

Joshua Chapter 23-24 – John Karmelich

1. Well everyone, we've made it to the final lesson in Joshua. Let me say before I begin that I hope these lessons have been as beneficial to you as they have been to me. As I do with every last lesson of a book, there is a bibliography on the last page of this study.
2. Now that we are essentially at the end of the book of Joshua, let me ask you all a question. If you were Joshua, and you had one last chance to do something for all of the Israelites, what would you do? If it were me, I would probably give some sort of speech telling the Israelites to keep on sticking close to God and avoid things that would keep them from turning from God.
 - a) Well, if you guessed correctly, you're either very smart or have already read these two chapters. ☺ These two chapters are both speeches to the Israelites.
 - i) The first speech is to the leaders of the Israelites. That is Chapter 23.
 - ii) The second speech is to all of Israel. That is Chapter 24.
 - b) Let me also say that these two chapters occurred many years after the previous chapter. They occur right before the end of Joshua's life. Most bible commentators believe these two chapters occur about twenty to twenty five years after Chapter 22.
3. This leads to my title for this lesson, "Beware of the dangers that turn us from God".
 - a) I need to explain that by first explaining what is "idolatry". The idea of idolatry is to turn from the true God to some other god. It is not just "switching religions". It is about compromising with our core-Christian beliefs. It is also about the danger of going through the motions of being a Christian, but our hearts are not really in it.
 - b) If you recall from the last lesson, the key issue was "internal fighting" amongst the Israelites. The underlying idea is the way Satan can cause Christians to be ineffective witnesses for Christ is to get us focuses on fighting one another.
 - i) In a sense, this lesson takes that danger one step further. The issue is still the danger of being an ineffective witness for Christ, but instead of internal fighting, we start to do things that get us to stop being effective followers of Christ.
 - ii) That is what "idolatry" really is: It is fairly rare when a devout Christian (or devout member of any major religion) drops their religious beliefs and turns to other religions. It is common for young people to check out other religious and see what is right for them. It is another thing when one has completely committed their lives to serving God and then turns away from that commitment.
 - c) That is the focus and the main point of this lesson. It is about "How to keep on the path of sticking close to God. It is about the danger of getting lazy in our trust in God and turning away from Him. That is what idolatry is really all about.
 - d) Remember that we are reading about a group of Israelites that have seen God work many miracles earlier in their lives. If a group like that can be dealing with issues of idolatry, I guarantee, the issue is relevant to devout Christians as well.
 - e) Let me end this discussion this way: I don't want you to read this lesson and think, "Oh those poor Israelites, they have seen all sorts of miracles, and yet they still have issues with following other gods." What I want you (and me) to consider is our own lives where we have not completely given ourselves over to God. The danger is our own idolatry!
 - i) To live the Christian life is to walk by faith. It is to trust that Jesus was a living human who gave His life for our sins and at the same time, understand that He was, is and always will be God.
 - ii) To act on that faith is all about living a life that makes a difference for Christ. It is about trusting God with every (big emphasis on "every") aspect of our lives.
 - iii) When there are areas of our life we don't give to God, that is idolatry.
 - iv) When we are trusting in God and "something else" that too is idolatry.

4. The whole point of this final lesson is to get us (that's you and me) to examine our own lives and ask ourselves, "Are there areas of my life where I am trusting in God and something else?"
 - a) If that is true, it is than a matter of identifying the "something else" and giving that "something else" to God. It is a matter of not just going through the motions of being a Christian but truly giving our lives over to God. That is the point of Romans 12:1.
 - b) It is very easy for Christians to slip into the "going into automatic" mode of our religious beliefs. We can go through the motions of going to church on Sunday and doing what we regularly do, but our hearts our not in it. When we are not reading God's word with the purpose of seeing what He has to say to us today or when we are not praying with the expectation that God will answer our prayers, that is idolatry. In summary, "idolatry" is the danger of going through the motions of "Christianity", but our hearts are not in it.
 - c) Getting back to the Israelites, that was their problem at this point. They were going through the motions of following God, but they still had idols. Understand that in this time era and location, people made statues to represent their idols. They worshipped or paid homage to those statues. Joshua is going to heavily emphasize that. Despite the fact the Israelites were claiming to follow God, they still had their idol statues.
 - i) Today, we rarely have idol statutes, but we definitely have "idols". That is the idea of trusting in things (including ourselves) and not God. A Christian idol could be a little statue we have in our car we are trusting in for luck. It could be trusting in our own ability to make money and not God's ability to provide for us. It could be in trusting our own ability to make the right decisions and not God leading us.
 - ii) The key is to ask ourselves in any questionable situation, "Am I trusting in God and what else?" That "what else" could be ourselves as well as a "false god".
 - d) OK, after that heavily convicting introduction, ☺ I can begin the text.
5. Chapter 23: After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, ² summoned all Israel--their elders, leaders, judges and officials--and said to them: "I am old and well advanced in years.
 - a) Let's start with the phrase, "After a long time had passed". We don't know for sure the exact number of years of that time frame. As I stated in the introduction, most commentators believe it was 20-25 years since the last chapter.
 - b) The rest of Verse 1 states a key point about the history of Israel during that time period: It has been a period of peace and Israel has not had to fight anyone as a nation.
 - c) As I stated in the introduction, Chapter 23 is a speech to the leaders of Israel. (Chapter 24 is a speech to all the Israelites). Notice the "elders, leaders, judges and officials" have all assembled for this speech. It also means those that live east of the Jordan River have traveled to wherever Joshua made this speech.
 - d) Understand that "judges" are not like the elected or appointed judges that most countries have. The judges are the elders of each city, who's job it is to "hang out by the city gates" and decide who can and cannot enter their cities as well as judge legal cases.
6. Verse 3: You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. ⁴ Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain--the nations I conquered--between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.
 - a) What is happening here is Joshua is recalling all of the good things that God has done for the Israelites within their lifetime. He is recalling how God had led these people into this land. God has made it possible for the Israelites to conquer groups that were much larger and had better weaponry than the Israelites had. God made it possible for the Israelites to occupy cites that were already built. God has established and protected their borders.

- b) The pronoun "I" is used in this speech. Joshua led the distribution of the land and Joshua led the Israeli armies to victory. Joshua is still giving God the credit, but he is also saying in effect that God used him to do all of these things.
 - i) I hold the view that there is nothing wrong about bragging about oneself in the context that if God has used us to accomplish something, we are not really bragging about ourselves as much as we are bragging about how much God has used us in that situation.
- c) OK, onto the important question: Why is Joshua giving this speech? Is it just because he is about to die and therefore wants to brag about how God has used him? ☺
 - i) It is much more than that. We will discover in these two chapters that Joshua was worried about is the Israelites turning from God to idolatry. In order to keep the Israelites focused on God, Joshua is reminding them of the past where God has led them and kept them safe.
 - ii) Why was idolatry such a big danger at this time? The problem is that the Israelites did not completely wipe out the local inhabitants and those who were not killed still worship pagan gods. These pagans made statues that represented their gods. In the book of Judges, (the next book of the bible) that next generation of Israelites did in fact turn to idolatry, so Joshua knew this was an issue to bring up and fight.
 - iii) To put it another way, Joshua is preaching against the danger of simply turning from the God they worship. That is the main purpose of this speech.
- d) Let me "modernize" these verses. Most people today don't have physical statues of idols that they worship. So how do we relate to these chapters?
 - i) Let me answer that by pointing out something about the New Testament: Every single book in the New Testament (all 27 of them) spend some space dealing with the issue of "false teachers" and turning away from God. Idolatry and turning from God is such a big issue that every book in the New Testament deals with it.
 - ii) Think of it this way: Satan is always looking for ways for the Christian church to be ineffective witnesses for Jesus. One of those methods is to get us to focus on "fighting amongst ourselves". That is the story of the last lesson. In this lesson, the danger gets one step further, where people who are God's witnesses actually turn from Him and worshipping other things.
 - iii) My point is one of the greatest dangers for a Christian is when they actually turn away from God to worship other things. This is why the New Testament spends so much time dealing with the issue of false teachers. Again, it is not so much actually "dropping Christianity", but mixing our faith with other things.
 - iv) The basic idea of a false teacher within the Christian church is anyone that turns us away from the essential "non-negotiable" issues of Christianity. This would include the idea that Jesus was a real human and at the same time is God Himself. It would include the idea that Jesus literally died and God the Father raised Him from the dead. It would include the idea that we too can live forever in heaven, only because we are perfectly forgiven of our sins by trusting in Jesus' complete payment of our sins. In other words we are not approaching God based on our goodness, but on the fact we are forgiven.
 - v) I state this because "false teachers" rarely tell Christians to go worship other gods. They usually just deny some or all of the essential doctrines of Christianity. Once we are willing to deny some aspects of "essential Christianity", we are more than willing to turn to other gods. All humans are created with a need to worship something. If we turn from the true God, we won't turn to "nothing", but we will still worship something. As I like to say, find out where a person spares their spare time and spare income, and you will usually find out what is their god.
 - vi) OK, time to get back to the Israelites. ☺

7. Verse 6: "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. ⁷ Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. ⁸ But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.
- a) If I had to pick one word that separates the "true" Christian from the "false" Christian, it is the word "obedience". That applies to the "true" religious Jew as well. Let me explain:
 - b) As a Christian, we are free to do whatever we want. However, God does not call us into a life of "doing whatever we want in order to please ourselves". God wants us to use that freedom to make a difference for Him in our lives. The one new command Jesus gave for Christians is to "love one another". (Reference John 13:34.) The idea is to put the needs of others before our own desires. The idea is to live to help the "body of Christ". It means to work to help other Christians grow in their relationship with God and letting them help us grow in our relationship with God. The emphasis is on teamwork in Christianity.
 - c) What does any of this have to do with these verses here in Joshua? He says in Verse 6 to do everything written in the "Law of Moses". That means to obey the law. The next verse goes on to say that they (we) are not to get involved in any way, shape or form with any other false god. Finally, Joshua says in Verse 8 to "hold fast" to the true God.
 - i) What does all of that mean? It means to stay true to God. It means to be obedient to God and all that He requires of us. It means to not turn to other religious
 - ii) Personally, I find the problem is usually much more subtle than just turning to other religions. Satan knows that we follow the true God and knows we can't lose our salvation. Therefore, his goal is to make us ineffective witnesses for God by getting us to compromise with our trust in God and our obedience to Him.
 - iii) One of the great problems for the Israelites on and off through their history is they went through the rituals of serving God, but their "hearts" were not in it. Now think of the half-hearted Christian who goes to church, but during the rest of the week, basically doesn't care about God.
 - d) Obedience for the Christian is not about following the laws of Moses as much as it about giving our hearts to God and giving God our "all". It is about making God part of our daily lives and caring about living to please Him in all that we do. Obedience is about taking the time to worship God with other believers. Obedience is about taking the time to regularly pray and regularly study God's word. Obedience is about living a life to make a difference for God in whatever capacity God has called for us.
 - i) That is the underlying point of this lesson: The danger of turning from God and how that happens "subtly" in our lives.
8. Verse 9: "The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. ¹⁰ One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. ¹¹ So be very careful to love the LORD your God.
- Verse 12: "But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, ¹³ then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you.
- a) I want you to see Verses 9-11 as a contrast to Verses 12-13. Verses 9-11 state the fact (in effect) that God has led us into the life of drawing close to Him. God has given us victory over all things that separate us from Him. God will continue to give us victory over sin issues we struggle with in our lives. The key to such victories is to stay close to God. We can and will have victory no matter how powerful the "enemy" is in front us.
 - i) I have learned that no matter what issue I face, I realize that without God's help, there is no way I can have victories over any issue. With God's help, I have had victories and will continue to have victories over such issues.

- b) This leads us to Verses 12 and 13. In a sense these verses teach the same point as Verse 9 through 11. The key difference is that Verses 9-11 stress the positive benefits of sticking close to God and Verses 12 and 13 stress the dangers of turning from God.
 - c) With that said, let me discuss the literal aspects of Verses 12 and 13 and from there I can discuss how they apply to our lives. The main idea being taught is the Israelites are not to intermarry with any pagans that are living in the land of Israel. The idea behind that is to not let the influence of other gods enter into our lives. It is similar to the Christian concept against believers marrying nonbelievers. (See 2nd Corinthians 6:14.)
 - i) God is saying to them that if they (or us) start down a path of compromising with Him, they (the Israelites) can guarantee that He will now work against them. Just as God has allowed them to have victories over the nations, they can count on losing battles if they turn from Him. It will grow worse and worse and be as painful as "whips on their backs" and "thorns in their eyes". (Verse 13). The essential idea is that if one turns from God, things will go from "bad to worse". The history of the Israelites has confirmed that statement to be true.
 - ii) The point for the Christian is just as God has given us spiritual victories as we draw close to Him, it is also a guarantee if we start to turn our lives against Him we still start having real losses in whatever we face in life.
 - iii) Most of us veteran Christians can think of lots of examples of people who followed God for a time, and then decided to turn from that lifestyle. In every case I can think of, the end was not good. I know of cases where devout Christians turned to adultery or a "party all the time" lifestyle. I have then watched their lives go way downhill. I know of a few cases where people have turned back to God, but the warnings of these verses is true. Once we know God and decide to turn from that lifestyle, we do pay the price in this lifetime.
 - iv) It is almost as if God is saying to such people, "What do I have to do to get you to turn back to me? How low do you have to sink in life before you realize how much better it is to be obedient to me?" It is amazing to watch the lives of people go to very low levels and still such people would rather live in that lifestyle than turn back to God. That is the danger being presented in these verses.
9. Verse 14: "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.¹⁵ But just as every good promise of the LORD your God has come true, so the LORD will bring on you all the evil he has threatened, until he has destroyed you from this good land he has given you.¹⁶ If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you."
- a) With these verses, we finish Chapter 23. Remember that Chapter 23 is a speech given by Joshua to the leaders of Israel. In Chapter 24 is a separate speech given to all of Israel.
 - b) Joshua makes the point that he is not far from death in Verse 14. Joshua goes on to point out that every promise that God has made to him has come true. Joshua led the Israelites to victory over many nations living in the Promised Land. The Israelites have enjoyed a period of peace from the end of the fighting years until the time of this chapter.
 - i) Joshua is not stating all of this to brag about what he has done. The main point Joshua is trying to get across is that if you (his audience) continue with being obedient to God, then "you too" can enjoy the same blessings he has had.
 - c) I want to pause and think of the lesson this way: There are times in our lives where it feels like God has "gone silent". I'm personally dealing with some issues and I don't feel like I'm getting any answers from God. I have learned that God sometimes "go silent" on us not that He has gone away, but so that we can trust He is still there working in our lives, even though we can't sense His presence as much.

- i) When it comes to "God's silence", I like to use the illustration of teaching a kid how to ride a bicycle. The child can't learn unless we let go of the bicycle. God's silence is often His way of teaching us to trust Him when we can't sense His presence.
 - ii) The way that ties to these verses is that Joshua is teaching the Israelites to remember the good God has done in the past. By remembering that, we can know that God is still there and He still wants us to follow Him in the "present".
 - iii) To put it another way, when we go through periods where we don't sense God's presence, we have to remember how God has worked in the past and know that He is still there working, even though we can't "feel" His presence.
 - iv) That is why Joshua is giving this speech about how God has worked in the past in the lives of the Israelites. It is not so Joshua can brag about how much God has used him. It is for the Israelites to know that God is still there and God still wants them (and us) to trust Him and be obedient to Him in our lives.
- d) This leads us to the negative aspects of these verses. These verses not only say in effect the blessings of sticking close to God, but the dangers of turning from Him.
- i) Let me ask a different question here: Why give this speech just to the leaders of Israel? The answer is the rest of Israel looks to these people as their leaders. The decisions they make affect everyone else. If these leaders start to allow idolatry in their lives, then they have failed to be the leaders God wants them to be.
 - ii) Let me put it another way: Can I grab someone by the neck, shake them and force them to change their ways? They may stop for a while out of fear of punishment, but that doesn't change their heart. People who steal or murder still need to be put in jail for the sake of society. People who willfully sin and refuse to change need to be kicked out of the church until they repent. Yes, we all sin, but I'm talking about the kind of person who commits a sin, is proud of it, brags about it and then refuses to change.
 - iii) In a sense, all a leader can do is warn against the dangers of turning from God. From there, we can take more drastic actions, but it starts with the warnings of what happens when we turn from God. That is what Joshua is doing here.
- e) The essential point that Joshua is making here is that all of the good things the Israelites have enjoyed because they have trusted in God can just as easily be lost if they make the collective decision to turn from God. Just as God has the power to bless us for obedience, so He can allow those blessings to be taken away if we choose to turn from Him.
- f) I've always believed that God loves "His" (that's us) too much to leave us alone. That often means God allows consequences in our lives for disobedience. Also know that not every negative thing that happens to us is due to some sort of sin on our part. Often such negative things are just there to get us to trust Him through difficult times. Still, when one encounters difficult times, one should do an inventory of one's life and confess anything that could be separating us from God.
- g) On that happy note ☺ I can move on to Chapter 24.
10. Verse 24: Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.
- a) Now we begin the second speech to all of the Israelites. What I suspect happened is right after Joshua finished speaking to all the leaders, he gives the orders to these leaders to go gather everyone and have them come to the city or town called "Shechem".
 - b) Shechem became the center of worship for the Israelites during the time of Joshua and would continue to be their "spiritual headquarters" all the way until the time of David.
 - c) Some of the same elements of Joshua's speech to the elders of the Israel will be part of this next speech to all of Israel. The idea of this upcoming speech is to get the Israelites to remember their history of how God has worked in their lives in the past so as to continue His blessings into their future.

11. Verse 2: Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: `Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. ³ But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, ⁴ and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his sons went down to Egypt.
- a) Joshua is going "way back" to the history of when God first called Abraham. This occurred 400 to 500 years prior to the time of Joshua.
 - b) Verse 2 mentions a river. This is a reference to the Euphrates River. Before Abraham was called by God to go live in the land of Israel, he lived in what is today Iraq. God called Abraham to go start a new life and to go live a life to make a difference for God. That meant for Abraham to literally cross the Euphrates River and move to the land of Israel.
 - i) Joshua is describing a "pattern" he wants to emphasize, the idea of "called". Just as God called Abraham to go live a new life in the Promised Land, so God called the Israelites out of Egypt to a new life of serving God within the land of Israel.
 - ii) That is also what God calls us as Christians to do. As Christians, we are called out of our old lives and now are called to live to make a difference for God.
 - c) So are you saying religious Jews are saved the same way we are? No. The problem with modern Judaism is there are no more blood sacrifices for the forgiveness of sin. The religious Jew today simply looks inward to confess their sin. While that is a good idea, one can never be 100% cleansed of sin. That is what the "cross" means to Christians.
 - d) In the meantime, Joshua is still describing the history of Israel. He is now talking about the son of Abraham, named Isaac. Later, Isaac had two sons named Jacob and Esau. God promised blessings to all the children of Abraham, so even Jacob's brother Esau inherited a separate section of land east of Israel, which is a point made in Verse 3. The main point of Verse 3 is that God called Abraham's grandson Jacob to go to Egypt with his family to begin the "400 year period" where the Israelites were to be enslaved in Egypt.
 - e) The main point of all of this is Joshua is teaching a "pattern". Just as Abraham was called from where he was raised to follow God, so He (God) called the Israelites out of Egypt to follow Him. God also calls you and me out of our old lives to follow Him.
12. Verse 5: `Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. ⁶ When I brought your fathers out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. ⁷ But they cried to the LORD for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the desert for a long time.
- a) Joshua finishes this "pattern of being called" by emphasizing the fact that when the Egyptians tried to catch the Israelites as they left, the Egyptian army drowned in the same sea in which the Israelites escaped through. The text emphasizes "darkness": The idea is the "world" (non-believers) cannot comprehend the good things that God does for those people that He (God) chooses as His own.
 - b) The underlying point is the Israelites were "chosen" by God just as Christians are individually chosen by God. Those people that want to keep us in bondage to our old lives are in "blindness" to what God wants to do with our lives. They can't "spiritually see" how God has called us into a new life to make a difference for him.
 - c) The final point of Joshua's little speech mentions how the Israelites lived in the desert for 40 years. There is a classic joke that goes, "It took forty days for the Israelites to get out of Egypt and 40 years to get Egypt out of the Israelites." The point is that even though the Israelites left Egypt fairly quickly, it took them a lifetime to learn to trust God and change their old way of thinking. For Christians too, it does take a lifetime of training to learn to trust God with every aspect of our lives.

13. Verse 8: `I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land.⁹ When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you.¹⁰ But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.
- a) Verses 8-10 finish Israel's history in the 40 years of wandering through the desert. The point here is that other groups fought the Israelites at that time, but God destroyed them.
 - b) The final point of this time era is about a non-Jewish prophet named Balaam. He was prominent enough to have three bible chapters dedicated to him. (Numbers 22-24). Balaam's power to "curse" is real enough that a prominent king trusted in him to curse the Israelites. The point here is that God did not listen to Balaam in that he ended up blessing Israel in his speeches. Balaam could not speak against God with his power.
 - c) The point of all of this is? God helped to defeat armies that tried to defeat the Israelites. God also used His power against those who had a legitimate gift to curse people. The point is God is more powerful than any "force" that would and could work against Him.
 - i) Remember that it's now been a good time period (probably 20-25 years) since the Israelites have seen any sort of major miracle occur. God wants them (and us) to learn to trust Him even when visual miracles are not occurring "daily". Just as God has seen the Israelites through the past, Joshua is saying to trust that God will see them (and us) through the present and the future.
 - d) As of the time of writing this lesson, I have been frustrated for a while because God has been fairly silent in terms of "yes" answers to my prayers. I know that most Christians go through periods like this and I have myself in the past. I know that it is God testing me and yes, I've done inventory work to see if there is some issue He wants me to confess. What I really had to learn and "still learn" is that God wants me to trust Him through such "quiet times" in order to build up my confidence that He is still there working.
 - i) That is what the Israelites are going through at this period of time. Joshua is giving this "encouragement speech" to help the Israelites through this period and hopefully to help them to keep trusting God at this time.
 - ii) When we experience "empty prayer periods", it is often best to recall how God has worked in our lives in the past and know that He still wants to trust us through those times when God is quiet in our lives. Do I understand how God will get me through this present period? No I don't. I know that He has worked in the past and that history helps to keep me going through the present.
 - iii) The temptation during such "God is silent" periods are to turn to other "gods" for help. That is what God wants us to avoid during such times. This includes trying to take matters in our hands and abandoning our prayer life. While we don't build pagan statues like it was done back then, it is our nature to "try different things" and want to walk away from God when we feel that "silence" from Him.
 - iv) Meanwhile, I last left Joshua lecturing the entire Israelite nation. ☺
14. Verse 11: "'Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands.¹² I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you--also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow.¹³ So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.'
- a) In Verses 11-13, Joshua summarizes all the years they have lived in the land of Israel to date. Joshua briefly mentions all the battles they have fought and Joshua says in effect, God won these battles for them. Did the Israelites literally have to fight the battles? Of course. The point is without God working "behind the scenes" to direct the course of events, the victories never would have occurred.

- b) So why is Joshua stating all of this? Do these Israelites not know their own history? Of course they do and I suspect most of them understand that God was working on their behalf "behind the scenes" to get the outcome He desired. So why give this speech? Again, it is about getting us to trust God during the "silent times". It is about getting us to not turn away from God just because He has not done anything on a grand, miraculous scale in the last, say day or week or even a good portion of our life!
 - c) God calls us to a life of obedience whether we sense His presence or not. God wants us to enjoy a full, rich life of trusting Him. Yes if we continue to trust in Jesus as both God and as complete payment for our sins, we are saved no matter what. God wants more than that. He wants a life of obedience whether we sense His presence or not! Why? Is it for His benefit? No, it is for our benefit. God's "silence" is far better than any and all ways of life that come from turning from Him. That's a key point of this lesson.
 - d) On that positive point, I can finish Joshua's speech to all the Israelites:
15. Verse 14: "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."
- a) Joshua ends this speech by telling the Israelites in effect to abandon their old (pagan) gods and focus on worshipping the true God. For many Israelites, even though they have been through all of the wars and watched God worked, they still have not abandoned some of the pagan gods (and their statues) that their parents passed on to them.
 - i) If you think you and I are any better than these Israelites, we have another thing coming. Think of situations where we don't really take "God along with us". Think of the parts of our lives that we still do things that are not pleasing to Him. I'm not saying we have to be perfect, but growing closer to God is always about obedience and learning to trust Him with every aspect of our lives.
 - b) Now we come to the most famous sentence in the latter part of this book. The last sentence of Verse 15 has the phrase: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." That phrase is commonly written on doors of many Jews and Christians homes. It is used as a "calling card" to show that the residents of this house are dedicated to God.
 - c) Let me explain the significance of that phrase "Me and my household", we will serve the Lord". A single adult is the head of a "household of one". If you are married with or without children, or even grown children, you are still in charge of your household.
 - i) My point is if you show me a "head of a household" that is dedicated to following God, then I will usually show you a household of people that follows Him. Usually when a man is committed to following God, the family usually follows.
 - ii) If you are not the head of the household, the New Testament teaches to "win over" the head of the household by your conduct (See 1st Corinthians 7:15-16). The point is we can't win over anyone by lecturing. We can win over people by living the type of life that is pleasing to Him and being obedient of what He asks of us.
 - iii) Further, when we sin, it should not only be confessed to God, but also to the people we have hurt or "let down" which usually includes our own family.
 - iv) My main point here is that if we learn to seek God regularly and give it "all we have" and learn to put the needs of others over our own needs, we will lead our family through our obedience closer to Christ.
 - v) I am getting at the idea that if we, as head of a household, seek and obey God, our family will usually follow.
 - vi) Yes I know of some tragic exceptions. What I also know is that the best solution to life is to stick close to God and be obedient of what He calls us to do, despite our circumstances and despite any feelings to the contrary at any given moment.

16. Verse 16: Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the LORD to serve other gods!
¹⁷ It was the LORD our God himself who brought us and our fathers up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. ¹⁸ And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God."
- a) This part of the chapter reminds me of a big rally. Here is the entire nation of Israelites all yelling that they will serve the true God. The Israelites are saying we remember the great miracles that God has done and we will do what He has commanded us to do.
- i) Pay attention to Joshua's response to what the Israelites said in the next verse:
17. Verse 19: Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you."
- a) At first, I visualize this big rally, where Joshua wants the crowd to yell even louder for God by saying in effect, "You don't really mean it." One wonders if Joshua is saying, "You don't really serve God" in order to get the crowd more pumped up and yell louder.
- i) It's kind of funny to read of the crowd saying they will serve God and then Joshua responds in Verse 19 with "You are not able to serve God".
- ii) The problem with "pump the crowd up" rallies is that it only works for a short time. It is only good until the next rally. Such rallies do get one's adrenaline pumping and it effective for a short time. The problem is that long-term obedience comes from trust and not from emotional "fervor".
- b) Which leads to Joshua's real point: You, the Israelites are going through the motions of worshipping God, but your hearts are not in it. It is like the people who go to church, but never do much with their lives over and above that. It is also like the periods of our lives when we go through the "motions" of Christianity, but our hearts are not in it. That is what Joshua is saying in effect to the Israelites.
- c) It may help at this point to understand the appeal of these foreign gods. These pagan gods are much more specific in their purposes. In other words, one god may be used for bringing good weather. Another god represented having children. One can see how tempting that would be to worship a false god just to "cover all of our bases" in case the "true God" is not responding to pray at that time.
- i) Now think about our lives: In order to make things work, we wrongly think we have to help God. We think we have to use "methods" to help God accomplish what we want (as opposed to what God wants). The modern equivalent of "foreign gods" is when we use our own efforts to "help God along" as if He needs our help. It is about trying to solve our problems via our own efforts.
- ii) So what is the difference between just "going forward in faith" versus trying to "help God along"? The difference is when we are knowingly going against God's will or God's word in order to accomplish something. The difference is seeking other methods (which are technically other "gods") in order to accomplish some sort of goal. If we have been praying and God is silent, then sometimes we do have to just go forward in faith and trust that He is still there and still working.
- d) Meanwhile, back at the big rally: Joshua is warning that if you continue to do what you have been doing (i.e., mixing Jewish rituals with the rituals of foreign pagan gods), know that you (the Israelites) will suffer disaster over time. It is one thing to say you love God and it is another of putting your actions where your mouths are. Speaking of which:

18. Verse 21: But the people said to Joshua, "No! We will serve the LORD." ²² Then Joshua said, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD." "Yes, we are witnesses," they replied. ²³ "Now then," said Joshua, "throw away the foreign gods that are among you and yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."
- a) Joshua is saying to the audience in effect, "OK, you say you want to serve God, then "put your money where your mouth is" and throw away the idols you own.
 - i) Remember that in that time era and location, statues represented these foreign gods. I'm sure the parents of these Israelites had some of these "statues" when left Egypt and lived in the desert. I'm guessing those pagan idols were past on to their children. Now Joshua is saying to throw those things away for good.
 - b) When one when considers becoming a Christian, it is essential that one not just make an emotional decision, but actually considers what that decision means for our life. I am grateful when I first made that commitment in a church, some elders took me aside and told me that eventually all my old friends and my family would find out and to consider what that means. The point is when we commit our lives to serving God we should not make that decision lightly.
 - c) As we live our lives for Christ, God has this way of showing us areas of our life that are not completely given over to Him. Those areas are in effect, "little gods" we still worship. That is what is being represented by what Joshua is announcing to this crowd.
 - d) Now we get the crowd's final response:
19. Verse 24: And the people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God and obey him."
- a) The difference between the crowd's first response to Joshua and this second response here in Verse 24 is the crowd now uses the word "obey". The Israelites made this statement and now God holds them responsible for that statement.
 - b) When we make a commitment to serving God, we find that our life changes in that God holds us accountable for that commitment. Ever notice how Christians can't "get away with things" that others can? It is due to our accountability to that commitment.
 - i) OK, enough said on that issue.
20. Verse 25: On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws. ²⁶ And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.
- a) Scholars debate what Joshua meant by the statement, "recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God". Some believe it is Joshua writing the "book of Joshua" and making it part of the Old Testament "cannon" of scripture. Others believe it is just a written record that these Israelites agreed to obey God's laws as recorded in the five books of Moses.
 - b) The main point of all of this is the Israelites have now put themselves on the record as making a commitment to follow and be obedient to God. Therefore, if in the future they decide to turn away from God, the leaders can point to a specific time when the Israelites have actually agreed to follow God and His decrees for their lives.
 - c) The point as it affects you and me is that if we have committed our lives to following Jesus and believe that He is both God and a human that died for our sins, God the Father now holds accountable for that statement.
21. Verse 27: "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God." ²⁸ Then Joshua sent the people away, each to his own inheritance.
- a) The point here is the last thing Joshua did before dismissing the crowd is that he wrote down on a big stone the Israelites commitment to God. It is Joshua's way of saying, "You understand what a commitment to God is all about. You have agreed to follow God, not just by going through the rituals, but by giving your "heart" to God and follow Him by making every effort to do so". Now that you the Israelites understand that commitment, you are free to go home and live your lives.

- b) While we as Christians are not under the law, we also choose to live our lives for God in all that we do. In that sense, we too, have made a binding commitment to God.
 - i) But I thought the bible says we are saved by faith alone? That is true. It is also true that if we have such faith, then our actions will naturally follow that faith and we will live accordingly. (See James 2:20 and 2:26 on this point.)
22. Verse 29: After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. ³⁰ And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.
- a) The point here is Joshua died soon after this speech. He was buried within the area that was part of his personal inheritance as decided during the big "land distribution plan" that we covered a few lessons back.
23. Verse 31: Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel.
- a) The point of this verse is that Joshua's speech was successful in that during his lifetime and everyone experienced Joshua's leadership, the Israelites were obedient to God.
 - b) The interesting thing is that this same verse listed here is also found in Judges 2:7. The point of this verse as listed in the book of Judges is that the next generation, "spiritual speaking" fell apart.
 - i) "After that whole generation (Joshua's generation) had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel." (Judges 2:10, text in parenthesis added).
 - c) So let me ask the big question: Why did Joshua's generation fail to pass their values on to the next generation? Why did the next generation lack obedience? The truth is we don't know, but that lesson has been repeated through all of history. I could make the same comment about the American "baby boom" generation, but I'll let that go.
 - d) So how do biblical values correctly get past on to the next generation? The bible tells us to raise our children in the way they should go (i.e., teach them to follow God) and when they are older, they will not depart from that teaching. (This is a paraphrase of Proverbs 22:6). The point is that good values have to be past on from one generation to the next and the failure to do so, will cause great harm to any society.
24. Verse 32: And Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants.
- a) So why mention this bit of "ancient history" here? Here were the bones of Joseph, that are now over 400 years old. Now they get buried. Why wait that long to bury them and why is this fact mentioned here at the end of the book?
 - i) This is mentioned because Joshua is more than just another bible book. It represents the fulfillment of promises made to the "founders" of the Jewish nation, that God would give the Israelites a homeland.
 - ii) Joseph wanted to be buried in the Promised Land and not Egypt (even though Joseph ruled over Egypt as "second in command"). Joseph understood that he had a future home in "the" Promised Land, which is our next life. By burying Joseph's bones in Israel, it is a symbolic act of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and even Jacobs' sons (which include Joseph) that the promise of inheriting their own land would happen one day.
 - b) So does this mean that "true" Christians need to be buried in Israel? No. It is just symbolic of the promises made to the Jewish "founders" that they will have a new life in "the" Promised Land, just as we as believers, will have a home in heaven.
25. Verse 33: And Eleazar son of Aaron died and was buried at Gibeah, which had been allotted to his son Phinehas in the hill country of Ephraim.
- a) The final verse mentions the death of the high priest.

- b) The point of the death of Joshua, the bones of Joseph and the death of the high priest represented the end of the era of the land of Israel being conquered and that same land being divided by tribe. That is why this book ends this way. It emphasizes that the promises made by God have been fulfilled.
26. OK, what I am to take away from this lesson? The idea of a commitment to God is more than just going to church and occasionally praying. It is about giving our "all" to God. It is the idea that if we have committed our lives to God, He expects obedience in that we are trusting Him with every aspect of our lives and we are seeking His guidance for our lives.
 27. Let's pray: Father, Help us to make a complete commitment to You and not just give you "lip service". Show us areas of our lives that we have still not given over to You and help us to change in a way that is pleasing to You. Help us during the times when You are "silent" to remember that You have worked in our lives in the past, and You are still working now even though we may not sense Your presence. Help us to live a life that makes a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

Supplement: Bibliography

“If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants.” (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted *me* to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to further commentaries as listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in this study. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV). Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) and The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189. “The Message” copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over the past lessons. The specific commentaries on Joshua are listed first, and then the bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to “audio” commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in Real Audio® or MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on Joshua by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://joncourson.com>
2. Commentary on Joshua by Bob Davies. They are available in Real Audio® format at http://www.northcountrychapel.com/audio_studies/index.php
3. Commentary on Joshua by David Guzik. It is available for free in text format. The web address is http://www.enduringword.com/library_commentaries.html.
4. Commentary On The Old Testament, Vol. 2: Joshua-2 Samuel By C.F. Keil & F. Delitzsch; Accessed electronically via QuickVerse® Software, from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved. Omaha, Nebraska
5. Commentary on Joshua by Chuck Missler, available at K-House Ministries 1-800-KHOUSE1. The web address is <http://www.khouse.org>. It is also available at <http://firefighters.org/html/library.cfm>
6. Gleanings in Joshua by Arthur W. Pink. Copyright 1964 by the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. ISBN# 0-8024-3004-X
7. The Defender’s Study Bible by Dr. Henry Morris World Publishing (1995) ISBN: 052910444X
8. The MacArthur Study Bible with commentary by John MacArthur Nelson Bibles (1997) ISBN: 0849912229
9. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm
10. The Expositor’s Bible Encyclopedia, Zondervan Publications, (via CD-ROM 1998 release). This is a multi-volume encyclopedia with notes on every verse of the Bible. (It is available at Christian bookstores.) Paperback books are published on individual Bible books from this source.
11. When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties -- Norman L. Geisler, Thomas Howe; Baker Book House 1999 (Available at Christian Bookstores.)
12. Numbers in Scripture by E.W. Bullinger. Published in 1967 by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel Inc., P.O. Box 2607, Grand Rapids, MI 49501. ISBN: 0-8254-2238-8.
13. I also refer to Greg Koukl’s apologetic ministry which is Stand to Reason at www.str.org