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WINFIELD BIBLE CAMP - 2003

FAITH: CHALLENGES AND CONSOLATIONS

LAST WORDS AT THE END OF AN AGE

Speaker: Bro. Andrew Hill

Study#2: Joshua - Choose whom you will serve!

Reading: Joshua 23 and 24

Thank you brother Daniel, and my dearly beloved brethren and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ and our dear young people.

The tribute that is given to Joshua is best expressed in that last chapter, Joshua 24, where it says in verse 31, 'Israel served the LORD **all the days of Joshua**, and all the days of the elders that over lived Joshua and which had known all the works of the LORD that He had done for Israel'. Brethren and sisters, it's our purpose today to have a look at this outstanding warrior, the servant of the LORD, and to draw out the lessons for us in this warfare of faith. Of course, the circumstances are different, the leaders are different, we have a different battlefield, but the warfare of faith, b&s, is fought on the same principles the same issues of obedience or compromise, of endurance or capitulation, to overcome or to wave the white flag of surrender. It is true, b&s, that we see the mark of the Canaanite all about us: as Christ overcame the world, so we are to gird up the loins of our mind and cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and to bring into captivity, every thought to the obedience of Christ. So it's a continual warfare of faith. So brethren and sisters, we too, take heed to ourselves!

You know, it has been said that overcoming the flesh is not a race that needs to be won, it's a race that needs to be started. You see, b&s, all too often we find it too hard and we give up at the starting point, and we find ourselves slipping back; so, what we want to do today is to remind ourselves of these issues of overcoming, lest we weaken and think that it's all a bit too hard, and find ourselves settling right down quite comfortably, being lovers of pleasures and settle right down alongside the Canaanitish way of life. You see, we all appreciate that this is an age of indulgences, it's an age of comfort, it's an age of rationalizing everything away; it's an age of compromise, not vigilance, nor an age of perseverance. To deny self and to take up the cross and to follow Christ is foolishness and it's foreign to the world. The world knows nothing of denying self, so that spirit, b&s, that spirit allowed to affect our thinking, or sap our spiritual energies, and our preaching will suffer, our personal alertness will weaken under that pressure, and our voice of concern and our voice of exhortation will fade and

we'll become Christadelphians not by performance but by profession. The very real danger, b&s, is that we might lose our children, because if we're not fighting against sin, in all of its guises, if we're not resisting these impulses to self gratification, then we'll be swamped by the pressure both from within our nature and from without. We must keep the lifestyle and the principles of the Canaanite out of our lives and out of our homes; and everybody will know what it is that they personally have to do to overcome. We all know our weaknesses and it was pointed out to me once that we need to lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us. In one conversation that I had and I can't remember the brother that I was talking to on this point, but back in my mind I was thinking that it probably was brother Dennis Gillett that passed on this little observation, that in so many conversations between brethren there was a confession that there was a particular sin that they had, that so easily beset them; some particular weakness that they had to battle with, wrestle with, try and try and try to overcome some particular weakness that so easily besets us. Now whether that's true or not in your case, or my case, we have to assess that for ourselves. But it's very true, to lay aside the weight, the cares of this life and those things that impede our race; but also that we might overcome that sin that doth so easily beset us. So we must examine ourselves unless the day of Christ come upon us and overtake us as a thief in the night, we **must take stock** and we must see where we're heading. There's one truism, 'that if we are painfully aware of how difficult it is to wage this warfare, and feel the struggle, then b&s, we are overcoming. If we feel no pain and if we feel at ease, then the battle is really over, because we've lost it'. As brother John Carter once said, 'The more a man knows of sin, the less he is aware of what it really is; sin is so deceptive'!

So let's summarize what we know about Joshua! Some 40 years or so younger than Moses, he became his servant, he became his minister, his understudy. His military skills first became known in the warfare against Amalek. When Moses went up into the mount to receive the Law, Joshua made the ascent with him. When Moses took the tabernacle outside the camp, Joshua stayed there with the tabernacle. Joshua was chosen to represent Ephraim as one of the 12 spies. He with Caleb was found faithful when the whole generation over 20 was condemned to die in the wilderness. Joshua was filled with the Spirit of God and was encouraged. Let's come back to the very start! let's come back to Joshua 1 and verse 5, he was directly encouraged by God, verse 5, 'There shalt not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses so I'll be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee, **be strong and of a good courage**'. So the key to his success as it is with any brother or sister and particularly our young people, taking up a new life in Christ, in verse 7, 'only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it, to the right hand or the left that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein. For then thou shalt make thy way prosperous and have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage, be not afraid neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest'.

Three times he is encouraged to be strong and of a good courage. So Yahweh would be with Joshua and would be with them, despite the high-walled cities, despite the hundreds of horses and chariots who looked so invincible, despite the confederacy of kings and armies. So in some cases, the assurance of Moses that with God's help, one would chase a thousand, and two would put 10,000 to flight was true! But success, b&s, success with God's help only came **when they went out to battle!** and so therefore, we need to be **active**, we need to apply the knowledge and the faith that we have and get into combat mode in our warfare of faith. Young people, particularly whilst you are young, you need to learn your bible quotes. We need to encourage our little ones to learn their bible quotes, and I think it's absolutely fantastic that's all part of the youth group program here at the bible school, to memorize bible quotes and to read them, and in particular, I would advocate that young people learn and read the Proverbs. Read a chapter of the Proverbs every day because those words are specifically written for young men and young women, so parents and grandparents can set an example, a faithful example. Young people can observe the example set by their elders, and having prepared well, young people can go out there like Joshua and enter into the warfare of faith and get involved in a work of the truth. So, young people, given the opportunity, don't ever shirk the opportunity, get good valuable experience and put that youthful energy and enthusiasm to good use, with careful planning and preparation. We would always advocate that young brethren and sisters get involved and see how God will bless the work. So Joshua under Moses learnt well, he learnt leadership, he learnt service, he learnt from Moses a zeal and a fervour for the Word of Yahweh, and he learnt meekness and he learnt selflessness. So when the opportunity came he was ready, he was ready to face huge Gentile opposition, or to deal with his people when they were slack and less than committed. So with God's help he persevered, and at the end of his life he calls the elders together and gives them and us a very wonderful summing up of what the real issues are; and, as we said, the end of Joshua 24 shows that that generation heeded his warnings.

So this is an exhortation for us, before his death. These are final words, words that are carefully chosen, words that are weighted with experience, convictions that have been honed and hardened by the heat of many a long day, so they are absolutely appropriate for us. So let's come across to Joshua 23 and verse 14, 'Behold, this day (looking back over his long life) I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; **all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof**'. God had fulfilled His part of the agreement as in the beginning of this letter. So, Joshua 23 verse 1, 'And it came to pass a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age'. So the last couple of chapters here, now bring us to a point where it was a time of rest - after many battles, it was a danger time! This is a dangerous period for Israel when the pressure is off, when people relax, when people enjoy the fruits of their labours, but Joshua is pointing out that it wasn't over yet! Chapter 23 shows that there was still much to do to complete the purging of the land, to continue

the expulsion of the Canaanite from the land, to expel all those people with their gross immoral practices. So God had begun to do a good work amongst them, but they must press on and they must complete the occupation. So as we glance through this chapter we'll see how the aged warrior gathers his chiefs unto him, the 70 elders, heads of families, judges and overseers, his team of trusted peers. They had shared many trials of faith, they could be trusted! they were of like mind, they were true yoke fellows; to them he laid down this solemn charge.

Firstly, as we noticed in this chapter, firstly, he paints the bigger picture, to see where they had come from to remind them of how Yahweh's hand was so evident in all of their success. Verse 3, 'Ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God is **He that hath fought for you**'. Do we notice one obvious omission there, b&s? There's no self praise, is there? all that Yahweh your God hath done. There's no mention of a personal role as **leader**; so like Moses his mentor, like so many bible men and women, they are too busy with the promotion of the work of God to worry about self promotion or self recognition, they fade right into the background and God is brought into the foreground. So Yahweh had wrought many wonders and signs in their campaigns; He'd moved heaven and earth to aid their battles; He'd marked out by lot the bounds of their habitations, so the door was open!

Verse 5, 'The LORD your God, He shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God has promised unto you'. You know, there's something very positive about verse 5 for all of us, **God will go before us** to lead us in our warfare of faith, to give us the final victory. B&S, let's take that to ourselves, to our own personal life, to our own individual or family situations. Let's do what we can and let God do what we can't. B&S, there would be some here who come to bible schools looking for very real refreshment, a very real desire to be rebuilt, to be fortified in their faith, to be rejuvenated in their faith, so let's encourage each other, b&s, and let's never be afraid to trust an unknown future to an all-knowing God; don't be afraid to place your life in the hand of God, for He is all-knowing. So as the Son of God showed, have faith in God; there may be a mountain of despair there in front of us, but if it be His will, that can be cast into the sea.

'So what things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them', there is the assurance of the power of prayer for all of us, but b&s, how do we use prayer? Is prayer in your life like a steering wheel? or like the spare tire in the trunk? Is prayer powerful in your life? perhaps it's the case of 'help Thou mine unbelief!' perhaps we need to lift the scales of doubt from our eyes, perhaps we need to go on believing that God is for us, perhaps it's a case of us trying to see, perhaps through the fog of despair, through the dark threatening clouds and to see the brilliant light of God above, that's always there so constant, and His ears are ever open to hear our cry. For us to see through that fog of despair, to see if we can possibly see at the end of the Lord, that He is **very pitiful and of tender mercy**. So we can go on believing, can't we?

Verse 6, 'Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the Law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left'. So here we have again, the same comments that we read earlier on, the keys to success imparted to Joshua at the very start. **KEEP AND DO!** So preserve and act upon it, press ahead, don't be distracted by side issues; this book is an infallible guide, it's a source book for all of life's perplexing questions; be ye therefore very courageous. So we need to steel ourselves to resist the temptation that's ever present for us to mix with the Canaanites as in verse 7. B&S and young people, let's take courage to resist and to fight temptation effectively, we need to draw a line in the sand, we need to take courage not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful. We need to pick up the words of 1 Corinthians 16 verse 13, 'watch ye, stand fast in the faith. Quit you like men, be strong!'

So verse 7 is a downward declension from the faith. 'Come from among them', because Joshua is saying if you seek their idols, if you come under their influence if you are dominated by them, then you'll lose your warfare of faith. There are **a lot of idols out there**, b&s, that are beckoning to us; there are a lot of idols inviting us to spend a little while with them, to enjoy their entertainments, to socialize, to talk their talk, and come under their spell. B&S and young people, again, 'let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall'.

Verse 8, 'But cleave (1692) unto the LORD your God as ye have done unto this day'. Stick like glue is the meaning of the words, **stick like glue** as in marriage! This is the exhortation of Barnabas, you know the passage in Acts 11 verse 23, 'that having seen the grace of God, he was glad and exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would **cleave (4347) unto the Lord**', exactly the same sentiment. So here Joshua says, 'look at the blessings of God, look at them; they abound all around you, look at them', so evident in all their campaigns. Thank God therefore and take courage with a sense of purpose and cleave to Yahweh your God. You know, b&s, we can do that! you know there's a very poignant little episode in the life of Paul; Paul being shipwrecked, and saved from the shipwreck, eventually gets towards Rome. Lands on the peninsula, he comes up to Appii-forum and the three Taverns, brethren came from those places to meet him as this little company of Roman soldiers with their prisoner wind their way up towards Rome. The brethren came from those little centres, and Paul when he saw the brethren come to him, to greet him, it says, 'that he thanked God and took courage', and all they did was to walk some distance to meet Paul. So whatever little thing we do, b&s, to encourage our brethren and sisters, going out of our way to meet them and to just simply fellowship, to encourage them; we who received that benefit **thank God and take courage**. Only a small thing perhaps almost passed over, there it is tucked into the record to show that these little things that we can do for each other, **inspire** our faith, as it did Paul! So God would prosper their powers despite the obstacles, so Shamgar would destroy 600 and Samson would destroy a 1,000 Philistines and Jonathan and his armour-bearer would overcome the opposition!

Verse 11, Verse 11 to verse 13 is one of the most expressive warnings of the whole of scripture. 'Take good heed therefore unto yourselves that you love the LORD your God. Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even those that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them and go in unto them and they to you: Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you, but they shall be snares and traps unto you and scourges in your sides and thorns in your eyes until you perish from off this good land which the LORD your God has given you'. They needed to take special care not to be deceived, not to be enticed, not to be a profane person who would sell their birthright for a mess of pottage. You know, these verses have very particular relevance for our young people. Let's make this point, **that many have made shipwreck of their faith by sailing too close, by ignoring the warnings.** Warnings like this! In their friendships, in their relationships with the world, when they go to college, when they go to work, get involved in all of those team activities in the workforce; long gone are the days when you can work from 9 to 5. You're involved, you're committed to working as a team and have a lot of outside hours' activities. We and our young people need to take these warning to heart! these verses would have to be the clearest warnings against **friendships with outsiders**; the words of Christ about Lot are very similar.

You know, the warning of Lot's day and Noah's day, was not the violence and the corruption, but the warning 'even so shall it be when the Son of man is revealed', the warning is twice, **remember Lot's wife!** because Lot strayed too close and he lost his most precious possessions, his wife and his family. So these are warnings **to not get too close!**

The captain of the Titanic was warned 6 times to slow down, to change course and to take a southern route, because icebergs had been sighted. The captain of the Titanic, b&s, ignored all warnings, he was the captain and he thought this ship is unsinkable! B&S and young people, particularly our young people, don't make the same mistake as the captain of the Titanic; none of us are invincible! we sail into dangerous waters if we play around with the world. If we know what's good for us, we'll heed the warnings of the scriptures, we'll heed the warnings of our parents and our grandparents and our true friends. We'll know that we're not invincible, we'll know that for our good we will deny self and we will change course, we can avoid disaster. When we do that, b&s, we can then celebrate a safe voyage. So the friendships that we have, the relationships that we have in the work force for example, as nice as they are, as friendly as they are, as respectable as they are, they are **outside the covenant with our God**; they don't share our love of God, they don't share our respect for His Word; but, let's speak openly. Let's not hide our light under a bushel, let's speak openly and naturally and positively and happily about the hope that we have, the kind of people that we are, the interest that we have, and to talk those things with our neighbours and with our work fellows. Tell them where we've been, that we've been to a bible school, the conversation will either happily go along that course or will, in fact, terminate fairly quickly. But nonetheless, if we do speak, speak openly and positively of the things that we've enjoyed together, but in the contact that we have with people outside the truth, let's have eyes of discernment, let's show discretion and above all let's be **careful**.

As Eve was deceived, so a handsome guy or a pretty face, or a close office relationship, can deceive us into becoming too familiar, perhaps too sympathetic, sometimes too involved, and a foolish heart deceives our minds. Let's be careful! let's be very careful about fair promises, and vain hopes because they can so easily lead to an unequal marriage. Unequal in the sense of 1 Corinthians 6, that in its train brings lifelong regret and some will testify to the truth of that; it will bring in its train, heartache and sorrow, 'as painful as snares, traps, scourges in your sides, thorns in your eyes', and I'm not exaggerating!

So what we need to do, b&s, is to inculcate some of these principles practically in the minds of our children when they're little tackers; it's no good trying to get these verses across to people in their late teens; we've got a wonderful bunch of teenagers there, they need these things reinforced in their minds because they've heard them from their childhood days. We need to be about the business of counselling our young people in the right ways and the wrong ways. We need to have our Sunday school lessons primed right up, the lessons of Genesis 6, the difference between the sons of God and the daughters of men; we need to have the lessons of seeking a wife for Isaac; we need to have the lesson of Samson; we need to have a lot of these proverbs right in the forefront of our minds and in the forefront of the minds of our children. You can only do that when you've got your children close with you. It's no good giving them a lecture and hope that they understand!

You know, the Proverbs, there's one expression I have for the Proverbs, it is **Prudence through Precept**. So all of these scriptures then, develop in their minds, an awareness, a sensitivity, to the right way, and a sensitivity to the wrong way. So we need to develop in them a conscience! Where did the young Joseph get his conscience from, when he was faced under that barrage from Potiphar's wife? He got it from his home, years before perhaps, some period of time when he was a lad, he had those principles, he had that conscience well and truly defined. Where did Daniel get his conscience from, that he purposed in his heart that he would not be defiled with the king's meat? He got that from the little group that were with him and the work that Josiah had done, all that education was given him so when as a young man he faced all of those temptations, he knew the path ahead. So, b&s, let our young people flee youthful lusts, follow after righteousness and those qualities of godliness with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart! So if our young people can be encouraged to enjoy the company of fellow Christadelphians, then that's going to stand them in good stead when they're alone, when they're with outsiders enjoying the social habitat of the world. There is much that we can do when our children are little to develop that conscience. So verse 13 talks about the fact that 'they would perish from off this good land'. Just as God had evicted the bulk of the Canaanites from off the land, so He would evict foolish Israel, they were an unfit tenant for the occupation of His land, so the issue is crystal clear; God has not fouled them in one as He had so wonderfully blessed them, just as surely He would destroy them **if they served other gods**. Let's remind ourselves, b&s, that **God is a jealous God**; so, young people, 'turn thy foot from the strange woman, turn thy foot from the unprincipled man'.

Joshua 24, having addressed his council of elders and advisers, Joshua now gathers all the tribes of Israel together to renew Yahweh's covenant with them. He calls them to Shechem and they presented themselves before God, most likely before the ark that was brought from Shiloh to Shechem. Joshua spoke the word of Yahweh in verse 2, this is a direct revelation of God through His servant Joshua. Verse 3 (all the way from verse 3 to verse 7) it points out how God Himself had been operative in their lives, in their history. In verse 7, we should note the point that He put darkness between you and the people of Egypt; **a physical separation as well as a new beginning**; so their eyes had seen it, they were eye witnesses of the signs and mighty wonders. They also heard of the blessings, not the cursing of Balaam. So God had fought for Israel in expelling the Canaanitish nations. The personal pronoun is mentioned there some 17 times, so God had been active in their midst very directly.

Then we come to verse 14, Joshua now directs a very personal exhortation to Israel and to us. 'Now therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and 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'. **To serve Him in sincerity and in truth!** You know, our fear of God is in profound reverence, knowing that He loves and chastens us for our profit, that as Hebrews says, 'that we might be partakers of His holiness if we are exercised thereby'. So in the light of God's gracious calling and His abundant blessings, b&s, we are happy to serve Him in sincerity (that is, completely) and in truth; and so, since Yahweh cannot look upon sin and deals with us without variableness, without shadow of turning, since He is so singular and pure, He cannot look with favour upon any double standards, any harbouring of any conflicting loyalties. So, b&s, we are asked in these passages as Joshua asked Israel, we are asked to put away, to cast off, any defiling association or interest. That's not easy to do! because the natural mind would not receive that advice, the natural mind does not receive gladly the call for self denial, but we're asked in these passages, chapters 23 and 24, to put away, like Jacob asked his wives, to put away the strange gods that are among us, we are asked to put away and to cast off anything that would defile. You know what that might be! I know what it might be in my life, so in effect, b&s, we are asked on the threshold of Christ's coming, we are asked **to clean up our lives**. We are asked to **put away the strange gods that may be amongst us**. You know, Jesus told the woman of Samaria the same things, that God **cannot** be one of a plurality of gods. He commands to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. For that to happen, b&s, we must lay aside every weight, and as we said, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.

So what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? There's no fellowship, is there? between light and darkness, between righteousness and unrighteousness; there's no common ground. There is to be no compromise, so sacrifice is required, self denial is required. We are a called and sanctified people and **holiness**, b&s, means **consecration**. **Holiness** means a 'purging of dead works and single-heartedly serving God'; James tells us that a double minded man is unstable in all of his ways, and think not that that man should receive anything of the Lord. Well, let's remember, b&s, our pioneer brethren have expressed it so well, 'the mind is insensibly affected by the

stream of thoughts that flow through it', so let's not put ourselves in a hazardous environment, where our senses are bombarded with messages which are not of God. So the mind is insensibly affected by the stream of thought that's flowing through it. Is the stream pure? or is the stream a little muddy? You know, good habits need to be cultivated, bad habits grow wild!

So verse 15, there must be a choice, a voluntary reaction; coercion, of course, would not cleanse the nation as king Josiah found out, the choice of action: 'choose you this day whom ye will serve!' You and I, b&s, cannot serve God and mammon (the Syrian god of riches) we cannot be a slave to both masters, as Moses said in his last exhortation, 'I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life!' Here they were at Shechem with the mounts Ebal and Gerizim on both sides; there they were and the choice was between blessing and cursing and the God of heaven with all of His proven goodness and power was there as a very present help in time of need, to remind them of His goodness. Or else, or else there was the power of the Canaanitish gods with all of the carnal immorality and all of the abominable degrading practices; gods had no power to save; gods were an excuse to express all the bestial instincts common to man. So Joshua says, 'choose you this day to abhor that which is evil. Do you know what that word 'abhor' means? You know when you take cough mixture, some pretty strong stuff, you know, my wife is very healthy because her mother said, castor oil would fix everything! can you feel a shudder as it goes down through your spine as you imagine taking castor oil? She's very healthy, she overcame those coughs and colds in a hurry, dare not have the castor oil!

The word 'abhor' is just that word, 'shudder', can't bear the thought of castor oil! Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good! So it requires us, b&s, to have our senses warning us of danger, our senses to be on the alert, warning us of the danger of that course of action, of that pleasure, of that entertainment, of that sport, of that career choice. It may be hazardous, it's dangerous! Can you ever read the bible after you've watched a television program? I think most of us would admit that we can't! It had such a powerful impact upon our mind, all those images flooding through the mind, affecting the mind, you can't just switch it off and then do our bible readings, it's impossible! All those images and the lifestyle of the world just filters through our brain and lodges there. So we need to be very careful, those images that we leave on our minds, those things that are worldly, not of God; you see, the mind would not be thinking pure and wholesome thoughts in many places of the world. So many places and some company is dangerous, and we know it will weaken us, so we need to 'abhor' it and cleave to that which is good. Of course, the Sunday School lesson is so true, that Sunday School hymn,

God's way is best,
 Although my eyes may view His plan with great surprise
 While doubts and fears within me rise
 His way is best.

Actually, isn't it beautiful to hear your grandchildren sing that hymn? hear those words from the mouth of babes and sucklings? That's so true! but as adults, we really don't believe the words, do we, at times? 'So as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD': like Abraham leaving his household, like Noah building the ark with his family all getting involved. The families building the walls in Nehemiah's day; Caleb and his daughters, the elect lady and her children walking in the truth, many families and many generations have centred their family life and are close to their children, and serving God is the principle activity of that family, not professing to but actively serving. They're all involved and they're all supportive and I think it's absolutely beautiful to see the moms take their little ones and their prams when they're giving out leaflets. The whole family's out there and that's a practice which has continued through their childhood and youthful days.

So verse 17, '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, which did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way wherein we went and among all the peoples through whom we passed. The LORD drove out from among us all the people even the Amorites which dwelt in the Land, therefore we also will serve the LORD; for He is our God'. That was their response! that's their first response, they were horrified that Joshua should accuse them of wanting to serve idols. So they endorsed Joshua's summing up all of God's providential care. In verse 18, it says there, 'that therefore will we serve the LORD, for He is our God', brave words, good intentions; you know, it's somewhat comparable to our baptismal vows, isn't it? We will serve the Lord, but Joshua's going to drive the point home in verse 19.

Verse 19, 'Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for He is an holy God, a jealous El, (a mighty One); He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins'. So with strange gods amongst them, their hearts were divided. He is a holy God, He is a separate God and so Peter could say, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy! He is a mighty One and He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins, He will by no means clear the guilty. Verse 20, 'If you 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'. So to **serve strange gods**, b&s, is to let your heart be captivated, captivated by that which is foreign to God, that which fills the minds of the people around us, the pleasures, the jobs, the sports and the cares of this life. We need to stop and consider, b&s, the awful implications of God being **holy**, of God being **jealous** in all of His ways. God is not mocked!

So verse 21, the second response is, 'The people said unto Joshua, **Nay, but we will serve Yahweh**'. I've got no doubt, b&s, that's very much like our prayers at the memorial meeting, when we present ourselves before the emblems of our Lord, good intentions, genuine earnest vows, but in this case, strong and loud protestations did not sway Joshua. Verse 22, 'Ye are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen ye the LORD, to serve Him'. So he's pressing the point the third time, when they said that they had chosen to serve Yahweh, they were to stand witness to their own words! Let's just recall our own position: we have made a vow before our God at baptism, that we

will serve Yahweh; can we ever so carelessly walk away from our baptismal vows? It's far, far more than reneging from promises or resigning from club membership or just drifting away. We have made vows before the God of all the earth. Dare we ever treat the table of the Lord as a give or take it hour of the week, because we are really too busy about other things. So how do we come prepared to stand on 'holy' ground and remember our Lord'? So we are witnesses against ourselves.

So, verse 22, they said, 'We are witnesses'. Yes, they publicly felt confident of fulfilling their vows but, of course, when the acid test came they failed; and flesh fails, as it always does. So how really devote are we? how intense are our fervent prayers? Verse 23 Joshua said, 'Now therefore, put away the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel'. If you are so sure of your convictions, prove it!, that's what he's saying, not in a negative way; to put away their strange gods that hurt them, for Joshua to insist that they did have strange gods, but more that the nation must positively incline their heart unto Yahweh God of Israel. So, b&s, when we get rid of certain things out of our life, let's not place ourselves in a vacuum; there's got to be cleansing, but there's got to be reformation. In this same spot, this very same spot, Jacob had buried and had put away the strange gods; now they had to go through their tents, and through their households and get rid of those strange gods. To examine their lives and their hearts and to purge out the leaven of idolatry, of whatever kind.

In verse 24 of Joshua 24, the people said unto Joshua, 'The LORD our God we will serve and His voice will we obey'. Could you and I say that? with all of our heart, can we say that **exactly like that**? having been pressed the way Joshua pressed Israel? So he cuts a covenant and there was more in this solemn ceremony; there was a stone of witness, a pillar, a highly visible sign that they were on holy ground. So this stone that was erected in this spot, was a silent witness to the covenant, to the words of Yahweh and to their own words of truth and of falsehood. So the people were there at Shechem taking it all in, all of the surroundings, all of those things that spoke of the landmarks in Israel's history. They had their own declarations ringing in their ears, they had the intense look of their leader boring into their hearts, and further, across the hills and the valleys they could see the evidence of this good land that God had provided for them.

Every inducement was there for them to hear and to do the words of this covenant. God had been with them, they knew that by experience that He would continue to be with them **if** (that's one of the most powerful words in the whole of scripture), two letters 'if', so there's a wonderful yet sobering application here for us. Do you know who is our stone of witness? Do you know who is like a Rock and a Stone, the Stone of Israel? that is listening to our vows, our declarations of serving Yahweh in sincerity and truth? Do you know who is our Stone right alongside of us? The Lord Jesus Christ. So when we do come before the table of our absent Lord to partake of the emblems and partake of the emblems in remembrance of Him; when we come to renew our covenant and to recall our baptismal vows of service, of purging and of dedication, it's as though the Lord Jesus Christ as the great Stone of witness is present to witness, to know our hearts and to read our minds and to silently record in the Lamb's book of life, our

commitment or our compromise to the great covenant sealed in His blood. Christ is in Revelation, the faithful and true witness! You might have your husband or your wife or your family along side of you, but b&s, when we're in that position, we have the Lord Jesus Christ right along side of us, listening to our prayers of dedication.

So the final verses record how Joshua died. A man of faith and integrity, initiative, resolution, endurance, a leader from start to finish in word and in personal example. A man worthy of double honour, labouring in battle, labouring in word and labouring in doctrine. A man who left his mark on all of that generation. They buried him, but his works and challenging words live on. B&S, let's heed His final words, 'shall we hear and do, and harden not our hearts?' Shall we respond to the challenge, 'choose you this day whom ye **will serve**'. We are witnesses to our response, our Lord Jesus Christ is also witness to our response, but thank God, He is a merciful and faithful High priest, who will intercede for us when we come with a true repentant spirit and seek the Father's forgiveness!