey. And that's what Joshua did. And it's something we all should emulate.

**Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation**

Now, when the Israelites had settled in the land, Joshua renewed the covenant and reminded the nation that obedience to God and his law was the foundation of the nation's occupancy of the Promise Land. Their obedience would bear fruit in the goodness and blessings that would come with whatever the nation of Israel did — blessings of material goods and favor in all of their endeavors. In contrast, disobedience to God would result in God's punishment, such as natural disasters like famine, a frequent punishment in the time of the book of Judges. And this would manifest itself if the nation continued to disobey. It would manifest itself as deportation and even enslavement of the nation in a foreign land. And this happened many years later, when the nation found itself in slavery, first to the Assyrians and then to the Babylonians.

**Question 6:**

**How can a loving God say in Joshua 24:19 that he is a jealous God and will not forgive rebellion and sins?**

**Rev. Kevin Labby**

God demands holiness of those who would be in fellowship with him, which, of course, raises the question of how we who are not holy, who are sinful, can be in fellowship with God. And God, by grace, makes that possible. He sent his son Jesus to be for us what we could never be for ourselves, and he's jealous for that relationship. But the jealousy that the Bible's describing there in Joshua is not a fickle, petulant jealousy. It's the jealousy of a husband for his wife who he loves and in whom he wants to have a wonderful, abiding relationship. And so, that's why so many times in the Old Testament, as well as into the New, idolatry, turning away from the Lord and chasing after other things — as what God would be for us instead — that's why it's likened so much to adultery... And so God, when he would have us be in relationship with him, we need to be faithful as he is faithful, and of course we're not. And he will not forgive — that is, turn aside, say that it's okay when it's really not — our sinfulness. What he requires is justice. He won't satisfy the desires of his love and grace at the expense of his justice, but in his mercy he sent forth his Son to be for us what we can never be for ourselves. And so, God, in that sense, does not forgive, but in another sense does forgive. But he does not forgive by sweeping our sin under the rug. He forgives by paying the penalty for our sin in our place through his Son.

**Dr. K. Erik Thoennes**

The jealousy of God describes God's ardent desire for exclusive favor from his covenant people. It's a demand that a husband has for the faithfulness of his wife. It's an astounding thing that the Creator of the universe, who has no unmet needs, has

nevertheless entered into a relationship with his people that he compares with a marriage. And when we are unfaithful to him as his people, it's spiritual adultery. So, he responds with an appropriate jealous anger, first and foremost for his own glory, but expressed primarily in glorifying him through our faithfulness. So, when we're unfaithful to him and we pursue other "lovers" besides God as the one true object of our affections, he rightly responds with the jealous anger of a husband.

**Dr. Robert G. Lister**

When we understand, according to the Scriptures, that God's attribute of love is a holy love, a jealous love, a love that brooks no rivals and has no tolerance for idolatry and false worship, we understand that yes, God is loving, but God's love comes with claims on his creatures. It comes with requirements. It's comes with an acknowledgement that God is God and there are no other gods. And ultimately, it would be unloving of God to tolerate idolatry. It would be unloving of God to say, "I'm not bothered by the fact that you're worshiping these other gods. I'm not bothered by the fact that you're spurning my redemptive initiative towards you." ... We want to be careful not to dichotomize what is the holistic reality of God's character. And if we take our understanding of God's love in conjunction with our understanding of his holiness, we realize that though hell is a sobering reality and final judgment is a sobering reality, God is absolutely right and just to judge the unrepentant in hell, and in fact, if he didn't, we wouldn't say that he was good. If God did not esteem the proper worship of the one true God — the way that he does in Scripture — we wouldn't say that he was good if he looked askance at sin and treated it as though it were no big deal. So, the love of God is a critical attribute to understand. We just don't want to abstract it and isolate it from the rest of what we know about the character of God as revealed in Scripture.

**Question 7:**

**What did Joshua 23 & 24 teach Israel about the importance of remaining faithful to God's covenant?**

**Rev. Henryk Turkanik, translation**

At the end of his life, Joshua reminded the nation of Israel of the most important laws, those that were connected to keeping the covenant and remaining faithful according to the covenant. These were the laws that Moses had repeated for a long time, both during the time of Israel's enslavement and during the time of wandering in the desert for forty years. And these laws had consequences. Blessings would always come to the nation of Israel as a result of their obedience to God. However, if the nation was disobedient to God, curses would fall upon the nation, along with other types of misery. This was written in Deuteronomy 28. There it was written that if you are obedient to God's commandments, you will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. Your storehouses and your property will be blessed, and whatever you put your hand to, God will bless. But if you are disobedient, you will not be blessed, either coming in or going out. Your basket and your storehouses will be

cursed, your livestock will be cursed, and anything you set your hand to will be destroyed. So, in accordance with the law, Joshua cited in the final two chapters — 23 and 24 — what Moses had spoken of in Deuteronomy 28.

**Dr. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

Chapters 23 and 24 take place at the end of Joshua's leadership. And Israel received these chapters in circumstances where the nation was living in a culture that was different than its own. The nations around Israel were polytheistic — worshipping many gods — whereas the nation of Israel, at that time, was the only nation that worshiped the one true God, Yahweh. And a warning was given to the nation of Israel so that they would remain faithful to God. He was not like the other gods that were worshiped in the nations surrounding Israel — whether it was Asherah, whether it was Dagon, or Baal — gods who had no relationship whatsoever with the people that worshiped them, where the concept was only “give and take” — asking, giving, giving an offering and then hoping. But the Lord had a covenant bond that was very personal between Yahweh and Israel. And the nation of Israel was reminded again to remember the importance of this covenant, which involved both parties. There was an initiative from God, and there was also a response from the nation of Israel. This was an exclusive relationship that needed to be maintained. This was the only God, the great God, the true God, who covenanted with them. Other gods, Baal for example, was the god of fertility; still other gods were gods over the sea, the land. But the God of Israel was a God who owned the whole world. And it is this God who made a covenant with the nation of Israel. It was important that they always remembered this covenant and remained in a right relationship. And that also involved the way they lived. If they obeyed God, then he promised to give them blessings. But if they did not obey God and turned to other gods, then the Lord would punish them. There were consequences in the covenant that the nation of Israel had known from the beginning, and this is what Joshua reminded them of because he would soon step down as their leader. And regardless of who became his replacement, I think Joshua wanted the nation of Israel to remember that God was truly their leader who remembered his covenant with them.

**Question 8:**

**How would God's supernatural blessings to Israel have motivated them toward covenant loyalty and faithfulness?**

**Dr. James M. Hamilton**

When we think of the supernatural blessings in the book of Joshua and their function in motivating the people of Israel toward covenant loyalty and faithfulness, the way in which I think we should think about this is in terms of the way that the signs and the wonders, so to speak, that God is doing for Israel in Joshua correspond to and match the signs and wonders that God did for Israel at the exodus from Egypt. So, there are many ways in which these wonders in Joshua point back to the exodus. For instance, the crossing of the Jordan River is very similar to the crossing of the Red Sea; the

people walk on dry ground. Joshua encounters the angel of the Lord and he's told to take off his sandals. Bruce Waltke, in his *Old Testament Theology*, says that there are eighteen points of similarity between the early narratives of Joshua and the narratives about the exodus from Egypt. And I think that the upshot of this is that the conquest of the land is already a kind of new exodus so that the way that God saved his people at the exodus is being presented as the way that he is saving, or working on behalf of his people at the conquest. And so, in the same way that God liberated his people, he's now granting them what he has promised them, and so it should inspire them to be confident in their God. It should convince them that their God is the only living and true God, and therefore he is the only God to whom they should be devoted. And this is reinforcing the message of Moses, particularly in the *Shema* — "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" — and you shall love him. He's the only one, so you shall love him. And this goes along also with the teaching of Joshua where the Lord is saying to Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you," and that's evident in the way that he saves them, and it's evident in the way that they are to obey what they've been commanded by Moses.

**Rev. Kevin Labby**

You know, when you come into the book of Joshua, one of the things that you see is the commandment to have twelve stones, a monument of God's faithfulness to his people, so that future generations of Israelites could look back upon the mighty works of God and know how God had displayed his love and affection for them in difficult times and proved to be their faithful deliverer. Of course, the Bible tells us we love because he first loved us and says that it's his comfort and his kindness that leads us to repentance. And I think one of the great catalysts to love for God in practice, in our words, our thoughts and our deeds is remembering God's great love to us in the extraordinary and oftentimes even ferocious way in which God rules, defends, cares for his people. And so, as the nation of Israel saw God deliver them through the Red Sea, in the crossing of the Jordan, providing for them bread, manna in the wilderness, meeting their needs, forgiving them time and time again, if they would take the time to reflect upon those things, it would stir their hearts in love and affection for God and then the outward manifestation of it. Later on, in the book of Judges, which of course follows the book of Joshua, one of the most fateful verses in that book is it describes Israel's decline as a whole generation grew up that neither knew the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. So, the writer of Judges is clearly making the same case in the inverse that, as we remember what the Lord has done, his great and mighty works, it stirs our affections toward him and that finds outward manifestation in what we think, say, and do.

### Question 9:

## What are some of the ways that covenant renewal and covenant loyalty in the book of Joshua apply to Christians today?

### Dr. Dan Lacich

When we look at covenant renewal and loyalty to the covenant in Joshua, it's easy to think, well, that's for then, that doesn't apply to us as Christians today, but there are some great lessons for us, one of them being the communal sense of the covenant. Certainly, in western Christianity, and in growing parts of the world, our faith is becoming very individualistic — *we* make a decision to follow Christ and it's just a "me-and-Jesus" kind of relationship. But when we look at the covenant with Joshua and God's people, it was very much about the community making this covenant together and even about holding one another accountable to the covenant. It wasn't just me praying a prayer to God and saying, "Yes, I have this agreement with you." It was us together as God's people making this statement, but also saying we will watch out for one another, we will care for one another, we will encourage one another in the keeping of that covenant. I think a second way that it's helpful for us is in the whole area of renewal of the covenant. Certainly, we make an appropriate emphasis on people coming to faith in Christ and repenting, but I think oftentimes, for Christians, we don't know what to do with someone when they sin *after* they've come to Jesus. That's not supposed to happen. What do we do now? And the covenant renewal, I think, lets us know that this is something that is an ongoing, regular occurrence in our lives, to reaffirm the relationship we have with God, and certainly as it relates to the gospel, to tell ourselves the gospel every day. I think if we would renew that commitment more regularly and would share amongst ourselves the gospel of the new covenant more fully, we would find, I think, less major scandals within the body of Christ, because we would deal with sin appropriately along the way and repent and renew instead of waiting until it becomes so big and massive that something just falls apart completely and then we don't know how to recover from that.

### Rev. Bin Li, translation

In Joshua chapters 23 and 24, we see Joshua lead the elders and people of Israel to renew their covenant before God. The application for us today is that we are to understand God in a new light. In the book of Joshua, what we see is that the people of that day truly experienced God as they entered into Canaan and fought for the Promised Land. They came to know that God was great and worthy of awe as he removed the people of Canaan, not because of any righteousness of the Israelites, but because of his judgment on the Canaanites. Joshua chapters 23 and 24 reminds us that we are always to have a heart of reverence before God: "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness" — Joshua 24:14. In reality, our understanding of God today tends to be more about his grace, and not enough about his majesty. We don't have enough fear of him. The book of Joshua especially reminds us that when it comes to knowing God, we must be cognizant that God is both merciful *and* majestic. And so, we aren't to approach him only from one side or the other. If we get to know him



strictly focused on his grace, we can easily indulge our sinful desires. But when only seeing his majesty and not his grace, we easily sink into guilt and legalism. That's the first point. The second point we see is that God's covenant leads us to serve him. In the process of teaching his people, Joshua himself told them, "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Because Joshua knew who God was, he chose to serve him whole-heartedly rather than serving idols. What this means for us as worshipers today is that we are to dedicate ourselves to following God. God led the Israelites to live in the land of Canaan, instead of the original residents, so that the Israelites could serve God. It was not just so that they could have a good life. They were not to live for themselves, but for God. The same goes for us today. In the church, we are not just to say that we've been saved by grace and all that's left for us to do is to wait to get to heaven. It's not that simple. What we are to do is to truly know how to respond to God's grace in this life, to worship and serve him. The covenant in the book of Joshua includes what our important responsibilities are, but God's grace also motivates us and causes us to be able to move toward the goal of serving God.

### **Dr. Tom Petter**

Well, the themes of covenant renewal, loyalty in Joshua and how all of that applies today to the Christian life is obvious on the one hand, but tricky on the other, because you look at chapter 1, the whole conquest and success of Joshua is dependent. There's an "if" there, so it's conditional. It's put in a conditional way, that *if* you follow the law and don't walk away from the law, this left and right — and [the] language is "to meditate on it," to think about it day and night. So, it's Psalm 1... This is traditional loyalty, covenantal loyalty that's asked of Joshua, that the Psalms pick up, covenant faithfulness — Deuteronomy — obedience to God's law from the heart. And if he does that, then he'll have success. And so, there's a conditionality there that's built into the conquest and the success of what Joshua will do, and then, how that's then passed on at the end of his life. So, chapter 1 and chapter 24, this whole covenant renewal in 23, 24, is a very powerful moment because then he tells the Israelites, "You have to do the same thing." But then he says, "I know you're not going to do it, but for me and my house, that's what I'm going to do." So, he kind of sets himself apart from the others because he doesn't think they're going to do that. And so, that's the dilemma of the Old Testament. There is the standard being asked. Yeah, covenantal loyalty, faithfulness to God's law, obedience from the heart, knowledge of God's Word, that's all there. And then, "If you do that, then I'll grant you success." ... But somehow, no one quite gets there. And so, of course, now comes Jesus in the new covenant, and he is the faithful Israelite. He fulfills Joshua 1. He fulfills Psalm 1... "Blessed is the man ... who meditates on the law day and night." He doesn't sit with sinners. Joshua 1 — he never departs to the left and to the right, and then he'll have success. And that language of "success" is very intentional because it's picked up in Isaiah 53, that the servant that's coming, Jesus, he will have success. It's the same kind of language. And that success is obedience to God's law. So, in the New Testament, we are absolutely, 100% called to follow and obey the law and to be faithful to God's law. I mean, look at all the imperatives by Paul and Jesus: "You've got to obey me." "If you are a disciple, you follow me." But now, the fundamental



difference is that we've had one who has been faithful ... just like that beautiful song by Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee." So, we hide in Christ's faithfulness, in his holiness, in his obedience, and so we obey out of Christ's faithfulness and Christ's success. We hide in his success. And as we follow him, we too will have that statement, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

### Question 10:

#### **Is the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8 a brand new covenant or a renewal of the old covenant?**

##### **Dr. Peter Walker**

There's always quite a bit of controversy as one looks at the Bible to discover, is it one big covenant, or is it divided up into two halves, or perhaps even more covenants? And, especially this language of the new covenant, which we find first used in Jeremiah, picked up in Matthew's gospel when Jesus talks about the blood of the new covenant, and also especially here in Hebrews 8, when it talks about the new covenant. Is that a brand new covenant, such that everything that happens in the New Testament is something which is completely new, fresh, and in one sense in opposition to the old? Or is it a *renewal* of the original covenant? I think it holds the Bible much more closer together if we see it as the renewal of the original covenant. And what's that original covenant with Abraham and with God's people? It is that God is going to remove sin from his people and from his creation. And therefore, Jesus comes not to do something entirely new, but to fulfill the original purpose of the covenant. He does that when he dies on the cross, his blood is the blood of the new covenant, and then the writer of Hebrews is then showing the benefits of that renewed covenant. Yes, it does mean certain things from the old are to be removed, and he says that in Hebrews 8, that aspects of the old covenant are close to destruction, he says, but the deep underlying theme is one of unity and continuity, a renewal of the covenant.

##### **Dr. Dan Lacich**

When we look at Hebrews 8 and we see the idea of a covenant and a new covenant, it really is a good question, is it a new one or is it just sort of reformatting the old one? There's a sense in which the answer is both. But ultimately, it is a *new* covenant. It builds on the previous covenant, and that's why it has a sense of being renewed or reformatted. But it's new on a number of levels. It's new because it has a different group of people who are being addressed in that covenant. You move from just the people of Israel to all who would have faith in Christ, so you have a different participant there. The mediator of that covenant is now specifically Christ, which changes it. And even the requirements of the covenant change. Certainly, faith was what gained salvation even for the Old Testament saints, but the requirements of the covenant, because they were so nationalistic for Israel as a people, were different for the requirements of us as God's people who are scattered throughout the world and

throughout his kingdom. So, it is a new covenant, but it is built on the previous covenant with similarities, but a new and improved version, if you will.

**Dr. Sean McDonough**

Virtually any time we are pressed theologically to give an “either/or” answer, it’s a sign that we’re probably dealing with a complex reality, which is going to have something of both. So, when we come to the question, “Is this a renewed covenant or an entirely new covenant?” my inclination based on my theological predilections as well as the evidence of Hebrews and the rest of the New Testament is it’s going to be aspects of both, that the very designation “new covenant” shows that there’s something new about this, that Jesus is superior to and different from the perpetual animal sacrifices in the temple, that he’s got a better priesthood, that the gift of the Spirit — not looming large in Hebrews, but throughout the rest of the New Testament — that the gift of the Spirit is a unique blessing of the new covenant... Even if we go back to the writer of Hebrews’ prime source text for the new covenant, Jeremiah 31, there is clearly a sense in which that’s a renewal of the old covenant. And surely God’s purposes and God’s wisdom were not lacking in the old covenant, so it would be absurd to think that he’d just want to chuck the entire thing aside. So, when we think, “Is it new or renewed?” as in so many other instances, we need to think that it’s going to have aspects of both.

**Question 11:**

**What does Jesus do as the mediator of the new covenant?**

**Dr. Alan Hultberg**

The mediatorial role of Jesus is especially laid out in the book of Hebrews, and in Hebrews, we’re told that Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant, that is, that through the work of Christ ... the new covenant that was promised in Jeremiah 31 is initiated in the life of the church. And so, what did Jesus do to initiate that covenant? The author of Hebrews tells us that he offered his blood as blood of a better sacrifice for this covenant, that that sacrifice is not better only because it was the blood of Christ, but also because it was offered in the heavenly tabernacle, not in the earthly temple. His blood atones for sin *once and for all*, the author of Hebrews says, that is, it’s only offered one time, and its effect is forever. And so, Jesus moves us from temporary and, maybe not “corrupt,” but imperfect sacrifices, imperfect atonement, to perfect atonement, to eternal atonement. And then, as our mediator, he stands as our high priest before the throne of God, interceding for us so that it’s impossible to be disconnected from the love of God when you have a Great High Priest — Jesus — standing, pleading our cause constantly before the Father.

**Dr. Dennis E. Johnson**

God had the plan from eternity past in the covenant of redemption to establish a covenant ... in which the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, would become our human brother and become the faithful servant of the covenant. He would

faithfully fulfill the requirements laid upon us to be utterly loyal to the Lord and absolutely obedient through his whole obedient life. We speak of his active obedience and the imputing, that is, the crediting to us, of his righteousness. And then, as the climax, Jesus offered up himself to endure the curse of the covenant that we deserve. Paul speaks in Galatians 3:13 of Christ becoming accursed for us because though he deserved no curse, we do. And so, he frees us from the curses of the covenant. He bestows on us his righteousness. Our sins are imputed, credited or debited to him as he endures. And so, he brings us together with God the Father. He mediates. He brings us together in peace and joy and blessing.

### **Question 12:**

#### **What benefits does Christ provide for us in the new covenant?**

##### **Dr. Mark Saucy**

The benefits that we get from the new covenant, from Jesus, I think, start to be enumerated right in the original passage of the new covenant, or at least where that term is used in the Old Testament, that's Jeremiah 31. In verse 33 and 34, there is an enumeration, or a listing of the benefits that come in the new covenant that would be coming in the age to come. And it starts out with the law written in your hearts. And then you have, if you bring in other passages about the law is going to be written by the Spirit that God is going to put within the individual in their hearts. Then it moves into questions of knowledge of God. And then it will move into, also, questions of the access that we have to God. And I think, in the Prophets, it also moves into things that are going to happen socially through a restored nation, and it's going to affect all nations and finally the world. And so, we bring these to Christ. Christ is the one who poured out the Spirit at his ascension. That's what Pentecost was about. That is what makes and activates the new covenant age finally for all people who will be found in it by faith. And so, what he does in regeneration, what he does on the heart, what he makes us with a new love, all of the language of the New Testament, that's new covenant promise that Jesus has already initiated. The knowledge of God, a powerful demonstration of this is when the temple veil rent at the crucifixion that showed that the system, that was mediating access to God by a cast — by a priestly cast, by calendar, by clean and uncleanness, definitions of the old covenant — those are done now and access is now in a new open way. God welcomes us without a priesthood, without coming on a particular day. And so, this kind of knowledge of God... And the most profound benefit — I would go back to that passage in Jeremiah — is in verse 34 where he says, "Because I will forgive your sins." There's the foundation of the new covenant, and there's where we see the interface of the crucifixion, the cross of Christ, to the new covenant reality and the life. The sin problem God solved, and so all of the other benefits could be poured out.

##### **Dr. Charles L. Quarles**

There are a couple of key Old Testament passages when it comes to understanding the new covenant. One is Jeremiah 31; the other is Ezekiel 36. Other texts discuss the

new covenant, but these are the fundamental ones. And those texts show us that the new covenant has two primary foci. On the one hand, the new covenant promises the forgiveness of sins. Ezekiel 36 speaks of us being cleansed of our iniquities and our uncleanness. Jeremiah 31:34 speaks of God remembering our sin no more. So, obviously there's a big focus on the forgiveness of sin, and that's normally our focus when we speak of the new covenant. But the new covenant actually entails far more. Not only is there forgiveness of sin, but there is a radical transformation of the person that results in a dramatic change in behavior. And Jeremiah says it this way; he says that God will write his law upon our hearts. And the idea is that the very heart is transformed so that we begin to naturally and spontaneously exhibit the righteousness of God's own character. Ezekiel said it a little bit differently, but the point is the same. He said that God would give us a new heart, and he said that God would grant us the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit would move us to keep God's commandments and fulfill his ordinances. And Jesus does both. Through his sacrificial death, he provides for us forgiveness of sin. But in addition to that, he fulfills the promise of John the Baptist where he says, "The one who is coming after me is mightier than I am. He will baptize you with *the Holy Spirit*," referring back to the promise of the new covenant in Ezekiel 36. And when Christ writes God's law upon our hearts, when he places his Holy Spirit in us, it changes our very identity, it changes our very nature so that we begin to naturally and spontaneously exhibit the character of the holy God.

### Question 13:

#### What does the book of Joshua teach us about God's benevolence?

##### Dr. James M. Hamilton

Joshua 23 and 24 teaches about God's benevolence particularly in the way that, right at the outset of Joshua 24, Joshua is presented telling the people of Israel that when their fathers lived beyond the river — and he especially mentions Abraham — they served other gods. So, Abraham and his father and his brothers, when they lived beyond the river, they were idolaters. And so, what Joshua is saying to the people is God is so good that you cannot, and your fathers *have not* earned their way into God's favor. Instead, what's happened is God has, of his own free mercy, set his kindness and love on Abraham. And then Joshua recounts here in Joshua 24 all that God did for Israel. *He* brought them out of Egypt and *he* has given them this land, and *he* has kept all of these promises that he's made. And so, what Joshua is saying is that God is good and free and his goodness is arising from within himself. His goodness is not being prompted by Israel's obedience; it's not being earned by their faithfulness to the covenant or anything like that. Abraham was not even a monotheist when God was pleased to show his goodness to him and promised to bless the world through him. And so, I think the message of Joshua is really consummate with the message of the Bible that God's goodness comes from who he is, and it is mercifully bestowed on anyone on whom the Lord is pleased to set his compassion.

**Prof. Dwi Maria Handayani, translation**

The main character of the book of Joshua is the Lord... From the very beginning, from chapter 1 to the last chapter, in fact, the one who becomes the main character is the Lord. It is the Lord who takes the initiative. It is the Lord who calls Joshua. It is the Lord who leads Israel into the Promised Land. It is the Lord who arranges the division of the land. It is the Lord who then, also, fights for them. It is the Lord who also punishes them. So, the Lord is the main character, and it's very clear how the benevolence of God really stands out in this entire book. And, in contrast, actually, is the failure of the nation of Israel. So, if we contrast these two things, we see how, in the book of Joshua, God is very good. God is a God who holds fast to the covenant, and the nation of Israel is a nation that fails to keep their promises. And this is what we read in the book of Joshua. From beginning to end, the goodness of God is so clear and evident. And I think we see this, not only in the book of Joshua, but we can draw a parallel with our own lives. The goodness of God is something that is very real and important in the life of the church and in the lives of believers. In essence, in our lives, we often feel that the Lord is a very good God, extraordinarily steadfast, and we see how the church fails to meet the standards of God's truth, fails to hold onto the covenant with God, while God remains a God who is faithful. And this is a lesson for us. Something that happened in ancient times also happens in our time. And it was for this reason that Joshua constantly reminded the people how important it was for the nation of Israel to remember, to look to God and hold firmly to the covenant that God had given them.

**Rev. Kevin Labby**

In the book of Joshua, one of the things we see over and over again is that God's people are called to obedience, and it's through their obedience that God is going to accomplish his plans and purposes in their life. But one of the most beautiful things we see in Joshua and all throughout the Old Testament is that when God's people fall short, they have the gracious opportunity to come to the Lord, seek his forgiveness, reconfirm their orientation and love toward him, and be restored to the knowledge that he's forgiven them and that the relationship has not been destroyed. And so, in Joshua, there are scenes where God's people fall short. There's sin in the camp. But as they deal with that sin, as they confess it, as they repent, as they go through a process of reconciliation and at times even restitution, God reassures them of his continuing love, his continuing affection, that he'll always be with them, he'll never leave them nor forsake them, and that his plans and purposes for them are not going to be interrupted. And I think, as Christians, we're reminded of the same thing. The Bible tells us over and over again, especially in the New Testament, we all stumble in many ways. If any man claims to be without sin, he's a liar. But we have a Great High Priest. We have the Lord Jesus who sits at the right hand of the Father, who intercedes for us, who reminds us by his Spirit according to the Word that we are forgiven, that we are accepted, and as we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us and will continue to rule and defend us all the days of our life.

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