

The Death and Burial of Joseph, Joshua and Eleazar the Priest

Joshua 24:25-33

Joshua 24:25-33 – “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.” ²⁸ So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance. ²⁹ Now it came to pass after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old. ³⁰ And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash.

³¹ Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the works of the LORD which He had done for Israel. ³² The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph. ³³ And Eleazar the son of Aaron died. They buried him in a hill belonging to Phinehas his son, which was given to him in the mountains of Ephraim.

Background Notes

Joshua’s farewell address here in Joshua 24 was really a call for covenant renewal, and the structure of Joshua 24:1-28 has the conventional form of an ancient treaty. The people responded to the stipulations of the covenant. They ratified and reaffirmed their commitment to the covenant by saying, “We will serve the Lord, for He is our God.” Joshua wrote up the agreement and set up a monument to commemorate this sacred event: “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,” (v26).

The “sanctuary of the Lord” mentioned here was not the Tabernacle, because the Tabernacle was located at Shiloh, and the covenant reaffirmation was at Shechem. The word *sanctuary* basically means a place that is “sacred” or “set apart,” so the “sanctuary of the Lord” as mentioned here seems to mean that this location at Shechem was special, and it was set apart as a holy place.

This location may have been the same place that Abraham built his altar to the Lord when he entered the land of Canaan, about 700 years before this time. Genesis 12:6-7 - “Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as

the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him." This location may have been the place where Jacob built an altar at Shechem, about 500 years before this time. Genesis 33:18-20 - *"Then Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan Aram; and he pitched his tent before the city. And he bought the parcel of land, where he had pitched his tent, from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money. Then he erected an altar there and called it El Elohe Israel."* The covenant was renewed at Shechem about 25 years before this time (Joshua 8). So Shechem was already a place of many special memories. Maybe this "sanctuary of the Lord" in Joshua 24:26 is where these events took place, and that's why it was considered a special place, a holy place -- whether there was a special building there or not.

Soon after his farewell address and the covenant renewal, Joshua died. *"... after these things that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Serah, which is in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash"* (v29-30).

Question: if Joshua wrote the book of Joshua, how did he write about his own death and burial? Most likely another inspired writer wrote this last section of Joshua, probably Samuel.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. Faithful believers publicize their commitment to the Lord.

After Joshua set up a large stone in Shechem as a memorial marker of the people's commitment to the covenant, he said to 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"* (v27). In other words, this stone was a public testimony of the verbal commitment that the people had made to the Lord. They said that they would serve the Lord, and Joshua set up this marker as a public testimony. This was a good thing to do!

It's always good for believers to publicize their commitment to the Lord. You've heard the following expression before, I'm sure (probably from me!) -- but it's worth repeating: "If you were arrested and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Some Christians are unwilling to publicize their commitment to the Lord, and they would never be convicted of being Christians because there wouldn't be enough evidence in their lives to show they're Christians!

What about you? What about me? Is there any really convincing evidence in your life to show that you're more than just a nice person? Is there evidence that you're a committed Christian? We all need to think this through. One question to answer is, "Are you reluctant to be baptized?" Christian baptism is a public testimony to your commitment to the Lord. Faithful believers are willing to publicize their commitment to the Lord.

2. Faithful believers appreciate their title to the Land.

Verses 29-33 are like an appendix to the book of Joshua. It's the report of the death and burial of Joshua, the burial of the bones of Joseph, and the death and burial of Eleazar the high priest. Now you might think that this is not a very pleasant ending for the book -- the death and burial of three individuals! However, it's actually a great way to end the book, for a number of reasons.

First of all, it's the way that God ordained that the book should end -- so it's a good ending, no matter what we may think! Second, Psalm 116:15 says, *"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints."* From God's point of view, this is a "happy homecoming" ending to the book of Joshua. Third, one of the lessons that we can glean from this ending is that God buries His workmen, but continues His work. The Bible doesn't end at Joshua 24.

Another lesson we can learn from this last section of Joshua is our doctrinal point: Faithful believers appreciate their title to the Land. Many people like to be buried where they were born and raised. That's home to them. But the place where they were born and raised wasn't "home" to Joshua and Eleazar! They wanted to be buried in the Promised Land, the Land that God had given His people. That was home for them. They appreciated their title to the Land!

Joseph also appreciated his title to the Promised Land. In Genesis 50:24-26 Joseph said to his brothers, *"I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt."* At the time of the Exodus, when the people of Israel were leaving Egypt for the Land of Promise, *"Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you" (Exodus 13:19).* The children of Israel faithfully carried Joseph's bones with them for 40 years in the wilderness, and finally Joseph was given an honorable burial at Shechem, in the Promised Land. Joseph must have had a magnificent tomb in Egypt, but he wanted to be buried in the Land God had promised to His people! Joseph, like Joshua and Eleazar the priest, appreciated the title to the land.

What about us? Do we appreciate our title to the land God has given us? You may be saying, "What are you talking about?" Remember, in the book of Joshua, the physical Promised Land represents and illustrates the spiritual land that the Lord has given us. This land is the land of spiritual realities, where our spiritual blessings in Christ are. This is the land where our Lord gives us victory in spiritual warfare.

How much do you appreciate your title to the land God has given us? Are you established in the land of blessing? Have you realized and experienced the joy of the Lord in your life? Have you appropriated the spiritual blessing of your eternal security in Christ? Have you seen Satan and his tactics overthrown because of your prayers? All of this is part of our title to the land. Are you established in the land?

Brothers and sisters, as believers we will not find true blessing if we live our lives outside the land. Don't even bother looking! True fulfillment and true satisfaction can only be found in the spiritual blessings that we have in Christ. That's part of our promised land as believers, and we need to appreciate our title to the land of spiritual blessing. Faithful believers appreciate their title to the land.

Practical Application

When it comes to commitment, are you a hen or a hog?

Are you a hen or a hog -- what's this all about? Well, I'm reading a little story that I picked up in one of the commentaries! "A hen and hog were walking past a church and noticed the pastor's sermon title on the outside bulletin board. It read, "What can we do to help the poor?" As hogs and hens are accustomed to do, they entered into earnest conversation over the question as they continued on their way. At last, the hen was smitten with a bright idea, "I've got it," she crackled. "We can help the poor by giving them a ham and eggs breakfast." "Oh, no you don't," shot back the hog. "For you, that only means a contribution, but for me, it means total commitment."

Although this is a humorous story, it does have a point. How committed are we? Does our Christian "commitment" consist of merely attending church and making token contributions? Or are we committed to live our lives -- 24/7/365 -- for the Lord? Is our commitment real and total? Is it good for the long haul? Have we committed ourselves as living sacrifices, as Romans 12 says?

How committed are we? Hebrews 12:1 tells us that we should "*lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...*" And Philippians 3:13-14 says, "*...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*"

How committed are we? Maybe this humorous little story about the hen and the hog will help us focus on what true commitment is all about. When it comes to commitment, are you a hen or a hog?