



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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Joshua 24:1-3, 13-15, 21-24 **New Revised Standard Version** **December 9, 2018**

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, December 9, 2018**, is from **Joshua 24:1-3, 13-15, 21-24**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Joshua 24:1) Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God.

Rather than gather the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel at Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle were located (about 10 miles away), Joshua called them to Shechem where the LORD first met Abraham after He told

him to leave Haran. At Shechem, the LORD told Abraham that He was giving the land of the Canaanites to his offspring, and there Abraham built an altar to the LORD (see Genesis 12:6-7). After Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, they met near Shechem where for the first time in the land Joshua renewed the covenant (the agreement between the LORD and Abraham's descendants) that the LORD had made with them through Moses and where Joshua taught them the Law of God once again (Joshua 8:30-35). Now, as he neared death, Joshua renewed the covenant once again and taught the leaders of the Israelites how to govern God's people and lead them to live according to the Law of Moses.

(Joshua 24:2) And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods.

Joshua's words to the people of God were the words of the LORD. He spoke as a judge and prophet: "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel." Joshua began the renewal of God's covenant with them by reminding the Israelites that they served the LORD (Jehovah or Yahweh), and it was the LORD (not a worthless idol) Who had made the covenant (agreement) with them. The LORD was their God, and the LORD had led Abraham from Ur, where his father had worshiped other gods, and where Abraham may have worshiped other gods in addition to the LORD. Joshua

reminded them of the basic facts of the LORD's work in the lives of their ancestors and in their own lives. The LORD had led Abraham, (and in verses we will not study this week) the LORD had led Moses, and through Moses the LORD had freed them from slavery in Egypt. The LORD had defeated their enemies in the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership, and the LORD and Joshua did not want the Israelites to worship any gods but the LORD. Joshua was not just teaching them their history, Joshua was proclaiming the Word of the LORD, the truth. The LORD did not save Abraham because he worshiped only the LORD, but despite the fact that he did not worship the LORD exclusively. By grace, the LORD made a new beginning with Abraham and his offspring. However, their worship of the LORD exclusively lasted only until the death of Joshua and the leaders who had followed him into the Promised Land (as the Book of Judges so sadly illustrates).

(Joshua 24:3) Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac;

In verses 3-12, through Joshua the LORD reminded the people how He had provided for the needs of Abraham, Isaac, Esau, Jacob, their fathers and themselves. The LORD had given Esau and his descendants the land in the hill country of Seir to possess, but before giving the 12 tribes of Israel the land of Canaan, the LORD had led

Jacob and his sons into Egypt until He freed them from slavery through Moses. The LORD showed them through many miracles that there were no gods greater than the LORD, their God.

(Joshua 24:13) I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant.

The LORD did not give the Promised Land to the Israelites earlier in their history because, as the LORD told Abraham, “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete (or full)” (Genesis 15:16). Because of their idolatry and wickedness, the Amorites eventually forfeited their right to live in the land; so, the LORD gave it to others, even as the Israelites in the northern kingdom of Israel eventually forfeited their right to live there because of their idolatry and wickedness so that the LORD had them carried off into exile and the kingdom destroyed in 722 B.C. The LORD drove out the Canaanites slowly so the wild beasts would not take over the towns and make them uninhabitable as He promised Moses He would (see Deuteronomy 7:20-23). The Israelites were able to eat from productive land and live in homes almost immediately because of the way the LORD led them into the land and conquered their enemies through Joshua’s leadership.

(Joshua 24:14) “Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.

Unhappily, some of the Israelites were still clinging to some of their household gods to guarantee them security and success in the Promised Land. After reciting many of the blessings and miracles that the LORD had bestowed upon the Israelites, Joshua called them to uphold their part of the covenant that God had made with them through the Law of Moses: the LORD expected them to love and obey Him. Joshua gave the people good and sufficient reasons to obey the LORD when he described some of the acts of God in their history. They were to fear the LORD, and when they had seen firsthand some of the consequences of the idolatry and wickedness of the Canaanites and God’s judgment, they had every reason to obey the LORD out of fear (and eventually, they did throw away their idols *for a time*). However, they should have also gone to the LORD with thanksgiving and gratitude for all He had done for them throughout their history and especially for leading them into the Promised Land as He had promised. Therefore, many of them moved beyond fear of the LORD and came to reverence and respect the LORD because of His loving holiness toward them: these came to love and serve the LORD in sincere faithfulness. The gods beyond the river were the gods of those who lived in Ur of the Chaldeans, the gods of Terah, Abraham’s

father. The Israelites learned to serve the gods of Egypt during their years of slavery. After they had been reminded of all the LORD had miraculously done for them, they knew (or should have known) that these false gods of Egypt were powerless and therefore worthless. The LORD had defeated all the gods and leaders of Egypt through various plagues and the destruction of Pharaoh's army.

(Joshua 24:15) Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region 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.”

Perhaps you have noticed that increasing numbers of people have decided that it is *evil* (a strong statement, *truly evil*) to serve the LORD, the God of the Bible, and they have turned to or have invented lesser gods that make them increasingly unreasonable in their thoughts and actions (see Romans 1:16-32). Some people felt the same way in the time of Joshua; therefore, Joshua put a choice before the people and their leaders, even as people have the same choice today. People can choose to love and serve the LORD of history, the Creator of heaven and earth as revealed in the Bible; or, they can choose to serve some of the false gods that have been handed down and served throughout history. Everyone will serve someone or something, even if it is a thing called money. It is the same today as in the days of Joshua and Jesus. In Matthew 6:24,

Jesus declared: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” Joshua taught by words and example: he and his house would serve the LORD.

(Joshua 24:21) And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the LORD!”

Because the LORD is holy, the people could not serve the LORD while at the same time keeping their idols (keeping them in reserve, so to speak, in case the LORD refused to give them what they desired). After telling the people what the LORD had done for them and that the LORD in His covenant with them required their unselfish devotion and sincere service, the people and their leaders made a reasonable and responsible choice to serve the LORD exclusively, obey the LORD and follow Joshua’s example.

(Joshua 24:22) Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”

Joshua had told the people that the LORD is holy, and they would need to serve the LORD in holiness. The people pledged to do exactly that; therefore, Joshua reminded them that if they did not do as they had vowed then their words would serve as a witness against them. They needed to remember that serving the LORD in holiness would be

difficult in a world where everyone around them served false gods (and the world, the flesh, and the devil). They would need the constant help of their Holy God, which they could only receive if they continued to worship and serve the LORD in holiness and truth, without any admixture of false gods in their lives.

(Joshua 24:23) He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

The people of God needed to take decisive action in accordance with their promise and put away all the foreign gods that they had collected in their travels: the gods from Ur, the gods from Egypt, and the gods of their foreign neighbors. The Law of God given to Moses demanded that they have no gods other than the true God of the Bible (the Bible as it was being revealed and written). In renewing the covenant with them, no doubt Joshua reminded them of these words in God’s law: “Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:3-6). The people were to incline or turn their heart to the LORD in love, to focus on the LORD and to doing His will at all times.

(Joshua 24:24) The people said to Joshua, “The LORD our God we will serve, and him we will obey.”

Even as Joshua repeatedly told them what the LORD required of them, so the people repeatedly vowed that they would serve and obey only the LORD. The people did so as long as Joshua and the leaders who brought them into the Promised Land lived.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How did the leaders and people know that Joshua’s words would be important to them?
2. What seemed the biggest problem the Israelites faced?
3. What are some of the first truths Joshua told the Israelites?
4. What are some of the commands Joshua gave the people?
5. How did the people respond to Joshua’s efforts to renew the people’s side of God’ covenant (agreement) with them?

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