

Joshua 24:1-8, 12-13

This address of Joshua just before he died is paired with Moses' in Deuteronomy 30 before his death.

The Haftarah reading rehearses the history of God's dealings with Israel through the conquest, and concludes at verse 13.

Joshua 24:13 - "And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat."

But the more interesting passages come later.

God through Moses had called on the people to "Choose life!" in Deuteronomy 30. Here Joshua challenges them to "choose you this day whom ye will serve"

Joshua 24:15 - "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

The people respond:

Joshua 24:16-18 - "And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, to serve other gods; For the LORD our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God."

The Joshua says a peculiar thing:

Joshua 24:19 - "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins."

Compare God's earlier warning:

- **Exodus 23:20-21** - "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him."

This is in the spirit of Naomi's response to Ruth, rebuffing her three times (**Ruth 1:11-18**).

The Jewish translation has "You will not be able to serve the Lord."

Joshua knew the law was too "holy, just, and good" for it to be possible that Israel should keep it. There was an inkling of the truth that by the deeds of the law "shall no flesh be justified in God's sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (**Romans 3:20**). God would have to keep and fulfill His own Law himself, through the redeeming sacrifice of His Son.

Joshua here echoes the prophets:

- **Isaiah 6:9-10** - "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

Adam, natural man, cannot serve the Lord, do the Law or even repent from his own power. As long as idolatry persists, no spiritual understanding is possible. It takes the intervention of the Holy Spirit to bring us to repentance.

God is holy, and the best of men are impure and unholy before him. That's why all service in the Temple had to be touched by the blood of the altar, signifying not only the death of Christ, but our own death with Him.

- **Romans 6:6, 11** NET - "We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ... So you too consider (reckon) yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

The people still insisted they would follow the Lord.

Joshua 24:22-23 - "And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel."

Their problem was that, incredibly, they still retained idols. These first had to be disavowed.

That's our problem, too. It can only be solved by continually reckoning ourselves to be dead (**Romans 6:6**).