A Renewed Covenant

Joshua 24:18-27
SS Lesson for 10/04/2026

Devotional Scripture: Jer 31:27-34

OUTLINE

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Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
Key Verses: Joshua 24:14

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

By the time of the events in today's lesson, the Israelites had defeated various coalitions of Canaanite kings (Joshua 10:28-12:24). However, some parts of the land remained unconquered (13:1-5). Despite this fact, the Lord instructed Joshua to divide the land among the tribes of Israel (13:8-19:51). By allocating the land at this point in time, Joshua demonstrated his trust that God would continue to drive out the other nations and be faithful to his promises to the Israelites (see 23:4-5). The latter half of the book of Joshua depicts his having become elderly (Joshua 13:1; 23:1). We estimate that Joshua was near the age of 85 (14:10). The land and the people were in a season of peace. The elderly leader gathered the leaders of Israel for what some see as a final address. It may not have been all that "final" since Joshua lives to be age 110 (24:29)! In any case, this speech took place at Shechem in the central hill country of Palestine, situated between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim (compare Deuteronomy 27:11-13; Joshua 8:30). In this address, Joshua recounted the history of God's provision, the Lord's faithfulness, their deliverance from Egypt, and, ultimately, their victories in Canaan (Joshua 24:1-13). This history lesson had a point: it encouraged the Israelites to revere God as their only Lord (24:14). The address culminated in a covenant renewal ceremony, referring to the covenant established at Sinai (Exodus 19-24; Deuteronomy 5-6).

Key Verses: Joshua 24:14

"Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord!

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Requirements of the Covenant (Josh 24:18-24)

18 And the Lord drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God."
19 But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.
20 If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."
21 And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the Lord!"
22 So Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord for yourselves, to serve Him." And they said, "We are witnesses!"
23 "Now therefore," he said, "put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel."
24 And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey!"

Separation of the people (18)

Separation from unrighteousness and lawlessness (2 Cor 6:14-17)

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

Separation from the world (John 15:19)

19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

Separation from the perverse generations (Acts 2:40)

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

Separation from works of darkness (Eph 5:11)

11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

Separation from sinful brothers so that they will return restored (2 Thess 3:6)

6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

Commitment to the covenant (19-22)

Committed to the covenant because it is with God (Deut 7:9)

9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

Committed to the covenant because of God's compassion (Isa 54:10)

10 Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

Committed to the covenant because of God's faithfulness (Isa 61:8)

8 "For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them.

Committed to the covenant because God's love is forever (Ps 89:28)

28 I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail.

Serve God (23-24)

Serve God as part of fearing Him (Deut 6:13)

13 Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.

Serve God with all the heart and soul (Deut 10:12-13)

12 And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

Serve God regardless of the pressure to do otherwise (Dan 3:16-18)

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Serve God because it is commanded (Matt 4:10)

10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Serve God because no one can serve two masters (Matt 6:24)

24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Witness of the Covenant (Josh 24:25-28)

25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.
26 Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.
27 And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness to us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord which He spoke to us. It shall therefore be a witness to you, lest you deny your God."

Witness of obedience (25)

Obedience to show faith (Gen 22:9-12)

> 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

Obedience to witness (Acts 8:26-31)

> 26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." 30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Obedience regardless of prejudice (Acts 10:19-23)

> 19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." 21 Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?" 22 The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." 23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along.

Obedience to follow Jesus (Matt 9:9)

> 9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

Witness written down (26)

Written to be song and taught (Deut 31:19)

> 19 "Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them.

Written as a witness against them (Deut 31:26)

> 26 "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God. There it will remain as a witness against you.

Written on an altar as a witness (Josh 22:34)

> 34 And the Reubenites and the Gadites gave the altar this name: A Witness Between Us that the Lord is God.

Written for a future generation (Ps 102:18)

18 Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the Lord:

Written as a remembrance (Mal 3:16)

16 Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name.

Witness of accountability (27)

Accountable because the whole world is accountable to God (Rom 3:19)

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Accountable at work (Eph 6:9)

9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Accountable because there are always higher human officials (Eccl 5:8)

8 If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still.

Accountable to leaders (Heb 13:17)

17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Accountable for how we treat others (Matt 18:32-34)

32 "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' 34 In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Thomas Constable

Verse 1

Shechem was a strategic location for this important ceremony. Joshua called on the Israelites to renew formally their commitment to the Mosaic Covenant at the site that was very motivating to them to do so.

"If you were to put Plymouth Rock and Yorktown and Lexington and Independence Hall together, you would not have what Shechem is to Israel." [Note: Clarence Macartney, The Greatest Texts of the Bible, pp. 74-75.]

At Shechem, God had first appeared to Abraham when he had entered the land and promised to give him the land of Canaan. In response to that promise Abraham built his first altar to Yahweh in the land there (Genesis 12:7). Jacob buried his idols at Shechem after returning to the Promised Land from Paddan-aram. He made this his home and built an altar to Yahweh there (Genesis 33:18-20), and later God moved him to Bethel (Genesis 35:1-4) where he built another altar.

"As Jacob selected Shechem for the sanctification of his house, because this place was already consecrated by Abraham as a sanctuary of God, so Joshua chose the same place for the renewal of the covenant, because this act involved a practical renunciation on the part of Israel of all idolatry." [Note: Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 226-27.]

At Shechem the same generation of Israelites that Joshua now addressed had pledged itself to the Mosaic Covenant shortly after it had entered the land (Joshua 8:30-35). They had also built an altar there.

"For the Christian, regular presentation before God in worship is an essential feature of a life of faith (Hebrews 10:25)." [Note: Hess, p. 300.]

"Joshua did not merely settle for a series of public admonitions in order to guide Israel after his death. The twenty-fourth chapter describes a formal covenant renewal enacted at the site of Shechem for the purpose of getting a binding commitment on the part of the people of Israel to the written Word of God." [Note: Davis and Whitcomb, pp. 87-88.]

The structure of this covenant renewal speech is similar to the typical Hittite suzerainty treaty. It includes a preamble (Joshua 24:1-2 a), historical prologue (Joshua 24:2-13), stipulations for the vassals with the consequences of disobedience (Joshua 24:14-24), and the writing of the agreement (Joshua 24:25-28).

"Joshua 24 completes the book by giving the theological definition of the people of God. Here we suddenly find highly loaded theological language, defining God and the God-man relationship. This makes the chapter one of the most important chapters in the OT for biblical theologians." [Note: Butler, p. 278.]

Verses 2-13

Joshua introduced what follows as the words of Yahweh, Israel's God (Joshua 24:2). Then he reviewed God's great acts on behalf of His people, going back to the call of Abraham in Mesopotamia.

The "River" (Joshua 24:2) is the Euphrates. Abraham's family members were idolaters in Mesopotamia, and we may safely assume that Abraham was too. God's call of Abraham was pure grace; there was nothing in Abraham that resulted in God choosing him for special blessing. Joshua probably mentioned Nahor because Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel descended from him. Two of the nations that had come from Abraham were Israel and Edom (Joshua 24:4).

The Exodus was a second great proof of God's grace to Israel (Joshua 24:5-7). The provision of Moses and Aaron, as well as the sending of the plagues, were special gifts then. Israel's deliverance from Egypt and her preservation in the wilderness were also highlights of God's faithfulness during this period of Israel's history.

God's third great act for Israel was the Israelites' victory over the Amorites east of the Jordan (Joshua 24:8-10). God also frustrated Moab's hostility by turning Balaam's oracles into blessings.

The fourth divine provision was the crossing of the Jordan River and the consequent victory over the Canaanites (Joshua 24:11-13). God routed Israel's enemies for her by using various hornet-like terrors (Joshua 24:12; cf. Exodus 23:28; Deuteronomy 7:20).

In this section of verses (Joshua 24:2-13), God said 17 times "I" did such and such for you. The emphasis is clearly on God's great acts for Israel.

Verses 14-24

On the basis of God's great acts for them (Joshua 24:14), Joshua appealed to the Israelites to commit themselves to Him anew (cf. Romans 12:1-2). Though Israel was not as guilty of idolatry at this stage in her history as she was later, this sin existed in the nation to some degree (cf. Leviticus 17:7).

Joshua's offer to choose the God or gods they would serve (Joshua 24:15) was not, of course, an encouragement to consider the idols as an equally acceptable option. It was simply an oratorical device (i.e., polarization) to help the Israelites distinguish their choices and to make the right alternative more obvious. As a true leader, Joshua announced his commitment, and in so doing encouraged the people to follow his example.

"So we find throughout the entire book of Joshua an emphasis on choice-choice that makes a tremendous difference in history, for individuals, for groups, for future generations." [Note: Schaeffer, p. 213.]

The people responded by committing themselves to Yahweh (Joshua 24:16-18). They would join Joshua in serving the Lord. Joshua did not want the people to make a superficial decision, however.

"The great need of most Christians is to learn that in themselves they simply cannot be the people God wants them to be." [Note: Jacobsen, p. 114.]

Therefore Joshua reminded them of the difficulties involved in following the Lord (Joshua 24:19-20). They would "not be able to serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:19) in their own strength simply by determining to do so (cf. Exodus 19:8). They had to remember that their God was holy and jealous (i.e., allowing no rival god in His peoples' affections). He would "not forgive your transgressions or your sins" (Joshua 24:19).

"When does God not spare (forgive)? (1) When transgression and sin is wilfully [sic] committed, and when (2) forgiveness would, as He foresees, lead to no amendment." [Note: J. P. Lange, ed., Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, 2:187.]

The people confirmed their earlier decision (Joshua 24:21), and Joshua reminded them that they were witnesses against themselves in the renewal of this covenant (Joshua 24:22). They would condemn themselves by their own testimony if they forsook the Lord.

Joshua then repeated his command to put away all idols, physical and mental, and to turn their hearts to follow Yahweh exclusively (Joshua 24:23). Again the Israelites committed themselves to follow the Lord faithfully (Joshua 24:24).

As Israel's history proceeded, the Israelites proved unfaithful to their promise to serve and obey the Lord wholeheartedly, as the following books of the Old Testament document. The Israelites should have learned from their past failure to follow the Lord faithfully. Their fathers had made the same promises when God gave them the Mosaic Law (Exodus 24:3; Exodus 24:7), but they had proved unfaithful at Mt. Sinai and in the wilderness.

Verses 25-28

The covenant that Joshua made with the people on this day was not a new one but a renewal of the Mosaic Covenant made for the first time at Mt. Sinai (Joshua 24:25). The Israelites renewed this covenant from time to time after God first gave it (cf. Joshua 8:30-35). The "statute" Joshua made was the written commitment of the people to obey the Law (Joshua 24:26). The "ordinance" (right) was the record of the blessings Israel would enjoy as the fruits of her obedience.

The "book of the law of God" (Joshua 24:26) appears to have been the document in which Joshua wrote the record of this renewal of the covenant. He evidently placed it with the written covenant itself. The "large stone" (Joshua 24:26) he erected became a permanent memorial of the renewal of the covenant undertaken this day (cf. Genesis 28:18; Deuteronomy 27:2). Joshua set the stone up under the oak that was the same tree as, or one that represented, the oak under which Abraham had built his altar and worshipped Yahweh. Jacob had buried his idols under an oak tree in Shechem, perhaps the same one (Genesis 12:6-7; Genesis 35:2-4). "The sanctuary" (Joshua 24:26) was this holy place, not the tabernacle that was then at Shiloh.

The stone had not literally heard all that had taken place that day (Joshua 24:27), but it would remain in the same place from then on as a silent witness to the proceedings. Joshua here rhetorically ascribed human characteristics to the stone (i.e., personification) to reinforce the seriousness of the commitment the Israelites had made to Yahweh. He then dismissed the nation (Joshua 24:28).

This ceremony was very important to the Israelites because in it the whole nation reaffirmed its commitment to Yahweh as her God and to His covenant as her law. Israel prepared to begin another phase of her national existence without a God-appointed leader such as Moses and Joshua had been. It was important that she remember the faithfulness of her God and rededicate herself to exclusive allegiance to Him. Each tribe was to proceed now to exterminate the Canaanites in its area trusting in Yahweh and obeying His covenant. God would raise up local leaders (judges) as He saw the need for these to provide special leadership in difficult situations. Committed as the Israelites were to their God at this time there was no reason they should fail to possess and experience all God had promised them in the years ahead.

(Adapted from URL:https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/joshua-24.html)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Notably, the names Joshua and Jesus come from the same Hebrew verb, meaning "to save." Joshua brought the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan. Jesus, the "pioneer of [our] salvation" (Hebrews 2:10), leads us toward our promised land of eternal life with God. And as one ponders Joshua's words and the commitment to the Lord that he called for, it is not difficult to recognize similarities to Jesus' teaching about what is required to be his disciple (Luke 14:25-33). For us to express commitment to serving God means we will honor Jesus as Lord and demonstrate that commitment by serving him faithfully. Like Joshua's audience, we too must reject the "gods" that threaten to undermine that commitment. Those gods to us are not likely to be statues or images of pagan deities but rather devotion to pursuits - status, wealth, prestige, and comfort - that undermine our commitment to the Lord. We are all guilty of that at times. How do we recognize those times?