

Joshua's Farewell Address to the Israelite Leaders

Joshua 23

Joshua 23 - *"Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age.² And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: 'I am old, advanced in age.'³ You have seen all that the LORD your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the LORD your God is He who has fought for you.⁴ See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward.⁵ And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you.⁶ Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left,⁷ and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them,⁸ but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.⁹ For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day.¹⁰ One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.¹¹ Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God.¹² Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations—these that remain among you—and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you,¹³ know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.¹⁴ 'Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed.'¹⁵ Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the LORD your God promised you, so the LORD will bring upon you all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.¹⁶ When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you."*

Background Notes

In the last three chapters of the book of Joshua we have three farewell messages. Joshua 22: Joshua's farewell to the military troops of the 2 ½ tribes whose territories were on the other side of the Jordan River. Joshua 23: Joshua's farewell address to the rulers and leaders of the nation of Israel. Joshua 24: Joshua's farewell to all the people, as the covenant is renewed at Shechem.

In Joshua 23 this farewell address to the leaders of Israel took place a long time after the seven-year conquest was over, anywhere from five to twenty years after the conquest. This address was probably given at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was located.

Verses 1-2: *"Now it came to pass, a long time after the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age."*² And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them: *"I am old, advanced in age."* Joshua was probably about a hundred years old at this time, maybe even as old as a hundred and ten.

Back in Joshua 13, the Lord told Joshua that he was old and advanced in years, and Joshua was at least ninety at that time. In Joshua 13, the Lord said, "You're old!" but in chapter 23 Joshua finally admitted it! It's good to admit that you're old when you're old – wouldn't you agree? We don't like to get old, and we don't try to get old -- but we do get old and we have to admit it!

It's good to admit that you're old when you're old, because then you have a stronger tendency to set your priorities more closely in line with eternal realities. Of course, setting our priorities in line with eternal realities is something we should do all our lives, as Joshua did. Young people -- you're not old now, but (if the Lord doesn't come back first) there's coming a day when you will be old. And when you're old, you can't recapture the years of your youth. Opportunities to serve the Lord with the energies that you have now will be gone forever. So be like Joshua, and make your whole life count.

This past week I was playing some strenuous basketball (strenuous for me, that is!) After that game I was wiped out! I don't have the energy or the skill that I used to have! (How do you shoot a basketball with bifocals, anyway?) We **do** get older -- so let's use our prime years to serve the Lord!

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. God is faithful to His promises in the land.

Remember that the physical Promised Land in the book of Joshua represents and illustrates the spiritual "promised land" that we enter when we become Christians. This spiritual land is called "the heavenlies" in the book of Ephesians. "The heavenlies" is not "heaven." Heaven is yet to come in the future. The unseen realm of spiritual realities is now – it is unseen but real. This is where our spiritual blessings are; this is also where our spiritual battles are. This is all part of a spiritual picture that God has given us in the book of Joshua.

Here in his farewell address to the leaders of Israel, Joshua emphasized that God is faithful to His promises in the land. Look again at verses 3, 4, 10 and 14) -- God was faithful to His promises!

As God was faithful to His promises concerning the physical land of Canaan for Israel, so God is faithful to His promises concerning the spiritual land that He has given us. Ephesians 1:3 says that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing “in the heavenlies” in Christ. And Ephesians 6 says that as long as we put on the full armor of God, we will not be defeated in spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers and forces of darkness and wickedness “in the heavenlies.” What a great promise! God is faithful to His promises in the land!

Now someone might be thinking, “Well, wait a minute. Was God completely faithful to His promises in the land for Israel? Because at this point, in Joshua 23, enemy forces still remained in the land! Doesn’t that mean that God was completely faithful to His promises?” No, God’s original promise was not that the enemy nations in the land would be eliminated all at once, but little by little. Deuteronomy 7:22 says, *“And the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you.”* And Exodus 23:30 *“Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.”*

So even though some of the Promised Land was still under enemy control in Joshua 23, God was faithful to all that He had promised. This is why Joshua 23:5 is given as a continuing promise: *“And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the LORD your God promised you.”* So God is faithful to His promises in the land – the physical land then, and the spiritual land today.

Now let’s take one promise that God has given us about the land of spiritual realities. Philippians 1:6 says *“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ...”* What a promise! If you’re a believer, you can be sure that God’s work of sanctification is going on in your life right now! And it **will** be completed -- little by little, just like in the takeover of the Promised Land. Do you see the picture? God is faithful to His promises in the land.

2. God is faithful to His warnings in the land.

In verses 11-13 and 16 the Israelites were warned that if they were not faithful to the Lord, they would perish from the good land that the Lord had given them. God must be faithful to fulfill His warnings if they are not heeded, and unfortunately all of the warnings came true because Israel didn’t follow the Lord faithfully.

It seems that Joshua even knew that this was going to happen (v16): *“When you have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed down to them, then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land which He has given you.”* Joshua certainly knew this, because Israel’s future unfaithfulness was predicted by Moses back in Deuteronomy 30:1 - *“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you...”* God was faithful to His warnings concerning the Promised Land.

The same is true today in reference to the spiritual land that God has given us. Look at 1 Timothy 6:9-10 - *“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”* Notice the parallel to Joshua 23:13 - *“know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you” [emphasis added].*

God must be faithful to His warnings. If believers don't faithfully follow the Lord, we will lose out on the spiritual blessings of the land, and we will be defeated in spiritual warfare in the land of spiritual realities. We will suffer loss and ruin as believers. God is faithful to His warnings in the land.

Practical Application

Practice the three steps of preventive maintenance for your spiritual life

This last week I had a preventative maintenance checkup for our car. Preventative maintenance will definitely extend the life of your vehicle and it helps to avoid potential disaster. This is true for your spiritual life, too. Here in Joshua 23 God gave His people three solid steps of preventative maintenance to avoid disaster in the land. These steps are good for us as well.

- a. Obey the word of God** - Do you obey the **all** the word of God, or just what you want to obey? Do you read the Word, or do you just listen to it on Sundays?
- b. Separate from the world** - We too must separate from the idolatry and immorality of this evil world system. It is a step of preventative maintenance.
- c. Love the Lord your God** - Let me ask you - do you really love the Lord your God, or are you “just a Christian”?

Israel didn't practice these three steps of preventative maintenance, and it led to their downfall. Let this be a lesson to us. This is an application for all believers, because even mature believers can fall. This was Joshua's address to the leaders of Israel, but it's good for all believers. Practice these three steps of preventative maintenance for your spiritual life.