

# CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## DHW BIBLE CLASS

### LESSON 15A

#### JOSHUA

#### CHAPTER 23

**Joshua 23:6**, *“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;”*

## INTRODUCTION

The major conquest of the Land had been completed. All the tribes including the Levitical priesthood had been allotted their inheritance. The two-and-the-half tribes, namely, Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, had returned to their settlements on the eastern side of Jordan after fulfilling their covenantal promise to help their brethren complete the conquest of the Promised Land. The Levites, who were not given any land inheritance, were given cities and suburbs for their dwelling places and agricultural work through the sovereign will of the LORD. Forty-eight Levitical cities were

granted to them and six of which were cities of refuge. Joshua was now one hundred and ten years old (24:29). The time had come for him to return to the LORD his God, and to join Moses and all the Patriarchs who had gone before him.<sup>1</sup> Joshua arranged for two meetings to give his farewell messages to the people. Chapter 23 records the first and chapter 24 the second. There was no more time and he felt the urgent need to give his last words of encouragement and exhortation to the Israelites.

Last words of a person are always to be taken seriously for such words take on a whole new significance, especially when they come from a godly servant of God like Joshua. In chapter 23-farewell message, Joshua emphasized the theme of godly responsibility and warned of sinful consequences. Joshua’s reasoning gives an insight into the manner in which the LORD deals with His people when they obey and when they disobey Him.

We can learn and apply this thinking to our Christian value system *in* the world as against those *of* the world which are being propagated on all fronts by radio, television, newspapers, magazines, all competing and claiming for support and allegiance. There are options in

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God

life, which we daily have to choose, and we ought to choose the right ones.

For convenience of study, this chapter can be divided into the following sections:

1. Formula for Victorious Living (23:1-10)
2. Motivation for Victorious Living (23:11-16)

### COMMENTARY

#### Formula for Victorious Living – 23:1-10

Joshua realized that the time to die was soon. He himself acknowledged in customary Hebraic expression of his impending death—*and, behold this day I am going the way of all the earth.* (23:14). Death to God’s servant is graduation. How he dies is irrelevant. His service unto His LORD is done. His work for God is completed. It is now time to go home and take a good long rest.

The first thing Joshua did was to call for all the leaders. He deliberately did not call all the people of Israel on this occasion. [NOTE: Joshua will address the people as a whole in chapter 24.] He summoned only the “elders”, the elderly who were experienced and wise and were also leaders, the “heads”; the leaders who were in positions of tribal authority; the

“judges”, who administered justice as the name implies; and the “officers”, who functioned as law enforcers like the policemen (see Deu. 1:15). The meeting-place is not mentioned, and since the second meeting, which involved all Israel was held in Shechem (24:1), this first meeting could have been held in Shiloh, only an educated guess. Leaders are crucial for the maintenance of Israel’s spirituality. Israel was not designed, nurtured and protected by the LORD to make her into a political or economic nation like the rest of the world. Israel was a spiritual nation from start to finish. Her one primary purpose was to be the birth nation for the first coming of the Messiah. Then her visible witness and testimony of God’s goodness, grace and mercies including the duty of guarding and teaching the Word of God would be some of her secondary purposes. When leaders are idolatrous and carnal, Israel will be carnal and idolatrous. This is also true of the leaders in every local church. In short, the spiritual level of the local church is as good as the spiritual level of the leaders they have TODAY, not yesterday!

Joshua began by reminding the leaders that they had seen how the LORD their God had done to all the nations in the Land because the LORD had fought for them. The present occupation of the Land was

not due to the strength of Israel's armies for they were not militarily trained fighting men. It was also not due to Joshua's good leadership or military strategy even though these were employed in the conquest of large portions of the Land. It was definitely not due to the enemies' weaknesses for they were mighty nations and they definitely outnumbered Israel manifold. It was entirely God's work that the Land was conquered and given to Israel as a gift. There are conditions Israel must comply for keeping this gift of the LORD.

Joshua had dutifully distributed the Land after they had conquered it. Joshua further said that the LORD had promised them that He "shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land" (see vs. 5) which they had received by lots so that they ought to fully possess it.<sup>2</sup> The use of the future tense is significant. It shows us that Joshua had completed his calling (past tense - verse 4) but the work of God for the

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 9:4 Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee. 5 Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

present younger generation was far from over (future tense - verse 5). They had mopping up operations to do. Pockets of resistance by the Canaanites will have to be dealt with by Israel on a tribal basis, of course always with God's help and enabling.

The possession of the Land was conditional upon their obedience to the covenant the LORD had made with them. Joshua therefore exhorted them to be "very courageous to keep and 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" (23:6).<sup>3</sup> This injunction was a parallel to what the LORD had given to him in the beginning before entering the land. At that time, the LORD said thus: *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 to 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 then thou shalt have good success (1:7, 8).* Strength and courage were needed to conquer the Promised Land. The

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<sup>3</sup> Note that they already had a written scroll of the Law of Moses

same strength and courage were needed to remain in the Promised Land. For the strength and courage were for the same thing i.e. to obey the perfect Word of God!

Joshua called them to maintain a strict separation from the nations that lived among them. They were not to make mention (Hebrew word is “zachar” which means “to remember” from which the word Zechariah – “the LORD remembers” originates) the name of the gods of these nations, nor were they to swear by them, or serve or bow to them. The gradual sequence of decline to idolatry is found here. REMEMBER – SWEAR – SERVE – BOW. Do not think of them and the problem would be resolved immediately.

Instead the children of Israel should “cleave” or firmly cling to the LORD their God to whom they had been doing. And the LORD had blessed and protected them against other nations which were great and strong — *one man of you shall chase a thousand: for the LORD your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you (23:10)*. Joshua had been with the nation since they left Egypt, and he gave this general evaluation of Israel’s past relationship with the LORD, who had been good to them. With the LORD on Israel’s side, no enemy or armies could stand against Israel. She will always be

victorious in the LORD. This is true today as well when the believer stand on the side of truth and righteousness according to the Scriptures. It is never a NUMBER game in terms of the size of the enemies’ armies or bank account or powerful friends. It is simply a question of whether the LORD is on the believer’s side. If He is, then he has nothing to fear.

#### **Motivation for Victorious Living – 23:11-16**

In view of the favourable circumstances that the LORD had accorded to them because they were obedient to Him, Joshua emphatically charged them to love the LORD their God (YAHWEH ELOHIM). “Take good heed” means “to vehemently heed”. The motivation that Israel will forever be strong and courageous is to love the LORD God. The use of the covenantal Name together with “elohiym” indicates to Israel that the covenantal LORD is also a powerful God.

But if they yielded to the temptations of the nations by relating and mixing with them in marriages or business, it would be certain that the LORD God would no more be with them. The nations which lived among them would become “snares and traps” to them. They would suffer scourging and severe pains like thorns in their eyes (23:13). Israel’s stay in the Promised Land was not an

unconditional but a conditional one. Israel must love God and hate idolatry. Under no circumstance must Israel befriend and accept the life-style of the heathen nations. It would destroy Israel by leading her into sin. The final chastisement from the LORD would be exile from the Promised Land.

Apostasy by the children of Israel against the LORD their God was a constant possibility. Joshua once again reminded them of his impending death and soon he would not be with them. He reminded them that the LORD had never failed to fulfil His promises. Not one thing had He failed! Israel's well-being was conditional upon their keeping and doing the will of God. God would bless them with all good things. But if they turned away from God and broke their part of His covenant by worshipping and serving other gods, they would incur the anger of the LORD their God who would then bring evil things to them, drive them out of the land and destroy them.

All the terms used here, *snares*, *traps*, *scourges*, *thorns*, *perish* and *evil things* are used to impress on them the dire consequences that would befall them when they turned away from the LORD their God. Captivity by other nations would be their lot for sure. The one living and true God, the LORD God, is both holy and love. His honor and truths cannot be compromised neither can His love

be taken for granted. Love and obedience to Him bring great blessings but disobedience and sins of idolatry will bring great punishment.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

The leaders must set the godly example. They must first realize the grave and great responsibilities placed upon their weak shoulders by the LORD. They were to protect, nurture and feed the nation of Israel with spiritual food, which must result in a spiritual and godly testimony. To do that, they must remember the LORD that He gave this Land to Israel to dwell in. It is all of grace never of right!

Strength and courage is sadly needed today in our world of compromise and moral decay. The wicked are getting more wicked and sinners are becoming worse than the previous generation. There seems no end to the greatness of man's absolute and total depravity. When we feel that we have seen it all then something more grotesque than before would appear to shock us. We are really living in the last days.

Unconditional salvation must not be confused with conditional blessing. Professing Christians must never think that they can live any way they like on earth and will automatically live a life pleasing to the LORD. Not only will that kind of

wretched living be an abomination to the LORD, it will be burnt up by fire from the LORD. Blessings from the LORD in this life are always conditional.

Biblical separation was the doctrine that sums up this chapter. Israel was surrounded by many of her enemies. They must maintain their separated way of life. They have a very high purpose from the LORD to live a godly life. There must be no compromise or else the visible witness of God’s grace and mercies in Israel’s existence would be destroyed by her failures not her enemies’. AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Joshua 23:1-10; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Philippians 1:3-6.

**TUESDAY:** Joshua 23:11-16; Mark 12:30; John 14:23; 1 John 4:20.

**WEDNESDAY:** Joshua 23:1-16.

**THURSDAY:** Joshua 23:1-16.

**FRIDAY:** Joshua 23:1-16.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Why do you think Joshua made his speech to Israel’s leaders first?

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2. What makes Israel strong?

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3. Who fought for Israel? Who is fighting for believers today? How?

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4. How to understand and apply these words, "One man of you shall chase a thousand" today?

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5. Explain the meaning of biblical separation. What is not the right understanding of this doctrine? Does CPBPC practises this doctrine well?

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