

Make Your Choice Today!



SABBATH—DECEMBER 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Joshua 24:2–13; Joshua 24:14, 15; Joshua 24:16–18; Joshua 24:22–24; Joshua 24:29–33.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘But maybe you don’t want to serve the Lord. You must choose for yourselves today. . . . As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord’ ” (Joshua 24:15, ICB).



The agreement helps Israel remember that their king is the Lord.

IN THE LAST CHAPTER OF JOSHUA, the people agree again to serve God. Joshua, their leader, helps Israel to make this promise. In this final chapter, we see that Israel's agreement has the same parts as other agreements from that time. These agreements or promises have seven parts. (1) The agreement has a beginning. The beginning of the agreement names the person who is making the promise. (2) Also, the beginning contains history. The history talks about the relationship between the groups who are making the agreement. (3) The agreement talks about how one group or person must be loyal to the other person in the agreement. (4) The agreement contains a list of blessings for keeping the promise and curses for breaking it. (5) The agreement names the witnesses. (6) A record of the promise is made for the future. And (7) the promise is made legal.

Joshua is at the end of his life. But Joshua doesn't name anyone to replace him as leader. The Israelites don't need a human king. God is their leader. If the Israelites stay loyal to God, He will lead and protect them. The agreement helps the people remember that their king is the Lord.

YOU WERE THERE! (Joshua 24:2–13)

“Then all the tribes [the 12 family groups] of Israel met together at Shechem. Joshua called [invited] them all together there. Then he called [sent for] the elders [religious leaders], heads [leaders] of families, judges and officers of Israel. These men stood before [in front of] God” (Joshua 24:1, ICB).

Abraham built an altar at Shechem. Shechem was the place where God first gave Abraham the promise about the land (Genesis 12:6, 7). Now, God keeps His promise to Abraham at last. God gives the land to Israel. So, Israel makes new the agreement with God. The people promise to serve the Lord at the very place where God first promised Israel the land. Joshua’s words at this time help us to remember the words of Jacob about false gods. Joshua says, “ ‘Throw away the statues of the gods that are among [with] you’ ” (Joshua 24:23, NIV; compare with Genesis 35:2–4). Shechem helps the Israelites to remember that they must be loyal to God. They must reject all other “gods.”

What is God’s message to Israel? Read Joshua 24:2–13 for the answer.

Look at what God says He did for Israel. God “took,” “gave,” “sent,” “punished,” “helped Israel escape,” “made Israel free,” and so on. God did all those things, not Israel. God made Israel. If God hadn’t chosen Abraham to serve Him, the Israelites would be worshiping false gods. Israel is a country because of God’s mercy. So, the Israelites must not brag that they settled the land on their own. Their living in the land is proof that they should serve God.

The Lord’s message talks about “you” (Israel) and “they” (Israel’s fathers). The Lord talks about Israel now and their fathers in the past as if they were all one group. Joshua wants to show a Bible truth that Moses already taught Israel in Deuteronomy 5:3. The Lord didn’t make His promise only with the Israelites in the past. The Lord’s promise is also for the Israelites who hear Joshua’s message. Most of these Israelites weren’t alive when God helped His people escape Egypt. But Joshua says that all of them were there. Why? Because he wants the new Israelites to understand that the things God did for Israel in the past, He also did for them. He will work for them now, too.



If God hadn’t chosen Abraham to serve Him, the Israelites would be worshiping false gods.

WITH HONESTY AND TRUTH (Joshua 24:14, 15)

What did Joshua ask the Israelites to do? Read Joshua 24:14, 15 for the answer. What does it mean to serve the Lord with honesty and truth?

Joshua asks the Israelites to choose if they want to continue to be God's special people. The choice is up to them. They must decide to stay loyal to God and live in the land. Or they can go back to worshiping false gods. Then they will become the same as the people around them. The people around them have no special relationship with God or special work to do for Him.

If the Israelites choose the Lord, they must respect and serve Him with honest hearts. They must follow Bible truth. To respect the Lord means that we understand that our God is holy and everlasting. God is all-powerful and wonderful. We, on the other hand, are small. Our lives have a beginning and an end. We are sinners. To fear God is to accept His work for us. We also will accept Him as our Father in heaven and our King. When we believe these things, we will live obedient lives (Leviticus 19:14; Leviticus 25:17; Deuteronomy 17:19; 2 Kings 17:34). When we respect God, we also will serve Him.

How do we serve God? In two ways. (1) We serve Him with an "honest life." (2) We also "live Bible truth." An "honest life" comes from a Hebrew word that mostly is used to talk about animal offerings. The Hebrews must bring only perfect animal offerings to the Lord. When we "live Bible truth," we will show we are loyal to God. God's love shows us who He is. God is loyal. He keeps all His promises.

A loyal person is dependable. We can trust him. Joshua asks the Israelites to show the same loyalty to God that God shows to them. Our hearts must match our behavior. Our lives should show everyone that we are grateful to God for everything He does for us.

What does it mean to you to serve the Lord with honesty and Bible truth? What are some of the things that keep you from doing that?



The Hebrews must bring only perfect animal offerings to the Lord.

FREE TO SERVE (Joshua 24:16–18)

Joshua respects the free will of his people. He wants the Israelites to serve God because of their free choice. Joshua doesn't want Israel to feel forced to serve God. That's why Joshua reminds the Israelites that they freely chose to serve the Lord (read Joshua 24:22). In other verses, Moses also talks about how God chose Israel to be His special people (Deuteronomy 7:6, 7; Deuteronomy 10:15; Deuteronomy 14:2). Israel is free to say "no" to the Lord after He chooses them. But that would be silly and foolish. Israel can choose to say "yes" to God. Then the people can continue to live and enjoy success. Or they can reject God and die.

What was the Israelites' answer to Joshua's invitation (Joshua 24:16–18)? What did Joshua say when he heard their answer? Why do you think he said these things? Read Joshua 24:19–21 for the answer.

In their answer, the Israelites show that they understand that the God of their fathers is now their God (Joshua 24:17, 18). The Israelites are willing to serve God with their whole hearts. After this promise, you'd think that Joshua would say something encouraging and nice. But that's not what happens. Joshua changes his topic. He stops talking about God's love in the past. Now Joshua gives the Israelites a warning: God is not always easy to serve.

Joshua knows how the Israelites in the desert easily promised to obey God after He helped them to escape from Egypt (Exodus 19:8; Exodus 24:3; Deuteronomy 5:27). But those same Israelites forgot their promises even as they made them (Exodus 32)! So, Joshua wants to make sure the Israelites under his command understand some things. First, the decision to serve God is very important. Their decision will change their lives. They must live for God and follow His rules. If they do, God will bless them. But if they disobey, they will suffer. Joshua wants them to understand fully what they are promising.

Second, the Israelites must make their own decision to serve God. Joshua can't make that decision for them.

Third, Israel must know that humans can't serve God in their own strength. We need God. We can't serve God with our own good behavior. We must have a personal relationship with God first. He must save us. Then we may serve Him (compare with Exodus 20:1, 2; Deuteronomy 5:6, 7).



Joshua wants to make sure the Israelites under his command understand some things.

THE DANGERS OF WORSHIPING FALSE GODS (Joshua 24:22–24)

Why would Joshua need to ask the Israelites to get rid of the statues of false gods? Read Joshua 24:22–24 for the answer.

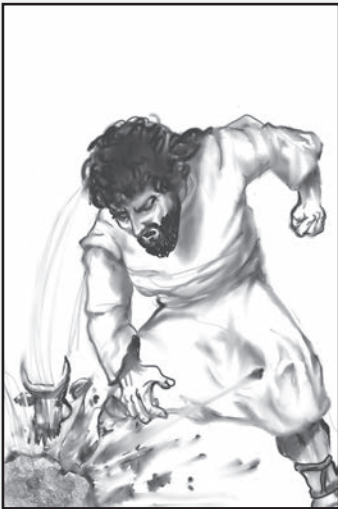
Earlier on the plains of Moab, Moses asked the Israelites to follow the Lord completely (Deuteronomy 30:19, 20). The gods that Joshua talked about are not the gods of Egypt or the gods that belong to the people in the land of Canaan. No, these are the statues of false gods that belong to the Israelites. So, now Joshua also asks his people to give their hearts completely to the Lord. If the people give their hearts fully to the Lord, the Lord will hear their prayers (2 Kings 19:16; Psalm 31:2, 3; Daniel 9:18). Later, God's special messengers will ask the Israelites to give their hearts fully to the Lord and to obey Him (Isaiah 55:3; Jeremiah 7:24). Sad to say, Solomon and other kings served foreign gods (1 Kings 11:2, 4, 9). Without God's help, we are as bad as Solomon. Our hearts are filled with sin. We can't obey God on our own. We must decide to obey Him. Then we must ask Him for help to serve Him fully.

The Israelites answer that they will listen to God's voice. Their answer shows that they are promising to obey God. God isn't asking Israel to follow lifeless or dead rules. God's promise with Israel is about having a living relationship with Him. The Israelites' religion wasn't about being saved with their own good behavior. Their religion was about having a living relationship with a loving God.

Israel's promise to serve God includes the promise to throw away the statues of false gods. But we don't know if the Israelites kept their promise. Whenever Joshua commanded Israel to do something, the book of Joshua reported on how the Israelites kept their promises. But there is no report at the end of the book of Joshua about their throwing out the false gods.

Joshua's invitation to Israel to serve God also is for us today. We must choose to serve the Lord. We also must throw out all of our false gods or idols.

How often do you promise the Lord you will do something? Do you do what you promise? If no, why not? What does your answer tell you about God's patient mercy?



Israel's promise to serve God includes their promise to throw away the statues of false gods.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT (Joshua 24:29–33)

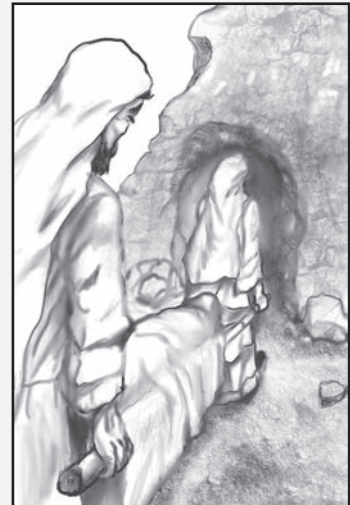
Read the last words in the book of Joshua (Joshua 24:29–33). How do these words look back over Joshua’s life? What do these verses say about the future?

The end of the book of Joshua tells us that Joshua and Eleazar die. Eleazar is the high priest or top religious leader. The writer talks about Joshua and Eleazar being buried. Then the writer talks about Joseph’s bones. Joseph’s bones are a symbol for life outside the Promised Land. The graves of Joshua and Eleazar are symbols of the new life in the land. The writer compares the graves with the bones to show us that the Israelites don’t need to wander anymore. They don’t need to carry Joshua or Eleazar’s bones along with them as they carried Joseph’s. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob buried their family members in a cave (Genesis 23:13, 19; Genesis 25:9, 10). Abraham bought this land at Shechem (Genesis 33:19). Now the Israelites can bury their leaders in the land that God gave them. This land is their home. The graves help Israel to remember that God kept His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The last verses of the book of Joshua connect the story of the book to Israel’s past history. This connection helps the Israelites also to look to the Lord to lead them in the future.

With Joshua’s death, an amazing chapter in the history of Israel comes to an end. Israel’s future depends on how the people will answer the following question: Will they be loyal to the Lord? Will they hold tight to the Lord? Will they throw away their false gods? The Israelites in Joshua’s day were loyal to the Lord and His law. But will the Israelites after them continue to be obedient? The Israelites in every age in the future will need to answer these questions. Their success as a people depends on the answers they give in their everyday lives. Will their lives show that they love the Bible truths that God gave them?

Both Joshua and Paul “fought the good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7, ERV). Why was Joshua a success? What decisions do you need to make today to finish life with the same success?



Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob buried their family members in a cave.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “The Last Words of Joshua,” pages 522–524, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“Joshua wrote down Israel’s promise in the book of the law. Then Joshua put a big stone under an oak tree near the Lord’s holy tent. ‘Then Joshua said to all the people, “This stone will help you remember what we said today. This stone was here when the LORD was speaking to us today. So this stone will be something that helps you remember what happened today. The stone will be a witness against you. It will stop you from turning against your God.” ’ [Joshua 24:27, ERV]. Joshua announces that his warning to the people is not his own words. The warning is from God. This big stone will be a memorial. This memorial will help the Israelites in the future to remember this time. The stone also would be a witness against the people if they start to worship false gods.”—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*, May 26, 1881, adapted.



“Then Joshua put a big stone under an oak tree near the Lord’s holy tent.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Joshua said that the Lord “is a holy God. And he is a jealous God” (Joshua 24:19, ICB). What does the Bible mean when it says that God is jealous? Jealous of what?
- ② How does understanding “free will” help us love God? Can anyone force you to love someone? If yes, can that love be real? If no, why not?
- ③ How can today’s church leaders help the young people get ready to serve and lead the church in the future?
- ④ Think about the idea that the Israelites served the Lord for all of Joshua’s life. At the end of your life, what would you like people to say about you?

“HOW DO WE LOVE GOD?”

Kim Sun was a Bible worker from South Korea. For three months, Sun shared 15 stories about God's love with the people in a faraway village in the Philippines.

The villagers were surprised to learn that God made everything on earth for them. The villagers were amazed at Jesus' picture stories about the Good Samaritan and the Lost Son. The hearts of the villagers were touched when they understood that Jesus died on the cross for them. After three months, many villagers said, “We understand that God loves us. But how do we show God that we love Him back?”

Sun thought to himself, “Yes. When we know someone loves us, we want to show that we love that person, too.” Sun knew it was time to teach the villagers deeper Bible truth.

For the next three months, Sun taught the villagers about the seventh-day Sabbath. He taught them about clean foods and foods that weren't clean. He taught them about tithes and offerings, and other Bible teachings. Tithe is the money we owe God. Tithe is 10% of all the money we get. Many villagers accepted the Bible teachings. The villagers wanted to know how to love God. The Bible teachings showed them the way.

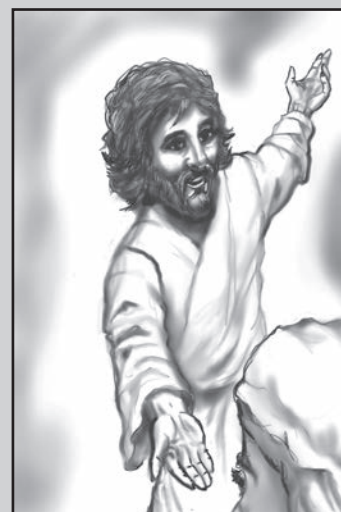
Sun served as a Bible worker for ten months. For three months, Sun helped the villagers. For the next three months, he told them Bible stories about God's love. For the final three months, Sun taught them deeper Bible truths. Sun had one month left to say goodbye. Sun spent the last month going door-to-door, inviting people to follow Jesus. Then Sun said to the villagers, “I'm leaving soon. I would like you to join my church. My church has blessed my life so much. I want you to be blessed, too.” Many townspeople accepted Sun's invitation.

Ellen G. White writes, “Jesus' plan is the only plan that will give us real success in touching people's hearts. The Savior made friends with people. He wanted what was best for them. He showed them that He cared. He helped them and took care of their needs. Jesus won their hearts. Then He invited them to ‘Follow Me.’”—*The Ministry of Healing*, page 143, adapted. For ten months, Sun followed Jesus' plan. He made friends in the village. He showed the villagers he cared about them. He helped them. He won their trust. Then Sun invited them to follow Jesus.

Today, Sun is a full-time Bible worker. He is a manager for the 1,000 Missionary Movement, in Silang, Philippines. The headquarters were built with help of the 13th Sabbath Offering from 1996. Sun says, “Being a Bible worker is the best job on earth. Bible workers must do more than give Bible studies. We must show Jesus in our lives.”

Thank you for your 13th Sabbath Offering this week.

INSIDE *Story*



“Jesus won people's hearts. Then He invited them to ‘Follow Me.’”



Kim Sun