



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

SEPTEMBER 09 2023

Scripture Story: Joshua 23; 24.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 49.

line in the sand



Photo by Jacqui Janczko

flashlight

"The aged leader urged the people to consider . . . and to decide if they really desired to live as did the degraded idolatrous nations around them. If it seemed evil to them to serve Jehovah, the source of power, the fountain of blessing, let them that day choose whom they would serve. . . . The gods of the Amorites had not been able to protect their worshipers. Because of their abominable and debasing sins, that wicked nation had been destroyed, and the good land which they once possessed had been given to God's people. What folly for Israel to choose the deities for whose worship the Amorites had been destroyed! 'As for me and my house,' said Joshua, 'we will serve Jehovah.' . . . His appeals called forth the unhesitating response, 'God forbid that we should forsake Jehovah, to serve other gods' " (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 523).

keytext

"But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

(Joshua 24:15, NIV)

what do you think?

Consider the following multiple-choice questions. Which answers do you agree with?

Courage is:

- The willingness to put everything on the line for what you believe.
- An attitude that isn't blocked by obstacles and pushes forward with faith.
- The ability to focus on what's truly important.

What tempted the Israelites to turn from God in Joshua's time?

- The Canaanite religions.
- Following God was just too complicated.
- They got too comfortable in their new land.
- They started thinking they could handle things themselves.

did you know?

Joshua gathered the Israelites at Shechem, one of the cities of refuge, for his final message to them. Shechem was where Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, and Joshua 24:32 (NIV) tells us that Joseph's bones, brought from Egypt, were buried at Shechem "in the tract of land that

Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver." Meeting in Shechem reminded the Israelites that they had come full circle—from settling in Egypt, to enslavement by jealous rulers, to providential escape, to finally settling again in the land God had promised half a millennium before. Joseph's life story was the Israelites' 500-year history in miniature—from favored son to enslavement to exalted authority. Joshua reminded them that if they were as faithful to God as Joseph had been, things would only get better.

INTO THE STORY

"After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, summoned all Israel . . . and said to them: 'I am very old. You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. The LORD your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

" 'Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside

to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

" 'The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. . . . So be very careful to love the LORD your God. . . .

" 'Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as all the good things the LORD your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the LORD your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you.' "

" 'Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.' "

(Joshua 23:1-9, 11, 14-16; 24:14, 15, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

True or false: God would rather you be a hypocritical Christian than an overt atheist.

God always gives people a choice as to how they'll respond. Why do people find following God so difficult?

Is it easier or harder to follow God now than it was in Joshua's time—in today's big business, media-saturated, technologically advanced world with a longer Bible to read and Christianity pretty well-respected in society? Was it easier or harder in Joshua's day, with living memories of amazing miracles, a specific covenant of blessing and curses to follow, and a clearer contrast between pagan depravity and true devotion?

As you look over your life, has God been faithful to you? Have you been faithful to God? How might the two be related?

Joshua urged the Israelites to be careful of intermingling with the Canaanites. Jesus charged Christians to spread out and make disciples of all nations. What's different about Jesus' mission for us? What part of Joshua's advice should we take to heart?

Underline the three phrases, promises, or commands that speak the most urgently to you from the *Into the Story* passage.

punch lines

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17, NIV).

“Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways. For the LORD detests the perverse but takes the upright into his confidence. The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed” (Proverbs 3:31-34, NIV).

“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” (Matthew 16:26, NIV).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:35-37, NIV).

further insight

“By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers. You will have strength from above to hold you steadfast, and thus through constant surrender to God you will be enabled to live the new life, even the life of faith.”

—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 48.

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read **Joshua 23:6-8**.

This week's *What Do You Think?* explores the meaning of courage. Joshua equates courage with moral strength of character. How does living a Christ-centered life require courage? What modern idols does the world face today, and how can Christians courageously take a stand against them?

Sunday

Read **Ephesians 2:8**.

Read this week's *Into the Story and Out of the Story*. The questions explore issues of our relationship with God, God's faithfulness to us, and our relationship and witness to others.

People often get tripped up by two different and equally false ideas about God—that God will excuse their sin without their repentance and that we can somehow achieve salvation through our own efforts. God calls us to rely completely on Him. Ellen White wrote: "While they trusted in their own strength and righteousness, it was impossible for them to secure the pardon of their sins; they could not meet the claims of God's perfect law, and it was in vain that they pledged themselves to serve God. It was only by faith in Christ that they could secure pardon of sin, and receive strength to obey God's law. They must cease to rely upon their own efforts for salvation, they must trust wholly in the merits of the promised Saviour, if they would be accepted of God" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 524).

That's grace. Why do you think some people have such a hard time accepting grace, whether it means letting go of sin or their own misguided efforts to be "good enough"?

Monday

Read **Joshua 24:15**.

If you grew up attending church, you've probably heard it any number of times—a

call to serve God wholeheartedly. The text reminds us as well that God always gives us a choice. Joshua painted a word picture of the Israelites' experience so that everyone would have a clear understanding of the situation, without excuse, but the choice remained.

When the Israelites vowed to follow God, Joshua charged them to get rid of their idols. What changes could you, your family, and church make to follow God more fully?

Tuesday

Read **Proverbs 13:22; 28:8; and Ecclesiastes 2:26**.

This week's *Flashlight* quote tells about the Amorites coming under judgment for their sins of selfishness and their possessions, their "blessings," being given to others.

What do these verses tell us about our priorities in life? How can we avoid the Canaanites' fate?

Wednesday

Read the *Punch Lines* from this week's lesson. The world has a way of getting us down—either through tempting us with quick fixes and shortcuts to happiness, or by shouting that God can't be trusted and we might as well give up. This week's *Punch Lines* remind us that we can trust God to help us handle all life's obstacles. Read them and consider the following questions:

How can we balance our rejection of what the world stands for with showing grace and acceptance to those still caught in its web?

How has God led in your life and in your family's history? Has He been faithful? What does it mean for God to be faithful?

Why do people envy the wicked? Despite what some prominent preachers say, Chris-

tianity offers no guarantee of prosperity in this earthly life. Do God's blessings make up for any lack of prosperity? In what ways can prosperity be a curse? (Use the Notes pages in the back of your study guide.)

Thursday

Read **Joshua 1:7-18**.

Old habits die hard. Despite all they'd seen of God's love and power, people in Joshua's time were still worshipping other gods on the side.

Joshua created a new landmark in Shechem to remind people of their commitment to God. What landmarks of faith can you look back on and/or create to remind you of God's power and promises? Write a song, draw a picture, or build something that will, like the stone Joshua placed at Shechem, remind you of how God has led in your life.

Friday

Read **Romans 12:2**.

Joshua left behind a legacy of faithfulness and commitment that inspired people to follow God for themselves. Who do you look up to as a truly inspiring "godly person"? What sets them apart and makes their example so inspiring? How have they impacted you and your choices?

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 49.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rB09s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.