

The Book of Joshua, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 13: Joshua's Farewell and Covenant Renewal

Joshua 23:1-24:33

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal heart of this final lesson is covenant faithfulness, and it has two sides that must be held together. On one side stands the glorious certainty that God keeps every promise: 'not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake' (Joshua 23:14). Help the class feel the weight of that. The land was given, the enemies were driven out, the rest was granted, exactly as God had said. This same faithful God has kept His greater promise to us in Christ, and into a greater rest He calls us still (Hebrews 4:8-10). On the other side stands a real and sober warning: if Israel forsakes the Lord, He will turn and consume them, even after He has done them good (Joshua 23:15-16; 24:20). These two truths are not in tension; they are the two faces of covenant. God is utterly faithful, and He calls His people to be faithful too.

Be ready to teach plainly, and lovingly, against the error of 'once saved, always saved.' Joshua's warning to a people who had just pledged themselves to God could not be clearer: those who have known God's goodness can still forsake Him and be consumed. The choice he sets before them, 'choose you this day whom ye will serve,' is a real choice, set before people who are genuinely free to make it. This cuts against any notion that election removes responsibility or that the believer cannot fall away. Bring the New Testament alongside: Hebrews warns the Christian, not the outsider, against an evil heart of unbelief that departs from the living God (Hebrews 3:12-14), and against sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth (Hebrews 10:26-31). Teach the class that continued, exclusive faithfulness to the Lord is required, and that turning away brings ruin. Do this without harshness; the warning is the warning of a loving Father who wants none to fall.

Finally, since this is the last lesson of the whole study, aim it at the heart and the will. Joshua's farewell is meant to gather up everything and bring the people to a decision: whom will you serve? Help your students see that devotion to God is not inherited, automatic, or passive; it is a daily, deliberate, wholehearted choice. Press them gently but firmly to make it. Like Joshua, let each one plant a stake for their own household: as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And point them always to Christ, in whom every promise to Abraham finds its yes (Galatians 3:16, 26-29), and in whom the rest that Joshua could not finally give is now offered to all who will follow Him fully. The aim is not merely that they admire Joshua's faith, but that they make his choice their own and follow Christ with undivided hearts.

Question 1

Student Question:

In his first farewell address, Joshua tells Israel, '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' (Joshua 23:14). Look carefully at how he frames God's faithfulness in verses 9 through 14. What had the Lord done, and what does Joshua want Israel to conclude about the character of God before he dies? How does this confession of a God who keeps every promise point forward to the greater rest we have in Christ (Hebrews 4:8–10)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joshua is now 'old and stricken in age' (Joshua 23:1), and the long wars are over. He gathers Israel's leaders for a farewell charge that centers entirely on the faithfulness of God. Before he dies, he wants one truth fixed in their hearts above all others.

The high point comes in verse 14: '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 hath failed.' Joshua reaches back over a lifetime and testifies that God's record is unbroken. Every promise was kept.

Notice how he builds to this. In verses 9 through 13 he reminds them that the Lord drove out great nations before them, that one man of them could chase a thousand because the Lord fought for them. The conclusion is unavoidable: the God who has done all this can be trusted completely.

This is the same faithfulness that anchors our hope in Christ. Hebrews 4:8–10 makes the point directly: Joshua gave Israel rest in the land, but he did not give them the final rest. That greater rest remains for the people of God in Christ. The God who kept every word to Israel keeps His greater word to us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God keeps every promise He makes; not one good word of His has ever failed (Joshua 23:14; 1 Kings 8:56).
- Remembering God's proven faithfulness is the foundation for present and future trust.
- The rest God gave Israel in the land was real, yet it pointed beyond itself to the greater rest in Christ (Hebrews 4:8–10).
- Joshua's whole life became a testimony to the trustworthy character of God.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Joshua summarize God's record over the whole history of Israel?
- Why does he want this truth fixed in their hearts before he dies?
- How does the rest Joshua gave Israel point forward to the rest we have in Christ?

Question 2

Student Question:

Joshua could look back over a long life and say with certainty that God had kept every single word. Where in your own life have you watched God keep a promise you once doubted He would keep, and how does remembering those moments strengthen you to trust Him with what is still unresolved?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joshua could look back over decades and declare with certainty that God had kept every word. This question asks the class to do the same: to recall the specific promises God has kept in their own lives, especially the ones they once doubted.

This is a self-examination question rooted in memory. We trust God for the future best when we remember Him rightly from the past. Israel's great failures almost always began with forgetting what God had done.

Help students see that doubt usually grows in the soil of forgetfulness. When we cannot see the way forward, the cure is often to look back and count the times God already proved faithful when we could not see the way then either.

Encourage them to be specific. Vague gratitude is weak; named, remembered faithfulness builds strong trust. Have them name an answered prayer, a provision, a rescue, and let that memory steady them for what is still unresolved.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith for the future is strengthened by remembering God's faithfulness in the past (Psalm 77:11–12).
- Forgetfulness is a chief root of doubt and unbelief.
- Specific, named memories of God's faithfulness anchor the heart better than vague gratitude.
- What God has already done is the surest ground for trusting what He has yet to do.

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you watched God keep a promise you once doubted He would keep?
- How does remembering those moments help you face what is still unresolved?
- What is one specific instance of God's faithfulness you could name and thank Him for today?

Question 3

Student Question:

Having celebrated God's faithfulness, Joshua immediately turns to a sober warning: if Israel forsakes the Lord and clings to the remnant of these nations and serves their gods, 'know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations' but they will become snares and traps until Israel perishes from the good land (Joshua 23:12–13, 15–16). Why

does Joshua place this warning right beside the promise of God's faithfulness, and what does it teach us about the two-sided nature of covenant relationship with God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Right beside the promise of God's faithfulness, Joshua sets a sober warning. If Israel turns back, clings to the surviving nations, and serves their gods, then the Lord 'will no more drive out any of these nations from before you,' and they will become 'snares and traps' until Israel perishes from the good land (Joshua 23:12-13, 15-16).

This is the two-sided nature of covenant. The same faithful God who blesses obedience will, in faithfulness to His own word, bring harm upon persistent unfaithfulness. Verse 15 is striking: as surely as the good things came, so surely will the evil things come if they forsake Him.

Joshua deliberately places the warning next to the promise because both are true and both belong to covenant relationship. A God who only blessed and never warned would not be holy, and Israel's love would not be tested or true. The warning is itself an act of love.

For the class, this guards against a sentimental view of grace that imagines God's favor cannot be forfeited. Covenant is a relationship with real terms and real consequences. God is faithful to His promises, and that very faithfulness means He will not wink at the abandonment of Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Covenant has two sides: God is faithful to bless obedience and faithful to judge persistent rebellion (Joshua 23:15-16).
- The same faithfulness that secures God's promises stands behind His warnings.
- God's warnings are themselves acts of love, meant to keep His people from ruin.
- Grace does not erase responsibility; covenant relationship carries real terms and real consequences.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Joshua place this warning right next to the promise of God's faithfulness?
- What does verse 15 teach about the certainty of consequences for forsaking God?
- How is a warning like this actually an expression of God's love for His people?

Question 4

Student Question:

Joshua warned that the very things Israel tolerated would become 'snares and traps' and 'scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes' (Joshua 23:13). What is one thing in your own life that you have been tolerating rather than driving out, something that seems small now but could grow into a snare for your soul?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joshua warned that the nations Israel failed to drive out would become 'snares and traps,' 'scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes' (Joshua 23:13). What was tolerated would not stay harmless; it would grow into something that wounds.

This is a self-examination question. Ask students to name the one thing they have been tolerating rather than driving out, the compromise that still seems small but is quietly putting down roots.

Help them see the pattern. Sin rarely announces itself as a scourge or a thorn at the beginning. It enters small, asks only a little room, and then grows into the very thing that pierces and entangles. The time to deal with it is now, while it still seems manageable.

Encourage decisive action rather than slow management. Israel's tragedy was that they made peace with what God told them to remove. Press the class to name one tolerated thing and to take a concrete step to drive it out this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- What we tolerate rather than remove tends to grow into what wounds us (Joshua 23:13).
- Sin enters small and asks little, then becomes a snare and a thorn over time.
- The time to deal with a compromise is while it still seems manageable.
- Faithfulness requires driving out, not merely managing, the things that draw us from God.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one thing you have been tolerating rather than driving out of your life?
- How could that small compromise grow into a snare if left alone?
- What concrete step could you take this week to deal with it decisively?

Question 5

Student Question:

At Shechem, Joshua rehearses the whole history of God's grace, beginning, 'Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah... and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham' (Joshua 24:2-3). Trace the pattern of God's actions through verses 2 through 13, noting how often the Lord says 'I' did this. Why does Joshua ground the call to serve God in a long rehearsal of grace rather than simply issuing a command?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

At Shechem, a place rich with memory where Abraham first built an altar and Jacob buried foreign gods, Joshua gathers the tribes for a covenant assembly. He begins not with a command

but with a history: 'Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time... and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham' (Joshua 24:2-3).

Trace the verbs. Through verses 2 through 13 the Lord keeps saying 'I': I took, I gave, I sent, I brought, I delivered, I destroyed. The entire story is told as the record of what God did. Israel's part was largely to receive.

Verse 13 is the climax of the rehearsal: 'I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not... vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat.' Everything they possessed was a gift of grace.

Joshua grounds the call to serve God in this long rehearsal of grace because true obedience is the response of gratitude, not the payment of a debt. He does not begin with 'you must' but with 'see what God has done.' The remembering of grace is what makes the call to serve compelling and right. This same Abraham whom God 'took' is the father of all who believe, in whom every family of the earth is blessed in Christ (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:8).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joshua grounds the call to serve God in a rehearsal of grace, not a bare command (Joshua 24:2-13).
- The repeated 'I' shows that Israel's salvation and inheritance were God's work, received by grace.
- True obedience is the grateful response to grace, not the payment of a debt.
- The call of Abraham that Joshua rehearses is the foundation of God's saving purpose for all nations in Christ (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:8).

Discussion Prompts

- How often does the Lord say 'I' in this rehearsal, and why does that matter?
- What does verse 13 reveal about how Israel came to possess all they had?
- Why does Joshua begin the call to serve with the story of grace rather than a command?

Question 6

Student Question:

Joshua's history lesson is really a memory exercise: he forces Israel to see that everything they have was given, not earned (Joshua 24:13). When you are tempted to feel that your life or your faithfulness is your own achievement, what helps you remember that 'every good gift' comes from God's hand, and why does gratitude matter so much to genuine devotion?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joshua's history lesson is really an exercise in memory. By rehearsing all God gave, he forces Israel to confront a humbling truth: they ate from vineyards they did not plant and lived in cities they did not build (Joshua 24:13). Nothing they had was self-made.

This is a self-examination question about the subtle pride that creeps in when we forget the Giver. Ask students where they are tempted to treat their lives, their blessings, even their faithfulness, as their own achievement.

Help them see why gratitude matters so much to genuine devotion. The proud heart serves God grudgingly or not at all, because it imagines it owes Him little. The grateful heart serves freely and gladly, because it knows how much it has received.

Draw out the timeless principle from James 1:17, that every good gift comes down from the Father. The cure for self-made pride is deliberate, specific remembering: tracing each good thing back to the hand that gave it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgetting the Giver breeds a quiet pride that imagines our lives are self-made (Joshua 24:13).
- Every good gift comes from God's hand, not our own achievement (James 1:17).
- Gratitude is the soil in which glad, wholehearted devotion grows.
- The proud heart serves God grudgingly; the grateful heart serves Him freely.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to treat your life or faithfulness as your own achievement?
- What helps you remember that every good thing comes from God's hand?
- Why does gratitude matter so much to genuine, glad devotion to the Lord?

Question 7

Student Question:

Joshua sets the choice before Israel with unforgettable plainness: 'choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served... or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24:15). Why does Joshua present serving God as a deliberate, daily choice rather than something automatic or inherited, and what does this reveal about the real and personal nature of devotion to the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After rehearsing all of God's grace, Joshua brings Israel to a decision with unforgettable plainness: 'choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24:15). The call to serve God is framed as a deliberate, present-tense choice.

Note the phrase 'this day.' Devotion to God is not a one-time event safely behind us; it is a choice renewed daily. Joshua does not assume Israel will serve God automatically because of their heritage. He calls them to decide.

This reveals the real and personal nature of faith. God will not be served by drift or inheritance. Each person must choose Him, and choose Him again, with a will that is genuinely free. The choice is real because the alternatives are real.

Joshua's own example seals it. He does not merely urge Israel to choose; he declares his own choice publicly and stakes his household on it. Leadership in devotion means going first. Help the class feel the weight of a choice that must be made and not merely assumed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Serving God is a deliberate, daily choice, not an automatic or inherited condition (Joshua 24:15).
- The phrase 'this day' shows devotion must be renewed in the present, not merely remembered from the past.
- Faith is real and personal; God will not be served by drift or by heritage alone.
- True leaders in devotion go first, declaring and modeling their own choice.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Joshua present serving God as a choice that must be made 'this day'?
- What does it reveal that he does not assume Israel will serve God automatically?
- How does Joshua's own public choice strengthen the call he gives to others?

Question 8

Student Question:

Joshua did not say merely 'I will serve the Lord' but 'I and my house.' How does the leader of a home, or anyone with influence over others, carry a responsibility for the spiritual direction of those under their care, and where is God calling you to lead the people in your life toward Him rather than away from Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Joshua does not say simply 'I will serve the Lord' but 'I and my house' (Joshua 24:15). He understands that his choice carries weight for those under his care, and he embraces responsibility for the spiritual direction of his household.

This is a personal question for anyone who leads or influences others, in a home, a family, a friendship, a class, a workplace. Ask students where God has placed people under their influence and which direction they are leading them.

Help them see that influence is never neutral. We are always leading the people in our lives somewhere, by our example, our priorities, our words. Joshua chose to lead his household toward the Lord, and he said so out loud.

Be careful to draw the timeless principle without overreaching: each member of Joshua's house would still have to make the choice their own, just as the rest of Israel did. A leader cannot believe for others, but a leader can set the direction, model the devotion, and call others to follow. Press the class to lead their people toward God rather than away from Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Those who lead or influence others bear responsibility for the spiritual direction they set (Joshua 24:15).
- Influence is never neutral; we are always leading others somewhere by example and priority.
- A leader cannot make the choice for others, but can model devotion and call them to follow (compare Acts 16:31–34).
- Faithful leadership in a home or community means going first toward God, openly.

Discussion Prompts

- Whom has God placed under your influence or care?
- In what direction are you currently leading them, by your example and priorities?
- Where is God calling you to lead your people toward Him rather than away from Him?

Question 9

Student Question:

When the people eagerly pledge, 'we also will serve the Lord; for he is our God,' Joshua answers with a startling warning: 'Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God... If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good' (Joshua 24:18–20). Why does Joshua press so hard against their easy enthusiasm, and what does this passage teach about the seriousness of covenant faithfulness, the real danger of falling away after one has known God's goodness, and the call to wholehearted, exclusive devotion to the Lord (compare Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:26–31)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson. When Israel eagerly pledges, 'we also will serve the Lord; for he is our God,' Joshua does not pat them on the back. He pushes back hard: 'Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins' (Joshua 24:18–19).

Joshua is not telling them service is impossible; he is shattering their easy, glib confidence. Casual enthusiasm will not survive the holiness of God. He wants them to count the cost, to grasp that covenant with a holy God is a deadly serious thing, before they make their vow lightly.

Then comes the sober warning in verse 20: 'If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.' Mark those last words. The people in danger here are people who have already received God's goodness. Having known His blessing does not make them immune; it makes their potential apostasy all the more serious.

This is the place to teach plainly and lovingly that the possibility of falling away is real. The New Testament says the same thing to Christians, not to outsiders. Hebrews 3:12-14 warns believers against 'an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God,' and calls them to hold their confidence 'stedfast unto the end.' Hebrews 10:26-31 warns of a fearful judgment for those who 'sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth.' The believer who has known God's goodness can still turn away and be lost.

So this passage stands squarely against the notion of 'once saved, always saved.' The choice Joshua sets before Israel is real, set before people genuinely free to forsake God after having served Him. Teach the class that continued, exclusive faithfulness to the Lord is required, and that turning away brings ruin, even after God has done us good. Wholehearted devotion is not optional; it is the very heart of covenant. And yet do not leave them in fear: the same God who warns is the God who keeps every promise, and He gives grace to all who will hold fast to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Joshua confronts easy, glib enthusiasm because covenant with a holy God is a deadly serious thing (Joshua 24:19).
- Those who have already received God's goodness can still forsake Him and be consumed; having known His blessing brings no immunity (Joshua 24:20).
- The New Testament warns Christians, not outsiders, against departing from the living God and sinning willfully after knowing the truth (Hebrews 3:12-14; 10:26-31).
- This stands against 'once saved, always saved'; the believer who has known God can still fall away and be lost.
- Continued, exclusive faithfulness to the Lord is required; turning away brings ruin even after God has done us good.
- The God who warns is the same God who keeps every promise and gives grace to all who hold fast to Him.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Joshua push back so hard against the people's easy enthusiasm?
- What does it mean that God could consume them 'after that he hath done you good'?

- How do Hebrews 3:12–14 and 10:26–31 show that a believer can still fall away and must remain faithful?

Question 10

Student Question:

We have come to the end of the book of Joshua and the end of our study. The choice Joshua set before Israel, 'choose you this day whom ye will serve,' now stands before you, made personal in Christ. Looking back over all the Lord has shown you in this study, what does it mean for you to choose Him fully, today, holding nothing back? Name the specific area of your life where you most need to say with Joshua, 'as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,' and follow Christ wholeheartedly from this day forward.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the capstone of the lesson and of the entire study. We have walked with Israel from the Jordan to the rest God gave them, and now the choice Joshua set before Israel, 'choose you this day whom ye will serve,' turns and stands before us, made personal in Christ.

Invite the class to look back over everything the Lord has shown them across this study of Joshua: His faithfulness in flood and battle, His grace in the inheritance, His warnings and His promises. Let all of it gather into one question: whom will you serve, fully, today?

Help students see that this choice is not made once and forgotten but renewed daily, and that it must be wholehearted. The danger Joshua warned of, drifting back to other gods, is just as real for us; our idols simply wear modern faces. Press them to name the specific area where God most needs to be made Lord, the place where they have been holding something back.

Point them finally and fully to Christ. The rest Joshua gave Israel was real but partial; the greater rest is in Jesus (Hebrews 4:8–10). Every promise to Abraham that Joshua rehearsed finds its yes in Christ, in whom all who are His become heirs of the promise (Galatians 3:16, 26–29). So the call to 'choose you this day' is now the call to follow Christ wholeheartedly. Ask each student to plant the stake for their own household: as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Let no one leave this study without making the choice their own.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The choice 'choose you this day whom ye will serve' now stands before us, made personal in Christ (Joshua 24:15).
- Devotion to the Lord must be wholehearted, exclusive, and renewed daily, holding nothing back.
- Our idols wear modern faces; the danger of drifting from God is as real for us as it was for Israel.

- The greater rest Joshua could not give is found in Christ, in whom every promise to Abraham finds its yes (Hebrews 4:8–10; Galatians 3:16, 26–29).
- The aim of the whole study is not to admire Joshua's faith but to make his choice our own and follow Christ fully.

Discussion Prompts

- Looking back over this whole study, what is the Lord asking you to believe about His faithfulness?
- In what specific area of your life do you most need to choose Him fully today?
- What would it mean for you to say with Joshua, 'as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,' from this day forward?