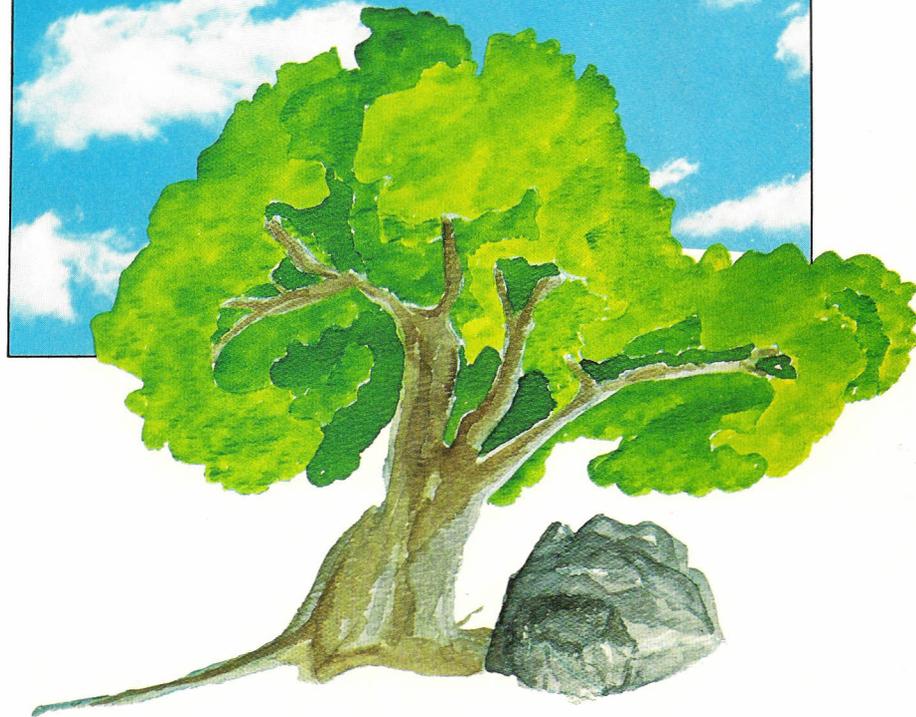


Joshua's Witness



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Set a rock in your mind as a reminder of your commitment to serve God and Him only.

The Old Testament contains a record concerning a tremendous man of God named Joshua. The record of "Joshua's Witness" occurs very close to the end of Joshua's life when Joshua called all the tribes of Israel together at Shechem.

Joshua 24:1:

And Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God.

The only way the people could present themselves before God was to present themselves before Joshua, who represented God as God's spokesman. Joshua then had the challenge of presenting the truth of God's Word to the people of Israel. God did many great things for those people as they were led out of Egypt into the Promised Land, and Joshua reminds them of this.

Joshua 24:11:

And ye went over Jordan, and came unto Jericho: and the

men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Gergashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I [God] delivered them into your hand.

God said, "I delivered them into your hand." It wasn't the children of Israel who won the victory; it was God who won the victory, He delivered them.

Joshua 24:12:

And I sent the hornet before you, which drave them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow.

God must have a great sense of humor. What He did was have hornets sting those mighty armies. God said the people did not do it with their military might, but *He* did it with hornets.

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.

I often think of how God has done things like this

for us in our ministry—given us things for which we never worked, victories which were accomplished, things that from our point of view we should never have had, but which God wrought for us.

After reviewing with the children of Israel what God had done for them, Joshua next admonished the Hebrews of their responsibility to God.

Joshua 24:14:

Now therefore [because of all this] fear [to reverence, respect] the Lord [Jehovah—the word “Jehovah” means God in relationship to that which He has created; in our relationship with God on a horizontal level, He is our Jehovah], and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord.

The first advice Joshua gave to the people was to rid themselves of any other gods. Whenever you have any god other than the one true God, you are in trouble. As long as Israel was faithful and served the one true God, God delivered them.

I know that the Word is talking about gods literally here, but today, though you may not have an idol or a statue of a god, something can be your god besides the true God. It could be a job or social position. What is your god? Joshua told the children of Israel to get rid of anything that stood in the way of the one true God. That is what my brother Harry meant when he would say, “Put your wallet on the altar. Dedicate it to God.” If money is still more important than God, you have a god. . . money. You have to get to the place where there is only one god in your life, and that God is the true God, Jehovah, and He is the one you serve. He is the one to whom you are dedicated. Everything else in life is secondary. Matthew 6 tells us this.

Matthew 6:33:

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The only way to success is to have one God and to put Him first in our lives. This decision to serve the one true God and no other gods was Joshua’s concern in speaking to the children of Israel.

Joshua 24:15:

And if it seem evil [wrong] unto you to serve the Lord [Jehovah], 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.

Joshua, as the leader of the people, was God’s spokesman. The first verse of this chapter makes this evident in saying that when the tribes of Israel gathered, they appeared before God. According to the senses they were merely standing in front of Joshua, but in God’s eyes they were before Him. Joshua told the people to choose, to make the decision whom they would serve. We always have freedom of will in making a choice; but once we have made the choice, then we live and operate within the framework of that choice.

Did you ever see a bird in a cage? That bird is totally free—within the cage. I know a lot of people that are caged, too. They are caged and encased,

just as much as that bird, within the confines of their decisions to serve things other than the one true God.

“Choose you this day whom you are going to serve. . . .” We have to make a choice. Are we really going to stand for God and His Word or are we just going to blow about? We must make up our minds. Joshua had his mind made up when he said with great determination, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua 24:16-20a:

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 [who] 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.

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.

If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods.

You cannot serve the Lord if you forsake the Lord and serve strange gods. God’s Word is so simple and so beautiful. Look at verse 20 again.

Joshua 24:20:

If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.

You cannot serve the Lord if you forsake the Lord and serve strange gods.

This is the Oriental way of saying that God takes His hand of protection off and the Devil can do as he pleases. The Devil may have an inroad into some of our lives at times; but he still cannot go too far. He is limited in what he can do when we are born again and walking on the Word, because God is always there. God never takes His hands completely off of our lives because we have His seed within which is eternal life.

Joshua 24:21 and 22:

And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the Lord.

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.

The people said to Joshua, who represented God, that they would not be unfaithful to Jehovah. So Joshua responded, “You yourselves are witnesses of the promise which you just made.”

Joshua 24:23-26:

Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel.

And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we

serve, and his voice will we obey.

So Joshua made a covenant [last will and testament] with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance [a commandment] in Shechem.

And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord.

What tremendous verses. Joshua made a covenant and wrote it down. He most likely wrote this on a scroll. The covenant was that he, Joshua,

**“As for me and my house,
we will serve the Lord.”**

representing the truth of God, had heard the leaders say what they would do. He wrote this in the book of the law of God. Then he took a great stone and he set it under an oak tree. The people had the freedom of will to make a choice and they said before God, “We are going to remain faithful to Jehovah. We are not going to marry other women that serve other gods and we are not going to allow our women to marry other men that serve other gods. We guarantee we are going to stand for the true God.”

Joshua 24:26 says that Joshua took a great stone, the longest lasting thing he could have used. Joshua took this commitment that Israel had made and he built a place where all the people could see the stone. It was a permanent reminder of their commitment to Joshua, God’s representative.

Joshua took that commitment and placed it beneath an oak. The oak tree in the Bible is a symbol of the presence of God. People would sit under an oak tree to pray. And in the Eastern culture when a person wanted to think something through, wanted to carefully consider a situation and make a decision, he would sit under an oak tree. Thus Joshua chose to mark the children of Israel’s commitment beneath an oak for the people had made a very great and important decision to commit themselves to serve the Lord.

I wonder what happened as the years went by and the children of Israel saw that stone? As years went by, the stone remained. The Word declares that these people were to teach the commandments to their children and to their children’s children. They would see the stone and be reminded that their forefathers made a commitment to serve no other god than Jehovah. The stone would be there long after the oak tree was gone. This great stone was something they could see for years and years, and that would remind them of the covenant made there.

Joshua 24:27 and 28:

And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.

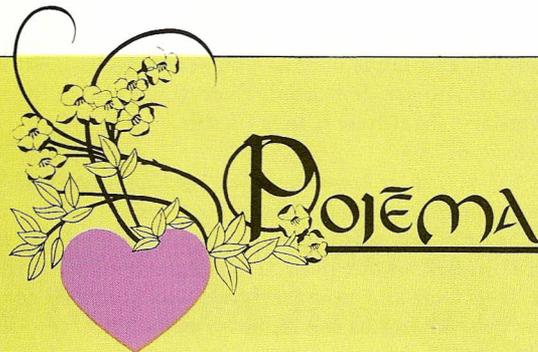
So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance.

Joshua allowed every man to go back to his inheritance which God had won for him. He allowed

the people to go back and reap the fruit of what God had made available to them.

When we read this in the Old Testament and understand the epistles in the New Testament, we realize that we, too, have to claim our inheritance. What is our inheritance? It is righteousness, redemption, sanctification, wisdom, love, peace, joy—all that which has been given to us by God. We find in the Word what God has given us, and claim it. We have the privilege of going back to our self-condemnation if we like. However, when we go back to our inheritance, there is no condemnation: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”; in Him “we are more than conquerors.” This is our inheritance.

We have only one life to live and to give and we have to give our utmost to achieve God’s best in our lives. Our commitment to God releases God’s blessing on our lives, just as it did in the time of Joshua. We have all eternity in which to enjoy the rewards of our faithfulness and the fullness of our inheritance. But we have the freedom of choice to decide this day which god we are going to serve. Joshua said, and I exhort you to say and commit yourself to the same thing with me, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” This is the great decision around which all of our lives pivot. Set a rock in your mind as a reminder of your commitment to serve God and Him only. And then enjoy your inheritance provided by God through Christ Jesus. ☑



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